

239

True and Dirty Tricks

# DRAGON® MAGAZINE

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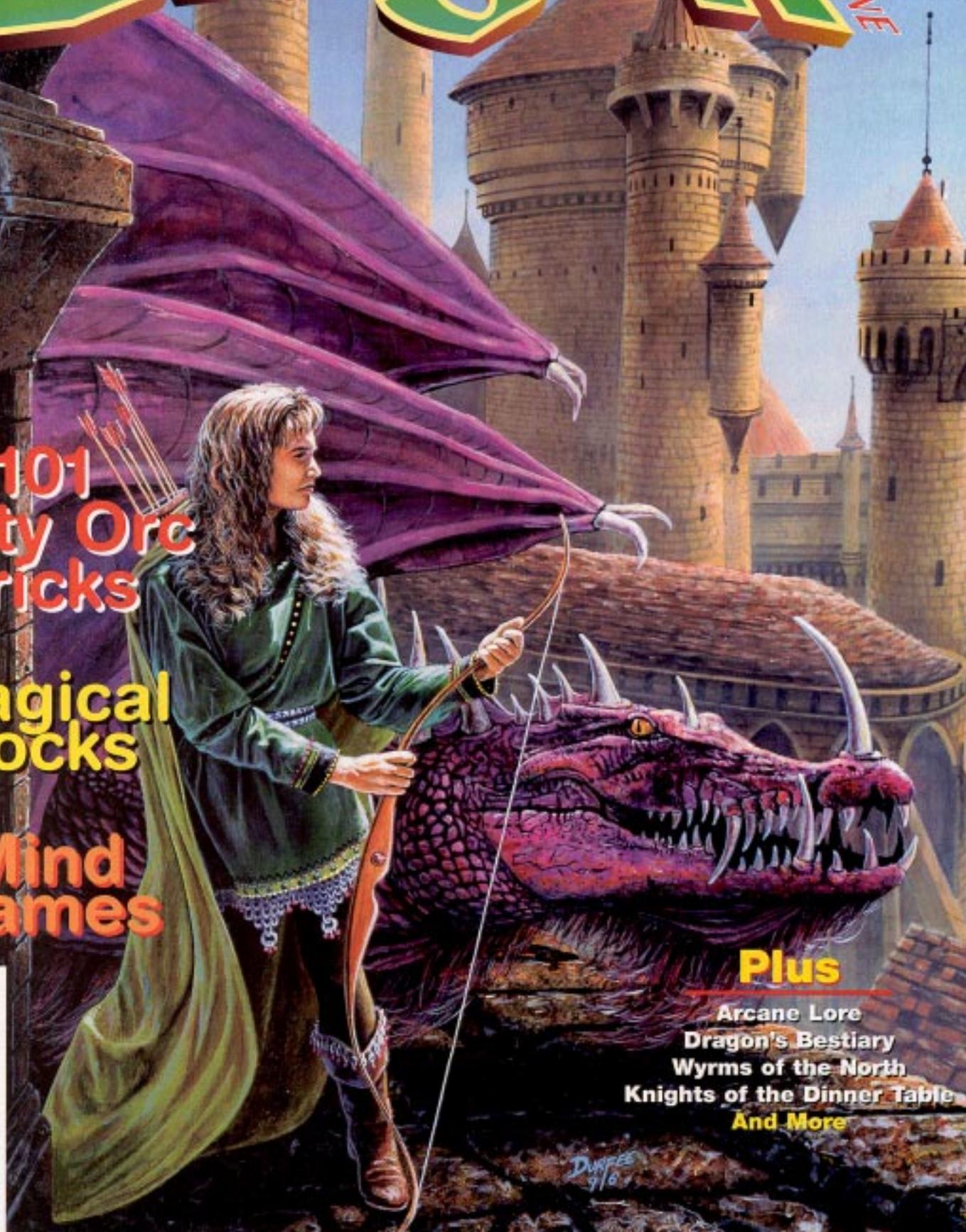
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## Carpe DM

**S**eize him!" they cried. I barely made it out of the room alive. Sometimes it's dangerous to mess with the players, even if it's only a little trick.

Ed Carmien describes them in much better detail in this issue's installment of "Dungeon Mastery," but what DM doesn't love to sit around talking about the sneaky, unfair, and downright dirty little tricks he's pulled on his players? Of course, you can't boast about them to the players, since they seem to lack the gene that makes such anecdotes amusing to those of us who run the games. Even the gentlest reminder of a past trick can transform the best of player-DM friendships into something more akin to the loving relationship between James Kirk and Khan Noonien Singh.

Of course, nothing in the world is so powerful as the urge to tell stories about your players falling for the simplest of tricks and traps. Those DMs who live to tell the tale all have their favorites. I have two.

Now, I hate illusion magic. Sure, it's fun, and no campaign seems quite right without at least one dastardly illusionist subtly misdirecting the heroes from time to time. But then some clown will argue that if an illusory *lightning bolt* spell deals damage to him when he fails to disbelieve it, then that illusory bridge sure ought to work for his stupid half-ogre companion who mistook the mayor's prized pig for the kidnapped prince last week. Then you bring out the *Player's Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, and you go over it all yet again.

Still, when my PCs had finally tracked down their adversary, that aforementioned illusionist, he cast an illusory fireball down the tunnel at them. "Disbelieve!" cried the paladin. "Everybody disbelieve!" And so they stood there, bracing themselves against the imaginary flames. Some of them even made their saves right away, and they automatically succeeded in disbelieving the second bogus fireball to come roaring down the passage. And so they stood there bravely, grinning into the darkness of the long tunnel as the false firelight dwindled, daring the illusionist to cast another.

Then his buddy the invoker cast a real fireball down the tunnel, and none of the PCs tried to get out of the way.

OK, so that was pretty basic, but I think the best tricks are. (Rolling back out of the window by the gaming table and landing on my feet was a pretty simple trick, too, when the alternative was to drown in a sea of thrown soft drinks.)

My other favorite dirty trick was also elementary. Of course, that's why they all fell for it.

Except for mind flayers (ugh!), beholders had become the most feared monster in the campaign at one point. The players didn't really think I'd throw one of those at them, since they were still low-to-mid-level. After the *fireball* trick, though, they weren't taking any chances. They had already planned their tactics for assaulting a beholder should I become particularly ornery one session.

"The paladin and ranger move to opposite sides, while the wizard casts a *phantasmal force* of himself flying above the thing. Meanwhile, the thieves slip underneath using *Hide in Shadows* and *Move Silently* to get a backstab on the big eye's blind spot."

Not a bad plan, of course. The PCs had already fallen for the gas spore trick once before, so they waited until the beholder they'd encountered turned around and spoke to them before launching their attack with all the speed and precision of a Navy SEAL assault unit.

Of course, they never stopped to think that a wizard might cast a *magic mouth* spell on the local gas spore. Poof!

I wasn't so quick to escape that day, but I reckon that walking with a limp for the rest of my days is still a small price to pay for fooling them again. But then, I'm a DM.

Dave Gross

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# Dragon®

## Traps & Dirty Tricks

September 1997  
Volume XXII, No. 2  
Issue #239

### Sneaky Devils

**Skip Williams**

*Nefarious tricks of the ocean's most vile predators.*

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### 101 Dirty Orc Tricks

**John Baichtal**

*Boring orcs? Here's how to liven any encounter with humanoid opponents*

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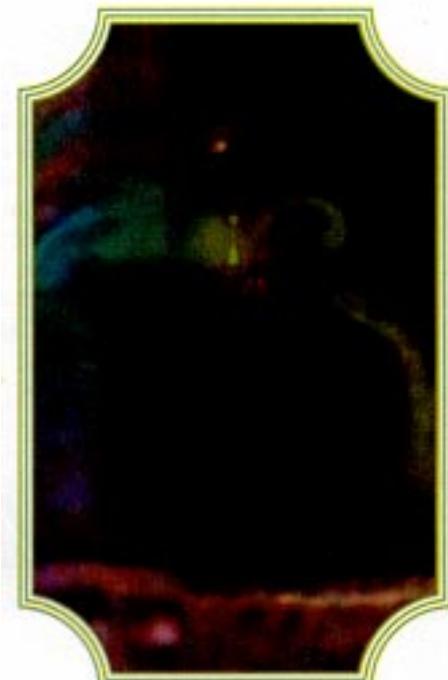


### Aurora's Undermountain Sale

**Paul F. Culotta**

*No underground explorer should be without a few tricks of his own.*

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**Robert S. Mullin and Charles M. Andrulis**

*Keep your treasure safe from lockpicks and knock spells*

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### A Saga of Your Own!

**Stephen Kenson**

*Love the SAGA™ system but want to play Drizzt? No problem!*

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*Bloodthirsty little horrors.*

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Brian Corvello

*Four tricky little fellows.*

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Jeff Dancey

*New spells for the criminally inclined.*

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### Dungeon Mastery: Mind Games

Ed Carmien

*How to trick your players into having more fun.*

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### And a Ship to Sail

Chris Pierson

*Adventure comes with a most unusual request in this sea-side tale of magic and romance.*





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

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## Welcome Back

I was shocked to have finally received issue #237 about 6 months after the last one . . . and I was very glad to see it. I had managed to receive my first subscribed issue in October. The first things I read are "Floyd," "Knights of the Dinner Table," and "Sage Advice." I think many fans will find issue #237's "Knights of the Dinner Table" strip very appropriate for the magazine's disappearance and reinstatement.

Thank you for returning, and welcome back!

Kendra McEvoy  
Topeka, KS

## Dungeon Mastery

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

I would like to comment on the "Dungeon Mastery" article in DRAGON

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Magazine issue #235. I found this article extremely helpful, since I could identify with almost all the examples given. The problems I have experienced with players similar to the examples given in the article discouraged me, but after reading it I feel like I have the answers I needed and a new hope for those players that can't seem to keep their mind on the game. Are there going to be more "Dungeon Mastery" articles?

I would also like to share a technique that I use with players. I found it irritating that when I told one player an observation his character made, all the other players heard and would know about the pit trap or about the person following the group, etc. So I started writing the information a certain character noticed that the rest of the group didn't on note cards.

I would slide the card over to the player and it would be his choice whether his character alerted the others. I don't know whether other people had the same problem, but I hope they find this tip useful.

I like what you've done with the magazine, but I have to agree with Frank V. Bonura's letter in issue #235 about the articles on card and dice games. However, I strongly disagree with his opinion about the AD&D® game being played only by adults and that only adults "have the real money to invest in gaming."

Paul A. Swanson  
Address withheld

"Dungeon Mastery" has been one of our many "rotating" departments, appearing whenever we find an impressive article. Fortunately, you can expect several more in the upcoming months, along with a new monthly column of interest to fans of "Dungeon Mastery" starting in early 1998.

## A Break from Roleplaying

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

I'm writing part of this in response to the letter from Frank Bonura. I'm 21, and someone somewhere decided that at that age I'm an adult. Mr. Bonura suggests that the AD&D game is played by adults—and it is, though not exclu-

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sively. I've been playing role-playing games since I was 12. When I was 16, I spent most of the money I got that Christmas to buy the 2nd edition AD&D rule books and numerous expansion sets and PHBRs. I love roleplaying, and at times I've spent hours tweaking a trap or getting to know an NPC inside and out. But after playing once a week for weeks on end, even the most die-hard roleplayer gets bored. And so we put down our DUNGEON MASTER® Guides (blasphemy!) and Player's Handbooks (heresy!) and pick up our SPELLFIRE® decks or DRAGON DICE® collections or, on occasion, an old-fashioned board game, and we viciously (in good fun) tear each other to pieces. Perhaps Mr. Bonura would do well to pick up the DRAGON DICE game and feel the joy at tearing apart his opponent's lava elf army with his trusty dwarves. DRAGON Magazine is for gamers, not just roleplayers, and I hope it remains so.

Alex Lohre  
Golden Valley, AZ

## Dicey Questions

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

I want to ask you about the DRAGON DICE game. I have been playing for over a year now and have introduced several of my friends to the game. We all like playing, but it gets frustrating when I read about these suggested armies in your articles only to find that I have no trolls, only one gargoyle (needing two), and only a few other monsters. I understand that part of the interest in this type of game is the collecting and trading of dice, but it isn't easy to find people to trade with. Is there some type of forum through which DRAGON DICE players can chat or meet to trade? Also, the way that the packs are set up now, the only way to get monsters of the first four races is to buy the "grab bag" assortment of a kicker pack 1. This is very frustrating for those of us on limited funds.

Please don't get me wrong, I have over 500 dice at present and am still adding. But I am tired of finding the same monsters over and over again. Is

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there a rarity for the different monsters? Could we find out what that rarity is?

With all of the special dice that have been released (Dragon Champions, Dragon Lords, etc.), is there a listing of these somewhere? I traded for a king's die—a purple one with gold icons. What are the exact properties of it? Is there a future article planned to cover these specials, or are we on our own?

Dori Hein's article in issue #233 refers to 'complete set' of each race. With five types of units per race at three rarities per type with five sides each—not counting ID icons—this gives 75 sides, plus nine sides per monster x four monster types for 36 sides, for a grand total of 111 sides per race. The article mentions 173-180 sides, depending on the race.

Is it just me, or are others confused as well?

I am trying to go through all of my back issues to gather up all of the DRAGON DICE articles: is there an index available?

Also, is there a web site for TSR products for those of us who choose not to use AOL? I have been trying to find one, but without success.

Keep up the good work. I look forward to receiving my next 30 issues.

**Kent L. Hawks**  
Minneapolis, MN

*DRAGON DICE game guru David Eckelberry tells us that all of your questions—and many more—are answered by the Dice Commander's Manual, an upcoming handbook that covers rules, game variants, and strategy tips for all DRAGON DICE players. While you're waiting to pick up that resource, he offers the following summary of the Kings' Die rules.*

*"This limited-edition promotional die counts as a 4-health unit in your army. Place the Kings' Die in reserves during setup. If you have any units in reserve at the start of any turn, roll the Kings Die. If a king comes up, promote any reserve units of the race indicated by the Kings' Die. Trade each unit in reserve for a dead unit of the same race worth 1 more health. If the TSR logo is rolled, choose any one race for promotion."*

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### More of the Same

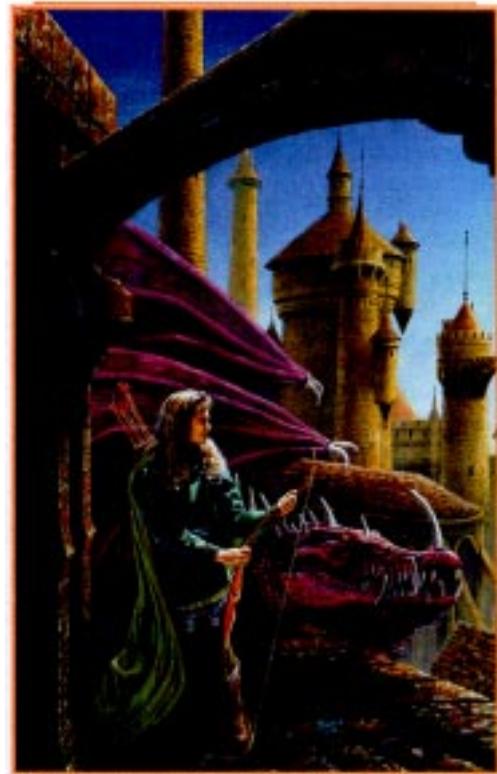
Dear DRAGON Magazine,

After a year of reading the "new and improved" DRAGON Magazine, I have to say that I'm impressed. All the staff responsible have done an outstanding job, and I can easily say that I enjoy the magazine 100% more than before. Articles such as "Campaign Classics," "Rogue's Gallery," and "Wyrm of the North" have been of special interest to me and have helped me improve my campaign overall.

In future issues I'd like to see more campaign-specific articles like "Wyrm of the North" and "Greyhawk Grimoires" (as a long-time fan of both of those worlds). In articles like "Rogue's Gallery," seeing the statistics and information on the characters that the staff at TSR play would be pretty interesting, while maybe even seeing similar results with older, established characters (like Rufus and Burne from the "Village of Hommlet," for example). The cartoons and comic strips are still satisfying, although I personally have a lack of interest in articles about DRAGON DICE and SPELLFIRE cards.

**John L. Combs**  
Mena, AR

*"Wyrm of the North" remains one of the most popular departments among those sending us mail, and we've seen great feedback on the GREYHAWK setting articles we ran in 1996, so you can bet you'll see more of both, and soon.*



### On the Cover

If you made it to the art show during the GEN CON® Game Fair '96, chances are you saw the original painting featured this month on the cover. Regular readers are not unfamiliar with the work of Brian Durfee. Although this marks Brian's first appearance on our cover, his work has appeared regularly on our interior pages over the last few years.

One of the great benefits of the art show is that I get a chance to meet artists that otherwise I communicate with only over the phone or through the mail. Meeting Brian was one of those occasions. That I also found a cover image only made it better.

### We've Moved!

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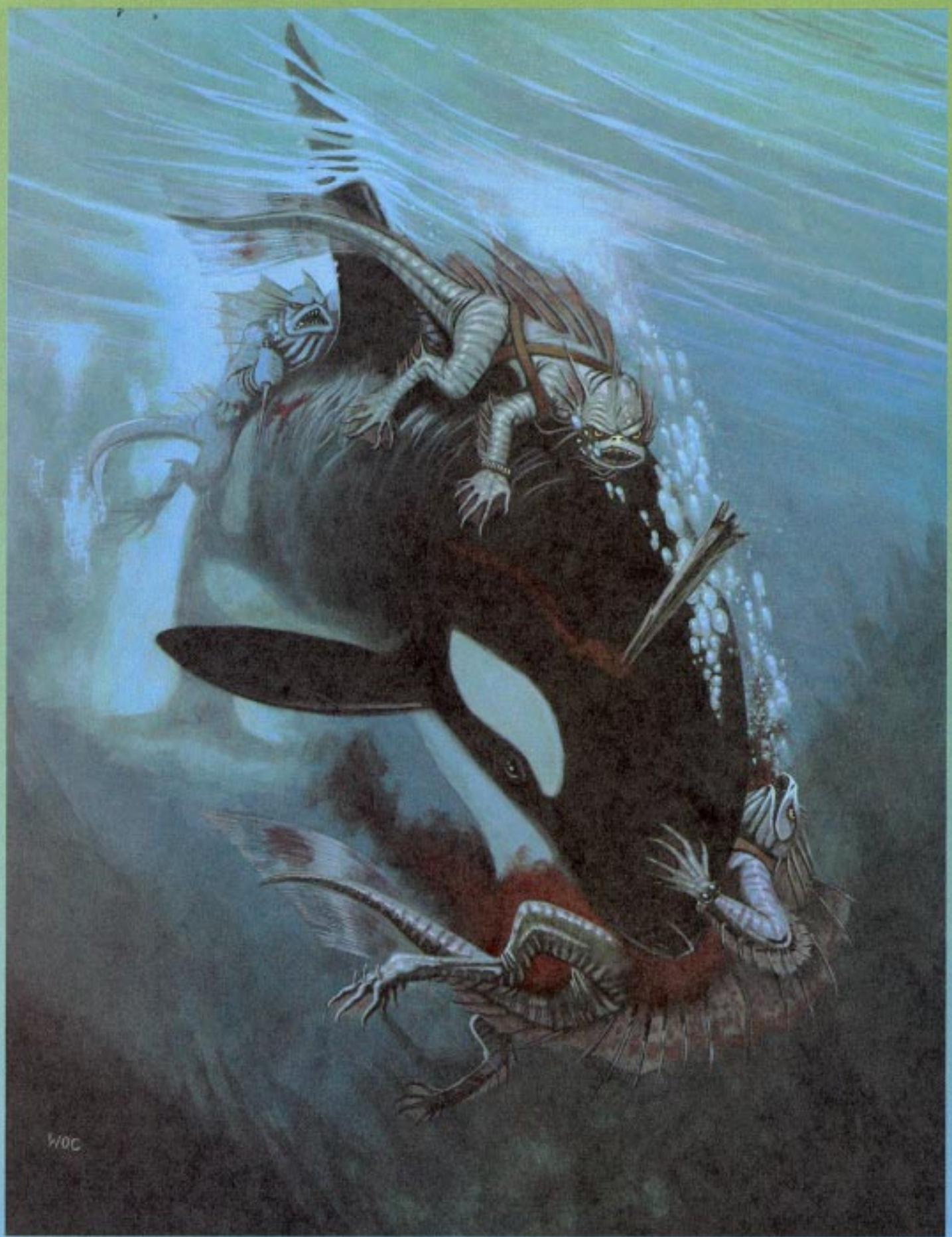
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## More Sahuagin Secrets Revealed

by Skip Williams

color illustration by William O'Connor

black & white illustrations by Arnie Swekel

**T**he Sea Devils, a 96-page book of lore and game information on the mysterious sahuagin, made its debut last month. Upon reading the manuscript, editor Keith Strohm exclaimed: "Boy, I sure wouldn't want to meet these guys."

In writing the book, I tried to make it a rigorous study of the sahuagin, exploring and developing all the powers attributed to the sea devils in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome. The book also includes a similar treatment of sahuagin culture. Inevitably, deadlines and page counts forced an end to the project, leaving several ideas undeveloped. These I present here. (Sorry, Keith).

### Sahuagin Technology

The sea devils possess almost 20% more brain power than do humans, and they have discovered numerous ways to overcome the difficulties of life under the sea. The sahuagin make new discoveries all the time. The items described below have recently appeared in the sahuagin's arsenal, though they remain fairly rare.

### Eye Protectors

To protect their eyes against the ravages of bright light, many sahuagin don masks fitted with lenses fashioned from transparent crystal and treated with a photosensitive gel. The sahuagin weave the masks from seaweed fibers and sinew (the same mate-

rials that comprise their nets). Each mask sports four cords trailing from its corners. A sahuagin donning a mask loops two of the cords over its anterior fins and ties the remaining pair under its chin.

When exposed to strong light, the gel on the lenses quickly darkens. Anyone fitted with a pair of these goggles gains a +4 saving throw bonus vs. light-based attacks. (Sahuagin normally suffer a -2 penalty vs. such attacks.) Further, sahuagin wearing these masks do not suffer temporary blindness when exposed to magical light and can function on the surface in full daylight without impediment.

One coating of the photosensitive gel lasts about two hours. Once the gel darkens, it stays that way. If necessary, a sahuagin can wipe off the darkened gel and apply a new coating. Sahuagin females make the gel from the bodies of octopi and other sea creatures that possess protective coloration. The gel-making process is fairly time consuming and difficult, and only sahuagin nobles and their subordinates enjoy its benefit. The gel usually comes packed in small shells that hold enough for four applications. The gel works equally well when applied to normal goggles or spectacles, though surface dwellers have a hard time focusing through it (the wearer sees as though walking through light rain or fog; see chapter 13 in the *Player's Handbook* for details.). A full shell would bring 200-600 gp if sold.



## Sahuagin Armor

Though unarmored sahuagin enjoy a reasonable level of resistance to physical harm, the sea devils occasionally find some additional protection desirable. The basic form of sahuagin armor is a sharkskin suit that covers the sea devil's neck, torso, upper arms, and thighs. Slits in the suit allow the wearer's fins to protrude. Straps at the neck, waist and thighs hold the suit in place. The basic suit does not improve the sea devil's Armor Class, but the process used to cure the sharkskin makes the hide resistant to fire and fresh water. A sahuagin wearing the suit gains a +2 saving throw bonus vs. fire attacks (instead of the usual -2 penalty) and suffers no additional damage from magical fire (instead of the usual +1 point of damage per die). In addition, the sea devil can endure exposure to fresh water for up to an hour before it must make a saving throw to see if the irritation forces it to retreat (see *The Sea Devils*, page 37). Sudden exposure to fresh water still has the normal effects. Because of its resistance to liquids, the suit also grants a +2 saving throw bonus against acid attacks.

The sea devils also construct heavier suits of the same basic design, but reinforced with plates of coral and shell. Such suits have all the protective qualities noted above, and grant the sahuagin wearing it an Armor Class of 3. The suit's weight and bulk, however, slow the sea devil's movement rate by one third (to MV 8, Swim 16).

The ultimate form of sahuagin armor features a basic suit reinforced with several layers of hardened bronze plates and a sort of half helmet made from bronze or a large shell. This suit grants the sea devil wearing it an Armor Class of 0. The suit slows the sahuagin's movement rate by half (MV 6, Swim 12). However, the helmet is fitted with eye protection as noted above. The suit also grants the wearer complete immunity to fresh water. The suit contains a water-retaining layer that provides a +4 saving throw bonus against fire attacks and reduces damage from such attacks by half. A sahuagin wearing the suit can function on the surface for eight hours instead of the usual four.

Sahuagin armor will not fit any other creature. The heavier versions prove much too complicated to survive attempts at alteration. However, a leather worker could merge two basic suits into a garment that another



humanoid could wear. A character wearing such a suit gains a +2 saving throw bonus vs. fire or acid attacks. The suit is non-bulky and weighs about 8 lbs. Only characters normally allowed leather armor can wear them. Unlike other protective gear, the altered suit can be worn under other types of armor.

### Sekolah's Fire

The sahuagin developed this unearthly substance for use against scrags (marine trolls). An oily jelly with a pungent, fishy odor, Sekolah's fire seems more like some unwholesome condiment that the deadly weapon it is. Upon contact with water (fresh or salt) the jelly ignites, burning with a ruddy glow. When completely immersed in water, the substance burns even more furiously, creating a seething mass of flame and steam that parboils anything in it. Worse, the flaming jelly tends to cling to any creature it contacts; opponents struck by Sekolah's fire cannot escape its flames even when they leave the affected area. By some trick of sahuagin ingenuity, Sekolah's fire sheds very little light, only about as much as a bed of glowing embers, and does not adversely affect the sahuagin's light-sensitive eyes.

Sahuagin usually carry Sekolah's fire in thin metal tubes fitted with bulbs or plungers. Each tube is about twice the size of a standard potion bottle and contains enough jelly for one use. Underwater, a tube creates an oblong cloud 30' long, 20' high, and 20' wide; the cloud extends away from the user, with one of its short (20') sides centered at the tube's mouth. The substance burns for five rounds, inflicting 3d10 hp damage each round. (Though nonmagical, the fire is treated as a magical fire attack when determining the effectiveness of magical protection such as a *ring of fire resistance*).

When used above water, a tube creates a jet of flame 15' long, 5' wide at the tube's mouth, and 10' wide at the jet's far end. The jelly burns for three rounds, inflicting 3d6 hp (nonmagical) fire damage each round.

In either case, victims are allowed saving throws vs. breath weapon; successful saving throws reduce all damage from any particular dose of Sekolah's fire by half. Submerged victims suffer a -2 saving throw penalty.

The sahuagin sometimes pack the jelly into flasks that function just like flasks of oil. Underwater, a flask creates

a 20' globe of fire. Above water, a flask creates a 10' puddle of flame. Both cause damage as noted above.

Sekolah's fire produces its own oxygen and cannot be smothered or quenched by nonmagical means. A *quench fire* or *pyrotechnics* spell can put it out, though any unburned jelly in the area of effect or clinging to a creature can be set alight again (which happens instantly underwater).

Above water or below, Sekolah's fire consumes flammable items it touches and scorches everything else. Characters failing their saving throws against Sekolah's fire must attempt item saving throws for their equipment-vs. magical fire underwater and normal fire above water. Above water, Sekolah's fire sets alight any wooden structure it touches. Though the jelly always burns itself out, smothering the area with sand or other dry, nonflammable material keeps the fire from spreading.

Sahuagin priestesses concoct Sekolah's fire using blubber, fish oil, and numerous chemicals gathered from the sea. For obvious reasons, the sahuagin use air-filled spaces to mix the jelly and pack it into tubes. Usually, only the kingdom's royal high priestess and her assistants know the formula.

Sekolah's fire has been a tremendous success as a weapon against the scrags. The sahuagin also find it useful for setting ships alight and for breaking up massed groups of enemies. Sahuagin priestesses guard the secret of Sekolah's fire jealously. Generally, only forces directly under the command of a sahuagin king or prince are equipped with Sekolah's fire. Even then, only chieftains and their lieutenants carry the substance, usually one or two tubes each. Sahuagin armed with the Sekolah's fire usually employ it quickly so as to use it up before the enemy has any chance to capture a tube.

Tubes of Sekolah's fire can prove as dangerous to the sahuagin carrying them as to the enemy. If accidentally ruptured underwater, a tube explodes, filling a 15' sphere with fire as noted above. On the surface, jelly in a ruptured tube ignites if exposed to fire or dampness, filling a 5' sphere.

If sold on the open market a tube or flask of Sekolah's fire would bring 200-500 gold pieces.

### Fighting Sahuagin

Sahuagin prefer to fight with their brains. Their tactics emphasize mobility,

the concentration of force, and protection from enemy counterattacks. A basic sahuagin tactic is to make a first strike from beyond the enemy's visual range. Sahuagin see at least three times as far underwater as humans and demihumans do. On the surface at night, they see roughly twice as far; this can give them a decided edge in missile combat. Sahuagin are known for attacking on the surface during the dark of the moon. This is not because they fear light, but because the darkness conceals them.

### Underwater Tactics

When sahuagin note an enemy, they usually split into three groups. One group shadows the foe, while the others surround the enemy—sea devils usually prefer to attack from above, below and behind, or from the left, right, and behind. At a prearranged signal, two of the groups launch missile attacks (and cast spells if the sahuagin party includes priestesses) while the remaining group observes the results. While the attackers reload their weapons, the other group notes the target's reaction and act appropriately. They generally launch missile attacks themselves—paying special attention to opposing spellcasters—or charge in for melee attacks. It is important to remember that sahuagin are blindingly fast (they swim at a rate of 24, which is as quick as a light horse on land). Note that sahuagin relentlessly attack any spellcasting opponents to kill these magical threats as early as possible. An underwater fight against sahuagin should play out like an old western movie in which hordes of whooping Indians pepper their foes with arrows—except that most of the time the sahuagin should be out of sight.

Because most player characters don't enjoy fast swimming rates, they should have great difficulty closing with the sahuagin and effectively counterattacking. A *protection from normal missiles* spell, however, renders sahuagin darts, javelins, and crossbows harmless (at least while the spell lasts). Magical barriers such as *wall of stone*, *wall of force* and *Otiluke's resilient sphere* can give PCs some cover, and a few quick *continual light* spells might reveal the sahuagin skulking in the submarine darkness (and blind them). Divination spells such as *wizard eye* also can help beleaguered PCs track sahuagin down.

If hard pressed, sahuagin won't hesitate to use their superior movement rates to vanish into the depths only to

regroup and return after an hour or so, when a party's protective spells have expired. The best way to deal with this tactic is to leave the area immediately.

In a pitched battle with sahuagin, anything that limits the sea devil's speed and maneuverability can be helpful. Even wrestling attacks can defeat the sea devils' hit-and-run tactics. Spells such as slow and *entangle* prove quite effective. Finally, all characters should stand ready to assist comrades who become trapped in sahuagin nets.

### Surface Tactics

After an initial attack with spells and missiles, sea devils close in from at least two different directions. If the battlefield has some obvious place where enemy reinforcements can arrive—such as a fortress or a ship's hatch—the sea devils quickly move to cut it off. One of their favorite methods for doing so is spreading out nets to catch creatures emerging from an opening; many a sailor's life has ended when he blundered into a sahuagin net and found himself stabbed with a trident or dragged, still struggling, into the sea.

Defeating sahuagin on the surface often proves a matter of sheer power. *Light* and *continual light* spells are even more effective against sea devils in the open air. Fire-based spells, ineffective underwater, slay sea devils quite readily, though parties traveling aboard ships must be very careful with them.

### Other Nasty Sahuagin Tricks

Sahuagin make full use of their superior memories to recall all the details of a battlefield and its surrounding area. They often use this knowledge to choose routes of retreat that pose real dangers to pursuers. When raiding coastal areas, for example, sahuagin might make a dash for a nearby sea cliff and dive cleanly into the water upon reaching its edge. Pursuers dogging the sea devils' heels might come upon the precipice unexpectedly and suffer nasty falls.

Sahuagin always make good use of reserves in any important battle. These troops lie in wait to ambush pursuers, and they always remain ready to take advantage of any tactical situation that might develop. For example, if a town garrison sallies forth to meet a wave of attacking sea devils, the sahuagin reserve will try to enter the settlement unseen. Likewise, adventurers who surge forward to beat off attacking sea



devils may find themselves blindsided by the sahuagin reserve.

Because of their ability to sense living creatures underwater, sahuagin invariably arrange to render any area where they fight into a cloud of murk. Often they can accomplish this task without any special effort at all, as the violence of an underwater fight can stir up loose silt from the bottom and send all manner of other debris swirling through the water. The sea devils sow most underwater areas in sahuagin villages, towns, and buildings, with a fine layer of silt. If a battle erupts, the immediate vicinity (all areas within 20' of the fight) becomes murky after only 2-5 (1d4+1) rounds of combat and effectively opaque in twice that time (double the initial die roll). The sea devils use the concealment the murk provides to press the attack, to fall back to a more defensible position or to bring reinforcements to the battle secretly.

### The Kalimox

The Kalimox (CALL-ee-moh) is a sahuagin memory game involving gestures and vocalizations (see the *Sea Devils*, page 54). The sea devils use it for both recreation and as a way to conduct nonlethal duels. It is possible that a character employing *polymorph* magic (or a similar magical disguise) to look like a sahuagin might find himself challenged to a kalimox. To conduct a kalimox, make three opposed Intelligence checks between the challenger and the challenged; the winner of each check is the one who succeeds his check by the larger margin. A typical sahuagin has an Intelligence score of 14 but receives a +5 bonus when performing a kalimox. Characters can add their reaction/attacking adjustments (from their Dexterity scores) to their Intelligence scores. The competitor who wins two out of the three opposed checks wins the challenge. In the event of a tie, the challenge continues, and the first competitor to lose an opposed check loses the challenge.



Skip Williams suggests that telemarketers make a good model for sahuagin because both tend to strike without warning, tirelessly attack again and again if they don't immediately succeed, and would gladly consume their own children.

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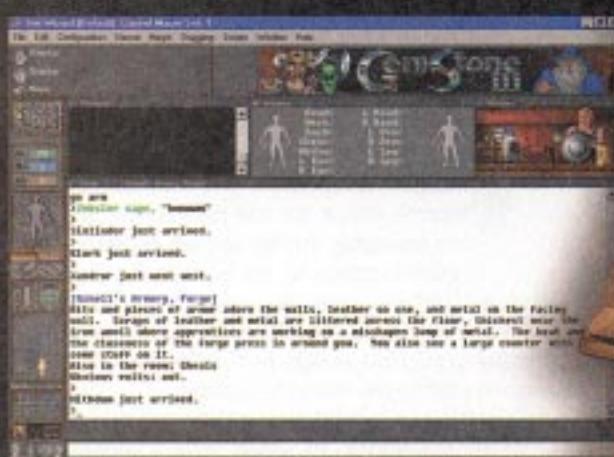
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# 101 Dumb Orcs

## Traps and tactics for your favorite humanoids

by John Baichtal

illustrated by David Sutherland

There was a time when an orc was a deadly foe for a PC— even an experienced adventurer. Now, with specialization, style specialization, maximum hit points at 1st level (a norm in many campaigns), and other perks for PCs, orcs are little more than a nuisance. Part of the problem is that the average humanoid's repertoire of tactics can be summed up in three words: scream and charge. This old cliche is silly, because most humanoids have an Intelligence rating of at least Average, and some (kobolds in particular) are considered extremely cunning tacticians.

To solve this problem, here are 101 ploys and stratagems for supposedly stupid orcs, goblins, and other humanoids. Facing them, perhaps even high-level PCs will come to sweat at the sound of goblin drums. Though only orcs are mentioned, these tactics work admirably for virtually any humanoid foe.

1. The orcs are mounted. Worgs are good choices as are horses. The orcs use lances if they are available.

2. The orcs, hidden in the bushes, throw a skunk into the PCs' midst. Depending on the party's behavior, the skunk could simply run off or spray them, with results described on page 242 of the *MONSTROUS MANUALS™* tome. If there is a druid or ranger in the party, this ploy could be spectacularly unsuccessful.



3. The orcs roll boulders down hills at the PCs. Normal attacks rolls do not apply; each PC must make a successful Dexterity check to avoid the rocks. If a check fails, the PC suffers 4d6 hp damage, save vs. paralyzation for half damage.

4. A human-appearing half-orc is hired as a guide and leads the PCs in to an ambush.

5. The orc chieftain wears a *medallion of ESP* and thus knows the PCs' every move. The DM can roleplay this situation by having the orcs see through all of the PCs' tricks and taking advantage of their weaknesses.

6. An orcish shaman casts *animate dead* on orcs previously killed by the party.

7. The orcs wave torches at the PCs' mounts to spook them. This tactic forces a Morale check for the horses, but war horses are immune, thanks to their training. If a PC's horse is spooked, he must make a riding proficiency check or be thrown, suffering 1d6 hp damage. To regain control of the mount, the PC must make a second check. In the meantime, all of his actions are at -4 due to the horse's bucking.

8. The orcs have dug spiked pits in the vicinity of the fight. These are about 10' deep, and a failed save vs. death magic means a PC falls in during melee.

Each victim suffers 1d4 hits, and each hit

inflicts 1d6 hp damage. The DM should reduce this damage for low-level PCs.

9. The orcs have nets that they sling in the trees, ready to drop them on the party. Alternatively, they carry the nets to throw at individual PCs.

10. Orc footbowmen fire at the PCs from long range—200 yards or so—to soften up the PCs before melee begins. Footbows are huge bows bent by the strength of the legs. Thanks to the long range, accuracy is poor, but only PCs with similarly long-ranging weapons can retaliate.

11. The PCs' trail passes through a narrow ravine, and the orcs attack from above—the ambush. The orcs gain the following bonuses: 75% cover, +1 to hit for higher ground, and possible surprise.

12. The orcs lure the PCs into a charge, then greet them with set spears, which inflict double damage.

13. Grease has been spread on the floor (if indoors) to make the PCs' footing extremely slippery. Each round, a PC must make a Dexterity check or fall, negating all actions that round.

14. The orcs throw sacks of pepper into the PCs' faces. Each PC must make a save vs. poison or be incapacitated for 1d2 rounds, sneezing.

15. Concealed in the grass by the road are pits with orcs inside; the hiding orcs jump out to surprise the party. The PCs suffer a -2 penalty to their surprise rolls.

16. The orcs have poisoned weapons. Of course, the DM should make the poison's strength commensurate to the PCs' level. It might be interesting to run a high-level campaign with orcs as foes, armed with weapons envenomed with giant scorpion poison.

17. The orcs are armed with man-catchers. See the *Player's Handbook* for more information on these weapons.

18. Orcs sneak into camp while the PCs are asleep. This may seem like a simplistic ploy, but it has the potential to be quite effective. The orcs doff all metal armor and cover themselves with black mud to blend into the night and foil infravision. While these commando orcs attack, the regulars charge in to support.

19. The orcish shaman has a *sleep* spell memorized, making him a substantial threat to PCs of 4th level and under.

20. The orcs harry the party for many days, perhaps weeks, occasionally shooting an arrow at them or feigning a charge. If the orcs are not dissuaded, the party becomes worn out for lack of sleep. For everyday without proper rest, all of the PCs' d20 rolls suffer a -2 penalty. Eventually the PCs may collapse from sheer exhaustion.

21. The orcs have hostages whom they use as (demi-)human shields. Any PC using a missile weapon against orcs so protected has a 75% chance of hitting the hostage instead.

22. A number of orcs pretend they're shamans, dressed in robes and waving their arms as if they were spellcasters. The effectiveness of this depends on the PCs, but Intelligence checks might be in order.

23. The orcs have a pet rust monster, and they attack the PCs armed with clubs, hide armor and wooden shields. For more information on the rust monster, see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 305.

24. The orcs have human allies and pretend to fight them; when the PCs charge to the rescue, they are attacked by both groups. Treat the allies as 1st-level fighters with 5 hp each.

25. An orc has a *potion of giant strength* and hurls rocks from far away. This scenario is a good challenge for mid-level PCs.

26. There are tripwires in the underbrush all around the party, so if the party charges or flees, their movement is hampered. Each PC who becomes tangled in a tripwire must make a successful Dexterity check or fall down, losing all actions for 1d2 rounds.

27. A squad of orcs consisting of light horsemen with bows attacks the PCs. Their plan is to shoot at the party, retreat beyond the range of the PCs' missiles, then return to fire again. They continue this tactic as long as they can.

28. The orcs have acquired some smoke powder, which they use to make crude bombs. Information on smoke powder appears in the

DUNGEON MASTER® Guide.

29. The ground seems muddy, but it is actually soaked with oil, which the orcs set alight. Flaming mud causes 2d6 hp damage the first round, then 1d4 the next two rounds before burning out.

30. One of the orcs is a champion, possessing higher-than-normal fighting skills and hit points. Orcish champions are described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 282.

31. Casks of drugged wine are left for the PCs to find. If they drink the wine, they must make a save vs. poison or fall asleep.

32. Green leaves are thrown onto a fire upwind of the party, with the hope that the dense smoke blinds the PCs. Each affected PC must make a save vs. paralyzation each round or be incapacitated by the choking blinding fumes. This effect lasts until the PC leaves the smoky area.

33. The orcs have hired mercenaries, human or some other race. These individuals should be about as tough as a PC—so a 10th-level party might fight mercenary giants.

34. The orcs are concealed in low water, breathing through reeds. When the PCs pass by, the orcs leap out of the water. Surprise checks are rolled at a penalty of -3.

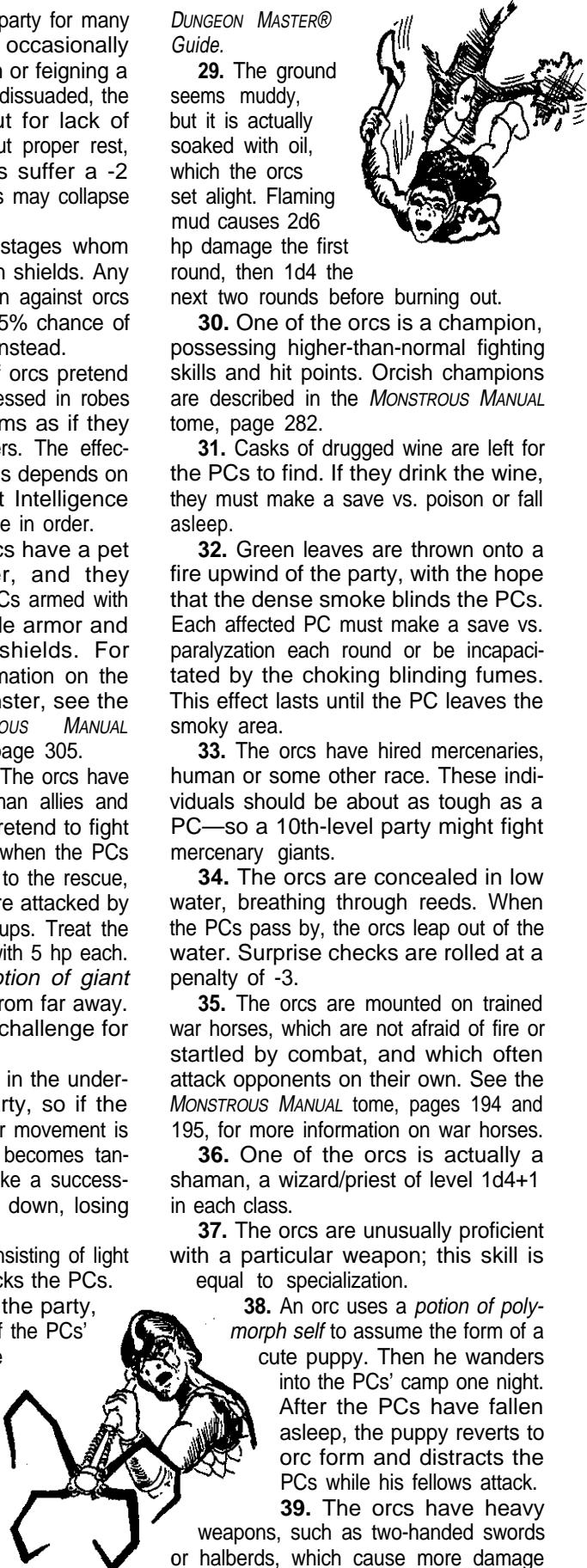
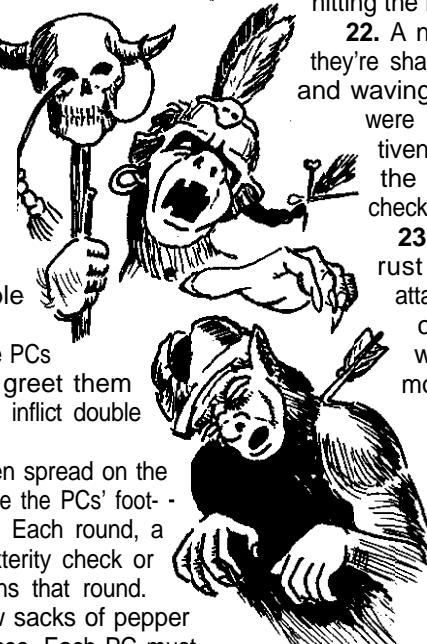
35. The orcs are mounted on trained war horses, which are not afraid of fire or startled by combat, and which often attack opponents on their own. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, pages 194 and 195, for more information on war horses.

