



## Books Are Books, and Games Are Games, and Never the Twain. . .

Heroic fantasy adventure novels relate a story for the reader's leisure enjoyment. Heroic fantasy adventure games provide a vehicle for the user's creation and development of epic tales through the medium of play. This simple difference is too often overlooked.

In the former case, the reader *passively* relates to what the author has written, hopefully identifying with one or the other of the novel's leading characters, thus becoming immersed in the work and accepting it as real for the time.

Games, however, involve participants *actively*; and in the instance of fantasy adventure games, the player must create and develop a game persona which becomes the sole vehicle through which the individual can relate to the work.

Again, in the novel, the entire advantage related is a matter of fact which the reader will discover by perusal of the story from beginning to conclusion, without benefit of input. In contrast, the adventure game has only a vaguely fixed starting point; and the participant must, in effect, have a hand in authoring an unknown number of chapters in an epic work of heroic fantasy.

A novel has an entirely different goal than does a game, although both are forms of entertainment. The novel carries the reader from start to finish, while the game must be carried by the players.

An heroic fantasy adventure story should be so complete as to offer little within its content for reader creativity, or else it is an unfinished tale. This is not to say that the reader can not become involved in the telling, that there is no rapport between writer and reader, or even that the whole milieu produced by the work isn't vividly alive in the reader's mind. It simply is to point out that the author has conceived a fantasy, placed it in black and white before the reader, and invited him or her to share it.

A fantasy adventure game should offer little else but the possibility of imaginative input from the participant, for the aim of any game is to involve the participants in active play, while heroic fantasy adventure dictates imagination, creativity, and more.

The obvious corollary to this—and one evidently missed by many players, designers, and even publishers—is that a truly excellent novel provides an inversely proportionate amount of good material for a

game. The greater the detail and believability of the fantasy, the less room for creativity, speculation, or even alteration.

Consider J.R.R. Tolkien's "Ring Trilogy" for a moment. This is certainly a masterpiece in heroic fantasy—with emphasis on fantasy. Its detail is vast. Readers readily identify with the protagonists, whether hobbit, human, or elf. Despite the fact that the whole tale seems to vouch for the reliability of the plain and simple "little guy" in doing a dirty job right, in spite of the fact that these books could very well deal allegorically with the struggle of the Allies versus the Axis in WWII, in spite of the fact that the looming menace of the Tyrannical Evil simply blows away into nothing in the end, millions of readers find it the epitome of the perfect heroic fantasy adventure.

There are no divine powers to intervene on behalf of a humanity faced by ineffable evil. The demi-god being, Tom Bombadil, is written out of the tale because his intervention would have obviated the need for the bulk of the remaining work. The wizards are basically mysterious and rather impotent figures who offer cryptic advice, occasionally do something useful, but by and large are offstage doing "important business" or "wicked plotting."

Thus, the backbone of the whole is the struggles of a handful of hobbits, elves, humans, and dwarves against a backdrop of human armies and hordes of evil orcs. Irrespective of its merits as a literary classic (and there is no denying that it is a beautifully written tale), the "Ring Trilogy" is quite unsatisfactory as a setting for a fantasy adventure game.

If the basis for such a game is drawn straight from the three novels, then there is no real game at all—merely an endless repetition, with a few possible variations, of the "Fellowship" defeating Sauron *et al.* As soon as the potential for evil to triumph is postulated by the game, several problems arise: First, most dedicated readers, identifying with the heroic elements of the work, do not desire to play the despised forces of Saruman or Sauron. The greater chance to win that evil has, the greater the overall antipathy for playing the game at all. Tolkien purists will also object to a distortion of the story.

Finally, even if the whole is carefully balanced, the best one can come up with is a series of variations on the "Ring Trilogy," whether the reenactment is a role-playing game or a boardgame. The roles are cast by Tolkien, the world is structured according to his wants and desires. The more game put into this framework, the less of J.R.R.T. the participant will discover.

