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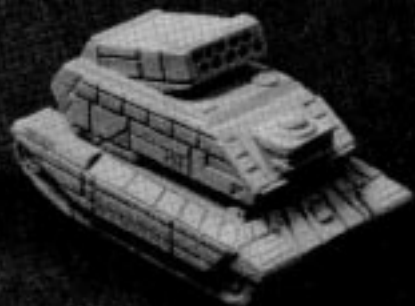
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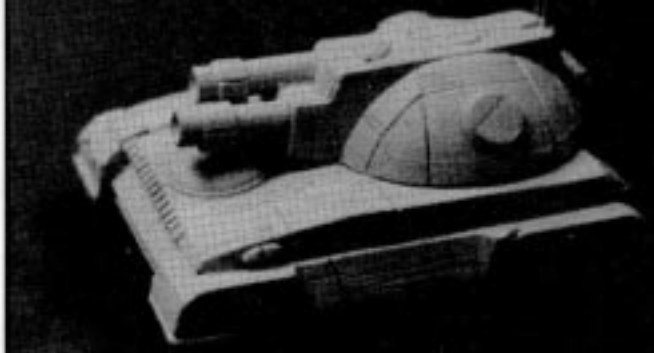


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COVER

Amused and unconcerned, a faerie creature teases an awe-struck night monster she has startled in the depths of her forest. "It's my version of 'Beauty and the Beast,'" said Donald Clavette of his second cover painting for DRAGON® Magazine.

LETTERS

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, PO. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR UK Limited, The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD, United Kingdom.

Name that cover II

Readers sent in scores of possible titles for Daniel Horne's cover painting for DRAGON issue #133, most involving dentistry, dating, fishing, and "Gimme five!" (Hal Lewis, Williamson NY). Sometimes, whole families sent in entries. Our personal favorites included the following:

"Your mouthwash ain't making it."

Cillian MC Dermott, Newcastle, N. Ireland
"Conan the Orthodontist."

David Innis (no address)
"What happened to that crown I put in for you last week?"

Brian Thaldorf, Lake Geneva WI
"Hold still! The Druids of Dental Hygiene pay me to do this!"

Pierre Savoie, Toronto, Ontario
"For the last time, I don't want to go skinny-dipping."

Timothy Thelen, Chicago IL
"Hello, sailor!"

Vince Streif, Eau Claire WI
"Blind date."

Carl Boyd, Shadyside OH
"Reach out and touch someone."

Deron Davis, Houston TX
"Hi, honey, I'm home!"

John Woosley, Kenosha WI
"Say, what are you doing tonight?"

Garth Gibson, Sydney, Australia
"Motor Mouth returns."

Douglas Shortes, Roswell NM
"Please take out your driver's license and vehicle registration."

Carl Rothman, Kendall Park NJ
"Pardon me, but would you happen to have any Grey Poupon?"

Andy Mills, Annandale VA
"On the good ship Lollipop."

Brian Tolley, Las Vegas NV
"Fangs a lot for all the help!"

Chris Doyle (no address)
"It slices and dices!"

Russell Mitchell, Newport RI
"Uh, this isn't the boat with the twenty-one unarmed slave girls. . . ."

Andrew Schwartz III, Houston TX
"Next time you get to the punch line, don't slap me on the back."

Travis Clemons, Roseburg OR
"Hey! I just had this boat painted!"

Kyle Kinder (no address)
"Sorry, this seat's already taken."

John Skosnik, Warren MI

"On his weekly spear-fishing trip, Albert runs into yet another 'trolling' problem!"

Eric Wetterlind, Proctor MN
"You got your peanut butter in my chocolate!"

Jeff Baughman, Greensburg PA
"You're the first meal I've seen with a complementary toothpick!"

J.J. Lee, Cypress CA
"Hi ho, this is Kermit the Mutant. . . ."

Sean Murphy, Philadelphia PA
"Tag! You're IT!"

David Mareske, South Bend IN
"Mother, what an unexpected surprise."

John Chang, Lynchburg VA

The longest response was from Heather McDonald of Gaithersburg, Md., who was taken by the sea troll's "Jimmy Carter grin," and so envisioned the troll as a used-boat salesman: "Yes, sir, Mr. Bar Barian. This little baby's only got a few thousand miles on it! It was owned by a little old boatman named Charon who used to take it across the River Styx. . . ."

Ramon Munoz II of Pasadena, Tex., spoke for everyone when he added, "The cover painting was great! Keep up the GREAT work, Daniel!" No argument there.

Golden oldies

Dear Dragon:

I have a copy of each of the three original D&D® rule books (*Men & Magic*, *Monsters & Treasure*, and *Underworld & Wilderness Adventures*). Can you tell me if they are worth a n y t h i n g ?

David Lewinnek
Newton MA

Yes, they are worth something — but it depends on who you are trying to sell them to. The 1985-1986 Game Buyer's Price Guide notes that the GEN CON® Game Fair auction in 1984 sold the first three books (known as the D&D Original Set) for \$8-9 together and all of the first seven books (including Greyhawk, Blackmoor, Eldritch Wizardry, and Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes, together known as the D&D Collectors Set) for \$13-14. Since then, prices on these items have at least tripled. The TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop has run out of Original Set volumes, but has copies of Greyhawk, Blackmoor, Swords & Spells (the first set of miniatures combat rules for the D&D game, thus the precursor to the BATTLESYSTEM™ supplement), and Chainmail (the medieval and fantasy miniatures combat game that was the precursor to the D&D game itself). Each of these volumes sells for \$15.00.

In short — name your own price.

Worldwide

When most people visit Great Britain, they head for places like Piccadilly Square, Brighton Beach, Buckingham Palace, and so forth. When I was there, I hunted for game shops. London was especially rich territory in this regard, and I bought myself into a stupor. I bought science-fiction miniatures games, 15mm space marines, bizarre gaming fanzines, and everything else I could stuff into my suitcases. London was Heaven.

I always wished I could return the favor. DRAGON® Magazine is now widely distributed throughout the U.K., as well as in the U.S. and Canada. You'll find dual addresses for regular columns like "Letters," "Forum," "Sage Advice," and "Convention Calendar," as well as U.S./U.K. addresses for TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop catalogs and subscriptions to DRAGON Magazine. Writers' guidelines and regular article submissions are also now handled on both sides of the Atlantic.

DRAGON Magazine has always had an international flavor. One-fourth of all of its subscribers live outside the United States, with better than 92% of those subscribers being Canadian. At present, about 450 subscriptions go out to gamers across Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Israel, and scattered locations in Central and South America, Asia, and Africa. This doesn't count retail sales, which amount to over 20,000 issues in the U.K. alone and over three times that many in the U.S. and Canada (and things are looking up).

Of the articles you've been reading, about one in five has come from Canada or the U.K., with pieces from New Zealand, Singapore, and elsewhere. You will be seeing more articles from the U.K. before long. Certainly, the "Forum" section should become more entertaining.

It would be nice to return to London someday (when I can afford it) and go on another frenzied game-shopping spree. Until then, editing a gaming magazine that can be enjoyed by gamers in that wonderful city (and elsewhere) will do.



FORUM

The "Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: The Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: The Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR UK Limited, The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to the "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys, so we may read and understand your comments.

In previous letters to the "Forum," some people have discussed different ways to rid [the AD&D® game's] magic-users of their nagging habit of dying at low levels. But if you tamper with the class too much, it tends to become a supercharacter. My solution to this dilemma is actually very simple. Just let the magic-user wear armor that is a cross between his normal robes and leather armor. This would consist of a resilient fabric with cloth reinforcements over the vital areas. The new armor would keep the original movement of the robes and weigh only a little more. As a result, the armor class, not including dexterity bonuses, would be dropped from 10 to 9. The magic-user now has a 5% better chance of survival. I have found this simple change gives the magic-user the tiny edge he needs to survive, but it will not affect him seriously when he reaches higher level.

Dain A. Muller
Marblehead MA

Scott Whitmore brings up an important point in the big debate over strengthening the low-level mage (issue #129). Unfortunately, it produces the opposite conclusion to what he has in mind. If we accept his claim that magic-users

are the favorite class of most players (a probable theory), then we must conclude magic-users must be made weaker, not strengthened.

Our basic fantasy world is a society in which the magic-user is a relative rarity. There are a lot of fighters, but only a few spell-casters. To role-play such a society, a majority of the players must choose to be fighters and relatively few to be mages or clerics. If a majority of the players would rather play a magic-user, the fighter must be given advantages while the magic-user must suffer.

Our ideal PC distribution would look something like: five fighter types, four of them purely fighters with only one ranger or cavalier type; two clerics; two magic-users; and one thief. As long as we have 20% of the players preferring to be mages, we don't want to strengthen the magic-user. Only when the players have to start drafting to get a magic-user in the party do we improve the class.

This does not mean we can't help the poor 1st-level magic-user, but if we do so, we must hurt the magic-user in other ways — say, reduce his spells at higher levels. The magic-user class cannot be made any more attractive. I'd love a more powerful magic-user myself, which means by my logic that we need a weaker, not stronger magic-user.

David Carl Argall
La Puente CA

About the ongoing controversy about low-level magic-users not having a good survival rate, here are some more remarks.

Larry Madden (issue #129) had some interesting suggestions, but they are not really practical. Whether or not your mage can pick up *magic missile* scrolls (or any others) just by walking in a store and requesting them is a matter for the DM to decide, but magical items

really shouldn't be that common. And for the merchant to "forget" to charge extra for more powerful scrolls or "mistakenly" give them out just isn't going to happen without DM collusion.

If I had a player tell me that *phantom armor* could be cast on the inside of a robe because the spell description doesn't require it to be visible, I'd say that the spell may be cast in that way, but the "armor" would still be visible on the robe's outside, since the spell description doesn't prohibit that, either! (The illusion is of a suit of armor of normal thickness, and surely the outer "surface" of it would be one armor-thickness distant from the robe's inside, and thus be visible.)

There is a simple solution, though: Start your magic-user character as a dual-classed (*Players Handbook*, page 33) 1st-level magic-user, formerly a 1st-level fighter. This gives the benefit of good hit points, and the magic-user can use fighters' armor and weapons. Armor cannot be worn during spell-casting (meaning in practice that the magic-user is going to wait until running out of spells before wearing the armor), and the weapons will never be used more skillfully than 1st-level fighter ability (by 6th level, the magic-user will do better with a magic-user's weapon).

Kenneth Arromdee
Ventnor NJ

In response to the letter by Elisabeth Atwood (issue #129): Spells do not require just one page each. In order to meet the specifications given on page 79 of *Unearthed Arcana*, the following dimensions can be extrapolated: A standard spell book would have 72 pages; a traveling book would have 18. Each cantrip would require two pages; 1st-3rd level spells, three pages; 4th-6th level spells, four pages; and, 7th-9th level spells, nine pages. These numbers agree quite nicely with the figures given in *Unearthed Arcana*. These pages would include a cover page for each spell, 1-3 pages of casting instructions, and 1-5 pages of additional notes and theory.

Brian Habing
Rockford IL

I am writing in response to Elisabeth Atwood's letter in issue #129. First, I don't think that vellum was or is an eighth of an inch thick. I

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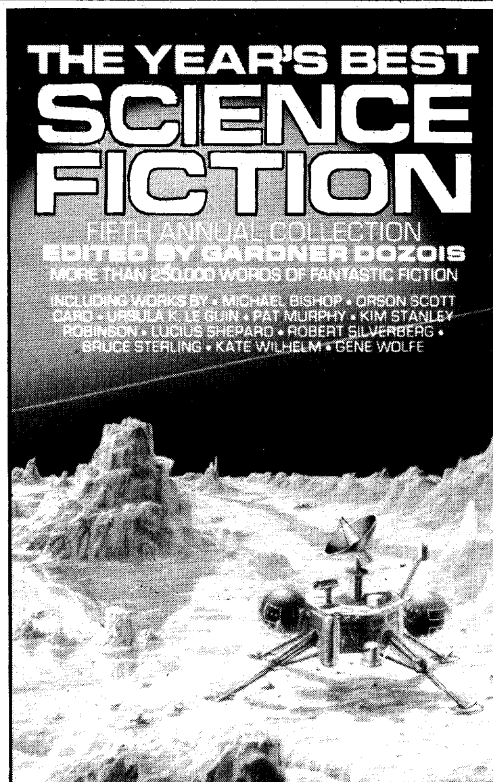
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think it is more realistic to say that it is as thick as the cover of a paperback novel (1/100th of an inch was the measure I got from my mom's romance novels), which gives a maximum of 1,200 pages, excluding cover. "1,200 pages?" you say. "What would a magic-user write on 1,200 pages?" One page per spell may seem realistic for lower-level spells (1-3), but as spells increase in power, so do they increase in complexity and therefore may require more than one page to write down.

Second, who said spell books contained only spells? Magic-users do lots of research taking lots of notes. How better to keep track of these notes than by keeping them in your spell book? Notes, maps, and maybe even a diary may be kept in a spell book (although not mixed with the spells).

Third, the cover can range anywhere from a piece of thick leather to a thin piece of metal covered by several layers of leather and cloth. A wise magic-user would devise a way to lock his spell book with a mechanical lock in addition to any magical protection it may have.

It's not impossible to conceive of a 6" -thick book - just difficult.

Randy Smith
Kingsville MO

In response to Elisabeth Atwood's letter in issue #129, let's consider the cover of the spell book itself. Dragon hide or some other strong leather is required. I don't have an exact knowledge of the consistency of such hide, but in my campaign I allow the softest part of such hide to be used for the construction of spell books, as the rest of the skin is so tough as to be unworkable. The softest skin is on the stomach and is at least an inch and a half thick.

Now for the paper. I only let PCs write on one side of a piece of vellum. I may be wrong, but I can't find any rule that states that a spell must fit on one page. We could possibly tie the length of the written spell to the casting time. While this seems like an ideal method to me, the designers generally opted to lump the length of spells in groups of three levels. If we accept Elisabeth's view on the thickness of vellum and my view on having multiple pages per spell, then add to this a thick hide, we come up with a book that could quite conceivably be 6" thick. There are such thick books around, mostly Bibles; I saw one of these large volumes on display in Boston's Old North Church museum.

While the figures for book size described in *Unearthed Arcana* may seem a little big, consider that the magic-user must constantly study

these volumes and will probably not write using microscopic letters and glyphs. I estimate the size of a written character to be at least a half an inch. This would require a book of large size, or else it would be a foot thick.

Let's turn to the point of transporting spell books. A magic-user should only transport a spell book when he finds one. A person would have to be crazy to adventure with his only spell book when you consider that it is his livelihood. If he loses it, he's out of business. DMs are familiar with how well a +2 book saves against acid, lightning, fireball, or *disintegrate*. As a player, I wouldn't want to give the DM any more chances to get at my PC's books than are absolutely necessary. That's what traveling spell books are for.

Wayne Straiton
New Fairfield CT

I would like to address several matters in the magic-user debate again raging in the "Forum."

First, I am forced to reject Mr. Burck's criticism (issue #129) of my letter on spell books (issue #123). *Unearthed Arcana* describes spell-book construction in good detail on page 79. It is apparent by inspection that the heavier materials in standard books make for a more rugged tome, as indicated by its saving-throw bonus, while the traveling book's "less is more" approach yields a higher relative capacity. The dimensions given by *Unearthed Arcana*, however, indicate that traveling books have the best of both worlds.

While our intrepid invoker might like a more rugged traveling book, adding enough armor to make it as rugged as a standard book would negate the high relative capacity which is the whole point of traveling books. If light, non-bulky armor could be had for traveling books, Mr. Wizard would likely use it beneath the decorative trappings of his standard books as well, their sheltered lives notwithstanding. This brings us back to square one.

(As for cantrip capacity, I could defend any of five ratios. The preferred ratio is strictly a matter of taste.)

Second, players who want sword-swinging sorcerers need merely play an elfen fighter/magic-user. True, the jolly old elf must stop at 11th level (give or take a couple), but how many campaigns run long enough for that to become a serious problem?

Third, I did not find the problem of spells learnable vs. intelligence to be a problem at all. Noting that *Unearthed Arcana* swelled the spell list by about 25% at most spell levels, I merely

increased the maximum spells learnable by 25% across the board, rounding fractions up. This allowed existing characters to learn some of the new spells without discarding old ones. Also, with these expanded limits, allowing unlimited selection to characters with 19 intelligence causes a significant discrepancy only for first-level spells.

Finally, I have modified the memorization rules in my campaign with good results. I require spell-casters of any class to declare in advance those spells memorized more than once. Thus, a 5th-level magic-user with four first-level spells could cast *magic missile* once without prior notice. To cast it again, he would have had to declare advance that he had memorized it twice and so had but two discretionary slots remaining. This stricture prevented overspecialization, while the discretionary slots led to a greater role for the less-used spells.

Eric Krein
Lakewood CO

John Kean overlooked the potential of the spell *simulacrum* his otherwise excellent review of long-duration spells in issue #130. Kean favors a combination of *polymorph other* and *charm monster* to the use of *simulacrum*, unless specific knowledge belonging to the original creature copied is needed.

What he overlooks is the fact that all *polymorphed* creatures have hit dice, not levels. A frog *polymorphed* into Elminster the Arch-Mage is just an old man with the hit dice of a frog. A simulacrum of Elminster would be a multilevel magic-user with at least 51% of the man's hit points. There is also no risk that a *charm* will wear off (simulacrums obey their creators, and they can be made to duplicate charm-resistant creatures - an unsafe practice using Kean's method).

Incidentally, you can use *simulacrum* to get information from a captured enemy by making a simulacrum of the foe and pumping its mind. There is a nasty way to get around the 65% memory-transfer limit: Make a simulacrum of a doppelganger. Its ability to completely read someone's mind is duplicated in the simulacrum, and you just have to copy the person you want to question. It doesn't have to kill the victim to get its information, and could stand by the victim for a few minutes (invisibly, if possible) to get the information. A fighter/magic-user of mine did this to a drow high priestess not too long ago. Not only did I get the information about her tribal defenses so the drow could be wiped out, but I got the true names of four demons, two devils, and a charonadaemon that the high priestess could summon. Not bad.

Theresa Mac Donnelly
Long Beach CA

In his article "The Faces of Magic" (issue #130), John Kean forgot to mention that the *spider climb* spell (MU1) is most useful for wizards acting as thieves; not only does it enable them to climb walls, but it also allows them to pick pockets by creating glue on their hands, in hopes that items under 50 gp of weight will stick to them.

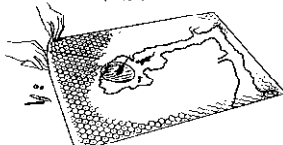
Also unmentioned was the fact that the *polymorph any object* spell (MU8) is the *ultimate* way to pick a lock or remove a trap. It can even allow the wizard to turn some rock or vermin into a trap, then claim to have "located" it.

Amit Izhar
Kiron, Israel

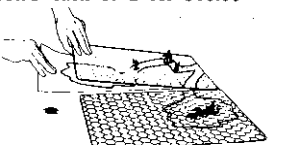
(continued on page 42)

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The Ecology of the Cave Fisher

Humans are its favorite catch

Arlach cursed as the flickering torch stub burned his fingers. He dropped it on the cavern floor and lit a new one from the dying flames. It was just one more annoyance on this wretched adventure.

He checked his remaining torches. Three left. He had spent an entire day exploring these tunnels, and he had found nothing but animal droppings and torch stubs — many, many torch stubs. These caverns were well explored, indeed. He could imagine the jeering laughter he would hear if he came out empty handed. But he would show them! He would show them all!

He had to, now.

Arlach sat down heavily on a nearby rock and pulled the map from his pouch. The Caverns of Gold Light, he read at the top. A bitter joke. Seventy gold autorachs just for a copy of this damned thing. But the map's name had promised treasure beyond all imagining. He had spent the last of his inheritance on this accursed map and the equipment to make the journey: his armor, horse, sword, torches, food, and waterskins. But everything had gone wrong from the very beginning. His armor rusted, his horse went lame, and half of his food rotted before he even reached the little village near these caverns. The only real shop in the whole hamlet was the stable, though it was full of fine horses for decent prices. Arlach decided to buy one when he finally found the treasure, when he could laugh in the face of the innkeeper just as the innkeeper had laughed in Arlach's.

"Perchance, could you direct me to the Caverns of Gold Light?" Arlach had asked him, knowing no better.

The innkeeper had roared with mirth. "No, can't say that I've ever heard of them! Unless you mean the Caverns of *Cold* Light, eh?" The entire tavern had joined the innkeeper in his laughter. Arlach's face reddened at the memory.

Arlach cursed and kicked at a patch of the slightly luminous fungus that grew all along the cavern walls, giving the place its true name. Without wanting to do so, Arlach looked closely at the map once again and saw where someone had altered the letter "C" to make it appear to be a "G." Sucker bait. He had been a fool not to have seen it before he'd started out, but he couldn't back out now. There was nothing left to do. Warily, he clambered to his feet and began walking down the tunnel.

There, what was that? Arlach peered ahead into the dimly lit darkness. Was that a glint of gold up ahead? His depression forgotten, Arlach hurried forward and dropped to his knees in front of a pile of equipment and armor. He pawed through it. The gold was a brass buckle. Nothing of value here but three silver denari — and a leatherbound book. Arlach held the torch high in one hand and opened the book with the other. The script was surprisingly large and sloppy, but it was literate. A diary . . . He flipped to the last entry.

I now write this testament not for my own salvation, but as a warning to others who come this way. If you find this book,



take it out with you. You are in the gravest danger.

I have spent three days, as nearly as I can determine, in this sunless dungeon. In that time I have learned much of the creature that holds me prey — a cave fisher. I have heard little more than tavern rumors of these creatures. What I have heard gives me little hope; what I have seen gives me less.

There are two of these creatures: one that holds me and another on the far wall. The one that has me also captured Gastron and Marb; the one across the tunnel caught nimble Desell. Almost as soon as we were snared, Marb was butchered and eaten. His armor was stripped away like a corn husk by the monster's claws while he struggled and screamed, then it cut off his limbs and are him in pieces, devouring even his bones. The other fisher consumed Desell at the same rime, his shrieks of agony ringing in my ears. The fisher that caught me left myself and Gastron in its strands, securing us to the ledge on



either side of it. By chance, it left one of my arms free. It does me little good. Although I retained my dagger, I cannot cut through the strands. I can at least write this message by this living light.

Many long hours after our capture, the creature devoured Gastron. First, the monster dissolved his bindings with a liquid discharged through its snout. Gastron attempted to defend himself, but the creature dismembered my friend with the same ease as it had Marb. I watched him die. I know that I am cursed to be the last.

You who read this beware: Make no sound as you leave this area. I have discovered that the creature is blind. The great membranes that appear to be the cave fisher's eyes are actually ears. If I move my free arm as if to throw something at the creature, it makes no response — yet my pen scratches on this page agitate it. Were I to rap my knuckles on the ledge, I fear it would attack me. The one across the tunnel seems able to unerringly capture bats; perhaps it can hear the high-

pitched cries they are reported by wizards to make.

I have noticed that these fishers have piled the gear from my dead comrades beneath them in the tunnel, as if they realize that such materials will attract prey. This indicates a greater intelligence than I have heard rumored of them, although it may simply be coincidence.

The last matter I must relay to you involves the possibility of escape. When Gastron was fighting the creature, he scored a blow on its head. The blood that dripped down fell upon his remaining bonds and dissol—

Arlach cursed as a glowing spark from the torch landed on his fingers. The torch dropped from his hand, hit the ground, and went out. Complete darkness fell. Continuing to swear, Arlach felt for his pack and began to rummage for his flint and tinder. He never felt the strand fall across his back until, with a startled cry, he was snatched off of his feet.

As the elf inspected the horse, the pudgy innkeeper rambled about its merits. "Yes, sir! That's one fine horse — a trifle lame, true, but that will pass in a few days. Besides, look at the price! Fifteen autorachs! You can't beat the price!"

The elf considered the offer in silence. Settling back to wait, the innkeeper reflected that maybe two days was too soon to be selling the boy's horse. But he had a buyer now, and the boy wasn't coming back. Young, cocky, treasure-happy — his kind never came back. It was not meant for regular folk to know what sorts of things lurked in caves and such. Why adventurers wanted to know, the innkeeper would never understand. Not that it mattered. Fools rushed in—

"I'll offer you eight autorachs," the elf said softly. "This poor creature is worth no more than that"

The innkeeper sighed, returning his thoughts to the matter at hand. "You drive a hard bargain, but for ten, I'll throw in an almost-new saddle. How 'bout it?"

Notes

The "eyes" of a cave fisher are actually multiple ears that allow it to capture its prey in the darkness with a high degree of accuracy. Because of this method of locating its prey, the cave fisher receives a bonus to hit when striking particularly noisy prey. Give the cave fisher a +2 bonus to hit against characters in metal armor or those who are talking. Give the fisher +1 to hit against characters performing less noisy actions such as carrying bags of coins or walking on hard ground. A thief (or an elf or halfling without metallic armor, attempting to surprise) may go unnoticed by a cave fisher if he can move silently; if he fails this roll, the cave fisher still has a -2 to hit due to the character's assumedly reduced noise. Tapping on the ground with a pole ahead of the party may induce a cave fisher to catch the pole instead (treat as AC 10).

The cave fisher's ears may hear sounds both below and above the human hearing range. Cave fishers often use this skill to catch bats flying nearby. If a cave fisher is presented with a number of different sounds associated with prey, it will fire at the loudest first; thus, it would choose an ogre in nailed boots over a nearby bare-foot halfling. Casting a *silence 15'* radius spell on a cave fisher causes it to freeze, making claw attacks at -4 to hit if it is

attacked.

When the cave fisher captures more prey than it can eat, it stores the "extras" in a manner similar to a spider's. It wraps the prey in adhesive filaments, almost always tying down all of a victim's limbs. The fisher then uses its adhesive secretions to secure the victim to a wall or ledge nearby. When the creature desires to eat, it simply dissolves the bonds of the victim and dismembers him (this can lead to some interesting rescue scenarios). The cave fisher can survive on very little food, even a few bats a day if need be, but when there is a surplus available it can consume up to 200 lbs. of meat per day.

The filaments, the adhesive secretion, and the dissolving secretion are all discharged through the creature's proboscis. The filaments are stored in the organic winch behind the creature's head; the two secretions are stored in frontal cavities. Once removed from a cavity, the adhesive hardens within one turn. The dissolving secretion takes one round to work.

Cave fishers can live over 100 years. Once every 20 years, the female makes a high-pitched keening sound (above human or demi-human hearing) that brings all males within a 5-20 mile radius underground. The female mates with the first male to arrive, then kills him, rejecting the overtures of all others. Three days later,

she lays a group of 5-9 eggs inside her mate's body and moves to a new spot. The eggs hatch within a month, and the young live for a short time on the carcass of their father. Three weeks after they are born, the young cave fishers are half grown, and they leave to establish lairs of their own. These half-grown cave fishers do half damage and 1+1 HD, but their armor class and movement remain the same. The young cave fishers reach full growth roughly one year after they are born.

Cave-fisher eggs 10 days old or less are greatly prized because of their high alcohol content, though they also contain other druglike substances. A single sip of the liquid found within the cave-fisher egg is enough to intoxicate a man for hours, bringing great delusions and hallucinations (save vs. poison or be confused for 1-4 hours; victim is merely *slowed* if he saves). Drinking an entire egg would be enough to kill a man (save vs. poison or die in 10-40 rounds). These fresh eggs bring 50-100 gp each in large cities. Neither the cave fisher's blood nor eggs older than 10 days have this property.

Cave-fisher lairs may have a large pile of equipment and treasure lying directly beneath them on a tunnel floor. Being semi-intelligent, the cave fisher is able to reason that this seems to attract prey, but it is not capable of more detailed planning. Ω

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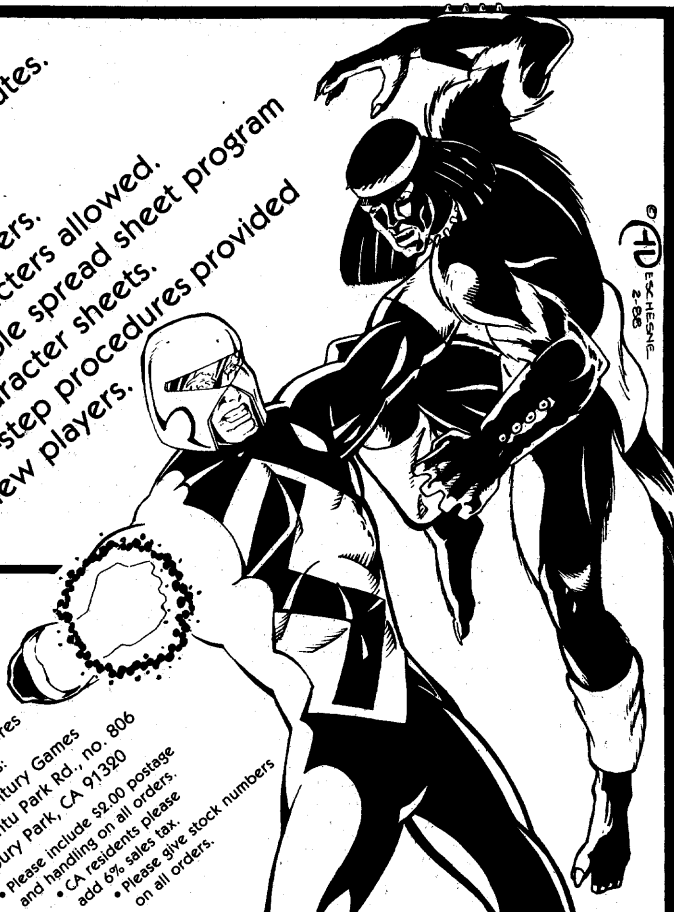
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The Dragon's Bestiary

Tibbit's Thief-Acrobat Abilities

Skill	Ability
Pick pockets	50%
Open locks	42%
Find/remove traps	40%
Move silently	90%*
Hide in shadows	75%*
Hear noise	95%*
Climb walls	90%
Read languages	25%
Tightrope walking	95%
Pole vaulting	11'
High jumping	5'
Broad jumping	30'*
Tumbling:	
Attack	10%
Evasion	30%
Falling	100%*

* Special tibbit ability.

Trouble comes on little cat feet



TIBBIT (Cat-were)

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
 NO. APPEARING: 1-2 (3-12 on Pandemonium)
 ARMOR CLASS: 6
 MOVE: 15"
 HIT DICE: 2 + 8 hp
 % IN LAIR: 40%
 TREASURE TYPE: *See below*
 NO. OF ATTACKS: 2 or 1
 DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-4/1-4 or by weapon type
 SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Psionics, rear claws for 1-6/1-6*
 SPECIAL DEFENSES: *+1 or better weapon to hit, immune to falling damage, spell use, high intelligence, healing saliva, never surprised*
 MAGIC RESISTANCE: 15%
 INTELLIGENCE: *Very*
 ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic neutral (15% chaotic good)*
 SIZE: *S (3' tall in humanoid form)*
 PSIONIC ABILITY: 111-160
 Attack/Defense Modes: *B,D/All*
 LEVEL/XP VALUE: *IV/200 +3 per hp*

Tibbits are the offspring of domestic cats that have mated with wizards' black-cat familiars. About 5% of such black-furred half-breeds are cat-weres called tibbits. A tibbit has two forms: a fat but energetic domestic cat, and a small, stealthy, dark-skinned humanoid with cat ears. In either form, tibbits are roguish, mischievous creatures whose pranks often get others in trouble, usually to the tibbits' delight.

In humanoid form, a tibbit has many of the special skills of a 10th-level thief-acrobat. A tibbit never (in either form) takes damage from falling. It usually

attacks with a knife, dagger, or short sword (held two-handed) in manlike form. In cat form, it attacks with claws. If both claws successfully strike a target, the tibbit also attacks automatically with its rear claws in the same melee round. A tibbit can leap up to 30' in either form from a crouched position. Their senses of vision, smell, and hearing are so acute as to prevent surprise by attackers.