36. One of the orcs is actually a shaman, a wizard/priest of level 1d4+1 in each class.

37. The orcs are unusually proficient with a particular weapon; this skill is equal to specialization.

38. An orc uses a *potion of polymorph self* to assume the form of a cute puppy. Then he wanders into the PCs' camp one night. After the PCs have fallen asleep, the puppy reverts to orc form and distracts the PCs while his fellows attack.

39. The orcs have heavy weapons, such as two-handed swords or halberds, which cause more damage than the usual orcish armament.

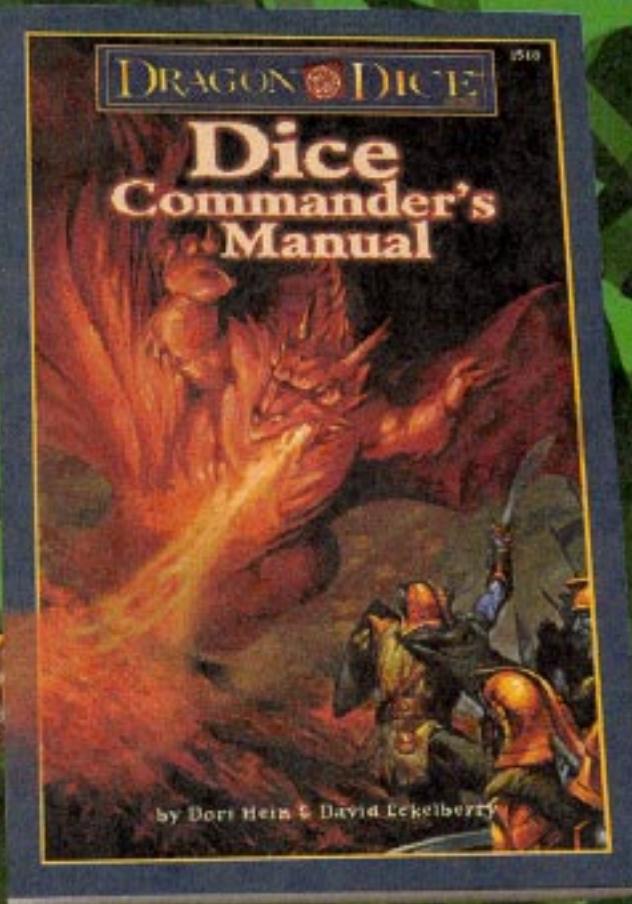




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**40.** The orcs are armed with several crossbows each, allowing them to keep up a steady rate of fire from a distance.

**41.** The orcs hide behind walls or mantlets, shooting their bows through arrow slits. This protection is equal to 90% cover to missile fire.

**42.** The orcs have an ogre with them for "heavy artillery."

**43.** The orcs, who understand the common tongue, attack at night. If the PCs try to coordinate their actions verbally, the orcs hear and compensate. If the PCs fight silently, the players must write their PCs' actions instead of announcing them aloud. This technique should hinder cooperative tactics.

**44.** The orcs have prepared an avalanche over a mountain trail. PCs may make save vs. poison to avoid being covered in snow; those who fail must be rescued within one minute per Constitution point or smother to death.

**45.** The orcs hide near a spring, which has been doctored with a tasteless drug that makes the drinker sick. PCs failing a save vs. poison lose 6 points of Strength and 2d4 hit points. Meanwhile, the orcs attack.

**46.** The orcs found a couple of *potions of heroism* and use them when fighting the party. This simple trick is good for mid-level PCs.

**47.** The orcs have pet dogs that serve as guardians and trackers. Thieves trying to sneak around will be detected unless they are downwind of the dogs or have covered their scent somehow. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 57, for more information.

**48.** The orcs are mounted on flying animals (hippogriffs are good), or perhaps crude hang gliders.

**49.** Anticipating the PCs' invasion of their lair, half of the orcs hide in barrels, then jump out and attack from the rear. PCs suffer a -1 penalty to surprise rolls.

**50.** The orcs dress as human peasants in order to get close to the PCs. This works only if all the PCs fail their intelligence checks.

**51.** The orcs have some *potions of healing* and make use of them during the fight.

**52.** The orcs fire flaming arrows to start fires in the PCs' tents and other possessions, before they charge. This could be a particularly deadly tactic if the party has many flammable items (bolts of cloth, kegs of lamp oil) or if they are situated on a raft or boat.

**53.** The orcs form a shield wall. Archers fire from behind the wall. The wall offers the archers 90% cover and the shieldbearers 75% cover. The only down side is that they are vulnerable to melee attack . . . but see #8 above.

**54.** The orcs have erected a palisade the party must cross. The palisade grants the defenders at least 50% cover and is high enough that a PC needs a ladder to reach the top.

**55.** The orcs try to trick the party into wasting missiles by offering themselves as targets. Any arrows, bolts, etc., shot are broken or stolen. The orcs try this only if they are far enough away to avoid incoming missiles (by hiding behind trees, for instance), but they abandon this tactic immediately if the PCs' aim is true.

**56.** The orcs are archers firing from a boat in a nearby river or lake, preventing the party from charging them.



**57.** The orcs pretend to flee but scatter caltrops behind them. Caltrops cause 1d4 hp damage, and a PC dashing through must make a successful Dexterity check for every 10' of trapped ground or step on 1d4

**58.** Logs soaked with flaming tar are rolled-down hills at the PCs. A PC must either make a successful Dexterity check to jump over or else outrun a log, which attains a top speed of MV 15. A PC who is run over suffers 1d8 hp damage for the log and 1d6 for the fire. Ouch!

**59.** The orcs are berserkers, as described in the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*.

**60.** Sacks filled with angry rattlesnakes are tossed into the PCs' camp at night. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, pages 320 and 321, for more information on snakes.

**61.** The orcs have narrow (2-3' diameter) caves through which to retreat if they are charged. PCs crawling after them had better be good with daggers.

**62.** The orcs stretch a rope across the party's path to knock them off, their horses. This is especially fun if the party is chasing them. Each PC in the front of the group may make an Intelligence check to detect the ploy. Characters who don't see it coming must save vs. death

or suffer 1d10 hp damage and be automatically unhorsed.

**63.** The orcs stake out a watering hole and attack while the party is bathing.

**64.** The orcs have spread bear traps throughout the underbrush. Snap! A bear trap inflicts 1d8 hp damage and requires a Strength of at least 15 to free the PC. An unaware PC must save vs. paralyzation to avoid stepping on one.



**65.** The orcs have dug an earthen cave underneath the trail, and they collapse it when the PCs cross over. The result of this trick is that the party tumbles into a 6' deep pit with loose earthen walls.

**66.** The orcs wield daggers in their left hands (perhaps badly) and use them to parry or strike. A kind DM can give the orcs the usual -2/-4 penalty; a ruthless DM can decide that the orcs have enough practice to eliminate some or all of these penalties.

**67.** The orcs are clad in rusty but functional plate mail, making them hard to hit for low-level PCs. This may seem like not much of a ploy, but when you consider that orcs normally have nothing better than ring mail . . .

**68.** There are orc longbowmen in a grove atop a nearby hill, and each archer has a stuffed dummy next to him to make the troop look twice as large. A PC unaware of the ploy has a 50% chance of targeting a dummy.

**69.** The orcs have a pet or mascot, such as a bear. Take a look through the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome and be creative.



**70.** The orcs whirl bullroarers as they approach; these noisemakers make horses nervous (non-war mounts must make a Morale check), and PCs must make a riding proficiency check or the animals bolt away. Stupid and/or low-level NPCs must make a Morale check or flee, unless a strong PC leader orders them to stay put.

**71.** The orcs have the advantage of numbers and try to tackle and overbear the PCs rather than fence with them. This simple "trick" is a huge advantage that humanoids usually enjoy, but one that is almost never utilized by DMs.

**72.** The orcs form a spear hedge to keep the PCs at bay. A PC must endure at least two attacks to come within

sword range, and if either attack hits, the PC is forced back and must try again next round.

**73.** The orcs paint themselves black and slip through the underbrush with knives, rather than fight toe to toe. The DM may give the orcs a Hide in Shadows and Move Silently score or simply decide when and where the orcs are detected.

**74.** The orcs have a ballista or catapult that they use to attack the party from a distance. A ballista bolt inflicts 4d4 hp damage, a catapult rock 4d6 hp damage.

**75.** The orcs' shaman casts invisibility on their champion.

**76.** A nearby ditch has been filled with tar, then set on fire to form a barrier or divide the party. Any PC entering the ditch suffers 2d8 hp damage.

**77.** An orc with pig blood all over his face and dressed in a merchant's clothes lies by the roadside begging for help. If a PC leans over to help him up, the orc lashes out with a concealed, poisoned dagger. The PCs surprise roll is at -3, and the poison is Type O (paralytic) venom. Other orcs are in hiding nearby.

**78.** The orcs pick a dark, rainy night to attack when humans cannot see and torches are doused by the torrent. Also, all missile fire suffers a -4 attack penalty, and bows and arrows may be ruined by the damp, at the DM's option.

**79.** The champion has had a stoneskin spell cast on him.

**80.** One of the orcs is a lycanthrope. This is a mean trick for low-level PCs, who most likely will not have any silver or magical weapons. Wereboars, werewolves, and wererats are the most appropriate types of lycanthrope.

**81.** The orcs are disguised as ghouls or other undead. PCs failing their intelligence check believe them to be the genuine item.

**82.** One of the orcs has thieflike abilities-moving silently, backstabbing, opening locks. Consider the orc to be 5th level.

**83.** The orcs pretend to be drunk. When the party approaches, the orcs invite them over for a pint, acting as friendly as can be.

**84.** The orcs have pilums (light spears) that they stab into the PCs' shields and armor to slow them down. The recipient of this attack must stop and remove the spears (taking a whole round) or suffer a penalty to movement and AC equal to 1 for every spear so

imbedded. Another advantage to pilums is that the shafts bend when they hit, so they cannot be thrown back at the orc.

**85.** The orcs have a huge keg of Greek fire that they roll into the party's midst and detonate. Anyone within 20' of the keg when it goes off suffers 3d6 hp damage the first round, 1d8 the second, and 1d4 the third and fourth rounds. Also, any flammable material in the vicinity (trees, hair, clothing) is likely to be set on fire.

**86.** Some of the attacking orcs climb nearby trees during the fight, firing missile weapons from the safety of a high branch.

**87.** In especially dry weather, the orcs set brush and forest ablaze. This one is a very orcish tactic.

**88.** The orcs are hiding in a wagon, which they move by pushing it from inside (there is no floor). There are arrow slits in the walls (providing 90% cover) and wet hides tacked outside to resist fire.

**89.** The orcs attack at night. The PC humans must use lights or fight at a disadvantage.

**90.** The orcs surround the PCs with a flaming barricade of brush and oil, then attack those trapped inside with missile weapons. Anyone trying to jump over the barricade must make both a Strength and a Dexterity check or be burned for 1d8 hp damage.

**91.** The orcs have a cage full of stirges and smear themselves with a stirge-repelling herb. Then they open the cage. Stirges are described fully in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 332. (See this issue's "Ecology of the Stirge" for variations of the monster.)

**92.** The orcs wear the armor (including full helmets) and emblems of a friendly group, in order to move close enough to attack.

**93.** The orcs keep a patch of quicksand between them and the party, then hurl insults and shoot arrows until the PCs charge. Any PC landing in quicksand must make three successful Dexterity checks, one per round, to escape. Every failed Dexterity check causes the PC to sink a little deeper; three failed checks and he is in over his head. Don't forget that the orcs are still there.

**94.** A number of orcs are actually ogrillons. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 275, for information on ogrillons.

**95.** A false treasure map lures victims into an ambush.

**96.** The orcs festoon themselves with leafy twigs and plant fronds as camouflage. This concealment gives the PCs a penalty of 1 on their surprise rolls and penalizes their missile fire by -1.

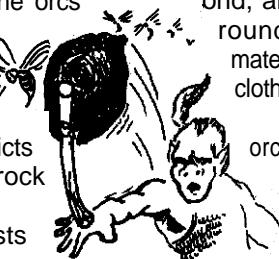
**97.** An orc throws a hornets nest into the PCs' midst. The hornets collectively inflict 1 hp damage per round to everyone in the swarm.

**98.** The orcs cause a herd of cows or other animals to stampede in the party's direction. The stampede lasts for 1d4+1 rounds. PCs caught in the stampede must make a successful Dexterity check every round to avoid being trampled. Any PC trampled suffers 2d4 hp damage and suffers a -4 penalty to his next round's Dexterity check.

**99.** A friendly wizard casts *massmorph* on a group of orcs to aid them in ambush. See the *PHB* for more information on this spell.

**100.** There are twice as many orcs as PCs, and the orcs fight in pairs, with one parrying, the other fighting. Whichever orc the PC attacks parries, and the other attacks. For best effect, use the parrying rules presented in the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*.

**101.** As the PCs are traveling down river in a boat or raft, orcish knifers attack from underwater and archers from the banks of the river.



*John Baichtal is an aspiring freelance writer whose interests include beer, football, and spending way, way too much time in the role-playing game areas of America Online. He recently wrote his first short story, which his Mom said was "perfect," but which everyone else hated. What would we all do without Mom?*





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AURORA  
UNDERMOUNT  
**SALE**



# AURORA'S UNDERMOUNTAIN

## For the spelunker **SALE** who has everything!

by Paul Culotta

illustrated by Stephen F. Schwartz

**A**s the intrepid adventurers wandered through Waterdeep, they happened to pass by the Aurora's Whole Realms outlet. In the window was a sign proclaiming "Aurora's Undermountain Sale! New Items and Backpack Packages for Delving into Waterdeep's Most Deadly Hole of Evil!" Curiosity aroused, they stepped inside and were met by a salesman who was more than happy to show them all the new items that Aurora had put on sale.

Welcome, stout adventurers! What bargains we have for you! Come right this way! Over here on this fable you will find several backpacks that are pre-stocked with the basic necessities for surviving Undermountain. We have pre-designed packs for all sorts, and we carry a new inventory of unusual items designed with the resourceful adventurer in mind. Our field representatives have been surveying our customers from Halruua to the Moonsea to determine what common items work best for each profession and how they should be distributed among a party of hardy adventurers like yourselves."

### Adventurer's Belt

Sturdy leather belts with metal "eyes" inserted at various regular intervals are useful in preventing attached pouches from sliding around.

**Weight:** 1 lb.

**Cost:** 3 gp

### Adventurer's Pouch

Each adventurer's pouch has metal clips for attaching to an adventurer's belt. Each pouch has a quick-release ring like the backpack straps. Each large pouch takes up the space of three small pouches. They are specially made to fit on to the belt, so they cost a little extra.

**DM Notes:** The belt and accompanying pouches are meant to carry items that a PC wants handy, like signal whistles, mirrors, thieves' tools, etc. A human or dwarf-sized adventurer's belt can accommodate up to three large pouches or 10 small pouches, or some combination of the two, as a general rule. The DM should review each adventurer's height and weight before deciding the actual "pouch capacity" of a belt. A slim elf (or even a very slim human) PC could probably carry only two large pouches or six small pouches.

In addition to pouches, each belt has room for two weapon sheaths or holders (one per side). Extra weapons stuck in a belt (such as a broad-bladed axe) take up the room of one large pouch. A canteen takes up the space of a large pouch. Using the belt and pouches does not relieve the character from encumbrance rules or restrictions; they merely provide convenient access.

**Weight:** 0.75 lb.

**Cost:** 1 gp small pouch

**Weight:** 1.5 lbs.

**Cost:** 2 gp large pouch

### Assayer's Kit

Developed by the dwarves of the Earthfast Mountains, assayers' kits are large pouches that contain a bottle of assaying chemicals, a squeeze dropper, a stiff brush, and a metal scrapper. They are used primarily by miners, although adventurers might find them useful. Whenever a miner comes across what he thinks is a vein of precious ore, he scrapes away excess rock and brushes it to expose the vein. He places four to five drops of the assaying liquid on the apparent find. If nothing happens, the ore is not worth mining. If it starts glowing with colors, however, the miner has found something worthwhile:

Color	Result
Green	Copper
Yellow	Iron
Blue	Silver
Orange	Gold
Red	Electrum
Purple	Platinum

An assayer's kit takes up all the room in a large pouch. The kit includes enough liquid to conduct 100 tests.

**DM Notes:** After 50 uses, there is a 2% cumulative chance (starting at use number 51) that the assaying chemicals deteriorate due to exposure to air. When the liquid deteriorates, it shows no readings at all, even when applied to the purest of metal ores. Note that this liquid can also be used to determine the kind of metal used in a piece of jewelry.

**Weight:** 2 lbs.

**Cost:** 25 gp



## Backpacks and Frames

All of Aurora's backpacks are now mounted on frames. Aurora's has had a 98% satisfaction rating with these frames, which put the weight of the pack on the hips instead of on the shoulders. They have sold so well, in fact, that Aurora's made the decision that all of their backpacks would be on frames.

Some ask why certain items were excluded from the Adventurers' Packs, but Aurora's has found that they sell best when containing only the essentials. Their packs were designed with the assumptions that 1) the adventuring party would be balanced and 2) warriors in the group were typically the strongest and could carry the most food and water. Rations, of course, are especially big considerations in underground adventuring, since one is not likely to find a deer to bring down or a brook to fill a waterskin.

Because each mission requires unique tools, there is still room for extra equipment in the packs and on the frames to carry additional items.

Provision bags are included so that the scent of freshly killed meat is contained and sharp-nosed underground denizens cannot track the party. (Provision bags can also double as treasure sacks and are even useful to keep spellbooks dry.)

On each strap of the backpack is a metal ring that can be pulled out, releasing the strap and causing the backpack to fall away. There is a ring on each strap to accommodate both left- and right-handed adventurers.

**DM Notes:** As indicated in *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue*, using a pack with a frame shifts the encumbrance factor one setting lighter.

An adventurer who has at least one hand free can quickly pull a ring and let

the pack fall to the ground. This way he can move with only the weight of weapons, armor, clothes, etc. Of course, the DM should adjudicate whether breakable items in the pack are smashed when they fall to the ground. Another thing to consider is what happens if the adventurers are in a constricted area and the first PCs in line (or all of them) cut away their packs to fight. It would not be unreasonable to require other PCs to make a Dexterity check if they try to step around the fallen packs while in melee.

## Blacksmear

Blacksmear is a breakthrough in underground camouflage. This mixture of several secret ingredients is the ultimate for adventuring underground. It is a vast improvement of Aurora's tar makeup kits. Like the makeup, Blacksmear covers skin and allows full vision and flexibility, yet it goes further: it keeps the skin temperature concealed so that underground creatures with infravision have a much poorer chance of noticing one. One jar contains 25 applications.

**DM Notes:** Creatures using infravision only have a 10% chance of noticing a character whose exposed skin has been covered with blacksmear. Like tar makeup, it allows a 2% bonus to hiding in shadows. Note that it takes one application for the face and one additional application for each exposed limb. The jar counts as an item for a large pouch on the adventurer's belt.

**Weight:** 1 lb.    **Cost:** 300 gp

## Nonscent Herbs

A concoction of the foreign lands, nonscent herbs can be spread around an underground campsite to remove any scents left behind by the adventurers (food, wine, blood, body odors, etc.). Of course, smart adventurers must still remove visible signs of their presence from the campsite. A packet of herbs is good for a 100 square foot area.

**DM Notes:** The game effect of nonscent herbs depends on the types of creatures involved. While giant hyenas track by scent, mindlayers don't learn a thing from lingering smells. It should be noted that using these herbs works both ways: for example, it will frustrate rescue attempts by allies or separated party members who are using bloodhounds or other scent-tracking creatures to find their lost friends.

**Weight:** Insignificant

**Cost:** 10 gp per package of 10

### Basic Warrior Backpack

Item	Weight (lbs.)	Cost (gp)
Backpack and frame	8	13
Bedroll	6	17
Ration packs (21)	21	10
Waterskin (3 gallon), full	18	2
3 Provision bags	3	9
Totals	51	51
<i>Sale Price:</i> .....		45 gp

### Basic Priest Backpack

Item	Weight (lbs.)	Cost
Backpack and frame	8	13
Bedroll	6	17
Ration packs (3)	3	1.4
Provision bag	1	3
Healer kit	10	6
Waterskin (1 gallon), full	3	8
Totals	30	42.2
<i>Sale Price:</i> .....		36 gp

### Basic Wizard Backpack

Item	Weight (lbs.)	Cost
Backpack and frame	8	13
Bedroll	6	17
Provision bags	2	6
Waterskin (1 gallon) full	3	0.8
Totals	19	36.8
<i>Sale Price:</i> .....		32 gp

### Basic Rogue Backpack

Item	Weight (lbs.)	Cost
Backpack and frame	8	13
Bedroll	6	17
Provision bag	1	3
Ration packs (3)	3	1.4
Totals	18	34.4
<i>Sale Price:</i> .....		29 gp

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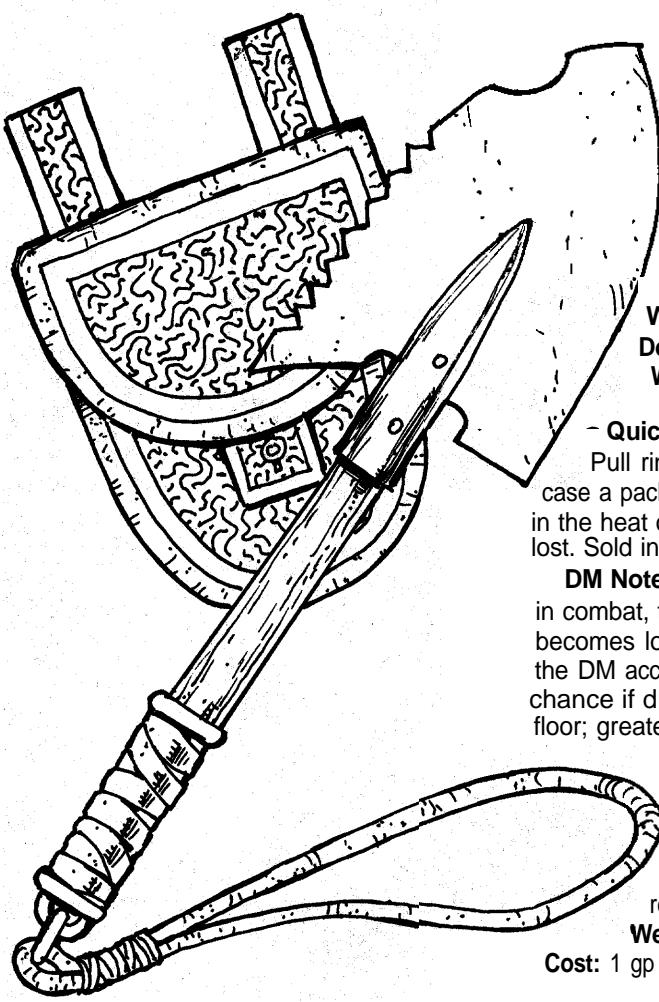
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### Cathole Tool

Fashioned by Aurora's in-house gnomish artisans, the cathole tool is a shovel-like device made of hardened steel with a wooden handle. Its serrated blade can dig into the hardest ground. It is bigger than a hand trowel and shorter than the normal shovel. The cathole tool was originally designed to cover up campfire ashes and other signs of the adventurers' passage. Comyrian infantry swear that they are equally good in digging hasty defensive positions-and that they pack a terrible wallop in combat. Each comes with a case that can be clipped on to an adventurer's belt or strapped to the back of a pack,

**DM Notes:** If wielded in combat, it inflicts 1d4+2/1d4+1 hp damage and can be used as a slashing or bludgeoning weapon at the adventurer's option.

**Weight:** 6 lbs. (w/case) **Cost:** 5 gp

### Grenadier Bandolier

The grenadier bandolier was developed originally for Thayvian shock troops. This thick leather strap fits across one's chest and clips to the adventurer's belt. At the waist is a convenient loop for placing a mace, sword, or other weapon.

Along the strap are four sewn-in Greek fire containers, each with a release pin. Double bandoliers are available at a slight discount from the cost of two singles.

**DM Notes:** See oil vial holder notes.

**Weight:** 10 lbs. **Cost:** 50 gp

### Double bandolier

**Weight:** 20 lbs. **Cost:** 90 gp

### - Quick-Release Rings

Pull ring replacements are sold in case a pack has had to be dropped and, in the heat of battle, the original clip is lost. Sold in packages of 20 clips

**DM Notes:** If a pull ring is discarded in combat, there is a 50% chance that it becomes lost. This may be adjusted by the DM according to circumstances (less chance if dropped on a hard flat stone floor; greater chance if in a pit of sand).

If a character has no spares, he certainly should be able to find something to keep his pouch or pack strap secured, but the quick-release feature is lost.

**Weight:** Negligible

**Cost:** 1 gp

### Screwcap Tube

Developed originally by the High Priest Cadderly of the Edificant Library in the Snowflake Mountains, the screwcap tube is a metal cylinder with a cap that twists on and off. Generally, smart adventurers realize that fire soul eventually burn out in the Underdark or (worse yet) may set off pockets of flammable gases.

Thus, they pay clerics or wizards to cast *continual light* spells inside this tube, creating a clear beacon of light. If they don't want the light, they merely screw the cap back on.

The cost of a tube used as a light does not include the casting of the spell, which must be paid for separately to a wizard or priest of the customer's choice.

Aurora's has developed a holder for this tube (counts as small pouch) as well as straps with which to attach it to backpack frames.

**DM Notes:** If *continual light* is cast inside the tube, the device functions with same range as a bullseye lantern. If *light* is cast inside, the beam of light has a range of 30'.

**Weight:** 0.5 lb.

**Cost:** 10 gp

### Nose-Squeezer

Manufactured in Lantan, the nose-squeezer is a large metal clip that opens with finger pressure and can be quickly put over the nose whenever adventurers run into foul smells underground like ghouls, ghosts, troglodytes, etc.

**DM Notes:** Using such an item gives a +3 bonus to the appropriate saving throw. The nose-squeezer counts as an item to be put in a small pouch, but most smart adventurers clip one to their backpack straps, belt, or armor so it can be easily grabbed if needed. Unless the adventurers are surprised, they should be able to do this quickly, prior to any initiative roll. Note that it does no good against inhaled poisonous fumes, since the PCs must still breathe through their mouths. The nose-squeezer is also a good thing to have when swimming underwater.

**Weight:** 0.5 lb. **Cost:** 1 gp

### Rope Set Pack (Improved)

The rope set pack contains a frame, quick-release straps, 100 yards of silk rope, two foldable grapples, several spikes, three pulleys, and a small hammer. This is an improvement on

the earlier version of the pack previously sold by Aurora's, which had 200 yards of rope. Customer surveys indicated that 200 yards was too heavy and was not needed in most instances. Aurora's recommends that this pack be carried by a warrior or other strong adventurer. The listed weight includes that of the rope.

**Weight:** 6 lbs.

**Cost:** 40 gp

### Oil Vial Holder

Vial holders secure one vial of oil or fuel for Greek fire with overlapping flaps secured with a quick-release ring. The character grasps the top of the vial, pulls the pin (which releases the flap), drops the pin, shifts the vial to his throwing arm, and heaves.

**DM Notes:** The vial holder attaches to an adventurer's belt and counts as a large pouch. It is sewn on the grenadier bandolier. The character should be allowed to perform the release-and-throw maneuver without penalty, as it is assumed that he practices this movement. Note, however, that it takes two free hands to do this smoothly.

Note also that this holder can just as easily hold potions, poisons, or other bottled containers. The listed weight is for the holder only.

**Weight:** 0.5 lb      **Cost:** 1 gp

#### Water Purification Tablets

This small bottle contains water purification tablets, developed by Shou Lung alchemists. Without a druid in the party, one seldom knows if underground water is poisoned, fouled, or otherwise contaminated. One of these tablets is reputed to purify a gallon of tainted water. Each bottle contains 50 fingernail-sized tablets, which are a dark brown color.

**DM Notes:** Whether the tablet works can only be tested by tasting the water or using a spell (e.g., *detect poison*). In any case, use of the tablets gives the imbiber a +2 bonus to his saving roll. If the save succeeds, the water has been purified. (Note that if the first character who tastes the water makes his save, others who drink from the water are safe. It counts as an item for a small pouch.)

**Weight:** 0.5 lb      **Cost:** 50 gp

#### Wizard Bag

The basic wizard bag has a special sewn-in case to hold one wand, and 10 easy-open pockets for spell components. Each spell component pocket is marked with a unique symbol that can be felt and identified in the dark. A flap pocket holds scrolls, and the inside pocket has enough room for up to two potion bottles or scroll cases, plus some room for extra packets of spell components.

**DM Notes:** Most DMs allow a spell-caster to drink a potion, use a magical item, or cast a spell of his choice in a combat round. This item is optional for DMs who want a bit more realism in their campaigns and who assume that if a wizard plans to cast one of his 15 memorized spells, he had better have some way of quickly getting to the right components, a different wand, etc.

**Weight:** 5 lbs.      **Cost:** 30 gp

#### Druidic Surprise

This large backpack holds nothing more than a foot of rich, wet earth and a living blackberry bush that has been folded into the pack's compartment. Druidic surprise is made especially for those druids who survive underground through *purify water* spells and a supply of *goodberries*. Typically, these priests of nature feel thwarted because the lack of plant life inhibits one of their best spells, *entangle*. To use this pack, the druid takes it off and releases the buckle on the back. The thorns of the vine typically do not allow the pack to immediately open. When attackers reach the backpack, the druid casts *entangle*, and writhing thorny vines emerge. Although it can affect only one man-sized creature or 1-4 small creatures, druids enjoy the surprised looks on their opponents' faces when the unexpected vines emerge from the pack.

**DM Notes:** The blackberry vine dies after three weeks underground without sunlight. It dies in less time if not watered, requiring one pint of water per day minimum. One can also use this device to fend off attackers by casting *plant growth* on the vines in a narrow pathway.

**Weight:** 35 lbs.

**Cost:** 20 gp

*Paul Culotta is recently retired from the United States National Guard, leaving him even more time to write game articles for DRAGON® Magazine and modules for DUNGEON® Adventures.*



# MAGICAL LOCKS

by Robert S. Mullin and Charles M. Andrulis

## Sorcerous security measures

Consider this: With all of the thieves prowling the AD&D® universe, storing one's wealth behind a locked door or within a locked chest is no guarantee of security. When magic like a *knock* spell or a *chime of opening* is added to the equation, a lock seems almost pointless. What are the most common solutions to this dilemma? In most cases, the lock is armed with some kind of trap, but to a skilled thief, a trap isn't much of a deterrent. So, in order to make a lock more formidable, further steps must be taken. Usually, this leads to the inclusion of magical "traps" like *fire trap*, *explosive runes*, *glyph of warding*, and *symbol* spells, or defensive spells like *hold portal* and *wizard lock*. Still, even these measures are, for the most part, easily bypassed with a simple *dispel magic*. So what can a person do to protect his belongings from an accomplished thief or spell-hurler? Perhaps a magical lock will do the trick.

Flipping through the ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICAT™ compendium, it was discovered that a mere pair of magical locks exist in the AD&D game, and one of those locks is little more than a variant of the others. This article attempts to remedy the situation by providing several new types of magical locks that, at the very least, will make would-be thieves and treasure-seeking wizards pause and consider what they're up against. However, despite the differing powers and effects these locks possess, most of them have certain things in common:

- ❖ The lock is of at least average quality (for purposes of picking attempts), though very often, it will be of even greater craftsmanship.
- ❖ The lock can be used with various portals (e.g., doors, gates, etc.) as well as chests, boxes, or similar containers.



❖ The lock can be picked, but if a picking attempt fails, or the lock is subjected to similar forms of tampering, the lock's effects are triggered.

❖ The lock's powers extend to the enclosure which it secures, so tampering with the enclosure in order to avoid the lock is regarded as a failed picking attempt, and automatically triggers the lock's powers.

❖ Attempting to open or bypass the lock via magical means (e.g., a *knock* spell or *chime of opening*, or a passwall on the enclosure, etc.) is considered tampering as above, and triggers the lock's magic. The magic used in the bypass attempt fails in any case.

❖ The lock's magic is continuous; that is, even if triggered, the magic automatically resets itself, enabling it to be triggered an indefinite number of times.

❖ The lock's powers and defense can be completely bypassed or avoided if the appropriate key or, if applicable, command word is used; spells like *dispel magic* will not negate the lock's effects or prevent their activation.

Unless otherwise noted in a given lock's description, readers should assume that all of these factors apply.

### Lock of Cages

This lock usually appears as a large iron padlock with six one-inch hollow cubes or studs raised on its front surface that form a ring around its keyhole.

When triggered, up to six creatures (and their belongings) within 10" of the lock are instantly reduced and teleported inside the six raised cubes, one creature per cube (though each victim receives a save vs. spells to resist the effect). If there are more than six creatures within the lock's range, victims are determined randomly, though the creature who actually triggered the lock's magic, if in range, is automatically counted as

one of the six.

Once inside a cube, victims are held in a form of suspended animation akin to



temporal stasis. As such, victims are unable to escape without help from an outside source. While so trapped, however, victims do not age or need nourishment, and they continue to survive indefinitely.

Trapped victims can be freed in one of several ways, as follows:

❖ If the command word is spoken and the appropriate cube or stud is touched (which does not trigger the locks magic), the victim held within that particular cube is freed and returned to its actual size. Since there is no way to determine which cube holds a victim, several attempts may be necessary to free the desired captive, and there is no guarantee that, once freed, an unknown captive will be on friendly terms with its rescuer.

❖ If the lock is destroyed, all creatures trapped in the cubes are freed and returned to their true size. However, each captive must make a successful system shock survival roll or die in the process. Furthermore, an attack directed against the lock that fails to destroy it triggers its magic and possibly traps the attacker as well.

❖ If all of the cubes are occupied when the magic is triggered, a current occupant is freed (and returned to normal size) in order to make room for the new captive. Freed victims are determined randomly, so several activations may be needed in order to free the desired captive. But again, a freed creature might be hostile.

**XP Value:** 2,000

### Lock of Curses

Contrary to what its name suggests, this lock is not itself cursed; rather, it bestows a curse (as the reverse of remove curse) upon those who trigger its magic. The lock does not have a predetermined curse; instead, when the lock is triggered, the curse is personalized according to the situation that triggered it. For example, a thief who triggers the curse while trying to pick the lock may find that subsequent picking attempts are at reduced chances; or a mage who uses a knock spell on the lock may be cursed so that future castings of that spell always fail. The exact nature of the curse is left up to the DM, but it can be removed by the usual means (e.g., remove curse, etc.).

Note that, unlike the other locks detailed in this article, a lock of curses can be opened or bypassed as a standard nonmagical lock. Thus, the usual magical or mundane methods used to

open locks are effective against it. The curse, however, is simply bestowed upon those who would use such methods. Opening the lock with the appropriate key is the only way to avoid the curse completely.

**XP Value:** 500

### Lock of Displacement

Unlike most of the other locks detailed here, a *lock of displacement* is not triggered by tampering; rather, its magic is in constant effect. Although the locks outer casing gives it the appearance of an ordinary lock, the interior mechanisms are displaced, causing an initial picking attempt automatically to fail, and subsequent attempts are made with a -20% penalty to the roll. This latter penalty applies only to those beings who recognize the locks magic (i.e., those who are aware that the internal mechanisms are displaced). Note, however, that the displacement effect can be completely avoided if the creature picking the lock augments the attempt with a *true sight* spell, a *gem of seeing*, or a similar power.

Obviously, a *lock of displacement* is intended to deter a thief's open locks skill; a *knock* spell or a *chime of opening* bypasses the lock normally.

**XP Value:** 750

### Lock of Elemental Guardians

In truth, several versions of this lock exist, each attuned to a different elemental, para-elemental, or quasi-elemental plane. Unlike other locks, a *lock of elemental guardians* is a charged item, possessing 5-20 charges when encountered (20 charges when first manufactured). When all of its charges are used, it becomes a normal lock.

When the lock is triggered, a charge is expended and an elemental of the appropriate sort appears within, and is confined to, 20' of the lock. Thereafter,

the elemental proceeds to attack any creature who enters that radius (choosing the creature closest to the lock over all others), save for bearer of the locks key. Note, however, that in no way does the key enable its possessor to command the elemental. In fact, the elemental is immune to all forms of control or command, whether by spell, spell-like ability, magical item, or psionic power. In any case, the elemental remains for one turn plus 1d10 rounds, even if all opponents are dead or have left the area. Furthermore, no more than one elemental can be summoned in a given round, though additional elementals appear if the lock is triggered on subsequent rounds.

Generally speaking, the elemental summoned is of the 12-HD variety, but given the nature of the lock, it is safe to assume that there are variants capable of summoning elementals of greater or lesser power. This is reflected in the XP values given below.

**XP Value:** 1,000 (4 HD)

**XP Value:** 2,000 (8 HD)

**XP Value:** 3,000 (12 HD)

**XP Value:** 4,000 (16 HD)

**XP Value:** 5,000 (20 HD)

**XP Value:** 6,000 (24 HD)

### Lock of Ethereality

A *lock of ethereality* is the only lock detailed here specifically designed to be used on a box, chest, coffer, or similar container, as the nature of its magic makes it impractical for use as a door lock.

When its magic is triggered, the lock, the container, and anything held therein immediately become ethereal, spirited away from the would-be thief. The container can be followed to the Ethereal plane (if the means to do so are available), but if the lock is triggered there, it returns to its former resting place on the Prime Material plane. This shifting back and forth between planes continues until the lock is successfully opened or the looter gives up.

In addition to enabling the lock to be opened without triggering its magic, the appropriate key can be used to recall a container that was previously transported to the Ethereal plane, or to draw it into the Ethereal plane if the key-holder is already there. In both cases, the container appears near enough to the key-holder to allow immediate access to it.

**XP Value:** 2,000

## Lock of Exploding

Locks of this sort are usually constructed of iron or steel, but they rarely possess frivolous decorations or the like. However, a *lock of exploding* has an oversized mechanism compartment, and the metal is thicker than a common non-magical lock, both of which features are pivotal to the locks effects.

When triggered, the lock explodes with great force, spraying the area in front of it with shrapnel; thus, its name (and the need for more metal in its fabrication). If space permits, the area of effect takes the form of a 10' radius hemisphere in front of the lock. All creatures within this radius must save vs. breath weapon or suffer 4d4 (plus the victim's AC value) hp damage.

Note that the explosion always blows away from the locks face, thus preventing damage to the enclosure that it secures (or anything or anyone behind the lock, for that matter). In any case, a *lock of exploding* cannot be used more than once; upon exploding, it is destroyed.

**XP Value:** 500

## Lock of Petrification

Unique among the locks detailed in this article, a *lock of petrification* is constructed entirely of stone, though enchantments used in its construction make it immune physical damage, as well as stone-affecting magic.

Like a *lock of displacement*, this lock is specifically designed to foil the Open Locks thief skill, though other forms of physical tampering (e.g., prying, chiseling, etc.) apply as well. Unlike the other lock, however, a *lock of petrification* is not affected by a *knock* spell or similar effect.

When the lock is triggered, the offender must make a saving throw vs. petrification. If failed, the offender's hands turn to stone over a period of 2-5 rounds. During this period, the offender experiences excruciating pain, suffering 1d4 hp damage each round until the transformation is complete. Even after the change is finished, the pain continues, inflicting 1 hp damage each round due to the strain the stone hands place on the victim's wrists and arms (which remain flesh and bone). This subsequent damage can be avoided if the victim's hands and arms are completely immobilized, but the pain is always present and is sufficient to prevent the victim from performing any actions that require a great measure of concentration (e.g., spell-casting).

Obviously, the victim is incapable of performing any actions that require the use of his hands, such as attacking with weapons, casting spells that require somatic components (and material components that require some kind of manual manipulation), catching objects, and so forth.

Because the connection between the victim's stone hands and flesh and bone wrists is tenuous at best, exposing the hands to forceful blows can cause them to break off or shatter. Therefore, any time a stone hand forcefully strikes (or is struck by) another creature or object, it must save vs. crushing blow with a penalty equal to the victim's damage bonus for high Strength (if applicable). If failed, the hand shatters or breaks off, inflicting 2d4 hp damage to the victim in the process. If the save is made, the victim suffers only 1d4 hp damage due to the pain. In both cases, if the hand is used as a weapon in order to strike a creature, the target suffers 1d4 hp damage plus any Strength bonuses. The hand is not regarded as a magical weapon.

Finally, the victim no longer receives any benefits from magical items worn on the hands (e.g., rings, gloves, etc.) since such items are no longer regarded as "in contact" with the wearer.

The victim's hands can be returned to normal via the usual methods (e.g., *stone to flesh*).

**XP Value:** 1,000

## Lock of Riddles

This fanciful lock is fashioned so that its front surface forms a musing wistful human face, its mouth forming the locks keyhole.

Once the lock is triggered, the enclosure to which the lock is fixed is completely sealed with a layer of invisible magical energy that prevents all bypassing attempts. Immediately thereafter, the locks face animates and, in a sly but jovial voice, speaks a riddle (of the DM's devising). If the riddle is answered correctly, the magical energy field vanishes and the lock snaps open, allowing the enclosure to be opened. Otherwise, the enclosure remains sealed, though subsequent attempts to bypass the magical field causes the riddle to be repeated.

**XP Value:** 1,000

## Lock of Shadow

This lock differs from the other locks described here, for once secured in place and a command word is spoken, it loses its solidity, becoming noncorporeal

shadow matter. Once it assumes its shadow form, picks and pry bars simply pass through it, yet it continues firmly to secure the enclosure to which it is affixed. However, while a *knock* spell or similar effect is useless against the lock, the enclosure itself is not so protected, and can be broken open as usual. On the other hand, the proper command word causes the lock to become solid, as does an *anti-magic shell* if the lock is within its area of effect.

**XP Value:** 750

## Lock of Shearing

Like a *lock of riddles*, a *lock of shearing* is constructed so that its front surface looks like a human face, though its expression is one of snarling rage, its mouth forming the keyhole. Unlike a *lock of riddles*, however, a *lock of shearing*'s magic is triggered only when an object other than the appropriate key enters its keyhole (e.g., lock picks, pry bars, chisels, etc.).

When triggered, the locks face animates, its mouth clamping down on the intruding object, shearing off the portion of the instrument that entered the key-hole. Immediately thereafter, the "mouth" performs a chewing motion, and shortly after that, the sheared piece of the object, mangled and ruined, is spat out onto the floor. Once this routine has been complete, the locks face resumes its snarling visage until the next object is placed in its mouth.

Although a *lock of shearing* always foils picking attempts and the like, it cannot prevent a clever thief from simply penetrating the enclosure itself, thus avoiding the lock altogether. For this reason, a *lock of shearing* serves best if affixed to an enclosure capable of withstanding such circumventing methods.

**XP Value:** 750

## Lock of Spell Holding

As its name suggests, this lock can store a single spell of any level, much as a *ring of spell storing*. Unlike such a ring, however, the spell held in a *lock of spell holding* is not fixed; when triggered, the stored spell is released, affecting anyone in the spell's area of effect. (Note that area spells (*fireball*, *ice storm*, etc.) are centered on the lock itself, while ranged spells (*magic missile*, *lightning bolt*, etc.) strike a random target (or targets, if applicable) within the spell's range. Touch spells affects only those creatures who are actually in contact with the lock (or its enclosure) when it is triggered.) Once the

spell is released, the lock's spell-holding area is empty, but if the appropriate command word is known, a new spell (of the casters prerogative) can be placed therein, ready to be discharged the next time the lock is subjected to tampering.

