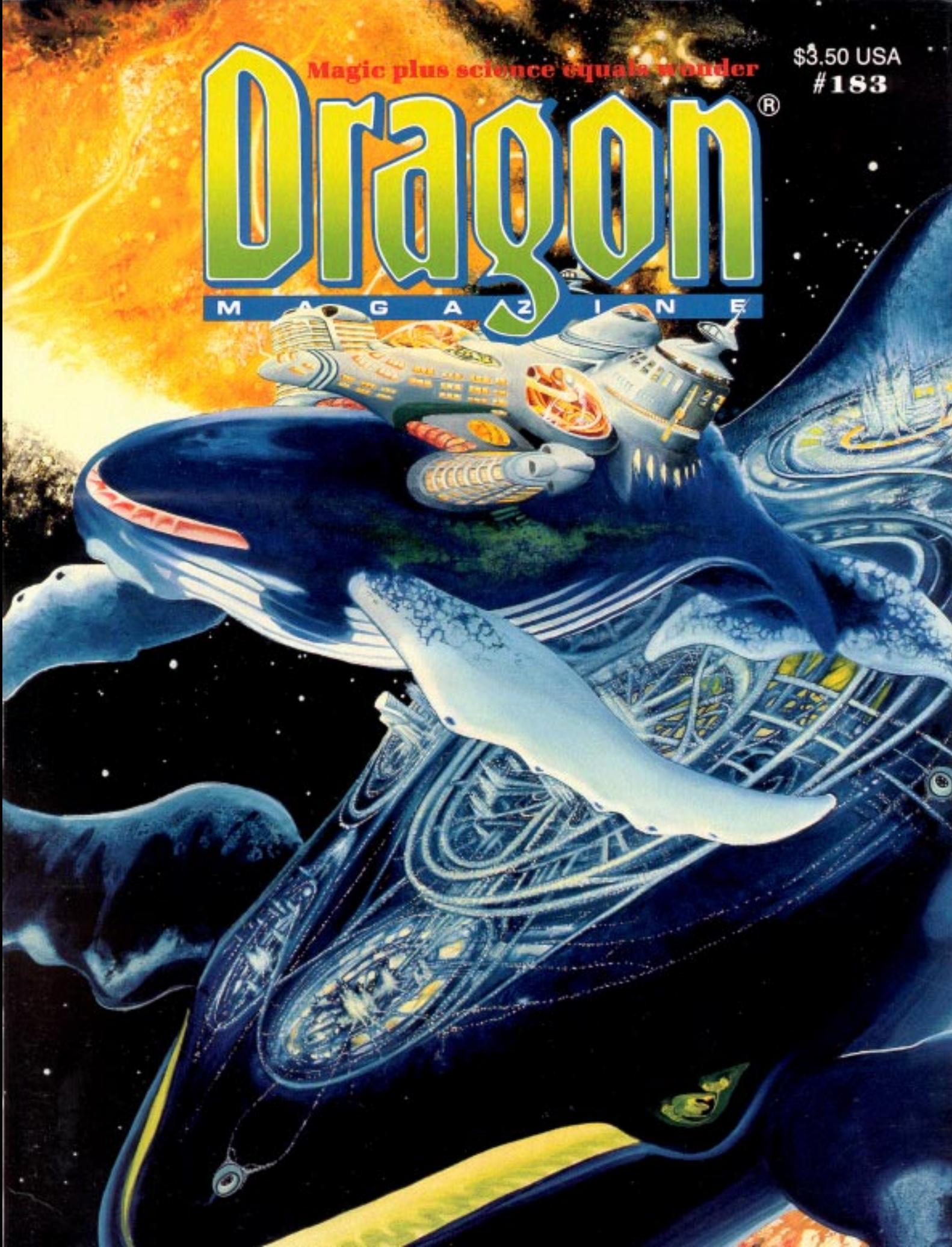


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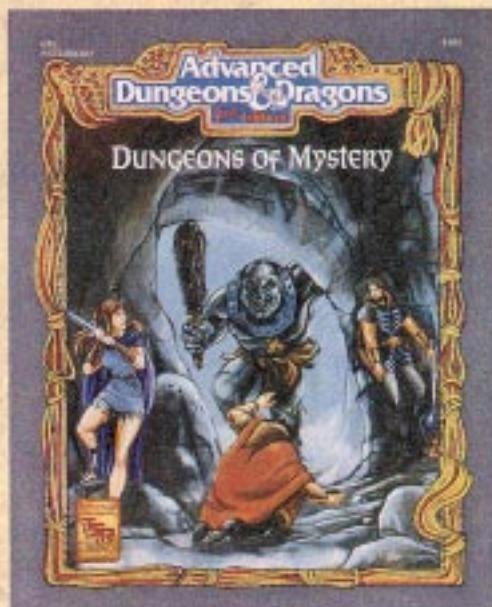
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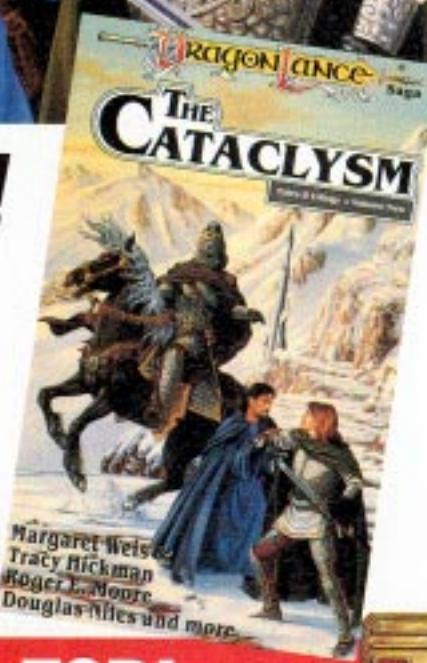
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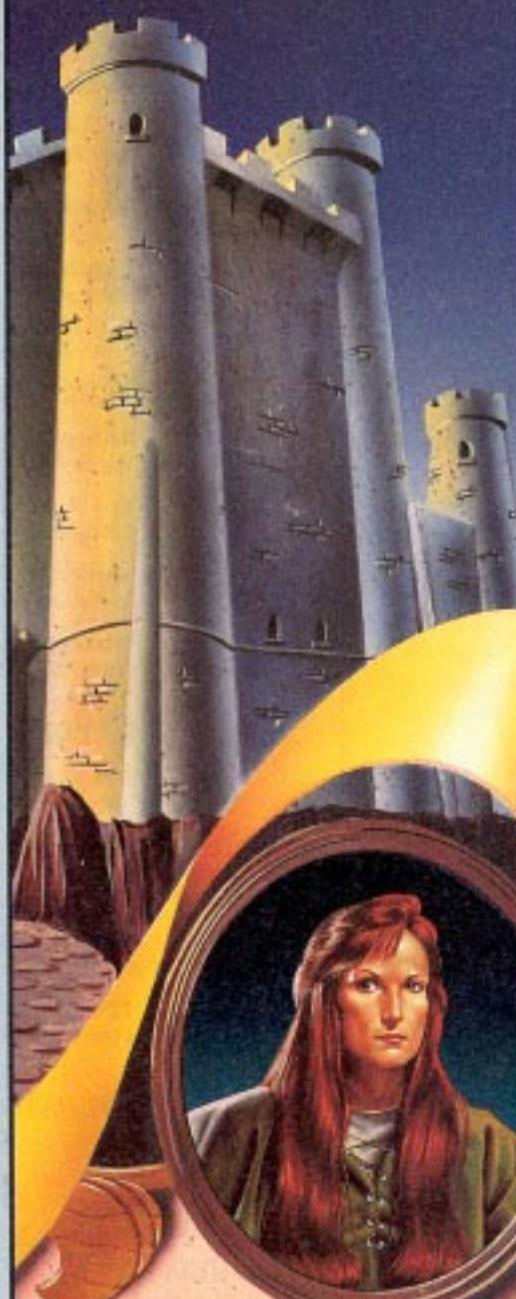
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COVER

In the SPELLJAMMER universe, graceful giants called the kindori trace their ancient migratory routes across wildspace, seemingly unaware of their human hitchhikers. Mike L. Scott, our cover artist, painted "Whales in Space" using oils. For information on prints of this and other pieces, write to: Stellar Graphics, P.O. Box 14546, Madison WI 53714-0546, U.S.A.

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Kwikeez

We've received a number of readers' letters that require only short answers, so we'll print the answers here without the letters themselves (it seems more convenient that way).

Issue #114, "The Witch": Witches cannot use clerical magical items unless such are meant for use by wizards or all classes. A witch cannot turn or command undead, either. If you choose to allow a player-character witch these powers, note that she will be quite powerful and might make other spell-casting classes redundant in an adventure; her power base, which is wide already, becomes extreme. Allowing an NPC witch these powers merely makes her more of a challenge to those who oppose her, which isn't so bad.

Issue #169, "New Weapons for Old": The names "morning star" and "flail" have been applied to a variety of weapons. Depending on the reference used, from gaming source book to dictionary, you could be looking at a heavy spiked club, a pole connected to a shorter striking pole by a swivel or chain, or a handle with one or more chains connected to spiked iron balls. It's confusing, but that's life.

Issue #173, "The Sociology of the Flind": It was noted that gnolls have 60' infravision in the second footnote, though this was not mentioned in the Monstrous Compendium entry on gnolls. Gnolls are said to have infravision (no range given) in the AD&D 1st Edition Monster Manual. I see no reason not to allow both gnolls and flinds 60' infravision, especially as they are nocturnal.

Issue #175, "Forum": The letter from "W. Norgielix" of Mexico City was actually from Arturo Magidin. Sorry, but I misread your signature!

Issue #176, "Servants of the Seldarine": Priests of Solonor, whenever possible, will own and wear elven chain mail during ceremonies. If elven chain mail is rare in your campaign, then the armor is only on loan for the ceremonies, being kept by the church for potential use in wartime. If such armor is more common, it will be made especially for those priests and will be theirs to keep and use, so long as they maintain their good standing as priests.

Issue #177, "Defenders of the Hearth": A specialty priest of Brandobaris is allowed to be multiclassed cleric/thief as a special power granted by Brandobaris, but the character must still divide all experience points between the two classes. There is no other way for a halfling to have this multiclass combination in the

AD&D® 2nd Edition game. Specialty priests of Sheela Peryroyl have major access to the following spheres: all, animal, elemental, healing, plant, sun, and weather; they have minor access to creation and divination spheres. The note to the effect that 80% of all priests of Sheela are druids is in error; 80% of them are normal clerics and 20% of them are specialty priests, as halflings cannot normally be druids in the AD&D 2nd Edition rules (if you're not so strict, 5% can be true druids, by special permission of Sheela, and 15% specialty priests).

Issue #177, "The Heroic Worlds Role-Playing Game Quiz: A British reader informs us that the DRAGON WARRIORS® game (mentioned in question #14) is actually composed of six (not four) mass-market paperbacks from Corgi Books.

Issue #179, "The Role of Computers": The photo credits for the game Conquests of the Longbow: The Legend of Robin Hood should have attributed the game to Sierra, not Renovation.

Issue #179, "Through the Looking Glass": The photo credit for Hartha the Death Machine should have noted that this miniatures kit was made by RAFM Company, Inc., not Thunderbolt Mountain.

Issue #180, "Colorful Connection": Regarding the flightless bird, look under "Flightless bird," page 41. We're not trying to mislead you; we're only being clever.

Other: The lines of AD&D, DRAGONLANCE®, FORGOTTEN REALMS®, GAMMARAUDERS™, and SPELLJAMMER® comic books produced by DC Comics have been discontinued. There are no plans for reproducing the game statistics (beyond what has already appeared in the comics).

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Continued on page 7

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EDITORIAL

An inferno from a spark



One of the problems facing fantasy-game referees lies in finding sources of new and unusual ideas for adventures and campaigns. New ideas are sorely needed by game masters to keep their campaigns fresh, vital, and intriguing, always drawing players back for more. One of the best sources of new ideas lies in the realm of fantasy novels, a topic that was touched on in the editorial in issue #181 on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien.

Let's see what sorts of ideas for fantasy game campaigns may be drawn from two modern fantasy novels: *The Face in the Frost*, by John Bellairs, and *The Last Unicorn*, by Peter S. Beagle. These gaming suggestions will apply to the AD&D 2nd Edition game, with which most readers are probably familiar, though they could also be used with almost any other fantasy game system. Note that the point is not to recreate specific characters, places, or items from these books, but to tease out the ideas *behind* those things.

The Face in the Frost

Homes: One of the most interesting and amusing parts of this book is the description of the home of the wizard Prospero, who "lived in a huge, ridiculous, doodad-covered, trash-filled two-story horror of a house" near a shadowy forest. What sorts of homes do the player and nonplayer characters in your campaign have? Encourage the players to draw up detailed plans of their characters' abodes, listing some of their major possessions as well. This could lead to a habit on the part of all PCs of picking up items on their journeys purely as souvenirs: a chimera's horn to be carved into a smoking pipe, a gemstone with a curious flaw, foreign coins with bizarre symbols, monstrous skulls, etc. There could even be an informal competition to have the most interesting domicile.

Atmos-fear: John Bellairs uses a number of methods to generate a profound sense of horror throughout the adventures of the two wizard-heroes in his book. Most of these "techniques of terror" are well detailed in the *Realm of Terror* book from the RAVENLOFT™ boxed set, on pages 129-137, and in Bruce Nesmith's

excellent "Game Wizards" column from DRAGON® issue #162. Such techniques include isolation, "warping the familiar," entrapment, an omniscient and omnipotent villain, assaults on mind and body, emotionally loaded sensory details, subtle suggestions of doom, and false alarms. You hardly need to run adventures in the RAVENLOFT campaign to make use of these methods; in fact, they would come in handy in running adventures with few PCs when you, as the GM, wish to avoid killing off the heroes right away. There's no law that says you can't scare the heroes to death!

Old acquaintances: The atmosphere of terror in this novel is heightened because the attacks against the wizards are personal; the evil wizard Melichus knows Prospero from their long-ago days as students of magic. What half-forgotten friends and enemies will one day enter the PCs' lives again? What secrets will they know about the heroes? What vulnerabilities will they exploit? What threads will bind the lives of the PCs and the NPCs in future adventures: companionship, aid, romance, conflict—or death?

Mage-centric quests: Bellairs's book revolves completely around wizards. The AD&D 2nd Edition *Complete Wizard's Handbook* discusses all-wizard campaigns briefly on page 66; the idea is certainly worth a closer look. If your gaming group wants a change of pace, it might be worthwhile setting up a limited adventure series in which only wizards take part, confronting some awful force that only they have a chance to stop. The wizards should have many options open to them to strengthen and balance their force, such as multiclass and dual-class status, different races, a wide variety of magical items and spell choices, use of different schools of magic, familiars and oddball helpers, and so on.

Facts on artifacts: Extremely powerful magical devices produce terrible effects on game balance when used by PCs. A hero becomes an unstoppable force, plowing blithely through orcs, giants, dragons, undead, etc.—not entirely a good thing for the GM and other players. But mix an evil artifact in a horror campaign with an evil user (especially one who knows one or more PCs personally), and things will really be hard going for the luckless heroes. In *The Face in the Frost*, an evil wizard finds a magical book with which he gains the power to create real things from nothingness, and he uses this power to terrifying effect. Do the good wizards have a bad time of it? You bet—and so will your PCs.

The Last Unicorn

Nonhuman hero: One of the major characters of this novel is, of course, the nameless unicorn who goes in search of all the missing unicorns. The editorial in issue #180 discussed the use of bizarre PCs in role-playing games, and a unicorn would certainly fit that bill. Really, now, which is

more unbalancing to a campaign: a unicorn PC, or a 12th-level paladin with *plate mail +3* and a *holy avenger*? I rest my case.

Unusual threat: In *The Last Unicorn*, some force or being has done away with all the unicorns in the world but one. Would you have ever thought of an adventure hook like that? What other off-beat menace could interfere with the workings of your campaign? The disappearance of certain wizards' material components, the coming of a great drought or Ice Age, the extinction of a much-ignored (but ecologically critical) species, a magical curse causing baldness among halflings, a new spell being taught to orcish shamans, an artifact that changes copper into gold (thus ruining the lands economy)—these are peculiar threats, indeed, but even the more humorous among them could cause trouble, and that's when heroes must step in to resolve the matter.

Zero-level heroes: Molly Grue is a major character in this novel, but she has no real combat skills whatsoever. What influence could a zero-level PC have on an adventure? Obviously, the key to having zero-level PCs take part in any AD&D adventure lies in the role-playing, and *The Last Unicorn* is rich with episodes in which the interaction of "low-level" characters is critical to the story. It might be worth creating an adventure thick with role-playing, detective work, diplomacy, and intrigue as opposed to fighting, such that characters of any level could participate (see the earlier notes on the use of horror in this event).

Wild magic: The magician Schmendrick, another major character, uses magic that he cannot control. In some ways, the wild magic rules from *Tome of Magic* mirror this condition. What if a wizard character was cursed to have a chance (say, 10% per spell level) that his spells would misfire? What if this effect could not be undone without a long quest? It's an interesting idea.

I would have liked to have added notes from Patricia A. McKillip's *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* (magical animals, seventh sons, the brothers of Sirle, vengeance, etc.) and William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* (extreme beauty, foes turning into allies, personable villains, adventures for true love, etc.), but there's no space or time. You'll have to make your own notes.

Pay a visit to your local library or bookstore and study these and other fantasy novels for ideas that you can borrow to enliven your campaign. The best ideas are worth working for—or reading for.



Letters
Continued from page 5

Kinky crawdads

Dear Dragon,

Upon reading your editorial in issue #177, I was prompted to write about one of my favorite "kinky" games.

Years ago, I stumbled across the CREEKS & CRAWDADS game. I have no idea which company produced it. Indeed, it may not have been published by any established game company. It was such a small and poorly made game that it may well have been produced in somebody's basement. [It] was a softbound book with only a dozen pages or so, including an adventure scenario.

The game is set on Earth after a major nuclear war has completely wiped out the human race. Due to radioactivity, the crawdads have become sentient, although just barely, and they are now the only sentient creatures on the planet. Character classes are very basic, and the rules are not very complete. It was promoted as a "beer and pretzels" game, and it definitely is that: long on role-playing possibilities and short (perhaps too short) on cumbersome rules.

Ian Johnsson
Asheville NC

Our office copy of Lawrence Schick's Heroic Worlds: A History and Guide to Role-Playing Games (page 251) says that that game was produced in 1986 by Crustacium Games. One module was also produced (Never Cry Crawdad), which featured Zombie Crawdads from Hell. That's kinky!

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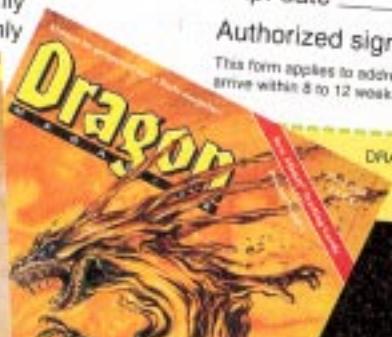
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This newly revised, expanded, and updated version of the AD&D game provides everything players need to enter a world of fantastic role-playing adventure. For intermediate through advanced players, ages 10 and up.

There comes a point in every AD&D® campaign when both the DM and the players need a fresh challenge, something new and different to rejuvenate the gaming group. Some DMs turn to campaigns like the SPELLJAMMER® or RAVENLOFT™ settings to add spice to their game. Me, I turn to TSR's GAMMA WORLD® game. That's right—the GAMMA WORLD game.

The AD&D 1st Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide* describes a conversion system for the two games (on pages 113-114) for very much the same reasons. However, both the AD&D and GAMMA WORLD games have undergone some revision since those glory days. The specific rules in the old DMG no longer apply. However, the spirit of that conversion has been kept and is presented in this article.

The GAMMA WORLD game is a rich source of creative game ideas.

Most of the game masters I know who own it have mixed it with their AD&D campaigns for an adventure or two.

Personally, I now and then like to introduce a new adversary for the players in the form of a unique dem— I mean, fiend from the outer planes. Although the Outer Planes appendix to the *Monstrous Compendium* is a wonderful product full of cool creatures, my players are familiar with many of them. I need something new, so I turn to the GAMMA WORLD game.

The character-creation scheme in the GAMMA WORLD game is the perfect dem—I mean, fiend generator. No two results will ever look alike. The powers that GAMMA WORLD game characters have almost put them in the same league as fiends. They certainly don't have the array of spell-like abilities that your players are used to. Fiends aside, the character creator also serves as a great monster-maker. The monsters tend to be on the tough side, averaging 10 or more hit dice, so don't sic them on low-level characters.

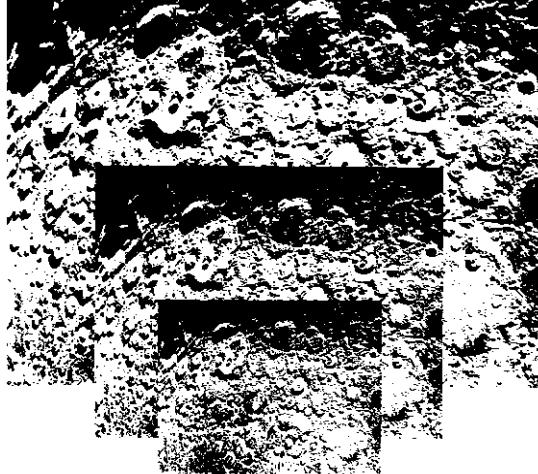
Mixing campaigns

There are a few basic ways to mix GAMMA WORLD and AD&D campaigns. Somehow, elements from one campaign must intrude upon the other, or else elements from both must meet on "neutral ground" in a dimension that belongs to neither. The neutral-ground idea works but isn't very satisfying. The whole point of mixing the campaigns is to allow the flavor of one to flow into the other. This can't happen very well if they meet somewhere that is in neither campaign.

Most game masters have fully developed, stable AD&D campaign. It is therefore the least amount of work to have characters, creatures, or artifacts from a GAMMA WORLD campaign end up in the AD&D world.

When bringing GAMMA WORLD game stuff into the AD&D campaign, remember that AD&D game characters will try understand these artifacts and strangers in a

Converting the fourth-edition GAMMA WORLD® game to the AD&D® game



MAGIC & TECHNOLOGY MEET AT LAST!

by Bruce Nesmith

way that makes sense to their own world view. If you place yourself in the boots of the AD&D game characters, it's easy to understand why they might assume that the GAMMA WORLD game stuff merely comes from another magical plane of existence. Since fantasy beings don't know about our Earth's people, must less nuclear bombs and lasers, they will tend to see such things as magical, not technological. As the game master, you must reinforce this idea. Intentionally describe all GAMMA WORLD game creatures and objects in medieval fantasy terms. Don't ever tell your players that this stuff is coming from a GAMMA WORLD campaign until the adventure is finished. This helps to preserve the sense of alien wonder.

A more elaborate scheme would be to take your AD&D characters and place them in a GAMMA WORLD campaign. There are two basic ways to do this. In one, you have an interdimensional gate, strange machine, or powerful deity send them whole to this strange world. The other option is to have just their minds make the journey; upon arriving, the heroes inhabit the bodies of characters native to the GAMMA WORLD campaign. This second method is the easier one, since there is no need to make conversions from one game system to another.

Even in the strange world of a GAMMA WORLD campaign, the AD&D characters will stand out. They dress "funny" but most qualify as pure strain humans. Locals

will assume that AD&D game demihumans are mutated humans. Although the characters might stand out, their equipment will not. Residents of GAMMA WORLD campaigns are quite used to bizarre artifacts with "magical" powers. However, they might be mystified at the lack of power cells on such devices. Spell-casters are assumed to be using mental powers.

When I have player characters cross the dimensional void to the GAMMA WORLD campaign world, the setting and creatures are so strange that it shocks them right out of their normal way of thinking. Here is a world where everyone is as powerful as a mid- to high-level wizard or psionicist! They jealously eye the laser pistols (magic wands) and black ray rifles (magic staves) of their enemies. One such adventure was one of the more exciting ones that we played that year.

Making conversions

The fourth-edition GAMMA WORLD game was written with an eye toward converting characters and monsters to and from the AD&D game. As a result, you will find that many statistical values convert easily, having exact analogs in each game system. For example, hit points and damage rolls are identically detailed in each system and need no conversion. The general rule is that characters from a given game use their own systems and methods of evaluation when in the other campaign world.

For those of you who are not familiar with the new edition of the GAMMA WORLD game, it arrived at your local hobby store in May. The game mechanics are completely new, but the concept and flavor hold true to the original game. Combat in particular is very close to the system used in the AD&D game. Each creature has a THAC (to hit armor class; the GAMMA WORLD game's equivalent of THAC0). The player rolls a 20-sided die and adds it to his THAC score. The result is the AC (armor class) that the attack penetrated. THAC scores usually start at zero and go up. AC scores start at 10 and get larger (11, 12, etc.). For example, a typical 1st-level character will have a THAC of 1 and an AC of 13 with armor. When attacking, the character rolls a 14 on his 20-sided die. Adding his THAC of 1, he finds he has penetrated AC 15. If the attack is successful, he then rolls damage, just as in the AD&D game.

The AD&D and GAMMA WORLD games derive their combat scores from the base attributes differently. Don't recalculate these derived scores when shifting a character into the other campaign world. Instead, the derived scores themselves are directly converted. The character's native world defines how such things as THAC (or THAC0) and AC are influenced by the attributes.)

In general, characters should try to use their native game rules whenever possible. For example, when an AD&D game char-

acter wants to try to ride a stag (the GAMMA WORLD game's equivalent of a horse), he should use the Land-Based Riding proficiency. If a GAMMA WORLD scout wants to track an animal, he should use his Tracking skill, which only the scout character class has in GAMMA WORLD campaigns.

There is a problem with this rule when characters interact with each other. It's impossible to play out combat if each side is using its own game system. In that situation, use the game system that matches the game world where everything is happening. A fight in the Forgotten Realms between AD&D characters and GAMMA WORLD characters should use the AD&D rules. The GAMMA WORLD characters need to have their converted scores available. Of course a fight in the land of Meriga between AD&D and GAMMA WORLD characters should use the GAMMA WORLD rules.

Character attributes

The character attributes of the AD&D and GAMMA WORLD game are very similar. The most obvious difference is that the GAMMA WORLD game includes a seventh attribute, senses, that has no equivalent in the AD&D game. As a simple rule, AD&D game humans are assumed to have a Senses score of 10, while demihumans have a Senses score of 13. Alternately, the game master can have AD&D characters roll a Senses score as they enter the GAMMA WORLD campaign. In that case, humans roll 3d6 and demihumans roll 4d6 and ignore the lowest of the four dice.

AD&D® game attributes	GAMMA WORLD® game equivalent
STR	PS (Physical Strength)
DEX	DX (Dexterity)
CON	CN (Constitution)
INT	IN (Intelligence)
WIS	MS (Mental Strength)
CHR	CH (Charisma)

A GAMMA WORLD character can have attributes that exceed 18. In fact, it is rather common. This represents a character that is superhuman in that attribute. There is no need to change the character's attributes if he ends up in an AD&D campaign world; just use them as they are. However, such characters do not get the divine powers listed in the Legends & Lore books for characters with superhuman attributes.

One anomaly of the AD&D game is that a strength of 18 can have a percentile figure attached to it for the fighter class. If such a character ends up in a GAMMA WORLD campaign, he is considered to have a strength of only 18 when making strength checks. However, he retains all of the combat bonuses to THAC0, damage, etc. that are derived from his unusual strength. If his strength needs to be compared to the strength of another character (as in an arm-wrestling contest), then his

strength is considered to be greater than a normal 18, but less than 19.

THAC and THAC0

These are the most basic combat scores in either game. These values perform the same function in both, namely to determine whether or not an attack succeeds. In the AD&D game, THAC0 values start at 20 and get lower as the character gains experience. A THAC0 of 10 is better than a THAC0 of 20. The exact reverse is true for the GAMMA WORLD game. A THAC of 0 is the average starting value. It gets bigger as the character gets better. Each plus one of THAC equal a minus one of THAC0. The following table shows how to convert one to the other easily.

AD&D® game THAC0	GAMMA WORLD® game THAC
20	0
19	1
18	2
17	3
16	4
15	5
14	6
13	7
12	8
11	9
10	10
etc.	etc.

Armor class

The armor classes of the two game systems parallel each other just like the THAC and THAC0. The base armor class in the AD&D game is 10, representing a typical unarmored human. As the person's defensive abilities are improved, the armor class gets lower. The GAMMA WORLD game has the same base value of 10, but the armor class number gets bigger as defense improves. The following table shows how to convert one to the other easily.

AD&D® game AC	GAMMA WORLD® game AC
10	10
9	11
8	12
7	13
6	14
5	15
4	16
3	17
2	18
1	19
0	20
- 1	21
etc.	etc.

Hit points, hit dice, & levels

In both games, the character's ability to take physical punishment is measured by his hit points. Beginning AD&D characters have very few hit points and see dramatic improvements as they go up in level. GAMMA WORLD characters start with a lot of hit points and get only a marginal

improvement as they gain experience. The hit points in one system equate directly to hit points in the other. There is no need to change or convert between the systems. This means that GAMMA WORLD character tend to have a lot more hit points than AD&D characters, especially at low levels.

A principle difference between the AD&D game and the GAMMA WORLD game is in levels and hit dice. In the AD&D game, hit dice and level are practically interchangeable terms. In the GAMMA WORLD game they have nothing to do with each other. However, all characters and all monsters are given a level. When using characters from one system in the game world of the other, use the levels and ignore the hit dice.

Mental powers

Unlike physical combat, characters from each game world conduct mental combat on their own terms. Psionicists attack using the AD&D game system, but defend with the GAMMA WORLD game system. Espers (a GAMMA WORLD character class) attack using the GAMMA WORLD game system, but defend using the AD&D game system. In the GAMMA WORLD game, characters all have MD (Mental Defense) scores and most have MHAC (Mental Hit Armor Class) scores. The MHAC is simply the mental To Hit score and works just like THAC or THAC0 for mental attacks. The MD is the mental armor class and works just like AC for mental attacks.

The poor AD&D character that finds himself in the GAMMA WORLD game has a problem when defending against mental attacks. He has no Mental Defense score! In such a situation, his MD score will be 10 plus the magical defense adjustment granted by his Wisdom score. Therefore a character with a 17 Wisdom would have an MD of 13 (10 plus the bonus of 3).

Psionicists are more at home with mental attacks and defenses. They have a GAMMA WORLD mental defense score equal to 10 plus their wisdom bonus (as described above) plus their level. All mental mutation powers that are directed at the character's mind use must overcome this defense, using the GAMMA WORLD rules. It is not necessary for the GAMMA WORLD character to establish three tangents (successful psionic attacks) in order to affect the mind of a psionicist.

Most GAMMA WORLD characters are treated as nonpsionic. The psionicist need only establish Contact (a telepathic devotion) to get into his opponent's mind. On the other hand, GAMMA WORLD game espers are trained in mental defense, which gives them an advantage when dealing with psionicists. In psionic combat using the AD&D rules, the esper uses his MD score as if it were a defense mode. The psionicist gets no modifiers for the various attack modes, so it doesn't matter which one he uses. Use the combat rules from the *Complete Psionics Handbook*, pages 22-27. A roll of 20 is always a fail-

ure, even if the GAMMA WORLD character's MD score is 20 or higher. It takes three successful attacks (called tangents) before the psionicist can enter the esper's mind.

Spells & magic

AD&D game spells affect GAMMA WORLD characters differently than they affect AD&D characters. The former have a natural magic resistance of 15% when in a magic-using world; this increases to 30% when in their native dimension. On the down side, GAMMA WORLD characters never make saving throws vs. any form of magic. If a saving throw is called for, they automatically fail it. Their extradimensional origin gives them a natural resistance to any form of magic, even beneficial spells, but beyond that they are very vulnerable.

Radiation

AD&D characters do not have the natural resistance to radiation that GAMMA WORLD characters have. The former each has a Health score (vs. radiation only) of 1, plus the constitution bonus for hit points; compare this to typical Health scores of 10-13 for a GAMMA WORLD character. This means that even the weakest form of radiation will usually harm fantasy-world beings. For example, an AD&D game thief with a constitution of 17 has a +2 hit-

point bonus. Therefore his Health score vs. radiation is 3 (1+2). The radiation attack roll must still be made to determine exactly how much damage is done, using the standard GAMMA WORLD radiation rules. As is true for pure strain humans in GAMMA WORLD games, AD&D characters do not mutate when exposed to high levels of radiation.

Things & stuff

In either game world, the characters might be carrying powerful devices: magical items or technological artifacts. Technology brought into an AD&D world works fine. What fun would it be if it didn't? For the same reason, magical items brought into a GAMMA WORLD game also work just fine.

Sentient creatures from either game world project an aura that maintains the physical laws of their native world. In particular, electrical and other high-tech power sources fail after a week in an AD&D world, unless they are in the presence (within 10 meters) of a sentient native from the GAMMA WORLD lands. The power cells or atomic energy sources otherwise cease to function. Only one GAMMA WORLD artifact doesn't work at all in an AD&D world: the solar recharger. Sunlight in an AD&D world cannot be used to recharge a power cell. No amount of tinkering with the recharger will

change this.

The same logic holds true for AD&D magical items in a GAMMA WORLD campaign. If not kept in the presence (within 30') of an intelligent native from an AD&D campaign world, they lose their magic after a week. This time is cumulative; a day here and a day there eventually add up to a defunct item. The magical properties return only after a full week spent back in an AD&D world.

These rules are to prevent players from abusing your campaign by bringing truckloads or cartloads of powerful stuff back from another world. If you use the rules properly, you shouldn't have any problems. However, no rule is perfect. The game master *must* take control of the situation to prevent player abuse. If your players figure out a way to keep their alien stuff functional for a long time, it is up to you to stop them. Rain can ruin GAMMA WORLD items, and radiation can destroy magical ones. Do whatever it takes to keep control over your campaign.

I've had a blast running the GAMMA WORLD game as a regular campaign. I've also had a ton of fun mixing it into my AD&D game. Of all the role-playing games I know, the GAMMA WORLD game provides some of the best sense of wild, wahoo fun in role-playing. And after all, fun is what gaming is all about. Ω

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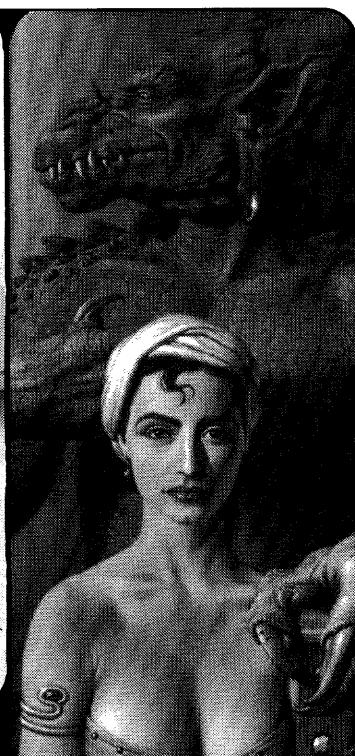
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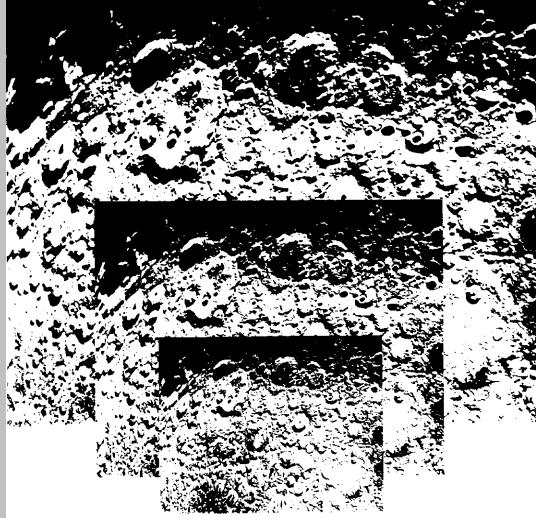
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—The Gaunt Man



Advice to a High Lord

@1992 by Martin Wixted

A gamemaster's best strategies for West End Games's TORG* game

Encapsulated within this article are the secrets, advice, and wisdom of several hundred hours of role-playing experience that will enable you to survive and savor one of the most gripping role-playing games I have ever encountered: the TORG* system, from West End Games. "Torg" refers to the goal of The Gaunt Man, the instigator of the Possibility Wars.

According to the game's premise, the mysterious Gaunt Man marshalled his horrific powers for an assault on Earth. His purpose was to drain every last drop of living energy from the Earth-energy known as "possibilities." But he knew that this prize, the richest hoard ever, was too much for him to handle alone. To this end, he enlisted the aid of those who would otherwise have been his enemies:

—Pope Jean Malraux I, the cybernetic antipode of a realm where believer and nonbeliever alike pay homage to the God-Net, a massive computer network that illuminates the way to their god.

—Lord Angar Uthorion, whose soul possesses the body of the greatest leader his magical fantasy world has ever known, and who is using her to corrupt and weaken the land itself.

—Kanawa-Sama, member of a ruthless Asian cabal where profit and loss is the difference between life and death, because failure is often rewarded by a ninja's blade flashing through the night.

-Pharaoh Mobius, the ruler over an empire where robed Egyptian priests offer sacrifices to the gods, and costumed crime fighters wage a neverending battle to defeat him.

—Kranod, demon master of Tharkhold, a dark realm of techno-horror, where ferocity and pain dominate all interactions.

—Baruk Kaah, lizard ruler over a lost world of swamps and jungles, who leads his scaled followers on rampages of bloodlust and violence.

To this mix, the Gaunt Man brought his own cosm (world) of unseen terrors and monsters lurking in the dark. With all this power, they should have been unstoppable. But the Gaunt Man did not realize, until it was too late, that the bountiful store of Earth's possibilities would also supply energy to his enemies.

Each player character is someone from one of these invading realities—or from "Core Earth" itself, areas of our planet that remain in what we call "reality"—who has decided to help defeat the invaders. What makes a player character special is the fact that he has undergone a "moment of crisis" and has come out of it on the side of good, with the added ability to manipulate the very energy these invading High Lords seek so desperately.

It is this possibility energy that, when collected and correctly manipulated, can make the Gaunt Man immortal and invinci-

ble. If he succeeds at this task, he will have earned the coveted title of Torg, the ruler of the infinite universes—the Infinitiverse.

After more than 12 years of involvement in role-playing, I can say the TORG system is the first gestalt game I have ever encountered—that is, it is a game larger than the sum of its parts. The game is involving and intriguing, but becomes richer by an order of magnitude when the different realms are intertwined. Send a dwarven mage to strike deep into the 1930s Nile Empire, follow an occult-using gypsy as she infiltrates the evil Cyberpapacy, or pay Nippon Tech ninja to battle dinosaurs in Vancouver, and you'll see that it is in the mixing of these realms that the most fantastic stories are told.

The TORG game is not for the rules-dependant gamer. A glance at the skill list for any game gives you a good indication of the game's thrust, and the TORG system is no exception. With only 70-odd character skills to handle seven different genres, the game is not for rules-technicians. In fact, the spirit of the TORG game shines through best when breakneck action explodes against the backdrop of conflicting worlds.

Of course, no game is perfect. If you are planning to run a TORG campaign, you would benefit from reading the novel trilogy published for the game. I highly

recommend the second book, *The Dark Realm*. Like many novels published to promote the games they are based on, this one gives you a true feel for the setting.

The Drama Deck

With great innovation comes great controversy, and this maxim is clearly demonstrated through the TORG game's Drama Deck. Nothing else in the game evokes more emotional response than those cards. Players love them or hate them, sometimes both simultaneously. The deck is used by the players to augment skill use and actually allows them to influence the story line. When I first used the cards, I wasn't sure that they encouraged role-playing. But the more I see them used, the more I am convinced they do enhance play.

As in virtually all role-playing games, the TORG rules are character-centered, with everything based around the individual as hero. Thus, the cards are a tool just as equipment, weaponry, and skills are. The ability of a TORG character to influence her environment, however, is potentially far greater than in any other role-playing game. The Drama Deck cards empower the player, allowing her to decide what trouble her character gets into. Through the cards, her character can become entangled in any number of dramatic situations ranging from a case of mistaken identity to a love triangle.

In a recent tournament, one player was using the Tough Hero character from the Nile Empire cosm. He surprised me in the middle of the scenario by playing the Nemesis card, signalling that he wanted to involve his Hero in a subplot. I was caught off-guard because few players new to the game are so daring. Nevertheless, I knew the villain of the adventure (a neo-Nazi named Skaven Lucas) would do nicely for a nemesis, and when the heroes finally met up with Skaven, I had Skaven look directly at the Tough Hero and say, "So. We meet again." The player looked at me questioningly when I asked who the villain was, then realization dawned on him. He puffed out his chest, exclaiming, "Yes! It is me, after all these years, uh, Baron von Strupp. I knew that prison would never hold you." We bantered back and forth for a full five minutes, developing an impromptu history for the two antagonists. As we did, I saw an ordinary game turn into an extraordinary one, and watched a jaded role-player become enraptured once again by his hobby.

Combat & the Drama Deck

In the TORG game, conflict is not choreographed exclusively by the game master but is merely guided by him. It is defined both by the cards and by the players, who hold the opportunity to legally influence the situation with their own card play. Combat is more intriguing for the GM, who can guide the flow of events instead of needing to administer every tedious

step. The Drama Deck manages to give back to the GM some of the thrill and uncertainty of confrontation that he loses by not being a player, because even he isn't sure what the next card flip will bring—or what cards the players might spring on him. But any new concept needs a period of time to iron out the kinks. After hundreds of hours of card play, here are suggested changes and advice:

—The standard conflict line gives heroes initiative each round two-thirds of the time. The dramatic conflict line awards them the initiative just one-third of the time. Use this fact to simulate luck by announcing that a disputed outcome depends upon who receives initiative next round. Knowing the percentages, you can weight your response to favor the more likely outcome.

—When players work as a team, the Leadership and Master Plan cards are the most powerful cards in the deck. Playing the Leadership card allows a player to give two of his cards to other players, then discard or refill his hand. The Master Plan card allows him to pick up the top card of the discard pile in exchange for the Master Plan card. Players can reuse a Leadership card by playing it, being sure it is on the top of the discard pile, and each player in turn (or the same player) playing a Master Plan card can do the same. While you should encourage clever use of card resources, this is clearly not something the designers anticipated. Therefore, I suggest a house rule stating the Master Plan card may be used only once per round.

—As the number of players increases linearly, the power of Drama Deck grows exponentially. For example, a group of six players is more than twice as powerful as a group of three players. Although this concept is true in any game with a good balance of character types and abilities, it is more obvious in the TORG system. Because there are more cards in play at one time, there are more resources from which players can draw. This is a problem if groups with different numbers of players are competing against each other, especially as the game's card play was optimized for three to six players. If there are seven or more players, limit each player to a hand of three cards (down from the standard limit of four). For a group larger than nine, allow each player only two cards. Two players are each entitled to a hand of six cards, and a single-player game allows a hand of eight cards.

Introducing new players

Tournament play helps me refine the techniques I use when presenting the TORG game to new players. This became critical at a convention when an AD&D® game DM assigned to run a tournament didn't show up. Instead of disappointing the players, the organizer asked the other GMs to accept players from that canceled run. I suddenly needed to present the

world and the game to people who had heard about the TORG system but never actually played it.

Because the players were experienced gamers and the game is role-playing oriented (as opposed to oriented toward rules, military strategy, or personal gain), I needed to emphasize that trait in my presentation. My greatest challenge was figuring how to highlight role-playing without disparaging what, in another game, might be a perfectly acceptable playing style. I decided to first present the mood and style of the different realms and, by extension, the personalities of the characters. The actual rules I would leave for last, so players would have their character's traits in mind when generating numbers.

I began by reiterating the information from the frontispiece of the rule book, ignoring the Infiniverse references. (Newcomers have enough to think about without concern for repercussions on a billion alternate Earths!)

Since I use miniatures in my games, I then began describing each of the six invading cosms in broad terms. As I detailed a realm, I showed miniatures for that realm so players could visualize what I was describing.

I then handed out photocopies of each miniature's background. West End Games's character sheets place statistics on the front and the character's background on the back, simplifying my task. In addition to defining a character's motivations, the reverse side lists an equipment summary, giving players a handle on the "real-world" capabilities of each character.

After everyone chose a character, I handed out copies of the character statistics and began explaining the rules. I always use a subset of the 24 TORG character sheets included in the box because they are well-focused on the overall mission of the game: that of driving out the High Lords and their minions. All source books include additional characters, but some of those personalities are focused too tightly (for my purposes, anyway) on the inner politics within a specific realm. For example, the Dark Avenger in the *Nile Empire Sourcebook* has come to Earth in an attempt to bring mad Pharaoh Mobius to justice—not exactly the type of character you'd expect would journey to Canada and help repel a dinosaur attack.

The other reason I stick with the characters in the boxed set is a simple one. Since I often run TORG tournaments at game conventions, it keeps the pool of possible character roles finite, which helps me remember the characters' resources—especially with some of the more popular ones. For example, it's easy for me to recall that the Nippon Tech Corporate Ninja has a bonus to stealth due to his Niyoki camouflage suit and that he knows lock picking. I can also remember without looking at the Nile Empire Tough Hero that she carries a .38 revolver and is skilled at

unarmed combat.

With this set-up, I sometimes feel like I'm running an extended campaign with the same set of characters. Each week, however, different actors are playing those parts!

If you are starting a group for people who are relatively new to role-playing games, there is little doubt as to what sort of character to offer them: someone from Core Earth. Each of the invading cosmics has new twists and turns on the basics of the game—nothing that would faze an experienced player, but try to remember what your very first role-playing games were like!

One of my newer players decided on an elven wizard from the Aysle fantasy cosm. I was concerned about her choice (a mage is not one of the simplest roles in the TORG system), but when she explained that the only other role-playing experience she had was playing a D&D® game mage, it suddenly made sense. In the final analysis, it is better to allow the player to chose the role she is most comfortable with or is the most excited about, because the player will be a more willing learner than if you were to recommend a character with which the player could not identify.

Card pools & new players

With a new group, ignore card pools for the first two or three sessions. Players have enough to comprehend without having a rule that fundamentally changes how the game is played but that applies only at particular times. New players are already unsure of the game sequence as a whole; card pools can make some players hesitant to use cards at all, while making others feel restricted because they don't grasp the reasoning behind the rule. I found that eliminating card pools allows the game to play in the same way that it does with the card-pool rule in place. That is, players ignore their cards during the first few hours of the game, then begin using the cards after they see how often this resource is replenished. Once your players are comfortable with the game system, put card pools back into combat.

A proved actions & new players

When it comes to combat, the TORG game is quite unlike any game I have ever run. Since I must assume that this is true for new players as well, I point out that the Maneuver, Trick, Test of Wills, Taunt, and Intimidate skills are conflict-oriented. Invariably, players want definitions of these special combat actions, and I use the ones out of the Adventure Book.

In addition to its other duties, the Drama Deck also regulates use of these special combat actions. In a given round, only particular actions are singled out as "approved actions." If a character succeeds in performing one of these approved actions during that round, the player is awarded a card from the Drama Deck. If the charac-

ter performs an action that is not one of the approved actions listed for that round, the player gets no award for succeeding.

For example, Trick was the approved action in a round during one of my games when a Nile Empire character going by the stage name of Professor Marvello was grabbed by a rather large and annoyed ogre. Although the professor was a magician by trade, he was a magician in the tradition of Houdini. Since the player had an opportunity to benefit by using a Trick, his character unleashed a trio of white doves hidden in his tuxedo. As it turned out, the character's Trick skill total was high enough to affect the rather dim-witted ogre, who was startled and immediately dropped him. If there had been little incentive to try unusual actions, it is doubtful that the player would have created such a character, never mind attempting such an outlandish but effective stunt.

The purpose for this ever-changing list of approved actions is to draw attention to them, as the GM always announces approved actions at the start of each round. Players also may find a large number of combat options to be confusing, and this simplifies player's choices. Finally, this mechanic encourages players to use skills that are not optimal for their characters, such as encouraging them to try a verbal Taunt when their character is better at physical Maneuvers.

This works well in an established campaign to prevent a character from using the same approved action in every conflict, which can become tedious, producing a case of the character parodying himself. However, this is true only for players with experience in the TORG universe. For new players, using approved actions is typically seen as merely restrictive, in that players are rewarded only when they perform an action from a randomly selected list without regard for an action's dramatic appropriateness (or lack thereof).

Instead of using this rule, I tell players that a successful use of an approved action at any time nets that player a Drama Deck card. This encourages players to look for nonstandard conflict solutions. Instead of beating on a goblin, a character might try a Trick, by pulling the rug out from under the creature. Instead of immediately flying into battle, a character might choose to pause for a few rounds and Taunt his opponent. Rewarding both the player (by handing out a card from the Drama Deck) and the character (by providing specific game effects) encourages flamboyant and sweeping action—just the right feeling for TORG campaigns.

Also be sure players understand that approved actions are separate from other combat acts. For example, a common tactic is to charge an opponent in the first round, thus permitting hand-to-hand

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melee in following rounds. Under the TORG rules, a character cannot claim this was a Maneuver skill, since the intent was to simply close the distance between opponents. The purpose of a Maneuver is to fatigue or distract an opponent, thus gaining an advantage, not simply to set up the opponent for an attack by other means. If a character is within range for a physical assault, but he chooses instead to spend a round to Maneuver around his opponent to gain a terrain advantage, that is a proper use of this approved action. Thus, a Maneuver is used in place of a normal attack.

Moments of crisis

Heroes are those characters who have experienced a moment of decision in their lives and have chosen to fight for good. According to the rule book, this crisis has happened some time in the character's past, but it can serve as a hook from which to launch a campaign. During the session I devote to character creation, while players are busy solidifying their characters' concepts, goals, and personalities, I role-play with each player on a one-to-one basis to portray each hero's moment of crisis.

For example, the story I told the player of a Core-Earth character was that his

character wakes up amid the wreckage of his room. The player's first response, naturally, was to wonder if his character was dreaming. I assured him that his character, Nathan, was very much awake. In fact, I said that as soon as Nathan managed to pick his way through the rubble to the street, he realized that his parents and brother were nowhere to be found.

"No! I race back into the house!" he cried.

