

#247

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Dragon® MAGAZINE

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The Rakasta

New Rogues:

The Taltos

Skills & Powers for
Heroes of Cerilia

Fiction by
Jeff Grubb



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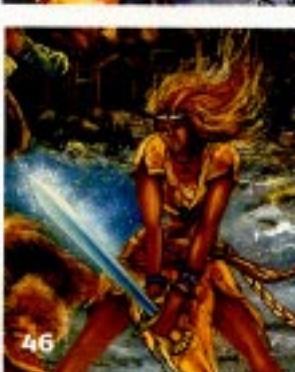


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ON THE COVER

On this month's cover, TSR's own rk post reminds us that heroes come in unlikely forms,
and from origins as varied as the countless worlds of the PLANESCAPE® multiverse.



The Wyrm's Turn™

Forgotten Realms

One of my favorite TV series is the now-defunct *Robin of Sherwood*, created by the BBC and brought to the U.S. via Showtime and various PBS stations. It was a sometimes sappy, new-age version of the popular story, but its virtues far outweighed its failings. The show's Marion was a formidable woman, much more than an object to be rescued every third episode. The villains, at first glance flamboyant and often comic monsters, evolved into well-rounded but no less evil human characters. The show introduced many new elements to the original tales: witches and sorcerers, magical swords and earth cults, mercenary berserkers and a noble saracen assassin (the last of which *Prince of Thieves* borrowed to lesser effect). In the most radical departure from the original story, in the prime of his youth and only half-way through the series, Robin dies. (It's all right, though; they make another one.)

You can see already that *Robin of Sherwood* is a perfect show for AD&D® game players. While it lacked the special effects and, ah, other attributes of today's *Hercules* and *Xena*, the show had a lot of character. As with most good series, *Robin of Sherwood* developed its own set of familiar actions and phrases. For instance, whenever the outlaws lost one of their own to the sheriff and Sir Guy of Gisbourne, the survivors would launch flaming arrows into a hidden pond in their own ceremony of remembrance. And during a crisis of faith, Robin or one of his companions would reassure the doubter, "Nothing's forgotten." That's the phrase that always makes me think of

the show, and it has double meaning for DRAGON® Magazine this month.

For our theme of "Heroes," the phrase serves as a reminder that no tale is truly heroic *while* it is happening. It's the retelling, the remembering, that elevates a story beyond adventure and into legend. Even your weekly AD&D game becomes "heroic" only in the retelling, months or years later.

Likewise, AD&D settings grow to heroic proportions only after they've ended—or seemed to end. Never was the GREYHAWK® campaign so fiercely revered until it appeared to be discontinued forever. (And like many heroes of legend, it rises from seeming death this summer.)

The MYSTARA® campaign has not burned in memory quite so long as did the GREYHAWK setting, but its fans will enjoy another visit to that world in Bruce Heard's "Rakasta of Mystara" this issue.

Though the comic series ended years ago (much to my dismay, as it was another of my favorites), the crew of the *Realms Master* return to our pages this month. First, read about them in Kate Novak's "Rogues Gallery," then see the heroes deal with the impending death of their captain in Jeff Grubb's short story, "Reunification: Body & Soul."

None of this is to say that we won't also continue to present the best, most useful articles for new TSR games. It's just a reminder that, at DRAGON Magazine, nothing's forgotten.

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FORGET IT, DAVE! **CAPTAIN SPUD BOY** JUST WENT AWOL! DON'T SWEAT IT. I'LL RUN YOU THROUGH **MY** ADVENTURE ON **SATURDAY!!**

THAT'S GREAT, B.J.! I'LL BE THERE TOO. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO PLAYING WITH OTHER **PARAGON** PLAYERS!!

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SATURDAY...

ALRIGHT, THE **TROLL** DIES HORRIBLY. THAT FINISHES OFF THE T SECTION. YOU WANNA START ON V?

(SIGH) UH...OKAY.





What Do You Think?

To share your opinions on this issue of the magazine, post a letter to "D-Mail," *Dragon® Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, USA. Send email to dmail@tsr.com. All material should be neatly typed or handwritten. Include your full name and mailing address if you expect your letter to be printed, and let us know how much of that address you'd like printed. (We'll assume city and state otherwise.)

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Correction

In *DRAGON® Magazine* #244, Rick Swan attributed authorship of *GURPS*: High Tech* to David Pulver in his review of *GULPS: Reign of Steel*. Minor error. Mike Hurst wrote *High Tech*. Pulver wrote *UltraTech* and *UltraTech 2*. In context, *UT* and *UT2* should have been the books recommended to go along with *Reign of Steel*.

Steve Douglas Anderson
via Email

Our apologies to David and Mike for this mistake. We should have double-checked our facts against the exhaustive list of GURPS products at www.sjgames.com, one of the most useful and entertaining game company sites on the web.

"Holy Swords of the Realms": The best thing about these swords is that, while they were designed for the Realms, they can be used in any campaign. A mention on magical items, and this message will be extended for other parts of the magazine: I'm getting sick of them. When I first started playing and *DRAGON Magazine* presented extra magical items, I was thrilled. I had only the 1st-Edition *DUNGEON MASTER™ Guide* for magic, so new ones were greatly appreciated.

By the way, I love weapons with names and histories. I think it started in *The Hobbit* when they found the hidden cave with *Glamring*, *Goblin Cleaver*, and *Orcrist*, not to mention *Sting*.

"He's Got Personality": Best article in the book. This is the kind of new stuff that is really useful, especially to DMs

now I get more jokes by flipping through the entire magazine. Great!

"Wyrms of the North": I know Ed Greenwood is very popular. I just don't really enjoy his stuff, though he did give me a great idea for a story,

"Honor and Guile": Good to see Margaret Weis writing in *DRAGON Magazine* again. She's great.

"Bazaar of the Bizarre": Again, too many magical items. I hate to say don't do it, because it is one of the simplest ways for amateurs to be published.

"Dragon's Bestiary": I'm glad you had the courage to try this article. I wouldn't have. It brings back the memories I had when I was a kid. When we first started playing, the new monsters we all came up with were invariable crossbreeds! Then we generally got better and started using our imaginations or digging monsters out of books we had read or research we had done. These were silly.

"In a Class by Themselves": Maybe I should have read that *DMG* section more carefully. The way I've created all my new classes was just to sit down and do it, then playtest it and make adjustments. Making a formula of it was too much for me, but I'm sure this is really good stuff for beginners!

"Arcane Lore": New spells, just like new magical items. Too many. I appreciate the effort, but I'm overloaded!

"Dungeon Mastery": Okay, I made a mistake; this is the best article in the magazine. I love the meaty historical stuff! I get to learn something at the same time I'm playing a fun game! Please ask Don to keep contributing. I like short articles. Good stuff!

Roleplaying is what makes AD&D® better than sitting at a computer game.

Deconstructing #243

"Sage Advice": Good stuff. What more can I say? Good for beginners too. When I was a beginner, I loved this column. It helped me out. Now, of course, I just make things up myself.

"Destriers of the Planes": These are great. Kind of tied to the outer planes, but they can be used anywhere. One of the things my players love is having a special unique pet. Warriors like horses and dogs. Wizards like familiars, etc. It's fun. I might use these even though I don't run a PLANESCAPE® campaign. Good art, too.

who are trying to get their players to role play more and hack and slash less. Role-playing is what makes AD&D® better than sitting at a computer game! This helps.

"Treasures of the Fifth Age": Not arguing that these are great, and they stimulate ideas, but I'm just sick of new magical items.

"Enchanting Weapons": More magical items. Good, but too much.

"The Unspeakable Oaf," or all jokes in general: I think it's fun to have the jokes spread around. In the old days, I used to flip straight to the jokes. I still do, but

"TSR Previews": I love this section. Keep it up. I like it three months ahead of time too. That way I can order it from my comic book retailer, who orders about three months ahead of time.

"Profiles": Excellent! I love Margaret Weis. She's awesome. The article was too short, but I loved it. Don't limit yourself to people who work for or are associated with TSR. Wouldn't an article with Robert Jordan or David Eddings be cool?

Jason Francis Smith
jsmith@itsnet.com

Enchanting Weapons

I am writing in response to Mike Nystul's "Enchanting Weapons" article in issue #243. Firstly, I must agree wholeheartedly with the aim of this article. Finding and owning a magical weapon should be a special experience. Mike, I think, missed one point though. The reason *Excalibur* is so special is not because it is a *sword of sharpness +5* usable only by LG beings (if I remember my *Legends and Lore*) but because it is *Excalibur!* It has a name, so it is treated like a character. Naming an item is the simplest and maybe the most important way of making it memorable.

I once DMed a fighter who was specialized in the battle axe but could also use a short sword. He owned a *battle axe +2*, but in an adventure (in which he was helping some dwarves to recover some of their treasures), he found a short sword called *Magebane*. It was a *short sword +1, +2 vs. magic*. The dwarf lord wanted the sword returned. Instead, the character, who was aware of the abilities of each weapon, gave the lord the *battle axe +2* and about 1,000 gp to keep *Magebane*. When asked after why he did it, he asked "Which would you rather to known as? Agnar, the guy with the nice axe—or Agnar, wielder of Magebane?"

So, name your weapons and the history, powers and such will make more sense. The name also fixes the weapons in your players' minds. Long after they forgot all the *swords +5* they ever found, they will remember *Nightfall*, the black-bladed *dagger +1* that they found at 4th level.

Garett Kutch
Gifu-ken, Japan



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Future Articles

You asked for what settings I would like to see for the ALTERNITY® game. Being an old timer, I have some that your middle-aged and younger readers might have missed.

1. Your *Cauldron Station* preview had a reminder of the old Andre Norton's Solar Queen series of *Free Trader* fame.

2. E. E. "Doc" Smith's Lensmen series.

3. Edmund Hamilton had a pair of books (one was *The Haunted Stars*) wherein the 20th-century John Gordon

entirely to ALTERNITY in a couple of years once momentum has built up.

I received the limited edition last September and have found it to be the most comprehensive and logical set of SF RPG rules since I began gaming nearly 15 years ago. The elegant dice mechanic is simple to use but manages to accomplish complex and varied tasks with ease.

One of the most important aspects of RPGs is character generation and development. ALTERNITY does this wonderfully. The skill-based rules with the

O ne of the most important aspects of RPGs is character generation and development.

exchanged personalities with the futuristic Zarth Arn and saved the galaxy from invasion—it was even wilder than *Star Wars*.

4. His wife, Leigh Brackett, combined space opera with swords & sorcery with her books about Eric John Stark.

Jeremy Michele
Billings, MT

To ALTERNITY . . . and Beyond!

In response to your question [about ALTERNITY articles], I would love to see an entire section devoted to ALTERNITY in *DRAGON Magazine*. I wouldn't be surprised to see a magazine devoted

addition of perks/flaws result in a system that allows any type of character you can imagine to be generated.

The only fault of ALTERNITY is that I still have to wait a couple of months for the official release. I have already been waiting for around a year, keeping a close eye on the ALTERNITY mailing list and responding to various critical issues such as the naming of the *Rulemaster's Guide*, now the *Gamemaster's Guide*.

What would I like to see in *Dragon Magazine*? Well how about:

1. Articles completely describing a race/culture and its homeworld.
2. Various creature descriptions from around the galaxy.
3. Vehicle/spaceship designs again from around the galaxy.
4. Equipment/weapon designs from around the galaxy.

In other words, I would like to see lots.

How Do We Look?

That might be a dangerous question when asked by your significant other, but we promise you won't have to sleep on the couch if we don't like your answer.

This issue's look is our dress rehearsal for our 22nd anniversary redesign. We'd like to thank DRAGON Magazine art director Larry Smith and Duelist* art director Shauna Wolf Narciso for making the book more attractive than ever before. Naturally, we're biased, but we hope you'll agree. Tell us what you think!

To answer what my favorite science-fiction movies and books would be, I would have to generalize and say I enjoy all SF that is somewhat action orientated including *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*, and *Space: Above and Beyond*. I have just started trying to get my mind around a book by Peter F. Hamilton, *The Reality Dysfunction*.

I have waited a long time for a good SF RPG, and from what I have seen and heard I really believe that the ALTERNITY system will capture the attention of the RPG community.

Frank Janik

FJ@onaustralia.com.au



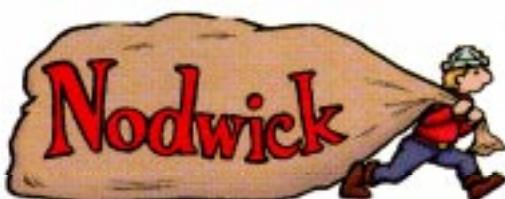
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Do psionics belong in the AD&D® core rules?
If so, what version is best or how would you
change them for a 3rd-edition game?

Alterations

Way back in the 1st edition of the AD&D® game, there was far less choice for wizards (or magic users, as they were called). You could be a magic user, or you could be an illusionist—and each had a completely different spell list.

Of all the changes in 2nd edition, the new wizard rules were my favorite. And it was a logical step. If there were specialist illusionists, why not other kinds?

I have found the specialist wizards to be a little less than perfect. The "new schools" such as Elementalist wizards, Geomancers, Alchemists, and the like (introduced in *Skills & Powers, Spells & Magic*, and so forth) are quite well thought out, but the "old schools" seem to suffer from a lack of internal logic.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Alteration school. This school has far more spells than any other, but if we

Alteration spells turn one thing into another

What they do not do is create or requisition.

examine the types of spells available to Transmuters, it seems as if Alteration is a "grab bag." If a spell doesn't fit anywhere else, then this is where it ends up.

The problem with this is that many spells are quite clearly not Alteration spells. To back up this statement, let us examine a few popular first-level spells from the *Player's Handbook*.

Burning Hands: "... a jet of searing flame shoots from his fingertips." According to the *Complete Wizard's Handbook*, Alteration spells turn one thing into

another. What they do not do is create or requisition. Logically, this flame either comes from the Elemental Plane of Fire (making it a Conjunction spell) or else is created by the caster (making it Evocation). There are only two ways to justify this spell as Alteration: either it "alters" targets from "unburned" to "burned," or it transforms the air into flame. Neither explanation is satisfactory; any damaging spell could be Alteration under the first explanation, while the second allows Alteration to create. I would place *burning hands* in the Evocation school.

Color spray: "... causes a vivid, fan shaped spray of clashing colors to spring forth..." These colors are created (which seems likely) or else they are conjured. You could even make a case for *color spray* to be Enchantment/Charm (since its most common effect is to render opponents unconscious) or even Illusion/Phantasm (if the effects are pro-

duced in a similar manner to *phantasmal killer*). Conjunction/Summoning might also be appropriate, since *prismatic spray* (which can be thought of as a more powerful version of this spell) fits that school.

Message: How does this spell work? I can think of three main possibilities:

- ▶ A tiny sylph is conjured. It carries the message to the target and returns with a reply. This would make message Conjunction/Summoning.
- ▶ A wispy breeze is created that carries the message; another carries

back the reply. This places it firmly in the Evocation school.

▶ The caster and targets are transformed to be able to hear otherwise inaudible messages.

While this latter possibility is certainly Alteration, it seems an unlikely explanation. Such a transformation is very specific. (For example, the caster is not otherwise gifted with exceptional hearing.) This one is more of a judgment call; on the whole, I believe that Conjunction/Summoning is the best school for this spell.

These are just first-level examples; there are others:

2nd level: *Fog cloud* (Evocation), *irritation* (judgment call; but it feels more like Enchantment/Charm).

3rd level: *Delude* (again, a judgment call—I feel this is more Enchantment/Charm related), *gust of wind* (Evocation or Conjunction/ Summoning), *Leomund's tiny hut* (Evocation), *Melf's minute meteors* (pure Evocation), *wind wall* (Evocation—this is a *wall* spell, not really that different from *wall of force* and so forth).

4th level: *Fire shield* (Evocation/Abjuration would be more appropriate, or even pure Evocation. There are no other Alteration effects that mimic this shielding ability), *Leomund's secure shelter* (Evocation/Enchantment), *Otiluke's resilient sphere* (pure Evocation), *rainbow pattern* (Enchantment/Charm, Illusion/Phantasm), *solid fog* (Evocation), *vacancy* (pure Illusion/ Phantasm—powerful, granted, but there is nothing quasi-real about it, and even the *shadow monster* spell is pure Illusion/ Phantasm).

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So why has the Alteration school been so favored? I believe the answer is the "grab bag" attitude mentioned above.

In the 1st edition, the school names were pure "flavor," so the actual school was unimportant (except for *detect magic* purposes). Looking through the 1st edition *Player's Handbook*, I have the definite impression that the attitude was "if in doubt, Alteration." This is certainly forgivable considering the minor importance that the schools had in 1st edition.

However, very few spells "changed school" from 1st to 2nd edition. It would seem that the designers of 2nd edition wished to maximize "backward compatibility." Why this is the case is unclear, since even a wholesale reconfiguration of the schools would have had no noticeable effect on existing 1st-edition magic users, and 1st-edition Illusionists changed markedly in any case. None of various source books have sought to remedy this problem. (*The Tome of Magic*, *Complete Wizard's Handbook*, and *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Spells & Magic* all failed to address it).

Alteration can be toned down considerably without overly weakening the school. Many great spell—*enlarge*, *polymorph other*, *water breathing*, *stone skin*, and so forth—are still Alteration spells. Removing inappropriate spells from the school should not discourage Transmuters as a class.

Gary Sturges

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Unintelligent Proficiencies

The proficiency system has been largely re-written, with the introduction of the *PLAYER'S OPTION* series, in a way that partially compensates for what has been a problem in the past. The trouble is that

doesn't require a great deal of Intelligence to learn. Practice and determination, maybe, but not Intelligence.

With the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Skills & Power* book, characters buy proficiencies with character points (CPs), but they still gain bonus CPs for the purpose of buying non-weapon proficiencies (NWPs) based on their Intelligence.

An alternative method is to allow PCs to buy these extra proficiencies based on their relevant abilities. They still have a standard number of slots (or CPs) to spend based on class and level, but their bonus to learning Strength-based NWPs (like swimming, blacksmithing, and jumping) comes from Strength. Dexterity affects their Dexterity-based scores (rope use, tumbling, pottery), etc. For an ability of 13-15, the character should gain one additional slot or two CPs. For an ability of 16-17, the character gains two slots or four CPs. For a maximum ability of 18, the character gains three slots or six CPs.

As an example, a paladin character with Strength 15, Wisdom 16, and Charisma 17 has the base three NWPs available to all warriors, one extra slot to spend on a Strength-based proficiency (such as swimming), two extra slots he can spend on Wisdom-based scores (like religion or land-based riding), and two more to spend on Charisma-based skills (etiquette or gaming, for example).

In a *PLAYER'S OPTION* campaign, the paladin might use his two CPs from his high Strength to purchase boat piloting, spend his four Wisdom-gained CPs on tracking, and use his four Charisma CPs to become an expert at singing.

With this method, characters may still buy NWPs that don't rely on their high abilities by using their base slots. Their bonus slots, however, buy NWPs that are

because of their high Intelligence still gain a bonus to their NWPs but they can apply their Intelligence to learning only Intelligence-based skills. The natural talents of each, however, dictate how far above the norm the character begins. Natural ability and experience should count more for learning trades and general abilities than does raw intelligence.

Lloyd Brown III
Jacksonville, FL

Aerial Assaults

Michael Lambert's "Warriors of the Wind" article in issue #244 sparked my interest in aerial combat, specifically the use of missile weapons in aerial vs. ground-based combat. Obviously, such combat would involve a lot of missile fire, since flyers would use their power to its maximum advantage.

So how would missile combat work against flying creatures? Let's consider the case of an archer on the ground firing her arrows at a flying menace (a Fainil, from Lambert's article, for example). The *Player's Handbook* gives the maximum range of a longbow using flight arrows at 210 yards, but this is the horizontal range. As you may remember from Physics class, this maximum range is achieved by firing the arrow at an angle of 45 degrees. For half the flight time, the arrow is rising—flying horizontally only at the apex of the arc—and for the other half it is falling. You can make the arrow fly higher by increasing the angle (and thus sacrificing horizontal distance), but for the top end of that height the arrow's velocity decreases to the point where it is no longer an effective weapon. Then it would reach the apex of its flight, stop, and begin plummeting to the ground. Thus, for simplicity's sake, the effective vertical range of a missile weapon can be considered to be about half the horizontal range. So our heroine can fire her longbow at the Fainil only if it is less than 105 yards above her.

If our heroine misses the vile Fainil, however, that arrow is going to come streaming back down, at a considerable velocity, to a position relative to the angle at which it was fired. Thus, if the Fainil was flying directly above her head, the arrow would land at exactly the same

The problem is that characters use Intelligence to learn proficiencies that are not based on Intelligence.

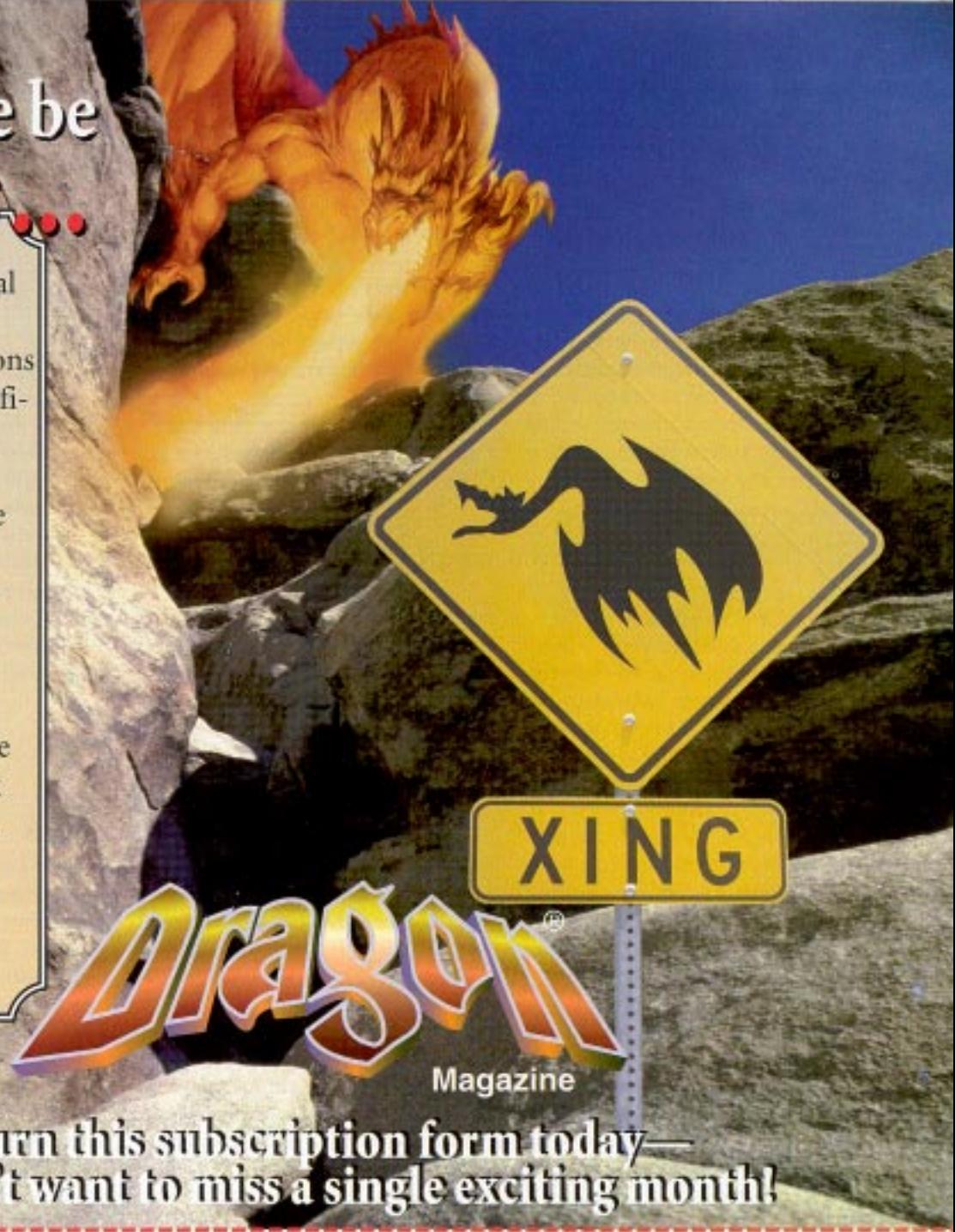
characters use Intelligence to learn proficiencies that aren't based on Intelligence. The best examples of this system's problems come when a wizard learns proficiencies like blind-fighting, endurance, and other Strength- or Dexterity-based abilities. Endurance, for example,

more easily learned for them and don't necessarily require high Intelligence. In other words, characters learn a uniform number of proficiencies based on their class and gain a wide variety of abilities as they age and learn. Wizards who currently learn a great number of NWPs

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point from which it was fired—our heroine, if she didn't have the sense to get out of the way. In a battle situation with multiple defenders firing at attackers directly overhead, some of the arrows are bound to miss and come plunging back into the mass of defenders. Some are bound to find their mark.

On the flip side, let's consider the Fainil's position. As long as he flies more than 120 yards (the effective vertical range of a heavy crossbow) above the defenders, he can do whatever he wants without being molested by missile fire. At the same time, regardless of his altitude,

Don't change the magic system; it's simple yet elegant.

tude, he can hurl missiles down at the defenders; gravity does the rest. In fact, these missiles strike at a greater velocity than missiles shot up or horizontally, for which the DM may wish to assign damage bonuses based on height.

To take that thought further, think of what happens to a penny when it is dropped from a tall skyscraper. Think about what it does to the sidewalk. Some creatures (eagles, for example) can fly at very high altitudes, so it stands to reason that some of our intelligent flyers could as well. Perhaps even our diabolical Fainil can. So, what if this villainous creature were to fly a mile overhead and open a bag of rocks over the defenders of a castle? Maybe none of the defenders would be hit, but the damage to the building would be extensive.

Let's imagine the following scenario. Our heroes are holed up in a castle, besieged by a horde of orcs. The orcs hire a group of 100 Fairil mercenaries to soften the defense. Under cover of darkness, these villains fly several hundred yards over the castle and, using the torch-fires for siting, begin pelting the castle with a deadly hail of rocks and arrows. Realizing that they cannot defend against the onslaught, our heroes abandon the walls to the destructive onslaught. Meanwhile, the orcs attack.

Using this information, flyers are dangerous opponents indeed, and more than worthy adversaries for most parties.

Kenneth Rath
Sunderland, MA

Thoughts on a Third Edition

Two points I would love to see changed in a 3rd-Edition AD&D game:

► The experience tables. I've never understood why a fighter is so slow at advancing during the first seven levels. Also I can't see any justification for the easy deal that mages get after about 7th level. This totally unbalances higher-level play. The opposite holds true for priests, who at higher levels advance painfully slowly.

► The newer psionics system in the DARK SUN® campaign and the PLAYER'S OPTION books is unworkable. A combat

between two psionicists can end only in one or both completely exhausting their PSP pool! This means that the player of a psionicist must avoid psionic combat or risk being left totally without power for the next several hours!

Don't change the magic system; it's simple yet elegant. I love AD&D magic; there is a huge variety of spells and options available, and it works wonderfully in play. More spells are always a bonus, but leave the system alone please!

Paul Benfield
Cardiff, UK

If It Ain't Broke ...

With great horror I see that TSR is considering a 3rd Edition. Oh, no! After eight years, I have just gotten completely comfortable with 2nd Edition. My main question is: "Why?"

Why is a 3rd Edition necessary? Other than the fact that it is a great source of revenue (rulebooks do sell, especially if they are the system's main books), what would be the improvement to the game? In my opinion, there would be no improvement. Why?

The 2nd Edition has everything one needs and wants—all very well structured, too. There are the core rulebooks, then the many optional books that players and DMs can use or not use at will. I don't believe there is any way to improve this. The combat system is well detailed and easy to use; the base magic system is very good, and if it isn't liked, the optional rulebooks give many choices to use instead (like spell points,

for example). Making a 3rd Edition might make many very important books obsolete—like *Faiths & Avatars*, for instance. That would be a travesty

As to the question of the month:

► Rule I would most like to see changed: Do not incorporate *Skills & Powers* into the base rules. It would just slow things down.

► Rule that should not change: A class-based system. If it were changed to a skill-based system (no more wizards, warriors, rogues, or especially priests), the entire fantasy system would fall apart. Skill-based is fine in future settings, in which classes don't really "fit" because of the huge array of possibilities, but it would destroy the AD&D game.

My only request is to think things through when designing a 3rd Edition—and look at what can be improved. (In my opinion, a near-impossible project).

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All for It

Regarding an AD&D 3rd edition, I'm all for it, and here are some suggestions:

Attributes: Leave 'em alone with one exception: The word "Wisdom" means acquired knowledge, not instinct or ego. I recommend calling it "Willpower." It's more descriptive.

Saving Throws: This game mechanic is unnecessarily awkward. Two options:

► Get rid of saves and make characters save with attribute checks.

► Make an intuitive list like this: mental effects, directed effects, toxin effects, etc.

Character Class: I think that the four basic classes are sufficient. Paladins and rangers and barbarians (oh, my!) are just warriors, aren't they? (I love to play paladins but would have no problem with this kind of change). Sub-classes confuse matters unnecessarily and take up unnecessary space in a manual.

Character Race: Leave 'em. Everyone's used to the list.

Character Kits: I like kits, but they are confusing. I recommend we abandon them and instead come up with a list of advantages and disadvantages that simulate the powers and effects that many kits come with. As with TSR's old

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TOP SECRET/S.I.™ game, allow the players to select X number of points of advantages and the same number of points of disadvantages. Building a cavalier from a warrior would be easy with such a list.

Proficiencies: These should be made into percentile rolls. That way, there is a single game mechanic for skill checks. This way, they can go up in smaller increments each level (like rogue skills). I also recommend making the proficiency list a single group instead of categorizing by class. To limit acquisition of more potent proficiencies, you could have prerequisites (see above), which some classes could give for free. For example, choosing "literate" could require "higher education," which might come for free with the priest or mage classes.

Magic: The memorization system is well-balanced and practiced by all. However, nobody would complain if spell levels were re-figured. Why not go

Tolkien's work does not translate well into game terms.

to a spell level 1-10 for both wizards and priests? It would require shifting some spells around or perhaps adding some, but who cares?

You should make a point-generation system for spells, so that you can add up all the effects of a spell and see that it works out to be a level X spell. This way, players would have a system with which to make their own spells.

Character Generation: A step-by-step procedure in an attractive layout would help. Some effort was made for the 2nd edition to organize character generation, but still it lacks the simplicity of some other games. With all of the books and the many wonderful options that exist in 2nd edition, where does one begin? Class-based systems aren't conducive to point-based character generation.

Suggestion: *Character Archetypes.* Some RPGs have archetypes, complete starting-level character with an illustration and everything done except a name (Name 'em something like "explorer mage," "undead hunter," etc). These are great for several reasons: cool characters for the lazy player, great source of quick NPCs, great examples of how to make detailed characters using the rules, etc.

Combat: The combat system seems damaged. Armor shouldn't make one harder to hit. Hit points grow at an alarming rate. Chance to hit an enemy should be based on the enemy's Dexterity and combat skill, not armor. I don't have a suggestion, but I think that the combat system needs attention. If you could come up with a combat system that more accurately reflected armor and damage, while still maintaining heroic prowess at high levels, I would play no other game.

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High-Level Middle-Earth

I'd like to respond to Jo Ann Spencer's letter in issue #245. While I agree with Ms. Spencer's opinion on the quality of Tolkien's work, I cannot agree that it is a story of a low-magic world.

The primary magical item in all four

books is the One Ring, at least a major artifact in AD&D terminology. We also have *Glamdring*, *Orcrist*, and *Sting*, the magical elven swords found in all four books, as well as the ancient magical blades of the hobbits in the trilogy, and *Anduril*, the reforged (and it can be assumed re-enchanted) *Narsil*. Then there is the armor that the dwarves and Bilbo use in The Battle of Five Armies (which, while made by dwarves, can easily be seen as the inspiration for elven chain), Gimli's dwarven armor, Legolas' bow, Sam's rope (which acts suspiciously like a *rope of climbing* at one point), the phial of Galadriel, the palantiri, the flaming sword of The Witch King of Angmar, and many other items. Magical items are plentiful throughout the books; you just need to know where to look. While many of these items did have a history or at least a name, many did not.

Also, Ms. Spencer's comment on the characters not walking away with wagon-loads of stuff in the end is not correct, at least in the case of *The Hobbit*. While Bilbo Baggins didn't use a wagon, he came home with quite a lot of treasure, and the surviving dwarves made

off with an entire dragon's hoard, as well as the loot from the trolls.

Stating that Gandalf is not a mage is like saying that Allanon from the Shannara novels and Merlin from Arthurian legend were not mages. Gandalf has extremely powerful spells and does in fact use them. Unlike the standard mage of RPGs, he uses his powers when he only must. Prime examples of this are when he battles the Balrog in *The Fellowship of the Ring* and when he uses *invisibility* and *ventriloquism* to keep the trolls busy all night in *The Hobbit*. As for power, stopping an extremely powerful death knight or defeating a powerful demon is power enough for me. If anything, Gandalf is an excellent example of how a mage should rely more on his wits than on *fireballs* and *lightning bolts*.

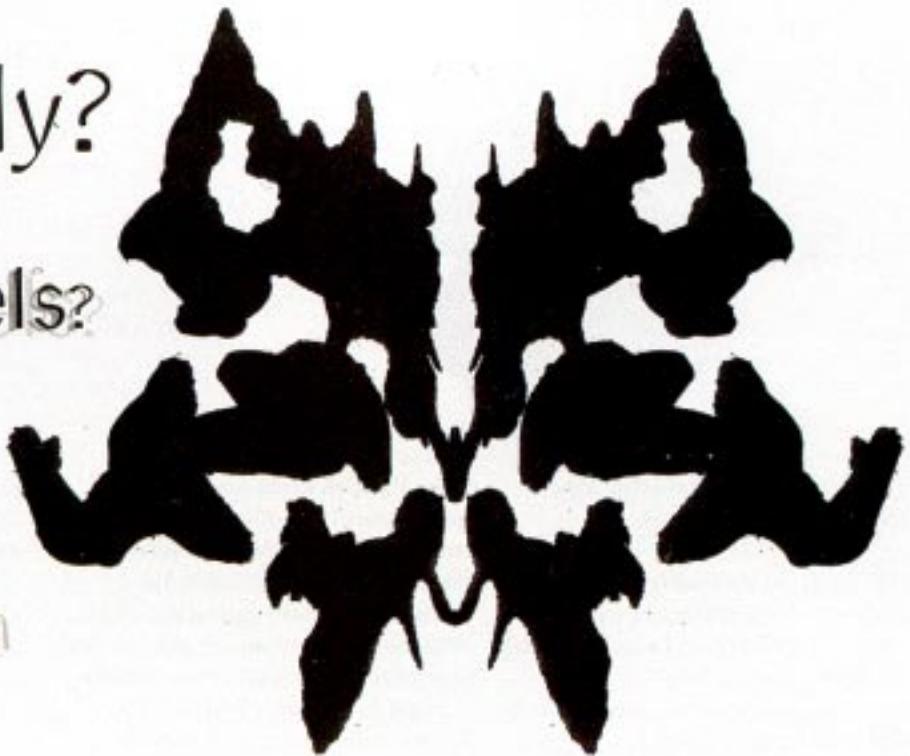
As for Aragorn (the party's ranger, as Ms. Spencer calls him), he is the perfect ranger. In game terms, a ranger does not gain his spells until higher levels, and they are meant only to supplement his ranger abilities. Aragorn certainly is an excellent tracker and woodsman: exactly what a ranger is supposed to be. The problem I see with Ms. Spencer's analysis of the characters in game terms is that she is looking at them the wrong way. The classes are based upon these characters, not the other way around.

There are a few points I'd disagree with concerning the opponents, the first being her reference to the Nazgul as "nine undead warriors." If anything, the Nazgul are nine powerful *death knights*. Smaug, the red dragon from *The Hobbit*, is an ancient or old wyrm red dragon.

Like any novel on the market, be it a FORGOTTEN REALMS® novel or the latest book from David Eddings, Tolkien's work does not translate well into game terms. As Gary Gygax stated way back when, the game is based upon many sources, Tolkien being only one of these. Yes, there is a tendency in game groups to go for high levels, big treasure, and lots of magic, but that is what those groups want. Sometimes it can lead to boredom, and sometimes it can lead to the most memorable characters ever.

Bill Johnson
Address withheld

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Dueling angels?

A snarling,
fiendish
half-breed from
the Abyss?

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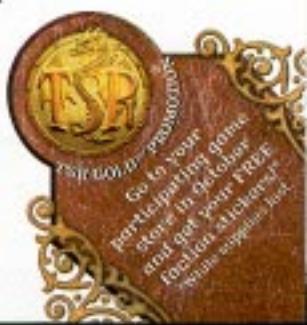
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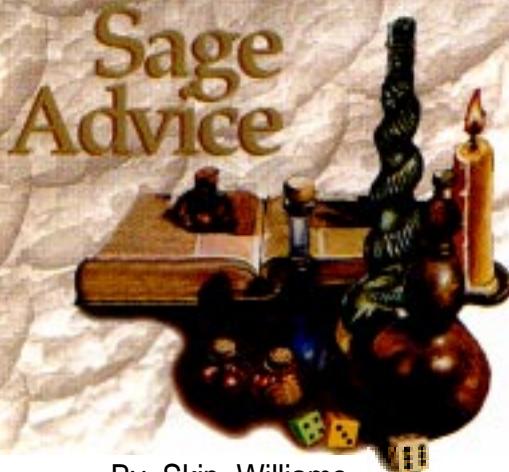


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By Skip Williams

This month, the sage offers advice about spells from the AD&D® game.

When a priest uses the reverse of a *conjure fire elemental* (or *conjure earth elemental*) spell to dismiss an elemental, what is the casting time?

The reverse has the same casting time as the regular spell; 6 rounds for *conjure fire elemental* and 1 turn for *conjure earth elemental*. Characters using reversed

wise, the spell works normally with other defensive spells. For example, a wizard using both *invisible mail* and *protection from evil* cannot claim the -2 defense adjustment against evil attacks that the *protection from evil* spell provides, but enjoys all the spell's other benefits (saving throw bonus, hedging out enchanted creatures, and blocking mental control).

Using *stoneskin* with *invisible mail* has

Can creatures or characters within a web take any actions while in the area of effect?

conjure elemental spells to banish hostile elementals are well advised to use *protection from evil* spells to prevent the elementals from disrupting the spells.

The *invisible mail* spell description (from the *Complete Wizard's Handbook*) says the spell's effects are not cumulative with other armor or magical protection, and that the spell cannot make a character's Armor Class better than 3 (before Dexterity bonuses). Does "magical protection" refer only to magical Armor Class adjustments? Could *stoneskin*, *fire shield*, *protection from evil*, or other defensive spells still function with *invisible mail*? If so, how would the *stoneskin-invisible mail* combination work? Would hits (that would normally hit Armor Class 3) be blocked by *stoneskin* and also subtract from the *invisible mail*'s duration?

Invisible mail provides a base Armor Class of 3, period. Armor Class adjustments and defensive bonuses from any other magical source do not make the caster's Armor Class any better. Other-

no effect on the *stoneskin* at all. Any attack on a *stoneskin* recipient—hit or miss—drains one charge from the *stoneskin*. The recipient's Armor Class, no matter what the source, is irrelevant to the *stoneskin*'s duration. An attack that inflicts no damage because of a *stoneskin* spell, however, does not count against the *invisible mail*'s duration.

I recommend that you give the *invisible mail* spell a maximum duration of 24 hours, regardless of how many hp damage it has absorbed.

Can creatures or characters within a *web* take any actions while in the area of effect? If someone has spent a round or two breaking through the *web* but has not yet escaped the full area of effect, can he light a torch?

I know DMs who assume characters can tear out open spaces inside a *web* spell's area of effect to allow for actions other than just ripping through the webbing. I suggest, however, that you assume the webbing fills in any cleared space almost the moment it's made. Not only is it not

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possible to clear a space to allow for lighting a torch, it's also not possible for one character to follow the path another character makes through the webbing. (Though it might be possible for a strong character to drag a weaker companion along with him as he breaks through the strands.)

The *pain touch* spell (from *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*) is listed as a Divination spell. Is this accurate? If not, what school should it be? If it is correct, is there any rationale for why?

No, *pain touch* is not a Divination; it's a Necromancy spell, and it is so listed in later printings of *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*.

If the spell *transmute bone to steel* (from *The Complete Book of Necromancers*) is cast on a character who just died and then is brought back to life with a *resurrection* spell, will the character have combat bonuses from the spell?

One of two things happens (DM's choice, but once you pick one, stick with it for the whole campaign):

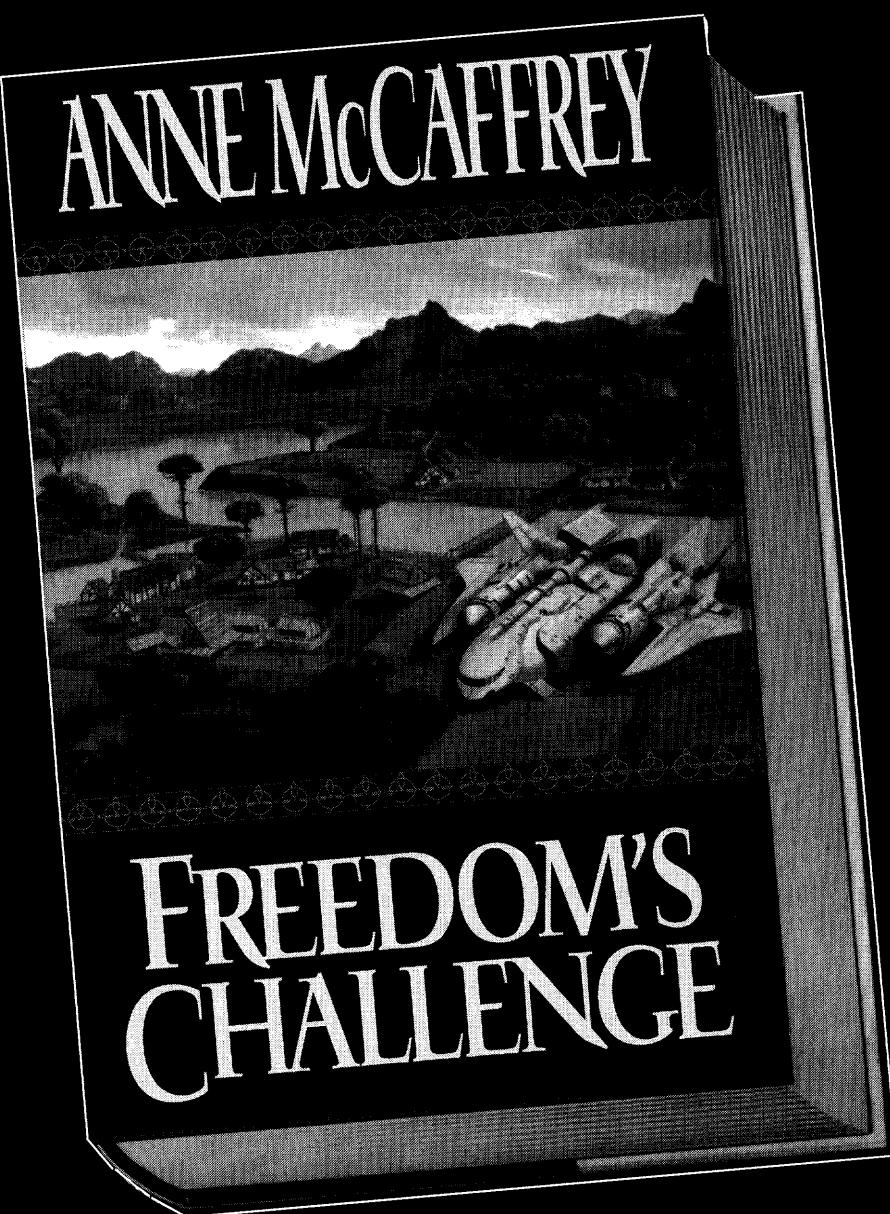
- The bones revert to normal upon the subject's return to life.
- The dead body cannot be *raised* or *resurrected* until the *transmute bone to steel* spell is reversed or *dispelled*.

In any case, the spell works only on dead bone. If life is restored through other means (such as a *wish*), the character's bones revert to normal.

If a mage with a *ring of spell turning* reads a cursed scroll, what happens? Does the curse rebound, or is the reader of the scroll treated as the caster

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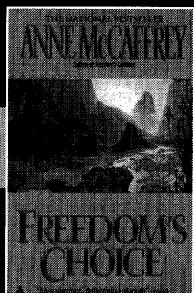
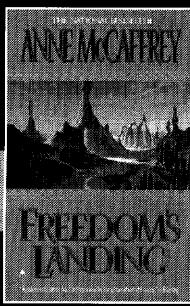
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of it in this case? I personally think that the scroll should still affect the mage who read it, but that's just me.

The effect of a cursed scroll on its reader is just like a touch-delivered or self-cast spell—not turnable by a *ring of spell turning* or a *spell turning* spell.

Is there a saving throw against the priest spell *charm person* or *mammal*? If so, does the save work like the wizard spell *charm person* in that the target gains a saving throw vs. spells, modified by the number of hp damage the party has inflicted on the target?

A successful saving throw negates the spell—that's what the abbreviation "Neg." means in the summary at the beginning of the spell description.

The target is entitled to a saving throw bonus if the caster or her party damages the target during the round when the spell is cast.

Chill touch can send undead packing in a RAVENLOFT game.

With a *stone shape* spell, a character can shape rock; is it strictly necessary for the caster to touch the stone with his hands?

The spell has only "touch" range, so the character must touch the stone to be shaped. Any manipulative appendage the caster happens to have will do for the shaping. Nonmanipulative appendages won't suffice. For example, the caster probably couldn't shape the stone with his toes.

The *fireball* spell description says a *fireball* is an explosive burst of flame. Now, wouldn't this explosion still cause damage to a fire-resistant creature? If you cast a *fireball* at a red dragon, would the concussion from the explosion still cause damage to the dragon? The flame

bombards count as "large" missiles and can harm the protected character, though the damage inflicted is reduced slightly (see spell description).

Can *rope trick* be used to bypass a *wall of force* by climbing up the rope on one side of the wall and then lowering it on the other? Can the rope be lowered only through the center of the "window"? If so, could the characters inside the extradimensional space just move to the other side of the wall and wait for the *rope trick* spell to expire?

Anyone or anything leaving the extradimensional space created by a *rope trick* spell re-enters the normal universe in the same place where it left (roughly the center of the extradimensional space). On the other hand, a rope lowered from the space is fixed at only one end. There's nothing to stop someone from tossing the loose end over a nearby barrier (even a *wall of force*) and then climbing down.

I've come across your discussion of the *frisky chest* spell from many issues ago, and I noticed a similar discussion of the abuse of the *Tenser's floating disc* spell in issue #241. For me, these issues beg a larger question: How does a DM draw the line between innovation and abuse? Can you name a few innovative uses of spells that should work?

First, trust your gut. Does the proposed use of the spell seem like abuse? If so, it probably is. If you feel enough doubt to ask "Sage Advice" for an opinion, it almost certainly is (but go ahead and ask anyway, especially if you feel you need moral support). On the other hand, if your first reaction to an unusual use of a spell is, "Wow, that's clever!" you're probably all right. In the latter case, you can always change your mind if the spell becomes a problem; as the DM it's your job, as well as your privilege, to bring things under control if they get out of hand. Here's a couple of other things to keep in mind:

Don't be a spoilsport. You are (or you ought to be) running your campaign for the players' enjoyment, so don't rain on their parade if you can help it. If somebody tries something cute with a spell or magical item, don't just say, "No way!"

Can the caster of an Otiluke's telekinetic sphere use it to fly?

The description for the priest spell *random causality* (from the *Tome of Magic*) lists the saving throw as "Neg." Who or what makes the saving throw? The wielder of the weapon? And against what? What if the spell is cast before the weapon is drawn, or when it lies on a table? Also, what is the correct casting time and duration for the spell? If the target weapon is in a creature's possession (drawn or not), the creature can attempt a saving throw vs. spell to negate the effect. An unattended weapon has no saving throw. The duration is 3 rounds, plus one round/caster level. The casting time is 6.

The normal description of the *chill touch* spell in the *Player's Handbook* says the spell can repel undead that the caster touches, but the spell's description in the RAVENLOFT® setting doesn't say anything about repelling undead. Can *chill touch* repel undead in a RAVENLOFT game?

A spell's listing in a RAVENLOFT product tells you what's different about the spell when it's used in RAVENLOFT. Anything not mentioned works normally. So, yes,

part of the spell wouldn't, but the explosion should.

No, it shouldn't. You stopped reading the spell description too soon and missed the part that says the *fireball* creates little pressure (second sentence). A *fireball* doesn't generate any concussion.

Can the caster of an *Otiluke's telekinetic sphere* use it to fly?

Yes, after a fashion. Subjects inside the sphere can be moved as if subjected to the 5th-level wizard spell *telekinesis* (20 feet per round), provided they weigh no more than 5,000 lbs. There is no reason the caster couldn't make herself the spell's subject.

What would happen if you fire two wheel-lock pistols at point blank range (2') at a person who has a *protection from normal missiles* spell cast on him?

Wouldn't the pistol shots be inside the spell's minimum range?

Protection from normal missiles makes the recipient immune to any small missiles (pistol and musket shots included), regardless of the range from which they are launched. Note that cannons and

What the Hell is a Baatezu?



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Try to think of a result that takes the adventure in an unexpected direction—one that the players hadn't bargained for—or that is at least amusing. I once had a player target a *create water* spell inside a blue dragon's mouth. The player confidently told me that this action would surely cause the dragon's lighting breath weapon to short out. As it happened, the dragon was an illusion and the player's attitude told me that the character in question certainly believed in it. If the dragon had been real, I probably would have decided that the breath would scatter the water in a gout of steam and spray, provided that the breath and the water appeared more or less simultaneously (which I could have determined from the initiative rolls). Perhaps, with a failed saving throw, the collision of breath and created water could have led to a whole lot of draconic coughing, gagging, and spitting. Such an event might even have rendered the dragon unable to act for a round (not unlike accidentally inhaling a beverage). As it happened, the spell had no visible effect on the illusory dragon at all; the water just fell in a big splash. The players didn't tumble to the clue and had to flee the illusory dragon. Note that *create water* cannot produce water inside a creature, but I think a dragon's mouth might just open wide enough so that a gout of water created within the space spanned by its jaws might not actually be inside the dragon.

