



### Introduction

*This is our first attempt at a guest author in this column. We feel that we couldn't have found a better candidate. The Judges Guild's contributions to D&D, and all of role-playing, are incalculable. I was among the early skeptics; the novel idea of playing aids by subscription/membership was certainly unique, and as a DM myself, I viewed "outsider's" suggestions as something bordering on profane. I ended up as the TSR person responsible for screening TJG material to ensure compliance with the rules. While this was the case, I saw the value of what they did; they stimulated thought, imagination and creativity. Even if the gamer didn't like what they did, he or she, invariably designed their own version, and still their campaign improved by that act. Bob Bledshaw is the man that "oversees" the Judges Guild — "runs" doesn't fit Bob's demeanor — it implies harshness, or rigidity, neither of which is evident in his gracious and gentlemanly manner.*

## WHAT JUDGES GUILD HAS DONE FOR DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS®

### PERSONAL OPINION BY BOB BLEDSAW

First, let me state that while we are licensed by TSR to produce playing aids for Dungeons & Dragons, none of that which I have written below has been edited by them. Our relationship has been quite amenable and businesslike from the beginning. *Dungeons & Dragons* is the universal language of fantasy role playing (being the grandfather of the third generation systems). Judges Guild has benefitted greatly by its association with this popular game and we in turn have benefitted *Dungeons & Dragons* by publishing sorely needed complementary playing aids. The net effect has been to create a larger economic pie for all concerned and boost the sales of all fantasy role playing systems. TSR has the right to accept or reject specific designs for approved use with *Dungeons & Dragons*. To date, only one project has been rejected and then with appropriate comments to permit its revision to acceptable standards. We do not coordinate projects which aren't meant for use with the *D & D* system. Judges Guild is an independent firm which has no direct ties to TSR except the license agreements for *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* which we hold. TSR does not provide financing, design, or layout help to Judges Guild. We receive no special considerations in the form of kickbacks, advertising rates, or reduced prices. In fact, Judges Guild has received sparse notice in any game reviews or articles by TSR Periodicals except in our paid advertisements. (*Ed. Note: We have shied away from reviewing TJG products for one primary reason. In the past, I was the TSR person approving their designs. A definite conflict of interest existed.*) Our arrangement has benefitted both parties . . . it is in the nature of complementary products! To those who abhor such an arrangement, an Archie Bunker salute! It works! And the end beneficiary is the consumer!

Judges Guild has expanded the horizons of *D & D* campaigning, supplying playing aids which: promulgated a more desirable method of play, permitted novices to examine the design of functional dungeons and wilderness adventures, and provided a transition or bridge between wilderness adventuring and dungeon adventuring which many judges chose to ignore, due to the lack of definitive guidelines and examples of application. Since the inception of my campaign shortly after the first publication of *D & D*, our group has been adventuring in wilderness as

well as dungeons. The play was based upon Tolkien's Middle Earth and encompassed a complete fantasy world where wilderness was as important as dungeon adventuring. As many players will attest, I in no manner shorted the design of my dungeons, with several sprinkled across the map from the Misty Mountains to the far reaches of Rhun. Some ranged upwards (or downwards) 28 levels, such as the Lonely Mountain, while most dipped a mere nine to twelve levels, such as the Lair of Ancalagon the Black. The time frame was such that the players participated in the Battle of Fornost (and quite a few less notable miniatures battles with no less fervor). With the thrust of our play covering a wider variety of action than most campaigns of that period, our group rapidly overcame any incongruities in game system, evolved a system of play which permitted a great deal of involvement on the part of the players, and went on to make blunder after discovery after blunder, etc. Naturally, the design emphasis of our products reflect the fine-tuned whole of our experiences with this campaign. Point by point, the following represents my own personal opinion of what Judges Guild has specifically done to enhance fantasy role playing . . . especially *Dungeons & Dragons*.

1. Recognized the need for playing aids which alleviate somewhat the burden of time necessary to create a complete fantasy world and speed play. The *Judges Shield*, *Ready Ref Book*, and *Wilderness of High Fantasy* are prime examples.

2. Supplied guidelines to make the original rule set more functional in a "live" campaign. Advertising, grappling, phantasmal forces and others were covered.

3. Placed a new emphasis on wilderness adventuring which elevated many "dungeons" to the status of "campaigns". The *Campaign Hexagon System*, *Village Book*, *Island Book*, *Castle Book*, and *Tegel Manor* with their attendant guidelines on prospecting, terrain, caves, flora, and fauna can take a bow here.