In any case, the lock itself is always immune to the spell it releases, but not to an identical spell produced by another source. The enclosure to which it is affixed is not immune, however, and may well be destroyed by the very spell intended to protect it. For this reason, a *lock of spell holding* is typically used with enclosures that can withstand any damaging effects the spell may produce.

Finally, *knock* spells and similar effects, as well as a thief's Open Locks ability (or the like) can open the lock, but such methods do not prevent the lock from releasing its spell. Only the proper key can open the lock without causing the spell to discharge.

**XP Value:** 2,000

#### Lock of Transference

This lock is typically used on doors, gates, and similar portals.

When triggered, the locks magic instantly teleports all of the offenders belongings, both carried and worn, to

the opposite side of the barrier, leaving the offender completely naked.

When chests, boxes, and the like are armed with locks of this sort, the offender's belongings are simply *teleported* inside the container. Note, however, that such a container must be large enough to hold all of the offenders belongings; items that are too large to fit are not affected. On the other hand, if the offender has so many smaller items that there isn't enough room in the container to hold all of them, the excess items are not affected, and DMs must randomly determine which items remain behind.

In any case, the lock continues teleporting items until it is successfully opened or, in the case of a container, there is no room left to hold *teleported* items.

**XP Value:** 1,000

#### Lock of Warning

Similar to *locks of riddles* and *shearing*, a lock of warning is fashioned so that its front surface appears as a human face, though the expression it portrays is one of watchfulness and vigilance.

When triggered, the locks "mouth" begins to scream and howl in alarm, its

cries clearly audible to a distance of 100 yards, minus 10 yards for every closed door or solid barrier it must pass through. The lock continues to shriek until the command word is spoken or the appropriate key is placed in its key-hole. In either case, the magic is reset, allowing it to be triggered anew.

Note that a *lock of warning* can be knocked or picked normally, though doing so still activates its magic. Also note that, while *dispel magic* has no affect on the locks howling, a silence, 15' radius spell or similar power is effective while its duration lasts.

**XP Value:** 500



Charles began playing the AD&D game circa 1980 and has been hooked ever since. This is his first contribution to DRAGON® Magazine.

Robert was first introduced to the AD&D game about the same time as Charles, but he didn't start playing on a regular basis until the summer of 1982. This is his first co-authored contribution to DRAGON Magazine.

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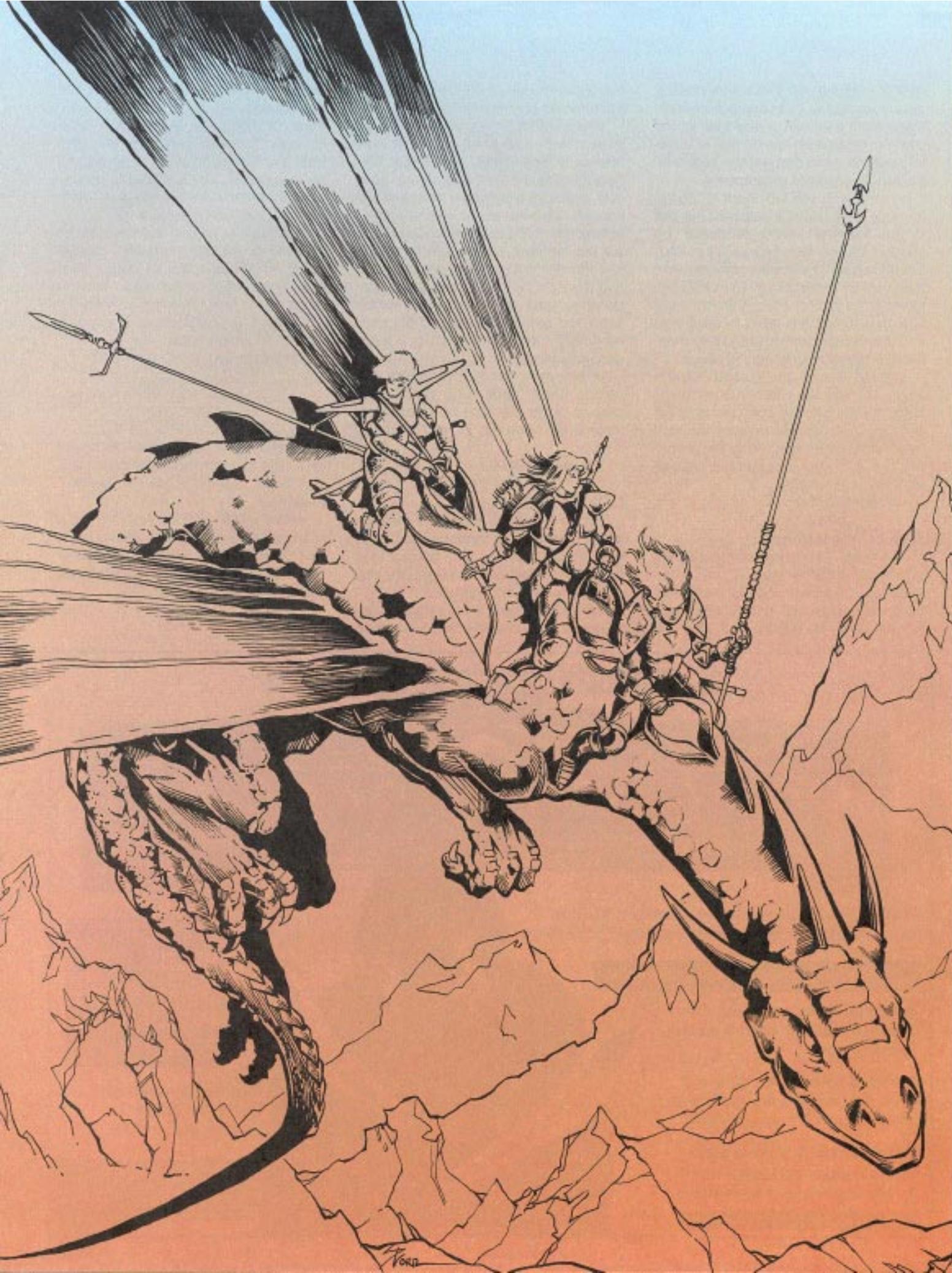
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## The Sunset Flame

by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

**O**ne of the dragons of the North that puzzles Volo most is Galadaeros, a copper dragon often seen in the sky flying low but fast across the Sword Coast North—and usually bearing several riders on his back. When such dragonriders can be seen clearly, they are almost always human females in ornate armor, bristling with weapons and looking eager to use them.

Elminster was able to supply secrets that Volo could only guess at (wildly and, as it turns out, wrongly), and so lay clear the unusual career of Galadaeros, the Sunset Flame or, less formally, the Flame Dragon. This latter nickname has confused many sages, who think it refers to a red dragon or other wyrm who breathes fire, whereas it was in truth bestowed on Galadaeros by Launchalo Rivrym, an otherwise forgotten Waterdhavian poet who was striving to describe the dragon's appearance as Galadaeros flew into the city across the Sea of Swords, out of the setting sun.

Galadaeros is a mature adult male copper dragon of unusually gentle and humorous character; the pride that so

dominates his breed seems almost entirely lacking in his manner. He dwells alone in a mountaintop cavern, on a nameless, uncharted island in the Sea of Swords northwest of Gundarlung. This island is generally considered by those who see it to be one of the Purple Rocks. Regardless, the Sunset Flame is seldom at home.

Galadaeros was visited in his lair 300 years ago by the Waterdhavian adventuress Ranressa Shiard, who preferred to seek her fortune in the company of other women. Ranressa was the last of an all-female adventuring band, the Shining Ring Swordshars, to survive a wild ocean voyage that ended in a shipwreck on the rocks of the dragon's island. "Bold" was her watchword and driving spirit; after hauling herself ashore, she set about exploring the isle. When she found Galadaeros, she promptly tried to slay him.

Amused by her dogged yet futile attempts to bring about his doom, the lonely copper dragon chose to question Ranressa rather than destroy her, and eventually a friendship developed. This

companionship led to the dragon taking Ranressa back to Waterdeep on his back.

Her triumphal flight into the city made Ranressa an instant hero—after the citizenry recovered from the sight of Galadaeros wheeling over the Palace to alight on Mount Waterdeep, a flourish that caused much consternation in the streets (and the hasty crafting of magical wards that, according to Khelben Arunsun, prevent most dragons from doing such things today).

Ranressa promptly chartered the all-female Galadran Company, who took ship 68 strong the next summer, to revisit her friend. All of the Galadrans (who were known rather less politely in the taverns of Waterdeep as "Sharp-tongues") were Waterdhavian ladies of gentle or noble birth who desired to be adventurers.

Galadaeros was delighted to acquire such friends, and he adopted them as his own brood, inquiring as to their health, mating plans, and goals in life with the manner of a kindly old uncle. He also served as their steed as they set out to discover adventure in the North.

Waterdeep was soon able to dismiss the Galadran Company as a band of crazed young lasses out for a fling (though lady minstrels and young girls playing in the streets find them harder to forget), but Galadaeros can still pass the magical city wards freely and bring his young comrades home to their villa on the seaward side of Mount Waterdeep. When the Sunset Flame wheels low over the streets, it is a sign of celebration among his riders.

This is not to say that the career of the Galadran Company has been one long sun-drenched pleasure outing. Ranressa proved a tirelessly bold—some might even say reckless—leader, and she grew restless when evil mages whose towers dripped treasure from every window and turret seemed hard to find, marauding orcs proved to have empty belt-purses, and the lairs of great wyrms turned out to house dragons who were far less friendly than Galadaeros.

Ranressa led her fellow adventurers on wilder and ever more daring exploits. The Sunset Flame had to effect several hasty rescues in that first season, and one or two in later years. During those seasons, fully half of the romantic but unskilled Galadran ladies perished messily in various misadventures.

The remainder slowly became competent warriors, and one named Lhaerilda made a fortuitous discovery in the Crags while the Galadrans were sneaking up on an orc encampment: a rockslide had laid bare one chamber of an ancient underground dwarven tomb that was literally crammed to the ceiling with gold.

Galadaeros flew it all out to his island for the Galadrans, and he gave over a side-cavern of his lair for their treasury. In return, they gave him a triple share of the staggering wealth; Ranressa judged the gold to total over thrice the dragon's body volume. The Galadran Company promptly acquired houses in Waterdeep, a fantastic array of impressive-looking armor (some of it almost useless in battle), and finally the respect they craved.

There have, however, been no more tremendous discoveries of treasure in the years since, and news of the great Galadran wealth has drawn more than a few foes to come calling on the Galadrans.

The mage Nuldus of Turorn (a ruin northeast of Conyberry), for example, enslaved several of the Galadrans with his spells, hoping to bring the entire band under his mental sway and thus lay his hands on their treasure. He got as far as

crafting amulets that allowed him to speak mind-to-mind over great distances with those who wore them, then he sent his slaves back to their companions with orders to slay Ranressa and the dragon.

They failed, and Galadaeros dove out of the sky one morning and smashed the mage's small tower to the ground, killing Nuldus. The Galadrans were able to salvage some magic from the rubble, and they retained the amulets. Today these magical pendants allow six of the lady adventurers to communicate at will with each other and the copper dragon—who can now be summoned from his isle when needed.

The Arcane Brotherhood of Luskan sent several of its ambitious apprentices out on separate missions to "prove themselves" by seizing what they could of the Galadran treasury. One after another found death rather than success—though the apprentice Indratril Khalshus slew no fewer than eight Galadrans before Galadaeros tore her apart, and the apprentice Rythimm Hardrost killed two of the lady adventurers and did snatch up a fistful of rubies (which were lost into the sea at his death) before being run through by the swords of six Galadrans at once.

An unsuccessful company of adventurers, Falder's Flourish, left Waterdeep vowing to slay Galadaeros "and his ungodly harem of sword-ladies," but they were drowned by a dragon turtle before they ever reached the isle Galadaeros calls home.

However, two Galadrans have since been slain in Waterdeep by stealth, on two separate occasions, by intruders lurking—perhaps covertly dwelling—in Galadran houses. Taunting messages left by the bodies indicate that the killers were surviving members of the Flourish, bent on "undying revenge." Whether this recurring phrase indicates that the Flourish slayers are undead is not yet known, but they have utterly eluded at least one magically-aided attempt to trace them.

The Galadran Company continues undaunted in the face of these and many more minor attacks and attempts to rob them. Some of their Waterdhavian homes have even been fitted with nasty falling-floor traps that dump intruders into greased shafts. Victims plunge down these ever-narrower chutes until they become wedged. There they can be hoisted out as captives, or just left in the walls to die. Other Galadran abodes sport overhead coal-scuttles full of boul-

ders, which a retreating resident can pull down on the heads of pursuers by jerking on certain bell-pulls. Wise opponents of the warrior-women don't bother to dare the trapped rooms and passages of a Galadran house; the lady adventurers they seek are almost always on the island where the Company's dragon lairs—and all substantial Galadran treasures are stored there.

Though his lair often rings with the clash of swords or the laughter of the ladies who wield them, Caladaeros never seems to tire of all the human activity around him. He has, however, been saddened by the infirmity and death of one aged adventuress after another (Ranressa in particular), and he was enraged when some men brought to his isle by the Galadrans to be their husbands conspired to make a crude boat and try to steal off with as much of the treasure as it could hold—he sank them when they were well out to sea. Other mates have proved more trustworthy, though the Galadrans now tend to rear healthy babes on the isle and sickly babes in Waterdeep, and they keep all husbands and consorts on the mainland.

As the years have passed, all of the original Galadrans have died, and the strength of the Company has dwindled to between 20 and 30 members. Of these, seven (five of them current holders of the amulets) are descendants of founding Company members.

The unofficial but unquestioned leader of the Company today is the warrior Emra Ilchantra, whose close companion and second-in-command is the sorceress Aszyra Thunderstaff (of the Waterdhavian noble family, though you will wait in vain to hear any of them speak of her; they seem to have disowned her thanks to the "low" reputation of adventurers in general). Aszyra is judged to be "of middling powers" in her magecraft.

The other amulet-holders, aside from the aforementioned Galadrans and Galadaeros himself, are the warriors Glyndra Rowandar, Jhandanna Orwynd, and Khalaltae Baerdith, and the fiery-haired and tempered Lokkara Arsalan (the sole amulet-holder not descended from a company founder).

The last two descendants of founding Company members, Ybril Harlundtree and Aurbreena Gathengate, have no desire or capacity for leadership. Ybril (pronounced "Eee-bril"), a priestess of Ilmater, serves as the Company's surgeon

and healer; and Aurbreena sees to Company provisions, gear, and stores, and she keeps a rough diary of Galadrans deeds and decisions.

A series of deaths and reversals in the Company some 20 summers ago led the Galadrans to add legitimate, stable business ventures to their adventuring lives, and today the Company provides short-term, high-risk bodyguard services to fearful (and wealthy) clients, and provides "secure hideaway banking and storage" facilities to Waterdhavians and citizens of Neverwinter and Baldur's Gate. Valuable items—even, on one occasion, an endangered noble heir—are conveyed to the dragon's isle and there stored in side-tunnels of his lair, secure behind boulders only the dragon can move.

The Galadrans have ignored many business proposals involving their dragon for two reasons: they defer to Galadaeros in such matters, and he seems uninterested; and they fear Cult of the Dragon agents will try to lure the Sunset Flame into a trap.

They are currently considering three separate requests from Waterdhavian noble families to take on daughters as short-term Company members, both to win treasure and to taste adventure.

Galadaeros has made it clear that although he has no objection to ferrying Company members back and forth across the North, he is not eager to become any sort of aerial-steed-for-hire-and the Galadrans are in full agreement. The one such commission the Company did accept, some years back, turned out to be from a wizard who tried to get the Sunset Flame to destroy the home of a rival mage by deceiving the dragon as to who owned the house. Galadaeros and two Galadrans found themselves in the midst of a wild spell-battle that ended only after Galadaeros swept past the turrets of the house and scraped the wizard (one Mrathatos Druin, pretending to be a scribe from Iriaebor by the name of "Namarathos Alonabrynn") on his back into bloody ruin. The Galadrans were badly hurt by that desperate aerobatic, and the wizard whose house was assaulted, Halynder Uinsible, still regards the Company as his foes.

This is not to say that the dragon and the Galadrans are adverse to new business ventures; in fact, they've charged their three city agents with the task of identifying new business ventures that the Company can undertake.

Bruth Melber is the Company's agent in Waterdeep. This careful, balding, middle-aged longtime diplomat has been active in the City of Splendors all his life, and although some can recall his rather colorful past as a swindler and later envoy for shady principals and shadier causes, he is glad to have found an employer to see him through his graying years, and he is steadfastly loyal to the Galadrans. In a house behind his office on the Sutherlane, Bruth maintains sleeping quarters for Company members visiting the city on business.

A many-balconied, tall, and narrow house on Eel Street is home to "Mother" Mounchathos, the fat, bustling woman who is the Galadrans agent in Baldur's Gate. This kindly matron never seems tired and may be seen at all hours chattering excitedly to sleepy-looking servants as she crashes and dashes around her abode, seeing to the cooking and the cleaning and the troubles and aspirations of a hundred Baldurians who regard her as their true mother and would do anything for her. Mother Mounchathos runs a bakery, a shop that sells yarn and needles and bolts of fine cloth from the South (along with free advice and demonstrations on how to turn these into stylish garments), and a soup-window. She sells "hot pots" of soup to merchants and others who must eat on the run; a young boy doles out copper piece deposits for the return of all empty pots, with another copper if their lids come back, and a third copper if the ladles make it home, too. In the odd moments all these activities leave to her, Mounchathos acts as a messenger and go-between for folk who need an all-female adventuring company to right wrongs—or just to appear at a revel or in a parade.

One rich merchant of Amn hires the Galadrans every year to pose in his grand bedroom as his "warrior wives." This fat, prancing little man of many eager enthusiasms and squeals of boundless energy, by the name of Veloudamar Ralanshalass, hungers more than anything else for respect. Each year the little merchant throws a party to impress his clients—and after there's been much dining drinking, and dancing, curtains are rolled back to display sultry Galadrans ladies reclining in wild armor and outlandish costumes while the little man struts up and down declaiming their romantic skills. A few breaths later, the curtains are firmly tied shut, and the Galadrans accept 100 gold pieces each

from silent servants and take wing on Galadaeros before any of the merchants more impressed guests can come looking for them!

The Galadrans agent in Neverwinter is a quiet, always calm man named Alasturan Malatheer. He runs a shop on Hindalos Street where he sells maps, charts, and floorplans of castles, mansions, lands, and seas of Faerûn. Some adventurers mutter that some of the maps they've bought from Alasturan seem to owe more to his imagination than to reality in the Realms, but there are rumors that folk who threatened this quiet shopkeeper found themselves facing a sudden onslaught of monsters and magical items that Alasturan seemed able to control in concert. Some say he's a retired adventurer, and others claim he's a wizard in hiding from some deadly sorcerous foe. Folk in Neverwinter most like to tell a tale that the mapseller denies: that once, when a copper dragon flew into the city with one ragged and torn wing weeping great tears of blood, Alasturan rose up into the form of a great gold dragon and cradled the wounded dragon to his breast, flying westward out to sea with his great golden wings carrying them both.

Probably only Alasturan and Galadaeros (who personally chose the Galadrans agent in Neverwinter) know the true nature and powers of the unassuming mapseller; Elminster refuses to do more than smilingly muse about what a formidable foe a weredragon wizard who retained his magecraft in gold dragon form would be—and then add enigmatically that Mystra would almost have to take a personal interest in such an individual.

On the subject of Galadaeros himself, Elminster was more forthcoming. The Company of striving, loving humans has become his family, banishing his loneliness and making him feel loved, revered, and needed for the first time in his life. It is more precious to him than treasure, dominance, and indeed anything else. So long as he can eat and find a safe place to rest from time to time, Galadaeros is happy to be a part of this noisy, reckless, fun-loving band of human women, with their wild plans and daring deeds; he is a young and playful wyrm at heart so long as he can be a part of this endless revel of human energy and ambition—and the Sunset Flame takes delight in such simple acts as sliding softly past the windows of Waterdhavian nobility to pluck his

Galadran ladies from a balcony in mid-revel and hearing the gasps, oaths, and screams of awed nobles from all sides.

Galadaeros seems to lack both the pride of his kind and the insensitivity that goes with it, but his most special talent is an uncanny ability he's developed over the years to judge the needs and schemes of humans. He's familiar with the North (and all of the Sword Coast from the Nelanther north to where the "undying ice" begins) and can find his way unerringly about in the worst snowstorms and other heavy weather. He also possesses some modest skill at magic.

Galadaeros happily spends his days acting as the steed, heavy reinforcement, and wise old advisor to the Company. His relationships with other dragons have been, in the words of the human sage Velsaert of Baldur's Gate (fast becoming recognized as an authority on the history of dragons up and down the Sword Coast), "polite but brief and casual encounters; he offers no menace but in turn ignores it when offered to him—and then removes himself while the other wyrm is still lost in puzzlement."

The key to understanding Galadaeros could be said to be recognition of his deep and discerning sensitivity to the characters of others, human females in particular. He has few known foes, but the Cult of the Dragon is most definitely among them.

### The Lair of Galadaeros

The Sunset Flame makes his lair in a network of caverns in the heart of the highest peak (a modest mountain by the standards of Faerûn, being a mere pinnacle rising out of high moors) on the island that he styles Flamehome (most of the Galadrans call it "Galadros" or "the Dragon's Isle").

The caverns are said to be warmed by volcanic vents at their lowest levels, and to stretch for miles, with many chambers large enough to hold Galadaeros comfortably, though he can spread his wings and glide to a landing or surge into flight, in only a handful of them.

The Flame Dragon has at least three entrances to his lair, and he is said by some Galadrans to have three wiz-shades as servants, though others suspect these seldom-seen sorceresses are wild mages who visit him rarely—or even some of the Seven Sisters. Elminster says that all three conjectures are wrong, but that the last one comes closest. Of other servants, there have

been no signs—beyond the dragon's obvious use of *unseen servant* spells.

### The Domain of Galadaeros

From Flamehome, Galadaeros roams the waters in a wide circle that takes in the Purple Rocks. On at least three occasions, he has savagely attacked and driven away dragons who tried to make their lairs amid the isles of the Rocks. When a marauding black dragon of gigantic size attacked, Galadaeros slew her by driving her down into the sea, to drown in the cold deeps.

Beyond this rather modest territory, Galadaeros makes no claims—but he also seems to consider himself exempt from the territorial claims of all other dragons, flying where he wills and (whenever possible) ignoring or avoiding battle with the wyrms he thus arouses.

### The Deeds of Galadaeros

The favorite prey of Galadaeros are the mountain goats and rothé that roam the Purple Rocks and the "Cold Coast" (that part of the mainland coast north of Mirabar), but he is apt to devour beasts—even livestock—and drink from handy lakes and rivers wherever he finds them when ranging far and wide across the Sword Coast North on Company business.

Outside of his time with the Galadran Company, Galadaeros is known to have gone on solitary flights exploring the northlands, but these have become rare in recent years. He has engaged in no known alliances or matings with other dragons (beyond whatever draconic element his relationship with Alasturan of Neverwinter may involve).

### The Magic of Galadaeros

Little is said of the magic of Galadaeros, beyond an oft-repeated tale about his once hurling a spell that released a handful of live firetails (a monster detailed in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual Volume Three*), and he seems to employ magics to do useful things, rather than as spectacular attacks or for foe-impressing effects.

#### Scalespurs

(Evocation)

Level: 4

Range: 0

Components: V

Duration: 2 rounds

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 33 specific scales on caster

Saving Throw: None

Galadaeros developed this spell to help Galadrans riding him to "stay aboard." The magic creates large, smooth, semicircular bars of glowing, translucent force that rise from one end of an exposed body scale and descend to meet its other end.

The "handles" created by this spell are non-metallic and non-conductive (i.e., heat, electrical discharges, and the like aren't transferred along them from dragon to rider, or vice versa), and they appear on specific scales of the dragon's choosing. They are solid and unbreakable, and they can support any amount of weight, even being used to lash down cargo or take lines that the dragon can use to tow large objects. Once created, they last until the spell expires, even if the dragon falls unconscious or dies.

Galadrans usually wear harnesses (resembling leather shorts made of various broad straps and buckles) that tether them to these handles, and they also hold on with their hands. The handles stand up a foot away from the scales they are attached to, and a human flattened between them is shielded from most damage if the dragon scrapes along a castle wall or other solid barrier, or is struck by another flying creature.

*Scalespurs* can't be broken off and won't vanish even with the direct application of a *dispel magic* spell; to remove one, three *dispel magics* must be directly cast (i.e., by touch) on it, or the scale it is attached to must be hacked away from the dragon's body.

The name of the spell comes from an earlier version developed by Galadaeros, a spell that made magical barbs project from his scales. These caused more damage to adjacent scales than to any foe, so he soon abandoned use of them.

Many mages are avidly seeking this spell; there is a belief that a modification of it could make the manufacture of dragonscale armors much swifter, less costly, and simpler.

#### Talonsnatch

(Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: 90 yards

Components: V

Duration: 2 rounds

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: 1 being (per round)

Saving Throw: Special

This spell creates an invisible "plucking" force extending from the caster's talons to an intended target (a single

visible being, though the dragon may choose different beings in each round of the spell's existence). The spell can be employed in two ways: as a deft snatch of a being onto the dragon's back (protecting the target from all damage despite whatever speed the dragon is flying and steering them safely past his wings) or as an attack (plucking the target into the dragon's claws).

There is no saving throw against the first form of the spell, even if the being doesn't want to be 'taken aboard' the dragon or is unaware of what is about to occur. A d20 should be rolled for both passenger and dragon; if one roll is a "1," the passenger is buffeted for 1d4+1 hit hp damage in the journey to the dragon's back; if both rolls have a "1" result, the passenger falls from the dragon's grasp. In the latter case, falling damage applies unless the height above the ground is great enough to allow the dragon to catch the dropped passenger before impact, either by use of this spell or by a physical snatch attempt; the latter may well involve some impact damage.

A normal save vs. spells is allowed against the attack form of a *talonsnatch*. If it succeeds, the spell fails utterly and is wasted. If it fails, the target being is hurled forcibly into the dragon's claws, receiving normal claw attack damage instantly. Thereafter, the target can be dropped by the dragon (falling damage probably applies) or handled as described under "Snatch" in the "Dragon, General" entry of the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome.

The caster of this spell can use either form of the spell in each round of its existence (i.e., it can attack in one round, and pluck a passenger safely in the other, or expend both rounds employing the same form of the spell). The presence of a passenger or attacked victim from the first round of the spell has no effect on the operation of the spell in its second round.

Caladaeros often uses this spell to pluck Galadran ladies aloft from areas to which he can't fly close enough to reach safely with an actual talon.

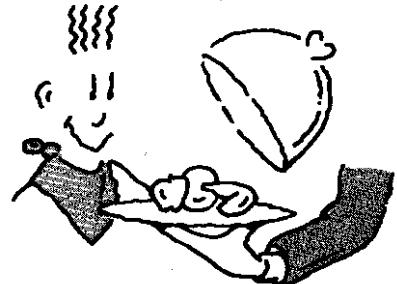
### The Fate of Galadaeros

Those who go adventuring are apt to die by misadventure, as the old saying goes—and that's as likely to be true for Caladaeros as it is for a human swordswinger; over the years, he's intruded on enough dragon territories, and swooped past enough Cult of the Dragon agents, to be widely noticed.

That would make him target enough

for ambitious young dragons, even without his Company service—which is all too apt to draw him screaming into deadly combat situations in attempts to rescue Galadran ladies from various dooms. Any attack on a Company member could well be intended as a lure deliberately to draw the Sunset Flame into a deadly trap—and more than one cabal in Waterdeep has tried just that over the years (along with the Arcane Brotherhood, agents of the Cult of the Dragon, and even servants of a Red Wizard of Thay who hoped to enslave Galadaeros to his will). All such attempts thus far have been failures, but sooner or later one will inevitably succeed, unless (as Elminster hinted a time or two) Galadaeros has formidable magic or allies he can call upon in times of need.

### GIVE YOUR KIDS A TASTE OF THE GOOD LIFE.



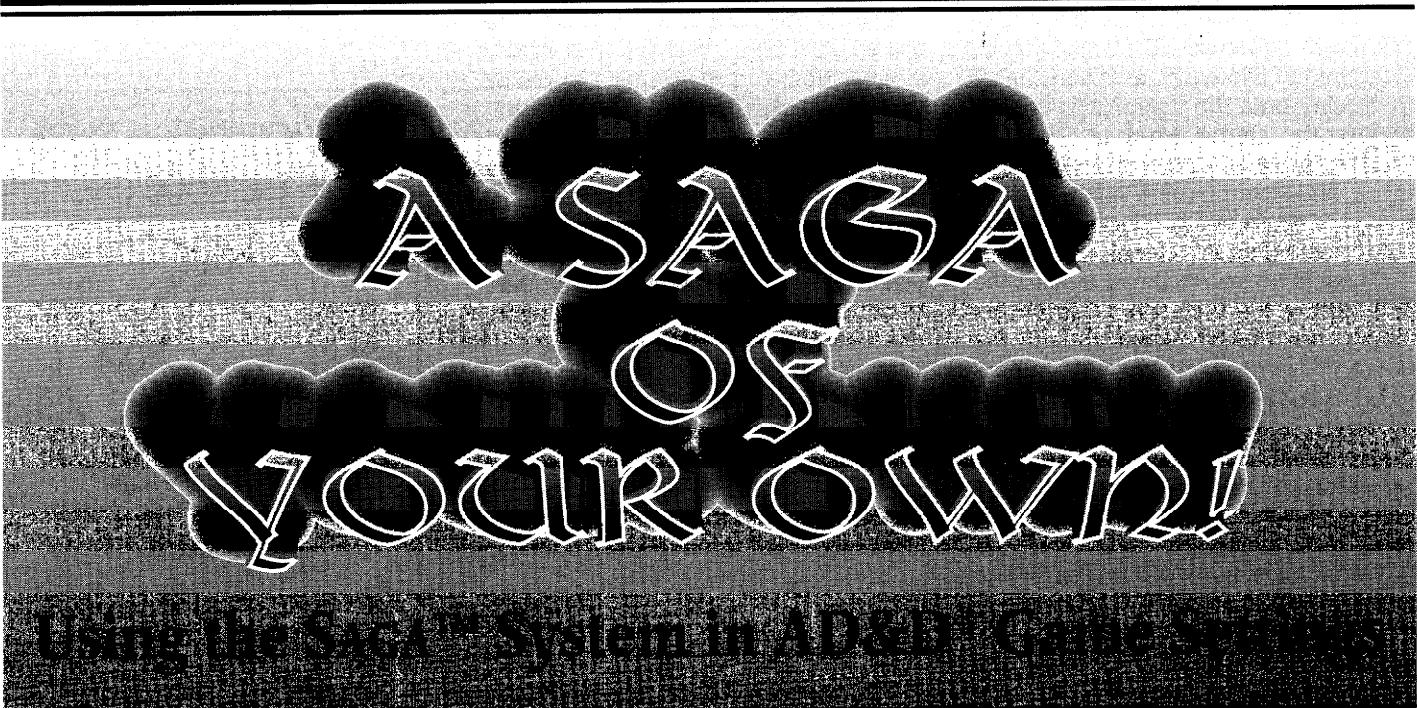
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*Ed Greenwood is a Canadian writer who tries not to be Volo or even Azoun, but who doesn't mind being Elminster*

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by Stephen Kenson

The changes brought about by the Chaos War on Krynn and the dawning of the Age of Mortals, warranted a significant change in the DRAGONLANCE® game saga. With the release of the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE™ boxed set, TSR has departed from previous AD&D editions of DRAGONLANCE and provided the world of Krynn with its own unique new game-system that offers open-ended, simple mechanics with a focus on the heroes of the story, along with a flexible new magic system that allows spellcasters to design their own enchantments. The new SAGA™ game system opens up a new world of opportunities for DRAGONLANCE players.

But the SAGA system presents an opportunity for more gamers than only DRAGONLANCE players. The SAGA system's innovative, story- and character-oriented game system can be used to enhance any new or existing fantasy role-playing campaign set in a world other than the Fifth Age of Krynn, usually with fairly little modification of the system presented in the FIFTH AGE boxed set. Take a look at the opportunities that the FIFTH AGE game presents and you can construct a saga of your own.

### The Basics: Getting Started

The first question that the gamemaster must ask is: if their SAGA game is not going to be set in the Fifth Age of Krynn,

where and when will it be set? Gamemasters can use any of the numerous published campaign settings that are available these days including the AD&D worlds like the BIRTHRIGHT®, DARK SUN®, PLANESCAPE® or FORGOTTEN REALMS® settings, or such campaign classics as the AL-QADIM®, GREYHAWK®, or MYSTARA® worlds. Or the gamemaster might use a different published game setting or an entirely new setting.

If using an established fantasy world, the gamemaster might be required to adapt the SAGA rules somewhat to suit the particular flavor of that world. For example, in a BIRTHRIGHT game, a hero's Social Status is far more important than it is in FIFTH AGE campaign, and noble birth carries certain benefits, so the gamemaster may wish to assign bonuses to heroes based on the Social Status they are assigned during character creation. The DARK SUN world has different standards of weapons and armor, making some of the higher Strength and Endurance codes in FIFTH AGE less useful, perhaps requiring some other benefits for those codes.

The gamemaster may also want to change the setting to better suit some of the FIFTH AGE rules. Magic in the SAGA system works quite differently from magic in most AD&D settings, so the gamemaster will need to come up with an explanation of why magic works differently. Either it

has always worked that way in the gamemaster's version of that campaign world or perhaps some significant event that is the equivalent of Krynn's Chaos War changed how magic works in the setting. The Avatar War in the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign is a good example of such a world-changing event.

**Example 1:** Bill is converting his FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign over to the SAGA system. He decides that the Avatar War, where the gods of the Realms were incarnated in mortal form for a time and fought to return to their celestial realm, had a more serious impact in his setting than in the official Realms setting. The death of some of the gods, particularly Mystra, the goddess of magic, changed how magic works in the Realms. Bill's players use the system presented in the FIFTH AGE boxed set to convert their existing AD&D characters over to the SAGA system, recording their new abilities and ability codes.

**Example 2:** Sarah is working on a new fantasy campaign called the Seven Kingdoms. She wants to use the SAGA rules for her setting to capture the feel of an epic heroic fantasy world like Krynn. She begins by outlining the history of the campaign world, its origins, legends and the races and nations that populate it, particularly the seven major warring kingdoms that give the campaign its name.

## Character Roles

The next thing for the gamemaster to consider is the roles that the heroes (player characters) can play in the campaign setting. The FIFTH AGE setting is character-and ability-based rather than class-based, so character classes might no longer exist in the campaign setting and might never have existed. The heroes still need hooks around which they can develop roles, and the narrator can use the old character classes of the setting to provide these character backgrounds. The Factions of the PLANESCAPE setting provide excellent character roles, as do the traditional AD&D classes of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting.

One of the major defining factors of a FIFTH AGE character is their race. While most fantasy worlds include the familiar Elf and Dwarf races, they may not be the same as the elves and dwarves of Krynn described in the FIFTH AGE game. Fantasy worlds such as PLANESCAPE also include other player-character races from the different planes of existence that Krynn has never seen before, requiring the gamemaster to develop racial advantages and disadvantages based on the races given in the FIFTH AGE game.

## The Trump Factor

One of the gamemaster's best tools for creating races and roles for characters in a SAGA game is the creative use of trump. Trump cards allow the hero to play an additional card from the top of the Fate Deck immediately on an action. Certain races on Krynn have advantages that make any card they use for certain actions a trump, such as an elf using a sword in melee combat.

The gamemaster can extend this advantage to other races to indicate their area of specialty, things they should gain a bonus at doing. This can include character roles as well as race, giving certain characters from a particular class, background or faction a special bonus that separates them from other characters.

A trump bonus should always be balanced out with some appropriate restriction, usually to one or more of the character's Ability Codes. For example, although Krynn elves gain a trump bonus using a sword or bow, they cannot wear heavy armor or have an Endurance Code higher than "C." New or modified races can be balanced in a similar way to keep them from becoming too powerful.

**Example 1:** Bill's FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign uses most of the roles found in AD&D to help define characters, but heroes are not limited rigidly by their class as before. Converting the existing characters over to the SAGA system has preserved most of their abilities and changed a few of them slightly. Bill decides that Krynn elves and dwarves are similar enough to those in the Realms to use their abilities with only slight modifications. He uses the kender as a basis for developing abilities for FORGOTTEN REALMS halflings but decides that the gnomes in the Realms are far different from their cousins in Krynn and decides to create a new set of racial abilities for gnomes.

**Example 2:** The Seven Kingdoms has a race that is similar to Krynnish elves, a people called the Endra. Sarah decides that the elven trump bonus with swords is appropriate for Endra, but not the bonus for bows. She also wants the Endra to be a very magical race and requires that any Endra hero have a Reason code of at least "B" to be able to use at least one school of Sorcery. The dwarves serve as a good basis for Sarah's idea for the Trollkin, a squat, ugly race of miners that live in the mountains.

Sarah also wants a new race in her campaign known as the Darklings, small humanoids covered in short black fur that are excellent sneak-thieves and spies. She uses the Ability limits of the small Kender as a guideline for darkling abilities and decides that they should receive a trump bonus for sneaking and hiding in the shadows, where their dark fur gives them natural camouflage.

## Combat

Most fantasy settings feature the same kinds of combat described in the FIFTH AGE game: close melee combat, either unarmed or with weapons, and long-range combat with thrown weapons or missile weapons like bows and crossbows. If the game setting features particularly exotic or unusual weapons and armor, such as the DARK SUN world, the gamemaster may have to make up the damage and defense statistics of those items so that characters can use them, but for the most part the SAGA combat system handles any of the combat actions that characters in a fantasy world would be able to perform.

**Example 1:** Characters in Bill's campaign simply convert their weapons over to the FIFTH AGE versions by name, so that

a broadsword that causes 1-8 hp damage in an AD&D game now inflicts +6 damage in the hands of a SAGA character.

**Example 2:** The Seven Kingdoms includes many of the weapons described in the FIFTH AGE set, but Sarah also wants to include a few new unique weapons that belong to specific kingdoms and races. The warriors of the Nomad Lands use a double-bladed weapon known as a ha'choose that is gripped by a central shaft. Based on the polearms in the FIFTH AGE game, Sarah makes the ha'choose a Medium weapon that does +5 damage. The darklings also use a wedge shaped throwing blade to strike from surprise. It gains statistics similar to a war dart, a Light weapon that can be thrown or used in melee for +2 damage.

Because FIFTH AGE melee combat is based on the hero's Strength and Endurance abilities, character converted from the AD&D to the FIFTH AGE game may find that many of their traditional combat techniques are not as effective when fighting against creatures with very high Strength and Endurance. SAGA heroes must often rely on their wits and other forms of combat to overcome physically powerful foes.

## Magic

The SAGA system uses an improvisational magic system based on the hero's Abilities, where the statistics of the spell are often designed on the spot as it is cast. The hero then pays Spell Points for the cost of the spell. This is quite different from the rote fire-and-forget nature of the AD&D magic system as well as from some other fantasy magic systems. The gamemaster will have to decide how much he wants to change the system of Sorcery and Mysticism presented in FIFTH AGE to suit the campaign world and how much the campaign world can change to suit the SAGA magic system based on the interests of the players and the needs of the particular campaign.

**Example 1:** Bill likes and wants to use the systems of Sorcery and Mysticism presented in the FIFTH AGE setting. He decides that one of the results of the Avatar War was that the way magic works in the Realms was changed by the death of Mystra, and an accord reached by the other gods that said they would no longer interfere in the affairs of mortals. The people of the Realms learned the arts of Sorcery and Mysticism to compensate and there are

now schools, temples and academies that teach those arts throughout the FORGOTTEN REALMS. Former mage and cleric characters have learned to use the new magic, and new characters may know either or both.

**Example 2:** Sarah likes the basic system of Sorcery and Mysticism given in the FIFTH AGE setting but wants it to suit her Seven Kingdoms campaign better. She decides that Sorcery is divided into different "paths," each consisting of three schools of sorcery. A character with a Reason code of "A" must choose one Path of Sorcery to follow, including the Path of the Sky (aeromancy, hydromancy, and electromancy), the Path of the Sea (hydromancy, cryomancy, and aeromancy), the Path of the Earth (geomancy, enchantment and transmutation), the Path of Fire (pyromancy, spectramancy, and electromancy), and the Path of the Stars (divination, enchantment, and summoning). A hero with a Reason code of "B" still chooses only one school of sorcery, as described in the FIFTH AGE game, and is considered a "dabbler" by serious sorcerers.

Sarah also decides that mystics must follow a particular Ideal on which they focus their emotions and beliefs to

develop their inner selves and that determines which mystic spheres they can use. They include the Ideals of Battle (channeling, healing, and alteration), Death (necromancy, sensitivity, and spiritualism), Knowledge (meditation, mentalism, and sensitivity), Mercy (healing mentalism, and sensitivity) and Nature (animism, alteration, and channeling). Characters with a code of "A" for Spirit must choose an Ideal to follow that decides which spheres they can use. Characters with a "B" code for Spirit can learn any one sphere of their choice.

Other than the concept of the Paths and Ideals, Sarah decides that she likes the overall magic system, but she also requires that characters carry some kind of crystal or gemstone on their person in order to recover spell points. If a spell-caster is deprived of access to a crystal, he cannot regain his spell points, and sorcerers and mystics are often recognized by the crystal pendants or jewelry they wear.

#### Creatures

Creatures in the SAGA system are defined by a few basic characteristics: Coordination, Physique, Intellect, Essence, Damage, and Defense. Guidelines are

given in the FIFTH AGE boxed set for converting AD&D creatures for use in the FIFTH AGE setting allowing gamemasters to use any creature from an AD&D setting in the FIFTH AGE game. The creature information in Book One of the FIFTH AGE boxed set can also be used as a guideline for developing creatures for a completely new campaign world.

**Example 1:** Bill wants to continue to use all of the various AD&D creatures he had in his campaign previously, so he chooses most of the creatures described in the FIFTH AGE boxed set, along with the conversion system provided to generate abilities for the numerous other creatures from various published sources.

**Example 2:** Sarah uses some of the creatures from the FIFTH AGE boxed set along with ones of her own creation to populate the wild and savage areas of the Seven Kingdoms. Occasionally she converts an interesting AD&D monster to use in her campaign as well.



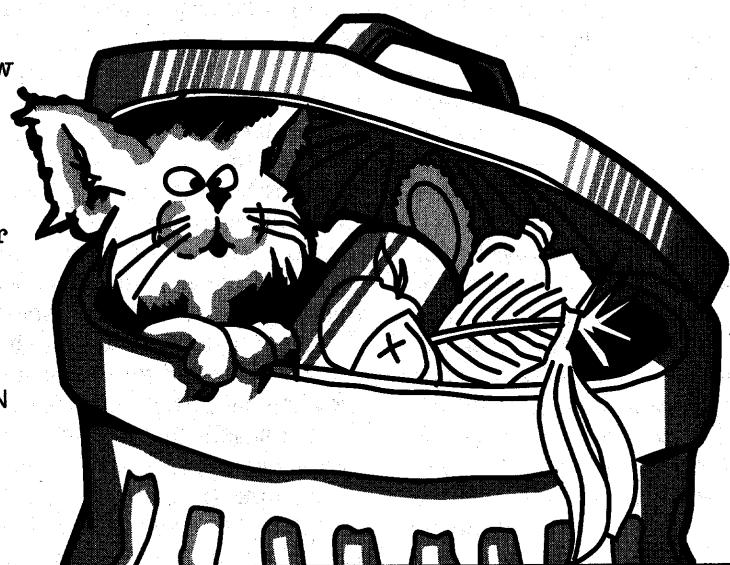
*Stephen Kenson's work has appeared in game systems ranging from FASA's Shadowrun to Daedulus's Feng Shui.*

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# Bloodthirsty

It should have been a time of celebration for the settlers of Albanner. The warm, moist breezes of spring swept away the lingering cold of winter. The houses and cabins of Albanner now stood open, embracing the new spring. Rows of corn and chew-leaf had been planted, and they thirstily drank the sunny rays of Father Tirador. It should have been a time of joy, not of mourning.