A tibbit's meow (when in cat form) allows it to *dispel magic* as a 10th-level magic-user, three times a day. Once per day, it can arch its back and generate a *mirror image*. Twice per day, a tibbit can spend one melee round licking a wound (on either itself or another tibbit), which heals 3-24 hp damage. Tibbits can never be *confused*.

Tibbits prefer comfort and luxury, though their possessions are often silly, such as cloth mice to be carried about and gnawed upon. Once in its lifetime, a tibbit may *plane shift* itself and 200 lbs. in goods to Pandemonium, where tibbits dwell in considerable numbers. Some tibbits with more beneficent attitudes remain on the Prime Material plane. These are typically found, in cat form with kindly old women whom the tibbits serve as protectors (without their mistresses' knowledge) in exchange for pampering and affection. If its mistress is attacked, a tibbit can gate in 5-50 other tibbits from Pandemonium to run rampant over the attackers (summoned tibbits return to their home plane after 30 rounds, whether their rescue was successful or not). If more than 20 tibbits are slain in one place, there is a 25% chance that the Cat Lord (*Monster Manual II*, pages 22-23) will arrive to exact vengeance on the slayers.

Tibbits are mildly psionic. All tibbits possess the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *precognition*, and *telepathic projection*, each at 10th-level mastery. Ω

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Through the Looking Glass

Photos and miniatures by Roger E. Moore



Our newest column — on the world of miniature

In Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures Through the Looking Glass, Alice reaches through a mirror and enters a land where chessmen become living beings. How many gamers who collect and paint miniatures would like the same opportunity to see their work come to life? Our mail indicates that reader interest in miniatures, both for gaming and for its own sake, is strong — and we've done something about it. Robert Bigelow is the Miniatures Events Coordinator for the 1988 GEN CON@ORIGINS™ Game Fair as well as a longtime miniatures enthusiast, and this is our newest column — about the little things in life.

What do you think about when you hear the topic of miniatures being discussed? Do you think of the bottles of paints, brushes, carrying cases, and hours of painting that are involved? Probably. Is even one figure worth the time and effort to fix it up? As anyone who has put his heart into painting a lead figure can testify: Yes! Those who like miniatures often see their favorite characters in the heroic figures they paint, and find challenge in painting the most complicated monsters. In transforming a bit of lead into a finished piece, a work of art is formed.

Many gamers don't extend their enjoyment into this part of the hobby. They allow themselves to be intimidated by the excellent painting work done by others in the field, believing they can't do such work themselves. This is often because they have not had the opportunity to learn the techniques involved. These gamers then join the growing army of collectors of unpainted "silver" figures (which is not

necessarily bad in itself) or they paint one or two figures and stop — for good.

That's why you now have this column. The thrust of "Through the Looking Glass" is to get everyone to think about miniatures, to find answers to readers' questions on the topic, and to see other points besides the work involved in painting — introducing the word "fun" to the topic. Quite a few letters have come to DRAGON Magazine expressing an interest in miniatures; we want to fill that need.

At the present time, this column will not be greatly restricted to any setting or time period. Some preference will be shown to Ancients that may be used in fantasy and Middle Ages battles, science-fiction figures, and modern-age figures depicting characters and items from World War II, ultra-modern conflict, and other modern-age settings frequently seen in role-playing games. Superhero figures and Age of Sail ships (typical of pirate campaigns) may also appear. Your own input will help refine our focus and keep us in touch with what you want to see; tell us what you want! Write to:

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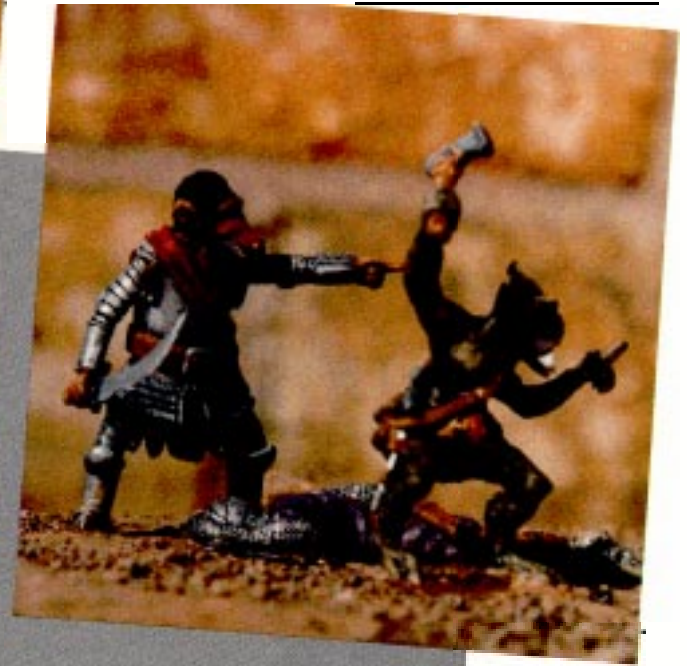
Nor will the scale of the figures reviewed be restricted, so coverage will be given to figure sizes from 15mm to 90mm. (There are some surprisingly good large-scale figures out there that would make excellent showpieces in a collection.) To cover all this and give you what you are looking for, the following things will be

presented as often as possible:

1. Miniatures reviews: Reviews draw lots of eager attention, as everyone wants to know what new figure lines are coming out. Your input on what sorts of figures you want to see is needed. The review section will also include a look at the various miniatures wargame rules and scenarios. Many readers have large groups of miniatures and would welcome the chance to use them all in one adventure, but are leery or weary of buying new rules. Information on wargame rules expands the world of miniatures collecting for all gamers, whether their interests lie in fantasy, science fiction, history, or all of the above.

2. Painting tips: This section deals with the fundamentals of painting miniatures. The column will cover all facets of the hobby, from tips on applying base coats to highlighting (even how to do the eyes on figures). People constantly ask about these points, and it is one area that I must compliment Ral Partha Enterprises on. Ral Partha is one of the few miniatures companies whose employees consistently go to conventions to paint figures and answer questions while doing it.

Painting tips are the kind of information, from both companies and painters of all walks of the hobby, that can be shared in this column. If you'd like to contribute some of your own ideas on painting, either as separate articles or as hints for the column, DRAGON Magazine would like to see them. Hints for the column can be sent directly to my address above; ideas for longer articles should be written up as proposals and sent to the editors, for their approval. Articles on painting and minia-



tures work may either be used in this column or used as stand-alone pieces. Of course, write for DRAGON Magazine's writers' guidelines before undertaking any major article work. In the United States and Canada, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope (9½" preferred) to: Writers' Guidelines, DRAGON Magazine, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Writers' Guidelines, DRAGON Magazine, TSR UK Limited, The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD, United Kingdom.

The use of color and black-and-white photography is important when discussing certain painting techniques. If you are interested in using photographs with your work, send samples of your photo work on miniatures for our evaluation. The pictures must be in *focus*. It seems funny to stress the "in focus" part, but you would be surprised at how many really good photographers take photos of figures that are out of focus. Pictures are as important as precise instructions to get your point across. Don't be put off, though, if you don't have pictures. I want to hear any ideas which may help someone, no matter how trivial they may seem to you. Questions on various painting problems are especially welcomed, as it gives me a better idea on what to cover in future columns.

3. *Setting the scenery*: This section will cover basic and advanced ideas on constructing, improving, and superdetailing scenery for miniatures in gaming and display. This could help anyone who puts together a miniatures game for other people, wants to run a special encounter that will stick in people's minds, or simply

hopes to build a diorama. Information on dioramas is often downplayed to avoid stealing attention from the figures, but good dioramas use their wealth of detail to draw attention to figures and give meaning to figure poses. What better way to remember a great role-playing scene than to bring it to life in a diorama?

In wargaming, scenery and buildings are used to force tactical issues and help plan strategy. A grove of trees, built in such a way that it hides figures, is a great ambush site in any miniatures rules systems. A building can be important as an objective or deterrent. Despite all this, many wargamers ignore the use of scenery because they don't know how to make it or don't have the time. I can't help you with time problems, but this column can cover building construction techniques, scenery blending, diorama methods, and new ways to set up better battles and more colorful dioramas.

4. *The combat zone*: What happens when an orc meets an elf? They fight, of course. Miniatures battles themselves are the main topic here: the besieging of castles and the blast of lasers against space armor. Conflicts involving large armies or small squads can be told about as in the tales of the bards. You can share your tales of miniatures battles by sending them to us, answering the questions below in a clear manner.

1. What scale did you use for your wargame conflict?

2. What types and numbers of troops appeared in each force?

3. What did the battlefield look like? Send a clearly drawn sketch and accurate descriptions of the terrain with relevant

landmarks, board size, placement of features, and other important details such as weather, ground conditions, and external influences (gods throwing lightning, for example).

4. Briefly, why did the battle occur? What were the goals of each army? What may occur if either of the parties wins? This setting of the stage will help those interested in the direction of the campaign to continue beyond the battle described.

5. Most importantly, what was the actual battle like? Tell us which units did what, which leaders led and which died, and give us a feeling for the fight (as briefly as you can!). Illustrations of maneuvers and personal input from the players would also help. If you have trouble figuring out what information is needed, good examples of miniatures warfare scenarios appear in Ral Partha's THE CHAOS WARS™ Rules According to Ral.

Of course, miniatures and game companies themselves may send in battles and scenarios, as well as suggestions for miniatures campaigns. All battles submitted will be given equal time, but well-done articles with minimum corrections needed in spelling, content, and grammar will have a better chance of being quickly printed as space permits.

We hope to give you a column packed with ideas that everyone can use to better your enjoyment of miniature figures in gaming and collecting. This column can only be as good as the contributions and feedback it receives. Let us know what you want, contribute what you can, and learn as you will.

Give Them Enough Rope!

game campaign that involved looking for a lost city in a big swamp, my character wanted to bring lots and lots of rope — about 1,000' of it, in fact. The RUNEQUEST game gives the weight and breaking strength for rope (the AD&D® game gives nothing but a price). According to the numbers given in The Avalon Hill Game Company's third-edition RUNEQUEST game's Gamemaster Book, a 30-meter rope that weighs 6 kg has a strength of 366 kg. Converting this to the D&D® game's standard 50' rope, that would mean that a 50' rope would weigh 6.7 lb. and be rated at 805 lb.

That sounds good, except that there are lots of different sizes of rope, and adventurers have uses for many of them. In addition, a quick look at a table of rope strengths would seem to contradict the RUNEQUEST game's numbers. According to *Mark's Handbook*,¹ standard fiber rope sizes start at 3/16" and go up to 4". The weight of a 50' manila rope varies in that range from 12 oz. to 219 lb., and the breaking strength varies from 450 lb. to a whopping 105,000 lb. The size closest to the RUNEQUEST game's weight of 6.7 lb. per 50' is 11/16" rope, which has a breaking strength of 4,400 lb.

Fiber rope is usually made out of plant fibers; hemp, jute, and manila are the most common. These ropes are cheap, strong, and relatively durable. The biggest problems with rope are rotting and simple wear.

The strength of rope is its breaking strength. You have to understand that a rope with a 1,000-lb. breaking point breaks if you try to lift 1,000 lb. with it. Now, suppose you try to lift 980 lb. with it. It's just possible, if you apply force very gently to the rope. Jerk on that rope with more than 20 lb. of force, and the rope breaks.

In practice, ropes are used in situations in which jolts, weights that fall before they run out of slack, and other sudden loads are routine. To allow for this, ropes should only be subjected to forces at most only

What can you do with 50' of rope?

My characters have always used a lot of rope. They've used it to build bridges, lower people into chasms, climb mountains, hog-tie orcs, tether mules, and create traps. The creative uses of rope are

nearly endless, but most game systems barely mention it. How much does it weigh? How much can it lift? Does it come in decorator colors?

Once, in a Chaosium's RUNEQUEST®

Properties of Rope²

Diameter in inches	Pounds per 50'	Breaking strength (lb.)	Useful strength (lb.)	D&D® game	Cost per 50' AD&D® game	RUNEQUEST® game
3/16	0.75	450	110	1 sp	2 cp	5 p
1/4	1	600	150	2 sp	3 cp	7 p
3/8	2	1,350	340	3 sp	6 cp	14 p
1/2	4	2,650	660	6 sp	12 cp	27 p
11/16	7	4,400	1,100	10 sp	20 cp	45 p
3/4	8	5,400	1,350	12 sp	25 cp	55 p
1	14	9,000	2,250	2 gp	4 sp	90 p
1 1/2	30	18,500	4,600	4 gp	8 sp	180 p
2	50	31,000	7,750	8 gp	15 sp	340 p
3	120	64,000	16,000	15 gp	30 sp	675 p
4	220	105,000	26,000	25 gp	50 sp	110 p

Monetary values for the D&D and AD&D games are in copper pieces (cp), silver pieces (sp), and gold pieces (gp). Values in the RUNEQUEST game are in pennies (p).

one-quarter of their breaking strength.

Going back and applying that to our 11/16" rope, the 4,400-lb. breaking strength shrinks to a 1,100-lb. working strength. Furthermore, that strength is for manila rope, which isn't available everywhere (for example, you can't grow the plant in Europe). For agava or jute ropes, the value would be 825 lb. This is very close to the RUNEQUEST game's value of 805 lb., so we know that Chaosium, Inc. did its homework here.

Still, why settle for just one type of rope? The Properties of Rope Table applies to manila rope, which is the best sort. Agava or jute ropes are two-thirds as strong as manila.

Finally, what can you do with 50' of rope? Here are a few ideas. Think about them – and make up some new uses for this most useful piece of adventuring equipment.

1. Tying horses to trees or posts.
2. Climbing and rappelling.
3. Lowering a lantern to see what's at the bottom of a shaft.
4. Lowering a kobold to see if the monster at the bottom of the shaft is hungry.
5. Creating trip lines for traps.
6. Keeping prisoners out of trouble by tying them up.
7. Lashing together stretchers for wounded characters.
8. Creating handy bridges and rope walks.
9. Going after *big* fish.
10. Winching doors and boulders out of the way.
11. Winching out supports to collapse roofs (this one's fun at parties).
12. Providing support to keep from falling out of a tree after being chased up there by a monster.
13. Knitting sweaters for giants (using spears for knitting needles, of course).
14. Making hammocks if a large piece of cloth is available.
15. Making clotheslines so you can wash everyone's smelly adventuring clothes.
16. Holding up large boulders until monsters walk under them (another favorite party trick).
17. Dragging things you don't want to have near you (like cockatrice bodies or dead rust monsters).
18. Forming rope skeins for catapults.
19. Swinging Tarzan-like across rifts.
20. Hanging particularly obnoxious enemies.

And by the way – ropes are not available in decorator colors except in elven lands.

Footnotes

1. Lionel Simon, ed. *Mark's Standard Handbook for Mechanical Engineers, Eighth Edition*. McGraw-Hill Books (New York, 1978), pages 6-152 and 8-93.
2. Information for this table was taken from *Mark's Standard Handbook for Mechanical Engineers*, page 8-93.

Illustration by Jim Roslof



Bazaar of the Bizarre

Nock pull, aim, hold — and fire!



In DRAGON® issues #127 and #131, we presented an assortment of bows, cross-bows, quivers, and nonmagical arrows for eagle-eyed archers. This month, we present magical arrows for all occasions. From 1-4 of each sort of arrow may be found in a treasure hoard, unless otherwise stated. All arrows that hit their targets are destroyed; those that miss are 50% likely to be broken or otherwise rendered useless, though unbroken arrows may be collected and reused with their powers intact. If an arrow misses its target, the DM must determine where the arrow finally does strike, and should consider the resulting effects.

Arrow of aggravation

This cursed arrow infuriates any being it hits, granting its victim a bonus of +2 on "to hit" and damage rolls as well as on saving throws, but causing the victim to lose one point of armor class. These effects last for 1-6 turns, during which time the target will do everything in its power to slay the archer. The arrow does no damage at all to its victim.

XP Value: Nil
GP Value: 100

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of antimagic

This magical arrow has a +2 bonus to hit but causes no damage if the target is struck. Instead, the arrow automatically negates all magic within a 10' radius of the target for 3-30 rounds. (If the arrow misses its target, the area of effect is centered on the first thing the arrow hits.) All magical items in the area of effect, except

for artifacts and relics, are rendered inert for the duration of the arrow's effect. All spells cast by, on, and around the target are *dispelled*, regardless of the caster's level. Illusions of all sorts are likewise nullified. Spell-casters are also unable to cast any spells for the duration of the effect of this arrow.

Note that the arrow's effect causes the target, and the area of effect around it, to be rendered immune to magic. Therefore, *fireballs*, *magic missiles*, and the like will not cause any damage to the target, nor to anyone within 10'. Only one such arrow may be found at a time.

XP Value: 60

GP Value: 360

Created by: Marc Andreessen

Arrow of blinding

When this arrow hits a target, it explodes in a flash of light that blinds everyone within 60' of the point of impact for 2-12 turns unless a saving throw vs. breath weapon is made. The archer must be outside the area of effect to avoid the blinding effects.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of bow-breaking

This arrow breaks any bow used to fire it, unless the bow makes a successful saving throw vs. crushing blow at -4.

XP Value: Nil

GP Value: 100

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of burning

All creatures are considered to be AC 10 against this arrow, although creatures with a high dexterity receive their armor-class bonus. With any successful "to hit" roll, the arrow engulfs the target in a flaming shroud that does 4-24 hp damage (no save), affecting only the victim and a 1' radius around him for one round. Creatures that are touching the target when the arrow strikes may make a saving throw vs. spells for half damage. All equipment on the victim must save vs. magical fire at -2. An *arrow of burning* may be used to burn through an average-sized dungeon door in 2-5 rounds.

XP Value: 100

GP Value: 600

Created by: David Pemberton

Arrow of clairaudience

This arrow gives the archer the ability to hear sounds within range of the arrow's location. As with the *arrow of clairvoyance* that follows, this arrow is activated by saying the command word ("Listen!") and shooting the arrow. The archer is then able to hear sounds from the arrow's location by covering his ears and concentrating. Sounds within a 15' radius around the arrow may be heard in this manner. This arrow can "hear" anything louder than regular breathing. The range of the

clairaudience is 240 yards, and its duration (once the arrow is fired) is six turns.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of clairvoyance

This arrow gives its user the ability to see an area from the location of the arrow. This field of view is equal to the archer's normal field, and is activated by sounding the command word ("Vision!") and firing the arrow. The archer is then able to see the area in front of the arrowhead by closing his eyes and concentrating. Normal restrictions for distance of vision apply with this magical arrow. In addition to normal vision, the arrow grants infravision and ultravision, both of which are limited to a 10' radius around the arrow's location. The range of the *clairvoyance* is 240 yards, and its duration (once the arrow is fired) is six turns.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of disintegration

This arrow is +1 to hit but has -4 on its saving throws. The arrow's effect is the same as the sixth-level magic-user spell *disintegrate*, except that it does not affect targets of a magical nature. The effects of the arrow also differ from the spell in that only nonliving material up to 20 cubic feet in volume may be obliterated. If the arrow misses its target and does not *disintegrate* anything, the arrow turns to dust. If a living victim is struck by this arrow, the victim takes normal damage (1-6 hp) but can only be healed by magical spells, potions, or powers; normal healing is ineffective.

The *arrow of disintegration* is made from a long shaft of oak and an arrowhead made of lodestone. The flights are usually made from the feathers of rare birds. Often, magical words are inscribed on the shaft of the arrow; these must be repeated before the arrow is fired. Only one such arrow may be found at a time.

XP Value: 60

GP Value: 360

Created by: Jamil Alam

Arrow of distance

When shot, this arrow has a range equal to twice that of a normal arrow, depending upon the type of bow from which the arrow is fired. This extended range does not, however, affect distances of short and medium range, so all distances beyond normal are considered long range. The arrow also has a +1 bonus to hit and damage.

XP Value: 25

GP Value: 150

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of explosions

When nocked into a bow, this arrow explodes into a 6-HD *fireball* (as if cast by

a 6th-level magic-user). The archer gains no saving throw against this effect, and the personal possessions he carries must save vs. *fireball* at -4.

XP Value: Nil

GP Value: 500

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of faerie fire

This arrow covers any man-size or smaller creature it hits in *faerie fire*, as per the first-level druid spell of the same name. The spell lasts 12 rounds. Normal damage is also done to the victim.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of fire

This arrow bursts into flame immediately after it is shot. An *arrow of fire* does normal arrow damage plus 1-6 hp fire damage to any creature it hits. All creatures native to the plane of Elemental Fire are immune to the fire damage, but cold-dwelling creatures take +2 hp damage from this arrow. Any clothing worn by the victim must make a saving throw vs. normal fire or be destroyed.

XP Value: 40

GP Value: 240

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of force

This arrow causes the creature struck to make a saving throw vs. spells at -3. If the save is unsuccessful, the creature is encased in a *forcecage* for 3 turns (see the seventh-level magic-user spell for details). Due to its great degree of power, the *arrow of force* provides a -3 penalty on its "to hit" roll. No damage is done to the victim.

XP Value: 80

GP Value: 480

Created by: Alan Grimes

Arrow of harm

This arrow does double normal damage to one specified type of creature. If used on any creature other than that specified for the arrow's use, normal damage is done to the target. The following table lists the most basic types of creatures for which *arrows of harm* are created. At the DM's discretion, other monsters and demihuman races may be added.

1d8	Creature type
1	Aquatic creatures
2	Daemons, demons, and devils
3	Demihumans
4	Dragons
5	Elementals
6	Giants
7	Lycanthropes
8	Undead

XP Value: 80

GP Value: 480

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of holding

This mystical arrow is inscribed with strange runes. When it hits its target, the target must make a saving throw vs. spells or freeze as if affected by a *hold* spell. This effect lasts for 2-8 melee rounds. The victim takes no other damage.

XP Value: 50

GP Value: 300

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of lightning

This arrow has a +2 bonus to hit and causes 1-6 hp damage, plus 20 hp electrical damage. When the arrow hits, it emits a large and bright flash of light for a split second (long enough to light up a dungeon corridor). Anyone touching the victim suffers 1-10 hp electrical damage. The arrow is consumed in the lightning charge. If the arrow misses its intended target, it discharges all of its electrical energy upon hitting the ground (or any other solid object, such as a dungeon wall).

XP Value: 100

GP Value: 600

Created by: Jon Deiss

Arrow +3, lycanthrope slayer

This silver-tipped arrow not only gives a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls, but also slays any lycanthrope it strikes, in beast or human form, unless the creature struck makes a saving throw vs. death magic. A successful saving throw causes the victim to take double damage from the arrow.

XP Value: 200

GP Value: 1,200

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of misdirection

This arrow is similar to an *arrow of direction* (*Dungeon Masters Guide*, page 137); the difference is that this cursed arrow tells the wrong direction.

XP Value: Nil

GP Value: 100

Created by: Dan Moynihan

Arrow of multiplicity

For every 30' this arrow travels, another arrow appears in flight alongside the original arrow (for a total of up to 10 arrows). Also, each arrow receives an individual "to hit" roll with no bonuses added to each roll. For example, a fighter fires one of these arrows from a bow +3. The arrow travels a distance of 65'. Three arrows will reach the target, all of them having normal "to hit" chances (counting none from the magical bow).

XP Value: 100

GP Value: 600

Created by: Alan Grimes

Arrow of penetration

This magical arrow has no "to hit" or damage bonuses. Once fired from a bow, however, an *arrow of penetration* keeps going, phasing through any nonliving material in its path, until it reaches its

maximum range or strikes a living object. Against this arrow, normal armor and shields are ignored in the determination of armor class. Magical armor and shields improve the armor class of the victim by one for each +1 of protection they provide, as do *rings* and *cloaks of protection*; *bracers of defense*, however, are useless. Bonuses for cover and concealment, unless made of living material, are ignored. Creatures totally hidden from view are treated as invisible (-4 to hit them). Magical protections and armor-class adjustments for high dexterity still apply. The armor class of creatures with natural armor remains unaffected.

XP Value: 50

GP Value: 300

Created by: Robert Benedetti

Arrow of perseverance

Once shot, this arrow goes after its target regardless of range, as long as the target is within view. The arrow, however, gains a cumulative -1 to hit for every 100 yards beyond its maximum range that it travels. Once the arrow gains a total of a -10 penalty to hit, it vanishes. The arrow has a +2 bonus to damage.

XP Value: 50

GP Value: 300

Created by: Alan Grimes

Arrow of piercing

The target of this missile must save vs. petrification or lose all protection provided by armor and hide. The subject has AC 10 with regards to this missile attack if the saving throw is failed, and the arrow then does maximum damage (6 hp, plus the strength bonuses of the archer if applicable). The arrow does normal damage-if the victim makes his saving throw.

XP Value: 50

GP Value: 300

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of polymorphing

An *arrow of polymorphing* is as rare as an *arrow of slaying*, and is thus infrequently encountered. This arrow is +3 to

hit but not to damage. Besides taking normal damage from being hit, a creature struck by an *arrow of polymorphing* must save vs. spells. If successful, nothing further occurs. If the the creature fails to save, it is *polymorphed* into another form. Only one arrow of this type may be found at a time.

There are six different kinds of *arrows of polymorphing*; when found, a random roll is required to determine the arrow type. Note that the only creatures affected by *arrows of polymorphing* are those that are susceptible to the spell *polymorph other*. *Arrows of polymorphing* are classified according to the form into which they change the recipient. The six different arrow types are as follows:

1d6 Form assumed

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1 | Stone |
| 2 | Monster |
| 3 | Ice |
| 4 | Small animal |
| 5 | Paper |
| 6 | Glass |

Stone: A creature hit by an arrow of this type becomes *petrified* as if struck by a cockatrice. The duration of the *petrification* is permanent, although spells such as *stone to flesh* or *limited wish* may be used to reverse the effects of the arrow.

Monster: This arrow *polymorphs* the victim into a randomly determined monster. The DM may either devise a table of monsters of his own or employ the suggested monster types shown below. If the victim's personality is lost, the monster attacks all nearby creatures until it is killed or until there is nothing left for it to fight. The effects last until dispelled. The suggested monster types are as follows:

1d6 Monster

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Werewolf |
| 2 | Medusa |
| 3 | Ogre |
| 4 | Troll |
| 5 | Owlbear |
| 6 | Five-headed hydra |

Ice: This is perhaps the most deadly of the various types of *arrows of polymorphing*. A creature hit by one of these arrows is instantly transformed into a statue of solid ice. Unless the statue is kept at a temperature below freezing, it will melt away, completely destroying the *polymorphed* creature in the process. The ice statue lasts for as many rounds as the target creature has hit points. If the ice form is undone by a *dispel magic* spell (against 12th-level magic use) or by other magical means, the victim is restored to life if a *system shock* roll is made; otherwise, the victim reappears, but is dead. For every round spent in the ice form, the victim loses 1 hp from the effects of melting; thus, a fighter restored to life after 12 rounds of being in ice form will have lost 12 hp.

Small animal: An arrow of this sort transforms the creature it hits into a small, harmless animal such as a mouse (AC 8; MV 6"; HD ¼; hp 1; #AT nil). This form lasts until dispelled.

Paper: This type of arrow reduces the individual it hits to a two-dimensional paper replica of itself. This "paper doll" is life-size and is highly flammable. The duration of this effect is only 4-24 turns. After this time has expired and if the paper has not been destroyed, the individual returns to normal. These paper dolls may be folded and carried without injury to the *polymorphed* individual (unless the effect expires, which causes the individual to return to his normal size and shape).

Glass: This final arrow type turns a creature it hits to solid glass. The effects of this arrow are permanent and may only be reversed with a *stone to flesh* or similar spell. A *glassteel* spell will preserve the victim from most harm until further aid can be rendered, but the spell must be removed before the victim is fully restored by other means.

XP Value: 225

GP Value: 1,350

Created by: John M. Boback

Arrow of pursuit

The *arrow of pursuit* is +3 to hit and damage. When shot from a bow, the arrow unerringly seeks out the living being with the greatest number of hit points within its range, then heads for that being - no matter which target was actually aimed for. In addition, if the arrow misses on its first pass, it returns on the following round after a long curved flight and attempts to hit the target a second time, only with a +2 bonus to hit and damage. If the second pass misses, it tries one last time on the following round with a +1 to hit and damage. If it fails then, it crashes into the earth and is destroyed. This arrow has a range of three miles, though it does not often need to follow its target that far.



The *arrow of pursuit* is very useful when a character wants to pick off a group leader who is moving about in an

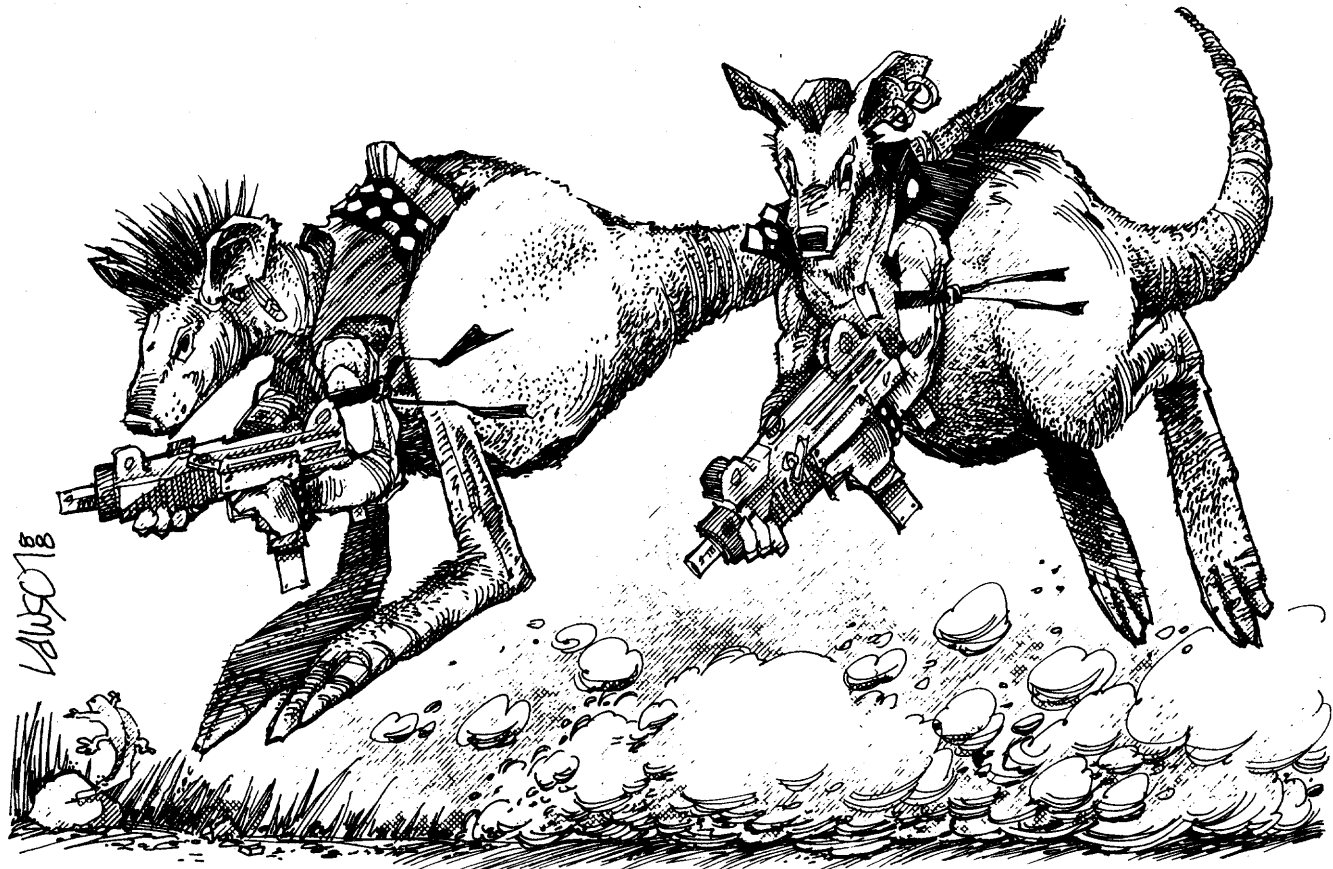
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It is Australia, generations after nuclear war has ravaged the Earth. Human-kind clings to survival by a thread.