Beware when players start telling you how things work. Before running a game, take the time to become familiar with the spells and magical items the PCs carry. That means keeping current copies of everybody's character sheets (this also helps when players forget them), including spell books and lists of priest spells. When a player tries something odd, open up your rulebook and flip to the spell or item description, study it, and decide if the action is even remotely possible. The discussion of *Tenser's floating disc* in issue #241 is nothing more than a step-by-step review of the parameters set forth in the spell description. About a year before writing the column for issue #241, I had a player at a convention try to use a *floating disc* to attack a group of tanar'ri the party had been pursuing over a series of rooftops. Before the

session even started, the player had boasted that he could get some real mileage out of the spell and that I'd better be careful. So, when the player announced that his character was breaking off the chase to cast *Tenser's floating disc*, load it with flaming oil, and send it after the tanar'ri about two blocks away, my jaw dropped. The character was three stories up, and there was a city street between the wizard and his targets. "You realize," I said, "that the disc winks out unless there's a surface no more than three feet below it, so this disc is going to wink out crossing the street and dump flaming oil all over some pedestrian or the building, or both?" Then the player's jaw dropped. As I pointed out last April, sometimes characters are smarter than their players. Because the character in question was a version of Tenser himself, I decided he knew the limitations of the spell pretty well. I didn't feel the need to point out that if the PCs, with movement rates of

barn (both places where there could be a fair amount of flammable dust in the air). A *fireball* (or *lightning bolt*) cast in a cloud of grain dust might very well generate a secondary explosion that includes a massive concussion.

As for innovative spell uses that work, here are three of my personal favorites:

Using pyrotechnics as a fire extinguisher. My druid characters almost always pack this spell, because it can turn any fire into a big cloud of smoke and snuff out the fire to boot. This leads my DMs to place a limit on how big a fire the spell can affect. (As the spell is written, one low-level spellcaster could put out a fire of any size, say the Sun or the whole Plane of Elemental Fire.) I recommend a 10' cube per caster level.

Using rope trick as a sky hook. Many a time, I've had PCs in situations where a firmly affixed rope would be useful, but no good point of attachment was at hand. So cast *rope trick*. The spell can lift a piece of rope from 5 feet to 30 feet long; long enough to haul a buddy out of a pit or swing over a chasm when there's no place to pound in a spike. Sometimes 30 feet of rope is long enough to scale a wall when a grapple might make enough noise to alert guards.

Using cantrip as a sketchbook. When questioning an NPC about someone's appearance, use a *can trip* spell to create a two-dimensional image of the person being described. Adjust the image until it matches the unknown character's appearance just as a police artist would. Note that if the witness has a faulty memory or lively imagination, the image you get won't look anything like the unknown person, but the trick can work well. (The process can draw lots of attention, so be careful where you try it.)

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12, couldn't keep up with the tanar'ri, the disc—with a movement rate of 6—wasn't going to overtake the foe, or even that tanar'ri are immune to normal fire. Sometimes player attempts at "innovation" are just plain silly.

Long-time readers of this column might recall that I have said spells do what their descriptions say they do and do nothing else. That's true, but it also means players and DMs have to read the spell descriptions and understand exactly what they do. For magical effects that don't actually produce energy or matter, that makes things pretty cut and dried—if it's not in the description, it doesn't happen. On the other hand, many spells do produce energy or matter. A *fireball*'s fiery blast doesn't produce any concussion, but it is fire. Fire sets things alight, uses up oxygen, and produces at least some light and noise. It's a bad idea to cast a *fireball* in a mine or

Skip Williams reports that a character of his was once vainly trying to wash some contact poison off some ioun stones he had found. The poison proved nearly impossible to remove. While the character was preoccupied with the stones, two dragons attacked, and the character slew one dragon by tossing a poisoned ioun stone down its gullet, much to the DM's chagrin and the delight of his fellow players.



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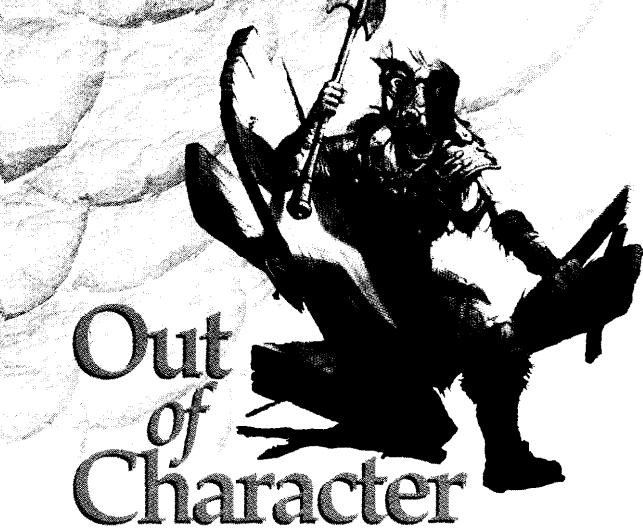


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Out of Character

By Peter Adkison

The greatest heroes of myth and legend didn't just wake up one day and decide, "I want to be a hero!" Most heroes have a strong inner drive that stems from some event in their life, or perhaps destiny took a hand in events, or maybe they were reluctant to take up their quest in the beginning. In any case, there's usually a story behind why a hero is, well, *heroic*. Here are some brief ideas that can be useful in helping your players develop their heroes' backgrounds.

Tragedy. In this scenario, the hero has experienced some terrible tragedy early in life. Conan watched Thulsa Doom destroy his village and grew up plotting his revenge. Luke Skywalker left the farm to join the Rebellion after discovering his aunt and uncle had been killed by Imperial stormtroopers.

Flight. Some characters take up the path of the wanderer because they are leaving behind a life where they didn't fit in. This was the story of Drizzt from the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting; he didn't embrace the evil practices of his homeland and the cruelties performed in the name of Lolth.

Exile. Similar to flight, the hero has left his or her homeland, but in this case because of a crime the hero allegedly committed. The hero might be innocent, or maybe the act was crime only against an evil institution, like freeing a slave or rescuing another wrongly accused person. Example: Caine from the original *Kung-Fu* TV series.

In the Beginning

Destiny. Some characters are destined for greatness. Probably the greatest example is Arthur Pendragon, who was destined from birth to be King of Britain. Another example is the Eternal Champion, in his various incarnations (Elric, Dorian Hawkmoon, Erekose, etc.) who is destined to serve the Balance.

Heritage. This is similar to destiny but has to do more with who the hero's parents are. Hercules was destined to greatness as the son of Zeus. Another example would be the Dalai Lama.

Outcast. The hero had a rough childhood because he or she was different. Perhaps the character was a half breed or had some physical deformity. The character is probably sensitive to this issue and is driven to prove his or her worth. One example is Cyrano DeBergerac, who was sensitive about his enormous nose, but this probably gave him the drive to focus on becoming such a great swordsman. This motive works well for underdog heroes, particularly if you allow players to play non-standard races like goblins or gully dwarves.

Mentor. Most heroes have a mentor, someone who teaches the hero a craft and a philosophy. The mentor might send the hero on a quest, or the mentor may be killed or abducted, forcing the hero into action.

Item. The hero happens upon an item that is linked with a destiny. The hero's possession of the item pulls the hero, perhaps reluctantly, into a larger plot, eventually testing the hero's mettle. The

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classic example is Bilbo Baggins from *The Hobbit*, who stumbles upon the One Ring.

Abduction. The hero is kidnapped—perhaps for ransom, or perhaps because of mistaken identity—and later escapes. The hero's quest would probably be to get home, but in the process the hero develops friendships and a taste for adventure. Once the hero returns home, he or she has trouble adapting to mundane life and again picks up the sword.

Greatness. Not all heroes make their reputation with sword or spells. Some heroes are simply people of great character who are thrust into greatness by taking the right stand at the right time and place, like Abraham Lincoln.

Once you have a well-developed background for a hero, it's so much easier to come up with interesting plots of the characters. The hero who had an abducted mentor can find clues leading to the mentor's captors; the hero in exile can be chased by bounty hunters; and the hero who came out of tragedy can encounter others who have suffered similarly.



Peter's heroes are the great game designers and novelists, particularly J.R.R. Tolkien, whose works have inspired this wonderful industry.



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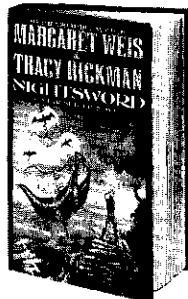
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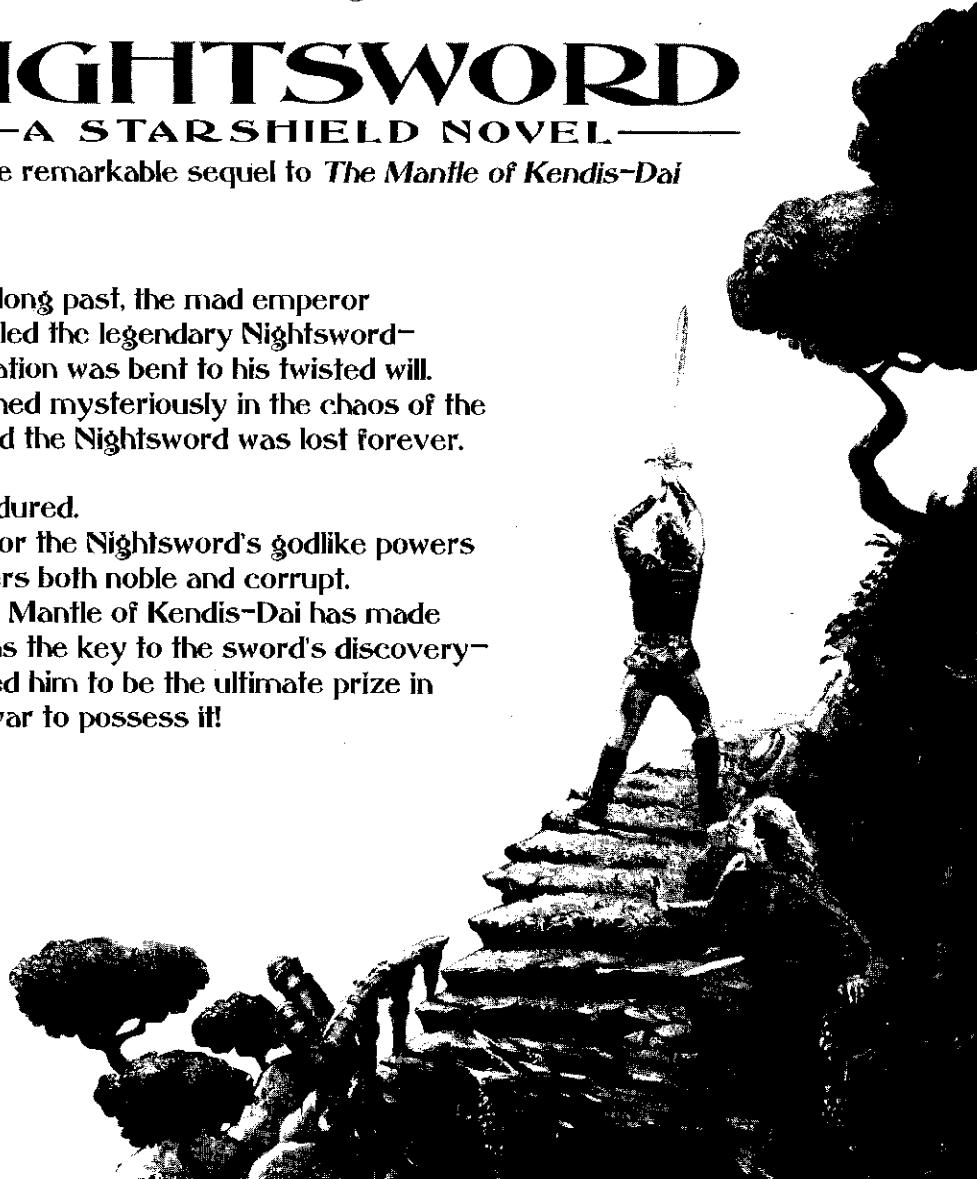
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The captain had returned with priceless stories from rakasta bards about their nation, origins, and beliefs. According to the rakasta, their origins are ancient, even older than the lupins'. A poem tells of a clever cat who fell in love with her human master, Kum-rah – the shaman of a tribe worshiping the Immortal Ka. The cat, named Ba-steh, endeavored to protect and serve her master, often supporting the Immortal's cause. As a reward, Ka transformed Ba-steh into a young woman who soon married Kum-rah. But one day, desiring to test his work, Ka sent a rat scurrying across the shaman's sacred cave. Dismayed, Kum-rah observed his young wife who, forgetting herself, chased and gruesomely dispatched the hapless rodent. Ka was disappointed. At first the Immortal wanted to turn her back into a cat, but a herald pointed out this would be unfair to his faithful shaman. Clearly, she could not remain a human either. Therefore, Ka transformed them both into creatures neither human nor cat. Thus were the first rakasta born.

Decades later, Kum-rah died. Nine times he died serving Ka, and nine times Ka revived him to serve him more. At the tenth death, Ka finally allowed his shaman to rest. The Immortal, to ease Ba-steh's inconsolable pain, allowed her to become his servant, and she took her place at Ka's side. There, Ba-steh learned about magic, the outer planes, and the ways of immortals. Eventually, she outgrew her charge and left to learn about the

Nyxmir 11, A.Y. 2001
After our fearless skipper's
visit to Bellayne,
and mine to Limbo,
I regained the safety of my
study aboard the
Princess Ark.

rest of the universe. In her quest for knowledge, she finally attained immortality herself.

The story does not end here. Before departing Mystara, Ba-steh left behind many sons and daughters. At long last pleased with the result, Ka made a final gift to the shaman's descendants. After Ba-steh's departure, he transformed the most powerful Mystaran cats into rakasta. In the millennia that followed, the original family grew, diversified, and left their home. They traveled to faraway lands and claimed them. Some traveled as far as Patera, a moon over Mystara, finding the most successful rakasta empire yet.

Meanwhile, Ba-steh, exploring the planes, found a world where she took her place as a powerful deity in a realm very similar to Mystara's ancient Nithia, where humans worshiped cats and everything feline. She was known there as Bastet. Alas, after many centuries of unrivaled spiritual leadership, the realm of her mortal followers collapsed before the onslaught of more organized eastern and northern conquerors.

Her earthly kingdom quickly sunk into the depth of misery and mediocrity, her worship gradually supplanted by other faiths. Despite her great power, she still could not reverse the sad situation. Many cats died at the hands of infidels, and Bastet finally left. She returned to her native plane, that of Mystara, traveling across dimensions and time.

Upon her return, Bastet discovered thriving rakasta communities along with several Immortal protectors. This was far more exciting than mere cat-loving humans. With some help from Ka, at once she summoned all these Immortal patrons. Since there was no clear leader of a rakasta "pantheon," patrons agreed to negotiate with her. Powerful Bastet gave some of her permanent immortal essence to these established immortals, as a token of goodwill. In exchange, these immortals pledged not to interfere with Bastet's endeavor to establish her own following and eventually position herself as the leading immortal force behind all rakasta.¹

Creating a Rakasta PC

Rakasta are created much as any other character, using the racial ability modifiers given in Table 1. Unless stated otherwise, racial minimums and maximums are 3 and 18. Size and weight are based largely upon the rakasta's breed and Strength score. Should you decide to make female characters smaller, a -10% size difference is recommended for rakasta up to 70 inches tall, -20% for taller specimens. Weight requires more calculation but is also based upon size and Strength.

Example: The male simbasta's size is 73+ Strength. A 16-Strength simbasta would then stand 89 inches tall. Its weight is (Size × Strength)/2.4. This means multiply the simbasta's basic height in inches by its Strength score. Then divide the total by the indicated number. This simbasta should therefore weigh (73 x 16)/2.4 = 486 lbs.

Note: The "basic rakasta" or "moggie" statistics are included here for comparison with other breeds. It is assumed the basic rakasta hero (from the RED STEEL™ Campaign Set) is but one of many alley rakasta. Should you decide to use this material, the basic rakasta should no longer be available. Instead, roll a "random" moggie.

Table 2 lists special abilities and weaknesses inherent to humanoid felines. Some apply only to certain categories of rakasta, while others affect all rakasta. Table 1 lists which rakasta are affected by which features.

Table 3 lists the classes available to the various rakasta groups. Although rakasta cannot be multiclassed, they can be dual-classed following conventional game rules. Domestic rakasta are restricted to the following wizard types: mage, conjurer, enchanter, illusionist, and transmuter. Note that wild and greater rakasta can use only the wokan kit, a wizard specialty kit from the RED STEEL Campaign Set.

Table 4 provides thieving skill adjustments. Tables 5 and 6 deal with appearances of domestic rakasta breeds and bloodlines.

Ability Adjustments for Alley Rakasta

Roll 1d20 for each statistic. A roll of 1 indicates a -2 adjustment for the ability. A roll of 2-5 indicates a -1 adjustment. A roll of 14-19 indicates a +1 adjustment. A roll of 20 indicates a +2 adjustment. If the total of all adjustments is +1 or more, the moggie has a high fear of water. If the total of all adjustments is -2 or worse, the moggie has no fear of water. Otherwise the moggie has a moderate fear of water. Specific racial adjustments and other features only have a 25% chance of being passed on to the moggie's progeny (roll d%: 1-25 father's, 26-50 mother's, 51-100 random).

Special Abilities & Weaknesses

Rakasta have special abilities. Some may vary with their age, as listed below and in Table 2.

Roar: Most ancestors and greater rakasta have a roar powerful enough to affect their foes (see Table 1 for individual listing). The roar must be used in the first round of any combat encounter to be effective and counts as an action. Table 2 lists the effects of the roar.

Fear of Water: See Table 1 for each rakasta's rating. Entering open water requires a successful Wisdom check, else halve the rakasta's Strength and Dexterity ratings (rounded down) until out of the water. Halve Charisma as well until dry. Rakasta listed with *None* are immune to this limitation. *Moderate* fear requires a normal Wisdom check. *High* fear adds a +4 penalty to the check.

Feline Physiology: All rakasta except the basic rakasta can gather their strength and release it in a sudden burst of activity. When doing so, a rakasta may temporarily increase its Strength as follows: subtract half the rakasta's normal Strength score from 10; add the result rounded up to the rakasta's Strength.

If using the AD&D® rules for fighters' Strength, apply the calculations to the percentage points instead, using 60 as the baseline. For example, a Strength of 18/80 yields a temporary Strength of 18/00 ($60-40=20$; $18/[80+20]=18/00$). Anything beyond 18/00 should be treated as a Strength of 19. Non-fighter types exceeding a score of 18 should be counted as 18/50 Strength (not 19).

This burst of energy lasts a number of rounds equal to half the rakasta's Constitu-



tution score (rounded down), or until the rakasta decides to calm down, whichever comes first. Each time this ability is used, the rakasta must rest for as many turns as the number of rounds the burst of energy lasted. Rakasta must sleep 12 hours each day in addition to these cat naps, although not necessarily at one time or during night hours. If a rakasta fails to complete either, its Strength, Dexterity, and Intelligence scores are all halved (rounded down) until properly rested. Felines normally rest 16 hours a day, but rakasta can limit their rest to 12 hours when adventuring.

All rakasta are light sleepers. They can wake up at any suspicious sound, provided they make a successful detect noise roll. Add a 20% bonus for each subsequent sound. For example, a snoring companion does not affect a sleeping rakasta. A companion waking up and

1. This opening story relates to the *Princess Ark* episode "In the Eyes of the Cat" originally published in DRAGON® Magazine issue #181 and later in the *Champions of MYSTARA™* boxed set. Raman Nabonidus, the ship's sage, provides a supplemental entry to the ship's log as he attempts to describe rakasta breeds of Mystara, from the Known World to the Savage Coast.

Table 1: Racial Modifiers & Other Statistics

Breed	STATISTICS						Size	Weight		Claws		Fear of Water	
	St	Dx	Co	In	Wi	Ch	(inches)	(pounds)	MV	Bite	(SM/L)	Roar	
Ancestors (Strength 16-19, max. 12 Intelligence & Wisdom)													
Cave Rakasta	+3	-2	-	-1	-2	+1	82+St	SizexSt./2.2	12	1d12	d4/2d4	Y	
Rakastodon Fatalis	+3	-1	-	-2	-2	-	76+St	SizexSt/2.1	12	2d6	d4+1/2d4	Y	
Greater Rakasta (min. 14 Strength, max. 14 Wisdom)													
Fast Runner	-	+2	-	-	-2	-	62+St	SizexSt/5.5	15	d4+1	d2/d2	N	
Jakar	+2	+1	-1	-	-2	-	68+St	SizexSt/4	9	1d8	d3/d4+1	Y	
Mountain Rakasta	+1	+2	-1	-	-2	-	68+St	SizexSt/4.2	12	1d6	d3/d4	N	
Pardasta	+1	+1	-	-	-2	-	64+St	SizexSt/4.4	9	1d6	d3/d4	Mod.	
Sherkasta	+2	-	-	-	-2	-	79+St	SizexSt/2.4	12	1d10	d4+1/d6+1	Y	
Simbasta	+2	-	-	-	-2	+1	73+St	SizexSt/2.4	12	1d10	d4/6+1	Y	
Snow Pardasta	+1	-	+1	-	-2	-	60+St	SizexSt/4.3	9	1d6	d3/d4	N	
Wild Rakasta (min. 12 Strength, min. 8 Dexterity, max. 16 Wisdom)													
Caracasta	+1	-	+1	-	-2	-	56+St	SizexSt/4.3	9	d4+1	d3/d4	N	
Cloud Pardasta	+1	+1	-	-	-2	-	57+St	SizexSt/4.6	9	1d4	d2/d3	N	
Jakarundi	-	+1	-	+1	-2	-	55+St	SizexSt/4.6	9	1d3	d2/d3	N	
Lynxman	-	-	+2	-	-2	-	58+St	SizexSt/4.5	12	1d4	d2/d3	N	
Ocelasta	-	+1	+1	-	-2	-	56+St	SizexSt/4.6	9	1d3	d2/d3	N	
Servasta	-	+2	-	-	-2	-	58+St	SizexSt/5.0	12	1d4	d2/d3	N	
Domestic Rakasta (min. 9 Strength, min 8 Dexterity)													
Alley Rakasta	*	*	*	*	*	-2	*	54+St	SizexSt/4.6	9	1d4	d2/d3	N
Basic Rakasta	-	+2	-	-	-2	-	64+St	SizexSt/4.2	9	1d4	d2/d3	N	
Domestic Rakasta	-	+2	-1	+1	-2	-	52+St	SizexSt/4.7	9	1d2	d2/d2	N	

MV: indicates a rakasta's normal movement factor. For the D&D® Game, multiply the rate by ten to get the distance moved per turn. Example: MV9 becomes 90' (30' for the D&D Game).

Bite: gives the amount of damage for a rakasta's bite.

Claws: specifies claw damage (front first, then rear claws). When not using artificial weapons, rakasta can make three attacks (claw /claw /bite) plus another two with rear claws if both front claws hit. Strength bonuses do apply. All rakasta have retractile claws to some extent.

rummaging inside a backpack does. An approaching thief will too, unless the thief makes a successful move silently roll. Use common sense in adjudicating these situations.

Natural Concealment: Wild rakasta can conceal themselves when hiding or moving slowly within their natural environment (see individual descriptions). Greater rakasta have the same ability, but all chances are halved. Table 2 lists the chances of success.

Catnip: Called *nepeta rakastaria* by some Known World sages, this plant of ancient Ochalean origins has a powerful effect on all Mystaran felines. Unless making a successful Wisdom check, the rakasta feels an uncontrollable and immediate urge to rub and roll on the plant, displaying a state of utter ecstasy (licking, biting, chewing, rubbing its cheeks and chin, shaking its head, purring, growling, leaping in the air). The victim never actually eats catnip but

only enjoys its contact and smell. This display persists for as many rounds as the rakasta failed its Wisdom check, during which time it can make no action (attacks, spell casting, etc). If attacked at this time, the rakasta retains all magical, armor, and Dexterity bonuses to AC, while the attacker sustains a -2 penalty to its attack rolls against this rakasta due to its unpredictable twists and rolls. There must be a fresh patch of at least a foot-square in order to affect a rakasta.

Whiskers: Part of all rakasta Dexterity comes from their *vibrissae*, which act as air-current detectors. Should these be damaged or cut off, the rakasta loses 2 points of Dexterity, and both the blind-fighting and detect invisible proficiencies. These whiskers regrow in 1d4 weeks.

Life Span

The basic life span of a rakasta is 90 years (maximum longevity is 90 + 2d8). Middle age for a rakasta comes at about half

its base life span (45 years for a generic rakasta). Old age comes at two-thirds its base life span (or 60 years, minimum 40 years), and venerable age at its base life span (90 years, minimum 60 years). A middle-aged rakasta loses a point of Strength and Constitution, but gains a point of Intelligence and Wisdom. An old rakasta loses two points of Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution, but gains a point of Wisdom. A venerable rakasta loses a point of Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution, but gains a point of Intelligence and Wisdom.

Weapon & Armor Limitations

Rakasta have no limitations on what weapons they can use, other than class-related or campaign setting restrictions. Ancestors and great rakasta never use missile weapons other than hand-thrown weapons (stones, javelins, hand axes, etc). The former weapons are either too complex, out of character, or simply

deemed cowardly. Hand-to-hand or unarmed bloodlust is more in their natural style. Some rakasta will not use any missile weapons at all due to their Warrior Honor. Beast-riders, honorbound, defenders, and wild rakasta never use firearms. There are no further weapon limitations.

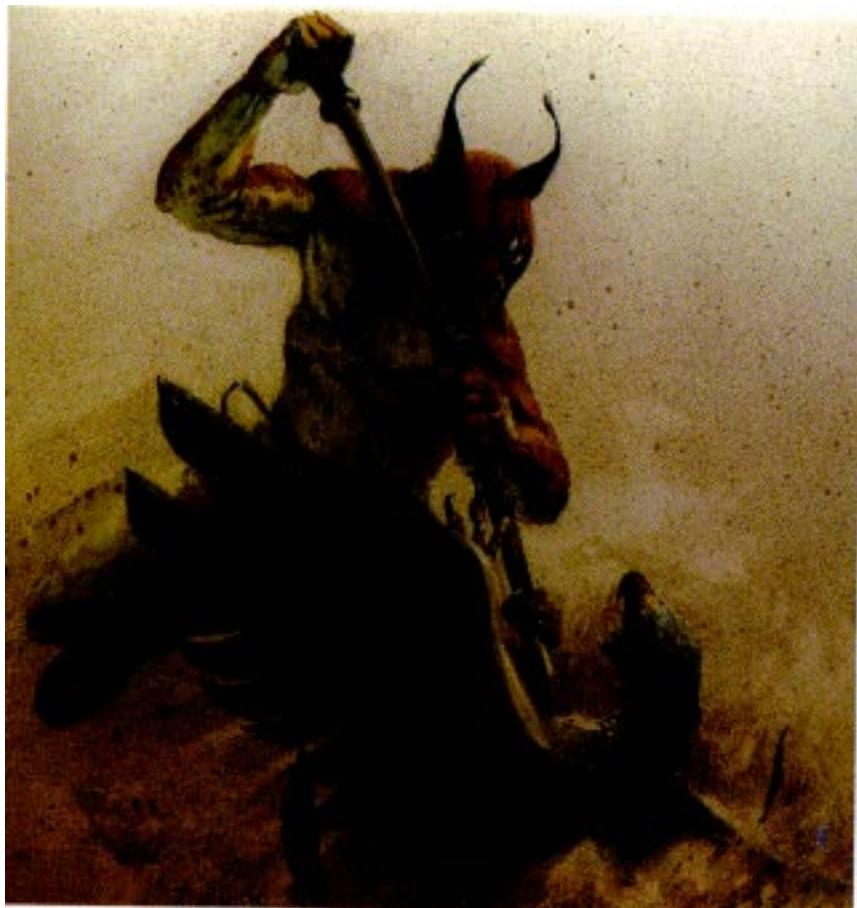
More lightly built rakasta stay away from heavy armor as a matter of racial preference. Rakasta listed with a weight divider of 4.6 or more (see Table 1) avoid armor whose standard encumbrance exceeds 25 lbs. Rakasta with a weight divider of 4.1 or more avoid armor whose standard encumbrance exceeds 40 lbs. Rakasta with a weight divider of 4 or less have no armor restrictions, other than those usually imposed by the chosen character class or the particular campaign setting.

Increase the weight of armor for larger rakasta, as follows: For rakasta up to 70" tall, use the normal armor encumbrance. For every extra 4" size (or fraction thereof), add another 10% (retain fractions). For example, normal plate mail is listed at 50 lbs. For each extra 4" size, add +10% (+5 pounds). For an 80" tall rakasta, this armor should weigh $50 + (3 \times 5) = 65$ lbs.

Generally speaking, rakasta favor swiftness, maneuverability, and aggressive tactics over cautious or defensive approaches (such as heavy armor). Ancestors never wear armor other than hides and bones. Greater and wild rakasta do not normally manufacture metal armor of any sort, but they might wear it if made available to them.

Starting Hit Points

Rakasta can be awesome creatures. Making them available to play as heroes implies they all start as 1st-level characters with hit points corresponding to class. Although this is technically true, it would be better not to start some of them as 1st-level heroes. Ancestors and greater rakasta should never be created as anything less than 3rd-level PCs, and they should be used with a party of that level or better. Likewise, wild rakasta initially should be created at least as 2nd-level PCs. In general, rakasta should always start among the lowest level PCs in a party of varying experience levels.



Caracasta

These wild rakasta, originally natives of Davania's Meghala Kimata plains, now live mostly in Hule. Many centuries ago they joined the expanding Milenian empire to defend themselves against other rival rakasta such as the simbasta, pardasta, and fast runners (q.v.). From the Milenians they adopted the use of bows and arrows. Their alliance to a human race and the use of a cowardly missile weapon made them pariahs, but all was fine until the Milenian empire collapsed. The caracasta lived on as a marginal people, hated and stalked by their greater cousins.

Huleans showed up on Davania, much later, in a new attempt to colonize the area. After this attempt failed as had the one before, many of the caracasta who had allied with the invaders left with them and resettled in Hule. Caracasta aren't uncommon in the ranks of the Hulean armies. As a reward for their services, the hagiarchy gave the caracasta conquered lands, mostly dry woodlands and scrub that human farmers had disdained. These rakasta are known in Hule as the Karakulak.

Their short, dense fur is a uniform pale reddish-brown. Most conspicuous, elongated tufts of black hair protrude at the tips of their large, pointy ears, which they quickly twitch when they are agitated. The caracasta use their ears to quietly exchange simple messages among each other, comparable to empathy.

Under Hulean guidance, the Karakulak have learned to manufacture and use specially made arrows and composite short bows that exploit their natural energy bursts, maximizing short range fire. When non-spellcasting Karakulak fire their bows during an energy burst, they gain a +1 bonus to initiative and their arrows inflict an additional +1 damage, while the firing range becomes 7/12/18 Normal bow range otherwise remains 5/10/18 (For the D&D game, enhanced bow range should be 70/120/180 vs. the usual 50/100/150). These weapons require a separate bow proficiency to use and are strictly limited to native Karakulak.

Spellcasting caracasta cannot use the special bows regardless of class. They can, however, use the quick movement of their ears to cast spells requiring only

Table 2: Special Abilities & Weaknesses

Adult Rakasta	Young & Old Rakasta	Cubs & Venerable Rakasta
Infravision: 60'	Same	30' only
Balance & Reflexes: sustain half damage from any fall.	Three quarter damage	Full damage
Detect Invisible & Ethereal Beings: +4 bonus for detection (see DMG chapter 13)	+2 bonus	No bonus
Blind Fighting: free proficiency	Same	None for cubs.
Natural Concealment: 50% chances of success within 100', or 70% beyond 100'.	Old: 60% (80% beyond 100') Young: 30% (50% beyond 100')	Venerable: 70% (90% beyond 100') Cub: 10% (30% beyond 100')
Detect Noise: 15% chance to detect noise as a 1st-level thief, plus racial bonus. Thieves may further improve this ability at higher levels.	10% chance only, plus racial bonus.	5% chance only, plus racial bonus
Roar: opponents within 100' of the rakasta make their attack rolls and saving throws with a -1 penalty for d6+1 rounds following the roar.	Within 80' for d4+1 rounds	Within 60' for 1d4 rounds None for cubs.
Special Weakness: Fear of water; -1 penalty to saving throws vs. sound-based attacks.	Fear of water; 1 penalty vs sound-based attacks.	No such special weaknesses, except fear of water.

verbal and somatic components (any spell up to third level in the D&D game). This spellcasting technique requires two proficiency slots and can be used independently from the energy burst. AL: any non-lawful.

Cave Rakasta

These creatures of Mystara's primeval past are direct descendants of Ba-steh, although their bloodlines are closer to Ba-steh's shaman husband than to herself. They remain essentially primitive, oversized versions of the contemporary simbasta (q.v.). Their kind has long since been relinquished to the Hollow World. Despite their tremendous strength and ferocity, their primal ways have sealed their fate on the surface world.

Unlike modern simbasta, the cave rakasta have a more powerful roar than the one described for greater rakasta when using its natural energy burst. This enhanced roar causes fear to all opponents within 100' who fail a saving throw vs. paralyzation (paralysis for the D&D rules). The fear lasts d6+1 rounds, during which victims drop any weapons at hand and attempt to escape in the opposite direction at maximum speed. AL: any non-chaotic.

Cloud Pardasta

Contrary to what their name seems to imply, these are not a greater rakasta. This wild felid type remains one of the best examples of arboreal rakasta, and somewhat of a legend as well. Cloud Pardasta live in the forests of Bellissaria and Skothar, along the Minaean Coast, Tangor Bay, and the Tangor Peninsula. On Skothar, they call themselves *Rimau-Dahan* –literally, fork-of-branch tigers.

Cloud Pardasta gained their name from the large spots on their backs, which look like cloudy blotches. Their base coats varies from brown to pale or rich yellow, with white or light tawny on the inner limbs, throat, and chest.

The odd name also comes from their unusual ability. When using their energy burst, the cloud pardasta can harness natural magical forces pervading the forest and blend away into its mist, fog, or clouds. In effect, the cloud pardasta can cast *dimension door* to a distance of 10' per experience level, at which point the energy burst ends. The cloud pardasta may invoke this power at any time while the energy burst still lasts. The cloud pardasta must be in contact with forest mist when they perform the *dimension door*.

Cloud pardasta clans are tucked away in small villages built on the branches of

very tall trees, virtually invisible from the ground. Cloud pardasta suffer no movement penalty when inside a tree. They have been observed by some hunters to sneak or run down tree trunks head first, without any difficulty whatsoever. They can hang from branches using only their legs, or run underneath one with ease. Jumping from one branch to another is a native game, which they do without requiring Dexterity checks or the use of a jumping proficiency, unless the distance exceeds 15 feet (horizontally or downward). Cloud pardasta have free jumping proficiencies, as can be expected of arboreal creatures (use the acrobatics skill instead for the D&D game). To accomplish these feats, the cloud pardasta's long tail must be free to help balance movements. On the other hand, they lose two points of Dexterity when caught on the ground. AL: any non evil.

Fast Runners

The fast runners dwell on the dry grasslands of the Meghala Kimata where they compete with Simbasta prides for food and freedom. Fast runners also survive in the southern Steps of Jen on Skothar and on the Isle of Dawn's southern plateaus.

The coat of a long runner is coarse, varying from yellowish-grey to golden or reddish-fawn with small dark spots. These tall, lanky rakasta often stun observers by their running speed and their agility when pursuing a prey. This alone makes them the most successful hunters among rakasta. This notoriety and the ensuing attention has been a curse to them for centuries.

The life of the fast runners remains indeed a difficult one. On Davania, where they call them selves Msongo, they must beware of the Simbasta (q.v.) who view them as annoying pests. Elsewhere, Thothian monarchs and Jennite warlords who wish to bolster the ranks of their armies often seek their services, often with less than amicable terms. The rich and the powerful covet them as household hunters and status symbols. Unfortunately, the fast runners are too few truly to challenge these difficult neighbors.

When using its natural energy burst, the Msongo can run at a much faster pace than other bipeds. Use optional rules for running presented in the AD&D Player's Handbook, with the following changes: the Msongo can triple its movement rate without any Strength check; quadruple it when succeeding a normal Strength check; quintuple it with a 4 penalty. Finally, with a -8 penalty, it can accelerate to six times its normal movement rate, but for one round only, after which the energy burst ends. No Constitution checks are otherwise required while the Msongo's energy burst is lasting. AL: any non-evil.

Jakar

This almost mythical creature hails from tropical rainforests and swamps on the Arm of the Immortal. Other indigenous races rarely venture deep into known jakar territory, so great is their fear of the powerful felidae, remaining instead within clear terrain and coastal areas.

Savage Coast explorers sailing from Vilaverde were the first easterners to encounter the jakar and call them the *onça grande*, or tall jaguar.

The heavily muscled jakar sport beautiful spotted coats, usually tawny with large rosettes circling smaller spots, or entirely black, which helps them remain concealed within rainforests. Some unscrupulous Vilaverdans have begun a nefarious trade, capturing jakar either for their pelts or as monsters to be shown in circuses. This trade, naturally, is fraught with dangers, judging m the growing number of Vilaverdan hunting expeditions failing to return.

The jakar normally live in small hunting clans, but on occasion high priests have risen from their ranks and founded more durable and advanced civilizations sweeping many of the small clans and uniting them. They often focused around powerful religious poles, with great pyramids,

temples, palaces, and fortresses built to protect them. If any, these remain hidden at the heart of the rainforest. Many times in the history of the warlike jakar, these kingdoms abruptly vanished as a result of bloody conflicts, the omnipresent rainforest quickly reclaiming their lost cities. Rumors of untold treasures and secret rums abound, which keeps the greedy coming.

The jakar tolerate and respect the were-jaguar, depending on prevailing alignments of the hunting clans, since they perceive it as a magical kin. Were-jaguars, on the other hand, never show goodwill toward the jakar and might very well cause them harm if given an

opportunity. Jakar have maintained a natural and mutual affinity with the common jaguar. Jakar have an empathic connection with the animal.

During the feline's natural energy burst, a 1st-level jakar's claw and bite attacks am equivalent to +1 magical weapons. They don't actually give attack or damage bonuses, only the ability to strike certain magical beings. For every five additional experience levels, the jakar improves this ability (+2 equivalent at level 6, +3 at level 11, etc). AL: any.

Jakarundi

This is the oddest-looking rakasta, appearing as a cross between a weasel and a rakasta because of its long neck, pointy head, and slender body. Its clans are well established in the rainforests of the Arm of the Immortal, getting along fairly well with the jakar people (q.v.).

The first Vilaverdan explorers encountered melanistic jakarundi, leading them to call these rakasta *tigrete preto*, literally "little black tiger" (or *trigrillo negro* for their neighboring customers). Their colors vary from black to brown, gray, red, or tawny yellow.

The jakarundi are perhaps the most talented wokani among wild rakasta. Although this hasn't been proven, some sages in Texeiras think that there may be some elven blood in them. Because of their magical talents, they are usually welcome among the jakar clans for the help they may offer. When using their natural burst of energy, jakarundi can cast one spell normally available to a wokan of half their experience level (rounded up). A jakarundi must succeed a Wisdom check at this time to choose a spell, else it is chosen at random among first-level spells. If not cast before the end of the energy burst, this spell vanishes on its own. Non-spellcasters make their Wisdom check with a -2 penalty, while spellcasting jakarundi benefit from a +2 bonus. AL: any non-lawful.

Lynxman

This strange rakasta claimed the coldest regions of Mystara. On Davania, these nomads travel as far as the southern tip of the Brasol Range. On Skothar and Brun, they do not venture past the Nentsun Plateaus, the Hyborian Reaches, or the Wyrmsteeth Range.

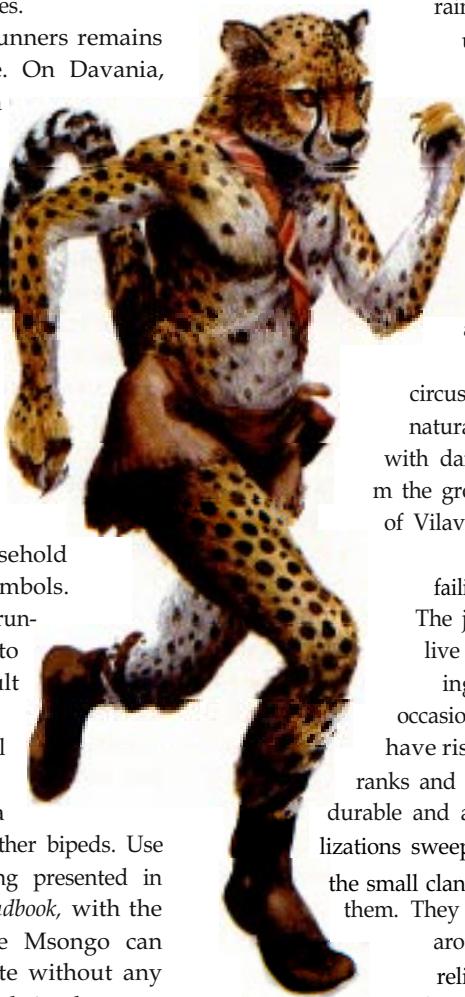


Table 3: Class Level Limitations

	Ftr	Pal	Rng	WE	Clr	Dru	Thf	Brd
Ancestor	15	-	12	-	6	12	-	6
Greater	U	-A	12B	6	9C	12	6D	9
Wild	12	-	15	6E	9	U	9	12
Domestic	9F	-	9	15	12	9	U	15
Basic	15	-	11	15	12	13	13	U

Exceptions: (other than those dictated by alignment limitations)

- A. Except simbasta, 12th level paladin.
- B. Except pardasta and now pardasta, 15th level ranger
- C. Except jakar and snow pardasta, 15th level cleric
- D. Except pardasta, 12th level thief
- E. Except jakarundi, 9th level wokan.
- F. Except alley rakasta, 12th level fighter.

Note: the wokan kit is the only available form of wizardry available to wild and greater rakasta (see RED STEEL™ Campaign Book, pg. 31 for the kit's description).

Table 4: Thieving Skill Adjustments

Skills	Great	Wild	Domestic
PP	-5%	-	-
OL	-5%	-	-
F/RT	-5%	-	-
MS	-	+10%	+5%
HS	-	+10%	+5%
DN	+5%	+10%	+5%
CW	- *	+5%**	+5%
RL	-10%	-5%	-

* Jakar, pardasta, and mountain rakasta have a 10% bonus to climb trees.

** The cloud pardasta has a 15% bonus to climb trees.

Recognizable by their tail, shortened as a protection against extreme colds, tufted ears, stocky bodies, and big broad paws, lynxmen are notorious for their thick neck ruffle when angered. Its pelage varies from reddish-tawny or cream with faint spots and facial lines in Davania forests, to grey in Skothar and Brun woodlands. In frozen regions, lynxmen turn pure white to blend in with the icy background.

These hardy felids travel the dark frozen expanses of the polar rims leading to Mystara's Hollow World. Their natural instinct guides them through these treacherous lands. Lynxmen travel between the two worlds according to the cycles linked to the clans' own totems, signs in the skies, or divinations from

their priests. Davanian clans know the way to Hollow World's Nithia, while their northern kin travel instead to the land of the Antalians. On this route, the latter compete with Norwold Malamutes (described in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #237—Lupins of Mystara). Lynxmen can move across snow at a normal speed.

When using their natural energy burst, lynxmen can shake off the effects of any cold-based attack, or survive a situation where natural cold would be fatal. For example, a lynxman accidentally falling into the sea in polar conditions might crawl out and still survive with one hit point left instead of freezing to death. It could also shake off all damage from a magical cone of cold. The energy burst ends immediately after any one such situation occurs. AL: any.

Mountain Rakasta

The mountain rakasta have claimed the entire continent of Brun as their native land. They favor above all unpopulated areas where they can freely hunt. If unchecked, these adaptable athletes claim any vacant land, including forests, swamps, grasslands, and semi-desert regions such as Terra Vermelha and Grande Carrascal in the Savage Coast. Humanoids usually get in their way, both as prey and hunter. As a result, the widely scattered tribes of mountain rakasta have adopted mountain ranges such as the Endworld Line, the Kurish Massif, and even the Wyrmsteeth Range as their true natural habitat.

The mountain rakasta's pelage varies from plain grey-brown, being the most common in the northern climes, to sometimes reddish or almost black. Accustomed to broken terrain, these adroit stalkers developed acrobatic skills unparalleled among rakasta. Many humanoids, both with awe and fear, have reported the ability of the Yutin people, as they call them, to perform stunning leaps. The mountain rakasta use this skill to leap over humanoid camp walls and moats, up into trees, or down from a rocky ledge, to stalk a prey or evade a sudden threat.

When using their energy burst, mountain rakasta choose to boost either their Strength or their Dexterity. They also have a free jumping proficiency with the following differences—broad jumping: no running start is ever needed for any leap, and the distance is $3d6 + \text{Dexterity}$; upward leap: $2d4 + \text{half Dexterity}$ (rounded up); downward leap: $3d12 + \text{Dexterity}$. AL: any.

Ocelotl

Although they are ground-dwellers, these wild rakasta favor forested regions on northwestern Davania and the southern half of the Arm of the Immortals. There aren't ocelotl tribes or nations, just scattered families traveling the land, selling their wares, entertaining villages, and telling their legends. A few easterners also know them as the Trigillos Errantes.

The ocelotl has one of the most beautiful coats among rakasta. This of course, makes them the target of some unscrupulous easterners. Spots cover their cream to tawny coats. A darker ring surrounds the spots' pale interior, which frequently join with each other, forming long, horizontal chains that almost become stripes. A white spot on the back of their ears gives the impression from a distance of two eyes staring backward.

The ocelotl people once had the opportunity to honor the evil Immortal Atzanteotl in exchange for power and protection. They recognized him for what he really was and moved on, choosing their own path in life. Angered with their attitude, Atzanteotl cast a curse upon them, condemning the Ocelotl never to rise as a powerful people. Over the centuries following the curse, the Ocelotl



spread out to the land in search of a secret to break the curse. Although they never found anything concrete, they did accumulate knowledge of Atzanteotl's evil and a few ways to counter it. Their unwavering resistance to the Immortal eventually caused Atzanteotl to lose interest in them, allowing the ocelotl to slowly work on their quest to weaken the curse and someday, perhaps, to break it. The curse consists of deadly epidemics striking ocelotl communities of more than 30.

In their quest the ocelotl developed the talent to heal their own wounds, once, when using their natural energy burst. If most of their wounds were caused by chaotic or evil magic, the ocelotl can cure up to three hit points per experience level. The latter includes spells cast by chaotic or evil spellcasters, or damage from chaotic or evil magical weapons. In all other situations, the cure affects up to one hit point per experience level. The ocelotl remain unable to alter Atzanteotl's epidemics, however. AL: any non-chaotic.

Pardasta

These clever rakasta can be found almost anywhere on Mystara, away from heavily populated centers—that is, regions with few human or demi-human settlements. Small tribes have been discovered fairly close to human settlements, but these rakasta are elusive and sneaky enough that people often fail to notice their presence at all. Their natural habitat includes any sort of woodland, savannahs, semi-deserts, and rugged mountains. Pardasta tribes exist especially on Skothar, Bellissaria, Ochalea, Cestia, and Davania, in regions stretching roughly between the 30th parallel.

Their pelage can be fairly short and sleek in warmer climes to deeply furred in the north. Base color varies from pale straw, tan, or gray-buff to bright reddish-yellow, or jet black for natives of heavily forested regions. Small spots cover their head and necks, turning to larger rosettes on their back and flanks. The base color of their throats, inner limbs, and belly remains white.

Pardasta are smart and strong enough to live near other rakasta or human settlements without too much difficulty. They often outwit the powerful simbasta (q.v.), they know how to avoid angering the mighty sherkasta (q.v.), and if threatened by humans they always find a way to exact a terrible revenge against their aggressors. Pardasta are supreme stalkers and always seem to find their quarry. They excel as thieves, spies, and rangers. They generally dislike tabaxi, unless they share the same alignment.

When using their energy burst, pardasta are immune to all mind-altering attacks (*fear, sleep, hypnotism, charm, etc.*). This does not affect their natural fear of water or spells that already had been cast upon them before they used their energy burst. They also have a permanent +2 bonus to their initiative rolls. AL: any non-lawful.

Rakastodon Fatalis

As with the cave rakasta (q.v.), the onslaught of more adaptable races on the surface world all but doomed the rakastodon to survive in the Hollow World as yet another witness of Mystara's forgotten past. It is the direct descendant of the tiger-like Ba-steh. Rakastodons now live in high grass or forested areas in the Hollow World's equatorial regions.

Rakastodons are a stump-tailed brutes, with massive forelimbs and saber-like fangs. Pelage varies, but a reddish-orange color seems common among their kin, sometimes with stripes. Their most impressive feature, the dirk-like fangs, are used to deliver the final blow to an immobilized victim.

The Rakastodons have been traditional rivals of the cave rakasta. As primitive as they may be, these chaotic loners remain at odds with the cave rakasta pride-oriented society. The sheer size, power, and organization of cave rakasta have prevented their kind from falling prey to these lethal hunters.

A Rakastodon may topple an opponent when using its natural energy burst. If the opponent is smaller or lighter than the rakastodon, it is automatically brought down with any successful claw attack. Else, the opponent needs to succeed a Strength check for each of the rakastodon's successful claw attacks. If the opponent's Strength is less than the rakastodon's, apply a -2 penalty for each point of difference. Once knocked down, a victim must succeed a saving throw vs. Paralyzation or die instantly from the rakastodon's next successful bite attack. AL: any non-lawful.

Servasta

These wild felids remain one of the lesser known eastern Davanian rakasta. Their realm lies on the savannahs and scrubs, where they compete with the pardasta and simbasta (q.v.). There, they call themselves *kisongo*.

Lean and lanky, the debonnaire servasta can be recognized by their small heads perched over slender necks and surmounted by huge bat-like ears. Small black spots cover their tawny coats, with

dark rings and a black tip marking their short tails.

The servasta use their huge ears to detect underground creatures, a talent that goes back thousand of years when their ancestors hunted simple rodents. They have an additional +10% bonus to hear underground noises, but with a -1% penalty for each foot in depth. Nowadays, servasta have developed a taste for other creatures also dwelling beneath the surface, including demihumans and humanoids, halflings being a most delectable treat.

The servasta rely on an elaborate combat style that consists of stalking underground prey from the surface until the latter comes out. Then, they jump upward and pounce down on the unsuspecting victim. Servasta can use this form of attack at will against prey less than a foot tall. On larger prey, the servasta's natural energy burst is necessary for this form of attack to succeed at all. If it does, servasta may either inflict maximum damage with any melee weapon at hand (including possibly a thief's backstab) or take a firm grip over the prey's

back and arms, allowing an automatic neck or shoulder bite every round until shaken off. The latter requires a successful Strength check with a -2 penalty. Servasta have a free tumbling skill (acrobatics with the D&D Game). AL: any non-lawful.

Sherkasta

Mightiest among the greater rakasta, sherkasta prowl the forests and swamps of southern Skothar. Some have also claimed the mountain forests of northern Skothar. The southerners, who call themselves the Harimau-Belang, remains the most common. Their base color runs from reddish-orange to reddish-yellow, with dark stripes and white or cream fur inside their limbs. Their northern cousins, the Tagh, show a thicker, light grey or white pelage, with brown or black stripes.