4. Emphasized a more "humane" relationship between the players and the judge wherein the judge was slightly more limited in his god-like powers to following guidelines in the more subjective areas of the game. Here our guidelines have been intentionally sparse and more in the vein of mere suggestions such as: wishes; negotiations; placing the combat charts on the player's side of the *Judges Shield* to encourage other groups to permit the players to become more actively involved in the game; *Dungeon Tac Cards* to remind novices of their weapon bonuses; traps which do not instantly snuff out the fantastic life of a well-played character; and poisons which also do not kill instantly. These were published at a time when the quality of many "dungeons" (campaigns) were judged primarily by the number of characters killed with malicious glee . . . with little view toward establishing a continuing series of session to permit the players more identification with their characters and the resultant extra effort involved.

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### *"It's 'your' campaign, and we leave much to your imagination and skill."*

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5. Introduced imaginative and mind-stretching approaches which "spiced up" and aided many campaign judges in developing their own style and verve. What happens to the hapless player which has a demon answer his ad for dancing girls? Which rumors are true or false? What purpose does a non-lethal apparition or Ghost serve? Why should a wizard send a geased warrior to some remote island to smell the grass on a slope? It's "your" campaign and we leave much to your imagination and skill. Our dungeons, and wilderness is designed to allow them to be altered to suit the tenor of "your" campaign . . . but we don't leave you without some direction or help.

6. Emphasized the speeding-up of play by placing more duties upon the shoulders of the players, simplifying by reorganization (see the monster compendium on the *Judges Shield*), and designing for the active judge in mind (no 1-12 clerics of levels 1-28 with 4-79 gold pieces each, and a 23% probability each of some magical item). Originally we had some bad feedback which indicated that judges felt that the actual description of dungeons was their "domain" and all they desired was a very skeletal framework with the more time consuming level details

worked out. We learned quickly and now design to allow the judge to delete (or modify) that which doesn't suit the tenor of his play. We try to keep the script fluid and thereby not limit the adaptability of our materials to divergent campaign styles. Let's face it! We can't design for every type of campaign. Some are run with 20th level characters in mind while others are just starting. We try not to "lock-step" every campaign which makes use of our materials to suit the mode of play extant in my campaign. (Yes, we still play wargames (even my campaign) two or three times a week, often to the wee hours of dew). The descriptions are designed with bookkeeping (how many of those ghouls are left anyway?) and ease of play (with hit points, hit dice, armor class, number appearing, and damage often specified). Foremost, we try not to make the judge switch dice types too often, and in general lift much time consuming "instant analysis" off his back. Some judges (especially novices) prefer to be led by their +3 nose . . . "the giant's john is 6'X3'8" wide and 3' high; filled with excrement within 4' of the top; and any player character sitting thereon is immediately transformed into a grub worm (without saving throw) to plummet to his well-deserved fate". Most judges prefer a cursory description (the mundane work) and some imaginative pointers . . . *ala The City State of the Invincible Overlord*. We are sensitive to the freedom of expression necessary in every campaign. Every campaign should be as unique and original as time permits the judge. If you change the rule set extensively, especially sensitive areas affecting play balance, you are no longer playing *Dungeons & Dragons*. Any advantages given the players must be offset by advantages given the monsters. Mr. Gygax called me on this very subject once when he found out (*how I'll never know*, because we never published it) that I reduce the instant kill rule (20 . . . 19 or 20) to double damage on a roll of twenty only (for monsters and players alike) . . . Gary thought I had only given this advantage to the players. This was for my campaign only and we are very careful not to introduce "rules", *per se*, into the *Dungeons & Dragons* system. *Ya don't tug on Superman's cape and ya don't mess around with the play balance built into the system you are designing for*. *Judges Guild* designs aids for *D & D* with two prime functions in mind: first, to spark the imagination and aid in designing viable campaign adventures; *Secundomonde*, to provide the basic framework (sheer time-consuming work) necessary to aid in the development of a "living" fantasy world.

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***"Ya don't tug on Superman's cape,  
and ya don't mess around with the  
play balance. . . ."***