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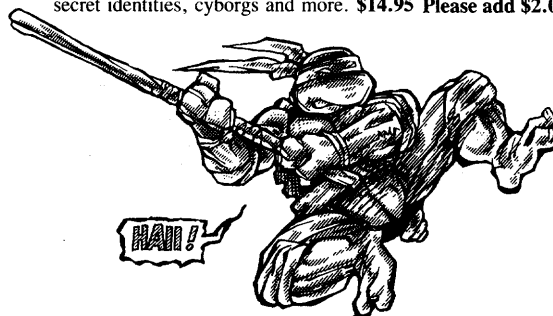
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army, protected by troops. In this case, the arrow winds its way in and out of the troops until it hits its target. Only one such arrow may be found at a time.

XP Value: 85

GP Value: 500

Created by: Jon Deiss and Jamil Alam

Arrow of returning

Once shot, this arrow will return to the archer's quiver after an unsuccessful attempt to strike its target has been made. An arrow of *returning* is +1 to hit and damage. It returns in the segment of a round following that in which it was fired. For example, a ranger fires an arrow of *returning* at a dragon. Its "to hit" roll is not high enough to damage the dragon, so the arrow returns to the ranger's quiver, where it can be used again as the ranger's very next shot.

XP Value: 40

GP Value: 240

Created by: Alan Grimes

Arrow of rock piercing

This arrow is made of a special, magical metal. When used by an archer of at least 16 strength, this missile automatically hits its intended target — which is a specific point of nonliving rock, into which the arrow sinks, leaving around 6" of the rear of its shaft exposed. A small steel ring is set into the rear of this arrow, to which can be tied a thin line or cord. If an archer with an *arrow of piercing* encounters a deep chasm with no way across, he needs only to tie a rope to the end of the arrow and shoot the arrow at the intended target. The arrow automatically hits its target dead center, and the archer can now cross the chasm. If a character of less strength attempts to fire this arrow; the arrow bounces off the rocky surfaces at which it is fired.

The *arrow of piercing* is reusable; in order to retrieve the arrow, the archer must simply grasp the arrow firmly with both hands and pull it from its target. The arrow will then slide out if an *open doors* roll is made. If the roll is failed, another attempt may be made one turn later.

This arrow actually bounces off any fleshy creature at which it is fired (doing no damage), but it acts as an *arrow +5* against any live or animated target composed of stone (e.g., stone golem, crysmal, etc.). Additionally, it will instantly slay any creature that has been *petrified* (treat stone as AC 0) if a saving throw vs. death magic is failed; a successful save means only double damage.

XP Value: 50

GP Value: 300

Created by: Robert M. Frame

Arrow of roping

When fired, this magical arrow leaves a smoky brown trail through its entire arc of flight. The trail solidifies into a solid

brown rope when the arrow strikes its target, bonding always to the bow that fired it. The arrow always bonds to any type of wood it strikes, and has a 70% chance of penetrating and bonding to stone or metal. Once bonded, the arrow will never pull free (unless excessive weight is applied), and will only bend if a successful *bend bars* roll is made. The rope can support up to 500 lbs. of weight at once before it breaks or the arrow pulls free (50% chance of either).

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: David Pemberton

Arrow of scent detection

This arrow allows its user the ability to smell odors from the location where the arrow lands, as per the *arrows of clairaudience* and *clairvoyance*. This ability is activated by sounding the command word ("Scent!") and shooting the arrow. The archer can then smell odors around the arrow's location by plugging his nose and inhaling. In so doing, the archer is able to breathe normally, inhaling air from the arrow's location. One major drawback of this arrow's use is that poisonous and harmful gases and such may be inhaled in this manner, affecting the archer as if he were breathing the gases normally. If the arrow is entirely buried in water or mud, the arrow's user will cough and choke for one round, being unable for that time to breathe, fight, move, or defend himself. This effect wears off immediately afterwards, leaving the archer no worse for the experience. Odors within 30' of the arrow may be so sensed. Few archers use this arrow, though some rangers and scouts have used it to detect monsters with an especially strong or distinctive scent.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Mark DeForest

Arrow of screaming

When this missile is fired, it emits an ear-shattering scream that deafens all beings within 30' of its flight path for 3-6 rounds (including the archer, unless protected as mentioned below). In addition, those affected drop everything and cover their ears during the melee round in which the arrow is in flight. Furthermore, spell-casters lose their concentration, so all spells to be cast during this time are lost. There is a 15% chance that a set of ear plugs are found with these arrows, to protect the archer from an arrow's effects.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Dan Snuffin

Arrow of Set

At first glance, this arrow appears to be an ordinary arrow. Closer examination reveals the arrowhead to be made of bone, carved to resemble the head of a serpent. An *arrow of Set* is +1 to hit and damage. Anyone hit by one of these arrows must,

save vs. poison at -1 or die within 1-4 rounds. A character who makes his saving throw takes 2-12 hp damage from the venom in addition to the damage taken when hit. The arrowhead disintegrates on impact.

Making an *arrow of Set* requires bone from a poisonous snake (for the arrowhead) plus the snake's venom (in which to steep the arrowhead). A cleric must be present to cast *poison* on the arrowhead during the enchantment. Only one such arrow may be found at a time.

XP Value: 250

GP Value: 1,500

Created by: Gregg Chamberlain

Arrow of signaling

This magical arrow has a brightly colored shaft, usually red, orange, or yellow in color. It sports a crystalline point. If used as a weapon, it does normal damage. However, if fired directly into the air to at least 100 yards over the head of the firer, it leaves a trail of glittering sparks behind it from the 100-yard height up to a height of 500 yards, regardless of the type of bow from which it was fired. When the arrow is 500 yards above the firer, the arrowhead explodes in a sphere of light 100 yards across, in the same color as was on the arrow's shaft. This ball of light is visible for many miles and lasts for 2-8 melee rounds before fading. The arrow disintegrates upon bursting.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Clark Timmins

Arrow of silence

This magical arrow is very useful indeed — especially when PCs are seeking entry to some heavily guarded fortification. Not only does this arrow hide the "twang" of the bow shot; it also silences any noise made by its target. Furthermore, any actions conducted within a 15' radius of the arrow are cloaked as if by a permanent version of the clerical spell, *silence 15' radius*. Thus, characters could toss a grappling hook over a castle wall without being heard.

XP Value: 20

GP Value: 120

Created by: Cordon R. Menzies

Arrow +5, stirge's bite

This arrow has a steel shaft and is rather large in size. When the arrow hits, it drains one ounce of its target's blood, which is then stored in a hollow compartment in the shaft. The following round, the arrow detaches itself from its victim and may be recovered later by the archer. Due to the importance of blood as an ingredient in the fabrication of scroll inks and potions, this arrow is highly prized by magic-users, clerics, and alchemists.

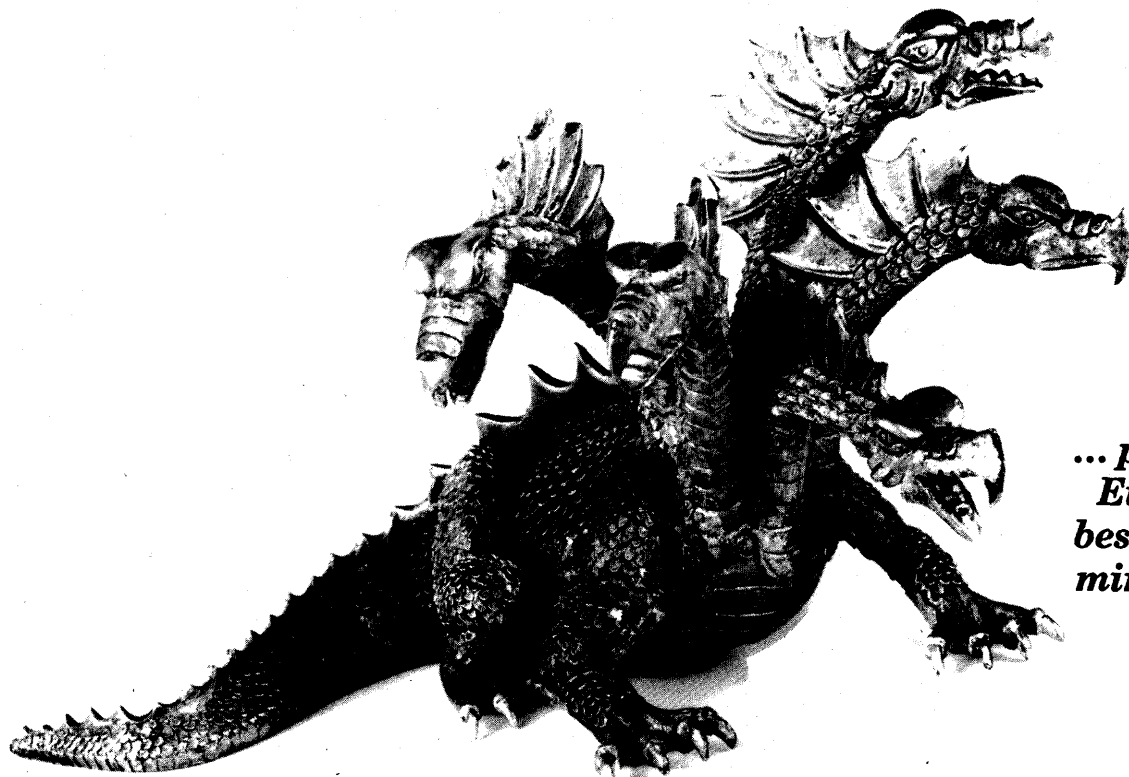
XP Value: 130

GP Value: 780

Created by: Dan Snuffin

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by Sherri Gilbert

When Game Masters Go Bad

Keeping your GM on the sunny side

10:45 P.M. Friday

"Whaddya mean, my thief is *charmed* by that magic-user? He didn't get a saving throw, and he's an elf!"

"Well . . . it's a special type of *charm*."

"He should get a saving throw! The *Player's Handbook* states that any elf has a magic resis—"

"Look, I'm the game master, and I say it's special magic, so your thief has been *charmed!*"

11:22 P.M. Friday

"Look, that was a two-ton rock that dropped from that trap. If the hit-point damage didn't kill your thief, then he's going to die in a few minutes from the weight of the rock anyway, so he's dead."

"But he has some hit points left. Maybe he found a crevice or something."

"Look, I'm running this game. The hallway is carved just right and that rock fits perfectly in a hollowed-out area that your thief happened to fall in. He took twenty-five hit points of damage, and he's dead. There's no help for him."

"You never said the hallway was strangely



12:05 A.M. Saturday

"That game was awful. I can't believe Randy killed off Franks thief just because Frank challenged that *charm* spell."

"Well, Randy isn't usually like that. Maybe it just happened that way."

"But Franks elf had been checking for traps, and Randy didn't even roll for him to find them. Randy didn't give him a chance. I think it was a vengeance plot. Those two don't get along too well anymore. This game is just going downhill."

A game master stumbles. He's the great leader of your group, the source of information and enjoyment, the deciding factor in a good game or a bad one, and he fails.

All the hours of gaming are wasted. Your character didn't get to do what you wanted, and the GM's calls and judgments were bad. You feel that the lofty game master has suddenly dropped from his pedestal. Of course, *you* would have done it differently, or so you think.

Everyone has a bad day now and then — even game masters. A bad day at work or school can ruin a game. Not enough time to prepare for a game can cause its demise. An upset stomach or too much to drink can cause many problems. In short, if a GM isn't in the mood to run a game, everyone should have the foresight to find an alternative before play even begins. In the end, a decision not to play may save time, trouble, and an ailing campaign.

Players often do not consider their game masters when that Friday-night campaign rolls around. They remember last week's great game and anticipate the next with ready dice. Everyone's excited, the munchies are spread out, and no one cares that the GM is a bit quiet and tired looking — more so than usual. The game begins, and things go bad.

Many things can affect the outcome of a game. Whenever six or more people are mixed together every week, someone is liable to do something to upset the balance of the game. The GM must, at this point, exert his position as the judge and controller of the game. He must remain neutral and keep the flow moving in the proper direction, anticipating difficult situations and carrying the game safely through them. This is a lot to ask, and even the best GMs aren't always up for it.



The following examples are formulated from real experiences. If the GM tries to avoid these common mistakes, he will be guaranteed a popular campaign, happy players, and less headaches.

Of course, no one can avoid disaster forever, but perhaps a little foresight can help deal with these problems as they arise in a reasonable, fun fashion.

Every gamer has experienced a few if not many of the numerous pitfalls to game mastering. Yet through it all, there comes the thrill of running a great game and the

admiration of fellow gamers that keeps the GM plugging along, creating one more scenario, then one more, then. . .

The get-the-players syndrome

Sometimes, for whatever reason, the players gang up on their GM, who retaliates in turn. The GM will always win in this situation, but it is a Pyrrhic victory, as players may walk out on the campaign. The DM should examine his motives closely when making a difficult and unpopular call. Be sure that judgment calls are fair and honest, with all sides of the situation being examined carefully. Consult charts or tables if an outcome is questionable. Important decisions made too quickly can upset those players involved. It is much better to keep the players waiting a few moments while a decision is being made than to make a random snap judgment that could kill a character unfairly. A written note to an uninvolved player, who may have more knowledge on the topic and can help with the call, can often help the decision-making process.

Without trust in the GM, there is little reason to play, other than to waste the entire group's time. Watch for players who constantly disagree with judgment calls. Often these players are also GMs for other games; players like these are sometimes the most difficult ones to entertain.

Sometimes, too, you can have a player who is simply not a very popular or well-liked person; perhaps the person is someone strongly disliked in the group. The GM must learn to swallow his pride and prejudices, and make an effort to treat this person as he would any other member of the group. There is nothing worse than a GM who goes out of his way to maliciously attack a PC solely because of the PC's player. Players should watch for vengeful GMs and avoid them; vengeance is a childish attitude best left to the hack-and-slay types and not the true role-players.

The had judgment call

Let's face it: GMs are not walking encyclopedias, capable of providing information at a moment's notice. Part of the flair of being a good GM is the ability to make snap judgments in tight spots *and* to be fair and correct in a majority of cases. But honestly, who really knows the falling speed in feet per second of a pegasus with an arrow in its wing? In fantasy or science-fiction games, one must often rationalize a situation and come up with a logical explanation for it all. Occasionally, the GM fails his "guessing roll" when formulating a decision on a subject on which he knows very little.

Most role-playing games understand this and often include a rule that states: "The game master's decisions are final." This is a good rule to live by in the role-playing game genre. Often, however, players forget this golden rule when their characters are in trouble. In this situation, it is best for the GM to stop the game and ask the

players for some input on the situation. The GM should admit that he does not understand the difference between the effects of 50mm anti-aircraft shells and 50mm machine-gun rounds on the PCs' hovercraft. Very often someone in the group will have a bit of practical knowledge that, when shared, creates a fairer conclusion. After having an open discussion, the GM can make a decision. If the decision is still not well received, the GM should explain that the decision is final. Most mature players will accept this decision if it doesn't seem that they were the victim of an uninformed snap judgment.

Players often take a great deal of time developing their characters, and poorly made judgment calls that have serious repercussions on a character's life should not be allowed to occur. If a situation is potentially dangerous for a character, give the character the benefit of the doubt (the PCs are supposed to be special, anyway — they're adventurers). Be fair and avoid being ruthless. One must remember that any game is meant to be enjoyable, not disappointing.

The tired/upset/bored/sick GM

Many things can upset a person: chili-pepper pizza, a lost girlfriend, a torrential downpour of rain, two hours of sleep the night before, or a group of players intent on playing out every minute of a shopping expedition for supplies. When the GM feels any potentially disruptive emotions coming on, he should try to recognize the source of these feelings without allowing them to interfere with the game. Keep things light and smooth, even if things go wrong — this is a *game*, after all.

Some people perform better under stress; others fall apart. Some GMs are better at judging when they are slightly tipsy, tired, and full of junk food, and others are better following several hours of meditation and complete abstinence from drink or food. The key is for the GM to know his tolerance levels and stick to them. If a GM has just had a falling-out with a best friend, and he feels the world is out to get him, it might be best to postpone the game. People may get upset, but it will pass. Suggest to the players that they run a short scenario from another system with another GM. Otherwise, they can always catch a movie. Give players adequate warning, though. Too many quick cancellations leaves a poor taste in the players' mouths — especially for those who drive 20 miles to find no game.

Another point: Be on time for the game! There is nothing more aggravating than waiting for the GM to arrive. A few minutes among friends is one thing, but an hour or so is downright impolite. Set an agreeable time for all and try to stick to it. It is this bit of responsibility to a



commitment that can help solve problems in a GM's game.

One possible solution to the GM "overload syndrome" is the substitute GM. Having another person around who is interested in running brief scenarios within the GM's campaign setting can provide a change of pace; it can also provide amusement for the GM. A brief vacation from the game can revitalize a burned-out GM and allow a chance to experience the other side of a world the group has created. If this change is to occur, one must work with the substitute in providing some information on the campaign, a few guidelines for working within the framework, and any specialized data on the current setting. One can usually plan in advance the first game or two the new GM is to judge. Thereafter, if the tired/upset/bored/sick-GM syndrome arises, the GM can turn the reins of his campaign over to another judge until the problem passes.

Another substitution that helps a long-running campaign is occasionally taking time off from the campaign. One schedule of play which seems to work best is three weeks of play followed by one week of rest. This vacation from the game delights girlfriends, boyfriends, parents, and other nongaming friends who are often left out of the GM's plans. It also helps the GM and gamers to return to Reality World and find that there are other things to do on a Saturday night besides slay dragons. This time should be consistent (such as the first or last week of the month) so that people can anticipate and plan for this time off. These scheduled breaks prevent absenteeism in a campaign and rejuvenate a slumping game by giving the GM time to rework his ideas and scenarios.

The time factor

A good game may deteriorate into a bad one over the course of many hours of play. A good game length depends upon how long the players can sit in one place, how well they enjoy the game scenario, and how many iron rations (e.g., pop and munchies) are on hand. One must also realize that the GM can experience a bit of mental overload and fatigue when playing beyond his limit. Some GMs are good at handling this stress, making it difficult for players to actually tell the GM's limit. Once the limit is reached, however, the telltale signs are quite obvious.

When descriptions of settings and encounters become vague and the GM spends little time on character interaction, one might suspect the GM's limit has been reached. Crazy bar fights often break out at this point, and the sillies may attack a perfectly sane game. Important information might be forgotten, and the GM might ask repeatedly for descriptions of a character's actions. A GM must learn to realize when control is slipping from his hands. At this point, a break should be arranged or the night's festivities should be ended, letting everyone sit around and talk.

Gamers love to talk; this is a well-known and well-documented fact. After a superhero group saves the world twice, rescues the mayor and the city council, defeats all the criminals, and repairs the ailing dam that saves the entire valley, it's time to call it a night. This also brings up the problem of pacing an adventure to avoid having too much super-action that leads to disappointment when the next game runs, given the build-up of emotion and anticipation. Avoid having the PCs save the world every weekend; allow for stimulating but low-key adventures as well. They're easier to run, especially for tired GMs.

The poor-plot syndrome

Every so often, the GM is unable to produce an adequate plot for his campaign and falls upon theft as the answer to this dilemma. It has been said that there are only nine different plots in the world, but many, many variations of these main ideas. Most games available today offer a wide selection of game modules. Some modules are suitable for an evening's game; others are more complex campaigns composed of several smaller scenarios. The GM should not feel obliged to be a superjudge who works for weeks on end to bring customized games to his loyal followers. There are several modules on the market that can be used in full in a campaign, or in part as references or idea generators. Do not overlook this great source of gaming wealth. With a little adjustment on the GM's part, most modules will fit nicely into any campaign setting.

Ideas from other media, such as movies, books, and TV shows, may help promote more original ideas when used in moderation. Development of a basic idea or news item can stimulate enough creativity to produce an entire campaign! The GM must beware, however: If current events such as these are used too often, the GM may come to rely on these quick sources entirely, until an entire movie plot is stolen for the sake of a game. When this occurs, someone will have seen the movie or read the book, thus ruining the entire scenario with a few words or actions. When the players catch on to this plagiarism, they begin to equate all future games with movies, trying to second-guess the GM's actions and stifling his creative drive. There is nothing worse for a GM than having a player say, "You stole that idea from *Star Trek!*" when the GM worked hours on the design and never even saw that episode.

Be very careful to disguise ideas borrowed from other sources. There is nothing wrong with stealing the horse, so to speak, but at least paint the horse another color before selling it to the players. If a GM likes the idea of X-wing fighters, change the exterior design somewhat in their description. Try to keep the borrowing of ideas simple, and develop original plots and twists on the ideas to avoid this problem. Everyone will benefit in the end!

[For more information on developing new plots from unusual sources, see "The Mix-&-Match Module," by Marcus L. Rowland, in this issue.]

Favoring a character

It happens. A player creates a character that the GM finds very intriguing or distinctive: an aloof and debonaire Shadow Rider; the young streetwise thief; the man now magically changed into a woman; a mysterious desert dweller with a hidden secret. Creating subplots for this favored character is a breeze, and the PC always reacts well to the situations placed before him. Unfortunately, the other players begin to feel like NPCs because of the lack of GM attention. Everyone feels cheated of time and glory as the GM's pet gets too much of the limelight.

If the GM begins to get those "not again" looks from players, it's time to move along. Quickly change the scenario and surprise them; if the game starts out with the flashy occult investigator getting too much attention, divert the flow to the quiet professor who is always "just there." This may startle the group and stimulate play. The GM will find that everyone likes to have their characters get special attention, whether it is a simple comment on Durk the Barbarian's lunch of beef and brew to noting the fact that a few NPCs make googly eyes at a good-looking yet oft-forgotten occult investigator named Marion. These comments help build character foundations, too. Often a situation occurs that earmarks a character in a special way. Not all barbarians are stupid; with a little training, they can achieve great academic levels. Likewise, all evil clerics are not created equal. One could easily show compassion or even be downright nice from time to time (if there's a scheme in mind, of course). Give characters chances to rise above common stereotypes, and interesting and unique characters will develop as a result.

Sometimes it is a GM's favorite NPC that gets a bit too much attention from the GM, thus causing a players' revolt. The GM should remember that the players' PCs are the focus of the adventure, not a paper creation. If the players moan about rescuing a certain NPC one more time, it's time for a new angle. Spotlight a particular character's interactions with an important NPC every so often, and be careful to pass the spotlight around. Powerful NPCs exist, but they exist to meet the PCs — they don't exist for their own sake.

Build upon the ideas that players supply about their characters. Most people, when they roll up a character, already have a preconceived notion of how this character will react in various situations. The GM should make it a habit to know his characters well; take an interest! One way to develop this knowledge and interest is to ask for a copy of each player's character to keep on file. If possible, also ask for a brief synopsis of the character's back-

ground, family, and reasons leading up to the PC's decision to be an adventurer. Is the quiet nomad outcast really a prophet in disguise? Is the old cleric out for another trek, having grown tired of early retirement? Is the doctor who turns to occult investigation fighting a horror from her past? If players do not develop their own backgrounds, help them along with suggestions. These helpful ideas can benefit the GM too, by creating miniscenarios and even campaign starters. (Be careful not to dwell too heavily on one character; as noted above, people can grow tired of that. Give every PC some attention.)

Not knowing the system

Complete knowledge of a game is not always an important facet of game mastering. In most game systems, there are many charts and tables that assist the GM in this task. This is why the rule books were created in the first place; if a GM didn't need to look things up, these tomes of information would be unnecessary.

Familiarity with a system makes the game run smoothly, though, and gaining this familiarity should be on top of a GM's list of things to do before running a campaign. Playing as a character often helps the GM understand the shortcomings of a game system and the special frustrations players have with this system. One complete reading of the rule books is a must. Mark pages with important charts and take down notes of difficult passages or rules. Use support material whenever possible. If the game system offers a sample scenario, read through it. Learning how other GMs handle the game will help a GM master it. The more game systems a GM is familiar with, the easier it will be to judge them. Try to keep abreast of new information or materials whenever possible, and either purchase or borrow periodicals relating to the campaign's game system. All of these suggestions can help a GM's game mastering skills and build confidence as a judge.

The too-much syndrome

Once more, the party rescues a beautiful lady from an evil magician and comes home to rest. They are then informed of yet another maiden in distress, this one having been sold into slavery by her father. Then, of course, there's the young woman who's been captured by the wild orcs of the hills. . . .

Too much of anything can cause a bellyache. Often, the GM may not realize that his game has too many maidens in distress, perhaps too much realism or fantasy, or even too much violence, gore and bloodletting. Be careful to vary basic plots so that the players don't say "Another maiden in distress — booring." If a GM has difficulty altering these plots, keep a record and check off the plots as they are used. The GM should also try to strike an equal balance between realism and fantasy, hack-and-slay and thinking, and high-

tech and humanism. Spread these elements around. Going overboard in any category, even one that the players enjoy, ruins the thrill of the event after the third or fourth time.

Feedback from players is important. Group feedback, however, doesn't always work. Group situations often intimidate those who sit back and watch; these players are often forgotten in these types of meetings. Talk to the players when a game is not in session, and try to get their opinions of the campaign. Listen to their praise and their complaints, and *don't* give long excuses. If a GM feels he must constantly apologize to upset players, something is wrong. Examine the game closely and ask for advice. It can only help.

No options available

Every so often, a GM forgets to leave a way out of a sticky situation. Perhaps the GM is so intent on having a game run in a particular fashion that the players are herded along from one incident to another with very little room to move about. All scenarios should be loosely structured so the characters can flow in and out without feeling trapped. Players should be gently ushered through events in some cases, but when the whips and chains are introduced and the game master turns into the slave master, it is time for reform. If the players turn the wrong way, let them make their own mistakes by fumbling along until they hit the right path once more. If the players feel they are in control of their characters, they will be less likely to balk at gentle nudging on the GM's path.

A critical note: Never, ever, have a no-win scenario! Most players do not enjoy playing in a campaign that offers no chance of success. Games can be complex and dangerous, but always try to match the PCs' level to the scenario. It's no use pitting the dark spawn of Yog-Shibbernath against a fledgling occult investigator with no chance of even running. This only upsets the game, the players, and most likely, the GM's stomach when his players leave him for a more compassionate GM.

Second-guessing

Second-guessing is a way of life with many people. A GM may often try to predict how a group of characters will react to a situation, and plan accordingly. Sometimes this gets so intense that the GM begins planning plots around one player's *assumed* reaction. Unfortunately, that player is often absent from that game session or reacts differently than planned. The GM's game plans are dissolved, forcing him to scramble for another scenario or attempt to change the existing one. Keeping a short scenario around for such emergencies is a good idea for the GM. Thus, if an important character is absent, the flow of the game continues.

Try to avoid guessing the players' reactions to every bit of a scenario; allow the game to run by itself. Most often, a good

Artwork courtesy of Dover Publications, Inc.



scenario naturally falls into place with little encouragement when left to the players for development. Listen as players try to guess what the GM has planned. This information can then be used to develop and plot out unfinished scenarios. Many games are created from the random thoughts of players. With a little groundwork and constructive listening, the GM can pick and choose from numerous endings, if the players each have a different idea of what is happening.

If the players guess a scenario's planned end before they reach it, *change it!* Always create a second ending — sometimes even a third. A plot twist can cure the "I-know-the-ending" players who must continually second-guess the GM. Even if this spontaneity leaves a few strings lying about, never let the players have the upper hand. Always leave an "out" for yourself, to keep players in the dark even when a bright light is shining on them. Leave a hint of mystery in every scenario design. This makes the GM look good in the eyes of the players. There is no more satisfying a feeling for a GM than to hear players speak of a game session two weeks after the fact, or to have special moments go down in game-journal history within the gaming community.

In conclusion. . .

In conclusion, game mastering can be a difficult task, if the GM *allows* it to be. Allow players to help all they can without letting them know the breadth of their assistance. Keeping these guidelines in mind will help any game run fairly and smoothly for many sessions to come. ☐

by James M. Ward

The Game Wizards

Readers speak out on GREYHAWK® Adventures

I asked for feedback in "The Game Wizards" column in DRAGON® issue #129. So, what happens when 511 letters come to my office, all filled with great and not-so-great ideas on what should get into the GREYHAWK® Adventures hardbound book? I read every one of them. Let me tell you, most of the handwritten ones, especially the ones with horrible penmanship, were a real chore, but every one was read — and some of them had ideas that are being put into the design of the book. Let me fill you in on the best of these.

Many people wanted zero-level PCs. Adventurers are not hatched ready to go; they undergo a bit of training in several areas before they find their niches. The rules on this character-creation system will cover experimenting with different classes and even keeping some powers from other classes (at a penalty of losing experience points on adventures).

A good many people wanted to know about some of the more unusual geographic features of the planet Oerth. There is now going to be an entire section in the book on this topic. Oerth has islands that float with the currents of the sea. Each of these places has become the lair of fierce monsters that need the islands' traveling ability to enter new feeding grounds dur-

ing the year. These monsters also have unusually large treasure hoards. Imagine, too, a strange magical pillar that greatly heightens the powers of any magic-user who touches it — but the more spell-casters who touch the pillar, the less power the artifact gives to each. Naturally, one person seeks to have all the power; rivals must be eliminated!

I was very surprised to see that hundreds of you wanted adventures in the book. Several sections will now have adventures patterned after REF3 *The Book of Lairs*; these adventures range from zero-level, easy-looking things like loading a hay wagon to high-level adventures for only the toughest of heroes. Each one is designed to provide hours of fun for PCs and DMs alike. Some letters confirmed my suspicion that several sections scheduled to be put into the hardbound would indeed be popular. There was a clear majority in favor of putting in new monsters from the WORLD OF GREYHAWK™ fantasy setting; the same went for characters and spells. I would be in trouble, too, if I didn't put in magic items especially designed for the WORLD OF GREYHAWK setting.

I'll close out this section by saying that I appreciated the thought and effort that

went into all those letters from you, the readers. My eyes especially appreciated the typed letters that came in. Yes, I will send out free copies of the book to those whose ideas I liked and used. No, I don't need any more ideas on this project, but I will still read your letters — not because I can use the ideas, but because I think your effort merits a little work on my part.

Small wonders

I am pleased to announce that Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc., will produce a special line of FORGOTTEN REALMS™ miniatures. The first sets will come out for the 1988 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ Game Fair. At the very least, you will be able to buy a boxed set of figures for the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting and a boxed dragon especially made for the DRAGONLANCE® saga, I will be talking to Ral Partha in the near future and when I know something more, you will know it, too.


The wight stuff

Recently, I was playing in a great AD&D® game campaign when my character ran into a monster my DM called a "white dwarf." I didn't think much of it at the time because the skin color of a dwarf had never come up in game play before. Then my party met lots of the little bug gers, and much to my horror I discovered that I wasn't facing a dwarf with white skin — I was facing a *wight* dwarf, an undead creature with all the powers and abilities of a dwarf and a wight.

At the time, I wasn't amused to see my character lose several life levels and have to run for his very life. After I had time to reflect a bit, I started to appreciate what my friendly DM had done. The idea of using puns of all types in a dungeon setting started my mind whirling. I would like to put together a dungeon filled with all sorts of "punnish" encounters, and I would like your help in accomplishing this feat. Just for fun, and if you have the time, send me some puns based on the AD&D game. The best 10 will appear in this column in DRAGON Magazine at a future date. The best punner also wins a year's subscription to DRAGON Magazine as well. You don't have to type out your puns (but it sure is easier for me to read them that way). Just send your puns to:

Puns for Jim Ward
TSR, Inc.
PO. Box 756
Lake Geneva WI 53147

The closing date on this minicontest will be July 29, 1988. If all goes well, I can put together something by then that can be put in the GEN CON/ORIGINS Game Fair tournament schedule for everyone to enjoy. By the way, I have read all the Xanth books, so don't bother using any of the puns from them.