So Jenner of Northreich reflected as he looked down upon the settlement. Those brave farmers, induced by a forbearance of the Kings tax, had left the lands of the North Realm, which slept nearly eight months beneath the bitter snows of Northor, Heart of Winter. The longer growing season of the south drew first the farmers, and then the shepherds, who would buy less fodder for their flocks. Jenner, a soldier from the King's own garrison in Northreich, had been sent here to protect them. And he did—or had.

They had lived through the winter, had endured the floods brought by the melting snows, and had driven away the great herds of frost-tail deer that threatened their precious corn and profitable chew-leaf. Jenner and his handful of men-at-arms, carrying steel and the Kings Writ, now faced a more horrible, unseen enemy, one who fed not on crops but on shepherds.

With a sigh, Jenner resumed his climb up and away from the village, into the grassy hills where the shepherds watched over their flocks. He met Legrin just above the village. Legrin was an old Northman, worn by the winds of time but yet unbroken. He chewed a large wad of the leaf grown in the village below and spat it over his left shoulder upon taking Jenner's hand.

"*Dal kahr,*" Jenner said, offering the traditional Realmic greeting.

Legrin nodded and spat again. "There are many dead now, Realmsman," was his only reply.

Jenner nodded grimly.

The first was the boy, Heb. Found him with a few of his flock—entirely drained of blood. They had puncture wounds, like an awl would make? Legrin removed a new wad of the slick,

# THE LEGEND OF theStirge

by Tim Richardson

illustrated by Tom Baxa

green leaf, put it in his mouth, and chewed thoughtfully for a moment. Motioning for Jenner to follow, the Northman walked as he related the terrible story.

"We lost sixteen sheep—all drained o' blood with them queer wounds. There's them that say its the vampire, but I never heard of one that drank from one great tooth, or one that et sheep's blood neither." Jenner nodded his agreement. "It's no vampire. And it doesn't sound like anything I've ever heard of—or seen."

"Three nights ago," Legrin continued, "we found seven bodies—the whole Tallman family from old Gebrik to little Saysha. She hadn't even seen her second summer yet.

"Curious thing was that none o' their sheep was touched.<sup>2</sup> That's how Enlieg found 'em—their whole flock jest up and wandered into his pastures. And they was livin' quite a pace from where we first found Heb." The Northman gestured with his head, indicating a rocky crest rising above the other hills. Jenner immediately recognized its strategic value: high ground, easily defensible. To a shepherd, though, it was just a place to watch over the flocks.

"They call it 'Heb's Crown' now," Legrin said quietly. "We got excited then, seven of our own done in like that, and

we was ..." the old man swallowed a bit of the leaf, and his tale was momentarily halted by a throat-tearing cough. After a moment, he continued, "... wonderin' what to do an' all, when Val, one of the boys, came back, bloody as the day he was born."

Two young men, Val and Nured, had taken it upon themselves to explore Heb's Crown, hoping to find some clue that would explain the death of their friend. Only one still lived who could tell of their gruesome discovery.

Jenner clung to the vague hope that Legrin's description of the wounds was an exaggeration, but he had grown to learn that Northmen were incapable of hyperbole. It was an accurate, if not understated, account of the true events.

It was near sunset when the pair reached Commonfield, a large and relatively flat plain northeast of Albanner. Ten large, make-shift shelters housed the two or threescore shepherds. Nearly three hundred sheep milled about, creating an odor impossible to describe,<sup>3</sup> and only slight less easy to tolerate.<sup>3</sup> "Well," remarked Legrin unnecessarily, "here we are."

The pair picked their way down onto the plain, and Jenner risked a look back toward the rock formation that overlooked the other pasture. It was about half a day's walk from Commonfield,

1. The wounds left by a stirge are very distinctive, anyone who has encountered them before will not fail to recognize them again.

2. Stirges prefer the richer blood of omnivores,

especially humans and demi-humans. Their typical prey is a herd or flock of herbivores—like sheep or deer—but they will quickly change their feeding habits to accommodate their preferred prey.

3. Stirges have an acute sense of smell that allows them to locate and track herds of their prey—like sheep or deer. Their superior eyesight and infravision also assist them in hunting their prey.

probably not much faster on a horse because of the rougher terrain above the plain. The men of the camp were standing around watching the women load more wood into a pile that, when the sun set in the west, would burn brightly long into the night. They watched Jenner carefully as he approached, their stern faces grim and protective. Their weapons were those of shepherds: wooden cudgels and stout clubs. Jenner doubted that there was any blade larger than a knife in all of Albanner.

"Dal kahr," Jenner said, offering the first of the men his hand. The Northmen muttered among themselves, and some spat wads of chew-leaf over their left shoulders. None took the offered hand. Perhaps, Jenner mused, that was how Northmen said hello. He chose to act as if he believed it.

"My friends, I am here to help you. Good Legrin has been kind enough to explain the trouble you face, and I give you my word as the Kings man that I will make it so that none of you, nor your families, need fear any more." All in all, Jenner was rather impressed by the confidence he displayed.

The men looked hopeful for a moment and shuffled their feet. "Don't stand around like ninny-goats!" admonished Legrin sternly. "It'll be dark soon, so see to your folk!" They dispersed quickly, moving with the confidence of men who knew that something was being done to protect them against the terrors of the night. One Northman stepped forward, nodded shortly to Legrin, and spoke in a deep, rich voice. "I am called Gillum. My boy Val is the one who saw the demons."

"What!" exclaimed Legrin and Jenner almost at once.

Gillum nodded once and spat over his shoulder, a curious custom whose meaning Jenner was becoming impatient to learn. "My boy, Val, said that the things were demons. Had faces like swords, with huge glittering eyes. Little ones, with wings, they hung upside down in caves like bats, but they gots two pairs o' talons. He's got the marks on his back to prove it. He said there's more'n a thousand of 'em livin' beneath Heb's Crown."

4. Stirges move around a great deal in following their prey, but often return to the same roosting sites year after year, where they may remain for as long as a season. Though not migratory, they will follow the migratory patterns of their primary prey. Common stirges defecate in their roosting areas, and, as Val noted, their guano is blood-red and tends to be more liquid than solid. The protein-rich

"Gillum, yer mouth is runnin' far today. You know there ain't no demons, and they're sure ain't no thousand of 'em. Why, they'd have killed us all by now."

"That's what my boy says, Legrin. And I'll not have you callin' him a liar." Gillum bristled at the older man's rebuke.

"Gentlemen," interrupted Jenner, "let's fight against the things, not over them."

The Northmen regarded the Realmic soldier for a moment as their mouths worked away at the chew-leaf. "He's right. Gillum, accept muh apologies." The two men spat in their hands and shook on it. Jenner barely repressed a shudder of revulsion. "I'm thinkin' that you'll want to talk to the boy," added Legrin.

"Yes, I think that would be wise," replied Jenner, moving to follow Gillum to the center row of tents. The large tent was made of wool, a plentiful commodity among the Northmen of Albanner. Treated with protective oils, the roof was rendered practically waterproof, and the thicker woolen walls retained heat during the winter. An old woman, bent with age, was applying a poultice to a young man stripped to his small-clothes lying on a make-shift bed. The "boy" was larger and more muscular than his father—a tall young man who showed the promise of a warrior. He was pale and his breathing quick and shallow.

"Val," spoke Jenner softly. "My name is Jenner of Northreich. I am one of the Kings men. Do you remember me?" The boy nodded weakly. "That's good. Your father and old Legrin tell me that you are a very brave young man—that you went into the cavern under Heb's Crown to find out what has been attacking your flocks." Val nodded again, wincing at the pain of recollection. "Tell me what you saw, Val."

The boy opened his eyes, which, despite his grievous wounds, were bright and alert. The entrance to the caves below the Crown was low, sir. It ran straight, though. Me an' Nured was wadin' ankle-deep in guano—I thought it was bats at first, and said as much to Nured. Still, though, by the light of the torches it looked awfully red—and it was goopier, more like mud.<sup>4</sup>

"I think it was pools of blood, drippin' from their fang, sir." This quiet assertion

guano, over time, hardens into a clay-like substance that, if broken or granulated, makes excellent fertilizer for crops.

5. A stigre colony can communicate simple ideas—like danger and where to find food and mates—through movement and a series of chirps. Stirges can and will alert the rest of the colony to danger and potential food. Often, as was the case

startled Jenner visibly, earning him a stern glance from the old lady. "Well, sir, the demons was hung from the ceiling, like bats. Only they wasn't bats. They had one long tooth, long as a dirk. Their eyes was big and round, like a bugs'. They had four talons, small, but real sharp. Them's what they use to hang on to you whiles they drain the blood right out. They got wings, too—feather ones, though, not like a bats. That's how I knowed they weren't none."

Jenner calmly examined the boy's wound. The claw marks were on the boys' back, indicating that the creatures were small. It was the "stab" wound that was the worst; it was several inches deep and did indeed look like it had been made by an awl or poniard. The wounds and the boys story confirmed Jenner's fear—he was dealing with something completely unknown to him and the Northmen.

The boy spoke again, "A few of the things flew at us right away and got me. Nured splattered one with his club and almost knocked my head clean off. That's when we started to run—but Nured fell and half a dozen of the things was on 'im before I could turn around.<sup>5</sup> Two more stuck on me, one on my thigh, and this 'un here." He indicated the wound Jenner had examined. "Well, sir, my father says I did right by leavin' Nured . . ."

"You did, Val," Jenner said, before even the father could rumble his assent. In the corner of his eye, he saw the old woman smile her approval. "You needed to tell what you had discovered—don't blame yourself for Nured's death. You may have saved the life of everyone here."

"That's what my father said . . ."

"Just tell me what else happened, Val. Everything you can remember."

"Well, sir, it was late afternoon, and the sun was still out. I managed to tear the one thing off my leg and ran as fast as I could until I collapsed." Jenner marvelled at the boy, as he noticed the chunks of flesh and muscle missing from his thigh—the boy had indeed torn it away with considerable strength. "I yanked its sticker out, but I couldn't pull it off my shoulder. I jest fell down on top of it, holdin' its sticker—it was soft, and I couldn't break it—so I held it away from

with Nured, several will attack one target. Stirges do not attempt to assist each other like a wolf pack in any coordinated way, but their superior sense of smell allows them to recognize the smell of wounded prey, me smell of blood and fear draws the monsters to attack. Once the stigre has attached to their prey they ignore everything but a direct attack until they have drunk their fill.

me. Eventually it let go and flew off, back into the cave.<sup>6</sup>

"I don't know what they are, sir, but I sure hope you can do somethin' about 'em."

"Don't you worry, Val," Jenner said, standing and grasping the boy's hand. "With what you have told me, we can take care of these things once and for all. You have done a great service for us all, Val, and I shall see you rewarded. You are a good Kings man. It would not surprise me if one day you were to wear steel." Val smiled and returned the grip as well as he was able before the soldier left, followed by Gillum and Legrin.

Outside, Gillum spoke. "You did my son a great honor, Realmsman. Thank you."

"I spoke the truth, Gillurn." Jenner considered the problem and made a quick decision. "I will stay tonight with you and your flocks. Tomorrow I will return to the village for the rest of my men, and we will either seal the cave or destroy these things. In the meantime, I would like to examine the sheep that were killed by these creatures."

The dry husks of the livestock had many wounds, all of which matched those of the boy Val. The blood had been drained completely. Jenner was glad that the bodies of the Tallmans had already been cremated; even his own military objectivity was shaken by the off-handed way Legrin mentioned how quickly the bodies had burned—"jest like dry kindlin'."<sup>7</sup>

The night passed without incident.<sup>7</sup> Jenner was pleased to see that Gillum had spread the news of his words to Val. The Northmen were a very patriotic people who revered their King. His remark that someday Val would wear steel was an honor to all of them.

Jenner left Commonfield shortly after dawn, arriving in Albanner just after midday. No sooner had the Realmsman arrived than he was accosted by Roveer d'Alindanzar, an Alian merchant who had underwritten much of the cost of the new settlement. Alians, hailing from the great jungles far to the southwest

were preeminent merchants of the lands, known as much for their financial acumen as their untrustworthiness. Roveer, like most Alians, was a small, thin man whose dark hair and copper skin made him stand out among the tall, fair-haired men of the North Realm. His eyes were bright, almost feral, and his face seemed to wear a mask that was always smiling. "Well, Jenner? What foul beast is plaguing the imaginations of our shepherds this week?"

"Roveer, I haven't the time to fence words with you today. They, we, have a serious problem. Some kind of bat that drains the blood of its prey."

The Alian looked skeptical. "Come now, Jenner! Surely the crags of Albanner are not infested by vampire bats?"

"I doubt it—unless there's a variety with only a single fang as long as a dirk."

Suddenly Roveer was all business, "What do you mean?"

Jenner, suppressing his irritation, briefly explained the boy's story and his own examination of the carcasses. "I can only guess what kind of monsters these are, but they've got to be destroyed if Albanner is going to make it. These things are killing our people."

"Indeed, they are, Jenner. Indeed they are." The little man looked thoughtful and continued, "I believe these things are spear-beak<sup>8</sup>—you would call them stirges in this part of the world."

"Stirges?"

"Yes, yes," said Roveer with a sigh of exasperation. "They're some bizarre hybrid of bird and insect.<sup>9</sup> A large mosquito with feathers, if you will. In the jungles of Ali they grow to be quite large, and I understand they may be poisonous—a toxin that deadens the nerves, like a leech.<sup>10</sup> In the deserts, I hear there exists a wingless variety with six legs—more like an insect than a bird, really. It hops after its prey, you see.<sup>11</sup> In any case, they drink until they're full of blood, then sleep for a few days until they're hungry again."

The Alian now had Jenner's full and undivided attention. "The ones you describe seem quite small, compared to the Alian spear-beaks, but I imagine

they are the same in most other respects." The little man looked seriously at Jenner, You'll have to kill them, you know. It could be quite dangerous to my investment here."

Resisting an urge to slap the man, Jenner growled, "I had reached a similar conclusion. My men and I are going to the cave tonight."

With a moments pause, Roveer shook his head, "No, Jenner. I can't permit it. You wouldn't reach the cave until after sunset, and the spear-beaks are most active at night. They live in colonies, you see, which may contain several scores of the beasts. During the day, they are more sluggish, and you and your steel-encased compatriots should find them easy work. Make sure you put on as much steel as possible; the little monsters have a talent for finding the chinks in your armor. They can sense heat, and their eyes are very large, like an insects, giving them keen sight, even in total darkness."

"You will not permit —"

"Oh, settle down, Realmsman. You know as well as I do that I'm making sense. You'll need to brief your men, pack up some supplies, and go traipsing off across the high plains to get to the . . . Crown, you said?" Jenner sputtered something incomprehensible. "I think I'll go along, too. Now, don't object, my friend. It is my duty to all of Albanner."

Jenner couldn't seem to speak, but just stood, quivering in astonishment.

"Shouldn't you notify the villagers here?" prompted Roveer. "I can only assume the shepherds are taking precautions, but it would be a grave disservice if the spear-beaks were to attack here tonight instead of the flocks. I guess we should have paid more attention to the deer herds."

"What?"

The deer, Jenner, the deer. The spear-beaks range for up to a full mile, and they must have been feeding on the frost-tails. You do recall those carcasses we found that were freshly killed, but all dried out? And no meat missing—just the blood! We really should have noted that

6. Stirges need not always be killed to be removed. At the DM's discretion, he may allow a Strength check or appropriate saving throw to rip the creature from his body (causing damage) or, with successive Strength checks or saving throws, to pull the stinge's penetrating proboscis from his flesh. Make a normal Morale check when this occurs, if the stinge fails, it drops off and seeks a new victim. Note that the victim should not be able to attack with a weapon while holding back a stinge. This struggle will prove to be more exciting than your average hack-and-slash session, particularly for low-level or green adventurers.

Stirges, except in the cases above, check for Morale as a group, which is higher (10) than the individual Morale listed in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, as long as half the colony is still alive.

7. Stirges will sleep off the effects of their feeding as per the guidelines in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome.

8. Stirges in various campaign worlds have many different names and the DM is encouraged to invent his own for the campaign. "Spear-beaks," "blood-birds," and "devil-birds" are common names for the stinge.

9. Stirges are a queer hybrid of bird and insect. It is believed by sages who study fantastical

creatures that they were originally crafted by vampiric wizards to throw hunters of the undead off the track. Others surmised that they were created long ago by a group of evil wizards, who gathered them by the millions, like locusts, and set the monsters on the enemy armies arrayed against them. The remnants of these stirges adapted themselves to the wild and spread across the lands.

10. The larger jungle variety of stinge does possess such a toxin, as is alluded to in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL, VOLUME I*. The statistics for this creature appear on page 46.

11. The desert stinge is described on page 45.

earlier, but there were always so many other pressing concerns. The frost-tails were supporting the entire colony."

"Well, of course!" Jenner spat. Quickly he regained control of himself, and, at the same time, cursed the unwholesomely clever Alian. "All right, Roveer, we'll do it your way. I'll send a runner to let the shepherds know what we intend to do, until then, keep out of the way."

Roveer smiled, "Of course, my dear friend." Jenner glared at him for a final time before spinning on his heel and shouting for his men-at-arms. Roveer was then left to his own reflections. The spear-beaks, he reasoned, hadn't fed for nearly seven days—since the Tallmans. There couldn't be all that many of the creatures, or else greater numbers of people and livestock would have been lost. Seven days. Still smiling, Roveer began to whistle happily.

The very next day, as the fiery globe that was Father Tirador inched above the horizon, Jenner led his six Realmsmen to the base of Heb's Crown. Little Roveer, the Alian merchant, trailed behind on his stout pony. They reached the base of the crown just before midday and quickly located the cavern.

"All right, Realmsmen. The creatures will be hanging from the ceiling. Once we get inside—load the crossbows. We'll fire off one volley, and that should bring the house down." Jenner grinned tightly and continued, "If one of you gets stuck, fall back immediately! Good Roveer will cut it off with his blade."

The Alian looked ridiculous—covered head-to-toe with leather armor, leaving only his thin face visible. He drew a nasty-looking dirk and added, "Don't try to be brave, my friends. The longer they stay attached to you, the weaker you become."

"Right," agreed Jenner to the assenting murmurings of the men. "Let's go."

The eight men carefully entered the cavern, and were instantly assaulted by the scent of blood. The cavern floor, as Val had said, was deep with the creatures' blood-red guano. Roveer paused to ignite his torch, and, seconds after it was lit, a loud chirping, similar to that of a cricket, echoed through the cavern.<sup>12</sup>

12. The chirping alerts the others to danger and potential prey. Stirges who are "sleeping off" their last meal are slow to react. See also note 13 below.

13. In addition to the surprise roll penalty described in the MM, I recommend penalizing their initiative roll by -2, and reducing their THAC0 to that of a 2-Hit Die creature. The maneuverability class of stirges drops to D following a full feeding.

14. Directly applied, flame always forces a stirge to release its prey and make a Morale check, but the

Crossbows at the ready, Jenner and his men advanced with caution as the chirping grew louder. It did indeed sound like a thousand of the monsters awaited them. Suddenly, a number of the creatures flew down upon the advancing men. Two quarrels were loosed before Jenner could yell, "Hold your fire! We won't hit them in the air! Spread out and draw your steel!"

"Don't yell!" screamed Roveer, forgetting himself in the excitement. "They'll pinpoint us and the whole colony will attack!" He hoped fervently that the spear-beaks had fed last evening, and that most would be sluggish and slow to attack.<sup>13</sup>

Almost as one man, the trained Realmsmen drew their swords; four of the monsters were sliced out of the air in quick succession. They were slow and clumsy fliers—bloated with the blood of recent victims. They quite literally burst, splattering blood all over the armored men. Quickly, the warriors entered the main chamber. Val had indeed exaggerated the number of the beasts, there were little more than a score of the beasts hanging above. They were all very awake—the chirping in the cave was deafening. Seven quarrels were loosed, and seven stirges died. The flock dropped, as one, and attacked. The fight was brutal and short. The stirges, slowed by their heavy meals, could not elude the singing steel of the Realmsmen. One of the older men, Sarich, slipped in the guano and fell to his knees, exposing the back of his neck to the blood-suckers. No sooner had one of the stirges attached himself, than Roveer leapt forward, applying his torch to the bird, whose feathers became engulfed in flame as it released its death grip.<sup>14</sup>

Sarich, only singed, looked at the Alian with something akin to respect. There were no other wounded; the stirges had been slow and seemed to have trouble locating a target for attack. Jenner was pleased with the afternoon's results. "Excellent, gentlemen! Let's make a casual sweep of the cavern, make sure we haven't missed any, and then get out of here!" The soldiers responded with a mighty cry and set about making a periphery search.<sup>15</sup> Another pair of sol-

flame must be applied to the attached creature, which inevitably damages the victim as well.

15. A more thorough search might have located a few clutches of eggs. Like birds, female stirges lay eggs—between four and 12 at a time. They are typically buried by the female in the guano of the colony's roosting area. Mating among stirges is a communal affair, with many males and females mating repeatedly twice a year—once in the early spring and again in late summer/early fall. The parents

diers hefted a guano-encrusted corpse—Nured the shepherd. His father, Jenner knew, would want the body for a proper burial. Roveer handed his torch to Sarich and left the cavern, tracing his way back to the base of Heb's crown.

It was still early afternoon when Roveer emerged and surveyed the valley of Albanner. Turning in the other direction, toward Commonfield, he noted a large column of smoke. Smiling quietly to himself, he began to peel off the leather armor. After a few moments, Jenner himself emerged from the cave, carrying one of the creatures. His pleased smile and triumphant eyes did not move the Alian to guilt, but rather to curiosity and wonder that a warrior could be so naive.

The stirge had a wing-span of about two feet, and its entire body was covered with rust-red feathers. The "beak" hung limp from its face; when feeding the sharp point was plunged into the victim's flesh with the stirges' strong neck muscles. Its talons were a milky yellow. "Ugly, aren't they?" noted Roveer, indicating the bulbous eyes. "Just like a fly."

"Roveer," began Jenner seriously, "I'll confess I don't like you all that much, but we are all indebted to you for the knowledge of these stirges. You've saved lives."

"We were lucky that the spear-beaks had fed. It made our jobs easy." The Alian looked meaningfully at the smoke rising from Commonfield.

Jenner saw that smoke, and instantly understood—"jest like dry kindlin'" is how Legrin had put it. "You knew they would feed last night," he said in a quiet voice.

Roveer, however, was all smiles. "Now, my dear Jenner, how would I have known?" So saying, the Alian walked off to retrieve his hobbled pony.



*Tim Richardson now resides in Virginia, where he is interning with the Senate Republican Policy Committee in Washington, DC.*

leave the eggs buried and abandon them. The eggs hatch in about three months, less than 20% survive into adulthood, feeding off the guano itself for several days until they are strong enough to fly and search for food on their own. Often, the young will kill each other for food. The young that do survive will either form a new colony or join the next one that enters the roosting area. Stirges reach full growth after about eight months and can have a life-span of five to six years.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any desert
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Colony
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Blood
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (2)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Nil

NO. APPEARING:	2-12
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	4, Jump 16, Burrow 12
HIT DICE:	1+1
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	1-2
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Blood drain, surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	T (1'-1½')
MORALE:	Unsteady (5-7)
XP VALUE:	120

Desert stirges resemble large, feathered mosquitoes and look little like their common or jungle cousins. In fact, the physical resemblance ends with the long dangling beak common to all members of the stirge family. The proboscis is just over 6" long and is a dull, sand-yellow color. Desert stirges have wings, but they are short, stubby, and incapable of supporting flight. Some witnesses, though, contend that stirges are able to glide on them. The feathers of a desert stirge are a reddish brown, allowing them excellent camouflage in the sand.

These creatures have six legs and are more insect-like than any other stirge variety. The legs are yellow-brown talons, joined at the center of their long beetle-shaped body. The monsters use their strong claws to burrow beneath the sand during the heat of the day as well as fasten themselves onto their prey. Perhaps the most remarkable feature is the stirges' unique jumping ability—the stirge is able to leap up to 20' high or a distance of nearly 50'.

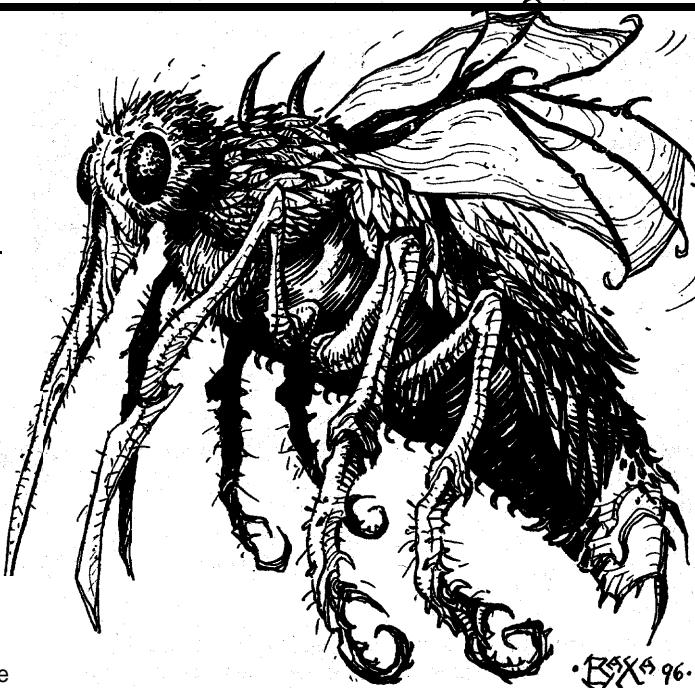
**Combat:** Desert stirges are not nearly as powerful as their larger cousins and attack as a 1-Hit Die creature, unless they leap onto a surprised victim. These monsters attempt to attack by leaping onto the victim's back from concealment. When employing this tactic, the stirge may make one initial hit roll as a 4-Hit Die creature. Because of their burrowing ability and camouflage, stirges are difficult to spot. Characters without the desert survival proficiency should receive a penalty to their surprise roll. In addition, if the victim is surprised, the DM is encouraged to add +4 to that hit roll, as a backstab. The creatures do not attack in concert, but often erupt from the sand at the same time to gain surprise.

A successful attack inflicts 1-2 hp damage with an automatic 2 hp blood drain for every round the stirge remains attached to the victim. The smaller desert stirges are full after draining 8 hp of blood from the victim, after which they drop to the ground, scurry away, and burrow back into the sand to escape retribution and sleep off their meal.

It is important for the DM to recognize that stirges attack only legitimate prey, almost never attack without surprise, and immediately flee combat once sated. In fact, stirges that miss their initial attack are more likely to try to escape (make a Morale check) by burrowing than to attempt to continue combat.

While the desert stirge is significantly less dangerous than other stirges, it is also the most difficult to remove once it has attached itself to prey. An attached stirge adds 5 to a Morale check, and its strong grip and extra leg power prohibits the option of a saving throw or Strength check to pull it off unless a combined Strength of 30 is employed.

**Habitat/Society:** The colonies of desert stirges are small; only rarely will more than 10 of the creatures hunt the same area. Stirges are often called "sand crabs" or "desert beetles" because of their burrowing and



queer appearance. Their feathers are short and scaly, but are feathers nonetheless, disproving theories that the monsters were actually crabs or some form of insect.

Desert stirges do not have an exoskeleton, but their legs, save for the talons, are covered in chitin. Sword-swingers targeting the legs of the monsters must hit AC 1, due to the small size and hardness.

The monsters are found in areas wherever prey can be located. They have no permanent lairs or nests but sleep beneath the sand during the heat of the day. Still, it is not difficult to know when desert stirges are in the area; typically, they bury themselves in the sand not more than 100 yards away from the bloodless corpses of their victims.

Fortunately, of all the stirges, the desert stirge is the least likely to bother humans, particularly those in armor. Stirges are unable to penetrate anything better than studded leather and do not attack armored individuals.

**Ecology:** Desert stirges possess superior sight and infravision (240'), but lack the acute sense of smell found in other members of their family. They compensate for this with a sharp sense of hearing—desert stirges are very sensitive to vibrations in the ground, allowing them to track prey and be instantly notified of interlopers in their area.

When the stirges hear prey, they burrow closer to the surface, opening the protective chitinous cover around their eyes (they are blind when underground, moving by hearing alone). The cover around their eyes also closes when they are attached to a victim.

The stirges' sense of hearing often wakes them during the day, and they take advantage of the morning or afternoon to snack. Barring this occurrence, stirges are never found above ground during daylight.

Once a stirge has drunk its fill of 8 hp of the victim's blood, it flees, burrowing underground. The slow metabolism of the desert stirge allows it to sleep for one day per point of blood drained—and it can go three times as long until needing to feed again. Stirges do, however, make the most of every feeding opportunity, storing extra food as fat in their bodies just above the tail, giving them a "hump" of sorts. Stirges sleeping after feeding are very difficult to find because they bury themselves so deeply. If located, the stirge does not awaken until exposed to sunlight, very loud noises (like digging), or damage (as from a weapon). In any case, they flee at the first opportunity, either by leaping away or by burrowing deeper into the sand. Though not much more than a pest to humans, they can be difficult to find and kill.

Desert stirges do not collect treasure.

# Stirge, Jungle

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Tropical, subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Colony
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Blood
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (2)
TREASURE:	See below
ALIGNMENT:	Nil

NO. APPEARING: 5-20

ARMOR CLASS: 7

MOVEMENT: 3, Fly 16 (D)

HIT DICE: 2+1

THAC0: 15

NO. OF ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE/ATTACKS: 2-6

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Blood drain, poison

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: M (4'-5')

MORALE: Average (8-10)

XP VALUE: 420

Found in the deepest jungles, these blood-draining monsters are nearly twice the size of the typical stirge. For this reason, the jungle stirge is not an accomplished flier. Slower and clumsier in the air, the jungle stirge cannot sustain its flight for longer than a turn. The plumage of these monsters is a bright red, and their dangling beaks are a light yellow-green. Their pincher-like feet are of similar color, with the hind legs much larger and stronger, assisting the creatures when they are roosting. If the DM uses the option of allowing a character to grapple with a jungle stirge, penalties should be applied to the Strength check or saving throw because of the beasts' greater strength.

**Combat:** Jungle stirges attack as 4-Hit Die creatures with their long proboscis. A successful hit inflicts 1 d4+1 hp damage, with automatic damage (also 1d4+1) from blood drain for every round the stirge remains attached. Jungle stirges are sated only after drinking 15 hp from their prey, after which they fly off to digest their meal.

The poison secreted from the proboscis of a stirge, while not deadly, is very dangerous. Immediately after being struck by the monster, the victim must save vs. poison. Those who make their saving throw are not out of the woods yet—the stirge continues to inject the toxin into its prey until the victim ceases struggling. The victim must save vs. poison each round at cumulative -2 penalty (-2 the second round, -4 the third round, etc.) until the stirge is killed, driven off, or the character has succumbed to the poison.

If the victim fails the save, he is paralyzed at the end of the following combat round and remains so for 2-12 hours. Once this time has elapsed, the victim may roll again for the save at no penalty. If the victim fails again, he remains paralyzed for an additional 2-12 hours. The victim remains paralyzed until he successfully saves against the poison or 24 hours have passed.

The poison of the jungle stirge is highly prized, particularly by jungle tribes. The poison is stored in two glandular sacs in the "jowls" of the creature, where the proboscis joins the head. Each sac yields between 2-12 doses of the poison, which remains viable as long as it is kept in the sacs at body temperature. The sacs, however, are difficult to locate and even harder to remove. The DM should select an appropriate skill or non-weapon proficiency to determine the success of sac removal. The poison must be injected into the blood stream to have its effect.

**Habitat/Society:** Jungle stirges live in colonies that rarely grow larger than 20 individuals. They do not hang like bats but build bird-like nests on ledges, in treetops, or in the ruins of thick rain forests.

These monsters are more fastidious than common stirges and defecate outside the nesting area, often near fallen victims after feeding. Thus, their nests are difficult to locate except by chance. Thus, little is known about their mating or nesting habits.



The stirges need a constant supply of blood and prey on the large animals of the jungle. Some native experts claim that only the female of the species requires blood, and that the male exists on fruit sap.

The largest concentration of jungle stirges have been found on the sites of ruined cities, which may host several colonies of the monsters. There have been no confirmed reports that jungle stirges have been raised in captivity, although their proclivity to ancient ruins suggests that in the past they may have been bred as guardians.

Though dangerous to small groups, jungle stirges are generally too far removed from civilized areas to be cause for great concern. It should be noted, however, that the beaks of this stirge are longer and sharper than their cousins and are able to puncture all but the finest crafted metal armors.

**Ecology:** Jungle stirges possess 240' infravision and a highly developed sense of smell. These highly developed senses allow the monsters to locate creatures large enough to become prey soon after they enter the habitat. Creatures with a natural AC of 1 are immune to stirge attacks because of their thick hides. As noted above, leather armor will not protect a character from the penetrating attack of a jungle stirge. Full suits of plate mail or specially crafted metal armors that cover the entire body will give full protection. However, the creatures will be able to distinguish by smell those who are invulnerable to their attacks and will not waste time around these potentially dangerous foes.

Jungle stirges have a high metabolism and sleep only one day for every 3 hp of blood drained, for a maximum of five days. During this sluggish period, stealthy opponents gain the advantage of a -2 penalty to the monsters' surprise roll. If the stirges are attacked after a full feeding (when more than half the colony drained 12-15 hp of blood each in the last 24 hours), their flight maneuverability class falls to E.

The colonies' territory is much smaller than that of their cousins outside the jungles due to their poor propensity for flight. Ranges of the stirges are rarely more than half a mile in diameter. They do not move around, except to hunt, preferring to remain in their permanent roosting areas far above the jungle floor. The jungle stirges have only one natural enemy—the arboreal constrictors that share their treetops.

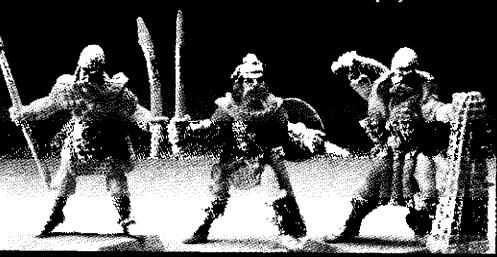
The presence of jungle stirges is difficult to detect, despite the smaller range. Their bloodless prey decay quickly in the moist jungle heat or are carried away by carrion eaters. Their nests are even more difficult to locate, although the few that have been discovered yielded a number of highly prized gems. Jewelry and other "pretty" treasures are carried back to the nest by the monsters, but no other treasure.

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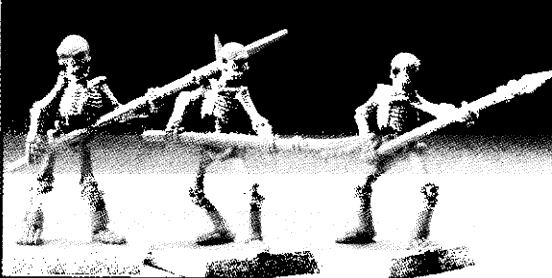


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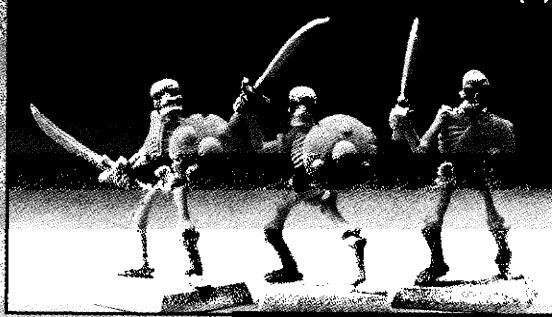
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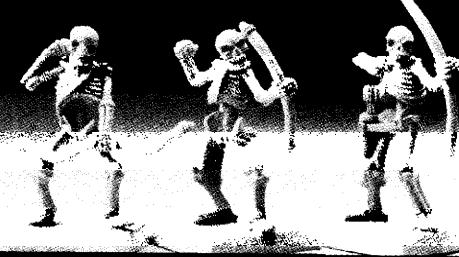
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# Skeletons



# The Dragon's Bestiary

## The Little People

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by Brian Corvello

illustrated by James Holloway  
and David Day

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**M**ost adventurers have, at one time or another, caught a fleeting glimpse of the fairy-folk, the sprites and pixies and brownies who love to frolic in green places—and occasionally tweak the noses of more serious folk.

These wee folk are magical creatures who may even have inhabited the world before humans. They are protectors of secrets and mysteries, and they might have things to tell even the most seasoned adventurer. Fairies can often inform PCs of news of the magical community and locations of treasure hoards. Greenfellow Rogues (as presented in DRAGON® Magazine issue #237) have the best chance of gaining the favor of the wee folk, but practically any good-aligned adventurer may find allies among them—if the hero can endure their mischievous antics.

While most of the wee people are good-hearted, some have turned to evil. The quicklings and the spriggans of the world probably meddled with magic too powerful to control and are now a threat to everyone who blunders into them. Woe to the hero who mistakes one of these wicked little terrors for a benign fairy.

The Little People are enigmas, shy and reclusive. Sometimes, however, they may come out of hiding to spice up an adventure. Presented here are four new types of these fairies, to liven any hero's day.



# Boggart

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Temperate/Urban
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Omnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (11-12)
TREASURE:	F
ALIGNMENT	Lawful Good

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	2
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	1
THAC0:	20
NO. OF ATTACKS:	0
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	n/a
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Invisibility
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	10%
SIZE:	T (1' tall)
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE:	270

Boggarts are tiny, helpful cousins to brownies who live in extremely old buildings. They much prefer inhabited homes to abandoned structures.

Boggarts are invisible to all but the most innocent of humans. These are usually children, but occasionally a very good paladin or lawful good priest can see them. Those who have viewed boggarts describe them as funny little men with big noses and colorful clothes. Boggarts speak the common tongue as well as the languages of elves and brownies.

**Combat:** Boggarts shun fighting, and they hate evil creatures. When one enters their home, they use their spell abilities to torment the creature in hopes of driving it away. Boggart pranks may include making an offending creature's hair grow, turning it green, or making it trip over the furniture.

Boggarts have several spell-like powers to help them with their jokes. At will they can use *faerie fire*, *ventriloquism*, *dimension door*, *audible glamer*, *cantrip*, and *telekinesis* (50 lbs.). As noted, they are invisible to most creatures, and only detection spells can reveal their presence.

Anyone who is cowardly enough actually to kill a boggart becomes the recipient of a debilitating curse of the DM's design. This may be lifted only by a *remove curse* spell by a caster of no less than 12th level.

Boggarts have a particular weakness: they are frightened by loud noises, which cause them to make a Morale check or flee.

Those who can communicate with boggarts find them a great source of information. Assume that any boggart is 50% likely to know any fact about the area in which they live, 80% if that knowledge involves other fairies.

**Habitat/Society:** Boggarts are helpful creatures who live in houses belonging to very good people, helping out with chores and such after the family goes to bed. They also



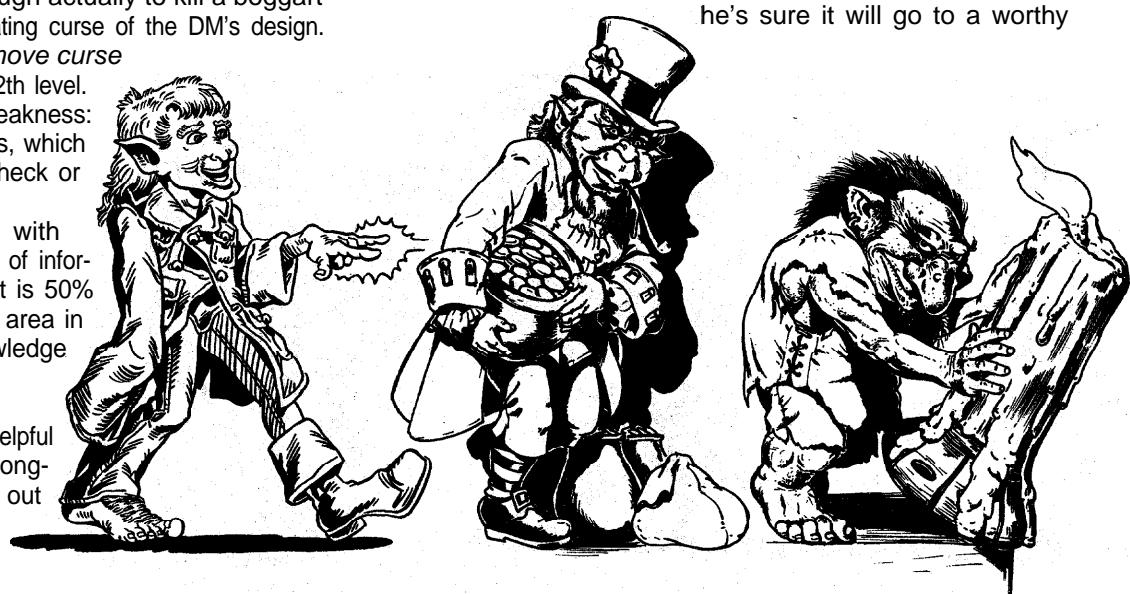
have been known to play with young children, but they vanish when a disbelieving adult is near.

Boggarts never accept payment for their help, though if someone leaves out small scraps of food for them, they gladly gobble it up.

Boggarts are usually solitary, though every month at the night of the full moon, dozens—or even hundreds—of boggarts gather in one area for a big festival. Very few mortals have seen these merry occurrences, and those who have tell that strange secrets can be gleaned from them.

**Ecology:** Boggarts are primarily vegetarians, though they may eat sausages and smoked meats at their festivals.

Boggarts don't hoard wealth, but some may have a small amount of treasure collected over the years. A boggart may be convinced to give up his treasure if he's sure it will go to a worthy



# Clurichaun

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any Urban
FREQUENCY:	Very Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Wine
INTELLIGENCE:	None
TREASURE:	See below
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic (50% Neutral, 25% Good, 25% Evil)

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	3
THAC0:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	By weapon
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Control liquids
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	30%
SIZE:	T (2' tall)
MORALE:	Average (8-10)
XP VALUE:	

Clurichauns are relatives of leprechauns. They are spirits who inhabit wine cellars of inns and other such establishments. They are mischievous little creatures who love nothing more than fine wine. They appear as tiny elves dressed like innkeepers.

**Combat:** When forced into melee, a clurichaun uses small weapons, usually daggers; however, clurichauns have a much more dangerous ability. Clurichauns can control up to 10 gallons of any liquid (usually wine) through telekinesis. In doing so, they can make bottles squirt fluid with the force of a *decanter of endless water*. They can also *create wine or water* twice per day (as the *create water* spell). If hard pressed, a clurichaun can create a *watery double*, once per day, but using wine rather than water.

**Habitat/Society:** A clurichaun's behavior depends mostly on its alignment. A good-aligned clurichaun may help an innkeeper by making sure spigots are tightened and no wine is wasted. An evil clurichaun might slurp up all the supplies, forcing the innkeeper out of business.



Regardless, a clurichaun can become nasty when drunk. It smashes bottles, scares pets, and makes a general mess of things. More than one innkeeper has hired adventurers as clurichaun-exterminators.

**Ecology:** A clurichaun lives entirely on wine, of any style or vintage. They don't drink to excess, taking only about a bottle a week, though individual clurichauns have been known to drink heavily.

Clurichauns collect no treasure, though all of them know the location of great riches, or at least interesting rumors of treasure hoards. Naturally, these caches are often well guarded by powerful monsters—a fact a clurichaun conveniently leaves out if interrogated rather than questioned politely.



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# Leprechaun, Wicked

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Dense forests
FREQUENCY:	Very Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Omnivore (see below)
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15-16)
TREASURE:	F
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral Evil

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	15
HIT DICE:	1
THAC0:	20
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	By weapon
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	80%
SIZE:	T (2' tall)
MORALE:	Elite (14)
XP VALUE:	420

Wicked leprechauns are probably the result of the same form of evil magics that turned a race of brownies into quicklings. While these creatures were once playful and mischievous, they are now vile, deadly monsters.

Wicked leprechauns appear similar to their more common kin, but they always wear black and gray, disdaining the colorful garb of their relatives. They inhabit haunted forests and glens.

**Combat:** Wicked leprechauns fight with pixie-sized daggers, garrotes and stilettos when they choose to reveal themselves. Lacking any type of honor, they often poison these weapons with various venoms.