"Well," I told him, "you spot what looks like a young Tyrannousaurus rex shoving its way through the rubble, a limp body in its gaping jaws. You suddenly get this overwhelming urge to stomp around the rubble and bellow at the top of your lungs."

"I—I fight the urge and look around for something to hit the monster with! I can't let this thing kill my family!"

"Yes, you find a nice, sturdy piece of timber to use as a club. Looks good for banging heads. There's another, human-sized lizard near you, trapped in the rubble. It looks unconscious. Just take the club and bash its head in. It feels right."

"No, I can't. I—I won't kill it. It's helpless."

Well, he wound up fighting the dinosaur and finally won, but his family was gone. This scene was the catalyst that forced him to make a choice: the reality of the

primitive Living Land was compelling him to release his savage instincts, to destroy for the sake of destroying, and to kill to avenge the murder of his family. But Nathan's decision propelled him to the side of good, which imbued him with possibility energy.

Role-playing out the moment of crisis often helps to focus and introduce the character to the other players, to you as the GM, and to the player of that new character. As you can see, the moment of crisis is usually an intense, often violent situation for the hero.

The expanding universe

Like any good game world, the TORG system continues to grow and evolve. The Possibility Wars recently expanded into the solar system with the arrival of supportive aliens from another dimension, detailed in the *Space Gods Sourcebook*. And with the advent of the *Tharkold Sourcebook*, the breakneck action is not going to slow down anytime soon.

Unfortunately, the Space Gods unintentionally brought a plague along with them, and the Tharkold demons arrived a little late to the party. Tharkold was one of the seven realms originally scheduled to come through during the initial attack on Earth, but Kanawa operatives sabotaged and thus delayed them. They've got a new High Lord, Jezrael, and guess why she's here?

With the suggestions in this article, you're now armed with the information you need to add new players to the ranks of the brave, journeying down that long road toward helping free the people of Earth and ultimately defeating the Gaunt Man in his quest to become Torg. Good luck.

Ω

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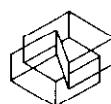
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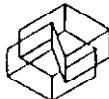
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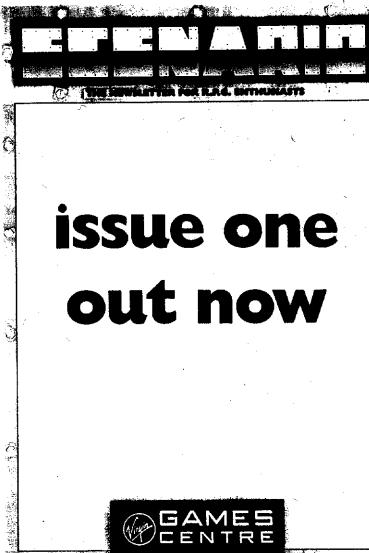
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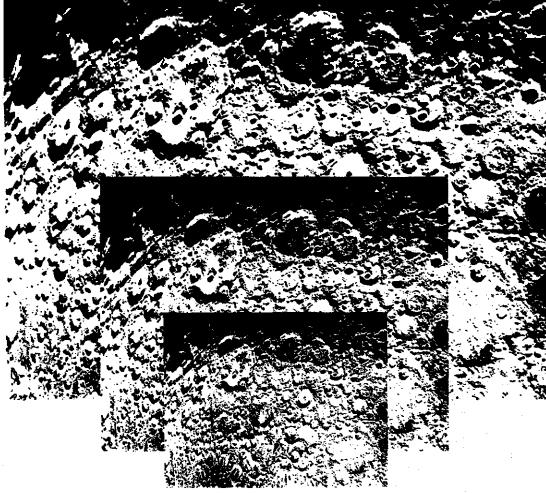
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of spacefaring nations, high adventure and rich rewards are theirs. Pirate or privateer, all they need is a good ship, a stout crew, and a bit of luck, and the whole of wildspace is theirs for the taking!

So why set a course on the high way, you ask? Well, if the call of the void and the prospect of a quick fortune aren't

enough for you, then perhaps you should reconsider. Only the daring need apply for this trade. What real adventuring spacefarer hasn't thought of turning rogue and pitting his wits and his sword against the vasty universe?

Consider this: A SPELLJAMMER campaign setting rarely takes advantage of one



of the most exciting aspects of the game system—spelljamming ships. In most campaigns, the party's ship remains a plot vehicle, a means to whisk them from one encounter to the next. Many of the great wars that take place in the SPELLJAMMER campaign are naval conflicts. Spacepower (like seapower on worlds with oceans) decides issues in the SPELLJAMMER game universe. What better way for the players to feel they are contributing than to have their characters bring their ship into battle? What rogue leads a more dangerous or rewarding life than the pirates of deep space?

Characters who take up a ship-based campaign have four basic options: They can become merchants, they can enlist in a space navy, they can obtain a letter of marque and set out against an enemy's merchantmen, or they can simply "go pirate." Merchants can certainly lead dangerous lives and reap rich rewards, but trade lacks the glory and the dash of preying upon the high spaceways. Enlisting in the service of one navy or another is fine, but it places the characters under the orders of their superiors. As a DM, you would be well within your rights to ensure that Admiral Ackendorf ordered the characters' ship to garrison duty any time there was another place they had to be.

On the other hand, turning pirate or privateer gives the characters great latitude in choosing how they will pursue their careers as terrors of the spaceways. There is one significant difference between pirates and privateers: Privateers carry letters of marque, and pirates don't. A letter of marque is a legal document, granted by a spacefaring nation, that gives the bearer the right to attack and confiscate any ship belonging to any enemy power named in the document. In many cases, the letter of marque also contains sweeping powers to enforce the nation's laws on the space lanes, like fighting against piracy or smuggling in addition to the power to attack the enemy.

This distinction between pirate and privateer certainly does not mean that all pirates are evil and all privateers are good. Characters who turn pirate in an evil empire and restrict their attacks to ships of that power are technically pirates, since they do not carry a letter of marque. Similarly, possession of a letter of marque would in many cases allow an evil captain to sack towns and outposts of the enemy and generally behave in a nasty fashion with no fear of legal repercussions. Since this line between pirate and privateer is so often blurred, the two classes of captains can be discussed at the same time. The same considerations affect both types of buccaneers.

There are several good locations for piracy or privateering campaigns in the official adventures published in the SPELLJAMMER product line. The Second Unhuman War of SJS1 *Goblins' Return* and SJQ1 *The Heart of the Enemy* is a great

place for good-aligned characters to throw in with the elves, obtain a letter of marque, and become privateers. The Vodon war of SJA4 *Under the Dark Fist* is another good setting. If you prefer a smaller backdrop, try a localized war between two human spacefaring nations within the same crystal sphere, or set up an evil empire and allow the characters to become a noble band of pirates fighting for freedom and gold. The considerations for turning pirate or privateer are about the same; the only difference lies in whether or not the characters bother to obtain a letter of marque.

Piracy set-up

A piracy campaign is relatively easy to arrange. At the simplest level, the characters need only take their ship out and waylay the first spacefarer they come across. As the DM, you will need to make some basic decisions about the powers that be in the sphere where the characters operate. Is there a lot of spelljamming activity or only a little bit? Is there one large, coordinated power that provides security for the entire sphere, or are there a half-dozen factions that secretly support piracy when it's happening to someone else? The most important part of your preparation for a piracy campaign will be mapping out the crystal spheres in which the characters plan to commit their depredations and setting up the encounter charts. The Planetary Display Track provided in the SPELLJAMMER boxed set is perfect for this kind of work.

You will want to take some time and develop the spacefaring nations of your SPELLJAMMER campaign. Decide how large and how well organized their navies are, and whether they respect each other's flags or attack one another on sight. Two or three large, aggressive powers in the same sphere will naturally be rivals and may be quite hostile. If your sphere contains only one or two weak powers and lots of empty space into which they can expand, they will hardly feel threatened by one another and may cooperate in rooting out pirates and similar scum!

Privateer set-ups

In general, all the considerations of a piracy campaign apply for setting up a privateering campaign. However, there is an important factor that is needed for a privateer: a war. The war does not have to be an active one; any declared conflict will do, even if it is hundreds of years old and no military actions of consequence are occurring. (For example, consider the English pirates of the Caribbean and their wars against Spain's colonies.) One of the powers (preferably both) should have some spacefaring interests and commerce. Being a privateer is no fun when you've no ships to take or towns to sack. Lastly, the characters need a letter of marque or a similar legal document authorizing them to attack enemy commerce and interests.

Letters of marque: Privateering is an old tradition in wildspace, and most powers issue letters of marque. There are professional privateers who wait until they hear of a conflict somewhere, then offer their services to whichever side will issue them a letter of marque. On occasion, the home port of a merchant captain will become embroiled in a war, and the captain will arm his ship and set out in the service of his nation. In most cases, simply informing the local navy that you desire a letter of marque against the enemy power is sufficient to start the wheels rolling.

Depending on the nation involved, a letter of marque might be issued by the commanding officer of the local military establishment or by an agent or agency of the state. In either case, it takes 3d10 days for the letter to be drawn up and approved. Nations suffering grave reversals may waive some of the red tape, reducing this time to 1d6 days. On the down side, nations whose navies have been destroyed are fond of pressing any ship in port into their service. There is an excellent chance under those circumstances that a captain will receive a requisition instead of a letter of marque.

On rare occasions, a captain might be offered or forced to take a commission instead, becoming a member of the military of the nation he is serving. This is not necessarily recommended for role-playing campaigns, because this means that the captain is now subject to orders from superior officers and usually ends up with his ship as a part of a fleet.

The professional privateers of wildspace are generally granted letters of marque out of respect for their abilities and reputations. No one wants to risk the ire of all mercenary captains by pressing all professional captains into service; it won't be long before the word gets out that the power is confiscating every warship that sails into port, and the professional privateers will simply go somewhere else to do business.

Outfitting ships of war

Let's assume that the characters successfully obtained a letter of marque without losing their ship or their freedom, or they decided they didn't need one after all. They have everything they need to set out after fat tradesmen, right?

Not quite. They now need to crew and provision their ship. The crew may be up to the task of everyday sailing, but are there enough sailors on board to form boarding parties and prize crews? Can the galley feed all those extra marines? Few characters who own a tradesman, for example, hire on more than the minimum crew of 10, thinking that they're saving money by skimping on extra crew. The truth of the matter is, when a ship goes into harm's way, people get hurt. Pirates and privateers need a large crew to successfully board and capture prizes and to replace losses.

Sample SPELLJAMMER® Random Encounter Tables

2d10 Phlogiston	Deep wildspace	Well-traveled wildspace
2 Dark space	Radiant dragon, 1	Radiant dragon, 1
3 Survivor	Krajen, mature, 1-2	Krajen, mature, 1-2
4 Phlog-crawler, 1-2	Trader, human	Warship, humanoid
5 Trader, other	Trader, other	Warship, other
6 Trader, human	Spacefarer	Warship, other
7 Wizshade, 1	Warship, human	Trader, other
8 Puffer, 1-2	Warship, other	Spacefarer
9 Wreck	Wreck	Warship, human
10 Undead	Krajen, immature	Trader, human
11 Undead	Scavvers, 2-8	Trader, human
12 Delphinid, 3-12	Puffer, 1-2	Warship, human
13 Spacefarer	Elemental phenomenon	Spacefarer
14 Warship, human	Undead	Pirates
15 Warship, other	Warship, humanoid	Scavvrs, 2-8
16 Warship, humanoid	Pirates	Puffer, 1-2
17 Spiritjam, 1	Pirates of Gith	Wreck
18 Misi, 2-5	Astereater, 1	Undead
19 Lumineaux, 1-2	Gravislayer, 1	Elemental phenomenon
20 Dark space	Sargasso	Sargasso

Dark space: A region of corrupted (dark, cold) phlogiston. Roll a random undead encounter. If the undead menace is vanquished, the phlogiston returns to normal.

Elemental phenomenon: A fire portal, asteroid, or air or water pocket.

Pirates: A hammership, squidship, wasp, or tradesman with a full pirate crew.

Sargasso: An area $1d100 \times 100$ miles across in which spelljamming does not work 95% of the time. Sargassoes will contain 1d6 - 1 wrecks.

Spacefarer: Barge of Ptah, Wonderseeker vipership, spacesea giants, thri-kreen leafship, beholder eye tyrant

Trader, human: Tradesman, whaleship, galleon, damselfly, wasp, battle dolphin, shrikeship, cog or carrack.

Trader, other: Mind-flayer nautiloid, neogi mindspider, gnomish sidewheeler, dwarven citadel, elven shrikeship, dwarven-crewed hammership.

Undead: Random ship type manned by skeletons and zombies, and led by a wraith or spectre.

Warship, human: Hammership, squidship, shrikeship, or battle dolphin. This ship may be neutral or friendly.

Warship, humanoid: Scro mantis, orcish or hobgoblin scorpion, ogre mammoth, goblin or kobold angelship.

Warship, other: Elven man-o'-war, elven armada, mind-flayer nautiloid, neogi death-spider, neogi mindspider, or dwarven-crewed hammership.

Wreck: A randomly determined ship adrift in space. Fifty percent of such wrecks are the lairs of some monster or undead.

Let's take a look at the tradesman, or "fish-ship." The 10-member crew minimum required for the ship includes the spell-jamming mage and nine deck hands-but this means the two large weapons mentioned in the ship description aren't crewed! The first thing a wise captain will do is hire on enough weaponeers and artillers to handle all of his ship's weapons at the same time.

The next step is to see how many extra tons of ship are left (remembering that one ton of ship supports one crewman) after crewing weapons and accounting for PCs. Presumably, most characters don't want to be tied down in shiphandling tasks or tethered to one weapon during a fight, preferring to not count themselves as minimum crew or weaponeers. The only exception to this is the spelljammer himself, who probably is a PC priest or mage.

Going back to the tradesman example, let's assume a PC party of six characters, including a mage who is the spelljammer.

They arm the ship with two medium catapults. The catapults require three men each, and five PCs aren't doing anything special, so your minimum crew of 10 is now up to 21. The party can only hire on four more bodies before exceeding the maximum crew.

Now, it is true that you can overman a vessel and accept the shorter voyage duration as a consequence. In general, the ship cannot comfortably quarter more than twice its normal crew, so a tradesman with a maximum crew of 25 could crowd a total of 50 on board. Unfortunately, this is a hard decision for a privateer captain. You need extra men to help win boarding actions and make up losses, but you also may need long endurance in deep wildspace, and adding extra crew drastically cuts into the endurance of your air envelope. A good rule of thumb: If you will be staying in the same crystal sphere, take all the men you can carry; if you are going into the phlogiston, do not endanger your

air supply.

To return to our example, let's say the characters expect to remain in their own crystal sphere and hire a platoon of 20 marines to sail with them. The ship is now carrying 41 men, which leaves little space for prisoners or passengers. However, the ship will be able to sail for only two to four months (rather than the four to eight it normally could) before its atmosphere begins to foul. One hopes that this won't be a consideration.

When hiring on crew with the intention of taking them a-pirating, most captains offer a share of any prize taken as part of the pay. In fact, it's very hard to hire on crew without this provision. Pirate crews divide the profits of their journey into three parts: one for the captain, one for the officers, and the third part of the takings for the crew. Privateers use the same arrangement, but their profits are somewhat lower because they usually are required to surrender half the value of their prize to the power that issued their letter of marque. Desperate men can be hired on with the promise of splitting as little as a one-tenth share among the crew, but their loyalty will be questionable.

Another consideration when outfitting a ship is provisioning. Buying stores of food and water is expensive and takes up space. Supplies to last 10 crewmen for eight months can be assumed to cost 500 gp and take up one ton of cargo space. In our example, provisioning a crew of 40 men for eight months would take four tons of cargo space and cost 2,000 gp. A stingy captain might make the observation that since he has air for only four months at best, he can halve his stores requirements. On the other hand, it can't hurt to be cautious, and one never knows when the unexpected might occur in wildspace.

Hunting for prey.

Without question, this is the most difficult part about being a predatory captain. Finding suitable victims in a place as big and empty as wildspace is virtually impossible. The wise captain will try to find a more effective strategy than simply roaming about looking for trouble. He could find a commonly used trade route between two worlds and patrol it. Another effective strategy consists of blockading a town or a portal in the crystal sphere. Lastly, the use of divination spells such as *magic mirror*, *divination*, or *magic font* could substantially increase the chance of finding a suitable target.

The best way to handle this phase of a pirate's career is to use the planetary movement tracks provided in the SPELLJAMMER boxed set. Remember, moving one space on the inner track consumes one game day, and moving one space on the outer track consumes four. Every time the ship moves into a new space or a game day passes, the DM should roll for a random encounter on a wildspace encounter chart. These charts

can be developed before you begin your campaign.

The base chance for an encounter is 1-in-20 per day, but there are several modifiers to this. Add one to the base chance if the ship is on the inner planetary track in the same ring as a planetary body of any kind, if the ship is in the same space as a planetary body of any kind, or if the crystal sphere enjoys a high degree of spelljamming activity. Subtract one from the base chance if the system is a low-activity area.

In addition, you can apply modifiers for the party's search techniques. Add one to the chance of an encounter if the ship is blockading a random portal in the crystal sphere or a remote port. Add three if the party blockades a minor port or a regular portal, and add five if the party blockades a major port. A successful divinatory spell could add a bonus of one to three on the search roll and also increase the likelihood that another ship is encountered rather than a monster of some kind. Lastly, the successful use of a *crystal ball* or other scrying device to obtain information such as departure schedules or planned courses might make an automatic intercept possible. All of these modifiers are cumulative.

Example: The PCs' ship blockades a minor port in an inner asteroid belt, in an active system. The base chance is 1 in 20, but add one for each of the following

factors: a) the ship is in the same space as a planetary body, b) the ship is on the inner planetary track, c) the ship is in the same ring as a body, and d) the system is very active. Add three for blockading a minor port. The base chance is now 8 in 20, checked once per day.

When an encounter occurs, it is not necessarily a ship. It could be anything from a radiant dragon to an elemental phenomenon. The DM should prepare encounter charts for the spheres he expects his players to hunt in. Several sample charts are provided here to help you out. You may want to set up your charts to give the characters an increased chance of encountering enemy ships (rather than monsters or phenomena) when blockading a port.

Meeting the enemy

At last, your waiting has paid off and the enemy is before your ram! Now what? Successfully encountering an enemy ship simply means that you have achieved a typical SPELLJAMMER encounter with a vessel under the flag of the enemy. The ships are 11-20 hexes apart, with a random facing for the prey and a facing toward the victim for a ship trying to achieve contact. Remember, once your prize is 25 hexes away, it is free of your "capture distance" and can return to spelljamming speeds.

Encountering a random ship may be good or bad. The DM should come up with a table reflecting what he thinks the average distribution of ships might be for this particular area. A ship-type chart should be set up on 2d6 or 2d10 for a nice bell curve, with the most common types right in the middle. To return to our example of the ship blockading a minor port, the PCs certainly hope that their encounter is with a helpless human tradesman. But what if the blockade runner is a neogi mindspider or a hammership full of lawful-neutral dwarves?

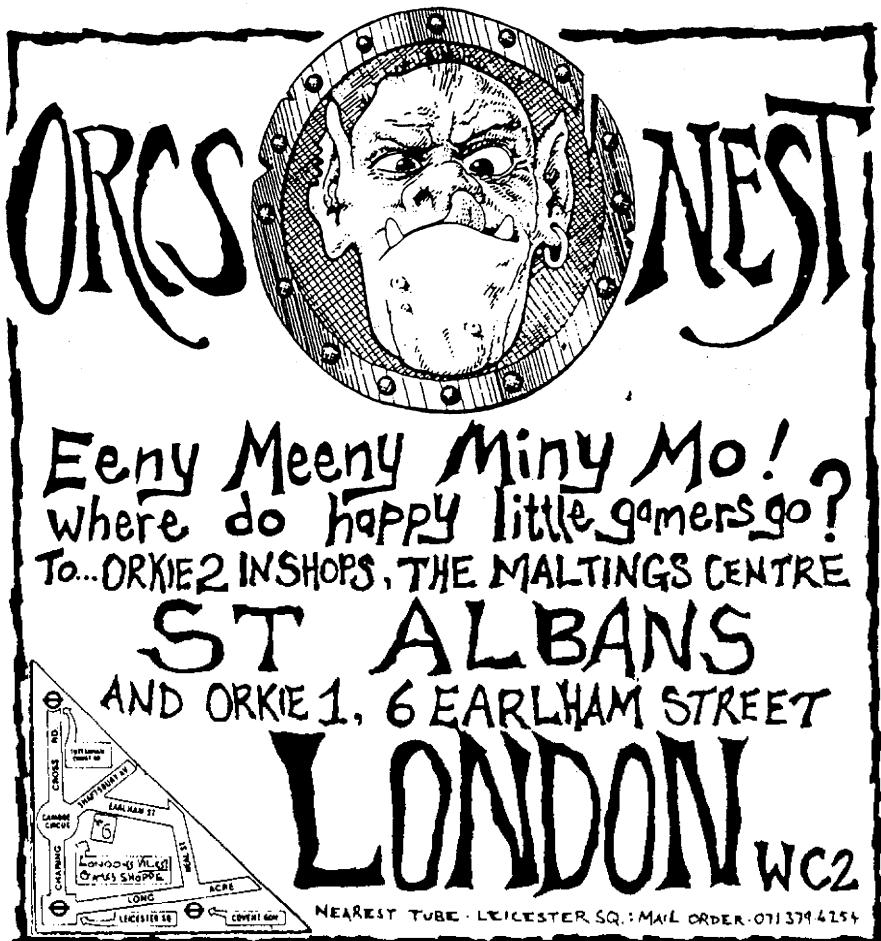
Once you have determined what it is the PCs have encountered, the DM needs to crew it and arm it before launching into a fight. The wise DM will have two or three sample ships written up and ready to go to avoid bogging the game down while he tries to rapidly generate a crew for his ship. The best way for the DM to do this accurately is to man each position on the ship as described in the previous section on outfitting a ship. If the ship is a warship, it probably carries marines up to its standard complement (maximum crew). If it isn't, it probably does not carry too many over its minimum crew requirements, and it may not even carry enough people to maneuver the ship and operate all its weapons at the same time.

Most ships have one or two spell-casters on board, priests or mages who are not currently on spelljamming duty and thus available to participate in a fight. Large warships may carry a couple of battle-mages with heavy-damage evocation/invocation spells memorized. Any kind of ship will have a captain and some officers of a level slightly higher than the rest of the crew. Try to be fair and accurate in assessing what the characters are up against. If they have encountered a lone mosquitoship, it's probably not crewed by six 15th-level paladins. It is quite possible that the ship is carrying an important envoy with a couple of mid-level fighters for bodyguards, though.

Capturing the prize

One of the chief goals of any privateer or pirate is to avoid excessive damage to the ship he is trying to take. He doesn't want to destroy it; he wants to capture it so he can sell it in a safe port and keep any loot he finds. Weapons like greek fire projectors and bombards, as well as high-speed ramming attacks, are right out.

On the other hand, the judicious use of some large weaponry to soften up the enemy before attempting to board is a good idea. Jettison shot or small shot for catapults is great for inflicting losses on the enemy crew without excessively damaging the vessel. Lucky ballista shots can knock out key crew members early on. Closing for a volley of small weapons fire or spell-casting is also advisable if you have a powerful spell-caster or a good contingent of archers. Mage spells that are especially useful in space combat include



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Cafeteria Workers Instigate Food Fight



"They were armed to the teeth," one surprised customer said. "You should have seen it. Carrots, tomatoes, broccoli everywhere." It seems cafeteria workers all over town have joined **The Great American Food Fight Against Cancer**. Now they're recommending foods that may help reduce cancer risk. The list includes foods high in vitamins A and C, high in fiber and low in fat.

"I love to see people eat healthy," as one server put it. "When I throw a big helping of steamed vegetables on someone's plate, I feel real good inside."

Similar sentiments were echoed by other workers. "When a kid reaches for low-fat milk or yogurt, or grabs an apple for dessert, well, it's just beautiful," said one emotional server.

Experts recommend that people join The Great American Food Fight Against Cancer whether dining out or at home.

The American Cancer Society, sponsor of the Food Fight, has more information. Call **1-800-ACS-2345**.

And, be on the lookout for Community Crusade volunteers armed with shopping lists. Ready? Aim. Chew!



Public Service Message

magic missile, web, haste, slow, confusion, fear, chaos, cloudkill, teleport, death spell, mass suggestion, mass charm, and maze. All can have significant effects on the crew without damaging the ship the way a *fireball* or *lightning bolt* would (and remember the dangers of fire in the phlogiston). Useful priest spells serving the same purpose include *bless, chant, warp wood* (for catapults and such), *protection from lightning, blade barrier, confusion, and sunray*.

When the enemy is somewhat weakened and demoralized, it's time to close and grapple. A boarding action is one of the ugliest and dirtiest fights you can imagine; more than one privateer has brought his ship hull-to-hull only to lose his own vessel when the boarding action goes the wrong way. It's a dangerous business, and these are the risks you have to live with when you set out to sweep the skies clean of the enemy.

When the smoke clears

After a long wait and a hard fight, the prize is yours. Now what do you do with it? In all but the most desperate circumstances, both pirates and privateers will detach a small prize crew from its own complement to man the captured ship and sail it back to a friendly port as a prize of war. If the ship is not too badly damaged, it can fetch a fine price. Even if the ship is a total wreck, salvaging the helm is always worthwhile. Occasionally, the captor won't have enough crew surviving to make up a prize crew and might burn or wreck the prize instead.

Prisoners are usually taken in the hope that an eventual ransom will make it worth their room and board. It is very poor form to put all your captives to the sword. Some pirates have even been known to allow the defeated crew to take their ship and flee, after looting the cargo.

Beside the ship itself, there is the issue of its cargo. The DM should decide if the loot is poor, average, or rich. The kind of ship and where it is encountered have a lot to do with what it might be carrying. A port that is under siege and is starving to death is likely to be the recipient of shipments of food. A warship out on lone patrol is probably a poor prize, carrying only a paychest and the personal effects of its crew. On the other hand, a hammerhead with an escort of two squidships might be carrying the tribute of a planet to some powerful ruler.

For a warship, there is a 10% chance that it is rich, 20% that it is average, and 70% that it is poor. For a merchant, there is a 10% chance that it is rich, 60% chance that it is average, and 30% chance that it is a poor prize. A rich prize would carry treasure type F, G, or H (as detailed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 133) in addition to its cargo. An average prize would carry treasure type A, D, or E in addition to its cargo. Lastly, a poor prize would have treasure type B or C in addi-

tion to its cargo.

Typical cargoes might include lumber, spices, textiles, weapons, foodstuffs, manufactured goods like pots, anvils, or tools, and raw materials such as ores, furs, or ivory. A warship has only a 10% chance of carrying any significant cargo. A tradesman has an 90% chance of carrying a cargo of some kind. Cargoes are generally expressed in value per ton of cargo space, so rare but unfinished furs might be worth 40,000 gp per ton and high-quality iron ore 5,000 gp per ton. The DM should decide on an appropriate cargo.

When operating under a letter of marque in wildspace, the government issuing the letter often claims 50% of all cargoes and treasures as its share but does not claim the prizes (captured vessels). Out of the loot left to the privateer (which includes the prize), one-third belongs to the crew, one-third to the officers, and the balance is the captain's. The captain will customarily reward exceptional bravery or compensate for serious injury out of his own share. As mentioned before, pirates often use a similar method for dividing their loot, but of course do not need to pay a government any of their profits.

A pirate's life for me

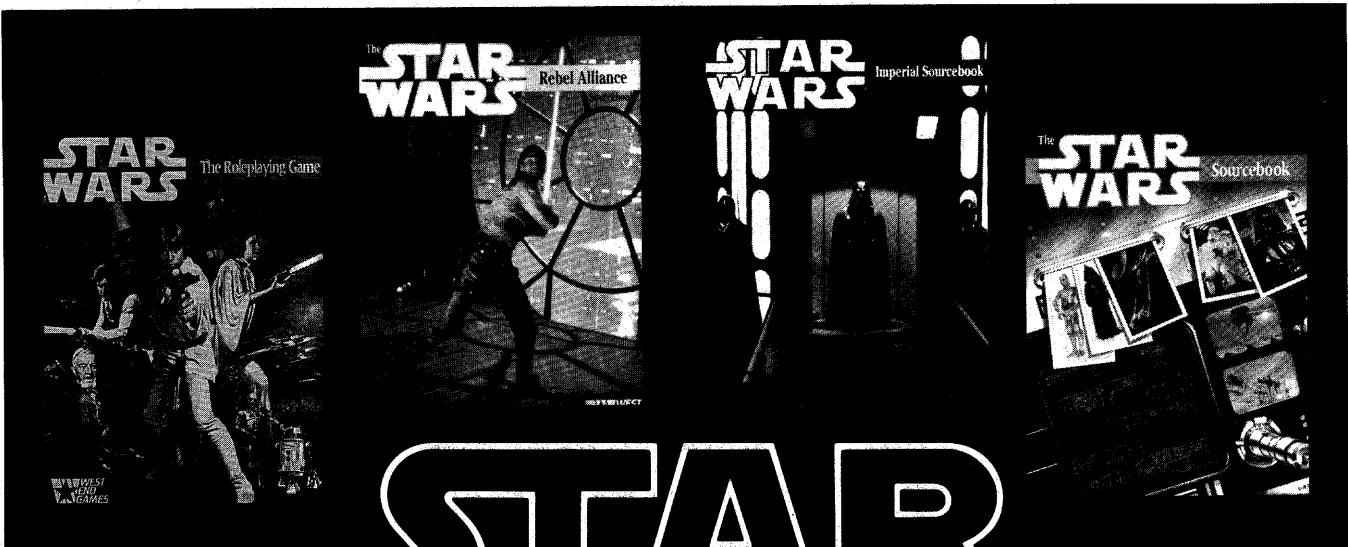
Taking an endless series of prizes will be fun for a short time, but eventually players should return to other adventures. If nothing else happens, they are guaranteed to someday run across a ship too well-armed or too powerful for them, and their piratical career will end rather abruptly. It's not very heroic to be hanged from the yardarm at dawn, so the DM should be prepared to have the NPCs hold the characters for ransom or maroon them on an asteroid, etc. Then again, if they've been putting their captives to the sword . . .

In any event, piracy and privateering is a fun and exciting aspect of life in the SPELLJAMMER campaign, and a crafty captain can make a name for himself that will be spoken of with dread by the sailors of a dozen ports. If you can put up with waiting, high expenses, extreme danger, and chancy returns, you might just get a crack at that fabled galleon full of gold! Ω



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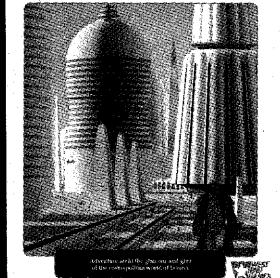
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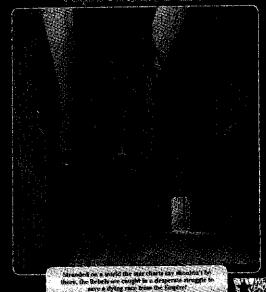
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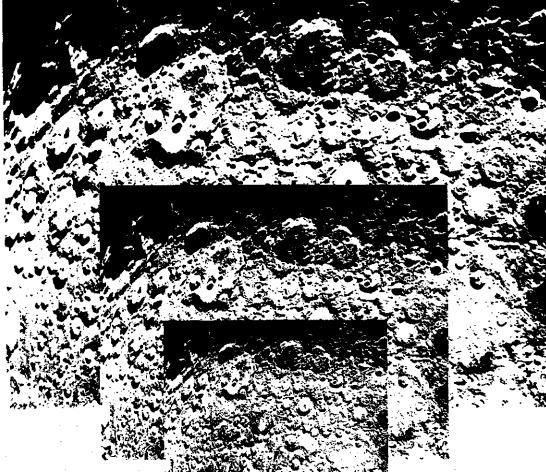
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Unidentified Gaming Objects

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Artwork by Dave Miller

Watch the skies: role-playing meets the UFO!

One of the most controversial mysteries of the 20th century has been the UFO enigma. Flying saucers have been reported by millions of people worldwide, and the historical record seems to indicate that similar phenomena have been appearing as far back as prehistoric times (some cave paintings seem to show saucers).

With such a widespread mystery, it is not surprising that a wide array of theories have been put forward to explain it. Many of these have never received notice from the general public. As UFO expert Jacques Vallee has put it, the UFO controversy is like American politics: There are only two parties you can join. Either you believe we are being visited by aliens from space, or you think the whole thing is a hoax. Rejecting one theory automatically makes you a supporter of the other by default.

This article will attempt to list all current UFO theories (aside from hoaxes or honest mistakes), with brief examples of how they can be used to enliven a modern-era role-playing campaign. Because we are concentrating on UFO origins, the bibliography at the end of this article may be somewhat different from the one you'd find at the end of the usual UFO-related article.

Note: I would like to make clear now that this article is a mere listing of all the theories, with no attempt on my part to either support a particular theory or actively debunk one that has not already been proven to be false. This is just a list

of ways to make a role-playing campaign more interesting; if we actively reject things that probably don't exist, we'll have to reject dragons, orcs, and elves, too. I don't want to have to start every other paragraph with: "Of course, this is probably all nonsense." This is all good, clean fun, not a serious discussion.

Secret weapons

One of the most popular early theories of UFO origins, this one has branched off into many subtheories. The main theory, of course, is that UFOs are secret weapons built by one of the superpowers— i.e., the U.S.A. or the old U.S.S.R. If the project was American, at least, it seems unlikely that the secret could be kept since the late 1940s, so the U.S.S.R. was a somewhat likelier candidate. Neither superpower explanation, however, explains the UFO reports before and during World War II. That war, incidentally, gave us one of the most popular terrestrial explanations for UFOs: They were Nazi secret weapons!

This latter theory states (quite prominently, in some circles) that UFOs are the work of refugee Nazi scientists who escaped the fall of the Third Reich and are now based in the wilds of Antarctica (the "New Atlantis" of ice discussed by Nazi philosopher Hans Horbiger). Stating that UFOs were built by the same nation that pioneered long-range missiles, jet- and rocket-powered combat aircraft, nerve gas, smart bombs, modern recoilless rifles, surface-to-air missiles, snorkels, and guns that could shoot around corners (to say

nothing of the Nazi's own atom-bomb project) bestows UFOs with an aura of glamour second only to that of the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

A variant of this theory has it that spacemen are or were helping the Nazis; the rationale is that since the Aryan Nazis were believed to be a master race, they were the only Earthlings that advanced aliens would associate with. Writer W. A. Harbinson wrote a novel, *Genesis*, with another variant to this theory. In it, the UFOs are earthly craft developed by an American designer who created the mysterious airships reported late in the last century. When shortsighted bureaucrats threatened the project, he quit, going to Germany to continue his work. The book is a creepy little tale with considerable power.

The true-to-life facts (as near as can be determined) are as follows: It seems that there *may* have been an experimental saucer-shaped craft, known as the *Kugelblitz*, that was supposedly test-flown by the Nazis early in 1945, just too late to do the Reich any practical good. There was also an attempt by the Nazis to capitalize on the "foo fighter" scare. In the last few years of the war, Allied bomber pilots reported that their planes were being followed by small fireballs that swooped in and out around them but did no harm. The name "foo fighter" came from a quote in the old Smokey Stover comic strip: "Where there's a foo, there's a fire.") A device called the *Feuerball* was claimed to exist, it being a remote-controlled device

that would supposedly knock out the ignition systems of aircraft at close range. However, captured German pilots revealed during interrogation that they, too, were being pestered by foo fighters! No plane was ever recorded as being brought down, from either side, by a foo fighter. A lesser-known fact is that foo fighters were also reported in the Pacific Theater, and they reappeared in the company of more conventional UFOs during the Korean War. The *Feuerball* seems to be a fake, which does not bode well for the reality of the *Kugelblitz*.

Witnesses once reported seeing an Allied B-24 over Italy being shot down by a "circular German fighter without wings or rudder." The bomber supposedly burst into flames after the saucer sprayed some bluish-gray clouds over it. There was talk in Germany of the development of a highly volatile gas that would blow up a plane after the latter's exhaust fumes had ignited it. For the purposes of most modern-era wartime or espionage games, such as TSR's TOP SECRET/S.I.TM and Victory Games' JAMES BOND 007* systems, we can assume the following: One discharge of such a gas from a plane would cover a 10'-diameter cylinder over 2,000' long before dissipating. The discharger weighs 300 lbs. and can fire one shot of gas every 15 seconds; its tank holds 10 shots. If the gas envelops a propeller-driven plane or other vehicle that expels exhaust, it will explode. The effect is like being in a tank full of gas fumes when they ignite. Even if the vehicle isn't totally destroyed, the exhaust-producing engine will be ruined.

A more exotic Nazi theoretical weapon for espionage or pulp-era role-playing games is the *Windkanone*, a gun that fired "shells" of concentrated air and water vapor. It had a large angled barrel with a crooked elbow resting in a huge cradle. Its assumed statistics for role-playing games would be: weight 500 lbs.; range 600' for aircraft (it could snap 1"-thick wooden boards at that range, but could kill a man at ranges well over a mile); fires one shot per five seconds.

Then there was the *Wirbelringkanone* (whirlwind annular vortex cannon), a gun that shot and ignited a ring of gas that then spun rapidly on its own axis to create a flying fireball (shades of the foo fighters!). Game-related statistics for this device are: weight 1,000 lbs.; range ½ mile; fires one shot per five seconds. We also have the vortex gun, a huge mortar that fired shells filled with coal dust and a slow-burning explosive. The idea was to create an artificial whirlwind that would bring down a plane in the manner of clear-air turbulence. Game statistics follow: weight 1,000 lbs.; range ¼ mile; fires one shot per 10 seconds; each shot has a 50% chance of forcing an aircraft to go out of control and crash.

A final Nazi weapon, one that was definitely being worked on (as were the *Windkanone* and vortex gun), was the

sound cannon. This seems more suited to a static defense role than to battlefield or aerial use. It consisted of a series of large paraboloid reflectors, the last one being 10' across, connected to a chamber made of several subunit firing tubes; the whole device weighed 750 lbs. Methane gas and oxygen were mixed in the firing chamber and ignited. The detonation in the firing chamber, which was exactly one-quarter the length of the sound waves produced by the explosions, would produce a high-intensity sound beam of 1,000 millibars that could kill a man at 150' after half a minute's exposure (assume the target loses one-sixth of his hit points, rounding up, per five-second turn) or incapacitate victims at 750'. In high-tech TOP SECRET/S.I., GDW's TWILIGHT: 2000*, pulp-era, World War II, or science-fiction games, this would make an interesting change from energy weapons.

Getting back to the Nazi UFO theme, this would be a good scenario for a modern-era game. In fact, Antarctica has already been covered back in DRAGON® issue #87, in the TOP SECRET® adventure, "White-out," which concerned the survivalist Children of Neptune. You can modify them into being a Nazi colony or even manipulate things so that espionage agents become de facto allies of the Children of Neptune against the Nazi menace.

There is one last variant on the Nazi secret weapons theory that should be mentioned. In his book *Intercept – But Don't Shoot*, Renato Vesco claims that the German weapons were developed but were captured by British troops at the war's close. Now Britain is holding out on her non-Commonwealth NATO allies, keeping saucer squadrons as a final ace in the hole in the wilds of Canada. This theory, however, does not explain the frequent reports of lethal encounters between UFOs and interceptors from the major powers, including the U.S. and Britain.

Aliens

The extraterrestrial hypothesis is undoubtedly the most popular of all the UFO theories now advanced. Given the vast number of planets astronomers assume exist in the universe, it does seem probable that at least some of them harbor intelligent life. Alien explorers or invaders are so well known in popular culture now that there is little to say about the theory of their existence. Where exactly the saucers are based, however, brings us to several subtheories.

The hollow earth

Dr. Raymond Bernard wrote the most coherent book on the now-disproved theory of a hollow earth in a book having the same name as this section. Generally, these theories state that either space aliens have an underground base or an indigenous terrestrial race lives there. This theory was most popular in the late 1940s, when AMAZING® Stories ran a series of

tales about a race called the Deros. These stories were fiction, but you wouldn't know it to read the magazine's letters column. Soon everyone was reporting Deros, the stories were said to be based on true experiences, and all sorts of foolishness was written. Editor Ray Palmer (who was responsible for keeping the tale going) was criticized for milking this sensationalism for the sake of magazine sales; in time, the furor died down. Be careful on your next fantasy-campaign dungeon-delving expedition, as there's no telling what you'll run into. (The AD&D® game has derros, a nasty underground race of degenerate dwarves; what if *they* had flying saucers?)

Underwater civilizations

Naturalist and former British Naval Intelligence officer Ivan T. Sanderson, in the course of studying UFO reports, noted that about half of them occurred over or near large bodies of water, particularly the ocean. In his book, *Invisible Residents*, he considers the possibility that the saucers came from beneath the sea, either from alien bases or from an indigenous underwater civilization (perhaps survivors from Atlantis?). He was also one of the first authors to write of the Bermuda Triangle, and he described about a dozen places on the Earth that had similar characteristics.

For those of you who occasionally like to mix fantasy and high-tech (in the manner of "High-Tech Hijinks" back in DRAGON issue #114), an underwater civilization that only rarely contacts the surface is more plausible than one on dry land that conceals its progress. You could make the saucer pilots sahuagin or tritons in AD&D games, or use any other aquatic race in your campaign (Deep Ones in Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game, for example). Since using high-tech forces against a fantasy world seems unfair, the underwater origin of these craft can justify a particular vulnerability. They could be filled with water instead of air, so even the smallest hole knocked in the thing could result in the crew suffocating. For that matter, UFOs from other magical planes of existence could be filled with fire, earth, ooze, ice, etc.

Time travelers

This is a good option for time-travel games, such as the old TIMEMASTER* game (formerly from Pacesetter Games, now from 54° 40' Orphyte) or BTRC's TIMELORDS* game. The player characters could go back in time to investigate UFO sightings, only to discover that their own time-traveling vehicles were the "UFOs" being reported. Time travelers could also come from either the future or a lost civilization of the past. (I cannot resist mentioning a panel of Bob Thaves' *Frank and Ernest* cartoon strip, in which a giant saucer disgorges dinosaurs who announce that they're back, then look around and wonder where everyone has gone.)

If the time travelers themselves do not

try to change history, humans who get their hands on the time travelers may grill their captives for information, trying to prevent dire future events such as those outlined in GDW's TWILIGHT 2000 and TSR's GAMMA WORLD® games. On a smaller scale, imagine a criminal who gains a time traveler's knowledge or equipment, so he knows in advance how every sporting event is going to turn out, or a businessman with similar backing who knows in advance what items will be most in demand in the future, and tools up his factories accordingly. The possibilities are endless.

Other dimensions

This is one of the most recent UFO theories, and it assumes the visitors come from another universe or dimension with access to our own. (Players of West End Games' TORG* system ought to know the drama inherent in this situation.) There are many UFO reports in which witnesses reported an unnatural stillness (e.g., no cars appearing on a normally busy highway), as if they were in another world. In Leonard H. Stringfield's *Situation Red: The UFO Siege*, there is an abduction case of three women who reported their car tearing along a straight highway at about 80 MPH; however, all the roads in the area were full of twists and curves, and it would be virtually impossible to go so fast on them without losing control of the vehicle and crashing. Researcher John Keel first came up with the term "windows": areas where the gap between dimensions is so thin that they have frequent reports of UFOs, monsters, etc. Janet and Colin Bord noted the proximity of ley lines, or natural earth current lines (much beloved by Palladium's BEYOND THE SUPERNATURAL* and RIFTS* game players), where these phenomena seem to cluster.

The greatest proponent of the ultradimensional theory has been Jacques Vallee. In virtually all his books, he compares modern UFO sightings to reports of fairies and the like in older times. He has also pointed out that there are *too many* UFO reports to make the idea of visitors from deep space seem plausible (it's the same problem J. Allen Hynek referred to as "the embarrassment of riches"). Vallee's idea is that our ultradimensional visitors are influencing our cultural evolution and are able to appear in whatever form our level of civilization will believe in (fairies, airship pilots, or extraterrestrials). Incidentally, he thinks that there are no cases of humans actually surprising aliens who have secretly landed, no matter how things seem otherwise; all sightings are deliberately staged to be seen. Since science in general refuses to study the UFO problem, many people are turning to cults for answers. Vallee sees this as the start of a new religious movement that may well result in the end of modern science-based civilization; this is similar to the advent of the Cyberpapacy in the TORG game. Even

without actual UFOs, a UFO cult would make an interesting adversary in modern-era games (see Douglas Curran's *In Advance of the Landing* for details on some real-life UFO cults).

There are a surprising number of similarities between the fairy folk of legends and the diminutive UFO humanoids reported today, leading Vallee and others to believe they are variations on the same phenomenon. Alternatively, maybe the race of fairy folk has undergone the same technological revolution we have, only faster, and now have their own spaceships, hovertanks, etc. Perhaps the robots occasionally reported in UFO sightings are like those in Japanese anime, scaled down to pixie-size. (Try a scenario for FASA's BATTLETECH* game in which a human seeing a "robot" is really meeting Lance Commander Finn Sidhe of the 1st Oberon Grenadiers—best unit of House Daoine Sidhe—in his BSK-3M Basilisk 'Mech. Someone can play the human and someone else can play poor Finn as he encounters a giant "faerieoid" the size of a 'Mech.) Similarly, the mysterious airships reported in the late 1800s looked plausible enough to people waiting for the real thing to come along, but examination of drawings shows that they were aerodynamically impossible (except, of course, in GDW's SPACE: 1889* game or the TORG game's New Empire of the Nile). When the space age ends, one way or another, it will be interesting to see what sort of UFO gets reported next.

Animals

Many UFOs seem to display the characteristics of animals, some playfully following planes and even playing tag with them. Therefore, the theory arose that the UFOs *are* animals who are native to the upper reaches of the atmosphere or even space itself. According to the theory, these creatures are tenuous, diaphanous beings of wispy material. They are often largely formless, which helps explain those reports of UFOs that can change shape. They feed on pure energy, such as sunlight or the radiation of Earth's Van Allen belt, only coming down to Earth in recent times because of the vast amounts of electrical power our modern civilization has been broadcasting into the atmosphere. Since life has been found everywhere else on Earth, say supporters of this theory, it should be found in the sky as well.

A man named Trevor James came out with a book titled *They Live In The Sky*, in which he described research he had supposedly done on these animals, complete with a series of photographs taken with infrared film. His work area was the Mojave Desert, because the sky was invariably clear over this arid region. His research technique was simply to photograph the entire sky at intervals, the most productive time being the immediate post-dawn period. He also mentions the film he used, but since the book came out in 1958, mod-

ern researchers will have to use something else. Part of his book was reprinted in Vincent Gaddis' *Mysterious Fires and Lights*, including the listing of films used. According to James, foo fighters are examples of these animals, visible to the human eye at high altitudes in insufficiently sealed propeller-driven aircraft. (Apparently, this type of UFO stopped appearing when the age of jet aircraft began.)

The photographs James published show bizarre creatures looking more like single-celled animals such as amoebas and paramecia than anything else. The animal explanation is that these primitive creatures adapted to the sky early on. Of course, looking like known creatures makes faking photographs much easier. Such creatures would make excellent monsters for TSR's AD&D game, particularly in the wildspace environment of the SPELLJAMMER® supplement. A wispy "ufo" (pronounced: u'-foh) in a fantasy game of this sort (including GDW's SPACE: 1889 game) might be easy to hit but impossible to harm using physical or electrical attacks. It could fly extremely quickly and well, and physical contact with it would likely harm the toucher with a powerful electrical shock. Perhaps it has a ranged attack with energy or electrical bolts, and can absorb electricity of all types and make use of it.

In his more conventional UFO book, *Uninvited Visitors*, Ivan Sanderson mentioned James's theories, adding the speculation that even the UFOs with occupants might be alive, being either domesticated space animals or the product of advanced genetic engineering. Introducing living spacecraft would certainly enliven many a science-fiction adventure, as in TSR's XXV™ game; genetically engineered living spaceships would definitely fit in with the rest of the "gennies" therein. UFOs could also be GAMMA WORLD game mutants or trained beasts in the SPACE: 1889 game, and TORG game players will have recognized by now their similarity to the stalker and bente of the Living Land. Things could get especially interesting if your living mount dies in midair (or mid-space). (For more on intelligent and living spacecraft, see the "Living Galaxy" column in POLYHEDRON® Newszine, issues 60-62 and 69.)

Paranormal phenomena

Another UFO idea that is fairly recent (from the 1970s) is the paranormal explanation. Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman were perhaps the first to mention this possibility in *The Unidentified*, repeating Vallee's observation that UFO contactee reports closely resembled tales of faeries in medieval times. According to this theory, the human mind itself is somehow capable of creating solid thought forms. Either the mind mysteriously creates the thing on its own, or someone makes a mistaken sighting, the word gets around, and the expectations of the would-be

spectators somehow supply energy to create the UFO (or Bigfoot, or whatever). Researcher Tom Bearden (whom we shall hear more of in the next section) dubbed this process "kindling." Precisely how the images become solidified is a question that has yet to be answered.

Canadian psychologist and research scientist Michael A. Persinger, then associate professor of psychology at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, made a special study of the conditions under which paranormal encounters take place. He discovered that UFOs are often sighted before or after violent storms or earthquakes; indeed, in the past, they were regarded as signs of disaster. With his assistant, Gyslaine F. Lafreniere, he published the book *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events*. What Mr. Persinger and Ms. Lafreniere concluded was that in many cases, severe storms could release sufficient electrical energy to create temporary fields of energy so highly ionized as to be visible to the human eye. Similar fields are created by earth currents when earthquakes occur. Just seeing the thing at a distance would make the witness think he was seeing a spaceship. If he came closer, the electrical field would interfere with the brain's own electrical workings. All the suppressed images of the subconscious would pour forth, and the unfortunate witness would literally experience a "waking nightmare" that seems perfectly real. Note that the energy concentrated in a visible electrical field would burn any one foolish enough to touch it, and it could even char vegetation, break branches, churn up the ground, and in general leave all the "ground traces" associated with UFO landings. The field could even create a temporary time warp, so anyone looking at it might see the prehistoric creatures often reported today, such as plesiosaurs and ape men.