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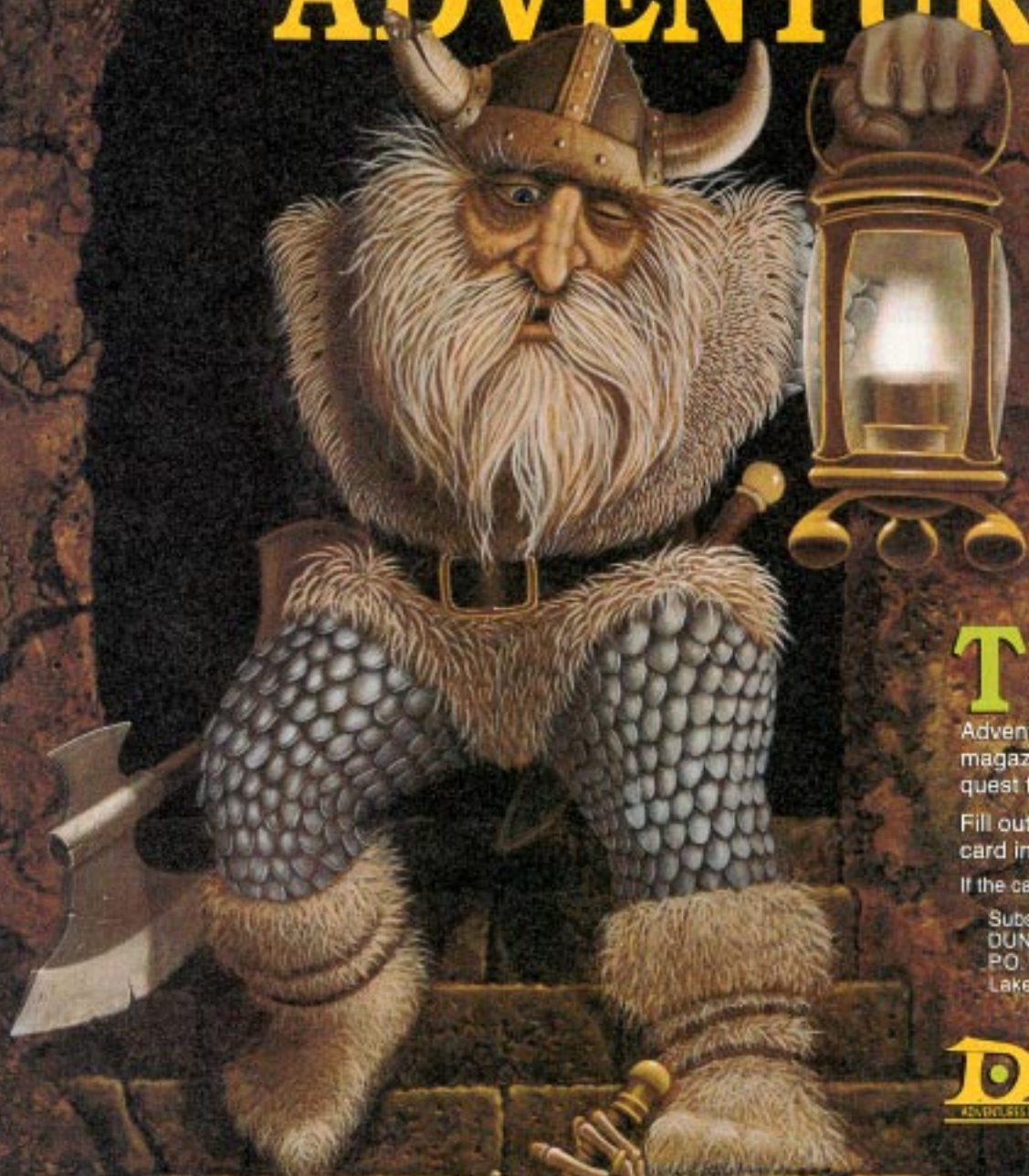
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There are many commercially available adventures based on this type of genre-crossing. For example, GDW's TRAVELER® game adventure *Shadows* is essentially a fairly normal dungeon expedition, complete with monsters and traps, but it adds additional complications (the characters are trapped in the "dungeon; and their vacuum suits are gradually disintegrating in a hostile atmosphere) to give the players added incentives to explore and escape. All games borrow concepts from each other; it's almost impossible to avoid some subconscious influences, and deliberate copying is far from unknown.

Scenario conversion from books, films, and comics is also common, partly in the form of licensed products (such as TSR's MARVEL SUPER HEROES® and THE ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES™ games), and partly in the use of ideas. For example, there have been many successful SF and fantasy crime scenarios, elaborate capers derived from the literature of the

underworld. Would many have been written without the influence of crime novels and films? Much more unlikely hybrids include a few fantasy romances, adventures in which the players are involved in love triangles, elopements, and other heart-rending themes. These adventures expose players to a whole new range of problems and can give the referee a lot of fun. Imagine the reactions of a group of hardened mercenaries who learn that they've somehow strayed into a romantic comedy or supernatural thriller (see TSR's AD&D® module UK1 *Beyond the Crystal Cave* and the ROLE AIDS™ module *The Keep* for examples of such adventures).

Commercially published modules are one source of variant plots; if there isn't a suitable adventure for your favorite system, try surprising your players by running one designed for a completely different game system. Obviously, it's important that the referee should not reveal that a change of pace is imminent. For example, it would be a mistake to tell players running characters designed for TSR's STAR FRONTIERS® game that they were about to take part in one of Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU® game scenarios. Converting player-character statistics to different game systems should be avoided, since you'll give your players too much information. At first sight, it's more work to convert an entire scenario to your usual system, but this difficulty is

illusory, since the conversion need only be approximate. A big, tough monster in one system becomes a big, tough monster in the new system; provided it's difficult to kill, exact statistics aren't too important.

Conversion to an unexpected type of genre can solve many problems. Generally, the very name and nature of a game system provides players with clues about the type of adventure they can expect. For example, CALL OF CTHULHU game players are usually prepared to encounter supernatural manifestations, TOP SECRET/SI™ game characters expect to be sent on espionage missions in exotic locations, and players of FASA's DOCTOR WHO RPG can usually anticipate encounters with Daleks, Cybermen, and other familiar foes. Thus, an essential element of surprise is lacking. The interesting point about these examples is that the average character is usually a normal human, so there's nothing to stop the referee from borrowing a plot from one game and using it in another. For example:

Professor Jones carefully descended the steps of the castle, keeping a wary eye open for snakes and dangerous insects. It wasn't likely that he'd find many in this part of Transylvania, but it never hurt to check. After all, there were those old stories about vampires, and several peasants were reported missing. . . .

Hastily ducking some spiderwebs, Jones noticed that the floor was surprisingly clean. There was a faint blue light somewhere ahead, and Jones traced it to the chinks in a door. Now he could hear a faint electrical hum. The air smelled of something that might be ozone.

Carefully, he pushed the door open to reveal a huge cellar, spotlessly clean and illuminated by a sourceless actinic light. It was some sort of laboratory; strange machines stood around the walls and floor. In a far corner was a human body, dressed in the most bizarre outfit Jones remembered seeing.

Nervously, he entered the room. Abruptly, two conical machines rotated towards him, and a strange metallic voice shouted, "Intruder! Exterminate! Exterminate!"

In this case, the referee has decided to stage an encounter between Indiana Jones and Doctor Who, using THE ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES game rules with a DOCTOR WHO game module to ensure that the encounter comes as a complete surprise. Jones gets the chance to rescue The Doctor and (hopefully) help him defeat the evil Daleks and their Nazi allies.

When introducing this type of unexpected encounter, the referee should take care to give the players a few escape routes. For instance, in the above example there is a staircase nearby, and everyone who's seen the *Doctor Who* television series knows that Daleks can't climb stairs.

If you're basing your adventure on a book or film rather than an adventure for another system, more work is needed, and

it's not a good idea to stick too closely to the original plot. It's more fun to throw in ideas from several sources, combining them to form a variant theme that will challenge your players and make them wonder what's happening. There are lots of plot ideas around that can form the basis of exciting adventures if your players can't identify their sources.

An excellent example of this type of surprise adventure is "Big Lizzy," by W.G. Armintrout, a scenario that appeared in *The Space Gamer* magazine in 1983. It begins as a normal Wild-West-style game adventure with romantic overtones, but it suddenly plunges the adventurers into an alien wildlife park infested with dinosaurs. Derived from the film *Valley of Gwangi*, it's one of the few Western scenarios to have appeared in any game magazine, and it is a classic of the genre.

As the first step of any adaptation, the referee should jot down the main themes involved, then see how they can be resolved. Sometimes the plot must be obscured; something that's hidden from the characters in a film might be glaringly obvious in the context of an RPG. It's tempting to turn important characters into NPCs, but this should be avoided, since it's likely that someone will recognize the character and realize what's going on. Unless all your players are rules lawyers, conversion of statistics and rules should be secondary to the basic details of plot and characterization. Obviously, films are only one source of plots; there are also books, comics, records, TV, radio, and the like. I've gotten at least four plot ideas from David Bowie songs and the title of one adventure from a t-shirt slogan. With a little ingenuity, you'll find ideas to boggle your players and revitalize your campaign.

The remainder of this article consists of two short scenario outlines, derived from two well-known horror films. Each has been rewritten for an apparently inappropriate type of game system; fine tuning and the addition of appropriate character statistics and details are left for the referee. I've also added a few additional film sources with brief hints on conversion to adventures.

"Chosen of the Gods"

System: Any futuristic space-travel RPG.
Source: Q: *The Winged Serpent*.

Players' Information

A survey starship is tracing lost human colonies on the fringes of known space. Three weeks ago, the ship discovered the planet Tak, which apparently regressed to a primitive state and is now roughly on a par with 20th-century Earth. All TV and radio broadcasts picked up suggest that the colonists have forgotten their origins. It's illegal to interfere with such a primitive culture or give the colonists any indication that more advanced civilizations exist.

Last week, a group of anthropologists made a secret landing and disguised themselves by wearing native clothing. They intended to pose as foreigners from another part of the planet and visit museums in Y'Kurth, one of the larger cities. Since the natives have radio, it wasn't possible to keep in continuous contact. None of the scientists returned to a prearranged pick-up point at the agreed time.

Most of the remaining personnel on the mother ship are specialist technicians, essential crew, or otherwise unavailable to investigate the disappearance. The PC search team is relatively expendable; the ship can get home without them. The PCs are given hypnotic language briefings, complete with cover stories, disguises, and technologically appropriate weapons. Their mission is to find the anthropologists and bring them back without arousing the natives.

Referee's Information

Weapons provided will be small, easily concealed handguns, not rifles, machine pistols, etc. The language briefing is naturally limited to the topics covered by native TV and radio transmissions. Several themes are omitted in these transmissions, but the PCs should not be told this until they try to utilize their knowledge. In particular, there are no references to religion. Three NPCs join the party: an anthropologist who was omitted from the original team, the fiancée of one of the missing scientists, and a security guard.

The team is to land (or beam down) in an uninhabited coastal area and work its way across country to Y'Kurth. Arrange a few diversions (such as some interesting ruins) to split up the party. Soon, the anthropologist becomes separated from the team; suddenly a shot or two is heard, but the remaining team members find nothing but a severed hand holding a bloodstained gun when they investigate.

The native TV transmissions haven't revealed that there is a planet-wide religion involving human sacrifice and the worship of huge carnivorous flying lizards. The matter is considered too sacred for normal TV coverage; only major rituals are televised, and the ship hasn't been around long enough to see such a broadcast. The cities resemble those of 20th-century Earth, but a few of the skyscrapers in each city are topped by conical structures providing ideal accommodation for the reptiles. These creatures come and go as they please. They are extremely fast, immensely strong, and well camouflaged. They will only be seen a fraction of a second before they strike, though they register on radar, tricorders, etc., if anyone uses these aids quickly enough. The bulk of the reptiles' food is provided by volunteer human sacrifices, supplemented by condemned criminals, at rooftop temples, but they also snatch people from the streets. These losses, comparable in number to those from road

accidents or crime, are ignored by the natives; anyone taken is venerated as the "chosen of the gods." Naturally, it's heresy to attempt to harm the "gods" in any way.

The missing scientists visited one of the temples. One accidentally entered an area used for volunteer sacrifices and was snatched by a "god." The others tried to rescue him and were attacked by guards armed with spears, whose normal duty is to finish off anyone who is mutilated rather than killed. In the ensuing fight, three anthropologists died. The two survivors are being held in the temple for sacrifice at a major ritual to be held in four days' time. Their behaviour is considered a matter of shame, a profanation of a sacred shrine. Needless to say, all their heretical equipment, like guns and radios, has been destroyed.

These details shouldn't immediately become apparent; use a few incidents (a bloody shoe falls from the sky and is ignored by passers-by, a conversation is overheard in which someone says that he will "give himself to the gods" if he fails his examinations, etc.) to gradually reveal the situation. Naturally, the natives don't discuss such matters in casual conversation.

As a final twist, the "gods" are more intelligent than humans. They originally intended to let the first colonists settle peacefully, but retaliated and destroyed most of the colonists' equipment after human hunters attacked them. The current situation is a form of domestication; the "gods" see the cities as convenient food supplies, much handier than looking for wild prey. This easy food supply gives the "gods" more time for relaxation, philosophy, and other mental disciplines. Many members of the species see this state as decadence, and they stay in the wilds, but they will still take humans if they are hungry (as shown by the loss of the PCs' anthropologist). The events at the temple are seen as a sign that the humans may be becoming dangerous again; if there are any further problems (for example, if the PC team harms a "god" while attempting to rescue the anthropologists), the reptiles will attempt to destroy the cities and kill most of the humans.

"The Apocalypse Assignment"

System: Any espionage-based RPG.
Source: Omen 3: *The Final Conflict*.

Players' Information

Yesterday, the American President arrived in Britain for a conference with the British Prime Minister and other NATO heads of state at Chequers. He is staying at the U.S. Ambassador's country mansion. The PC team is to work as liaison between British and American security units, and has been authorized to carry weapons on U.K. soil.

While making plans for this operation, the PCs are summoned to New Scotland Yard and informed that an intruder has

been caught trying to break into the Ambassador's mansion. The intruder is being held at the local police station.

Referee's Information

When the PCs reach the police station, they find that the prisoner has escaped, killing two constables and one of the security men from the mansion. Survivors (all badly injured) report that the man wouldn't speak and went berserk when he saw a copy of *The Times* (which has a picture of the President on its front page). A police sketch of the intruder shows that he looks vaguely like a bald version of Oddjob, from the James Bond film *Goldfinger* (if you're using Victory Games' JAMES BOND game, say that the intruder looks a bit like Oddjob, without mentioning the film).

The PCs don't know that three months ago a vision appeared to members of an obscure order of Tibetan monks. The vision told the monks that a demon had broken free from the underworld and taken human form as the American President. The monks must kill the demon, or else the world would be destroyed. Seven monks followed these commands; they crossed the border to India, learned the President's travel plans, then sold gems to pay for a flight to Britain. The KGB spent several years perfecting the hologram

projector used for the vision, and all the monks are utterly convinced of its authenticity. The Russians plan to cause an international incident and a deterioration in U.S.-Chinese relations.

The monks have sworn vows of silence. They wear badly fitting British suits and carry an assortment of throwing knives, shuriken, and other Oriental weapons. Rifles and explosives fill their transport (a battered old minibus). All monks have shaved heads and thick moustaches; they are all related, since the monastery is in a small village, and the PCs may think that they are dealing with brothers or clones. The monks are proficient martial artists but don't belong to any of the recognized schools of combat. Each monk should be a match for three or four average police or security guards, or at least two player characters. Monks should each have one or two weapon specialties; one might be extraordinarily good with swords and a bow, and another an expert rifle shot. At least one of the monks should be able to drive, though not particularly well.

The remainder of this adventure should be a hunt for the assassin and the team's gradual realization that several men are involved. This should produce a prolonged chase and martial-arts battle as the assassins try to reach the President. Scopolamine injections and a linguistically skilled

interrogator can reveal the truth if a captive monk becomes available. Follow-up missions can track the assassins back to Tibet, reveal the Russian involvement, and possibly add a mission to capture the hologram projector and the scientist who built it.

Optionally, ruthless referees might wish to run this scenario in a slightly different manner. What if the vision was genuine, and the U.S. President really is a demon? As the assassins make their attempts against the "President," they should die in a series of unlikely "accidents." For example, an assassin tries to get into the mansion by climbing a tree, intending to drop over the perimeter fence. However, a patrol car skids off the road and strikes the tree, and the assassin falls and is impaled on a support post. The PC team should gradually realize that something strange is happening. The final revelation to the PCs might come in the form of a dying statement from the last monk or another vision.

Once the PCs are aware of the facts, they should realize that some of the President's recent actions will worsen the international situation and could easily lead to nuclear war. The PCs must then decide whether or not to stop the demon directly. Naturally, any assault on the "President" should be extremely difficult; the team must somehow get past the elaborate security measures surrounding him. A demon should be extremely difficult to kill; bullets will probably be useless. Exact details are left to the referee, who should decide whether this is simply a minor demon (and thus vulnerable to holy water or exorcism) or something much more formidable. Whichever side wins the final conflict, there probably won't be much of a future for these particular secret agents!

Further sources

The following films are recommended for conversion to role-playing adventures.

The Terminator: for any 1920s or horror-theme RPG. Imagine an unstoppable robot stalking adventurers who think that they are dealing with a normal human or deranged cultist. Imagine the panic when they learn the truth!

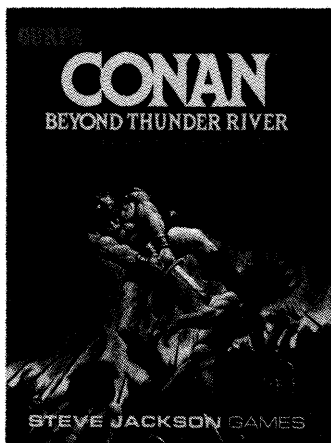
Ice Station Zebra: for any futuristic space-travel RPG. This is a good "closed environment" story with a cast of hundreds. For something exceptionally lethal, try mixing this with the next selection.

The Thing: for any espionage-theme RPG. Two weeks ago, the Agency's polar HQ dropped out of contact. Now a crack team of agents has been assigned to investigate the mystery. As the agents climb out of their helicopter, a dog bounds joyfully towards them. . . .

Point Blank: for any fantasy-world RPG. The Thieves Guild betrayed you on your last mission; you were left for dead, and your share of the loot was stolen. Now you have returned, and you will follow your money wherever it leads you. Ω

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Heroes are Made — Like This!

There's much more to a superhero than superpowers

article discusses creating and playing a character in a superhero role-playing game. The game master and player might want to violate one or two of these guidelines because they run contrary to a superhero's style. But if you violate too many, then the character is unlikely to survive long, or else the campaign will suffer from lack of role-playing input from the players and GM.

Power planning

Players in superhero role-playing games usually start creating characters by determining their abilities and powers. However, a player should not worry solely about the amount of physical power his character has, even if the character worries about it. If properly used, any power, skill, or ability will become important. The GM will undoubtedly give his players the opportunity to use all the options at their disposal.

Never forget what a character can do. In a campaign I ran, five heroes were about to go to that big Danger Room in the sky. They had been captured by a villainess named Darkling, and were about to be used as power sources in a ritual of magic. All of the heroes were tied up and their known powers neutralized. As the ritual neared completion, I was just about ready to have the players start rolling new characters when Guano Jim (now known as Deva) remembered his psychic link with Lynch, a small hawk. Because he rarely used the bird, the villains did not know about it. Once Jim got in touch with the bird, it was child's play to sneak it into the villains' headquarters. There, it freed one of the heroes, who freed the others, and they made short work of the villains. Because Jim's player forgot about that one power, the characters very nearly did not survive that adventure.

The point here is that power is relative — not to other characters, but to the situation. If players have the chance to choose powers, abilities, equipment, or skills, they should do so in a way which makes each character interesting, not just trying to maximize the power level of the character.

If a character has a power that's not being used, chances are he simply hasn't found a use for it. If the power was written up in the rules, it undoubtedly has a use. However, players may want to down-play one or more of a hero's powers. Because Guano Jim rarely used his psychic link, the villains did not plan against it — they didn't know about it. None of Jim's other powers were psychic, so the villains didn't attempt to dampen his psychic ability. Keeping the villains in the dark is always useful, if it is done consciously.

Body and mind

Once a supercharacter's powers are decided, take some time to flesh out the character. By now, you probably have some idea of the character's physical characteristics and personality. It is nearly impossible to go through the process of creating a character without picking up some idea of how the character will look, both physically and mentally.

Expand upon vague ideas. Be specific. If you can draw, draw a picture of your character. If not, just write everything down: height, weight, hair, eyes, skin, sex, and handedness. To describe anything out of the ordinary, use lots of adjectives. Is the character gangly? Does the character have deep blue eyes, a soft voice, a plump physique? Don't forget distinguishing characteristics. Does your character have a moustache or beard, beehive hairdo, scar, or missing left pinky? Write it all down. Picture the character clearly in your mind

"Truly it can be said that it is the man, not the powers, that make the hero."
The Watcher, What If #36

Superhero role-playing games have become very popular, though they can prove to be exceptionally complicated. The players must deal with a world that is as complex and changing as the real world, because it is the real world in many ways. Only the presence of superheroes (and supervillains) makes it different.

Because of this complexity, players often ignore certain important aspects of role-playing when playing superheroes. This

and treat that picture like a sculpture. If something looks wrong, fix it. Make sure you're able to picture your character's appearance without difficulty. I once had a player decide, after his character had been established, that he wanted to change his character's skin color because the original color didn't fit the player's picture of the character. Because he was insistent, the player was allowed to make the change, which didn't affect anything that had already happened. Still, the player should have figured out this characteristic in advance. In another instance (and in a game in which handedness was determined randomly) a player decided that his character had to be right-handed. The player was right-handed and didn't think he could picture his character doing things left-handed. This may sound trifling, but if you can't picture your character correctly, you'll find it that much harder to get into the game.

Eventually, you should have a pretty good idea of your character's personality. Write down this information. Is your character slightly pessimistic, noble, occasionally erratic, or prone to follow orders? Don't forget bravery, cowardice, short tempers, kindness, cleanliness, brashness, and eccentricity.

Don't think it necessary to create extreme personalities. Some players try to create personalities that nearly qualify for inclusion in diagnostic manuals for psychologists. These aberrations often take the form of berserker or killer instinct, or pride that would put a Bostonian to shame. These characters are easy to role-play because the player can rely on stereotypes or focus on only one aspect of personality, such as pride. However, it is much more satisfying in the long run to play normal personalities. Psychotics tend to be very one-dimensional by nature. They also tend to make the game less fun for the other players, as their heroes must be wary of the psychotic hero.

If you want to play a very strange character, at least keep it three-dimensional. Limit extreme strangeness to one or two odd personality traits. A happy-go-lucky berserker is fine, but a happy-go-lucky, erratic, noble berserker is not. Expand the character's normal personality 'traits in a way that will make the character more fun to play. Maybe the character tends to go berserk when fighting, but she also values her friends highly and will usually listen when these friends try to calm her.

Previous lives

Your character has powers, a body, and a mind; now he needs an origin. Origins cover the history of a character up to the present. Think about your character's personality; think about how it could have formed. What kind of upbringing brought this character about? You might even want to think about some specific events that happened in the character's past. Don't forget to take skills and knowledge into

account. If the character is quiet, shy, works well with animals, and knows quite a bit about farming, chances are he didn't come from New York City.

If the character has a Ph.D., Masters, or Bachelors degree, from what college was this received? What was college like for the character? Does the character still keep in touch with friends and professors? What was the character's childhood like? What is the character's occupation? Does the character like her occupation? What kind of people does the character have for relatives? What kind of people does she have for friends, and who does she hang out with when she's not adventuring? This is all included in a complete origin. All of these facts need not be determined immediately; they can be added as the game is played and the knowledge is needed.

Finally, how were the character's powers received? Were they inherent powers gained at birth? If so, how did this affect the character's childhood? If the powers were only recently gained, how did the character react to this? Have the powers changed the character's life in any way?

When you know the answers to these questions, it will become much easier to role-play and have even more fun. You will be much more involved in your character and may even be able to give your GM ideas for subplots to liven up the main adventure. Take an interest in your character's family, friends, and aspects of his history, and the good GM will occasionally incorporate them into the game.

A basic origin outline can streamline your work. Each of the following areas should be covered for a superhero:

1. Distinguishing physical characteristics (including eye color, hair color, skin, height, build, etc.).
2. Distinguishing mental traits.
3. Favorite activities.
4. Occupation(s).
5. Co-workers and superiors of importance to the character.
6. Relatives important to the character.
7. Best friends.
8. Affiliations, including:
 - a. Hometown
 - b. High school (sports, band, etc.)
 - c. College (sports, fraternity or sorority, etc.)
 - d. Professional (societies, union, etc.)
 - e. Recreational (health clubs, etc.)
9. Manner in which powers were gained, and the effects thereof.

Secrets within secrets

It is very easy to determine whether or not your character will keep a secret identity. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Does my character have relatives or friends who are not as well-equipped as my hero to deal with megalomaniacal villains?

2. Does my character's intelligence rate above moronic?

If you answered "yes" to both questions, your character will probably keep a secret

identity. If you answered "no" to both, he probably will not. If you answered "yes" to only one, your character probably needs a secret identity, but may or may not actually keep one. Most comic-book superheroes fall into the first category.

Superheroes falling into the second category are virtually nonexistent, though many supervillains (especially the monstrous types) appear here. Examples of Marvel Universe® heroes in the third category include the Fantastic Four® and the Hulk™. The Fantastic Four, while intelligent, have few friends or relatives who are not superheroes. Bruce Banner has many friends who get into trouble because of the Hulk, but the Hulk is not (or has not been, at least) intelligent enough to worry about a secret identity. Note that Mr. and Mrs. Fantastic have realized that secret identities are useful and have tried to create them — but have discovered that this is not an easy task, and that it would have been far easier to have done so right from the start.

Why have a secret identity? Even if your character is the most powerful being on Earth, chances are her grandmother and her lover are not. Some villains have no qualms about taking revenge on people close to your character. A secret identity also gives your character the ability to rest without worrying about having villains attack him or the public mob him.

The first precaution in getting a secret identity is to change your character's appearance. The easiest way to do this is with a costume, which serves two purposes: It hides your character's identity, and it makes his superhero identity easily recognizable to friends and foes alike. If your hero (in his secret identity) and a costumed villain slug it out on the streets of New York City, the cops are likely to try to arrest both combatants but if your hero is wearing his easily recognizable red-white-and-blue costume, officers will recognize him as a hero and give him some help. Costumes also identify heroes to other heroes, making it much more likely that they will receive cooperation, and they identify heroes to the public. Crowds are less likely to panic if a costumed hero "flames on" than if some anonymous stranger bursts into flame.

The best way to mask your character's identity is by covering her face, which is the part of the body that most people use to remember acquaintances. If you do not wish your character to wear a full face mask, a Lone Ranger mask is efficient.

Hair disguise is also important. If your character has a distinctive hair style or color, this must be hidden. Don't forget beards and moustaches. These can make Lone Ranger masks nearly useless. Hair can also be useful in changing appearance. Wigs, fake beards, and fake moustaches can aid in hiding your character's identity. It is not recommended that these aids be worn in the superhero role; in an all-out battle, they are far too easy to lose.

Instead, they should be worn in the normal (secret) identity. If your character already has a beard and moustache, and they aren't too important to him, shave them off and replace them with exact replicas. Then, when changing to the superhero identity, take off the beard and moustache. Also, a wig that matches your character's hair can give a different hair style for each identity.

Glasses are great. If your character wore glasses before receiving his powers, keep them, even if they are no longer needed. If they are still needed, use contacts or goggles in the superhero identity. Combined with other factors, glasses can be a great and subtle disguising factor.

The basic idea is to make your character look different as a superhero. Anything you can do to change her physical appearance will help. If she has a power that will do this, it can also be used. The effect should be permanent, however, and not dependent on concentration. It would not do to return to normal every time your character is surprised or knocked out.

Voice changes are also important. If your character has a distinctive voice, find a way to disguise it. A face mask that covers the mouth can muffle the voice. Your character might even want to make that part of the mask thicker to muffle his voice even more. Don't go overboard, however; people need to understand what your hero's saying. If your character is a good actor or impressionist, he could even change his voice when switching identities, becoming more dramatic in his heroic role. If your character does follow this example, make sure that each voice used sounds convincing, and that your character does not goof up. If your character uses uncommon expressions ("Wild!" or "Ducky!" for example), make it a point that he does not use these in his hero role. He may even want to make up some unique ones for his heroic identity, even if they sound a little corny.

Gloves are a useful part of any costume, as fingerprints can identify almost anyone. Remember that chance and human nature are on your character's side. Villains who know her in her hero identity will find it hard to connect her with her normal personality (unless she unwittingly helps them). Likewise, the thought that this woman could be a superhero will never occur to friends and relatives who know her in her secret identity (unless she makes them suspicious). It is up to the player to make sure that others simply do not make the connection between the character's two identities.

Also be careful about where your character appears. She very likely has one built-in disadvantage: She can never appear in both her secret identity and her hero identity at the same time. Do not compound this problem by having your character's hero identity appear in every out-of-the-way place her secret identity happens to be. In these situations, she

doesn't have to change into costume to combat crime. Many powers can be used quietly and quickly, without arousing suspicion. If a villain happens to trip over a vine while escaping a heist in Hawaii, nobody's going to connect it with that tourist from Michigan (who has many secret plant-control powers).

When friends and relatives get into trouble and your character must save them, try to do so surreptitiously. Not only will extended contact with people he knows tend to make them suspicious, others will recognize that he is paying too much attention to certain people and will be able to get at his friends and relatives without even knowing his secret identity.

You may also want to do things to actually mislead those searching for your hero's identity. You could pick a certain part of the city and always have the hero arrive to fight crime as if he were coming from that part of town. If he usually swoops down from the northeast when confronting villains, people will eventually come to assume that he lives in the northeast part of the city. Tricks such as these are not hard to develop.

Who to tell

One final point about secret identities. Your character will occasionally want to trust someone with the "big secret." Certain people even have a right to know. For instance, spouses should be told; so should parents, if the hero is still living at home. In both of these cases, the affected person should be told immediately before making the decision to be a superhero. These people will be strongly affected by the decision and should be involved in the decision-making process (if the player and GM like the idea of playing this out). Friends can be sources of support when times get tough.

If your character doesn't tell them, she'd better be good at making excuses; she'll need to explain quite a bit, such as why she is consistently late for school or work, why she must cancel engagements and disappear at a moment's notice, and why she must disappear for hours at a time.

Your character may also feel the need to tell someone else: a girlfriend or boyfriend, perhaps. Chances are that they should not be told. They must not only be implicitly trustworthy now — they must be trustworthy years from now. And even if they can be trusted, they can still get themselves or your character into trouble. Anyone who knows your character's secret identity will try to contact him when he is needed. If this contact comes to the notice of one of the superhero's enemies; not only will your character be in danger, the friend will be in grave danger as well.

Your character may even feel it necessary to tell the secret to government agencies or other superheroes. Government agencies are a no-no; everything they know is on file. Anyone with the know-

how can access such information, thus, even the agency cannot be trusted. Just because the agency is friendly now doesn't mean it will always be friendly. Leadership changes hands, legislative bodies take new action, and public opinion varies. Any number of things can occur which would put your character and her friends in jeopardy. The recent events in the Captain America® comic are proof of this.

Superheroes are another story. If your character works with a certain hero or group for a long period, he will find it very useful to be able to relax with these heroes as friends in their secret identities. If protected and used properly, a secret identity is far more useful than it is a nuisance.

Playing the game

The first thing you must do as you start playing the game is find out about the campaign world. What other heroes and villains exist? Take special notice of the NPC heroes and villains taken from the comic books; they are likely to play a prominent role in the game world. Also, keep up-to-date on current events in the real world. Some of these may also occur in the game world, if the GM is on the ball.