Table 5a: Hair Characteristics

1d20	Length	1d6	Texture	1d6	Form
1	Hairless*	1-2	Fine	1-3	Straight
2-10	Short	3-4	Coarse	4	Crinkled
11-15	Medium	5-6	Dense	5	Curly
16-20	Long	-	-	6	Wavy

* Essentially a very short, down-like fur. Do not roll for texture or form.

Table 5b: Domestic Coat Patterns & Colors

1d20 Coat Patterns

- 1 Colorpoint: generally a light coat (white, ivory, or pale cream) with darker extremities (lilac, chocolate, blue, sable, or ginger) covering the nose, ears, tail, and paws.
- 2-4 Particolor, 2: white coat with patches of a random secondary color.
- 5 Particolor, 3: white coat with patches of two other random colors.
- 6 Particolor, Calico: patches of black, cream, ginger, and white.
- 7-9 Tabby, Classic: dark oyster-shaped patterns on the flanks, butterfly-shaped markings on the shoulders, and rings on the tail. Roll for a basic coat color other than a very dark color. 10% chance white patches are present.
- 10 Tabby, Patched: patches of brown and ginger with darker stripes. 10% chance white patches are present.
- 11 Tabby, Spotted: darker spots extending to the tail; roll for basic coat color other than a very dark coloration. 10% chance white patches are present.
- 12 Tabby, Striped: dark stripe patterns; roll for basic coat color other than a very dark coloration. 10% chance white patches are present.
- 13 Tortoiseshell (torbie, tortie): black or blue, cream, and ginger colors evenly intermingled. 10% chance white patches are present.
- 14-19 Uniform: one single color. For detail-minded cat-lovers, some colors may be solid or show a lighter underlying coloration, depending on whether the hair is tipped, shaded, smoked, or ticked.
- 20 Van: similar to colorpoint (q.v.) except only the top of the head, ears, and tail are of a darker color.

1d100	Coat Color
1	Auburn
2-21	Black
22	Blue
23	Bronze
24	Brown
25	Champagne
26	Charcoal
27	Chocolate
28	Cinnamon
29-33	Cream
34-38	Fawn
39	Ginger
40-44	Golden
45-63	Gray
64	Lavender
65	Lilac
66	Peach
67	Pewter
68-72	Platinum
73	Ruddy
74	Sable
76-80	Silver
81-100	White

Table 5c: Physical Features

1d6	Face	1d6	Ears	1d6	Tail
1-2	round, pug-faced	1	Small (pointed, round or folded)	1-3	Normal
3-4	Intermediate	2-4	Medium, pointed	4-5	Long
5-6	Wedge-faced	5-6	Large, pointed	6	Stubby

The more reclusive sherkasta form small clans and shun contact with other races. Other individuals sometimes mix with neighboring populations of humans or demi-humans. Sherkasta, because of their size and ferocious appearance are normally considered evil monsters, or at least dangerous predators by other races. However, with time, a few become more accepted by the local population.

The sherkasta loathe the rakshasa evil spirits that resemble them. For centuries, individual rakshasas have subjected clans to a despotic rule or slavery. These spirits resort, to magic, fear, or blackmail to maintain their hold over the clans and influence their minds. Sherkasta can only unmask rakshasas for what they really are when attacking and realizing fangs and claws aren't hurting them. Rakshasas delight in pitting their feline slaves against humankind to further their own schemes. This has done great harm to the sherkasta clans and their relations with human populations. The power of the rakshasas over sherkasta clans can last decades, but usually a sherkasta escapes to return later, when it has reached a sufficient experience level to challenge the spirit and free its clan.

Sherkasta and weretigers, on the other hand, get along fairly well and sometimes ally against a common foe. Sherkasta can also maintain an empathic link with common tigers.

When using their natural energy burst, sherkasta can virtually shake off the effects of magic previously cast upon them. A successful Wisdom check dispels a first-level spell, provided it originated from a lower-level spellcaster. Sherkasta cannot alter the effects of area spells or spells that are not cast directly upon them (*fireballs*, *stinking clouds*, *phantasmal force*, etc). For example, a 10th-level sherkasta can dispel a *charm* cast by a 7-HD rakshasa, but not one cast by a rakshasa maharaja (13th-level spellcasting ability). Furthermore, at every fifth additional level, the sherkasta may increase its spell immunity one level (second-level spells at 6th level, third-level spells at 11th level, etc). AL: any non-evil.



Simbasta

These regal creatures once roamed most of Mystara. Over the centuries, they too have retreated in the face of human and demi-human hegemony and now live essentially on the continent of Davania, in the savannahs stretching around the Aryptian Basin, from the Adakkian Sound to the Pass of Cestia and the Gulf of Mar. They call themselves the Ikimizi.

Unlike most other rakasta, male and female simbasta look different from each other. The normal pelage color for both is a tawny yellow that blends with their natural environment of dry grasses. Color may vary from ginger to black, with the male sporting a huge mane, making it appear even taller than the

powerful sherkasta. This mane sets apart the simbasta male from the female.

Again, unlike other felids, simbasta are sociable creatures, naturally living in large clans called prides. Females, often siblings with their cubs, originally formed the core of the pride, with peaceful males ensuring safety and progeny. This arrangement demanded that young males born to pride simbasta leave to avoid unhealthy lineages. The stronger male simbasta usually headed the pride, until driven off by a younger or more powerful male. The first duty of the new master was then to eliminate all existing cubs, which among Ikimizi still is an ancient religious ritual. A brutal and shocking practice by human standards, it nevertheless ensured the strength of the prides. From there, a pervasive Code of Honor was slowly established, governing the behavior and society of modern simbasta. As a result of their solemn and dignified ways, the proud simbasta are the only rakasta capable of becoming paladins.

Simbasta generally consider normal lions as simple animals, yet they enjoy taming mature males—something they can do very well (+2 bonus to the proficiency). The relation between them and this animal is one of strength, where the simbasta means to demonstrate its own power before eventually releasing the lion. They view themselves as the rightful and deserving heirs of Kum-rah's legacy. They honor him under that name and tolerate none other amongst their prides, including Ba-steh so far. Simbasta often are at odds with wemics, which they consider inferior half-breeds.

It is in the simbasta's temperament to want to control and dominate. As a result, simbasta's energy burst allows them to attack and save as if three experience levels higher, and with an additional +2 bonus on all damage, if striking to subdue an opponent. A subdued opponent views the simbasta with awe and immediately ceases combat. When subdued, unwilling PCs may salute the simbasta and leave with the intention never to cross this simbasta's path again. NPCs and "willing" PCs may instead embrace the simbasta's authority and offer their blades in servitude. AL: any lawful.

Snow Pardasta

Snow pardasta tribes are scattered above forest lines on the northern mountains of Skothar (Nentsun Plateaus) and Brun (Hyborean Reaches, Norwold). On Davania, some can be found as far north as the Ice Peaks and the Diamond Ring.

Their thick, long fur protects them from the intense cold of their natural habitat. Small spots cover their heads

and neck, becoming large irregular circles on their back and flanks. Their pale grey fur makes them difficult to detect against the bleak background of high mountain rocks.

Hardly anyone competes with the snow pardasta, considering how remote their homelands are. There, they hunt the ibex, the markhor, and as opportunities present themselves, marmots and other small mammals. Occasionally they wage sporadic wars against encroaching yetis or sasquatches. Their villages, often built around temples, include a few free-standing buildings made of stones and slates, and walls covering the entrance to natural caves.

Snow pardasta can tread ice and snow without movement penalties. Although they cannot boost their Dexterity ratings

as mountain rakasta do (q.v.), snow pardasta benefit from the same leaping abilities. Furthermore, a snow pardasta can blend into a rock big enough to contain the whole creature or into a large chunk of ice for the duration of its energy burst, after which it reappears outside. While doing so, it can see and hear what happens outside, but it cannot communicate or cast spells. The snow pardasta is at a disadvantage outside its natural terrain. When exposed to warm weather or less mountainous terrain, the snow pardasta suffers a -2 penalty on all saving throws, ability checks, and attack rolls. AL: any neutral alignment.

Domestic Rakasta

These rakasta can be found in just about any region of Mystara, much as their lupin rivals. The term "domestic" is by no means derogatory but merely a common way of referring to more "civilized" rakasta, especially in the eyes of neighboring humans with whom they interact more easily than greater or wild rakasta ever could. Aside from their physical appearances, domestic rakasta have the same natural ability—a legendary power that makes them very successful indeed, even when compared to their more powerful cousins.

This fabled ability is specific only to domestic rakasta and not to the basic rakasta described in the *MYSTARA MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix* or the *RED STEEL Campaign Setting*. If using the breeds described in this article, basic rakasta characters should be converted to conform with the information listed in these pages. While a domestic rakasta uses its energy burst, it can literally avoid death. In game terms, if the rakasta would have been killed, it survives instead but with only one hit point left. It can perform this feat no more than nine times in its life—thus the proverbial nine lives. However, each time a "life" is forfeited, the rakasta permanently loses a point of Charisma.

Physical appearances are linked to the domestic breeds; however, many variables are possible. Either pick a breed with its corresponding characteristics, or roll at random on Tables 5a–5c.

Table 6a: Basic Bloodlines

Roll 5d10	Ancient Lineage
4-5 tens	Strong Elven
3 tens	Weak Elven
2 tens	Faint Elven
2 ones	Faint Dragonne
3 ones	Weak Dragonne
4-5 ones	Strong Dragonne

Table 6b: Effect of Bloodlines

Lineage	Strength	Effect
Elven* (ten)	Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Resistance to <i>sleep-</i> and <i>charm</i>-related spells: 45% ❖ Longevity: 180 years + 2d8 ❖ Wizard or wokan level limitation: raised three levels higher. ❖ Constitution: -1
Dragonne** (ones)	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Roar: as dragonne with half its normal range ❖ AL: neutral (a pariah among simbasta) ❖ Tough skin: natural AC is 6. ❖ Charisma: -1 (coarse hair, bulgy eyes, solitary temperament, hissing and growling voice).
Sphinx (nines)	Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Male: Roar requires a saving throw vs. Petrification or opponents receive a +1 penalty on d6 Initiative (or +3 on d10 Initiative) for the next d4 rounds. (nines) ❖ Female: With a simple growl, can cast <i>clairaudience</i>, <i>clairvoyance</i>, and <i>legend lore</i> once per day (or lore spell for the D&D game) ❖ Male: Allows greater rakasta roar, or doubles its range for greater rakasta; must be lawful. ❖ Female: free reading/writing, ancient history, and poetry proficiencies; Must be neutral.
Displacer Beast (eights)	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Can use magical displacement d6 rounds per day. ❖ Can grow two tentacles for d6 rounds once per day (no armor allowed). Damage d6 per attack. Can either attack once with each tentacle or normally with weapons. ❖ +2 bonus to AC due to unusual shifting movements. ❖ Alignment can be neither good nor chaotic.

*Woodland rakasta and domestic breeds only.

** Simbasta only.

Unusual Breeds

Rakasta may bear some blood ties with foreign breeds. These creatures are very rare and usually have a special goal in life. Among a few documented cases are rakasta with elven or even draconic bloodlines, especially with the mighty dragonne. Table 6a shows what lineage a rakasta might have (if any at all) and its strength. The lineage of a rakasta has no bearing on its breed or physical appearance.

It is possible to have mixed heritage (rolling 2 or 3 tens and 2 ones, for example). Rolling anything other than tens and ones or different numbers would indicate a total lack of a clear bloodline, other than the rakasta's own breed.

Lineage generally is hereditary but can be weakened or strengthened through successive family generations. If either of the parents has no clear lineage, then roll 5d10 on Table 6a for each cub.

If both parents have at least a trace of a bloodline, roll 1d20 for each cub. An odd result relates to the father's lineage, an even number to the mother's. With a score of 19-20, lineage is strengthened by one category. On a roll of 7-18, lineage is passed on as is. On a roll of 1-6, lineage is weakened by one category. If either parent had equal traces of two different bloodlines, then choose one at random (50%) as the one passed on to the cub.

Feel free as a DM to assign different dice numbers to additional bloodlines for use with Table 6a, as appropriate to your campaign. For example, lammasu, feystags, cath shee, and ebon tigers could be related to some rakasta as well. Table 6b shows examples of stronger bloodlines.

Other Issues

Unfortunately for rakasta, some human or humanoid cultures covet rakasta for certain valuable items, usually spell components, medicinal ingredients, valuable pelts, and so forth. Items involved are the whiskers, fangs, claws, bones, or blood of greater rakasta. They also involve the coats of many wild and greater rakasta as well. Black rakasta (domestic) also receive unwanted attention from some wizards. The wild and greater rakasta are often thought of as monsters or dangerous predators by human cultures. Many believe them to

be lycanthropes and hunt them down. Choosing a greater rakasta or even wild rakasta as a PC to adventure into human lands requires precautions to avoid constant difficulties. Disguises can help. Support from local nobility (the PC is hired by a local leader) may do the trick. Fame also does much to reassure villagers that not all rakasta are dangerous monsters. It's up to PCs to establish such a rapport with local populations.

Rakasta societies adopted legal practices that may astound human neighbors. For example, the Kingdom of Bellayne on the Savage Coast, which considers itself very civilized, does not usually resort to the death penalty or long term prison—they prefer instead declawing, neutering, or banishing their criminals. Simbasta warriors, on the other hand, cast out known cowards, but only after cutting off their tails, which among simbasta is much worse than death. Elsewhere, hanging by one's whiskers or tail may be considered for lesser crimes.

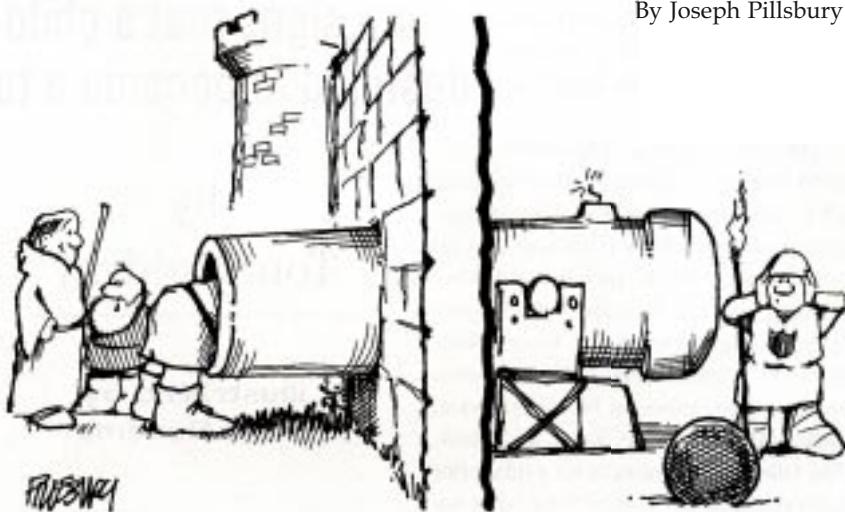
Rakasta are thought to have a short attention span. In situations that aren't life-threatening, rakasta are easily distracted. They tend to switch their interest without warning or reason. Although this is left entirely to the player's desire to roleplay, the DM may request an occasional Wisdom check. Rakasta also are a

playful folk, especially when large balls of wool, rodents, fish, or birds are involved. Their presence may require a Wisdom check on the part of the rakasta to keep focusing on the task at hand.

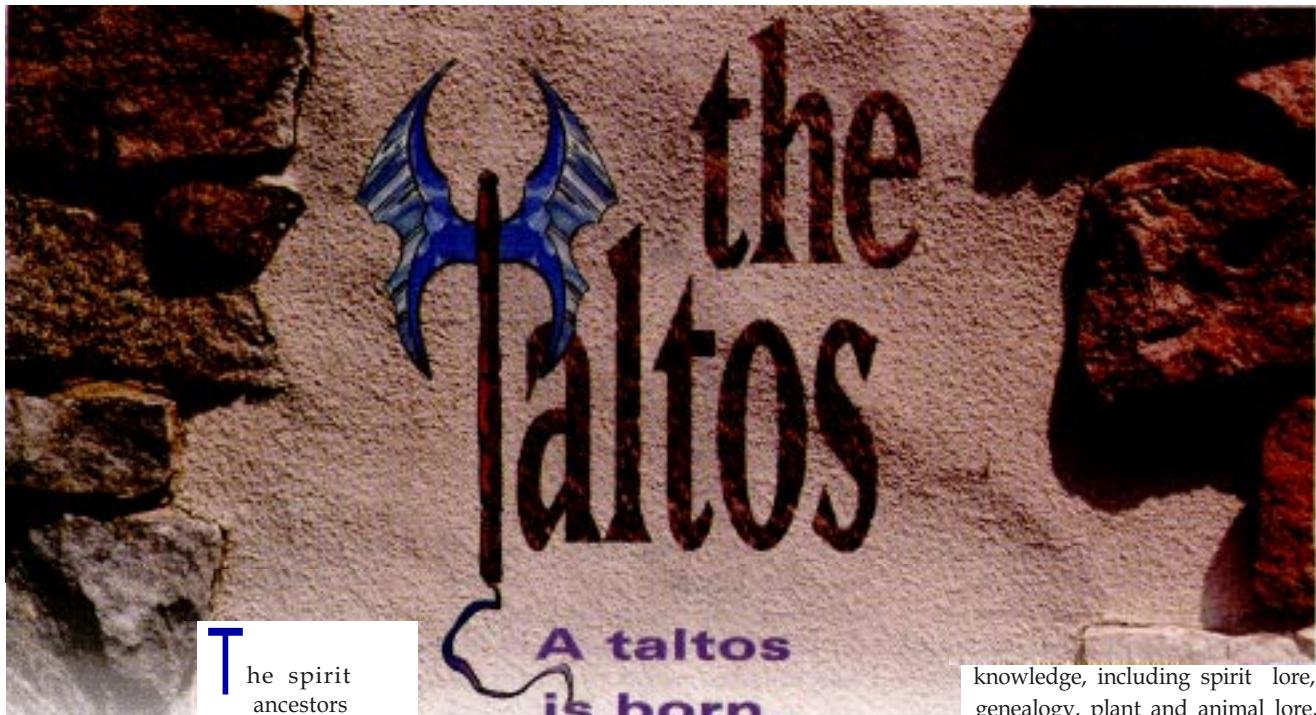
Another game, the cat's cradle, remains a child's diversion at least among humans. For some rakasta cultures, however, it has a greater meaning. For example, among rakasta tribes of Davania, a 10th-level druid using a cat's cradle can attempt to diminish the bite of the equatorial sun. In effect, it causes clouds to mask the sun and bring rain (control weather). It can attempt this once per moon cycle with a successful Wisdom check. The idea is to "catch the sun" in the cradle's strands, as clouds of rain seem to do. Likewise, tribes living near the arctic circle and beyond can try the same to calm a winter storm and bring out the sun (trapping it up in the sky).

While at TSR, Bruce Heard was the author the Principalities of Glantri and Orcs of Thar gazetteers, and of the Princess Ark series in DRAGON Magazine. Bruce developed lupins for Mystara's Known World and Savage Coast, which appeared in issue #239.

By Joseph Pillsbury



"WE'RE PRETTY SURE THIS DRAINAGE PIPE LEADS RIGHT TO THE TREASURE CHAMBER."



**A taltos
is born,
not made.**

**A caul or teeth at birth,
webbed fingers or toes,
a sixth finger,
different colored eyes,
or a distinctive birthmark
are signs that a child is
destined to become taltos.**

by
Tom Moldvay

**illustrated by
Scott Rosema**

The spirit ancestors have imparted secret knowledge to the taltos. A taltos does not study to learn most of his spells; rather, the act of spellcasting is an innate talent. For those spells that come from the gods themselves, the taltos performs sacred ceremonies, handed down through the ages.

Based on heroes of Hungarian mythology and folklore, the taltos is an enemy of evil spirits. Similar characters appear in the myths of many peoples, especially the Finns, Norse, and Celts. Contemporary fantasy writers continue to add to the legend of the taltos.

The taltos legend originated with various hunting/gathering peoples, stretching back to the Stone Age. The classic age of the taltos comes with pastoral nomads (i.e., people who live by herding and riding horses). These peoples include the Scythians, Huns, Hungarians, Turks, and Mongols-plus many Indian tribes of North America, such as the Cheyenne, Sioux, and Crow. The taltos ideal continues for a time after such nomadic peoples become what we might call "civilized."

Most taltos are raised in tribal societies, which means they place a special emphasis on family ties. They serve as repositories for tribal learning and have memorized a considerable body of

knowledge, including spirit lore, genealogy, plant and animal lore, and mythic stories. Taltos believe everything has a spirit—not only humans, but also animals and plants. To the taltos, even inanimate objects such as mountain peaks and rivers have their own spirits. Important spirits include their own sacred ancestors, who appear in animal form.

The following pages present the taltos as a new rogue class that combines combat with spell-casting abilities. A taltos can heal wounds, cure diseases, and gain additional abilities through meditative trances. Their prime purpose, however, is to battle evil spirits both at home and abroad.

Their spells, thief abilities, and combat techniques aid them in this one overriding purpose—ridding the world of undead monsters and hellish fiends.

The Taltos

Ability Requirements: Strength 9, Dexterity 12, Intelligence 13, Wisdom 13, Charisma 15.

Prime Requisites: Dexterity, Charisma.

Allowed Races: Human only
Because taltos are rogues, Use Table 25: Rogue Experience Levels from the *Player's Handbook* to determine advancement in level and hit points.

Taltos cast spells using Table 32: Bard Spell Progression to determine the

number and level of spells available. Likewise, saving throws and starting proficiencies are calculated as per rogues. Otherwise, a taltos has a different set of abilities than a thief or a bard.

Taltos can use any weapon and can wear any armor up to chain mail (AC 5) but cannot use shields. Unlike most classes, taltos do not gain +10% earned experience. Taltos can be any non-evil alignment.

In addition to general and rogue proficiencies, taltos may take one non-weapon proficiency each from the priest, warrior, and wizard categories at no additional cost.

Taltos can cast both wizard and priest spells. They can choose their spells freely, but such spells are limited to the wizard schools of Alteration, Divination, and Illusion and the priest spheres of Astral, Combat, Divination, Healing, and Protection.

Taltos have no need of spell books; however, when casting a wizard spell, taltos suffer the same armor restrictions as wizards. When casting any spell, a taltos cannot engage in any other actions and loses any Dexterity bonus during spellcasting.

As stated above, taltos gain spells at the same rate as bards. They can choose any combination of priest spells and wizard spells up to their maximum per level. For example, a 3rd-level taltos can cast two spells per day; he could choose a wizard spell and a priest spell, two wizard spells, or two priest spells. If the taltos takes only priest spells, he may cast those spells while wearing armor.

Special Abilities

Besides the ability to cast spells, taltos have a number of unique abilities.

- Like a paladin, a taltos can heal 2 hit points per experience level once per day by laying on hands.

- Also like a paladin, a taltos can cure diseases of all sorts. The ability can be used once per week for every five experience levels.

- Trained spirit-warriors, taltos learn a particular kind of spirit fighting called *taltosviaskodas* ("taltos spirit-combat"). When fighting undead or evil extra-planar beings, taltos gain a bonus of +1

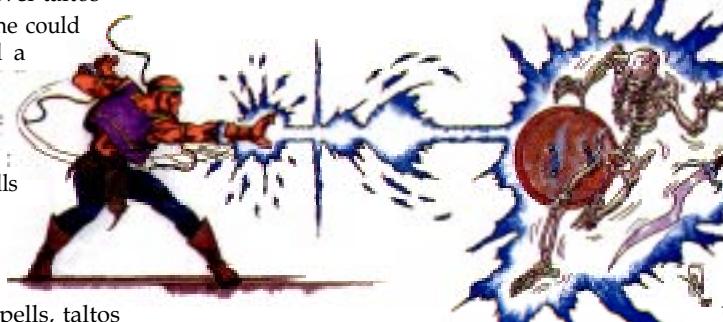
to hit and +2 to damage. At 7th level, the taltos can hit undead only affected by +1 weapons, even when using a non-magical weapon.

The following creatures from the MONSTROUS MANUAL® tome are considered "evil extra-planar creatures": all baatezu, salamanders, water weirds, skriaxit, eyewings, feyrs, dao, efreeti, giths, githyanki, mites, jermlaine, hell hounds, imps and quasits, mind flayers, spirit nagas, nightmares, rakshasas, all tanar'ri, spectral trolls, and lesser and greater yugoloths.

A taltos cannot take weapon specializations but is eligible to take the two-handed weapon style and/or two weapon style specializations. (See *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*.) Taltos do not gain the Warrior's bonus for exceptional Strength or Constitution.

Taltos have two special trance states. In the *revules* ("ecstatic") state, the taltos makes a journey into the spirit world to confront evil, contact dead ancestors, and safely escort newly dead souls to the afterworld.

To enter the trance, the taltos fasts or engages in ecstatic singing and dancing. The taltos sings his mystic chants while dancing to the rhythm of a single-sided drum. He may use a sieve with rattles and bells. His costume is covered with beads, bones, and metal strips that



jingle to the beat. During the dance, the taltos wears a special headress of feathers, often with the horns of a bull or stag. It takes 2-8 rounds to enter a trance, during which time the taltos cannot engage in combat, cast spells, or perform any other actions.

From the *revules* state, the taltos gains three abilities, depending on level:

- At 1st level, the taltos can aid clerics or paladins in attempts to turn undead. An attempt to turn undead, while the taltos is chanting and dancing,

Suggested Reading

Brust, Steven. *The Vlad Taltos Series*, Ace Books, New York. *Jhereg*, 1987; *Yendi*, 1987; *Teckla*, 1987; *Taltos*, 1988; *Phoenix*, 1990; *Athyra*, 1993; and *Orca*, 1996.

Brust, Steven and Lindholm, Megan. *The Gypsy*; Tor, New York. 1992.

Rice, Anne. *The Lives of the Mayfair Witches* trilogy, Knopf, New York. *The Witching Hour*, 1990; *Lasher*, 1993; and *Taltos*, 1994.

Seredy, Kate. *The White Stag*. Viking Press, NY, 1937.

Note: As his name indicates, Vlad could be considered a taltos, and Steven Brust's excellent seven-book series details his adventures. Vlad Taltos would best be considered a duel-class fighter/taltos. The hero of *The Gypsy* is a taltos. While Anne Rice doesn't use "taltos" in the usual mythic sense, a traditional taltos could, conceivably, be someone with the recessive "taltos" gene. Besides, the trilogy makes great reading. *The White Stag* is a story based on Hungarian mythology.

gains a +2 bonus to the die roll. A taltos cannot turn undead by himself. If any undead are destroyed by the turning attempt, the taltos (in his trance state)

can spend 2-8 rounds "leading" the banished undead spirits back to the spirit world so they are not called upon again. This has a 10% chance per level of succeeding, and it yields the same effect as a *dispel evil* spell, ensuring that the undead spirits do not return or reform. Disturbing the taltos during this trance breaks his contact with the spirit world and ruins the "spell."

- At 5th level, the taltos gains the ability to communicate with one of his dead ancestors, similar to a *speak with dead* spell. Information gleaned in this manner is limited by what the ancestor knew in life; the power is used more for spiritual guidance than clue-gathering. It is otherwise identical to the *speak with dead* spell, with success determined by

Pronunciation Guide

The following are suggested pronunciations for the kits and terms connected to the taltos. Note: In Hungarian, stress is always on the first syllable (only).

Name	Pronunciation
Alakvált	Awl-ock-valt
Allati	All-ott-ee
Bikáver	Bick-ov-air
Boszorkány	Boz-or-khan-ee
Elrejtezes	El-reg-ez-ace
Revules	Rev-oo-lace
Sarkany	Sar-khan-ee
Taltos	Tall-toss
Varazslo	Var-oz-low
Viaskodás	Vee-ah-sko-das
Zelganok	Zel-gon-ock

the level of the taltos and by how long the ancestor has been deceased.

► At 13th level, the taltos gains the ability to separate his astral body from his material body. The taltos must first enter the *revules* trance for a full turn. This ability is otherwise identical to the wizard's ninth-level astral spell.

The other trance state of the taltos is the *elrejtezes* ("occult being"). This is the special trance that forms the basis of the taltos's supernatural powers. In a typical *elrejtezes* trance, the taltos climbs the great cosmic tree at the center of the world which has the sun and moon atop its branches. From the top of the tree, he flies into the world of the ancestors. There, he is cut into pieces. The pieces are put into a magical cauldron. An extra bone from the spirits is added, then the cauldron is stirred, and the taltos is reborn with his special powers.

From the *elrejtezes* trance, the taltos gains two abilities:

► At 9th level, the taltos gains a special spirit guide. This guide is a benevolent spirit of a dead ancestor in the form of a totemic animal. The guide will not fight for the taltos, but it can provide useful information and act as an other-dimensional guide when the taltos is in his astral body (Treat this as the fifth-level priest spell *commune*.) The spirit guide can be summoned once per week. Once the animal form of the spirit guide is chosen (either by the player or the DM), it cannot be changed. (If the player uses any of the taltos kits presented in this article, it is recommended that the

spirit guide fit the restrictions given in the kit's "Totemic Animals" section.)

► At 11th level, the taltos gains the ability to shapeshift into the animal form of his spirit guide for a duration of 1 turn/level. General animal forms for spirit guides are: eagle, horse, falcon, goose/gander, raven, swan, deer/stag, bull, and bear. Any normal animal could, however, be a spirit guide. The taltos is limited to this one form and cannot assume the form of any animal other than his chosen animal guide. Otherwise, the effect conforms to the ninth-level wizard spell *shapechange*.

Barbarian Taltos

Barbarians (as per *The Complete Barbarian's Handbook*) can also be taltos.

Barbarian taltos receive d8 for hit dice instead of d6, but they cannot use any metal weapons or metal armor. They have the same leaping, springing, back detection, and climbing abilities as a shaman but use the shaman experience levels for advancement.

Skills and Proficiencies

The taltos kits make use of two new secondary skills and three new nonweapon proficiencies.

Secondary Skills

Herder is the skill of maintaining domestic animals for a living. The primary herd animals are cattle, horses, sheep, and goats. The skill covers learning to live off the animals, maintaining their health, moving them in large groups, breeding them, and knowing how to maximize their use. Thus, a herder would have at least some knowledge of butchering, skinning, tanning, milking, making cheese, shearing, etc.

Mountaineer is the secondary skill based on the mountaineering proficiency.

Nonweapon Proficiencies

Animal Husbandry (Intelligence) is the nonweapon proficiency equal to the Groom skill. This proficiency allows the character to properly maintain animals by providing the care they need to stay healthy and fit.

Herding (Wisdom +1) is the non-weapon proficiency equal to the Herder skill, described above.

Tribal Lore (Intelligence +1) is roughly equivalent to Ancient History but deals only with a specific tribal people. A character with this proficiency has knowledge of the specific tribe's genealogies, legends, and laws. A successful proficiency check enables the character to recall obscure bits of tribal lore not considered "common knowledge."

Taltos Kits

Taltos kits have been given two names. The bracketed names are for players who prefer English names. The regular names are Hungarian, for players who prefer to add more spice to their characters. See the pronunciation guide.

Zelganok (Brave)

A brave is a mystic warrior who has undergone a special vision quest. In his vision, the brave speaks with the totemic spirits and his ancestors.

In combat, when the

brave rolls a natural 20 to

hit, he re-experiences the vision and becomes especially inspired. The brave gains +2 to hit and inflicts double damage. The bonuses last for the remainder of that combat. This effect is not cumulative with additional rolls of natural 20.

Braves are, essentially, barbarian fighter taltos. The brave is a kit specially inspired by tales of famous North American Indian heroes such as Crazy Horse and Geronimo.

Totemic Animal: Any animal encountered in the wild.



Secondary Skill: Hunter.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Required*: any bow, any spear. *Recommended*: atlatl, battle axe, bolas, warclub (use club, spiked), hand/throwing axe, javelin, knife, lasso, light or medium lance.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus*: tracking, survival. *Recommended*: animal lore, animal training, bowyer/fletcher, dancing, direction sense, endurance, herding, leatherworking, riding, land-based; running, set snares, singing, swimming, tribal lore, weather sense.

Equipment: No metal weapons or metal armor.

Special Benefits: Receive d10 for Hit Dice. Use Warrior THAC0, saving throws, and proficiency slots. Leaping, springing, back detection, and climbing as per barbarian fighter. Receives a -3 reaction bonus from members of his own tribe. A brave may specialize in one weapon.

Special Hindrances: Use the paladin experience table for level advancement. A brave cannot cast spells or aid priests and paladins in turning undead.

Wealth Options: 3d4 gp of tradable goods.

Sarkany (Drakos)

The totemic "animal" of the drakos (sarkany) is the dragon. The Sarkany tribe believes they are the descendants of dragon ancestors who once lived on Earth in human form. The people of the tribe are, therefore, known as the dragonfolk. The ten clans of the Sarkany are: Brass Dragon, Bronze Dragon, Copper Dragon, Silver Dragon, Gold Dragon, Amethyst Dragon, Crystal Dragon, Emerald Dragon, Sapphire Dragon, and Topaz Dragon.

At 11th level, the drakos gains the ability to shapeshift into his totemic dragon once per day, for a maximum duration of 1 turn/level. Initially, he is limited to only the 1st age category but gains all of the dragon's natural and special abilities, save spellcasting. For every additional level beyond 11th, the drakos can *shapechange* into a dragon one age category higher. Thus, at 23rd level, the drakos can *shapechange* into a great wyrm.

Drakos are sympathetic to any non-evil dragon. One of their missions is to seek out and slay evil dragons that chal-

lenge their totemic dragons' territory. Each drakos reveres his totemic dragon and pays homage to the dragon whenever possible.

Totemic Animal: Dragon (non-evil).

Secondary Skill: *Recommended*: Fisher, forester, mountaineer, hunter.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Non-weapon Proficiencies:

Bonus: Animal lore. *Recommended*: Appraising, Blind-fighting, dancing, direction sense, gaming, gem-cutting, set snares, singing, tribal lore, weather sense.

Special Benefits: Shapeshifting into dragon form (see description), -3 reaction bonus from members of his own clan, -2 reaction bonus from other Sarkany tribes.

Special Hindrances: Use the ranger's experience table (Table 14) for level advancement. However, the drakos receives none of the paladins special abilities. The drakos must donate 10% of his wealth to his totemic dragon, either by visiting the dragon's lair or by leaving the wealth in a sanctified site or in hands of the tribal elders (who will see the money safely delivered or assign the drakos the task of delivering it). Drakos are forbidden from deliberately harming their totemic dragons and, if tricked into doing so, must atone for their actions in some manner dictated by the elders (to be determined by the DM as need arises).

Equipment: As normal.

Wealth Options: 2d6 x 10 gp.

Alakvalt (Shapeshifter)

An alakvalt is a taltos with special shapechanging abilities. The alakvalt can change into another form (and change back) once per day for every five levels of the taltos (twice/day at 6th-level, thrice/day at 11th-level, and so on). The shapeshifter cannot wear armor.

There are limits to the alakvalt's shapeshifting ability. The shapeshifter can never assume the form of an evil creature and is limited to creatures with the same or fewer HD as he has levels (ignoring any creature HD "pluses"). The shapeshifter retains his own hit points and THAC0 regardless of the new form. However, he gains the creature's natural Armor Class, modified by the shapeshifter's Dexterity and magical



bonuses. Any damage done to that form carries over to the shape shifter when he changes back. Lastly, all clothing and loose items are absorbed into the new form, their powers temporarily nullified. This includes all magical items carried or worn by the individual.

The shapeshifter gains any special, innate powers of the creature but retains his own Intelligence. He is able to cast spells in a new shape only if the creature is able to speak and gesture appropriately. For example, a shapeshifter who shapechanged into a centaur could cast spells and use weapons normally. A shapeshifter who changed into a griffon could neither cast spells nor use weapons but could fly and fight like a griffon. The shapeshifter can maintain the new shape for a maximum of 1 hour per level.

Shapeshifting into the totemic animal gives the shapeshifter special benefits. In this form only, the animal's normal hp are added to that of the shapeshifter. The maximum number of additional hp is 10. Damage is taken from these extra hp first. The extra hp do not carry over to the shapeshifter when he changes back to normal form. The shapeshifter is also able to maintain the shape of the totemic animal for 12 hours, regardless of level.

At 9th level, once per day, when the shapeshifter changes into totemic form,

Hungarian Names

For players who wish to stick to the ethnic origin of the taltos, the following are some Hungarian names that can be used as character names. A name in brackets is the short, familiar, version of the longer name.

Male	Female
Almos	Ana
Aurel	Claudia
Andras	Danya (Dana)
Bela	Eva
Elado	Ilona
Elod	Ivona
Ferenc	Julia
Gabor	Katalin (Kati)
Gyorgy	Katya
Horca	Kodaly
Istvan	Koppany
Janos	Lena
Kalman	Magda
Ketel	Margit
Laszlo	Maria (Mari)
Lazar	Mala
Matyas	Natalie
Miklos	Olga
Rasdi	Reszna
Sandor	Sandora
Tibor	Sarolta (Sari)
Turzol	Steva
Vajik	Varla
Yevgeni	Vera
Zoltan	Zsuzsa*

* pronounced Shu-sha

the ancestral spirits give him special aid. When reverting to his natural form, he regains 10-60% ($1d6 \times 10$) of his lost hit points.

The shapeshifter cannot wear armor. As he constantly shifts into different forms, his own natural armor improves, however. At first level, his natural AC is 9. For every two levels of advancement, the shape-shifter's natural armor drops by 1. Thus, at 19th level, his natural Armor Class is 0. High Dexterity improves the shapeshifter's AC, as would rings and cloaks of protection. Bracers of defense work only if they afford AC protection better than the shapeshifter's natural AC.

Totemic Animal: Any. Suggested: eagle, horse, stag, bull, wolf.

Secondary Skill: Groom or Hunter.

Weapon Proficiencies: As normal.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* animal lore. *Recommended:* animal handling, animal training, dancing, Disguise, direction sense, herding, hunting, jumping, singing, tracking, tribal lore.

Special Benefits: Shapeshifting allows for better natural armor (see above).

Special Hindrances: Use the ranger's experience table (Table 14) to determine level advancement. However, shapeshifters receive none of the ranger's special benefits. Shapeshifting limits are described above. No armor allowed.

Equipment: As normal, but no armor.

Wealth Options: $2d4 \times 10$ gp.

Allati (rider)

The *allati* is a barbarian taltos kit. The taltos rider belongs to a clan whose totemic animal is typically a steed or mount. The taltos rider is able to befriend and train that animal, even if the animal is not normally a riding beast. (See "Totemic Animal" below.) During training, a special bond is created between the taltos rider and his steed. Once this bonding has occurred, there is a telepathic link between steed and rider. If the mount is killed, the allati suffers 2d6 hp damage. The allati must mourn for at least one month before recruiting another steed.

Inside his tribe, the taltos rider is elite. The taltos rider is, after all, bonded to one of the sacred ancestors in animal form. Outside of the tribal circle, however, the special bond between steed and rider is considered either unimportant or downright bizarre, depending on the strangeness of the steed.

Totemic Animal: Any. *Suggested:* bear, boar, buffalo, bull, camel, elephant, horse, lion, rhinoceros, or tiger. Rarer examples include dire wolf, dolphin, giant eagle, giant seahorse, fire lizard, griffin, hippocampus, hippogriff, hyaenodon, killer whale, mammoth, mastodon, minotaur lizard, narwhal, pegasus, sea lion, spotted lion, smilodon, unicorn, or woolly rhinoceros.

Secondary Skill: Groom.

Weapon Proficiencies: *Recommended:* battle axe, composite short bow, horseman's flail, mace, or pick; javelin, knife, any lance, lasso, long sword, saber, spear, warhammer.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Bonus:* riding (either land-based, airborne, or seaborne, depending on the totemic animal). *Recommended:* animal handling, animal lore, animal training, direction sense, healing, hunting, rope use, set snares, singing, tribal lore, tracking, weather sense.

Equipment: The taltos rider receives any gear needed to ride his steed. No metal armor or weapons.

Special Benefits: Telepathic bonding link to riding steed; -3 reaction bonus to members of own tribe; -4 reaction bonus to animals of the totemic species; -2 bonus on all riding check with totemic steed.

Special Hindrances: +3 reaction penalty to members of other cultures. The taltos rider suffers 2d6 hp damage when his bonded steed dies.

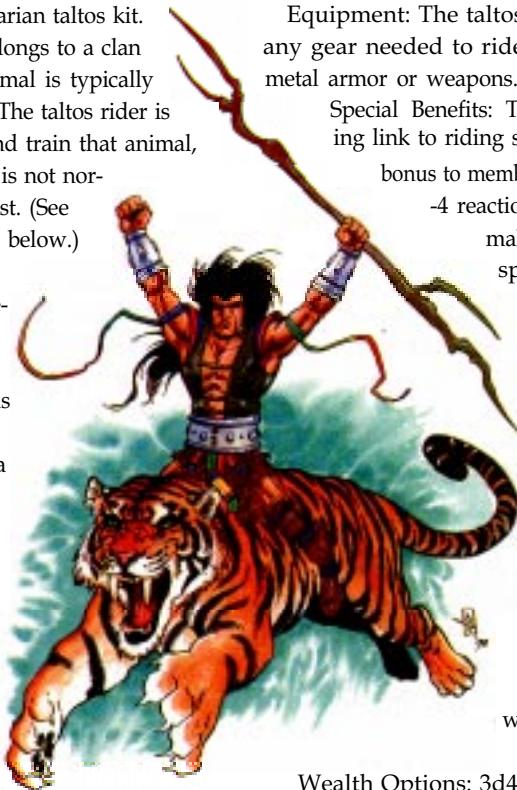
Wealth Options: 3d4 gp of tradable goods.

Bikaver (Sacrificer)

Bikavers are essentially taltos clerics. *Bikaver* means "bull's blood" and is the name of a particular kind of Hungarian wine. Sacrificers are so named because, in the past, they made blood sacrifices to the gods. While the ancient practice has ceased, the name has stuck.

The sacrificer casts priest spells only. Sacrificers must have at least 15 Wisdom, but Intelligence is no longer an ability prerequisite. They may cast spells while armored.

Sacrificers have no aversion to spilling



blood in combat and may wield edged and piercing weapons as well as bludgeoning weapons.

Totemic Animal: Recommended: bull. Other: any sacrificial animal, such as sheep, goat, horse.

Secondary Skill: Herder, hunter or trapper.

Weapon Proficiencies: Recommended: battle axe, dagger, short sword, spear. Other: Any axe or sword; any axe-like or spear-like polearm, any bow, sickle, sling.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Bonus: Tribal lore, weather sense. Recommended: animal lore, animal handling, astrology, dancing, fire-building, fishing, gaming, healing, herbalism, herding, hunting, riding, land-based; singing, religion, spellcraft.

Equipment: As normal for priest, except bikavers may employ weapons of any type (B, P, S).

Special Benefits: Receives d8 for Hit Dice. THAC0, saving throws, and proficiency slots as per Priest. Can use shield. Can choose spells from any sphere allowed by deity. (Typical spheres include All, Animal, Combat, Necromantic, Plant, Summoning, and Weather); -3 reaction bonus to members of own tribe; -2 reaction bonus from allied tribes.

Special Hindrances: Use Table 23: Priest Experience Levels to determine level advancement. Bikavers may not turn undead, but they retain the taltos ability to aid other priests and paladins in their turning attempts.

Wealth Options: 3d6 × 10 gp.

Boszorkany (Witch)

A taltos witch, or *boszorkany*, follows a religion and spellcasting tradition practiced in secret. Sometimes the cult is proscribed by law, and sometimes it is merely discouraged. The secret tradition is known as "the old religion" and focuses on the great earth goddess and the fertility of crops, people, and animals.

As a follower of a proscribed religion, the taltos witch tends toward secrecy. Boszorkany find it hard to trust outsiders. At the same time, taltos witches often help underdogs and outcasts. Boszorkany are never of lawful alignment, since the law persecutes their religion. A taltos witch comes from a civ-

ilized society but often lives in the wilderness. Taltos witches are less likely to risk combat and more likely to charm or incapacitate an opponent.

Totemic Animal: Goat, toad, bull, cat, horse, owl, peacock, raven (crow).

Secondary Skill: Forester.

Weapon Proficiencies: Recommended: bill, flail, scimitar, quarterstaff, sickle. Other: any bow, dagger, dart, javelin, any polearm, sling, any spear, trident.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Bonus:

Ancient history (clan-specific), herbalism. Recommended: Animal lore, animal training, astrology, blind-fighting, cooking, dancing, direction dense, disguise, healing, languages, ancient pottery, religion, seamstress/tailor, spellcraft, weather sense, weaving.

Special Benefits: -4 reaction bonus to witches and followers of the old religion. Taltos witches have a wider range of spell choice. They can additionally choose from the Wizard schools of Enchantment/Charm and Conjuration/Summoning and the Priest spheres of Animal, Charm, Plant, and Weather.

Special Hindrances:

Lessened taltosviaskodas: when fighting undead, the taltos witch has a +1 bonus to hit and a +1 bonus to damage (instead of +2 to damage). Taltos witches cannot aid in turning undead and cannot choose spells from the Priest spheres of Astral and Combat; +3 reaction penalty applied to non-boszorkany.

Wealth Options: 2d6 × 10 gp.

Varazslo (Warlock)

A warlock, or *varazslo*, is a taltos who casts only wizard spells. Varazslo must have at least a 15 Intelligence; Wisdom is no longer an ability requirement. Like normal wizards, they wear no armor.

Varazslo still fight against evil spirits but are far more likely to use magic as their sole than is a normal taltos.

Totemic Animal: Any animal that would make a good familiar, especially any cat (including the great cats) or dog (including wolf), ferret, fox, hawk, owl, raven, and weasel.

Secondary Skill: Scribe.

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, dart, javelin, knife, quarterstaff, sling, and spear.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Bonus: Spellcraft. Recommended: Animal lore, astrology, blind-fighting, dancing, disguise, herbalism, reading/writing, ventriloquism.

Equipment: Limited weapon proficiencies; no armor.

Special Benefits: Warlocks can additionally choose from the wizard school of

Invocation/

Evocation.

Special Hindrances:

Cannot cure disease, heal, or aid priests and paladins in turning undead.

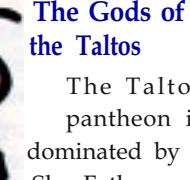
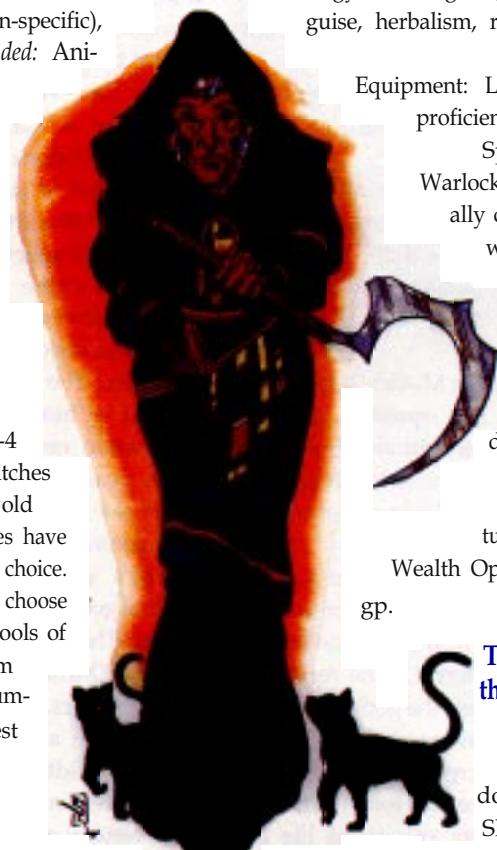
Wealth Options: 2d4 × 10 gp.

The Gods of the Taltos

The Taltos pantheon is dominated by a Sky Father and Various forces of

nature, such as wind, thunder, volcanoes, and storms are personified as lesser gods and goddesses. Important demigods include the ancestor spirits. Special landmarks are considered sacred, each possessing their own animating spirit. To a taltos, the whole world is but an extension of the spirit world. Humans can pass into the spirit world; spirits can pass into the material world. If the spirits are evil, they can harm people. It is the taltos' task to defeat such evil spirits.

Tarem, The Sky Father. Tarem is a primordial being, the basic masculine principle. He is a benevolent god but takes little interest in daily affairs. He is the ancient father of the gods and all created beings. Major god; Lawful good.



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Other Gods of the Taltos

Many historical and game mythos have gods applicable to the taltos.

Finnish: Ilmatar, Mielikki, Untamo, and Ukko.

Norse: Frey, Freyja, and Odin.

Classical: Hermes (Mercury), Dionysus (Bacchus), and Apollo.

Egyptian: Horus, Isis, Osiris, and Thoth.

Celtic: Cernunnos, Epona, Esus, Dagda, Oghma, and Rhiannon.

Native American: Coyote and Raven.

In the GREYHAWK® setting, the two gods most sympathetic to the taltos are Celestian and Ehlonna.

In the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, the gods most sympathetic to the taltos are: Chauntea, Eldath, Mielikki, Mystra, Oghma, Selûne, and Silvanus.

protects the herds. Menur is also god of kingship and one of the gods of war. Minor god; Neutral good.

Hadur, the Creator, and represents the principle of creation. He is thus concerned with generating new life, but is also the god of craftsmen and civilization in general. Minor god; Lawful good.

Ortriki, Ortriki is the chief ancestral spirit of the taltos. He is also known as Mir-xum. He is the son of Tarem and Kaltes. Ortriki appears as a gander, or as a man steering a golden sky chariot pulled by geese. His titles are: Gander Prince, Hero Ancient, and World Surveyor Man. As Gander Prince, he is god of tribes and clans. As Hero Ancient, he is the patron of taltos and warriors. As World Surveyor Man it is his function to continually inspect and preserve the natural order of the world. He is also the god of knowledge and patron of druids and bards. Major god; Neutral good.

Jemaika, The Divine Bear. Jemaika is the god of hunting, ranging back to a time when new hunters tested themselves against the fearsome cave bears. He is also a war god, concerned with maintaining the wilderness. Jemaika is Ortriki's wilder brother. Minor god; Neutral good.

Xoli, The Dawn-Woman. Xoli is the sister of Ortriki and Jemaika and helps both brothers. She is primarily concerned with aiding women, especially during childbirth. She is also the patroness of new ventures. Minor goddess; Neutral good.

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Xul-Ater, The god of death and the underworld. He may aid a taltos to insure proper arrival of a newly dead spirit. Minor god; Lawful neutral.

Tunder, female nature spirits, are usually benevolent but may turn malevolent if offended. In folklore, the Tunder are akin to "fairy godmothers." Demigoddesses; Neutral.