Such a massive charge of electricity could kill a person who got too close, or at least bring about conditions that could result in death. Persinger noted that the Bermuda Triangle region is noted for the creation of severe electrical storms and many hurricanes. Perhaps local electrical disturbances are responsible for the loss of so many ships and planes there. If anyone ever developed a machine that could broadcast electrical energy at the right frequencies, its potential as a weapon of terror would be obvious. A "waking nightmare" device would certainly be a worthy target and major threat to any secret agents or super heroes who tried to put it out of action; in some science-fiction universe of the future, it could even be an everyday hazard.

Note that if storms and quakes do cause this effect, then the casting of earthquake-causing or weather-controlling spell in fantasy role-playing games will inadvertently produce an array of illusions that will be believed by everyone, including the spell-caster's own party (probably includ-

ing the spell-caster, tool. With the quasi-physical manifestations of energy involved, such illusions would do some physical damage, thus being classed as "natural" versions of semi-real illusory spells. Depending on how much energy is released, there could be up to a small army of these illusory thought forms created. These would look like the monsters the characters most fear, whether undead, dragons, or mind flayers. Paradoxically, the best-prepared party may suffer the most; if the illusions are a side effect of a weather-related attack spell, and the characters had cast sufficient divination-type spells to determine that no illusion-capable enemies were present, then they would have no reason to disbelieve these "natural illusions." (Incidentally, any intelligent enemies present would also be affected by the phenomenon.)

The theory that paranormal phenomena in general are due to something in nature received a boost when Loren Coleman checked on the times of peak UFO activity. Since UFOs are aerial mysteries, one would expect sightings to be more frequent in spring, when more people are outside, than in winter. However, he discovered that spring actually had the fewest reports. He found that sightings peaked between November and January, and also between June and September (August had the most sightings, May the fewest). John Keel cut it even finer: The last two weeks in March and the first two in April, all of July and August, the last two weeks in October, and the first two weeks of November and December are busiest. On the average, Wednesdays and Saturdays are the best days of the week for UFO sightings; the 24th of April, June, September, November, and December are the best dates; and 10 P.M. is the best time. June 24—St. John's Day—is especially rich in sightings, and it was on this date that the modern UFO era began with Kenneth Arnold's "flying saucer" sighting in 1947. The dates for peak sightings are also roughly the same for sea serpents, Bigfoot, poltergeists, etc.

Coleman found out a few more things. Places with the word "devil" in their names generally got them due to frequency of paranormal phenomena there (such spots might be windows or have ley lines around them). Also, places with odd names also have more than their fair share of sightings, and people with uncommon names report more sightings than people with names like Smith and Jones. Coleman concentrated on a few names, like Decatur ("dweller at the sign of the cat"; supernatural pantherlike cats are a very common paranormal phenomena) and the collection of Fay, Fayette, La Fayette, and Lafayette. The key word in the latter series may be "fey," the old term for faeries. Such names somehow seems to attract paranormal phenomena. (Thus, if you want to jack up the odds of your seeing a UFO, ghost, phantom panther,

etc., have your name changed to something like Fay Decatur, find a place with "devil" in its name, and sit up around 10 P.M. on June 24, preferably in a year when that day is either a Wednesday or a Saturday. Good luck!)

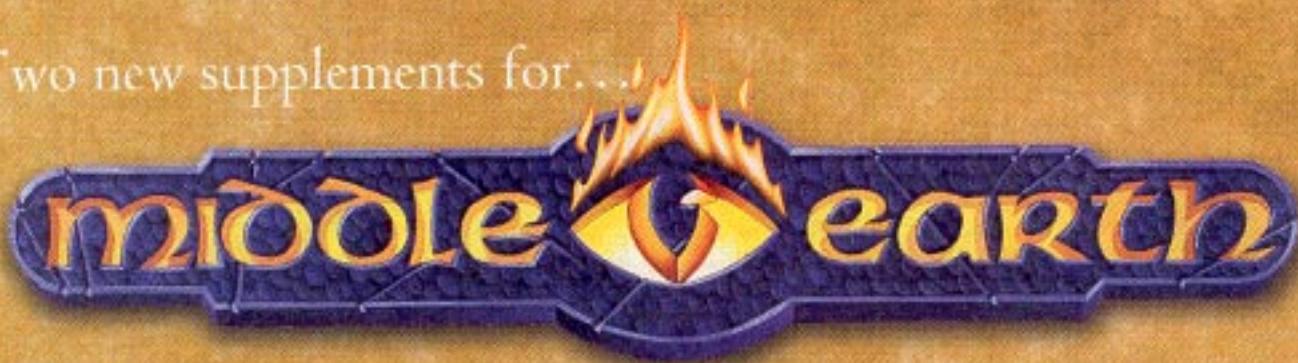
Anyone who studies written or oral records of paranormal occurrences could figure out particular sorts of patterns of their appearance, even if the exact causes of such events were not known, and this could provide a clever man with a powerful weapon against the ignorant. Witch doctors, high priests, etc., could claim to have supernatural powers and contact with the gods merely by accurately predicting when the next wave of unusual sightings would begin. In our technological age, when spaceships are seen, a nation could deliver an ultimatum to its enemies (heck, why not its friends as well?) to surrender, right after the worldwide demonstration of its new secret weapons, against which no one has a defense ("Go ahead, try to shoot them down. We dare you.")

For a final "occult" explanation, of course, there are always angels or demons. Their appearance as spacecraft in modern times is easy to explain. With all the Rambo-types and gamers around, demons in their "natural" form might lose their aura of terror. After a few demonic visitors get jumped by amateur monster-hunters and "ghost busters" armed with cold iron crowbars and squirt guns filled with holy water (collected from local churches), they would soon choose a technological form as the only means of coming and going with a whole skin. Whether your characters are pulp heroes seeking to discredit a lost tribe's witch doctor or high priest, secret agents or super heroes finding the truth behind a hostile nation's superweapon threats, or occult investigators uncovering the deceptions of demons and the like (*Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU** game even specifically makes a connection between flying saucers and the appearance of the alien god Yog-Sothoth), natural paranormal phenomena can liven up an adventure.

Mix-&-match theories

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Thomas E. Bearden has written a series of books stating that UFOs were a combination of materialized thought forms created by human minds under stress (in the modern era, fears of a Third World War) and open-field tests of a new weapons technology by the Soviet Union. He uses the term "psychotronics" to describe it, borrowing the term from the Czechs. The Soviets themselves used the term "psychoenergetics" ("energetics" is a generic term they use for all energy weapons, including lasers, particle beams, etc.). Based on the work of the electrical genius Nikola Tesla, psychotronic devices can transmit or extract energy from an unlimited distance, through hyperspace. When transmitting energy as a weapon,

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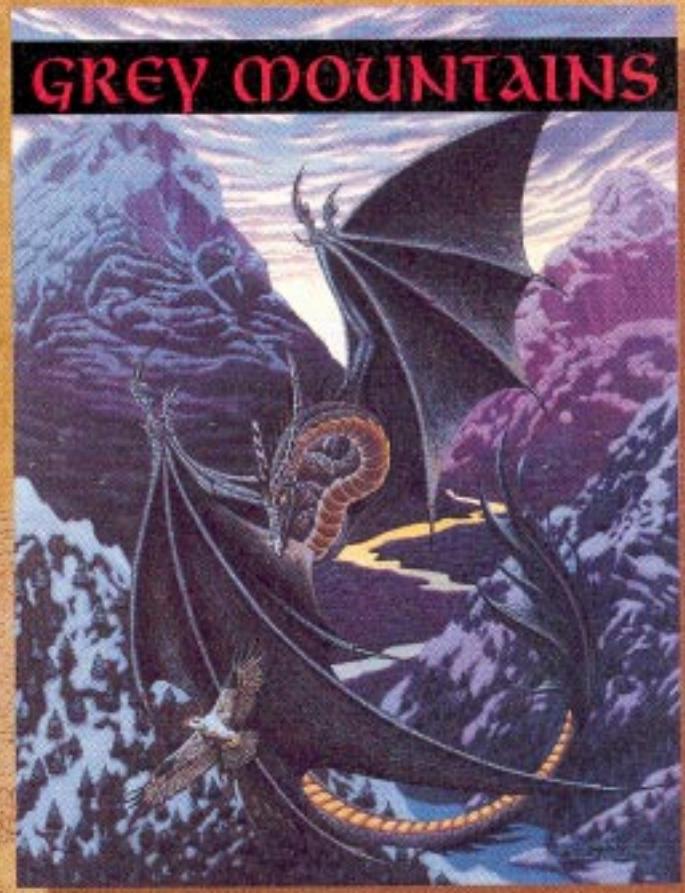
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the effects are similar to those of the electromagnetic pulse following a nuclear explosion. Such effects include killing humans by disrupting their nervous systems (the weakest charge will only stun), setting fire to flammable materials, detonating explosives and fuel (since the energy travels through hyperspace, it will bypass any armor), and short-circuit all electrical equipment (ditto for insulation). If the pulse is strong enough, it can even make a jet engine flame out.

This energy can be transmitted by a variety of means, including searchlights and radar sets. Crossing beams can create "energy holograms," explaining those "ball of light" UFOs that simply vanish into thin air (since they are composed of pure energy being beamed to the spot, they will naturally vanish once someone flicks the "off" switch). These energy fields can be truly vast, being used as force fields to defend areas. Extending up to hundreds of miles in area if enough energy (extracted from the Earth's core) is poured in, the fields will cause anything that passes through them to suffer all the catastrophes described in the last paragraph, simultaneously. If the energy form is only a hundred feet across (average UFO size), while the amount of energy in it is the same, any object that comes in contact with it will literally be disintegrated. There have been frequent rumors and reports of the blips of aircraft on radar screens suddenly "merging" with the blips of UFOs, after which the UFO either flew away or disappeared into thin air. The most celebrated case was the Kinross incident of the 1950s, when a jet intercepting a UFO over Lake Michigan was said to suffer this precise fate.

According to Bearden, most of the "ball of light" UFOs were energy holograms put out by the Soviets (all devices were controlled by the KGB, of course) to stimulate UFO reports and thus discourage scientists from looking into the problem. Psychotronic devices are supposed to do vastly more than this, including earthquake generation and weather control, but you'd have to read Bearden's books to get the whole story. Incidentally, he also claims several nations other than the U.S.S.R. have psychotronic weapons, and a few "warning shots" have been exchanged to keep the Soviets from simply rolling over the West. For instance, in the late 1970s, there were two explosions in the South Atlantic that may (U.S. officials' own emphasis) have been due to South African nuclear testing. However, there are reports that the second of the two explosions (viewed by U.S. Vela-class spy satellites) was invisible to the naked eye, being visible only when glimpsed through infrared sensors. No nuclear explosion could do that. Even some earthquakes have been stated to be warnings or skirmishes. This last note is for the interest of those who thought it an odd coincidence that two years in a row, the southern

U.S.S.R. was hit with a violent earthquake when Gorbachev visited the U.S. Get your espionage-game agents working on this one, and you may be able to discover whether or not it is true in your worlds.

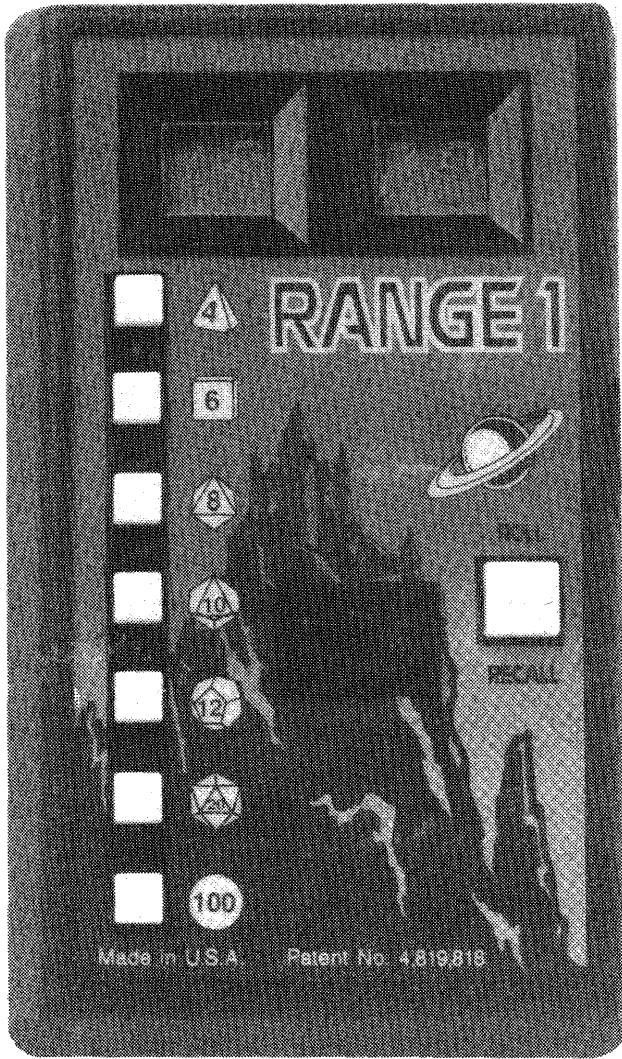
In summary, there are many theories to explain UFO sightings. Since there are so many reports, there could be several explanations from among those listed here that are correct for some of them. Energy could be released from the Earth's crust or from electrical storms, atmospheric or space animals could be flying about, and some foreign power could be testing new weapons, while true extraterrestrials could be flying above this melee, wondering what's going on down here. Multiple explanations not only make the current study of UFOs more interesting but can really muddy the waters of a gaming investigation, enabling the game master to hit the investigating players with half a dozen or more red herrings.

One last adventuring possibility for modern games is still untouched. There have been rumors for decades that the government (of the nation of your choice) has been covering up the "true facts" concerning UFOs. A freelance group could have one or more adventures trying to uncover this information. Perhaps the ultimate case of GM sadism would be an adventure where the characters shoot their way into the Pentagon to uncover the government's UFO files—only to discover, as a small army of military police and Special Forces troops gather outside to counterattack, that the government didn't really know what was going on after all.

There are a great many explanations for UFOs, many of them not widely known, but all of them quite useful in making a game campaign more interesting.

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- For specific researchers: All Bearden's stuff is Soviet-built Tesla weapons lore; *Excalibur Briefing* also covers paranormal phenomena in general. Bernard's is the only "hollow earth" book. The Bords' books are, respectively, on ley lines in general and seemingly supernatural animals that most often appear around them. The "Nazi secret weapons" are covered by Ford, Vesco, and a fair "factual" chapter at the end of *Genesis*. The "space animal" theory is covered by James, Gaddis, and Sanderson's *Uninvited Visitors*. *Invisible Residents* has the underwater theory. Keel has the first stating of the "window" theory. *The Unidentified* and *Space-Time Transients* cover the "paranormal" theory by itself. Coleman's first solo books is a listing of general weird phenomena and covers both the "devil" name listings and the clustering of events around weird names in general. *Curious Encounters* is more of the same, but the last chapter shows the timing of all paranormal events around certain days, months, etc. Steiger's book and all of Vallee's cover the ultridimensional theory, and everything else (including some books already mentioned) is more-or-less straight UFO stuff. Ω
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Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

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

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

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

- ◆ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
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ARCHON 16, July 10-12 MO

This SF&F convention will be held at the Henry VIII Inn and Lodge in St. Louis, Mo. Guests include John Varley, Don Maitz, and Roger Tener. Activities include: panels and workshops on science, SF, fantasy, horror, RPGs, art and writing; an art show; a dealers' room; a masquerade; and two video rooms. Registration: \$22/weekend; single-day rates are available. Write to: ARCHON 16, P.O. Box 50125, St. Louis MO 63105.

III-KHAN, July 10-12 CO

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn North in Colorado Springs, Colo. The guest of honor is Christopher Stasheff. Events include AD&D®, SPACE HULK*, CAR WARS*, SKY GALLEONS OF MARS*, BATTLETECH*, and STAR FLEET BATTLES* tournaments, with a movie room, a dealers' room, a miniatures-painting contest, an art show, and open gaming. Registration: \$20. There will be a \$1/game fee. Write to: Miniatures Wargamers' Guild, 7040 S. Hwy. 85-87, Fountain CO 80817; or call Perry at: (719) 391-8318.

DOVERCON VIII, July 11-12 NH

This convention will be held at the University of New Hampshire's Memorial Union Building in Durham, N.H. The special guest is Steve Jackson. Activities include RPGA™ Network tournaments, RPGs, war games, seminars, miniatures and art competitions, and a dealers' room. Registration: \$15/weekend preregistered, \$20/weekend at the door; \$12 Saturday only, \$8 Sunday only. Write to: DOVERCON VIII, P.O. Box 753, Dover NH 03820.

DRAGON CON '92, July 17-19 GA

This convention will be held at the Atlanta Hilton and Towers in Atlanta, Georgia. Guests include Raymond E. Feist, George R. R. Martin, Forrest J. Ackerman, L. Sprague de Camp, Phil Foglio, Ralph Bakshi, Denis Beauvais, Robert Anton Wilson, Dr. Timothy Leary, John Byrne, Chris Claremont, Lynn Abbey, Richard Garriott, and Erick Wujcik. Activities include every sort of gaming, with panels, seminars, a writers' workshop, an art show and print shop, anime, videos, dances, robot battles, demos, costumes, a hospitality suite, and consignment game auctions. Registration: \$35/weekend at the door (RPGA™ Network discounts available). Send a long SASE to: DRAGON CON '92, P.O. Box 47696, Atlanta GA 30362-0696; or call our 24-hour information line at: (404) 925-2813.

ECONOMYCON VI, July 17-19 AZ

This convention will be held at the Campus Village West Shopping Center in Phoenix, Ariz. GMs: Come and run your board, miniatures, or role-playing game. Prizes will be awarded to the best GMs. Other activities include a miniatures-

painting contest and door prizes. Registration: Free. Call the Roaming Panther Game Company at: (602) 820-2083 or (602) 547-0239.

GAMEFEST '92 PART II, July 17-19 IL

This gaming convention will be held at Friends' Hobby Shop in Waukegan, Ill. Events include a variety of role-playing and historical-and fantasy-miniatures games. Registration: \$8/weekend or \$5/day. Write to: Gamemasters' Guild of Waukegan, 1411 B Washington, Waukegan IL 60085; or call: (708) 336-0790.

MEMPHIS FANTASY CON '92

July 17-19 TN

This convention will be held at the downtown Radisson hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Guests include Walter Jon Williams, Steven Brust, and Bart Sears. Activities include an art room, a dealers' room, an art auction, a costume contest, and gaming. For more information and costs, write to: MEMPHIS FANTASY CON, 4730 Poplar #2, Memphis TN 38117; or call direct, days: (901) 683-7171; nights: (901) 385-0088.

QUINCON VII, July 17-19 IL

This gaming convention will be held at the Days Inn in Quincy, Ill. Events include fantasy and historical miniatures games, RPGs, board games, and RPGA™ tournaments. Guests include Jean Rabe and Lester Smith. Registration: \$5/day or \$12/weekend. Special room rates are available. Send an SASE to: QUINCON VII, c/o Quincy Hobby Center, 3632 Maine St., Quincy IL 62301.

SUMMER EXTRAVAGANZA '92, July 18 TN

This convention will be held at the Governor's Square Mall in Clarksville, Tenn. Events include an AD&D® RAVENLOFT™ tournament and BATTLETECH*, ROLEMASTER*, and TWILIGHT: 2000* games, with miniatures, art, and writing contests. Registration: \$3 preregistered; GMs enter free. Write to: Clarksville Gamers' Guild, 205 Walnut St. #12, Clarksville TN 37042; or call Don at: (615) 645-2031.

CONGENIAL IV, July 24-26 WI

This convention will be held at the Quality Inn South in Madison, Wis. Guests include Michael Kube-McDowell and Jeanne Mealy. Activities include hucksters, an art show, videos, filking, a fan lounge, child care, and a con suite. Registration: \$25 at the door. Write to: CONGENIAL IV, P.O. Box 44146, Madison WI 53744-4146.

CUBICON '92, July 24-26 MI

This convention, hosted by SF³ and HFCC, will be held at the University of Michigan-Dearborn campus' Recreation and Organizations Center. Events include D&D®, AD&D®, BATTLETECH*, STAR FLEET BATTLES*, PALLADIUM*, CAR WARS*, and CHAMPIONS* games. Registration: \$4/day or \$7/weekend at the door. For preregistration and GMing information, write to: CUBICON, c/o SF³, 4901 Evergreen, ROC Building, Rm. 210, Dearborn MI 48128; or call: (313)593-5390.

DALLASCON '92, July 24-26 TX

This gaming convention will be held at the Worthington Hotel in Ft. Worth, Tex. Events include AD&D®, BATTLETECH*, SUPREMACY*, and AXIS & ALLIES* tournaments. Other activities include an auction, a painting contest, movies, and a dealers' room. For more information and costs, write to: DALLASCON '92, P.O. Box 867623, Plano TX 75086.

IMPACT 2, July 24-26

NE

This SF&F/gaming convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Old Mill in Omaha, Nebr. Guests include Barbara Hambly, Tom Prusa, Rick Harris, and J. R. Daniels. Other activities include 24-hour gaming, video rooms, a hospitality room, an art show and auction, panels, a dealers' room, and a masquerade. Also: "Alien Prom 2," a fund raiser for Project Literacy U.S. (costs \$1 or used fantasy/SF book in good condition). Registration: \$13/weekend for a game/hospitality pass, or \$25/weekend for a full pass; single-day passes are available. Write to: IMPACT, P.O. Box 4486, Omaha NE 68104.

VEGASCON '92, July 25-26

NV

This gaming/comics convention will be held at the Palace Station hotel in Las Vegas, Nev. Events include AD&D®, STAR WARS®, and DC HEROES® games. Guests include Greg Gorden, Mike Grell, and Mike Nystul. Convention proceeds will benefit the Special Olympics. Registration: \$18. Write to: VEGASCON, 4210 Chatham Cr. #1, Las Vegas NV 89119; or call: (702) 733-7470.

CANGAMES '92, July 31-August 3

*

This convention will be held at the Skyline hotel in downtown Ottawa, Ontario. Events include a wide variety of role-playing, miniatures, and board games. Other activities include an auction, dealers, movies, and 24-hour gaming. Family discounts are available. For more information and costs, write to: CANGAMES, P.O. Box 3358, Station D, Ottawa, Ontario, CANADA K1P 6H8.

TACHY4CON, August 1-2

FL

This convention will be held at the Deland Hilton in Deland, Fla. Guests include Wendy and Richard Pini. Activities include Starfleet's 3rd Annual Region 2 Competitions. Registration: \$14/weekend. Write to: TACHY4CON, 426 S. Lakemont Ave., Winter Park FL 32792; or call: (407) 628-5047.

GAMEFEST XIII, August 5-9

CA

This convention will be held in historic Old Town in San Diego, Calif. Events include AD&D®, D&D®, CIVILIZATION®, DIPLOMACY®, BATTLETECH®, VAMPIRE®, RIFTS®, WARHAMMER 40,000®, and AXIS & ALLIES® games. Other activities include figure-painting contests. Registration: \$20 until July 31; \$30 at the door. Write to: GAMEFEST XIII, 3954 Harney St., San Diego CA 92110.

KUBLA KHAN III, August 7-9

UT

This gaming/comics convention, presented by Comics Utah and Terrain Specialties, will be held at the Utah State Fairpark in Salt Lake City, Utah. Events include role-playing, SF&F and historical miniatures games. Other activities include guests, a painting contest, and dealers. Registration: \$20/weekend before July 31; \$24 at the door. Dealers are welcome. Write to: Comics Utah, 258 E. 100 S., Salt Lake City UT 84111; or call: (801) 328-3300.

BUBONICON 24, Aug. 14-16

NM

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn East in Albuquerque, N.M. Guests include Thorarin Gunnarson, Dell Harris, and Walter Jon Williams. Activities include panels, readings, movies, a play, parties, an auction, filking, and the Green Slime awards (Saturday is Toga Day). Registration: \$20/weekend before July 31; \$23 at the door. Write to: NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque NM 87176; or call: (505) 266-8905 10 A.M.-10 P.M. local time. No collect calls, please.

REALM OF ROLEPLAY V, Aug. 14-16

☆

This convention, hosted by TROA, will be held at Loewangskolen in Denmark. Events include AD&D®, AL-QADIM™, ROLEMASTER®, CALL OF CTHULHU®, STAR WARS®, MERP®, ALIENS®, RIFTS®, SHADOWRUN®, VIKING®, and WARHAMMER FRP® games. Other activities include additional, local games. GMs are welcome. Registration: DKK 80. Write to: TROA, Martin Laursen, Vesterlade 25 - 2, 9400 Noerresundby, DENMARK; or call: +45 98 19 22 09.

**1992 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ GAME FAIR
August 20-23**

WI

This gigantic gaming convention will be held at the MECCA Convention Center in Milwaukee, Wis. Events include hundreds of role-playing, board, miniatures, war, and computer games. Other activities include panels, seminars, workshops, the Exhibit Hall, an art show, and a games auction, with RPGA™ Network activities. Registration: \$35/weekend preregistered; \$40/weekend at the door. Write to: 1992 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ Game Fair, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.

DRAKCON '92, August 22-23

•

This fund-raising convention for famine relief will be held at the Northern College of Education in Aberdeen, Scotland. Events include RPGA™ Network AD&D® tournament, and a figure-painting contest. Registration: £4 before July 1; or £5.50 thereafter. Single-day tickets will be available at the door. Write to: Sandy Douglas, 13 Springbank Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 2LS SCOTLAND. All checks should be made payable to Dragon Aid.

CON-SPIRACY '92, August 28-30

NC

This convention will be held at the Omni Durham Convention Center in Durham, N.C. Guests include Greg Porter and Allen Wold. Activities include RPGA™ Network tournaments, workshops, Japanimation, speakers, an SF movie room, miniatures and open gaming. Registration: \$25/weekend or \$15/day. Write to: NAARP P.O. Box 2752, Chapel Hill NC 27515. 2752. Make checks and money orders payable to NAARP.

PACIFICON '92, August 28-31

CA

This gaming convention will be held at the Dunfey Hotel in San Mateo, Calif. Ask about special room rates. Activities include role-playing and board-game tournaments, a flea market, seminars, movies, painting contests, dealers, auctions, and miniatures and open gaming. Write to: PACIFICON, P.O. Box 2625, Fremont CA 94556.

TACTICON '92, Aug. 28-30

CO

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Convention and Trade Center in Denver, Colo. Events include the first NASAMW WRG Ancients Final west of the Mississippi River. Other activities include gaming of all kinds, RPGA™ Network tournaments, auctions, a figure-painting contest, and miniatures events. Registration: \$15/weekend. Write to: Denver gamers' Assoc., P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044; or call: (303) 665-7062.

GATEWAY 12, Sept. 4-7

CA

This convention will be held at the L.A. Airport Hyatt hotel in Los Angeles, Calif. All types of strategy, family, and adventure board, role-

playing, miniatures, and computer gaming. Other activities include seminars, demos, flea markets, auctions, an exhibitors' area, and special guests. Write to: STRATEGICON, P.O. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849; or call: (310) 326-9440.

TEXICON '92, Sept. 4-7

TX

Sponsored by Greater Houston Gaming, this convention will be held at the J. W. Marriott hotel in Houston, Tex. Events include AD&D® and RPGA™ Network events, with PARANOIA®, CALL OF CTHULHU®, BATTLETECH®, STAR FLEET BATTLES®, WARHAMMER 40,000®, and CIVILIZATION® games. Other activities include an auction, a video room, and open gaming. Registration: \$20 until Aug. 14; \$25 thereafter. Special room rates and one-day passes are available. Send an SASE to: Greater Houston Gaming, P.O. Box 631462, Houston TX 77263-1462. Checks should be made payable to TEXICON '92 or Greater Houston Gaming.

EMPEROR'S 22nd BIRTHDAY, Sept. 5-6 IN

This convention will be held at the Century Center in South Bend, Ind. Events include Napoleonic miniatures and RPGA™ Network AD&D® events. Other activities include a dealers' area. Registration: \$12/weekend or \$7/day. Write to: Mark Schumaker, P.O. Box 252, Elkhart IN 46515; or call: (219)294-7019.

ANDCON '92, Sept. 11-13

OH

This gaming/PBM game convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Independence in Independence, Ohio. Guests include Darwin Bromley and Jim Land. Events include AD&D® RPGA™ games, other RPGs, board games, a national PBM expo, a PUFFING BILLY® tournament, microarmor, a dealers' room, and a luau. Registration: \$17.50 until Sept. 1; \$22.50 at the door. Write to: ANDCON '92, P.O. Box 142, Kent OH 44240-0003; or call: 216) 673-2117.

MIRACLECON '92.2, Sept. 19

OH

This convention will be held at the Liedertafel Club in Springfield, Ohio. Events include gaming, a dealers' area, an auction, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$5 preregistered until Sept. 1; \$6 at the door. Visa/Mastercard are accepted. Write to: Wolf's Lair Games, 601 W. Leffels Lane Ste. P, Springfield OH 45506; or call Tim at: (513) 325-0059.

FANTASY FOLLIES I, Sept. 26-27

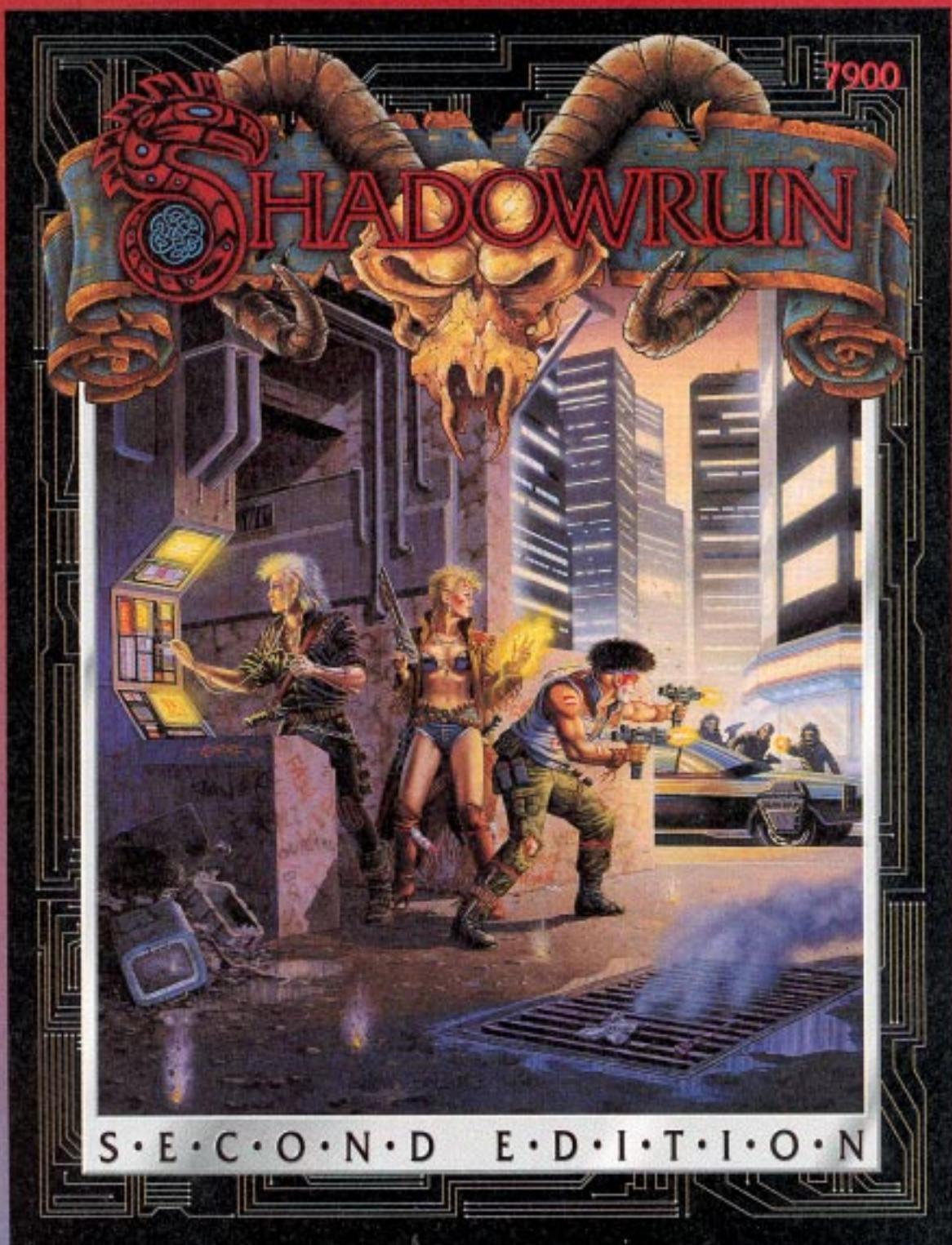
SD

This convention will be held at the City Auditorium in Burke, S.D. Events include RPGA™ Network events for AD&D® and PARANOIA® games. Other activities include many popular board games. Judges are welcome. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$15 at the door. Write to: Eric T. Benoit, Fantasy Follies Event Coordinator, c/o General Delivery, Burke SD 57523.

How effective was your convention listing?
If you are a convention organizer, please write to the editors and let us know if our "Convention Calendar" served your needs. Your comments are always welcome.

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The VOYAGE of the PRINCESS ARK

Part 30: Web of the Wizard-King

by Bruce A. Heard

This series chronicles the adventures of an Alphatian explorer and his crew as they journey across the D&D® Known World in their skyship. The information herein may be used to expand D&D campaigns using the Gazetteer series.

From the Journals of
PRINCE HALDEMAR OF HAAKEN
Lord Admiral of the Mightiest Empire
Captain of the Ever-Victorious
PRINCESS ARK
Imperial Explorer, ETC., ETC.

Amphimir 11, AY 2001: Our Saragon Gazetteer mentioned something about a wizard's nation, the Kingdom of Herath, southwest of Bellayne. Unfortunately, no capital was shown. I decided to stop at the largest city and send Ashari ahead as my envoy.

She returned a few days later with good news. Although she couldn't reach officials of the royal court, she had come into contact with a noble related to the wizard-king, Duke Yaluughu of Ensheya. Ashari had also managed to arrange an audience with the duke, at his palace in Sorodh.

Indeed, I did meet the duke, a very

austere and somewhat sinister character with whom conversation was often terse. I finally reminded him I was an official representative of Her Imperial Majesty of Alphatia and that I sought an audience with the wizard-king of Herath. That seemed to embarrass him. He eventually revealed the wizard-king should already be aware of our presence, and if he had wished to see us, we would already know. He later added that the Royal Citadel was located at the center of the king's domain, a thick forest ("a forbidden land infested with horrible monsters").

For a fellow wizard, this was no friendly welcome. Empty-handed and rather disappointed, I took my leave from the duke and returned to the *Princess Ark*. Judging from the "forbidden forest" hint, I was clearly not to go there. I soon got a confirmation of this from Ashari. She had found that the woods in question, the Forest of the Magus, were indeed strictly prohibited by law to the common population. It was a place only nobility was permitted to enter, and only with a royal invitation at that.

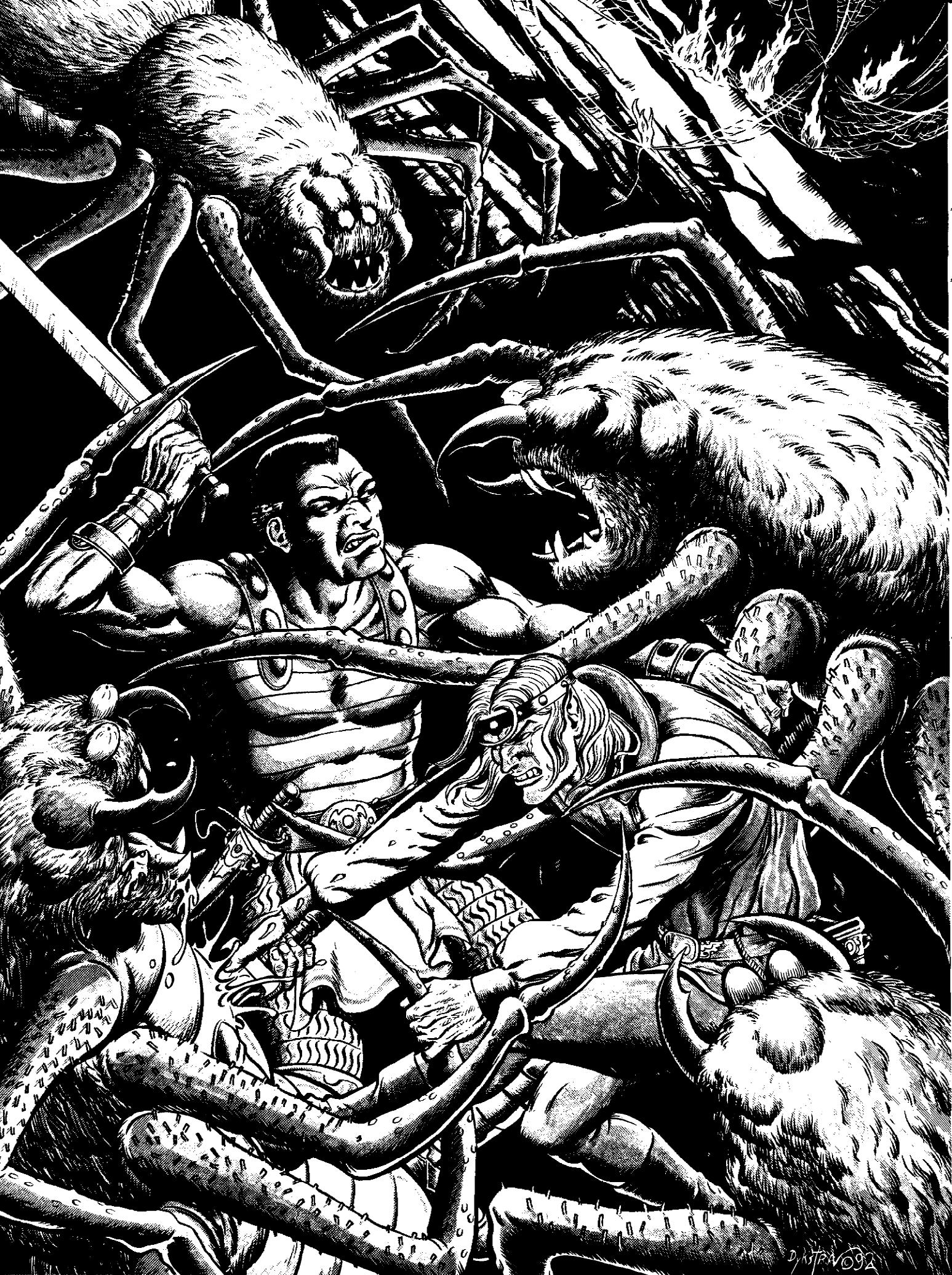
I found all this rather rude. I was not the representative of some third rate, petty kingdom—like Herath! I was upset and felt insulted. Well, then, if I could not enter the forest, fine—I would then fly over it!

I ordered a northerly route at once. I may not be granted any favors as a result of all this but, by the Eye of the Newt, I would not be ignored!

Amphimir 11—Baaloth, from a later account: His Lordship, Duke Yaluughu, summoned me this evening. I was to board the outsiders' flying ship and find out who they were, unveil their intentions, and retrieve any magical secrets. His Lordship provided me with a magical brooch of spying into which I could store all that I saw and heard. I was to report back to the Watcher with the brooch,



Artwork by Terry Dykstra



after my mission.

I began my duty after a quick prayer at the Temple of Enebaan. I cast a spell of invisibility and approached the outsiders' flying skiff. The sailor noticed nothing. Soon after my arrival, the outsiders' commander returned with his rakasta guard and they boarded the skiff. I followed. We reached the outsiders' flying ship just before nightfall, when I began exploring the large vessel.

Amphimir 13—Haldemar: At last, we found the citadel. I didn't want to antagonize the wizard-king further and decided for the moment it would be best to keep the *Princess Ark* visible.

I signaled the citadel's guards I was coming down, and they formed a double line and stood at attention. Their trumpets announced my arrival. The guards all wore high pointed hoods and sinister black robes that covered their entire bodies. Of all visitors, of course, I would be the least prone to be impressed by such a display. I went on by them.

I met the Viscountess of Berevrom, a lady of great beauty and mind. She was far friendlier than the duke. She apologized for His Majesty, saying he was busy at the time and could not receive me. She showed me to my quarters and verified that I was comfortably installed until such time as I could meet the wizard-king. I saw very few people in the palace other than the hooded guards. A magically animated table knocked at my door, bringing a cup of steaming tea and a few pastries. The viscountess returned with an invitation to the wizard-king's dinner that evening.

The evening came soon enough, and guards escorted me to the banquet hall. There, three dozen nobles and their spouses sat at a large table, along with the viscountess. They were mostly humans, with a few lupins and rakastas. Strangely, none of the last two seemed the least annoyed of each other's presence at the same table. In fact, a deadly silence filled the room.

The wizard-king and queen arrived shortly thereafter, and everyone rose. He quietly motioned everyone to sit down. Still, no word had been uttered in the entire hall. The queen clapped her hands twice, and a wooden statue came alive, playing a lute. A group of magical trotting tables then entered with food and beverages. The high point of the dinner involved the serving of large, plump houseflies the size of fat chickens. Everyone picked up sharp silver tubes, inserted them into the flies, and, with great delight, began noisily slurping out the juices. Courtesy demanded that I go along with the other guests. Could it be worse than stuffed mice à la Uxington? (It was.)

After no word had ever been spoken, the wizard-king and queen left and everyone returned to their quarters. The magical trotting tables began cleaning the remains of the feast, occasionally grunting and fighting for leftovers.

Amphimir 13—Baalboth—from a later account: This ship is truly wondrous, although it presents a difficult endeavor for spies. I soon learned to stay away from the floors, since they create glowing marks around footsteps. Fortunately, the wooden bulkheads were no match for my eight claws, and I could easily cling to them and to the ceilings and move unhindered. The stairways, also magically protected, forced me to waste precious *dispel magic* spells to get through. I heard the outsiders' officers utter magical words before entering certain areas, and I concluded some doors were also enchanted. I quickly followed them into those rooms I wanted to visit.

After long hours of poring over an immensely revealing log book in the quarters of the outsiders' commander, I examined a big gem, a fiery topaz of great value. Surely, it must be the magical stone mentioned in the entry dated Andrumir 15 in Jaibul. The Watcher will be pleased with it.

An outsider female then unexpectedly entered the room. Surprised, I dropped the precious stone. The female did not see me but noticed the gem fall to the floor. She looked perplexed, then began moving back toward the door. I picked up the gem as she turned back, and tried slipping past her, but she caught one of my legs in the door. I screamed.

The female immediately started slashing wildly with a short sword she had quickly drawn, wounding me badly. Some of my ichor stained the floor, and the female sounded the alarm. I had to flee, triggering almost every magical ward in my way. I then ran into a row of heavily armed outsiders standing on the deck. Next to them was a tall, hairless outsider with a big hammer. I hate big hammers. Seeing my ichor spilling on the deck, the bald outsider cast a spell that negated my *invisibility*. Almost instantly, the other outsiders started firing *lightning bolts* at me.

Fools! Their aim could not match my superior agility. I leaped out of harm's way and clung to the underside of the ship. I immediately secreted a long strand of silk and began descending toward the forest. I had to warn The Watcher I had been seen.

Amphimir 13—Xerdon, from a later account: A monstrous creature was aboard the *Princess Ark* late this night. Lady Abovombe reported she had heard some noise in the admiral's quarters and went to investigate. There she saw an object fall to the floor for no apparent reason, which it seems had been held by an *invisible* creature that Lady Abovombe wounded shortly thereafter while it was caught in the doorway. The alarm was sounded, but the creature escaped. It appears the creature stole a precious object from the captain's quarters. Nyanga and I are going down into the forest to pursue the creature.

Amphimir 14—Haldemar: At last, I had a chance to meet the wizard-king. He pointed out that he was a busy man, but

he would do what he could to accommodate me. We discussed that which wizards often enjoy to chatting about. He said he was an astrologer by profession and could see in the stars some of the great events of this world. He gazed at me for an instant and added he had seen in the stars the end of a great empress. Treachery from an ancient mountain wizard threatened her rule. He said perhaps I had something to do with this, and I should return to Alphatia to seek out the danger. Then he burst into diabolical laughter. Surely, this was a joke. There were no mountain wizards threatening Her Imperial Majesty. There couldn't be.

The meeting came to an end, and I was asked to leave. The wizard-king needed to work on a complicated problem of astrology, and he required absolute silence and tranquility. The viscountess escorted me back to the tower on which I had originally alighted, and she bid me farewell as I climbed aboard the life boat. The leaving seemed too easy. There was something very odd about the wizard-king's jest. This monarch seemed decidedly too suspicious to me, and I wanted to know more. As the skiff flew back toward the *Princess Ark*, I instructed the sailor to keep going and to ask Commander Talasar to feign a departure and turn the ship *invisible*. I cast a spell of *invisibility* of my own, and flew back to the wizard-king's keep. I was intent on figuring this wizard out once and for all.

Amphimir 14—Baalboth, from a later account: By Yehm, what arrogance! The outsiders have followed me down into the Forbidden Forest. Blasted be this wound that slows me. This will be the outsiders' undoing. I know cousins of the Astafirs have a village nearby. They'll help, I'm sure of it.

Amphimir 14—Xerdon, from a later account: The creature left footprints in the forest's soft soil. A *light* spell prolonged our search into the night hours. We were getting closer to our fugitive when we ran into trouble. A magical illusion concealed the terrain before us, which caused both of us to fall into a ravine—or, rather, into a very large spider web in the ravine. Our legs were caught. Three huge spiders approached, while a fourth, wounded, remained aloof. One of them hissed and clicked, "Now you die, outsiders!"

Nyanga glanced at me and asked with a grin, "You be ready; mohn?" His giant blade hummed as he tore a wide gap through the web. We fell heavily into the bushes underneath, as the three spiders reached the gap. Just then I cast a *wall of fire* around the spiders, setting the entire web ablaze. The spiders had no choice but to jump off as well. The rest was standard procedure; the three giant arachnids were soon chopped to bits. The wounded one fled.

Both of us had seen creatures such as these, in the rain forest of Yavdlom and

the dark woods of Shye Lawr and Blackheart. Araneas—vile intelligent spiders, deadly creatures. What they wanted with us, I had no idea. But we had to capture the fugitive, alive.

Amphimir 14—Haldemar, later

that night: I finally managed to get past the hooded guards and the magical wards that defended the wizard-king. Carefully, I snuck into his quarters. There, I discovered a semicircular door, about 3' high. It was a secret door that someone had considerably left open.

It led to a spiral staircase to the top of the keep. There, hidden under a one-way mirror dome, was a huge spider web. At its center stood a giant spider, gazing at the stars through a looking glass, or “longview.” I cast a wizard eye and sent it closer to the spider. There it was, watching through its longview, and making notes with little insectlike fingers.

The creature wrote in a language I couldn't read, but I did recognize an old rune. It came from an alphabet once taught to young Alphatian students of wizardry. The rune alluded to Followers of the Fire, ancient foes from Alphatian mythology. More followed, among which I recognized the symbol of Alphatia, the Immortal. I had to unveil this mystery, at any cost.

Suddenly, the web vibrated, like the cord on a lute, but much deeper. The spider hissed and clicked as it put away its longview. Images appeared in the web, near the center. It was Xerdon and Nyanga. What were they doing in the forest? I saw them fall into a giant web, escape, and defeat three large spiders.

The creature I was watching dissipated the image and moved to the edge of the web where I was. I hid in a corner, hoping it wouldn't see me. Indeed, it went out through the open secret door. This was the chance I was hoping for. I crossed the large chamber and reached spiraling stairs at the center, which led up to the web's nexus. There, I stretched up to reach the notes, carefully avoiding the mess of sticky strands. Unfortunately, my sleeve caught some of the web and caused vibrations to ripple all the way out. The spider reappeared at the door—and then fled!

Drat! It will alert the guards. I shoved the notes into my shirt and ran after the creature. I heard a door slam and a lock bolt shut just as I crawled back into the other room. The spider was gone, but the wizard-king stood there, holding a key. He cast a spell that ended my *invisibility*. Beside him, 30 guards aimed cocked crossbows at me.

“I seriously advise you not to make a move nor to utter a word, admiral. These guards are very twitchy. You have come here without an invitation and disturbed my research. Despite all, I have received and entertained you at my court. And you have the gall to return here, like a thief, to spy on my research and annoy my familiar. Worse yet, your men have entered the

forbidden forest and harmed my pets. This angers me greatly. I have no concern for what nation you belong to, nor do I care about who you might think you are, admiral. Since you are so interested in Herath, I invite you to extend your stay among us for some time—a very long stay, admiral. Guards, throw this fiend to the dungeons!” I was trapped and defenseless. The wizard-king cast a *web* spell at me, and the guards carried me to the dungeons.

Amphimir 15—Baalboth, from a

later account: Enebaan the Wise has abandoned me. I've had no rest since my flight from the outsiders' ship. My pursuers haven't halted their hunt, and they are but a few instants behind me. I am exhausted. The death of the Astafir cousins causes me great sadness. They must be avenged. There is still hope for this. I must reach the citadel. I must keep going. The tunnel is close.

Amphimir 15—Talasar, from a

later account: Late last night, the wizard-king's guards treacherously attacked the ship despite our *invisibility*. The wizards in the citadel must have discovered our presence and directed their troops' fire. I fear the admiral was either discovered or captured in his covert visit to the citadel.

The attack began just past midnight when the guards began firing globbs of webbing from the highest towers of the citadel, probably in an attempt to pull the Princess down. Failing this, giant spiders attempted to climb aboard, running up the silk strands, but we successfully repelled their assault. Unfortunately, the citadel used a magical shield that absorbed the Princess's breath weapon. It proved only marginally effective against the assaulting spiders. The boltmen now show signs of fatigue after this long night of fighting. The sight of so many giant spiders severely tested their nerves.

The aft sight spotted packs of spiders gathering in the citadel. They seemed to be coming from the forest en masse. They must be preparing for a massive assault. Vats of boiling slime from which the webbing shots came have been replenished. With the sun rising above the forest the crew finally managed to cut off the majority of the web strands that held us fast despite volleys of arrows. We lost several sailors overboard due to the arrows and stray web strands; those who survived their fall were mercilessly slaughtered by the giant spiders. This is perhaps our last chance to leave, for another assault would certainly crush our defenses.