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A little enlightenment on basic viewpoints might be appreciated on the second function. (So, appreciated or not, here goes!) In a "living" fantasy world, creatures of intelligence tend to form working relationships and are the products of their environments (how's that for original phrasing?). Thus, shopkeepers aren't pushovers and orcs can be found working for humans, and, (horror of horrors!) elves. Creatures of the same type vary in their characteristics (smarter than normal Trolls? . . . why not? . . . variety is exciting) with all degrees of skills, aptitudes, and responses to life as they find it. Evil is sometimes stronger than good . . . and vice versa . . . *re* the Nazis. The leader of a group or nation may be diametrically opposed to the predominate alignment of the populace (I often wonder if this is always the case). . . . revolutions do happen. Creatures of widely divergent end-goals may often work together because both ends are furthered in the course of events. A dragon may protect a village like a shepherd his flock until the hatchlings arrive ten years from now. Like the real world, a "living" fantasy world has many mysteries and illogical (or so it may seem) events and circumstances not resolvable by logical deductive analysis, nor is the judge compelled to create a reason for the being of fantastic creatures or apparent contradictions in the scheme of things. If everything were logical there would be no work for scientists . . . and why impose restrictions on your viewpoint of reality on a fantastic universe, anyway? I know you have to start somewhere . . . but aren't ancient economics just as logical as medieval economics . . . and if it's so logical why aren't we all rich (another freshly coined phrase) Economists today are great at analysis, but, like most of the "logical" sciences today . . . no two agree completely and the impor-

tant ones disagree significantly. You must begin by assuming that everything in your fantasy universe is unknowable while enough is known to permit the players to gain enough knowledge to grow and develop. A dash of logic goes a long way as players have their own conception of the mechanics involved . . . ie. the length of a sword, conceptualizing actions, and so forth. Mystery cannot be replaced, as it is the source of adventures, diligent research by players, and a main part of the fun to be had in a fantastic world. Don't cheat your players of a little ill-reason every now and then (remember, this is my *personal* opinion).

So that is what Judges Guild has done for *Dungeons & Dragons* . . . even if I did get off the subject once or twice. May the Blues Brothers never play at the Balrog's Eye!

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## CANGAMES '79

***A brief report on the Canadian Gaming Convention at Ottawa, May 18-21, 1979 — G. Gygax***

The progress report on "CanCon 79" billed the event as "The Great Canadian Games Adventure". Having never really been to Canada before, let alone to a gaming convention there, I was unsure what to expect. After a long tour through Ontario, I arrived in Ottawa on Friday the 18th — much impressed with the beauty of the country I had been through and even more taken by the beauty and cleanliness of Ottawa. Jim Lamb, one of the Cangames organizers, telephoned the motel, and after we had supper nearby, took me over to the convention site on the campus of the University of Ottawa.

The convention area was bustling with activity. There were gamers everywhere I looked, playing a few boardgames but mostly engaged in miniatures battles—highly reminiscent of early GenCons. So was the crowd of some 500 or so dedicated, friendly, and enthusiastic hobbyists there for a long weekend of gaming. The scheduled events ran the gamut from ancients to armor. There were chariot races, gladiatorial combats, WRG competition armies, *D&D*, *AD&D*, *Traveller*, naval battles, air battles, *Kingmaker*, *Rail Baron*, seminars, and many excellent movies run frequently. My seminar on *D&D* was well-attended, and the three-hour talk saw many very interesting and intelligent questions (including some defenders of David Berman and his *Apprentice* magazine who thought my critical review of both unjust—and *The Dragon* should soon run a review of the latest offering from Mr. Berman, possibly an improved magazine!). The Sunday evening seminar on TSR was only lightly attended, but it was fun nonetheless.

The dealers' area contained about nine or ten exhibits—Canadian firms handling U.S. products and a few who were actual publishers. The duties on U.S. goods makes it expensive to buy them in Canada—about 50% higher than here. It is certainly to be hoped that more and more game items will be manufactured in Canada, both by Canadian firms and by subsidiaries of U.S. hobby gaming companies. It was informative to talk with the exhibitors and learn the problems they face. When Cangames '80 is held next May, it is to be hoped that more dealers will support the hobby by advertising in the convention program and exhibiting at the show!

All-in-all, The Great Canadian Games Adventure was a fine convention. Chairman Bruce Knight, seeing things from the "inside", was continually concerned that it wasn't as good as it should be. As a guest and conventioneer, everything seemed great from my perspective. Bruce, Ramon Ross, Jim Lamb, Scott MacGregor, Paul Raymond, and all the rest of the people who worked hard to assure that a superior convention took place certainly deserve the thanks of all who attended. After an excellent buffet lunch and the presentation of trophies on Sunday, Bruce Knight was already talking about changes for next year's event. John Mansfield, chairman of the first two Cangames conventions, should be thanked too, for this gathering certainly is an enjoyable one, and it goes far to promote the hobby too! Next year there will be a bigger *AD&D* tourney, games, seminars, and all the rest. If you can manage to take a few days off and travel to Ottawa, odds are you'll be more than happy you did so. I know that I will certainly do my best to be there again in 1980, for Cangames is one of the best gaming conventions around.