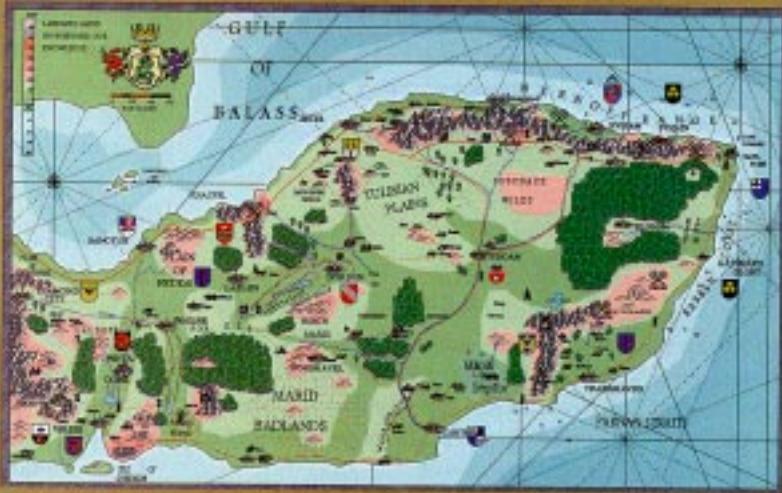
Tom Moldvay has been a contributor to Dragon Magazine since issue #26. Among his credits are modules B4 The Lost City and X2 Castle Amber. Tom is currently finishing his first book, a horror novel entitled Holyoak.

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1. Character Points

Character points (CPs) as the means to acquire abilities and proficiencies for a PC were first introduced in the *PLAYERS OPTION: Skills & Powers* book. The number of CPs allotted depends on the race and class chosen. Points are expended for race and class options as well as for proficiencies. Saved points may be spent in other ways, such as to acquire a new spell, re-roll a missed attack, or grant a second save. Character points may not be used in this manner to re-roll ability scores or blood abilities. For a complete list of ways to spend CPs, see Chapter 1 of *S&P*.

Abilities cost from 3 CPs up to 25 CPs. Some options allow a player to impose limitations on their characters for bonus CPs that can then be spent to obtain other abilities. At any stage of PC creation, PCs may retain 5 CPs for use later in the creation process.

Two new optional categories appear in this article for scions and regents. All blooded characters may select options from the "Blooded Abilities" category. Regents have access to both "Regent Privileges" and "Blooded Abilities."

by Ed Bonny

Illustrated by
Pamela Shanteau

2. Ability Scores

Once ability scores have been determined, the player selects the PC's race. Ability scores are modified according to the race chosen. Racial ability score modifications for all PC races are listed in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

As detailed in *S&P*, a PC's ability scores may be split into their appropriate sub-abilities. Players exercising this option can increase one sub-ability at the expense of diminishing the other. For each ability score, there can be no more than 4 points in difference between its two sub-ability scores. Note: Some options offer a bonus point to one sub-ability. Characters taking these options are allowed a 5-6 point difference in sub-ability scores.

3. Racial Requirements

Each PC receives a specified number of character points dependent on race. Points can be spent to customize a PC from the general skill list for each race or they can be used to purchase that race's standard skill package. Note that there are some traits so intrinsic to a PC race that they cannot be considered optional. These include fundamental traits like

elven immortality and the dwarven chance for magic malfunction. Players should refer to the Character Races section of the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook* for all pertinent information on each race.

Dwarves

Standard Abilities: Dense body, encumbrance, infravision, mining detection ability, saving throw bonus.

Akin to Earth (10): Weapons made of stone or metal cause less damage to PC by -1 hp per die rolled. Weapon damage cannot be reduced below 1 hp.

Dense Body (10): The dwarf suffers half damage from bludgeoning and crushing attacks.

Earthen Healing (5): When resting underground, the dwarf heals at twice his natural rate, regaining 2 hp per night of rest instead of 1 hp.

Eliminate Penalty (10): The dwarf no longer suffers from the 20% chance of a magic malfunction.

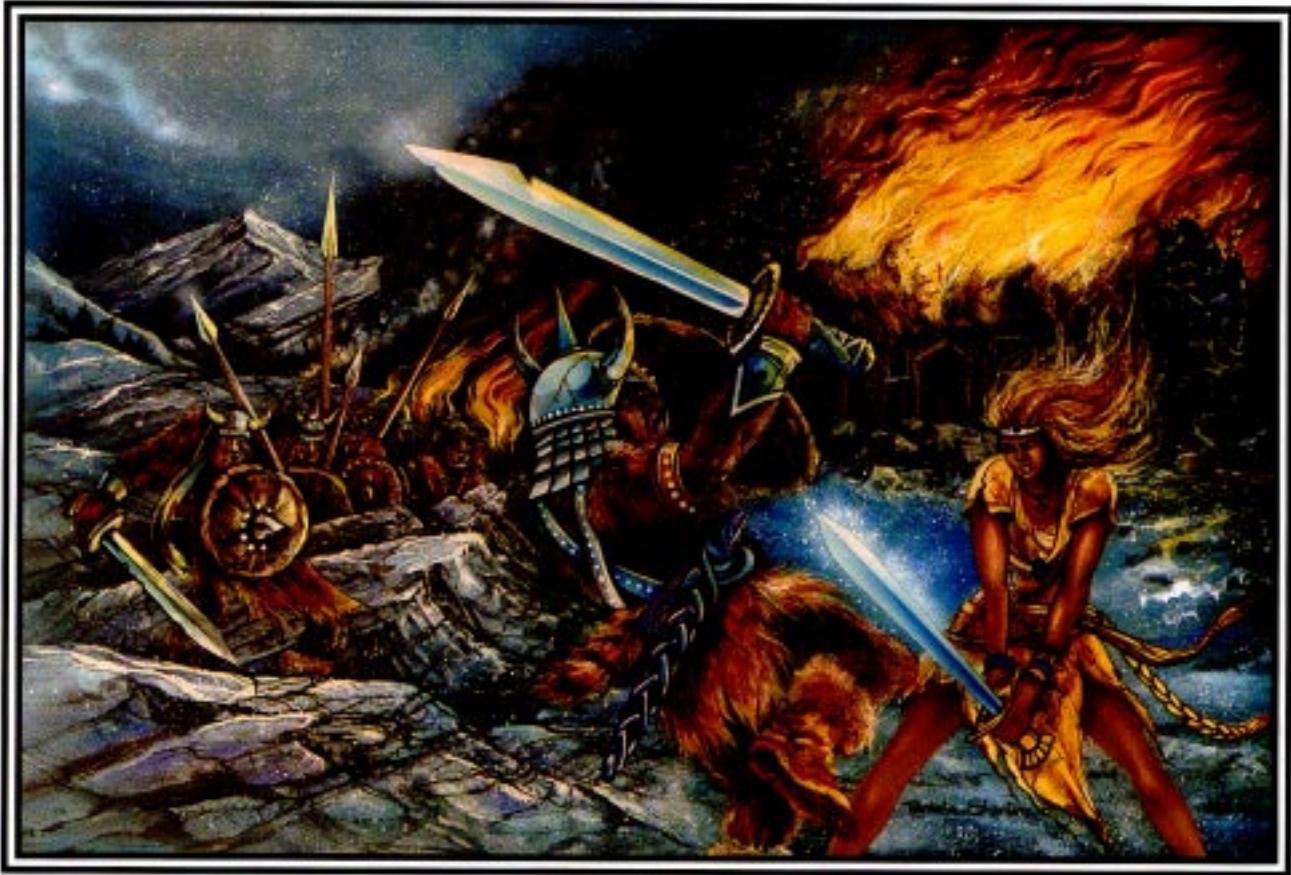
Encumbrance (5): For purposes of encumbrance, the dwarf's Strength is considered 4 points higher. Each percentage bracket above 18 counts as 1 point.

Evaluate Gems (5): The dwarf can determine within 10% the value of any gem.

Fitness Bonus (10): +1 bonus to Fitness/Constitution sub-ability.

Health Bonus (10): +1 bonus to Health/Constitution sub-ability.

Hit Point Bonus (10): The dwarf gains an additional hit point with each new level.



Infravision (5): Infravision to 90' range.

Mining Detection Ability (5): As per the dwarven ability in the *PHB*.

Orog Killer (5): +2 to hit against the dwarves' hated enemy, the orogs.

Saving Throw Bonus (10): As per the dwarven ability in the *PHB*.

Stone Quiet (10): At will, dwarf moves silently underground as if magically silenced.

Weapon Bonus (5): +1 to hit with one preferred weapon, either the dwarven axe or war hammer.

Ultravision (10): Dwarf was born with a rare form of sight. PC has ultravision at will as per the wizard spell in *S&M*.

Elves

Standard Abilities: Charm/sleep resistant, disease/aging resistant, freedom of movement, night vision, pass without trace, surprise.

Aim Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Aim sub-ability.

Alluring Nature (5/10): Normal mortals often find the beauty of elves to be irresistible. The elf can use *charm person* once/day for every five levels of experience. For 10 CPs, the elf can also cast a *suggestion* once/day, starting at 5th level.

Balance Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Balance sub-ability.

Charm/Sleep Resistant (10): The elf is 90% resistant to *charm* and *sleep* magic.

Companion (10): The elf gains the companionship of a cooshee (elven dog) or similar woodland creature. Animal companions respond to simple verbal commands and are capable of conveying its needs and emotions to the elf.

Conceal (10): In woodland settings, the elf may at will conceal self by remaining motionless aside any large tree, thus rendering the PC *invisible* as per the *invisibility* spell.

Disease/Aging Resistant (10): The elf is unaffected by aging attacks and normal diseases.

Freedom of Movement (5): The elf ignores ground characteristics when

moving or marching as described in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

Knowledge Bonus (10): +1 to Intelligence/Knowledge sub-ability

Manhunter (5): The elf gains +2 to hit against all humans.

Night Vision (5): The elf can see clearly by starlight or moonlight.

Pass Without Trace (5): In natural settings, the elf can *pass without trace*.

Quickfooted (5): Naturally quick, the elf has a movement rate of 15.

Reason Bonus (10): +1 to Intelligence/Reason sub-ability.

Surprise (5): As per the elven ability in the *PHB*.

Tree Walker (5): In areas of moderate to dense forest, the elf can walk along the tree branches at one-third movement rate.

Note: This article provides Skills & Powers options for BIRTHRIGHT PCs. To make cross-referencing easier, this article follows the organizational structure of the *PLAYER'S OPTION: Skills & Powers* book. It also incorporates various material presented in several products. Players creating characters using this article should have access to the *Player's Handbook (PHB)*, *Tome of Magic (ToM)*, *BIRTHRIGHT Campaign Setting Rulebook*, and *PLAYERS OPTION: Skills & Powers (S&P)*. Some options refer to *SPELLS & MAGIC (S&M)*, but this book is not required. Other BIRTHRIGHT accessories mentioned in this article are not required when customizing PCs.

Table 1: Character Points by Race

Race	CP Allotment
Dwarf	40
Elf	45
Half-Elf	20
Halfling	40
Human, All	10

Weapon Bonus (5): +1 to hit with one preferred weapon, either the long bow or javelin.

Withstand Magic (5/10): As creatures of faerie dust and starlight, the elf gains a +1 to all saves vs. magical attacks. For 10 CPs, the bonus increases to +2.

Woodland Silence (10): In woodland areas, the elf can move quietly as if affected by a *silence* spell.

Half-Elves

Standard Abilities: Charm/sleep resistant, disease/aging resistant, night vision.

Aim Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Aim sub-ability.

Appearance (5): The half-elf looks closely like the race of one parent. The player picks either human or elven. The half-elf is 95% undetectable as a half-elf in casual settings and is assumed to be what race he appears to be. This percentage may drop, at the DM's discretion, should the half-elf come under scrutiny.

Balance Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Balance sub-ability.

Charm/Sleep Resistant (5): The half-elf is 30% resistant to charm and sleep magic.

Disease/Aging Resistant (5): The half-elf is 30% resistant to aging attacks and natural diseases.

Hit Point Bonus (10): The half-elf gains an additional hit point with each new level.

Less Sleep (5): The half-elf requires only four hours of sleep a night.

Longevity (510): The half-elf has inherited a life far longer than that allowed to most mortals. For 5 CPs, the PC has $2d4 \times 20$ years added to racial maximum. For 10 CPs, the half-elf gains $1d4 \times 100$ years.

Night Vision (5): The half-elf can see clearly by starlight or moonlight.

Strong Ancestry (5+): For 5 CPs more than the cost listed, the half-elf may purchase any human or elven trait.

Weapon Bonus (5): The PC gains +1 to hit with a weapon of choice from Table 7: Weapons and Availability in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*. The weapon must be one available to either elves or the human sub-race of his parent.

Halflings

Standard Abilities: Saving throw bonus, shadow sense, shadow traveler, weapon bonus.

Aim Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Aim sub-ability.

Balance Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Balance sub-ability.

Cautious Traveler (5): The halfling possesses a keen understanding of the Shadow World and is ever on guard for the forces of the Cold Rider. The halfling is surprised only on a roll of 1 while in the Shadow Lands.

Enhanced Senses (5): The halfling with the Shadow Sense option has his chance of detection success increased by 2%/level of the PC.

Intuition Bonus (10): +1 to Wisdom/Intuition sub-ability.

Reason Bonus (10): +1 to Wisdom/Reason sub-ability.

Portal (15): Once per day, the halfling can open a portal to the Shadow World. The portal lasts for five hours plus one hour/level of the PC. It allows travel both to and from the Shadow World and is wide enough to allow five human-sized persons to pass through at one time. The emperor Michael Roele employed halflings with this power to transport his armies through the Shadow World during his war of conquest (as revealed in the *BIRTHRIGHT* novel, *The Iron Throne*).

Saving Throw Bonus (10): As per the halfling ability in the *PHB*.

Shadow Sense (10): At will, the halfling can *detect evil*, *detect undead*, and *detect necromantic magic* as described in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

Shadow Traveler (10): Under the right shadowy conditions, the halfling can shadow walk or dimension door as described in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

Shadow Weaver (10): The halfling can draw on his link with the Shadow World to cast one spell per day from the school of shadow. The halfling can cast only a spell that a wizard of the same level could. For example, a halfling of 7th

level could cast one shadow spell up to 4th level. A list of spells belonging to the school of shadow is found in *S&M*.

Resist Necromancy (5): Long-term exposure to the evil magic of the Shadow World has helped the halfling to develop 30% resistance to baneful necromantic magic. This protection lasts even in death, hampering those who would animate the PC after death.

Undead Loathing (5): The halfling's intense hatred for the undead that corrupted the Shadow World grants him a +2 to hit against all undead.

Weapon Bonus (5): +1 to attacks with slings and thrown missile weapons.

Humans

Human PCs choose traits from the nationality of their origin. DMs may allow PCs of mixed heritage access to more than one nationality.

Experience Bonus (10): The human gains a 5% bonus to all XP earned.

Hit Point Bonus (10): The human gains an additional hit point each time he advances a new level.

Lucky Human (10): Once per day, the human may re-roll a failed save or a missed attack.

Seafarer (5): The human gains a +2 to all sea-based proficiency checks.

Tough Hide (10): The human has naturally tough skin, gaining AC 8.

Weapon Bonus (5): The human gains a +1 to hit with weapon of choice from Table 7: Weapons and Availability in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*. The selected weapon must be available to the PC's nationality.

Anuire

Armor Class Bonus (10): The Anurian is an expert at maneuvering himself in battle, thus better able to avoid blows and granting a +1 bonus to armor class.

Imperialist (10): The memory of the greatness of the Anurian Empire burns brightly in the PC. From this self-assurance and confidence, the PC's will to succeed ensures that he tries harder in all his endeavors, granting a +1 bonus to all proficiency checks as well as +2 to all reaction rolls.

Intuition Bonus (10): +1 to Wisdom/Intuition sub-ability.

Reason Bonus (10): +1 to Wisdom/Reason sub-ability.

Brechtrür

Aim Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Aim sub-ability.

Balance Bonus (10): +1 to Dexterity/Balance sub-ability.

Friendly Trader (5): The people of Brechtrür appreciate the beneficial effect that good relations with others can have on business transactions. PC has a +4 reaction modifier with all humans.

Language Master (5): The PC is especially adept at learning human languages. Besides speaking his native tongue, the PC learns another human language of choice at 2nd level and then every 3rd level thereafter, until all five human tongues are learned at 11th level.

Khinasi

Enlightened One (10): The Khinasi's enlightened approach to understanding provides the PC with a worldly outlook and the calm self-assuredness to deal with life confidently. PC receives a +1 bonus to all surprise rolls. PC is also less likely to be deceived by illusions and thus receives a +2 to saves vs. illusion/phantasm magic.

Heat Endurance (5): The PC gains a +3 bonus to saves vs. heat and fire attacks.

Knowledge Bonus (10): +1 to Intelligence/Knowledge sub-ability.

Reason Bonus (10): +1 to Intelligence/Reason sub-ability

Rjurik

Cold Endurance (5): The human gains a +1 to all saves vs. cold attacks.

Fitness Bonus (10): +1 bonus to Fitness/Constitution sub-ability

Free-Willed (10): The fiercely independent Rjurik steadfastly resist attempts to constrain them. The human is immune to first-level Enchantment/Charm spells and receives a +1 to all other charm magic.

Health Bonus (10): +1 bonus to Health/Constitution sub-ability.

Vos

Battle Rage (10): Once per day during combat, the human can enter a battle rage lasting 2 rounds/level that grants the PC +1 to hit and +1 to damage.

Cold Endurance (5): The human gains a +1 to saves vs. cold and ice attacks.

Muscle Bonus (10): +1 to Strength/Muscle sub-ability.

Stamina Bonus (10): +1 to Strength/Stamina sub-ability.

4. Character Classes

Each class has a standardized package of abilities found in the *PHB* that is also duplicated here for easy reference. Players may opt to take the standard list of skills or customize their PCs using the abilities listed here. More information concerning each class (such as allowable weapons and armor, level limits, and minimum requirements) is found in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

Also included are two new subsections specifically written for *BIRTHRIGHT* that provide additional options for scions and regents. Both scions and regents may select additional options from the Blooded Abilities subsection, while regents alone may choose options from Regent Privileges. Blooded PCs do not receive any additional CPs to spend in these subsections. Players must pay with CPs from their class allotment for these options; however, no more than 15 CPs can be spent in this manner. In this way, a PC sacrifices knowledge about his profession to be a more learned or empowered scion or regent.

DMs who find these new blooded and regent abilities unfair to PC classes with low CP allotments, like the fighter, may opt to provide extra CPs to those classes. Alternatively, DMs may refuse to allow these extra blood options into the game.

4a. Character Class Options

Most *BIRTHRIGHT* character classes are similar to their standard AD&D counterparts. Players creating a fighter, paladin, ranger, thief, or bard may select options for their PC from both *S&P* and the *BIRTHRIGHT* options listed below. Cerilian priests, wizards, magicians, and guilders are fully customizable in this article. The guilder, a sub-class of rogue specializing in commercial adventuring, is unique to the Brechtrür region but may be taken by most PCs. Full details on the guilder including race and class restrictions along with special benefits for regent guilders may be found in the *Havens of the Great Bay* accessory.

If the DM allows it, wizard, priest, ranger, paladin, and bard spell options and restrictions listed in *S&M* may be taken for extra CPs.

Table 2: Character Points by Class

Class	CP Allotment
Warrior	
Fighter	15
Paladin	60
Ranger	60
Rogue	
Bard	80
Thief	85
Guilder	35
Priest	
Cleric, Druid	100
Wizard	
Magician & Specialist Wizard	35
Wizard, Standard	40

All Classes

All classes can select any of the following options:

Bodyguards/Followers (special): All regent classes may receive bodyguards at 1st level as described in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*. Paladin, ranger, and wizard regents receive these bodyguards as a free bonus. Regent fighters, priests, and thieves must pay 5 CPs for bodyguards who replace their followers. Regent bards and guilders taking this option must pay 5 CPs to gain 2d6+5 bodyguards at 1st level. Ranger regents who desire followers in addition to bodyguards must pay 5 CPs for those followers. Non-regent warriors, thieves, and priests may choose only followers. Non-regent bards, guilders, and magicians cannot acquire followers and must retain hirelings as per standard AD&D rules.

For all the specifics on bodyguards and followers, players are referred to the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

Weapon Specialization (special): PC has the ability to specialize in a single weapon, but the CP cost for acquiring the specialization must be met in addition to paying for this option. This cost varies depending on the class chosen: fighter—5 CPs; paladin, ranger—10 CPs; bard, cleric, druid, thief—15 CPs; magician, wizard—20 CPs.

Warrior Class

Optional Warrior Restrictions: All sub-classes of warrior (and of other classes) can gain bonus points by accepting the voluntary restrictions on normal abilities listed in *S&P*.

Fighter

Standard abilities: Bodyguards/followers, weapon specialization.

Complete Strategist (10): An excellent strategist, the PC provides the movement rating of whatever unit on the battlefield that he is fighting alongside with a +1 bonus.

Conduct Prejudicial (10): Fighter despises humans, demi-humans, and humanoids not of his own race receiving a +1 to hit and damage when fighting these races.

More Bodyguards/Followers (5): A fighter who has chosen the bodyguards/followers option may roll a second time on the same table and add new bodyguards to his retinue.

True Defender (10): Any war card unit that the PC fights with on the battlefield has a +1 bonus to defense.

True Leader (10): When PC fights with an army unit on the battlefield, he improves that unit's melee rating by one. If PC is an elf, then he may choose to improve an elven unit's melee or missile rating by 1.

Warrior Privilege (5+): The fighter may buy any paladin or ranger option for 5 CPs more than the cost listed.

Paladin

Standard abilities: Circle of power, curative, detect evil, faithful mount, healing, health, protection from evil, saving throw bonus, turn undead. All paladins except for paladins of Cuiráécen are granted priest spells. Players may refer to the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook* and *The Book of Priestcraft* for bonus powers granted paladins by their gods. All paladins follow the class restrictions listed in the *PHB*.

1d12 for Hit Points (10): The PC rolls 1d12 for hit points.

Awnsheghlien Slayer (10): The paladin is the sworn enemy of all evil awnsheghlien and gains a +3 to hit and damage against them.

Commanding Presence (5): The paladin may *command* as per the spell 1/day.

Dispel Evil (10): At 7th level, the paladin *can cast dispel evil* once per day.

High Wisdom Bonus (5): The paladin receives bonus spells based on high Wisdom as do priests.

Inspiring Leader (10): When the paladin fights with an army unit on the battlefield, that unit will never be routed and will never fail a morale check.

Paladin's Privilege (5+): For 5 CPs more than the cost listed, the paladin may purchase any generic option or option offered to priests of his god.

Ranger

Standard abilities: Bodyguards/ followers, empathy with animals, hide in shadow, move silently, priest spells, special enemy, tracking, and two-weapon style.

1d12 for Hit Points (10): The ranger rolls d12 for hit points.

Druidic Bond of Erik (10): Once per day, the ranger can use any one druidic ability that a druid of the same level possesses. The ability functions precisely the same as if the ranger were a druid. This option is not available to elves.

Healing Touch (10): Once per day, the ranger can lay hands on himself or any natural animal to heal 2 hp damage/ level of the PC.

High Wisdom Bonus (5): If the ranger has the priest spells option, the ranger receives bonus spells based on high Wisdom as do priests.

Speak With Animals (5/10): Once a day, the ranger can speak with animals as the spell. For 10 points, the ranger can employ this ability once/day for every three experience levels possessed.

Speak With Plants (5/10): Once per day, the ranger can *speak with plants* as the spell. For 10 points, the ranger can employ this ability once/day for every three experience levels possessed.

Wilderness Leader (10): When the ranger fights with an army unit on the battlefield, that unit can choose to ignore any terrain cards on the battlefield.

Winter Grace (5): At 5th level, the ranger may ignore the dangerous effects of cold weather. The ranger suffers no ill effects from the extremes of cold weather and may walk upon snow covered terrain with no penalty to movement rate. This option does not provide any protection against magical cold.

Rogue Class

There are three kinds of rogue available in the *BIRTHRIGHT* campaign: bards, guilders, and thieves. Thieves and bards have access to any standard rogue thieving skill listed in *S&P* provided that each skill is paid for with CPs. The base values of each rogue skill are detailed in *S&P*. Racial modifiers for the races are found under their specific entry in the *PHB*. Modifiers based on Dexterity and the specific type of armor worn are found in *S&P*. Skills can be improved upon as a PC advances in level as described in *S&P*. A complete description of all thieving skills and their CP costs may be found in *S&P*.

Thief

Standard abilities: Backstab, bodyguards/followers, climb walls, detect noise, find/remove traps, hide in shadows, move silently, open locks, pick pockets, read language, scroll use, Thieves Cant.

Missile Backstab (10): A thief who has chosen backstab may apply the +4 to hit when using one missile weapon of choice. The missile weapon becomes the "backstab" against an unsuspecting opponent.

Backstab Bonus (5): A thief who has chosen Backstab now attacks with a +6 to all backstab attacks.

Defense Bonus (10/15): An unarmored and unencumbered thief gains a -2 bonus to AC. For 15 points, the thief receives a -3 bonus to AC.

Shield from Law (5): The thief is capable of hiding some of his assets from the local law. All attempts by a law holding to take gold from the thief's guild have a 20% chance of failing. This roll is made prior to the law's attempt to take gold.

Warrior Fortitude (10): The thief enjoys the hit point benefits of a high constitution score as do warriors.

Warrior-Thief (15): The thief fights with the THAC0 of a warrior.

Bard

Standard abilities: Alter moods, bodyguards/followers, climb walls, counter effects; detect noise, history, magic item use, pick pockets, rally friends, read languages, wizard spells.

Blood Song (5): The bard's music has an extraordinary effect on bloodied



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individuals. Blooded individuals suffer a -1 penalty to all saves and checks vs. any spells cast by the Bard.

Charm Person (10): The bard can cast *charm person* by singing the spell 1 /day. At 9th level, the bard can cast *charm monster* instead of charm person 1 /day.

Instrumental Spell Casting (10): The bard has learned how to enhance his spells by casting them through a music instrument with which he is proficient (CPs must be spent for this proficiency also). All spells cast through the instrument are treated as if two levels higher with regard to effect, range, etc., and they require no material components. Casting spells in this manner increase casting time by 2 per level of the spell.

Magical Item Use (10): The bard can use magical items usable only by wizards but with a chance of failure as per the *PHB*.

Magician's Option (5+): For 5 CPs more than the cost listed, the bard can select one option available to wizards/magicians.

Secret Spell Casting (5): A bard with this option may cast spells through his musical instrument with no chance of being detected. To observers, it will appear as if the spell effect simply occurred. Extraordinary means of detecting spell casting such as divination magic have a normal chance of working against the bard.

Spell Bonus (10): The bard gains an extra spell per spell level if the wizard spells option is taken.

Weapon Bonus (5): The bard gains +1 to hit with a weapon of choice.

Wizard Spells (10): The bard can cast spells as described in the *PHB* and *S&P*.

Guilder

Standard abilities: Armor advantage, bonus proficiencies, read languages, and weapon advantage.

Armor Advantage (10): A distinct advantage among rogues, the guilder may wear any type of armor.

Bonus Proficiencies (10): At each level advance, the guilder gains double the new CPs normally earned. These CPs must be spent to purchase new non-weapon, proficiencies or improve existing non-weapon proficiencies.

Guild Bonus (10): When collecting gold from guild holdings, any roll of a

zero or negative number automatically becomes a 1.

Master Trader (10): The guilder's mastery over trade increases the maximum number of trade routes a province can possess by one so long as the guilder possesses all the guilds in that province.

Proficiency Transfer (5): If the guilder has selected bonus proficiencies, he may now spend the bonus CPs on weapon proficiencies.

Read Languages (5): The guilder has a 20% chance of reading languages at 1st level; the ability improves by 5%/level.

Shield from Law (5): The guilder can hide some of his assets from the local law. All attempts by a law holding to take gold from the PC's guild have a 20% chance of failing. This roll is made prior to the law's attempt to take gold.

Weapon Advantage (10): The guilder may wield any weapon so desired. The weapon proficiency must be paid for normally.

Weapon Bonus (5): The guilder gains a +1 to hit with weapon of choice.

Priest Class

The gods of Cerilia have priesthoods that distinctly define their priest's special abilities, sphere access, type of allowed armor and weapons, etc. Customization of priests can significantly interfere with the mood of the *BIRTHRIGHT* setting. Therefore in keeping with the spirit of Cerilia, the optional rules were designed to encourage players to create priests as defined in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*. Players of Cerilian priests have 100 CPs to spend on sphere access and special abilities.

Players customizing *BIRTHRIGHT* priests must pay more CPs for abilities and access to spheres not normally granted by their god. This higher cost is attributable to the extra energy that a god must expend to provide these normally out-of-reach options. Most of the powers listed below are offered by at least one god of Cerilia. Players selecting an option offered by the PC's god pay the CP cost listed. Players selecting an option provided by another god must pay double the cost for that option. Some options are generic and are available from all gods for the CP cost listed.

DMS who find these priest costs unfair to the class are free to lower the costs

listed for sphere access and abilities. Alternatively, DMs may increase the CP allotment for the priest class to offset the higher costs of some spheres and options.

Also presented here are options for dwarven priests of Moradin (from *Monster Mythology*). Priests for Moradin have major access to all, combat, creation, elemental (earth, fire), guardian, healing, law, necromantic, protection, war, wards, and minor access to divination. Priests of Moradin receive three abilities from their god: Dwarven charisma, warhammer bonus, wondrous prayer.

Some options below refer to "blood spells." All blood-related spells are found in *The Book of Priestcraft*.

Cleric/Druid

Bestow Darkness—Eloéle (5): The priest may cast darkness, 15' radius 1 /day at 7th level.

Blood Curse (10): The priest is an expert at casting priest spells that specifically target blooded individuals, who save against such spells at a -2 penalty.

Charm Monster—Laerme (10): At 7th level, the priest may cast charm monster 1 /day.

Clumsy Curse—Sera (10): The priest may cast *fumble* 1/day at 10th level.

Cold Aura—Kriesha (10): At 5th level, the priest can cast *wall of ice* or *ice storm* 1/day.

Cold Resistance—Cuiracén/Kriesha (10): At 7th level, the priest has cold resistance equal to a *ring of fire resistance*. Priestesses of Kriesha gain cold resistance at 13th level except that the protection offered is the same as a *ring of warmth*. PCs of other gods choosing this option may select the benefit offered by only one of these gods, not both.

Courageousness—Haelyn (10): +2 bonus to saves vs. fear, hold, and mind-affecting magic.

Command/Turn Undead (10): The priest is granted power over undead beings by either turning or commanding undead depending on the god's outlook. Priests of Erik, Cuiracén, Sera, and Belinik taking this option must pay double the CP cost and can only turn undead.

Detect Blood (10): The priest can see the godly emanations of blooded beings within a path 10 feet wide by 60 feet

long. It takes one round to scan a direction, and the priest cannot be attempting other actions. The priest cannot detect blooded beings through stone or other thick materials.

Detect Evil/Good (10): The priest can see emanations of evil or good from creatures or objects within a path 10 feet wide by 60 feet long. It takes one round to scan a direction, and the priest cannot be attempting other actions. Good priests can detect only evil, while evil ones can detect only good. Neutral priests may scan for good and evil.

Detect Undead (10): The priest can detect all undead within a path 10 feet wide by 60 feet long. It takes one round to scan a direction, and the priest cannot be attempting other actions. The priest cannot detect undead through stone or other thick materials.

Druidic Powers—Erik (25): The priest has all the standard powers allowed to druids as defined in the *PHB*.

Dwarven Charisma—Moradin (5): The priest's Charisma score is considered 2 points higher when dealing with dwarves.

Expert Healer (5): The priest can cast one *cure light wounds* in addition to the priest's normal daily allotment of spells 1/day.

Fearful Priest—Belinik (10): The priest can cast *fear* 1/day at 9th level.

Fiery Bolt—Avani (5): The priest can cast *flame arrow* 1/day at 5th level.

Fire Charmer—Laerme (5): At 5th level, the priest may cast *fire charm* 1/day.

Fire Touch, Major—Laerme (10): At 9th level, the priest may cast either *produce fire* or *fireball* 1/day.

Fire Touch, Minor—Laerme (5): At 1st level, the priest may cast either *affect normal fires* or *burning hands* 1/day.

Fire Resistance—Laerme (10): The priest has fire resistance equal to a *ring of fire resistance* at 11th level.

Fortune's Curse—Sera (10): Once a day at 7th level, the priest may curse a victim, resulting in a -4 to victim's attacks and saving throws for one week.

Free Actor—Nesirie (10): The priest has free action as per a *ring of free action*.

Hit Point Bonus (10): Cleric rolls 1d10 for hit points.

Ice Maiden—Kriesha (5): At 1st level, the priestess receives a +1 to saves vs. cold and may cast *chill touch* 1 /day.

Infravision—Eloéle (5): At 4th level, the priest gains infravision to 60 feet.

Invisibility—Sera (5): The priest can cast *invisibility* 1 /day at 4th level.

Know Alignment (10): The priest can cast *know alignment* 1 /day.

Lightning Resistance—Cuiraécen (10): At 7th leve, he priest has lightning resistance equal to a *ring of fire resistance*.

Mental Fortitude—Belinik (5): The priest receives a +2 to saves vs. mind-affecting magic at 7th level.

Mist Maker—Nesirie (10): At 5th level, the priest can cast *solid fog* 1 /day.

Perceptiveness—Avani (10): The priest gains a +2 to all saves vs. illusion magic.

Physical Fortitude—Belinik (15): The priest's Strength and Constitution gain a +1 bonus to a maximum of 18 at 5th level.

Produce Flame—Laerme (5/15): At 3rd level, the priest can cast *produce flame* 1/day. For 15 CPs, priest can *produce flame* at will at 9th level.

Ranger Powers—Erik (10): The priest possesses animal empathy and can move silently and hide in shadows as a ranger three levels higher.

Saving Throw Bonus—Sera (10): Priest receives a +2 to all saving throws.

Sphere Access (special): Players selecting major or minor access to a sphere normally granted to them by their god pay the standard CP cost as listed in *S&P*. Players selecting major access to a sphere when their god has only granted minor access must pay double the CP cost for that sphere. Players selecting minor access to a sphere not offered by their deity must pay 10 CPs plus the cost listed in *S&P*. Players selecting major access to a sphere not offered by their god must pay 15 CPs plus the cost listed in *S&P*.

Strength Under The Moon—Ruornil (10/15): Opponents of the priest suffer a -2 penalty to saving throws while the moon is in the sky. For 15 points, the penalty worsens to 4.

Sun's Caress—Avani (10/15): At 9th level, the priest can cast *sunray* 1 /day. For 15 points, the priest can cast this spell at 6th level.

Thief-Priest—Eloele (20): The priest gains standard thief abilities of a thief half of priest's level, rounded up.

Warhammer Bonus—Moradin (5): The priest receives a +2 to hit with the war hammer at 5th level.

Warrior-Priest—Cuiraécen (25): The priest has a THAC0 and number of attacks equal to a warrior of the same level.

Water Lover—Nesirie (5/15): The priest can cast *water breathing* or *water walking* 1 /day. For 15 points, the priest can breathe water as easily as air.

Weapon Allowance (5): The priest may select to wield one weapon not normally allowed by priest's god.

Weapon Master—Haelyn/Belinilc (15): At 5th level, priests of Haelyn gain a 3 attacks per 2 rounds; they gain a +1 to hit with weapon of choice at 9th level. Belinik's priests gain a +1 to hit with weapon of choice at 1st level; they gain 3/2 attacks at 3rd level. PCs of other gods choosing this option receive their powers as if they were priests of Haelyn.

Winter's Kiss—Kriesha (10/15): At 9th level, priestess can cast *cone of cold* or *Otiluke's freezing sphere* 1 /day. For 15 points, the priestess can cast both spells 1/day.

Wizardly Priest—Ruornil (15): Priest gains the spell abilities of a magician of half the priest's level (rounding down).

Wondrous Prayer—Moradin (10): At 9th level, once/day, the priest may cast a special *prayer* that, upon expiration, heals all dwarves within spell radius for 1d3 hp. This *prayer* cannot be negated by enemy magic resistance.

Mage Class

Magicians and true wizards have similar characteristics. Listed below are options available to all types of mage. Some options below refer to "blood spells." Blood-related spells are listed in *The Book of Magecraft*.

Wizard and Magician

Standard true wizards have the following ability: Access to schools as defined in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*. Specialist true wizards and magicians have the same standard abilities, but they work differently for each type of mage. The abilities for specialist wizards and magicians are: Access to schools (no point cost), automatic spells, bonus spells, intense magic, learning bonus, research bonus, saving throw bonus. Note that specialty wizards and magicians suffer a -15% penalty when learning spells outside of their specialty school(s) as described in the *PHB* and *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

Table 3: Nonweapon Proficiency Summary

Proficiency	Cost	Initial Rating	Ability
General			
Administration	4	5	Intelligence/Knowledge
Law	4	6	Intelligence/Knowledge
Leadership	3	6	Charisma/Leadership
Warrior			
Siegecraft	4	7	Intelligence/Reason
Strategy	3	5	Intelligence/Reason
Priest			
Diplomacy	3	6	Wisdom/Intuition
Rogue			
Intrigue	3	7	Wisdom/Intuition

Access to Schools: For standard true wizards, access to one school costs 5 CPs. It costs 40 points for a standard wizard to have access to all eight standard schools of magic. Specialty mages and magicians gain automatic access to their specialty school(s) and other allowed schools.

Armored Wizard (5+): As a 5-point ability, PC may wear padded armor. For 10 CPs, PC may wear leather, studded leather, hide, or brigandine armor. For 15 points, PC may wear any armor desired. Wizards and magicians are never allowed to use shields.

Automatic Spells (5): When a PC with this option gains access to a new level of spells, the PC automatically acquires one spell of choice for that level. Specialist wizards and magicians may select only spells belonging to their chosen school.

Blood Spell Bonus (5): The PC may memorize one extra blood spell for every three levels of the caster, provided the wizards could normally cast that spell.

Blood Specialist (5): The PC is an expert at casting wizard spells that deal specifically with blood abilities. Victims saving against such spells cast by the PC suffer a -1 penalty. Plus, "blood spells" last an extra 1 round per caster's level.

Bonus Spells (10): The wizard may memorize one additional spell per spell level. Bonus spells memorized by specialists must belong to the wizard's specialty school.

Detect Magic (10): This ability allows the wizard to *detect magic* once a day for every two levels of experience.

Dispel Magic (10): The wizard can cast *dispel magic* once a day for every five levels possessed.

Extra Bonus Spell (10): If the Bonus Spell option was taken, the specialist now receives a second bonus spell per spell level provided that the spell belongs to his chosen school.

Fighting Mage (10/15): For 10 CPs, PC fights with a priest's THAC0. For 15 points, PC fights with a warrior's THAC0.

Greater Hit Die (10+): For 10 points, PC rolls d6 for hit points; for 15 CPs, d8; for 20 points, d10.

Intense Magic (5): The targets of a spell from a particular school suffer a -1 saving throw penalty when cast by the wizard or magician. Standard wizards may select what school of magic they want affected by this option. Specialist wizards or magicians can affect only school(s) from their specialty. This option may be purchased several times with a cumulative effect.

Learning Bonus (5): +15% bonus when attempting to learn new spells belonging to one chosen school.

Learning Enabled (5): The specialist wizard or magician does not suffer the -15% penalty when attempting to learn spells outside their specialty school(s).

Read Magic (5): The wizard can *read magic* as the spell once/ day for every two levels possessed.

Research Bonus (5): When attempting to research and create a new spell, the spell is treated as one level lower than its actual level. Specialty wizards and magicians gain this bonus only for their specialty school(s).

Saving Throw Bonus (5): +1 bonus on saving throws vs. spells cast at the wizard from one chosen school of magic. Specialty wizards and magicians only gain this bonus for their specialty school(s). This option may be purchased

several times with cumulative effect.

Warrior Mage (10): The PC enjoys the benefits of a high Constitution score the same as warriors.

4B. Blood Abilities

These options must be taken and applied at the time that the player rolls for bledded abilities.

Derivation Choice (5): The player picks bledded derivation of choice.

Modify Roll (5): The player may modify up or down any one rolled score by any amount up to 5. A PC's bloodline strength, derivation, blood ability acquisition, or blood abilities may be altered by this option. This option may be taken more than once.

Re-roll Blood Score (5): Player may re-roll any one blood score. This option may be taken more than once.

4C. Regent Privileges

Beloved Ruler (5): The regent's popularity has created many pockets of loyalists in all his provinces. The cost of all actions within rebellious provinces are the same as if the province's loyalty rating was poor.

Elite Forces (15): The regent favors one type of military unit and directs more money to train and outfit these units. On the battlefield, all units of this type receive a +1 to their Melee rating. The type of military unit must be selected upon assuming the throne and can never be changed.

Efficient Rule (10): The regent runs a fit and efficient kingdom. The regent's domain maintenance costs are reduced by 10% (rounded down).

Dreams of the Emperor (15): So great is the desire to forge an empire that the quest to be Emperor is ever present in all the regent's plans. This manifests itself as a +1 bonus to all of the regent's realm actions requiring a success roll. This bonus does not apply to any of the regent's lieutenants.

Great Defender (5): When defending the regent's realm against invading armies, all military units have their Defense ratings increased by 1.

Magic Manager (10): The regent's command over ley lines is absolute and masterful, reducing the cost of maintaining ley lines by 15% (rounded down) per domain turn.

Military Master (10): The cost of mustering and maintaining the regent's army and navy units is reduced by 10% (rounded down).

More Lieutenants (5): The PC works hard to extend his authority and influence, thus gaining one additional lieutenant beyond the limit allowed by regent's Charisma and bloodline strength.

Regency Power (10): Each domain turn, the regent accumulates 1 additional regency point for every two levels of experience. This is added to the PC's current Regency Point score.

Sovereign of the Court (5): The regent is a master at running his court. The PC's court value is treated as if one additional GB higher than the actual amount expended.

Superb Requisition (15): During a domain turn, when law holdings attempt to claim gold from province taxation or from guild and temple collection, any score resulting in a zero or negative score is treated as a 1.

5. Character Kits

The *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook* lists dozens of acceptable PC kits from numerous AD&D Complete Handbook supplements. In *The Book of Magecraft*, players will find eight unique kits for magicians: Court magician, disguiser, illuminator, bloodline hound, crystal gazer, oracle, and visionary.

6. Nonweapon Proficiencies

At this stage of PC development, players spend points on nonweapon proficiencies and traits. Standard nonweapon proficiencies by point cost are listed in S&P. *BIRTHRIGHT* PCs receive the same number of CPs as the standard AD&D classes given in S&P.

Seven new non-weapon proficiencies for *BIRTHRIGHT* have appeared so far. The proficiencies summarized in Table 3 are all found in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*.

7. Weapon Proficiency & Mastery

Consult Chapter 7 of S&P for more information on acquiring weapon proficiencies and other weapon skills. *BIRTHRIGHT* warriors, rogues, priests, and wizards follow the same weapons rules presented there.

A unique, two-handed style of sword fighting known as *klaunstrichen* or "black strike" style of fencing may be learned in Brechtür. To become proficient in this style, a PC must spend the necessary CPs to become proficient in the rapier plus the CPs for proficiency with a smaller weapon such as the dagger or main-gauche. The PC must then pay the cost for another weapon proficiency to learn this combination fighting style. The *klaunstrichen* is fully described in *Havens of the Great Bay*.

9. Psionics

As mentioned in the *BIRTHRIGHT Rulebook*, psionics do not fit the mood of Cerilia, so no rules psionicists have been provided in this article. DMs seeking psionic options for their *BIRTHRIGHT* campaigns may direct their players to either "Heroes of Athas" in *DRAGON Magazine Annual #1* or "Campaign Classics: Mindscapes of Athas and Beyond" in *DRAGON Magazine Annual #2*.

8. New Schools of Magic

The world of Cerilia offers fascinating magical possibilities for all PCs, from priests to magicians to wizard regents and priest regents. Some of these PCs can unleash destructive battle spells in combat or tap the sources of the land to cast incredibly powerful realm magic. *The Book of Priestcraft* and *The Book of Magecraft* are excellent resources that expand the roleplaying options for wizards, magicians, and priests of Cerilia with new insights, new magical items, and a variety of new spells.

When not tormenting players in his BIRTHRIGHT game, Ed Bonny spends his time exploring ways to become the first blooded regent of Manhattan. He would appreciate any suggestions or bloodsilver anybody has to offer.

THE UNSPEAKABLE OAF

by John Kovalic





THE SENTINEL WYRM Miirym

She kept to the
letter of her bond,
even after her body
rotted and fell apart.
The spells that bound
her animated her still,
keeping her sentient
... if not entirely sane.

by
Ed Greenwood

Illustrated by
Storm Cook



IHEN HE READ VOLO'S NOTES (a confused cluster of speculations surrounding little more than a correct name and gender) Elimister nodded, summoned a quill and fresh parchment from some handy otherwher, and started writing.

Volo's sketchy notes came as no surprise to the Old Mage, because very few folk alive in Faerun have even heard of Miirym. Though this statement has become a trite truism overused by taletellers describing dragons, the reason for her obscurity is indeed that "most who encounter her don't live to speak of it later."

Long, long ago, Miirym was a silver dragon who dwelt near Candlekeep. In her playful hunting, she devoured several scholars and destroyed a score or so irreplaceable books on their way to the abbey, so a wizard attached to the abbey bound her to service: she was to defend the monks, buildings, and books of the abbey for some twenty years.

Unfortunately for Miirym, the mage was the archsorcerer Torth, whose spells were so mighty that when he died-fifteen years along in Miirym's sentence of twenty—no one could break his enchantments. The monks apologetically wrote up a tome describing the situation and all that was known of Torth's spells, then set a copy of it in a crypt beneath the keep, in a casket with the sorcerer's bones and staff.

Miirym was a captive in servitude. Though she kept to the letter of her bond, her attacks on transgressors became savage. This is how Candlekeep acquired its reputation of utter impregnability, and

that to attempt to steal from it or slip into it unnoticed, was futile.

Eventually worn out by advanced age and the attacks of foolish would-be intruders—notably several bands of Calishite wizards, who planned and then tried to carry out elaborate spell attacks on Candlekeep in the Year of the Shield-tree (1181 D.R.) and the Year of the Tomb (1182 D.R.)—Miirym “died.” That is, her body rotted and fell apart, losing flesh before bones, and then bone after bone crumbled away to dust, while the spells that bound her animated her still, keeping her sentient . . . if not entirely sane.

When all that remained of the Sentinel Wyrm was a malevolent but diligent invisible guardian force, the monks of Candlekeep, fearing for the safety of legitimate visitors to the abbey, hired mages to destroy their strange guardian.

Even these wizards could not prevail against Torth's cunningly-woven spells (so linked that the destruction of one serves to strengthen the next, and spawn an eventual regeneration of all destroyed magics), and succeeded only in “driving down” Miirym to a radius of perhaps a quarter of a mile from the remains of Torth. A sacrificial band of monks undertook to carry the archsorcerer's casket deeper into the cellars and natural (volcanic) passages beneath them. Where the last of this band fell, Torth's casket rests,



SHE TORE ONE BOOK THIEF TO SHREDS with her jaws and often shows his resting-place to parties of intruders as a warning; a narrow passage littered with forels, blood-stains and small dust-heaps . . .

at the heart of a labyrinthine complex of caverns and passages beneath Candlekeep—and Miiryrm still lurks there, under the keep, defending it very effectively against intrusion from below.

According to Elminster, Miiryrm exists today as a pair of spectral jaws that can *dimension door* at will. The jaws can “bite” for 2d12 hp damage or unleash a dragon breath weapon each round; Miiryrm can choose any chromatic or metallic breath weapon type. She is AC -11, causes 24d10+12 hp with her breath weapon, and has 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1 wizard spells and 2,2,2,1 priest spells. She also

has 60'-range x-ray vision and also can see astral, ethereal, and invisible objects and

Miryrm defends Candlekeep diligently, but she'd rather talk than fight . . .

beings for 120 feet in all directions. Dealing her 77 hp of damage in any 1-hour period causes her to vanish, “disrupted,” for 2d8+8 hours. Miiryrm defends Candlekeep diligently, but she'd rather talk than fight, and she will trade tales for information about current events in Faerûn. She is very lonely and secretly dreams of regaining her body and flying high and free over all of Toril. Adventurers seeking to seduce her aid or favor by promising such things are warned that it has been tried several times before, and so bitter were Miiryrm's disappointments that she is cynical about any promises to aid her in her dream—though she never tires of talking about it.

In life, Miiryrm loved green, growing things. In her minds eye, she can still vividly picture (and identify) many plants, the Sword Coast topography between Amn and Waterdeep (about as far inland as the western edge of the High Moor) as it was fifteen hundred years ago, and the fierce lightning storms she used to love to fly through. She likes to hear jokes but is saddened by news of changes and daily doings in the Realms she can't see or be a part of.

Miryrm's sanity isn't strong. Although she'll never forget the situation she's in and the identities and locations of poten-

tial foes or would-be intruders into Candlekeep, anyone who tries to trick her or launch a sneak attack can expect to have her come screaming and howling after them, hurling everything she can in a savage, furious attack.

She tore one book thief to shreds with her jaws and often shows his resting-place to parties of intruders as a warning: a narrow passage littered with forels, bloodstains, and small dust-heaps that were once small scraps of flesh and bone; nothing larger than the size of a man's fist was left of the thief when the dragon was finished. The books themselves are missing. (Miiryrm carefully put them atop Torth's casket, and a daring priest of Candlekeep magically snatched

them back to the keep; the Sentinel Wyrm suspects that this was their

fate, but she is haunted by the possibility that a force or being she failed to detect somehow reached the books and spirited them away.)

If intruders who come within Miiryrm's reach are openly carrying books of any kind (such as their own spellbooks), or reveal such items to her at any time, the Sentinel Wyrm insists that they be surrendered to her for “rightful return” to Candlekeep. She won't believe any protests as to the ownership of the tomes: as far as she's concerned, writings of any sort belong to Candlekeep, period.

She has one further grisly warning to share with intruders: in a dead-end passage, a skeletal head and shoulders floats in midair, arms frozen forever raised in futile warding-off gestures, jaw stretched wide in an endless scream. The rest of the skeleton has long since crumbled away; this much remains due to the failing magics of a plain electrum carcanet still encircling the bony neck. Its magics fail entirely if it is disturbed, allowing both it and the remaining bones to crumble into dust. In any case, its enchantments long ago rendered the bones inert to scrying and necromantic magics; nothing of the identity or intentions of the remains can now be learned.

Miryrm willingly supplies all she

knows: this was once a beautiful and imperious sorceress who tried to bargain with the Sentinel Wyrm, offering to surrender a book she'd seized if she were allowed to copy certain writings out of it, unmolested. When the dragon told her both the tome and the new writing would have to be returned to the keep, the mage hurled a *meteor swarm* at Miiryrm—but she had the misfortune to do so in a section of passage where an earlier intruder had left a glass guardian (several of which still survive, elsewhere in the passages roamed by the Sentinel Wyrm), so she felt its full effects herself. Staggering and near death, she retreated to where her remains now float and cast her last powerful spell at Miiryrm as the floating jaws approached her in slow silence. It was an *imprisonment*, and it had no effect on the Sentinel Wyrm. Why, Miiryrm doesn't know; the enchantments that bind her probably render her immune to such spells . . . or perhaps the spell simply missed her). The sorceress gave in to despair but refused to surrender the books when Miiryrm asked her one last time—so the Sentinel Wyrm ate both of her legs. The carcanet held the mage upright as she bled to death.