These creatures possess most powers of the normal leprechaun. They can turn invisible, *polymorph* nonliving objects, create illusions, and use *ventriloquism* as often as they like. They often use these powers to set deadly traps for victims. For example, one might wait at a bridge for someone to cross, and then turn the rungs into sand, sending the victims plummeting. They cannot, however, grant wishes or enact Leprechaun Law (teleporting victims away).

Once per turn, a wicked leprechaun can cast an *evil grin* spell that duplicates the effects of a scare spell. Once per day he can cast *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter* on 1-4 victims.



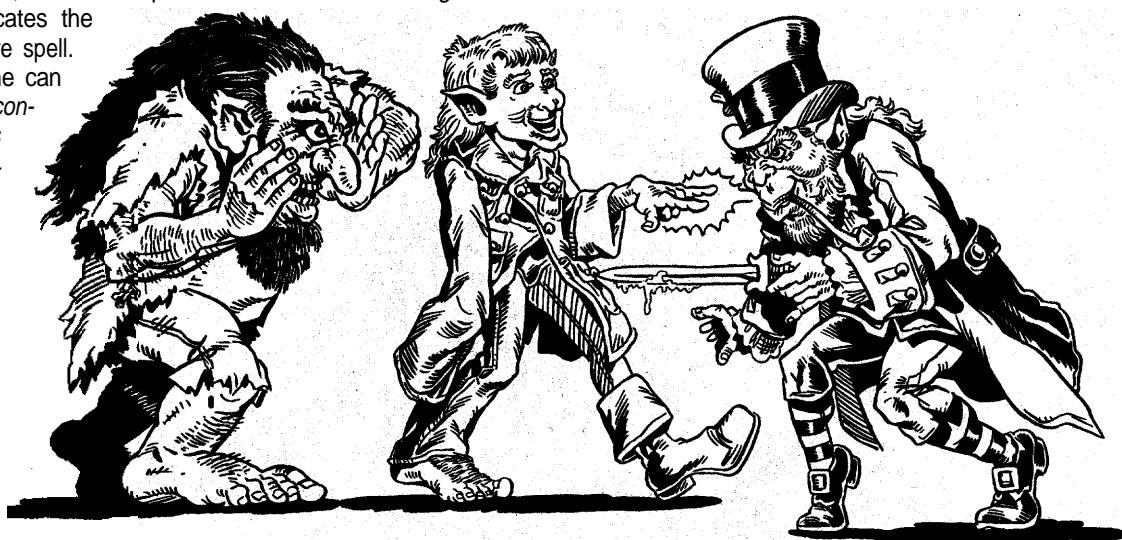
Wicked leprechauns can communicate with hornets, wasps, and similar insects. They often send the pests to torment humans and horses. They can also command a single giant insect of this type, often using one for a mount.

**Habitat/Society:** Wicked leprechauns aren't a normal part of fairy-kind and often disrupt ecosystems instead of filling a place in them.

These creatures get along with other evil fairies, such as quicklings and spriggans.

**Ecology:** Wicked leprechauns eat normal food, but instead of savoring wine, they have the habit of drinking the blood of their victims.

These fairies are, if anything, even greedier than normal leprechauns, and they hoard large amounts of treasure.



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# Leshy

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any large forest
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
D I E T :	Herbivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Genius (17-18)
TREASURE:	M (x10)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral Good

NO.APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	12
H I T D I C E :	8
THAC0:	12
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	By weapon + possible Str bonus
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	40%
SIZE:	Varies
MORALE:	Champion (15)
XP VALUE:	2,000

Leshies are magical protectors of old and ancient forests. There, is always only one leshy per forest, and they can never go more than 100' from their domain, as they are tied to it as a dryad is bound to her tree.

Leshies look comical, appearing as young elflike men in green and red clothes. Their coats are always buttoned wrong, and their shoes are always on the wrong feet.

A leshy's size depends on where he is in his forest. At the forest edge, he is tiny, merely 1' tall. In the forests center, he is as tall as a hill giant and has the Strength to match. In between, his size varies; the closer to the center, the bigger he is.

**Combat:** A leshy can blend in with his surroundings by standing perfectly still, effectively invisible. A druid or ranger has a 5% chance per level of spotting a leshy. It is impossible to surprise one.

Leshies do not normally carry weapons. They may, at their largest size, use tree trunks as clubs, inflicting double club damage plus the Strength bonus (2d6 + 7 hp damage). They may also, at this size, hurl rocks up to 200 yards for 2d8 hp damage, as a hill giant. They rarely use this attack, however, as they consider it barbaric.

Leshies have the spellcasting ability of a 12th-level druid. They prefer spells dealing with plants. They can also call woodland beings once a day, calling creatures who fight to the best of their ability.

Also, no good- or neutral-aligned forest creature will ever harm a leshy.



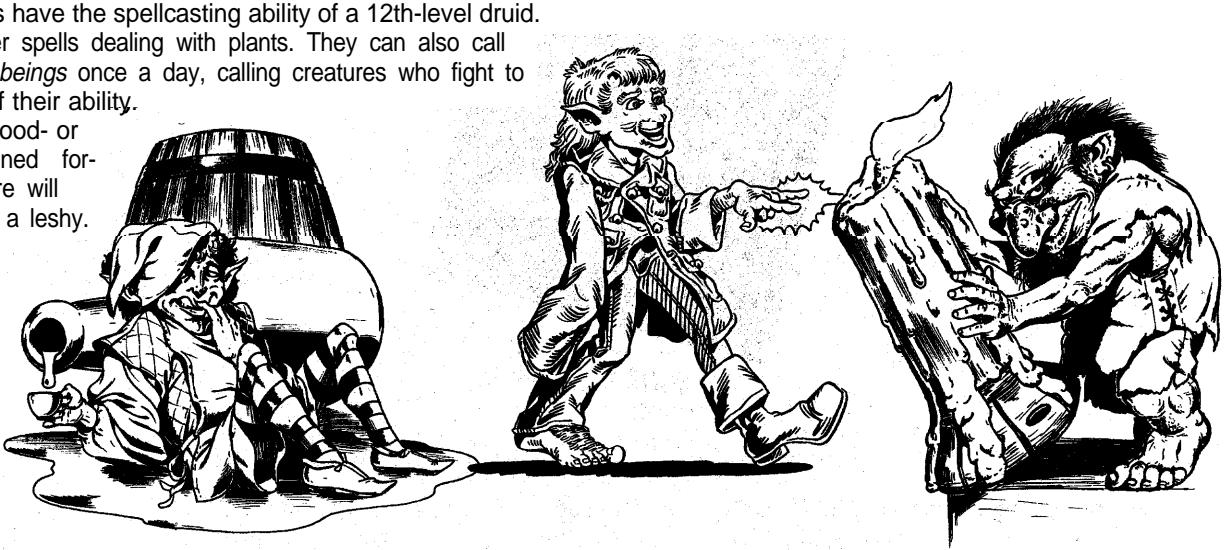
**Habitat/Society:** Leshies are protectors who act in maintenance and defense of their forests at all costs. A leshy will die if his forest is destroyed (a rare event, as they inhabit only the largest of forests).

Leshies know every detail of the forest they inhabit and may make excellent guides if they can be persuaded. Leshies help only good creatures and drive away any evil ones.

**Ecology:** Leshies can live to be 1,000 years old, retaining a youthful appearance throughout their lives. If one dies, a new one appears by some unknown occurrence.

Leshies are vegetarians, subsisting primarily on berries, fruit, roots, and tubers.

Gold and silver have no value to leshies, but they often keep small amounts of wealth to use for bartering purposes.



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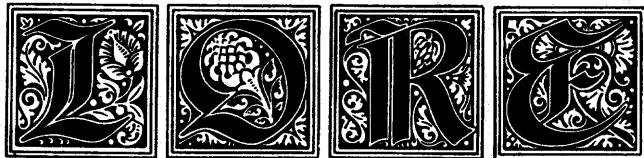
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# ARCAVE



## Larcenous legerdemain

by Jeff Dancey

illustrated by David Day

**A**lmost every major city or large town in an AD&D® game setting has at least one organized Thieves' Guild. In their own way, these guilds are a source of enormous wealth and power, with access to a wide variety of resources. In a world where magical traps guard valuables and wealthy men can afford to hire a diviner to locate stolen belongings, any powerful Guild should employ a mage out of self-defense. And in a world where priests and mages control a significant amount of the wealth, a mage/thief could make a good living pilfering magical treasures. Despite this, very few spells are written for mage/thieves.

These spells are presented primarily for the use of mage/thief characters, or for pure mages whose personal ethics may be slightly lacking. Most of the spells below can be used by any wizard character, although a number are more effective when employed by a mage/thief.

In an attempt to maintain the unobtrusive nature of their intended casters, most of these spells do not have a verbal component. Similarly, few of the spells listed have any visible effect or cause physical damage to opponents.

### Appraisal

(Divination)

Level: 1

Range: 10 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 1 object/round

Saving Throw: None

By use of this spell, the caster can identify the type and quality of gems and precious metals. Gemstones are identified by type, relative size, and quality. Precious metals are identified by type, weight, and purity. This spell does not give actual values in gold pieces for gemstones, since that varies by location and availability. The approximate value of precious metals is apparent from their weights. A caster using this spell can immediately spot fake gems or gilded coins, and illusionary or conjured valuables are also revealed.

The material component of this spell is a small glass lens worth 5 gp. It may be re-used.

### Disawareness

(Illusion, Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Components: S, M

Duration: 1 turn/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Caster

Saving Throw: None

When this spell is invoked, the caster begins to radiate an aura of unremarkability. Any person viewing him for the duration of the spell sees nothing unusual about him and, if questioned later, retains only vague recollections of seeing someone. He is unable to identify the caster or put any specific features to him. In order for the spell to be effective, the caster must be in or near a group of four or more people. (The caster could sneak into a guarded area if he tagged along with a group on legitimate business, but not unaccompanied.) This spell is most effective when used in crowded areas, such as city streets or marketplaces.

The caster may be wearing or carrying anything he desires: the spell renders him inconspicuous no matter what his appearance, so long as it is not unusually frightening or strange. (A heavily armed character or a character carrying a bag of loot is fine; a character drenched in blood will be noticed.) Otherwise, only the caster's actions determine whether the spell is broken. The spell ends instantly whenever the caster takes a hostile action or does anything to call attention to himself. The use of abilities such as Pick Pockets is acceptable, so long as the caster does not fail a roll. Speaking with any person for any reason during the course of the spell negates its benefits.

The material component of this spell is a small quantity of diamond dust, worth 25 gp, which is destroyed in the casting.

### Instant Lockpick

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Components: V, S

Duration: 2 rounds/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

By means of this spell, the caster summons an ordinary lockpick of any desired type into being. It performs as an ordinary lockpick for as long as the spell lasts. The pick may be used to open as many locks as the duration allows.

### Lock Inspection

(Divination)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Components: S





Duration: instantaneous

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Lock

Saving Throw: None

This spell allows the caster a brief glimpse into the inner workings of any lock. For a brief moment, the insides of the lock are exposed to the caster's view, allowing him to analyze its mechanisms. The end result of this spell is that the caster gains enough knowledge of the lock to increase his Open Locks and Find/Remove Traps rolls by 25% for the analyzed lock. The knowledge gained by this spell cannot be fully imparted to any other person; a thief relying on a mage's description of the lock has his rolls improved by only 10%.

### Muffling Blow

(Alteration, Enchantment)

Level: 1

Range: 0

Components: S, M

Duration: 5 rounds/level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 1 object

Saving Throw: None

This spell is designed to be cast upon a weapon of any kind. It has no visible effect upon the weapon it enchants. The first opponent struck with the enchanted weapon within the spell's duration is silenced (as by the 2nd-level priest spell, *silence 15' radius*, but affecting no one other than the victim, even those within 15') for a single round. The victim can make no noise during the round ensuing the attack. (This spell was originally designed to mute the sound of a collapsing body.)

The material component of this spell is black pitch, which must be applied to the weapon to be used.

### Audio Enhancer

(Evocation)

Level: 2

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: Caster

Saving Throw: None

By means of this spell, the caster greatly increases the sensitivity of his ears. All sounds around him are greatly magnified-giving him an effective 100% Hear Noise check. This spell also allows him to hear things at a greater distance than he would normally be able to detect, but it does not give him any special ability to filter the new sounds. This spell could be used to listen to a whispered conversation from across a room, but it would not allow the caster to separate that conversation from among others in a crowded area.

For the duration of this spell, loud noises have a detrimental effect on the caster. Any area with a high level of noise, such as a battle or the common room of a crowded inn causes the caster pain and forces him to make Constitution checks before taking any strenuous actions, such as spell casting. Sound-based attacks, such as the 3rd-level mage spell *shout*, have twice their normal effect on someone using this spell, and saves against such attacks are made at a -4 penalty.

The material component of this spell is a rabbit's ear, which is destroyed in the casting.

### Feet of the Cat

(Alteration)

Level: 2

Range: Touch

Components: S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: Creature touched

Saving Throw: None

This spell grants the recipient the ability to move unnaturally quickly and quietly. For the duration of the spell, anyone affected has their movement rate doubled and has their Move Silently rolls improved by 50%. If the recipient of the spell is not a thief or ranger, he has a 50% chance of moving silently during the course of the spell. This spell does not impart any ability to jump higher than normal, although leaping horizontally is obviously easier for a person moving at increased speed. (Assume the character can leap as far horizontally as a character using a jump spell could.)

The material component of this spell is a tuft of cat fur. It is destroyed in the casting of the spell.

### Forgery

(Alteration, Divination)

Level: 2

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 5 rounds/level

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: 1 page/level

Saving Throw: None

This spell allows the caster to make altered copies of official documents. In order to cast the spell, the mage must possess a sample of the handwriting he is attempting to duplicate. The sample used must be at least a full page document (approximately 250 words); it is destroyed at the end of the spell's duration. For the duration of the spell, the mage's handwriting perfectly mimics the handwriting on the sample document. There is no restriction upon the meaning of the document that the mage writes; only the style of the writing is copied, not the content. Documents made by this spell are indistinguishable from documents written by the author of the handwriting sample used. Any signatures or seals on the sample are magically duplicated on any page the caster desires, to a limit of one page per level of the caster. It is not required that duplicated signatures be in the same hand as the rest of the document; the spell reproduces the signature as accurately as it does the other handwriting. A dispel magic spell causes the writing created by a forgery spell to revert to the casters own handwriting.

### **Minor Disarm**

(Abjuration)

Level: 2

Range: 10 yards

Components: S, M

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: 1 trap

Saving Throw: None

By use of this spell, the caster can disarm one small mechanical trap of the same type as is revealed by the thief ability Find/Remove Traps. This spell successfully disarms any single trap on a selected object; in cases where an object is protected by multiple traps, it is determined randomly which trap will be disarmed. Any single object may be affected by this spell, up to the size of a large chest or heavy double doors (approximately 25 cubic feet). This spell does not disarm any form of magical trap, even those that may normally be disarmed by thieves.

### **Silent Saw**

(Conjuration/Summoning Alteration)

Level: 2

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None



This spell summons an invisible sawing force that cuts through an object the caster desires without creating any noise. The object to be sawed through must be visible to the caster. The saw may be used in multiple areas during the spell (such as to cut both ends of a bar), but the caster must maintain concentration on the saw. If the caster ceases to concentrate, the saw falls dormant until the caster returns his attention to the task. The saw cuts through a  $\frac{1}{2}'' \times \frac{1}{2}''$  section of material per round of the spell, but the types of material it is able to penetrate depend on the level of the caster:

*1st level*— Normal wood, rope, cloth, etc.

*3rd level*— Ironwood, bronzewood, other hardwoods or treated woods

*5th level*— lead, gold, soft metals

*7th level*— Iron, silver

*9th level*— Steel

*11th level*— High quality steel and alloys

*13th level*— Enchanted metals (+1)

For every two levels above 13th, the caster can cut through an enchantment of additional +1 value. All enchanted metals are entitled to save vs. spell to

avoid damage. A single save nullifies the spell's effectiveness for its entire duration.

The material component of this spell is a small silver file worth 10 gp, which disappears after the spell duration ends.

### **Ghostly Garrote**

(Necromancy, Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 3

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: S, M

Duration: 3 rounds

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: 1 creature/4 levels

Saving Throw: Negates

This spell conjures a pale, ghost-like garrote that wraps itself around the neck of the target creature as if it were pulled by an invisible being from behind. The garrote inflicts no damage but causes the target to lose the capacity for speech for three rounds. In the first round, the victim is allowed a save vs. death magic; if successful, the victim is rendered incapable of speech for the first three rounds but can still perform actions, with a penalty of -2 to any attacks, and suffer no other ill effects. If the save is failed, the victim spends the next three rounds



pulling at the insubstantial garrote in panic; at the end of the three-round period, the victim collapses into unconsciousness. A successful *dispel magic* cast during the three-round duration terminates the spell's effects immediately; it does not wake a victim who has been rendered unconscious.

The material component of this spell is a small silver garrote worth 50 gp. It is destroyed at the spell's conclusion.

### Major Disarm

(Abjuration)

Level: 4

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: S, M

Duration: 5 rounds/level

Casting Time: 8

Area of Effect: 10' x 10' x 10' cube/level

Saving Throw: None

This spell temporarily suspends the function of large mechanical traps (deadfalls, pits, etc.), rendering them harmless for the spell's duration. All such traps whose triggers fall within the spell's area of effect are rendered ineffective, although magical traps and smaller devices are not affected. Only traps that

have a physical trigger of some kind can be disarmed. Thus, a pit trap with a collapsing floor can be disarmed, but a pit with an illusion covering the top cannot. Poison needles, traps, and other small devices are not affected in any way by the spell.

### Remote Access

(Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: S, M

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Special

This spell allows its caster to reach a distant opponent or object. When it is cast, a small magical window appears at a selected location within the spell's range. In the following round, the spell-caster can either strike through this window with a melee weapon or pull an object back through it. The window may be placed anywhere the caster chooses, so rear attack bonuses may be applicable, including a thief's backstab bonuses. If the caster is a mage/thief, he

can attempt a Pick Pockets through the opening, although the roll is made at a -15% penalty. Objects of up to 1 lb. per level of the caster can be drawn back through the window. An attempt to retrieve an object currently being held by an opponent requires a successful attack roll to succeed. In the event of a successful grab, the target is still allowed a Strength check at a -2 penalty to retain possession of the object.

The window is normally visible only to the spell's caster, though a character using true sight or a similar spell can identify its location. In any event, no one else may attack through the opening, and the caster may only launch one round of attacks through it. Any attacks made through the opening must be physical, no spells of any kind can pass through the window. The window cannot be reoriented after its initial placement, so if a target moves between the time of the spell's casting and the caster's attack, the attack might fail.

This window can be opened to locations that the caster cannot currently see, but it provides no illumination of its own for viewing such areas. This spell could be used to grab something out of an unopened container, if the container is large enough to hold the casters hand plus whatever is currently in it. Players should note that blind grabs into chests can be dangerous. This spell can be used to strike someone on the other side of a wall of force or similar barrier.

The material component of this spell is a miniature hand carved of ivory, worth 25 gp. It is destroyed in the casting of the spell.

*While the local guild has cautioned us against revealing more specific information about him, we can safely report that Jeff Dancey lives in Calgary, Alberta.*

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# Lands of Intrigue

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# *And Ship To Sail*

## *Chris Pierson*

*Artwork by Rebecca Guay*

hen I was a lad and the world was bright, my da asked me what I wanted from life. I told him I only needed three things: a lady fair, a purse full of gold, and adventure.

That wasn't the answer he'd hoped for, but I reckon it was the one he'd expected. "Oh, Radesen," he said. "There's more to this life than all that. You mustn't listen to old Harnmag's stories."

My da, bless his soul, was never a man for imagination. He was a sail-dyer down at the harbor in Medella town, and that was all he'd ever be. Truth to tell, it was all he ever wanted to be. A simple man, but happy.

Not I. I wanted to be a pirate-hunter like old Harnmag: cutting through the surf at the prow of my own galley, sails full, chasing down the scourge of the Twin Seas. Most of all, I wanted out of Medella, away from all my father's yards of sail-cloth and vats of smelly dyes. My mistake, I reckon, was in telling him so—but the view behind is seldom blind, as they say.

"But I want to make something of my life," I said—well, *whined*, to be fair. "I don't want to waste away my days like—"

Though I shut my mouth before I could say more, my da knew what I meant anyway. Ask any father, he'll tell you: the sharpest thing in the world is his own child's tongue. I cut him to the quick, and I still feel ill remembering the look on his face. I've only seen the like once since, and that was on a dead man they found under Eight Dogs Pier, with a knife in his heart.

Some lads' fathers have no temper for lip—make a slip like that, your hide gets tanned. But my da was never much for beatings. He just shook his head. "Go on, then," he said. He always had watery eyes—the curse of working with dyes all your life—but I could still tell when he was trying not to cry. "Get you gone. Go with Harnmag, find your fortune on the seas. And when some sea-dog spits you on his cutlass, remember your old da, wasting away his days."

I never went with Harnmag, of course, and though things between my da and me were never quite the same, he left me his shop when he died. And though I'm not as good as he was, I've become a fair sail-dyer in my own time.



It was late summer and there'd just been a beast of a storm through. For most men who make their lives by the sea, such a thing is a curse, but for those of us with truck in sails, it's the other side of the coin entirely. Besides ripping off roofs all over Medella town and collapsing the fish-market, the stormwinds had split half the sails in the harbor.

"Bleeding dogs should know better, should come back to port when the seas get high and gray," growled Harnmag. By that time he was older than Ustachh the Black and had long since sold off his boat. "Fools."

"Aye, but if they knew better, I'd have no work," I told him. "And then I'd have nothing better to do than sit around another man's shop, grumbling all the day."

Harnmag gave me one of those squinty looks of his where you weren't quite sure whether he was grinning or snarling at you. "Show some respect for your elders," he snapped.

"I'd like to, but if I showed you as much respect as you want, I'd have no time for anything else," I said, and he laughed. "I just got Lagerl's new jib off, and already there's three new orders in this morning."

"Ten gold falcons say one's for Earbern," Harnmag quipped, with a nod at my hands.

It's hard for a dyer to hide his work: up to my elbows in the vats half the time, I rarely see the real color of my hands. On this day they were the particular shade of crimson favored by Earbern Redlocks, a grizzled privateer who'd been one of Harnmag's fiercest rivals. "He gave me a bigger bag of silver than you ever did, old man," I said.

"Shows how dense the man is," he shot right back. I did a passable imitation of his squint, and he laughed again.

You'd think that, since I'd followed my da and not him, Harnmag would have little time for me, but you didn't know Harnmag. We'd always be friends, we two, whether my hands were red with dye or pirate's blood.

Still, even a friend can tarry too long and Harnmag was spending more and more time in my shop those days. He'd been there since opening, and, truth to tell, I was wondering if he'd ever leave. "Sun's riding west," I said. Midday had long passed, though gloaming-hour was still a while off. "The Sharks probably opened her doors."

The Shark and Anchor was the other place Harnmag spent his time, now that he didn't go asea anymore. It was a dark, smelly taproom a few docks north of my shop, and a favorite haunt of old sea-dogs like him. He spent most nights swilling grog and singing chanteys with men he'd known-

and, in most cases, hated—for years. Sometimes I joined him.

Harnmag grunted and pushed himself to his feet. "Well, since you're so keen on getting rid of me, I'll get gone. I've got something of a throat on me, anyway."

"Crabbing the day long is thirsty work," I said.

He squinted and hobbled out.

Chuckles I went in the back of the shop and checked Earbern's mainsail. It was stewing in the biggest vat, but it wasn't yet done. You've got to take care that crimson dye sets well, understand, or the first time it rains it'll fade right to pink. And then, like as not, the dog you did the dyeing for will come back and thrash you blue for making him look a fool. Sailors are a rough lot, and flying a pink sail's just asking for trouble.

I grabbed a paddle and stirred the vat a bit, then went to check on the other sails I'd gotten that day—a green one and a black. They both still needed time, too.

The black vat was in the far back of the shop, which probably explains why I didn't hear the lady come in.

"Excuse me?" said a voice from the door, and I jumped. I wasn't expecting anyone just then. I looked up in surprise.

It was easy to see she had no business being down at the docks. Her clothes were fine, and she held a perfumed handkerchief to her nose. Now, it's true my dyes don't smell like a lilac bush, but anyone from the docks gets used to much worse stinks from a young age—fish guts, sewage, sailors who've been at sea for weeks, that sort of thing. My dyes were mild beside these, but she looked fit to faint. I hurried to her with a steady hand, but she drew back quick.

That was another thing marked her as someone other than a dockswoman: she carried herself with a noble's arrogance. I swear by Haremeth of the Hearth, you have to have upper-class blood to hold yourself so. But then, if someone stinking of dye and with blood-red hands came lurching at me, I'd probably step back myself.

She was beautiful, 'tis true: long, coppery curls, black eyes with flecks of green, full lips painted the color of summer plums, cheeks flushed the faintest shade of rose . . .

Well, I am a dyer by trade. I tend to notice colors first. Anyway, she was lovely in a way most noble-women aren't—many are too cold by half, but she had a warmth to her that made me look at my hands in embarrassment and try to wipe the crimson off on my smock. Of course, it didn't come off, but I reckon I'd have rubbed them raw if she hadn't spoken first.

"Are—are you—" She stopped, blushing a little, as noblewomen sometimes do. "Are you a dyer?"

"Aye, that I am," I told her. Well, truth to tell, I stammered a bit first. "But, milady, my main works in sailcloth. Perhaps you'd prefer going to the Merchants Quarter—"

"No!" she yelped. It wasn't loud or anything, but it was a yelp all right. I wondered what that meant. "That is, good sir," she added after a deep breath, "I was hoping you would do me a service nonetheless." She reached for her belt. "I have silver."

"Stay yourself, milady," I said, trying to sound as well-bred as she. "I've no doubt you have the means. I merely meant—"

"Please," she said, and grimaced just a bit. She was fighting back tears, like my da used to do.

I swallowed. "Maybe you'd prefer to speak in the front of the shop, away from these," I offered, waving at the vats of dye.

She nodded thankfully, and I took her into the shopfront, sat her down, and pulled the front door shut. From the looks of her, she appreciated the privacy. "Now, milady," I said, "what do you require?"

"I need some clothing dyed," she replied. "A sash."

I nodded. Sashes were very much in fashion among the well-to-do of the Upper City at the time. "Have you the cloth?" I asked.

She nodded and reached into her hand-pouch. It was all I could do not to whistle at what she produced—it was a sash all right, but it was *silk*, from Lyria across the sea, and worth more than a dozen sails.

I took it from her with care—silks slippery stuff, and I wasn't about to risk dropping a lady's sash on my grimy floor. I looked it over and decided I'd take the job. Well, be fair, I'd decided to take the job when she'd first mentioned it, but now I told her I'd do it.

She looked about ready to kiss me, she was so relieved. "Thank you, good sir," she said. "I am greatly in your debt." She went for her purse again. This time, I *did* reach out and touch her arm. She stiffened a little, but didn't draw back.

"Please, milady," I said. "That won't be necessary. The sight of you in this place is payment enough." I can be quite silver-tongued when I set to it—but I meant it, too. She must have understood that, because she looked right at me with her black-green eyes, and there was something in them I couldn't read: sorrow, fear, pride. Probably all of them. I felt like I was falling into two black, green-flecked wells.

"Th—the color, milady?" I babbled.

She looked away and I leaned against the counter, feeling a bit wobble-kneed. She stared at the sash, and twisted her long, green skirts in her

hands. "Purple," she said softly. "I want you to dye it purple."



Of course, I told Harnmag all about it.

As it happened, I was able to close up the shop early that day. The lady—only later did I realize I had no idea who she was—was my last customer. I hung the crimson, green, and black sails from the ceiling to dry, set the silken sash in a shallow pan of purple dye to soak for the night, locked up and went to the Shark and Anchor to lift my elbow.

Harnmag was sitting with Blind Gefnath in their usual corner. He saw me come in, and by the time I pushed my way through all the drunken sailors, he'd poured me some of the raw Plecath red I fancied at the time. In a reasonably clean cup, even.

"Little Radesen," said Blind Gefnath as I squeezed into my chair. It always surprised me how he could tell it was me in a noisy, smelly place like the Shark. But then, he'd been a sea wizard before the pirates took his eyes, and wizards have their own ways of seeing.

"You'll not guess who came into the shop today," I said.

Harnmag squinted and took a big gulp of some foul stuff or other. I once caught a whiff of what Harnmag liked to drink: my nose burned for a day. "The Prophet Urul and all his holy retinue?" he guessed. Blind Gefnath chortled and smiled toothlessly.

"A young lady from the Upper City."

When I told him that, Harnmag laughed. "Oh, aye, and the Bishop of Jaresh stopped by our table earlier for a quick game of hobbledy-wink," he quipped.

"It's no joke," I insisted. "Noble blood, she had."

"He's right," Blind Gefnath said. "I thought I smelled jasmine when you sat down. The lady's perfume, no doubt."

How he could tell that, when the Shark reeked of sweat and stale wine and worse, and I stank of dye—well, again, Gefnath was a sorcerer. He could summon up wind on a calm day, charm a man with just the sound of his voice, and even farspeak, sending messages from shore to ship and back again without saying a word. He was whip-smart besides, and I never knew him to speak aught but truth. I reckon Harnmag could have said the same, because Gefnath seemed to convince him I wasn't fibbing.

"Was she pretty?" Harnmag asked, flashing a leer only an old sea-dog can muster. "Take a fancy to her, did you?" I reckon I must have blushed, because he roared with laughter and clapped me on the back. "Mark me, Radesen," he told me and poured

himself another cup, "you don't want any lady who'd come down to the docks. What was she after?"

"She wanted a sash dyed."

Blind Gefnath straightened in his seat then, and stared sightlessly at me. He did that now and again, and it always gave me the shivers. "What color?" he asked. Hissed, more like.

"Uh," I remarked, trying not to look into the holes where his eyes had been.

"What color sash?" By this time, Harnmag was looking hard at me too.

"Pur-purple," I said.

"Urul's beard," Blind Gefnath swore. He clenched his hands and made a face like he'd just swallowed a whole mackerel. Harnmag had an odd look about him, too.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Unlettered pup," Harnmag grumbled. "You don't know? Where did you get your schooling anyway?"

I bristled at this. I may not be as sharp as some, but I like to think I know something of the world. And here Harnmag was calling me unlettered.

"Blame yourself," I snapped. "You always say you taught me everything you know."

"Reckon I was wrong," he said. "You truly don't know what a purple sash is for?"

"No, for Urul's sake!" I was beginning to lose my patience. "What are you two on about?"

"She means to end her life," Blind Gefnath said.

Well, I could have been poleaxed. I may have said something, but it couldn't have made much sense, because my mind was in about twelve places at the same time.

"The purple sash has been a token of death in the Upper City for nigh eighty years," Harnmag explained. "Remember what I told you about the Duchess Fielle?"

It took me a moment. Harnmag had told me more stories than I can count. But I can still remember every one, and for obvious reasons the tragedy of Fielle and Nytenbreg is strong in my memory still. It's too long for telling now, but the important part is that Fielle, out of unrequited love for the selfish Prince Nytenbreg, cast herself into the sea to drown. I recited that much to Harnmag.

"Well," he snarled, "what do you reckon she was wearing about her waist at the time?"

The pole-axe smacked me again.

"That happened a few years before I was born," he went on. "Since then, it's been a fashion for lovesick lasses with more gold than brains to wear the purple sash when they throw themselves off Fielle's Cliff into the waves."

I didn't say a thing; I was too busy imitating a landed fish to talk.

"Your lady friend must not want anyone in the Upper City to know what she means to do," Blind Gefnath noted. "That's why she came down here instead of going to the Merchants Quarter."

"That's—that's *horrible*," I observed.

"Right," Harnmag said.

"I have to stop her!"

Harnmag scowled—and squinted—and shook his head. "I wouldn't try that, Radesen," he said. "She'll just find another fellow who'll do it for her."

I wasn't listening to him, though, or to Blind Gefnath, who counseled me sagely about the folly of getting involved in affairs in the Upper City. For the rest of the night, all I could think of were those black-and-green eyes, staring glassily at some poor fisherman as he hauled her body out of the brine, of that copper hair tangled with seaweed, that rose-flushed skin turned bloated and waxen and blue. I felt sick. Then I decided, even as Harnmag and Gefnath advised me to let her alone, that I was going to save her.

I went to bed early that night, but first I returned to the shop.



She was due to come for the sash at midday. Of course it would be my luck that Wainscit the Wearisome would stop by that morning.

Wainscit the Wearisome was something of a local legend. You see, he was beyond a doubt the most boring rattlemouth south of Khun. Once he started talking you practically had to hit him in the eye to shut him up. Unlike Harnmag, who could talk off your ears but keep you amused, Wainscit rambled on forever about nothing—getting to the point directly was an idea he'd never been acquainted with. Some said he could move his ship through calmed seas simply by talking into the sails, and there were more than a few stories of sailors jumping overboard rather than enduring his conversation.

And in he came, right before she was due. He didn't even have a sail to dye; he just wanted to talk.

"Good day, Radesen," he said. "Although maybe it's not so good after all. It looks like it might rain, and when it rains that bone I broke in my wrist starts hurting and one of my men has the gray fever, and I'm worried it might spread around the boat, which reminds me, I ought to see about putting some more pitch on her hull, and—"

And, and, and. You'll notice I hadn't said anything yet. He didn't give me a chance. I handled it the way everyone handled Wainscit the Wearisome: I ignored him, tried not to strangle him, and prayed for him to leave.

"—and I noticed during the storm that the main spars a bit loose, so maybe I should get someone to tighten the bolts because if another wind like that one the other day comes up—"

Most times, I'd have thought up an excuse to close the shop, bustle him out, and wait for him to go away, but she might arrive any time. I shuddered to think of what might happen if Wainscitz started prattling to her.

"—and, of course, I had to let go my second mate last week. He wasn't fitting in, didn't seem to have much spirit whenever I was around, so I—"

"Wainscitz? Can I talk to you for a moment?"

Now, there was something I never thought I'd hear in my long life. It didn't come out of my mouth, of course; rather, it was Harnmag. He'd poked his head in the door while I wasn't looking. I stared at him in slack-jawed wonder.

"Well," said Wainscitz, "I was just telling Radesen about how my second mate wasn't fitting in—"

"Yes, yes," Harnmag said. He stepped over, put a friendly arm around Wainscitz's shoulders, and steered him, still nattering, toward the door. I've heard many tales of men facing gruesome death in the name of friendship. I reckon Harnmag was doing much the same thing for me. Before they disappeared out into the street, he squinted at me to make it clear I owed him one.

I could still hear Wainscitz, blithering off into the distance, when she came in.

Truth be told, I'd been worried she wouldn't be as lovely as the day before, that some witchery of the light had made me fall in love with the mere sight of her. Worried—or perhaps a bit hopeful. After all, this same woman was far above my station and set to leap to her doom off Fielle's Cliff. Not good material for courting.

The sight of her crushed both my worries and my hopes. If there was a witchery to the light, it must have followed her around, because she was just as beautiful as the day before. I froze as she approached the counter. All of a sudden my tongue was stuck to the roof of my mouth, and my belly felt full of feathers.

I reckon I stood there gaping like a moron for a while, because she finally cleared her throat. "I—I brought in a sash yesterday," she murmured.

And then I saw it, in the depths of her eyes: doubt. Some part of her wasn't set on her fate. My heart about danced a jig.

"I'll get it," I said. "But first, I must tell you I lied about not wanting payment. No," I added, raising my hand as she reached for her purse. "I don't ask for your silver. I just want to know one thing."

She swallowed, clutching her skirt like she had

the day before. She was wearing pale blue today. "Very well," she said after a moment. She knew what was coming.

I drew myself up, trying to look stern and compassionate instead of frightened and smitten. "Why?" I asked.

She lowered her head, letting her coppery curls fall over her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"The purple sash." I wasn't about to let her demur her way out of this—not while that doubt was there. "It's not exactly the sort of thing a lady wears to the Highsummer Ball."

She flinched, and I was sorry I'd been so glib. She looked up at me, her eyes shining. "I hardly think it should trouble you," she said, trying, vainly, to sound haughty.

"I hardly think it shouldn't. You want me to give you your death-token. I believe I ought to know why."

She could have walked out, then. All it would have cost her was a bit of Lyrian silk, something her family could, no doubt, afford. But she stayed, leaned wearily against the counter, and told me everything.

Her name was Armena, and she was second daughter of His Grace the Count Gyldlith, one of those minor lords who spend their lives plotting to increase their power. As part of one such plot, His Grace had arranged for Armena to wed Lyscerl, the son of some duke or other.

"But I don't love him," she finished. "Lyscerl's a fool who cares only for his own amusement."

I could only nod for a moment, because my mouth had gone dry as a dead man's bones. I swallowed a few times and managed to coax some spit to wet my lips. "He doesn't deserve your love, then," I said in a low voice, and winced as soon as I'd said it. It was so *blatant* . . .

"No," she said, and gave a wistful little sigh. "He doesn't. But my father won't have it any other way."

"What—" I began, coughed, and fell silent. She leaned closer—just a bit, but it seemed half the world. "What would it take for your father to—to change his mind?"

She gave me an odd look, then: surprise, maybe. Perhaps a bit of hope. But it soon ended: her brow furrowed, and she regarded me loftily. "You presume too much, sir," she said.

Her words may as well have been a slap. I drew back, stung—and with a deeper hurt beginning to grow. "I apologize, milady," I murmured, and turned to go back into the shop, to fetch her sash.

I had my hand on the door when I heard her stir behind me. "Wait," she said. I stopped, hoping my trembling wasn't visible. "Bide a moment, if you will."

I would and did—I was back at the counter before I even knew I'd moved. "It is I who should apologize, sir," she told me. "I have been rude when you tried to help. You only offered your ear for my troubles."

If only she'd known how much more I was offering. Then again, if she *had* known, matters might not have turned out as they did. "Nonetheless," I said, "I've offended you with my bluntness."

"Nonsense," she replied. "I have had my fill of delicate talk, words whose meaning gets lost in niceties and decorum. There are times, sir, when I would give up all my riches and station to be able to speak as bluntly as you."

I'm not ashamed to tell you I blushed. "I reckon you just did, milady," I noted. She smiled, laughed a little. It wasn't a polite, mannered laugh, as she might have uttered in her father's company, or Lyscerl's. It was real, and with it her beauty grew tenfold. I felt my mouth starting to go dry again.

"I suppose you're right," she said. She looked at me again in that odd, surprised-hopeful way, and somehow her hand was in mine. "You're the first man to make me laugh in . . . longer than I care to think. If you were titled, I daresay I'd forsake Lyscerl for you in a trice."

It took some effort, but I forced myself not to answer. If I had, I would have started to gibber. I just smiled, and held her green-flecked eyes with mine.

Suddenly, she realized what had happened. We were close to each other—far closer than a lady and a commoner should be. We were touching, for Haremeth's sake. She drew back, flushing and putting a hand to her breast.

"But that cannot be," she said, not daring to meet my wonderstruck gaze. "My father would not have it. Yet, I cannot face marriage to Lyscerl, so I have no choice. I have vowed before Amorassi the Love-Giver that I will follow Fieille into the sea instead."

I opened my mouth to speak, to tell her what I felt. And then I closed it again. I hadn't the ghost of a clue what to say. She was right: a countess-to-be and a low-born sail-dyer were no match. So I kept my tongue, for once, and stared at the scuffed toes of my boots.

"Please, sir," she said after a moment, in a small, tight voice. "I implore you. Bring me the sash."

I did. What else could I do? And then she was gone in a billow of blue skirts, the scent of jasmine hanging in the air behind her for a moment, before the docks' stink smothered it. I leaned back against the wall, feeling ill, and prayed that Wainscit the Wearisome was right, that there would be rain.



They were all singing, as they sometimes did, in the Shark and Anchor. There was a bounce to my step, I'll admit, because my prayers had come true—it was raining knives out, and had been most of the afternoon. The chantey the old dogs were wailing lifted my spirits even more, because it was one of my favorites, "A Sword and a Ship to Sail." That's the one where the chorus goes:

*Give me a sword and a ship to sail,  
and I'll never come home again.  
I'll travel the waves and kiss the maids  
and fight a hundred men.  
I don't know why I'm leaving, lass,  
I don't know where or when,  
But give me a sword and a ship to sail,  
and I'll never come home again.*

Harnmag had sung me that song when I was a lad, more times than I can remember. I still know all five traditional verses, as well as some particularly salty licks Harnmag and his mates made up. I heard them hollering in something like harmony well before I reached the Shark, and I was bellowing the tenor part in full throat as I came in the door, for which I got soundly thumped on the back and given a foaming mug of Blackfalcon ale. The singing went on as I quaffed my drink and pushed through to join Harnmag, who was pounding his fist on the table with glee as he boomed the baritone. Blind Gefnath and a huge ox of a sailor named Holmwick were with him, crowing in the higher registers. Holmwick, in particular, was stunningly off key—but no one would ever dare tell him so.

Harnmag made up the last verse, something about a mermaid and a swordfish that would surely have made a mannered person faint, but which ended the song with gales of laughter all around. By that time, I was well into my second ale. When I could make myself heard, I thanked Harnmag for rescuing me from Wainscit the Wearisome.

"Twere nothing," he said, though I knew there'd be four moons in the sky before he let me forget about it. "I saw him bound for your shop, and I knew you were expecting your lady friend. I didn't want him spoiling your chances at love."

I went red to the tips of my ears, which is what Harnmag intended. He and Holmwick howled with laughter. Blind Gefnath turned toward me and sniffed the air. "Jasmine," he said. "So she came back. Did you ask for her story?"

I nodded, someone put a third flagon in my hand, and I told them about Armena and her

betrothal to Lyscerl. "I've heard of the fellow," Harnmag said. "A cad, to be sure, but a rich cad, which is what really matters." He shook his head glumly. "Reckon that ends it, then. Too bad."

"No," I said. "It's raining tonight. She'll come back."

Holmwick chuckled. "If she's hurling herself into the brine, I doubt she'll care about the weather."

I explained what I meant, what I'd done. Their reaction was predictable.

"Where's your head at, lad?" Harnmag growled.

Fair enough. But, I told him, he hadn't seen the doubt in Armenia's eyes, nor the deeper, more revealing look she'd given me when I'd held her hand. He shrugged as if this were neither here nor there, and I told him, and the others, that I intended to win her away from both Lyscerl and the sea.

"And how, exactly, to do that?" Blind Gefnath asked. "If you challenge this Lyscerl for her hand, he'll demand satisfaction. And, while I'm sure you know which end of a sword is pointed, he'll like as not carve you up a treat."

"We don't have to fight fair," offered Holmwick. "I know some lads'll jump to go at a noble with gaffs and belaying pins. Give the word, Radesen."

I believed him, too. I just had to say so, and they'd be fishing bits of Lyscerl out of the sea for weeks. Somehow, though, that wasn't quite right, and I turned Holmwick down. He was, naturally, disappointed.

"What, then?" asked Harnmag. "If you're truly set on this—"

I nodded I was.

"Then," he went on, "you must play to win at a single stroke, or you'll likely find your head mounted on a pike in the Nobles' Common. And if you want to win, you have to go after her, not Lyscerl."

I spread my hands, asking for ideas. I got none. For a while, I sat and mulled over my fourth-or, perhaps, fifth-flagon, thinking about what Harnmag had said. Even if I won Armenia's love, it would be scandalous for one so low-born as I to take the hand of Count Gyldlith's daughter. He, and Lyscerl, would probably have no qualms about getting their mates to cut me into little bits. I had to keep them from doing that, too. But how?

Well, if there's one thing a nobleman understands, it's the clatter of a coffer of coins, as my da would say. Which didn't help much. True, I had some silver—a fair bit, for a docksman—but nothing that would set His Grace's eyes awinkle. How, then, could a mere sail-dyer slake a noble's thirst for riches? I'd need more gold than I could count—maybe even a whole sea of the stuff . . .

Suddenly, I had the answer—or the beginning of one, at least—and it about near knocked me off my

chair. I reckon it showed plainly, because even Blind Gefnath looked my way. "Methinks the lad's got an idea," he said.

I held up a hand to stave off their questions. The plan was just forming, and I didn't want it to slip away. After a while, I had most of it worked out, and I nodded. "I know," I said. "I know what to do."

Harnmag squinted eagerly. He was always one for games, and the prospect of winning one against the folk of the Upper City had him excited. "Out with it, then," he said.