Alas, I've yet received no message from either the admiral or our hunting team. In the face of the grave danger threatening the *Princess Ark*, I am obliged to order her withdrawal to a safer altitude. I pray to Razud that our companions are safe. I will advise a new course of action as soon as the *Princess Ark* is out of danger.

Amphimir 15—Xerdon, from a

later account: It was fortunate that the sky had remained heavily overcast this night, for we would have otherwise lost track of the fugitive. When my magical *light* had run out, infravision revealed faint spots of warmth on the leaves and on the soil, no doubt ichor from the monster's injury. My experience in tracking the woods of Blackheart had again paid off. By sunrise, the spots of ichor and the footprints had led us to a small cottage. We knew the fugitive hid there.

Nyanga kicked the door open, and a woman screamed. There stood a wench whom I took to be the wife of a forester. She had almost convinced us she had seen no monster, but said she had heard some noise in the rafters. As I considered her words, Nyanga noticed blood dripping from her hand. Before I could intervene, his blade swung wide, beheading the wench.

“Eh mohn,” he said to my horrified protests, “I be sure de monster spirit be inside her. I be taking no chances with de magical spiders.” He had a point. The wench's wounds did look like several deep sword slashes, yet there really was no way to tell. She looked very human to me, even in death. This could mean trouble later.

A search revealed a black brooch, a fiery topaz, thieves' tools packed in a weblike net, the remains of a pickled house fly the size of a chicken, and a secret passage leading down to a tunnel. It ran for hours. We finally reached the bottom of a dungeon well, just above the surface of muddy, fetid water. Unidentifiable, putrid flesh bobbed at the surface as we forced the tunnel's rusty grate open. I cast a *dimension door* to reach the top of the well and tossed a rope to Nyanga. Just then, we heard shouting and the sound of people running toward us. Perhaps we had triggered some unseen alarm.

Madly racing down the hallway came the admiral, shouting “Jump back, you fools! Jump!” A few paces behind him followed a crawling mass of huge, repulsive spiders, hissing and clicking furiously. All three of us reached the bottom of the foul pit in no time. Nyanga slammed the tunnels metal grate behind us.

Choking and gagging, the admiral sputtered a spell with such volubility I thought for a moment the spell would fail. But just as the spiders ripped the grate right off its hinges, the *travel* spell took effect. At last, we were back on our way to the *Princess Ark*.

Amphimir 15—Haldemar, epilogue: I congratulated Talasar and Xerdon for a job well done, as well as Lady Abovombe, without whose alertness many questions would have remained unanswered today. The ship was safely headed north. Xerdon had retrieved from the intruder—the creature called Baalboth—the stolen Jaibuli topaz and a magical black brooch. The latter turned out to contain Baalboth's comments, magically etched inside—comments that I have en-

tered into my log book at the appropriate spots. I can only hope it really was Baalboth that Nyanga eliminated. It knew far too much about the *Princess Ark* for my own comfort.

From this and what I had seen in the citadel, I must conclude the wizard-king has allied himself with a tribe of araneas, either by common accord or by coercion. Was the Great Magus an aranea himself? I strongly suspect it but don't have irrefutable proof. Wizards do have strange ways at times.

More interesting were the notes taken from the spider in the wizard-king's keep. The dungeon's muddy sludge had ruined part of the parchment, but Raman still helped me decipher the runes that survived. There were hints to waves of magical power being sucked into Glantri, a nation northwest of Thyatis. The wizard-king of Herath had scribbled some concerned comment that perhaps this had to do with the overall impoverishment of mortal magic on Mystara, our "Known World." I had no idea what he was alluding to, but the thought was nevertheless worrisome. The wizard-king of Herath seemed neither a prankster nor an incompetent fool. I would have to investigate this myself soon. Perhaps his warning should be brought back to Her Imperial Majesty after all.

To be continued...

The Lands of the Great Magus

Magocracy of Herath —Capital: Belphemon (pop.: 186,000 araneas — absolutely no outsiders); ruler: Wizard-king Yahav IV "The Watcher," son of Queen-Sorceress Amsharai II (hereditary domain includes the Forest of the Magus); patron: Yehm.

The araneas of the Savage Coast are a secret race; no one knows that they really exist, because these araneas have learned to take the shape of humanoid creatures when dealing with outsiders. (Note: "Humanoid" throughout the following text includes humans, demihumans, goblinoids, rakastas, tortles, lupins, etc.). Araneas are spiderfolk, highly intelligent beings that look like human-sized spiders in their natural shape.

Over the centuries, araneas learned to use magic to subdue their environment. They also developed a unique culture that, if cold and amoral, remains nevertheless quite pragmatic. Araneas are predators to whom humanoid flesh remains a delicacy. Because of this and their clearly arachnid morphology, other races loathe the very mention of araneas. Unruly children from rakasta cottages to goblin yurts are often told stories about how scary araneas come and take away disrespectful youngsters. Had the araneas not learned to conceal their identities, the neighboring realms would have annihilated the aranean nation long ago. Today, araneas of the Savage Coast are thought to be the stuff of legends, mere mythology of the past.

Thus, as the aranean nation grew, laws and customs that reflected their behavior and mentality were created. The young araneas of Herath are taught from birth that they are *two* different people. One is the true aranea, the other is a humanoid alter-ego. The aranea's two personalities are very distinct, with two separate sets of histories and personal experiences that the aranea learns to accept as legitimate identities. This is done to ensure that the aranea will play its alter-ego's role to perfection in order to better fool outsiders. Indeed, the practice has largely succeeded' thanks in a great part to the araneas' superior intellect.

However, the practice does present a risk. Some araneas develop split personalities. When this happens to an aranea, it no longer knows it has a second personality and forgets what it did under its other personality. A psychotic aranea will almost always revert to its natural mind and shape when in presence of araneas in arachnid shape (95% chance). If it fails, it becomes permanently insane in that it forever forgets about its true nature and everything pertaining to araneas, save perhaps some common humanoid legends and folklore about araneas. So deeply ingrained is the aranea's double-personality teaching that a psychotic aranea will always shut down its aranean self and switch to its humanoid alter-ego when in presence of outsiders. (One of the secret aranean laws demands that araneas switch to their humanoid form whenever they prepare to leave the Forest of the Magus.)

A further limitation exists on an aranea's shape-changing ability. It can switch only between its two specific alter egos; it cannot use humanoid or aranean identities other than the two given it at birth by aranean sages. These two original identities are chosen in accordance with the aranea's family lineage. An aranea of noble birth will be given a noble humanoid identity (e.g., the family of a "human" baron is most likely to be a single aranean family).

Aranean imitation and acting are so good that an aranea can hardly tell whether or not a character met for the first time is an aranea. Furthermore, if wounded or killed in humanoid form, an aranea does not revert back to its arachnid body. Dispel magic cast at 20th level or higher is necessary to force an aranea to adopt its true form. This fosters a certain element of confusion very useful to intruding adventurers.

No one knows for sure exactly where araneas came from. Some say they were a creation of the Immortals, an experiment with a race that was left unchecked. Others surmise they came from other worlds and adapted to Mystara. In any case, there are several aranea realms on Mystara, all of which are exceedingly well concealed.

Savage Coast araneas spread out from the area that is presently their capital, at the center of the Forest of the Magus.

Beneath the citadel lies a huge network of caverns that saw aranean prehistory. There, primitive paintings and carvings remain a silent testimony on how long they've existed below the earth. Armed with their incredible abilities, the aranean advance remained unchecked within the confines of their dark forest, a thick wilderness only rarely visited by primitive hunters.

When they reached the outer limits of their forest, the araneas had already developed their shape-changing skills. They also knew of the humanoids' hatred and fear of things arachnid. Under their impenetrable disguises, araneas began mingling with their primitive neighbors and soon came to think humanoids were their inferiors. They believed that the aranean Immortals put the "savages" there for the araneas' benefit-as succulent edibles at first, as convenient armies next, and finally as a precious source of labor, revenue, and sometimes even magical innovation. However, in the Immortals' infinite wisdom, "savages" were made dangerous and wonderfully varied so that their gift could not be abused and so araneas would learn and inspire themselves.

In the past centuries, Savage Coast araneas posed as wizards and slowly established their magocracy. Seizing power in the region without drawing suspicion from the local folks proved to be an easy task for the crafty araneas. Over the years, four "wizards" established large domains and imposed their authority on the people there. Finally, the "wizards" declared allegiance to the "Great Magus in the Forest," and "united" their domains into a single, large realm. Nonaranean wizards are unwelcome and promptly and quietly removed from any position of power there. Today, the aranean realm stretches from Bellayne to the northern edge of the Dark Jungle in the Orc's Head Peninsula, and goes about 140 miles inland from its shore on the Western Sea.

The common folk of Herath have grown accustomed to the thought of their ruler being a quiet and reclusive wizard, "over there in his tower at the heart of the dark forest." They have had no reason to complain of their treatment or suspect the truth about the ruling nobility. Their fate is comparable to any other nation's subjects' save for people who occasionally "disappear" without explanation.

Once in a while, the Great Magus (in humanoid shape) visits one town or another or the court of his vassals. Most of the time, envoys or vassal nobles will conduct business with visiting dignitaries on behalf of the Great Magus. So far, no monarch abroad has had reasons to suspect anything, other than the natural distrust of magocracies—wizards can be strange, indeed. The Forest of the Magus is off-limits to all uninvited people. In any case, none of the local folk would enter that forest, since it is rumored to be haunted and infested with monsters—a

perfect place for wizards.

The Great Magus lives in what could be called the capital of the araneas. It is a great citadel where araneas enjoy going about in their true shapes. There, the most brilliant aranean minds help the Great Magus determine his nation's fate and rule his subjects, humanoid and aranean. The citadel reaches 100' into the air but delves 10 times deeper below ground, connecting with ancient caverns where many more araneas dwell. The deepest and oldest caverns hold sacred grounds for temples, as well as dark secrets and clues to the true origins of araneas.

Six fortresses delineate the Great Magus' domain. Each is the home base for aranea patrols (in humanoid shape) that guard the edge of the woods. The fortresses connect with each other and with the Great Magus' citadel through tunnels and caverns. Each fortress is a magical building that marks the edge of the Magus' magical power.

An invisible web of magic emanates from the citadel and affects the forest. The web is an immaterial extension of the Great Magus' mind, allowing him to sense everything inside the forest, including the predominant feelings and physical sensations of visitors. If an animal is killed, the Magus may sense it, but the Magus cannot actually read someone's thoughts, only the surface impressions.

The greater the extent of the sensations (e.g., many warriors fighting in a small area of the forest), the more the attention of the Magus is likely to be attracted; this chance is 1% per 10 HD or levels of creatures involved in a single event (round up fractions, with a 1% minimum chance per roll). If the Great Magus expects trouble somewhere and actively searches the web, the chances he'll notice some activity go up to 5% per 10 HD.

Once the Magus' attention has been caught, the Magus can "lock" his attention on a specific individual in a party, usually the one with the highest experience level or the greatest number of Hit Dice. The Magus will not know who that individual is, but he will sense where the victim is (within 1d8 miles) as long as the individual keeps moving through the magical web. If the individual stops for more than 1d4 hours, the link is lost.

The Magus can tell if someone he's been tracking with the web enters the citadel, but no more. Short of personally encountering the visitor, the Magus will not be able to locate or identify that visitor. Once he has personally met a visitor, the Magus may keep tracking the visitor through the web after the latter's departure from the citadel (no die roll needed for this). If the visitor returns to the web at a later time, the Magus will then be able to recognize him, provided he does something to attract the Magus' attention.

Herath maintains peace with Bellayne, as a war with the rakastas would be far too costly; there's also the risk of unveiling the araneas' little secret if things go wrong.

The Great Magus is far more interested in political intrigue and magical influence than in open warfare. He stays busy maintaining a delicate balancing act between Bellayne to the east and the bellicose orcish hordes of the Dark Jungles at the opposite end of the magocracy. The presence of Terra Leaoca, a small Vilaverdan colony, is useful to the Great Magus, since the colony is a pain in Bellayne's flank. The Magus quietly supports the Vilaverdan colony, in exchange for which Herathite merchant ships may sail through the colony's territorial waters without any interference.

Eastern Dominions of Herath

Viscountey of Berevrom —Capital: Amion (pop.: 4,300, araneas, humans, elves, rakastas); ruler: Lady Beryam "The Deft," daughter of Lord Balmoroth of Berevrom; typical NPCs: soldiers, thieves, and aranean spies; patron: Enebaan.

Duchy of Ensheya —Capital: Sorodh (pop.: 14,900, araneas, humans, elves, halflings); ruler: Duke Yaluughu "The Dark Weaver," son of Lord Ezer of Ensheya; typical NPCs: farmers and woodcutters; patron: Yehm.

County of Enom —Capital: Nezhev (pop.: 5,700, araneas, humans, dwarves, some tortles); ruler: Count Disbaal "Eight-Eyes," son of Lord Enzuth of Enom; typical NPCs: miners and gem cutters; patron: Negayavim.

Viscountey of Hethzya —Capital: Shahav (pop.: 18,500, araneas, humans, halflings, some rakastas); ruler: Lord Mazieth "The Hook," son of Lord Gerphemon of Hethzya; typical NPCs: merchants and soldiers; patron: Shaya.

The Wildwoods —Administrative center: Tower of Yedom; regional population is mostly araneas, with some humans and elves; ruler: Lord Yezarath of Pazphezu, appointed overseer; typical NPCs: forest hunters and lonely wizards; patron: Shaibuth.

The Wildwoods are mostly wilderness, barely touched by civilization. The Great Magus is still debating whether it should be left to the hand of the woodcutters and farmers to expand the nation, or saved for future aranean generations. Aranean nobility is widely divided on the fate of this unclaimed territory. More pressing is the need to curb the incessant encroachment of rakasta hunters from Bellayne's Wyndham Marches.

Immortal Patrons of Herath

Yehm (alias Korotiku the Spider): Araneas are an old-time favorite of Yehm, one of those Immortals who no longer remembers ever being mortal. It is tempting to say he once was a mortal aranea, which would attest to this race's ancient existence in the universe, but no proof exists of this. Nevertheless, Yehm is the grand patron of araneas, even more so than he is of the lupins.

Enebaan (better known as Masauwu):

Enebaan represents the arts of diplomacy, intrigue, influence, and masquerade—things of vital importance to the existence of araneas in a world dominated by humanity and its cousins. By definition, this makes him the patron of rulers, spies, and thieves.

Negayavim (known as Iliric elsewhere): This Immortal is a brilliant teacher of magic whose attention was attracted early on by the araneas' talent in things arcane. His followers use the local mining of gems and the dwarves' skillful crafting of these precious stones as a source of sacrificial gifts to this greedy Immortal. Negayavim is the patron of aranean wizardry—but also of their insensitivity.

Shaibuth (also named Eyrindul): This eleven Immortal took on the cause of araneas as an afterthought, merely a means to compete against Korotiku, his old rival. Eyrindul, however, prefers those araneas who decided to remain creatures of the forest. He still tries to create a druidic aranean philosophy but with little luck so far. His devout eight-legged followers have decidedly proven much too pragmatic and cynical for Eiryndul's hopes.

Shaya (alias Valerias): One might be shocked to find such a symbol of beauty and love here; however, the unusual story of two Herathite lovers touched her so much she wished to know more about araneas. A human paladin once met an aranea's beautiful human alter-ego. They fell in love—he being unaware of his lover's true self, and she being so immersed in her masquerade she could neither discern nor control her emotions. Alas, the nature of the aranea's shape-changing ability allowed the lady to bear a child, no doubt some poor creature neither fully human nor arachnid. This tragic birth would foil her secret and forever destroy her love. In desperation, she kissed her knight and bit him to death, then ended her own life and that of her progeny. Shaya witnessed the sad tale and saw that even within a truly loathsome creature true love could still be found—and it is this quality that she sponsors.

Araneas as PCs

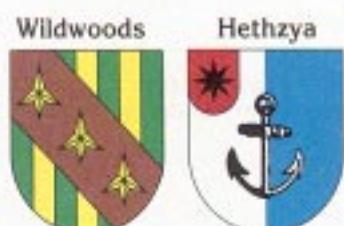
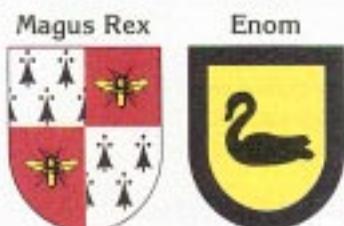
Although these creatures are better suited as NPCs to annoy and torment your favorite player characters with, they could be a challenge to role-play among a group of unsuspecting adventurers. Use the magic-user's experience progression table, with a 50% penalty (rounded down) to all experience gained for the sake of game balance.

Araneas were described in the AC9 *Creature Catalogue* as 3-HD monsters. Let's assume these are a separate species of NPCs. PC araneas would start with the same game statistics and abilities as human magic-users, with the racial abilities listed as follow. These differences apply only to araneas in their natural form. An aranea can cast spells in both forms.

In humanoid form, treat an aranea as a



Scale: one hex equals 8 miles



Ensheya	Berevrom
Magus Rex	
Enom	
Wildwoods	Hethzya

Capital

City

Town

Village

Castle

Tower

Ruins

Light House

Trail or Shipping Lanes

National Border

Dominion Limit

Mines

Battle Site

Plantation

Farmland

Grasslands

Light Forest

Heavy Forest

Forested Hills

Rocky Hills

Desert

Swamp

River

Cataract

Mountain

Plateau

Reefs

Sheals



Cartography by John Knecht

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normal human magic-user. If mimicking elves, rakastas, or lupins, be aware that the PC's number of Hit Dice and the combat tables will remain those of a human magic-user. Otherwise, the shape-changed araneas do benefit from the race's special abilities (e.g., increased dexterity and claw/claw/bite routine for rakastas, secret door detection and infravision for elves, improved senses of hearing and smelling for lupins, etc.).

Aranean racial abilities

Level 1: Araneas can shape-change at will between their two alter-egos. The change requires a full game turn. Araneas have multiple sets of eyes that provide infravision, secret-door detection, and wide-angle vision (araneas can be surprised only on a roll of 1 on 1d10). They can climb walls without the help of tools like thieves of the same level, and can cling to ceilings with a -40% penalty to the climbing roll.

Level 2: An aranea can build a sticky web (or a cocoon) or secrete a silk strand. It does so at the rate of one square foot per round for the web, or 20' per round for the single strand. The aranea can hang at one end of the strand and descend as it secretes the strand. The strand is as strong as a normal rope, with half the encumbrance. The aranea can climb up its strand at its normal web movement rate.

The web functions like a *web* spell for creatures running or falling into it. The web must be large enough to cover the

entire creature or else it rips apart. Without constant care, an aranean web lasts a week, after which it dries up and falls apart. Araneas can move at their web movement rate on any giant arachnid web. They can also toss a small sticky web (no more than 3' x 3'); treat as a basic skill with nets (*Rules Cyclopedia*, page 79).

Level 3: Aranean venom becomes potent enough to affect creatures of ½ HD or more. The venom causes paralysis (saving throw vs. poison to negate) that lasts one game turn per level of the aranea.

Level 5: Araneas can freely sense the presence of and control normal spiders (up to 4 HD worth). This is done at will, as long as normal spiders exist within 30' of the aranea (no save). This does not include giant types or other monstrous arachnids.

Level 7: Once a day, araneas can summon normal spiders regardless of the situation. They arrive magically within 1d4 rounds as a single, crawling mass. Treat as an insect swarm for game purposes (*Rules Cyclopedia*, page 187).

Level 9: The aranea's poison becomes lethal. If the victim fails to save against paralysis, the victim must then roll a second saving vs. poison. If the second saving throw fails, the victim dies within 1d4 turns. The lethal effects of the poison affect only creatures with the same number or fewer Hit Dice as the aranea.

Level 12: The summoning and controlling of spiders also applies to nonmagical giant spiders. The aranea magically attracts a number of Hit Dice of giant spi-

ders equal to or less than one third its experience level, once per day.

Araneas must be neutral or chaotic, use skill slots to acquire the ability to speak to normal and giant spiders (one skill slot covers both), and reach a score of 18 in Acting as soon as possible. The Acting skill is based upon the araneas' natural Charisma scores.

Araneas gain a +2 bonus to Dexterity and Intelligence (up to 18), but suffer a -2 penalty to Strength and Constitution. These game statistics apply to both alter-egos. Roll up the aranea's natural Charisma as usual. The Charisma of the humanoid alter-ego is initially equal to 8 (use the aranea's natural Charisma if 7 or less). Each time the aranea gains a new level of experience it may make an Acting skill check. If successful, the aranea permanently increases its humanoid alter-ego's Charisma by one point, up to 18. Note that the alter ego's Charisma can be higher than the aranea's natural Charisma. In their natural form, araneas have a Charisma of 3 to outsiders.

Natural Aranean statistics: AC 9 (minus dexterity bonus); HD as MU; MV 180'(60') or 120'(40') on web; #AT 1 bite or weapon or spell; Dmg by weapon or spell (bite 1d6 +paralysis); Save as MU; AL C or N. Ω

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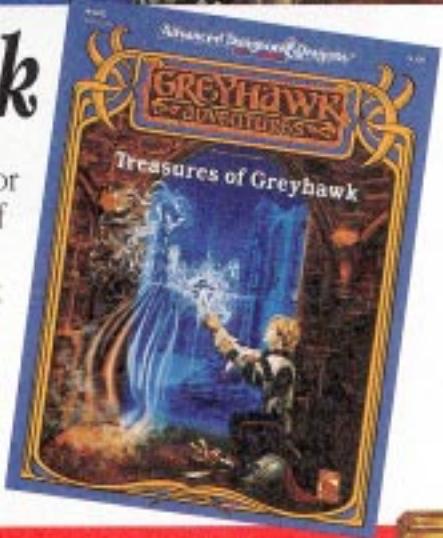
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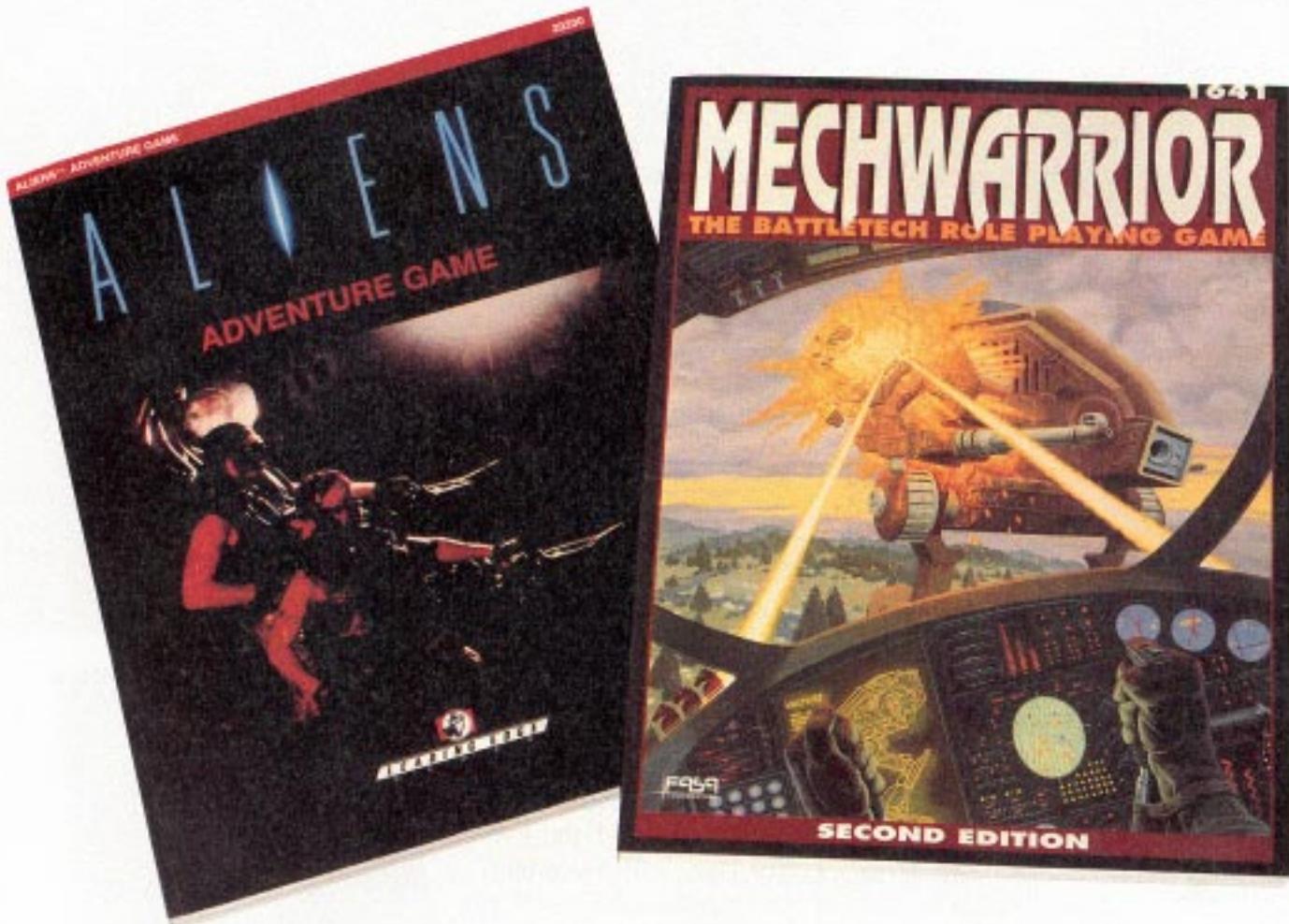
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Role-playing Reviews

©1992 by Rick Swan

A hard look at hard science-fiction games



Role-playing games' ratings

X	Not recommended
*	Poor, but may be useful
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	The best

People inclined to divide things into groups sometimes assign all science-fiction literature to one of two general categories. "Hard" science fiction refers to stories based on physics, biology, and other so-called hard sciences. The gadgets, technology, and applications of hard SF are extrapolated from accepted scientific principles; they might be impossible today, but assuming that science continues to advance, it's reasonable to speculate that they might actually exist at some point in the future.

"Soft" science fiction, on the other hand, concerns itself with people more than gizmos, taking its cue from soft sciences such as sociology and psychology. It's one thing to theorize about how genetic engineering might really work. It's quite another to imagine how racist governments might use such a discovery to manage their constituencies.

Science-fiction role-playing games, however, resist these categorizations for a couple of reasons. First, most game designers aren't all that scientifically predisposed, despite the fact that many—yours truly included—have backgrounds in science. We're not particularly bothered by the "whoosh" made by the U.S.S. Enterprise when it soars through the vacuum of space, and we approach our designs accordingly.

Second, and more important, most players don't want physics lessons or sociology lectures in their RPGs. They aren't about to sit still while game designers wring their hands over the feasibility of warp drives or time travel—they just want to get on with the adventure. Publishers who intend to stay in business quickly learn to give players what they ask for.

But, while game designers may not emulate the science in SF literature, they strive to emulate the tone. In that sense, RPGs can be sorted into categories using slightly different definitions of "hard" and "soft." Hard games emphasize technology and realism, and as much effort is made to engage a player's intellect as his emotions. Hard games tend to focus on complex hardware, authentic-sounding jargon, gritty settings, and labyrinthine backgrounds. Rules rely heavily on numbers, formulas, and charts; players don't need to be mathematicians or engineers, but they're encouraged to act like them. Examples of hard SF games include Iron Crown's SPACE MASTER* and GDW's MEGATRAVELLER* games.

In contrast, soft games stick to more traditional elements of high adventure. Fact takes a back seat to fantasy whenever necessary to make for a more exciting game. Soft games tend to be more fanciful and less number-heavy, focusing squarely on characters and plot. West Ends STAR WARS: The RPG* and the late, lamented STAR TREK: The RPG* from FASA typify the soft approach.

Think of it this way: When a hard-SF game designer creates a laser gun, he

wonders how it can be logically derived from the scientific principles employed elsewhere in the game system. When a soft-SF game designer creates a laser gun, he wonders how big a stain will be left behind when it blows away little green men.

This month, we'll be taking a look at two hard SF games. These products are hard in the literal sense as well as the figurative. They're not impossible to master, but they're admittedly demanding, best suited for experienced players and diligent referees.

MECHWARRIOR* game, second edition

168-page softcover book

FASA Corporation \$15

Design: Mike Nystul, Lester W. Smith

Development: Mike Nystul

Editing: Donna Ippolito, Sharon Turner
Mulvihill

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lerton, Earl Geier, and Jim Nelson

The first edition MECHWARRIOR game looked like a sure thing. The role-playing supplement to the immensely popular BATTLETECH* board game, the MECHWARRIOR system boasted an intelligent character-generation system, a set of complex but clever combat rules, and some new insights into the rich BATTLETECH universe. But the game never took off. Not only did it fail to attract many new converts, even hardcore BATTLETECH game players stayed away in droves.

How come? Three fundamental problems with the first-edition game limited its popularity (all of these were addressed and corrected in the second edition):

1. The first-edition MECHWARRIOR system required ownership of the BATTLETECH game, a prerequisite that novices rightly found intimidating since mastering the complex BATTLETECH system is hardly a day at the beach. The second-edition MECHWARRIOR game is a stand-alone product, requiring neither the BATTLETECH rules nor the maps and miniatures of the tactical board game.

2. The role-playing rules in the first-edition MECHWARRIOR game essentially functioned as an extension of the BATTLETECH combat rules. Player characters existed mainly to pilot giant BattleMech robots and didn't have much personality; for all practical purposes, a PC was just another circuit board. The second-edition rules strive to create three-dimensional characters who have lives outside the cockpits of their BattleMechs.

3. The first-edition rules were plagued with glitches, none of them major, but

there were enough of them to drive nit-pickers nuts. Rather than attempt to patch up the holes, the second edition's designers opted for a top-to-bottom overhaul, resulting in smoother and more sensible systems.

Despite these changes, the thrust of the game remains the same. Set in the far future in a universe devastated by the Succession Wars, skilled combatants called MechWarriors struggle for personal glory and domination of the stars. The primary weapons in their arsenals are BattleMechs, robotic monstrosities loaded with missile launchers, particle beams, and other deadly doo-dads. It's a chaotic, nightmarish setting, made to order for players who think diplomacy is for wimps and a duel to the death—preferably with a lot of explosions, smoke, and flames—is a reasonable way to settle an argument.

Characters: The unnecessarily complicated character-creation system is the game's most disappointing feature. Characters derive from five basic attributes (Build, Reflexes, Intuition, Learn, and Charisma), compared to the first edition's four (Body, Dexterity, Learning Ability, and Charisma). Additionally, second-edition PCs come with characteristics (Athletic, Physical, Mental, and Social, used as a basis for Saving Throws and Skill rolls), advantages (personal assets ranging from Wealth to Toughness), skills (Acrobatics, Navigation, and four dozen others, twice as many as in the first edition), and BattleMech aptitudes (anything from Light units to heavy-duty Assault models). Available races include Human, Clan Warrior, and Elemental.

To begin constructing a character, the player prioritizes five general categories (Race, Attributes, Skills, Advantages, and BattleMech) by assigning them a rating from 0 to 4 on the Master Character table. He might assign 1 to Attributes, 3 to Skills, 4 to BattleMech, and so on, but may not use the same numerical rating more than once. The prioritized ratings generate point allotments for each category; a rating of 1 in Attributes generates 21 Attribute Points, and a rating of 3 in Skills generates 20 Skill Points. He spends his points to acquire power levels for specific abilities in the five categories.

It sounds easy, but the multitude of formulas, racial modifiers, and special cases make what could be an otherwise straightforward procedure into a real headache. For instance, Build, Reflexes, Learn, and Charisma all have values equal to the number of Attribute Points spent on them, but Intuition has a value of only half the number of expended points. It costs 1 point to buy a Level 1 skill, but 3 points to buy Level 2, and 15 to buy Level 5. Finding the saving throw for an Attribute involves doubling the Attribute's value and subtracting the result from 18. All this rigmarole might be worth the effort if the ensuing characters were out of the ordinary, but with no super-human abilities to speak of and no skills beyond the expect-

ed, they're nothing special.

Fortunately, the game provides 16 ready-to-go archetypes for players lacking the patience to navigate the character generation rules. Reminiscent of the Character Templates in STAR WARS: The RPG, the archetypes comprise a broad range of personalities, such as the Bounty Hunter and the Grizzled Veteran, including relevant statistics and background information for each. Simple rules for customizing the archetypes allow players to create their own variants. Both archetypes and player-generated characters may improve their Attributes and Skills by cashing in Adventure Points and Skill Points, awarded during the game for completing missions and successfully using Skills.

Mechanics: Resolving noncombat actions uses a skill-roll system similar to the proficiency system in the AD&D® 2nd Edition game. Just as every AD&D-game proficiency has an associated ability, every MECHWARRIOR-game Skill has an associated characteristic. To compute the Base Target Number (that is, the chance of success) for a particular skill, the player subtracts his PC's skill level from the associated characteristic rating. For instance, the associated characteristic for Acrobatics is Athletic; if the PC has an Athletic rating of 9 and an Acrobatics skill level of 3, his Base Target Number is 6. A 2d6 roll equal to or higher than the Base Target Number means the skill succeeds. The referee may, at his discretion, declare a bonus or penalty to the Skill roll to compensate for especially easy or difficult situations. In addition, each PC begins the game with a point or two of "Edge" that he can spend any time he likes to negate a bad dice-roll and throw again, substituting the new result for the original. Comparable to Force Points from STAR WARS: The RPG or Karma Points from TSR's MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ game, Edge Points serve to distinguish MECHWARRIOR-game PCs from mere mortals without significantly disrupting the balance of the game.

The personal combat system derives from tactical war games and is correspondingly complex. The system slices combat into 10-second rounds and sorts actions into three general categories: incidental (relatively effortless actions, such as falling to the ground or shouting a warning to a friend), simple (standing up, readying a weapon, and similarly reflexive actions), and complex (actions involving a PC's full concentration, such as reloading or sprinting). On his turn, a PC may perform any number of incidental actions, one or two simple actions, or a single complex action. Movement involves modes (Walking, Running, and so on) and the expenditure of Movement Points, determined by a formula for each mode; for example, the sum of a PC's Build and Reflexes Attributes, plus his Running skill level, equals his Running-mode Movement Points. Hex maps and counters aren't strictly necessary to regulate movement,

but for a system this complicated, the frazzled referee will find them helpful if not essential.

Adjudicating weapon attacks involves range assessment (Short, Medium, Long), the target's status (is he Running or Stationary? Prone or Covered?), and the attacker's situation (is he Sprinting or Walking? utilizing Careful Aim or Burst Fire?). Melee combat also comprises a host of modifiers, among them Elevation, Concealment, and Darkness. As in the first-edition MECHWARRIOR game, the second edition's damage rules are based on hit locations, courtesy of rolls on the Damage Location table. Unlike the first edition, the second edition uses Condition Monitors, three lines of boxes (labeled Good, Fair, and Poor) that track a PC's health. Each line has up to eight boxes, depending on the PC's Build score. When the PC suffers Bruise Damage, resulting from clubs and other minor attacks, the player makes slash marks in the indicated number of boxes. When the PC suffers Lethal Damage, from firearms or other deadly weapons, he makes X marks. Each X of Lethal Damage equals two slashes of Bruise Damage. When all of the boxes on the Good line have been filled in, the PC is reduced to Fair condition. A PC no longer in Good shape suffers penalties to his Consciousness rolls, which are made now and then to see if he stays on his feet. Like the rest of the combat rules, the damage system is intricate but not overwhelming, thanks to lucid explanations and generous examples of play.

Notable in their absence are usable rules for BattleMech combat. While technically the domain of the BATTLETECH game, the MECHWARRIOR game contains so many tantalizing peeks at BattleMech duels that players are bound to be disappointed when they can't find guidelines to stage them. A few pages of general rules for BattleMech combat, along the lines of the *Jump Start* Rules in Steve Jackson's CAR WARS* game, would have been welcome and would have boosted my rating another half-star.

Campaigning: Aside from a few generic encounter ideas and a handful of obvious referee tips (be dramatic, tell a good story, use strong villains), there are no formal scenarios. However, the 50-plus pages of Succession Wars background material ought to stimulate the imagination of creative referees, or at least inspire them to run out and buy a supplement or two. The historical overview traces the first tentative steps of interstellar exploration in 2001, through the Reunification War of 2578, to the clash of Clan invaders and ComStar regiments on Tukayyid in 3052. As the overview focuses on the current state of affairs in the BATTLETECH universe, old-time BATTLETECH game players may want to check it out to bring themselves up to date.

As befitting a hard-SF game, the MECHWARRIOR book catalogs an impressive

array of high-tech equipment, from laser scalpels and medipaks to neural whips and infrared suppression suits. Availability ratings are assigned to each gadget; a lowly A rating indicates availability to all forces, while the D-rated devices are nearly impossible to obtain for most characters. If PCs want the top-of-the-line armaments, they'll have to risk their necks to get them.

Evaluation: Usually, I'm as enthusiastic about number-heavy games as I am about trips to the dentist. But all the chart-checking required by the MECHWARRIOR game not only complements the tone of the game, it actually enhances it. Most wizards, spies, and super heroes have better things to do than juggle numbers, but it seems perfectly natural for the spunky technologists of the MECHWARRIOR universe. With the exception of the awkward character-creation system, the rules mesh logically and justify their complexity by producing convincing and satisfying results.

Though the MECHWARRIOR game is a self-contained product, it barely scratches the surface of the BATTLETECH universe, and I can't imagine staging extended campaigns with this material alone. In particular, the original BATTLETECH game is a virtual must, especially if players want to board their BattleMechs and crunch some serious steel (and really, that's the whole point of the BATTLETECH series). The second-edition MECHWARRIOR game furnishes simple suggestions for incorporating BATTLETECH tactical systems; the *BATTLETECH Compendium* supplement provides fine-tuning. Beyond these core rules, there's a mountain of source books, adventures, and expansions from FASA that ought to keep players busy until the 31st Century actually gets here.

ALIENS* Adventure Game

** ½

194-page softcover book
Leading Edge Games
Primary design: Barry Nakazono
Writing and design: David McKenzie
Editing and production: Irene Kinzek
Illustration and graphic design: Toni Dennis

For the most part, the appeal of the Alien movies was lost on me. The plots were filled with easy scares and B-movie clichés right out of *Halloween*. The alien itself struck me as a cross between a praying mantis and an oil derrick, more silly than scary. But I got a kick out of the portrayal of the military, with its ridiculously elaborate weapons, grungy vehicles, and grime-caked grunts. Intriguing stuff.

I guess I wasn't alone in my impressions, as the designers of the ALIENS RPG apparently felt the same way. Though the game takes tactical combat seriously—and I mean *very* seriously—horror-film conventions are all but absent, and many of the

science-fiction elements seem perfunctory. Short on monsters and long on the military, a more appropriate title for this game might have been "Space Marines."

Characters: Character creation exercises the wrist a lot more than the mind, as it involves a lot of dice-rolling and not many decisions. For starters, players have no choice of character types, since all new PCs must be Colonial Marines; if you want to be a scientist, a trader, or an extraterrestrial diplomat, you're out of luck.

A player determines his PC's primary characteristics—Strength, Intelligence, Will, Health, and Agility—either randomly (rolling 3d6 twice for each characteristic and choosing the highest result) or by spending points from a fixed total (4d6 + 48). Dice-rolls also establish four secondary characteristics (Charisma, Leadership, Perception, and Motivation). Skill levels derive from the PC's background and social standing, generated by rolling on a series of personal history tables not unlike those in GDW's original TRAVELLER* game. It's a mildly interesting procedure the first couple of times, but a monkey might as well be rattling the dice. Skip the tedium and stick with the pre-rolled PCs in the back of the book, which include all the major characters from the movies.

Mechanics: The basic rules are drawn from Leading Edge's PHOENIX COMMAND* and LIVING STEEL* games. Players familiar with those titles can probably guess what they're in for—namely, a jungle of modifiers and enough formulas to gag an actuary. For instance, using a skill requires the referee to assign a numerical Difficulty level to the attempted action, which gives the Base Odds. The Success roll equals the Base Odds plus the PC's Character Skill Rating modifier; a 3d6 roll less than or equal to this total means the skill succeeds. Familiar territory so far, except the basic Success roll applies in only the most elementary situations. Complex actions, such as those involving an active opponent or a chance of physical harm, may require Movement modifiers, Risk levels, rolls on the Opponent Skill Rating Generator, and Equipment checks from the Damage to Equipment table. Should a character fall from a height, he must make a Fall Recovery roll, based on the distance fallen and the appropriate Fall Recovery Difficulty modifier, before assessing damage.

The number of die-rolls increases dramatically when several characters are involved. Instead of waiting for the referee to figure out the odds of crossing a river, antsy PCs might go ahead and jump in, just to get the game moving again. Though the rules work, they tend to suck the life out of action encounters; it's as if the PCs are perpetually stuck in slow motion, incapable of replicating the frenzied activity of the films.

Characters can improve themselves, but it's not easy. Once per year, a PC may

attempt to boost the level of a single skill by attempting a Learning roll. If the roll is high enough, the skill goes up a notch. Otherwise, he waits till next year. Outstanding performance in the field may earn the PC an extra Learning roll, but such circumstances rely on exceptional Success rolls and the benevolence of the referee. Did Ebeneezer Scrooge have a hand in these rules?

Combat is, in a word, tough. A combat encounter comprises two-second Phases in which PCs expend a variable number of Combat Actions (CA) as specified by the Action Time table. For instance, Moving Forward in a Low Crouch costs 2 CA per 6', while Moving Forward on Hands and Knees costs 3 CA per 6'. Firing involves the PC's Gun Combat Skill Rating modifier, Target Range, Shot Accuracy, and Target Visibility. Special cases, such as Desperation Fire and Automatic Fire, incorporate additional modifiers. If a shot hits its target, the victim calculates damage by consulting the Hit Location and Damage table that designates Superficial, Disabling, and Critical hits for various parts of the body. The victim may need to make a Glancing roll, adjusted by the Armor Glancing modifier, and may have to check for Incapacitation Chance by comparing the total amount of Physical Damage to the Knockout Value. There's more—much more—but you get the drift. The ALIENS game strives for realistic combat results, and for the most part achieves them. But the cost in time and effort is high.

The Aliens: A chapter devoted to the ecology of the Aliens explains their life cycle in delightfully repulsive detail, including the Facehugger's grisly embryo transplantation technique and the decidedly antisocial behavior of the Chestburster. The Queen Alien, the meanest of the mean, progresses through 10 distinct and increasingly deadly stages; the number of eggs she produces depends on the number of people she gobbles.

But failure to develop the many promising ideas renders the Aliens as little more than mindless killing machines. Even their attacks are randomly determined (toss a ten-sided die; it bites on a roll of 0, a 1-8 results in a grab, a 9 means a sting). What's the background of the Aliens and their relationships with other entities? What about their home world? Do they have cultures, societies, or personalities? And shouldn't they have names more evocative than the generic Queen, Warrior, and Alien?

Campaigning: A well-written historical overview details the shaky relationship between the nations of the Earth and the omniscient corporate powers. Corporate-supported colonies exist across the galaxy, some compliant, some openly rebellious. The overview lists capsule descriptions for about 60 colonies and planets, comprising an intelligently conceived setting ripe with possibilities for exploration and conflict. A brief but imaginative rundown of extrater-

restrial life forms features such compelling oddities as the antlike Arcturians and the savage Harvesters, who resemble giant moles with bad tempers. But neither illustrations nor developed statistics accompany these entries; referees will have to figure out specifics for themselves.

Truth to tell, the ALIENS game doesn't provide much help of any kind for the hapless referee. There are a few generalized ideas for commando-styled missions, but no developed adventures. There are no meaningful suggestions for recreating the tension of the films, no floor plans or blueprints, no clues as to what the Aliens are good for other than slaughtering PCs. The referee has some work to do if he doesn't want the game to degenerate into a repetitive series of combat encounters.

Evaluation: In short, the military rules are pretty good, the horror material pretty flat. The detailed combat system allows experienced referees to stage reasonably engaging tactical battles, and the Aliens make formidable opponents. But storytelling is undervalued and underplayed; players expecting to duplicate their favorite scenes from the movies may respond to the game like Sigourney Weaver did to the Queen.

Short and sweet

What's up, Buck?: Players who aren't up to the demands of the MECHWARRIOR or ALIENS games might want to stick with the kinder and gentler BUCK ROGERS® XXVc™ game, which downplays technology and number crunching in favor of AD&D-game-flavored role-playing and tongue-in-cheek intrigue. With its exotic locales, whimsical gizmos, and intergalactic femme fatales, the XXVc game reminds me less of the STAR TREK or STAR WARS games than it does the old TOP SECRETS/S.I.™ game. Captain Kirk might feel a bit out of place in the XXVc universe, but James Bond would be right at home.

TSR has supported the XXVc line with a generous assortment of adventures, source books, and accessories, some of them superb, a few so-so, and most somewhere between. With so much to choose from, where does the neophyte begin? Here's a rundown:

The NEO in the 25th Century adventure (TSR, Inc., \$10) is not only a first-rate introduction to the XXVc game, it's one of the game's best supplements to date. Designed by TSR ace Troy Denning, NEO whisks a small group of 1st- to 3rd-level PCs from the sleazy Last Chance Cantina for a dizzying tour of outer space, careening though a series of provocative encounters as offbeat as they are exciting. The plot focuses on the search for a filched microchip containing the schematics of a new stealth fighter, but it's really just an excuse to stage showdowns with a potpourri of characters from the XXVc universe. Unusual opponents (such a vengeful computer program), sly humor ("I'm a doctor, not a warrior!") snarls an

especially "enterprising" NPC), and delightful twists (including a surprise cameo at the end) push this rousing adventure over the top. Denning's energy lapses occasionally, as his reliance on ambushes and narrow escapes borders on the redundant, and he fails to satisfactorily develop an encounter with a mad space surgeon, potentially the adventure's most nail-biting sequence. Otherwise, this is a dazzling ride that zeroes in on XXVc's most appealing features and exploits them to the hilt.

Nigel Findley's *Phases of the Moon* adventure (TSR, Inc., \$7) doesn't scale the heights of *NEO in the 25th Century*, but it succeeds in its own modest terms as a low-key espionage thriller, replete with double agents, mysterious beauties, and other familiar spy trappings. As special operatives of the NEO, the PCs attempt to unravel the mysterious disappearance of a renowned Terran diplomat and his alleged defection to RAM. Despite a few annoying clichés—you think an agent in the 25th century would carry a suicide capsule in a hollow tooth?—it's a smooth mix of action and puzzle-solving that leads to an agreeable climax. Thanks to the crisp writing and clear presentation, experienced players should be able to complete this one in a single session.

Short on plot and characterization, *A Matter of Gravitol* (TSR, Inc., \$7) is okay but nothing special. An interesting premise, involving the struggle for a wonder drug that inhibits organic deterioration in space, doesn't really go anywhere, which is not so much the fault of designer Dale "Slade" Henson as it is the limitations of the format. A full adventure, a new ship catalog, and several reference summaries is a lot of material to cram into a mere 32 pages. Still, a devious referee ought to see a myriad of possibilities in Gravitol, the wonder drug in question, since abuse causes heart attacks, immune system deficiencies, and other sources of torment. Additionally, ship-to-ship combat, under-used in many XXVc products, is prominently featured here, making *A Matter of Gravitol* worth a look from anyone interested in giving those rules a workout.

For a witty overview of one of the 25th century's busiest locales, check out David "Zeb" Cook's *Luna* source book (TSR, Inc., \$10), which details the culture, architecture, and landmarks of the "Switzerland of Space." Written in the style of a tourist's guide book, *Luna* begins with a Customs Declaration Form from the Cooperative Federation of Lunarian States Immigration Ministry, then follows with local slang (a "wind-sucker" is a foreigner from Earth or Mars), hotel ratings (two stars for the austere but cheap Traffic Hostel), and other crucial information for the first-time visitor. As *Luna* prides itself as a center of intergalactic commerce, a sizeable chunk of the book concentrates on business and economics, perhaps too much for players looking for ruins to explore and aliens to zap. And there are no scenario hooks,

meaning that referees wishing to create *Luna*-based adventures are on their own.

The *Belt* source book (TSR, Inc., \$10) explores a setting a bit less civilized and a lot more rugged than *Luna*. Designer J. Paul LaFountain examines the 13 major colonies in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, describing the government, economy, and military of each, as well as their relationships with NEO and RAM. There are colonies for spacefarers of all persuasions, ranging from the modest shipyards of Juno to the classy gambling dens of Aurora. Though *The Belt's* textbook-like approach makes for a much drier read than the *Luna* supplement, the writing is clutter-free and authoritative. Again, the designer neglected to provide any scenario hooks, but there are ideas galore—a referee who can't do something with the devastators, a vicious RAM-bred race from Vesta, ought to turn in his rocket rifle.

Hard Times, by Charles E. Gannon. GDW, \$12. Let's say you're a lion tamer inside a cage with three snarling felines. Now imagine that a sinister ringmaster decides to throw in a couple of tigers, a few king cobras, and a pack of rabid dogs, then locks the door and throws away the key. For good measure, he stands outside the cage and blows a pea shooter at the animals to get them really stirred up. That's roughly the situation facing GDW's MEGATRAVELLER* game players in *Hard Times*, a chilling look at the Shattered Imperium in the aftermath of the War of the Rebellion. If the MEGATRAVELLER game heated up the universe of the original TRAVELLER game, *Hard Times* incinerates it. The interstellar economy is crumbling, planets are gasping for life like guppies flung from a fish bowl, and the luckless survivors face a future of staggering adversity. The beginning of the book explains adjustments the referee must make in his campaign to reflect the current chaos; included are biosphere damage tables, tech-level formulas, and maps of the Shattered Imperium pinpointing the Outland Borders and new Frontier Areas. The last section outlines a 10-stage campaign set in the Khavie and Pasdaruu Subsectors. Each stage spotlights a specific change in the post-Rebellion Imperium, beginning with the "Scorched Earth" adventure (featuring a salvage operation complicated by the Imperium's economic collapse) and ending with the "Light a Candle 'Gainst the Coming Night" scenario (where the PCs help defend a struggling gateway world against a pirate raid). It's fascinating material, masterfully done.