There's little else of interest in the passages within the Sentinel Wyrm's reach, beyond one seeping spring of drinkable water and the aforementioned scattering of glass guardians; would-be intruders are warned that Miiryrm knows every bend and fissure of her “domain” intimately and always knows precisely where she is, and whether anything has changed (i.e., if an intruder uses magic to appear made of stone and hugs a wall, the Sentinel Wyrm knows that this or that lump “isn't supposed to be there” and confronts it as a disguised intruder).

Miryrm's Lair

The Sentinel Wyrm hasn't been back to her lair in a little over fifteen hundred years—and in that time, it's disappeared, sliding into the sea in 788 D.R., when the “sea stack” it was located atop collapsed under the tireless pounding of the waves. The pillar of rock had been separated from the shore before Miiryrm (one of a large family of silver dragons who ranged across the comparatively-

dragonless North of the time, to find their own lairs sometime circa 2 D.R.) ever found it. It stood like a lone dark pillar just offshore from Ulgoth's Beard (which, of course, didn't exist then). Many rocks and islets can still be found in the vicinity today, left behind by a receding shore—despite the silt brought downstream by the adjacent river, onshore waves scour the coast here, and wear it away, year by year.

Miirym's stack stood well out to sea from where the shore is today, but has been reduced to fist-sized rubble and gravel by the Sea of Swords since its destruction, and her paltry treasure hoard (coins and silver tradebars, no magic) drowned and lost. The lair itself was no more than a long, twisting cave of natural origin, home to a mated pair of wyverns until Miirym arrived, was attacked, and slew them.

Miirym's Domain

Miiryn once roamed the rolling, forested coastal lands between the High Moor and the Sea of Swords (as far offshore as Mintarn), south as far as the Cloud Peaks, and north to Mount Helimbrar. This was so long ago that dragons who now dwell in or near her onetime domain don't know of her existence—and in the unlikely event she were to emerge into the surface world today and desire to rule over a territory, Miirym would have to fight for, and win, her domain all over again.

The Deeds of Miirym

Miirym spends her endless days wandering all of the passages within her reach, idly widening connecting tunnels and enlarging rooms by casting the few rock-shattering and matter-teleportational spells available to her. She always enjoys a chat, and from time to time an especially bad monk of Candlekeep is sent down to talk to her as an especially cruel punishment; marks on the passage walls clearly show how far they can travel and still remain just out of reach of her spells and jaws. She'll always challenge and try to talk to intruders before attacking them—and if they offer her violence at first sight, she'll try to converse while battling them.

The Sentinel Wyrm isn't above lurking near intruders, silent and as hidden as possible, and eavesdropping to learn all she can about them (and whatever they may be talking about), before first revealing herself—or after intruders think they've escaped her.

Miirym's Magic

Miirym has custody of—and knows the powers of—at least seven glass guardian spheres. She moves them to aid her in battle against magically-powerful foes if she deems it necessary.

Glass Guardian

These small, translucent glass spheres tend to be green, blue, or near-colorless mauve in hue. Empty and about the size of a large man's fist, they float motionless in mid-air unless grasped and towed (or thrust along by an impact or force) to a new location; when released, they hang motionless. Any physical attack that "kills" these AC 9.2 hit point globes causes them to shatter, whereupon they fall harmlessly to dust, their magic lost.

Their sole purpose, however, is to reflect back at its source any magic that enters or erupts into being within (or partially within) the 10'-diameter "safe area" that each *glass guardian* protects.

They do this unerringly, darkening and shattering the moment they've reflected a single magic. However, they can be clustered in groups to provide more lasting protection; only one *glass guardian* reacts to a magic, negating it and "dying" to leave nearby guardians intact and still operating. Some of these spheres have existed for thousands of years; the enchantments that create them are ancient and fairly simple.

XPValue: 200 GPValue: 1,000

The Sentinel Wyrm also wields an impressive array of spells. She had little time to devise her own magics before being bound into the service of Candlekeep, but from time to time she has gained spells from writings brought to her by the monks, or that she gleaned from books gained from intruders (before they were taken up to the keep

proper by the spells of monks *farscrying* her). She's had little chance to alter her spells, but a few of them are rare enough to warrant inclusion here.

The last spell, *breathdoom*, is beyond Miirym's powers to cast, but it is included here from Elminster's private books because it is an advanced version of *breathball*, a spell that Miirym often employs. (The Old Mage owns a text of the spell as written by and for a dragon, but he declines to say just which wyrms of Faerûn currently command this mighty magic.)

Bladebite

(Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: 60 yards

Components: V

Duration: 3 rounds

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One bladed weapon

Saving Throw: None

This spell transforms any visible bladed weapon chosen by the caster into a sharp-fanged, smooth-bodied serpentine form (the cutting edges of the weapon disappear). This "blade serpent" strikes at any living creature it can reach, biting twice per round for 1d4+1 hp damage a time. (Usually this spell is cast on a drawn weapon in the grasp of a foe of the spellcaster.)

A blade serpent is AC 4, is MV 5 if free to move on a horizontal surface, and can be shattered (turning the weapon it is made of into metal shards forever) by dealing it 22 hp damage.

If the affected weapon is held by its wielder (who is forced to suffer its attacks) throughout the entire duration of a *bladebite*, it shifts back into sword form when the spell ends. If the weapon is released, however (or wasn't in the grasp of anyone when struck by the spell), it lapses into a twisted, edgeless bar of metal when the spell expires and must be re-forged to regain useful bladed weapon shape.

Enchanted weapons aren't changed into twisting, biting serpents by this spell, or altered in shape in any other manner, but their bonuses and special powers are negated for the duration of the *bladebite*.

Breathball

(Evocation)

Level: 6

Range: 100 yds. + 10 yds./level

Components: V

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: 30' radius

Saving Throw: 1/2

This spell brings into being a 10'-diameter sphere of roiling, rushing, opaque whirling air that appears floating in a chosen spot within spell range. If a locale beyond spell range is chosen, the *breathball* appears as close to it as spell range allows. A *breathball* hangs in its chosen spot until its caster wills it to detonate (usually when a foe is nearby), a living creature other than the caster makes contact with any part of it (missile weapons and probings with weapons have no effect on it), or 10 rounds elapse from casting, whichever comes first.

When any of these conditions is fulfilled, the *breathball* bursts, explosively spraying its contents throughout a 30'-radius sphere of effect. These "contents" are any chosen breath weapon the draconic caster can employ (human spellcasters able to use spells such as *cone of cold*, by use of the "linking" spell *dweomerflow*, can substitute such magics for the breath weapon they lack).

Thus, a bronze dragon could cause a *breathball* to release either a stroke of lightning or repulsion gas. The lighting would burst into a sheet of ricochetting miniature bolts, entirely filling the 30'-diameter sphere for one round, and the *breathball* would limit the repulsion gas to the same area of effect, thereby extending its effective "life" from one round to three. Breath weapon damage and effects are unaltered by *breathball*; whenever the nature of the breath weapon allows, target creatures are allowed a saving throw for half damage.

Breathballs are typically set in narrow passages in a dragon's lair, where they can't be circumvented. Their edges can be in contact with walls or other solid, non-living objects without altering their operation (or distorting their spherical area of effect). They don't create rushing winds but whirl only within the confines of the magic.

Breathdoom

(Evocation)

Level: 8

Range: 100 yds. + 10 yds./level

Components: V

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 1 round

Area of Effect: 30' radius

Saving Throw: 1/2

This spell brings into being a 10'-diameter sphere of whirling air floating in a chosen spot within spell range. (If a locale beyond spell range is chosen, the *breathdoom* appears as close to it as spell range allows, but physical constrictions or obstacles have no effect on its formation or performance). The caster can make this sphere invisible, but its presence is always betrayed by a continuous shimmering or rippling of the air.

A *breathdoom* waits in place until conditions set forth by its caster are fulfilled. These conditions can be as detailed and extensive as the caster desires, as per the conditions that govern the operation of a *magic mouth* spell (e.g., "Take effect when any humanoid, or any human bearing drawn bladed weapons or wearing the vestments of the god Malar, passes through this archway.") Once casting is complete, the conditions can't be augmented or altered. (The usual solution to desired changes is to employ another *breathdoom* in an immediately adjacent locale, though it should be noted the 30'-radius "blast areas" of *breathdoom* spells can't overlap; casting a second one so as to intrude on the potential area of effect of an earlier *breathdoom* causes both spells to silently and harmlessly dissipate and be wasted.) Whatever the wording of the conditions, actions of a caster can never trigger his own *breathdoom*. Attempts to destroy, negate, or move a *breathdoom* cause it to take immediate effect (in the process nullifying *dispel magic* or any other enchantment intended to nullify it). Otherwise, nothing can cause it to be unleashed save the preset conditions; it can wait for years or centuries until they are fulfilled.

When "triggered," a *breathball* bursts, spraying its contents throughout a 30'-radius sphere of effect. These "contents" are one discharge of any chosen breath weapon the draconic caster can employ.

Saves (for half damage) are allowed whenever the nature of the breath weapon permits, but the effects of the breath weapon are otherwise unaltered.

Miiryrm's Fate

The Sentinel Wyrm has passed beyond death and awaits the untwining of Torth's mighty spells to grant her freedom. Thereafter, she would be a wandering, spectral force, free to do great damage in Faerûn if she desired. Azuth knows the means of binding even so powerful a spectral sentience into the helve of an enchanted weapon or other item. Certain Netherese liches and senior Red Wizards might also know, or be able to devise, such magical processes, but Mystra is unlikely to provide guidance to any mages or priests requesting inspiration over such matters.

All in all, Miiryrm bids fair to be around the underways of Candlekeep for another thousand years or more, in Elminster's estimation. If something were to happen to her, he said, one of Mystra's Chosen might even find themselves restoring her to her present state, for Mystra and Oghma seem to share some secret and solemn agreement as to the sanctity of Candlekeep.

Miiryrm's sad fate is best described in a tome written over a hundred years ago and, ironically, stored on the shelves of Candlekeep. Throughout the book, the writer describes Miiryrm as "Lonely-jaws." Elminster suggests that any similarly lonely Faerûnian who doesn't mind a little danger—and doesn't carry any writing materials—might cultivate her as a friend to talk to. There are worse ways of spending one's time.

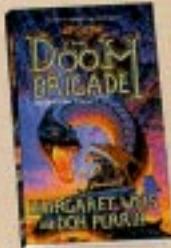
Ed Greenwood lives in a house surrounded by woods that aren't infested with mosquitoes only when they're choked with chest-deep snow. He loves to look out windows at green growing things and the many flowers his wife Jenny coaxes into splendor—but actually prefers flickering computer screens where he can bring new corners of the Realms to life.

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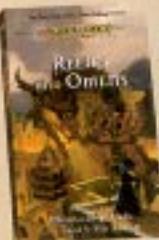
The Doom Brigade

by Margaret Weis
and Don Perrin
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Reunification (Body & Soul)

by Jeff Grubb

illustrated by
Rags Morales

Vartan hai Sylvar moved surreptitiously down the white marble halls of his god's palace. He moved like a thief, and a guilty thief at that. No one would question his presence there, for he was a servant of the god Labelas Enoreth. But, if he were seen, questions might be asked, and those were questions that Vartan did not feel comfortable answering.

He moved through the halls and came at last to a great vault. Vartan unlocked the door with a key carved from unmelting ice. The door, made of burnished gold and carved with the serene likeness of the god's eye-patched face, swung inward silently. The treasures within glowed of their own light. Vartan entered and secured the doors behind him.

The key had been a gift from the God of Immortality himself, who charged Vartan with the duty of checking on the vault regularly to make sure that everything was in proper order.

Despite his god's permission, Vartan crept into the vault like a sneak-thief, for his god had said nothing about him using any of the devices contained within.

Vartan passed by the gems of insight and the jewels of power and the long rows of bottles containing living darkness. Vartan passed great beasts frozen in time, still alive but immobile within their undying forms. He passed petrified spirits of ghosts, trapped like spun candy within chunks of amber. And he passed the portals to the Realms and other places where the elven gods were venerated. Some of these portals were shattered and darkened. They would transport the unwary to lands that no longer believed in elves or immortality.

And at last he came to a wall of mirrors, windows into the planes beyond the elf-god's domain. Most of them were dusty from neglect. Vartan pulled down a small mirror with an ornate ivory frame, one that was in better condition than most of its fellows. Vartan had been using that mirror each time he performed his regular checks on the god's vault of treasures.

Vartan rubbed the reflective surface with a soft cloth and saw his own face within. It was a narrow face, the brow a bit more care-worn than it should have been for a priest in living service to his god. His blonde hair was braided in a long plait down his back. His ears, still handsomely pointed after all these years, swept stylishly upward and were, in the elf's opinion, one of his most charming features. Vartan could have spent a few hours contemplating his own image, but he had other concerns.

He thought of his friends and breathed on the surface of the mirror. His image faded, replaced by a scene from the Realms below. The mirror became a window into the mortal world and showed a dockside of some island in the Sea of Fallen Stars. Two figures, a man and a woman, were making their way up a low hill overlooking that dockside. It was early spring, and the grass was a bright shade of green, almost unnatural in its vitality. In the land of enduring continuance, Vartan felt a pang of nostalgia. He had missed springtimes. He missed beginnings.

Looking at the couple, Vartan felt another pang this one of regret for the passing years. Both Agrivar the paladin and Ishi the eastern warrior were aging, as all mortal beings aged. Both were still hale and proud, but Vartan could see the first signs of unrelenting years creeping up on them. There were a few lines around Ishi's eyes, which only

made her appear wiser. A touch of gray tinged Agrivar's temples, which made the paladin seem all the more noble. Yet he was still broad-shouldered and strong, and Ishi moved with a feline grace alongside him.

The couple moved up a beaten dirt path toward the hilltop, where a metal statue waited. Most would call the bronze-hued female figure a golem. Minder was always the sensible one, the rock upon which all the others built their lives. She would be the one to live forever, trapped within her metal form. As the couple approached, the golem spread her arms wide, and a sad, worn smile spread across her bronze lips.

"Welcome," said Minder, "I'm glad you made it."

"We almost didn't," said Agrivar with a weary grin. "The ship captain didn't even want to stop here. There were rumors of a mad wizard in the hills."

"I wouldn't say mad," replied the golem. "Permanently peeved, perhaps, but not mad."

"How is he?" said Ishi.

Minder shrugged, her muscles moving like molten gold. "Groggy. He's been in an enchanted sleep for most of the past year, and he just came out of it two days back."

Ishi nodded, then said, "But how is he?"

Minder's mouth became a thin line. "Tired," she said at last. "He is very, very tired. This may be our last chance. Omen's last chance."

Minder led the two warriors inland to the wizard's lair, though the couple had tread this path many times before. Omen's domain consisted of several buildings that had once been a sea-dog's inn overlooking the bay. The main inn had been converted into living quarters and libraries, while an adjacent stables were used for experiments. This latter building had been rebuilt several times, and the ground was permanently blackened around it.

The furnishings of the stable changed according to the nature of Omen's experiments. One time it would be filled with gears and wheels, and the next crammed with bubbling alembics of brightly-colored chemicals. This time it was filled with energy.

Squat black boxes were crouched around the perimeter of the room, and cables of spun copper and steel hung from the rafters. Sparks danced along great globes mounted in the center of the room, and the ground reverberated from the humming of the machinery.

The halfling, Foxilon Cardluck, moved among the machinery, a rubber-wrapped spanner clenched in his hand. He wore blue-striped coveralls and had a green-tinted visor pulled down over his eyes as he danced from device to device. He would tighten a socket here, tap the glass of a meter there, and occasionally thump the side of a particular device until he got the result he wanted. He greeted the two new arrivals with a cheery wave and turned back to the machines.

In the center of the room, surrounded by the great globes, stood the wizard Omen. Or rather, two wizard Omens. The first was the mortal Omen, and even to Vartan's eye the specter of death clung tightly to him. The old wizard's hunched frame was as gaunt as a vulture's, his cheeks deeply sunken and his eyes bleary. He skin had faded to the color of weather-beaten parchment, and even his hair looked sparse and sickly.

The other Omen, laid out on the table before the emaciated mortal version, was made of brass. This was the

Omen that Vartan remembered—the proud captain of the good ship *Realms Master*. The statue's face was learned but not ancient, his posture straight but not haughty, and his hair, made of strands of stiff gold wire, jutted from its head like peacock feathers. The Omen on the table looked more like Omen than the pathetic figure leaning over it.

The living Omen hobbled over to the couple. He grasped Agrivar by the arm in greeting and he gave Ishi a warm hug. From his vantage point in the next universe over, Vartan noticed that both handled the old man like fine porcelain—fragile and about to go to pieces under the slightest breeze.

"Good that you could make it," wheezed the older man.

"We've always come when you've called," said Agrivar.

"How are you?" said Ishi, her eyes already showing that she knew how he was.

"Good days and bad days," said Omen. "Good days and bad days."

More bad days than good, thought Vartan. Omen had a wasting disease within him that resisted all treatment, magical or otherwise. He was cured, briefly, by Labelas, but at a price that was too high for any of them. Labelas was mad at the time, and they had fought against the god, all of them, even Vartan. The battle had cost them their ship, the *Realms Master*, and nearly their lives.

Labelas recovered from his madness and truly regretted his actions. He had tried to make amends to Vartan and the others. Vartan forgave and entered the direct service of his god, but Omen would never trust the god again, nor accept his aid.

Minder was talking "I cannot talk you out of this, old friend?"

Omen started to argue but was overcome with a coughing fit. The assemblage waited for the racking coughs to subside, then the wizard tried again, "It is the last option we have. We tried all the others and came up with naught."

"But to put your spirit in an unliving shell of metal ..." said Ishi.

"You will no longer be able to taste, or smell, or feel as a living thing would," said Minder, "It is not the most pleasant of conditions. Take it from one who knows."

"It would be an advantage at this point," said Omen, and fell into another hacking cough, "Are we ready, Mr. Cardluck?"

"As we'll ever be," said the halfling, his face showing his own unspoken concern.

"Then let us begin," said Omen. He turned to Agrivar and Ishi, "I am glad you came. I may need help when something goes wrong."

"If," corrected Agrivar. "If something goes wrong."

"Of course," said Omen with a tired smile. "If something goes wrong."

They took their places. Agrivar and Ishi stood by the stable's entrance. Minder took her place beneath a great crystalline lamp—she would serve as the template for the magical transference. Omen lay down beside his metallic creation. Foxy skittered from machine to machine, spanner in hand, shouting numbers in a code that only he and Omen seemed to understand.

"Three-Four-Nine!" shouted the halfling.

"Good," rasped the wizard in response.

"Two-five, and amperage thirty over seven," said the halfling, and the old man raised a withered hand in response.

Total flow at seventy point seven," said the halfling.
"Goose it a bit," said Omen.
"It's within the optimum parameters," said Foxy.
"Goose it," repeated the tired mage.

Foxy threw a few more toggles, and the machine sparked as he did so, "Seventy point nine," said the halfling.
"Better," said the wizard.

Near the entrance, Ishi said, "This isn't going to work, is it?"

Agrivar said nothing for a moment, but Vartan liked to think that the paladin was grimly praying that Ishi was wrong. At last he said, "If something goes wrong, you get Foxy, and I'll get Omen."

"Of course," said the woman warrior, and a dimension away Vartan could see the woman's muscles tighten, ready to move in an instant.

The old wizard straightened himself out on the bench, alongside his metallic doppleganger. He crossed his arms over his chest and said, "Hit it!"

Foxy pulled a large scissors-switch shut, and all the machines in the former stables came to life. Tights ran along the corners of the various black boxes, and lightning arced between the great metal globes. The light washed Minder with a crimson hue. On the great slab, Omen stiffened as he and his statue were bathed in a blue glow.

Then something unexpected sparked overhead. One of the rafter-strung cables had burned through its insulation, and through its supporting rope. The rope parted with a sharp snap, and an electrified cable of spun copper and steel dropped down on the machinery below.

A circuit closed that was not supposed to be closed. Immediately three of the black boxes along the perimeter exploded in a roar, flames shooting out toward the walls. The light above Minder magnified to a burning sun. She lunged up in pain, smashing the crystal at the heart of the lamp. Foxy remained glued to one of the machine handles, his hair standing on edge from the current passing through him. And in the center of the stables, a fountain of sparks showered the two Omens.

Ishi and Agrivar moved immediately. Ishi somersaulted over a pile of burning debris, knocking the halfling away from the machine with a deft kick. Foxy tumbled to one side, and Ishi was beneath him before he struck. She scooped up the halfling and crouched as another of the machines exploded in a ball of crimson fire.

The building quickly filled with smoke and flames, and there was no sign of the others. There was a crash from the direction of the door as burning rafters tumbled in the entranceway. There would be no escape that way.

Ishi grit her teeth and gave a deep-throated shout. Then she leapt against the burning wall of the building, striking it feet-first.

She had chosen her spot of attack well, for the flames had weakened the walls enough for her to breach through, scattering burning splinters in her wake. She cradled the halfling against her stomach.

Outside, she gagged on the smoke, sucking air to clear her lungs. She laid the halfling down on the grass and made sure he was still breathing.

As she looked up, Agrivar appeared at the fire-framed hole, holding Omen in both his arms. The fringes of the paladin's tabard were smoking from sparks, and he had a swatch of cloth tied over his nose and chin. He barreled

through the opening as part of the old barn collapsed behind him. He staggered forward, and Ishi rushed toward him. The paladin handed the old mage to Ishi, then fell to one knee.

Ishi laid the old man next to the halfling, who was already awake, shaking himself and patting the smoking bits from his overalls. Omen gave a raspy groan, and looked up at Ishi. Then he gave a weak curse and said, "Didn't work."

"I am afraid not," said the warrior. Omen said nothing more but launched into a prolonged coughing fit.

Agrivar stumbled to his feet as the old barn began to cave in, the flames licking at all sides. There was a crash as the front half of the building collapsed. The remaining roof was a dimpled camel-back as the main supports succumbed to the flames. There was another explosion, and the building collapsed with an outward rush of burning lumber and hot air. The three humans and the halfling all threw up their hands as burning slivers rained among them.

Out of the fireball strode Minder, her metallic skin red from the heat and blackened by streaks of soot. She held the body of the Omen-automaton under one arm and its slightly-melted head in the other hand. Most of the stiff gold wire had drooped like limp noodles, and the metal face was twisted in a obscene leer.

Minder laid the shattered form at Omen's feet and said, "I'm sorry. I tried to save it before everything exploded." Omen only nodded, gagging on the last of the smoke in his lungs.

"Well," said Foxy tipping back his visor, "Back to the drawing board."

"No," said Omen, his voice a rattling rasp, "That was the last one. Even with an enchanted sleep, I won't live long enough to try again. We are out of options. I am . . . I am going to die." He looked at the other concerned faces around him. "And I think I'm ready for it."

In the land of Arvandor, Vartan pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. Labelas was the elven God of Longevity, and the many years granted to the elven peoples were his gift. To live longer than your compatriots was a normal part of being an elf. An elf might get to know humans, but one never lost track of the fact that you would still be young when they had succumbed to old age.

So why did it bother him that Omen, the old human wizard, was now at the end of his rope? He had fought to live, fought harder than anyone Vartan had known, and had fought with every resource, magical and mundane, at his disposal. He had not accepted the disease within him but rather battled it at every turn. And he was forced to retreat, step by step, until at last he was willing to sacrifice his own body in order to overcome the disease.

Perhaps that was why, thought Vartan. He had taken his elven longevity as a given, the gift of the gods that it truly was. In several hundred years, when Vartan's own time came, would he be as tenacious as Omen?

And would he have his friends surrounding him, ready to help, to risk their lives on his account?

Vartan let the mirror fade and sat among the glittering treasures for a long time. Then he got up and went to the shelves near the entrance. He took one of the gems and turned it over in hands several times. Then he went to one of the portals and stood on the brink for a long time. Then he took a deep breath and stepped through.

He did not offer a prayer to his god for fear that Labelas might hear him. And Labelas, Vartan thought, would probably not approve of what his trusted priest was planning.



The stables were a complete loss and would have to be rebuilt again. Foxy and Agrivar disagreed how many times this had happened, though both knew it was well into the double digits. After ascertaining that everyone was as healthy and intact as they normally were, the paladin and the halfling retired to the kitchen to prepare an afternoon meal. Minder set the fire in the inn's main room and began polishing the scorch-marks out of her skin. Omen collapsed in a large stuffed chair, and Ishi knelt beside him.

"It's over," said Omen bitterly.

"It was a setback," replied the Kozakuran warrior, "There must be other options."

"It was the last," wheezed the elderly mage, "There's no time. There's no . . ." He let his voice trail off as he looked into the fire, and Ishi wondered whether he had lost his train of thought. "Energy," he finished. "I'm too tired to fight."

"In the east, death is not something to fear but to embrace, when the time comes," said the warrior.

The aged man blew the air out of his cheeks and looked like he was deflating. "It's not death I fear, Ishi Barasume."

"No?"

"It's the manner of death," said Omen, "It is one thing to be cut down, but quite another to worn away. And it has been wearing me away, grinding me down bit by bit, until there is nothing left but dust. It is a Beast, and it is finally consuming me."

The meal was delicious if subdued. Minder finished her polishing (she had no need to eat), while Foxy and Agrivar served up a savory if simple stew.

The conversation was polite. They talked around the events of the afternoon and their consequences, instead touching on other matters of gossip—the latest fashions in Waterdeep, Cormyrian politics, the weather, and the wheat crop this year in the Dales. Foxy dredged up shared stories from years ago, of which all had been a part, but they did not interrupt when the halfling exaggerated a few points.

Finally, it was Agrivar who said, "What now?" And Ishi saw Foxy and Minder both relax. It was the question they wanted to ask.

Omen shook his head in response, "There is no now," he said calmly. "I'm going to die, and I'd better get myself used to that."

The silence draped the table like a shroud. Foxy's face was pained, and Minder was stern. Ishi supposed her own demeanor was closed as well, and she wondered if she would face a certain end with the same resignation.

No, she decided, she would want to fight to the last breath.

It was Agrivar who broke the silence. "This experiment failed, but . . ." he began, but Omen raised a bony hand and the paladin fell silent.

"This experiment," rasped the old man, "And the last one and the last one before that. I've tried potions of longevity and magical rings and fields of stopped time. At best I hold the Beast at bay, and at worst," and here the phlegm built up in his throat and the other four were quiet as he bent double, coughing. "At worst the Beast takes more of my life.

There is nothing else to try, my friends. It may be hours or days, but I am beaten. I'm going to die, and there is nothing anyone can do about it."

The old man looked from face to face. Foxy was near despair, Agrivar stern, almost angry. Ishi frowned deeply. Minder seemed to take the news calmly, but it was an intense calm, the calm before the storm.

"There is always one more thing to try," said a new voice from the doorway, a familiar one that none of those present had heard for years.

Vartan hai Sylvar, bedecked in his golden armor, stood in the entranceway. Ishi and Agrivar rose as one to greet him, but it was Omen who spoke first, his voice a raspy accusation.

"Why are you here, gold elf?" snarled the emaciated old man. "Just thought you'd drop by and taunt me with your youth and good health?"

Indeed, Vartan looked young. Not just young in the terms of well-preserved, or the ageless nature of the elves themselves, which made them thinner and even more ethereal with the passing decades. Vartan looked young, and there was a liveliness in his eye and a lilt in his voice. It was as he had just stepped out of the room for a moment the last time they had seen him.

Vartan looked at Agrivar and Ishi. At another time there would be hugs and handshakes, but for the moment there was a wariness in the wake of Omen's accusation. He smiled at the couple, then spoke to Omen directly, "I'm not here to taunt. I'm here to help."

Vartan stepped forward and put a large gem on the table. It was a great pinkish stone that seemed to pulse of its own accord. Its facets were incised with forgotten runes and unreadable inscriptions. "It is called a gem of insight," the elf said. "It is a tool used by Labelas in Arvandor. And it may provide a solution to your . . . problem."

Foxy leaned forward, intrigued by the size of the glittering gem. Omen pulled his knees up like a small, petulant child. "Go away, elf. I don't need your help, or that of your god."

Agrivar said, "I had heard that you had entered the direct service of your god."

"I am still in his service," said Vartan.

The paladin shook his head. "We refused the aid of Labelas, once, when the *Realms Master* was destroyed. There are too many strings when dealing with your god. We would have to refuse your aid again."

Ishi looked at Omen, his bony knees even with chin, his eyes locked on the gem. Finally she said, "No offer of aid should be dismissed out of hand," she said, "but I think Agrivar is correct. Your god has dealt badly with us in the past. Even if he means well, what proof could you offer of his intentions?"

Vartan scratched at the skin at the base of his neck and made a embarrassed noise, "Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know what his intentions are. He doesn't know that I've done this yet."

There was a silence around the table, then Agrivar said, "He doesn't know?"

Minder chimed in, "You've taken something from your god without asking his permission?"

Foxy looked up over the edge of the gem, "Ooooh, it's stolen, then. That makes things *much* better."

Vartan managed a weak smile, "I knew your plight, Omen, and—like you—could not rest unless every avenue

was tried. I know you would not want to deal with my god, so I just . . . neglected . . . to ask permission." His voice trailed off and he ended the sentence with a shrug.

"A magical item stolen from a god," said Agrivar. "This bodes ill."

"We should consider every opportunity," said Ishi. "And if it does work, this gem might be returned with Labelas none the wiser."

"Stolen is stolen," replied the paladin, "and I don't think that Omen wants a god's help, even without that god's knowledge."

"How does it work?" said Omen.

Agrivar turned and stared at the older man, who was leaning forward now. The distant and resigned look was absent, replaced with a lean, hungry visage of a man given one more chance.

Vartan looked at Agrivar briefly, then said to Omen, "The paladin has a good point. Even if it is not the will of Labelas for me to bring you the stone, it does contain some of his power...."

"I don't have time," rasped Omen. "How. Does. It. Work?"

Vartan's face clouded for a moment. He had forgotten how exasperating the old man could be. "It is used to delve into the soul and psyche of an individual. Often it is used for psychic quests. The user attunes himself to the stone and passes into it, to face whatever matter is troubling him. Often it is used by elven spirits in the outer planes that are afflicted by heartbreak or madness. Through the journey, they confront and defeat their ills."

As the elf spoke the remaining animation within Omen's face drained away, and the hope died in his eyes. Finally the old man shook his head.

"Pass within the stone," said Omen. "Psychic quest." He held out his withered arms. "I'm afraid I'm not much for traveling at the moment. Your offer comes too late. I cannot make the journey. I was foolish to think otherwise."

"Can others journey with him?" asked Ishi.

"Or instead of him?" suggested Minder.

Vartan rubbed his chin. "It's a possibility," he said, "but there is a great risk. Death or distraction on the journey might kill the traveler."

"A small risk," said Minder.

"One worth taking," added Ishi.

"Can't be any worse than one more explosion," said Foxy.

Vartan looked at Agrivar, who had remained silent throughout the discussion, stroking his chin with his knuckles. Finally the paladin said, "I do not trust your god, or anything that is attached to him."

"All the more reason for you to come along," said Vartan. "We need someone who is prepared for anything to go wrong."

The paladin was silent for another moment, then shook his head and smiled. "You've lost none of your ability to argue, Vartan. Because I disagree with you, that's all the more reason for me to go along with you?"

"Exactly," said the elf.

"Makes perfect sense to me," said Foxy. Everyone looked at the halfling, and he said, "Well, it does!"

Agrivar looked at Omen, then at each of the others. At last he said, "Very well, let us try this one last thing. When do we start?"



A wide space was cleared in the center of the sitting room, the low tables and chairs pushed against the walls. Agrivar helped Omen to one of the overstuffed sofas, "I would go if I could," said the old man weakly.

"I understand," said Agrivar.

"It's just that I'm so weak nowadays," Omen continued plaintively, and the paladin nodded. Omen looked up at Agrivar and said, "You don't think me a coward for being a weak old man, do you?"

Agrivar opened his mouth, then shut it. Up to that very moment, he did not consider Omen a coward at all. But now, looking into the deep-set eyes of his friend, he saw it. Fear. Omen might be weak, but more importantly, he was afraid of what they would find within his psyche. And he would rather have his friends face it than confront it himself.

"I don't think you're weak," said Agrivar, meaning it to console the wizard. "I never thought you were weak."

"You stay with Omen," said Minder to Foxy.

Foxy said, "I don't see why you and Agrivar and Ishi and Vartan get to go. You won't let me because you're afraid I'll break something, or take something or lose something."

The golem knelt beside the halfling. "Of course not. But I do want someone capable at Omen's side, someone quick-witted and resourceful and devoted."

"You forgot handsome," added the halfling.

Minder managed a warm smile, "And handsome. I want someone I can trust to be by Omen's side when something goes wrong."

"If something goes wrong," corrected Foxy.

"If something goes wrong," agreed the golem.

Vartan held up the gem of insight and muttered some words in archaic elvish. As he spoke, the pulsing light within the stone increased until the room was filled with hot, strobing shadows of the gathered heroes. Agrivar held a hand before his face to ward off the light, and Ishi's eyes became hooded slits. Minder stood, an immobile statue, her metallic muscles coiled in worry and anticipation.

Vartan touched the runed gem to Omen's forehead. Omen seemed to relax at the touch. Minder took two steps forward, but the gem began pulsing again, this time in a low, fluttering light, weaker and slower. Foxy took Omen's wrist and noted that Omen was unconscious now. The weak flashes of the gem matched those of Omen's pulse.

Mists began to stream from the pulsing gem now, longropy strands of steam that twisted upon themselves, doubling and re-doubling until they finally gained solidity. The cored stream of smoke made a low, overhanging archway, and within that arch the lights twisted and melded. Then suddenly it was a gateway into elsewhere.

Vartan handed the pulsing gem to Foxy, "Don't let go of it," he admonished. The halfling nodded as the gold elf stepped through the archway, vanishing among the pulsing colors. Minder went through next, without looking back.

Ishi and Agrivar looked at each other, then nodded and stepped through as one.

They found themselves on a black road twisting through an ever-changing landscape. The road itself was of the deepest ebony, ridged with swirls and ripples, much like the back of a tortoise. Surrounding the road was a constantly evolving landscape of swirling colors. The ground itself was more akin to ocean swells rising and falling, with identifiable solid pieces emerging from the ground like flotsam cast about by a storm.

Castles appeared momentarily among the swells and then were covered again. The moving ground quieted for a moment to reveal a pastoral scene of trees and brooks, then these were swept up in another swell that scattered the pieces aside.

Agrivar asked, "Where are we?"

"Omen's psyche," said Vartan. "Or at least what we can understand of it. Feelings, memories, emotions, all of it is right here. The black road seems to be the most long-lasting piece of the mental fabric. If we keep to it, we probably can . . . Ishi?"

The Kozakuran was already kneeling in the roadway, steadying herself with one hand, clutching her stomach with the other. Her face was an unhealthy shade of green.

"Everything moving," she muttered as Vartan knelt beside her. "Hurts to look at it."

"Then don't look at it," said the gold elf. "Look at the road. Just concentrate on the road. It's not moving."

"Stupid," she said, her breathing short and ragged, "I don't get sea-sick."

"This is not the sea," said Vartan, "Now look at the road and take a deep breath. Two, three, four. Now exhale. And again. Two, three, four."

Agrivar noticed that the golem was staring intently into the swirling chaos that lapped at the side of their ebony path, "Are you all right, Minder?" he asked.

Minder nodded. "I understand Ishi's problem," she said, "When you are at sea, there are those who see the patterns in the ocean, who seek order among the rising swells and drifting clouds. Once they perceive the order, the sea no longer disturbs them. There is no obvious order here, so it troubles her."

"And what about you?" said the paladin.

"I see the pattern," said Minder, "I have served alongside Omen for many years, and the landscape is as mercurial as the wizard. I cannot explain it, but I see the pattern." She looked at Agrivar, "Vartan is likely protected as a result of his life in Arvandor. But what about you, paladin? You serve the cause of Law. Why does this not disturb you?"

Agrivar shook his head and said in a low voice, "It reminds me of a week-long bender I drank myself into one time in Waterdeep. Not the most pleasant experience in my life."

Minder nodded and the pair turned back to where Vartan had helped Ishi to her feet. Her face was a slightly healthier shade of green, but her eyes were locked on the road. Her breathing was slow and purposeful, and she said, "I'm fine."

"Perhaps you should go back," said Agrivar, "We can bring Foxy along. He might be less affected..."

"I am *fine*," repeated the eastern warrior, in that tone that would brook no argument.

Agrivar raised his hands before him in surrender. "You're fine. Totally fine. Never looked lovelier. Let's move on."

Ishi muttered something in her native language that Minder and Vartan did not catch but which made Agrivar wince. Then she strode forward, head-down, and the others followed.

The heaving landscape lasted for a mile, by Agrivar's estimate, though distance had little meaning in this non-land. Buildings he recognized from Waterdeep and Shadowdale pirouetted around like dancers, and a squadron of Halruuan flying ships emerged from a fog-bank, only to be swallowed

by a hillside, complete with grazing sheep. Once the *Realms Master* itself topped a great swell, its sails billowing as it ran before the storm. Then a wall of blood-red rain passed in front of it and it too disappeared.

Slowly the landscape began to stabilize, the waves moving more sluggishly, becoming a tarry syrup as parts of Omen's memory swirled through them. Lights began to appear, like stars in a stormy night's sky. The lights became more numerous as the roiling landscape finally came to a halt, and Agrivar noted that they were gems, each as large as a man's fist. As they pressed forward the gems became more numerous and clustered like cacti in thick growths.

"I'm suddenly glad we didn't bring Foxy along," said Agrivar.

Vartan nodded, "I don't know what these gems are, but I don't think that the halfling could resist the opportunity to pinch one. Minder, what's the matter?"

Now the golem was standing stock-still, in the middle of the road, a broad smile across her metallic face. "Lilacs," she said, "I smell lilacs." And she took a step toward the edge of the road.

Agrivar did not understand for a moment, but Vartan shouted, "Stop her before she steps off the path!"

Agrivar was quick, grabbing the golem from behind, reaching up to grapple her around the neck. He was as ineffectual as a kitten trying to bring down an old hunting dog. Ishi was equally fast but more effective. She dove between the golem's legs and used her body to trip up the huge construct. Minder tipped forward with a shout and went sprawling on the road, inches from the edge, Agrivar still attached to her back.

Vartan joined the paladin, and Minder tried to rise beneath their combined weight. "I'm all right," she said at last.

"Can you smell anything?" asked the elf.

There was a pause. "No, nothing," said the golem.

"Are you sure?" said Vartan.

"What's all this about smell?" asked Agrivar.

"She's a golem," said Vartan sharply, "She's not supposed to be able to smell."

Minder rose unsteadily to her feet. "Lilacs. I suddenly smelled lilacs," she said. Agrivar could have sworn she was blushing. They were my favorite flower, and Omen would let me gather them and put them on the ship, even though I could not smell them."

"Memories are more than just visual illusions," said Vartan. "Let's press on."

The road wove into a great city carved out of a mountain top. They passed through empty courtyards and markets filled with chattering ghosts. There was a great statue of some fire-eyed wizard, perhaps Omen's own mentor, and a crypt with a rainbow of fresh flowers. They passed within a great library filled with books. One was within reach, but when Agrivar reached out to touch it, it burned away in blue smoke.

They passed through a great vault marked with a map of the Realms. Those places that they knew were exact to the smallest detail, while those that Omen had not visited were merely lifeless lines on the map.

They passed over the remains of a battlefield. Shattered siege engines and broken bodies were strewn everywhere, and there was the sound of a man screaming in pain in the distance. Agrivar felt the desire to offer aid, but he kept to the road.

Then the road forked. Looking ahead, the road forked again, and again, and again, forming a great branching tree of paths that separated and re-separated again and again.

"Which way?" Agrivar asked.

Vartan shook his head, "I don't know. Only one path is right. The rest are illusions. We must be getting close. The disease is starting to manifest its own defenses."

"This way," said Ishi sharply.

"How can you be sure?" asked Vartan.

"I have been staring at this road for half-past eternity," snapped the woman warrior, "I know which is the real path. I just know. Follow me." And she set off along the right-hand path.

Vartan looked at Agrivar, who merely shrugged, and the three followed Ishi as she chose one branch after another. After a while the paths began to rejoin the main course, surrounding them with oblivion. Only the rough-patterned road was visible before them.

"We're getting close," said Vartan.

The personal demons came. They swooped in from all sides on bat-wings and jabbed at the travelers with tridents and spears. They could not step upon the road itself but lunged at the adventurers, seeking to knock them from the path.

Agrivar knocked back a thrust spear with his own blade and noted that the demons had human faces. Some he recognized, but others were strangers to him. There was one that looked like an ogre mage they had fought, and another a lich, and third the Halruuan captain they had battled. There was one that looked like the fire-eyed colossus from earlier, and several that wore eye patches and resembled the god Labelas Enoreth. And one looked just like Vartan.

The last one, the Vartan-demon, swooped low over the gold elf and let out a long, cackling laugh. Vartan snarled a few elvish words and raised his hands above his head. He snapped a few more words in a precise, measured order, and his hands burst into incandescent light. The light revealed the winged demons to be pale, translucent things, and they fled into the surrounding darkness.

"Shoo!" he shouted at the retreating demons.

"Did you know to do that," asked Minder, "or were you just angry that one of the Omen's demons wore your face?"

Vartan shot the golem a telling look and pointed to a larger splotch of darkness, the side of an ebony cliff. The path disappeared into a cavern at the base of the cliff.

"In there," said the gold elf.

A fetid dampness rose from the cavern's entrance, and the roadway became slick as it plunged into the heart of the black mountain. Walls rose around them. Tattered, fleshy things hung from the sides. At first Agrivar thought them to be bats, or some hanging moss, but the shreds were parts of the cavern itself, pulling away from the surface as they rotted.

There was a hot, warm breeze in their face, smelling of rancid flesh and spoiled meat. Agrivar put a hand over his mouth and noticed that Ishi had already bound a scarf over her nose and mouth. Vartan was looking a bit green now. Only Minder was unaffected.

The road became a stream, a black creek that flowed before them through the ebony mountain. There were cries now-tired, exhausted cries of a man's last breaths. Agrivar

wondered what was happening on the outside world. Should Omen die, what would happen to them?

The walls opened up into a huge cavern lit by blue veins of radiant flesh among the rotting blackness. The stream poured into a great lake at the center of the cavern, and rising in the center of the lake was a white island.

It was a pale island of translucent flesh, its color as sickly as an old man's eyes, and it was crisscrossed with slender black filaments. Agrivar was not sure if the strands bound the island or merely gave it support, gathering the flesh in on itself again and again. The warm, sticky breeze emanated from great pores along its side and was almost overpowering.

"It's huge," said Ishi, her voice lost in the immense space around them.

"I think we're here," said Vartan.

"And now that we are," asked Minder, "what are we going to do?"

As the words left Minder's mouth, the island shrugged. It was a rippling cascade of flesh that undulated like a wave across its surface. At the center of island, a fold of flesh parted to reveal a huge, throbbing eye, its surface pulsing with ebony vessels. The flesh-island regarded them, for a moment, and in that moment, there was recognition.

The island screamed, mouths opening along its base as it lunged toward the four adventurers. The remaining black strands held it in place. It thrashed, and waves crashed against the shore.

All four took a step back, and the brackish water at the edges of the pools bubbled for a moment, then erupted with tendrils. Each of the tentacles was a thin, pale worm spun off from the main body of the island. They struck like serpents, and each had a human head at the end.

One human-headed snake launched itself at Agrivar, and he met it with his blade. Her reaction was immediate and automatic, and only as his sword passed through the pale worm's body did he realize that the face at the end of the tendril was Omens.

They were all Omen's face, he realized. Young Omens, childlike Omens, angry Omens, and sickly Omens—far too many of the emaciated mage's face—all seeking to ensnare those who invaded their lair.

Another Omen-snake lunged at him and met a similar fate to the first. Nearby, Ishi glided nimbly among the snaking tendrils, dodging their strikes and returning with a lethal sting of her own. Minder merely stood her ground and caught the snake faces as they struck at her. She grasped the Omen-faces in her large, metal hands and twisted them off. Already there was a growing pile of Omen heads at her feet.

Vartan was being driven back, away from the pool and the others, by a particularly thick and determined knot of pale Omen-worms. He was bashing each in turn with his great mace, but for every one he smashed, there were two more behind it, and he was nearly at the back of the cave. The heads bludgeoned Vartan at every chance.

Another snake slithered toward Agrivar, trying to loop around his leg. He brought his sword down on the coils, and black blood poured from the beheaded serpent. That was when Agrivar noticed that the first snake-Omen he had killed had not retreated. Instead, the flesh over the wound had sealed over, and there was already a bubbling of the flesh over the wound. As Agrivar watched, the

disturbance formed into another face of Omen. The reformed Omen-snake hissed at Agrivar and coiled for another strike.

There was a tug on Agrivar's left shoulder, and the paladin wheeled to discover that another Omen-tendril had coiled up along him, encasing his left arm. He tried to pull the arm free, but the Omen-snake merely laughed as it tightened.

His arm felt like it was caught in a vise. Agrivar shouted a curse as he tried to bring his sword to strike. But that limb was caught as well in the pale coils of another serpent, and a third and fourth snake were already coiling along his ankles.

Agrivar shouted for aid, but the others were in little better shape. Vartan had been swamped by coils, pummeling him from all sides and pulling him toward the lake. Minder was buried beneath a huge pile of snakes, occasionally a great arm erupting from the mass, only to be buried beneath a renewed assault. Ishi was snared in much the same way as himself, by the wrists and ankles, and being dragged down to the lakeshore. She would pull free, then another tendril would quickly loop around and snare her again.

Agrivar tried to resist, but the pull was too great. He would slide forward a few feet, try to regain his footing, then slide again. Perspiration dotted his forehead as he was dragged slowly, step by step, down to the impenetrably black water.

A familiar voice shouted, "Hold!" And the tendrils, through they kept their firm grip, stopped pulling at him.

"Release them," said the voice, and the tentacles hesitated for a moment, as if in indecision. "I said release them," said the voice again, and the tendrils slowly peeled away from his flesh.

Agrivar's legs and arms felt like dead things, and he managed to gasp out, "Omen?"

It was Omen, standing at the entrance to the cavern. He was surrounded by a yellowish glow that hurt Agrivar's eyes. He looked straight and tall, but still emaciated and worn, and his eyes had a touch of madness about them. Foxy peeked out from around the side of the wizard.

The great baleful eye at the island's center regarded the living Omen and recognized him at once. The mouths along the base of the island let up a tremendous howling of pain, and the tendrils pulled back into the thick viscous water, splashing as they were retracted into the main body.

Agrivar looked at the others. Vartan was unconscious and Ishi was slowly pulling herself upright. Minder seemed unaffected and was already remonstrating.

"Foxy," she said, "You were supposed to stay with him!"

"I did!" said the halfling, "He came here, and I stayed with him every step of the way." He held out his hand. "I kept the gem, too!"

"Omen," said Agrivar, pulling himself up the shore. "You shouldn't have come."

"I had to come," said the mage calmly, "though I would not have made it without you and the others to lead the way." He paused for a moment, and added, "I am not a weak man."

Agrivar nodded wearily. "I never said you were."

This is my fight, now," said Omen. "Take Vartan and get upshore."

Agrivar looked at the old man, then nodded. He grabbed one shoulder of the fallen gold elf, Ishi the other, and together they dragged him up toward the entrance.

The pair looked back to see Omen standing at the shore of the black lake, Minder on one side, Foxy on the other. The island did not attack with its snakes and indeed seemed afraid of Omen's presence. Great shudders roiled through the black flesh, and the single pale eye spouted a gout of blood-red tears.

Omen began speaking, and Agrivar did not catch the words. Instead, he heard only Omen's voice rising and falling, the pitch increasing and decreasing. Like waves on a beach, or like the pulsing of a human heart.

The pale island shuddered once more and began to shrink. Slowly at first, but then rapidly. The mouths screamed as it shrank, the voices slowly throttling as the wind ran out of the great mass. It shrank more quickly with each passing moment. Finally it was a mere stump of its former self, and then it disappeared entirely beneath the lake, leaving only a cluster of bubbles.

Omen waded out to his knees, bent over, and scooped something out the water. He returned, with Foxy and Minder, to where the two humans and the elf were waiting. Vartan was just beginning to recover his senses.

Agrivar saw in Omen's hands was the twisted mass that had been the living island. It was a small thing now, squirming between the mage's cupped palms.

"That is it?" asked Ishi. "Is that the Beast?"

Omen nodded.

"Then kill it," said Agrivar. "Destroy it once and for all."

Omen shook his head, and said, "I cannot destroy it, because it is part of me. I have thought of this thing as an opponent, as something outside of myself, an invader. That is why all my experiments had failed, in one way or another. And because I denied it, it grew more powerful. The only way to defeat this thing is to contain it. And there is only one possible prison for it."

He raised the squirming mass to his chest. Ishi shouted, but was not quick enough, for the former island-thing passed into Omen's chest as if it were made of thin air.

The old man took a deep breath, and the yellow glow around him intensified. When it subsided, he was standing there, tall, straight, and smiling.

And healthy. Omen was healthy and whole again.

"Come on," the mage said, offering Agrivar his hand. "Let us get out of here before some other part of my dark past chooses to show itself."



They returned to find the room as they left it. They had been gone only a few minutes, according to the clocks. Omen spent the next hour undergoing every test of health that Minder and Foxy could conceive of, and several that Vartan swore the pair had made up on the spot.

It was obvious to the elf that they had succeeded. There was a sense of life about the old man as he grumbled through every exercise and complained about every prodding touch.

Foxy and Minder continued to argue about what a normal human temperature was, while Ishi and Agrivar retreated to the kitchen to prepare a feast. Vartan was ministering to his own wounds. The gem of insight was in his pocket, now, and he wondered how he was going to get back to Arvandor before he was found missing. He hoped the old mage had something in his spellbook that would help.

There was a soft touch at the back of Vartan's mind, and despite himself, the gold elf winced. It was a familiar touch, and he knew at once that he was in a great deal of trouble. The jig, as Foxy would say, was finally up.

He slowly stood up and moved to the door, ignored by the others. Vartan passed out of the inn and around the side of the collapsed stable. From this side there was a view of the bay below. A tall figure in ornate elven armor waited for him. The westering sun glittered off his armor and his eyepatch.

"My Lord God," said Vartan, looking at the figure's feet and not daring to raise his own eyes.

"Greetings, Vartan hai Sylvar," said Labelas Enoreth. "Is the old human all right?"

"Perhaps I should explain..." started Vartan.

"Perhaps you should answer my question," said the elven god sharply.