I told them.



"Good gods," Harnmag remarked at the last. "You'll need every sailor in Medella town to agree to that."

I laughed. "Not all. Most should do."

"I like it," Holmwick put in. "I don't know if it'll work, but I like it."

Blind Gefnath made a sour face, but I could tell by the way he was leaning forward that I'd won him over too. "How are you going to do it?" he asked.

"Well," I declared, "I'll need your help. The three of you—Harnmag's tongue, Holmwick's muscle, and your charms and farspeech, Gefnath."

It was one of the few times Harnmag genuinely smiled—no hint of a squint there. He laid a gnarled hand on my arm. "You have it," he said. Holmwick put his beefy fist over Harnmag's, and after a moment Gefnath nodded and let me place his hand atop the rest.

Harnmag was still grinning. "How long will you need, lad?" he asked.

I thought about it. "Three days."

"It's settled, then," Blind Gefnath said. "Three days. You know," he added, "I truly wish I could have my eyes back, so I could see this when it happens."



The rain ended an hour before dawn. I know this, because I was still awake, in my shop, my arms deep in sailcloth and dye. It was a busy week, indeed—all the vats were full, the ceiling hung with drying canvas. And there was much work left to do. Harnmag didn't come in that day: he, as were Blind Gefnath and Holmwick, was too busy to chat.

Armena returned that morning, as I'd known she would. She was angry, as I'd known she'd be. Myself, I felt fit to jump up on the counter and dance at the sight of her. I quickly quashed that urge, I'm glad to say.

"Sir!" she shouted as she stormed in. I managed to get into the front of the shop before she could

stomp to the back. She was wearing green again, a deeper hue than before.

"My name is Radesen, milady," I said. I could hear the smile in my voice, but I didn't let it touch my face, and so convinced her it wasn't there at all. My hands behind my back, I sketched a quick, respectful bow.

"Very well, Radesen," she snapped. "Explain this."

She slammed the sash onto the counter with a hand that trembled with rage. I had to fight back another smile as I looked upon it, for where it had been a rich, royal purple the day before, it was now pale, mottled lavender.

"The dye ran in the rain," she told me. "It ruined my blue gown."

I thought it rather odd, considering what she meant to do, that she would be upset over ruining a frock, but I didn't say as much. I tried my best to look penitent, hoping she wouldn't guess I'd deliberately removed the silk from the dye too early, that it had faded because I'd wanted it to fade. "Milady, I am truly sorry," I lied. "I must not have given it enough time to set. I will, of course, pay for your gown."

Her reaction was what I'd hoped for. The doubt was back, and it had grown from a spark to a candleflame. Some more fanning, I hoped, and it would blaze like Haremeth's own hearth. "That—that isn't necessary," she stammered. "Just dye it again. Properly this time."

I bowed again, kept my hands hidden, didn't reach for the sash. "As you wish, milady," I said. "But I fear I cannot have it ready for three days' time." I nodded—didn't point—back into the depths of the shop. "My works piled nigh to the rafters. You may seek another man's services, of course, if you so wish."

She didn't so wish, though, and I bloody well knew it. That strange, secret look was back in her eyes. She wrung her skirts. "No, good sir, that will do," she said. For a moment, she looked ready to say more. It seemed all I had to do was ask her, and she would have forsaken and forgotten Lyscerl and Count Gyldlith altogether. Unfortunately, they would not have been so absent-minded, as I well knew, so I held my tongue, bowed a third time, and bade her good day.

With a small sigh—disappointment, perhaps?—she wandered thoughtfully out of the shop. I looked down at the faded sash and finally let myself smile.



The days passed in a blur of canvas and dye and captains collecting their sails. Sleep and I became

strangers. Truth to tell, I'd not have found sleep even if I'd sought it. I'd have lain abed the night through, without so much as a wink for thinking of how much work I had yet to do, and why I had to do it. And, most of all, whether it would work.

I slaved like a wizard's golem, going from task to task without thinking, my mind roiling like a storm. It's one of the world's great wonders that, in my distraction, I didn't fall into a vat of dye and drown myself. Of Harnmag and the others I saw nothing at all. They were busy at their own tasks, and since I left the shop only once or twice to buy new supplies, I had to trust they would succeed.

Sometimes I look back on those three days, and they seem an eyeblink; other times they seem as years. I spent so much time hunched over the dyeing-vats, I nearly lost my sense of smell altogether—which, as I've said, isn't such a bad thing at the docks. My eyes ran like gutters after a storm. And, even now, my head sometimes feels like a blacksmith's been using it for an anvil, and I must stop what I'm doing and lie down with a wet cloth over my eyes until the pain goes away.

Was it worth it? I'm getting there.

Came the third day, and I ran out of money. I had nary a copper bit to my good name—even what little I'd inherited from my poor da was gone. If he'd known what I'd done with it, he probably would have cried. Or, on the other hand, maybe he wouldn't. It's at such times when I wish I'd known him better.

Not long after I'd spent my last silver, I ran out of sailcloth for dyeing too. I had to turn a few dogs away, and they were fit to spit for it, but what choice did I have? Once the last of my stock was gone, I realized the full spread of what I'd done: I'd put so much into my fancy over Armena, I had nothing left. If I failed, I'd have to close up my shop or borrow silver from some dog or other to keep it running. And, then as now, it was best not to be beholden to anyone on the docks.

Done be done, though, as they say: the view behind, and all that. When I'd rid myself of my last scrap of canvas, I saw to the sash and began closing up the shop. I was just reaching to lock the door, in fact, when Harnmag came a-barging in. He squinted me up and down and barked a laugh. You're a sight," he said, then hobbled to a chair and sat.

I ran a hand through my hair, which had gotten to looking like an ill-tended haystack. "You look halfway dead yourself," I shot back. Harnmag didn't laugh—I reckon if I'd known he was ailing and would be gone before Year-End, I'd never have said such a thing.

"You try walking up and down the wharf, chasing down every dog with a boat to his name," he

wheezed. He nodded toward my hands, which were even more brightly stained than when Armena had come in, two days before. "You'd best keep those covered on the morrow."

I reached behind the counter and pulled out a pair of gloves. "I gave a thought to that."

"I won't take more of your time," he said, rising stiffly. "I just needed to find my wind. And to make sure all was well, too."

"Well enough," I told him, trying to sound confident though my guts had been tightening all day, and by then they'd gotten to feeling about the size of a walnut. "Tomorrow, around midday," I said. "Wait for the signal."

"Tomorrow, midday," he answered, and turned to go. He paused with the door half-open on the darkening streets and squinted back at me. "Good luck to you, Radesen."

I nodded and smiled. It's good to have such friends.



Exhaustion, it seems, is stronger than impatience, for I slept sound as a dragon that night. I rarely remember my dreams, but I still recall one image, even now: coppery hair flowing around green-flecked, doubtful eyes.

Mercifully, I forgot to close my shutters before taking to my bed, or I'd surely have slept the day through while all my plans fell to pieces. Instead, light streaming through my window dragged me out of slumber. As it was, the sun was already well into its ride when I awoke, and I washed and dressed in a panic, hoping Armena hadn't chosen to come by early. I nearly forgot my gloves but caught myself at the last moment and was pulling them on as I stepped into my shop.

Fortunately, Armena, as with many nobles, was a late riser. It was almost midday before I heard her soft tread approaching the shop. I gripped the edge of the counter to keep my hands from shaking as the door opened and she entered in a swirl of satin skirts. She had on a gown the red-orange hue of dying embers, and I found I was having great trouble breathing all of a sudden.

"A fine d—" I started to say, but my voice shook and finally broke. I looked quickly at the floor, but not before I saw the faintest rosy blush tint her cheeks. I made myself take three quick, deep breaths, then looked up at those eyes that had haunted my sleep.

The doubt in them shone like a lantern.

I must have stared too long, for she blinked rapidly and cleared her throat. "Good sir," she whispered. She, too, was trying to keep her voice from shaking. "The sash."

I stepped into the back, fetched the sash, brought it to her. But I didn't give it over. "Milady," I said, fighting all the while to keep from babbling, "I'll give you the sash, but first I must ask one last favor of you."

She sighed impatiently and squared her shoulders as the doubt blazed hotter and brighter. "What of it, then?" she asked.

"Allow me to accompany you. Allow me to go with you to Fielle's Cliff, that I might be the last man to see you alive."

It wasn't what she'd expected, from the way her shoulders slumped. I reckon she'd thought I'd beg her to reconsider, not to jump, to abandon Lyscerl and her family. I knew, though, that that wouldn't work. And so, without another word, I handed her her death-token.

She stared at it a moment, wringing it in her hands, then nodded. "Very well," she breathed. The words were almost too soft to hear.



The Duchess Fielle, as well as being shamelessly romantic, had also had a dramatic bent to her. Fielle's Cliff, north along the shore from Medella town, afforded the best vantage on the entire city, Upper and Lower. Most of all, it gave a breathtaking view of the harbor, which was by then dotted with ships going about their days business—or at least seeming to.

Hundreds of eyes had seen Fielle plummet to her death eighty years before. Hundreds of eyes would see Armena do the same, and for a while, as we silently climbed the narrow path, it seemed she might balk at that notion. At the last, though, she found the strength that had brought her that far, stepped to the bluff's edge, and began folding the purple sash about her waist.

I said nothing. I checked the sun: midday was close. I looked at Armena, whose eyes were shut and lips moving in silent prayer, then I glanced over my shoulder at a large cluster of redmottle bushes near the path. They rustled, and I took a deep breath and turned back to Armena.

She tensed to jump. I grabbed her arm.

With a yelp, she stumbled back. Then the shock wore off, and she struck me. She was, truth to tell, startlingly strong. I reeled, but I didn't let her go.

"How dare you interfere!" she snapped. "If I had known this was your intent, I never would have allowed you to accompany me. Now, release me, Radesen!"

"No," I said. "I would not stand by and watch anything of such beauty be destroyed." Blood was



pounding so hard in my head, I could barely hear my own voice. But she could hear, it was plain, for her face turned ashen and the fires of doubt glowed like a furnace in her gaze. "There are other choices to make besides death," I said.

"Choices like what?" she asked, trying to put on an air of arrogance, but sounding just frightened instead. "You, good sir?"

"Yes, milady," I told her, and I was suddenly as calm as the sea on a windless day. "Choices like me. Look down upon the harbor."

Reluctantly, haughtily, she did.

"There's something odd about the ships today," I said. "Can you tell me what it is?"

She scowled, then blinked. "They—they fly no sails," she breathed.

I nodded. "Unlike your betrothed, milady, I have little gold to give you," I said, loud enough to be heard all across the cliffs breadth. "But I would give you all I have."

The sun crested the sky. The redmottle bushes rustled. And the ships unfurled their sails as one.



Harnmag and the others had been busy indeed. Persuading well nigh everyone with a boat to fly a sail that's not his own is every bit as hard as it sounds.

Over the past three days, while I'd toiled over my dyeing-vats, Harnmag had gone from pier to taproom to brothel, speaking to every captain he could find. Most, I should say, agreed to the plan straight away, or near enough—it helped, of course, that I was giving them new sails without asking for a copper bit in exchange.

Some dogs, however, are stubborn or slow-witted or just plain mean. They took convincing. Between Holmwicks' muscle and Blind Gefnath's charms, though, almost all of them fell into line. While 'twould be a lie to say every captain flew one of the sails I'd prepared that day—no one had wanted to talk to Wainscit the Wearisome, for one—those who didn't were few indeed.

The rest was simple. That morning, Harnmag went out aboard a ship belonging to a mate of his. About the same time Holmwicks led Gefnath up to the bluffs, where they hid in a particular clump of redmottles and waited for me to arrive and give the old wizard his cue. When I spoke the words we'd settled on, he farspoke a signal to Harnmag, who, in turn, raised the first of the sails I'd spent the past three days dyeing a golden hue. At that signal, the rest of the dogs did the same.

And so now Armena and I gazed down upon the harbor as it blossomed into a sea of gold.

She gasped softly, and even my eyes widened—it was quite a sight, mark me. And we weren't the only ones: as we watched, wondering crowds began to gather at the docks and other vantage points in the city. Among them, I learned later, were Lyscerl and His Grace the Count Gyldith. But I cared for none of that. All that mattered, all my toil came down to, was the look in Armena's eyes. Feeling at once triumphant and sick, I removed my gloves, revealing the deep golden stain upon my hands, and gazed at her.

The doubt that had burned so brightly was gone; in its place, a new certainty shone like the sun.

She said nothing—what was between us then was beyond words. Instead, she reached down to her waist, removed the purple sash, and tossed it over the cliff's edge. It wafted away on the summer wind as she let me take her in my arms.



When I was a lad and the world was bright, my da asked me what I wanted from life. I told him I only needed three things: a lady fair, a purse full of gold, and adventure.

Well, I won the first of those that day, high on Fielle's Cliff. His Grace, while not overjoyed that a commoner had wooed his daughter, could ill afford to scorn a man who'd filled the harbor with gold. He reluctantly gave blessing to our wedding that autumn. Lyscerl the ducal heir fell into drinking soon after and got himself killed in a duel. Most folk agreed he wouldn't be missed.

The second thing, the gold, came quick enough, as well. Armena's dowry aside, I became famous for a time. Demand for the work of Radesen Goldensea spread all over Medella town, even among folk in the Upper City. And every year, on a day in late summer, every ship captain raises a golden sail. They even made a festival of it, with me, reluctantly, at its midst. So, though I've never been truly wealthy, my heart and purse have been full ever since.

And adventure?

I'll tell you about that someday.



Canadian Chris Pierson has contributed two stories to recent *DRAGONLANCE*® anthologies. This is the first appearance of his work in *DRAGON*® Magazine, but we hope not the last.

## Give me a Sword and a Ship to Sail (And I'll Never Come Home Again)

Well I was born with my feet on the deck  
of a ship upon the brine,  
My father was a fighting man,  
his blade was keen and fine,  
He took me up upon his knee  
when I was nine or ten,  
And said "get you a sword and a ship to sail,  
and you'll never come home again."

CHORUS

*Give me a sword and a ship to sail  
and I'll never come home again,  
I'll travel the waves and kiss the maids  
and fight a hundred men,  
I don't know why I'm leaving, lass,  
I don't know where or when,  
But give me a sword and a ship to sail  
and I'll never come home again.*

I left my home soon after  
and I bought myself a sword,  
I fought for silver and for gold,  
I built up quite a hoard,  
And so I went down to the wharf  
and bought a boat and then,  
I had me a sword and a ship to sail,  
and I never went home again.

CHORUS

O'er many years I've plied the seas,  
I've seen nigh every sight,  
I've cut the throats of men by day,  
loved lasses in the night,  
I've fought and drunk and learned far more  
than many a wise man's ken,  
And with my sword and a ship to sail,  
I'll never go home again.

CHORUS

The sea has always been my love,  
the blade has been my life,  
But one morn after too much wine,  
I woke up with a wife,  
And, alas, she kept me home  
and clucked at me like a hen,  
So I gave her a sword and a ship to sail  
and she never came home again.

CHORUS

And now I'm old and stooped and gray,  
my eyesight's growing dim,  
But when I die, I'll happily go,  
I won't be glum or grim,  
For I have seen the great wide world,  
I didn't stay in my den,  
'Cause I got me a sword and a ship to sail,  
and I never went home again.

CHORUS



# Network NEWS

by Nicky Rea

Ever wonder why it's so difficult to find a good gaming convention that doesn't offer several RPGA® Network games? The obvious answer is, of course, that players demand Network-sanctioned tournaments. Ranging from AD&D® events that feature LIVING CITY™ (or LIVING JUNGLE™, or LIVING DEATH™) and RAVENLOFT® events (among others) to such diverse games as *Shadowrun\**, *Timemaster\**, *Amber Diceless Roleplaying\**, and *Star Wars\**, the Network offers a smorgasbord of gaming delights to the discerning player.

And then there's the appeal of points and prizes. Points, glorious points! Could anyone ask for more fun than gaining points for sitting down at a table and playing through a tournament game? Well, yes. The Network not only awards us points based on both our attendance and performance at tournaments, but it also provides prizes—gaming goodies handed out to the winners at each table. Members can see their points accumulating and track their growing expertise as they rise in level to masters, grandmasters and even paragon level.

## Join the club

The RPGA® Network supports conventions all over the world with tournaments designed for many different game systems, but especially the AD&D game and all of TSR's campaign settings.

For more information about the Network's programs, write to: RPGA Network, 1801 Lind Avenue SW, Renton, WA 98055, or send e-mail to: rpgahq@aol.com.

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

But gamers aren't asking for RPGA Network tournaments just because we earn points and network ranking thereby. Ranking and prizes are nice extras, but few players would put up with several hours of bad games just to gain them. Something beyond these perks attract several thousand gamers to participate in Network-sanctioned games each year. What is that "something?" How do RPGA Network tournaments differ from the run-of-the-mill fare available from individual gamemasters? In a word, quality. Consider these scenarios:

**Scenario One:** You choose a game based on its name and the capsule description given in the convention literature. The system may be old hat to you or this may be your first stab at trying a game you always wish you'd learned. When you arrive at the table, you discover a knowledgeable, conscientious, creative gamemaster who is well prepared and runs an exciting, memorable game. You've discovered a talented GM whose games you'll look for in the future.

**Scenario Two:** You do everything described above, but you discover that the beginning level character you're playing is pitted against the queen of dragons ("slurp!"). After several exhausting hours (or a few, tortured minutes) in which your character is belittled, led around to view the egotistical gamemaster's supposed brilliance and finally slain horribly, you are mercifully released to stumble off to your next game.

**More Scenarios:** Again, you optimistically show up only to find that:

❖ The gamemaster's dog became sick, so he (the GM, not the dog) isn't attending the con after all.

❖ The gamemaster forgot the characters, so he expects you to spend the next hour and a half rolling up new ones.

❖ Someone forgot to mention that there will be 20 people at this table. Naturally, the scenario calls for you to travel in a troop, but there is never enough to do to hold the interest of even one character, let alone 20.

❖ The gamemaster ignores all but one attractive person, even resorting to having all the rest of the characters struck mute, so she can try to pick up the cute guy without distractions like the other players.

❖ The good buddies of the gamemaster are all at the table taking up the other five positions. You get to suggest a course of action once during the game, but it is ignored.

Do these scenarios sound ridiculous? Maybe they are slightly exaggerated, but I've sat at all those tables during my career as a convention attendee.

So, am I saying there are never any problems with RPGA Network games? Of course not, but many of the scenarios mentioned above can be more easily dealt with by the Network. When playing in a Network game, convention goers can count on certain standards.

First and foremost, any tournament sanctioned by the RPGA Network goes through an editing process designed to catch rules violations, iron out problems with the storyline, match the characters to reasonable challenges and provide something for each type of player (role-playing opportunities, tricks and traps, puzzles, and good old-fashioned combat). Additionally, the ethical guidelines the Network follows assures parents of younger gamers that their children will not be exposed to adult situations.

The RPGA Network works in concert with the companies that produce their sanctioned game systems. They send tournaments to the respective companies to make certain that the rules, atmosphere, and spirit of the game in question are all satisfactory. This process allows the companies to approve the tournaments that represent their games, and it assures players that they are playing the game they expect to be playing and not some weird hybrid or in a game world they don't recognize.

While one-round tournaments are easy to squeeze into a busy schedule, many players prefer the advantages of two- and three-round tournaments. Following a longer storyline and being able to play different characters within that unfolding drama provides players with a greater sense of their role in the tale. Often, multi-round tournaments

# PC - 3.5"



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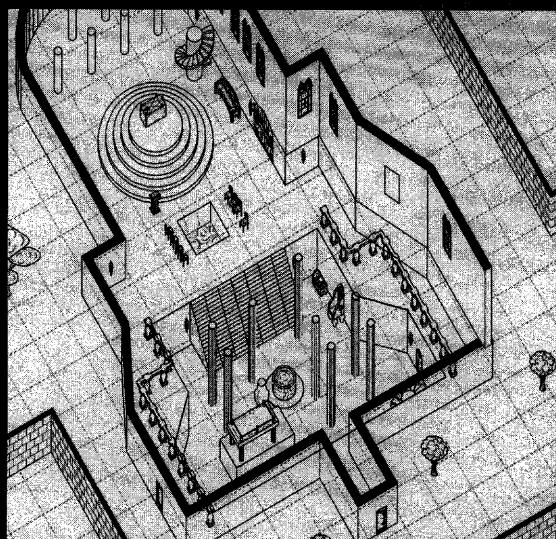
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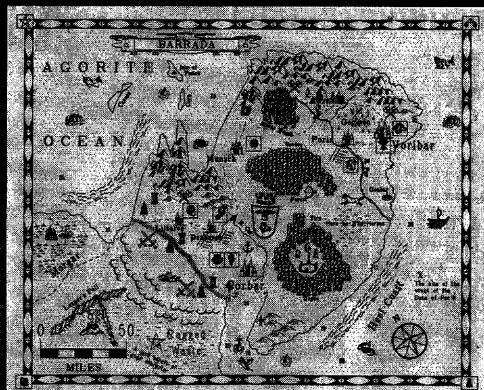
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give players the satisfaction of knowing that others enjoyed their play enough to vote for them, allowing them to advance to succeeding rounds. The RPGA Network often offers multi-round tournaments, which are otherwise hard to find at conventions. Best of all, Network tournaments are limited to six to eight players at a table—a policy that is even gaining adherents among the ever-popular LIVING CITY crowd, where lack of enough game masters used to create tables of up to nine players—or more!

While there is occasionally more demand for a game than anticipated (such as often occurs with LIVING CITY events), the Network tries to determine in advance how many people will be interested in playing a particular game. This allows them to schedule enough judges to run several tables. Sometimes this means there are more judges scheduled for a specific game than there are tables, but the opposite occasionally happens as well.

Combatting the dreaded not-enough-GMs syndrome, the Network has been known to shove a scenario into a willing volunteer's hands and ask that kind person to run a game (without prior preparation) just to accommodate overflow. Some gamers might resent the lack of a prepared GM, but most of us would rather play than sit out the four hours, and we appreciate the commitment to provide fun for everyone—a far cry from no-show GMs.

Because the RPGA Network ranks both players and game masters, it is possible for new players to find games (the feature, the special, the benefit, etc.) where they won't be overpowered by veteran players their first time at a convention. Newcomers can relax and enjoy the game without feeling as though they are being judged by more experienced players. Friendships that can last for decades are often formed during players' first Network games at a convention. As members tend to flock to other RPGA Network games at whatever convention they attend, it is usually possible to locate new-made friends quickly and arrange to play with them again.

For the more advanced players, the ranking system allows them to enjoy masters, grandmasters, and paragon level games—often with old friends who have risen within the ranking system alongside them and who may only meet at conventions. Those ranked players who haven't met before are more likely to encounter one another during the higher level games as well, expanding

the circle of friends. And if there is room at the grandmasters table and a first-time player wants to join in? She's welcome. Many "newbies" have stolen the game right out from under the "vets" in this fashion, blowing them away with great roleplaying and clever ideas.

Aspiring GMs have no better friend than the RPGA Network. The Network encourages (some say begs) members to become involved with judging. Most conventions give judges a break on the admission price if they run a few sessions, giving GMs a few more bucks to spend in the dealers' room. No experience is needed to sign up for judging an RPGA Network tournament, but most Network games provide enough instructions that a neophyte judge can do a creditable job. Further, the Network tries to send out tournaments far enough in advance that game masters can read through the scenario several times and make notes on running it. Some GMs even give it a run-through at home with local gamers.

Best of all, the network uses voting sheets handed out at the end of the game. These sheets ask that players rank

the GM and provide space for commenting on the judge's performance. Game masters who want to improve pay attention to those comments, using them to correct problems of which they may not even be aware and to hone their techniques. Because of this feedback, after judging a few rounds for the Network, GMs become more adept, and that experience translates into more enjoyment for both the game master and the players.

Quality, fairness, attention to detail and policing itself when it makes mistakes are hallmarks of the RPGA Network tournament system. Enjoy one today.



Nicky Rea is a freelance game designer whose computer has recently been overrun by two new kittens.

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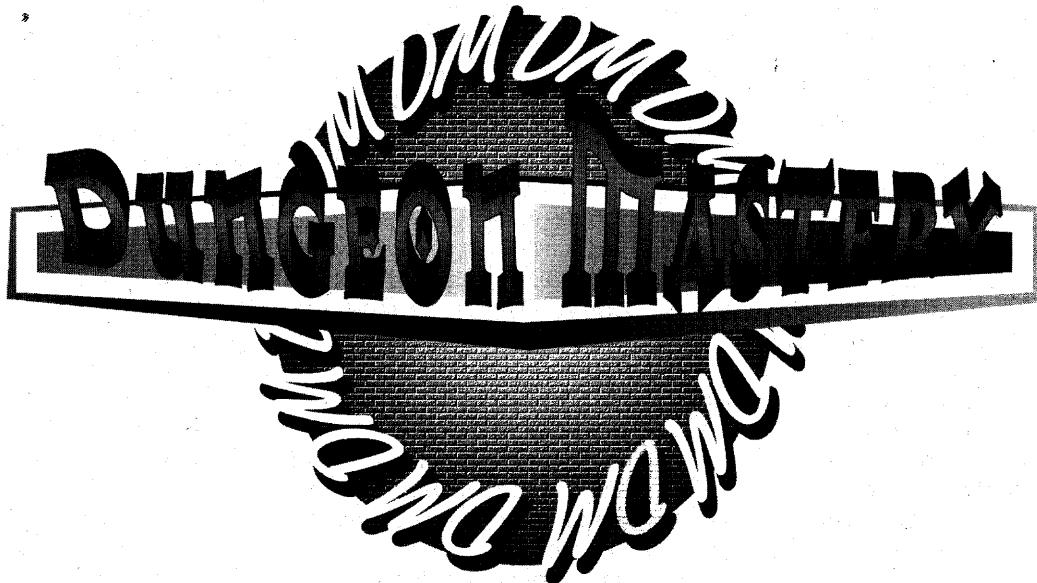
Complete with amazing example maps, this software is essential equipment for serious role players.



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# Mind Games and Other Dirty Tricks for DMs

by Ed Carmien

**M**ind Games. All role-playing games are mind games in that the characters exist and the action takes place only in the imaginations of the players and DM. For the purposes of this article, however, the term refers to the tricks and "slights of mind" intended to befuddle players in order to entertain them better.

Please remember that these tricks are intended to increase the fun of the game, not to belittle players or make them appear foolish. Play nice!

## In-game Tricks

There are an infinite number of shenanigans DMs and players can get up to in a role-playing game. Here are just a few hints and suggestions. Experiment all you like: just remember, the enemies you make may be your own!

## Switching Genres

This trick plays upon the expectations a certain genre of game creates. Set up an AD&D® game and the players expect fighters, clerics, princesses in distress, and so on. But what if an hour or two into the game, or a week or two later, strange things begin to happen? Villagers panic and leave their huts empty. Rumors about well-dressed aristocratic monsters abound. The moon is eerily full. Wolves howl at night. Suave nobles make passes at party members, and the results are lost in disturbing dreams. It's a RAVENLOFT®

game, of course, masquerading as a standard AD&D campaign.

DMs wishing to add a bit of "super" to their fantasy roleplaying can start a DARK SUN® campaign, then transport the characters to a standard AD&D environment. Talk about super powers!

Switches like this are most effective when there is a striking difference between the genres, but not so much that the PCs from one genre can't fit into the other. Changing gears between fantasy and space opera might be a bit much for many players. This trick doesn't usually work a second time with any particular group: it's a "funny once" joke.

## Body-Snatching

With doppelgangers, this trick is easy. A DM merely observes the behavior of the players for awhile, decides when one of the characters is alone and vulnerable, and then flats the switch. The real character is "tucked away someplace, while the DM knows the character is now actually a doppelganger.

There's really no point in telling the character involved: that would just spoil the fun. (See "Foreshadowing" for clues about how to reveal the truth slowly to the rest of the characters.)

This trick works with any genre in any system, so long as the imitation has a game-based explanation (pod-person, android, solid holoprojection, whatever).

## The Bad Patron

This plot twist involves a party with a patron of some kind: a king who hires them to find his daughter, a merchant who needs guards, a wizard who needs help collecting spell components. The trick is that the patron has some other goal in mind, and the health of the characters isn't necessarily high on the patron's list of priorities.

Caution must be used with this trick, as it's fairly common. However, if the characters have worked with a patron before, it can work nicely. Also, DMs who plan ahead can think up plausible diversions for suspicion when it does arise, a "secret explanation" they can ferret out that is still not the truth.

## Hide in Plain View

When the object of a quest is a particular item, let the characters find it early in the story, but in such a way that they don't recognize that they have it. Then as the hunt progresses, strange clues can surface (see "Foreshadowing") that don't make any sense. Ultimately, the key is to recognize what they already possess.

Recent variations on this theme include making the quest object a living creature, via magic or misinterpretation of a legend. The helpless Princess is actually the "Scepter of the Silver River," and so on.

## Bait and switch

Sometimes, role-playing games can be pretty deterministic. The players receive information from the DM and their characters act on it. To muddle the issue, and to help players actually think before they act, it's a good idea for DMs to present a false picture and see what happens.

Once upon a time, a party of adventurers was traveling alongside a stream. The DM chuckled and hummed suspiciously (see "Dinner Table Tortures"), so when an armed group of men charged over a nearby hill, shouting and brandishing weapons, the party reacted like a finely tuned machine.

The mages hurled *lightning bolts* and *fireballs* at the enemy. Two of the PCs unlimbered their bows and shot the bad guys full of arrows. At the end of the battle, the party's fighters met the onrushing survivors, who said, gasping for breath, "What . . . are . . . you . . . doing? Frogs . . . chasing . . ."

At which point several hundred giant frogs topped the rise and attacked the party, who were now low on spells and arrows.

## Poison in a Pretty Package

Take something unpleasant and wrap it in a nice package. See that the characters come across it, pick it up, take it with them. Eventually, whatever it is will "come out." For example, the maiden proves to be a disguised fiend, the pretty gem turns out to cause bad breath, etc.

## Divide and Conquer

Not a good trick to play on groups who are only tentatively bonded, this ploy can be used by players on each other. The name says it all. First, you divide a group you wish to conquer through one of many methods. Offer a few special privileges or goodies, deny the same thing to the others. Appear to play favorites.

When the characters grumble, they are divided. DMs can then drop an encounter on them that requires real teamwork to vanquish. Players might be truly selfish and try to benefit from the situation. Whatever the case, fun is the goal, not hard feelings among the PCs.

## The Twonky

In some games, any object that comes to the attention of the players is obviously important. Be it a person, a sword, or a building, if it holds center stage for even a minute, the players know it's

important and will try to figure out what role it plays in the ongoing story.

DMs wishing to humble such eagle-eyed players can introduce a twonky, or a thing that has no place in the game setting. It shouldn't have special powers: it should just exist conspicuously and have no role in the current story. When the storyline comes to a close and the players ask, "What about that giant pyramid?" the DM replies, "Oh, that had nothing to do with anything."

This is a variation on the red herring, a clue that is meant to throw characters off the true scent. Used too often, the twonky can be very annoying. Use it sparingly, or watch out for thrown polyhedral objects.

## Narrative Tricks

Narration is the art of telling a story. Stories usually progress chronologically. DMs can play with this expectation. With careful planning, certain parts of a tale can be told out of sequence. However, this trick needs a clear purpose.

First, out-of-sequence narration must heighten the drama of the subsequent storytelling experience. Obviously it's not

possible to give away too much of the overall story, because doing so destroys dramatic tension. Second, unlike movies and novels, role-playing games tell stories that aren't fixed in place, so any out-of-sequence narration must not be too specific, otherwise the subsequent gameplay might not end up at the right future or past event.

DMs can rove a bit into the future, but the past might be a richer mine of opportunity for time-shifting of role-playing action. Also, for this trick, DMs might assign players temporary characters, just for fun. The players can learn a little bit about what's going on while gaining a better sense of history (or the future) on a scale larger than their characters.

## Foreshadowing

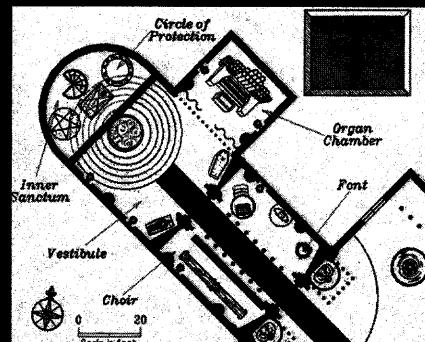
This literary technique is familiar to everyone, but how to use it might not be. To employ foreshadowing, a DM or player must merely pretend to be a mystery writer and start with a fact. That fact must be largely unknown ("Who Shot Mr. Burns?"), but it has to tie into the ongoing story. It should also have some relevance to the overall plot: foreshadowing the

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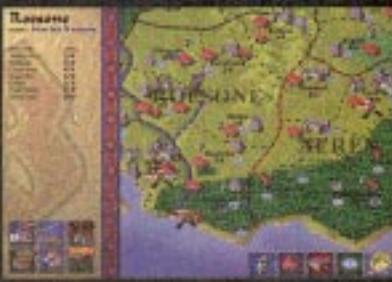


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illness of a house cat isn't very interesting (unless it means something in the "big picture"). Such facts are often discovered in the future: mystery writers often start with a corpse, but finding the murderer takes the whole book.

The foreshadowed fact must entice the PCs but it shouldn't give away the mystery. Shift gears from being mystery writer to a murder suspect, and think of what clues you should cover-up. The obvious ones must go, but no criminal (or mystery) is perfect, so some must stay. The clues that remain should have more than one possible explanation, so the PCs must question each of them.

Now insert those clues into the game as necessary. Clever PCs will begin to add things up, so that when a key event occurs they are ready for it, or at least they can say, "Aha! I knew it."

Take that nasty silver Terminator in the movie *T2: Judgement Day*. It loses a chunk of itself early in the film, but that chunk slithers back and is reabsorbed by the bad guy. Later, when it reshapes itself after being shattered into hundreds of bits, it's not a surprise: the ability was foreshadowed by the movie makers.

DMs can foreshadow events just as simply. Players can get into the action too: moody, role-playing situations can be enhanced by players who know where their characters are going psychologically and foreshadow, through their behavior, some character development detail.

## Dreams

Often ignored by DMs and players, dreams present an alternate world in which a bunch of new tricks can be played.

A popular trick is the hideous-encounter-where-everyone-dies-horribly-dream . . . that isn't known to be a dream until the characters wake up. The fact that it is a dream can be foreshadowed by having increasingly strange things happen, until someone figures it out.

Dreams are also a good place to inform and misinform characters. There is no expectation of truth to a dream, so anything goes. Dreams can be the conduit for contact by higher powers: they can even be visions, or powerful waking dreams. Such dreams can be used to confuse a character. What is a good dream one day can the next be a misleading dream provided by a competing higher power.

Nightmares can provide information to characters in a subtle way. Disturbing

dreams about a fellow party member might be a signal that there is something wrong (perhaps the character is a doppelganger!) and the dream is just one signal that indicates investigation is warranted. Warnings about upcoming dangers can be provided in a spooky way: will the party accept a warning about crossing a chasm from a character's experience in a nightmare?

Of course there are many more games players and DMs can play "in the game," but this list provides a lot of opportunity for mental mayhem. There are other tricks to be played, however, tricks that take place outside the scope of the game itself.

## Dinner Table Tortures

Deceits played outside of the game setting are just as valid as those that involve details inside the game itself. In fact, they can be more effective, at least in the short term, before everyone wises up. Here are a few unchivalrous behaviors and shenanigans that can be used to sow fear and discord among your friends.

## Harmless Scams

Everyone's eyes are on the DM. A raised: eyebrow, a cough, a blush: all carry information to the players. It's fair, therefore, to use this focus to a DMs advantage. Fake maps or monster descriptions left out for players to see "by accident" can tie a group up in knots. Long thoughtful stares, unnecessary rolling of dice, strange props lugged to the game table (then handled but never used), and fake notes have all been part of the DMs arsenal of misinformation .

One extra word about fake notes. A note that says 'Read this then hand it back" tells that player that you're using the fake note technique to fool the other players. A note that says "Roll a saving throw vs. poison and tell me the result" induces panic and fear in everyone . . . while concealing the fact that you're sending a fake note in the first place.

## Let's Talk Privately

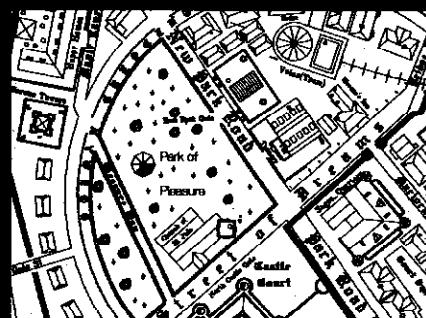
This old chestnut has been around forever. It is a given that any conversation that can't be held in public around the gaming table is A) important and B) possibly harmful to those not conversing in secret.

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These secret chats are sometimes necessary, but other times they can be used to recruit help or just to ask about the weather. They can also serve as an avenue for introducing disinformation into the game. After all, if a DM says something to the group as a whole, it's gospel.

On the other hand, if one player passes on information gleaned from a secret chat, hey, it's just that character's word, isn't it?

Clever players and DMs wishing to conceal the subject matter of a secret chat can also drop a few words on another subject on the way back to the table, suggesting to casual listeners what the discussion was about.

## Divide and Conquer

Sometimes tight cliques grow in gaming groups. Bob and Allen always team their characters up, Jane and Wilma never suspect each other of double-dealing. It may be healthier for the group as a whole for these micro-cliques to loosen up a bit.

It's dangerous, however, to attempt such manipulation in a group that isn't stable and friendly as a whole. So be cautious!

Sometimes all that's necessary is a gerrymandering of character sub-groups so that everyone has a chance to hang out with each other's characters. Other times it might be necessary to sow actual distrust between characters who are pals in the game and out of the game (as players). Characters who steal for a living are easy to exploit this way, as are characters with strong moral positions, such as paladins.

When the dust settles, clever DMs can pin the blame on a pesky Brownie or another playful sprite.

## Cultivate Paranoia

When everything goes wrong, people worry. They begin to take extra precautions. Every door in a dungeon receives the whole "listen-check-for-traps-listen-again-check-again" treatment (and the thieves are taking precautions against nasty brain-eating mites that climb into your ear when you listen at a door, right?).

Humble peasants met on the road are interrogated within an inch of their lives. When a patron offers a party a job, they sneer at the idea, because they've been burned before.

Obviously, too much paranoia can really slow a game down. But just the

right amount of paranoia can do wonderful things. It can be cultivated by many means: Harmless Scams, above, describes just a few, while unhappy surprises produce their own watchfulness and new precautions.

Clever DMs encourage paranoia when it's not needed. After the characters gradually return to a state of normalcy, when the stakes are big, when a few extra precautions would pay off, whammo! The bad guys slip something sneaky by the characters. A little dramatic irony never hurts!

## Conclusion

These tips are like salt: a little can be good for a dish, but too much ruins it. As with any individual fun-making technique, too much of a good thing is a bad thing. Also, many of these tricks aren't particularly nice. If played on people who don't know each other well, the point that it's supposed to be fun might be overlooked.

Used judiciously, however, these mind games can liven up any roleplaying game. They help defuse some common and stultifying habits in roleplayers, and can be used by DMs and players alike to spice up a game.

I can't take credit for creating these shenanigans: they've been painstakingly crafted and developed by primates since the first time the new guy on the hunting trip was sent after a "left-handed smokesifter." So when things in a game are getting a bit too serious, when folks begin to forget what the point of playing a game is, it's time to trot out one of these tricks.

Have fun!



*A gamer since the hot new product was Blackmoor, Edward now teaches English at a small college in New Jersey, in between publishing stories and articles in sundry fun markets. Rumors that "Doc" Carmien assigns grades in his classes by rolling polyhedral dice are entirely false.*

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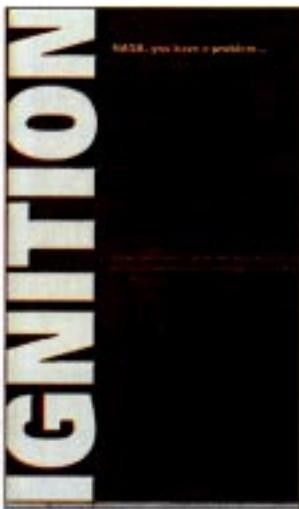
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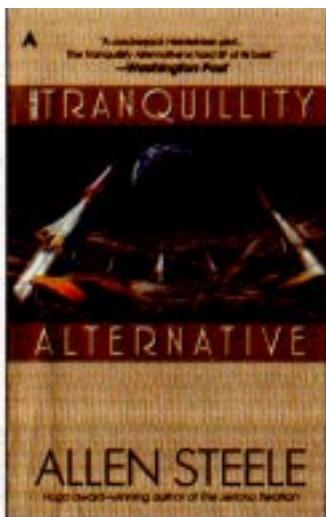
A few years ago, the techno-thriller boom took to outer space with a book called *Storming Intrepid*, which rocketed onto the bestseller lists. Now a best-selling author (with over ten years of experience at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories) and his occasional collaborator (an air force colonel and former member of the White House science staff) revisit the astro-techno-thriller genre with panache and all of the fixins of a hard-to-put-down novel.

The plot is simple: *Die Hard* on the launchpad. There's a bomb attached to the shuttle, and a refined madman with a plan is holding it and mission control hostage in exchange for a suitcase of precious gems. It's up to the benched-with-a-broken-foot former shuttle commander to stop this evil plan.

The pace is brisk with the accent on action, and the detail of NASA workings and procedures are wonderfully detailed and precise. Cast Bruce Willis in the lead,

and blast off for a fast diversion that will pass a few hours in record time.

—Brian Thomsen



## *The Tranquillity Alternative*

by Allen Steele  
**Ace Books** \$5.99

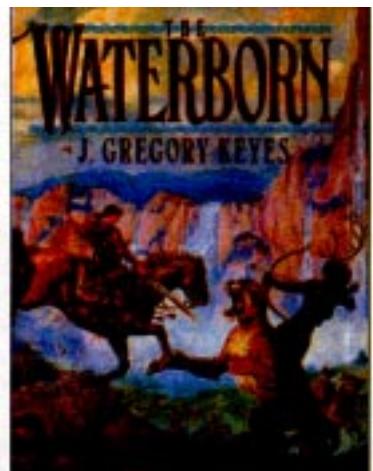
If *Ignition* is *Die Hard* on a launchpad, this is definitely *Die Hard* at the moonbase . . . and that's not bad.

The crux of the plot is that a military moonbase housing six missiles (left over from a Star Wars sort of defense system) has been sold to the private sector. A NASA crew, with representatives from the new corporation and the press in tow, has been dispatched to nullify the now-unnecessary weapons of war. Unfortunately several other interests have their own plan for the deactivation ceremony, including hijacking the missiles for later use on earth.

Steele marvelously weaves a plot with numerous twists and turns that call to mind what Alistair MacLean (author of such notable thrillers as *The Guns of Navarone*, *Where Eagles Dare*, and *Ice Station Zebra*) might have written had he ever turned his talents to science fiction. Fully realized characters, neat technofiction, and plot surprises galore make this a real page-turner.

As an added bonus, Steele has set his tale in an alternate timeline that he has used several times before in other novels and short stories, one in which the United States began its space program in 1944. The differences are never intrusive and are quite thought provoking, a credit to Steele's expertise, as he manages to keep several storytelling balls in the air at the same time while still delivering a bravura performance.

—Brian Thomsen



## *The Waterborn*

by J. Gregory Keyes  
**Del Rey**

\$22.00 HC  
\$5.99 PB

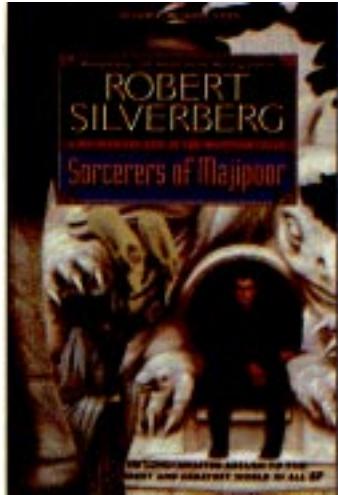
J. Gregory Keyes blends the shadows of Native American and Asian mythologies to form one of the most original fantasy settings of recent years in *The Waterborn*.