The PARANOIA Sourcebook*, by Ed Bolme. West End Games, \$18. Correctly sensing that the PARANOIA* game was repeating the same jokes too often, the powers-that-be at West End decided the time was right for a shake-up. By incorporating the *Sourcebook* suggestions, the

PARANOIA game becomes more of a traditional RPG, similar to what the original rules so gleefully satirized. Troubleshooters are tougher and more autonomous, unlike the passive pawns of the Computer in the classic PARANOIA view. To give the Troubleshooters a variety of villains to face, the Computer now exists as a series of compnodes, each with its own quirks and goals. Clones are in short supply, encouraging Troubleshooters to cooperate and perform like conventional adventuring parties. Thanks to the urban renewal necessitated by a massive Computer Crash (an alternate version of which appeared in the *Acute PARANOIA* supplement), the various sectors of Alpha are more diverse than ever, even including (gasp!) a network of underground dungeons. The tone of the game is as loopy as ever, but the focus has shifted from anything-for-a-laugh episodic scenarios to plotted adventures that can be linked into campaigns. Traditionalists may balk, but the open-minded should give it a try before they call in the High Programmers to delete the designer. Q

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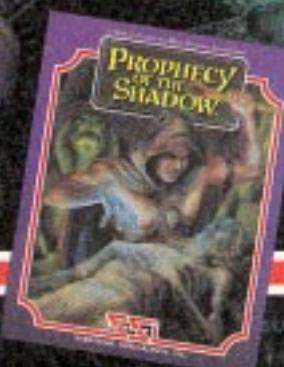
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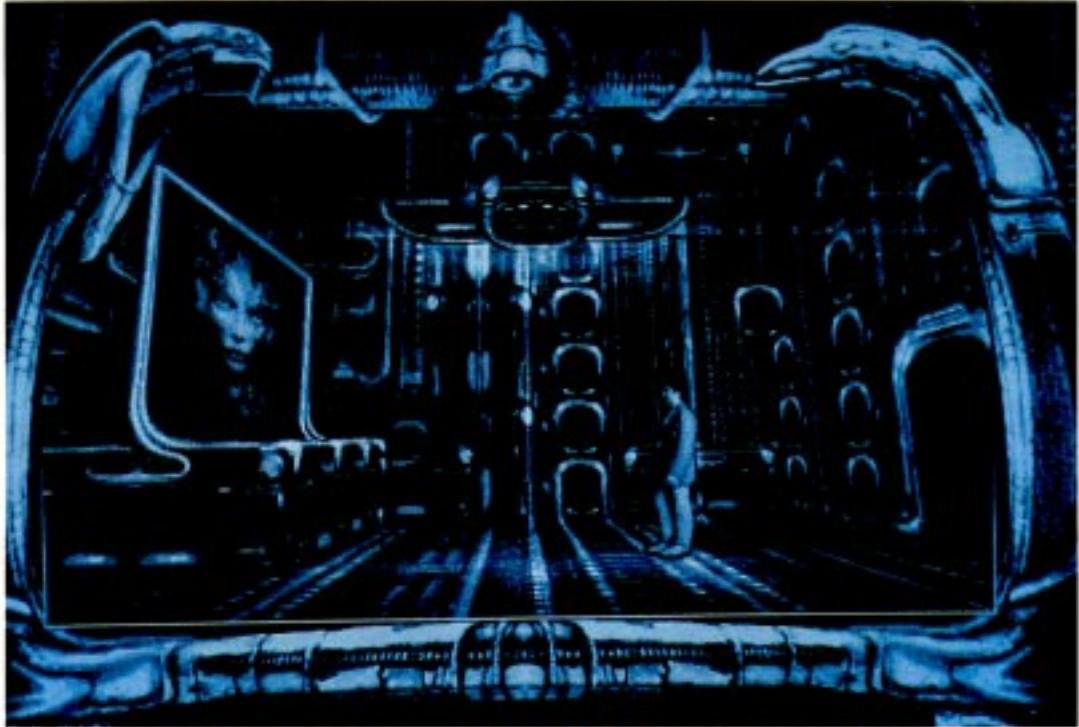
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Talk about a "Wow!" product for all gamers: We've just had our first peek at the stills and public-relations write-ups for Cyberdreams' *Dark Seed*, a new science-fiction adventure that features the awesome art of H. R. Giger, the Swiss surrealist who let his artwork be used for the *Alien* movies. The technical folks at Cyberdreams scanned his art, then used it to create the biomechanical world featured in this adventure.

In *Dark Seed*, the hero enters his newly purchased home in Woodland Hills to finish writing a book, but he soon realizes strange things are happening. He discovers a way into the Dark World, where evil,

biomechanical creatures have selected Mike to assist in their procreation. With horror upon horror in adventure after adventure, *Dark Seed* seems to possess all of the elements to become a smash hit for Amiga and PC/MS-DOS computer gamers.

The process of transferring Giger's work to the computer screen was quite involved. The background locations in the game were generated by first selecting a portion of Giger's work and scanning it, capturing it as a computer file. These

elements were "cut and pasted" together, then cleaned up and sized proportionally for high resolution. There are over 1,000 frames of animation, more than 75 locations to explore, and an easy-to-use, point-and-click interface. When we run the game, we'll let you know our thoughts right away.

Just think what will happen when the price for CD-ROMs lowers to the point that they become affordable by the majority of gamers! Origin, foreseeing that day, has released *Wing Commander CD-ROM Edition* and *Wing Commander/Ultima VI: The False Prophet* on CD.

H.E.L.P.

A query has been received from Fred Wisdom, of Sterling Heights, Mich., regarding *Ultima V*, from Origin. "I have completed everything the clue books indi-

Computer games' ratings

X	Not recommended
*	Poor
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	Superb

cate should be done. I still can't figure out how to get into the center of the underworld, though. There is a place there called the Dar Place, marked number 3, in the clue book. After you complete all of the quests for the shrines, you go to the Codex for the last time. It tells you to descend through the dungeon Shame, but Shame is blocked by a cave-in. The first room you go into is blocked off on all sides. So, how do you get there? Also, when you go to the shrines after completing their quests, they tell you to give them hundred weights of gold. When you do this, Alakazam flashes on the screen. What does this mean?"

Steven Clark of Mesa, Ariz., has responded to Jason Dunn's question (from issue #173) which dealt with *Ultima VI*. Steven states these hints are based on his Commodore 64 version of the game. It lacks some of the spells that appear in other versions, such as the Seance spell that Jason used. "In the lower left corner of Diligence is a ladder. It is hidden inside the walls, so use x-ray to see its exact location. Also, anyone having a hard time reaching the Shrine to the Codex with your lenses, cubes, and stones should try ballooning."

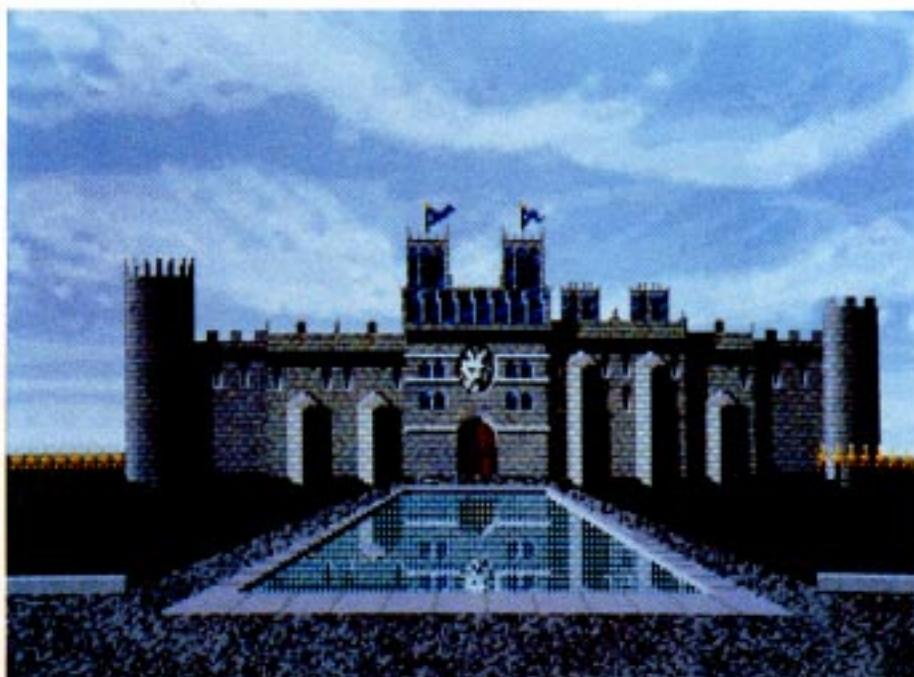
Jake Haney of Lawrence, Kans., requests some assistance for his foray into *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* from Infocom. "I don't know what to trade the salesman in back of the mad scientist's house in exchange for his machine, which I suspect is the key to the other places I'm stuck in the game. I am also unable to buy an exit at the Canal View Exit shop on Mars, defeat Thorbast in the outer space sword fight, make it through the catacombs under the Haren, or Kiss the Frog. For the latter, I have closed my eyes, donned the lip balm, and held my nose, but the frog's croak is so repulsive that I can't bring myself to kiss it. I suspect that the cotton balls would take care of this problem, but I can't find them."

Charles Lin of Burnaby, B.C., has a simple request: "In *Eye of the Beholder II*, past the crimson lock, what do I do with the sword imprint?"

Sean Larson of Appleton, Wis., asks for help with *Spellcasting 101*. "I have received the talisman. I have all the spells (even from the simulation), but I can't leave the university grounds. What have I missed?"

From Norman, Okla., Bruce Kumsteen writes, "I need help progressing from the two dungeon levels in *Secret of the Silver Blades*. I have the Staff of Oswulf and have also cleared the Black Circle headquarters. What should I do next to move on?"

Charles Rose and Inoo Labion (stationed in Germany) ask the following question regarding *Dragon Wars*. "We have made it all the way to the Sword of Freedom, yet we cannot find Namtar. Is there an area where we're not looking, or is there something we haven't completed? What is the importance of the rock on the Faerie



Civilization (MicroProse)

Bridge in the Magan Underworld? And where do you find the Black Sickle? Lastly, what is the purpose of the rusty axes?

Marty Gleason's request for help in *The Bard's Tale* (issue #180) has been answered by Jason Denzel of San Jose, Calif. "The answer to the riddle in Harkyn's Castle about warriors and battlefields, etc., is 'shield.' A second riddle—one given by the old man—is 'vampire.' The third riddle requires the answer 'Skull Tavern.' The silver square is vital later in the game: Do not drop or sell it! Finding your way through Kylearan's Tower is one of the hard parts of this game. First, in the entryway, face north and go three steps west, then one step north. Here you are teleported. Go two steps west, one step south, one step east, one step south, and one step west. This part of the tower is where you must travel back and forth, answer a question about golems, and kill a powerful guardian. When you come to three adjacent rooms that are all identical and have doors on all four sides, stay near the walls. Pay attention to the direction you are facing! The west door of one of these rooms teleports you to a winding passage that leads to the wizard himself. By the way, the answer to the riddle in Manger's Tower (3rd level) is: 'Lie with passion, and be forever damned.' "

Reviews

Civilization

MicroProse

PC/MS-DOS version

\$69.95

Do you recall the game *Railroad Tycoon*, and how well MicroProse designed and coded that simulation? Remember the hours of involvement, from building your

first railroad to advancing to the stage where you could compete with all contenders? Now there's *Civilization*, as perfectly executed as any simulation we've seen, but with the development of an entire civilization resting upon your shoulders.

Playing *Civilization* is no small task. You must commit many enjoyable hours to this game, most of which are spent learning the various routes to take to build your village into a city. As your population grows, you must learn how to appropriately feed and defend it. You must take any of several pathways and influence other growing civilizations through trade, diplomacy, or force. You have to think ahead and manage inventions in order to continue the growth of your civilization to the stars themselves. You must learn how to use units to build your empire, when it's time for talk or war, when to change governments in order to meet specific criteria and continue your civilization's growth cycle. Best of all, learning to manage your people and assist them in their growth is a highly enjoyable, extremely educational, and thoroughly satisfying entertainment. *Civilization* is a simulation we feel should be ported to as many systems as is possible as soon as possible, so all computer gamers can enjoy it.

The graphics, sound, and I/O device you wish to use must be selected before each game. There's not much of a delay before getting into the meat of the game, but it would have been nice to have the game write its own setup file so that you didn't have to go through these menus each time you start play. A superb music score accompanies a menu invitation to either start a new game, load a saved game (you can save as many as 50 games on a floppy disk and an unlimited number on a hard

Elvira II
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ELVIRA INSIDE THREE
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SETS—A GRAVEYARD,
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Civilization (MicroProse)

drive, depending upon storage space), use Earth (you play on a map of our planet, not a random map created by the game), Customize World (you select how much land mass you want, as well as air temperatures and starting date), or View Hall of Fame, which shows those players who attained the highest civilization ranking.

Once you've highlighted your choice using the mouse or the keyboard, the birth of the world is seen, leading you into your difficulty level selection. You select Chieftain (the easiest level), Warlord, Prince, King, or Emperor (really difficult). If you select Chieftain, you also obtain on-screen help messages during play that advise you as to what and where you might want to build. We started out at Chieftain level until we had learned the game's basics, then restored with the Warlord level and found it quite suitable for learning the remainder of the game's mechanics. You then must determine how many starting civilizations there are to be, from three to seven. The higher the number of starting civilizations, the more opportunity for you to trade with them—or be wiped out by them! Fewer civilizations means you have more time to build your own civilization from scratch before worrying about invasion—usually. Thanks to random generation, no two games are ever alike.

You must now select your tribe. For example, you could select Roman, Babylonian, German, Egyptian, American, Russian, Zulu, French, Aztec, or Chinese. More starting civilizations means more tribes for selection. You name yourself and are the tribe's leader. We selected Americans as our tribe and learned from a subsequent window that our tribe already has knowledge of Irrigation, Mining, and

Roads. This is good, as these elements help in the growth of starting cities. However, this knowledge can only be implemented by Settler units, but more on that later.

As with most games, Civilization consists of sequential turns. First, the date advances. Then, if a natural disaster strikes your city, that toll is taken and you are notified of its impact. The production cycle determines if there are enough resources to support the city's population and works. If not, you are notified of population or unit depletion. If there is an excess, it is added to the city. Growth of your city, the next step, is determined by surplus food units. If the population grows, it is immediately put to work. You are then informed of any disorder that might run through your city, resulting from unhappy citizenry. You are allowed an opportunity to correct whatever caused the dissatisfaction; otherwise, it continues into your next turn. Taxes are collected, and any repairs needed throughout the city are paid for; then your scientific research is calculated. When you have acquired a technology, you are so informed.

Movement and combat come next. You rotate through all of your active military units. Those in fortification or sentry mode are skipped until you reactivate them with your cursor. You can also delay moves until the end of the movement turn, if you so desire. To enter into combat, you simply move your unit into an adjoining enemy occupied square, whether that be a ship, a city, or a ground unit. When this is completed, it's a good time to check with your advisors to obtain reports on how your civilization is growing.

When the turn is over, you are examined by historians as to any new accomplishments. If you are a good leader, perhaps the citizens will wish to improve your palace. The historians rate you on how many technological advancements you have acquired, how many happy folk reside in all of your cities, the power of your forces, the size of your population, and the wealth in your civilization's coffers.

You can end the game anytime you wish by quitting, retiring, being destroyed by another civilization, conquering the world, or building a spaceship that reaches Alpha Centauri—an automatic ending. Technological advancement is so critical to your success that you must pay attention to your advisors throughout the game to ensure that you acquire certain sciences, letters, and arts before the others, in order to achieve ultimate power and technology. Bonus points are awarded if you do conquer the world, or if your civilization produces space colonists.

We recommend you expand as quickly as you can. Have your military units find those locations that are topnotch, then create Settler units to build on those sites. Immediately improve the areas around each city with other Settler units, then

move the "build" units out to another location.

If it looks like war is ahead for you, the Wheel (Chariot), Masonry (City Walls), and Mathematics (Catapult) should be considered. To obtain those highly useful diplomats, obtain the Writing advancement. Caravans are superb for economic growth but you must obtain Trade first.

Two types of leadership you might consider are the Berserk leader or the Content-and-Defend leader. The first requires chariots and racing throughout the land removing all opposition. Unfortunately, remember the peace dividend give as part of your score? Forget those points—you'll never see them. If you're good as a Berserker, you can gain points by forging ahead on the technology aspects. But, at some point in the future, you'll find that you've made so many enemies that all of your resources are being dumped into defense! The Content-and-Defend method requires you to concentrate on city development and acquiring technologies ahead of your opposition. This makes trading quite an advantage for you, but you can't be hesitant in making moderate advancements either.

Should you fail in your attempts to lead your civilization successfully to the stars, you'll learn that archaeologists of the future find remnants of your civilization beneath the sands of time—roads, some buildings—plus a stone tablet. The stone tablet leaves no doubt as to whether or not you might return!

There is simply no way this review can reveal all of this simulation's content. The well-written manual contains 124 pages of superb information, including which technological advancements lead to what ends, what kind of governments produce what sort of response from the citizenry, what type of city improvements affect your growth, and information on taxes. The entire manual should really be read before play, but, knowing gamers as we do, we doubt that will occur. We didn't—we dove right in and read sections that we felt were needed as we were pressed hard on all fronts by opposing civilizations.

Civilization is one of the highest dollar-to-play-ratio entertainments we've enjoyed. The scope is enormous, the strategies border on being limitless, the excitement is genuinely high, and the experience is worth every dime of the game's purchase price. This is an absolute *must* purchase for any PC/MS-DOS gamer. We again hope it will be translated to other systems such as the Macintosh and Amiga. Congratulations, MicroProse and Sid Meier, for another truly outstanding simulation! Graphics support includes VGA, MCGA, EGA (256 color), and Tandy 1000; sound support includes Roland, AdLib, Sound Blaster, and IBM sound.

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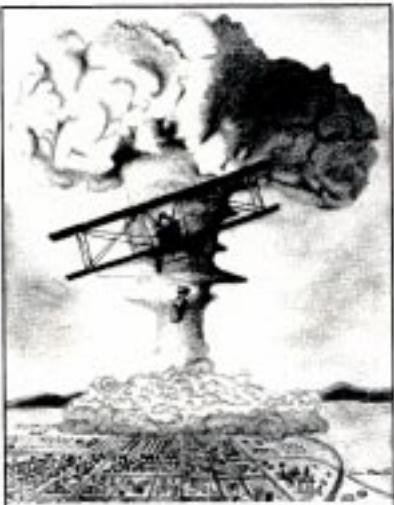
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Bard's Title Construction Set

Interplay

PC/MS-DOS version

* * * * *

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Ignore the adventure construction sets you've seen or used in the past, the text-based programs that simply dump ASCII characters in to build walls, create encounters, and find items. Grab a program that gives you the total look and feel, plus the quality, of *Bard's Tale* adventuring. The *Bard's Tale Construction Set* is the finest fantasy role-playing game construction set we've used. It produces outstanding, high-quality games. Naturally, the higher the expertise of the user, the higher the quality of the game.

Previous game builders have required you to learn a "language" or special coding to obtain the results you want, whether it was building the actual environment (dungeon, castle, etc.) or creating your monsters. Not with this. The program is point-and-click in windows. If a value needs to be changed, you simply enter the new value and click "Done" or press the F1 key. It really is that simple.

The Main Menu consists of the following items: Item Editor, where you edit or create your own items, from torches to weapons; Spell Editor, for editing or creating your own magic spells; Monster Editor, for populating your world with beasties; Map Editor, for designing everything from dungeons to cities to wilderness areas; and Utilities, where you can print out lists of stuff you've created, test your environment, and even bring in your own pictures that you've created in *Deluxe Paint Enhanced* or *Deluxe Paint Animator*.

You may use any of the three standard I/O devices: mouse, keyboard, or joy stick. When a selection is highlighted, you accept its listed value by hitting the Return key. Graphics support includes VGA, MCGA, EGA, Tandy, and CGA; sound support includes AdLib, Pro Spectrum, Sound Blaster, and Tandy sound.

Despite the fact that the Roland driver would not work on our computer with this package, we highly recommend this entertainment to anyone interested in building his own adventure game. Not only do you obtain a high quality fantasy game, but you also learn what makes an adventure game worth its code.

Clue corner

Conquest of Camelot (Sierra)

1. When selecting a boat destination, choose "Gaza."
2. Follow the child at Gaza Port.
3. Ask Al-Sirat of the Six Goddesses.
4. Follow the man to the top of the mountain until you reach a pool with a skeleton. Go to your right—don't drink the water!
5. Go down the stairs at the building of the frightened lady.
6. Go to the guards and pay them one silver.

7. When in the bazaar, let the thief go. Sell the mule to Mohammed.

8. Buy herbs and charcoal from the man selling those items.

9. Buy the Truth Apple from the lady.

10. Give the leper charcoal and the fish merchant herbs; buy grain and a mirror.

11. Give the mirror to Mari, above Mohammed's store.

12. Buy a relic from the relic seller. For the name, put "M-A-Y-N-A-R-D" so that it reads "Maynard."

13. Give this relic to the charcoal merchant.

Keith Shaboo
Norman OK

Dragon Wars (Interplay, Commodore 64 version)

1. Go through the doors in Irkahal's realm, make a left, and jump into the pit to receive five experience points.

2. Leave the island where the Magic College is, then return and repeat all of the steps and get the Sing Ring and the Laugh Staff.

3. Use the Soul Bowl in the Magic Forest on the rock.

4. Don't cast Soften Stone under Salvation in the depths of Nisir. You can't use light, and every step you take drains your life away.

5. Find the secret rooms in the Dwarven Mines. The Dragon Wand casts Rage of Mithras.

6. Use the Charger spell whenever you heal yourself. Most magical items you find take 49 charges.

7. There is a magic shop in Freeport. Have lots of money before entering.

8. Don't be greedy and take all the Dragon Stones when you find them. Leave some for emergencies.

9. The robes in Kingshome are needed to get to Nisir.

10. In the Lansk undercity, there is a secret room in the closed shop.

Inoo Labion and Charles Rose
Nuerenberg, Germany

This wraps up another column. Remember, those hints and tips save hundreds of lives each month! Send your crucial information to: Clue Corner, c/o The Lessers, 521 Czerny Street, Tracy CA 95376, U.S.A. We look forward to all of your correspondence. Until next month, game on!



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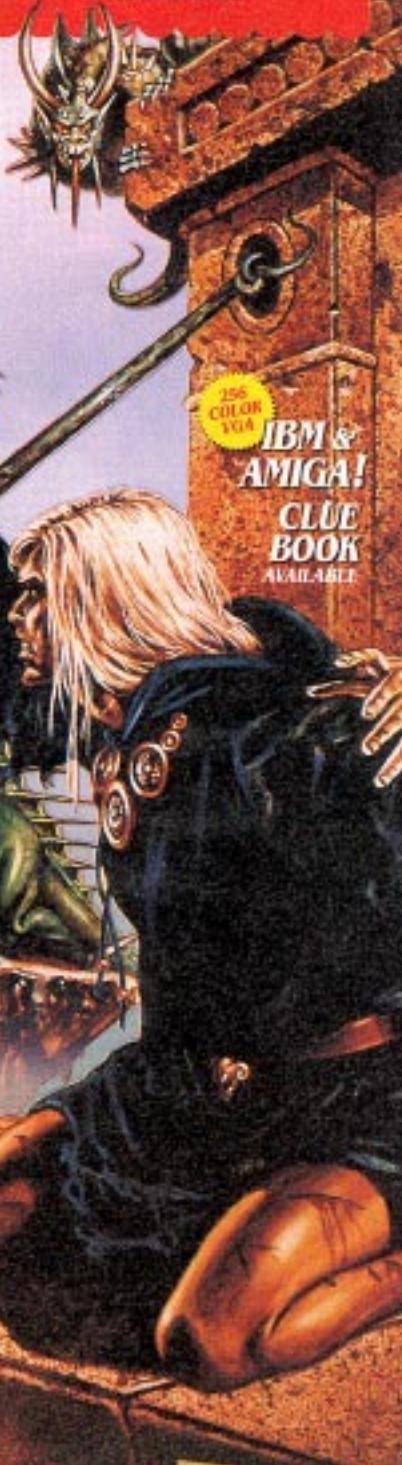
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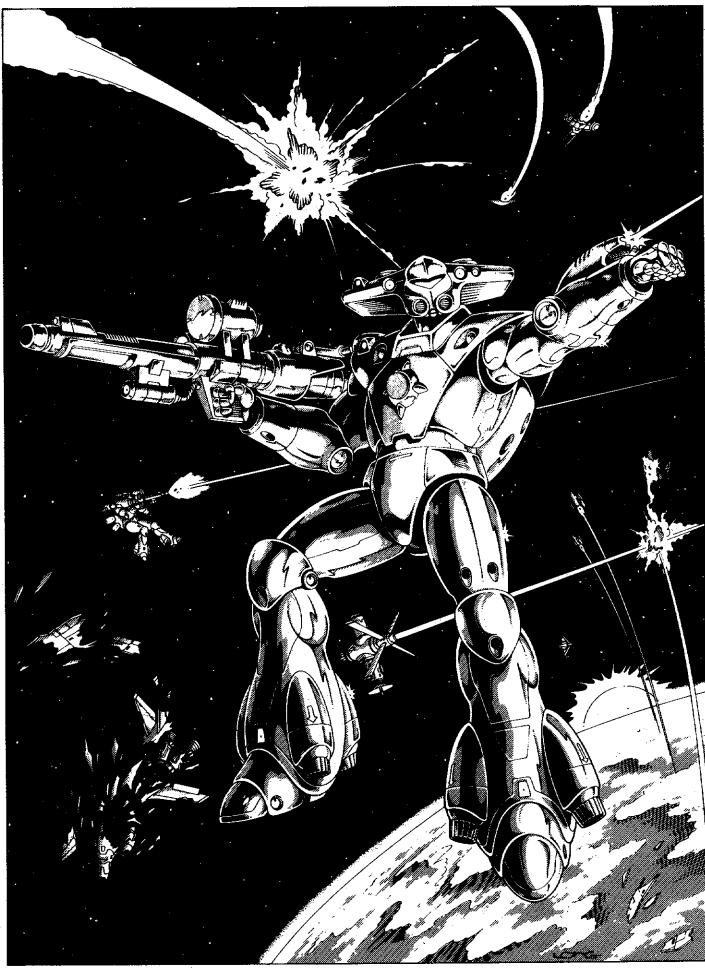
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* Written by Kevin Siembieda, art by Kevin Long.

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The Vikings' Dragons

by Jean Rabe

Artwork by Jim Holloway

An overview of the Norse lands' great serpents, part 2

In DRAGON® Issue #182, we presented the first portion of this article, detailing linnorms — Norse dragons first described in The AD&D® 2nd Edition HR1 *Vikings Campaign* sourcebook — and how to use them in your own AD&D campaigns. We now continue with our parade of Norse nasties — plus two deity class individuals for your highest-level campaigns.



Linnorm, Flame

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:

Any

FREQUENCY:

Very rare

ORGANIZATION:

Solitary

ACTIVITY CYCLE:

Any

DIET:

Special

INTELLIGENCE:

Exceptional (15-16)

TREASURE:

Special

ALIGNMENT:

Neutral evil

NO. APPEARING:

1

ARMOR CLASS:

-4 (base)

MOVEMENT:

24, Fl 40 (B)

HIT DICE:

20 (base)

THAC0:

4 (at 20 HD)

NO. OF ATTACKS:

2 claws/1 bite + special

DAMAGE/ATTACKS:

3d6/3d6/3d10

SPECIAL ATTACKS:

Spells, breath weapon

SPECIAL DEFENSES:

Variable

MAGIC RESISTANCE:

Variable

SIZE:

G (40' at base)

MORALE:

Fanatic (17-18)

XP VALUE:

Variable

Flame linnorms are the most beautiful of the Norse dragons and perhaps the most rare. They live to bend others to their will and to accumulate wealth. Adept at magic, even the youngest of the flame linnorms can master spells.

Upon hatching, the scales of a flame linnorm are as black as unused coals. By the time a linnorm reaches the juvenile stage, the scales have faded to a soft, dull gray, the shade of ash. At this stage the linnorm is sometimes confused with gray linnorms. However, when the linnorm reaches adulthood, its scales become vibrant, starting with a glowing orange in the young adult stage and reaching a pulsing scarlet by the time it is a wyrm. Adult and older linnorms appear as a mass of fire when they walk, their scales shifting, seeming like flames lapping over the creature's body. Great wyrms are said to look like living fireballs.

Flame linnorms speak their own language and can communicate with all other Norse dragons. In addition, a very young linnorm has a 20% chance to pick up human tongues. The percentage chance to gain this ability increases 10% per age category of the linnorm until the wyrm stage, when it is certain to possess this skill.

Combat: Flame linnorms attack nonintelligent creatures only for food. These great dragons reserve their full fury for Viking ships, castles, and bands of adventurers laden down with chests and bundles. In combat, a flame linnorm prefers to attack from above where it has a good vantage point and a better chance to escape a dangerous situation. It almost always attacks first with its spells, hoping to take down its targets without damaging any valuables. If, however, its adversaries prove too staunch, the linnorm continues with its breath weapon and magical fire abilities. It fights with its claws and bite only if it has no choice, as the linnorm fears close combat could harm its beautiful scales.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: A flame linnorm has two breath weapons that cause equal damage. One is a cloud of hot ashes 90' long, 70' wide, and 40' deep. The second is a stream of flame 5' wide at the linnorm's mouth and 110' long. The flame linnorm casts spells and uses magical abilities at 9th level, plus any combat modifier.

From birth, a flame linnorm is immune to nonmagical fire. As the lin-



norm ages, it gains other abilities: very young—immune to magical fire-based attacks, plus *heat metal* (three times a day); juvenile—*pyrotechnics* and *produce fire* (three times each a day); adult—*fireball* (at will every three rounds); old—*fire charm* and *fire trap* (three times each a day); venerable—*flame strike* and *wall of fire* (twice each a day); great wyrm—*fire seeds* and *firestorm* (once each a day).

Habitat/Society: Flame linnorms are loners, making their homes as deep within the earth as possible in caverns that can accommodate their huge forms and even larger piles of treasure. The linnorms do not hate other flame linnorms or other breeds of linnorms. However, they choose to isolate themselves, not wanting to risk the chance that other linnorms might steal their wealth. The linnorms frequently inventory their treasure to make sure every piece is accounted for. Magical treasures are especially prized, and the linnorms will spend long hours trying to discover what those treasures do. Flame linnorms that master the use of magical items use those items in battle or to *charm* or enslave humans and demihumans. These captives help the linnorm acquire more treasure.

Flame linnorms memorize every inch of their territory and guard it zealously. There is a 25% chance for a flame linnorm that has attained venerable age or greater to have 1-4 fire elementals guarding its lair. Sages are uncertain whether the elementals are summoned by magic the linnorms have acquired or whether they willingly serve the linnorm in exchange for treasure.

Flame linnorms mate every 30 years, then separate. The female is left to lay its eggs on its own, and she abandons them as soon as the young linnorms hatch.

Ecology: Flame linnorms have been known to eat herd animals, trees, and the very earth. However, their favorite food is in the form of any object on fire. These linnorms sometimes set sections of a forest ablaze just to dine.

Age	Body Lgt.(')	Tail Lgt.(')	AC	Breath Weapon	Wizard Spells	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	3-24	3-24	- 1	2d8+1	1	40%	½E	14,000
2	25-42	25-42	- 2	4 d 8 + 2	2	45%	E	18,000
3	43-57	43-57	- 3	6d8+3	3	50%	E,G	21,000
4	58-76	58-76	- 4	8d8+4	31	55%	E,G	22,000
5	77-96	77-96	- 5	10d8 + 5	321	60%	E,G,H	24,000
6	97-107	97-107	- 6	12d8 + 6	432	65%	E,G,H,I	25,000
7	108-129	108-129	- 7	14d8 + 7	5331	70%	E,G,H,I × 2	26,000
8	130-156	130-156	- 8	16d8 + 8	5432	75%	E,G,H,I × 2	27,000
9	157-186	157-186	- 9	18d8 + 9	6443	80%	E,G,H,I × 2	28,000
10	187-217	187-217	- 10	20d8 + 10	64441	85%	E,G,H,I × 3	29,000
11	218-237	218-237	- 11	22d8 + 11	75442	90%	E,G,H,I × 3	30,000
12	238-265	238-265	- 12	24d10 + 12	75543	95%	E,G,H,I × 3	31,000

Linnorm, Gray



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (11-12)
TREASURE:	Special
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1 (5% of 1-4)
ARMOR CLASS:	-1 (base)
MOVEMENT:	12, Fl 36 (C), Sw 12
HIT DICE:	13 (base)
THAC0:	7 (at 13 HD)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite/1 tail strike + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	4d6/4d6/4d10/2d6
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, poison tail, breath weapon
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Variable
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Variable
SIZE:	H (18' at base)
MORALE:	Fearless (19-20)
XP VALUE:	Variable

Gray linnorms are ruthless to a fault and revel in deceiving and harming all other intelligent creatures, especially humans and demihumans. While they have the smallest bodies of all Norse dragons, they have long, whiplike tails that they are quick to employ in combat.

At birth, a gray linnorm has shiny black scales so small they appear as smooth skin. The black scales remain, although they grow larger and thicker until the linnorm reaches the juvenile stage. Sometime during this growth stage, the scales' color begins to fade. By the time the linnorm has reached the mature adult stage, the scales are normally a dull gray, the color of lead. While the linnorm can alter the appearance of its scales by concentrating, it is limited to changing the shades of gray and making the scales appear shinier or duller.

Gray linnorms speak their own language and can communicate with all other Norse dragons. They also have a propensity for learning other languages. A hatching gray linnorm has a 40% chance of being able to speak with any other intelligent creature. The chance to gain this ability increases 15% for each age category up to the young adult stage (100%).

Combat: Gray linnorms spend little time plotting their attacks, usually adopting a plan on the spur of the moment. They prefer to initially strike from a height, from where they have a better vantage point. However, unlike some of the other linnorms, they do not attempt to kill their victims only using spells and their breath weapon; they use these abilities only to weaken their foes (of course, their foes are often not hardy enough to stand up to a breath weapon attack). Gray linnorms relish killing their foes with their foreclaws and whiplike tail. Especially malicious gray linnorms capture humans and demihumans, taking them to their lair where they toy with them before eventually finishing them off.

Gray linnorms of the adult stage and older will often use their *shape change* ability to appear as a different type of linnorm (especially if another Norse dragon is in the area) in an attempt to blame that other linnorm for the attack.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: The breath weapon of a gray linnorm is a jet of black slime 3' wide and 60' long. It is a corrosive substance that, in addition to causing physical harm to creatures, will rust

or corrode any metal in 3-12 rounds unless washed off. The metal is allowed a saving throw vs. acid to avoid this effect (magical bonuses may be applied).

The tail of a gray linnorm oozes a poisonous substance that is the equivalent of poison type B. Creatures struck by the tail suffer 2d6 hp damage from the physical blow, plus 20 additional hp damage from the venom unless they save vs. poison.

Unlike other linnorms, a gray linnorm is not born with any special abilities. However, it gains abilities as it ages: very young—*protection from normal missiles* (constant); juvenile—*contagion* (three times a day); adult—*shape change* (at will, three times a day); old—*wraithform* (three times a day); venerable—*distance distortion* (three times a day); great wyrm—*sink* (twice a day).

Its clerical spells come from the spheres of All, Charm, Elemental, Protection, and Weather. A gray linnorm casts spells and uses its magical abilities at 7th level, plus its combat modifier.

Habitat/Society: Gray linnorms usually are found on mountains, hills, ridges, and other places that overlook the land. They place themselves on these earthly pedestals and consider their territory everything within their lines of sight. Their lairs are usually tunnels into hillsides, the entrances of which are carefully concealed and trapped.

Gray linnorms mate once every 20-30 years, with the parents staying with their offspring until they have passed from the young stage. After that time, the parents separate, meeting again in another 20-30 years.

While gray linnorms are solitary, they have been known to join forces with others of their kind to raid a settlement or ship, particularly if they can place the blame through their *shape change* on another linnorm, particularly the frost linnorm, whom they hate above all other dragons.

Gray linnorms will immediately attack any intelligent creature that encroaches upon its territory, as it fears that the creature might be after its wealth. A gray linnorm hoards its wealth deep within its tunnels. While it will collect virtually anything (including cloth, furniture, and ship gear), it is especially fond of coins of all types.

Ecology: Gray linnorms can digest nearly anything. However, they have acquired a taste for deer, cattle, and sheep, and they are a terror to farmers.

While these linnorms have no natural predators, they are sometimes hunted by adventurers who use their scales for armor and their poison and other body parts in potions and for spell components.

Age	Body Lgt.(')	Tail Lgt.(')	AC	Breath Weapon	Cleric Spells	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	1-4	4-10	2	4d4+1	1	10%	C	7,000
2	5-9	11-20	1	6d4+2	11	15%	C	9,000
3	10-15	21-32	1	8d4+3	111	20%	C,E	10,000
4	16-25	33-52	0	10d4 +4	211	25%	C,E	11,000
5	26-35	53-73	- 1	12d4 + 5	221	30%	C,Ex2	13,000
6	36-47	74-96	- 2	14d4 + 6	2 2 2 1	35%	C,Ex2	15,000
7	48-59	97-121	- 3	16d4 + 7	3 2 2 2	40%	C,E,F × 2	16,000
8	60-72	122-150	- 4	18d4 + 8	3 3 2 2 1	45%	C,E,F × 2	17,000
9	73-87	151-178	- 5	20d4 + 9	3 3 3 2 1	50%	C,E,F × 3	18,000
10	88-116	179-235	- 6	22d4 + 10	3 3 3 3 2	55%	C,E,F × 3	20,000
11	117-136	236-277	- 7	24d4+11	4 3 3 3 3	60%	C,E,F × 4	21,000
12	137-157	278-325	- 8	26d4 + 12	4 4 3 3 3 1	65%	C,E,F × 4	22,000

Linnorm, Rain

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:

Any

FREQUENCY:

Very rare

ORGANIZATION:

Solitary

ACTIVITY CYCLE:

Any

DIET:

Spécial

INTELLIGENCE:

Average (8-10)

TREASURE:

Special

ALIGNMENT:

Chaotic evil

NO. APPEARING:

1 (5% of 1-6)

ARMOR CLASS:

3 (base)

MOVEMENT:

18, Fl 40 (B), Sw 9

HIT DICE:

10 (base)

THAC0:

11 (at 10 HD)

NO. OF ATTACKS:

2 claws/1 bite + special

DAMAGE/ATTACKS:

1d12/1d12/3d10

SPECIAL ATTACKS:

Spells, breath weapon

SPECIAL DEFENSES:

Variable

MAGIC RESISTANCE:

Variable

SIZE:

H (20' at base)

MORALE:

Fanatic (17-18)

XP VALUE:

Variable

Rain linnorms are the most vain of the Norse dragons, and will go out of their way to destroy communities and harm the land in the area of other dragons. However, unlike gray linnorms, the rain linnorms do not attempt to place the blame for the attacks elsewhere. The rain linnorms demand credit for their atrocities. The more heinous the act, the more powerful the rain linnorm considers itself. Further, the rain linnorms seek to gain vast amounts of treasure, more than they believe other dragons could possibly accumulate.

When rain linnorms hatch, their teardrop-shaped scales appear shiny and white. As the linnorm ages, the scales retain their shape, but they become larger, thicker, and are able to become gray, blue, green, or white at the creature's whim.

Linnorms speak their own language and can communicate with all other Norse dragons, although they rarely lower themselves to do so. In addition, a hatchling linnorm has a 5% chance of being able to communicate with all animals. The chance to possess this ability increases 5% per age category of the linnorm.

Combat: Young and juvenile rain linnorms are quick to rush into battles that will net them treasure. This includes attacking traveling merchants, wandering adventurers, and small communities. The linnorms attack first with their breath weapon and any magical abilities they possess. A favorite strategy of juvenile rain linnorms is to *call lightning* on a target, then breathe on anything left standing. However, if the target appears small and nonthreatening, the linnorm will combat the victim with its claws and bite in an effort to keep any valuables intact. As the linnorm ages, its tactics change. Adult and older rain linnorms hate to sully their claws with physical combat. The older linnorms always attack first with their weather-related spells, to show their superiority even over the elements. Then they assault their targets with their breath weapons.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: A rain linnorm's breath is a stream of boiling water 3' wide at the linnorm's mouth and 90' long. Creatures struck must save vs. breath for half damage. A rain linnorm



casts spells at 8th level, adjusted by combat modifiers.

Rain linnorms are born invulnerable to electrical attacks. As they age, they gain additional abilities: very young—*create food and water* (twice a day); young—*plant growth* and *entangle* (each three times a day); juvenile—*call lightning* (twice a day); young adult—*lightning bolt* (twice a day), *water breathing* (at will); adult—*control winds* (twice a day); mature adult—*moonbeam* and *rainbow* (each three times a day); old—immune to missile weapons and *transmute dust to water* (three times a day); very old—immune to nonmagical blunt weapons, *weather summoning* (twice a day); venerable—immune to nonmagical edged weapons, *conjure water elemental* (twice a day); wyrm—regenerate 10 hp/round, *control weather* (once a day); great wyrm: regenerate 20 hp/round, *wind walk* (once a day).

Habitat/Society: Rain linnorms live on hills where they can be comfortably buffeted by the winds and rain. Their lairs are usually deep within the hills, and their treasure hidden inside the many chambers. A linnorm usually stays in its lair only when the weather is pleasant. Wyrms and great wyrms have been known to *control weather* around their domains when the land has been too long without inclement weather.

Rain linnorms consider all others—including other rain linnorms—to be beneath them, and therefore improper company. The only time more than one rain linnorm will be encountered is when a pair has mated. The pair separate when the eggs hatch, abandoning the baby linnorms to their own devices.

Rain linnorms attempt to kill all intelligent creatures that come too near their lairs. If a linnorm believes the location of its lair is known, it will painstakingly move every piece of treasure to a new lair.

Ecology: Rain linnorms are able to subsist on almost anything. However, their favorite sustenance is lightning bolts, which they attempt to catch in evening storms. They have no known predators except human adventurers.

Age	Body Lgt.'l)	Tail Lgt.'l)	AC	Breath Weapon	Wizard Spells	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	1-4	1-8	6	3 d 6 + 1	Nil	Nil	½B	2,000
2	5-10	9-20	5	5 d 6 + 2	Nil	Nil	B	7,000
3	11-17	21-34	4	7d6+3	Nil	Nil	B	10,000
4	18-24	35-48	3	9d6 + 4	Nil	Nil	B×	11,000
5	25-32	49-64	2	11d6 + 5	Nil	Nil	B×	12,000
6	33-41	65-62	1	13d6 + 6	Nil	Nil	B,Z ×	13,000
7	42-51	83-102	0	15d6 + 7	Nil	Nil	C,Z × 3	14,000
8	52-62	103-106	- 1	17d6 + 8	1	25%	C,Z × 3	18,000
9	63-75	107-109	- 2	19d6 + 9	21	35%	C,Z × 4	20,000
10	76-91	110-112	- 3	21d6 + 10	32	45%	D,Z×4	22,000
11	92-108	113-115	- 4	23d6 + 11	43	55%	D,Z×5	24,000
12	109-130	116-118	- 5	25d6 + 12	54	65%	E,Z × 5	25,000

Corpse Tearer

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Unique
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
<b b="" diet:<="">	Spécial
INTELLIGENCE:	Genius (18)
TREASURE:	A × 3,B × 3,C × ,H × 3,I
A L I G N M E N T :	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-10
MOVEMENT:	24, F140 (C), Sw 18, Br 18, Jp 18
HIT DICE:	28 (170 hp)
THAC0:	2
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	3d12/3d12/4d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, level drain, breath weapon
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+ 1 or better weapon to hit, spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	50%
SIZE:	G (330' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	35,000

The linnorm called Corpse Tearer is the most hideous of the Norse dragons and one of the most feared. The only offspring of the godlike linnorm of the same name, this mottled-brown dragon has long front legs that end in broken but deadly claws. It has no rear legs. The creature's slime-covered scales are small and weathered, and when the linnorm is at rest it looks more like a fallen, dead tree than a serpent. The linnorm's snake-like head is ringed with matted brown and gray hair. Tufts of the hair appear at random intervals over his body, in places so matted it resembles loose, rotting flesh.

Despite its ragged appearance, the linnorm is very much alive, moving and striking quickly. Corpse Tearer is ancient, and because it has traveled greatly it has become fluent in nearly all human and demihuman tongues. Further, it is able to converse with all linnorms and many evil, intelligent monsters.

Combat: Unlike many other of the great dragons, Corpse Tearer enjoys fighting and will not often let lackeys do battle for it. This ancient linnorm is not quick to fight, however. It watches foes carefully and from a distance, noting their abilities, potential weaknesses, and determining if it can gain something by defeating them.

When it is ready, it strikes, flying above its victims and beginning with its paralyzing breath weapon, followed by its disease breath and spell-like abilities. If its victims survive the first onslaught, Corpse Tearer lands on top of the strongest ones in an attempt to crush them, then fights with its energy-draining claws and powerful bite to finish them off. Each successful claw attack drains one life level automatically from its victim. If Corpse Tearer suffers more than 170 hp damage, it flees, flying away if possible or using its *dimension door* ability to escape.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: Corpse Tearer's breath weapon is a cone of *paralyzation force* 10' wide at his mouth, 300' long, and 50' wide at its apex. Creatures of less than 4 HD caught in the cone are automatically paralyzed for 4d4 turns. Creatures of greater than 4 HD are allowed a saving throw vs. breath weapons to avoid the effects. This breath weapon causes no physical damage. Corpse Tearer's second breath weapon is another matter, however. The disease breath is a cloud 100' long, 80' wide, and 80' thick. All creatures trapped within the cloud suffer 8d12 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half). Further, the creatures are subjected to a magical disease that slowly weakens them. The disease manifests itself within 1d6 rounds by cutting a crea-



ture's strength score in half. Every three turns, the strength score is halved again until the creature's strength drops to 1. A *cure disease* will stop the strength loss. However, a *wish* or *limited wish* is needed to restore all lost strength points.

Corpse Tearer can breathe twice before needing to rest two rounds before it can breathe again. It can breathe as many times as it wishes within this restriction.

This linnorm has the following permanent abilities, useable at will: *fly*, *water breathing*, *continual darkness* 100' radius, *feign death*, *polymorph self*, and *speak with dead*. In addition, he is able to use the following once a day at will: *protection from good*, *spectral hand*, *delude*, *vampiric touch*, *wraithform*, *enervation*, *dimension door*, *animate dead*, and *control undead*. Corpse Tearer uses all magical abilities at 15th level.

Habitat/society: Corpse Tearer's lair is in a vast chamber beneath an ancient Viking burial cave on the Vikings' home world. His lair is guarded by a pair of *controlled* vampires and the corpses of dead linnorms and Vikings. This lair is almost impossible to find because it is so deep beneath the earth. The few creatures that found their way there are now helping to guard it.

The lair is dank, stinks of rotting flesh, and is filled with Corpse Tearer's considerable wealth. The linnorm is obsessed with garnering an ever-increasing amount of gems, magic, art objects, and coins, and uses his animated corpses to dig through graves to obtain more. Further, the linnorm raids human and demihuman communities and Viking ships to gain more treasure.

Corpse Tearer claims little territory, only its sepulcher-like lair. It enjoys the closed-in feeling of the chamber walls and the darkness, willingly leaving the above ground to other linnorms. Because Corpse Tearer spends an extraordinary amount of time cataloguing his wealth, he rarely leaves its home.

Ecology: Corpse Tearer does not need sustenance when inside his lair. Outside, he is able to eat virtually anything, although he prefers rotting carcasses. This linnorm has no known predators, as the men and demihumans who hate him so are wise enough not to pursue him.

Linnorm, Midgard

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Unique
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Supra-genius (20)
TREASURE:	S,T,U,V,W,X (all × 5)
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-12
MOVEMENT:	18, Sw 40
HIT DICE:	25 (200 hp)
THAC0:	2
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite/1 tail strike + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	3d10/3d10/2d12/4d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, breath weapons, constriction
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+ 2 or better weapon to hit, spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	70%
SIZE:	G (500' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	31,000

The Midgard linnorm is said to be the sole offspring of the Midgard Serpent, child of Loki. The Midgard linnorm, of which sages believe (and hope) there is only one, is the most magnificent of the Norse dragons and rivals Bahamut and Tiamat in power (see FOR1 *Draconomicon*, pages 57-59). Sages think that this great wingless serpent may be as immortal as his sire. Their flamboyant and frightening stories claim the Midgard linnorm lives at the bottom of the ocean. Few have actually seen the Midgard linnorm, and fewer still have lived to tell of it. They say the creature is so long they could not see the end of it.

The giant linnorm's body is covered with massive blue, green, and silver scales that glisten like opals. When it moves, the shifting colors make it look like a stream of running water. Its head, filled with a double row of pale-blue teeth, is said to stretch 50' wide and twice that long. Its emerald-green, lidless and pupil-less eyes are perfectly round and mirror whatever is looking into them. While the Midgard linnorm has no horns, its head is topped with a ridge of coarse midnight blue hair that looks like a horse's mane. The hair extends partway down its massive neck where it becomes a lighter blue spinal ruff that runs to the tip of its barbed tail.

The Midgard linnorm's rear legs are short and stumpy for its massive form, and appear as if they are not strong enough to support it. Its front legs are longer and end in razor-sharp claws. The linnorm uses its legs primarily to aid its maneuverability as it slithers along in the water and across the land.

The Midgard linnorm speaks the languages of all Norse dragons and can telepathically communicate with all other intelligent creatures. This is the only linnorm with this extensive telepathic ability.

Combat: Despite its malicious nature, the Midgard linnorm avoids battles, considering physical struggles beneath it. It prefers to meddle in the affairs of other linnorms, humans, and demihumans through its spells and abilities, keeping its distance yet maintaining control of the situation. The Midgard linnorm has entered few fights in its centuries-long existence. It relies on guards to fight for it.