In similar fashion, imagine a game based on the exploits of Arthur Conan Doyle's magnificent Sherlock Holmes. Which of the participants wouldn't wish for the role of the great detective? Or at the very least Dr. Watson? The subject matter for any such game would be particularly difficult to handle, and what would the participants do if Holmes were slain? Or merely made a fool of, for that matter?

These two examples of extrapolating a game from fiction are given only to illustrate the point about the major differences between what makes a good game and what makes a good adventure novel. The same applies to all works of fiction to a greater or lesser extent.

Delving further into the matter, we next come to the character in the adventure. In heroic fantasy novels, each character is designed to fit into the tale being told, for whatever ends the author desires. Each such character is interwoven to form the plot fabric of the work.

Such characters make for great reading, but as absolute models for games? Never! What AD&D player would find it interesting to play a wizard figure of Gandalf-like proportions? What DM would allow a Conan into his or her campaign?

The object of the character in the fantasy adventure game is to provide the player with a means of interacting with the scenario, a vehicle by which the participant can engage in game activity. Each gaming character must provide interest for the participant through its potential, its unique approaches to the challenges of the game form, and yet be roughly equal to all other characters of similar level.

While novels fix character roles to suit a preordained conclusion, game personae must be designed with sufficient flexibility so as to allow for participant personality differences and multiple unknown situations.

Were a designer to offer a game form in which all participants were fighters of Conan's ilk, participants might find it interesting at first, but then the lack of challenge and objective would certainly make the game

pall. If the design were then amended to allow for titanic forces to actually threaten a fighter of Conan's stature, the game merely becomes one where participants start at the top and work upwards from there.

This approach seems quite unacceptable to my way of thinking, and not necessary because it could have begun on a far more reasonable and believable level. The same logic applies to designs which feature any type of character as super-powerful. They are usually developed by individuals who do not grasp the finer points of game design, or they are thrust forward by participants who envision such characters as a vehicle to allow them to dominate an existing game form.

Were fighters to be given free rein of magic items in AD&D, and spells relegated to a potency typical of most heroic fantasy novels, for example, then the vast majority of participants would desire to have fighter characters. This would certainly lessen the scope of the game.

If a spell point system which allowed magic-users to use any spell on the lists (frequently, for what spell point system doesn't allow for rapid restoration of points?!), these characters become highly dominant, and again most participants will naturally opt for this role.

Were clerics to be given use of all weapons and more offensive spells, the rush would be for priest characters.

Were thieves assumed to be more brigand and less of a sneak-thief, pickpocket character, so that they fought as fighters and possibly wore armor, then the majority of players would desire thief characters.

The point is, each AD&D character has strengths and weaknesses which make any chosen profession less than perfect. Choose one, and you must give up the major parts of the other approaches. Each character has different and unique aspects. Playing the game with the different classes of characters offers a fresh approach, even if the basic problems are not dissimilar. The diversity of roles, without undue inequality, is what makes any game interesting and fun to play.

In a novel, diversity is a tool for the author to use in developing the protagonist's character, for highlighting the magnitude of his or her accomplishments, as a contrast between good and evil, or whatever is needed. A novel can easily have a magic-using fighter, a sword-wielding wizard, or a thief who combines all such aspects.

The work can just as well have the antithesis of such characters—the inept swordsman, the bumbling, lack-power magician, the hopeless thief who never gains a copper. The writer knows his or her aims, and such personae are actors who follow their roles to the desired end.

Contrary to this, in the fantasy role-playing game, characters are the principal authors of the adventure epic which is developed by means of the rules, the Dungeon Master's scripting, and the players' interaction with these and each other. With characters of too much or little power, the story rapidly becomes a farce or a tragedy!

By all means, do not discard heroic fantasy novels as useless to gaming. They are, in fact, of utmost benefit! If the basis of the game is a setting which allows maximum imaginative input from players, and characters' roles are both unique and viable (as well as relatively balanced as compared to one another), ideas for these areas, and for all the structure and "dressing," are inspired from such fictional works.

With appropriate knowledge of what can only be called primary source material as regards heroic fantasy (the classic mythology works of Europe, et al), these novels not only engender fresh ideas, they also point the designer or DM toward other areas. After all, the authors of such works often have considerable knowledge of subject matter ideal for use in heroic fantasy adventure gaming. Tolkien drew heavily upon British myth, the Norse Sagas and Eddas, and even the word *ent* is from the Saxon tongue, meaning giant.