Find out about the differences between the real world and the game world. Are there lots of super-powered beings or only a few? Is public opinion for superheroes favorable or unfavorable? Does the public know that these beings exist? One player in my campaign missed out on a decent amount of fun because he didn't listen to my introduction and didn't know that the PCs were the first and only superbeings on Earth. You will have a lot more fun and your character will have a much better chance of surviving if you know what is going on around you.

Most importantly, learn from your adventures. Don't make the same mistake twice, and don't act without thinking. If something unexpected happens, ask yourself if there is a reasonable explanation. This could save your hero's life. One adventure I ran involved the heroes in a fight with a giant, seemingly invincible robot. One of the PCs, Lightwave, was a hero who could convert his body to blue-green light. He could also emit a laser beam of the same light. When he attempted to hit the robot with the laser, the beam dissipated a few feet from its target. Meanwhile, the rest of the team were trying to see if they could get inside the robot. Lightwave thought this was a good idea, so he decided to try to dart into the robot's ear. A moment's reflection would have told him that the laser light was probably dissipated by a field of some kind surrounding the robot. Since Lightwave was made of the same energy as his laser, the field was able to dissipate him. He survived but sustained massive injuries. It was an important lesson learned at a very high cost: Think before you leap.

The limits of power

Your character must also get to know his powers. Determine your character's limits. If she is strong, what is the maximum weight she can lift? If he has an energy blast, what is the maximum damage he can do? It is far better to learn your limits under controlled conditions (i.e., by experimenting) than in the heat of battle; this is particularly true if the GM likes to hide exact information on a character's powers.

Practice using your hero's powers at maximum potential, and practice using them at less than maximum. In the field, it is best to use attacks at half-strength or less, depending on who is being fought, unless the added power is needed. Your character is not going to make brownie points with anyone — press, public, or police — if everybody she fights ends up either dead or maimed for life. Real heroes rarely need to kill.

Using powers at less-than-maximum potential should also save energy (if the previous argument isn't suitable). If the game system used does not account for this, you may want to talk to your GM. A satisfactory system would be easy to implement. Using a power at half the normal output would use half the power requirement, and would thus make the power useable twice as often. One-third normal would use one-third the power

requirement and would thus make it useable three times as often, and so on.

Your character should also practice tricks — special uses for his powers or abilities that may not be very obvious. A trick may involve another skill or more than one power. Using telekinesis to fiddle around with the inside of a lock is a trick; not only does your character need to learn fine telekinetic manipulation, he must also learn lockpicking skills.

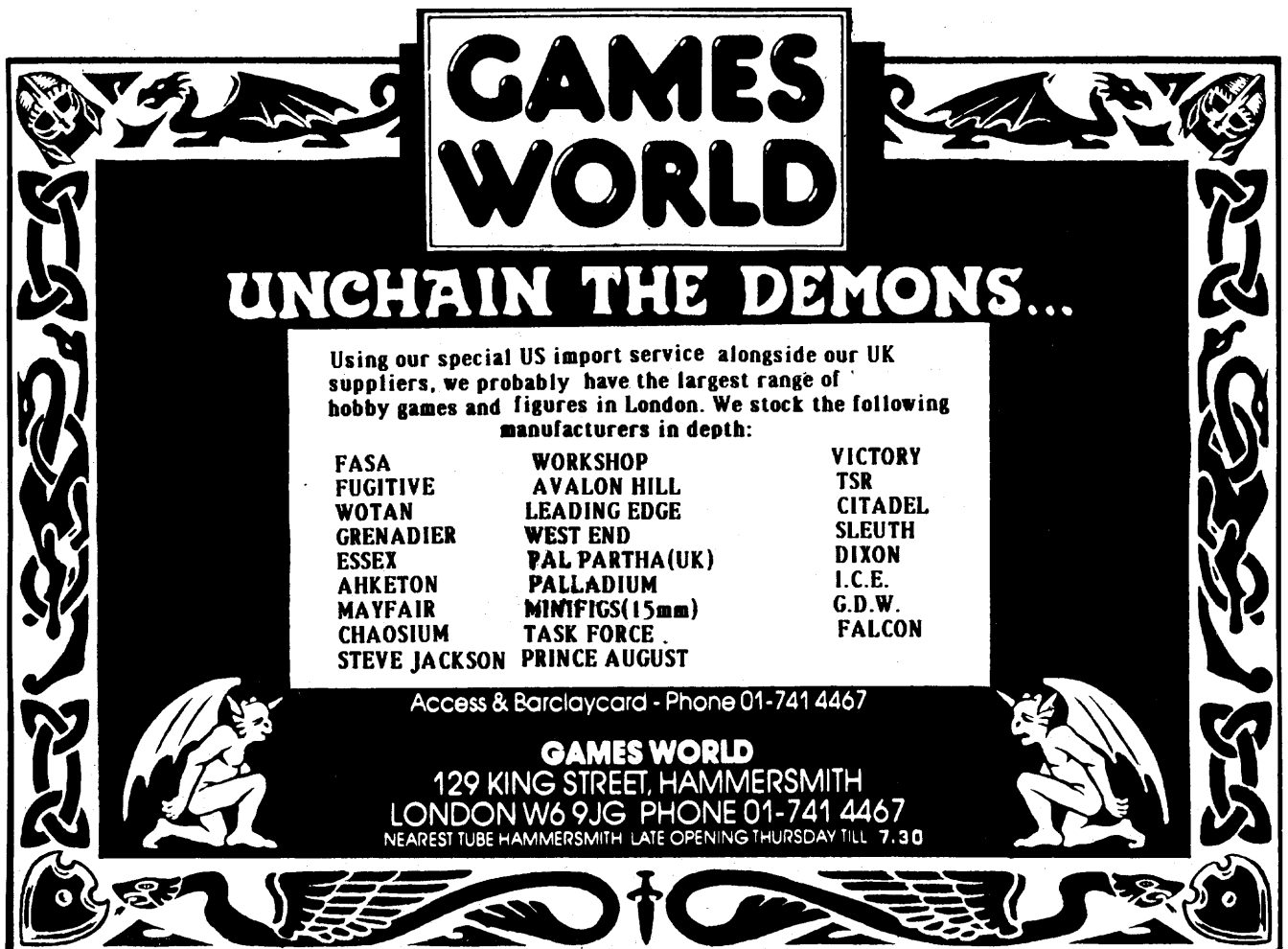
Sometimes you may come across a trick by accident, so keep your eyes open. One player in my campaign had a hero, the Lurking Grue, who knew the magical spell for invisibility. He was not very good at casting it and failed almost as often as he succeeded. Then one failure resulted in a very strange occurrence. Although the Lurking Grue didn't become invisible, various items which he was carrying did. When he realized what had happened, he cancelled the spell but took note of that effect. He reasoned that it meant this specific spell could be used selectively. Thus, it could be used to make things only partially invisible. No doubt visions of headless horsemen and bodiless smiles ran through his head, but he also found other uses for that spell. He found it simple to make a wall invisible in order to see through it, and with practice was able to safely inspect suspicious packages by

making the wrappings and box invisible. If the Grue hadn't been observant and hadn't thought about what had happened, that use would never have been realized.

Group effort counts

At some point in your character's career, he will probably become involved with a group of heroes. There are a couple of things groups should keep in their collective minds. First, make it a point to practice together. Practice combining your various specialties into tricks that are more complex than tricks a single hero can perform. The "Fastball Special" of Marvel's Wolverine™ and Colossus™ is a prime example of this. Using Colossus's strength to throw Wolverine at extremely large, flying, or highly perched opponents allowed the two earthbound heroes to attack villains they couldn't normally reach.

Special maneuvers must also be developed. These are general, nonspecific plans for the group to follow that can work in many situations. By calling the plan "maneuver A" or "maneuver B," the leader can give instructions without informing the opposition. For example, if the group has entered combat with some villains in a fairly crowded area, the leader can tell the group to execute maneuver A. The group will then perform a series of feints and



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retreats designed to move the fight to an isolated area. This works much better than yelling "We gotta move the fight away from all these people!" thus reminding the villains (played by the GM) that there are dozens of possible diversions and hostages there for the taking.

Maneuvers should be limited to easily remembered, generally applicable instructions. Useful maneuvers can often be found by recalling what happened in a fight after the action is over. If someone must often repeat a certain set of instructions, that set of instructions is a candidate for classification as a maneuver. Likewise, if a simple plan failed because the villains heard the leader yelling it out, that plan is also a candidate for classification as a maneuver.

Choosing a leader is another very important part of being in a group. Every group of more than three heroes should have a leader to make quick decisions when speed is necessary. The basic candidate for a leader must be able to think fast under stress, be able to command, and have a good public presence.

The ability to think fast is most important. It wouldn't hurt if the leader were also highly intelligent, but quick thinking comes first. The leader must be ready to make important decisions at a moment's notice. If plan A begins to go wrong,

should the group continue or switch to plan B? If the group is attacked unexpectedly, are they going to be able to deal with the threat? If not, the group must get out immediately, and the leader must find the best means of retreat. This is a lot to ask of a player, but if he's sharp, having his hero lead pays off well.

Of course, all the intelligence and quick thinking in the world will do no good if no one follows the leader's orders. Thus, the second requirement is that the leader should be able to command, either through respect or friendship. In any case, the group must be willing to follow the leader's orders. A charismatic and enthusiastic player helps enormously here!

Finally, the group will be interacting with the public, through innocents, officials, and media. The leader will usually be the group member who communicates with the public because he is the person the public wants to talk to. A leader with good public presence (i.e., high charisma) will greatly enhance these interactions. It is the leader who will keep the group on the good side of the local public, media, and government.

The "real" world

Most important of all: When you are playing the game, play as if it were real. If something seems strange to you, assume it truly *is* strange. Do not assume it is strange just because the GM made a mistake or the game rules make that strange event normal. Also, do not take events in the real world as reasons for events in the game world. More than once I have seen players ignore valuable information only to find out later it was because they simply attributed it to a mistake on my part, rather than to actual events in my game world. ("Yeah, I noticed that, but I thought you just misspoke!") If you truly think the GM misspoke or the game system broke down, point this out immediately. The GM will tell you whether or not the event actually occurred.

The tendency to take real-world needs and actions as causes for game-world

events can be much more subtle. At one point in the campaign previously mentioned, in which the PCs and one NPC were the only superheroes, the NPC hero died. The players know I prefer to have an NPC in the group, so they expected me to create another one. At the same time in the game world, ROC (the major criminal organization) was devising a plan to infiltrate the Lugnuts (the players' group) using a very elaborate scheme. ROC took a man, created an identity and a history that explained his knowledge of ROC, and fed it all to the man through hypnosis. One night while the Lugnuts were sitting around eating reheated pizza, there was a knock on their door, and in walked "Sandy."

"I understand you're after ROC," Sandy said. "I am, too. I'd like to join forces with you."

"How do you know about ROC?" was the inevitable question.

"I've been chasing them for many years." "Why?"

"They . . . they killed my daughter. I'd rather not talk about it."

And the Lugnuts believed it. These heroes had been in touch with the CIA; according to their contact, the CIA knew little about ROC except its name. Sandy claimed to know names, office locations — the works. There wasn't complete acceptance, however. One player stated that he was suspicious and was going to keep an eye on Sandy. But there was no attempt to check out the man's story or his background.

The result: The heroes were led straight into a trap. On the way to that trap, they picked up and passed on so much disinformation that the CIA now knows less than nothing about ROC. Both the players and the CIA believe ROC has been all but destroyed. *C'est la vie des fous.*

In short, use your head in superhero games. They're tough, but they're the best there are.

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(continued from page 6)

I want to challenge a common claim about role-playing games: that the primary aim is to have fun — bend the rules, insult everyone's intelligence, ignore any subtlety or sophistication — just have fun. As long as you're having fun, the story goes, it doesn't matter if you're playing the most mindless rubbish imaginable.

I think this devalues RPGs. I'd like to claim that the "work hard, play hard" ideal should be applied here. Good RPG play challenges intelligence, makes demands upon puzzle-solving abilities, brings out the actor in players, and more, and all this makes a lot of demands on the players' skills. You get out of an RPG what you put into it. If you're too lazy to apply, the "garbage in, garbage out" dictum applies.

I'm not saying that RPGs shouldn't be fun. That would be stupid. Instead, I'm making the point that putting the objective of having fun above everything else is pointless. Rather, the fun and pleasure generates itself as the players and DM play through the challenges of the adventure. It arises from player by-chat and improvised DM-player exchanges set against the backdrop of a fairly serious business. If an adventure doesn't have a worthwhile goal, all the higher qualities of role-playing just disappear. This is why silly dungeons — adventures with no worthwhile goal — are a total waste of time. The humour in an adventure has to be incidental or the whole thing falls flat. In my experience, the utter failure of silly dungeons shows how self-destroying the claim that the primary objective of RPG play is having fun really is.

Also, the "just have fun" bunch, by the nature of the argument, obviously rail against any idea

of quality or standards in RPG play. Yet this is absurd; every RPG player knows good and bad players. If we can distinguish between good and bad, then we're using some kind of rule to do so: So-and-so is a good role-player, someone else is very poor. They might both be having fun, but almost all of us know which one we'd prefer to enjoy role-playing with. We do think that a person who acts out a role well is a better player than an unconvincing one — an intelligent player is better than a dumb one, a harmonizing, mediating player is better than a petty dictator or a disruptive one. Indeed, our views on these matters decide with whom we are prepared to game and with whom we form friendships, and they concern personal qualities strongly tied with the ability to play well, not just what some fun-o-meter rating would read.

This is serious stuff. But there are too many dumbheads outside role-playing who see us as whackos for us to put up with the ill-disciplined fun-seekers inside the hobby. Let them go play something else and let the rest of us get on with really enjoying a good time!

Steve Allen
London, U.K.

I am writing to comment on Matt Battison's article, "Illusory Solutions," that appeared in issue #131. First of all, I would like to commend him on his well-thought approach to the problem of defining just how effective an illusionist can be with the *phantasmal force* spells (*phantasmal force*, *improved phantasmal force*, and *spectral force*). However, I would like to point out another solution to the problem. Simply redefine these spells to be hologram-type constructs with more than just the visual component in the case of the higher-level versions. As these spells are not cast *against* their intended "victims" (not directly, anyway), no saving throw should be allowed for anyone viewing them. A person should not be able to look at an illusion and be able to declare it as such. Certain telltale signs (like a dragon that makes no noise) may indicate that this is the case, but until someone or something is actually seen to pass through the illusion, there can be no certainty. However, should an adventurer gather his courage and approach the illusion, it will be incapable of harming him. The true power of these spells is trickery; once they have been revealed to be illusions, their power is gone. Not to say that the adventurer no longer sees the illusion, it is just that he will no longer "respect" it.

Now, for the aspiring illusionist who wishes to turn the power of a creature's mind back on itself, there are a variety of more sophisticated (higher-level) spells designed to do just this. An illusionist who wishes to "create" a dragon for his enemies to fight does so by placing the "brunt" of it within their minds. The spells *shadow monsters* and *demi-shadow monsters* have been created for just this purpose. These spells create a hologram-construct similar to the *phantasmal force* spells, but they also attack a person's mind. The victim(s) gets a saving throw to resist the mental-attack portion. A failed save means that a substantial portion of a victim's mind is now turned against him, giving the monster(s) "reality." A successful save means that a much smaller portion of his mind is being turned against him, making it easier to "kill" the illusory creature. (Note that the wisdom adjustment for mental attacks should *definitely* apply here.) Furthermore, an illusionist wishing to cast an illusory *fireball* that could cause "real" damage would use the *shadow magic* and *demi-shadow magic* spells. A similar type of saving throw would be used here to determine if full

normal damage (as a magic-user of the same level as the illusionist) is taken or whether the reduced damage (1 point/level or 2 points/level, respectively) is taken.

This system would keep low-level illusionists from doing what only medium-to-high level illusionists should be capable of doing. As a final suggestion, I think that the areas of effect for the *phantasmal force* spells should be *volumes* of effect to restrict how tall an illusion can be. The thought of an illusion of a mile-high, 60'-diameter tornado (an 8th-level illusionist is presently capable of this) is kind of scary.

Brett Barnsdale
Claremont CA

I have to disagree with Brian Tillotson with regard to his interpretation of illusions. A 4th-level barbarian walking down an alley is no more difficult for a 3rd-level illusionist to copy than a 1st-level barbarian is.

The fact that one monster has more hit dice than another does not mean that the higher-hit-dice monster has more complexity in detail than the lesser one: Consider the butterfly (1 hp and that's being generous), with its picturesque wing pattern and graceful but erratic flight. Now consider a gelatinous cube. Which one is more difficult for an illusionist to mimic?

If a limit on hit dice should be placed, and the official rules *do not* have any such limit on illusions, it should be based on the caster's intelligence, not his level. (Just a hunch, since the magic of the game is fictional and this can never be tested, but I suspect a 7th-level illusionist with an 18 intelligence would create a better will-o-the-wisp illusion than a 9th-level one with a 15 intelligence would, if a comparison were made.)

To answer one of his questions though, a 6th-level illusionist could not create an army of 20th-level paladins with *holy swords* +5. The spell description limits the illusion to one object or creature, and it only lasts while the caster concentrates. Casting a new spell breaks the caster's concentration on the old spell, or limits it to a couple of minutes of continued existence if the illusionist is using *improved phantasmal force* or *spectral force*. Even if he could cast the 20 separate spells he'd need to create 20 paladins, the first spell would end before he could complete casting half of them, and the rest would vanish one by one every round. Anyone witnessing all that and not realizing these are illusions *deserves* to take fatal damage from the illusion.

On another point, Tillotson would give +2 to a victim's disbelief rolls if the illusion was hit by a *lightning bolt*, but not if it was an illusion of a creature that was magic resistant. A check with the rules says any illusion that is struck (and being hit with a *lightning bolt* qualifies) must react appropriately or be dispelled. Either the caster adjusted the illusion to show it taking damage (we rule that the caster must save vs. paralysis to show the reaction) — in which case, the viewers have no right to a bonus on disbelief — or the illusion is *gone*, and no disbelief bonus is necessary.

There is an aspect of illusionary spells that Tillotson seems to have forgotten: The viewer (or more actually, perceiver, since the more advanced illusions affect other senses as well as vision; closing your eyes against a *spectral force* ogre only gives it a better chance of hitting you) has to be conscious of the attack to take damage. Spells like *lightning bolt*, *fireball*, and *magic missile* are all instantaneous in duration. The illusion must behave like the spell it is copying or be exposed as an illusion. This means that the

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illusion must end at the instant it is cast; no problem, but it also means that it will not be in effect several fractions of a second later when the victims of the spell realize that they were hit. They weren't conscious of the damage while the spell was in effect, so they took none.

Also, suppose that an illusion of a bear bites a sleeping character and is dispelled; the sleeper is quickly awakened to see how badly "hurt" he is. No damage is going to be done in either this case or the previous one. This is why the spells *shadow magic* and *demi-shadow magic* exist.

The problem is that the rules themselves are so bloody vague that they cannot be made consistent. The best thing to do is to pull every illusion spell out of both the magic-user and illusionist spell lists and rewrite them from scratch. This will leave existing illusionist characters intact, but these characters may have to deal with a *phantasmal force* in their spell books that behaves differently than it used to.

S.D. Anderson
Whittier CA

I believe that I have developed the solution to the thief's "experience points for theft" problem. You simply take the experience level or hit dice of the being from whom something was stolen and multiply it by 100. In cases of victims with less than one level or hit dice, then simply award the thief 50 xp. The DM may wish to modify the experience-point award due to difficulty or simplicity.

For example, Dougal, a 9th-level thief, successfully picks the pocket of a 3rd-level fighter. Thus, Dougal will receive 300 xp from the theft. Later, Dougal steals a necklace from the lair of a huge ancient red dragon. Dougal receives 1,100 xp from the theft. The necklace he stole was later sold for over 5,000 gp. (This system does not use monetary value to determine experience points, nor should it.) Finally, Dougal steals a small treasure box from a kobold. He is awarded 50 xp for the theft (though there were only 200 cp in the box).

Hopefully, this system will help all the referees and players having trouble with experience-point awards for theft.

Rick J. Federle
Fairfield OH

Regarding Jon Slobins's article, "A Little Less Super," in issue #132: While Jon shows a concern for the DC HEROES game which we appreciate, I think he went slightly awry in his "unlimited growth" analysis of its character generation system.

Jon states that one problem with unlimited growth (his term for any character's ability to gain Hero Points and then spend them to increase statistics) is that "you wind up watching every Hero Point with an eye to increasing your character's powers still further, which can make you reluctant to use Hero Points when they're needed." Jon refers to the need for characters to burn Hero Points on particularly important actions in an adventure, such as saving innocent bystanders from harm or defeating the villain in the final encounter. If a person plays his character along the guidelines established in the DC HEROES game, he will understand the need to burn Hero Points at critical times and will do so, regardless of the effects relevant to his character's development. Okay, so not everyone plays strictly by the book, but the rules suggest that the best role-playing is done in this fashion.

Jon's emphasis further into the article is toward the appealing aspect of having charac-

ters of various power levels in one group, as opposed to each team member being generated on a base of 250 Hero Points (or a multiple thereof). Again, there is nothing inherent in the DC HEROES system to preclude players from designing characters with different Hero-Point bases. One of the major strengths of the DC HEROES system is that, unlike the random, dice-rolling generation system of AD&D games (which Jon suggests as an alternative), the DC HEROES game allows a player to actively design his hero to desired character strengths and weaknesses. Personally, when I'm rolling up a character in the AD&D game, I dislike being so dependent on my dice roll, which usually approaches the minimum; the DC HEROES system allows the player to devise exactly what weaknesses, strengths, and statistics a character will have.

As Jon gets further into explaining his Origin Table for creating characters' backgrounds and determining their Hero-Point bases, he discusses what he terms "latent" powers and skills, these being "purchased at level zero . . . To be increased later." In terms of character growth, Jon apparently wants to eliminate the inclusion of new powers and skills to existing characters (as he states that "no latent powers or skills may be bought later"). However, while a character under these rules could not later purchase a latent (0 AP) power or skill, he could still purchase 1 AP of a power or skill (for 10 or 5 times, respectively, the base cost, plus 60 or 40 Hero Points, respectively, for the 1 AP level) and still receive the new power or skill — a nominal cost, it seems, to circumvent this rule.

My primary concern with Jon's article is at the heart of his new character generation system. Jon seems troubled that existing characters can grow too powerful too rapidly in the DC HEROES system. Has Jon considered that it is much more costly in Hero-Point expenditure to increase any existing character's statistic by 1 AP (via character growth) than it is to increase that same statistic at the time of the character's original design?

For example, if I were designing Captain Charisma under the existing DC HEROES system and initially gave him 13 APs of the Charisma skill, but then decided (still at the design stage) that he should have 14 APs, I would need only expend an extra 16 Hero Points. However, if Charisma had been originally designed with 13 APs of Charisma, and six months later I decided to increase that to 14 APs, the cost for such character growth would be 70 Hero Points (perhaps not a major-league kick in the head, but still a significant increase).

Jon's system seems to neglect the fact that Hero-Point expenditure toward existing character growth is much more costly than the same Hero-Point expenditure at the time of the character's original design. By awarding a character such potentially overwhelming Hero Points at the initial design stage (I rolled only once on Jon's Origin Table and came up with a base of 15,670 Hero Points — I have witnesses), the resulting extremely high Hero-Point bases would allow for the design of heroes far too powerful as beginning characters. (Also, at such Hero-Point levels, the need to adopt Character Limitations and Vulnerabilities, one of the system's major role-playing catalysts, becomes impractical, as the drawbacks they present drastically outweigh the Hero-Point bonuses they award.)


Jon's interest in the DC HEROES game is certainly appreciated; he seems knowledgeable of the system and many of his points are well taken. However, I strongly disagree with his

interpretation of character growth in the system. In our basic set and in each supplementary module, players are encouraged to play their characters in the most heroic fashions possible — saving innocents, defeating villainy, and (dare I say it?) fighting for truth, justice, and the American Way. Following successful completion of an adventure, characters receive modest Hero-Point awards, which they can bank for later adventures or apply toward moderate statistic increases (as the average level of Hero Points banked by a character would barely raise a statistic one or two APs).

Jon's argument centers on his assumption that some characters hoard Hero Points to increase their statistics instead of burning them toward successful completion of an adventure. However, presenting such characters with great numbers of Hero Points at the design stage will not create more heroic characters; it will only create very powerful, greedy ones. In any campaign, there will always be those characters who sit idly by and hoard their Hero Points rather than spending them as the game demands. Yet, if the GM is conscientious, these characters should receive fewer Hero-Point awards and, as such, should find their character growths justifiably stunted.

Thomas Cook
DC HEROES Coordinator
Mayfair Games, Inc.
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by Skip Williams

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The sage's horizons have now expanded beyond the D&D® and AD&D® games. This month's column focuses on the STAR FRONTIERS® game system. Page numbers in the "Alpha Dawn" section refer to the Alpha Dawn expanded game rules book, and page numbers in the "Zebulon's Guide" section refer to the *Zebulon's Guide to Frontier Space* accessory, unless otherwise stated. See DRAGON issue #125, pages 73-74, for previous errata.

Alpha Dawn

The tables on pages 32-33 of the expanded game rules cover damage to moving vehicles. But what happens when a character fires at a stationary vehicle?

Treat any inapplicable result as a "No Effect" result or assign a different effect. For example, when rolling on the Vehicle Damage Table on page 32, the referee might choose to treat a "Spin" as a "No Effect," and a "Roll" as wheel or hoverfan damage equal to the "Turn Speed -15" result.

Is damage to vehicles cumulative?

Yes, both special damage and structural damage are cumulative.

What happens when a pedestrian is hit by a moving vehicle?

The pedestrian suffers 2d10 points of damage for each 20 meters per turn the vehicle was traveling. The referee might allow the driver or the pedestrian (or both) to attempt to avoid the collision if not surprised.

Will a grenade bounce when thrown from point-blank range? Is it even possible to miss when a grenade is thrown at point-blank range?

Generally, it is foolish to throw a grenade at point-blank range, since the

thrower will almost certainly be caught in the blast. In the basic game, grenades cannot be thrown at point-blank range. In the expanded game, grenades can be thrown at point-blank range with standard chances to hit (a character can miss with a grenade at this range just as easily as he can miss with any other weapon). The grenade will bounce 1 meter if it misses. *Zebulon's Guide to Frontier Space* has no point-blank category; use the grenade rules on pages 31-32 to adjudicate grenade misses at any range.

Are there any climatic conditions that Sathar avoid? For example, is it possible to find Sathar operating in polar or Ice Age conditions?

This is up to the referee, but it is reasonable to assume that, given proper survival equipment, Sathar could operate in almost any terrain or climate since they do so in deep space.

Where is the planet Starmist (depicted in module SF3 *Sundown on Starmist*) located? I can't find it on the frontier sector map.

Starmist is not on the sector map; it's just off the map's left edge and is about the same distance from both Scree Fron and Araks. The exact star route to Sundown (Starmist's star) is a UPF secret. Sundown does appear on the sector map in *Zebulon's Guide*.

In the article "Going for a Swim?" in DRAGON issue #110, a laser is deemed too inefficient for underwater use. Why? Lasers are just intense lights, after all, and light goes through water doesn't it?

A complete answer to this question involves physics too complex to discuss in this column. To put it simply, water scatters light. Even in relatively clear water, this scattering is great enough to render even the most powerful laser useless as a weapon (it makes a good light, though).

If two vehicles are traveling side by side, what is the chance for a character to successfully jump from one to the other?

Assuming that the two vehicles are traveling at the same speed, and assuming that both are open-topped and thus easy to exit and enter, such a jump will succeed if the character passes an Agility check. The referee should assign penalties if the conditions are less than ideal.

If two vehicles are traveling in the same direction at the same speed, what modifiers apply when ranged combat takes place between the occupants of the two?

Only modifiers for cover (assuming that the fire is directed at the occupants) and for attacker movement apply. Target movement modifiers do not apply as long as the vehicles are not moving relative to one another.

What are the limits on Dralasite elasticity? Can one form into a limbless ball and roll downhill? Form into a boatlike shape and float? Form Yazirian-like wings and glide?

A Dralasite could retract all its limbs and roll down an incline, but any character foolish enough to do this on any but the gentlest and smoothest of slopes will suffer a considerable amount of damage from bouncing and colliding with obstacles (see the falling rules on page 20 of the expanded rules). Dralasites can swim by taking any number of useful shapes. Dralasites can't make themselves thin enough to form useful wings, even for gliding.

Do vehicle-mounted weapons get bonuses to hit? How much do vehicle-mounted weapons cost?

The referee might allow a weapon mounted on a vehicle a 5% bonus to hit (or one column shift in the combat system in *Zebulon's Guide*) due to its improved stability. Page 83 of *Zebulon's Guide* gives costs for mounting weapons on vehicles.

Can hover vehicles fly higher than 30 cm off the ground?

No. The air cushion cannot be made larger.

The terrain effects table on page 19 of the expanded rules has an entry labeled "Track-mobile?" What does this mean?

The entry applies to vehicles or robots with tank treads.

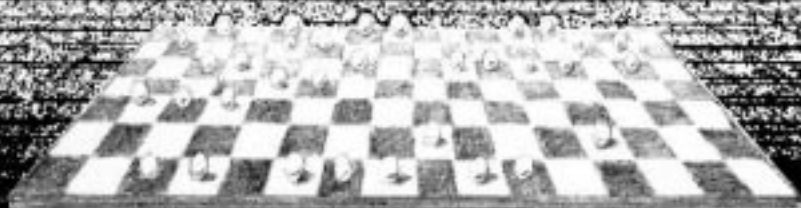
What kind of protection does armor give a vehicle? How much does vehicle armor cost?

The referee should assign a structure point value to the armor. Until these extra structure points are eliminated, an attacker cannot roll on the vehicle damage tables. Information on vehicle armor is given on page 83 of *Zebulon's Guide*.

How does a telescopic sight improve a weapon's chance to hit? What is a telescopic sight's cost and weight?

In the expanded game, a telescopic sight (scope) reduces the effective range to the target (see page 22). In the new combat system given in *Zebulon's Guide*, a scope extends a weapon's effective range (see *Zebulon's Guide*, page 30). Weights and

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costs for scopes are given in the equipment lists in *Zebulon's Guide*.

When a character tries to break out of a hold, does he use his Strength or melee "to hit" score?

The character uses his melee score, which might be based on his Strength (see page 25 of the expanded rules).

If a technician has flown a jetcopter once, does he have to roll against his operate machinery subskill in order to fly a different jetcopter?

Generally, no. Page 15 of the expanded rules clearly states technicians can automatically operate familiar vehicles. The referee, however, might require a roll if the second jetcopter has a locked ignition or is of an alien design. The referee might also require a roll whenever the character attempts an intricate maneuver or tries to operate the vehicle in poor conditions.

Can a character try again after failing a skill check?

This is up to the referee. Assuming that the initial failure did not produce a catastrophic result that would prevent further attempts, there is no reason why a character couldn't make several attempts. The referee should require a reasonable interval between attempts, from one hour to one day depending on the skill and the task. Attempts at lock-picking, for example, could be made every hour. An attempt to diagnose a disease or perform surgery could be made once a day at most.

Do Galactic Standard years have weeks or months?

No, the day is the largest sub-unit of a Standard year. If you want to use months and weeks, I suggest 20 months, each with four weeks, with five days in each week (20 days per month). Keep in mind that a month is usually based upon a world's lunar cycle, which may or may not be the same as the Earth-Moon lunar cycle, and which will certainly not be the same as any other world's lunar cycle(s).

The expanded game rules seem to indicate that a character can successfully climb a rope by passing just two Strength checks (at the halfway point and at the top), and these get a +30 modifier. Is the modifier applied to the die roll or the Strength score? Just how long a rope can a character climb?

The modifier is applied to the character's Strength score, but any roll of 96-00 is a failure. The actual length of the rope can vary; 30 meters is average. The referee might require additional checks for every additional 15 meters climbed, and might waive one of the checks if the climb is less than 15 meters.

The rules list grenades, standard energy clips, and pistol bullet clips

as having no weight or mass. This is causing real problems in my campaign. My players insist that their characters can carry several hundred of these items at no encumbrance penalties.