However, if a threat is menacing enough, the Midgard linnorm breathes on the targets. Those left standing are next subjected to its spells and further breath weapons. The Midgard linnorm will only attack with its bite, claws, and tail slash if there is no other recourse.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: The Midgard linnorm possesses three breath weapons. The first is a spray of boiling water 10' wide and 200' long. Creatures of fewer than 4 HD struck by the spray automatically drown unless they are capable of breathing water. Creatures of 5-7 HD drown only if they fail their saving throws vs. breath weapon. Creatures of greater than 7 HD are not subject to the drowning attack. Further, all those struck by the water spray suffer 20d20 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half), and they are propelled 100' back. The second breath weapon is a cloud of dust 200' long, 80' wide, and 60'



deep. Those caught within the cloud suffer 16d20 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half). All those who fail their saving throws are affected as if they were subject to *dust of sneezing and choking*. The final breath weapon is a cone of wind 20' wide at his mouth, 200' long, and 50' wide at the base. All those caught within the cone suffer 12d20 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half). Further, they are automatically propelled backwards 200' from their starting position. The Midgard linnorm is able to breathe every other round as often as it wishes. Creatures struck by a breath weapon save at -3 because of this linnorm's awesome power.

Another deadly attack is its ability to constrict creatures by wrapping its tail about them and squeezing. Those caught in this grip suffer 20 hp damage per round until dead. A successful bend-bars attempt at one-half normal chances is needed to wriggle free.

In addition, this great linnorm has the following permanent abilities, useable at will: *water breathing*, *ESP*, *telepathy*, *create water*, and *protection from fire*. At will, he can perform the following, once a day: *charm person*, *charm monster*, *wall of fog*, *detect invisibility*, *hypnotic pattern*, *whispering wind*, *improved invisibility*, *solid fog*, *wizard eye*, *airy water telekinesis*, *death fog*, *raise water*, *veil*, *power word stun*, *teleport without error*, *power word blind*, and *shape change*. The Midgard linnorm uses his magical abilities at 14th level.

Habitat/Society: The Midgard linnorm lives at the bottom of the ocean on the world of the Vikings, and there spends most of its time. The serpent is a solitary creature, believing the company of others largely inconsequential. Still, the linnorm recognizes the value in keeping others nearby as guards. The serpent's lair is a huge underwater sea cave, so deep beneath the surface of the water that no light filters down. In this lair, the Midgard linnorm is guarded by a quartet of venerable sea linnorms of maximum hit points (see DRAGON® issue 182). The Midgard linnorm stores his wealth within the deepest chambers. Discarding coins and gems, the serpent elects to keep primarily magical treasure, and he employs some of that magic when venturing out of his lair. Also in his lair are remnants from visits to the surface—prows of Viking ships, statues from villages, large shields, and other trinkets.

The Midgard linnorm considers all of the sea floor his domain and is quick to dispatch any creatures that claim territory in his presence.

Ecology: The Midgard linnorm requires very little sustenance, dining once every four or five decades. During this time, the linnorm consumes vast amounts of sea foam—and whatever is floating on it.

The Midgard linnorm has no known predators but many enemies in human and demihuman communities. Occasionally, bands of humans and demihumans who have heard of the Midgard linnorm foolishly band together in an attempt to hunt it; they are never heard from again. All normal linnorms bow to the Midgard linnorm, never daring to challenge it. Ω

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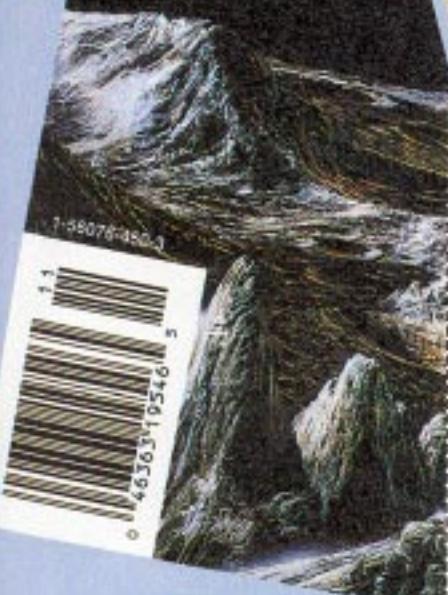
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Griselle flapped irritably through the fog, peering downward from time to time in search of her nest. Short-sighted as she was, it was hard enough to see when the weather was clear, and now, after casting about for hours in this mucky weather, she was totally confused. Not a single mountain peak loomed through the mist to give her guidance toward her nesting place, which was neatly situated in a sheltered valley among the Dra-chenberg Mountains.

Not that she was terribly happy with nesting. A gryphon was simply not designed for sitting on eggs, and that was a fact. The lion's body wasn't designed for it, though the wings did a fairly good job of keeping the dratted things covered warmly and the mist off them.

It was not an easy life, being a female gryphon, and Griselle was not naturally maternal. Young gryphons were nasty tempered and their beaks were painful when they tried to suckle. That was another mistake of nature that she resented rather bitterly.

She hoped that the present batch would be her last clutch of eggs. She was getting too old for this, not to mention entirely too blind. Keeping track of the young monsters was no easy task, once the boring job of hatching was done with.

She tangled with a small tree and found her wings flailing desperately at flexible branches and wet leaves. Was this the rhododendron growing on the ledge just above her nest? She pecked at a leaf, decided it must be, and dropped through the damp foliage to land springily on her lion legs.

Her tail switched with impatience as she made her way among stones that were like any others, anywhere. She never had made a study of them, and whether they were granite or sandstone she couldn't truly say.

There were rocks around her nest, so she must be headed in the right direction. After a half hour of stumbling and bumping and thrashing around in the fog, she found a huddle of jagged boulders in the midst of which lay three pale eggs. They seemed a bit smaller than she remembered, but her memory wasn't very good anymore, either. It was a nest, and that was good enough for her.

With a whistling sigh the gryphon settled painfully onto the rockpile and scuffed her legs to arrange the eggs so her leg-bones wouldn't break them. Strange—they felt comfortable for a change. Instead of having slick shells, they seemed to have become leathery and slightly soft. A nice change! There were too few pleasant surprises, these days.

The night-mist lifted, but Griselle was sleeping, her whistling snores echoing among the distant heights. When the sun topped the eastern mountains, the gryphon opened one eye and looked about. She raised her head and peered short-sightedly toward the blue peaks. Their shapes swam dizzily before her, not exactly like those she remembered but not exactly unlike. Near enough.

Warmed by the sun, she dozed away the summer days, waiting for hatching time to arrive. Garamond, her mate, did not visit her, which was not surprising. She had left him sitting on their nest while she went to find a sheep or

Gryphon's Nest

by Ardash Mayhar

Illustrations by Terry Dykstra

a man or some other tasty bit to keep her from getting hungry while she sat, and she had found the nest unattended when she returned. He knew better than to face her after such slack behavior.

The visit of the manticore almost caught her unaware. Deceived by his lion body, too blind to note the lack of wings and the leering man's face, she moved lazily at first, thinking it was that laggard Garamond. She opened her beak to dress him down before she caught the gleam of those humanlike eyes.

She sprang into the air with a desperate flap of her powerful wings and a surge of energy to her furry legs. The manticore lunged, but she was out of reach and the thing squirmed out of the nest and backed away, its triple rows of teeth grinding together in fury. Nasty things, manticores!

Griselle might not be maternal, but this was her nest; he was threatening her property. She settled back, her wings covering the nest jealously, her razor sharp beak ready to amputate any part of the creature that came near.

The manticore paced to the right, and her sinuous neck followed its movements. It moved to the left, and again Griselle kept her clouded gaze fixed upon its blurred shape. When it sprang toward her with the terrible speed and distance of its kind, she was ready.

Her beak dug into its tender underside, and the thing gave a shrill shriek as she tossed it aside. The beast's voice fluted a challenge, and she rose to her full height, wings ready to buffet, beak prepared to strike again.

This time the creature did not dare to spring. Instead it turned and leaped toward the mountains, disappearing in a few bounds beyond the first line of peaks with incredible agility, as that kind was wont to do. They were speedy creatures, and they could jump almost as high as she could fly.

Her blood racing nicely after the workout, Griselle rearranged the eggs and prepared to sit again. It should be time, and past time, for them to hatch. But eggs were eggs, and they always kept to their own schedule, no matter what their mother might prefer.

Even as she drew her legs up and sighed, she felt a quiver beneath the fur of her stomach. Was something happening? Was it time at last? She rose again and put her beak close to the nearest egg, trying to see with one dim eye if it was cracking.

At first she doubted what she saw. Her vision was all but gone, anyway, and surely she couldn't be seeing the shell of a gryphon egg rippling as if it were made of skin. Even as she watched, the covering tore and something poked through the hole.

This was no child of hers! A gryphon pecked out respectfully with its beak, and its damp, furry body followed it out of the shell. This . . . creature . . . had a pointed head, its shiny eyes visible even to Griselle. As the thing slithered out of the soft egg-leather, a sinuous body followed the head, and the dumbfounded gryphon realized that she was staring at a young basilisk.

The shock was terrible. That night when she last fed—the fog—she must have lost her way and found this basilisk nest by accident. Where was the parent of this small creature?

It was too late to ask that question, for the little serpent

wriggled to her side and curled about her leg for warmth, its small body quivering with contentment. In time two more joined it. She knew that it was too late. They had seen her and claimed her for their own.

I am the mother of three basilisks! Griselle thought, her heart pounding. But what has happened to my own eggs? Is poor Garamond still sitting there, waiting for me to return? And to think that I blamed him for deserting our nest, when it was I—I! – who never came back!

Now, however, she had other things to think of. If young gryphons were difficult and painful to feed, how much more difficult was it going to be to keep three infant basilisks alive? What did they eat? Serpents did not suckle their young, that was one thing she knew without doubt.

Eagles, who were in a way her distant half-kin, brought meat to their ravenous young. She had seen that. But when she put her head down near those of her foster children, she could see that their mouths were totally unsuitable for chewing. What on earth should she feed the creatures?

One put its snaky face near her eye and opened its mouth as if hungry. Fangs—yes, there they were, set well back but definitely there. No, she would *not* allow them to suckle, even if they showed signs of wanting to. She had no desire to test the potency of basilisk poison.

She spent futile hours catching bugs, which she couldn't see but had to listen for and squash with her awkward paws. The young cared nothing for squashed bugs.

She left them squirming in the nest and went toward the stream that ran down from the mountains. There she hunted painfully for fish, for rabbits, for caterpillars, for anything at all that might tempt their unknown appetites.

The blood of the rabbit proved to be the one thing they relished, and in the next weeks the population of rodents around the nest diminished remarkably. Given suitable nourishment, the young basilisks grew with terrible speed—almost as quickly as young gryphons, in fact. Before fall, they were coiling around the rocks, catching curious birds and animals that thought to den against the cliff.

Although they returned at night to warm their sluggish blood against her furry body, Griselle realized that these were young who took their own way at an early age. She hunted her own food now, leaving theirs to them, and often she thought about her stressful months of suckling her own kind, pulling her weight down to nothing, having to eat every week instead of once in three or four months.

Given the choice, she realized that she much preferred being foster mother to basilisks. But she often wondered what had happened to their own parent before she had arrived on the scene. Surely the creature must have died in battle or in an accident, or she would have come back to tend her eggs.

When the sun had moved to the south and cold winds swept down from the mountains, the brood grew quiet. Even Griselle knew that they must hibernate during the cold months, and she watched with interest as the three hunted among the boulders for snug dens in which to sleep away the winter.

Once they were settled, she stretched her wings and sighed. It had been an interesting summer, but she had

best seek out her own family before the clouds and storms again dimmed her vision. Garamond would have given her up, she was sure, and her children would not know her at all.

She sprang into the sky, feeling her old muscles ache with effort as her wings strained for altitude. Surely she must have come too far and crossed a second range of mountains on her way back to the nest, all those months ago.

She soared, riding a thermal draft up and over the heights. She could smell fresh snow, still distant in the north but on its way to add depth to the white fields below her. Garamond would have withdrawn from the summer nest into the high cave against the cliff where they always wintered with a new brood. The small ones would be flying on their own by now, though still dependent upon their parents for food until next summer.

Griselle swooped down the slope of the range, scanning the dim distances hopelessly. Where was that peak that so resembled the one near her basilisk nest? It had seemed such a fine landmark, with its broken tip and the hump on one side. And then she saw it, looming against a snow-laden sky.

She wheeled, seeking the dark spot against the sheer wall that would be the cave. When she found it at last she found her heart beating rapidly. It had been so long—would Garamond be happy to see her? Would the young be afraid of her?

She cupped her wings and settled onto the ledge outside the cave. From inside came the whistling roar that was the challenge of a gryphon, but she shrilled her name into the echoing tunnel. There was silence for a moment, and then Garamond came sidling from the darkness to peer at her.

"Griselle?" he piped. "Alive?"

"Lost, but alive," she agreed. "Did the young hatch? I thought I was sitting upon them until the basilisks hatched and I realized my mistake."

Garamond made a strange sound, something between another roar and as near to a chuckle as one can come using a beak. "Basilisks!" He lay on the cold stone and whipped his lion's tail wildly against the cliff.

Griselle looked down, alarmed at his behavior. "Of course, basilisks. What is wrong with you, Garamond?"

Then there came a hissing voice from the darkness of the tunnel. A long shape slithered into view, its face familiar even to Griselle's dim eyes.

"Why are you not asleep, with the rest of your kind?" she asked the intruder.

"I have found furred and hot-blooded creatures to keep me warm and awake," said the basilisk. "You sat, I think, upon my abandoned nest. My thanks to you, but do not think to push me from this place. Your eggs hatched and the young gryphons accepted me as their mother."

Garamond looked sheepish, as much as could be done with his birdlike face. He rose to his feet and stiffened his tail. "You were gone. I was alone, sitting on eggs that you left to me. This one assisted me, and she has found a place among us."

For a moment, Griselle felt a hot rage building in her bosom. Then she realized that this was just what she would have chosen if asked.

No more egg-laying! No more suckling young with eagle beaks! No more soothing Garamond, whose temper grew worse every season. She felt a great sense of relief.

"Allow me to rest for the winter in our warm cavern," she said to the basilisk, ignoring her former mate. "I will leave with the spring to find other basilisks who desire relief from nest-sitting. I shall become a foster-mother to the young of your kind, now that I know how to manage them."

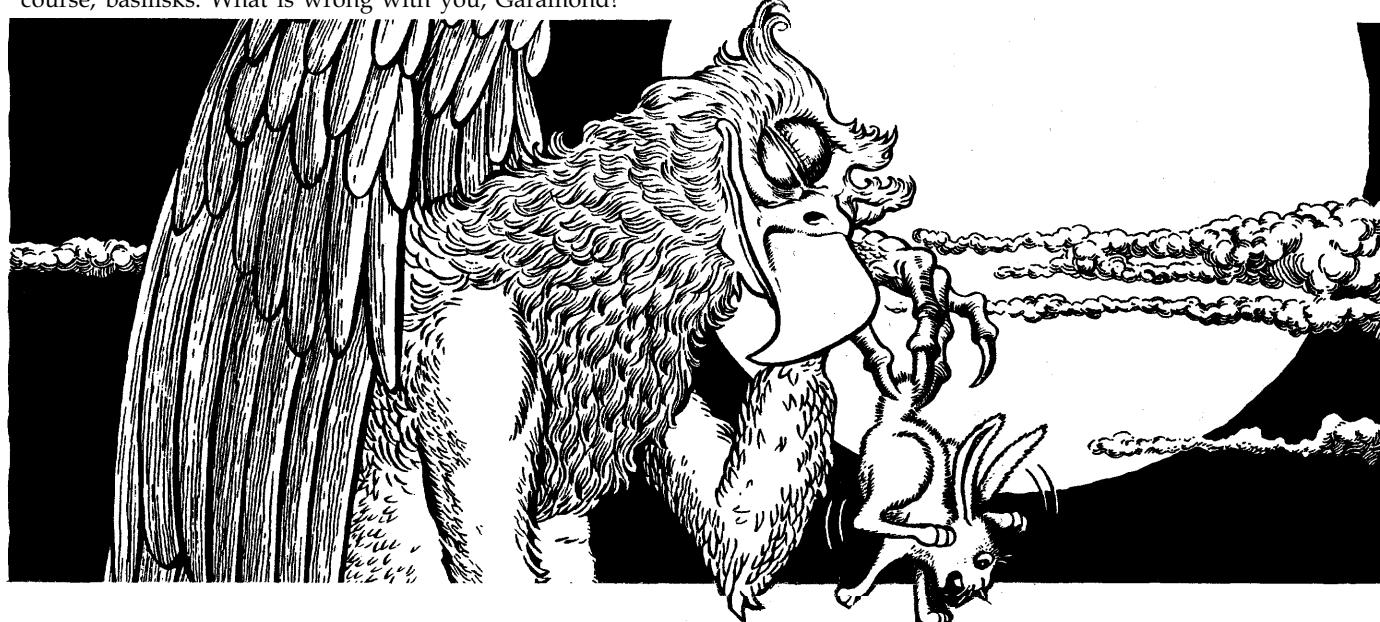
The serpent hissed agreement, withdrawing into the deepest chambers of the cavern. Garamond glanced apologetically at Griselle before stalking away behind her, his tail twitching nervously.

As well it should! thought Griselle. *If he tries to mate with that one, he will end up dead, but I know better than to speak of that.*

She found a convenient chamber, small enough to be kept warm by a single gryphon, and curled her tail around her paws. Settling her beak on a convenient stone, she closed her eyes and thought of those comfortable leather eggs, the affectionate young basilisks, their early independence.

She had found the calling for her old age, she knew, and when she slept she dreamed of pleasant things. Next summer. . . ahah! Next summer!

Ω



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by Steven E. Schend

THE MARVEL®-PHILE

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Color by Steve Sullivan,



TM

After months of leftovers, updates, and various odd bits of trivia here in the 'Phile, we now present two great characters from the EXCALIBUR comic book for your game universe: Cerise, an alien energy wielder; and Kylun, a mutant swordsman of Ee'Rath. They're the new allies of the British superteam, Excalibur. These two have only recently been inducted into the team but have already proven themselves heroes on Earth and other worlds (and can soon prove their mettle on the battlefields of your MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ game universe as well).

CERISE™
Dimension-crossing alien
adventurer

First appearance: EXCALIBUR #46
(cameo, face unrevealed); EXCALIBUR #47

F	RM(30)	Health: 90
A	EX(20)	
S	EX(20)	Karma: 60
E	EX(20)	
R	EX(20)	Resources: GD(10)
I	RM(30)	
P	GD(10)	Popularity: 5

POWERS:

Light Force: Cerise has the Amazing (50) rank innate ability to generate and manipulate crimson energy fields for a wide variety of effects, many of which have yet to be revealed. For now, Cerise has exhibited the following variations of her power:

— *Force Blast:* Cerise can generate Force bolts of up to Amazing (50) rank and range.

— *Force Fields:* Cerise also manipulates her crimson energy into force fields of Incredible (40) rank covering her area. If her field is extended over an expanse greater than one area, its defensive rank is

reduced by -1CS; Cerise apparently cannot maintain fields over three areas in size, though her versatility in shaping these fields seems limitless. Her standard fields are protective force bubbles in which to carry people (apparently as extensions of her flight power), walls for unidirectional protection, tubes, and semi-malleable personal fields to protect and retrieve others. Cerise can generate a field across distances of up to four areas away from her.

— *Flight:* Cerise can fly at an Excellent (20) air speed alone; if carrying any passengers (maximum of 1,000 lbs.) within a connected force field, she can maintain a Good (10) air speed.

EQUIPMENT:

Transit Suit: Cerise arrived on Earth wearing a beetlelike suit of alien armor from her home planet. The suit's capabilities are as follows:

- Body Armor: The transit suit is made of unknown materials that afford the wearer Amazing (50) protection from energy attacks and Incredible (40) protection from physical and Force attacks. It also has a life-support system capable of maintaining life for up to two weeks unaided.

- Dimensional Scanner Gloves: Cerise's gloves (with the main components removable for localized scanning) provide holographic monitors that scan surrounding space and allow the wearer of the suit to navigate hyperspace to reach preprogrammed coordinates. The limited scanners contained in Cerise's gloves have a range of eight areas and can detect energy, space, or time fluctuations or abnormalities with Amazing (50) ability.

Dimensional Transit: The transit suit allowed individuals to travel through hyperspace at Shift Y (200) interplanetary speeds. The suit's "Dukane Drive" capabilities utilized energy- and space-manipulation principles totally unknown to current space-travel theorists of the MARVEL UNIVERSE™. The drive units on Cerise's armor have burned out and may not be repairable with current Earth technology.

TALENTS: Cerise exhibits a wide variety of talents, including Spacecraft Pilot, Bilingual (Native Shaskofrugnonian and English), Astrophysics, Temporal Physics, Electronics, and Martial Arts C.

HISTORY: Very little is known about Cerise's background. She prides herself on her rank, boldly proclaiming quite often that she is a "warrior of the Grand Jhar, genestock of Subruki, Zarstok, and Kuli Ka." Whether the latter three are her ancestors or parents is unknown, though some familial relationship is suggested. Cerise arrived on Earth while travelling from her homeworld of Shaskofrugnon (a previously unknown planet). By her markings, she was en route to the Phlegmnon Rim frontier. As she passed through the Quassion Field of Tryar, she encountered extreme turbulence throughout hyperspace and real space (undoubtedly caused by Necrom's recent attempt at multiversal convergence—see later). A vortex formed, and Cerise's transit suit burned itself out before she entered a dimensional rift and materialized in the dimensional nexus within Excalibur's lighthouse.

Cerise's arrival was timely, as she was quickly accepted as an ally and member of Excalibur after a minor fracas with the Technet, who were guests of Excalibur at the time. She aided the team in the fight against Necrom and the Anti-Phoenix, and both she and Kylun comported themselves well during the multiversal crisis (detailed later). Cerise now resides with the other members of Excalibur in Braddock Manor.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Cerise is an extraterrestrial warrior-adventurer, one with experience beyond her seemingly few years. She is friendly and warm-mannered to those she meets, but she can become cold and overly analytical when presented with a mystery. Cerise has traveled the universe seeking excitement and adventure, arriving on Earth by accident and staying since it seemed she "could have a lot of fun here." Though she comes from a technological society far more advanced than our own, Cerise seems somewhat naive and innocent on Earth.

In your own game campaigns, Cerise could just as easily fallen in with the PC heroes as with Excalibur, so she is quite adaptable to nearly any campaign. Much fun role-playing can be had while the PCs acclimate Cerise to the complexities of Earth's culture (try to explain American political systems, television sitcoms, and hot dogs to someone with no comparable frames of reference). Her powers are quite spectacular, so imagine her problems if she wishes to work with heroes who rely on stealth and subterfuge. As a hero, Cerise is quite dependable, and her dimension-traveling experiences open up an infinite number of new doors for PC heroes if they wish to explore the space-

ways with her.

Though she is not such, Cerise could be perceived as a villain for an adventure or two. Imagine a beetlelike alien teleporting into the middle of Times Square, with its universal translator damaged. The alien (Cerise) is confused and disoriented from her dimensional trip, and she cannot comprehend the native language; her appearance and language, of course, do little to calm the crowds, which promptly panic. If your PC heroes tend toward knee-jerk reactions, Cerise may find herself hunted down as a hostile alien until she can fix her translator. Of course, there are many who can fix it for her, but what should happen if she meets a friendly (but always uncouth) Wizard looking for a new member for his latest Frightful Four? Perhaps others from her world later come to Earth looking for her; they might assume that the PCs are holding Cerise against her will, and they'll seek to free her from her "captors? Or, maybe her dimension-hopping armor is stolen by one of your campaign's villains. Cerise and your PC heroes might need to find some other means of crossing dimensions to chase him. The opportunities are endless for this naive but powerful alien in your games, so take advantage of



KYLUN™

Colin McKay, mutant revolutionary and adventurer

First appearance: EXCALIBUR #2 (as Colin); EXCALIBUR #42 (as Kylun the Warrior)

F	IN(40)	Health: 120
A	RM(30)	
S	EX(20)	Karma: 46
E	RM(30)	

TY(6)

GD(10)

I
P
RM(30)

Resources: GD(10)

Popularity: 5; 50 on Ee'Rath

POWERS:

Bestial Appearance: Kylun's mutant physiology grants him catlike eyes that allow him Night Vision (no penalties for fighting in normal darkness) and a full-body covering of light brown fur that provides a Feeble (2) Resistance to Cold.



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Sound Duplication: Kylun has the Incredibile (40) rank mutant power to duplicate any sound he hears. He apparently cannot change the tone, pitch, or volume of the stimulus, simply reproducing sounds exactly as he hears them. There is no audible difference between the actual sounds and those Kylun produces, so voice scans do not detect any abnormalities.

EQUIPMENT:

Swords of ZZ'Ria: Kylun's magical swords are indigenous to Earth 148, known to its natives as Ee'Rath, and are rare and wondrous artifacts bestowed on this gifted warrior. The two swords are made of an unknown metal but have Unearthly material strength due to their enchantments. Created by one of Ee'Rath's greatest sorcerers, the two swords can cut through anything but those creatures who are "pure of heart"; in Kylun's hands, the swords each deal out 25 points of Edged Attacks damage to all inanimate items or evil beings. In addition, the swords have the power to cut through and disrupt any energy barriers (especially magical energy) of less than Unearthly strength. Kylun's swords, when not in use, are magically held in place on the back of his costume.

Dagger: Kylun also carries a wide-bladed enchanted dagger for use as a missile weapon (range of two areas) that inflicts 15 points of Edged damage to its target; it has an innate Resistance to Magic of Excellent rank.

TALENTS: Kylun has the talent of Weapons Specialist with the *Swords of ZZ'Ria* (Monstrous Fighting rank). His other talents include Martial Arts D & E, Thrown Weapons, and Resist Domination.

HISTORY: Kylun originally was born Colin McKay in our Earths England; his catlike eyes marked him as a mutant from birth. When he was seven years old, his parents were killed and he was kidnapped by the Vixen, Britain's equivalent of America's "Kingpin of Crime." Colin escaped the Vixen and her men, hiding in a derelict English factory. The factory's previous inhabitant had been Tweedledope of the Crazy Gang, a *savant* inventor who threw together pieces of scrap metal, a transistor radio, apple cores, baked beans, a rubber spider, and other garbage to inadvertently create the artificial life-form now known as Widget. Widget befriended Colin and kept him company, a fact the lonely Colin never forgot. When the Vixen and her men came to the factory to recapture the boy, Colin escaped through a dimensional portal created by Widget and arrived on the barren, icy plains of Ee'Rath.

Cohn was raised as a warrior, becoming one of the premier fighters for the Sorceress' Sisterhood. Kylun's body took on his

current bestial appearance as he grew, and this heightened the stories about this great warrior. Fame, however, mattered little to Kylun. As he reached the age of majority, he chose as his symbol an approximation of Widget's original form, then gained the love of the Princess Sa'Tneen, the heir to the Sisterhoods dynastic rule. The couple's joy was soon interrupted by the sorcerer Necrom and his druids, who conquered Ee'Rath and subjugated its peoples. Necrom soon drained the planet of much of its life in the sorcerer's relentless quest for more power, as he hoped to bring the multiverse under his own malevolent rule.

Kylun led a revolt against the rule of Necrom, culling an army from the long suffering natives of Ee'Rath. He saved his lover from becoming a sacrifice on Necrom's altar, and together they led the rebel army to Necrom's Dark Citadel. Necrom had drained much of the life of the planet into himself, and he prepared to go to another Earth through the cross-time chamber in his citadel. He stopped long enough to animate the remains of his worlds Excalibur team (Captain Britain 148, Thor, Black Knight, Spider-Man) to fight Kylun and Princess Sa'Tneen. The animated heroes were quickly defeated, but the princess was slain before they could stop Necrom's entrance into his Chamber of Infinity, which would take him to Earth 616, the prime (Marvel) Earth and current home of the Phoenix. Kylun followed Necrom through the chamber, his heart filled only with hate and revenge.

Kylun rematerialized inside the lighthouse of Excalibur, mistakenly thinking Excalibur was responsible for the destruction of his adopted world. After meeting Nightcrawler and ascertaining his heroism, Kylun worked alongside Kurt and the exiled Technet, and was on hand with Excalibur to see the release of the Anti-Phoenix from its prison in County Sligo, Ireland. Necrom, fortified by the absorbed power of the Anti-Phoenix, soon made his presence known in England when he slaughtered a contingent of 19 F.I.6 agents in London, draining their life forces and nearly killing a British mutant hero, Micromax. Necrom then played his final gambit, confronting Excalibur and their allies outside the lighthouse.

Kylun, with Cerise, Micromax, and Feron (a young mystic trained to wield the Phoenix force); led an attack on Necrom while Excalibur quickly repaired the damage Necrom had done to the multiverse when he attempted to "converge" all the various universes. Despite this repairing and strengthening of the dimensional walls that separate each universe, the repercussions of such widespread dimensional havoc will occur for years to come. Kylun managed to wound Necrom with his

swords, damaging one of his eyes, but Necrom abandoned the battle and fled to Otherworld to confront Rachel Summers, the Phoenix. The Phoenix vs. Anti-Phoenix battle destroyed an entire solar system light years away. Necrom was defeated by Rachel when she gave him the full power of the Phoenix. Necrom couldn't absorb that much power, and he exploded; Rachel's body teleported back to Otherworld clad in the green and gold costume of Earths first Phoenix, Jean Grey.

Kylun has been accepted as a member of Excalibur along with Cerise, and the entire team now resides in Braddock Manor following the destruction of the Tower that Crosses Time (a.k.a. the Excalibur lighthouse).

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Kylun is, despite his martial talents and fearful looks, a relatively shy and reserved hero. This is all the more remarkable due to his accomplishments as a rebel leader on Ee'Rath. He is quietly confident in his own abilities and remains calm in any combat situation. His leonine features belie a young, fiercely loyal heart and slight insecurity over his "insignificant" mutant power. In the short time he has been with his teammates, he has quickly gained their respect and trust, things he cherishes all the more because of his lonely childhood. Most of all, he is loyal to Widget, his only friend from his youth before being teleported to Ee'Rath.

In your game campaigns, Kylun fits easily as a trusted ally and skillful warrior. His use of swords will be hard to explain to local law-enforcement officials, and it may easily get him into trouble until the properties of his swords are discovered. Though he is a native of Earth, his mutant appearance could be disguised by calling him an alien from Ee'Rath (helping his Popularity score). He reacts quickly to danger and often leaps into battle regardless of planning or strategy, unless he is in command.

Though initial mistrust of Kylun might come from his appearance, he can become one of the best allies your PC heroes have met in quite a while. Though he would never fall in with any established super villains, he could become a lone vigilante; as Spider-Man has known for years, the media and public can view him as a menace regardless of any heroic deeds he might perform. Once Kylun finds an ally that he (and his swords) could trust, he will try to ally with that person for aid against Necrom (should the latter return) or any other evil that makes its presence known.

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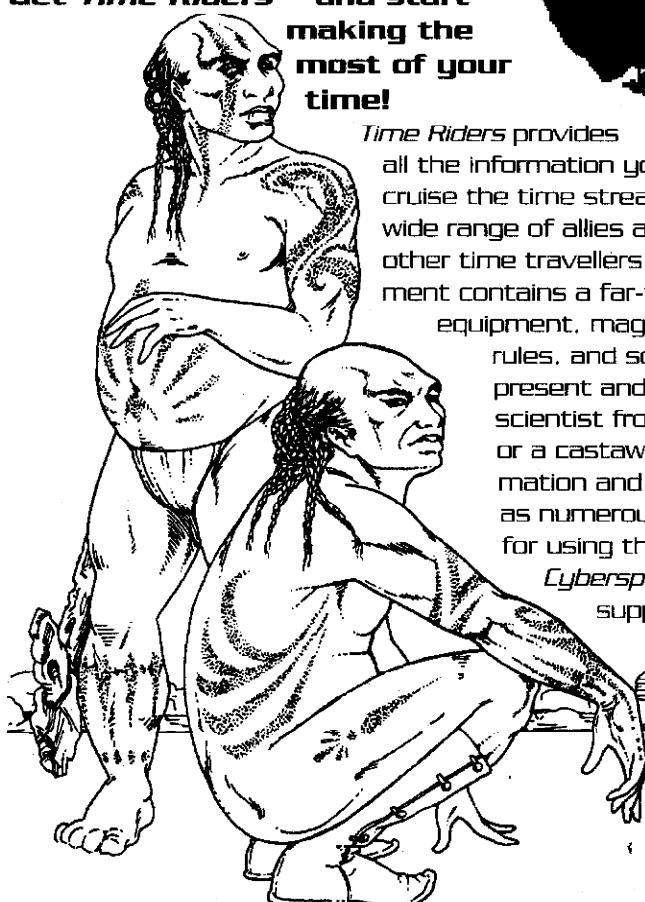
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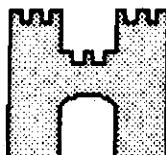


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Rolemaster



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.

I have been following the recent letters from female gamers regarding the problems they encounter in this hobby and the difficulty of finding other women who share their interests. Eight months ago, I started a survey of women gamers with the intention of discovering the demographics involved, whether my experiences with gaming were universal and what sort of archetypes and worlds are created by female gamers and GMs. Some respondents have expressed an interest in creating a directory of women gamers and in creating a quarterly amateur gaming magazine for, by, and about women in this hobby. The directory project is underway. I would like to extend an invitation to your female readership to write to me. There are women gamers out there; some of us have been around since the CHAINMAIL game and the first D&D® boxed set. We welcome you to join us.

I do apologize to your male readership for leaving them out, but having graduated from a women's college, I am a firm believer in a separate space for women to find support and advice from other women. I would welcome comments from male gamers on their perceptions of women as players, GMs, characters, nonplayer characters, etc.

I have been reading DRAGON Magazine off and on since issue #50 or so. This topic has always been around. There have been numerous articles through the years about the strength limit for female characters, class level limits, complaints about art, and the lack of women in modules and game systems. It is obvious that gaming, like the science-fiction and fantasy genres, is predominantly male. Part of this may be due to role-playing games' long association with war gaming and the fact that, until recently, RPGs were principally available through game stores, hobby shops, and comic shops—again mostly frequented by males. It's a self-sustaining cycle. A female gamer is unlikely to discover the hobby unless she frequents certain outlets or college clubs, or her boyfriend

or husband introduces her to the hobby. Having discovered the hobby, she is likely to be the only woman in a game and possibly in the area. In my experience, gaming conventions are overwhelmingly male.

Many game systems provide little or no guidance on creating or running female characters. Games based in a particular historical period also, for "realism" purposes, have gender discrimination built in. Recently, I reviewed a series of products by several games publishers, counting the ratio of male to female sample characters or NPCs (see *Alarums & Excursions* #201). Although some publishers were better than others, the average ratio was four male characters to one female. I don't know if this reflects the gaming population, but it implies that women are a minority. The near-universal decision by gaming companies that the pronoun "he" is sufficient to include "she" in their products makes the writer's job easier, but again it does make some women feel unwelcome. Finally, while scantily clad women in seductive or passive poses probably do increase sales among young men, women are more likely not to buy the product or, more sadly, not to enter the hobby. I question whether the end justifies the means, particularly since as many potential customers may be lost as are gained.

Please write to: Clarissa Fowler, White Rose Publishing, P.O. Box 933, Amherst MA 01004-0933, U.S.A.

Clarissa Fowler
Amherst MA

Congratulations to Rebecca Whaling of Indianapolis, Ind., for writing in issue #179. As the co-manager of a game store in Indiana [Metalcraft Miniatures and More], I see a wide variety of customers—male and female. Although most of the gamers are male, the female portion of gaming groups seem to be on the increase.

I became interested in fantasy in grade school when I read *The Hobbit* for the first time. In junior high and high school, I had several male friends who played the D&D game, but due to some kind of prejudice ("We don't want a girl playing! Yuck!") I never had an opportunity to play. The week after I got my driver's license, I decided to pay a visit to my local hobby store. The salesman was really nice, so I started to hang out there after school. After a while, I ended up behind the counter helping with sales; eventually, I married the guy! My husband and I both work full time at the shop now, and we play games on our days off.

My advice to the young man who wrote in a

few issues back (issue #173; see also the third letter in "Letters," in issue #179) is this: You're trying too hard! The main goal of gaming ultimately is fellowship with others. Try talking with people at school, the library, or at extracurricular activities or clubs. Perhaps you can find others with similar interests. The whole point is to have friends with whom you can spend some time together.

Leslie A. King
Elwood IN

The letter from the female gamer in issue #179 caught my attention. I am a female college student and I have been gaming for five years. In high school, role-playing could be absolute hell. Either I was being "protected" or ignored! In one session, I had to keep finding a different place to sit because this guy was following me around trying to put his arm around me! At a tournament, a gamer (who hadn't slept in 48 hours) was trying to flirt with me. He told me all about his night job: He worked in a morgue! Come on! The group I play with now is great, and the little side "games" are at a minimum. I hope this gets printed. I want male players to read this and think about how their behavior makes us female players feel.

Shirl Phelps
Redlands CA

I'm writing in response to a letter in issue #173's "Letters" column. It was a letter from one of your readers who said he has never met any girls who gamed. Sadly, I have found this to be true. I'm a 17-year-old girl, and in the six or seven years I've been gaming, I have met only five girls who were fellow gamers. Of course, considering I've met about 1,000 fellow females in my life, this is a very small amount.

Giving some consideration to all the gamers that my brother and I know (about 30 or 40), that's about one girl among every eight male gamers. But here in my hometown, we have a biased sample since there is a liberal-arts university 10 blocks from my house. I think this might have something to do with the local popularity of various role-playing games.

I know that gaming is looked upon as weird by my fellow girls, but I'm always thrilled to find another girl who has decided to try gaming and likes it. Sometimes I'm even embarrassed to tell my friends what I did over the weekend if I went to a gaming session.

Maybe you should try marketing some games that appeal to a larger female audience. The idea of slashing up demons and goblins doesn't really appeal to many girls.

Sarah Brundage
Eugene OR

This is in regard to Tim Schroeder's article, "Creative Campaigns: A New Recipe," in issue #175. A good article, however, (don't you hate those "however"?) there was one subject it didn't address: changing the relations between the races.

You know the setup: the humans with their elven, dwarven, and halfling allies vs. the orcs, goblins, hobgoblins, and kobolds, battling in an epic struggle. But does it have to be that way? Not necessarily.

On one world, the DM could have the humans oppressed by tyrannical elves, and the humans' only allies are the orcs. Another world could have the humans themselves as evil, with all the nonhumans allied in an attempt to free themselves from the vile overlords. The PCs could either uphold the human race's evil or act to bring mankind back to the old ways of peace

and tolerance.

In one corner of my own campaign world, the elves and the dwarves have come close to war over a holy site on a mountain. Both races are actively trying to recruit the local orcs to support them. The orcs are, at the same time, trying to get the elves and the dwarves to pay attention to the threat posed by the local lizard men who live in a nearby desert. The elves are elves, the dwarves are dwarves, and the orcs are orcs, when you get right down to it, but the three races have come to a form of accommodation. While there is a degree of animosity between them, they've managed to learn to live without antagonism (until recently, that is).

Players get used to the "typical" relations between races in role-playing games, so changing the relations could get them to perk up and pay attention again. Finding out that a flind war party is there to help the hill dwarves against a raiding party of wild halflings can make even the most jaded player sit up and take notice. Just because it says dwarves hate orcs in the official rules doesn't mean it *has* to be that way on your world.

Alan Kellogg
435 13th St., #317
San Diego CA 92101

I'd like to comment on Tim Schroeder's article "Creative Campaigns: A New Recipe" (issue #175). In his article, Tim states that a large organization of mages would significantly change any campaign. I agree, but I find it difficult to believe that such an organization could form, or last for long if it did.

If one group of mages banded together to produce cheap *continual light* devices (or whatever), there would be much opposition from the other mages in the area, who might possibly form a counter organization to undersell the first. The concept of industrial espionage/sabotage takes on a whole new meaning—one well-placed *fireball* could wipe out a *continual light* factory and work crew of lower-level mages. And *fireball* spells are available to the same mages who can cast *continual light*.

The thieves' guild would take offense if its work became harder because there were no shadows to hide in. Thieves might hire their "brothers" in the assassins' guild (who, incidentally, would also be angry at the mages' organization for making assassinations harder). Seeing as day and night are basically now the same, the thieves might start working full-time during the daylight hours (which would increase the incidence of crime).

The lantern makers' guild or chandlers' guild, whose mainstay is producing devices that produce light, would be similarly upset and might hire the assassins or lots of mercenaries to squash the competition.

The clerics of the gods of darkness may be offended, as might the local vampires, shades, or other light-hating creatures.

Most peasants are superstitious by nature and would see the preponderance of magic as an ill omen, especially if followed shortly by a rise in the crime and murder rates (as the assassins knock off the mages) or appearance of evil creatures (vampires, etc.) or other agents of darkness.

There is no guarantee that the sovereign of the land will grant monopolies or other favors to these mages, especially when other groups form and clearly demonstrate that there is competition.

Traveling charlatans could make bad copies of *continual light* devices using regular *light spells*, so the spell wears off after the merchant has

skipped town with the exorbitant sums of gold paid to him.

There might even be competition from within the organization as mages bump each other off for promotions or revenge, or any of the other reasons a nasty DM can think up.

Finally, there is a very limited market for these items. Few people in a medieval society have the money for even one of them. These *continual light* devices last forever (or, at least, a very long time), ensuring that there will be few repeat customers. Few people have use for more than a handful of these things. Considering the problems of turning these things off during wartime blackout conditions (a common occurrence in many nations in my campaigns), even the government bodies may decide to stay with the cheaper and more controllable "flame on a stick" torch.

Problems arise if these mages try to produce just the *continual light* devices. There could be even more problems if they try to expand into other spell effects.

L. Leon Adrian
Highstown NJ

I am glad to see that in recent months my favorite area of all fiction—time travel—has been addressed in the pages of DRAGON Magazine. I would, however, like to explain my thoughts on a different aspect of time travel: journeys to the future. True, this has been touched upon in the past ("Sturmgeshutz and Sorcery," in the *Best of DRAGON Magazine* anthology, vol. I, and "Modern Monsters," in the *Best of DRAGON Magazine* anthology, vol. V), but these dealt with throwing fantasy characters into battle against modern-day, real-world technology.

However, stepping back and taking another look, the question that comes to mind is, "If our world is the 'future' of the AD&D® game, what has happened to the magic?" The answer is simple: In our Middle Ages, there was no magic, so we advanced technologically. However, the AD&D game's "Middle Ages" are saturated with mystical energies; therefore, such people would, most likely, advance magically. What form would this advancement take, if the study of magic were allowed to evolve over a millennium or two? Knowing that groups which begin with similar cultural bases (such as campaign settings resembling Western Europe) will probably develop in similar directions, there is a good chance that it would be much like the world that we live in today, except that magic would supplant technology as the means to an end.

In my campaign world, 2,000 years in the future, the streets are paved with solidified shadow, and people watch the nightly news on their CBS (*crystal balls*). They drive to work in horseless, wheelless carriages that rest on a specialized form of *Tenser's floating disk* and process information on their PCs (personal contemplators: intelligent slabs of metal with tremendous math and memory abilities). Anything that exists in our world thanks to technology can be transformed to a magical equivalent. All the police carry advanced *wands of magic missiles*, and the military uses anti-aircraft *meteor swarm launchers*.

I've found that this is not just a great place to visit, it's a great place for a player looking for a really different character. I had a PC in my campaign who went back in time looking for a time traveler gone mad. He was allowed no weapons that were beyond the realm of "period" magic, and quite a few times he wanted to kill someone but his intelligent helmet would warn him that the victim was an ancestor of his!

I do hope that I have fired the imaginations of some DMs out there. May all your futures be interesting.

Michael Miller
Catasauqua PA

I have been playing the AD&D game for about three years now and have been a DM for about a year. A problem that has begun in my campaign world is the players need to become super characters and attain a king's fortune in treasure and magical items in one adventure. I have tried many solutions to remedy the problem but it still exists.

My players think that a player character must have a 15 or 16 in at least two abilities scores to be worth playing. They would not even think of playing a character with an ability score under 9. I have talked to them about this and have made them roll up characters in front of me, but the problem persists. I have even noticed some ability scores changed from one playing session to another. When I look down and see that one PC has not one ability score under 14, something is wrong. The hit points these so-called PCs have are astronomical. They had maximum possible hit points even at 7th and 8th level. When I question them about it, I get a response like "The dice were hot" or my favorite: "You even saw me roll them." I had the players roll them in front of me and even limited the hit-point maximums a few hit points per level to stem this tide, but it didn't work.

My players also think they should have more treasure and magical items than what would be found throughout the entire kingdom they are playing in. They constantly commit to memory every magical item in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and can't handle it when I throw in a new and unusual item. The purpose for them going adventuring was to just get more loot and become more powerful, and any plot line was just another excuse to do this. Therefore, I tried to stop this by throwing in new monsters, giving out very little treasure, giving out more cursed items, inflating the cost of items in my campaign, increasing attacks by intelligent creatures because of items of value carried by the PCs, having adventures that deal more with problem-solving than gaining treasure, having PCs thrown in jail because of gaining treasure, having PCs thrown in jail because of some act caused by their greed, and even a stern and serious talk with them about their problem. Nothing seemed to work.

The aim of any role-playing game is to have fun while socializing, dealing with problems, role-playing your character, and working together to reach a common goal. Gaining treasure and power are a part of the game, but they are not the only part to which a PC must deal with. Did you reach the goal that was set for you? Did you role-play your character so well that you made the adventure a little more interesting for all those involved? Did you use your wits to avoid some costly encounters or foil a nasty trap set by the DM? Did you play well with your party and make the experience better for all who played? Overall, you must ask yourself did I have fun and if not, how could this be changed? I have yet to see any of my players even consider these questions, much less answer them. I am open to any suggestions anyone has to offer.

Jackson Caskey
Marshfield WI

I am writing this in hopes that you will print it for all those DMs who may have had some trouble getting their players into another adven-

ture without pushing them into one they don't want to play.

I was having a difficult time keeping my players up to date on the happenings in my game world, and also providing avenues for them to pick and choose adventures they would like to play without pushing their characters into something they did not want. I was forever stopping the game and bringing one player up to date on things in the world when the others had already heard it. Or I would tell the players information they should know, then I would forget what I had said.

So that I could give them news about my game world and give them ideas for further adventures without having to repeat myself over and over again, I created a newsletter that I try to put out once a month. I try to include all the things happening in the world. Sometimes the newsletter gets out twice a month, but what the heck, the players get more information and I get more history for my game. I also include ads that are comical to make the newsletter a bit easier to read. This gives my players and me opportunities to include clues to adventures or codes being passed from one guild (or player) to another.

I have found this works great for remembering events, and players can investigate such occurrences later or come across them during an adventure. It makes a great way to keep track of events all around your game world and create a history.

This newsletter idea worked out better than I thought when I moved across the country. I still have players back at my old home, and I mail them the latest newsletters to keep them up to date in the game. Then they write back to tell me what they want their characters to do. Now I don't have the high cost of calling my old players on the phone with information, and they stay active in the game all this time.

I would hope that other DMs might use this idea to help out in their games. It cuts down on trying to remember what you told the players or when you told them. And, if the players have information they can look back on, I feel this makes the game run more smoothly.

John A. Tomkins
No address given

I am writing concerning Michael D'Alfonso's excellent article in issue #177 entitled, "Secrets of the Masters Revealed." For the DM wishing to take his game to a higher level, this is must reading. Not only are his suggestions regarding work habits invaluable, but I believe the spirit in which they are offered deserves even more attention—namely, the role of DM as fiction writer. Seeing the game as an extension of the DM's story is the most creative way to approach role-playing games. If DMs want their work to be appreciated as "art," then they must create it as such. This means going beyond the mechanics and into the mind of your NPCs. William Faulkner once said that, "If the character the author creates is any good, then all the writer [in this case, the DM] has to do is set him up on his feet and then run down the road behind him with a notebook and pencil, taking down what he says and does." This seems to me to be a perfect description of how a DM should think and work. If the NPCs are cleverly "fleshed out," your PCs will chase down the road after them just as Faulkner would. If NPCs are boring or not believable, they deserve a good flailing if it will bring them to life!

Thomas Kane's article "That's Progress!" (also in issue #177) provides some great ideas for how to flesh out your campaign. By encouraging

the PCs to make history, not just hear about it, a whole new realm of possibilities opens up. What I found most interesting about Kane's article was that it showed how items can be deemed "magical" simply by providing them with an appropriately early historical context. Realizing this can save DMs a lot of work and give low-level mages, priests, and other intelligent beings adventures of their own without having to hide behind a paladin. What self-respecting student of Magius the Great wants to go out wading through goblin gore when he could peacefully be working on ahead-of-their-time "magical" weapons like *bracers of binding* (you know—hand-cuffs). Try checking out books like James Burke's *The Day the Universe Changed* for ideas to research such campaigns. If you can find an angle for every NPC and PC, they will serve you (and each other) long and well.

Christopher Newton
Raleigh NC

I'm writing in response to Mark Krieter's letter in issue #173 to address the issue of player motivation. Since I am one of those players who recently lost a character to DM frustration when I just couldn't seem to focus on the game, I have a lot to say for those of us who may appear distracted or uninterested.

In my case, it was hardly a lack of "motivation." I think that a more accurate description might be "player funk." While I fault myself for my inattention because I know my DM thought I was being rude, I fault my DM for not speaking up to address the problem either during or after play. There were things I would have said to him that I would not have said to the group at large.

Here are some of the things that contributed to my overall dissatisfaction with the game and, in turn, my lack of focus on play. Some of these things have been addressed before in back issues of DRAGON Magazine, but they bear repeating; some are personal observations. DMs, take notes, please:

1. Don't play in eight-hour stretches or into the wee hours of morning. At 1 A.M., there's no such thing as focus. Play is sloppy, and players are more inclined to argue with both the DM and their fellow PCs. Wrap up your game early.

2. Be organized, and expect your players to follow suit. If you plan a game for 5:00, play at 5:00. Plan a break and tell everyone when it will be and for how long. You'll be amazed at how quickly your players adapt to this and how much more they accomplish in a single game session.