There is certainly much to be learned from scholarly writers, and they can often point the reader toward the source material they used. As a case in point, L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt cite *Faerie Queen* and *Orlando Furioso* as sources for parts of *THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER* and *THE CASTLE OF IRON*. The latter stories are exceptionally fine examples of heroic fantasy adventure. The former works are excellent inspirational sources.

The "G Series" modules (*STEADYING OF THE HILL GIANT CHIEF*, *GLACIAL RIFT OF THE FROST GIANT JARL*, and *HALL OF THE FIRE GIANT KING*) were certainly inspired by the de Camp and Pratt *INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER*.

The three "D Series" modules which continue the former series owe little, if anything, to fiction. Drow are mentioned in Keightley's *THE FAIRY MYTHOLOGY*, as I recall (it might have been *THE SECRET COMMONWEALTH*—neither book is before me, and it is not all that important anyway), and as Dark Elves of evil nature, they served as an ideal basis for the creation of a unique new mythos designed especially for AD&D. The roles the various drow are designed to play in the series are commensurate with those of prospective player characters. In fact, the race could be used for player characters, providing that appropriate penalties were levied when a drow or half-drow was in the daylight world.

The sketchy story line behind the series was written with the game in mind, so rules and roles were balanced to suit AD&D. It is not difficult to write a tale based on AD&D characters, but it is difficult to try to fit regular characters from an heroic fantasy novel into the AD&D mold. There are exceptions.

\*\*\*

Individual characters from myth or authored mythos can be used as special characters of the non-player sort (monsters, if you will) for inclusion in scenarios. Most such characters can be altered to fit into AD&D—or rules can be bent in order to allow for them as an exceptional case-in order to make the campaign more interesting and exciting.

That is not to say that they can be used as role models for character types in the game—that Melneboneans, for example, are suitable as player characters just because Elric is inserted into a scenario. This sort of thinking quickly narrows the scope of the game to one or two combination-profession character types with virtually unlimited powers and potential, and there goes the game!

So when you are tempted to allow character additions or alterations which cite this or that work as a basis for the exception, consider the ultimate effect such deviation will have on the campaign, both immediate and long-term.

Keep roles from novels in their proper place—either as enjoyable reading or as special insertions of the non-player sort. The fact that thus-and-so magic-user in a fantasy yam always employs a magic sword, or that Gray Mouser, a thief, is a commensurate bladesman, has absolutely nothing to do with the balance between character classes in AD&D.

Clerics, fighter, magic-users, thieves, et al are purposely designed to have strengths and weaknesses which give each profession a unique approach to solving the problems posed by the game. Strengthening one by alteration or addition actually abridges the others and narrows the scope of your campaign.

#### YE FANTASYSMITH THE MATHEMATICIAN:

Smart folk would have figures that 3mm is one half of 6mm, so the scale fraction should be 1/600: half the fraction of a 6mm figure. Yet FantasySmith said that the scale is 1/500! Did the half-elf lie?

Nay, varlet, let me show you the secret:  $.12'' = .01', .01$  divided by 6 = .00167, ROUND UP TO .002. The rest, dear reader, is mere child's play. Hope you had fun. (Gales of jeering derision: NYAAANYMA)

## Did you Know? . . . ?

Of course we all know that July 15 is St. Swithin's Day, September 22 is the Autumnal equinox, and Guy Fawkes Day is celebrated enthusiastically on November 5. But, did you know that the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival occurs on June 10? Or that the Battle of Agincourt and the Battle of Balaklava (the Charge of the Light Brigade) were both fought on the same date, October 26?

You'll find these dates, traditional holidays, and future convention dates, along with some other more esoteric and little-known anniversaries in the upcoming TSR Periodicals Fantasy Calendar. This calendar will feature 13 full-page, full color pieces of art by several different fantasy artists, many of whom have done covers for *The Dragon* in the past.