"The old human is cantankerous, complaining, and absolutely confident that he has the situation totally in control," said Vartan. "In other words, he's back to normal."

"Good," said the god.

Vartan looked up and saw that the elven god was smiling. "I am pleased, Vartan," said Labelas. "Does that surprise you?"

Vartan searched for the words, but for the moment they failed him. Instead he could only open and shut his mouth. Finally the elf managed, "You planned this."

"Yes and no," said the god, "Yes, I did put you in a position where you had access to all the tools needed to save your friend. Yes, I was aware that if you kept checking on Omen, you would be moved to do something. And yes, even being aware of this, I did nothing to stop you. But no, I did not plan what you would do, nor was I with you on your journey through Omen's psyche."

"But, why?" gasped Vartan.

"I could have been less subtle," said the god. "But that paladin could spot my fingerprints at fifty paces, and if he couldn't, the wizard could, and all would have rejected any aid I offered. I still owe your former shipmates much. The way things have worked out, I can call the scales even, and they cannot refuse my aid, since I never truly offered it."

Vartan thought for a moment, trying to digest what the god told him. At last he said, "But you knew what I would do."

Labelas held up a hand, "I suspected. I believed. I had . . . faith. But I cannot say that I knew what you were going to do." He smiled again. "That is why you mortals have free will, you know. It gives us gods plausible deniability."

Vartan took a deep breath and shuddered, "I . . . stole from you, my lord. I took the gem to help my friends."

"Yes," said the god, his smile turning wolfish. "Terrible transgression, I'm afraid. And you would do it again, if you had to, wouldn't you?"

Vartan said nothing, but he nodded.

"And unrepentant, too," said the god, shaking his head. "Well, you will have to be punished for your actions. Let's see, what would be a suitable punishment for someone who did as you did?"

Vartan shut his eyes tightly. He could think of at least a dozen things that were within Labelas' abilities that would be eternally painful.

"Yes," said the god. "I know. The worst thing I can do to a loyal follower. You are hereby banished from my Realm. You are no longer my servant or proxy. You are demoted to mere mortal, and a priest of mine at that. Yes, I think that is suitable punishment."

Vartan popped open one eye, "That's it?"

Labelas' face was an impassive mask. "Is there a greater punishment than to be denied my illustrious presence?"

"Yes," said Vartan. "I mean, no. I mean— You are most wise in your judgments, my god. May all sing your praises eternally."

"There will be time for that, later," said the god. "Now, I am a kindly god and as such will not leave you stranded on this island with mere humans. So I will grant you a suitable manner of leaving this place."

The god waved his hands, and there was a boat that the side of the dock. Not just any ship, but the *Realms Master* herself, fully rigged and accurate down to the original figurehead.

Vartan looked in wonderment, but he shook his head, "My god, you know that the others would not accept this gift from you."

"I am not giving it to *them*," said the god sharply. "I am giving it to you. And you, as a good follower, will accept it, won't you?"

Vartan looked at the ship at dock, and said, "Of course. I am indebted as always."

Think of it as . . . severance pay," said the god. "After all, you have lost the best position an elf could have."

Vartan could only nod, and as he nodded, Labelas started to fade from view, his flesh growing transparent, "One last thing," he said, smiling. "You'll need a captain and crew. I suppose you can handle that, of course."

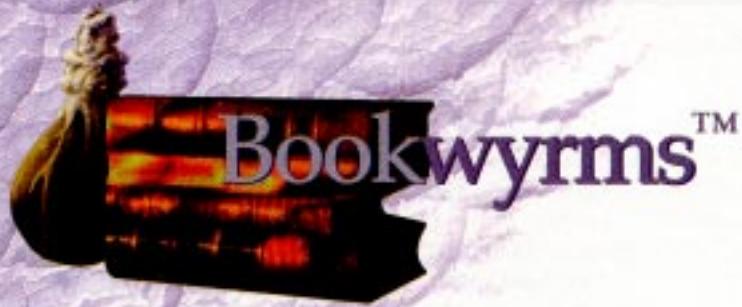
And then the god was gone entirely, and Vartan was alone.

Vartan stood for a long time, looking out over the bay and the rebuilt ship. He thought about what he would say to the others. He thought about how much he would tell them of what Labelas had told him.

Finally, he heard Foxy calling his name to come join the celebration. Vartan shook his head, decided merely to state the truth and let them make their own decisions. Smiling he looked forward to introducing the others to the new owner of the *Realms Master*. The look on Omen's face would make everything else worthwhile.



The natives of lake Geneva, Wisconsin, can tell when Jeff Grubb is working on a book by the clatter of keystrokes followed by insane giggling from his room.



Between the Rivers

Harry Turtledove

Tor

\$24.95

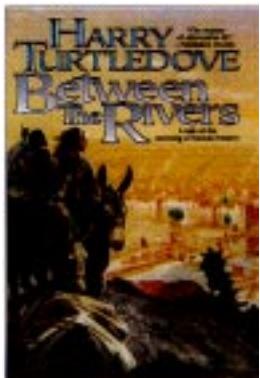
Harry Turtledove, Hugo-winning master of alternate SF, has produced a stunning new fantasy novel. Set in the early bronze age, *Between the Rivers* takes place in what is most likely the Tigris-Euphrates valley, though it is not so named in the novel. Here, early man struggles toward civilization while beset by various supernatural beings such as fever demons, devils of the waste, and gods.

The gods of Turtledove's world are active. They take part in and interfere with the everyday activities of humans. Swear an oath to your god? Be careful, he will hold you to it. Speak ill of your god, and he may hear it and punish you.

Sharur is a young merchant in the city of Gibil, which is ruled by the god Engibil. The Gibli differ from the citizens of the other cities between the rivers in that their god is less active. He rarely speaks directly through one of his subjects. Most important, he allows Kimash, a human, to rule in his place. Kimash directs the people of Gibil. He also keeps Engibil distracted with treasures and wonders and concubines. Thus, Kimash maintains his authority.

Sharur sets out on a mission of trade, selling his prized bronze weapons to people who still live in the age of copper. Sharur has always been welcome before, but now the gods of the other cities forbid trade with Sharur. The Gibli are seen as corrupters. Along with their bronze, they bring a new way of thinking. They bring self-reliance to replace god-reliance. The gods hate the Gibluts and the lazy Engibil. More important, they fear the people of Gibil and their egocentrism. Sharur must find a way to renew trade, or Gibil's power will fade, and the Gibluts will lose their newfound freedom.

Between the Rivers is a novel of ideas. It brings to life the possibilities suggested by Julian Jaynes in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. There, Jaynes postulates a time in the past when egocentrism was rare and



... *Between the Rivers* is primarily a book of conversations—a verbal struggle between reason and mindless obedience.

people were ruled by their gods. For instance, seeing an icon of a god of the fields might prompt a farmer in the proper care of his crops through an internal voice. Jaynes sees such interaction as a function of a little-understood area in the right brain. The story of the Tower of Babel is a metaphor for the downfall of the right brain and the ascendancy of the left brain. Too many people with too many gods gather in one place. When the gods quarrel, so do the people. Chaos ensues.

If Jaynes is correct, ancient peoples would behave as they do in *Between the Rivers*. Historically, more than one group of people have allowed themselves to be led or misled by charismatic individuals because it was easier to follow than to lead.

It is the brave and the bold who refuse to obey without reason. The people of Gibil have learned to think for themselves. They are not unique in this respect, but those in other cities, cannot break free as long their gods maintain a stranglehold on their actions and their very thoughts. Not all of the Gibli are free thinkers. Many would return to the safe times when Engibil ruled utterly, but the newly freed predominate and, by the very nature of their freedom, prevail.

Between the Rivers is not an adventure novel but one of political and theological intrigue. There are battles. There is war. There are encounters with devils and demons. There are also nattering, dusty old ancestral ghosts advising caution and adherence to the old ways, but *Between the Rivers* is primarily a book of conversations—a verbal struggle between reason and mindless obedience. It serves as a metaphor, mirroring a modern society where pressures of population and economics force people to stop thinking, driving them to hear and obey. Read *Between the Rivers* for fun or read it to think, but read it.

—PIERCE WATTERS

Ship of Magic

Robin Hobb

Bantam

\$23.95

Robin Hobb blends realistic characters and a unique setting into one of the best fantasy novels of the year. *Ship of Magic* is primarily the story of the liveship *Vivacia* and the Vesrit trading family. Liveships are made of magical wizardwood, and when three generations of the family attuned to the ship have died on her deck, the ship truly comes alive. Ephron Vesrit's early death changes the Vesrit family forever. As the newly awakened *Vivacia* tries to make sense of a strange, confusing world, the Vesrit family struggles to pay old debts and deal with their loss.

Althea Vesrit, Ephron's favored daughter, heir to his knowledge of the sea, must vie for the cap-

taincy of the *Vivacia* with her older brother-in-law. Kyle succeeds in taking control of the ship, and the family's troubles continue to mount. After Kyle foolishly tries using the liveship to transport slaves, the *Vivacia* is captured by Kennit, a pirate. Unfortunately the plot is not brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Althea, who ran away after Kyle took control of the ship, still plans to win it back. Malta, Kyle's willful daughter, is still causing the family problems. These are only the biggest of the problems still to be resolved in the story.

The book is blessedly free of clichéd heroes. The characters each have their own agendas, and several of the truly likable characters come into direct conflict while pursuing their personal goals. The villains are also captivating; their actions and personalities are often offensive, but they are so well portrayed that it is impossible not to enjoy the show. The most enjoyable aspect of the characters is that they are aware of their shortcomings, but like most people, they usually act true to their nature instead of true to their ideals.

Despite its length and excellent story development, the ending of *Ship of Magic* is disappointing. Hobb makes no attempt to bring the book to a satisfactory conclusion, giving us simply a pause before the story continues in the sequel.

The ending is the only weakness in an otherwise outstanding book. *Ship of Magic* is as enjoyable a read as any fantasy novel, and I can't wait to follow the story through to a satisfactory conclusion.

-JESSE DECKER

Touched by the Gods

by Lawrence Watt-Evans

Tor

\$24.95

A vengeful wizard. An undead army. A hero of prophecy. These are the trappings of the fantasy genre; all that's missing are mythical beasts and multiple moons. Sadly, there are no mythical beasts in *Touched by the Gods*, but there are moons—more than one hundred of them. Each represents one of the gods who govern the fate of the Domdur people. In times past, the gods spoke to the Domdur through oracles, guiding them and granting them favor over the other races of the world. However, for sixteen years the oracles have been silent, leaving the Domdur to govern themselves. Without the gods to guide them, they have lost their way and left themselves vulnerable to an embittered warlord who seeks revenge for wrongs inflicted many centuries ago.

The novel tells the story of Malledd, a child born with the mark of Ba'el, the god of war. Malledd is declared as the divine champion of the Domdu—his destiny foretold by the priests of Biekeda. But Malledd has no desire to be special.

He tires of the attention, jealousy, and derision. He becomes a smith, settles down with a family, and forbids others in the village to speak of his "gifts"—his strength, his ability to work without tiring, and his rapid healing.

The novel also tells the story of Rebiri Nazakri a spiteful man whose people were defeated by the god-favored Domdur many centuries ago. His hunger for vengeance is fed by an ungodly magic discovered deep within the earth. Unlike Malledd who shuns his destiny, Rebiri embraces his. He learns the dark magic and uses his sorcery to raise an army comprised of disgruntled rebels and nightwalkers—animated corpses.

The conflict between the divine champion and the dark sorcerer is inevitable. The first half of the book moves slowly, as Malledd hides from the Domdur priests who seek the divine champion to protect them. Malledd's uncertainty becomes less compelling as the story develops. Fortunately, the novel introduces a number of subordinate characters subplots to compensate for a hero whose indecisiveness grows increasingly tiresome. In Seidabar, the Domdur capital, Prince Granzer and the ruling council contend with an ailing empress, Nazakri's spies, and the coming of the nightwalkers. As Seidabar builds its army, the search for the divine champion continues.

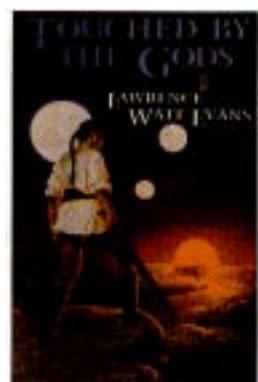
The story both fails and succeeds. Malledd is a disappointing hero, and Rebiri is a cardboard villain. Most of the supporting characters—in particular, the female characters—are shallow. Among the exceptions are Malledd's friend Onnell who, despite not being the divine champion, fights valiantly against the nightwalker onslaught, and Lord Duzon, a noble fop who wants the prestige of being the divine champion and cannot fathom why Malledd would reject his god-given gift.

The story positively shines in the last third of the novel, when Malledd meets one of the gods and finally accepts his destiny and joins the Domdur vanguard in its struggle to keep the nightwalkers from advancing to Seidabar. The battle between Rebiri's tireless nightwalkers and the Domdur vanguard is chilling, memorable, and expertly narrated. There are moments when Malledd proves he's more than just a skilled fighter—moments that elevate the story above expectation. Unfortunately, the sword-and-sorcery climax relies too heavily on fantasy cliché—I won't give away the book's major "revelation," but let's just say it involves an eclipse. Nevertheless, *Touched by the Gods* resolves itself fittingly, affording the hero a chance to fulfill his destiny and rise above mortal men.

—CHRIS PERKINS



Robin Hobb blends realistic characters and a unique setting into one of the best fantasy novels of the year.



There are . . . moments that elevate the story above expectation.



Some of my favorite moments:

Foxy's jaunty halfling song, Alias's drafty armor, Elminster and Omen in a drunken bragging match, Agrivar realizing he's got to cook a giant squid . . .

by
Kate Novak

illustrated by
Rags Morales

Crew of the *Realms Master*

I

N 1989, as a joint venture with TSR, Inc., DC Comics began publishing the FORGOTTEN REALMS® comic book, written by TSR game designer Jeff Grubb and drawn by DC artist Rags Morales. I began gaming in Jeff's AD&D® campaign in 1976 and was greatly entertained by his gift storytelling. When the FORGOTTEN REALMS was published, I was enthralled once more.

The stories of the crew of the *Realms Master* were more than just tales of archetypal heroes on great quests for glory or battling against evil. They were stories about very human characters, none of them perfect, but all of them interesting. They were brought together by Omen, the fatherly old wizard with a hot temper, a huge ego, and more than a bit of snake-oil in his blood. At the height of his career, Omen found his powers impotent against the gods and death—yet still he fought on, beyond despair and madness.

The spirit of the wise dwarf Minder twice turned away from the honor and peace of the afterworld to stay by Omen's side. Although she must abide in a the unliving shell of a golem, she is content so long as she is with her friend.

Omen's first mate, the clever and loyal halfling Foxy, who seems so perfectly carefree, fought to come to terms with the memories of the horror his life once was when he was an addict of the halfling narcotic known as *cheeeese*. He summoned the strength to turn away from that path again.

The Kozakuran warrior Ishi Barasume discovered that her sword alone cannot protect her from the western barbarians

among whom she lives. Not only did she single-handedly rescue her friends by fighting off a tribe of cat people, but also she managed to unravel some of the mystery behind affairs of the heart.

Vartan Hai Silvar's elven racism fell before the ugly realization that not even the elven gods are perfect. He taught his own deity that what is granted is never as valuable as what is earned.

The paladin Priam Agrivar, burdened with the knowledge that all his fineness couldn't save him from tossing his life into a bottle, learned to believe in himself again. He realized the wisdom of his own words to Foxy, "When you fail, it doesn't mean you've fallen off the mountain. If you've slid downhill a little, you can climb back. But you need help to do it. You need friends."



Kate Novak is co-author of the *Finder's Stone* trilogy, and the recent novels *Finder's Bane* and *Tymora's Luck*. She and husband Jeff Grubb have just celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary.

15th-level human wizard

STRENGTH:	12
Dexterity:	10
Constitution:	8
INTELLIGENCE:	18
WISDOM:	14
CHARISMA:	13
AC:	5 (<i>ring of protection</i>)
THAC0:	16
HITPOINTS:	27
ALIGNMENT:	N
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (6'2")

Weapons Proficiencies: Dagger, staff, sling.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Ancient history (17); astronomy (18); etiquette (13); seamanship (11); healing (12); languages—Common, Elvish, Dwarvish, Auld Wormish, Centaur, Halruuan, Thayan, Amnite (18); navigation (16); reading/writing (19); religion (14); spellcraft (16).

Commonly memorized spells: *detect magic, feather fall, magic missile, read magic, flaming sphere, improved phantasmal force, knock, lightning bolt, dispel magic, fireball, fly, gust of wind, contact other plane, dimension door, improved invisibility, shout, conjure elemental, teleport, legend lore, stone to flesh, true seeing, banishment, power word-stun, teleport without error.*

Appearance: Dwalimar Omen was once a tall, handsome man with pale skin, blue eyes and jet black hair. Great age, (and dealings in dangerous magic) have turned his hair and beard pure white. He still carries himself with a proud bearing, and he wears his hair in a southern style which resembles a mane. These serve to accentuate his height even more. His forehead is tattooed with a triangle of three blue dots which in the south indicate scholarship in reading, religion, and magic. He dresses in simple robes of white trimmed with blue and black.

Background: Omen hails from Halruua, a southern nation ruled by mages. As a young man he proved his cunning and loyalty by “acquiring” the Astrolabe of Nimbral for his nation. Years later, Omen was entrusted by Halruua’s leader, the Netarch Zalathorm Kirkson, with the astrolabe in order to track down dangerously powerful magical artifacts in the north and dispose of them. (The astrolabe was capable of teleporting Omen’s ship, the *Realms Muster*, anywhere in the Realms.) The astrolabe was destroyed during the Time of Troubles.

Some time in his past, Omen was cursed with a disease which is killing him painfully and slowly.

Equipment: Omen has an extensive library of books on a variety of subjects from artifacts to ziggurats.



Magical items: *Ring of protection +5*. Omen has accumulated several magical scrolls and several useful potions. He is not the sort to hoard such magics, and uses them liberally. He always has on hand the following spell scrolls: *improved phantasmal force, stone to flesh, levitate, feign death, Leonund's tiny hut, minor creation, polymorph others, wall of ice, sending, and a gate into the Demiplane of Fear*, and the following potions: *extra healing, sweetwater, water breathing*. There is a 10% chance Omen will be cataloguing some powerful and dangerous artifact (DM's choice) before tossing it into the Demiplane of Fear.

Roleplaying notes: Omen can be pompous and stern when trying to impress. He can also be as charming as a summer's day when he wants something. He has a mercurial temper when crossed. On days when his disease leaves him especially debilitated he can be very moody. Fortunately, a challenging task can help keep Omen's mind from his pain, and at such times he appears carefree and eager. While the mage continues to seek a cure for his condition he recognizes that his primary responsibility is to use his great power to help and protect others from those who would abuse power. Omen may occasionally hire a party of less powerful characters to help him retrieve some artifact or other. The pay will be generous, but Omen might insist on leading the party.

Minder

11TH-LEVEL DWARVEN WARRIOR (IRON GOLEM)

STRENGTH:	20
DEXTERITY:	7
CONSTITUTION:	24
INTELLIGENCE:	12
WISDOM:	16
CHARISMA:	14
AC:	3
THAC0:	7 (including Strength bonus)
HIT POINTS:	80
ALIGNMENT:	NG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	M (8')

Weapon Proficiencies: Battle axe, short bow, short sword, dagger, war hammer, punching, wrestling.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Armorer (10); blacksmithing (20); etiquette (14); languages—Common, Dwarven, Halruuan (12); religion—Dwarven (16); seamanship (8); spellcraft (10); reading/writing (13).

Special Defenses: Minder's golem-like body is immune to non-magical weaponry, although any magic and enchanted weapons can cause injury. Poison gases do not affect her.

Magic Resistance: Like a true golem, Minder is healed by magical flame. Her first golem body was melted down in a large forge, so she can be injured by great heat of a mundane nature. Magical electrical attacks slow her. Since she does not breathe, many magical gas cloud attacks have no effect.

Appearance: Minder's spirit inhabits a magically-crafted 8'-tall iron golem that resembles an attractive warrior woman with eyes and hair of gold and a body plated with bronze. She wears a bit of fabric around her chest and loins, with a helmet, girdle, and steel sandals to complete the look of a warrior.

Background: As a golden-haired dwarven maid, Minder left her people to seek glory and honor in foreign lands. She befriended Dwalimar Omen and accompanied him on his quest to obtain the Astrolabe of Nimbral. In the battle against the crystalgriff which guarded the prize, Minder's body fell deeply into death's shadow. Omen found a way to transfer his friend's spirit into the body of a golem before she joined her dwarven gods in the afterlife. Since then, Minder's golem body was reforged by a dwarven artisan into a shapelier, more feminine form. Minder is reasonably pleased by the comfort and sturdiness of her new body, so much so that when offered a *wish* by the elven god Labelas Enoreth, she chose to decline the chance to regain a dwarven form (mainly to spite Labelas). She has followed Omen loyally for years and is his main confidant and best friend.



Equipment: Minder has little in the way of worldly goods. She longs for little and requires even less.

Magical items: None. Though she has some knowledge of the workings of magic from her long association with Omen, Minder has the usual dwarven distrust of things magical.

Roleplaying notes: Minder experiences no discomfort from the weather, nor does she require food, water or air to survive. She can no longer eat, drink, taste or smell. In her dreams she misses the sharp tangy scent of juniper and pine in the icy air of her homeland and the taste of ale. She can still see, hear, and feel as well as any dwarf. She is a wise warrior, and her calm consideration and steely resolve have served her and her companions well. Since inhabiting the form of a golem, Minder has taken to fighting without a weapon, relying on her size and great strength in most battles. Minder has discovered her true soulmate, the dwarf Onyx the Invincible, and when Minder is in Tethyr, their courtship proceeds apace despite her golem form. Minder is never far from Omen, unless she is acting as his ambassador. If she is unwillingly separated from him, she will find a way to rejoin him.

10TH-LEVEL HALFLING THIEF

STRENGTH:	9
DEXTERITY:	18
CONSTITUTION:	12
INTELLIGENCE:	15
WISDOM:	12
CHARISMA:	15
AC:	6 (Dexterity bonus)
THAC0:	16
HIT POINTS:	42
ALIGNMENT:	CG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (3'3")

Weapon Proficiencies: Crossbow (light), dagger, dart, sling.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Appraising (15); forgery (17); healing (10); languages—common, reading/ writing (15); running (6); seamanship (19); spellcraft (13); swimming (9); tailoring (17).

Thieving Skills: Pick pockets 75%, open locks 75%, find/remove traps 55%, move silently 90%, hide in shadows 90%, detect noise 50%, climb walls 65%, read languages 25%.

Appearance: Foxilon is an attractive young halfling of thirty some years with black hair and deep brown eyes. He favors vests or short tunics over his shirt and pants, all of bright colorful fabrics. Like most halflings, he does not wear shoes but prefers to go barefoot. He follows the peculiar southern practice of shaving the hair on his feet.

Background: Foxilon Cardluck, Foxy to his friends, left his home in Luiren at a young age to earn his fortune adventuring with a party of young, like-minded halflings. Unfortunately, the party soon ran into a human called Joribel who duped them, as he had many others, into becoming addicted to a narcotic substance known as cheeeese which affected only halflings. The halflings became Joribel's pawns, stealing, raiding, even killing at his command to earn their daily ration of cheeeese. Foxy was forced to perform in Joribel's combat arena, and he might have ended his days there as a cheeeesed-out wretch, but a larger halfling, a bully, stole Foxy's share of cheeeese, forcing Foxy to "dry out." In a moment of lucidity, Foxy, trying to save a halfling girl from Joribel's advances, attacked Joribel and fled with the girl. While evading pursuit they ran into Omen and Minder. The girl kept running, but Foxy told Omen something of Joribel's doing. Omen destroyed the human and took Foxy under his wing. The wizard taught the halfling the finer points of stealing items of magical power. By the time Omen had acquired the *Realms Master* he had gained a great respect for the young man's wit and skills, and he made the halfling his first mate.



Equipment: If Foxy doesn't have it, he can acquire it within a reasonable time. He prizes a collection of non-magical but wondrous curios, including a magnetic compass, several magnifying glasses, a spyglass, a music box that plays the lover's duet from the opera *The Tragedy of Cassana and Zrie Prakis*, and a shadow box with silhouettes of a variety of flying creatures.

Magical items: Foxy has hoarded a few magical scrolls against the day when he finally learns to read them. These include: *feather fall*, *light*, *identify*, *knock*, *rope trick*, *infravision*, and *power word-stun*. Omen does not know about the latter.

Roleplaying notes: Foxy is a buoyant, charming halfling. He feels a protective affection for all his crewmembers and does his best to keep their spirits up. He's a reasonably shrewd businessman, an able seaman, and a first-class thief. He's generally friendly and likes everyone. A person would have to be truly mean to get on Foxy's bad side, but the halfling is by no means naive about human nature (or elven, dwarven, or halfling nature). Foxy is still occasionally tempted by a desire for cheeeese, but like Agrivar he has managed to keep from sliding back into that gutter. When he has free time in a town, Foxy seeks out the company of other halflings and news on Luiren.

Ishi Barasume

9TH-LEVEL HUMAN WARRIOR

STRENGTH:	13
DEXTERITY:	18
CONSTITUTION:	14
INTELLIGENCE:	15
WISDOM:	12
CHARISMA:	15
AC:	2(Armor and Dexterity)
THAC0:	12
HIT POINTS:	56
ALIGNMENT:	LG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Shout*
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (5'5")

Weapon Proficiencies: Katana, wakhizashi, bo stick, tae kwon do* (unarmed combat featuring kicks, leaps, a fisted blow, a great throw; 1d8 damage; #AT 1; provides AC 8 when using the style alone without armor). Ishi has successfully blended tae kwon do with the use of her katana.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Calligraphy* (18); etiquette (15); endurance (14); jumping (13); language—Common, Kozakuran (15); reading/writing (16); swimming (13); survival (15); tea ceremony* (15); tumbling (18).

Special skills: Hide in shadows 41%, move silently 50%, find/remove traps 45%, climb walls 89%, open locks 52%, tightrope walk 40%, pole vault 10.5 feet, fall 20 feet without damage, escape 26%.

Special Attacks: By focusing her ki* and entering combat with a fierce shout, Ishi raises her hit points, fighting ability, and saving throws by 2 levels for a full turn. Damage is dealt first to the temporary hit points. The shout can be used only once per day.

Appearance: Ishi is an attractive woman in her mid thirties, small, lean, muscular, and very graceful. She generally wears her dark black hair in two neat plaits fastened together in a short tail behind her head. She has dark brown eyes and a small mole high on her left cheek. In combat she wears traditional Kozakuran armor. When she is relaxing she prefers simple, elegant robes of silken fabric imported from her homeland.

Background: Ishi is from the far-off eastern nation of Kozakura. After training as a warrior, Ishi was chosen to receive special training in skills not usual to a warrior. Then she was assigned a mysterious mission. Shortly thereafter she left Kozakura entirely and traveled through Kara-Tur gaining much renown. She aided the barbarian wizard Dwalimar Omen in delicate negotiations with a T'u Lung wu jen*. Afterward, eager to travel far, or perhaps far away, she readily accepted Omen's offer to serve as a crew member of the *Realms Master*.

Equipment: Katana* (1d10/1d12), bo sticks* (1d6/1d4) Ishi's



armor consists of several exotic pieces made of chain mail, plate and metal strips laced together for a total weight of 50 lbs. and an AC of 6. She once owned a wakhizashi that matched her katana, but she lost it in combat with an evil demon. She cannot replace it; honor demands that she retrieve it one day.

Magical items: None.

Roleplaying notes: Ishi is a valiant fighter for whom honor is the highest standard. She would readily face death before discrediting herself and her family name with an act of cowardice or failure in combat. She has excellent manners, though they are often tested by the western barbarians amongst whom she has chosen to live. While she is reserved among strangers, with her friends her nature is open and playful. Her respect for the paladin Agrivar soon grew into affection and great passion that Agrivar has reciprocated. Ishi is a more formal than friendly person, but she has great respect for other skilled warriors and will be glad to make their acquaintance.

* Further information on these can be found in *Oriental Adventures*.

12TH-LEVEL ELVEN CLERIC OF LABELAS ENORETH

STRENGTH:	16
DEXTERITY:	15
CONSTITUTION:	18
INTELLIGENCE:	16
WISDOM:	15
CHARISMA:	15
AC:	0
THAC0:	1 (Armor and Dexterity)
HIT POINTS:	60
ALIGNMENT:	CG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (5'8")

Weapon Proficiencies: Blowgun, mace, quarterstaff, sling.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Dancing (15); etiquette (15); fast-talking (15); healing (13); herbalism (14); languages—Common, Elvish (16); local history-western heartlands (15); orienteering (15); reading/writing (17); religion (15); spellcraft (14); swimming (16).

Commonly memorized spells: Cure light wounds, detect evil, detect magic, light; charm person or mammal, find traps, hold person, slow poison, spiritual hammer; dispel magic, cure disease, locate object; cure serious wounds, detect lie, neutralize poison, protection from evil 10' radius; cure critical wounds, dispel evil, heal.

Appearance: Vartan is one of the Blood of the Shining People (i.e. the gold elves), as is quite apparent from his deep bronze skin and long golden hair. Not usual for his people are his green eyes. He is handsome and strong.

Background: Vartan was born and raised in Everska, the elven fortress home in the western heartlands. In his fortieth year, he left his home to see more of the world. For some time what he saw did not impress him much. Like many elves, he found humans foolish and their encroachment on nature disturbing. Always eager for adventure, he agreed to help a party of human warriors deal with a band of marauding gnolls. The gnolls' strength proved greater than supposed; the human warriors were killed, and Vartan was captured for sacrifice. The gnolls had the misfortune to stumble across Prism Agrivar, who vanquished them and freed Vartan. Vartan swore to do all in his power to aid Agrivar as Agrivar had aided him. Shortly thereafter Agrivar joined the *Realms Master*, so Vartan did so as well. Vartan was now among heroes, both noble and brave, and he found himself forced to reevaluate humans. His friendship with the crew changed his outlook on everything, even his relationship to his own god. During the Time of Troubles Vartan served as the avatar for his god, Labelas Enoreth. Labelas's evil treatment of Vartan's friends (while in Vartan's body) led to a falling out between the cleric and his god. Labelas came to



repent of his actions, greatly desiring Vartan to return to his faith. Several years later, god and elf were reconciled fully. Vartan now serves in Arvandor, Labelas's realm in Arborea.

Equipment: Holy symbol, mace, full plate armor.

Magical items: General power key of healing from Labelas.

Roleplaying notes: Vartan has the most amazing ability to put his foot in his mouth. Whether he is trying to be witty, appear well-informed or just exhibiting elven snobbery, he always manages to say something callous, insensitive, or snotty. This gift lingers on despite having seen some of the errors of his way after the trauma he suffered as his god's avatar—a lifetime of habit is hard to break. Vartan has an eye for the ladies, and human ladies are no exceptions. He prefers dalliances to true romance; no one has yet captured his heart. Vartan is not particularly introspective and prefers activities to occupy his thoughts. The elf is a clever and valiant combatant. Vartan shows courtesy to any beings who are reasonably courteous themselves. He tries his best in an unassuming way to wean his fellow elves from their many prejudices against humans, hoping to sow peace and understanding between the races, for the betterment of all.

Priam Agrivar

9TH-LEVEL HUMAN PALADIN

STRENGTH:	17
DEXTERITY:	10
CONSTITUTION:	16
INTELLIGENCE:	12
WISDOM:	14
CHARISMA:	17
AC:	3 (Armor)
THAC0:	11 (Strength bonus)
HIT POINTS:	63
ALIGNMENT:	LG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (6'1")

Weapon Proficiencies: Bastard sword, long sword, longbow, dagger, blowgun, punching, wrestling.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Endurance (16); etiquette (17); fire-building (13); language—Common, Elven, Orcish (12); reading/writing (13); religion (14); swimming (17).

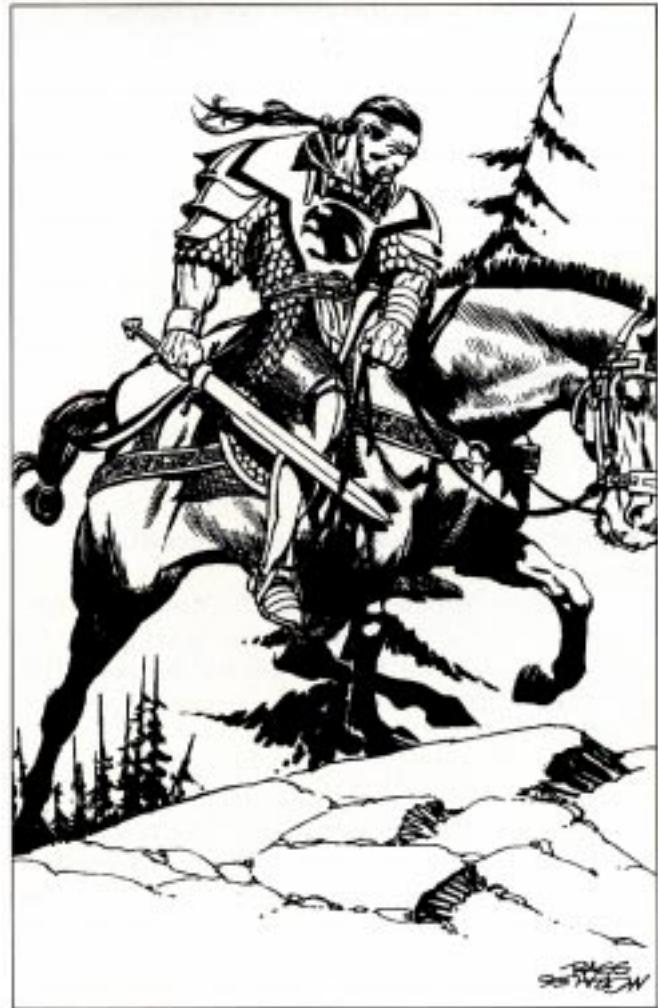
Appearance: Agrivar is a tall, lean man in his early forties with a warrior's muscular build. He wears his dark black hair long, pulled back into a tail at the nape of his neck. His eyes are deep violet blue. He prefers to keep his face clean-shaven. Over his armor he wears a short sleeve white tunic bearing his family crest, a sable griffon rampant.

Background: Priam is the only son of Ostus Agrivar, a wizard of the North. In his youth, Priam gained some renown as a paladin of Torm. Unfortunately, he was magically crippled while attempting to defend his father from an extra-planar monster called Imgig Zu. More than his body was withered; upon witnessing his father's death, Priam's spirit was crushed as well. His frustration at being unable to avenge his father helped twist him into a self-pitying drunkard. In a quest to help his half-sister Cybriana (now known as Kyriani) Priam ultimately slew Imgig Zu and regained the full use of his body. He battled thereafter to free himself from the lure of alcohol. In his travels he rescued the elven cleric Vartan Hai Silvar from death at the hand of gnolls, and the two joined the crew of the *Realms Master* to help recover and destroy the Hand of Vaprak.

Equipment: Plate mail, bastard sword, dagger, blow gun.

Magical items: Long sword +1, +2 vs. magic-using & enchanted creatures; longbow +1, six arrows of illithid slaying +3; periapt of proof against poison.

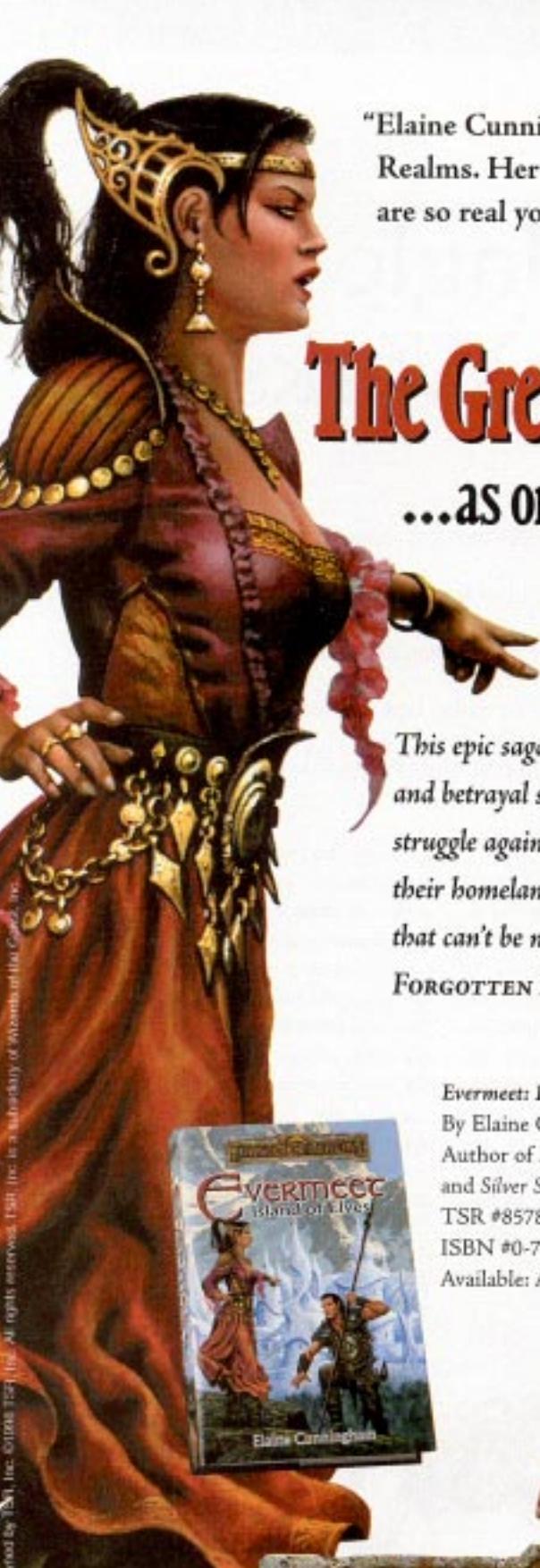
Property: Priam has inherited the holdings that belonged to his father Ostus. Set some distance north of Waterdeep, the holdings comprise over 100 acres of fertile fields, old woodlands, and a large stone manor house set on a rise overlooking



the land. In recognition for the many services Ostus and Priam performed for him, Lord Nasagh holds the land in reserve while Agrivar wanders the Realms battling evil. No doubt the lord hopes for the good and loyal knight to return someday.

Roleplaying notes: Agrivar is a solemn, taciturn man with a strong sense of justice and fearless courage. While he takes his calling seriously, Agrivar is not a stern killjoy. His gentle good humor has endeared him to his fellow adventurers. He considers his actions carefully, knowing his paladinhood carries a great responsibility to himself and others. During the Time of the Troubles, Agrivar again fell prey to his lust for drink, but he has since fought back that urge once again. Shortly after joining the *Realms Master* crew, Agrivar discovered a mutual attraction to and affection for the Kozakuran warrior Ishi Barasume. The pair are well-matched physically and spiritually.

Agrivar could fit easily into any group of good and lawful adventurers. His love for the spirit of the law over the letter of the law, and his understanding of nature has given him a certain tolerance for those who do not share his alignment. Always prepared to shoulder his share of the load and willing to help others learn and grow, he can be both a fine team member and an excellent leader.



"Elaine Cunningham is the best wordsmith of the Forgotten Realms. Her writing has a lyrical quality. Her characters are so real you feel every pain and share every joy."

— R.A. Salvatore

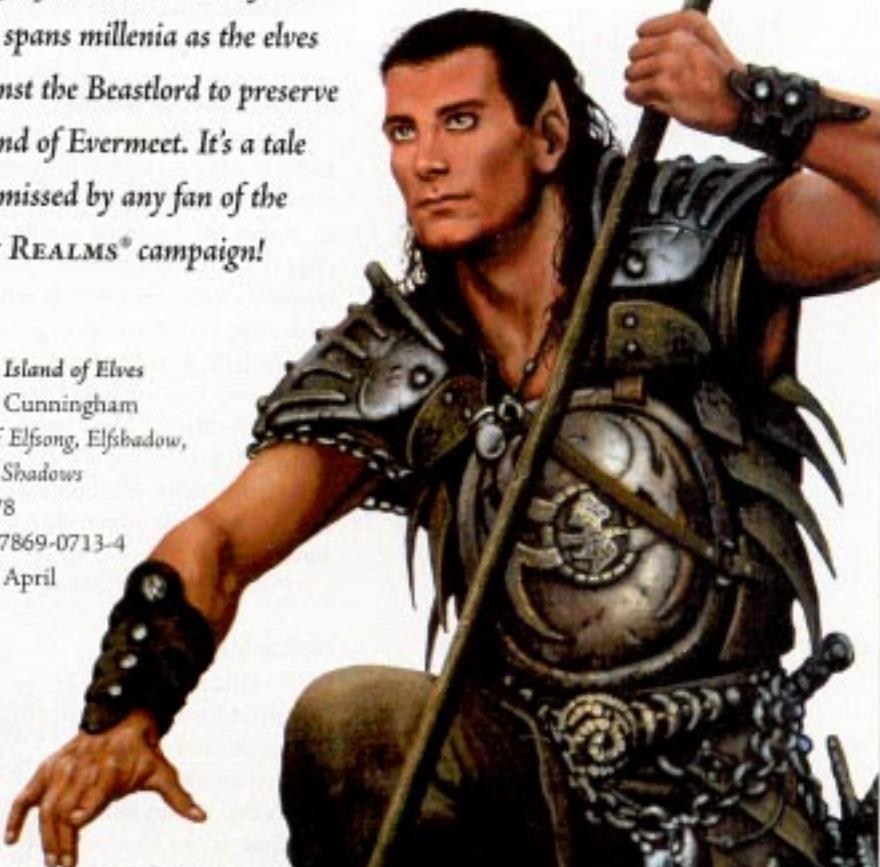
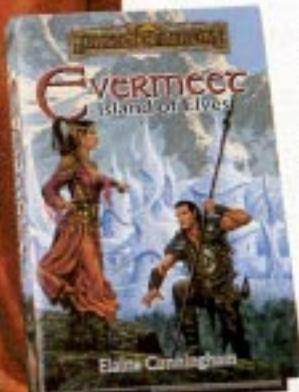
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by
Sebastian Dietz

illustrated by
Jim Crabtree

H

ERE, THEN, is a small collection of magical items designed not for warriors and invokers but rather for alchemists, merchants, and craftsmen. These examples of "working magic" rarely found among the treasure hoards of dragons or trolls, but in greater cities, some lucky artisans might own one or two of these helpful devices.

Apron of the Alchemist

This long apron is made of thick leather, and it is adorned with four rubies on its collar. The apron of the alchemist lends its wearer AC 7 against attacks from the front or sides, but it does not prevent the wearer from casting spells. Furthermore, the apron is enchanted to provide the wearer with a +3 bonus to all saving throws vs. fire- or acid-based attacks from the front. The apron of the alchemist is thus especially useful for those alchemists who conduct experiments involving flammable or acidic materials.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 2,500

Nalkor's Apron

The alchemist Nalkor improved the apron of the alchemist after losing his left eye in an explosion. Whenever within the area of effect of an explosion causing more than 1d8 hp damage, the wearer of this apron is *teleported* to a predetermined location. This site may be chosen or changed once per week by visiting the place and

speaking the command word. After the teleportation, one of the rubies on the collar vanishes. If no more rubies remain, the teleportation power is lost. To replace lost rubies, the wizard must cast a *teleport* spell on a red ruby worth at least 500 gp, then sew the ruby onto the apron within one turn, using a mithril needle. Finally, the wizard must cast *permanency* on the ruby, or else the power of the teleport spell is lost. Using a needle of non-mithril metal destroys the apron's powers completely.

XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Tools of Art

The *tools of art* are special implements enchanted to improve the user's crafting skill. All of these tools have in common that they provide their user with a skill bonus from +1 to +5 on a specific proficiency. If the user does not have the appropriate proficiency, the *tool of art* provides the proficiency with no bonus. To determine the item's bonus, use the chart for magical sword bonuses. Cursed *tools of art* might also exist.



Tool	Proficiency	Bonus
Awl	Cobbling	
Chisel	Stonemasonry	
Grindstone	Weaponsmithing	
Needle	Sewing	
Wheel	Pottery	
Hammer	Blacksmithing	
Shuttle	Weaving	
DMs	should feel free to add more tools for proficiencies not listed here.	

XP Value	GP Value
+1	700
+2	1,000
+3	1,400
+4	2,000
+5	2,800

Magic Tar

This sticky substance was created to seal a boat's hull. If applied to other objects, it becomes nonmagical, normal tar. When the *magic tar* is used to seal a boat's hull, however, no water will ever seep through the boards, except when the boards themselves are damaged by an attack or collision. *Magic tar* also repels creatures that normally adhere to a ship's hull, such as mussels and sea-pocks. *Magic tar* is normally contained in 10-lb. pots.

XP Value: 250 GP Value: 500



Flag of the Warsmith

Every army needs at least one weaponsmith to repair broken arms and damaged armor, or simply to make new horseshoes for the fighters' warhorses. The only problem is the weight of the smith's tools. General Polger therefore asked a wizard to create a method of easy transportation for smithies. The wizard enchanted a red flag to satisfy the general. Every time this flag is put on a pole above a tent large enough to support a smithy, the tools needed for forging weapons appear inside the tent. The tools include: an anvil, two bellows, one small forge, one grindstone, hammers and tongs, 50 lbs. of coal, and a barrel of water. If one of these items is removed from the tent, it does not appear when the *flag of the warsmith* is used again. Coal

reappears after being burned in the fire, as does the water.

To make the *flag of the warsmith* function, however, there must be at least 20 soldiers in a radius of 100 yards around the tent. If the *flag of the warsmith* is removed from its pole, the tools disappear. The flag can be used once per day for eight hours at a time.

XP Value: 10,000 GP Value: 30,000

Nalkor's Tape Measure

Nalkor was fond of the first-level spell *unseen servant*. While making a *tool of art* for a befriended tailor, Nalkor also made this tape measure. It looks like a simple leather strap of two yards' length, with numbers marked on it. If the command word is spoken, the magic of the tape is evoked. To make this item function properly, the user of Nalkor's tape measure must provide a small sheet of parchment, a quill, and ink. When these materials are available and the command word is spoken, the *unseen servant* takes the measures of one humanoid and writes them on the parchment (copying the numbers from the tape measure, for the spell creates only mindless force). If one figure is greater than two yards, the servant writes only "Two yards plus."

Nalkor's tape measure works only on humanoids. If they wear clothes, the tape measure functions, but its results might be distorted.

XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 2,000

Glasses of the Architect

These amber spectacles are a helpful device for architects. If plans of a building are viewed through this magical device, all points are seen as spots. The glasses may be used only once on a construction plan; their effect lasts one full hour. After that time, the plans must be changed or drawn again to make the *glasses of the architect* work on them once more.

XP Value: 2,000 GP Value: 4,000



Barrel of Potion Storing

This barrel has a small spigot and two large parchment labels. It is enchanted to store magical potions. After pouring a potion into the *barrel of potion storing*, the wizard must write down the name of the potion on the left parchment. If he needs one of the stored potions, he writes its name on the other parchment and opens the spigot. The name written need not be the real name of the potion; a synonym will suffice.

If the name of a potion is not written four rounds after storing the potion, the potion is lost, as is the next potion coming out of the faucet. The latter potion changes to a deadly poison (save vs. poison or die instantly). A potion also becomes poisonous when its name is spelled incorrectly on the right parchment. It is not deadly in this case, but the user of the potion suffers 20 hp damage if the save is failed.

There is room for only 100 names on either parchment. When the last potion is taken from the *barrel of potion storing*, it crumbles to dust. The same thing happens when one of the parchments is removed.

XP Value: 10,000
GP Value: 25,000



Jadon's Mortar

The wizard Jadon was well known for his magical tools for artisans. After crafting several *tools of art*, he was asked by a wealthy merchant to create a mortar that would harden on com-



Nalkor's Book of Servants

This small book usually has 30-40 pages and contains 1d4+1 *unseen servant* spells. If the user of the book needs the services of one or more servants, he writes the tasks he wishes a servant to perform in the book. After performing the task, the conjured servant vanishes, but special enchantments duplicate it, so the *unseen servant* is available once more 24 hours later. If the *unseen servant* must complete several tasks, the user might write down the phrase, "Obey my commands." The spell then has a duration of four hours, but after this time, the spell is lost forever. If the book contains no more *unseen servant* spells, its pages crumble to dust. By burning this dust, the user may summon one last servant that serves the user for 1d10 hours before vanishing forever.

XP Value: 3,000 GPValue: 7,000



Easel of Pageturning

To operate this easel, four command words are required. The first word, followed by a page number, opens a book placed on the easel to the desired page. The second command word skips one page forward; the third skips one page back. The last command word shuts the book.

The *easel of pageturning* works only if no more than one book is placed upon it. It does not open books that are closed by locks or leather straps, though it can open nonmagical, non-locked bonds such as silk cords.

XP Value: 1,000 GPValue: 2,500

Changing Mold

If a weaponsmith wishes to forge many different weapons, he must spend a great amount of money on molds. Another possibility is to use the *changing molds*. Three types of *changing molds* can be found: small, medium, and large. The smith must name the weapon he wishes to create with his mold and speak the proper command word. The mold then changes its interior shape to resemble the outlines of the weapon to be created.



Using a small *changing mold*, the weaponsmith

may create a small weapon, a small item, or up to 15 tiny items (such as arrowheads). Medium and large molds work the same way, but a medium mold can create three small items or up to 30 tiny items; a large *changing mold* can create 7 small items or up to 70 tiny

Five percent of all *changing molds* are cursed, and items created in them break within 1d4 uses or days.



mand. After an entire year of experimenting, Jadon found another solution to the merchant's problem. It was not possible to use command words, so Jadon enchanted the mortar to harden four rounds after salt was poured over it. The only drawback to this process is that one ounce of mercury dissolves 1 lb. of Jadon's mortar within two rounds. Jadon's mortar is normally found in sacks containing 50 lbs. of this unusual material.

XP Value: 500 GP Value: 50

Knife of Decoration

A *knife of decoration* is a helpful device for any carpenter. When a person with the carpentry skill uses this knife to decorate a wooden item, the item's worth is increased by 15 percent +1d20 percent. However, there is a 5 percent chance that the item is ruined during the process of decoration.

XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 2,500



Fitting Doll

This gray doll is a magical device made to help a tailor with his work. It is made of stuffed silk and is mounted on a wooden pole to hold it upright. When the command word is spoken, the doll's size changes to that of the next humanoid touching it within two rounds. If damaged, the doll must be sewn with a golden needle within six turns; otherwise, its magic is lost. There are three general types of fitting dolls: male, female, and genderchanging. Naturally, male or female dolls work only with humanoids of the appropriate gender, while genderchanging dolls work with either.