3. If you see someone drifting, speak to him. Don't verbally attack him or make it a public issue, though. Pull the player aside and find out what the problem is. Don't assume anything. You may find out exactly what the player is dissatisfied with. It may be a problem with another individual in the group. It may be that the player prefers solving puzzles and riddles to combat, or vice versa. It may be that the player doesn't understand something. It may even be a personal problem, something completely outside the game. Ask, and if a player can't come up with an immediate answer, give that player time to come up with something, perhaps even in writing. You may get a thoughtful, articulate critique of your DMing style.

4. A great exercise might be to ask your players to describe what their ultimate fantasy game would be like. These ideas could be woven into the tapestry of your game world in ways that will be unexpected when they arise. For me, there is a gender difference here, which is why I suggest it. While my fellow players seem

to enjoy endless rounds of combat, I quickly tire of it. I prefer role-playing—the interaction between characters, quietly putting the large pieces together behind the scenes, intrigue, shadowy "pasts" of fellow party members, romance, drama in its highest form, love, hate, friendship, betrayal, and all the things that people love soap operas for. My fellow players have labeled me "overly dramatic" and jokingly refer to my idea of a good game as "Soap & Swords." I like what I like. If you do your homework, DMs, at least you'll know what grabs your players and they'll be less likely to lose focus on your campaign. And if you can't deliver what the player wants, tell that player so and why you can't. It will save you both a lot of hassle.

5. Skip the powerful magical-item routine. I ought to know: I had one. It was always there in the back of my mind that my fellow PCs were only carrying my lower-level character because she had something they needed and wanted. I heard more than once, "If she didn't have the symelhedron, we'd leave her in the drow city." There are far better and more fair ways of involving out-of-sorts players and lower-level PCs. What about a rousing good solo adventure?

6. Praise your players. Too often we hear only criticism. A simple, "You did good" can make a player feel that his PC's actions are noticed and make a difference. Praise your players often, even for small things. Morale suffers when the odds are against you. One of the worst mistakes DMs make is when they chorle, "I can't believe you guys did X when you should have done Y!" (Implication: "You utterly stupid, incompetent nincompoops!") Think about it. Have you forgotten what it's like to be a player? If so, play for a while.

7. Tell your overbearing, loud, take-charge players to shut up once in a while. Turn an attentive ear to your quieter players, even if you have to take them in another room to hear them. There's nothing more discouraging to a less-outgoing player than to be out-shouted. For example, my character was timid and weak, but in ICE's ROLEMASTER* system she had the equivalent of an 18 charisma. When she opened her mouth, she was ridiculed by her fellow party members. However, the 18 score counted for something and there should have been DM intervention to rectify the problem. If I could have been heard, I would have protested as much!

8. Don't forget to have fun. Can you believe that sometimes we forget that games are supposed to be enjoyable? If your players feel overwhelmed and they go out with haggard faces, then something's wrong. Last August, our game wrapped up with my character dead, her body being dragged along with the fleeing party, which ended up stranded halfway up an icy mountain range with no food, water, supplies, or spell books. We didn't play again until Christmas. Were we depressed? You bet! Was the game fun? Well, uh, no.

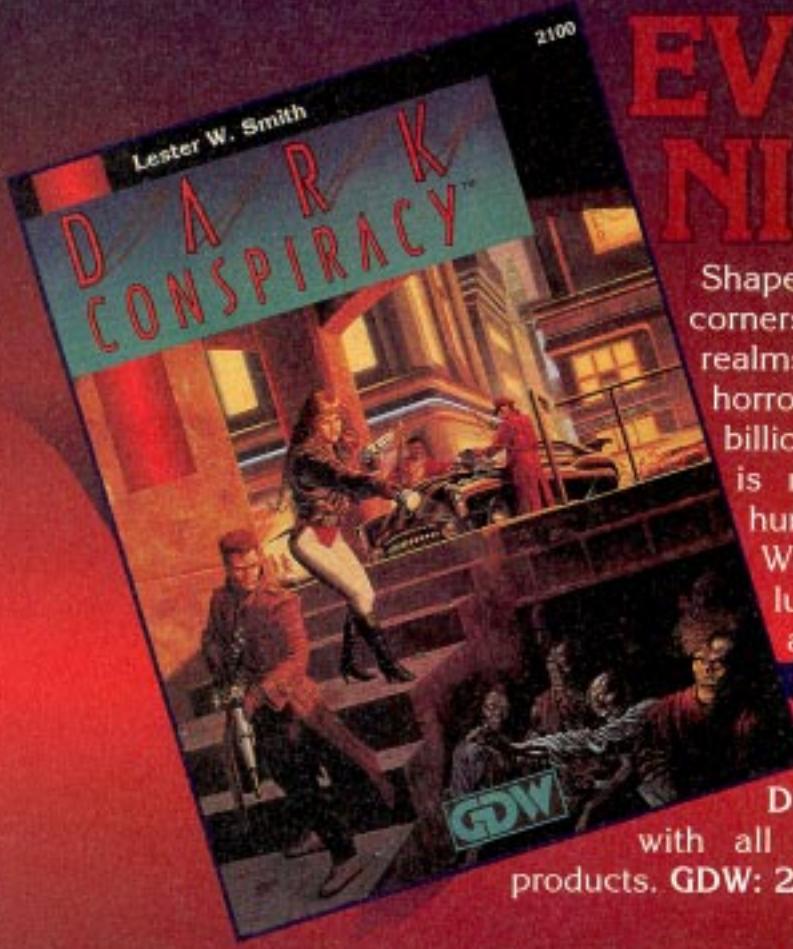
I hope my "player funk" has passed now, and that I'll renew our seven-year-long dungeonengineering odyssey with vim and vigor. From an unmotivated player to DMs everywhere, a word to the wise: Be kind.

Donna L. Beales
Lowell MA
Ω

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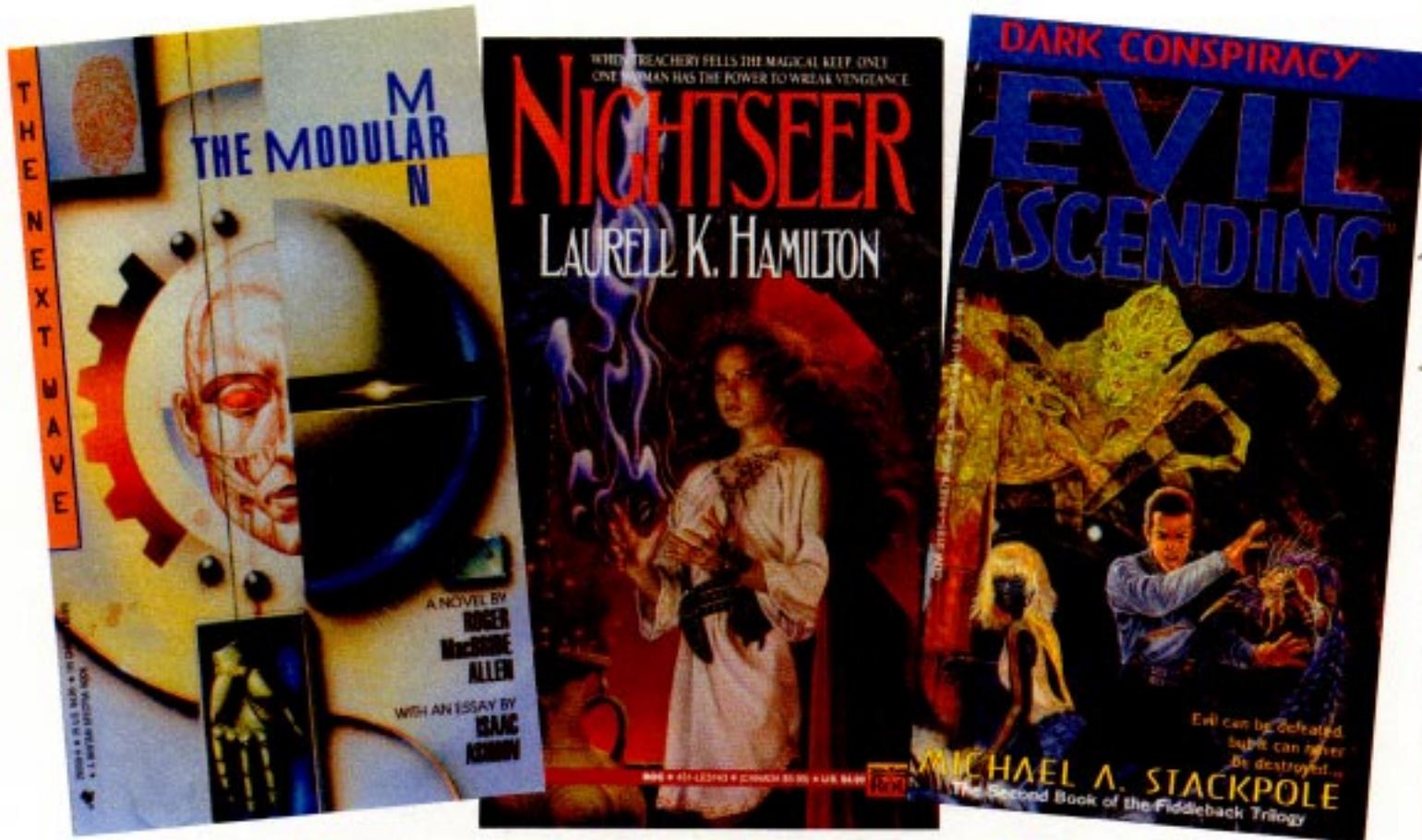
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NIGHTSEER

Laurell K. Hamilton

Roc

0-451-45143-0

\$4.99

Laurell Hamilton's first novel is set at a venerable school of magic, but it's not the usual mild-mannered story of a misunderstood heroine learning to command her powers. Rather, *Nightseer* is a crowded yarn about sorcerous intrigues, revenge, and as many sorts of spellcraft as you'd

care to find in one place at the same time.

The narrative, though, is no dry catalog of mystical course descriptions. Indeed, there's scarcely time to pause for breath between crises as half-elven Keleios fends off murder plots, demons, and the marriage-proposals of the black healer Lothor, who persists in courting her even after she challenges him to a duel. But the witch Harque has more on her mind than

Keleios' destruction; she's also involved in a conspiracy that threatens the academy itself as well as the established political order. In order to defeat her, Keleios will need every form of magic at her command, from dream-prophecy to sorcery to power over demons.

Hamilton's magic system is carefully worked out, with an eye for diversity and balance. No one brand of spellcraft is

dominant, and the narrative relies on action rather than exposition to highlight the differing abilities of each sort of magician. Despite the frenetic plot, it's clear there's order in Hamilton's universe—enough, in fact, to make her system of magic seem almost tailor-made for adaptation to a fantasy role-playing setting.

Events unfold quickly as the book progresses, perhaps a bit too much so. Hamilton does an excellent job of working bits of world-building into the rapid-fire action, and she is equally good at keeping the story's focus squarely on its heroine. The combination is mostly successful but occasionally leaves rough spots around the edges of the plot, where the effects of Keleios' adventures on the wider political climate aren't always clear.

Overall, though, *Nightseer* is solid sword-&-sorcery, and Hamilton's clever touches (particularly the final scene, where she deftly works a touch of humor into some unexpected pyrotechnics) easily outweigh any occasional vagueness. It's also refreshing to find a first novel that isn't the start of a series or the first book in a trilogy. Between its skillfully developed magic system and its lively pace, this is a book gamers should definitely enjoy.

DOOMSDAY EXAM

Nick Pollotta

Ace 0-441-15866-8 \$3.99

EVIL ASCENDING

Michael A. Stackpole

GDW 1-55878-099-8 \$4.95

Richard Tucholka's BUREAU 13: STALKING THE NIGHT FANTASTIC* game is a role-playing system devoted to modern-day supernatural spook-chasing, and Doomsday Exam is the second novel in a series adapted from its game universe. Unfortunately, that origin shows: This is one of those cases where the book is too much like a game adventure for its own good. By contrast, the second book in Michael Stackpole's trilogy based on GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY* game universe, is a crisply executed thriller that just happens to take place in a world designed for role-playing.

Doomsday Exam's heroes are agents of Bureau 13, a standard-issue secret government agency dedicated to combatting ghosts and monsters of all descriptions. To this end, they're outfitted with an incredible variety of magical, mundane, and mixed-origin weaponry and licensed to hack-&-slash with wild abandon. Some monsters, though, just can't be killed in the field, and these creatures are hauled back to a convenient pocket dimension for storage until Technical Services can figure out how to dispose of them. Then a new inmate triggers a mass escape as part of an elusive alchemist's plot to absorb the world's entire supply of magical energy—and only Team Tunafish has any chance of stopping him.

The oddball nickname is typical of the

books tone; it's the kind of reckless comedy-thriller in which the next joke or the next attack can come out of nowhere, and it usually does. Most of the ingenuity goes into combat style, with firefights taking up nearly all the action. This is faithful to Tucholka's game (according to Lawrence Schick's guide to role-playing games, *Heroic Worlds*, the manual includes almost 40 pages of damage rules), but the constant melee wears thin as the story progresses. Players in a gaming session are keenly interested in keeping their characters alive, but readers don't share that kind of empathy with Pollotta's prefabricated cast.

To his credit, Pollotta shows signs of realizing the problem. The books single best gag has agent Ed Alvarez stop one battle with an ingeniously nonviolent maneuver. While the mood is mostly comic, there are occasional darker moments. Pollotta's strike team isn't immune to death or change either, a truth too rarely encountered in series fantasy.

The flashes of originality and thoughtfulness, though, just don't mesh very well with the rapid-fire action. One character's secret origin is grafted onto the book for no apparent reason, a sequence involving a vampire's afternoon snack strikes a jarringly serious note in what's mostly a light adventure yarn, and Pollotta arbitrarily restores one character's sacrificed powers at the end while a second character remains burned out.

Evil Ascending is a different story entirely—and mostly self-contained, despite being the middle book of a trilogy. Though there's no shortage of gunplay and martial artistry, Michael Stackpole's novel puts equal emphasis on sophisticated intrigue and tightly written characters whose lives aren't limited to committing mayhem.

Where Pollotta's characters function almost exclusively as a group, Stackpole's are lone-wolf types. Coyote is a trained assassin seeking secrets from his past, Sinclair MacNeal is a corporate troubleshooter sent to Japan as Coyote's agent, and the mysterious Rajani is an alien adrift in a dangerous near-future American Southwest. For the most part, each works alone, and Stackpole's smooth writing allows readers to see not just what they do, but a hint of why they do it.

The chief nemesis in *Evil Ascending* is Fiddleback, one of a number of extradimensional Dark Lords currently interested in annexing Earth and adding its citizens to their legions of slaves. Fiddleback, though, doesn't rely solely on brute force to achieve his ends. Sinclair's mission in Japan is to find the secret location where Fiddleback and his human allies are luring in and training recruits, one of whom may well be the Emperor's grandson and heir. Rajani, emerging from stasis after surviving a previous conflict, rescues a small child who becomes a pawn in a struggle between Fiddleback and a rival Dark Lord.

And Coyote can't help either of them unless he can convince yet another faction that he's not already under Fiddleback's control.

The DARK CONSPIRACY universe is a moderately high-tech near future, but it shows more in the settings than in combat gadgetry, which consists mostly of an impressive range of firearms and a sprinkling of bladed weapons. Emphasizing the game's realistic approach to violence allows Stackpole to give his fight scenes a tense, high-risk quality that puts the reader in the middle of the battle, not in a safe ringside seat. At the same time, desk-sized touch-control computers and occasional references to next-generation pop culture ("I can't see Macaulay Culkin as Henry V.") credibly project the action into the next century.

In short, *Evil Ascending* succeeds as a novel, while *Doomsday Exam* succeeds only in reproducing the essence of an evening's game session. In part, that may simply illustrate the differences between the two gaming systems—but only in part, when one considers that Mercedes Lackey's Diana Tregarde occult thrillers are also inspired in part by the STALKING THE NIGHT FANTASTIC world. Pollotta's book uses its gaming connection as a crutch; Stackpole's takes the foundation of a game universe and builds on it.

TWO-BIT HEROES

Doris Egan

DAW 0-88677-500-0 \$4.99

You'll probably appreciate more of the humor in *Two-Bit Heroes* if you've read its predecessor, Doris Egan's first novel about Theodora of Pyrene and Ran Cormallon. But this second book in the series is worthwhile on its own, as a clever far-future twist on the Robin Hood myth with an appealing cast and a practical-minded approach to swashbuckling.

Egan's setting and style are in the wide gray area between science fiction and fantasy. The world of Ivory is very much a part of a lively interstellar community, but it's also the one planet in that community where a form of magic works. Rather than focusing on that puzzle and its resolution, Egan's novels have so far concentrated on the intrigues of Ivory's essentially feudal government, in which magically gifted noble families play a pivotal role.

Narrator Theodora, however, isn't native to Ivory; she's an off-world anthropology student who initially had no intention of becoming tangled in the planet's convoluted politics. As the current novel opens, however, she's loosely engaged to wealthy sorcerer Ran Cormallon, and when the couple accepts a request to investigate rumors of trouble in an out-of-the-way province, problems appear and multiply with alarming speed.

Chief among these is that Ran is mistaken for a notorious criminal; he and Theodora are then captured by the outlaw's band. It turns out, though, that

Stereth Tar'krim has turned outlaw for a noble cause, and Theodora draws a conscious parallel between Stereth and the Robin Hood legend. The Ivorians, though, aren't familiar with the story, and when Theodora explains the reference, Stereth promptly adapts his own strategies and goals with all the benefits of a historian's hindsight. Now all Theodora has to do is keep herself and Ran from being executed for inciting the rebellion that ensues.

Egan does well both at creating Ivory's alien landscape and cross-pollinating it with a familiar adventure yarn. Hair's-breadth action and wry comedy are skillfully balanced, and the range of characterizations is broader than one might expect, with a number of likeable and distinctive secondary players. There's also a liberal dash of romance, as Theodora and Ran wrestle with the issues and rituals involved in formalizing their relationship.

In short, *Two-Bit Heroes* is simply an entertaining, well-told story whose components do a great deal to recommend it to gamers interested in the process of assembling new tales from elements of established literary traditions. Egan combines a personable style with a firm grasp of her material, and her attention to detail shows in the finished product.

RIVER RATS
Caroline Stevermer
HBJ/Jane Yolen Books

0-15-200895-0 \$16.95

I haven't seen the new fourth edition of the GAMMA WORLD® game rules yet, but it's a pleasant coincidence that TSR's game of post-nuclear survival is returning on the heels of an unusual post-nuclear novel from Caroline Stevermer. Though it looks as if the book and game offer divergent visions of life after the bomb, those interested are likely to be intrigued by both.

Stevermer begins 20 years after "the Flash," which has among other things—left the Mississippi River navigable but toxic. There are still small communities and a very few larger cities, and a bit of trade moving upstream and down again.

Some of that trade travels by the *River Rat*, an old paddlewheeler crewed by a band of fiercely loyal teenagers whose shipmates are their only family. The *River Rat* carries mail, news, and occasional cargo, and its crew doubles as a high-octane rock band playing to riverbank audiences on instruments powered by a rare hoard of rechargeable batteries.

Their relatively peaceful existence takes a turn for the dangerous, however, when they cross paths with an old man being pursued by a persistent band of roughnecks. Though he loudly objects to being rescued, the mysterious King nonetheless ends up traveling with the riverboat's crew, and they in turn are drawn into the hunt for a lost cache of pre-Flash firearms.

The prose is clear and understated, giving a dark but not really grim portrayal of the world after the Flash. The characters are likeable and distinctive, and this is very much an ensemble story in which the narrator, Tomcat, is only nominally at center stage. While Stevermer's novel clearly draws inspiration and atmosphere from the familiar works of Mark Twain, her style and plot are very much her own.

The tone of *River Rats* is quiet but intense, while that of the new GAMMA WORLD rules has been described as "whimsical," so the two may not be directly compatible. But Caroline Stevermer's book manages a rare feat in post-apocalyptic literature—it bypasses both excessive ideology and violence in favor of a story that skillfully combines low-key adventure with a memorable cast and setting. Anyone interested in tales of life after global disaster should definitely find this novel worth investigating.

THE MODULAR MAN
Roger MacBride Allen
Bantam Spectra 0-553-29559-4 \$4.99

The best science fiction doesn't simply imagine exotic technical breakthroughs; it thinks out their consequences as well. For example, suppose an increased understanding of the brain was combined with significant advances in robotics? Roger MacBride Allen's new novel foresees not

only the hardware-robots with personalities copied from living brain-patterns, and people with artificially enhanced bodies—but the legal, moral, and economic implications of technology with the ability to postpone or even eliminate death.

Lawyer Suzanne Jantille is defense counsel in one of the strangest murder trials conceivable. Her husband, David Bailey, is both the victim and the alleged killer, who may or may not have succeeded in transplanting his mind into the couple's housekeeping robot, nicknamed Herbert. The Washington, D.C. police have arrested Herbert for the crime, and the capital's district attorney is determined to use the case to push through a legal precedent preventing the super-rich from engineering themselves into a permanent ruling class of immortals.

It's a tricky situation. If David has succeeded, then the "murder" of his body is at worst a victimless crime; if he hasn't, then Herbert can't be prosecuted for David's suicide. To further complicate matters, Suzanne is appearing in court by remote control, using a robotic double to compensate for the fact that she's a bedridden quadriplegic. And both the D.A.'s hand-picked prosecutor and the Washington policeman ordered to arrest Herbert are uncomfortable with their roles in the unfolding affair.

Though both the plot and the science are fairly complex, Allen does a good job of keeping his story moving without lapsing into lectures. Readers know the results of David's experiment long before the characters do, but there's still an element of suspense as to whether or not they'll actually influence the trial's outcome. Though not all his characters are likeable, even the least appealing of them have legitimate reasons for their stands on the issues Allen raises.

There's probably not much in *The Modular Man* for gamers to build into their campaign worlds—at least not directly. But Allen's thoroughly logical, carefully reasoned treatment of one particular science-fictional premise is still intriguing reading, and his attention to detail is a mark of quality craftsmanship that's worth emulating all by itself.

Recurring roles

Fred Saberhagen has been busy; since the last edition of this column, he's published new entries in both his Dracula series and in the "Lost Swords" cycle. *A Question of Time* (Tor, \$19.95) is the Dracula book, and while it's not the best of the series, it generally lives up to expectations. The setting is the Grand Canyon, where a reclusive vampire is only the lesser of multiple adversaries. *Wayfinder's Story* (Tor, \$17.95), meanwhile, is about as good as Saberhagen's fantasy gets, which regrettably isn't very good. The faintly stilted, simple style Saberhagen uses for the Swords books reads as if a vampire had sucked all the humor out of a Piers An-



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thony Xanth novel. That's a shame, because the Swords themselves are intriguing, quirky magical items—especially Wayfinder. Interested readers are advised to wait for the paperback edition.

The California Voodoo Game (Del Rey, \$20), on the other hand, is worth acquiring in hardback. This third novel in the Dream Park series by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes takes live adventure gaming to new and more dangerous heights. This time, Park operators are testing software destined for a high-profile aerospace project in the most sophisticated gameworld ever devised, and a host of familiar and first-time characters are on hand. But while some are content to play the programmed game, others are simultaneously engaged in very real games of intrigue, espionage, and death. This is a state-of-the-art story that gamers shouldn't miss.

Several more series have solid new installments out as well. *Serpent's Gift* (Ace, \$4.50) continues A. C. Crispin's StarBridge series with a story set at StarBridge Academy itself; Crispin and Deborah Marshall combine to produce a crisp, multifaceted yarn about music, archaeology, and a reckless youngster with the unique power to link her mind with computers. Anne Logston's *Shadow Hunt* (Ace, \$4.50) is the second adventure of Shadow, who's off this time to recover a

missing jewel and restore the good name of her local Thieves' Guild. It's a touch darker than its predecessor, but Logston still has a good ear for an adventure tale and a clever hand with magic. And *Dark Reunion* (Harper, \$3.99) adds an intriguing fourth volume to L. J. Smith's Vampire Diaries series. Smith manages the difficult trick of bringing a dead character back into the story line, and she continues to stage some of the most dramatic confrontation scenes in her class.

Dramatic confrontations also highlight *Mistress of the Empire* (Doubleday Foundation, \$20), as Raymond Feist and Janny Wurts conclude their trilogy about Mara of the Acoma in fine form, this time pitting her against the Assembly of Magicians, whose supreme power has not been challenged for generations. For intricate strategy, clear-minded statecraft, and exotic alien magic, few writers can match the team of Feist and Wurts.

Also in the realm of successful collaborations is *Summoned to Tourney* (Baen, \$4.99), in which Mercedes Lackey and Ellen Guon combine to produce another suspenseful adventure in the world of West Coast fantasy subculture. This time the heroes of *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* are in San Francisco, dodging shadowy nightmare-creatures and unsavory research scientists as they race to prevent an earthquake that will crumble

most of the Bay Area into the Pacific Ocean. Once again, the atmosphere is sharp and accurate, and the cast is large and interesting.

The news isn't as good for Tom Swift fans. *The Microbots* (Archway, \$2.99) is the eighth installment in the series, and it's a step down from the previous two volumes (reviewed in DRAGON® issue #181). The current incarnation of Victor Appleton makes Tom act much too carelessly in order to propel the teenaged scientist and his friends into a miniaturized crisis, then draws too much conflict from petty character bickering and not enough from the situation itself.

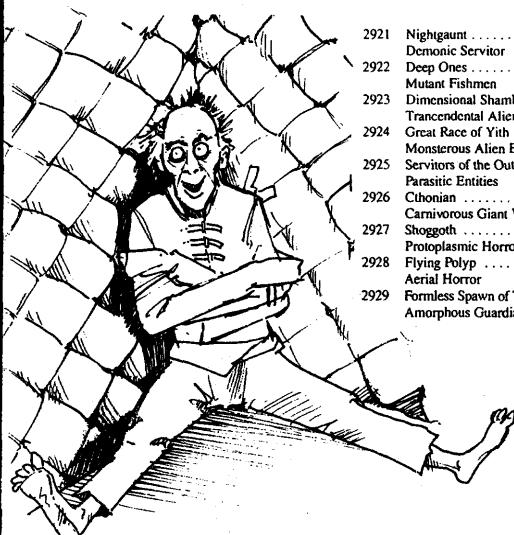
A brief update: I, once again, have a new address to which books for review and letters about this column should be sent. Correspondence should now be directed to:

John C. Bunnell
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Your comments and questions are always appreciated. Ω

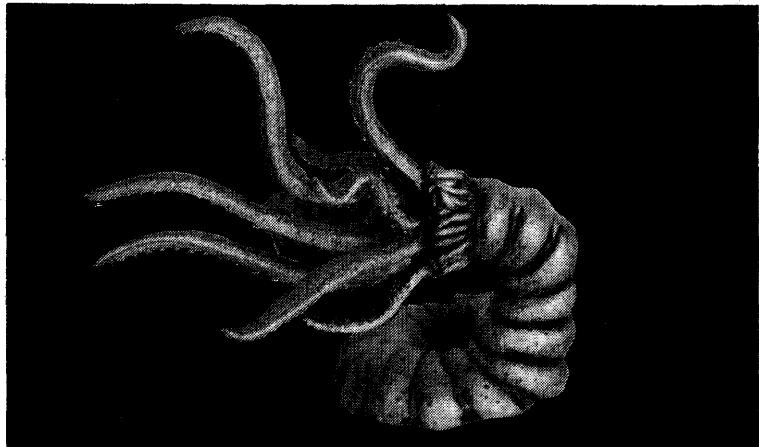
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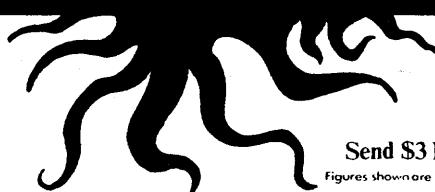
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by Skip Williams

SAGE advice

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We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (old SASEs are being returned with writers' guidelines for the magazine).

This month, the sage explores the limits of a powerful AD&D® game magical item, takes an in-depth look at magic resistance, and considers a few complaints from a dissatisfied reader.

What exactly does a rope of entanglement do? Are victims automatically ensnared and rendered helpless until freed or killed? Is an attack roll required? Does the victim get a saving throw? What is the rope's maximum area of effect?

The current rules seem to leave the exact effects up in the air, as the description in the AD&D 2nd Edition Dungeon Master's Guide (page 179) does not mention any game effects at all. The AD&D 1st Edition DMG isn't much more helpful, but it does include the phase "entangle and tie fast" (page 153). It's pretty clear to me that the intent behind this item is to allow the wielder to at least immobilize opponents and probably to restrict their attacks.

Judging from the description in the 1st Edition DMG, I'm inclined to think that a *rope of entanglement* prevents its victims from moving normally (i.e., no walking, running, jumping, burrowing, or flying with wings) but does not prevent magical movement such as levitation or fly spells. Humans and demihumans who use their limbs to swim are immobilized and will sink if ensnared in the rope; however, fish and similar creatures probably still could swim through open water at half or two-thirds speed, as their streamlined bodies and tiny fins really can't be effectively tangled. On the other hand, even a fish or

levitating creature can be held in place if there are weeds or other suitable objects the rope can grab along with the victim. For example, a wizard flying through a forest might be immobilized when the rope wraps him up along with the branches of an oak tree.

For purposes of game balance, I suggest that a creature entwined in a *rope of entanglement* be allowed to make melee attacks at a -4 penalty, but only against the rope or opponents who are directly adjacent to the entwined victim. Missile attacks are generally not possible while entwined, but the DM might allow them under special circumstances; a manticore's tail spikes might still be effective, for example, as might a giant porcupine's quills. An entwined victim might manage to fire a loaded and cocked crossbow that was already pointed at a target when the rope struck. Such attacks also should suffer the same -4 penalty to attack rolls that melee attacks get.

In any case, no attack rolls are required to use this item. The wielder can direct the rope at any opponent within range (20' horizontally and 10' vertically). The targets are automatically entwined in the rope, with no saving throw allowed, provided they fit within the size limits specified in the item's description. Common sense suggests that the rope's "downward" range (the distance within which it can be used if it is dropped from a height) could be more than 10', but probably not more than 20'.

Common sense also suggests that the rope cannot affect creatures in a total area more than about 40' long by 5' deep (this is the distance a line of eight man-sized creatures will occupy if they line up shoulder-to with enough space between to allow for normal melee). In other words, the rope's maximum area of effect is 200 square feet, and its maximum "length of effect" 40'. Note that I'm assuming a *rope of entanglement* is 50' long, as this is the "standard" length for a rope in the AD&D game and it seems to jive with the rope's basic "capacity" of eight man-sized creatures (the "missing" 10' of the rope's length

is used up as it coils around its victims).

Please clarify the effects of magic resistance in the following situations: 1) Someone casts a *wall of stone* spell so that it falls on top of the magic-resistant creature; 2) A drow (an elven race that has magic resistance and suffers various penalties in bright light) is enveloped in a light or *continual light* spell; and 3) A magic-resistant marine creature that breathes only water finds itself within an airy water spell.

"Sage Advice" discussed magic resistance in issue #175 (page 76), but it seems to be time to study the subject in more detail. Most of these answers are pretty straightforward; a little common sense and a careful rereading of the magic-resistance rules (PH, pages 102-103; DMG, page 66-67) should put these matters to rest. When adjudicating the effects, if any, of magic resistance, the DM has to consider two factors. First, what type of magic is involved? The rules make four distinctions: individually targeted spells, area-effect spells, in-place spells, and permanent spells. Second, does the "incoming" magic directly affect the magic-resistant creature, or is the effect on the creature merely a consequence of the magic being there? Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules (beyond what's already printed in the books) to decide which conditions apply. Here's my reasoning:

1) A *wall of stone* is a permanent magical effect (its duration is so listed in the spell description). Furthermore, magical "wall" spells are evocations, which directly bring forth or create their effects. When the *wall of stone* falls on top of a magic-resistant creature, or even if the creature tries to walk through a stationary wall, the magical effect is acting directly on the creature. Magic resistance applies; if the magic-resistance roll succeeds, the creature passes harmlessly through the wall. Since the *wall of stone* is permanent, there is no effect on it; that is, the wall is not dispelled or pierced with a hole that other creatures can pass through.

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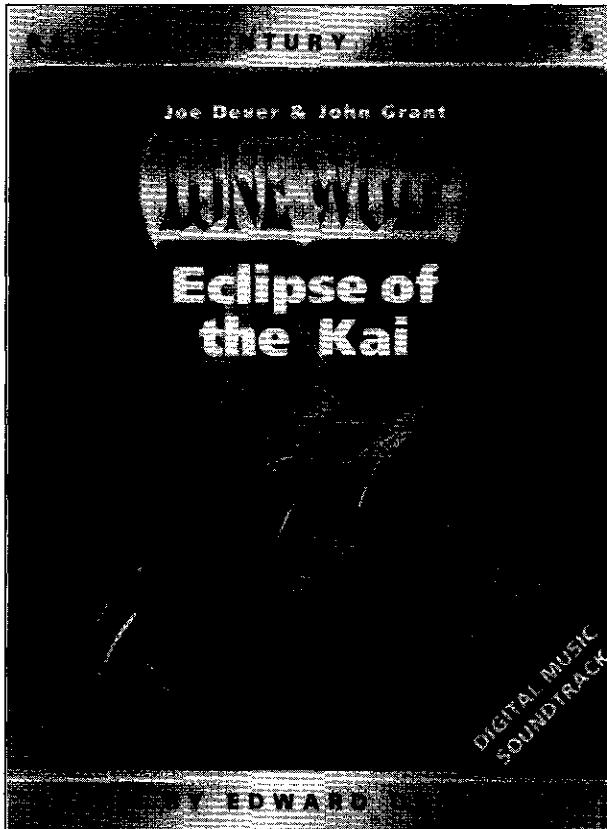
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2) *Light* and *continual light* spells are a little harder to figure out. Both are in-place effects, operating continuously in a particular place or on a particular item. However, *continual light* also is permanent, and both spells can be cast directly against a creature to blind it. When used to blind a creature, either of these spells is treated as an individually targeted effect, and magic-resistance applies. Since the caster is targeting a single creature only when trying to blind an opponent with either spell, the effect is completely negated if the magic-resistance roll succeeds (as it is for any area-effect spell targeted solely at the magic-resistant creature).

However, an entirely different set of circumstances prevails when a magic-resistant creature moves into or otherwise finds itself inside either spells area of effect. Both spells are alterations, magic that works a change on a creature, area, or object, and this change produces the spells effects. In the case of *light* and *continual light*, these spells change an area or object so that it emits light. One explanation of how this works is that the atoms in the area of effect are excited so that they emit visible light. The light has a central focus (so the light can be hidden by an opaque container), but it is the target object or area that emits the light, not the spell. Since the magic affects the area and not the creature, magic resistance

does not apply (the light is a consequence of the spell). The same holds true for the reverse of these spells; a creature might be very badly affected by *darkness* or *continual darkness*, but, since the magic doesn't directly affect the creature, magic resistance is irrelevant.

3. *Airy water* also is an in-place spell, but it is also an alteration that affects an area, not the creatures within the area.

As anything published by TSR, Inc. is considered by a great many gamers to be canon, your column is more than just a source of advice. In the past, you have always known what you were talking about, and the written rules supported what appeared in "Sage Advice." However, from the time you ruled on which THAC0 a fighter/thief uses when backstabbing, to the effects of a *cloak of displacement* on *magic missiles*, to the abilities of the tarrasque polymorphed into a bunny, you have not followed the rules. In the past, you have mentioned that other people sometimes help you write the rulings, but your name is on the column, so I'll assume you are responsible.

In issue #169, you said a fighter/thief must use his thief THAC0 and cannot get specialization bonuses

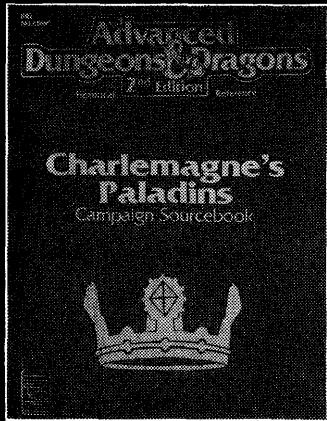
when backstabbing. But the PH, page 45 says: "A multi-classed warrior can use all of his abilities without restriction. The warrior abilities form the base for other character classes." Page 45 also says multi-classed characters can combine class abilities, in direct contradiction to what "Sage Advice" said in issue #169. Did you make a brainographic error (to quote game designer Aaron Allston) or are you playing the "Skip's AD&D" game, in which DM interpretations override rules? If so, my friends and I will ignore your column in the future and ask DRAGON Magazine to run a disclaimer stating that your column does not follow the books.

In issue #179, you said that *magic missile* was a spell attack, and that the only effect a *cloak of displacement* had on spell attacks is a saving throw bonus. Since *magic missile* has no save, you said, there is no effect. Well, the spell description says that the spell produces "missiles" and that the target must be seen or detected to be hit. A displaced creature is really somewhere other than where a viewer thinks it is. When a spell caster targets a displaced creature, he's really just aiming at empty air. The creature

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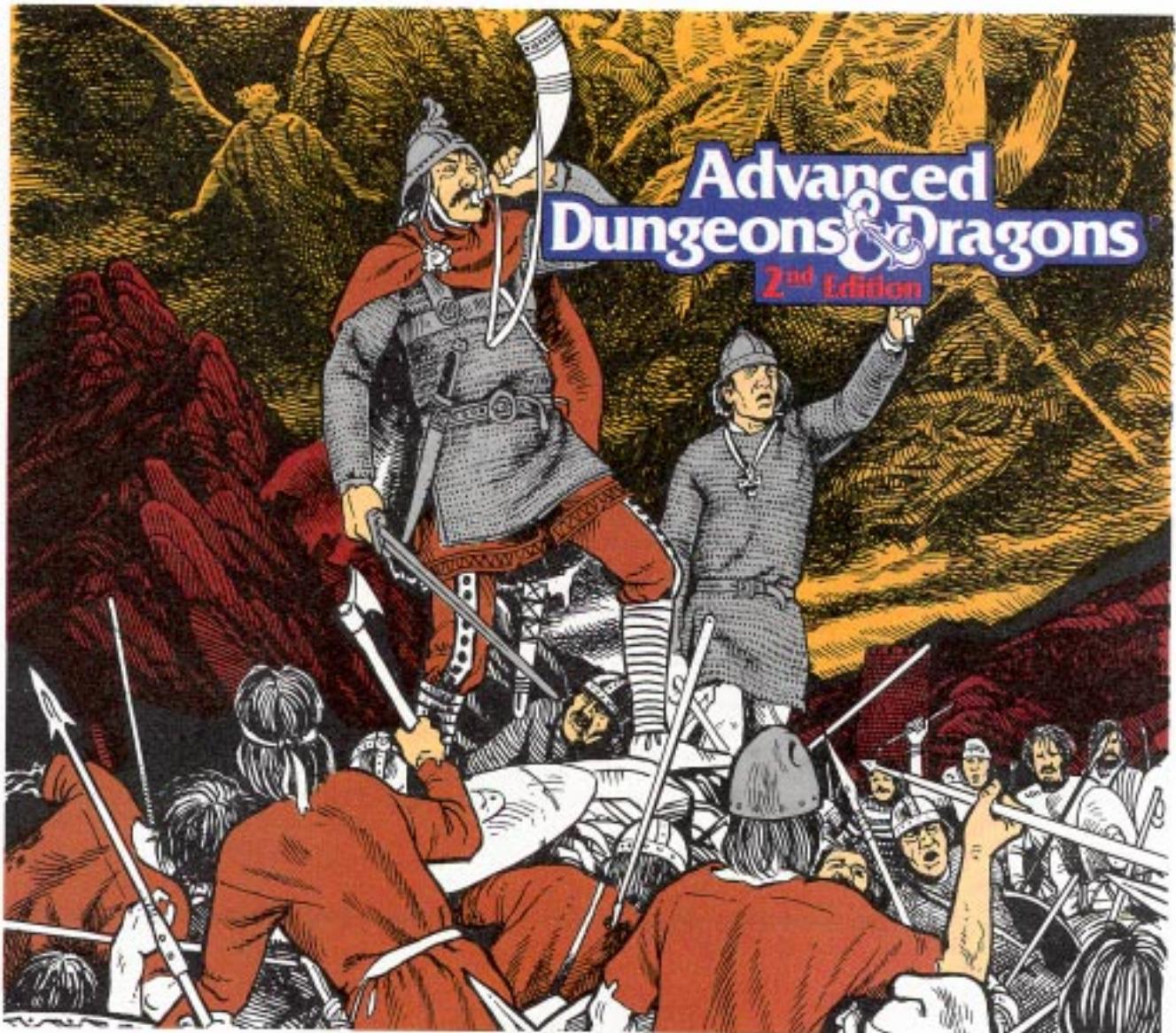
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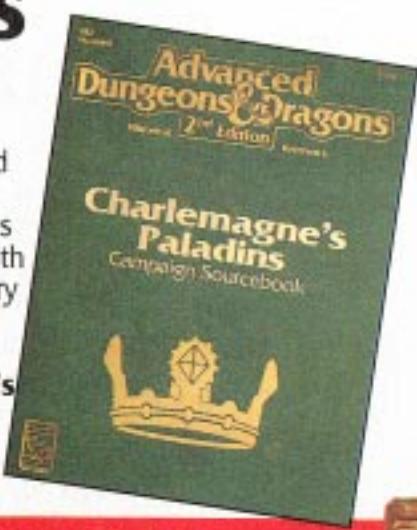
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wearing the cloak is actually unseen, as the cloak creates a sort of *mirror image* that is some distance from the wearer's actual location. Since *magic missile* doesn't work on inanimate objects, it is wasted in this case.

In issue #180, you said *polymorphed* creatures keep their hit points, natural armor class, and possibly other purely physical abilities. This directly contradicts the *polymorph other* spell description, which clearly states that the creature gains the natural armor class and "purely physical" abilities of the assumed form. You also suggest that the tarrasque could keep the sharpness ability of its bite. While this is a magical ability, a bunny's skeletal structure is hardly the same as that of the *un-polymorphed* tarrasque. In short, the tarrasque would be a 300-hp bunny with the saving throws of a 70-HD monster, and that's all.

We have long enjoyed your column and hope you can tell us why these three—and possibly other—errors occurred.

First, I (Skip Williams) do write "Sage Advice." Of course, I get lots of help, but ultimately I put fingers to keyboard and am responsible for what appears here.

Regarding "combining" multi-classed abilities: The word "combine," as used on page 45 of the *PH*, is meant to convey the fact that the character can freely use his abilities during a single encounter or adventure without penalty, as opposed to dual-classed characters, who can suffer experience penalties if they fall back on their old class abilities too soon. It is not meant to convey that a multi-classed character can use abilities from two or more classes simultaneously.

Regarding fighter/thief backstabs: The TSR house ruling—not the "Skip" ruling—on this matter is that the character must use his thief THAC0. You have quoted page 45 accurately, but the rules contradict themselves here. Two of a fighter's most important "abilities" are unrestricted weapon and armor use, and these are severely curtailed in several multi-classed combinations: fighter/wizards are prohibited from wearing most metal armor, fighter/clerics can't use edged weapons, and fighter/thieves can't wear metal armor without reductions to thief abilities. This is hardly unrestricted use of fighter abilities. The TSR staff's concern here is for game balance. The thief's backstab ability can do pretty darn hefty damage, and generally it is best for the campaign if a backstab attempt fails once in awhile.

Still, the letter of the rules supports your view. So does game logic; if thieves care-

fully study anatomy and learn to place their attacks so as to inflict maximum damage, it stands to reason that fighter abilities might allow them to hit an opponent's "soft spots" more easily. This particular conundrum won't be officially cleared up until that far-off day when an AD&D 3rd Edition comes out. Until then, I suggest you either follow the advice given in issue #169 or allow fighter/thieves to use their fighter THAC0 when backstabbing, but only with the standard +2 rear attack bonus. For purposes of game balance, the +4 bonus and fighter THAC0 is just too tough a combination for the campaign's bad-guy NPCs to withstand. From the standpoint of game logic, the training in precise blows a thief learns while perfecting the backstab (a highly favorable situation for the attacker) overlaps the fighter's generally superior training in the use of weapons in all situations.

Regarding *cloaks of displacement* and *magic missiles*: I stand by my answer in issue #179. A *magic missile* is a spell attack (the number of times the word "missile" appears in the spell description notwithstanding) that always hits, *displaced* target or no. A *displaced* creature is neither invisible nor replaced by an illusory double. The cloak distorts other creatures' visual perceptions of the wearer's location. A wizard may very well be "aiming at empty air" when casting *magic missiles* at

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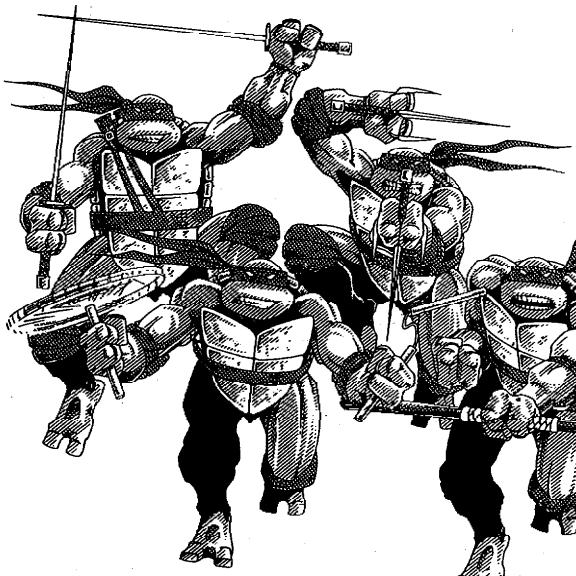
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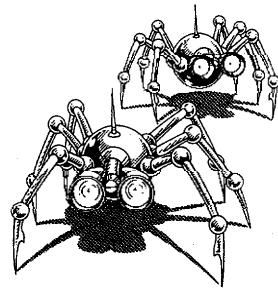
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a *displaced* creature, but the spell compensates for the error and hits anyway. The spell description does require that the caster see the target, and a *displaced* creature is still visible, even if the viewer isn't sure exactly where the creature is.

The situation is analogous to what happens when you look at an object underwater from above the surface. The physical refraction (bending) of light as it passes from air to water makes the object appear to be in a different place. In the case of a displaced creature, the margin of error is 1'-2'. In either case, the viewer sees the object. The visual distortion caused by a *cloak of displacement* does not make the cloaks wearer immune to spells. For example, *charm person* and *charm monster* spells also cannot affect objects, but when cast at a *displaced* creature these spells don't dissipate into "empty air." The *displaced* target gets a +2 saving-throw bonus but still is vulnerable to the spell cast at him.

As an aside, a colleague of mine at TSR also considered my reply on this question in issue #179, and his comment was that I was being too generous when I suggested that a *cloak of displacement* might grant a save against *magic missiles*. In his view, a *cloak of displacement* has no effect on *magic missiles* at all. TSR's Jon Pickens did point out, however, that the cloaks saving-

throw bonus would be cumulative with a *scarab of protection*, which does grant a save vs. spells such as *magic missile*, which normally allow no save.

Regarding *polymorphing* the tarrasque into a bunny: The victim of a *polymorph other* spell is stuck with the natural armor class of the new form; I goofed on this one. Nevertheless, the tarrasque is legendarilly tough and keeps its armor class even when *polymorphed* into a bunny, amoeba, or anything else that doesn't have an armor class better than -3. The point I was trying to make in issue #180 is that the tarrasque is a near-deity-class creature that is all but invulnerable in any form. Note that regeneration is not dependent on a creature's outer form and *any* naturally regenerating creature—whether a tarrasque, troll, vampire, or whatever—still regenerates when *polymorphed*. Other forms of the tarrasque's special defenses—including immunity to heat and fire, and returning to life unless reduced to -30 hp and *wished* dead, remain when it is in bunny form. However, I forgot to mention in issue #180 that the tarrasque's ability to reflect beams and rays specifically depends on the creature's carapace, and this ability disappears if the creature is in "bunny form."

Regarding the tarrasque's *teeth of sharpness*: There are two things you obviously

haven't seen: the size and sharpness of a large rabbit's front incisors, which can do nasty things to errant fingers, and the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, in which a vorpal bunny wreaks havoc on King Arthur and his knights. The movie isn't part of the game, but I couldn't help thinking of the vorpal bunny scene when I was writing the column. You have a good point in that bunny teeth really aren't the limb-severing type. Still, the tarrasque is a power unto itself. I encourage DMs to ride herd on any group of PCs foolish enough to tackle the tarrasque, and limb-severing tarrasque/bunny bites are fine with me so long as they are fine with the DM.

Regarding "Sage Advice" and what it's really all about: relax. This column is not the tip of an insidious conspiracy to change the face of the AD&D game. It's a place where a harried DM or player can go to get advice on how to muddle through the tough spots so the game can go on. If getting everybody to agree on what rules to use is a tough situation for you, "Sage Advice" is as good a court of final appeal as you're likely to find. But I'm just a regular guy doing a job here, not the keeper of the canon. In fact, the closest thing to canon in the AD&D game is David "Zeb" Cook's simple statement: "If you don't know the answer, make it up."

I think the rules are vital in making campaigns believable and playable, which is what they must be if the game is to be enjoyable. Fun is what gaming is all about. When writing my answers, I try to avoid making simple rules interpretations and instead try to explain how I arrive at the answers. I hope longtime readers of "Sage Advice" are using the information presented here to figure things out for themselves and keep their games running smoothly. The next time you reach for this column to settle an argument, first try to follow the advice I gave regarding rules disputes in issue #181, then look at the column. You'll have a much better time playing the game if you develop your own feel for the way it works. Ω

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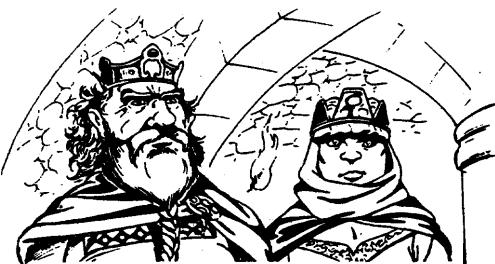
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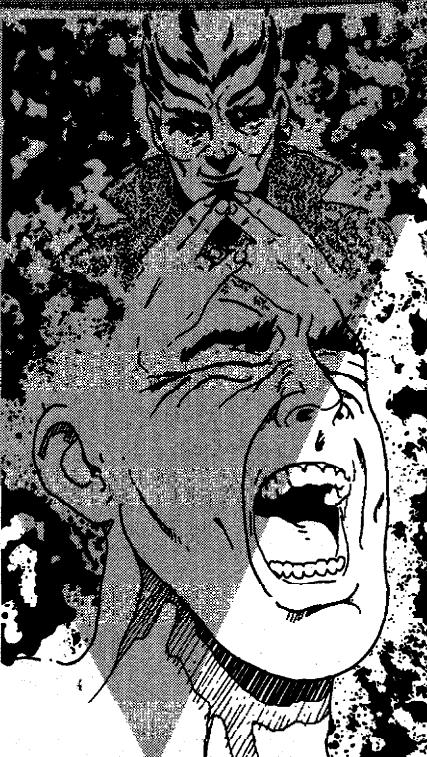
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The Game Wizards

by Anne Brown

Artwork by Ned Dameron

When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping

Is it just me, or do all wizards look like they buy their clothes at the same Wizard-Mart? Or is it that all the tailors in every city are conspiring to prevent fashion statements? Likewise for backpacks—are they all brown leather affairs? Are cloaks merely woolen capes with hoods that come in red, brown, green, blue, and black? Boooooooring!

