

Cure Light Wounds

An Insider's View of the AD&D® 2nd Edition Game

by Steve Winter

The POLYHEDRON™ Newszine has given me this space to reply to the review of the new *Player's Handbook* printed last issue, and to answer a few comments that other members have made about the revised game. This is not a rebuttal. I hope to point out those things I disagree with, the areas where I feel the critics have expressed their opinions rather than facts about the game, and explain the reasons why some things were done the way they were.

Before starting, I should introduce myself. I was assigned to the design team in 1986 as the developer/editor. Dave Cook and I worked on the *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* steadily for the next year, when the manuscripts were sent out to numerous groups of playtesters. When the playtest results came back, Dave Cook made the needed adjustments and corrections, Mike Breault and Warren Spector re-edited both books, and I wrote the introductions and compiled the indexes.

I'm not going to argue with what Lisa and other members have said about the 2nd Edition *Player's Handbook*. They've stated their opinions honestly, and there's nothing to be gained by starting a fight. Opinions, however, are highly subjective things, especially when they're about something like a role-playing game. Lisa, for example, states in *The Critical Hit*, issue #48, that "paladins have lost the cavalier feel that *Unearthed Arcana* gave them, and this is bad." I disagree; I'm glad to see it gone. Other members agree. They feel that *Unearthed Arcana* paladin and cavalier were too powerful and too complex. Everyone will have his own opinion about that sort of thing. Ultimately, it doesn't matter a whit what I or Lisa or anybody else thinks. These kinds of things are entirely matters of personal preference.

We knew from the beginning that we couldn't make everyone completely happy, and we didn't try. We didn't even make ourselves completely happy; that's the point of working within restrictions. I doubt there is anyone playing the original AD&D® game who is

entirely happy with everything about it, and I feel the same way about the new game. The whole thing is just too big and open-ended to be perfect in everyone's eyes.

Some Philosophy

Everybody has noticed that the new *Player's Handbook* is larger and contains more information than the old edition, in fact, it's the first thing most people notice about it.

How much information to put into the *Player's Handbook* was one of the most important decisions we made during initial development, and we debated it for days. We decided to put most of the rules in the *Player's Handbook* for the sake of speed. In the past, everything revolved around the DM. All answers came from the DM. And everything stopped while the DM looked up a modifier or an obscure rule.

The size of the *Player's Handbook* reflects a deliberate decision on our part to place more responsibility for the conduct of the game on the players. The DM's job is to keep the game interesting, fun, and moving at a good pace. That's hard enough without also having to be an encyclopedia and a filing clerk simultaneously.

The statement that "... players are now meant to be all knowing, perhaps to alleviate the need for a DM. ..." is misleading. To start playing the game, you need to roll your character's attribute scores, pick a race and a class, get some equipment, and step through the dungeon door—the same as before. You don't ever have to read any of the additional material if you don't want to, but if you do want to, it's there.

It never was our intention to collect information from all the previous books into two comprehensive volumes, that simply would be impossible. Our goal was to include the unchanging core rules that form the heart of the AD&D game. The rules in the *Player's Handbook* are now chiseled in stone. We will never change them except where errata is concerned (or until such time, far in the future, that the company decides a 3rd edition is warranted). Much of the material in *Unearthed Arcana* is ancillary and doesn't belong in a collection of

core rules. The same applies to almost everything in the *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* and the *Wilderness Survival Guide*. We incorporated everything that we felt belonged in the core. Everything else is optional. You may see some of that material again in source books and the *Complete Fighter, Rogue, Wizard, and Priest Manuals*, but all of that material is optional.

Many people have been wondering out loud about why so much material from *Unearthed Arcana* was left out, especially the extra classes and races. The reason for having those alternate classes and races was to give players more role-playing options. But at the same time, those classes and races were loaded with special abilities and powers. We heard a lot of arguments about how these advantages merely counterbalanced inherent disadvantages. The real point, however, is that playing an unusual character class should be its own reward. If we must bribe players with bonus powers to play a character with some social disadvantages, we're going about things the wrong way.

In the same vein, if a player wants to play a peculiar race because it comes with special powers, he's doing it for the wrong reason. (As a secondary point regarding drow elves, this is a game of heroic fantasy and there's nothing heroic about playing a character that has evil printed into its genetic structure.)

None of these things have been outlawed. The ins and outs of nonstandard PC races and unusual classes are discussed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. In fact, this discussion extends even beyond what was allowed by *Unearthed Arcana* to include things like elf paladins. But if you want to do something unusual with your character, you have to make your case to the DM.

Point/Counterpoint:

The design department and Network HQ have heard a lot of comments about the new game from people who played—and loved—the old game. Here are my opinions:

The ranger has not lost his combat bonus, as some people have suggested. Instead, he gets to choose what sort of creature he wants the bonus to apply

against. This is more restricted than it used to be, since the bonus now applies to only one species instead of 11. The bonus is also +4 to hit rather than plus the ranger's level to damage. A bonus to hit is more generally useful than a bonus to damage. Making the bonus flat rather than increasing with level helps the ranger at low levels without being overpowering at high levels.