These items are so lightweight that carrying a few of them will not significantly affect a character's encumbrance. Normally, a character should carry no more than four grenades and six clips of ammunition. If a character insists on carrying more than this, each grenade weighs .25 kg and each clip weighs .10 kg. Carrying too many grenades *could* result in an accidental triggering of one or more grenades; the referee should assign a chance of this occurring for every grenade over the limit of four.

How much does anesthetic cost? One dose is required for surgery, so the supply included with a medikit tends to run out fairly quickly.

A hypo containing 10 doses of anesthetic costs 50 Cr.

How far can a character move during combat and still attack?

Any character can move his full allowance and still attack, though at a penalty; see pages 22 of the expanded rules. If you are using the new combat system in *Zebulon's Guide*, see page 37 of that book.

The skills section in the expanded rules says that a character cannot skip a level; that is, he must "buy" 4th level before he can advance to 5th. Fine, -but can a character "buy" 4th and 5th level (or any other consecutive levels) at the same time?

No. The character must spend at least one adventure at the lower level before advancing to the next level. This also applies to the new skill system presented in *Zebulon's Guide*.

Please explain how the three subskills of the Martial Arts skill (from the Military PSA) are used, and what die rolls are required. Also, where is the description for the Unarmed Combat skill? How much does this skill cost?

The subskills are used automatically when certain conditions arise. *Tumbling* comes into play whenever the character falls. The character's Martial Arts skill level is subtracted from any damage the fall causes, no die roll is required; see page 20 of the expanded rules for falling damage. *Defensive throwing* comes into play when a character breaks a wrestling hold. No die roll is required except the roll to break the hold. When the character breaks the hold, his opponent is knocked down and suffers damage equal to the character's punching score. The character receives no bonus when rolling to break the hold; he simply gets a better result when he succeeds. Wrestling and punch-

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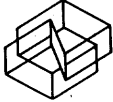
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ing are explained on page 25 of the expanded game. *Nerve combat* comes into play whenever the character is attacking a Dralosite, Human, Yazarian, or Vrusk with his bare hands (the referee might allow the character to learn nerve combat against the new races in *Zebulon's Guide* for an additional experience cost). When the character scores a successful hit, he has an increased chance to score a knockout. The bonus (+1% per Martial Arts skill level) applies only to the base chance (01-02) for scoring the knockout; see page 25 of the expanded rules for information on knockouts. The effects of the Unarmed Combat skill are explained on page 25 of the expanded rules. Consider Unarmed Combat a military skill when determining its experience cost (see page 11 of the expanded game).

Can a character use a heavy laser or other heavy weapon if he is strong enough to carry it?

Heavy weapons *must* be mounted on vehicles or tripods if they are to be aimed properly. If a character wishes to lug a heavy weapon, tripod, and power source along with him, and if he is willing to take time to set up the weapon every time a fight breaks out, more power to him.

How much does a tripod for a heavy weapon cost and weigh?

Tripods weigh 15 kg and cost 50 Cr,

Can I photocopy the character sheet that appears on the back cover of the basic game rules?

Yes, but only for personal use while playing the STAR FRONTIERS game; this also holds true for the character sheet included in *Zebulon's Guide*.

Are the -10 modifiers for using two weapons and for using a weapon in the "wrong hand" cumulative? What about a Vrusk using two weapons?

The two penalties are cumulative. When a character uses two weapons, his "right" hand fires at -10, and his "wrong" hand fires at -20. Vrusk never suffer the "wrong hand" penalty, but each weapon fires at -10 if one uses two weapons.

Why do groundcars move over water faster than explorers do?

Groundcars are not capable of water movement unless specially modified. When so modified, their lighter weight gives them a faster water movement.

How do you determine a robot's Strength score?

The referee must decide this on a case-by-case basis. In general, a robot will be weaker than an average individual of the race that built it, unless the robot is specifically designed for warfare or security. (No society wants to risk the consequences that might arise if a superstrong robot malfunctions and goes berserk.) Construction and industrial robots will have cranes, forks, or lifting arms that are very powerful, but these are designed to perform specific functions such as lifting bulk materials, compacting trash, excavating, etc. Decide how much strength a robot should have to get its job done (with some extra strength as a safety measure).

Do you need a robcomkit in order to deactivate a robot?

Yes, usually. The deactivation procedure for most robots involves removing an

access plate and fiddling with the robot's circuitry. Some domestic and industrial robots, however, have easily accessible kill switches. Any robot that is capable of inflicting large amounts of damage, like a snow-removal robot with a large rotary snow blower, will have such a switch. Any character can operate a kill switch. Of course, criminals or Sathar agents might reprogram the robot for destruction and thus disable such a switch.

Can a character exceed 6th level in a skill?

The 6th level is the limit in the expanded game. In *Zebulon's Guide*, however, the limit is 8th level.

Zebulon's Guide

When will volume two of Zebulon's Guide come out?

There are currently no plans for publishing further volumes of *Zebulon's Guide* or any other STAR FRONTIERS game products. Articles on this game (like this one) will occasionally appear in DRAGON Magazine, however.

Is it possible to use equipment from the first- or second-edition GAMMA WORLD® game for a STAR FRONTIERS game campaign?

Yes. Since the two games use the metric system, conversions between them are quite simple. You will have to assign a credit value to each GAMMA WORLD game item, and you will have to multiply the base damage of GAMMA WORLD game weapons by four in order to use them with the *Zebulon's Guide* resolution system. You might try to work out SEU consumption rates for GAMMA WORLD game weapons and equipment, but it is simpler if you just introduce GAMMA WORLD game energy cells into your campaign. This gives an alternate technology whose energy supplies are not interchangeable with those of standard items.

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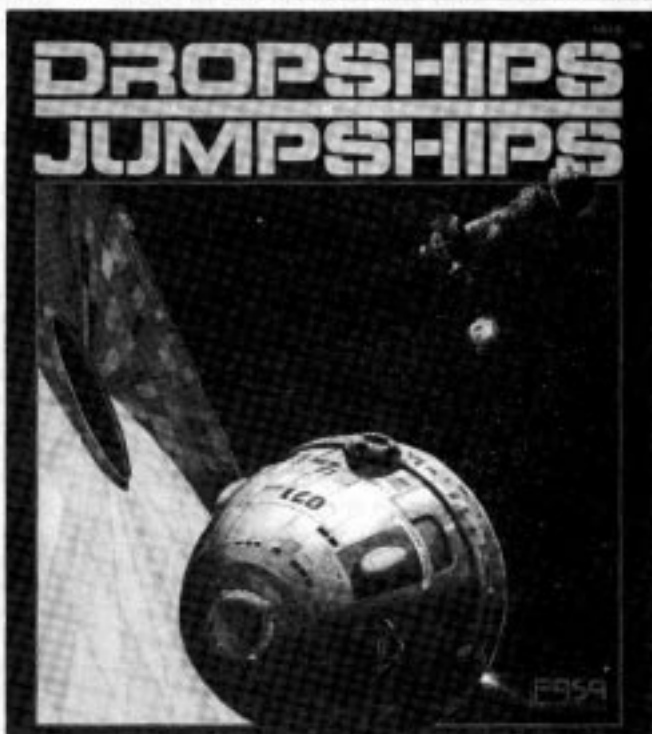
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Does an attacker who is unskilled with his weapon roll on the 0 column or the /0 column?

All unskilled weapon attacks use the 0 column before adjustments.

I don't understand the Humma's entry on the movement chart. What's the difference between walking or running and a Humma's leap/walking or leap/running?

Humma can move in two ways; they can walk or run just as the other races do, or they can use their springing ability. Since Humma attain a reasonable height when springing (5-10 meters, depending on the length of the spring), they must walk when indoors or whenever there isn't enough clear space overhead. Use the first line ("walk") when a Humma moves this way. A Humma's normal mode of locomotion is a series of kangaroo-like hops; use the walking rate from the second line ("leap") when a Humma moves this way. A Humma can also make a series of long springs when it wants to move very quickly; this is represented by the running rate on the "leap" line. When a Humma uses the run rate from the "walk" line, it is subject to the endurance rule on page 19 of the expanded rules, but it can only use the run rate from the "leap" line for 10 turns (see page 1 of *Zebulon's Guide*).

Does a character have any chance to succeed when he attempts a task requiring a skill he doesn't have?

This is up to the referee. Generally, an untrained character cannot perform any of the scientific skills or any skill that has a prerequisite. Otherwise, the character rolls on the -X column and will usually get a result that is less than the minimum result listed for the skill. For example, if an untrained character tries to use the Body Speak skill, he would only be able to convey simple concepts such as "help," "hello," or "danger." The referee might allow the untrained character to roll on a better column if the task is very simple or the character has some special knowledge. In the previous example, the character might roll on the 0 column if he was repeating a message he had seen a trained Body Speaker successfully convey earlier.

Are the Dexterity modifiers listed on page 38 applied before or after a combat roll?

All combat column shifts are applied before the die roll.

What qualifications must a robot have in order to operate a vehicle?

First, the robot must be able to fit in the driver's seat; this requires an android robot, a special control station that can accommodate a nonandroid robot, or a robot that is integrated directly into the vehicle. The robot or robot/vehicle must have a vehicle computer, a special version of the mind drive progit (at five times normal cost), and the following scanners: visual, radar, motion, and shape.

Page 31 (second column, "Skills") mentions a "throwing" skill. Where is the description of this skill?

This is a skill from the Alpha Dawn rules; see page 11 of the expanded rules.

How do you determine how far thrown explosives bounce when they miss? Page 31 mentions a non-existent miss section. How do you determine how far a grenade bounc-

es when it is on a timer? Page 32 says the bounce can be up to half the distance it was thrown; how does the referee decide the actual distance?

Thrown explosives behave exactly like grenades when they miss (see page 32). The referee will have to decide how far timed grenades (or explosives) will bounce on a case-by-case basis. The main consideration should be the setting on the timer. If the setting is one round or less, the grenade won't have very much time to bounce around before going off. I suggest treating such grenades as though they were set to go off on contact (they then bounce 1d10 meters). If the setting is longer, the grenade will probably stop bouncing before it explodes; determine the maximum distance for the bounce (half the distance it was thrown) and divide by ten, then roll 1d10 times the quotient to determine how far the grenade bounces, rounding any fractions up to the nearest meter. For example, a character throws a grenade 50 meters and misses. The grenade could bounce up to 25 meters ($\frac{1}{2} \times 50$). The player rolls 1d10 and gets a three, so the grenade bounces 8 meters ($25/10 = 2.5$; $2.5 \times 3 = 7.5$, round up to 8).

Do the mentalist's Beam and Detection disciplines require an unobstructed line of sight to the target in order to function?

No, although Beam requires that the mentalist know the general location of the target.

Will solar optics negate the -2 column shift inflicted when a character is "hit" by the beam of a floodlight?

This is up to the referee. If the surroundings are dimly lit, a sudden zap with a floodlight will blind a character wearing solar optics for one round. Afterwards, the optics will darken and negate the penalty. Of course, if the floodlamp is switched off, the darkened optics will obscure vision until they readjust to the

(continued on page 68)

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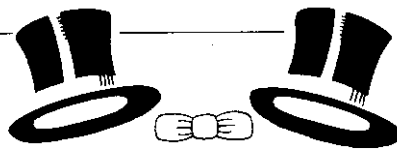
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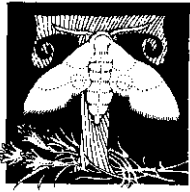
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MINIATURES





he three hunters, Karl and Shem and Anaxander, picked up the ogre's trail only a day after they had left the village and begun to follow the river back along its course to the spot where the unicorn had been killed, deep in the folded foothills of the Berkshires.

Steeply sloping woods cluttered with ferns and mossy boulders. Slim trees, beech and sugar maple, leaning every which way in hot green light. June, the sky a blank blue. They'd gone down to the water to refill their bottles, and there, in a little embayment between white boulders tumbled by snowmelt floods, Karl found the ogre's boot prints in wet gravel at the river's edge.

A gangling blond lad of twenty summers, Karl wiped sweat from his eyes as he stared down at the prints — intagliated with the waffle pattern of oldtime shoes — and felt no elation. After a moment he called the others over.

Anaxander nervously shook black, elf-locked hair from his eyes and barely glanced at the prints before dancing away, trailing a high happy babble, *ulu-la, ulu-la-la*, then spinning around and cocking his head to listen to the trill of some bird in the woods that rose above the river. Meanwhile, Shem put his hands on the knees of his jeans and puzzled over the sign: poor, slow, patient Shem. He'd been the best hunter of all, Karl's mother had said, before the transgression that had brought down the changelings' anger. They had broken the edge of his intelligence then, leaving only a dog's dull unquestioning loyalty. Karl had never learnt what Shem had done; none of the hunters liked to talk about it, not even his often outspoken mother — and now she was gone, sent by the grim changelings who had charge of the hunters' guild to track down the last of the ogres in the rainy forests of the North Pacific coast.

Karl said impatiently, "Not such a big one this time. My weight or maybe a little less."

"Maybe," Shem said at last, and straightened, squinting against the sun-dazzle that salted the swift-running river. Sweat shone on the dappled horseshoe of baldness that pushed into his red hair. He said, "Let it be clean this time, boy. None of the talk. Just do it."

"Talking about the oldtime doesn't harm," Karl said, smiling, sure in his power over the older man.

"Maybe. I don't know, boy."

Karl swatted at a mosquito. "There's an undine in this river, right? Worth calling up, I guess."

"I guess," Shem said, while Anaxander pulled the little wooden pipe from his belt and trilled the notes of the bird-song he'd just heard.

Squatting in hot sunlight, Karl laboriously scratched the necessary signs on a heavy granite pebble with his bodkin, then straightened and lobbed the stone out into the central current. Immediately, the glass-green water there boiled in white foam. An arm as long as Karl was tall broke surface, huge hand spread to show the membranes looped between the fingers; and each finger tipped with a claw curved like the thorn of a rose. Then her inhuman face, hair tangled like waterweed about it; then her shoulders and breasts, as smooth and white as the boul-

Karl and the Ogre

by Paul J. McAuley

ders of the shore. Water spraying from the gill-slits in her neck, the undine sculled the current, turning to face the hunters.

But she had little to tell them. Yes, she said in answer to Karl's questions: yes, the ogre had drunk the water of the river that morning, just after dawn. And yes, there had been only one creature. But when it had drunk its fill, it had turned and gone up the hillside, and the undine knew no more of it. Karl thanked her and she sank back, hair floating out from her face as water closed over it, and she dissolved into her element. Then there was only the sound of the river and the high piping of the birds in the green woods.

"Come on," Karl said, picking up his blanket roll. "There are bound to be tracks through the undergrowth up there — the dirt's so wet you can kick a spring out of it with your heel. What is it, Ax?"

Anaxander was pointing across the river. Karl shaded his eyes and saw a deer step daintily over a spit of gravel, then lower its head and drink.

"I see it," Karl said, "but it's on the wrong side. I could put an arrow in it, sure, but I'm not swimming across to get it, and none of us can walk on water. Or can you, Ax, huh?"

Shem said hoarsely and urgently, "They said it was not allowed to kill anything but the ogre. You remember, boy, remember the cow. Ready for us when we return. Not allowed, here."

The placid Jersey cow, her long-lashed eyes looking trustingly at the village slaughterer as he placed a hand on her white muzzle. Her abrupt sideways collapse. Karl said bitterly, "You'd think we'd be free of their damned rules up here!"

Shem shrugged; Anaxander piped a fragment of the tune that the girl had sung. Karl reddened and plunged his fists into the pockets of his long cotton coat. No use scolding the idiot, he probably didn't mean anything by it. Although you were never sure, never really sure. Anaxander was an idiot, but he was also a changeling. You never really knew what went on behind those clear green eyes. "Come on," Karl said, after a moment. "Still a long stretch before sunset. The damn ogre might even have its lair near, huh? So put that pipe away, Ax. It might hear."

Shem glanced at Karl, and the boy, his ears beginning to burn, turned and started off up the slope beneath the trees. But as he cast about for signs of the ogre's passage — moss scraped from the ground, a bent twig, a fresh-turned pebble — he could not help remembering the girl. The changeling, girl as she had come along the shore of the lake with the basket resting on the swell of one hip, butterflies dancing about her long black hair in the sunlight. Karl remembered her with angry helplessness mixed with loathing. No. She was not, never would be, for the likes of him.

They had arrived at the village, Karl and Shem and Anaxander, two days before, around noon, their horses tired and fidgety in the heat. There was a thorn fence twice the height of a man, its barbs as hard and as sharp as tempered iron, and so thick that the gate, barred and

bolted, stood at the end of a kind of tunnel. The three hunters had to wait outside until the sun had sunk to its last quarter before the village began to wake and the kobold who guarded the gate would let them in. Karl, thirsty and with a thick head from sleeping in the heat, followed the shambling gatekeeper with the others, leading their horses over close-cropped turf. Sheep scattered from their path.

The village stood beyond fenced hay meadows, near the shore of a lake that reflected the dark trees encircling it: a huddle of whitewashed stone cottages, each in its own garden and thatched with reeds, backed by strips of vegetable gardens and white-fenced paddocks where horses grazed. The three hunters were led away from this to a big barn with a hex-eye painted on one side like a target, which stood next to a rambling single-story house.

These belonged to the village slaughterer, of course, a gnarled, birdlike man who dismissed the kobold and took charge of the hunters, showing them into the barn and telling them to wait for the village council. The hunters watered and brushed down their horses; then, while Anaxander and Shem sprawled on clean straw and slept again, Karl sat just inside the barn's big, square door, fretting at the delay, even though he should by now have become used to the changelings' disdain.

Beyond the barn, a grassy slope ran down to the edge of the lake. Presently, a girl walked down from the slaughterer's house with a wooden bucket, and Karl watched as she stooped to fill it, and watched her walk back, her soft leather kilt flapping at her plump calves, sunlight shimmering on her cotton jerkin, on her long flowing hair and the scraps of colour that danced about it. Then she was inside the house, the door closed. Karl saw that, farther along the shore, the deputation of the village council was making its way toward the barn.

Karl rose and shook the stiffness from his legs, roused Shem and Anaxander. Green eyes shining mischievously, the changeling pranced about the two men, blowing shrill dissonances on his pipe; Karl managed to grab his arm and push him forward into the sunlight just as the villagers halted outside.

At first glance the half-dozen men and women were unremarkable, but something about their bearing, a pure, calm certainty, always intimidated Karl, so that he became uncomfortably aware of his shirt sticking to his shoulder blades, the dirt under his fingernails, the rank smell of his own sweat mingled with that of his horse. Their spokesman, a plump man of fifty or so, started off by addressing Anaxander, and when Karl pointed out the error, the man simply shrugged and said to the idiot with solemn courtesy, "I am sorry, brother."

Karl said, "He doesn't understand much of anything except music."

"He understands," one of the women said, eyeing Karl and Shem with displeasure.

And so, as usual, it began badly, Karl angry yet at the same time more afraid that he cared to admit — for any one of the changelings, however homely their appearance, could have twisted him inside out as easily as snap a pod of peas. At least it was a straightforward task. The spokesman explained that the village had long suspected that at

least one ogre survived in the hills beyond the lake, and that suspicion had been confirmed when a freshly killed unicorn had been found there. Karl guessed that the villagers had in fact tolerated the creature for some time; ogres were often the source of a multitude of minor nuisances around changeling villages, either from genuine hatred or foolishness or simple bravado, rarely the agent of a single outrage. Easier to ignore such trespasses than cause the kind of upset a hunt involved, raising the guilt of the deaths of all the people of the oldtime, but the murder of a sacred creature could not be ignored.

So he said, "Unicorn, huh? Well now. How long ago was that?"

"Twelve days."

Karl considered, working out the time it had taken to organise this hunt, the time they had taken to ride out here. He said, "Why did you wait two days or more before notifying our guild? The thing could have left the area by now."

"There was, as now, a reshaping. That could not be disturbed." The plump man's gaze was remote and unfathomable, without trace of guilt. As always, Karl was made to feel that, somehow, he was in the wrong. He fumbled through the rest of the routine, the questions about when and where, and was relieved when the changelings took their leave.

Later, the girl Karl had seen filling her water bucket came up to the barn, a basket balanced on an outthrust hip: a flagon of cider, a ripe cheese, bread, honey. Karl thanked her, then said impulsively, "Your father is the slaughterer, right? I guess we have something in common."

The girl lowered her gaze, and Karl was able to study her round, pretty face. Her long hair had been braided over one shoulder. A butterfly sat above the swell her small breasts made in her cotton jerkin, wings pressed upright like praying hands; others, he noticed, fluttered in the warm shadows of the barn. She said, "You are surely too young to be a hunter. I have heard it said that they are not allowed children."

It was true, of course, and Karl blushed to be reminded of his singular birth. The changelings put something in the food of the Hunter Towns, it was said, or in the water, or in the very air, some oldtime poison that stopped women from conceiving. Away from the Hunter Towns the poison wore off, so hunting parties must consist only of men or of women, but sometimes hunting parties would meet in the wilderness, by accident or design. In one of her more drunken moments before she had left for the North Pacific coast, Karl's mother had told him that his father could have been any one of three men: he had hated her for that. Now, he told the girl boastfully, "I've been a hunter five years now, killed eleven ogres." He realised at once that it was the wrong thing to say, and quickly added, "You mustn't be frightened of me. I've come to help your village."

"Oh, I'm not at all afraid of you." Her smile was the merest upcurving of the ends of her delicious lips. How old was she? Fifteen? Sixteen? All of Karl's drinking companions were at least as old as his mother or Shem, as were his few lovers and fewer confidants. He had the

briefest fantasy of running off with the girl, finding a place in the wilderness to live as the ogres did. Hunters did that sometimes, and were hunted down like ogres for it. And then Anaxander pranced over, blowing fragments of some remembered melody through his little pipe, and the girl shied.

"Don't worry," Karl said. "He's harmless, too: really he is."

"But why is the brother with you?"

"He's one of you, all right, but stupid, you understand? The brain's damaged. All he understands is music; any tune he hears he can play right back like one of the old-time machines."

The girl drew herself up and Karl was suddenly afraid. Her gaze was bright and imperious, like a sudden blade of light in the dim barn. Butterflies swirled around her head like multicoloured flakes of flame. She said, "You must not talk of such things."

"I didn't mean —"

"I must go now."

"I'm sorry," Karl said. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"Really, I must go." Was her gaze softer? "My father and mother must have an early supper. There is a change, this night."

"What are they doing to the world this time?"

"It's not our place to know."

And then she was hurrying away over grass striped with lengthening shadows. And she sang as she went, some complex atonal chant sung in a clear high voice that touched something in Karl, even though he understood it not at all.

And now, as the hunters followed the ogre's trail through the steeply slanting forest, Anaxander pipingly played fragments of the girl's song, mixed in with scraps and snatches of other remembered melodies, and Karl mumbled at the edges of his memory of her, trying not to think of the terrible thing that had happened later. No, she wasn't for him.

At least the trail was easy to follow. Rather than keep to the clumps of rock that thrust through the rich mold of the forest floor, the ogre had followed a winding path over the soft ground between. It was almost too easy, but then all ogres were old, now. Karl's mother had regaled him with tales of desperate fights and hard tracking in the old days, and if even half those stories had been true, those ogres who remained were poor relics indeed. The last one Karl had helped dispatch had been quite beyond speech, a baby no doubt when it had all changed, grown wild in the years since, no more than a frightened animal. It had been a long time since Karl had learnt anything new about the oldtime, and that had been from the babblings of an arthritic half-crazed crone to whom Shem's knife had been a blessing.

They were high above the river now, could see an old-time road like a broken-backed snake amongst the trees on the other side. Karl tried to imagine what it had been like, with autos roaring along in clouds of fire and smoke — that at least was something all the ogres agreed on, the terror and majesty of the oldtime roads. . . . Shem had stopped, was sniffing the air. After a moment Karl caught

a trace of the scent, raw and foul in the hot air.

"Spiders," Shem said.

They went on cautiously, and soon Karl saw filthy grey webs swagged from tree to tree ahead, glimpsed a dark shifting movement within their shadows. He shivered. "I wonder what they were thinking of, bringing those things into the world."

Shem wiped sweat from his balding pate and said, slowly and seriously, "Everything has its purpose. We aren't to understand it."

"Pity they couldn't dream up something useful, something that would hunt down ogres."

"They have us," Shem said after a moment.

"I guess so, and what would we do if we didn't have hunting? I'd hate to be on one of those labour gangs pulling down the old buildings." Although sometimes Karl wondered just what was left in the miles of brick and concrete the gangs were slowly turning back into the earth. He sighed and settled his blanket roll more comfortably. "Well, it won't have gone through those webs, anyhow. Spiders'll eat an ogre as handily as you and me, or you, Ax! Don't get too close now! Let's look around."

After only a brief search Shem gave a low call and Karl crossed to him, jeans brushing through ferns. The older man pointed to the freshly broken sapling, the waffle print beyond.

Karl flapped at the midges that danced around his head. "That's strange," he said. "The ogre is pretty light-footed, but here it's broken this sapling like it deliberately stepped on it. As if it wants us to follow it."

"Stupid, maybe," Shem suggested. "Killed the unicorn, after all."

"That was dumb, not stupid. There's a difference. We'll go easy, you think? Watch every step. You hear, Ax?"

Grinning broadly, the idiot changeling shook hair from his white forehead.

There were other signs as they climbed the slope: slashed branches, red earth scraped free of moss. Karl, following Shem's example, cut a sturdy sapling and used it as a staff to probe before him, but it was Anaxander who sensed the trap, where the ogre's trail passed between two lichenous outcrops of rocks,

The point of Karl's staff sank deep in the litter of broken branches there, and he kicked them aside. Beneath was a freshly dug pit, shallow and perhaps an arms-breadth wide, twice as long. A dozen or more sharp-pointed stakes were set at its bottom, whittled points smeared with excrement.

Shem looked at this for a long time. "Survivalists used this trick, long time ago now. All dead I thought. They wanted to fight, not hide. Kids left arsenals by their parents, see. I don't know. . . ."

Anaxander was watching them with wide anxious eyes, and Karl said, "Don't worry, Ax; it's long gone. This trap, see, it hoped to catch us."

Shem scratched his stubbled chin.

"Now we go real slow," Karl told them.

But there were no more traps. The ogre's tracks, mostly keeping to a narrow deer trail that wound amongst the trees, led on up the slope, crossed here and there by little

streams. Karl's boots kept slipping on the skim of moss and liverwort over the wet clay. Here and there bushes with dark leaves were in flower, each small white star-shaped bloom as intense as an epiphany in the green shade. Then the trees gave out to scrub and grass, and at last the three hunters gained the windy crest of the ridge, saw other ridges rolling away beneath the blue sky. Far out a small shape was crossing the sky from east to west. Shading his eyes, Karl could just see that it was a chariot pulled by a phalanx of huge birds, and he felt a pang of empty jealousy: there was some changeling lord or lady, and here he was, slogging through the muck of the world.

The ogre had left a tramped track through the long dry grass. The hunters followed it down the reverse slope, and they had not gone far into the trees when they reached the edge of a clearing where an oldtime ruin sagged in a shaft of sunlight, the collapsed shell of a wooden house beside a little brook shaded by dense ferns. There was a ragged black hole at the base of the ruin, a little apron of earth stamped flat in front of it; off to one side was a pile of blackened bones and other rubbish.

By now the three hunters had established a routine; rather than try to smoke out the ogre, it was safer — even if tedious — to wait for it to emerge of its own accord. Shem crept around to the back of the ruin and found a hiding place in a clump of ferns by the brook, while Karl and Anaxander lay in wait in front, watching the ragged entrance to the lair. Once, Anaxander made to draw out his pipe, and Karl swatted the idiot's hand away, whispered to him to be quiet and still. The changeling looked at him with wide eyes, then rolled over to look up through the trees, his lips moving as he mumbled some melody or other. Unwillingly, as he waited, Karl's mind circled about the memory of the girl in the village and of what had happened on that night, the night of the reshaping.

He had taken a hunk of bread from the food she had left, poured himself a hefty shot of cider, and retreated into the depths of the barn to brood on the day's small humiliations. And must have fallen asleep, for he woke with hazy light drifting through the doorway, the warm night beyond. Shem and Anaxander snored at different pitches. His muscles stiff from the day's ride, Karl stepped to the doorway. The air seemed to tingle with anticipation, small static discharges, and he remembered what the girl had said: a change.

Outside, the moon rode like a bruised baleful eye in green and violet scarves of light that washed the whole sky. The little lights of the village shone around the swerve of the lakeshore like stars settled to earth. Although the night air was warm, Karl shivered, wondering what was being worked on the world, what new thing was being brought into it or what was being changed, by the collective will of the changelings operating down in the whirl of elementary particles where what is blurs and widens into a myriad possibilities.

The lights of the slaughterer's house were also lit, and by their spilled glow Karl saw a pale shape on the grass near the edge of the water. The girl. His heart beating quickly and lightly, he walked down to her. Halfway there all the lights of the village and the lights behind him went off, but he was able to see well enough by moonlight and

the cold flickerings of the aurora.

The girl sat cross-legged, leaning over the cradle of her knees. She didn't seem to be breathing.

Karl said, "I couldn't sleep either." There was no reply. When he knelt beside her, he saw the whites of her eyes showing under her half-closed lids. "Hey," he said softly, and dared to touch her shoulder.

She shuddered, and in the same instant Karl felt a kind of contracting coldness over his whole skin. The change. The girl's mouth hung open, and he thought that he saw her tongue flick out. No, whatever it was, was like a pair of little whips. Then the dusty wings broke free of her lips, and the fat moth flutteringly fell.

The girl was making a kind of hollow gargling. Something else was pushing past her lips with a slow heaving motion.

Karl fled, falling once and smearing grass and dirt on the knees of his jeans, getting more dirt under his fingernails as he pulled himself up and ran on. In the stuffy, scratchy heat of the barn, he lay awake a long time, seeing over and over the moth push out of her mouth into the world. And now, sprawled in dusty fern fronds, watching the entrance to the ogre's lair, he shivered despite the warm air at the memory, a queer cold feeling in the pit of his stomach. His mother had been right when she had said that the changelings were not human.

The sun sank lower, brushing the top of the fern clump where Shem hid with brassy light. At last Karl saw a stirring in the ragged hole at the base of the ruins, and the ogre poked out its shaggy head, pausing as if to sniff the air before slowly and painfully crawling into the open. At once Karl stood, and after a moment Anaxander sprang up too, trembling lightly. The ogre brought up its rifle, and there was the faintest click. "Damn," it said in a high

cracked voice, and Shem launched himself from his concealment and knocked it into the dirt.

It was a woman, of course. Karl had guessed as much from the unicorn's murder. An old, scrawny woman, wrapped in a kind of cloak of badly tanned deerhide over ragged, faded oldtime jeans and workshirt, more darns than cloth, her hair tangled in greasy ropes. But she could talk, and once she realised that she wasn't going to be killed straight away, she grew garrulous, told Karl that the unicorn had chased right after her to lay its great golden horn in her lap. That was when she had cut its throat.

The wrinkles on her face rearranged themselves around her smile. "Thought it was going to spear me."

"It would have, if you hadn't been . . . well." Karl felt a cold clear elation, could only just control his eagerness to press out all that this creature knew.

"A virgin, oh yes! Never was anything but a few of us girls out here, heh heh." Then she frowned and said, "I hate those things they make. Hate them."

She needed only a little prompting from Karl to yield up her life story. Her name was Liza Jane Howard, she said, and she had lived here most of her life. "When the change came, Pappy hid me here. He was a biologist, knew he was dying, everyone past puberty was dying, but didn't know the superbrights had done it. I didn't either, for the longest time. Changed the bacteria in the guts, see, so they killed any adult. After a couple of years it was all over, and then I guess they changed the bacteria back, so they could grow up, huh?" Karl nodded. He already knew this much from his brief interrogations of the other ogres he had helped to track down. "I stayed up here," she said, her eyes unfocused, that time of winnowing closer to her than the blue evening. "Kept to myself, that's how I survived. Oh, I'd talk to a few like me, but never let them know where I lived. Had a little girl here once, in the early days, sick little thing, died of pneumonia inside a month. Never did learn her name. Suppose it was a blessing, huh? Haven't seen anyone for a couple of years now. Soon we'll all be gone, and there'll be nothing but the superbrights."