Our AD&D® game characters were preparing to head into arctic territory once, and the order of the day was to equip our characters and mounts for the trek. I wanted a sheepskin-lined cloak for my wizard. After arguing with the druid in the party about slaughtering an animal for the sake of apparel (we finally agreed that our party would stand around until an elderly sheep died of natural causes), my wizard got her cloak. But the DM and I still had to discuss what such a cloak should cost and how long it would take to be manufactured. (Fortunately, the DM

was my husband so I got off easy.)

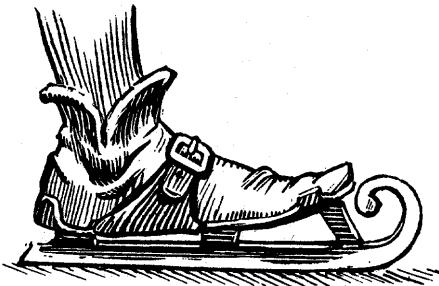
In another game world, in another place and time (Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU® game, America, 1920s), we had similar equipment problems. What was appropriate dress for women in the 1920s? What firearms were available? How much would this cost our characters, who had annual incomes of \$9,000?

The solution to the last problem was a reprint copy of a 1920s Sears, Roebuck Catalogue. After we discovered this venerable tome, it became the lifeblood of our campaign. Now we knew what kinds of picks, shovels, and lanterns were available, and how much they cost. Now we knew that 1920s' women almost never wore slacks. Now we knew the caliber of our weapons and how much the ammunition cost. We felt that we were living in the spirit of the 1920s at last.

Then I started working for TSR. We were eventually asked what products we would like to publish over the next several years. I piped up and said, "Wouldn't it be cool to publish a Sears, Roebuck Catalogue for the AD&D campaign worlds?" I explained the usefulness of that catalog in

our 1920s campaign. One day, my wish came true. The rest of the creative staff said, "Yeah, that would be cool. We could put in clothing and tents and fishing gear and all. But what should we call it?"

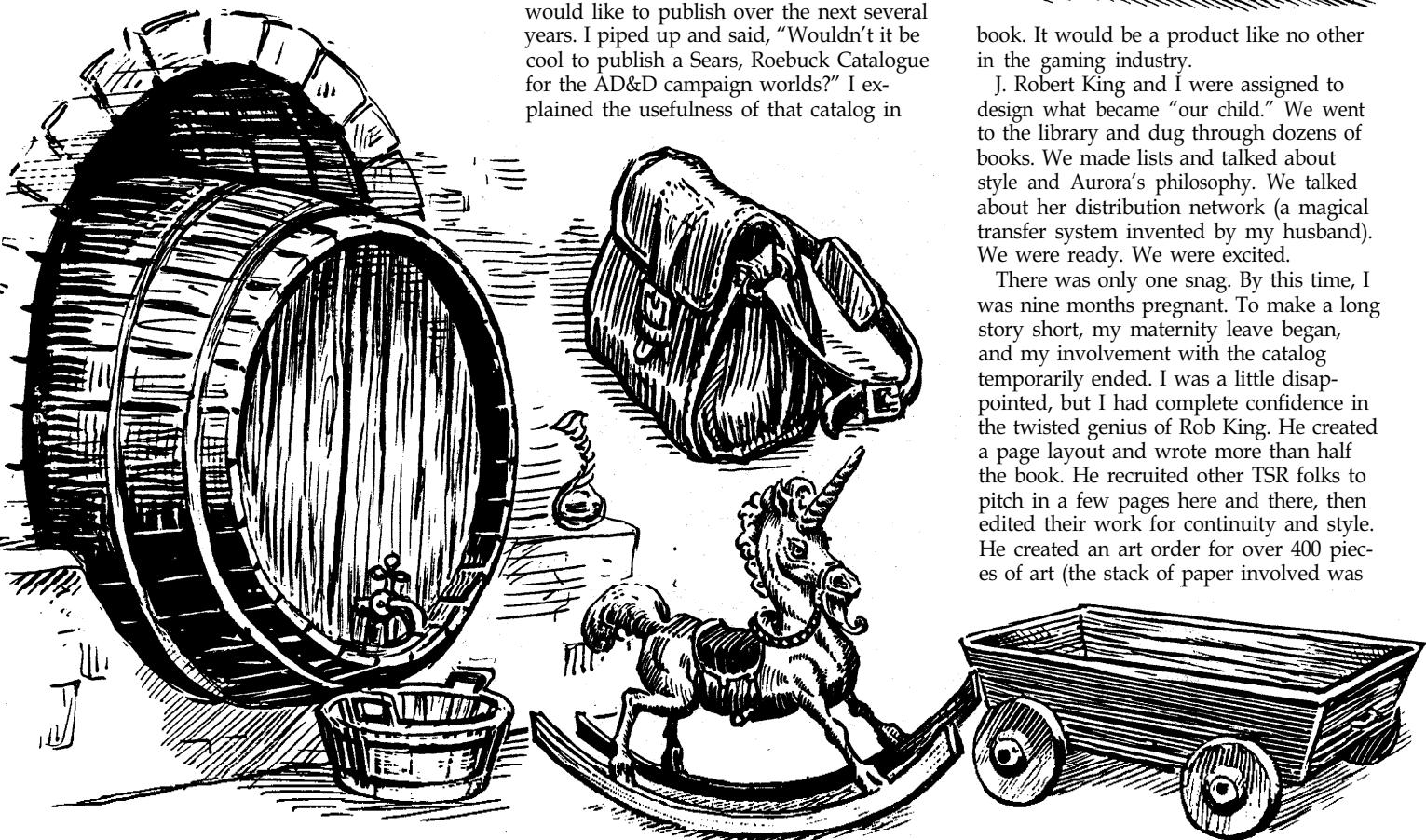
I again piped up. "Let's name it after my wizard character, and let's give the name a ring like *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*." Thus we settled on *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue*. Plans were made, equipment lists were drawn up, and artists were scrutinized. We had big dreams for this



book. It would be a product like no other in the gaming industry.

J. Robert King and I were assigned to design what became "our child." We went to the library and dug through dozens of books. We made lists and talked about style and Aurora's philosophy. We talked about her distribution network (a magical transfer system invented by my husband). We were ready. We were excited.

There was only one snag. By this time, I was nine months pregnant. To make a long story short, my maternity leave began, and my involvement with the catalog temporarily ended. I was a little disappointed, but I had complete confidence in the twisted genius of Rob King. He created a page layout and wrote more than half the book. He recruited other TSR folks to pitch in a few pages here and there, then edited their work for continuity and style. He created an art order for over 400 pieces of art (the stack of paper involved was



about half the thickness of the Milwaukee telephone directory). He turned over a beautiful manuscript to Karen Boomgarden for editing. And he remained sane through it all. The book couldn't have been in better hands during my absence.

Why am I telling you all this? I think it's interesting for our readers to hear some of the stories about the sweat and the care that go into our products. We have stories of success, disaster, and anguish, some hilarious and some not, that our readers never hear.

But I'm also telling you all this for a bigger reason: *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue* is more beautiful than I ever imagined it could be. It is truly stunning. It is a product like no other. You can't help but notice this fact when you pick it up. It is loaded with artwork, chatty text, and the flavor of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, but it can be used in any campaign world and, for that matter, any game system of the period.

It is my sincere hope that our gamers will get the same enjoyment out of reading *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue* and equipping their characters with it that we did in creating it. We think it's the answer to everyone's adventuring gear problems. Let me give you a quick peek.

Aurora, after a rich adventuring career, decided it was time to settle down and enjoy the fruits of her life's work. Being an unashamed collector of anything interest-

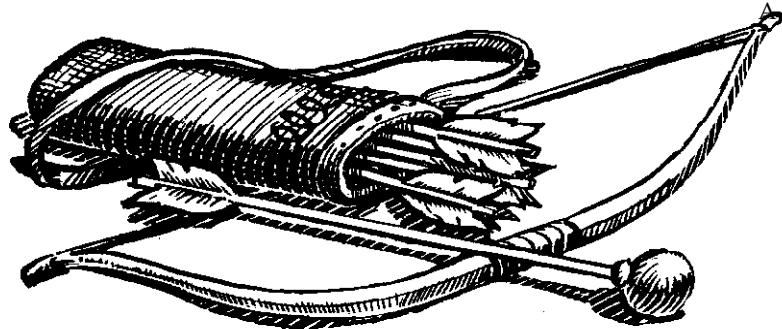
ing, she realized that her home had become something of a small warehouse. She decided to do what she wished someone had done years earlier: establish a number of catalog outlets throughout the Forgotten Realms, where adventurers could depend on quality, price, and availability of merchandise. She has since opened numerous outlets across the continent (anywhere the DM feels an outlet would be convenient). Her catalogs are available at the outlets, where shoppers can browse through the books and order their selections.

A quick look at the table of contents will give you an idea of the merchandise available from Aurora: general hardware, farming tools, thieves' tools, spell components, laboratory equipment, baskets, barrels, jewelry, holy symbols, toys, wines, ales, herbs, candles, incense, clothing and shoes, bath oil,

blankets, brushes, food, thread, sewing needles, fabric, toy beholders (oops—those were discontinued!), and on, and on, and on. You'll be impressed with the selection. You'll turn the pages and be amazed by the artistic genius of Ned Dameron and Marco Aidala. And you'll find one section particularly astonishing: DaRoni's Workshop (a tribute to the inventions of Leonardo da Vinci), with items available through special order (and your DM's consent) from Aurora's master craftsmen.

You're gonna love it. We already love it. Frankly, we've amazed even ourselves.

Thank you for shopping with *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue*. We hope you enjoy the experience. And please feel free to drop the customer service department a line with your comments! Write to Anne Brown or Robert King at: TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Ω



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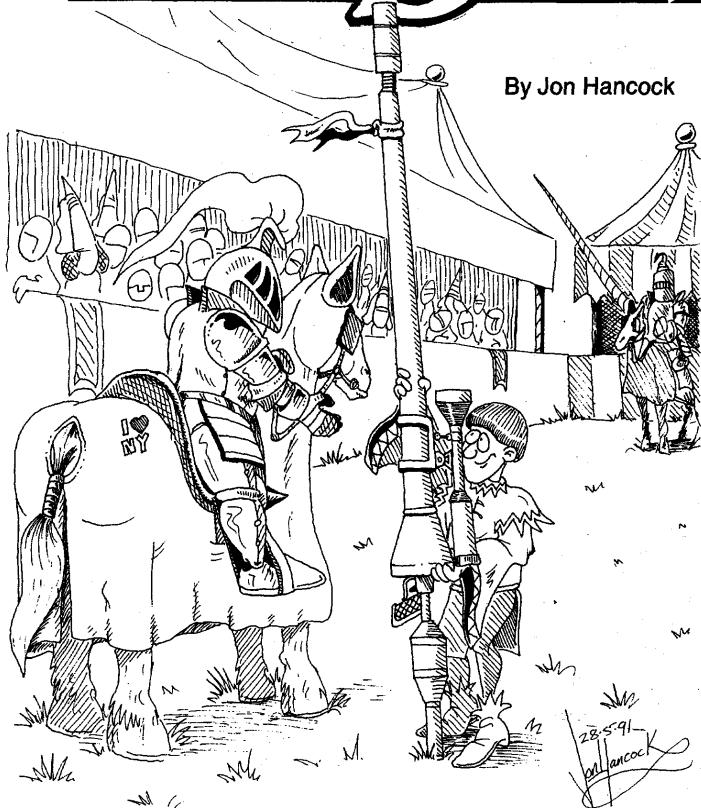
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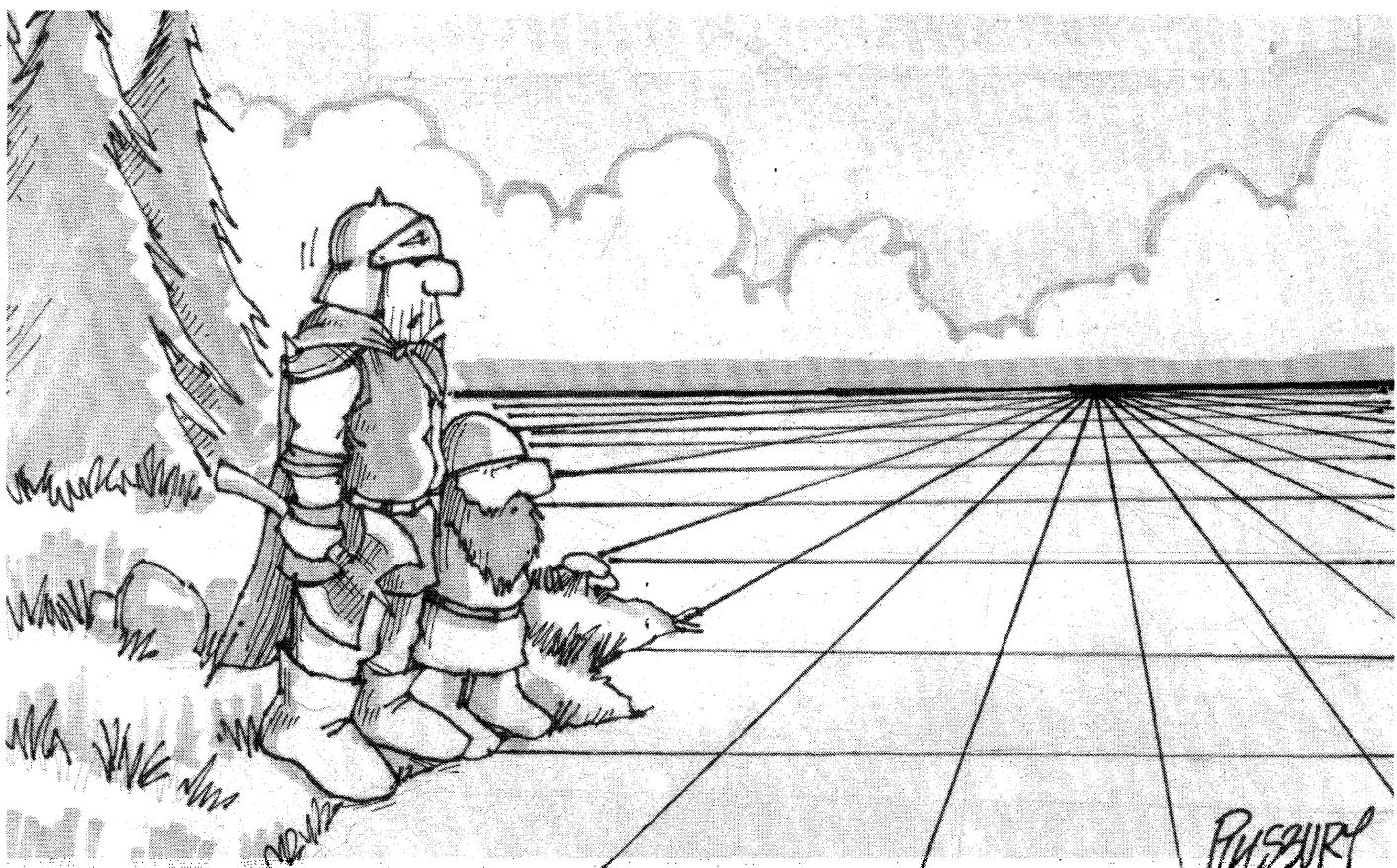


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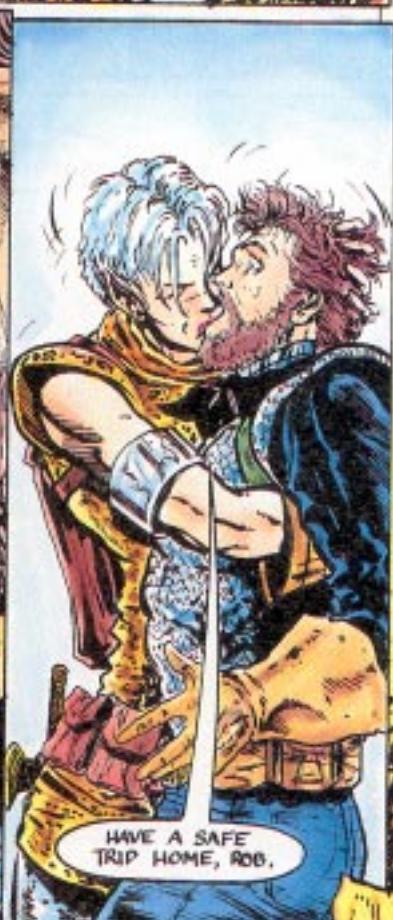
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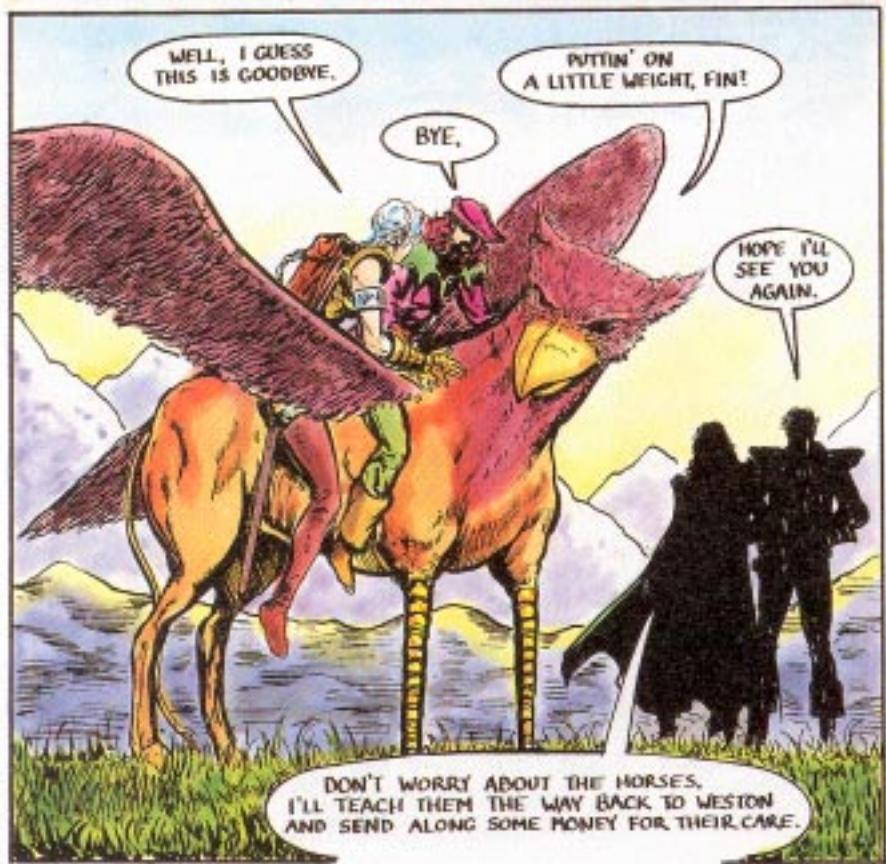
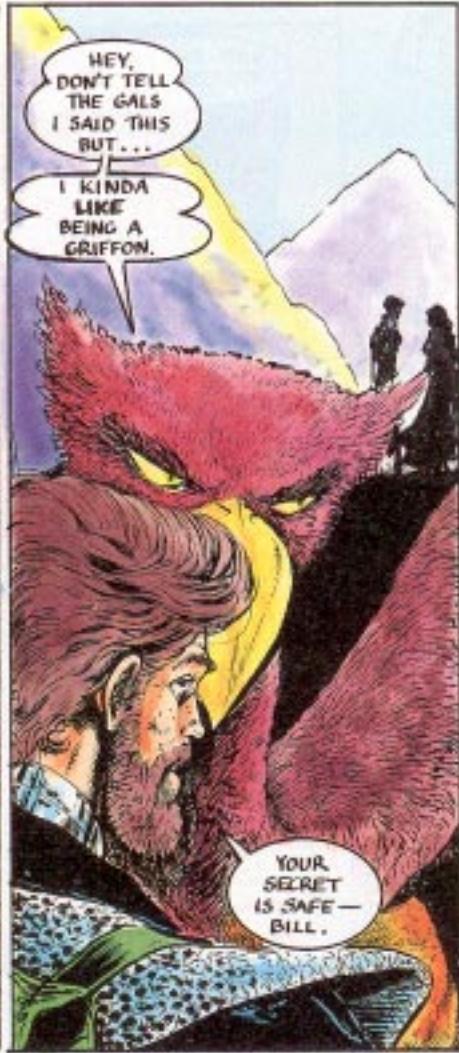
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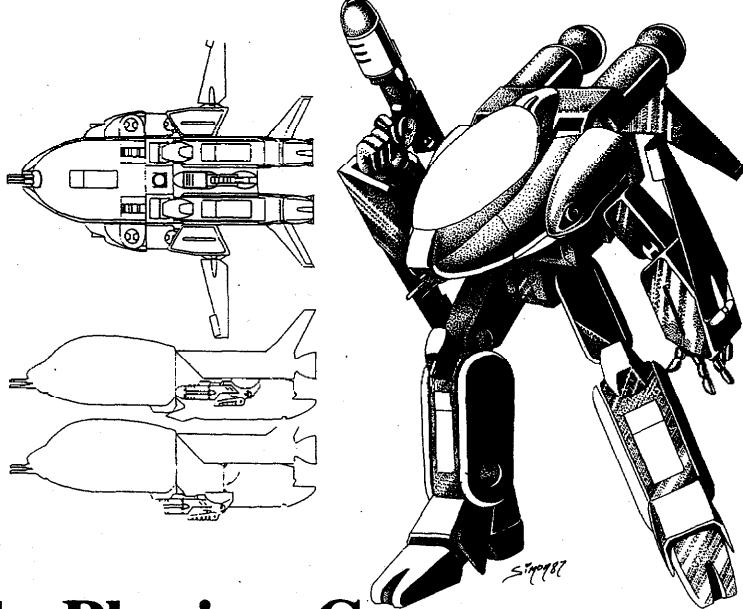
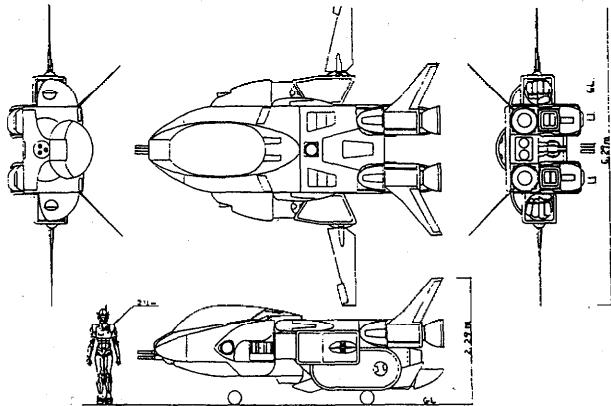
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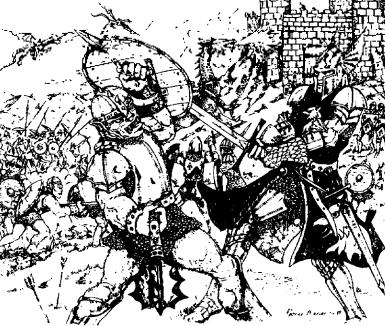
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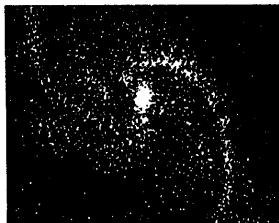
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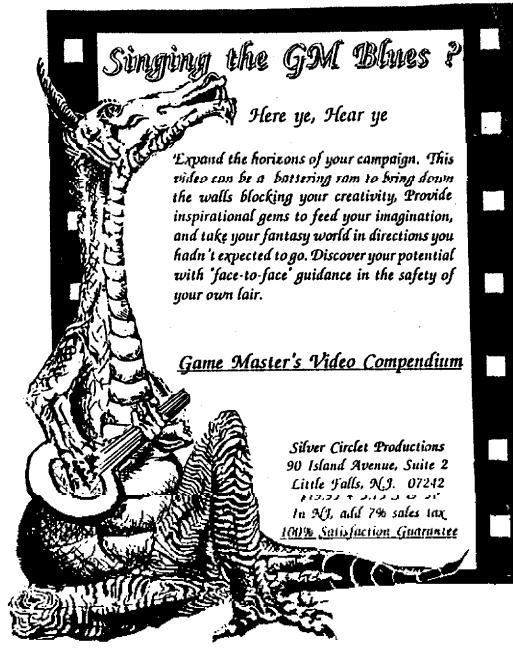
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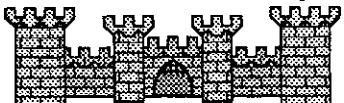
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Through the LOOKING Glass

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Photos by Mike Bethke



Ventauran Star Legion (Stone Mountain)

Is there no-lead gaming in your future?

It's July, and everyone should not only be enjoying the summer sun but should also be well into the summer convention frenzy. The highlight of the convention season will be the 1992 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ Game Fair in Milwaukee, Wis. All genres of miniatures games will be represented there, including science-fiction, fantasy, and historical events. See this issue's "Convention Calendar" for more information.

I also want to remind all American readers to continue writing to your Congressional representative or senator. As of May (when this column was written), the bill to ban lead miniatures is still alive and kicking in our illustrious halls of government. An amendment was added to the Senate version that exempts figures classed as collectibles, but that status is not stable in the House version. Our hobby has been targeted by environmentalists because

they feel our activities are frivolous and that we are a weak-spirited group that will go down without active opposition. An organization of game manufacturers, GAMA, is fighting for our cause. Without frequent, eloquent, and massive backing by letters and calls to our representatives, GAMA may be well viewed as a group representing only the figure-making companies. If we are seen as weak, bill provisions can always be changed to garner the environmental vote in this election year.

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

Our hobby is not the only one being threatened. Passage of this bill would damage, if not mortally wound, the model-railroad industry, which uses lead as weights and detail parts. Another industry that would be hurt is the doll-house industry, in which lead is used for fine-detail miniatures and as stiffeners for food packages. Both of these groups are also arguing strongly for the retention of lead, and these uses for lead should be mentioned in any correspondence you send.

When you write, please be concise, polite, and nonthreatening. If you're not sure how to word the letter, do some research at a public library. Frequently, the library will have information on the correct format for letters and may even have copies of letters written on other subjects as examples.

I appreciate hearing from readers who support my position. A number of calls and letters have attacked my position, however. Here are some of the reasons why I support the defeat of this part of the bill:

1. Lead is one of the mediums used for super-detailing. Because it is liquid when poured into a mold, the medium almost always fills the mold cavity completely. Most lead figures are made out of "soft" lead that allows you to bend and shape the figures to give you unique results. It is also easy to clean and trim lead figures.

2. Lead is a cheap medium. Plastic requires pieces of large, expensive equipment to be made, for it must be molded under pressure. Epoxy is more expensive in the long run as it also needs pressure and frequently has air bubbles.

3. Lead is a convenient medium. Many plastic figures are made of a flexible plastic to which it is almost impossible to get any paint to stick, even with primer; the paint then flakes off when the figure is flexed. The assembly of these figures usually also requires a special, strong-smelling adhesive that is manufactured for use with plastics because of their smooth surfaces.

4. Lead is a natural product, despite some of its bad reputation. It is mined, smelted, then shipped with the slag usable

for fill. Lead is mixed with other natural items to reach the composition needed for miniatures. Lead fumes are given off at all molten stages, but this can be contained by hoods.

Plastic, however, uses a rapidly diminishing resource—oil or an oil byproduct—as a main ingredient. The manufacturing process creates several byproducts that have no real use. The finished product does not hold detail well.

Please write to your representative or senator if you want to keep the present level of quality in our games and miniatures. If you're worried about your exposure to lead, go to the nearest drugstore or surgical supply and pick up a box of thin rubber gloves. These will effectively block your exposure. If you break figures, don't throw them out; use epoxy or super glue and fix them. If you are getting out of miniatures gaming, for whatever reason, do not throw your figures away. Give them to other gamers or to a hobby shop that will find a good home for them with other collectors.

I want to correct something that appeared in DRAGON® issue #181. Stone Mountain Miniatures was listed as the manufacturer of Kryomek figures here in the U.S. Since the review appeared, Kryomek has changed U.S. manufacturers to Grenadier Models. I apologize for any problems this may have caused.

Reviews

Geo-Hex

2126 North Lewis
Portland OR 97227-1790

GSMAT-OX Starscape Mat

Star maps are normally nothing new in SF miniatures gaming. Our hobby club has gone through many paper hex maps with both large and small hexes. The only maps with extended wear were from the old Mayfair interlocking set or Chessex's black vinyl maps. Now a third contender for longevity enters the scene: the Starscape mat from Geo-Hex.

The Starscape mat is 4' × 6' and printed on thick felt, with a slightly rough finish and rough, unfinished edges. Our sample has two irregularities on sides where the cut was slightly off, but this does not detract from the product. The felt is flexible but does retain a slight crease if folded, so I recommend loose folds or rolling this map up.

The map is oversprayed with a number of dots that form the background. These dots represent stars and planets as seen from a spacecraft and are done in five colors; they range in size from 2 mm across down to pencil-lead diameter, varying slightly from circular to almost oval in shape. Nebular dust clouds are present as well. The hexes on this map are outlined by green-gray dots that form the borders of 20-mm hexes, each big enough to hold a

number of different miniature bases. The hexes are not numbered. If you want, you may purchase a map without the hexes,

This map is roughly twice the size of the Chessex mat but has some disadvantages. For one, you cannot plot special movements on the map by marking on the felt. The map is dark enough that soft-drink spills will not be evident, but cleaning this mat might be difficult and must be done carefully; the mat must then be drip-dried rather than wiped off. The felt has good sticking ability when applied to tabletops, however, and it is slightly more cost effective when compared to vinyl.

This mat can be used for ICE's SILENT DEATH® game, Task Force Games's STAR FLEET BATTLES® system, and others. If you want to get maximum use out of this mat, I recommend you get Task Force's Mega Hex packages. The planets and other materials included will enable you to re-create planetary assaults or to use the planets as obstacles. These Starscape mats are recommended even at \$36 each. (Note: The Geo-Hex Starscape mat forms the background to the photos in this month's column.)

Stone Mountain Miniatures

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DSF 210 Ventauran Star

Legion

***** ½

When you play a science-fiction miniatures game, the figures in each particular unit should be dressed in the same uniforms, though having different poses and carrying a variety of weapons. This is done in the Denzien line.

This pack contains four 25-mm-scale lead figures. The figures all have hex-shaped bases, with the kneeling figure's base being slightly elongated. All four wear trouser suits, jointed at the knees and ankles and armored in the front, and gravity boots with thick soles. Each figure's left ankle is wrapped by cloth and supports a holder and two vials.

The upper torso has overlapping sealed plates and armor with flex joints, joint protectors, and pads. Hands are covered by jointed gloves; arms are covered by long, interconnecting strips. The split facial visors each have air-hose connections at the lower front, and each figure has a peg on its back that allows an environmental pack to be glued on. Packs come attached to a separate sprue and must be cleaned and trimmed. Each pack is 5 mm × 8 mm and has a gauge, vent, and bottom air-hose connection that lines up with the air hose molded on all the figures' backs. There was no flash, and mold lines were minimal. Each figure has a different pose with slight alterations.

Figure SF13 has a pistol strapped to his right side and holds a rifle pointed at the ground while advancing forward. The gun is slightly warped and will be difficult to

straighten. A power cord runs from a power pack on his back to the butt of his rifle.

Figure SF16A is kneeling and firing what appears to be an FNL assault rifle with a vented barrel. A small pouch with flap and buttons is supported by a large pack that holds spare clips for his weapon, and it rests on his right side; a monitoring device hangs from his left side.

Figure SF17B is firing a pistol, supporting his right arm with his left hand. He is also armed with a blaster with a scope and a grenade launcher that hangs behind his left shoulder from a strap. His belt supports a large map or instrument pouch and three spare ammo clips. A communicator and laser-sighting bulge is on the right side of his helmet, complete with lenses.

The last figure, SF19A, probably represents an officer. Each leg has a pocket sewn onto the front, and a cartridge clip hangs from his belt. He is firing a large rifle from the shoulder, and a pistol hangs from his right hip.

These are quality figures. The only thing that detracts from them are the weapons, which are warped to join the bodies. These figures can be used with any SF game rules and are recommended at \$6 per pack of four.

Stan Johansen Miniatures

128 Barberton Road
Lake Worth FL 33467

SM019 GEV Missile Tank

***** ½

SM023 Rolling Thunder

***** ½

GEV Artillery

***** ½

One assumes that in the future of warfare, the emphasis in equipment will be on vehicles with good speed, the ability to get where they're needed, and the simplicity to allow for rapid damage repair. There will also be attempts to standardize equipment to cut down on the variety of parts needed. The land vehicles will probably be air-cushion types, as they are among the few sorts to fit all these needs.

These two SF miniature vehicles represent just such units. These vehicles share many similarities. The miniatures are scaled for use with either 20-mm or 25-mm figures and are made of soft lead. Both platforms measure about 92 mm long, 54 mm wide, and 14 mm high. Each vehicle has a rounded front and is relatively straight. The air-cushion effect is contained by a skirt that encircles each vehicle and forms the base for the hull.

Hull detail is good. There is a front hatch for maintenance access or a driver, and machinery bulges on both sides with access panels on top. The rear engine has well-detailed grill work and cooling vents. Maintenance panels include handles that look as if you could actually open them. The rear deck also has several tool and repair boxes attached, and an exhaust system is visible. The sides are solid and



GEV Missile Tank (Stan Johansen)



Rolling Thunder GEV Artillery (Stan Johansen)

flat with ridges. The Rolling Thunder artillery vehicle has a small dent midway along the right side that may be a slight mold bulge, but it looks like it could be normal wear-and-tear or battle damage. A mold line was on each skirt and there was considerable flash, but cleanup went well. You may want to deepen some of the skirt-division points to improve the detail.

Both vehicles have the same two-man crew, and this is a weak point. The figures are about 22 mm scale and are molded in spacesuits. Each is armed with a machine gun on a strap across his back and shoulder. Each gun requires some work with putty and detailing to be fully presentable.

The figures are also armed with pistols and knives. The spacesuits appear to be unarmored and smooth, with slight indentations at the joints. Environmental packs are well detailed, but the end lines are blurred. Communications units are built into the helmets. The commander figure has a binocular case on his chest and holds a remote control panel that is very well done; he also carries a large reload. Both figures had flash that filled the space between their legs, but this cleaned up easily. Other flash was present and required more careful work.

The Missile Tank turret consists of a circular, grated launch platform that

serves as the support for a battery of six large missiles encased in firing jackets; the wiring needed for power is molded on. Some light flash is on the nose cones, but assembly of the three-piece unit is easy. This is a good support unit.

The Rolling Thunder piece consists of the same ridged work surface as on the missile launcher, but also includes two side pieces that serve as the gun support. These pieces were free of flash and fit into their pegs well. Be sure to fit the gun in place before you glue down the side walls, I also recommend that, after the unit has dried slightly, you take your fingers and gently crimp the side walls in the front. This crimping supports the gun in a horizontal position instead of allowing it to droop. The barrel for the gun is large and has a slight mold line that needs to be trimmed. The barrel is also topped by a large propellant tank. The bottom of this tank must be cleaned up and filed level before assembly. This tank lends itself to a variety of modifications. With the addition of a gun shield to protect the crew and a couple of curved magazines, you could easily change this vehicle into a tank destroyer.

Work is needed to get these vehicles into top shape, but at \$10 each, they are a real bargain compared with other units.

Game Designers' Workshop

P.O. Box 1646
Bloomington IL 61702-1646

GDW-1842 Legions of Mars

****½

This set contains 21 separate lead castings made for GDW's SPACE: 1889* game by RAFM figure company. The figures are scaled in 25 mm and are 28 mm high (this height is consistent with the taller stature of the game's Martians). The set represents a company of Martians that could be one-half to one-sixth of a Martian legion, not counting artillery or mercenaries. Ten types of castings are offered, coming in several poses with different equipment. All share similar bases, being roughly oval and slightly textured. All Martian figures share the same sharp facial features (they remind me of sea elves with finlike ears, high cheek bones, and upswept noses). All look poised for battle.

A mounted officer, equal to a major, leads the unit. He wears a metal shoulder guard and breastplate over joined bands of leather. Well-muscled legs are exposed, guarded from the knees down by shin pads and with moccasins on the feet. His arms are covered by a jointed and flexible banded suit of armor, with the right hand signaling a stop while the left clutches a sword. The helmet leaves much of his face open, but a nose guard is present; two feathers jut from the top of the helm.

The gashant (the officer's mount) is equivalent to a horse and looks like a cross between a small dinosaur and a large bird. The beast stands just under 40 mm tall, not including the base. This animal has



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only stubs for hands, and its sharp beak is bridled by a well-detailed strap leading to a simple saddle and tack. A set of plates protects its head. A scabbard for the officer's sword is on the right, and a pistol in its case is on the left. The beast has a large tail with a spinal ridge that included flash that obscured part of the saddle. This flash had to be removed, as did mold lines on the right side of the nose. This figure will take a little time to clean up fully.

Figure #3 is an officer with sword and pistol, leading the "cutters," or edged-weapon part of the company. His bare arms are well muscled but suffer from a mold line that must be trimmed. The tight pants have a bell-bottom look; bare feet are visible. His hands are covered by flared gauntlets. The chest, back, and groin are covered by a quilted vest with overlapping straps and a buckle. The helmet has a ridged crest, and a feather adorns the top. This figure is yelling to encourage his men onward.

Figure #4 is an officer with a musket who leads the group's "shooters." He wears a loose-fitting tunic secured by a belt and groin protector. The legs and feet are bare except for a pair of high, fold-over leggings. The arms and hands are bare, and muscle detail is very good. A musket like a flintlock is in his left hand, and he is gesturing his troops forward. His hair is cut in Mohawk fashion. A sword is sheathed across his back. Only a powder horn and a shot holder adorn his belt. The only problem with this figure is a mold line on the leg muscles.

Figure #5 is a legionnaire with a shield gun. This figure closely resembles a fully armored medieval knight holding a cutoff musket firing through a shield. The shield

is a bowl-like contrivance of riveted plate, with the musket sticking out the middle and a view slot at the top of the shield. The arm that holds the shield up by means of straps also supports the musket. The figure wears a sheathed sword, a powder horn, a ball pouch on the belt, and a large shoulder protector. The upper body appears to be uncovered from waist to shoulder protector. The helmet is topped by a group of feathers, and frontal leg armor has some engraving on it.

Figure #6 is a legionnaire advancing with a flintlock-style musket. This figure has bare arms, and legs with high boots. His chest and back are protected by laminated armor; a studded and fringed chest strap supports a sword, powder horn, and shot bag on his right hip. His hair is braided down his back. The figure wears an undecorated helmet with cheek guards.

Figure #7 is a legionnaire firing a musket. This figure wears a reinforced fabric secured by studs and cinched by a belt that supports a loincloth. The figure is set as if to fire his musket; a powder horn is in easy reach. Knee protectors, open-toed boots, and a ridged helmet with noseguard complete the garb.

Figure #8 is a legionnaire holding a large halberd with an ornate multispiked head. The figure wears nothing on his legs, feet, arms, or hands; a stiff shell and shoulder protector provide cover for the torso, while a loincloth and sword hang from the belt. An ornate, leaf-shaped shield is supported by ornate straps on the left arm. A vision hole is at the top of his shield, allowing him to see his enemies even while blocking. His head is protected by a helmet with large spines that can be used as a weapon in close combat simply by head butting.

Figure #9 is a legionnaire advancing with a spear. He wears no extra armor on his arms, hands, or head, and a long Mohawk drops down his back. Quilted armor protects his chest and back. A wide belt with a knife in the small of his back cinches the uniform. High boots with open toes protect the feet. His primary weapon seems to be a spear with a wide pikelike head and a braid at the bottom that can be used for a slashing attack. The metal on this figure was grainy, but no flash or mold lines obstruct or detract from the figure's detail.

Figure #10 is a lightly armored legionnaire with a great sword. A breastplate covers his front torso and extends to great flared shoulder protectors in the front and the lower part of his back. The arms and hands are encased in flexible armor. His head is protected by a high, ridged helmet decorated by a feather. The sword is slightly engraved.

Though this set is designed specifically for the SPACE: 1889 game, several figures could be used for AD&D® games as aquatic elves or a new race. This set is recommended at \$25.

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HC 5/1 Saurian Troops

* * * * ½

The Saurian pack from Folio Works is a new entry in the "enemies we love to hate" category. Lizards have always held a certain edge in that field. The package contains two 25-mm-scale lead miniatures of what appear to be crocodiles in space suits. At first glance, the figures appear to be almost identical. Close examination, however, reveals a number of differences.

Both figures are approximately 30 mm tall. Their uniforms consist of flexible armored boots and suit limbs, with torsos covered by hard shell suits complete with shoulder pads; hard helmets adorn their heads. In both cases, the snouts extend out from the helmets. Each alien has its arms in a position to fire a rifle. Here is where the similarities end.

One figure has its tail up, while the other's is wrapped around his leg. One has his jaws tightly closed, while the other has his open. One has a soft pilot-style hat on with a visor, while the other has no head gear. One has a water bottle, spare ammo clips, and is slightly more hunched over; the other has a map case and ammo packs.

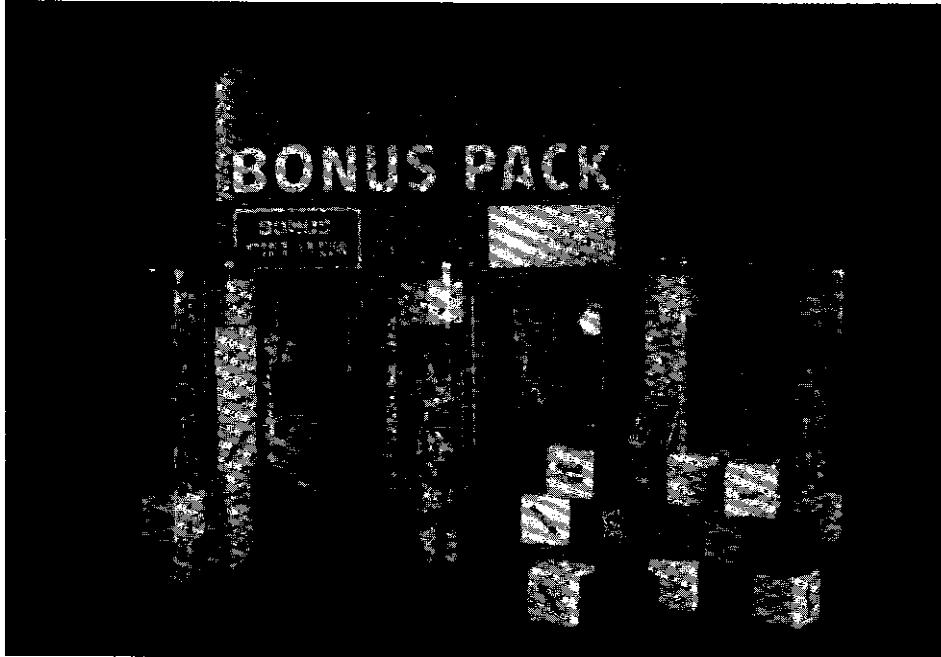
Several of these figures could form the core of a group of Chaos creatures for Games Workshop's WARHAMMER 40,000® game or would fit in well with any number of other SF rule sets. These are menacing figures, and after you add the weapons that are included they appear even more fearsome. There was no flash on either



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Saurian Troops (Folio Works)

figure and only minimal mold lines. These are recommended but are slightly expensive at \$6.50 per pack of two.

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RP 10-843 Assault Omni 'Mechs * * * *

Omni 'Mechs are crucial to the success of the Clans in their drive to conquer the Inner Sphere in the BATTLETECH® universe. The 'Mechs reviewed here are designed to break through defenses. Before we start, I want to thank Chris Osbourne for his able work in painting these 'Mechs to represent those of the Wolf Clan.

These 'Mechs share several common points. All are made of lead and close to 7-mm scale. All units are multipiece kits, and a hex base is provided for each 'Mech. We also found several quality-control problems that we will cover as we look over these figures. We'll take them in the order they appear in the Tech Manual 3050: *The Return of Kerensky*, from FASA Corporation (here abbreviated as TM3050).

The first of our 'Mechs will be the Man of War (TM3050, pages 36-37), an 80-ton 'Mech most common to the Wolf Clan. The miniature is 47 mm tall, 31 mm across the shoulders, and 15 mm thick. The kit comes in four pieces, including base. Our sample came with two left arms, which was rectified by a trip to our parts box. The model closely resembles the TM3050 illustration except for small differences in the foot and pelvic areas. Detail is good, but there was some flash along the legs and head.

The Masakari (TM3050, pages 38-39) is a six-piece kit. The pieces fit together well, but many areas of flash existed on this

'Mech. This is not a heavy-use model, as the guns are especially easy to bend or warp with handling. The miniature is 43 mm tall, 27 mm deep, and 25 mm across the shoulders even slightly hunched. The miniature matches the TM3050 illustration almost perfectly, with all details in the right spot. Problems with this figure included the foot pegs, which were too big and needed to be trimmed, and the fact that the feet did not fit into the base. This 'Mech is used most frequently by the Smoke Jaguars.

The Gladiator (TM3050, pages 40-41) is favored mostly by the Ghost Bears. The miniature is a six-piece unit that had little flash and fit together well. It is 49.5 mm tall, 33 mm across the shoulders, and 18 mm deep, narrow when compared with the other 'Mechs. The 'Mech matches its book illustration closely, but examination shows differences in the hand (only four fingers appear instead of five in the book), the right shoulder (which is molded close to the right arm instead of being separated from it), and some of the lines.

The Daishi (TM3050, pages 42-43) is the 'Mech of choice for the Smoke Jaguars. The miniature is 40 mm high, 33 mm wide, 30 mm deep, and looks like a house on legs. The figure is an eight-piece kit that had a lot of problems. Flash was present on several pieces, and we were again given two left arms. The pegs on the bottom were too big to fit into the holes in the base, and the piece barely lined up with the base slots. The figure is, however, almost an exact match with the book's illustration.

The kits are worth the effort put into them, but I question the logic behind Ral Partha's packaging. In this set's present configuration, you'll have to buy several boxes to put together a unit for the clan of your choice. These are still recommended at \$23 per box of four 'Mechs.

If you need to reach me, you can do so at this address and phone number: Robert Bigelow, c/o Friend's Hobby Shop, 1411

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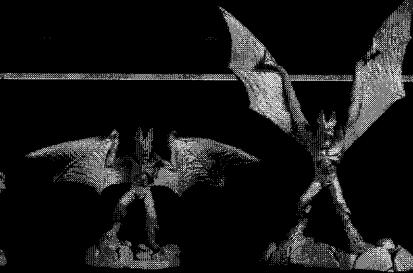
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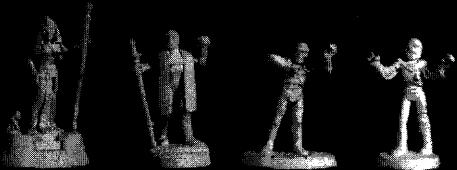
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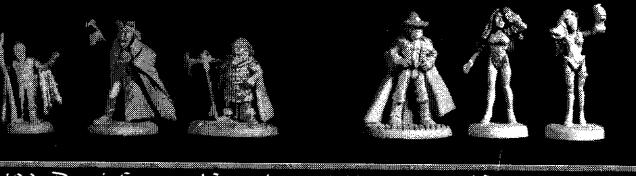
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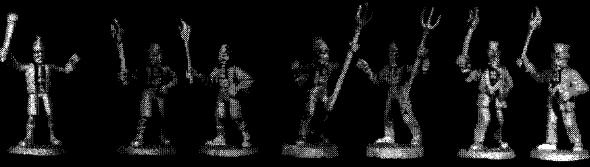
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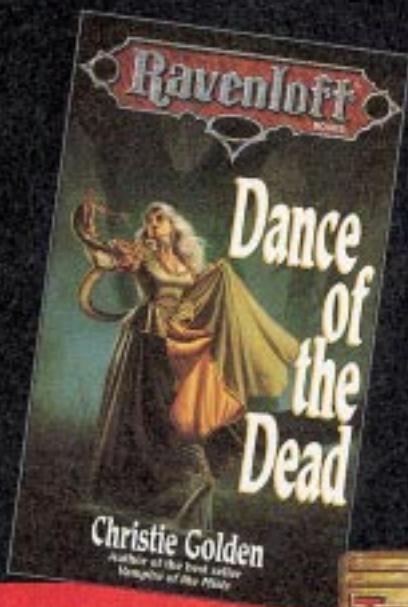
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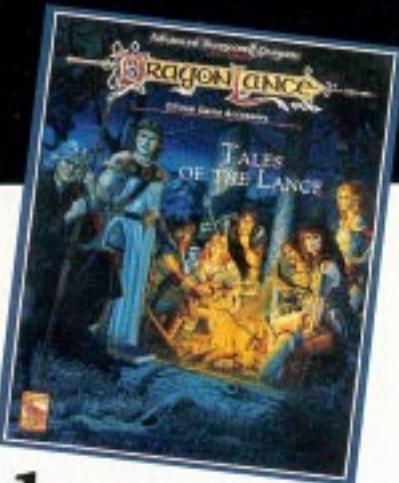
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