The dual protagonists are Perkar, a young warrior of the Cattle People, and Hezhi, a princess of the city of Nohl. From the very beginning of the novel, the lives of these two young characters are ruled by the most powerful god of their world, the River. Perkar seeks the River for revenge and his desire for *piraku*, or honor and glory. Hezhi, on the other hand, gradually discovers the secret of her own heritage as one of the waterborn, the noble descendants of that same River.

*The Waterborn* features a cast of engaging secondary characters, each inspired by the archetypes of fantasy—the teacher, the assassin, the loyal servant, and a few gods of varying power—but Keyes handles each with a deft touch that avoids cliche. Keyes also succeeds at introducing flawed protagonists who develop into powerful and morally mature characters by the inevitable climax that brings them together.

While the first half of the book suffers from slow pacing and the sometimes unlikeable protagonists, the payoff is well worth this gradual development. Keyes is in full command of his story by the conclusion, and the end result suggests that *The Waterborn* could be the start of one of the decade's best fantasy series.

—Dave Gross



## Sorcerers of Majipoor

by Robert Silverberg

**HarperPrism**

\$23.00

Majipoor is a world of two kings: the cloistered Pontifex, who resides within the subterranean Labyrinth, and the worldly Coronal of Castle Mount. When Pontifex Prankipin lies on his deathbed, Coronal Confalume's successor seems to be Prince Prestimion. Prince Korsibar, the Coronal's own son, is barred from the succession by tradition. Ambition and intrigue are more powerful than tradition, however, and Korsibar is prophesied to "shake the world." In a land that has never known civil strife, an inevitable conflict begins.

Majipoor is a tremendous world, many times the size of Earth. Its culture is a convincing amalgamation of medieval Europe and Malaysia, with a strangely plausible marriage of both science-fiction and fantasy elements.

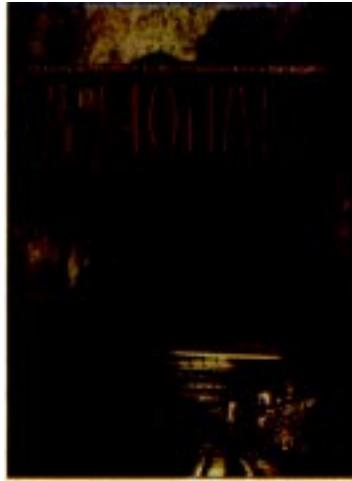
Silverberg's characters are great and tragic, some equally capable of magnificent heroism and despicable villainy. Their words and actions are equally great. These are not the bland little archetypes that populate so much modern fantasy; they must live in giant Majipoor, for they are the size of legends.

Beyond the fabulous characters and setting, *Sorcerers of Majipoor* offers masterful writing. Silverberg's plot unfolds as deliberately as an Elizabethan drama, and his dialogue is perfectly suited to

the wit and grandeur of the noble characters. Every image of Majipoor transports the imagination, enthralled and unquestioning.

Comparing Silverberg's novel to those of Tolkien or Eddison is insufficient, but if you pine for the memory of those classic fantasies, do not fear that there are no more great masters of epic fantasy: read *Sorcerers of Majipoor*.

—Dave Gross



## Reliquary

by Douglas Preston & Lincoln Child

**Forge/Tor Books**

\$24.95

Reliquary is the sequel to the New York Times bestselling novel *The Relic* and it picks up the action where the subtle epilogue left things in the first book. Where *The Relic* succeeded as a new twist on the monster-in-the-house motif (granted that the house in question was New York City's Museum of Natural History), *Reliquary* more closely resembles a cross between a disaster thriller and *The Mole People* without sacrificing science or verisimilitude.

The crux of the action is that new headless corpses are turning up around New York City, leading the survivors of the previous book to come to the conclusion that a monster similar to the one in the first book is running loose in the subterranean strata beneath the sidewalks and subways of the Big Apple. Genetic mutation, ecology, and sociology all come into play as a cop, an anthropologist, a reporter, and a CIA spook search for the answer and the antidote.

Native New Yorkers will enjoy the city beneath the city revelations of the plot, while the solid genetics and evolutionary theories will please the more discriminating Michael Crichton fans. Plenty of action, plot twists and thrills

make it a page-turner that is not too dependent on reading the novel that precedes it.

—Brian Thomsen



## Millennium 1: The Frenchman

by Elizabeth Hand

based on a teleplay by Chris Carter

**HarperPrism**

\$5.99

The good news is that Chris Carter's latest TV brainchild *Millennium* has made its literary debut. The bad news is that the books are novelizations of TV episodes rather than spinoffs from the series, as has appeared from such successful tie-in lines as *Star Trek* and *X-Files*. In other words, no new stories of Frank Black and the Millennium group are revealed. Once I got over this initial disappointment, I was more than pleased with the inaugural book in the series.

*The Frenchman* was the pilot episode for the series, and noted SF novelist Elizabeth Hand does a crackerjack job with the novelization, remaining painfully faithful to the teleplay yet managing to convey the same sense of dread and eeriness that the visuals bring to life on the TV screen. Her attention to detail and internal dialogue and pacing succeeds in heightening the tension of the hunt for a serial killer, and her terse yet precise prose make it easy to skip over some of the annoyingly protracted pauses and facial closeups that have become an irritating signature of the noire cinematic style of the TV series.

I look forward to future volumes dealing with my favorite episodes and hope that new adventures are available soon.

—Brian Thomsen





# Sage Advice

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by Skip Williams

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If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, 1801 Lind Avenue SW, Renton, WA 98055 USA. You can also email questions to [tsrsage@aol.com](mailto:tsrsage@aol.com).

We are no longer able to make personal replies. Please send no SASEs with your question. SASEs are being returned with copies of the writer's guidelines.

This month, the Sage considers optional abilities for PCs in the AD&D® game.

**Page 5 of *Warriors and Priests of the Realms*** says geographical kits are usable by any warrior class and can be combined with kits found in the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*. Does the same thing apply to the deity-specific priest kits listed in *Warriors and Priests of the Realms*? Can deity-specific kits be used in conjunction with kits found in the *Complete Priests' Handbook*? Can you make Fighting Monk Greenlords? Or Darkcloak Prophet Priests? Such allowances seem to be an abuse of the spirit intended for the rules. Can geographical kits be used in conjunction with the kits outlined in the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book? Such as Tezirian Rogue Pugilists? Or Waterdhavian Enchanter Nobles? Can the geographical kits be used in conjunction with the kits from the *Planewalkers Handbook*? Or is this a benefit that only Toril's primes are privy to? The possibility of planewalker scouts, explorers, or even diplomats sounds tantalizing.

I strongly recommend that you allow the geographical kits to be combined only with kits from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*. Kits presented in other books are constructed in such a way that they make the geographical kits moot. The priest kits from *Warrior and Priests of the Realms* cannot be combined with any other kits regardless of the source.

**What Hit Die does a character with the crusader kit from the *Spells & Magic* book use?**

Crusaders roll eight-sided dice for hit points.

A paladin in my game lost his special warhorse. One of his fellow paladins, however, decided to breed his own warhorse and give the first paladin the foal. When will the foal be suitable for use as a mount?

Given proper training (which starts at birth) most horses become ready to carry riders at about age three. Once the horse has been broken to the saddle, it needs two more years of training to serve as a war mount (it's ready by age 5). Once trained for war, the horse probably would remain serviceable until age 24 or 25, at which point it would be too old for any heavy work.

Note that a mount acquired in this manner probably could not serve as the paladin's special mount. However, if the DM decides the horse is an exceptional specimen, he could devise an adventure in which the paladin discovers the animal's special qualities and creates a bond with it.

**When using the channeling and fatigue rules from the *Spells & Magic* book, how are Quest spells (clerics) and True Dweomers (wizards and clerics) handled? Does the use of a priests spell-like granted power cause a cleric to become fatigued? If so, what level of fatigue does the priest suffer? Do creatures who have innate spell-like abilities suffer from fatigue when they use these powers? If so, what level of fatigue do they suffer?**

True Dweomers never become available through the expenditure of spell points or the use of channeling. That is, characters of less than 20th level and 18 Intelligence (or Wisdom) cannot use spell points to cast True Dweomers. Neither

can a character normally allowed to cast True Dweomers increase the number of True Dweomers available on a given day through the use of channeling or spell points. Preparing or casting a True Dweomer does not cause a channeler fatigue, but the channeler must be fresh (suffering from no fatigue penalties at all) to prepare or cast a True Dweomer.

Quest spells are similar to True Dweomers in that characters cannot acquire them through channeling or the expenditure of spell points—Quest spells only come as a direct favor from a priests deity. Generally, deities will grant Quest spells only to fresh (not fatigued) channelers, but once granted a channeler can cast a Quest spell so long as he is alive, conscious, and not mortally fatigued.

Likewise, a priests granted powers and the innate spell-like abilities of certain creatures function independently of spell points or channeling. So long as the user has not expended his normal allotment of granted or innate powers, they remain available provided the user also is not dead, unconscious, or mortally fatigued.

**Page 28 of the *Complete Book of Humanoids*** says that Firbolgs inflict double damage when using weapons of their own make, provided they wield them in both hands. Now, Table 7 (from the back of the book) lists the giant-kin mace at 1d8 x 2/1d6 x 2 and the giant-kin two-handed sword at 1d10 x 2/3d6 x 2. Are these damage amounts doubled because of the Firbolg's special ability or because they are double sized versions of human-sized weapons? If it is the latter, then why aren't the giant-kin halberd and dagger listed as "x 2" instead of raising the damage die (which is how they appear on Table 7), if the former, does the damage get doubled again if Firbolgs use them two-handed?

There doesn't seem to be a consistent pattern to the damage ratings given on Table 7. As you point out, the damage ratings for maces and two-handed swords seem to reflect the Firbolg racial ability to cause double damage; but, the arrow, dagger, and halberd seem to have been "upgunned" to reflect their larger size.

To make the Firbolg special ability more consistent with the descriptions for the various races of giants presented in the *MONSTROUS MANUALS* tome, I recommend that you use the regular damage ratings from the *Player's Handbook* for the

halberd, mace, and two-handed sword. If a Firbolg character wants to claim his racial damage bonus, he can double only the man-sized damage rating for these weapons. See the answer to the next question for details.

**The Complete Book of Humanoids lists all giant-kin weapons as size G—even the dagger. Is this correct? My group uses the critical hit tables from the PLAYER'S OPTION: Combat & Tactics book, so we need to know.**

I recommend the statistics in the chart on this page for all the weapons included on Table 7 in the *Complete Book of Humanoids*.

**What experience point progression chart do shamans and witch doctors use? Please don't tell me to use the wizard or priest charts in the Player's Handbook these classes are extremely limited and weaker than their human counterparts. What are the numbers of initial weapon and nonweapon proficiencies for a shaman? At what levels do shamans receive more proficiencies? Likewise, what is the number of initial weapon and nonweapon proficiencies for a witch doctor? What levels do witch doctors get more proficiencies? Shouldn't all this information be included in the Complete Book of Humanoids?**

Sorry to disappoint you, but shamans and witch doctors are priests. That's why these two classes always appear in the Priest section of each race's Class Restrictions table in the *Complete Book of Humanoids*. The opening paragraphs of the shaman and witch doctor descriptions (see *CBH*, pages 78 and 79) also make it pretty clear that these characters are types of priests.

I recommend using the cleric experience table for shamans and the druid experience table of witch doctors. It may seem unfair to put these characters, with their meager spell selections, on the same experience tables with their human and demihuman counterparts, but life can be tough when you're a humanoid.

Both shamans and witch doctors gain proficiencies at the normal rate for priests.

**Witch doctors can select only one school of magic for mage spells. Can they select one of the elemental schools or the wild magic school from the Tome of Magic? The Player's Handbook says the minor divination school is available to all wizards. Is this lesser school available to witch doctors in addition to their**

## Humanoid Weapon Statistics

Weapon	Weight (Lbs.)	Size	Type	Speed	Melee Reach	Damage S-M/L	Knockdown
Club, great	15	L	B	SI (9)	1	2d4/1d6+1	d12
Dart, barbed	5	S	P	Fa(3)	—	1d4/1d4	d8
Flindbar	6	M	B	Fa(4)	1	1d4/1d4	d8
Goblin Stick	5	L	P	Av (7)	2	1d4/1d6	d6
Lance, flight <sup>1</sup>	6	L	P	Av (6)	2	1d6+1/2d6	d10
<b>Close quarter weapons</b>							
Body spikes	Var. <sup>2</sup>	S	P	Fa (2)	1	Var.2	
Kick Slasher	3	S	S	Fa (2)	1	1d4+1/1d6+1	d6
Punch Cutter	1	S	S	Fa (2)	1	1d4/1d3	d6
<b>Giant-kin weapons<sup>3</sup></b>							
Bow, long	8	H	-	-	-	-	
Arrow <sup>4,5</sup>	1/5	M	P	Av (7)	-	1d8/1d8	d8
Dagger <sup>5</sup>	3	M	P	Fa (3)	2	1d6/1d8	d6
Halberd	35	L	P/S	SI (9)	3	1d10/1d10	d10
w/2h	35	H	P/S	SI (9)	3	2d10/2d10	d12
Mace	12	L	B	Av (7)	2	1d6+1/1d6	d12
w/2h	12	H	B	Av (7)	2	2d6+2/2d6+2	d16*
Two-handed	35	L	S	SI (10)	2	1d10/3d6	d20
Sword	-	-	-	-	-	-	
w/2h	35	H	S	SI (10)	2	2d10/2d10	d30*
<b>Oriental weapons<sup>6</sup></b>							
Daikyu	4	L	-	-	-	-	
Arrow, leaf head	1/10	S	P	Av (7)	-	1d8/1d6	d8
Katana	6	M	S/P	Fa (4)	2	1d10/1d12	d8
Two-handed	6	M	S/P	Fa (4)	2	2d6/2d6	d10
Naginata	10	L	S	Av (7)	2	1d8/1d10	d10
Tetsubo	8	L	B	Av (7)	2	1d8/1d8	d16*
Wakizashi	3	S	S	Fa (4)	2	1d8/1d8	d8
<b>Pixie weapons</b>							
Pixie Bow	1	T	-	-	-	-	
forget arrow	1/100	T	P	Fa (4)	-	forget	-
sleep arrow	1/100	T	P	Fa (4)	-	sleep	-
war arrow	1/100	T	P	Fa (4)	-	1d4+1/1d4+1	d3
Pixie Sword	1	T	S	Fa (4)	1	1d4/1d3	d4
<b>Saurial weapons<sup>7</sup></b>							
Bladeback flail	25	L	B	SI (9)	2	1d8+1/2d6	d12
Bladeback mace	16	L	B	SI (9)	2	1d8+1/1d8	d12
Hornhead Staff	20	L	B	Av (6)	2	2d6/2d6	d12

\* To roll a d16 with regular polyhedral dice, roll 1d6 and 1d8 together. Read the d8 normally if the number on the d6 is a 1, 2, or 3. Add 8 to whatever number you roll on the d8 if the number on the d6 is a 4, 5, or 6.

To roll a d30 with regular polyhedral dice, roll 1d6 and 1d10 together. Read the d10 normally if the number on the d6 is a 1 or 2. Add 10 to whatever number you roll on the d10 if the number on the d6 is a 3 or 4. Add 20 to whatever number you roll on the d10 if the number on the d6 is 5 or 6.

1. This weapon inflicts double damage if wielded in a mounted charge.

2. Body spikes are short blades attached to the wielder's armor. Armor fitted with body spikes weighs 25% more than normal. Body spikes inflict damage according to the wielder's size: T/S=1d2, M=1d3, L or large=1d4.

3. The values for melee reach and knockdown assume a firbolg (size large) wields the weapons. The abbreviation w/2h refers only to the larger firbolg version of a weapon, which must be wielded with two hands.

4. This is the equivalent of a flight arrow.

5. These larger versions of normal weapons inflict more damage than their human-sized counterparts, but never qualify for the firbolg damage bonus.

6. The values for melee reach and knockdown assume an ogre magi (size large) wields the weapons.

7. The values for melee reach and knockdown assume a bladeback or hornhead (size large) wields the weapons.

**main school of study? If not, how do witch doctors obtain the spell read magic to translate new spells for their spell books?**

A witch doctor's school of wizard spells can be anything the DM thinks suitable for the character's tribe. The traditional schools of magic from the *Player's Handbook* and the elemental schools from the *Tome of Magic* should work fine. The schools of metalism, and shadow (schools of effect from the *Spells & Magic* book) and the schools of geometry and song (schools of thaumaturgy from the *Spells & Magic* book) also might fit witch doctors

well. The school of wild magic is the product of a long academic effort and I don't recommend it for witch doctors.

Witch doctors are priests, not wizards, and don't gain automatic access to the school of lesser divination (or to the school of universal magic from the *Skills & Powers* book). There's no reason to assume witch doctors use spellbooks. As unusual priests, they might receive their spells after meditation, consultation with spirits, or any other manner suitable for their tribes. Even if they use spellbooks, it's a good bet they don't look anything like a traditional wizard spellbook does.

A witch doctor's spellbook might be a collection of fetishes, a set of runes, a collection of oddly shaped pebbles, or anything else the player and DM can dream up. Likewise, a witch doctor could gain new wizard spells through direct insight (much as priests do) or through some other non literary means—the read magic spell is not a necessity for witch doctors. Note that a witch doctor who does not have access to the read magic spell cannot employ scrolls.

The *DM™ Option:High-level Campaigns* book says very specifically that the highest level of experience a PC can obtain is 30 and that THAC0 doesn't advance after 20th level. The FORGOTTEN REALMS setting is obviously a exception to these great rules, but one of my players keeps on banging me on the head with the FORGOTTEN REALMS *Faiths & Avatars* book (I run a FORGOTTEN REALMS

campaign), which specifically states that maximum level of advancement for PCs is 40 and THAC0 continues to improve till that very level. I don't know how to keep up ruling against such a mighty power as a FORGOTTEN REALMS rulebook with only a simple advanced general rulebook to shield me. Help!

The FORGOTTEN REALMS setting is a place with rules of its own. The tables on page 22 of *Faiths & Avatars* are intended to supersede High-level Campaigns for FORGOTTEN REALMS campaigns. For example, level 40 is the limit for mortal advancement in FORGOTTEN REALMS campaigns. On the other hand, you're the DM. If you like the rules in the *High-level Campaigns* book use them. Being the DM is all the armor you need.

The blind-fighting proficiency is listed in *Skills & Powers* with no success rating. The description of the skill in the

text states that a successful proficiency check allows the character to move at a normal rate through the dark, but how can one make a proficiency check for a skill with no success rating?

The base score for blind fighting is 9, but remember that a proficiency check isn't necessary to fight, just to move normally through darkness for one round. A failed proficiency check imposes no penalties on the character.



Skip Williams has created scores of player characters for the AD&D game, everything from a druid with a pet potted plant to an illusionist with a penchant for knitting. None, Skip reports, has ever used a kit.

**9 out of 10  
mice prefer it.**

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I have been reading *DRAGON Magazine* for some years now, but until recently I did not play the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game because I hated the rules for being illogical, sometimes even downright stupid. But players came and went, and in the end I had become the game master. Quite soon I turned to the AD&D® game, which for the game master (or Dungeon Master) is the perfect role-playing game. Nothing is greater than having some orcs up and going simply by rolling some d8s behind the screen. Even better, suddenly I understood all the articles in *DRAGON Magazine* much better.

But three facts in the AD&D® game remain ugly:

1. That Strength is needed in order to hit an opponent, instead of Dexterity. How hard you hit your opponent, that's what strength is for.

2. The rules rely too much on the game master/players solving problems with magic. Thanks for the "get-the-magic-out-of-the-campaign" article.

3. AD&D players do not understand that any rule is optional. Optional rules and non-optimal rules are *optional*, boys. So what if the rules say you must have high Strength to hit an opponent?

In our game, the attack bonus is applied when Dexterity is high.

In other words, even I didn't like AD&D until I realized I could customize rules. By choosing yourself what you want to use or not, the game becomes just what you want it to.

Remy Verhoeve  
Norway

I've been playing AD&D for a few years now, and for the most part I am happy with my group. They have been a pleasure to game with and are creative when playing and DMing. But, there are always the black sheep in every flock.

I have a few in mine, and they upset the game by talking out of turn, not paying attention when the DM is relaying the story, and just acting silly. Now, I do not oppose joking and having a few laughs, but some of these people take it too far. Some might interrupt the DM while he speaks or yell above the one who is talking.

. . . with muscles like the Russian bodybuilding team and the hit points of a 1976 vending machine, Stelgar soon became the Lord of the Campaign . . .

I have considered not inviting them to the group, but I cannot sacrifice any more of my players, for it is already a small group. I would like some suggestions on how to discipline these unruly players.

Mark Fitzpatrick  
25 Jerry's Ave  
Clayton NJ, 08312

My friends and I are simple and trusting folk, often believing what we are told by others whom, we believe, would have no reason to lie. In particular, we had been told in every text ever written for the AD&D game that min-maxing was disapproved of. When TSR released 2nd Edition, we realized that some classes were more powerful, but it was easily controlled. So we continued to believe. With the advent of the handbooks and kits, our characters began to grow in power, but we still held faith. Finally came the PLAYER'S OPTION™ series . . .

I am reminded of our first foray, in particular, the story of Stelgar the Stupid, a warrior. In the beginning, Stelgar was a simple fighter, gleefully dispatching kobolds and orcs, though hard-pressed to deal with great numbers. Specialized with his long sword, he reveled in the

joy of victory against his foes. Then he discovered a tome in a cave. *The Handbook of Warriors*, it was called . . .

Stelgar became dissatisfied with being a fighter, and he was reborn as a myrmidon and honed his abilities, learning to use his long sword with both hands or with a stout shield, and growing a bit more in the process. "This is good," the gods proclaimed, for now Stelgar the Stupid was Stelgar the Skilled and a bit more realistic. Now, Stelgar brought low the kobolds and orcs with glee, but he felt much more challenged by trolls and ogres. Then, one fateful day, the legendary knights of the game table retrieved the Optional Books of TSR, and after elaboration, Stelgar once again was reborn.

Stelgar the Skilled soon became Stelgar the Supreme, leaving a swath of death in the ranks of dragons, fiends, and undead. As a grand master of the long sword with muscles like the Russian bodybuilding team and the hit

points of a 1976 vending machine, Stelgar soon became the Lord of the Campaign, at which point the DM renamed him with his most deserved title yet: Stelgar the Shredded Character Sheet.

Not to be too hard on the PLAYER'S OPTION books, for there are several redeeming parts, but the optional rules do make min-maxing very difficult to control, unless the DM enjoys policing every aspect of a character's creation and advancement. After hammering out the bugs (mostly by throwing out *Skills & Powers*), we gave Stelgar another chance. He is, at last report, on his way to Silverymoon, where he looks forward to meeting orcs and kobolds who have never heard of his latest incarnation, Stelgar the Simply Normal.

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## Cons&Pros Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

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

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

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, 1801 Lind Avenue SW, Renton, WA, 98055, USA.

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.).

## SEPTEMBER CONVENTIONS

### Hostile Aircraft Aces Tournament '97

**September 26-28 NY**

Travel Lodge, Kingston. Events: Open gaming Friday night, aircraft tournament on Saturday and Sunday. Other activities: museum tours and WWI and Pioneer Era air shows at Old Rhinebeck. Registration: Tournament registration \$20 before August 31, \$25/on site. Goblintooth Enterprises, 46 Highland St., Reading MA 01867.

### First Contact

**September 26-28 WI**

Midway Hotel, Milwaukee. Guests: Kaja and Phil Foglio, Margaret Weis, Mike Davis, and Robert Bloch. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: comic show, and tournaments. Registration: varies. MSFCI, P.O. Box 92726, Milwaukee, WI 53202-0726 website <http://www.strich.edu/~zoinks>.

### Razorbattles 5

**September 26-28 AR**

Clarion Inn, Fayetteville. Guest: Jim Hatfield Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: tournaments, art show, costume contest, and a charity auction. Registration: \$10/weekend, \$15/on site. RB5, 555 W. Maple St. Apt G,

- ❖ Australian convention
- ✳ Canadian convention
- ✳ European convention

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Fayetteville, AR 72701. Email: [Razorbattles@webtv.net](mailto:Razorbattles@webtv.net).

Northwest, 6517 NE Alberta, Portland, OR 97218.

### Grand Game Con

**October 17-19 MI**

Cascade Commons, Grand Rapids. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: varies. John Edelman, 331 Carlton SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

### Novacon '97

**October 24-26 TX**

On the campus of Texas A&M University, College Station. Events: role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: RPGA® Network tournaments, and an anime room. Registration: \$10. MSC NOVA, Memorial Student Center, Box J-1, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77844-9081. Email: [MSCNOVA@tamu.edu](mailto:MSCNOVA@tamu.edu) or <http://novacon.tamu.edu/>.

### Conline XXVII

**October 25-26 Online**

The Games RoundTable on Genie and the RPGA Online Forum on America Online. Events: LIVING CITY™ Procampur, LIVING DEATH™, Call of Cthulhu, and RAVENLOFT tournaments. For more information, send email to [games-rt@genie.com](mailto:games-rt@genie.com) or [uccprep@aol.com](mailto:uccprep@aol.com).

## OCTOBER CONVENTIONS

### Quad Con 97

**October 3-5 IA**

Ramada Inn, Davenport. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: an auction and dealers area. Registration: varies. The Game Emporium, 3213 23rd Ave., Moline, IL 61265. Email: [quadcon@revealed.net](mailto:quadcon@revealed.net).

### Necronomicon '97

**October 10-12 FL**

Camberly Inn, Tampa. Guests: Joseph Green, Kevin J. and Rebecca Anderson. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: author and artist panels, art show, auction, a dance and much more. Registration: \$18/preregistered, \$25/on site. Ann Morris, P.O. Box 2076, Riverview, FL 33568. Email: [74273.1607@compuserve.com](mailto:74273.1607@compuserve.com) or to [ann@stonehill.org](mailto:ann@stonehill.org).

### Adventure Gamefest '97

**October 17-19 OR**

Portland Convention Center, Portland. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: a game auction, dealers area, and a miniature painting contest. Registration: varies. Adventure Games

*Continued on page 94*

### Important:

DRAGON® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

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

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**International Camarilla****Conclave '97****October 30-2 MO**

Kansas City Airport Marriott, Kansas City. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: costume contest, charity auction, a dealers area, and seminars. Registration: varies. Dark Heartland, c/o 812 NE 100th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64155.

**UmfCon 21****October 31-2****ME**

University of Maine, Farmington. Guests: Thomas Kane and Sharyn McCrumb. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: *M:tG* tournaments and a flea market. Registration: varies. Table Gaming Club, 5 South Street, Farmington, Maine 04938.

**NOVEMBER****CONVENTIONS****Sci-Con19****November 7-9**

Holiday Inn Executive

Center, Virginia Beach. Guests: James Patrick Kelley, Lubov, and Steve Luminati. Events: role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: panels, readings a dance, and more! Registration: varies. Send an SASE to Sci-Con 19, P.O. Box 9434, Hampton, VA 23670. Email: info@scicon.org or <http://scicon.org>.

**Pentacon XII****November 15-17****IN**

Grand Wayne Center, Fort Wayne. Events: role-playing-

card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities: dealers area, an auction, and a painting contest. Registration: varies. NIGA/Pentacon, P.O. Box 11174, Fort Wayne, IN 46856. Email: 102654.230@CompuServe.com.



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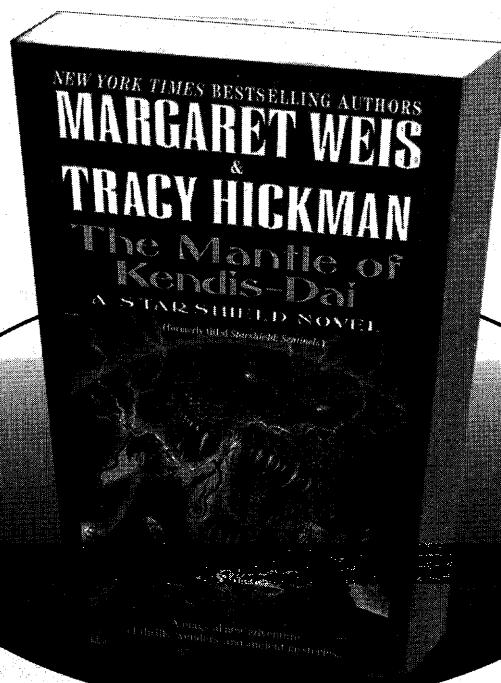
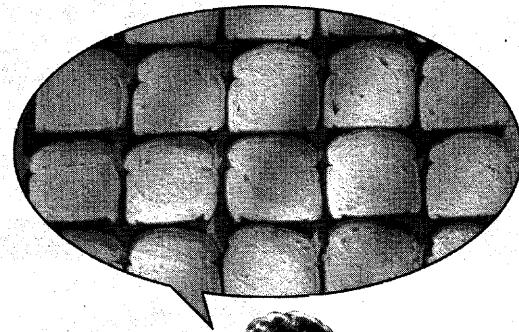
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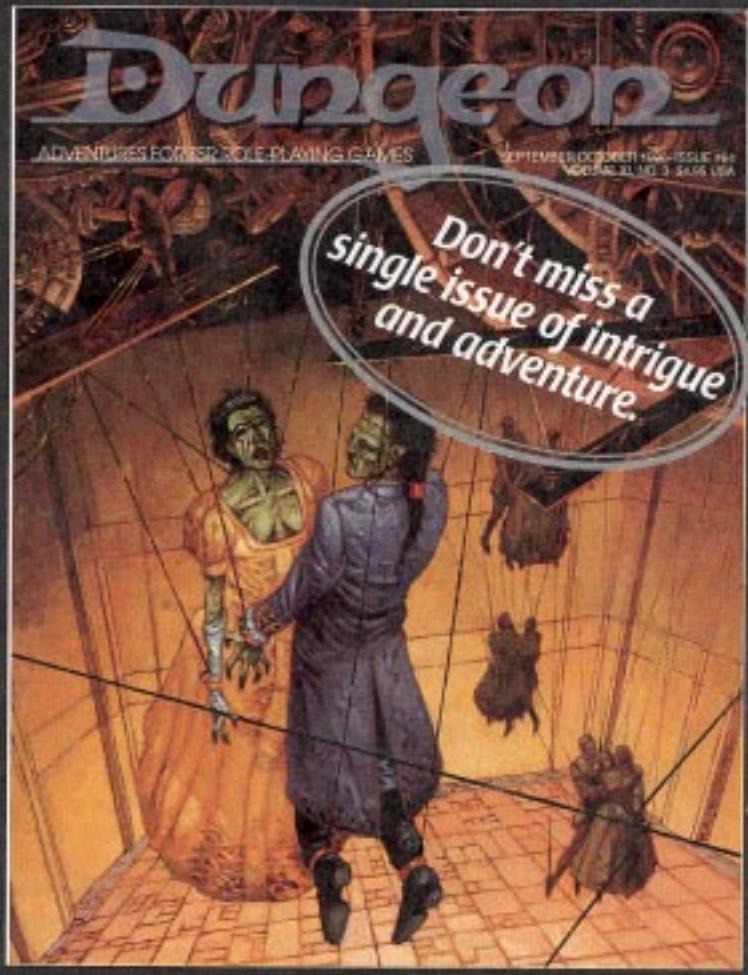
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## The Arcane Challenge

answers by Steve Winter

Here is the third installment of the answers to 1996's AD&D® game quiz.

51. The Cleric Quintet is set in what AD&D game realm?

**Answer:** The FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting.

52. Who is Charles Oliver O'Kane?

**Answer:** The Lord Mayor of Ravens Bluff (or The Living City).

53. Who are Yondalla the Provider and Brandoberis?

**Answer:** Halfling deities of nature and adventure, respectively, from *The Complete Book of Gnomes and Halflings*.

54. What term describes an outcast Vistani, "utterly corrupted by the gloom of the surrounding land."

**Answer:** Darkling.

**Source:** Vistani are from the RAVENLOFT® campaign.

55. What is the word for "alien wizard" in the AL-QADIM® setting?

**Answer:** Ajami.

56. Name the three principle orders of knights in the DRAGONLANCE® setting.

**Answer:** Knights of the Crown, Knights of the Sword, Knights of the Rose.

57. What is the name of the creature who rules Dragon Mountain?

**Answer:** Infyrana (the red dragon).

58. The Demonweb Pits are part of what plane?

**Answer:** The Abyss.

59. The Horseshoe Temple, deep in the Quoya desert where only adventurous nomads travel, houses shrines to the Nine Sacred Sages of the Path. Who was the 5th sage?

**Answer:** Yao Tsung-i the Swordbreaker.

**Note:** This was a trick question, and it eliminated more people than any

other. Yet it was a very simple trick. The Horseshoe Temple is described in the boxed set, *The Horde*. The sacred sages are listed in the key to the temple, and each has his own little room. The sages are in rooms 2 through 10. The 5th sage, Yao Tsung-i, is in room #6. An awful lot of people looked at the list and didn't realize that the numbers were room numbers, not sage numbers. They saw "5. Cham Fao" and entered that as the answer, but because of the offset in the numbering, Cham Fao is only the 4th sage.

This question was also a booby trap. TSR was concerned that the answers might somehow be leaked before the contest was over. So the few answer keys that were circulated in the office during the contest listed the wrong answer to this question (Cham Fao). Only one person (Steve Winter, who assembled the key) knew the right answer. If one of those copies got out and people used it to cheat, they all got this answer wrong. Cheaters never prosper.

60. What are the names of Strahd Von Zarovich's brothers?

**Answer:** Sturm and Sergei.

61. What alignment is Chemosh, Lord of the Undead?

**Answer:** Lawful Evil.

62. What is the name of Drizzt Do'Urden's panther companion?

**Answer:** Guenhyvar.

63. Which vampire in Ravenloft lived the longest?

**Answer:** Jander Sunstar.

**Note:** This question had to be read carefully. It has nothing to do with how long someone has been a vampire, because vampires are not alive. The question is about which of Ravenloft's vampires lived the longest before dying to become a vampire.

64. What three magical weapons must PCs retrieve from White Plume Mountain?

**Answer:** Whelm, Wave, Blackrazor.

65. What do Soldai, Aurachil, and Kirinor have in common?

**Answer:** They are all Wednesday, in the various languages of Krynn.

66. What is the title of the leader of the Solamnic Knights of the Rose?

**Answer:** The High Justice.

67. What sort of creatures guard the upper level of the Forgotten Temple of Tharizdun?

**Answer:** Norkers and gnolls.

68. Complete the stanza, "Open the gates to my Sphere of Power, And put off evil . . .

**Answer:** "in its appointed hour."

69. What are the three moons of Krynn?

**Answer:** Solinari, Nuitari, and Lunitari.

70. What lies beyond the ring of Sigil?

**Answer:** Nothingness.

71. Aside from the Markessas, who can tell the false Markessa from the original Markessa?

**Answer:** Her bodyguard.

**Note:** Markessa is one of the slavelords, from the four-part Slavelords adventure series.

72. What is Azalin's true name, and from what campaign world did he originate?

**Answer:** Firan Zal'Honan; GREYHAWK® setting.

**Note:** But now he's a darklord in the Demiplane of Dread.

73. How does Petit-Singe convince the guards at Chateau Sylaire to let him pass?

**Answer:** By not knowing the password (he persuades them there isn't one).

**Notes:** I tip my hat to anyone who got this one. The answer was on the audio CD in *Mark of Amber*.

74. Translate the phrase, "Est Sularus oth Mithas"

**Answer:** My honor is my life.

**Note:** It's the slogan of the Knights of Solamnus.

75. Who found the Silencer of Bodach "about three Kings Ages ago?"

**Answer:** Rimmon.

**Note:** It's an artifact, and the answer was in the *Book of Artifact*.

# Knights of the Dinner Table™

By Jolly R. Blackburn

AS YOU KICK DOWN THE DOOR YOU ARE GREETED WITH AN ENORMOUS BLISTERING WALL OF FIRE AND BILLOWING SMOKE. DAVE, YOUR CHARACTER IS THROWN AGAINST THE OPPOSITE WALL OF THE HALLWAY BY THE FORCE OF THE BLAST.

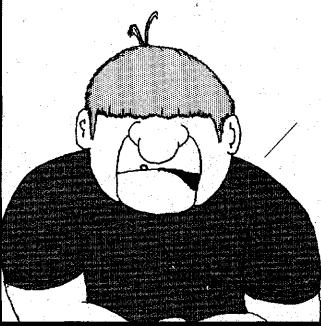


REMEMBER THAT CRUMBLING BOOK WE FOUND IN SHINY PEBBLE CASTLE? WELL THERE WAS A PASSAGE IN IT ON OL' ROT GUT THE DRAGON. AND IT CLAIMS HE'S VERY FOND OF FINE WINES. THE BOOK ALSO CLAIMS HE'S A SUCKER FOR CONTESTS AND CHALLENGES.

BRIAN THINKS HE CAN OUTWIT THIS GUY. I SAY WE GIVE HIM A CHANCE.



OKAY, B.A., HERE'S THE SITUATION. REMEMBER ALL THOSE BOTTLES OF WINE WE FOUND ON LEVEL TWO OF SHINY PEBBLE CASTLE? WELL, I'VE PLACED ALL 50 BOTTLES IN A PORTABLE HOLE. I'M GONNA PULL THEM OUT AND SET THEM BEFORE OL' ROT GUT. I'LL EXPLAIN THAT I AM CHALLENGING HIM TO A WINE TASTING CONTEST.



HERE ARE THE TERMS. FOR EVERY BOTTLE OF WINE HE CAN'T IDENTIFY BY TASTE, WE GET TAKE ONE LARGE SACK OF GOLD COINS FROM HIS HOARD FOR EVERY BOTTLE OF WINE HE CORRECTLY IDENTIFIES, ONE MEMBER OF OUR PARTY WILL BECOME HIS WILLING SLAVE. DOES HE ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE???

MOMENTS LATER...

OKAY, I GIVE HIM BOTTLE NUMBER ONE. IT'S A RARE DWARVEN ELDERBERRY WINE FROM THE IRON MOUNTAINS.

HE TAKES A SIP, THINKS FOR A MOMENT, AND CORRECTLY IDENTIFIES THE WINE. HA HA! HE LAUGHS AND ASK FOR THE SECOND BOTTLE OF WINE!

UH... ACTUALLY, B.A., I LIED. IT WASN'T WINE IN THAT BOTTLE BUT A MAGICAL POTION: POLYMORPH TO INSECT. OL' ROT GUT TURNS INTO A LARGE DUNG BEETLE WHICH I QUICKLY STOMP UNDER THE HEEL OF MY BOOT. SCRATCH ONE DRAGON! SNICKER.

WHOAH!  
AWESOME!



THE REST OF YOU MUST SAVE VS. FEAR AS YOU SEE THE AN ENORMOUS SWACK-IRON DRAGON Emerge FROM THE SHADOWS. AT FIRST IT APPEARS HIS FACE AND HEAD ARE BRISTLING WITH THORNS OR BONY-SPIKES. THEN YOU REALIZE THEY ARE ACTUALLY THE BROKEN SHAFTS OF HUNDREDS OF ARROWS. THE DRAGON IS HORRIBLY SCARED AND NICKED, SILENT TESTIMONY OF THE HUNDREDS OF SLAIN HEROES WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO SLAY THE ANCIENT WYRM.

AT LAST WE MEET OL'  
ROT GUT FACE TO FACE! I  
WASTE HIM WITH MY  
CROSSBOW!

STEP ASIDE BOB.  
THIS IS A JOB FOR MY  
HACKMASTER +12

WAIT! BRIAN AND I  
HAVE A PLAN. WE WANT  
TO PARLEY.



HEY, I'M IMPRESSED. I DIDN'T THINK YOU GUYS HAD EVEN CONSIDERED THAT VALUABLE CLUE I PLANTED MONTHS AGO.

CONTEST?? WITH A DRAGON? YOU CAN'T OUTWIT A 3,000 YEAR OLD DRAGON.

BRIAN I KNOW YOU THINK YOU'RE A PRETTY CLEVER GUY BUT THIS IS A STUPID IDEA. ARE YOU FORGETTING THAT STUPID WEND RIDDLE THAT GARGOYLE THREW AT US?

DON'T LISTEN TO THEM  
BRIAN. PROVE TO THEM THAT  
BRAIN MATTER IS MIGHTIER  
THAN THE SWORD.

STAND ASIDE  
BOYS.



YES, HE ACCEPTS. OL' ROT GUT LOVES THE IDEA AND SEEMS VERY EAGER TO TAKE THE CHALLENGE.

GAAA! WILLING SLAVE??  
BRIAN YOU BETTER KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU ARE DOING.

RELAX, GUYS. I'VE GOT EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL.  
WATCH THIS.

THIS IS NO TIME TO PLAY GAMES BRIAN. I SAY WE FORGET YOUR PLAN AND LAUNCH AN ATTACK.



THANK GAWD THE HACKMASTER 1-800 SUPPORT LINE IS THERE FOR TIMES LIKE THESE. WHEN A GAMEMASTER IS DEALT SUCH A HUMILIATING DEFEAT AT THE HAND OF A PLAYER, IT'S NICE TO KNOW HE HAS A PLACE TO TURN.

LET'S LOAD UP THAT HOARD, BOYS!



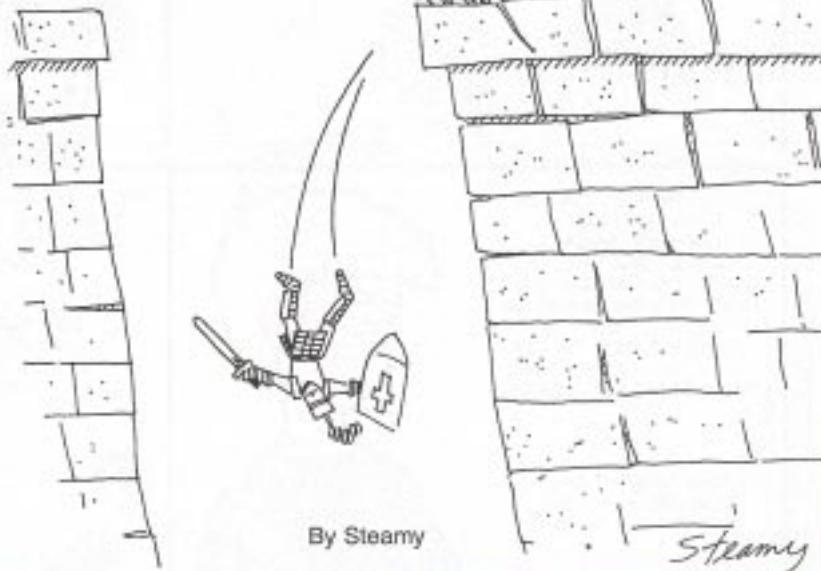
# DragonMirth

By Joseph Pillsbury



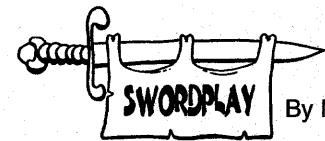
I GUESS THAT  
WASN'T FLYING  
POTION AFTER ALL.