"Those are the changelings," Karl prompted.

"You don't know, boy? See, back in the old days there was a way of enhancing a baby's intelligence before it was born, all the rich people had it done. But they didn't know just how much they had changed those damned kids until the kids started changing the world. All the adults going was the first of it." She peered at Karl. "You didn't know?"

"Not the whole story." His mother had never taught him any history, but his mother had only been a baby when it had happened, an ordinary baby.

On the other side of the clearing, Shem coughed and spat, as always disapproving of this talk, wanting to finish the job. Anaxander scuffed at the grass, watching the ogre with mingled fear and fascination.

She said, "Wonder I stayed alive as long as I did, all the changes going on. Waking up and finding giant spiders hung in the trees, or little dragons hiding under stones, whistling like kettles. And the wolves came back, never sure if that was natural or their working. Heh. Soon



enough they'll have changed the world right out of the goddamn universe, then where'll you be, eh boy? You ever think about what'll happen when you hunt the last of us down?"

Karl remembered the cow killed in readiness for their return, the trusting way it had followed the slaughterer, its sudden unstrung collapse at the touch of his hand.

The ogre cackled. "Know why they changed it the way they did? You ever read oldtime books? Pappy left me with thousands."

Karl couldn't read, but he had heard about books from one or two of the ogres. His curiosity tingled under his entire skin. He had never before met an ogre who knew so much about the way things were before it changed.

"You come inside, boy. I'll show you," she said. "Show you where it all comes from."

"Sure, okay."

Shem stood, hand on the sheathed knife at his hip.

"Listen, boy, that's a bad idea, a crazy idea."

"She can't hurt me," Karl said angrily. He had to know, had to see. Anaxander looked at him, looked at Shem, eyes wide. Karl said to the idiot, "It's okay, isn't it, Ax?" But the idiot looked away indifferently.

"I haven't a tooth left in my head," the ogre said, "and you've got my rifle. I just want to show him how it was."

Shem pressed his hands over his ears, shook his head.

"Come on," Karl said, and pushed the ogre toward the ragged hole.

It stank inside, a mixture of old urine and sweat and hot tallow from the candles which burned in niches in the crumbling brick walls. A pile of rotting cloth made a kind of nest; more covered the floor, tearing beneath Karl's boots. He had to stoop beneath the cobwebbed ceiling. Muttering, the ogre rummaged through a pile of rubbish, disturbing insects that skittered away into the shadow. At last she held up something big and square, opened it to show still-bright pictures. "See," she said, riffling the pages in front of Karl's face, "see?"

The pictures didn't move, as one ogre had told Karl, but still they held his entire attention: drawings of dragons, of griffins, of a unicorn with delicate hoof raised in some impossible leafy bower, of a village. He grabbed the book, peered at it in the uncertain candlelight. A cluster of white, thatched cottages surrounded by a high thorn fence, in a clearing in a dark forest. "What is this?" he said. He couldn't understand how an oldtime book could contain images of the here and now.

The ogre cackled, shadows deep in the lines of her face. "A children's book. Understand? Something made for children to look at, tales of made-up places to entertain them. When they changed the world, the superbrights were only children, the oldest my age back then. Eight, I think. Hard to remember. Most much younger. This was all they knew, so this was how the world was changed. All out of fairy-tale books. Only it's real now, Utopia built on the bones of almost everyone who lived back then. Look at that, let me show you something else."

While she rummaged, Karl turned damp, mottled pages, blinking at the fantastic illustrations of the familiar. The ogre turned to him again, and he saw that she held a little pistol. Something in him relaxed. He had been

expecting some such trick.

"My damn rifle might not have worked," she said calmly, "but this'll do for you and your friends. No offense."

The click as the hammer fell was small in the dank space. No other sound.

Karl said gently, "It's Anaxander. He's an idiot, but he's also a changeling. He has a power that stops weapons working against him or against his friends. He doesn't even have to think about it: it's like blinking."

The ogre screeched in rage and threw the pistol at Karl. He ducked, and it clattered against brick as she rushed past, scabbled through the entrance hole. Then silence. One by one the candles resumed their level burning. Karl calmly searched for the pistol and tucked it in his waistband, then crawled outside. Shem stood over the ogre's thin body, licking blood from the blade of his knife.

Much to Shem's disgust, Karl insisted on burying the body. The older man sat on a boulder as Karl scooped out dirt with a board and said sulkily, "Won't do it any good. Wolves will come and dig it up."

Karl furiously attacked the earth and didn't reply. By the time he had finished, the evening light had gone. Sweating, he rolled the ogre's body into the hole, kicked dirt on top of it, stamped it down. Shem watched impassively; Anaxander idly piped fragments of melody. Karl took a pebble and scratched a spell on it, tossed it into the lair. Flame licked out instantly. The only conjurations he'd been taught were those that called up elementals, but they were enough.

Anaxander leading — glancing back now and then to see the shapes the smoke made as it rolled into the sky — the three hunters climbed through the forest. When they came out of the trees at the crest of the ridge, they saw that the sky was alive with slowly writhing banners of light and Anaxander pointed, grinning delightedly. As they went on, the changeling took out his pipe and played a slow rolling melody in solemn celebration of the change.

Shem said to Karl, his voice low, "Throw it away, boy."

Automatically, Karl's hand went to the pistol tucked in his belt.

"Won't do you no good. If he" — Shem pointed at the idiot who pipingly paraded ahead of them — "can stop oldtime things working, any of them can. I should know."

"That's just what they did to you talking."

"Maybe so. Can't see how I'd tell. Don't want to see you in trouble, boy, is all."

"What will happen?" Karl cried out. "What will happen when they don't need us anymore?"

Shem shrugged. Farther down the trail Anaxander looked around, green eyes luminous, then went on, playing his slow tune. Karl hefted the pistol, real as any unicorn or dragon, then abruptly threw it far into the undergrowth. The loss didn't matter. He knew now that a part of the oldtime lived still, would always live, in the fabulous conjured beasts, in the very stones, white as bone, of the cottages of the little village by the lake, of all the little villages of the changed world.

"Come on, boy," Shem said, and Karl hurried to catch up with him. Together, they followed the changeling down into darkness.

Ω

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Up Close and Personal



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Crouched in the thick shrubbery that ringed the secluded mansion, Nikki Haiku checked her Orioncomm. It was midnight — time to execute her part of the plan.

Dressed in a black body suit, Nikki divorced herself from the cover the foliage provided and sprinted as silently as possible toward the large oak tree that towered high above the second story window. She covered the distance in record time and plastered herself against the tree. If all was well with the rest of the group, Carlo should be disabling the cars and Randall should be dealing with the alarm systems. Now, a quick climb into the branches and a swing over to the bedroom window —

Nikki froze as a beam of light bobbed toward her from the side of the building. The guard should have eaten the drugged pizza by now! Still the light advanced, swinging back and forth across the lawn. In seconds, she'd be discovered, and that had to be prevented at all costs.

Nikki steeled herself for combat as the guard turned the corner. She knew he'd be armed, and she'd only get one chance to take him out quietly. As the flashlight beam danced around the corner and focused on her, she made her move. . . .

"Surprise action," Jodi stated as the Admin explained Nikki's situation. She rolled the dice, easily making her skill check at -20. "What can my ninja do now?"

The TOP SECRET/S.I.™ game rules have been streamlined to allow for creative combat situations such as the one described above. The special techniques for the various hand-to-hand styles, though, are hard to follow without some study of the rules they involve (*Players Guide*, pages 77-79).

Herein is a detailed description of each combat technique, including standard results for success, failure, and Lucky and Bad Breaks. The Admin is encouraged to replace such results in unusual combat situations. For example, a ninja character doing a Leap into combat atop a skyscraper might fling herself over the edge of the roof if she rolls a Bad Break of 99, or may knock her opponent over the edge if she was merely trying to capture him!

Attack/Defend: An agent skilled in this technique can both attack and defend in a single turn at full skill level if the primary skill check at -20 succeeds. An unskilled combatant makes an attack/defend sequence at half skill level (*Players Guide*, page 63).

Success: The agent maneuvers and mentally prepares for both an attack and a defense. One attack and one defense roll are allowed at full skill checks.

Lucky Break: The agent is exceptionally prepared to use this technique, and as a result automatically succeeds in this tech-

nique in the next round. This Break does not apply if the agent switches techniques.

Failure: The agent is not prepared or positioned, and makes the attack and defense at half skill level. The technique may be attempted in the next turn as usual.

Bad Break: The agent is overextended, and only the first half of the sequence (attack or defense, whichever comes first) can be made at half level. The second half of the sequence fails.

Blindfighting: The agent skilled in blindfighting uses other active senses (smell and hearing) to locate all opponents in a 10' radius. This check can be made as often as needed until it succeeds. Option: An agent with the Acute Smell or Hearing advantages (*Players Guide*, page 14) can add these bonuses to this technique check at the Admin's discretion.

Success: The agent fights at half skill level (not the usual quarter skill level for other agents) for the duration of combat.

Lucky Break: The agent accurately predicts his opponent's initial action and makes his first attack at full skill level.

Failure: The agent fights at quarter skill level, as a normal fighter would. The technique can be attempted again next turn.

Bad break: The agent has lost his opponent; no attack can be made this turn.



Drop: The agent is skilled at landing blows at certain points on an opponent's hand, wrist, and forearm that cause the hand to open by reflex. No damage is caused, however,

Success: Any object held by the opponent falls to the nearest surface. The Admin must decide the probability that the object breaks or (if a firearm) goes off. On a quarter skill check or less, both of the opponent's hands open and all items are dropped.

Lucky Break: The agent actually snatches the item or kicks it into his own hands if so desired.

Failure: The attempt misses, and the opponent is made aware of the agent's intentions. No other action can be made.

Bad break: The agent is overextended or stumbles, and he makes his next initiative check at -5.

Hold: The agent can inflict holds that cause damage. The body location rolled is the area held, although such rolls can be bumped according to skill level.

Success: The agent inflicts 1 wound or 1d4 bruise points to the held body location. The agent makes full skill checks on successive turns to inflict further damage.

Lucky Break: The opponent must make a CON check or pass out for 1d8 minutes. The hold is so well applied that any

attempt to break it is at quarter (and not half) skill level.

Failure: The victim eludes the hold attempt.

Bad break: Poor execution allows the opponent to reverse the attempted hold. The body location is determined randomly on the agent.

Instant Defense: The agent can react quickly enough in surprise situations to make a last-second defense. No attack may be made, however.

Success: The agent, through finely tuned reflexes, manages to recover enough presence to block the attack.

Lucky Break: The agent reacts so quickly as to gain an attack immediately after the block. Only unconsciousness or the death of the agent will prevent this bonus.

Failure: The agent did not react quickly enough; the defense was ineffective.

Bad Break: The agent froze in surprise and makes his next initiative check at -5.

Instant Stand: The agent can recover his stance from a prone position and still make a normal move.

Success: The agent stands and can execute a normal move at no penalty.

Lucky Break: The agent moves so swiftly and unexpectedly that the opponent must

make an INT check or be surprised.

Failure: The agent stands but he completely fails to act.

Bad Break: The agent slips, returning to his original prone position, and may not act that turn.

Knock Down: The agent is skilled at striking vital equilibrium and balance centers of an opponent's body.

Success: The opponent is knocked to the ground directly in front of the agent. Normal damage applies.

Lucky Break: The opponent is dazed temporarily and loses his next action, in addition to the result under "Success."

Failure: The attack misses.

Bad Break: The agent is overextended or stumbles, making his next initiative roll at -5. The attack misses completely.

Leap: The agent is skilled at jumping and leaping to the extent that a leaping attack can be choreographed with high precision. An unskilled character can leap or jump 5% of his movement score (MOV) vertically and 10% horizontally.

Success: The agent can leap up to 10% of his movement score vertically and 20% horizontally. The agent can still make an attack or move.

Lucky Break: In combat, the leap actually becomes the brunt of the attack. On a successful attack roll, the opponent is knocked back 1d8 feet in addition to the normal damage delivered by the attack.

Failure: The agent manages only an average leap (as per an unskilled character). In addition, the leap cannot be combined with another action.

Bad Break: The agent makes an average jump, but slips upon landing and suffers a leg wound for 1d4 -1 bruise points.

Multiple Attacks: The agent is skilled in superfast fighting styles that result in multiple attacks. An agent with a level 1 fighting style still attacks only one opponent, so this technique is not usable until the agent has at least a level 2 in some attack style.

Success(es): The attack in question hits.

Lucky Break: The next attack in this multiple attack sequence is made at the same level as this attack (i.e., the -10 cumulative penalty is not assessed for the next attack). However, any attacks after that suffer the normal penalty.

Failure(s): The agent misses the target on this attack. He can continue with additional attacks this turn (if any) with the standard penalty applied (-10 per attack, cumulative).

Bad Break: The agent is overextended and loses all other attacks this turn.

Multiple Defense: The agent is skilled in warding off several attacks from multiple directions. A character with a level one fighting style still defends against only one opponent, so this technique is not usable until the agent has at least a level 2 in

some attack style.

Success(es): The defense succeeds.

Lucky Break: If defending against an armed opponent, the weapon is released from the opponent's grasp; otherwise, the next defense in this sequence does not incur its usual -10 penalty.

Failure: The attack was not blocked. The agent may continue with his additional defenses (if any) at the usual penalty (-10 per defense, cumulative).

Bad Break: The agent is overextended, and all later defenses are lost.

Stun: The agent is skilled at striking precise nerves which result in reflex disruption (stunning). An exceptional strike (-40) results in a knock-out blow.

Success: The opponent is stunned or knocked out. A stun (-20) results in inaction when the opponent would normally move next. A knockout (-40) means the opponent is unconscious for 1d8 minutes.

Lucky Break: The opponent is laid out for 2d10 minutes.

Failure: The attack misses.

Bad Break: Because of poor execution, the agent stumbles or is overextended. His next initiative check is at -5.

Surprise Action: The agent is skilled at "the art without form." Seemingly random actions can have a stupefying effect on nearby opponents.

Success. The agent is allowed to make a surprise attack (*Players Guide*, page 77) at full skill level, and he may deliver the blow to any area desired. All opponents within a range of 10' are surprised and inactive for the rest of the round.

Lucky Break: All opponents who witness the move, regardless of distance, are surprised for the rest of the round.

Failure: The attack surprises no one, but a normal attack is allowed at full skill level.

Bad Break: The so-called surprise action was so poorly executed that all opponents within 10' will expect similar "surprises" during the rest of the combat; if the agent attempts another surprise action during the combat in question, all opponents receive an INT check to predict such a move.

Throw: The agent is skilled in the art of using opponents' weight against them. The opponent must be held (*Players Guide*, page 77) before the throw attempt.

Success: The held opponent is thrown 1d8 feet in any direction the agent wishes. Landing on a hard surface incurs 1d6 points of damage to a random area.

Lucky Break: The opponent must make a CON check or be knocked out for 1d8 minutes (full bruise damage to the head).

Failure: The agent fails to lift or divert

the opponent, but he keeps the hold. No damage from the continued hold accrues this turn, however.

Bad Break: The throw attempt loosens the hold, and the opponent slips out.

Vital Areas: The agent is skilled in hitting the most painful and damaging spots in any area of an opponent's body.

Success: The agent damages the desired body location for 2 wound or bruise points.

Lucky Break: The pain caused to the opponent renders him disoriented; his next initiative check is made at -5.

Failure: The agent misses.

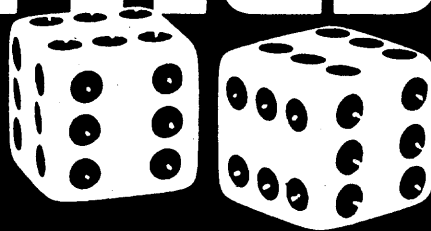
Bad Break: The agent is overextended and makes his next initiative check at -5.

As the flashlight beam danced around the side of the house and focused on her, Nikki made her move. Calculating the distance to the guard as within range, she launched herself into an unorthodox ninja move — a forward somersault. Allowing the momentum of her acrobatics to carry her back up into a standing combat stance, she landed a hammer strike to the guard's unprotected head. He dropped like a rock, out cold.

Nikki reached down and switched off the flashlight. With a quick grin, she turned back to the tree. . . .

Ω

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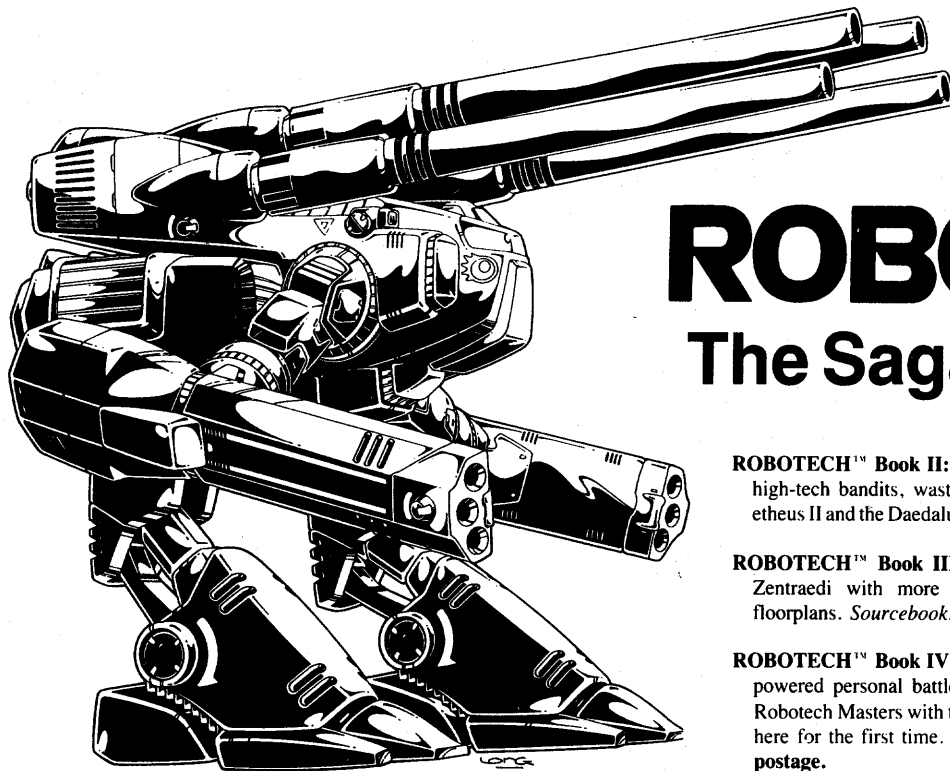
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(continued from page 50)

dim light (the effect is exactly the same as wearing sunglasses in a dark room). If the surroundings are already brightly lit, the optics will already be darkened and will protect against zaps from a floodlight.

Does a maxiprogram have all the functions given in its description, or does it perform only one of these functions?

A maxiprogram will perform only one function from the list suggested in its description, according to *Zebulon's Guide* designer Kim Eastland. However, Mr. Eastland points out that *Zebulon Guide's* computer section, like the rest of its contents, is intended to give referees a few basic guidelines for handling campaigns. If he wishes, the referee can introduce multi-function maxiprograms that combine functions. Such progs will be more expensive and will perform each function less well than a specialized prog.

What is the random location indicator on the file computer?

This is a catalog showing what information is stored in which file. This aids in retrieving information stored in the computer — information does not have to be retrieved in the same order it was put in.

Can a mainframe maxiprogram or bodycomp program be used simultaneously with other programs, or must they be used one at a time?

Assuming that the computer is not overloaded with programs, it can run all of them simultaneously. A level two mainframe, for example, can run up to four levels of maxiprograms, and can run these simultaneously. The computer could be loaded with more maxiprograms, but only four could run at any one time.

Is there an error on the mass and weight of scanners? A Type D scanner weighs in at 80 kg, but the slightly larger Type E weighs 1,000.

The mass figures for scanners listed on page 89 are accurate; the large increase in mass that you have noted reflects the Type E's much larger volume.

Can the spy eye be controlled through a joystick, or does it have to be preprogrammed?

A spy eye can be controlled manually.

Is the damage caused by the mentalist's Cryokinesis and Pyrokinesis disciplines one time only, or is the damage inflicted every turn? Is damage first inflicted on the third round or the fourth?

Once the mentalist has successfully completed three uninterrupted rounds of concentration of a target, he may continue to concentrate on the target and do additional damage every turn. Since these disciplines involve the complex task of controlling molecular activity, the mentalist must make a new roll for damage each round. If the mentalist switches targets or breaks concentration for any other reason, he must again concentrate for three rounds before inflicting damage. Either discipline inflicts damage on the fourth round of uninterrupted concentration.

What are the maximum and minimum (if any) changes in density allowed by the mentalist's Density discipline?

The time required to use the discipline (one turn for a 10% change in density) puts a practical limit on the change. In absolute terms, a character cannot give himself negative density. When the character reaches "zero" density, his body behaves like an underinflated helium balloon, not quite light enough to float but easily pushed about even by the slightest breeze. Any decrease in density will effectively make the character weaker; the character loses 10% decrease in Strength for each 10% decrease in density. Theoretically, there is no limit on how much density a character can gain, but in normal Earth gravity, a character will become totally immobile once his density increases 500% (five times normal).

What is the range of a grenade launcher?

A grenade launcher has "D" range (see page 37, Weapon Ranges table).

What is an asbestos suit? How much does it weigh and cost?

An asbestos suit is a fireproof garment that covers the entire body, including the head and extremities. It weighs 3 kg and costs 500 Cr.

Ke-5000 lasers and raffur M-10s can use parabatteries. What are parabatteries, how many SEUs do they carry, and what is their weight and cost?

Parabatteries are essentially larger versions of standard power clips. The capacities, costs, and weights of parabatteries are listed on page 41 of the expanded Alpha Dawn rules. Both weapons can use parabatteries of any size.

What skill is needed to fire a micromissile?

Technically, no skill is required, but the base column for success would be column 0. Characters with PGS weapons skill get a bonus when firing micromissiles.

How much does a minigrenade launcher cost and weigh?

A minigrenade launcher weighs .75 kg and costs 200 Cr.

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Role-playing Reviews



The prop is mightier than the word

Exhibit A

Player: "Okay. We open the door. What do we see?"

DM: "A twenty-by-twenty room with blah blah blah yattahtuh yattahtuh et cetera."

Exhibit B

Player: "Okay. We open the door. What do we see?"

DM: (Wordlessly removes a piece of cardboard, revealing a full-color layout of the room with numerous illustrated details of furniture, bookshelves filled with tomes and scrolls, a pentagram with flaming candles at the vertices, and an elegant carpet with the Ten Runes of Ultimate Transfingination worked into a design in gold thread.)

I am a sucker for FRPG sessions with pretty miniatures and fancy, full-scale table displays. I am an even bigger sucker for FRPG products with props that help me present fancy, full-scale table displays for my players. In one sense, this is just an extension of my childhood affection for

toys. It's also a reflection of a frustrated penchant for scale modeling — the sort of disease that afflicts plastic-model-kit freaks and HO-gauge railroad hobbyists. But it also comes from a conviction that, in role-playing, seeing is believing, and believing is a strong foundation for a successful role-playing session.

Doing elaborate scale displays for FRPG sessions has its pros and cons. On the plus side, a scale tactical display helps keep track of character position, movement, range, line of sight, and other wargaming-type stuff. Though few of us play all our role-playing sessions with wargame precision, combat is often the action centerpiece of a scenario. To use wit and skill in FRPG combats, you need a clear idea of where everything is.

Also a plus is the visual appeal of a well-presented adventure setting. Having something colorful and complex to look at helps me focus on the role-playing activity (rather than on the label of my Coke can or the stack of dice my fellow player is building), and it adds to my sense of presence in the scene. It's as basic as using sets and props

in a play. Role-playing is a dramatic activity, and a well-dressed set adds to the total effect.

At its best, a scale layout may offer specific visual details that are significant in the scenario. For example, in a verbal description, a DM's mention of an unremarkable detail like a scrap of paper under a desk is a dead giveaway to the paper's significance. On the other hand, if given a floor plan in which there are dozens of pieces of paper illustrated as strewn across the floor in addition to dozens of other unrelated details, the players are given no inadvertent clues to the significance of the scrap of paper. Here's an example of play from an FRPG session with elaborate illustrated display:

Player: "Those patterns on the rug; they almost look like runes. Hey, I take that funny ring I found and touch it to the runes. Anything happen?"

DM: "Nope."

Player: "And this funny decorative plate on the desk. [Player points with his pencil.] I pick it up. Anything on the underside?"

DM: "Nope. But there is a piece of paper under the plate. What do you do with it?"

Elaborate layouts have their liabilities, too. For one thing, game-master preparation and set-up is often time-consuming, and moving miniatures and props really slows down the action. Purchasing and preparing miniatures and props can also involve considerable expense in time and money. One of the great things about role-playing games is that you need no more than paper, pencil, and dice to play them. Getting too involved in miniatures and props can distract from FRPGs' simpler virtues.

Ultimately, it's a matter of style. If you want fast, loose action, elaborate displays are not for you. If you want rich, detailed, colorful settings with lots of neat props, you'll have to accept a slower, more measured pace of play.

What elements make up a typical FRPG display? A few notes on this topic follow.

Scale: Most fantasy role-playing displays use metal or cardboard miniatures to represent the characters and horrors encountered in fantasy adventuring. The most popular scale is about 1" = 5', a scale roughly compatible with 25mm figures. Use of 15mm figures is much less common; some games (the STAR FRONTIERS® game, for instance) have also used wargame-size, 1/2" x 1/2" counters, too, though they've never been very popular.

The unfortunate thing about 25mm scale is that it is too large to permit a lot of maneuvering on a tabletop with most FRPG systems. In TSR's AD&D®, Chaosium's RUNEQUEST®, and Games Workshop's WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY games, characters can run the length of my dining room table in four or five rounds, and run from the center right off an edge in two rounds. It's not such a problem with dungeons and building interiors, where walls and doors keep the

characters on the table, but outdoor encounters are difficult to present at this scale. Thus, FRPG combat in 25mm scale is a matter of slugfest and spell-casting rather than maneuver and pursuit. Using 15mm scale (roughly 1" = 10') might encourage more maneuver and pursuit, but 25mm metal figures, sculpted with more detail and more rewarding to paint, are the solidly established standard.

In fact, most FRPG products cheat a bit on the 1" = 5' scale of 25mm figures, precisely because it's too big to print on a reasonably sized piece of paper. One way to do this is to print square grids on the props. The squares are from 3/4" to 7/8" to a side, but you treat them as though they were 1". Another way to cheat is to carefully avoid any mention of the scale — a sleazy but not unheard-of trick. A third way to cheat on scale is to present objects as out of scale, but not so much that it makes you wince. For example, if a door reaches to a 25mm figure's nose, it's okay, but if the door only reaches to his waist, it looks ridiculous. In the cut-out buildings in TSR's AD&D BATTLESYSTEM™ supplement H1 *Bloodstone Pass*, the doors come up to a 25mm character's boot tops. *Bloodstone Pass* wasn't designed for 25mm figures, of course — it was designed for tabletop miniatures battles — but it's a pity those pretty buildings can't be used as props for role-playing sessions.

Because of the common impulse to cheat a bit on 25mm scale, FRPG props may sometimes look a bit out of scale with your 25mm lead figures. Don't worry; it's a mistake to take scale too seriously in an FRPG scenario, anyway, as in cases in which only one lead miniature will fit into a 5' x 5' space. (Telephone-booth stuffing in the sixties was an extreme test of packing people into small spaces, but not out of line with some situations in which many FRPG characters have been stuck.)

Floor plan grids: To grid or not to grid, that is the question. There are three basic grid styles: square, hexagonal, and no grid at all. The guys in art departments tend to be offended when you want to put ugly grids on their lovely floor plans; they usually prefer the no-grid style. I like grids because they make movement measuring easy — just count hexes or squares as you move. Sure, grids look kind of ugly, but they're useful. Anyway, that's what I tell the art guys just before they tell me to go away and leave them alone.

Most grids on FRPG products are square. All of the products mentioned in this article, except one, have either square grids or no grids at all. Square grids are okay, particularly in narrow corridors and enclosed spaces. But in larger rooms and outdoor encounters, hexagonal grids feel more natural and work better for tactical maneuvers and ranges. The only major role-playing system that uses hexagonal grids is Steve Jackson Games' GURPS® game — a system particularly well designed for FRP tactical wargaming.

The worst thing about square grids is the problem of diagonal movement and range. A diagonal move travels about 1½ times as far as moving back-and-forth and sideways. Since FRPG is recreational, nobody wants to deal with fractions, so nobody wants to deal with diagonal movement. But the alternative is just as bad. The mage who's targeting you with a spell across the room is just seven squares away on the diagonal, but 14 squares away without diagonal movement. It looks and feels awkward.

Most games are wisely silent on the topic of diagonal movement. For my part, I just prohibit diagonal movement. The ease of using a grid adequately compensates for the clumsiness of prohibiting diagonal movement and the resulting awkwardness of the scale representation. For those who don't mind measuring each move and range, using the rulers and ignoring grids (or using no-grid floor plans) is probably the wiser course.

The Halls of the Dwarven Kings

A multisystem fantasy role-playing supplement

Boxed with 24-page scenario booklet, 8-page NPC booklet, 12-page scenes booklet, DM's screen, 4 pages of play aids, and 12 pages of card-stock floor plans.

Integrated Games \$23.00

Scenario: Simon Forrest

Editing: Basil Barrett

Floor Plans: Allen Hickling

Artwork and cartography: Jes Goodwin, Judith Hickling, Jon Baker, Paul Ward, Brendan Hickling, Toby Hardwick, and Selina Goodman

Many British readers will already be familiar with The Complete Dungeon Master series, four FRPG adventure supplements with remarkable game aids and props supporting imaginative, well-developed scenarios. *Halls of the Dwarven Kings*, the first of this series, was published in Britain in 1984 but has only been available in the U.S. since 1987.

The first hint that this is a special sort of FRPG scenario is that it comes in a 1" -deep box with a real nice cover — a whole box for just one scenario. Some of the all-time great Chaosium supplements for RUNE-QUEST and CALL OF CTHULHU® games came in similar boxes, but they were campaign supplements, not single scenarios. When you open the box, you goggle at its contents.

Floor plans: *Halls of the Dwarven Kings* contains twelve 8½" x 11" sheets of floor plans to be cut up and assembled as displays representing the layout of the underground complex. These well-designed floor plans are of two varieties: standard rooms and passages of varying widths and lengths, and special rooms and passages illustrated with details specific to a particular location in the dwarven halls. The plans are diagrammatic and clearly rendered, not cluttered with illustration-

style detail. They are attractive nonetheless, with an effective use of black, blue, green, and brown for contrast.

The floor-plans scale is ostensibly 25mm (about 1" = 6'). However, the objects illustrated on the plans seem more to scale with 15mm, and the corridors seem particularly narrow. Granted, this is a dwarven settlement, presumably on a somewhat diminished scale; still, 25mm figures look cramped on these displays. The plans are printed without a grid, so movement must be measured with a ruler.

The best thing about these floor plans is that they let the players see what's before the eyes of their player characters. Thus, the players can respond to what they see on the plans as much as to what the DM describes verbally. No matter how brilliant the DM or designer, words can't compete with visuals in presenting spatial relationships or setting details. At a glance, the player can understand the main features of a location that a DM might describe for five minutes without creating a clear sense of what the poor PC has sitting before his very eyes. For swift, concise, and unambiguous description of an FRPG setting, nothing compares with a clear, diagrammatic floor plan.

Props: The pack also contains four sheets of play aids to be cut up and delivered to the players when various artifacts are discovered by the PCs. Printed to resemble parchment and torn scraps of paper, these play aids include maps, scribbled notes found tacked to walls, hand-scrawled and illuminated notes left by other adventurers, century-old scraps from historical and scholarly texts, obscure clues, and dwarven shopping lists. A particularly fine touch is that not all of these handouts are really significant. The prospect of players puzzling earnestly over a perfectly bogus clue fills my sinister DM's heart with perverse glee.