Giving the player his choice of enemy enhances the player's input into the character, which in turn improves role-playing. Now a ranger in an island campaign can choose sahuagin or lizardmen as his enemies and get a lot more use out of his bonus. The result is a more well-rounded class.

I cannot see how druids have lost any power whatsoever, either in comparison to clerics or to their 1st Edition counterparts. Consider the following:

	cleric	druid
spheres, major access:	12	6
spheres, minor access:	1	1
special abilities:	1	7

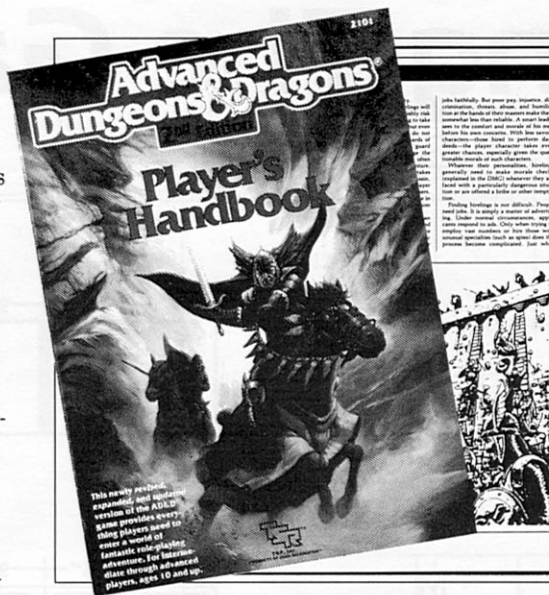
In my book, those seven special abilities are worth giving up access to some spells. The cleric does not get to cast more spells—both the druid and the cleric can cast the same number per day. The druid just has a narrower range to choose from, for which he is compensated with seven special abilities.

The druid's selection of spells is greater than it used to be. The new druid has access to 100 spells. In the old game he had access to 78 (96 with the addition of *Unearthed Arcana*). This is hardly a reduction in power.

Several people have correctly pointed out that *call woodland beings* and *commune with nature* are missing from the druid's spell lists. This is a for-real piece of errata. Those two spells should have crossed spheres and appeared in the Animal sphere (*call woodland beings*) and the Elemental sphere (*commune with nature*), at least so far as the druid is concerned.

The new bard likewise stirred up a lot of controversy when the first draft appeared in the Newszine. Many readers felt the changes made the new bard too weak. The final version is a bit different from that first version. The bard's special abilities are:

- limited spell casting
- climb walls
- detect noise
- pick pockets
- read languages



influence reactions of crowds
inspire companions to heroism
counter effects of auditory attacks
have a chance to know something about anything

The new bard class can be played a lot of ways. He can be a traveling con artist; a wandering, learned minstrel and scholar; or just a happy-go-lucky guy with a song in his heart. We don't force any single role on the player. Again, the class has been altered to offer more options and improve role-playing.

The assassin is gone. Grieve all you want, but the class is no more. The arguments on both sides of this issue are well known, and I'm not going to dredge them up again here. But this is one we simply will not apologize or make excuses for. It was a bad class and we dumped it.

Familiars have been abused for too long, and changes were made purely to force some sort of conscience onto characters. A familiar should be a precious and treasured thing. Wizards need some encouragement to take care of them. In the old game, it wasn't unknown for a wizard who was unhappy with his familiar (especially if it was, say, a toad) to arrange for its accidental demise. The penalty for this was a very vague "displeasure of the gods." That displeasure has now taken concrete form: save vs. death. Obviously, the decision to summon a familiar can no longer be taken lightly. Before summoning, the character had best determine to accept and protect whatever appears.

Comments about the new *identify* spell make it sound as if the changes we

made were oversights. In fact, they were specific and intentional.

The spell does not tell the wizard how many charges an item has remaining. It tells him, within a 20-point range, what percentage of its original charges remain. This information is really useful only if the character knows how many charges the item had originally.

A *ring of 3 wishes* appears weak because anything with five charges or less appears weak. Again, this is to keep the players guessing about the true nature of unknown magical items, which we feel heightens the sense of mystery and danger.

People who lament the "loss" of cantrips should look again. If anything, the reduction of cantrips to a single spell really opens up new options for wizards. A cantrip can now do anything the character wants it to, as long as it's a weak and minor effect. The uses for cantrips are limited, literally, only by what the players can dream up. If that doesn't encourage ingenuity, I don't know what does.

Meat and Poison

These may seem niggling points, but an old saying applies here: one man's meat is another man's poison. If you are in doubt about whether to buy the new *Player's Handbook*, don't let someone else make the decision for you. Read every review you can find (including Lisa's), then go to the store and examine the book yourself. Better yet, find a friend who has a copy and borrow it for an evening or two. We're sure the effort is worth it.

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