By Steamy



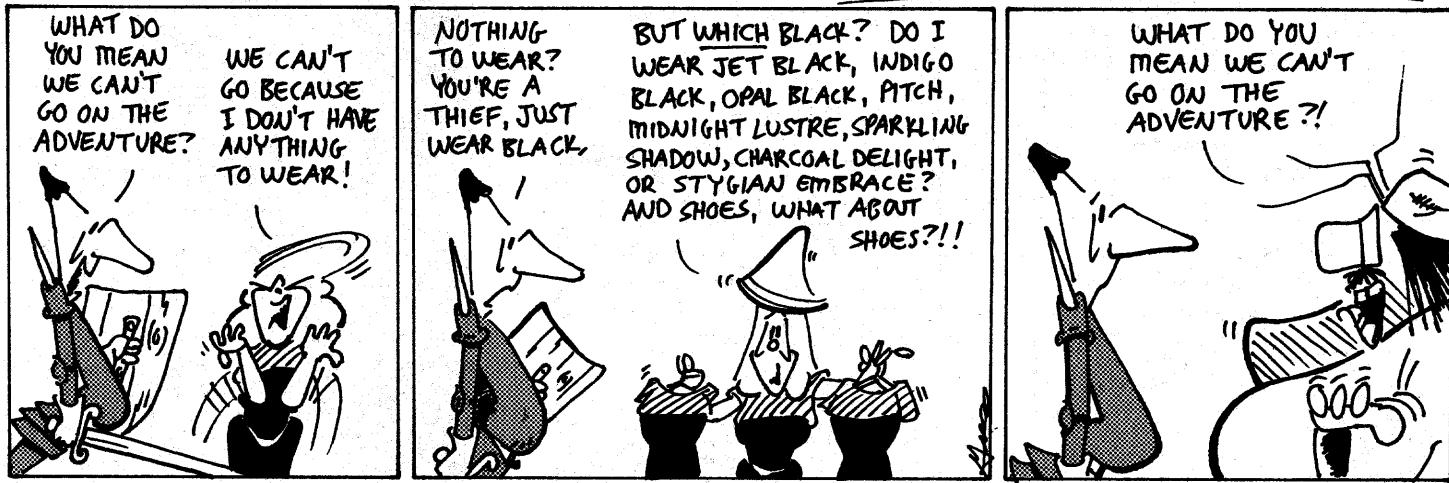
"And you must be *Eric the Bold!*"

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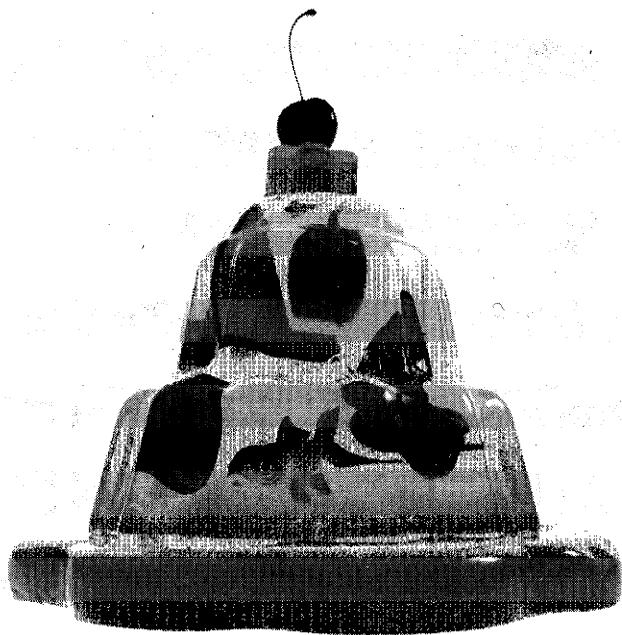
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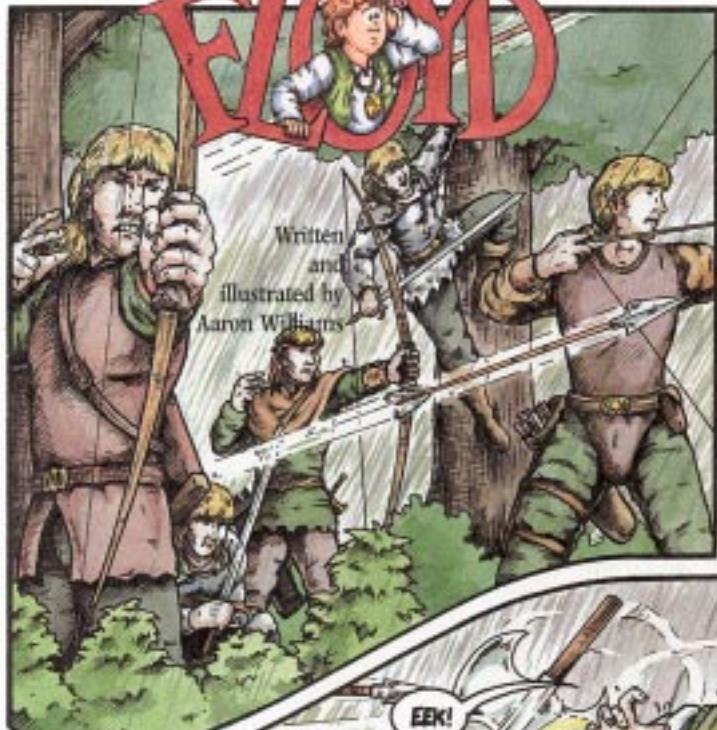
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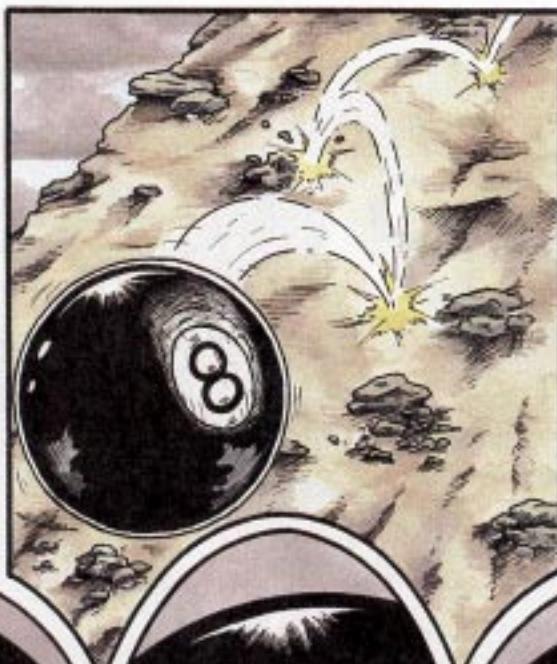
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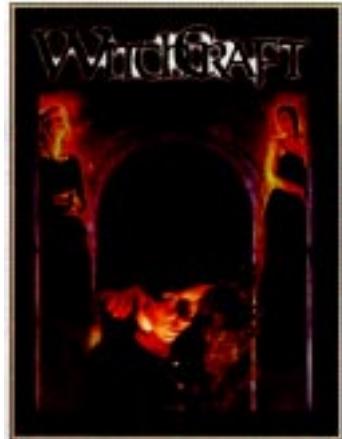
Written  
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Aaron Williams











### **Witchcraft\* Game**

224-page softcover book

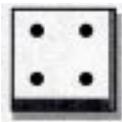
Myrmidon Press \$23

Design: C.J. Carella

Editing: Joan T. Masters

Illustrations: R.K. Post, Fred Hooper, Gui Burwell, Heather J. McKinney, and Dan Smith

Cover: Fred Hooper



God knows I've seen a lot of lousy small press RPGs, which is why the good ones tend to linger in the mind. One of the most memorable lingerers is the *Witch Hunt\** game, an underappreciated gem from 1983 published by the long-defunct Statcom Simulations. Set during the Salem witch trials of the late 17th century, *Witch Hunt* evoked the hysteria of the era with ingenious rules and remarkable insight. Sadly, Statcom lacked the marketing muscle to give *Witch Hunt* the push it deserved. It went straight to the cemetery where it remains to this day, waiting for an enterprising publisher to dig it up.

Until that happens, we brimstone and broomstick connoisseurs can content ourselves with *Witchcraft*, which shares many of the same concepts as *Witch Hunt*. For instance, *Witch Hunt* has player characters called (natch) Witches who wield spells like tanglefoot and withering. *Witchcraft* has PCs called the Gifted who wield spells like soulfire and mindtalk. *Witch Hunt* bad guys are called Magistrates, fanatics devoted to ridding the world of spell-casters. *Witchcraft* bad guys include the Dark Covenant and the Combine, fanatics devoted to ridding the world of you-know-who. *Witch Hunt* PCs are outsiders of dubious morality. Ditto for *Witchcraft*.

*Witchcraft*, however, features a contemporary setting, a world of corruption and despondency similar to the one portrayed in the *Vampire: The Masquerade\** game and other White Wolf gloomfests.

It's Magic Month here at Review Central. To celebrate, we'll be looking at a brand new game, a campaign setting, and a couple of supplements, each and every one of 'em saturated with spells. But before we dive in, let's begin with a cautionary note, taken from the introduction to the *Witchcraft\** game but applicable to all of this month's material: "[This] is first and foremost a work of fiction meant to entertain . . . Anybody who has problems distinguishing fantasy from reality and who thinks this or any other game depicts actual occult practices should stay away from this and similar books." In other words, magic in role-playing games doesn't really work. Also, if you tie a towel around your neck and jump off the roof, you won't be able to fly; if you fondle

the insignia on your T-shirt and ask to be beamed up, you won't find yourself on the *Enterprise*; and if you leave a rotten molar under your pillow, you won't be visited by the Tooth Fairy. Okay?

#### **Role-playing games' rating**

	Not recommended	
	May be useful	
	Fair	
	Good	
Excellent		
The <b>BEST!</b>		

And unlike *Witch Hunt*, which suffers from so-so writing and a shaky grasp of role-playing conventions, ***Witchcraft*** boasts the talents of a first-rank designer: C. J. Carella. Fans of Palladium Books who've marveled at Carella's supple imagination in *Pantheons of the Megaverse* (for the *Rifts*\* game) and the *Nightbane*\* game (reviewed in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #227) won't be disappointed.

Carella's take on character creation is so thorough, it eats up nearly half the book. To whip up a Witch . . . er, a Gifted . . . the player begins by selecting an archetype, such as Avenger, Daredevil, or Seeker of Knowledge. Each archetype generates a list of professions; Daredevils can be test pilots or cat burglars, Seekers can be scholars or occultists. The player then receives a fixed number of points to spend on attributes (Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity) and advantages (Attractiveness, Fast Reaction). If he likes, the player can sign up his PC for membership in a Covenant — sort of a supernatural social club — making the character eligible for one or more special abilities; Wicce members receive a defensive bonus against magical attacks, Rosicrucians become adept at restraining spirits. A handful of formulas are used to determine secondary attributes, including Endurance Points and Speed. To complete his PC, the player spends points on a set of skills, with Dancing, Brawling and Martial Arts among the options. The more points spent, the more effective the skill. Spending three points on the Running skill, for instance, enables the character to compete in the Boston Marathon; spending 14 points enables him to win the Boston Marathon. The resulting characters not only play well but seem like real people, the hallmark of a good system. I could've lived without the social clubs, however; they strike me as suspiciously similar to the clans of Vampire and seem to exist as an excuse to sell sourcebooks.

Want your PC to do something? Easy. Roll a ten-sided die, add the appropriate skill number, then add or subtract any circumstantial modifiers determined by the gamemaster. If the result is less than 9, the attempt fails. Otherwise, the higher the result, the more successful the action; a result of 15 might mean that the PC won the marathon in record time, a result of 20 might mean that he won with a broken leg.

Combat uses the same fundamentals as the action resolution system, but it's encumbered by a ton of formulas, modi-

fiers, and special cases. Here's an excerpt from the combat example, to give you an idea of what happens when a character fires a gun: "The range and darkness penalties give a total modifier of -2. [The player] rolls a d10, subtracts 2 and adds the character's Dexterity and Pistol skill. The die roll is a 6, modified down to 4 by the penalties, and then raised to a total of 8 by the skill and attribute . . ." Sheesh. True, ***Witchcraft*** combat isn't significantly more clunky than, say, *Rifts* combat or, for that matter, *Vampire* combat. And true, the book provides an alternate diceless system that relies on the whims of the gamemaster instead of raw numbers (it's harder than it sounds). Still, I can't help but wonder: Is pulling a trigger really that much more involved than running a marathon? RPG designers think nothing of spending months, even years developing elaborate new settings and cool new characters. You'd think they could spare a weekend to devise a set of simple combat mechanics.

The magic system, in contrast, is flat-out terrific. Nearly every character in the game has the ability to channel Essence, a mystical substance that comprises all reality. Acquiring Essence — a consequence of experience and study — gives access to a broad range of spells, each learned as a distinct skill. Samples: *remove emotional debris* (purges an area of the negative emotions that cause nightmares and bad luck), *become one with the land* (creates a psychic link between the caster and every entity in the region, spirits included), *stone attack* (causes a chunk of concrete to fly through the air and smack into an adversary). Despite the overall excellence of the spells themselves, its the ways in which the spells are manipulated that push the system over the top. PCs can pool their Essence to perform group magic, producing effects of extraordinary drama. Spells cast at certain times (an autumnal Equinox, a full moon) are more powerful but also more dangerous, prone to unexpected backfires. PCs who master the Necromancy skill may attempt sinister incantations like *death speech* and *wishkill*. And PCs who die may return from the grave, taking the form of immaterial, near-invulnerable ghosts.

Setting-wise, however, ***Witchcraft*** falls short — way short. We're given only a superficial history of the Gifted and their struggles, seasoned with a few tantalizing hints of things to come ("Ghosts are coming back to Earth in growing numbers . . . supernatural predators are

becoming a real threat in both large cities and small towns . . ."). But without specific information about the threats, the locales, or the culture, it's all a tease. There's nowhere near enough material to cobble together a campaign, which is real shame considering Carella's expertise at setting design. (Want proof? See his *South America 2* supplement for *Rifts*.) Three brief scenario outlines give an idea of the game's potential, but fail to compensate for the skimpy background.

**Evaluation:** ***Witchcraft*** could've been great. But due to the skeletal setting, it's merely good. That said, with an experienced gamemaster at the helm — one capable of constructing a world from a handful of scraps — ***Witchcraft*** conjures a paranoid, creepy atmosphere, giving players an idea of what life would be like in a society that'd just as soon see them dead. Yes, at times, ***Witchcraft*** reads like warmed-over White Wolf — call it *Vampire Lite*. But if emulating White Wolf were a crime, half the designers I know would be breaking rocks.

Hmmm . . . maybe White Wolf ought to buy the rights to *Witch Hunt* and hire Carella to do the overhaul. (Information: Myrmidon Press, P.O. Box 1374, Royal Oak, MI 48068.



## Netheril: Empire of Magic

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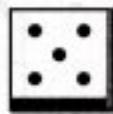
TSR, Inc. \$25

Design: slade with Jim Butler, Julia Martin, and Cindi M. Rice

Editing: Jim Butler

Illustrations: Jesus Redondo

Cover: Ciruelo Cabral and Alan Pollack





## How the Mighty Are Fallen

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game supplement for the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting

64-page softcover book  
TSR, Inc.

*Design:* slade

*Editing:* Jim Butler

*Illustrations:* Ned Dameron

*Cover:* Nick Jainschigg



\$13

The AD&D® game without magic would be like Christmas without presents, so whenever TSR delivers a boxed set emphasizing all things magical, it's like Santa Claus coming down the chimney with a couple of extra bags. Netheril: **Empire of Magic** one of TSR's most magic-intensive boxes to date, describes the world of Faerûn as it existed in the distant past, an era in which the discovery of the mysterious *nether scrolls* gave the populace a head start in the sorcerous arts. Result: a society crawling with super-charged spellcasters.

The *Winds of Netheril*, Book One of the double-volume set, opens with an entertaining history of Netheril, discussing its

beginning as a collection of fishing villages, the golden age of floating cities, and the disaster-plagued era dubbed The End of the End. Author slade — or, if you prefer, The Designer Formerly Known as Henson — covers it all in eight clutter-free pages, earning him kudos for brevity.

*Winds* also provides two methods for getting a Netheril campaign off the ground, the first using existing PCs, the second using brand new ones. In Method One, the Dungeon Master whiskers existing PCs from a contemporary AD&D setting and plops them into the past. To move the PCs from now to then, Method One utilizes simple time travel techniques based on *time conduit* and *gate* spells —, which the book fully describes. In Method Two, Netheril PCs are rolled up from scratch — no time travel required. Both methods work fine, but I prefer the second, as it allows players to sample nifty new class variants like the Arcanist and ten different specialty priests.

The Arcanist, a souped-up wizard who's **Netheril's** most interesting archetype, casts spells by reaching into the "weave" (the source of all magic) and plucking out whatever he wants. In game terms, he's able to cast to a fixed number of spell levels per day (note that's spell levels, not spells). Further, if an Arcanist attempts to learn a spell (via a chance to know roll) and fails, he can never attempt to learn that spell again. Specialty priests — including the Dark-bringer, Doomscribe, and Bloodreaver, each associated with a particular deity — are able to cast spectacular quest spells along the lines of elemental swarm and *animal horde*.

Both the Arcanist and specialty priests are a blast to play; they're pow-

erful, versatile, and best of all, unburdened by a ton of new rules. Two drawbacks: (1) To find all the details about quest spells, you'll need to round up a copy of *Tome of Magic*. (2) Spells from the *Player's Handbook* have different names in **Netheril**, even though the effects are identical. Thus, *false vision* becomes *Smolyn's fraud*, *binding* becomes *Yong's truss*. It's confusing.

The second half of *Winds* describes dozens of Netheril locales shown on the two poster maps. The entries are intriguing — the orc-plagued village of Earsome, the spelljamming port of Yeoman's Loft — but frustratingly brief, rarely more than a couple of paragraphs long. Better is the Karsus Enclave chapter, Book One's last major section, which details a magnificent flying metropolis complete with castles, magic academies, and an alchemical seminary.

Book Two, *Encyclopedia Aracana*, is essentially a collection of new spells. Despite a few yawners like *detect living* and *precipitation*, most hit the mark. Samples: *handfang* (creates a fanged, biting mouth in the palm of the caster's hand), *plant lance* (transforms plants into animated, flying spears), *advanced sunshine* (borrows sunlight from later in the day to be used as illumination or as raw material for fireballs). A selection of magical items rounds out the *Encyclopedia*, a warehouse of winners that includes the *skimmer* (a speedboat powered by a trapped air elemental) and *netherpelter* (a blowgun firing pellets that cause the target to decompose.)

Although **Netheril** features a few NPCs (Nether the Elder, Lady Polaris) and monsters (tomb tappers, the sharn), it forgoes anything resembling a ready-to-play adventure. You'll either have to cook up your own (not terribly hard; just *gate* your Netheril PCs into a FORGOTTEN REALMS scenario and make a few tweaks) or invest in **How the Mighty are Fallen**, a rambling, ambitious adventure covering the events leading to Netheril's collapse. In brief, a party of mid-level PCs is sent to look for a missing corpse, a quest that takes them to an elven graveyard, an obstacle course of zombies, and a memorable finale in a haunted castle. Here and there, the designer takes a nap and lets an underdeveloped encounter slip through; monsters like kobolds and ogres, for instance, just sort of appear, forcing the Dungeon Master to figure out how they're supposed to behave. Overall, though, it's a solid adventure, one in which the PCs take an active role

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in shaping Netheril history.

**Evaluation:** For AD&D players who can't get enough magic, *Netheril* is a made-to-order playground, a Disneyland for wizards and priests. Don't be intimidated by the weight of the box ("You mean I gotta read five pounds of books?") or the *ARCANE AGE™* label ("You mean I gotta learn a whole bunch of new rules?"). A good chunk of the material is for reference only, the rest is an effortless read. As for the Arcane Age, there's not much to it — compared to, for instance, the *PLANESCAPE™* setting, the Arcane Age is about as complicated as an episode of *Sesame Street*. And if you're still not sure how to stage a Netheril campaign after perusing the box, *How the Mighty Are Fallen* belongs in your shopping cart.



## The Book of Crafts

*Mage: The Ascension\** game supplement

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*Design:* Aaron Anderson, Phil Brucato, James Estes, Looking Eagle, Deena McKinney, Wade Racine, Andrew Ragland, Derek Pearcy, Kathleen Ryan, and Lucien Soulban with Kevin Andrew Murphy and Jim Comer

*Editing:* Veronica Randall and Ken Cliffe  
*Illustrations:* James Daly, Pia Guerra, Anthony Hightower, Mark Jackson, Robert Macneil, Shea Anton Pensa, Alex Sheikman, and Ron Spencer

*Cover:* Ash Arnett and Matt Milberger



## Serenades: The First Book of Powers

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*Editing:* John Myler

*Illustrations:* Ran Ackles and Dee Beckwith

*Cover:* Ran Ackles



My AD&D campaign suffers from a chronic shortage of spells, having long ago exhausted the possibilities in the *Tome of Magic* and other official TSR supplements. Being one of the world's laziest Dungeon Masters, I'm always on the lookout for spells I can steal from other games. I mean, it's a heck of a lot easier to steal 'em than make 'em up. Plundering other fantasy RPGs rarely works, however, as my well-read players are quick to identify the sources; these guys can sniff out a spell from the *Earthdawn\** game at a hundred yards.

So I've learned to look elsewhere. *Mage: The Ascension* supplements, for example, I've found to be excellent candidates for theft. Supplements for *Immortal* (reviewed in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #233) also qualify. True, both *Mage* and *Immortal* are fantasy RPGs. But because of their modern day settings and liberal doses of horror, overlaps with AD&D are practically non-existent. As a bonus, the supplements are a ball to read; the designers have yet to reject a concept on the grounds that it's too abstract, disturbing, or nutty.

*The Book of Crafts* is a bit restrained by White Wolf standards, but it's still pretty wild. Recognizing that many *Mage* PCs will decline to join the official organizations described in the original rulebook, *Crafts* presents eight alternatives, each with its own practices, traditions, and teachings. Members of the Polynesian Kopa Loei condition new initiates by massaging them with dream-inducing plants. The Children of Knowledge concoct tiny animated humanoids resembling china dolls and tin soldiers. And if you hook up with my favorite, a Caribbean voodoo cult called the Bata'a, you can learn to split your spirit in two and store one of the halves in a protective container.

More to the point, *Crafts* includes dozens of provocative, off-the-wall spells. Samples: *coco macaque* (enchants a cane so that it responds to danger by

dancing and hopping), *biting the heart* (induces paralyzing fear in the target), *nails of the poisoned concubine* (causes the caster's nails to grow long; scratched victims are injected with a black poison). Some spells, admittedly, are trivial, like *spatial sheath*, which turns a sword invisible when in its scabbard. And some are more trouble than they're worth; *silent promise of the spring tortoise* enables the caster to increase the probable success of an action. But the process takes a week (!) to complete. Still, the winners outnumber the losers by a wide margin.

*Serenades: The First Book of Powers* elaborates on the music-based magic system introduced in the immortal rulebook. Immortal PCs perceive the universe as a fabric of sound waves, an infinite ocean of noise. With training and practice, PCs can imitate these sounds with their voices, shaping them into enchanted melodies called serenades. Performing a serenade — analogous to casting a spell — involves mastery of the vox (a reed-like instrument that exists alongside an Immortal's vocal cords), secondary hostiles (factors influencing the effectiveness of a serenade), and taints (consequences of catastrophic failures). It's a fascinating system, but dizzyingly complicated due to the abundance of formulas and jargon. Here's an excerpt from the section on taints: "When an Immortal nulls his talent roll, taint invades his halo . . . The amount of taint is equal to the square of the number of nulls (the number of nulls times itself), including the primary talent roll." Aspirin, anyone?

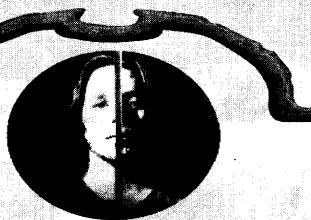
The spells, however, take up most of the book, and except for a few misfires, they're grade A. The effects are original and dramatic, the descriptions lengthy (averaging a half-page each) and vivid. Samples: *boon* (wounds inflicted on the caster appear instead on an enemy), *breath* (the caster transforms himself into vapor and enters the lungs of another creature), *endue* (the caster's finger becomes a screwdriver, his arm a grappling hook, or his entire body a crossbow).

**Evaluation:** *Mage* aficionados should find *The Book of Crafts* a delight; the factions described here are more appealing — and more gruesome — than those in the *Mage* rulebook.

For *Immortal* fans, *Serenades* is an indispensable reference; I can't imagine playing without it, unless you're willing to play without spells.

As for Dungeon Masters whose brains are stuck in neutral, both books

# THERE'S A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FANTASY AND FAIRY TALES....



**"The demon dactyl came awake."**

"The tangible, corporeal body felt good to the wandering spirit. The dactyl could feel its blood, hot blood, coursing through its wings and mighty legs, could feel the twitching of its mighty muscles. The creature flexed and stretched, extended its wings to their full glory, reached and clawed at the air with its humanlike arms. The demon extended its fingernails, transformed them into hooked claws, and grew its teeth—two pointed canines extending down over its bottom lip. Every part of the demon was a weapon, devastating and deadly.

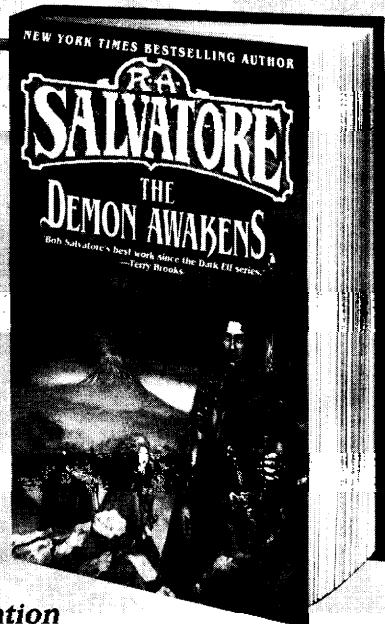
"And undeniably powerful though this monster appeared, this demon's real strength lay in its mind and its purpose, the tempter of souls, the twister of hearts, the maker of lies. How long had it been? The creature remembered that long-ago time now, savored the thoughts of the streaming blood as army after army had joined in delicious, desperate battle.

"Its thoughts turned from its enemies to those it would summon as minions. The wicked goblins certainly, so full of anger and greed, so delighting in murder and war. The fomorian giants of the mountains... And the powries, yes, the powries, the cunning, warlike dwarves who hated the humans above all others. A line of drool hung low from the dactyl's mouth as it considered its former and future allies, its army of woe. The dactyl threw back its head and opened wide its mouth, screeching for the sheer joy of the return, for the thoughts of the chaos it would bring again to the quiet human kingdoms of Corona."

**THIS IS NO "ONCE UPON A TIME."**

## R. A. Salvatore

the New York Times—bestselling author of *Siege of Darkness*, *Starless Night*, and *The Legacy*—universally acclaimed creator of unforgettable characters, relentless action, and stunning depictions of battle—has now written his masterwork. An epic of mortality and magic, and of innocence and evil locked in an unholy war for control of a world's destiny.



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are ripe for the plundering. Don't get me wrong; adapting this material to AD&D (or Earthdawn or the fantasy RPG of your choice) takes time, but it can be done, and it's worth the effort. Just imagine the look on your players' faces when you spring nails of the poisoned concubine on 'em. Happy stealing!

## Short and Sweet

**Werewolf Chronicles: Volume One:** by Sam Chupp, William Hale, Robert Hatch, Bill Bridges, Phil Brucato, J. Morrison, William Spencer-Hale, and Richard Strong. White Wolf Game Studio, \$15. **Mage Chronicles: Volume One,** by Steven C. Brown, Phil Brucato, Robert Hatch, Daniel Greenberg, Harry Heckel, and Darren McKeeman. White Wolf Game Studio, \$22.

Though *Vampire: The Masquerade* put White Wolf on the map, the company didn't hit its aesthetic stride until the publication of the *Werewolf: The Apocalypse\** and *Mage: the Ascension* games, which marked a quantum leap in presentation and focus. These reprint collections, compiled from the formative years of Werewolf and Mage, showcase the stark graphics, flamboyant writing, and outrageous ideas that revolutionized role-playing. *Werewolf Chronicles* collects two of the sourcebooks that set the tone of the Werewolf universe: *Rite of Passage* (a globe-spanning adventure exploring Garou customs and traditions) and *Valkenburg Foundation* (five linked scenarios rife with international intrigue and bloody conflict).

*Mage Chronicles* expands on concepts introduced in the original rulebook: *The Book of Chantries* describes mage strongholds, *Digital Web* examines the relationship between magic and virtual reality. Unlike the Vampire reprints (packaged as the *Chicago Chronicles* series, reviewed in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #239), which now seems a little stale, this material hasn't aged a day.

**Shadowrun Companion: Beyond the Shadows,** by Zach Bush, Jennifer Brandes, Chris Hepler, Chris Hussey, Michael Mulvihill, Jonathan Jacobson, Steve Kenson, Linda Naughton, and Brian Schoner. FASA Corporation, \$15.

Is your *Shadowrun\** game getting a little creaky? Tune it up with this enticing compendium of odds and ends. Improved character creation rules allow players to buy advantages (ambidexterity, natural immunity) if they'll also take a few flaws (color blindness, bad reputation).

Advanced rules cover mana surges, karma pools, and high tech combat. You know, it's been a while since we had a new edition of *Shadowrun*. Could this be a rough draft?

**Middle-earth: The Wizards Player Guide,** by Craig O'Brien, Bob Mohney, Larry Hughes, Deborah Sue Curtis, R.S. Anderson, Michael Campbell, Coleman Charlton, Sam Daish, Jesse Dallin, Jason O. Hawkins, Jessica Ney-Grimm, Pete Fenlon, Luke Potter, Michael Reynolds, Chris Seeman, Mark Thorne, Jonathan H. Whitney, Rebecca L. Whitney, and Seth Wood. Iron Crown Enterprises, \$14. **Redemption Player's Guide,** by David M. Easterling. Cactus Game Design, \$10.

What do the *Middle-earth: The Wizards\** and *Redemption\** collectible card games have in common? Both derive from literary sources (*Middle-earth* from *Lord of the Rings*, *Redemption* from the Bible). Both were surprise hits. And both have spawned comprehensive, well-written player guides, complete with card analyses, deck building directions, and strategy tips. Further, both books address dozens of frequently asked questions. (How does the Lost Souls card work? What do you do if you don't have access to all of the rare Nazgul?) Neither, however, addresses this particular query: If the rules to a card game can be fitted into a teeny little pamphlet, how come it takes a big fat book to explain how to use them?

**Dark Horizon: Escape\*** game, by Kevin Brusky with Tim Zinsky. APE Games, \$45.

This clever science-fiction board game takes place in the headquarters of Talobar Technologies, where rogue agents battle the Talobar Corp Guards for control of the deadly Armageddon Device. Units carrying submachine guns and laser pistols scuttle through a maze of corridors to engage the enemy in brutal melees; action cards and die rolls determine the outcomes. Though the game utilizes deceptively sophisticated tactics, what makes it a pleasure to the play are the components: five sheets of thick cardboard room tiles, ten status logs that can be used with an erasable felt tip pen (included), ten metal miniatures. Production costs being what they are, I suspect that board games this elaborate will be going the way of the dodo. Grab 'em while you can. (Information: APE Games, 5407 Ranch Lake Drive, Magnolia, TX 77355-5029)

**The End\*** game, by Joseph Donka with Dan Woodward and Reid San Filippo. Scapegoat Games, \$20.

If we gave points here at Review Central for irreverence, this over-the-top RPG of "theological horror" would score a perfect 10. In a family-friendly publication like *DRAGON Magazine*, we can't get into specifics, so we'll have to use some euphemisms. Players take the roles of Twonkies, some of whom wind up in Blongo, others in Flockle following a devastating Gorp-inspired Splog. None other than Spud himself plays a prominent role, which is sure to give the willies to Bloobs and Sklinks alike. (Okay — "Flockle" stands for 'Heaven' but that's all you're gonna get out of me.) The rules rely on established RPG conventions, such as attribute levels and skill rolls, making it a snap to learn for any one who knows his way around a 10-sided die. Is it fun? Let me put it this way: after an afternoon of *End-* inspired fun, it took an evening of *Barney* reruns to restore my spiritual balance. Recommended for the courageous, the broad-minded, and those comfortable with sentences like: "Q: Is there any kind of afterlife for the Meek? A: No. After life, you rot." (Information: Scapegoat Games, 1005 Dearborn Ave., Aurora, IL 60505.)



A former newspaper publisher, Rick Swan has freelanced for dozens of publications, including Writer's Digest, Video Review, and Wizard magazines. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply

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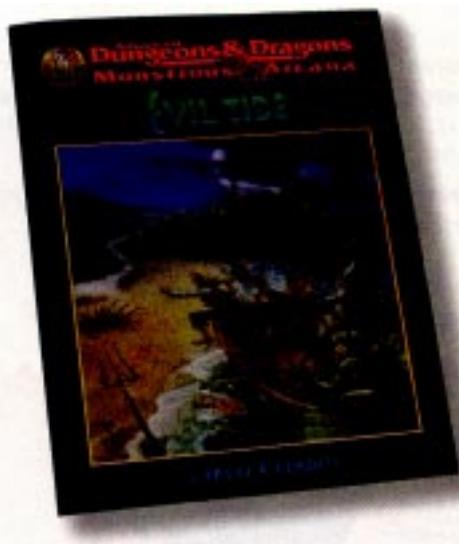
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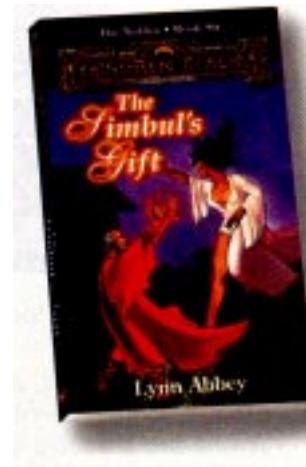
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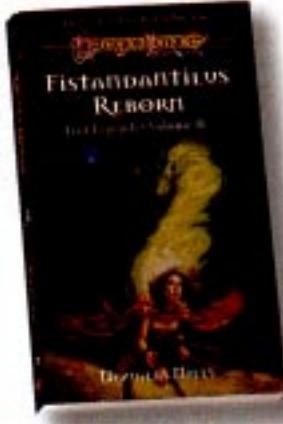
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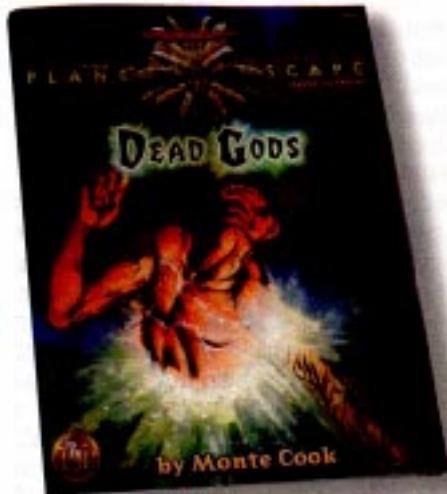
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Cover by Mark Nelson

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This past February, LoBrutto called Allston's agent to ask about the outline. Huh? What?

As part of the sudden, intense contract negotiations, Allston outlined all three novels in three days. The new X-Wing series continues the adventures of Rebel pilot Wedge Antilles, captain of Rogue Squadron, as he finds a new unit dedicated to stealthy commando missions. Allston's first X-Wing book, Wraith Squadron, should appear from Bantam in mid-1998 - around the time Baen Books publishes his sequel to Doc Sidhe, tentatively titled *Sidhe Devil*.

Stackpole's four original X-Wing books fly into the gaming field this winter in West End's *Rogue Squadron* Sourcebook for its *Star Wars* roleplaying game.

Bantam's many bestselling *Star Wars* novels have brought their authors lucrative royalties. However, this year Bantam changed its *Star Wars* contracts to give authors a flat fee rather than royalties. Still, Allston says, "It's tremendously cool to play around in the *Star Wars* universe, and I hope to bring something fun to it." (allston@io.com)

## Notes from the Field

Casualties of tough times: Marquee Press (*Lost Souls, Legendary Lives, Khaotic*) has ceased publishing, as have two overseas gaming magazines: *Australian Realms* with issue #30 and Britain's excellent *arcane* with issue #20. And the FPG trading card company, which published the excellent *Guardians* and *Dark Age* trading card games, closed its game division in spring, so we won't be seeing the promised *Dark Age* roleplaying game.

In June fantasy novelist Thorarinn Gunnarson finally confirmed longtime rumors that, no, he's not Icelandic as he'd claimed, nor an opera singer, nor a European movie actor, nor a Formula One racecar driver, nor et cetera. His real name is Chris Wobey, and he's from New Mexico. His story — unembellished at last, yet still entertaining — is on the Web at [www.thuntek.net/hardmag/thorinn.htm](http://www.thuntek.net/hardmag/thorinn.htm).

In spring Vancouver's leading (and, Clack hopes, only) Cthulhu-punk band, *The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets*, released a CD of Lovecraft-inspired music, *Great Old Ones* (a follow-up to 1994's *Cthulhu Strikes Back*). According to band leader

Toren Atkinson ("Toren McBoren Macbin"), the CD's 22 songs include "One-Gilled Girl" (a Deep One's life is saved by a Deep-One/Human hybrid, and they fall in love); "Yog-Sothoth"; "Please God No" (a tribute to Lovecraft's story "The Haunter of the Dark"); "Six-Gun Gorgon Dynamo" — you get the idea. *Great Old Ones* should add a distinctive atmosphere to your Call of Cthulhu campaign; you can read that comment any way you want. (thickets@uniserve.com)



For two years freelancer Allen Varney has written the news columns for both DRAGON® Magazine and The Duelist. Now he can no longer make catty remarks about each publisher in the other's magazine. Send news and gossip to APVarney@aol.com.

## Game Company E-mail Addresses

Here are Internet mail addresses for selected roleplaying game companies.

**Atlas Games:** AGPeter@aol.com

**Avalon Hill Game Company:** AvalonHill@aol.com

**Biohazard Games:** BIOHAZARDG@aol.com

**Chameleon Eclectic:** cee@bev.net

**Chaosium:** chaosium@chaosium.com

**Daedalus Entertainment:** jgarcia@halcyon.com

**FASA:** FASALInfo@aol.com

**Five Rings Publishing Group:** l5r@frpg.com

**Gold Rush Games:** GoldRushG@aol.com

**Hero Games:** HeroGames@aol.com

**Iron Crown Enterprises:** ice@ironcrown.com

**Metropolis Ltd.:** Metropolis@aol.com

**Myrmidon Press:** CJCarella@aol.com

**Pagan Publishing:** PaganPub@aol.com

**Palladium Books:** MSiembieda@aol.com

**Pinnacle Entertainment:** Deadlands@aol.com

**R.Talsorian Games:** Talsorian@aol.com

**Ronin Publishing:** RoninP@aol.com

**Steve Jackson Games:** sjgames@ io.com

**TSR Inc.:** TSRInc@aol.com

**West End Games:** WEGEdit@aol.com

**White Wolf Game Studio:** WolfMail@white-wolf.com

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## Wizards Buys Five Rings

Okay, you knew that Wizards of the Coast (Renton, WA) has acquired TSR, Inc. In June, Wizards bought another game company, Five Rings Publishing Group (Bellevue, WA), publisher of the acclaimed *Legend of the Five Rings* (L5R) trading card game and roleplaying game. Five Rings had negotiated with Wizards in strict secrecy for over two months before the purchase.

At press time details of the buyout remained sketchy. A Five Rings spokesperson said the company, which has eight employees, would probably remain intact within the larger Wizards organization. The purchase isn't expected to affect Five Rings' aggressive current schedule: a "prequel" L5R release, Scorpion Clan Coup, released over three months starting in September; continued support for its new Dune: *Eye of the Storm* card game; a new Doomtown trading card game based on Pinnacle Entertainment's *Deadlands: The Weird West* RPG; and a new edition of Rage, formerly published by White Wolf.

More details in a later issue.

## Hercules/Xena RPG from West End

In May West End Games (Honesdale, PA) added yet another licensed RPG to its pantheon, this one based on the syndicated TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules: The legendary Journeys*. Designed by line editor George Strayton, the *Hercules & Xena Roleplaying Game* uses the "D6 System" popularized in West End's *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, and seen more recently in this summer's *Men in Black* licensed RPG.

The *Hercules & Xena* boxed set is set for a first-quarter 1998 release, with seven additional supplements scheduled for the rest of the year, including a mass-market product similar to 1997's *Star Wars Introductory Adventure Game*.

West End is still negotiating for role-playing rights to another (secret) license. In the spirit of baseless gossip, Current Clack reminds readers again that West Enders prominently wore *X-Files* T-shirts during last year's GEN CON® Game Fair. (WEGEdit@aol.com)

## Harn for Free

Among multitudes of fantasy campaign settings, N. Robin Crossby's *Harn* has unjustly become lost. Now Harn's longtime publisher, Columbia Games (Blaine, WA), has made a bold promotional move: It's giving away the flagship product, *HarnWorld*, free for the cost of shipping (\$4.95).

With an elaborate history, a realistic low-magic setting, and gorgeous maps, mist-shrouded Harn island slips easily into existing fantasy game worlds. It stands well alone, too; Columbia has published over 20 *HarnWorld* supplements and the elaborate *Harnmaster* rules system. The publisher hopes that the *HarnWorld* giveaway will increase sales of the supplements. Recent releases include a new edition of *HarnMaster* in a looseleaf binder (\$39) and a *HarnMaster Magic* set of binder pages (\$29). Next up are the adventure *Dead of Winter*, *Harnmaster Religion*, and a reprint of *Cities of Harn*.

*HarnWorld* comes in a folio including the 80-page "Harndex" reference, the 72-page "Harnview" overview, and a large color map. According to Columbia's Grant Dalgliesh, they've given away over 1,000 *HarnWorlds* in two months and intend to maintain the offer indefinitely. Send \$4.95 (US\$6.95 for Canadian customers, US\$9.95 overseas) to Columbia Games, P.O. Box 3457, Blaine, WA 98231; for credit-card orders, call 1-800-636-3631. (questions@columbiagames.com; www.columbiagames.com/Harn/)

Longtime DRAGON® Magazine readers may remember (from issue #232) Atlas Games' similar giveaway of MIB

Productions' hilarious *Pandemonium* RPG of tabloid journalism. Atlas President John Nephew says the offer was successful, there are still 1,500 copies left, and you can get one for \$3 shipping/handling (U.S. \$6 overseas surface mail) from Atlas Games, P.O. Box 131233, Roseville, MN 55113. No credit cards. (AGPeter@aol.com; members.aol.com/atlasgames)

Clack says get 'em both!

## Allston To Write X-Wing novels

Suppose, out of the blue, you got a call from Bantam Books saying you're overdue to send an outline for the next *Star Wars* novel — a novel you had no idea you were writing.

Fantastic dream or anxiety nightmare? Ask Aaron Allston.

Allston, longtime freelance designer for several companies, including TSR (*Complete Fighter's Handbook*, *I Tyrant* and many more), has also published six novels, including *Galatea in 2-D* (Baen Books, 1993) and *Doc Sidhe* (Baen, 1995). In March 1996 Allston attended CoastCon 19 in Biloxi, MS, where fellow writer and game designer Michael A. Stackpole introduced him to Bantam editor Tom Dupree. Dupree had edited Stackpole's four highly successful *X-Wing* novels licensed from the LucasArts computer game set in the *StarWars* universe.

Five months later, Dupree asked Stackpole to write books #5-8 in the *X-Wing* series. Because of scheduling conflicts, Stackpole took only book #8 and suggested that Allston write #5-7. Reading and liking Allston's work, Dupree pencilled him in to write the three novels. But soon thereafter — follow Clack closely here — in an editorial shuffle, Dupree left Bantam, and Pat LoBrutto took over the *X-Wing* series. LoBrutto, unaware that neither the author nor his agent had been contacted, simply assumed Allston was writing the books.

*Continued on page 118*



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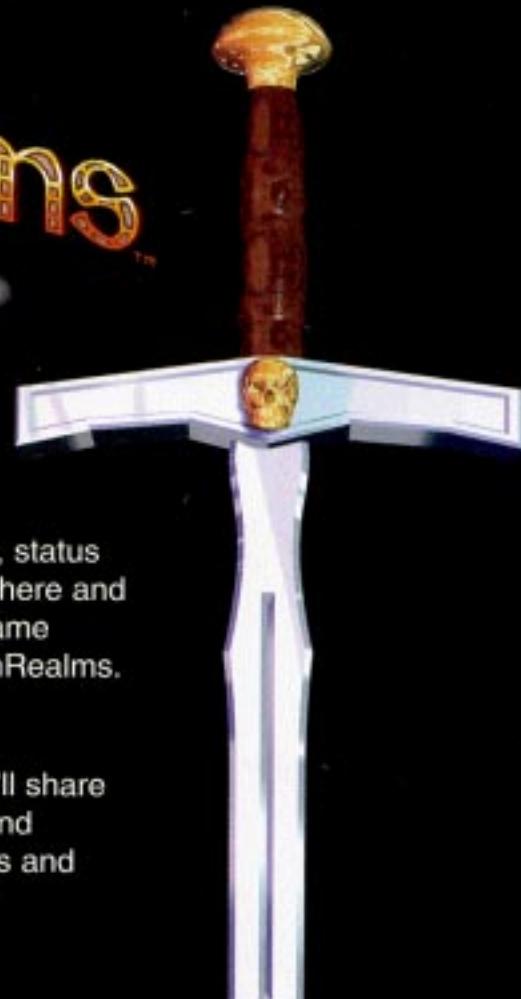
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