Male or Female

XP Value: 2,000 GPValue: 4,000

Genderchanging

XP Value: 3,000 GP Value: 6,000

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	XP Value	GP Value
Small	1,200	5,000
Medium	2,000	9,000
Large	2,500	15,000

Mold of 1,000 Candles

This candle mold automatically produces 1d2 candles per day. If hot wax is poured into the mold, this production increases to 4d2 candles per day for one week. If the candles are not used within 48 hours, they disappear.

XP Value: 750 GP Value: 1,500

Pot of Metal Melting

This large pot melts all metal placed within it after the proper command word is spoken. Up to 10 lbs. of metal may be made molten each day. Magical metal saves vs. spell to avoid being melted. The *pot of metal melting* itself radiates no heat while operating.

XP Value: 2,000 GP Value: 4,000

Diamond Sales

Diamond scales look like simple apothecary's scales. However, if a gem is placed on one side, the illusion of gold coins appears on the other. The number of coins equals the price of the gem.

XP Value: 1,500
GP Value: 5,000

Diamond Scales of Chalacha

These improved *diamond scales* have a small lever at the bottom. If the position of the lever is left, the scales show 10 percent more coins than the gem placed on the one side is worth. If the lever is placed in the middle, the *diamond scales of Chalacha* work normally. If the lever points to the right, the scales' illusion contains 10% fewer gold pieces than the gem is worth. Despite the scales, Chalacha was cheated by a wizard whose magical gems appeared to weigh twice as much as they truly did.

XP Value: 2,500 GP Value: 6,000



Dan's Dough Doubler

Dan Salingford was an archwizard at the court of Queen Beltanar. To lower the cost of the Queen's weekly banquets, Dan tried to invent a magical device that produced an infinite amount of food. Unfortunately, he was neither an expert of enchantment nor a particularly good cook. His only successful invention was a great wooden plate used to knead dough. While bread is kneaded, the dough's mass increases. After the whole process, a baker ends up with twice as much dough as he started with. This effect functions only once per portion of dough for up to ten lbs. *Dan's dough doubler* may be used five times a day.

XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 2,000



Jeremiah's Box of Knife Sharpening

Jeremiah, wizard and carpenter, frequently grew angry about blunt knives. After ruining a chair made of very expensive wood, he created this mahogany box. Jeremiah's box of knife sharpening is 18" long × 9" wide × 5" tall.

To sharpen a knife, one must place it in the *box of knife sharpening* in the evening. By morning (at least 12 hours later), the knife is sharp and may be used with a +1 bonus to attack or a +1 bonus on any appropriate proficiency check (such as carpentry or cooking) made while using it. This bonus is applied only to the first three attacks or proficiency checks made after the sharpening. The

box of knife sharpening may be used five times a week and affects up to three blades at the same time.

XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 2,000

Vial of Nalkor

Nalkor often had problems identifying potions, so he created this vial with the help of Baskur, a potionmonger. When potion is poured into the vial, he vial Nalkor identifies potions with 75% accuracy. A small amount of the potion disappears during this process, which might cause the potion's effects to be invoked if the potion's magic normal

affects an area (DM's discretion). After the proper identification, the potion's name appears on the vial's label. Otherwise, the label bears a question mark. The effects of the potion remain mysterious if the character using the *vial of Nalkor* does not recognize the name.

XP Value: 4,000 GP Value: 10,000



Sebastian Deitz assures us that he employed neither the pen of composition nor the envelope of automatic acceptance in submitting this article.

Attention Gamers! It's time once again to select the best game and game-related releases of the past year (1997) for the annual Origins Awards. Please **vote for one release in each category**. Return your completed ballot by June 17. And feel free to photocopy this ballot for your own use or to pass it on to other gamers (only one ballot per person, though). Origins Award winners are announced at the ORIGINS national gaming convention—be there, or check summer issues of this magazine for the winners!

Deadline: June 17, 1998

Best Abstract Board Game

- Balanx Mayfair
- Kill Doctor Lucky Cheapass Games
- Löwenherz Gold Sieber
- Stock Market Guru Avalon Hill
- Survival of the Wits Avalanche

Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

Best Historical Board Game

- Euphrat & Tigris Hans im Glück
- Home Before the Leaves Fall Clash of Arms Games
- Sam Grant Columbia Games
- Six Days of Glory Clash of Arms Games/TOME
- Successors Avalon Hill

Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Board Game

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- Princess Ryan's Star Marines Avalon Hill
- Roborally Grand Prix Wizards of the Coast
- Starship Troopers Avalon Hill

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- Dune: Eye of the Storm Last Unicorn
- Shadowrun Trading Card Game Limited Ed. FASA
- Warlords Trading Card Game Iron Crown

Write-in Title:

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- Give Me the Brain Cheapass Games
- Groo: The Game Archangel Entertainment
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- Titan: The Arena Avalon Hill

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- Battles of the Revolutionary & Napoleonic Wars Clash of Arms Games
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- AKU-1X Akuma Ral Partha
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- Cauldron Born Ral Partha
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Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

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Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

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Manufacturer:

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- Cold War Battle Plan Flying Buffalo, Inc.
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- Middle-earth PBM Fourth Age Circa 1000 Game Systems, Inc.

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Manufacturer:

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Manufacturer:


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- A Bright Dream/A Dark Dream Steve Jackson
- Appearing In-In Nomine Chaosium
- A Forty Share in Innsmouth Chaosium
- Appearing in Singers of Strange Songs Dream Pod 9
- Crisis of Faith Pinnacle
- Independence Day White Wolf
- Not Damned White Wolf
- Appearing in Dark Tyrants Anthology Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

Best Roleplaying Adventure

- Film Festival #1 (Honk Kong Action Theatre) Event Horizon
- Independence Day (Deadlands) Pinnacle
- Mob War (Shadowrun) FASA
- Tale of the Comet (AD&D) TSR
- The Great Modron March (AD&D) TSR
- The Medellin Agent (Millennium's End) Chameleon Eclectic
- Appearing in The Medellin Agent Dream Pod 9
- The New Breed: Battle Before the Storm (Heavy Gear) Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

Best Roleplaying Game

- Big Eyes, Small Mouth Guardians of Order
- Blue Planet Biohazard Games
- Domains of Dread TSR
- Legends of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Alderacon
- Saga Game Rules/Fate Deck TSR
- The Babylon Project Chameleon Eclectic

Write-in Title:

Manufacturer:

Best Roleplaying Supplement

- A Magical Medley (FUDGE) Grey Ghost
- BattleTech Field Manual: Mercenaries (Mechwarrior) FASA
- Delta Green (Call of Cthulhu) Pagan Publishing
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Manufacturer:

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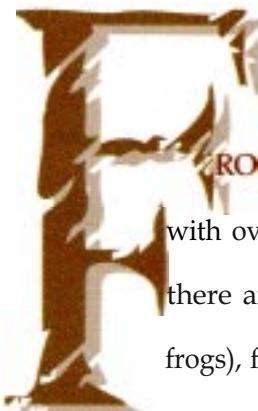
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Amphibians are some of the most adaptable creatures on the planet, occupying a diverse range of habitats and existing on every continent.

by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
Bob Klasnich



ROGS AND TOADS make up the vast majority of amphibians, with over 4,000 species known today. In the AD&D® game, however, there are only three "monster" frogs (giant, killer, and poisonous frogs), four "monster" toads (giant, fire, ice, and poisonous toads), and a handful of frog-like creatures (bullywugs, gripli, grung, and froghemoths, to name a few). The following pages add to the ranks of the amphibians—specifically, the anurans, or tailless amphibian—by introducing four new species.

Incidentally, the terms "toad" and "frog" are often interchangeable. Originally, the terms were used to differentiate between the species: toads having drier (and often bumpier) skin than frogs; frogs generally being more streamlined and better jumpers than toads. Nowadays, the term "toad" is often used as a catch-all to include all types of anurans, especially since individual species are often called by different common names in different parts of the world.

All anurans are carnivorous, although individual species have adopted different hunting strategies. Some roam at night searching for prey, specifically the snails and worms that appear in the dampness accompanying the dew. Others actively seek out prey in specific locations, especially areas of high concentration (for instance, a watering hole or giant ant hill). Still others ambush prey by using camouflage techniques and pouncing on their victims as they pass within range.

The four new monsters in this article hardly scratch the surface of possible new anurans. DMs wishing for a wider variety of monster frogs and toads need only alter a few characteristics of "existing" creatures—many similar species come in different sizes and color schemes. For example, it isn't difficult to imagine a tropical version of a fire toad, with vivid yellow and black skin warning away predators. Such alterations help the DM provide a surprise or two to players who have long since memorized the statistics of the "standard" monsters.



With his many contributions to "Dragon's Bestiary" and the "Ecology" department, Johnathan Richards is rapidly becoming the "monster man" of DRAGON® Magazine.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any fresh water, often tropical
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Pack
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal
TREASURE:	Incidental
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	1-6
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	6, Swim 12
HIT DICE:	3
THAC0:	16
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Acid
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (6' long)
MORALE:	Average (8)
XI' VALUE:	270

Archer frogs look like large specimens of the standard giant frog. They are usually mottled shades of green and brown.

Combat: In their natural surroundings, archer frogs' coloration gives them a natural camouflage, imposing a -3 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls. Like giant frogs, they attack with their tongues to a range of 18 feet, at +4 to hit. An archer frog's tongue, however, ends in a hardened series of wicked barbs. The frog uses its tongue to pierce the body of its prey, causing 1d8 hp damage and drawing the victim into its mouth. The tongue barbs prevent prey from escaping; those that manage to pull free from the tongue suffer an additional 3d4 hp damage.

A victim pierced by an archer frog can cut itself free by slicing through the tongue. The tongue is AC 9 and must suffer 6 hp damage in a single blow to be severed. This damage is not subtracted from the archer frog's hit points. Once severed, the tongue regenerates, barbed tip and all, in about two weeks.

Once the prey is within the mouth, the archer frog's acidic saliva begins the process of digestion, causing an addition 1d4 hp damage each round, until the prey has been totally liquefied and swallowed. Non-organic materials (such as armor, weapons, and jewelry) are not digested; these items are spit out by the archer frog after dissolving its meal.

Once an archer frog has "speared" a victim on its tongue, it is virtually defenseless until its current victim is dissolved. For this reason, an archer frog prefers to target solo prey; parties of two or more capable of fighting back are seldom attacked.

Habitat/Society: Archer frogs, possibly because of their larger size and greater food requirements, are not found together in as great numbers as are other species of giant frogs and toads. They tend to hunt on their own, gathering only to mate and sleep. Possibly this is to prevent two different archer frogs from



accidentally spearing the same prey—an awkward situation that would endanger both frogs until the victim was fully dissolved and the frogs' tongues were freed.

Because of their unique hunting method, archer frogs tend to concentrate on larger prey. Creatures smaller than a rabbit are difficult to spear with their tongues and are often ignored by the archer frogs in favor of creatures closer to their own size. The frogs have large, expandable throat-sacs which hold prey in much the same manner as a pelican's beak. This enables a full-grown archer frog to digest something as large as an elf or human in its mouth.

The throat-sacs also come into play during courtship rituals. In the springtime, the male archer frogs inflate their sacs and issue forth impressive bellows and croaks. These bellows attract females of the same species while simultaneously warning off competing males. They can often be heard from well over a mile away.

Ecology: If properly preserved, an archer frog's barbed tongue-tip can be used as a spearhead, harpoon tip, or similar weapon. Its flesh is considered a delicacy among many humanoid races. In fact, a common practice among those who hunt archer frogs is to silently follow one as it hunts, attacking it immediately after it captures prey of its own. This ensures that the archer frog is defenseless when attacked and also gains the frog's prey as well as the archer frog itself.

On rare occasions, archer frogs have been domesticated by humanoid races, usually bullywugs, gripli, or lizard men. Bullywugs and lizard men use archer frogs as guard animals, often keeping them tied by a leash or chain to a certain area. Gripli, because of their smaller size, can use archer frogs as riding mounts. In either case, the archer frog makes a below-average war beast, as its combat abilities extend only to the first victim it spears with its tongue. Still, as the diminutive gripli assert, that's one less foe that they must face.

Ghoul Frog

CLIMATE/TERRAIN :	Any fresh water
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Pack
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Insectivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	2-8
ARMOR CLASS:	8
MOVEMENT:	6, Swim 12
HIT DICE:	1+4
THAC0:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-2
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Blinding flash
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Poison
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	S (2'-3' long)
MORALE:	Unsteady (6)
XP VALUE:	65

A ghoul frog appears to be some sort of zombified creature, but it is not. Its skin is translucent, revealing the skeleton, muscles, and internal organs. Large, black pupils give the illusion of hollow eye sockets, adding to the misconception.

Ghoul frogs are not undead and exhibit no ghoulish attributes: they cannot paralyze, nor do they feast on carrion. Nonetheless, the term "ghoul frog" has stuck, although they are sometimes called "zombie frogs" or "skull frogs."

Combat: The skin of a ghoul frog gives off a faint luminescence that attracts flying insects at night. Those that fly too close are attacked by the frog's tongue, which draws the prey into the frog's mouth. Ghoul frogs normally attack only insects, but they can bite for 1-3 hp damage if cornered (although they flee from most attackers larger than themselves). Like most anurans, they have many small teeth, but only on their upper jaw. These teeth are used primarily to hold struggling prey steady so they can be swallowed whole.

Once per turn, a ghoul frog can generate a flash of bright light from its luminescent skin, causing victims to save vs. paralyzation or be blinded for 1d4 rounds, during which time the ghoul frog escapes. Ghoul frogs themselves are immune to the effects of such flashes. They are also somewhat resistant to the blinding effects of *light* and *continual light* spells; if either of these spells is cast directly on a ghoul frog's eyes, its attack rolls and saving throws are reduced by 2, not 4.

Habitat/Society: Ghoul frogs are often found in small packs, but they have no specific social structure. Staying in a group allows them to use their defensive flash more effectively, as they can take turns "flashing" enemies. They are never found far from a source of fresh water like a lake, pond, or stream, where they lay their jellylike eggs.



Ghoul frog tadpoles are transparent as their adult forms, although they do not gain their bioluminescence until after completing the metamorphosis into full adults. Glowing tadpoles would be too easily spotted by aquatic predators.

During daylight, ghoul frogs lie buried in the mud of the lake bottom, covering their skin and preventing its light from being spotted by predators. Only during the darkness of the night do they emerge and begin their hunt for insects.

Ecology: From a distance, the eerily-glowing ghoul frog is often mistaken for a will o'wisp. Those hoping to find a will o'wisp treasure trove are in for a disappointment, for ghoul frogs accumulate no treasure.

Ghoul frog flesh is bitter and mildly poisonous. Those eating it must save vs. poison or be violently nauseous for 1d4 hours. During this time, the afflicted individuals suffer a -2 attack penalty and a +2 AC penalty, as well as temporarily losing 24 points of Strength. Thus, ghoul frogs are not often hunted as prey. However, many predators try to stay close to a pack of ghoul frogs, waiting to pounce upon those creatures unfortunate enough to be blinded by the frogs' defensive flash.

In addition, ghoul frog skin, once dried and powdered, can be a useful ingredient in the manufacture of magical inks used to transcribe various spells. It is predominantly used for such light-based spells as *faerie fire*, *dancing lights*, and so on, but it can also be used for *corpse visage* and similar spells that deal with at least the appearance of being undead.

Ghoul frog blood is a vital ingredient in the manufacture of *skeletal potions* (see *Dragon Magazine* #198, "The False Undead"), which turn the imbiber's skin and organs invisible but leave his bones unaffected. In a pinch, it can also be used to create *potions of invisibility*, but such potions are usually inferior in terms of duration and often cause a flickering luminescence that negates the benefits of the invisibility.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Non-arctic
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Pack
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Blood
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-6)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	3-8
ARMOR CLASS:	10
MOVEMENT:	6, hop 6
HIT DICE:	1-1
THAC0:	20
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-3
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Gaze
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	T (6"-1')
MORALE:	Unreliable (2)
XP VALUE:	120

Small horns protrude from the heads of leech toads. With pitch-black skin, these creatures are difficult to see at night, when they are most likely to be encountered. Their bright red eyes are large, with horizontal pupils. Leech toads are also known as "bloodeyes," "stirgetoads," or "shadow toads."

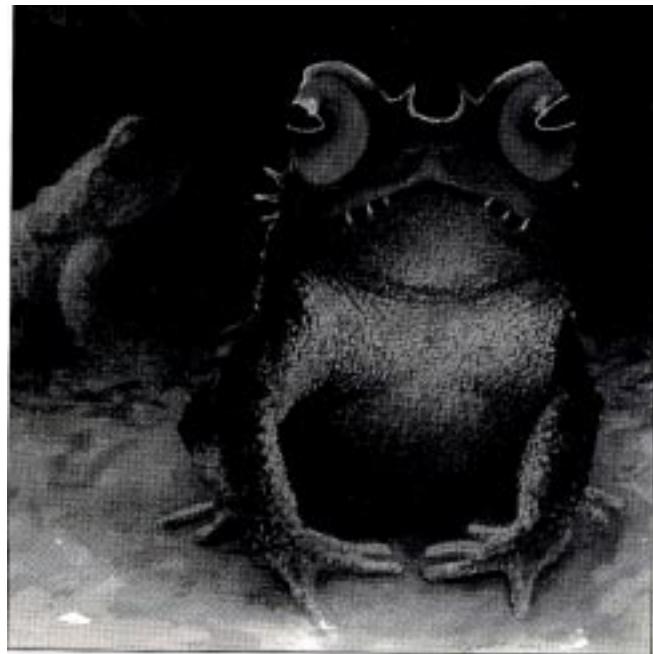
Combat: Leech toads hunt in small packs. They encircle a potential victim stealthily. Then one of the creatures approaches from the front, using its gaze attack. The leech toads eyes glow an evil red while it gazes at its victim. Those meeting the eyes of a leech toad must save vs. paralyzation or be frozen in place. The paralyzation lasts one round per point by which the save failed. Thus, if a 14 was needed to save and the roll was a 12; the victim is paralyzed for two rounds. A victim who saves is immune to further paralyzation attempts for the next 12 hours.

Paralyzed victims are swarmed by the rest of the leech toad pack; each leaps onto the victim and bites for 1-3 hp damage at +4 to hit. Leech toads are bloodsuckers, and once a successful bite occurs, each toad remains in place, draining an additional 1-3 hp of blood per round automatically, until it has drained a total of 6 hp. At that point, the leech toad leaps off the victim and moves on, sated.

If there are still leech toads on the victim when the paralyzation effects wear off, they immediately disengage and flee, regardless of how much blood was drained. Leech toads are cowards, attacking only those who cannot fight back.

Victims of the leech toads' gaze attack are immune to further paralyzation attempts for the next 12 hours, just as if they had originally made a successful save.

Habitat/Society: Leech toads stay in small packs to hunt more effectively. A single leech toad is almost never encountered.



Neither is it likely to find these creatures about in the daylight hours, as they prefer a nocturnal existence, when they can hide in the shadows of the trees. They prey exclusively on warm-blooded creatures. They prefer attacking larger creatures over smaller ones: a mammal the size of a wolf can provide sustenance for many leech toads at the same time with only one gaze attack, whereas something the size of a mouse would only feed a single toad, and perhaps not fully at that.

When stalking potential victims, leech toads call out to each other in high-pitched chirps. While not approaching the complexity of a spoken language, these chirps allow each toad to know the locations of the other members of the pack. Each leech toads chirp is slightly different in pitch, length, or volume, enabling the toads to differentiate between individuals.

Leech toads spend the daylight hours in hollow stumps, hidden under fallen leaves, or, more commonly, in holes dug by burrowing creatures such as moles, rabbits, or ground squirrels. They are too lazy to dig their own holes but are more than willing to take over one already created, usually by hypnotizing and killing the current inhabitants.

Ecology: Leech toads are universally hated and feared by those who live near them. They are tasty when cooked but generally too dangerous to hunt.

Nonetheless, wizards and alchemists have quite a different opinion about the usefulness of the leech frog. The blood of these creatures, when dried and mixed with fluid from their eyes, is a useful component in the magical inks used to inscribe the spells *hypnotism*, *hypnotic pattern*, and *hold person*. Leech toad hearts can be used as substitute material components in the casting of a *fear* spell without any lessening of the spell's efficacy. Furthermore, one formula for the creation of a *wand of fear* calls for the wooden wand to soak in the blood of thirteen leech toads for no less than one week before the spell *enchant an item* is cast upon it.

Spined Toad

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Non-artic
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Pack
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	1-4
ARMORCLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	9, hop 9
HIT DICE:	1-2
THAC0:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-2 (1 HD) or 1-4 (2 HD)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	S-M (2'-6')
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE:	1HD:35 2HD:65

Spined toads appear to be a strange mix between a giant toad and a hedgehog. Except for their undersides, their bodies are covered in short, sharp spines. Coloration ranges from tan to dark brown, with a lighter (often white) underbelly.

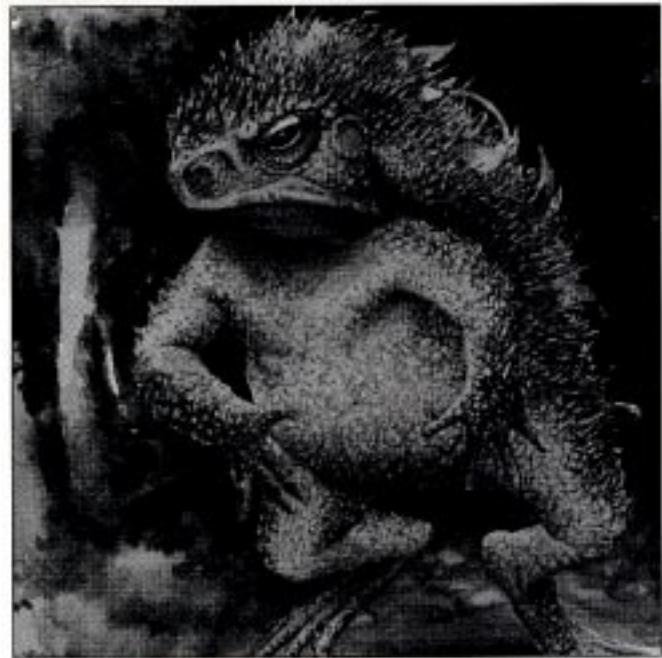
Combat: The spines are used strictly in defense; like other giant toads, the spined toad attacks only with its bite, inflicting 1d4 hp damage. However, those attacking a spined toad and coming into contact with the numerous spines suffer 2d4 hp damage. This includes most animal predators and PCs attacking with bare hands or short weapons, like a dagger or knife.

If attacked by a powerful enemy, a spined toad curls up into a ball, protecting its soft underbelly with its outward-thrusting spines. Most natural enemies give up and seek easier prey.

Habitat/Society: Spined toads live in small family units. They lay their eggs in water; after the tadpole stage, a young spined toad stands 2 feet long, has 1 HD, and bites for 1-2 hp damage. Every year it grows one foot in length; upon reaching four feet, it adds an extra hit die and bites for 1d4 hp damage.

Spined toads eat insects and most animals smaller than themselves, preferring small rodents. They also dine on everything from snails to snakes. While hunting mainly on land, spined toads occasionally enter the water to hunt ducks, swans, and other water fowl, popping up underneath them to swallow them whole.

Like other giant toads, spined toads can hop their full movement distance. However, they don't hop as often as do other frogs and toads, especially when in forested areas, as they tend to get their spines stuck in tree trunks or low overhanging branches. Spined toads walk in an awkward, loping gait. As they move through foliage, their spines tend to shred leaves



and twigs; rangers should be granted a +8 bonus to their tracking ability when attempting to follow a spined toad's path.

Somewhat playful at times, it isn't uncommon to see a spined toad curl up in a ball at the top of a hill and go rolling down to the bottom. This behavior not only provides an avenue of amusement for the toad but also occasionally impales small creatures on the toad's spines on the way down. These creatures are then removed and devoured.

Ecology: Because of their impressive defenses, not many creatures prey upon spined toads. However, some lizard man tribes have devised a way of turning spined toads into weapons: using a wooden oar or similar implement, they flip the toads at their enemies. "Projectile" spined toads cause 2d4 hp damage to their opponents, while the toads themselves suffer 1-2 hp damage upon impact and are 50% likely to be stunned for 1 round. Generally, only spined toads smaller than three feet long can be used in this fashion.

Spined toad skin is also popular among lizard men as leather armor, due to the extra damage caused by the spines. The skin can be stretched across a frame to form a shield with offensive capabilities similar to a spiked buckler. The spines of the largest specimens of spined toad can be sawed off and used as weapons themselves: as primitive daggers, or as the heads of such weapons as spears or morning stars.

Several humanoid games take advantage of the spined toad's armament. The simplest, often played by goblins, involves surrounding a spined toad, poking it with spears until it curls up into a ball, and then playing tug of war with a 10 pole centered over the toad, with each goblin trying to pull his opponent onto the toad's spines. Another game involves throwing apples or similar fruit at a spined toad; the winner is the one who gets the most of his fruit to "stick." Ogres have a variation of this game in which they see who can throw a curled-up spined toad and get it to stick the highest in a tree.

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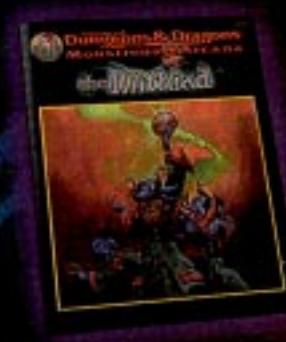
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Give Them Pidgins

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by
Brent Knowles

illustrated by
John Stanko



YOU HAVE EXOTIC LOCALES to spark interest in the hearts of your hardy adventurers. You have a dozen countries, each with different set of customs, to add unpredictability to your campaign. So, what happens when your PCs visit these places? Do

they ask if they can speak the language? Or do they assume that all humans can speak to each other?

After the first few minutes of trying to roleplay the presentation of the foreign language, you become frustrated and allow the PCs to understand the ambassadors of the Kru'llik Confederation even though the Kru'lliks speak a language several thousand years removed from that of the player characters.

Language barriers are often overlooked in roleplaying campaigns. How do you encourage your PCs to communicate in a realistic manner?

The most obvious solution is to spend a proficiency slot on a language. This works when the party is traveling to only one other country. What if you run sessions for the thrill-seeking group of heroes who travel through several different linguistic societies? They will never improve their nonweapon proficiencies if they must always purchase new languages. Is learning a language as difficult as learning some of the non-weapon proficiencies?

Another solution is to use a translator. This is a NPC who tags along with the party for the main purpose of supplying language translation. (One hopes he isn't an unctuous, gold-plated iron golem.) Conversation is routed through the

translator transparently. The players (and the DM) soon forget to mention the translator's presence. Even if the translator dies, the DM might continue to assume that the PCs understand all languages.

Another favored method of translating is the Universal Magic Translator (UMT). The UMT comes in many forms. Imagine magical language beads given to each PC. These beads allow the wearer to communicate with all varieties of life, creating a huge game imbalance if players insist on speaking to everything from mice to shrubbery. The beads seem like a convenient idea at first, but an experienced DM soon finds it necessary to remove them from the game.

The Pidgin

A better solution is one commonly used in real life. A pidgin is a system of communication between two or more groups of linguistically diverse people who have no method to communicate with each other. Usually it is a simplified blending of the two mother tongues. A pidgin is not as sophisticated a unit of communication as a language, but it meets the needs of basic conversation.

With the following rules, a party can "adopt" many pidgins to communicate in a wide range of situations. When would you need a pidgin? The PCs arrive at the City of Darm, where all the inhabitants speak Darmish. The PCs speak only Nugelian and are at a loss to understand anything. They decide to devote time to learning the language. They learn a Darmish-Nugelian pidgin. (You can assume a suitably cute name such as "Nugish.")

Learning a Pidgin

The language learners must devote time to learn this new skill. The length of time before this "Language Index" develops is determined by the learner's Intelligence. Using the Language Index table, locate the Intelligence of the learner to determine the length of time (in days) before a basic LI is gained.

Language Index (LI)

Intelligence	Days To Learn
3-4	2d20
5-8	d20
9-12	d12
13-14	d10
15-16	d8
17	d6
18	d4
19+	1

The times listed in the table assume rigorous dedication to learning the language. After this learning period, the learner begins to grasp the new pidgin. He or she receives a language index (LI), which is the total of the learner's Wisdom and Intelligence scores combined. For game purposes, the LI is used when the language speaker attempts to communicate a difficult series of commands. When a check is necessary the DM rolls percentile dice; rolls lower than the LI means that the check succeeded and understanding was achieved. A higher roll means failure.

Example 1: A warrior and a rogue (from two different countries) traveling together have learned a common pidgin. A troll attacks them. The warrior asks the rogue to take a torch to burn the

troll. The DM decides that an LI is required. The rogue rolls a 34 (but his Intelligence and Wisdom scores combined add up only to 20). He fails his check, so he does what he'd originally planned: use his crossbow.

Use of the Pidgin

Pidgin speakers can attempt to speak with each other each round. This activity does not take up an action in combat. Every month of pidgin communication increases the LI by an additional 1d10.

Limitations on the Pidgin

Of course, the pidgin comes to the player characters at a cost. For each pidgin studied, the character pays 1% of the total experience points (XP) earned during that time. However, the character can stop learning at any time. The LI remains at the level it was when the character learned the pidgin. The XP expenditures represent the commitment on the part of the character to devote time each day from other duties to improving his or her command of the pidgin.

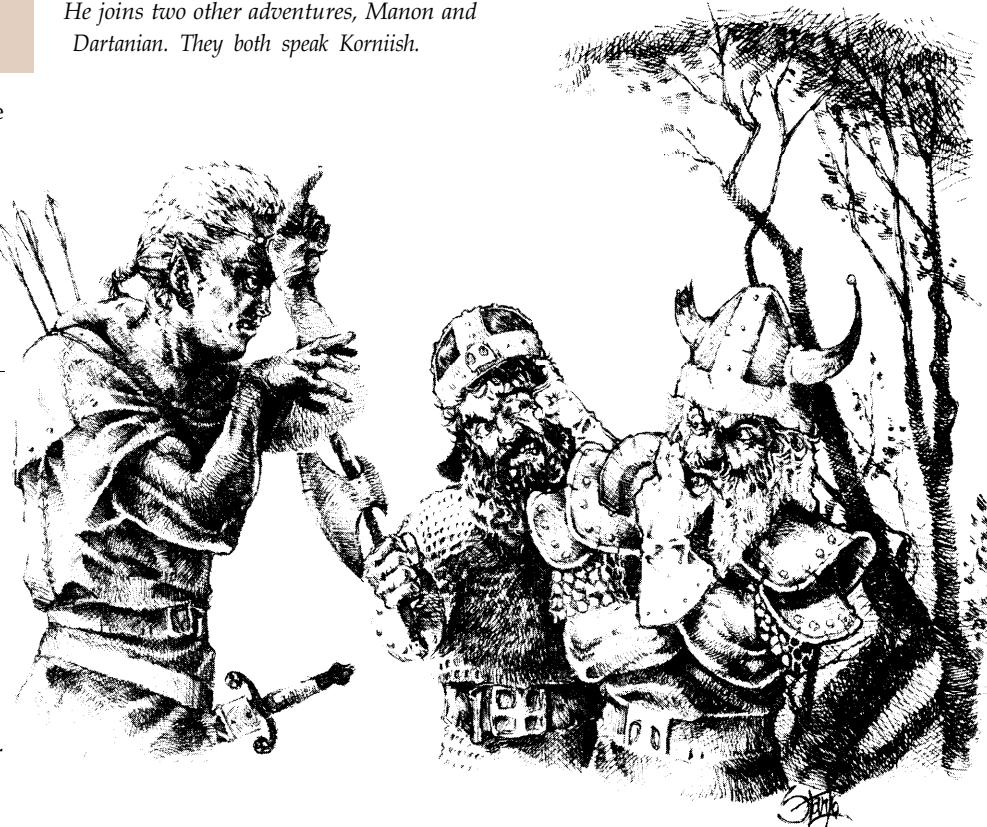
For an additional 1% experience payment, per language, the character may learn further pidgins.

Example 2: A warrior, Ivory, has taken only one language, his own tribal tongue. He joins two other adventures, Manon and Dartanian. They both speak Korniish.

They try to communicate with Ivory while adventuring. For the first week of travel, there is little chance of communicating any difficult commands, but eventually everyone begins learning the pidgin. During this time, they each receive 200 experience points. With the one-percent cut, the experience point "take-home" is 198.

All three adventurers require 1d12 days to learn a basic LI. After this time, Dartanian has an LI of 21 (W10 + I11), Manon has 25 (W14 + I11), and Ivory scores a 19 (W10 + 19). Whenever the DM decides that a check must be made to see whether they understand each other, he or she rolls 2d100. A result less than the number means that the check succeeded; otherwise, comprehension is not achieved.

Example 3: Manon decides to cast a fireball at several Orcs. She speaks in a Korniish/Tribal Pidgin, giving orders to both Dartanian and Ivory. The DM decides that this requires a check, so he rolls 1d100 for each. The former rolls a 12, the latter a 30. Dartanian understands the command and knows not to rush into combat. He circles around and prepares his bow to shoot at the survivors of the fireball. As Manon casts her spell, she realizes at the last moment that Ivory hasn't understood her. (His 30 is



well over his LI rating of 19.) Ivory races in to fight the orcs. Thinking that Manon told him to engage the enemy, he almost manages to kill one of the orcs, but the roar of the fireball surprises him. Has he been betrayed? He never learns the answer to that question, for he dies in the flame-burst of the spell.

H pidgin, passed on to the offspring... becomes a creole.

The characters who learn a pidgin still do not know the mother tongue of the other language involved in the pidgin (i.e., Ivory knew a Korniish pidgin, but that didn't mean he could speak Korniish, although he knew some simple Korniish words).

Optional Rules

When a PC's Language Index exceeds 100, the DM might let the character understand but not speak the other mother language. To continue with the previous examples, once Ivory had reached 100 LI, he could understand most spoken Korniish but could still speak only the pidgin. It would have taken a skilled language coach (i.e., a proficiency slot) for him to discard the pidgin and embrace the Korniish language completely.

Where To Go From Here

A pidgin, passed on to the offspring of the pidgin speakers, becomes a creole adopted by the community. Thus the PCs might become the literary parents of a linguistic community in your campaign world.



Adventure Hooks

- The party speaks a pidgin in a major center of the Empire. Zealous guards who think the characters are spies from an enemy country overhear them. The PCs might find themselves imprisoned.
- The PCs are shipwrecked on a lush, tropical island. They must learn a pidgin to speak with the native peoples of the island. The island people might then have some ideas on how the party can return home.

With these new rules, any DM can take his or her players to far-off lands and explore exciting cultures. A truly experienced adventurer will acquire not only the weapons, magic, and history of the countries he or she has traveled but also a taste of the language. Pidgins can only provide more excitement for DMs and players alike.



Brent Knowles is a short story writer living in Northern British Columbia. When not writing or roleplaying, he designs software.



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Convention Calendar

May

East Coast Game Faire

May 8-10 NJ Sheraton Meadowlands Hotel, East Rutherford, NJ. Guests: Andrew Greenberg and Bill Bridges of Holistic Design, and Peter Adkison of Wizards of the Coast, who will run his own AD&D® game. Events: Babylon 5* LARP, *Dark Ages** Vampire LARP, four new RPGA® events, and the *Magic: the Gathering** North American Extended Championships. Contact: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 13500, Columbus, OH 43213. Email: Andon@aol.com. Web: <http://www.andonunlimited.com>.

Ben Con '98

May 21-24 CO Denver Doubletree Hotel, Denver, CO. Events: RPGA tournaments, including decathlon, LIVING CITY™, LIVING JUNGLE™, LIVING DEATH, *Threads of Legend*, and *Virtual Seattle*. Other events: LARPs, *Puffin'Billy**, TCGs, war, miniature and board games, industry guests, charity auctions, seminars, dealers room. All proceeds go to local charities. Registration: \$20, event fees \$1-3, demos free. Contact: Ken Ritchart, P.O. Box 19232, Boulder, CO 80308-2232. Email: dragon0525@aol.com. Web: <http://www.bengames.org/~whitet/bencon/>.

AgamemCon

May 22-24 CA Burbank Airport Hilton and Convention Center, Burbank, CA. Guests: David Eagle, Stephen Furst, Joshua Cox, Jeffery Willerth, Mark Altman, Stephen C. Smith, Richard Herd. Events: dealers room, parties, art show, masquerade,

video room, panels, and more. Contact: Agamemcon, 24161-H Hollyoak, Laguna Hills, CA 92656. Email: orrock@ix.netcom.com.

GameCon I

May 22-25 CA Pleasanton Hilton, Pleasanton, CA. Events RPGs CCGs, boardgames, Warhammer* and Warhammer 40K*, miniatures, LARPs, demos, and more. Other events: dealers' room, painting contests, awards banquet, movie room, video game room, and flea market. Registration: \$30 prereg, \$35 at the door. Contact: GameCon, P.O. Box 730, Oakley, CA 94561. Email: gamecon@netwizams.net. Web: <http://www.netwiz/~lynx/gamecon.html>

Three Rivers Game Fest

May 22-25 PA Green Tree Marriot Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA. Contact: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 13500, Columbus, OH 43213. Email: Andon@aol.com. Web: <http://www.andonunlimited.com>.

Games on the Horizon II

May 29-31 IN Days Inn, Portage, IN. Guests: Ken Whitman, Lester Smith, Tony Lee, and Don Perrin. Events: roleplaying, TCGs, LARP, miniature games, board games, guest demos. Other events: RPGA events, Battletech* and Magic*, charity auction, guest signings. Registration: \$15 until May 1, \$20 at door. Contact: Games II, P.O. Box 1602, Portage, IN 46368. Email: conmanl@gte.net. Web: <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Dungeon/6825>.

Lehicon 8

May 29-31 PA Best Western Easton Inn, Easton, PA. Events: roleplaying, card, computer, live-action, board, and miniature games. Other activities: auction, raffle, dealers' area, painted miniatures competition, food drive, and more. Contact: LehiCon 8, P.O. Box 556, Horsham, PA 19044. Email:Lehicon@juno.com.

June

Milwaukee Summer Revel

June 5-7 WI The Inn Towne Hotel, 710 Old World Third Street, Milwaukee. Guests: Gary Gygax, Janet Pack, Tom Wham. Events: LIVING CITY and LIVING JUNGLE, AD&D, *Call of Cthulhu**, BOOT HILL™, *Paranoia**, board games, miniature events, war games, nonstop *Dawn Patrol**, TCGs, and the always exciting Wham-A-Thon. Other events: Seminars, dealers' area, and game demos. Registration: \$20. Contact: Bruce Rabe, Summer Revel, P.O. Box 779, New Munster, WI 53102.

Roundtable

June 6 PA Maennerchor Club, Lebanon, PA. Events: LIVING CITY, AD&D and other RPGs, and boardgames. Registration: \$5 until the day of the convention, \$7.50 at the door. Contact: Scott Gettle, 405 N. 10th Street #1, Lebanon, PA 17046-4627. Email:canaris@bellatlantic.net.

S.A.G.A. '98

June AU University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Events: *Shadowkin**, *World of Darkness**, and *Raven's Nest** free forms, *Magic*, *Wyvern**, and all major RPGs, cards, and miniatures. Registration: roleplaying \$5 per session, miniatures \$30. Contact: S.A.G.A., 18 Dunlop Street, Roselands NSW 2196, Australia. Email: Ravensnest&norgan.net.au.

Manafest '98

June 12-14 CA South San Francisco Conference Center, South San Francisco, CA. Events: TCGs, board games, and miniatures. Other events: tournaments, special events,

demonstrations, prizes, game flea market, and exhibit hall. Contact: Manafest P.O. Box 170436, San Francisco, CA 94117. Email: info@magicscroll.com. Web: <http://www.manafest.com>.

Blue Water Con

June 13-14 MI
Masonic Temple, Port Huron, MI. Events: RPGA, roleplaying, card, and miniature games. Other activities: two benefit games, concessions, and a dealers' section. Registration: \$10/weekend or \$5/day prereg; \$12/weekend or \$7/day at door. Contact: Len Reiter, 2202 Military, Port Huron, MI 48060 or Heidi King 1522 10th Ave, Apt.5, Port Huron, MI 48060. Email: paldin007@aol.com or talena@juno.com.

July

Origins '98

July 2-5 OH
The Greater Columbus Convention Center and the Hyatt, Columbus, OH. Expected Guests: Jeremy Bulloch, David Prowse, Mira Furlan, and John Byrne. Events: Over 1,500 gaming events of all kinds, including the National Magic championship, Battletech TCG World Championship. Registration: \$40 prereg by 6/19/98. Contact: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 13500, Columbus, OH 43213. Email: andon@aol.com. Web: <http://www.andonunlimited.com>.

QuinCon XII

July 10-12 IL
The Civic Center Hotel, Quincy, IL. Guests: Steven Burgaurer and Lester Smith. Events: painting contest, TCG, boardgames, miniatures, and roleplaying. Registration: \$12 prereg. Contact: QuinCon XIII, 2429 Cedar St., Quincy, IL 62301. Email: mikeyl7@bcl.net.

Hudson Valley Con 2

July 24-26 NY
Holiday Inn Hotel & Conference Center, Fishkill, NY. Events: RPGA events, *Magic* tournaments, roleplaying, miniatures, boardgaming, dealer's room. Registration: \$25 before 7/3/98, \$30 afterward. Contact: Hudson valley Con, 125 Dolson Ave., Suite 131, Middletown, NY 10940.

Web: <http://www.members.aol.com/SpenHart1/con/MainPage.html>.

Concussion 3

July 10-12 NE
Holiday Inn Northwest, Omaha, NE. Guests: Margaret Weis, S.M. Stirling, Laurell Hamilton, Don Perrin, Timothy Zahn, Jeff Easley. Events: casino night, SF dating game, LARP, panels, video rooms, art show, Klingons in Black, and more. Contact: Concussion 3, P.O. Box 85762, Lincoln, NE 68501-5762.

Skirmishes '98

July 10-12 MO
Holiday Inn South, Kansas City, MO. Special Event: "Masquerade Live." Other events: roleplaying, LARP, boardgames, CCGs, miniatures, painting contest, dealers' area. Registration: \$30 prereg, \$35 at the door. Contact: Skirmishes, P.O. Box 10641, Kansas City, MO 64188. Email: skirmishes@aol.com. Web: <http://users.aol.com/skirmishes>.

August

Bubonicon 30

August 28-30 NM
Howard Johnson East, Albuquerque, NM. Guests: Robert J. Sawyer, Jane Lindskold, and David Martin. Events: panels, art show, gaming, GoH speech, autographs, dealers' room, science talk, Saturday dance, auctions, costume contest, filking, and others. Contact: NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque, NM 87176. Email: mps@ncgr.org. Web: <http://www.members.aol.com/bubonicon>.

September

CogCon 6

September 25-27 MO
University Center-East, Rolla, MO. Events: *Earthdawn**, AD&D, CoC, LIVING CITY, LIVING DEATH; also *In Nomine**, GURPS; *Champions**, Warhammer Fantasy Battles and FRP; Starfleet Battles*; sanctioned *Magic*; and *Star Wars** TCG. Other activities: network computer gaming, charity raffle. Registration: \$10 pre-reg, \$13 at the door. Reduced fees for partial

Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

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

Warning: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! 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 all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," DRAGON® Magazine, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A.

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 (425) 254-2262 (U.S.A.).

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.

- ♦ Australian convention
- * Canadian convention
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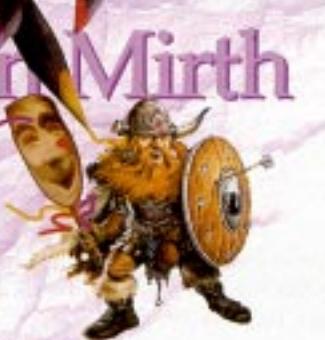
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attendance or CCG-only. Contact: CogCon, P.O. Box 1939, Rolla, MO 65402. Email: cogcon@rollanet.org. Web: <http://www.rollanet.org/~cogcon>.



Dragon Mirth

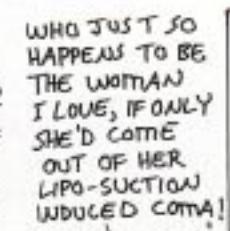
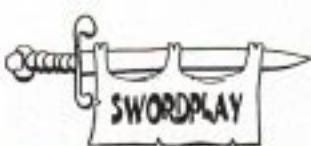
By Aaron Williams



"YOU MEAN IT ISN'T CASUAL DRESS DAY?"



By Joseph Pillsbury



By Mathew Guss

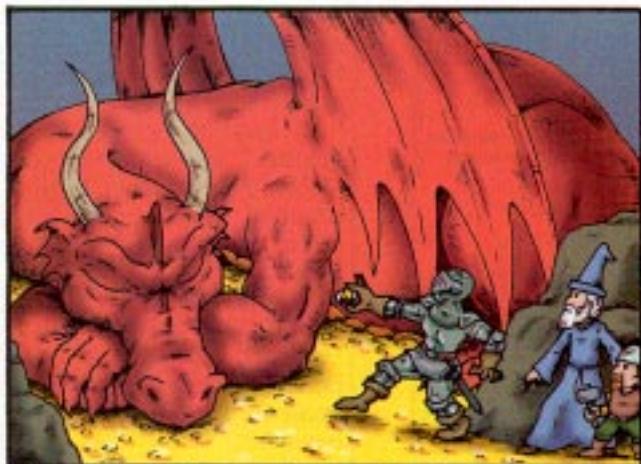


"I DON'T HAVE TO BE AN OLYMPIAN, YOU KNOW! I COULD MAKE A PERFECTLY GOOD LIVING DELIVERING FLOWERS!"



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By Aaron Williams



Gamer's Guide

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Cafeteria Workers Instigate Food Fight



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

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

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

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

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

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



Public Service Message

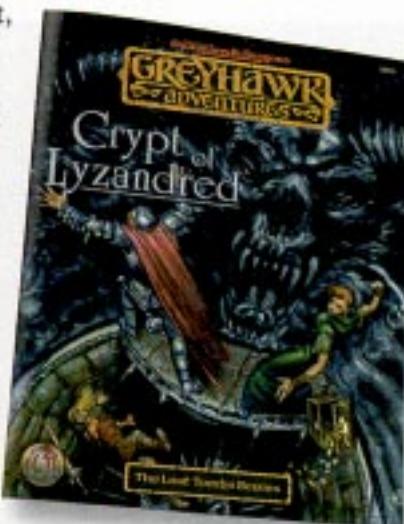
Trap Design Contest

Design a dungeon trap for the GREYHAWK® campaign setting!

The WORLD OF GREYHAWK® campaign is synonymous with excitement, adventure, and really horrible dungeons—dungeons full of tricks and traps guaranteed to humble the most brazen adventuring band. Here's your chance to take your place beside Zagyg, Lyzandred, Tsojcanth, and all the greats of dungeon construction!

Design a dungeon cavern, hall, or chamber that has a trap. Describe the room and its trap, making it as much like a room description in an adventure as possible. You can include a legible drawing of the room and/or trap. Your trap will be judged by a panel of GREYHAWK savants, and the winner will receive a piece of original GREYHAWK art. Three runners-up will each receive copies of three forthcoming GREYHAWK adventures: *The Star Cairns*, *Crypt of Lyzandred*, and *The Doomgrinder*.

Please limit entries to 1,000 words or fewer.



"Trap Design" Contest Rules

1. Entry: To enter, send your completed entry form including your name, address, phone number, the spell to which your submission applies, and your proposed spell ("Entry") to TSR, Inc. (TSR) Dragon Magazine Trap Design Contest, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. No purchase required. You may submit as many entries as you wish, but only one entry per submission. There is no advantage to submitting the same entry more than once. Artifacts may not exceed 1,000 words in length. If you are under 18, you must have your parent's permission to enter. Entries must be received before midnight (Pacific Time), July 17, 1998. Winners will be selected by a team of TSR judges based on the Entry's consistency with the feel of the GREYHAWK® campaign setting, originality, appropriateness to the game, and applicability to the game system. All decisions are final. The probability of winning is based exclusively on the quality of the entries received.

2. Originality of Entry: All entries must be in English. Entrant warrants that the Entry written above is the original and exclusive work of Entrant, and that Entrant has not assigned, transferred, licensed, or sold the right to use the Entry to any other party. Entrant agrees to indemnify TSR against good faith claims of copyright infringement based on TSR's use of the Entry, but such indemnification shall not apply if it can be shown that Entrant had no access to the allegedly infringing work.

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4. Prizes: The designer of the best trap shall receive an original piece of Greyhawk art (approximate value \$120.00). Three runners-up will receive copies of three forthcoming Greyhawk adventures: *The Star Cairns* (approximate value \$9.95), *Crypt of Lyzandred* (approximate value \$9.95), and *The Doomgrinder* (approximate value \$9.95).

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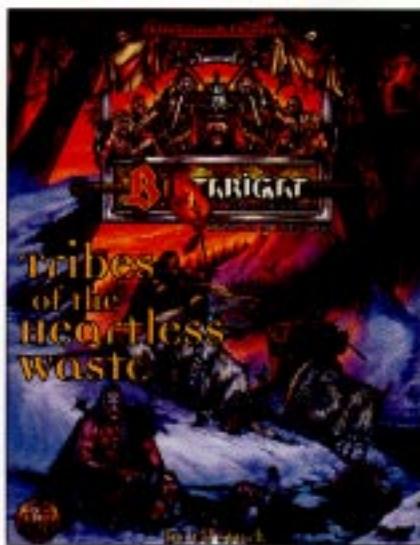
6. Restrictions: Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All prize winners shall be notified by phone or letter. No substitutions of prizes are allowed, except at the option of TSR, should the featured prizes become unavailable. All federal, state, provincial, and local regulations apply. The winner is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state, provincial, and local taxes. For a list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Dragon Magazine Trap Design Contest, Winners, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057. Requests for witness kits must be received by August 17, 1998. Allow 4 weeks for delivery of winners kit.

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Roleplaying Reviews

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Tribes of the Heartless Wastes

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game supplement for the BIRTHRIGHT® setting



One 32-page softcover book, one 64-page softcover book, one 16" x 22" map, and four sheets of war cards

TSR, Inc. \$19.95

Design: Ed Stark

Editing: Anne Brown

Illustrations: Todd Lockwood, Tony Szcudlo, Dee Barnett

Cover: Tony Szcudlo

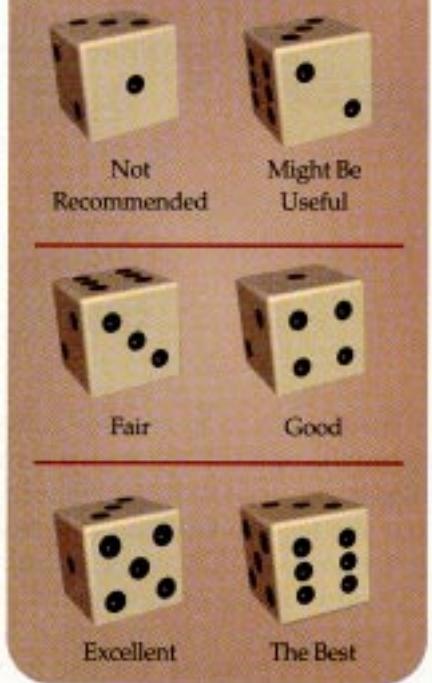
Tribes of the Heartless Wastes is a major sourcebook for the BIRTHRIGHT setting, detailing the wild lands of Vosgaard and its multitude of inhabitants. The focus of the book is, of course, the Vos themselves. These barbaric humans are the descendants of those of Azrai's soldiers who survived Battle of Mount Deismaar, the nearly apocalyptic

engagement that destroyed the old gods and transformed the world of BIRTHRIGHT forever. The Vos are legendary for their ferocity and skill in battle, and a treatment of this important race was long overdue.

Tribes of the Heartless Waste is divided into two books, a 32-page *Player's Chronicle* and a 64-page *DM's Guidebook*. The *Player's Chronicle* contains all the information on Vos history and culture. Since one of the purposes of this book is to provide realms for PC regents to rule, these opening sections need to bring this society to life and let your players know exactly what it means to be Vos. It nearly succeeds, explaining the character of the Vos race, their history of struggle, and the reasons that they have united as a people only once since the Battle of Mount Deismaar. However, the portrait lacks depth. Even after reading the whole book, I found it difficult to say more about the Vos than they like to fight and they don't like anyone telling them what to do. This is fine as a starting point, but a deeper characterization would have been welcome.

The heart of the *Player's Chronicle*, however, is its description of four PC realms. These realms—Cwmb Bheinn, Melyy, Rovninodensk, and Yeninskiy—offer a good range of possibilities for PC regents. Cwmb Bheinn is an ancient elven land struggling to survive in the harsh north, Melyy is a small realm in the throes of a silver rush, Rovninodensk is recovering from a recent civil war, and Yeninskiy is divided by two factions who maintain an uneasy peace. Any of these realms would provide an excellent starting point for a BIRTHRIGHT campaign and each is presented in the format established by *Ruins of Empire* (in the BIRTHRIGHT campaign setting boxed set) for easy reference.

Ratings



The Player's Chronicle ends with a short section called the "Player's Primer," providing players with "what they know" about the rest of Vosgaard. Here new regents can learn about the five NPC realms, the two Awnshegh who call Vosgaard home, and the assorted humanoids who complete the mix. No edge-of-civilization setting would be complete without some dire, dangerous, and unexplored areas, and these too have their place here. PCs who choose to make Vosgaard home certainly won't lack things to do.

The DM's Guidebook provides the real dirt. All the realms and sites from the *Player's Primer* receive a full treatment, as well as the NPC realms that act as allies and enemies for PC regents. The non-human realms are particularly good, and the sections on goblins, gnolls, and orogs are popping with adventure ideas. Interestingly, the gnolls are in the process of doing what the Vos cannot: unify under a single ruler. This development provides a ironic counterpoint to the squabbling of the Vos realms.

Another good thing about the *DM's Guidebook* is that it doesn't give all the answers. Some rumors from the *Player's Chronicle* are proven false, but others are left for individual DMs to play with. In

your campaign, you can decide whether the ice tower Timoshev is real. That kind of leeway is refreshing, and often a few sentences on a topic is enough to spark entire adventures.

Players who have been looking for a more hands-on type of regency would do well to check this out.

The last part of the DM's *Guidebook* is a hodgepodge of new rules appropriate for Vosgaard, including modified domain actions, some new weapons, and rules for Vosgaard's harsh climate. Weather rules never thrill, but these are pretty inoffensive. Spell tattoos, which are badges of achievement among the Vos, seemed far more intriguing. After the buildup of how powerful spell tattoos were throughout the book, however, they turn out to be a bit of a letdown. They basically amount to single-use spells that must be recharged by a willing cleric after each use. And since you can only receive spells of up to third level, they are really not unbalancing. Were I to run a campaign, I think I'd actually make them work once per day as long as the PC retained the favor of the church. That makes more sense to me than having great heroes of the Vos running to their priests all the time to have their tattoos recharged. Maybe it's just me, but that image just kills some of the coolness.

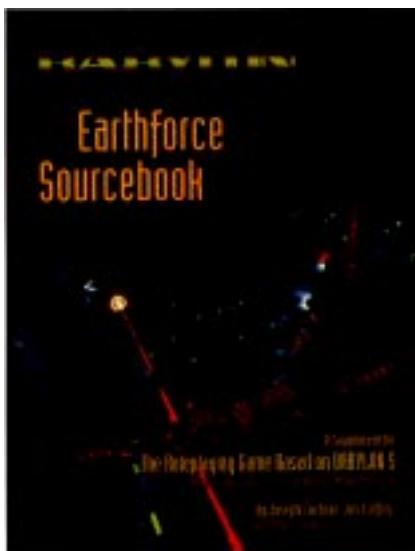
Evaluation: *Tribes of the Heartless Wastes*

Wastes is a solid book. While not exactly inspiring, it tackles a difficult subject and does it well. Players who have been looking for a more hands-on type of regency would do well to check this out. DMs will find about everything they need to run a fine campaign here. If you had this and the basic *BIRTHRIGHT* set, you could run a game for quite a long time.

The greatest potential for this setting, however, is only hinted at in the book. The Vos, unlike most Cerilian cultures, recognize leaders who make names for themselves, to the point that priests will "blood" successful leaders who lack a bloodline. Imagine a campaign where the players start as simple adventurers in Vosgaard. Through their deeds, they can rise to regency in one or more

realms. This would allow players to take advantage of the *BIRTHRIGHT* setting's unique system, but only after truly earning the right to rule. And maybe one of the characters can succeed in uniting all

the Vos realms and making them into a power to be reckoned with. That would be a tale worth telling.



Earthforce Sourcebook

*Babylon Project** game supplement



140-page softback,
two sheets of cardboard ship counters
Chameleon Eclectic Entertainment/
Wireframe Productions \$18.00

Design: Joseph Cochran, Jon Tuffley,
Dale MacMurdy Charles Ryan, Zeke
Sparkes

Editing: Charles Ryan, with Ronald
Jarrell and Joseph Cochran

Illustrations: Theodore Black, Audrey
Corman, Darryll Elliot, John Gronquist,
Chris Impink, Mark Poole, Douglas
Schuler, and Christina Wald

Cover: John Gronquist

When the *Babylon Project* debuted last year, one gaming newsgroup produced a thread called "the Babylon Project Was a Dream Given To the Wrong People." The most frequently heard criticisms of the game were that it contained no system for starship combat and had

abysmal artwork. The *Earthforce Sourcebook*, the first support product for the *Babylon Project* thus became a crucial release. Could it successfully address the problems of the core game and win over some of the critics?

Like its parent game, the *Earthforce Sourcebook* boasts full color throughout. While it shares the same basic layout, the quality of the artwork is far superior to that of *The Babylon Project*. Finding enough good color artwork to fill a book is harder than people think, so it is easy to forgive the couple of stinkers here. The best illustrations are those of the space ships, which is appropriate considering the focus of this book is the Earthforce. The cover, a portrayal of a fighter attack on an earth destroyer, is particularly well done.

The book itself is divided into four chapters. The first details the Earthforce's history and organization and provides new rules for Earthforce characters. This chapter is a really dry read, which is unfortunate since it opens the book. Sometimes it reads like a military manual and fails to bring the Earthforce to life. The info is certainly useful to GMs, but the presentation lacks punch.

Some of the historical info will be familiar to fans of the show, but much of it is new. The breakdown of service branches and ranks is enlightening, since the show doesn't go out of its way to explain that kind of thing. The rules are useful, adding new skills, specialties and characteristics, plus two new martial arts. There are also some optional combat rules. While aficionados of "realistic" combat will no doubt enjoy these, they make an already cumbersome combat system that much more complex.

Chapter 2 describes common Earthforce equipment. It covers all the bases and is neither better nor worse than other RPG equipment catalogues. I will pause only to wonder why it is that so many SF settings use such a limited number of fictional companies in their description of the setting. Here all protective-gear is made by Coleman and all hostile environment equipment is made by EnviroCom. You'd think the earth of the future might have more than one company in each industry.

After slogging through the first two chapters, I was beginning to have serious doubts about this book. OK, it looked good, but my interest was about to flatline as I hit chapter 3. Here, at last, the *Earthforce Sourcebook* hits its stride.

The chapter opens with detailed descriptions of Earthforce ships. These are a necessity for anyone wanting to set adventures in the fleet. Each ship is briefly described, along with notes on its tactical role. More importantly the book provides cutaway diagrams of each ship, color coded for easy reference. While the schematics are not as detailed as diehards might have liked, they are

type, and ship control and order sheets that can be photocopied for easy use. Earthforce naturally has the most ships to chose from at the moment, but no doubt other races will have their fleets expanded in upcoming sourcebooks. This book includes Narn, Centauri, and Minbari ships in addition to those of the Earthforce.

The biggest problem with space combat games has always been the lack of tactics. When you're playing on a big black map that represents empty space, it's all too easy just to fly your ships at each other and unload your weapons. Not too exciting, especially when

Another fine feature of these rules is that they don't require a hex map. You can play on the floor or on a table or wherever you have space. You can also scale it to your liking. The rules are written around Movement Units, but it is up to you to decide how big MUs are. The suggested unit is an inch, but if you lack space you can just easily use centimeters. The game also plays equally well with miniatures. Although Chameleon Eclectic does not make *B5 minis*, Agents of Gaming do (for their *Babylon Wars** game) and these would really spice up the playing field.

A common problem for systems such as this in roleplaying games, however, is how to make them fun for people with only a casual interest in tabletop wargaming. This is addressed most elegantly. Basically, player characters at different posts can try to affect the battle with their unique skills. Only PCs can do this, which makes them capable of turning the tide of a battle in heroic fashion. And these options are not limited to commanders or gunnery officers. Even those at comm stations can try actions such as coordinating fire or jamming the enemy's fire control. This added level of detail works beautifully. It serves to engage players who might otherwise just sit around, and it ensures that almost any character can do something during a space battle.

The final chapter details some major NPCs in Earthforce. These characters are surprisingly well-drawn. Reading their backgrounds and personalities gives a much better idea of what Earthforce is all about than the opening chapter. It also provides a revealing glimpse into Earthforce and Earthgov politics. Some of the plot threads mentioned here could easily be expanded into major story lines.

Evaluation: Don't let the first half of this book bring you down; the second half delivers. *Earthforce Sourcebook* is worth the price for the space combat rules alone and it is a must for anyone serious about running a *Babylon Project* campaign. It's too bad that this book took so long to appear, but one hopes Chameleon Eclectic will follow it up quickly with sourcebooks on some of the other races. Those put off by the core rules should check this out.

The *Earthforce Sourcebook* is worth the price for the space combat rules alone. . .

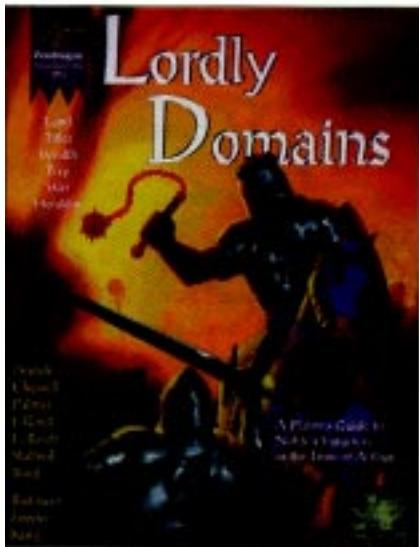
excellent for roleplaying purposes and should serve any GM well.

The next 43 pages are the core of the book: the space combat rules. They provide what the main rulebook lacked and do it brilliantly. Chameleon Eclectic showed their savviness here by hiring Jon Tuffley to adapt his *Full Thrust** rules for the *Babylon 5* universe. This was a wise move, since it allowed *The Babylon Project* to inherit a fast-moving rules system that has already seen years of playtesting. The book contains everything you need to use these rules, which is rather refreshing. There are two sheets of color counters at the back of the book, with at least two counters for each ship

grafted on to a roleplaying game. The great thing about Tuffley's rules is that the movement is vector based and you must plan out all your moves before the turn starts. Vector movement takes a bit of getting used but is quite worthwhile. It means that you have to think ahead, since your ship will travel a certain distance by momentum each turn before you can use your main engines and thrusters to change directions. It also means you can travel in one direction while facing another, which allows you to bring your weapons to bear without flying directly at the enemy. These refinements make fighting combats much more challenging and enjoyable.

"NEXT TIME, BE MORE
SPECIFIC WHEN YOU
SUMMON THE SONG OF A
SIREN!"





Lordly Domains
*Pendragon** game supplement

One 120-page softcover book

Chaosium Inc.



\$19.95

Design: James R. Palmer, Greg Stafford, Michael Trout, Mark Angeli, Ben Chessell, Judy Routt, and Liam Routt

Editing: Liam Routt, Judy Routt

Illustrations: Elise Fowler, Mark Angeli

Cover: Stephen King

Pendragon stands as one of the all-time classic RPGs. No other game has ever matched its evocation of the ideals of knighthood and chivalry, or married myth and history in such a compelling way. The game focuses on knighthood and the part PC knights can play in the unfolding drama of Arthur's reign. While the PCs' relationship to their liege lord is explored, the idea of PC lords is given but short treatment. *Lordly Domains*, a long overdue revision of the 2nd edition *Noble's Book*, changes all of that.

Lordly Domains is a masterful treatment of lords and lordship. It takes the focus off the adventuring knight and shows again and again that with power comes responsibility. The book describes in detail three areas of lordship: administration, social obligations, and war.

Administration is not a word that stirs the hearts of roleplayers. One of the great things about *Pendragon*, however, is the way you can roleplay a whole family of knights through the 80+ years of Arthur's reign. In a campaign of such

scope, the family estate takes on an importance not seen in the casual game. In a sense, the family land is the only character that remains constant throughout the entire campaign, and its ultimate fate depends on the fortune of its lords. While a system that dealt with manors and their maintenance appeared in the *Pendragon* rules, it was necessarily brief.

Now the Winter Phase takes on a whole new meaning, as lords must allocate their income for the coming year and try to ensure that things run smoothly.

Those uninterested in such details will still find much to recommend *Lordly Domains*. The chapter entitled Grand Events describes feasts and festivals, tournaments, hunting, falconry, and the

The new systems add even more depth to a game already dripping with atmosphere.

Lordly Domains presents an entire system for the ruling of noble lands, from the single manor house all the way to an entire kingdom.

Make no mistake, this system involves bookkeeping and, as such, it's certainly not for everyone. But for those who really want to get into the nitty gritty of ruling a fief, this system can't be beat. Villages and towns are rated by population, and each provides a certain amount of revenue. Lords must pay to maintain their lifestyle, then they have such options as sponsoring tournaments, upgrading fortifications, or building new churches.

keeping of a kennel. The book stresses the obligations of the lord both to fellow nobles and the peasants and townspeople of his demesne. Each section is detailed and authentic. The authors have obviously done their research into real medieval history, and it fits seamlessly into the *Pendragon* milieu. The entire year of feasts and festivals is mapped out, from Twelfth Night to Christmas, with details on common rituals and practices. Tournaments also receive a comprehensive treatment, further fleshing out one of the most important knightly events.

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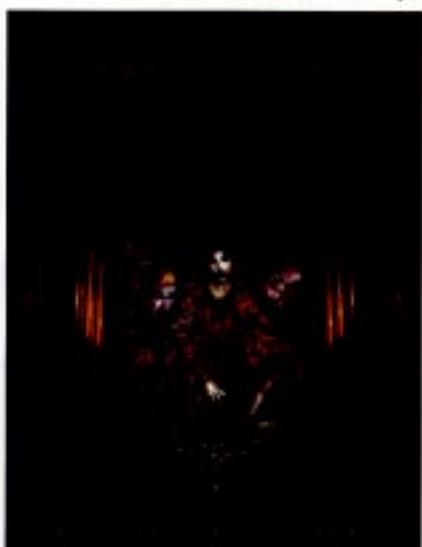
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And what would a lord's life be without war? The *Pendragon* rules present a system for large-scale battles, but *Lordly Domains* introduces three new types of engagement: raid, siege, and invasion. Each type receives a thorough description, and the system of conflict resolution is designed to work in tandem with the land-management mechanics. There is also an expanded section on castle fortifications, along with prices and availability throughout the campaign. This section is well complemented by a series of beautiful cutaway diagrams of a keep at the back of the book.

Rounding out this comprehensive sourcebook are a chapter on heraldry and an adventure entitled "Of Allies and Enemies." The adventure pits the PCs against two evil knights who have usurped a widower's lands. They must go to Oxford, take over the abandoned manors of the former lord, and deal with the usurpers. This clever set-up allows the PCs to try their hand at running a manor with the new rules. If they do well, they gain the opportunity to continue, or even to marry the widower and take over the fief.

Evaluation: *Lordly Domains* is an excellent supplement that any *Pendragon* GM should seriously consider picking up. The new systems add even more depth to a game already dripping with atmosphere. The details on lordly life in the medieval era are extremely well done and would benefit GMs of nearly any fantasy RPG.



Libellus Sanguinus 1: Masters of the State

*Vampire: the Dark Ages**
game supplement

One 104-page softcover
book

White Wolf Game Studio \$15.00

Design: Craig Bolin, Richard E.

Dansky, and Robert Hatch

Editing: Allison Sturms

Illustrations: Jason Felix, Michael
Gaydos, and Eric Hotz

Cover: John Bolton

Masters of the State is the first of a new series of sourcebooks for the *Dark Ages* line. Each of these "blood diaries" will examine three clans united by a common theme. This book describes the so-called "ruling class" of vampire society: the Clans Lasombra, Tzimisce, and Ventre. All three clans pursue political power,



Those engaged in *Vampire: The Dark Ages* campaigns will certainly find useful material here.

although in very different ways. The Lasombra prefer to rule from behind the scenes, the Ventre by controlling human regents directly, and the Tzimisce by bloody-handed despotism. *Masters of the State* sets out to delve deeper into each clan, showing how and why they pursue power in the way that they have chosen.

The book is essentially three mini-clan books in one. It is to White Wolf's credit that they chose this approach rather than producing "Dark Medieval Clanbooks" for each clan separately. The descriptions of each clan follow the clanbook format, so this is familiar territory for longtime *Vampire* fans. In fact, the designers seem to assume that the reader have a knowledge of the *Dark Ages'* parent game, and many references to the future are sprinkled throughout the text. Those who play *Dark Ages* but not *Vampire: the Masquerade* might find some sections hard to follow, since they are filled with jargon and bits of future history.

The descriptions of the clans are competent enough. There's a history of the clan, current practices and plans, some new skills and disciplines, a selection of character templates, and finally some "secrets" of the clan. The Lasombra are

interesting in that they approach candidates, offer them the Embrace, and let them make their own decision. The Ventre are fractious, and they have been such since the fall of Rome. Most of their schemes revolve around uniting their clan again.

The Tzimisce had great potential. Dominant in eastern Europe, they rule vast lands and defend them against western invaders. The book goes out of its way to set up conflict between eastern and western Europe, even going so far as to suggest that GMs advance the Teutonic Knights' crusades in northern Europe by thirty years so they fit the nominal time frame of the game. There could have been an engaging tension between east and west, with the Tzimisce driven to joining the Sabbat after their lands were taken from them.

The problem here is that the authors seem unable to forget that the Tzimisce will join the Sabbat in the future. They are therefore made into utter monsters from the start, ruling their lands ruthlessly, using mortals as so much chattel, and living lives of debauchery and extreme violence. Leaving aside how this approach fails to appeal as a player character option in any way, it also takes the fire out of the *drang nach osten* (the drive to the East). If the east is ruled by vicious, evil monsters, the crusades of the Teutonic Knights lose the moral ambiguity that makes them so interesting. They cease to represent a conflict of cultures, a clash of Christianity vs. paganism, and the struggle becomes just another monster hunt. The Tzimisce would have been better served if their pagan ancestry had been played up instead of their brutality.

At the end of the book, we discover that the *drang nach osten* itself is the brainchild of the Ventre, and this revelation points to a much larger problem with *Masters of the State*: vampires control medieval Europe. To a ridiculous extent, mortals dance at the strings of powerful vampires. Monasteries are full of Lasombra, the Normans are dominated by the

THE
FINAL
NIGHTS
BEGIN
OCTOBER
1998.

And you will know these last times by the Time of Thin Blood, which will mark vampires that cannot Beget, you will know them by the Clanless, who will come to rule, you will know them by the Wild Ones, who will hunt us even in the strongest city, you will know them by the awakening of some of the eldest, the Crone will awaked and consume all, you will know these times, for a black hand will rise up and choke all those who oppose it, and those who eat heart's blood will flourish, and the Kindred will crowd each to his own, and vita will be as rare as diamonds.

VAMPIRE

THE MASQUERADE



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Venture, and the battle for crown the Holy Roman Empire is really a vampiric power struggle. It goes on and on, and at a certain point it just becomes silly. In fact, the biggest revelation of the book is that El Cid was *not* a vampire. Surely an oversight on the part of some Methuselah! To quote from page 79: "Lasombra, Toreador, mages and even *mortals* [emphasis mine] struggle actively for control of the church's administration." Wow, even mortals! Imagine humans being involved in their own world. You would never get the idea that mortals had anything to do with medieval Europe after reading this book.

Evaluation: *Masters of the State* could have been quite interesting. Instead, it is simply adequate. Those engaged in *Vampire: Dark Ages* campaigns will certainly find useful material here. Players can get a better understanding of their clan and learn about new Disciplines. Of the new Disciplines, the sorcerous path of the Koldun Tzimisce is the most interesting, and those wanting to beat the Tremere at their own game are bound to enjoy it.

The character of the Tzimisce and the absurd amount of vampiric influence over human history, however, show an unfortunate lack of vision.



Crisis of Faith,
Storyline Book One
(1933-1935)
*Heavy Gear** game sup-
plement



One 112-page softcover book
Dream Pod 9, Inc. \$19.95

When *Heavy Gear* was released two years ago, it was clear from the start that Dream Pod 9 intended to develop an ongoing storyline on the richly detailed world of Terra Nova. Each supplement

that was released revealed a few events and hinted at others, but a comprehensive treatment of the important events of the last couple years on Terra Nova was a long time in coming. Here at last, *Crisis of Faith* is the first of a series that tells the story of the *Heavy Gear* universe.

Timed to coincide with the release of the 2nd edition of *Heavy Gear*, *Crisis of Faith* is unusual in a couple of respects. First, it is strangely sized for a gaming book (8" x 5") and looks more like something you'd find at a museum gift shop than in a gaming store. Second, it is simply credited to the Dream Pod 9 staff and presented as an ensemble production. The book looks beautiful, and the only downside of the size is that it might go unnoticed on a crowded retail shelf. One look inside, however, is enough to ensure that you won't put it down. Thirty-two of the pages are full color, and the whole thing is up to DP9's usual excellent level of graphic design. Great care has obviously been taken not only in the writing but also in the look and presentation of the *Heavy Gear* universe.

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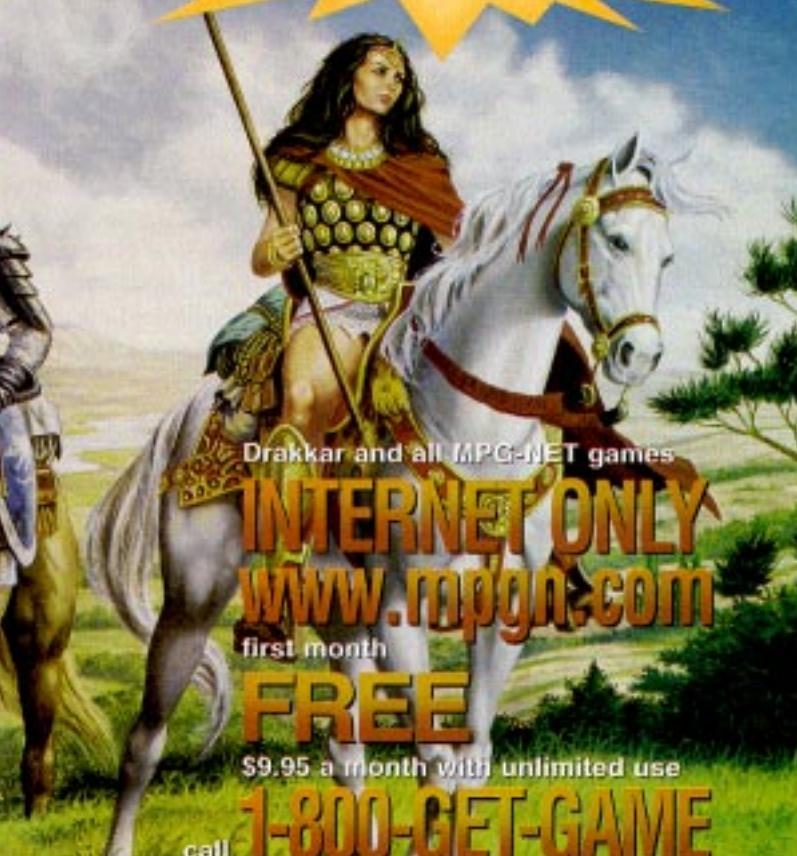
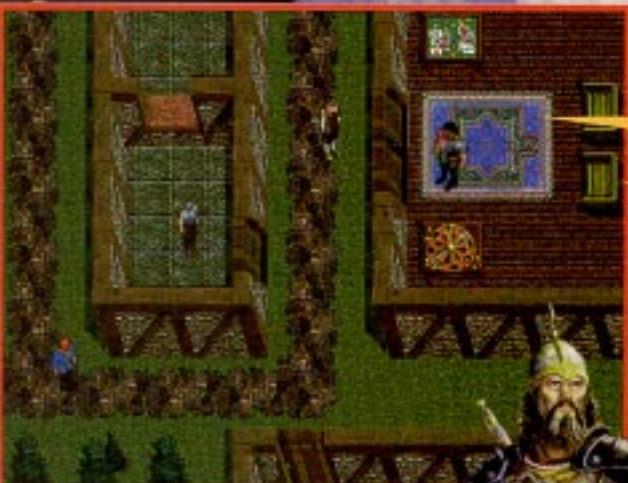
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The book eschews the typical gaming book format, and for the better. Rather than a dry description of two years' worth of political and social events, we see a first-hand glimpse of history. We learn of these events by reading transcripts of conversations, memorandums from government agencies, excepts

With this release, Dream Pod 9 has really made Terra Nova live and breathe.

from personal diaries, and news stories direct from Terra Nova. A complex picture of people, causes, actions, and inactions appears, and the book culminates with an assassination that leaves the world on the brink of war. While there are no game statistics of any kind, the book is a gold mine of scenario ideas. The presentation makes it eminently pilferable for handouts. It's much cooler

to give your players a copy of a news story than to tell them they saw it on a trideo broadcast.

The only downsides of the book are its price (\$19.95) and its lack of accessibility to the new player. With recent events in the gaming industry, it's hard to fault DP9 for the price, but it might put off

Evaluation: *Crisis of Faith* is an excellent supplement. It is lovingly crafted and tells a compelling story. Those who have longed for more information on the world of Terra Nova should pick this up, despite the hefty price. There is plenty here for both GMs and players, though GMs might want to keep some of what is revealed a secret. With this release, Dream Pod 9 has really made Terra Nova live and breathe. One hopes it won't take them two more years to produce the next one.



Chris Prams is a freelance author who recently moved to America's newest corporate deathzone, otherwise known as Seattle. His most recent publication is Blood of the Valiant, the Guiding Hand Sourcebook for Feng Shui.

Re: Views

Date: Thu, 11 Mar 98 10:04:00 PDT

From: lester smith <lester@pensys.com>

To: DRAGON Magazine <dragon@wizards.com>

Stupor Powers!* Game

32-page, 6" x 10", saddle-stitched book

\$4.95

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262 Fifth Ave., 2nd Floor, Brooklyn,
NY 11215

Email: unstopmail@aol.com

Website: <http://www.artnet.net/~mwulfson/stup.html>

"Conceived and Perpetrated by":
Ryan Dunlavey, Steve Ellis, Jamal Igle,
Carson Jones, Stew Noack, Lauren
Rabinowitz, Fred Van Lente, Alan H.
Zatkow

"Q: Why is this roleplaying game different from all other roleplaying games?

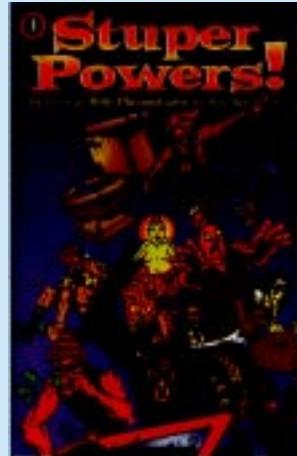
"A: Because other games cost \$40 per manual and have rules that read like a Calculus text book, while this game costs only \$4.95 and has rules that you can read while on the can."

That's how the Stuper Powers! game sums itself up, and it's an apt description. Irreverent, light-hearted, and very funny this "First-Class Role-Playing

Game for Third-Rate Heroes" makes for an afternoon's reading full of belly laughs, and may actually be worth playing a time or two to boot.

The game puts players in the roles of heroes with powers of questionable value (and sometimes taste), then pits them against villains such as the "Mighty Joe Jung"—a criminal genius resulting from the transplant of a psychiatrist's brain into the body of a gorilla. Against such perfidious evil, the heroes wield awesome powers like "Summon Mariachi Band," "Vacuum Butt," and "Spontaneous Combustion" (the PC actually incinerates), and others even funnier. (I won't spoil the surprise.)

Though sized like a comic, the book is printed on game-quality paper, with a durable cover, and consists of roughly half text and half art. Game mechanics are simple: flip a coin, or-as an advanced option-play rock/scissors/paper. And there is enough material here for a game master to gen-



erate and run at least a few adventures. After all, it isn't as if normal super-hero game adventures are all that complex anyway.

As for complaints, it's tough to find any for a product this well focused on its purpose. But if I gotta, here's one: Some photocopy places might actually take the joke on the character sheet seriously and refuse to make copies for you. That would be a bummer.

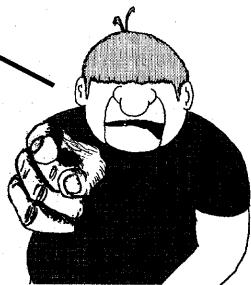
Personally, I think the publishers made a mistake in pricing the Stuper Powers game at only \$4.95. It's easily worth at least a couple of bucks more. Buy it; you'll like it



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WHAT DO YOU MEAN MY MOTHER HATED ME?
HOW CAN SHE HATE ME? GAWD, LOOK AT MY STATS! ANY MOTHER WOULD BE PROUD TO HAVE A DWARVEN THIEF LIKE ME.

SOMETIMES I REALLY WISH THEY HADN'T PUT THOSE BACKGROUND TABLES IN THE BOOK.

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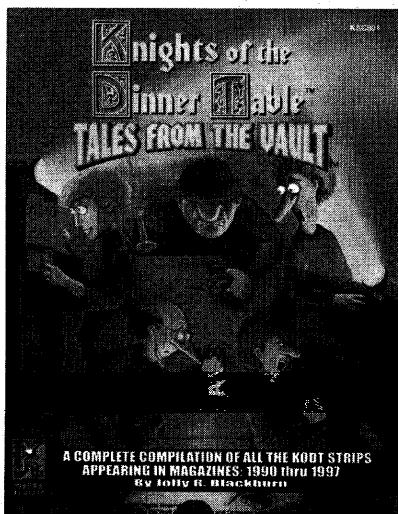
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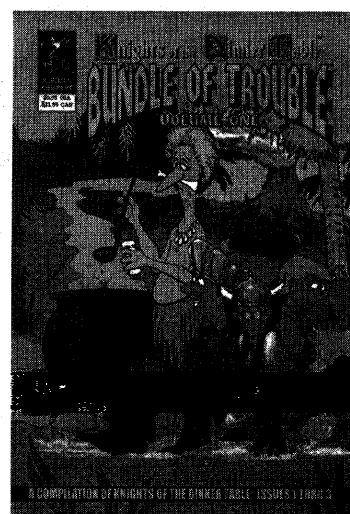
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HOODY HOO!! I KNEW THAT SAWED-OFF SHOTGUN WOULD COME IN HANDY. I HOP ONTO THE BACK OF CACTUS FLOWER AND HIGH TAIL IT!!

WAY TO GO BOB!! WE'LL MEET UP BACK AT OUR HIDEOUT!

YOU SHOT THE DEPUTY? BUT...BUT... HE THREW DOWN HIS GUNS!!

I'M LOSING THE TRAVELING PREACHER OUTFIT AND DONNING MY SNAKEOIL SALESMAN DISGUISE. THEN I'LL BREAK DOWN THE GATLIN GUN AND LOAD IT ON THE WAGON.

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL BANK ROBBERY!!! WE RULE!! I'M COUNTING THE LOOT. HOW MUCH DID WE GET AWAY WITH THIS TIME?

HOW MUCH? GEE, LOOKS LIKE FIFTY BUCKS, EASY!!

FIFTY BUCKS?? DAMMIT B.A.!! THIS SUCKS BIG TIME!!

AH DUDE, WE WERE ROBBED!! FIFTY BUCKS?

CHECK IT OUT, EINSTEINS!! YOU'VE ROBBED THE SIERRA MADRE BANK OF MUSKEEGIE EIGHT TIMES IN THE LAST TEN DAYS. THE TOWNSFOLK ARE STARTING TO SET THEIR WATCHES TO YOUR DARING HIGH NOON BANK HEISTS. UNDERSTAND?? THERE ISN'T EXACTLY A LOT OF CONFIDENCE IN THE BANK'S SECURITY.

TRUST ME, YOU WERE LUCKY TO GET THE FIFTY BUCKS.

WELL, LOOKS LIKE THE BOUNTIES ON EACH OF YOUR HEADS GOES UP ONCE AGAIN. BOB YOURS IS NOW 150 BUCKS. BRIAN, THE BOUNTY ON YOUR HEAD IS 750 DOLLARS. SARA'S IS UP TO 50 BUCKS AND DAVE TOPS THE LIST AT AN EVEN 1,000 DOLLARS

HEY!! HOLD ON A SECOND!! WHY THE HELL IS MY BOUNTY SO DAMN LOW??

A THOUSAND BUCKS!! JUMPIN BA-JEEMERS!! THAT'S 200 MORE THAN ACE JARRET'S BOUNTY!! THAT MAKES ME MUSKEEGIE'S MOST WANTED!!

GEE DAVE, REVEL IN THE MOMENT!!

STRANGE, DON'T THESE RED NECKS KNOW THAT I'M THE BRAINS OF THIS GANG??

HOW COME DAVE'S BOUNTY JUMPED SO FREAKIN' HIGH??

BECALISE DAVE DISEMBOWELED THE BANKTELLER WITH A MACHETE!! IT WAS CONSIDERED A PARTICULARLY HORRENDOUS CRIME - THUS THE HIGHER REWARD.

THAT'S NOT FAIR!! I GAVE THAT DEPUTY BOTH BARRELS IN THE FACE!!! THAT'S FAR MORE HORRENDOUS THAN WHAT DAVE DID.

C'MON BOB! YER FORGETTIN HOW I LAUGHED MANIACALLY AS I TWISTED THE BLADE.

WELL LA-DE-DA!! I THINK MY MEAN AND MENACING Demeanor IS WORTH A FEW MODIFIERS.

SORRY, BOB. B.A. MADE A GOOD CALL. ACCORDING TO THE BOUNTY TABLE ON PAGE 156 OF THE CATTLEPUNK GM'S GUIDE, DISEMBOWELMENT RANKS THREE LEVELS HIGHER THAN A SIMPLE FACE SHOT.

OH MY!

ACCORDING TO THE RULES, ALL CRIMINAL ACTS ARE CATEGORIZED BASED ON THEIR AFFECT ON PUBLIC OUTCRY. THE CATEGORIES ARE: HORRENDOUS, APPALING, REPULSIVE, HIDEOUS, AND HEINOS.

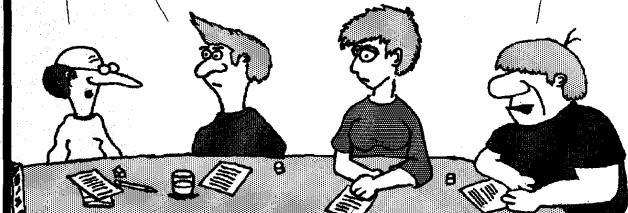


EACH CATEGORY HAS ITS OWN MODIFIER FOR THE BOUNTY TABLE DIE ROLL. HEINOUS CRIMES FOR EXAMPLE GIVE A WHOPPING +15 MODIFIER!!

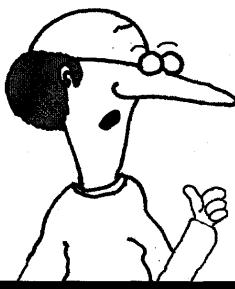
DAMMIT!! WHY DOESN'T SOMEONE TELL ME THESE THINGS?? I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THESE LAME PUBLIC OUTCRY RULES!!

A MANIACAL LAUGH PULLS A +2 MODIFIER DUDE!!

WELL, LIKE I'VE ALWAYS SAID, "RULE FAMILIARIZATION IS POWER." MAYBE YOU SHOULD START READING THE MANUALS DIP-DICE!!



WHATEVER! NOW THAT I KNOW THE DEAL, JUST WATCH ME CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THOSE WANTED CHARTS, BABY!!



A FEW MINUTES LATER...

WH... WHAT DID YOU SAY YOU'RE DOING TO THE STAGE COACH DRIVER?

YOU HEARD ME, WHISKER BOY! I'M EXTRACTING ALL OF HIS TEETH AND BRANDING MY CALL SIGN, "MACHETE DAN" ON HIS FOREHEAD. THAT SHOULD GET THE PUBLIC OUTCRY METER HOPPING!!

I'M MAKING THE GUARD WEAR A FRILLY DRESS AND SING 'GONNA WASH THAT MAN RIGHT OUT OF MY HAIR' HUMILIATION OF AN AUTHORITY FIGURE IS WORTH AN ADDITIONAL +5 MODIFIER!!

GUYS, WE'D BETTER TAKE THE CASH BOX AND RUN.



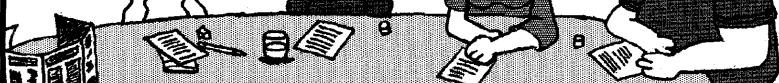
SEVERAL JOBS LATER...

HOODY HOOD!! YOU LOSERS!! 10,000 SMACKERS ON THIS HEAD! MACHETE DAN IS THE MOST WANTED MAN IN THE TERRITORY!!

HEY, I'M RIGHT ON YOUR HEELS WITH MY 8,000 DOLLAR REWARD, DUDE!

CONGRATULATIONS, BOYS! GEE, THE TWO OF YOU ARE WORTH MORE THAN OUR ENTIRE TAKE FROM ALL THOSE BANK JOBS!!

YEP, YOU GUYS ARE A WALKING FORTUNE.

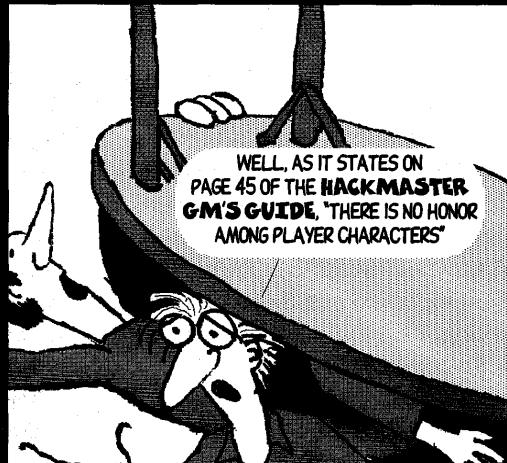


B.A., TONIGHT WHILE BOB AND DAVE ARE SLEEPING, BRIAN AND I ARE GOING TO PULL GUNS ON THEM AND TIE THEM UP. THEN WE'RE GOING TO COLLECT THAT 18,000 DOLLAR REWARD.

THIS IS SOME KIND OF JOKE...RIGHT??
SARA??
BRIAN??

HEY, YOU'RE NOT THINKING OF KEEPING THIS REWARD TO YOURSELVES ARE YOU?

WE WERE GONNA HOLD OUT FOR A EVEN TWENTY THOUSAND BUT WE WERE AFRAID SOME LAME NPC BOUNTY HUNTER WOULD CASH IN.



WELL, AS IT STATES ON PAGE 45 OF THE HACKMASTER GM'S GUIDE, 'THERE IS NO HONOR AMONG PLAYER CHARACTERS'



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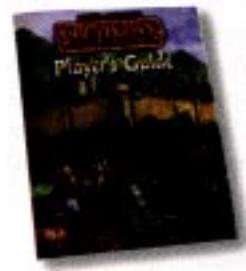
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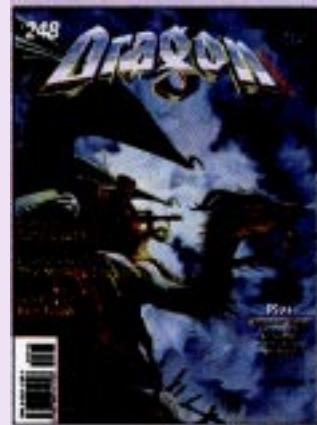
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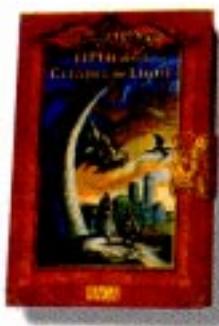
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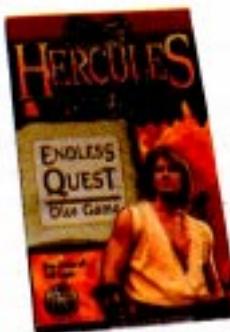
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Profiles



JEFF GRUBB

Designer of the AL-QADIM® and SPELLJAMMER® campaigns; author of the Finder's Stone trilogy (with Kate Novak) and the new *Magic* novel *The Brothers' War*; and co-founder, with Ed Greenwood, of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, Jeff revives his own comics heroes in this issue's fiction.

By Allen Varney

Jeff Grubb says, "I'm too busy writing to be writing." You read that right, but what does he mean? It has to do with sandboxes.

Grubb started playing D&D® at Purdue University in the early '70s. "I walked up to a group of players to ask what they were doing. One turned to me, handed me three six-siders, and said, 'Roll these. We need a cleric.' It was all downhill from there." Graduating as a civil engineer, he spent a year working on air pollution control devices "until cutbacks nailed my job. Used the time off to oversee the design of the AD&D Open at the GEN CON® Game Fair. On the strength of the designs, I got a position with TSR as a game designer."

In his 12 years at TSR (1982-94), Grubb worked on "just about everything. The original *Marvel Super Heroes** game still makes me smile, as does Spelljammer." Showing an engineer's love of simple elegance, Grubb takes pride in his Marvel game's Universal Table, *Monster Manual II*'s d12+d8 random encounter system, and the *Manual of the Planes*. Of his game work, he's most proud of the *AL-QADIM Arabian Adventures* book, which he designed with editor Andrea Hayday "riding shotgun."

Grubb has a phrase for working with existing games, settings, and characters: "playing in other people's sandboxes." He loves it and keeps finding new ways to play. In 1984, while managing TSR's biggest sandbox, the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, "I had a concept for a novel that mixed sword-and-sorcery with mystery and personal discovery—the tale of a woman who wakes up one morning with no knowledge of her immediate past and a set of strange tattoos on her arms.

"I laid out the novel one night to my wife, Kate Novak, while we were driving from Lake Geneva [Wisconsin] to Milwaukee. By the time we got there, I had a co-writer. *Azure Bonds* and the five books that followed have proved to have surprising staying power, and *Bonds* is in its eighth printing. Not bad."

In the late '80s Grubb wrote four fill-in issues of DC Comics' licensed ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® comic book, then all 25 issues of its

FORGOTTEN REALMS series. To wander the immense territory of Faerûn, he invented a magical boat, the *Realms Master*, captained by a crotchety archmage named Omen. Omen and his crew traveled from Waterdeep to Shadowdale, Baldur's Gate to Anauroch, and now into short fiction. This issue's story reunites Grubb with Realms comic artist Ralph "Rags" Morales, whom Grubb calls "absolutely brilliant. He is completely fearless as an artist. He does so much with nuance but is unafraid to tackle big, complex panels."

Having gone freelance three years ago, Grubb has explored new sandboxes. "I worked on [Mag Force 7's] *Wing Commander* and *Star Trek* (original series) trading card games, and a novella for Margaret Weis's *Testament of the Dragon*, published by HarperCollins." He's also doing some game design for artist Larry Elmore's *Sovereign Stone* project.

But what excites Grubb most is May's *The Brother War*, which kicks off a new line of *Magic: The Gathering* novels. It tells of the Antiquities War between planeswalking brothers Urza and Mishra. "I guess [Wizards] figured that after sorting out the many strands of Realmslore, I could handle sixty years of sibling rivalry.

"This book is much more personal than I thought it would be. Part of my own life has been a conflict between rational (engineer) and creative (author). Sometimes they work together, sometimes at cross-purposes. A lot of that has crept into *Brothers' War*, such that when I'm writing about Urza, he's my favorite character—and when I write about Mishra, he's my favorite instead."

So, does Grubb ever plan to build his own sandboxes—his own creations? "One of the frightening things about being good at playing in other people's sandboxes is that they are more likely to search you out to help with new sandboxes than with your own ideas. I have my own plans in the works, but they keep getting sidetracked. I still have things I want to say in the Realms, and in DRAGONLANCE, and particularly in Dominaria. And I would love to get back to comics.

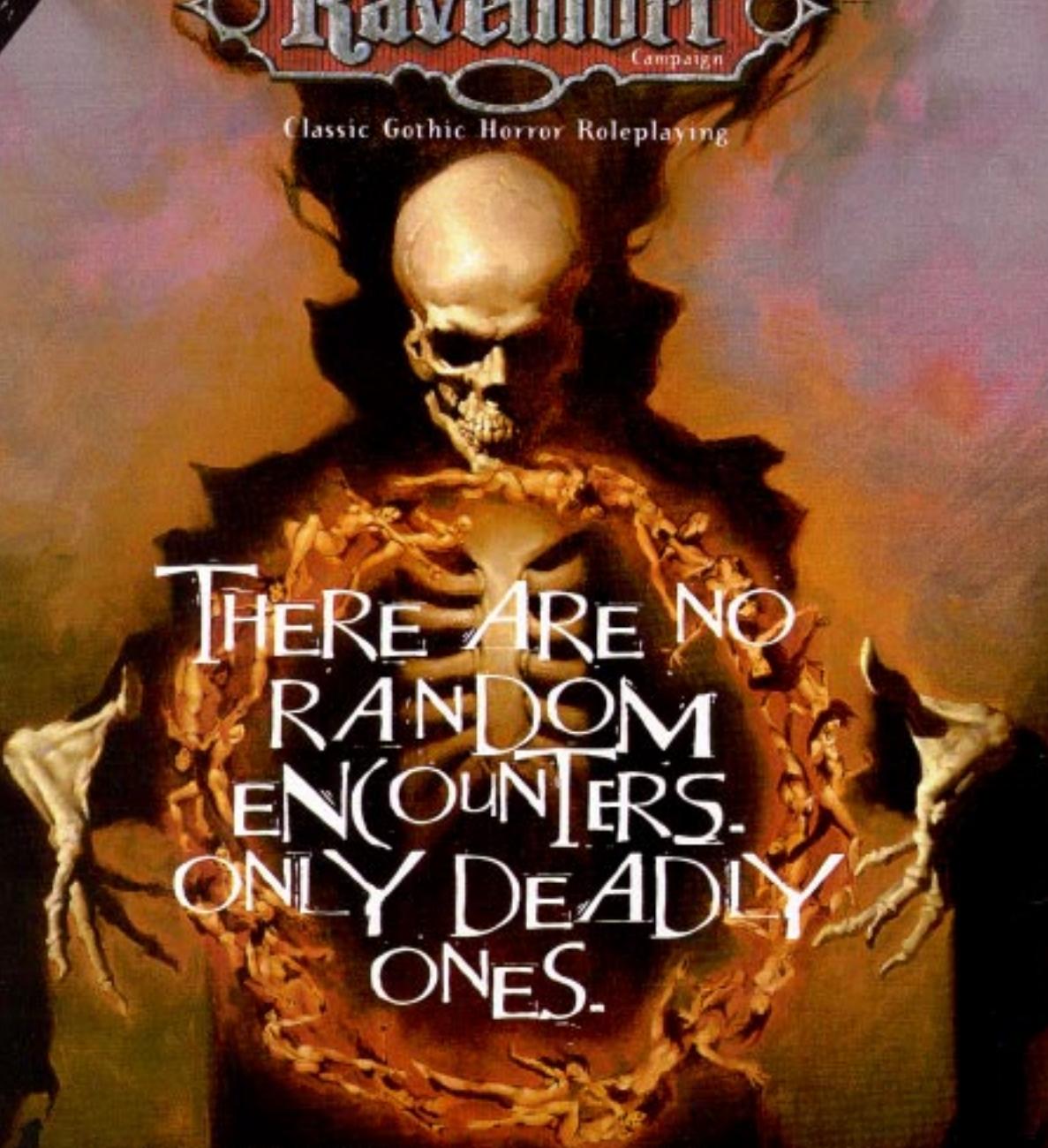
"In short, I am too busy writing to be writing. I think cloning might be the only answer."

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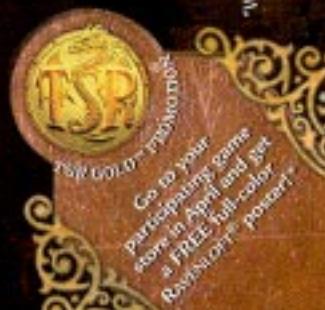
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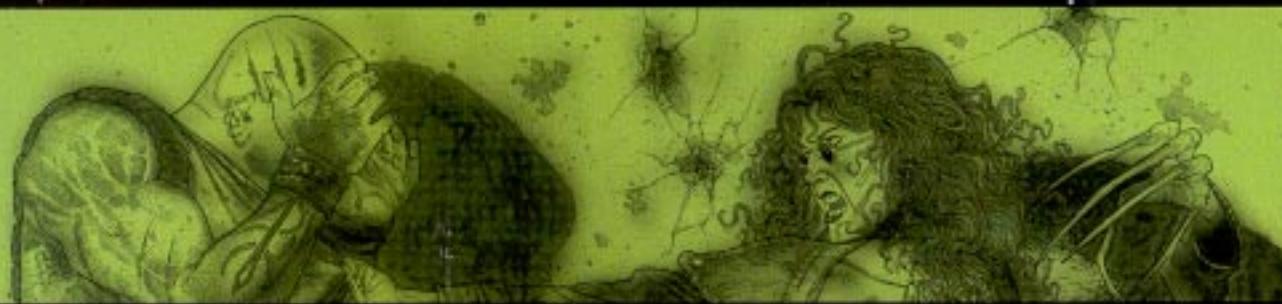




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