DM's screen: The setting for the scenario is a vast residential, temple, and tomb complex enlarged from a cave system by several generations of dwarves. The diagrams of the six main levels of the cave complex indicate how the cut-out floor plans are to be laid out to represent the various rooms and passages of the adventure setting.

Notes on the screen describe the design, construction, and architectural elements of the dwarven complex. Since FRPG dwarves are generally identified as master engineers, we deserve some nice textural detail here, and we are not disappointed. For example, in some places, the flooring has been built over old subterranean stream beds. The stone pillars and wooden beams supporting that flooring have deteriorated, and the flooring may give way under the unwary and overburdened adventurer.

Comprehensive reference charts summarize the contents of each room in the complex, indicating which contain hand-out props, which are illustrated in "The

Scenes" booklet (see below), which have detailed special floor plans, which contain traps, which have the old streambeds beneath the flooring, and which contain monsters or NPC opponents.

This is the most useful, detailed, and well-designed DMs screen reference I've ever used — except, perhaps for the screen in *The Lost Shrine of Kasar-Khan*, the second in The Complete Dungeon Master series, which includes a side cutaway view of its cave complex. A side cutaway for the Dwarven Halls would have been nice, but practically speaking, the Halls are so elaborate that a comprehensible cutaway would have been horribly difficult to design.

Compared to most dungeons, the layout of the Dwarven Halls is incredibly complicated and detailed. This is the good news *and* the bad news. On the plus side, the detailed text and presentation as well as the included floor plans for layouts makes this a pretty spectacular dungeon setting. On the minus side, studying and understanding the Dwarven Halls is no simple matter for the DM. Just figuring out the staircase and tunnel connections between the various levels requires careful study of the DM's screen; everything's clearly marked, but with so much detail, it's still bewildering.

Further, with the floor plans, you can only lay out small sections of each level at a time. The package doesn't include enough pieces to lay out the entire complex at once — all six levels would cover several tabletops, anyway. Besides, the point of the floor plans is to reveal details to the players a bit at a time, not place an entire map before them. Nonetheless, setting up and laying out the floor plans as the PCs explore the Halls is bound to be a deliberate and time-consuming procedure, resulting in a colorful but slow-paced adventure session.

Scenario book: This describes the background, setting, major figures, and narrative elements of the scenario. The setting is a dwarven underground settlement abandoned for a century since its inhabitants were exterminated by raiders.

The PCs' task is to locate and retrieve the crown of a renowned dwarven king buried there. The crown is an important symbol to competing political factions of dwarves, and other parties may also be seeking to retrieve the crown first.

The dwarves of this setting may not agree with most standard FRPG conceptions. In this cruel, grim, and pragmatic dwarven culture, torture and human sacrifice are accepted elements, and sorcerous and clerical spells and enchantments are commonplace. In AD&D game terms, these dwarves might be thought of as Neutral Vicious.

However, other more familiar dwarven cultural conventions are well served. The engineering and design of the underground complex, and the elaborate but practical mechanical traps and locking mechanisms which guard the residences and tombs, fit perfectly with most notions of FRPG dwarves. These traps, and the various warding enchantments and magical beings, are serious threats to the survival of the PCs.

The PCs also face various other intelligent and semi-intelligent menaces, as well as other parties competing to recover the crown. Between the traps, enchantments, and hostile opponents, a PC party might go through a couple of *rods of resurrection* in this adventure, and even then, I suspect that only a very fortunate or very thorough group could successfully retrieve the crown. The designers recommend this scenario for 4th-level game characters or those with skill levels of 50-80%, but more importantly, they recommend this scenario for experienced *players*. The richness and subtlety of the setting favors well-organized, deliberate players. Sheer firepower and durability won't be much help in achieving the PCs' objectives, and may not save them from the tougher traps and enchantments.

Character book: This book presents the personal profiles, motivations, and tactics of the scenario's major dwarven figures. Complete statistics usable with the AD&D and RUNEQUEST games are given for these figures and for their assistants,

magical advisors, engineers, and guards. The text offers the DM clear guidelines for presenting these NPC opponents, and suggests how the DM can adapt the scenario's difficulty for weaker or stronger PC parties by altering the timing and aggressiveness of their appearance.

Scenes book: This book's 10 charcoal sketches of major rooms and NPCs are to be shown the players when the rooms or NPCs are encountered. Though a bit vague and awkward in appearance, these sketches are quite appropriate in tone; they effectively personalize the major NPCs, and some offer useful details about the room settings.

In principle, the conception is excellent; in practice, I'd have appreciated a finer touch with visual detail, and a tighter keying of the illustrations with the text. For example, if you cross-reference the text and the illustration for the Torture Chamber, little of the detail offered in the illustration seems of significance to the players, and while the text states that the PCs will not know where certain nasty creatures are in the room, the illustration clearly pictures these creatures for the viewer.

System compatibility: Specifically designed for use with games like the D&D®, AD&D, and RUNEQUEST games, the setting, characters, and narrative elements of these supplements are relatively independent of specific rule systems, and presumably might be adapted to various other game systems (like WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY or GURPS games) with varying degrees of ease. The statistics provided for NPCs include spells and skills for games similar to the D&D and RUNEQUEST games. Unlike other generic products which achieve global system compatibility by being bland and nonspecific, The Complete Dungeon Master series is exceptionally detailed in setting and background, and gives very specific guidelines for resolving character responses to scenario problems — often more specific and detailed than are accounted for by most FRPG rule systems.

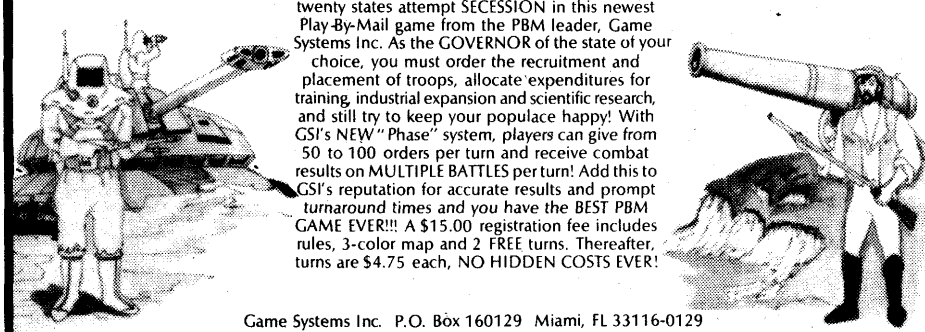
Evaluation: This set offers great play aids, a plausible adventure, and a well-detailed background. On presentation alone, it qualifies for the FRPG Supplement Hall of Fame. Experienced gamers should love it. Rookies may love it, too, but may find it too complex and sophisticated. Above all, *Halls of the Dwarven Kings* is unique for the amount of detail and variety of play aids lavished on a single scenario setting. Perhaps the most remarkable thing is how such a superb FRPG supplement might have remained unknown to us Yanks for so many years.

The other three titles in The Complete Dungeon Master series (*The Lost Shrine of Kasar-Khan*, *The Watchers of the Sacred Flame*, and *The Feathered Priests*) are equally remarkable in their presentation. Though I do not offer a formal review of them at this time, I informally recommend

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you give them a look. All four of these games are available from: (in the U.K.) Integrated Games, 2 The Old Bakery, Long Itchington, Rugby, CV23 8PW, England; (in the U.S.) Chessex Games, 2950 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley CA 94702.

Blood on the Streets

A WARHAMMER supplement

22-page GM booklet and 16 card-stock sheets (12 cut-out buildings)

Games Workshop \$10.00

Gamesmaster's Guide design: A.V. Szczepankiewicz

Cut-out buildings: Dave Andrews

Despite the misleadingly lurid title, this is a surprisingly amiable collection of village settings for FRPGs. The most apparent attraction of the pack lies in the attractive fold-up, glue-together, 25mm-scale cardboard buildings, but the accompanying booklet describing three villages turns out to be a real treat, also.

The buildings: The pack contains 12 buildings: a town hall/mansion, a tavern/inn, a manor house, a cottage, a shop/customs office, a hovel, stables, a bakery/smithy/mill, a temple, a jail/warehouse/barracks, a two-story house, and a brewery/shipbuilders. The buildings are handsome and colorful, printed on thick card stock and designed for relatively easy assembly. I say "relatively" because some of the constructions are fairly complex. Rather than stick with safe, simple box shapes, the designer has included some tricky elements like free-standing corner columns, overhanging second stories, and a chimney stack.

Scattered around the cut-out sheets in waste space are various little bits like extra doors and windows, tavern signs ("Ship Strong Ales," "Jolly Coachman," etc.), heraldic shields, and posted handbills; these can be used to dress up the completed buildings. Some of these bits are adorably light-hearted — a handbill advertising "Fram Gargee, Double Glazing and Patio Doors," for example, and what appears to be a space program poster with a lizardman in a spacesuit. These irresponsibly cute jokes are fortunately optional elements; the buildings themselves are straightforwardly and convincingly late medieval in appearance.

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that an English chap can design more-convincing late medieval buildings than I see in most American FRPG supplements. Of course, we poor Yanks haven't got much opportunity to look at 500-year-old buildings, while Brits have them lying around all over the place. The designs are pleasingly rough and irregular, and possessing of what a real estate agent might call "architectural interest" — that is, they are not just square boxes with peaked roofs, but they have little attached sheds, dormers, stairways, chimneys, and such. Great care is taken to avoid displaying the unprinted, colorless reverse side of the

printed cards when the buildings are completed — a subtlety difficult to appreciate until you've tried to design your own cut-up, glue-together buildings like I have.

Statistics for each of the buildings are provided in the Gamesmaster's Guide. "Statistics? For buildings?" Sure enough. The WARHAMMER game has mechanics for Toughness and Wounds to be taken by walls, doors, and such, and these mechanics are accounted for here. The Guide also contains sections on "Assembling Your Card Models" and "Tips for Modellers." The instructions and assembly procedure are tolerably simple for a patient adult like myself, and the resulting models are gratifyingly elegant enough to justify the time and concentration necessary to build them. (For some useful suggestions on reinforcing card-stock building models with bits of scrap card, see the third-edition WARHAMMER FANTASY BATTLE rules, page 32.)

The Gamesmaster's Guide: "The Riding" is a small rural setting for a fantasy campaign. The Gamesmaster's Guide describes the three major villages of The Riding — Shoodthorpe, Mayby, and Averidge — and the principal NPCs of each. The text describing each village is quite short — less than a page each — and is accompanied by an illustration showing the position of the various building models, as well as roads, fences, fields, rivers, gallows, stone circles, and other interesting details. The major NPCs are briefly described in these village descriptions; personality profiles and WARHAMMER character stats are provided for these NPCs in a separate six-page section. The NPC illustrations and counters printed on the cover are — depending on your perspective — either discouragingly crude or refreshingly naive, but they effectively suggest NPC personalities and dress.

The villages seem very much medieval in flavor — perhaps because the Brits are closer to that sort of thing, or perhaps because the writer has some knowledge of the historical subject. A ferryman, rat catchers, criminals confined in stocks, taverns, breweries, stone and half-timbered buildings covered with plaster, a leper ringing his bell and loudly proclaiming "Unclean!", a dutiful local knight whose sergeants are charged with maintaining law and order, a militia filled with foreign mercenaries — these details suggest more depth of characterization than one typically finds in a fantasy village.

The various personalities have imaginative backgrounds and motivations, well devised for generating FRPG narrative conflicts. For example, consider Ned the beggar:

"Ned was a soldier until he was discharged for stealing and then he turned to highway robbery. He was caught and blinded in one eye as a punishment. His experiences at the hands of Splicer [a sadistic local jailer] left him a cripple, and there is no love lost

between the pair. Ned knows the Riding very well from his highwayman days, and will part with information for money. He knows of the location of the richest Barrow in the Barrow Hills, but will only divulge this if the players promise to kill Splicer."

Ned is a perfect NPC informant and GM mouthpiece through which adventure hooks may be passed to the players.

The fantasy elements in the setting are also charming. There's mysterious old Mother Parma who lives with her cat Huntley in the little shack at the edge of town — how curious that a large band of raiding orcs was discovered unaccountably baked near her hovel. Perhaps the meek brothers of the Temple of Gadd, a god of precipitously declining popularity, are not what they appear to be. And the rich, dissipated High Elf dandy, black sheep of the family, living a tedious exile among prosaic humans, is ever ready to fund PC expeditions to exciting places, perhaps even to accompany the party for the excitement — as long as the journey is not too tiresome.

My favorite is the Annual Shoodthorpe-Mayby Skullball match — a vigorous sporting event between the folk of two villages — a bit like rugby, but requiring an orc skull be carried across a goal. WARHAMMER rules are used, with wounds converted to a 2" pushback, and bow skill used to pass the skull between players. A less vigorous but equally curious event is Mayby Frog Swallowing Day, a drunken revel centering around a contest to see who can consume the greatest number of fried amphibians.

Evaluation: The most attractive features of the pack are the cardboard model buildings, which are first class. Since they are in 25mm scale, they are perfect for displays of FRPG village layouts, and their excellent design and execution add substantially to the flavor of such a display. The villages and personalities described in the Gamesmaster's Guide are clever and colorful. Though not designed with any specific adventures in mind, there are plenty of narrative hooks here to inspire a game master. *Blood on the Streets* is available from: (in the U.K.) Games Workshop, Chewton Street, Hilltop, Eastwood, Nottingham NG16 3HY, England; (in the U.S.) Games Workshop US, 1220 Key Highway, Baltimore MD 21230.

Citi-Block

A JUDGE DREDD and WARHAMMER 40,000 supplement
20-page booklet, four pages of cut-out props, eight 11" x 16" floor plans
Games Workshop \$12.00

Design: Richard Halliwell, Carl Sargent, Alan Merrett, Graeme Davis

Artwork: Gordon Moore, Dave Andrews

This package provides 25mm floor plans designed for the JUDGE DREDD RPG setting and for the WARHAMMER 40,000

miniatures battle system, but the floor plans are more-or-less suitable for use with other futuristic role-playing settings like those of GDW's TRAVELLER®, FASA's STAR TREK®, West Ends STAR WARS®, and TSR's STAR FRONTIERS games. Specifically intended for the grubby, battered, near future of Judge Dredd's Mega-City, these floor plans are good looking and have square grids, and include a fine assortment of cut-out details to dress up the basic layouts. The rules and background provided in the accompanying booklet are specific to the JUDGE DREDD and WARHAMMER 40,000 game systems, but the sample layouts diagramed might be appropriate for a variety of science-fiction systems.

The floor plans: The box contains eight 11" x 17" layouts: two of motorways and foot corridors, one of small offices, one helipad/hoverbus stop, one sky-rail station, one entrance plaza (for an office building or residential block), one large enclosed landscaped garden, and a large empty area enclosed by walls (to be customized using cut-out details). These are printed on one side of thin, coated stock in full color. Also included are two 11" x 17" sheets of thicker card stock, printed with various cut-out details like boilers, desks, autocars, potted plants, and vid-fone booths. (These are stapled with a booklet as inner and outer covers.)

A variety of layouts can be improvised from the elements provided. Diagrams for the following layouts are provided in the booklet: Entrance Plaza, Clement Freud Con-Apts; a basement services floor; individual and family standard apartments; individual and family hyperlux apartments; Renko's Supermart (actually more like a small convenience store); and the offices of Fawn Hall Personal Services, Inc. The generous assortment of cut-out details makes the layout flexibly adaptable according to the needs of a given scenario or setting.

The feel of the illustrated floor plans and details suggests a worn, shabby future, rather than high-tech or shiny plastic. Thus, these plans are less useful for far-future settings like the STAR TREK or STAR WARS games, unless used for scenarios on backwater or frontier planets. On the other hand, they'd fit just fine with a post-apocalyptic future world like Steve Jackson Games' CAR WARS® and AUTODUEL® game setting — except that the AUTODUEL GURPS game uses a hex grid rather than a square grid.

These floor plans are perfectly designed for role-playing displays. The unobtrusive 1" -square grids make measuring range and movement a snap. The basic layouts are open and uncluttered, but can be customized with the various cut-out bits to create a variety of tactical and dramatic

settings. The colors and designs are sharp and attractive. In sum, these are ideal gaming floor plans.

The Citi-Block book: The charts and guidelines for creating a Mega-City residence block are admirably detailed and specific, and are an essential supplement for anyone running a JUDGE DREDD game campaign. As inspiration for designing buildings and residences for other futuristic settings, this material may not be very useful. For example, given the charts and guidelines in this booklet, one of Mega-City's mile-high citi-blocks might conceivably house a population of over a half-million persons — at a conservative estimate. A tongue-in-cheek futuristic setting like Judge Dredd's Mega-City needn't be too fussy about plausible urban residences, but other heroic and anti-heroic science-fiction settings are likely to need more elaborate rationalizations for mile-high apartment buildings with such large populations. Note, however, that most science-fiction role-playing games are conveniently silent on the features of futuristic cities. Regardless of its more dubious premises, *Citi-Block* is unique in its detailed treatment of a futuristic urban environment for role-playing.

The WARHAMMER 40,000 section of the booklet provides special rules for using miniatures rules with these floor plans. For example, since the WARHAMMER

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40,000 movement rules are defined in inches, as in most miniatures rules, the problem of diagonal movement on a square grid must be resolved. Here, for movement, the diagonal is defined as 1%". (On the other hand, having a miniature face along a diagonal is prohibited. As noted above, diagonals cause some messy rules problems.)

Various other rules are provided for movement, sighting and shooting, and breaching walls and doors. Some parts of the text are puzzling or obscure. For example, in one place, moving through a breach in a wall is described "at the cost of a quarter of a model's movement allowance as for a normal obstacle" (*Citi-Block*, page 17), yet the WARHAMMER 40,000 game defines movement across obstacles as "costing a model half of its total move distance" (WARHAMMER 40,000 rules, page 16). This and another curious reference — a text example referring to four breached adjoining wall sections, with an accompanying diagram with only three breached wall sections — slightly undermine my faith in the testing and checking phase of rules presentation. On the other hand, the excellent diagrams provided to illustrate the rule section make clear at a glance what might be puzzling if presented only in text.

Also provided for WARHAMMER 40,000 game players is a section describing Hive

World Gangs — lightly armed cannon fodder for the high-tech, battle-armored Space Marines. The tables and instructions provided enable random generation of Hiver gangs. Unfortunately, the reader is "invited" to calculate the point values for the individuals of the sample gang, if he likes, using the rule book. Why not provide point values for us? And why not set up a specific scenario using the floor plans as an example? As an experienced miniatures gamer, I'd appreciate more support in setting up a skirmish like this.

Evaluation: As floor plans for role-playing displays, the *Citi-Block* pack is good-looking, utilitarian, flexible, and suitable for many near-future SFRPGs. The detailed charts and notes in the booklet are probably of interest only to JUDGE DREDD or WARHAMMER 40,000 players. As a treatment of futuristic city setting for role-playing, it won't withstand rigorous logical analysis, but given the dearth of competing RPG materials for the urban future, it achieves preminent status by default. *Citi-Block* is available from: (in the U.K.) Games Workshop, Chewton Street, Hilltop, Eastwood, Nottingham NG16 3HY, England; (in the U.S.) Games Workshop US, 1220 Key Highway, Baltimore MD 21230.

Special mention

Other role-playing supplements with fancy play aids are given here. Like *Halls*

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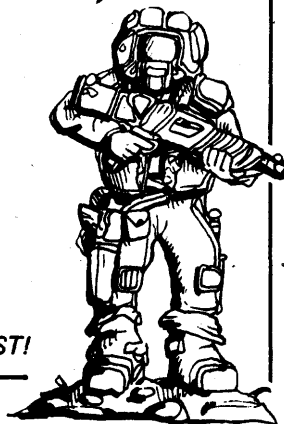
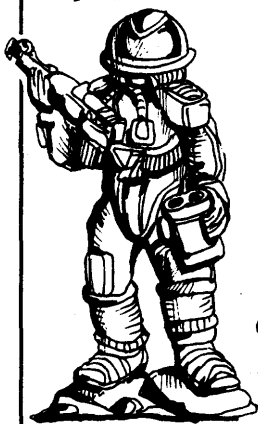
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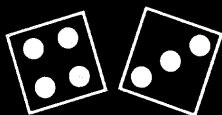
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of *The Dwarven Kings*, these FRPG scenarios contain 25mm maps in which illustrated details are significant to success in the adventure. Instead of listening to a GM's verbal descriptions, the players are invited to look at, speculate on, and touch the displays before them.

01 *The Gem and the Staff*. A D&D Expert Set adventure for one thief, this has unusual viewed-from-above scale maps. The two scenarios are simple but exceptionally effective. This may be encountered in the dim recesses of game stores [but is also available from the *TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop* for \$6.00; see the address on page 4 of this issue].

***Brotherhood of the Bolt*.** This 1983 FRPG scenario (published by The Companions, Inc.) features 25mm plans of a complete castle, with two 17" x 22" fold-out floor plans and various details of tower floors. The accompanying adventure is excellent — a classic, but out of print.

GURPS Battle Maps. Steve Jackson Games, \$5.95. At first glance, I thought these dull and unappealing. Now, after using them, I think they're great. These three double-sided maps are geomorphic — that is, they can be placed together in various ways to form a-grid-covered playing surface about 6' long and 3' wide, just right for many tabletops. One side is an outdoor setting with a road running down the middle and various features like rocks,

trees, and bushes. The other side has large floor plans for building interiors. Because they lack detail, these maps are usable in almost any role-playing setting — fantasy, horror, science-fiction, whatever. The grid is hexagonal — my preference for maneuver and pursuit encounters. The maps aren't very colorful or attractive in comparison to the floor plans described in the feature reviews above, but for sheer usefulness, they're hard to beat.

Cardboard Heroes. Steve Jackson Games, \$3.50 each. If the time and expense of purchasing and painting metal miniatures discourages you from using tabletop displays in FRPGs, these fold-up 25mm cardboard miniatures are a good compromise. For \$10 to \$20, you can get enough miniatures to represent most common role-playing encounters.

H1 *Bloodstone Pass*. TSR, Inc., \$13.95. A real nice package, this includes a 32-page scenario booklet, a 24-page unit roster and model-building instruction booklet, a sheet of cardboard counters, and 12 pages of cut-up, glue-together building models and miniature figures. The big problems with this pack are that it was designed for use with TSR's fantasy miniatures rules, the BATTLESYSTEM supplement. Thus, the buildings are not even close to 25mm scale.

Dungeon Floor Plans I. Games Workshop, \$8.00. The least attractive but most

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useful of Games Workshop's floor plan products includes 10 sheets of stone, dirt, and flagstone dungeon floor (with square grids for 25mm scale) and two sheets of cut-out details like staircases, furniture, and doors — all printed on thick card stock. Cut the sheets up and lay them out as you go. It's perfect for fast-and-dirty tactical displays of most typical dungeon encounters.

Short and sweet

Two light-hearted treasures for gamers with a sense of humor are described here:

Castle Greyhawk, various authors. TSR, Inc., \$9.95. This is what dungeon-bashing is all about: "The Random Monster Generator, located on the lowest level of the dungeon, is running on Full Automatic." In order to achieve the truly fantastic, sometimes you need to be silly. The designers of this 12-level mega-dungeon have each been given a level to indulge their wildest whims and peculiar twisted geniuses. I freely admit that the FRPG play I enjoyed most in my formative years was this sort of bizarre, humorous, incoherent fantasy arcade adventure, where DMs took the totally illogical premises of the D&D and AD&D games, accepted them without question, then improvised thinly rationalized dungeon universes for us to wander about in, smashing and roasting things and having a thumping good time. Finally, TSR

has dignified this style of play by publishing an anthology of "really low fantasy" scenarios. Hooray!

Murphy's Rules and Other Strange Stuff from The Space Gamer, various authors. Steve Jackson Games, Box 18957, Austin TX 78760, \$4.95. "Murphy's Rules" was a delightful cartoon feature in *The Space Gamer* magazine when it was published by Steve Jackson Games. In this series, the cartoonist would lampoon four or five ludicrous features of silly games rules. For example: "THE TRIPLETS OF CRANE: In *The Tribes of Crane*, a tribe's population can increase up to 10% a month, a figure which makes sense only if every female is constantly pregnant with triplets." The cartoons illustrating the silly rules were often delightful. "GOING OUT FOR A FEW BIERS: In *Wizardry*, a dead character can join the rest of the party at the inn," is illustrated with a couple of adventurers sitting around a table with a pop-eyed, arrow-punctured comrade's corpse propped up before a stein of beer. "Murphy's Rules" are brilliant and required reading for gaming fans. In addition, this book includes such classics as the "Errata for Kung Fu CB Mamas on Wheels vs. The Motorcycle Aztec Wrestling Nuns" and the one-page rules for "The Realistic After-the-Holocaust Game: NUCLEAR WINTER" Don't miss this one. Ω

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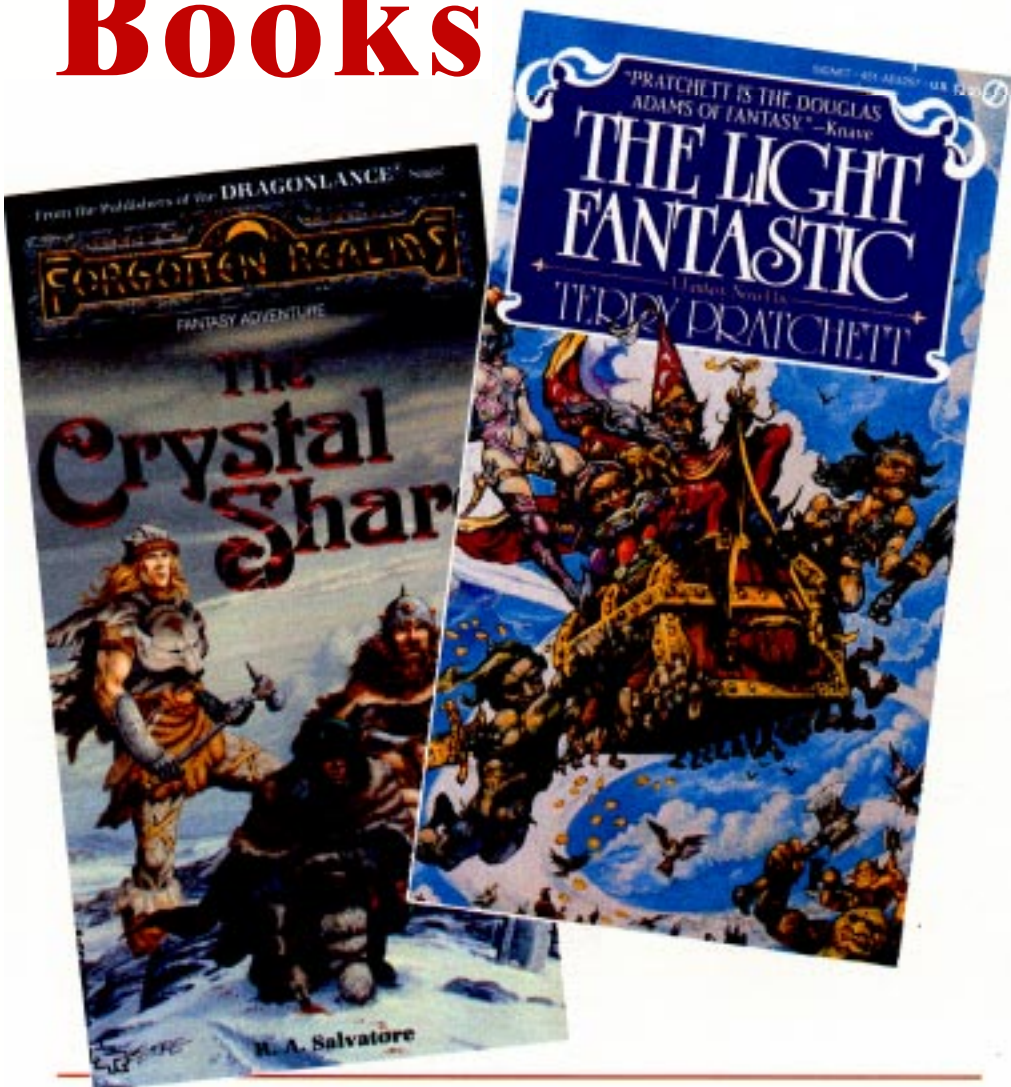
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THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Terry Pratchett

Signet/NAL 0-451-15297-2 \$3.50

The cover quote on *The Light Fantastic* calls author Terry Pratchett “the Douglas Adams of fantasy,” prompting readers to think, “Aha! This book will be absurdly funny in a left-handed, British sort of way, with lots of shaggy-dog stories and an absolute minimum of plot.” That’s right, but the end of the story contains the most unexpected shaggy-dog punch line of all.

Pratchett’s cheerfully insane Disc world was first described in *The Colour of Magic*, a 1983 British book which attracted only minimal attention in America. (I recall coming across it in my local library, but I

had to buy an out-of-print used paperback to reread when the sequel arrived.) *The Light Fantastic* begins precisely where its predecessor left off — just after its heroes have literally fallen off the edge of the world. Only a miracle can save the perpetually worried wizard Rincewind, his tourist companion Twoflower, and Twoflower’s remarkable sapient pearwood Luggage (with a capital L and a large number of legs) — and it does. The one spell burned into Rincewind’s head is part of a collection (Octavo) required to bail the Disc world out of an impending Cosmic Disaster, and the semisentient Octavo refuses to let the spell get away. Unfortunately, there are also numerous wizards who would

very much like to extract the spell from Rincewind’s head, and the combined attention turned toward the trio is therefore considerable, not to mention hazardous to the health. The humor is slapstick, wry, and deceptively logical in all the right places. Cohen the Barbarian, a truth-in-advertising lecture, a tribe of rock trolls, and a lost-and-found curio shop are among the cleverest touches. The plot, somewhat more structured than the first books, hangs together reasonably well, taking an unusual turn at the climax. The only distraction is a very occasional tendency to overnarrate some of the lectures, but this is both rare and hard to avoid in Pratchett’s sub-genre.

It’s the ending that makes *The Light Fantastic* distinctive. There is an unexpected touch of real drama to Pratchett’s cosmology that resonates through all that has gone before. On a more intimate level, it’s only when Rincewind and Twoflower finally part company that readers realize how much they’ve come to like the unlikely pair. In this respect, Pratchett easily surpasses Hitchhiker’s Guide creator Adams, whose books are humorous but lack a sense of character empathy. Pratchett has accomplished a truly remarkable feat — writing stories that combine densely packed absurdity with characterization so subtly crafted it’s almost invisible.

Oh, yes — I should mention that Rincewind popped up recently in one of the AD&D® game campaigns I play in, as a dual-classed jester/magic-user. Only the Luggage’s timely appearance rescued our party from a collapsing dimensional pocket. Now I’m waiting for my DM to tell us that one of the elephants carrying the world is getting a cold, and we’re supposed to figure out how to feed it an aspirin (some things really *do* translate from books into RPGs).

SORCERY AND CECELIA

Patricia C. Wrede and Caroline Stevermer

Ace 0-441-77659-4 \$2.95

In one sense, *Sorcery and Cecelia* is a period theatrical piece, unfolding as an elaborately costumed romantic melodrama with lots of intrigue and as many weddings as possible at the end. In another, it’s a clever and mysterious tale of upper-class magic with a surprising degree of practical lore on spellcraft, both benevolent and malign. Oddest of all, this unusual collaboration is possibly the simplest and most sophisticated fantasy role-playing campaign published to date.

The premise of the game is simple: One player writes a letter to the other, establishing a setting and character. The other answers this first message, and out of the mutual invention some sort of adventure and mystery arises. (A brief section at the back of the novel gives some insight on the origins of this particular incarnation of the exercise.)

Co-author Patricia Wrede plays Cecelia

Rushton, daughter of a noble household who is stuck in a country manor for the summer while her cousin Kate (played by Caroline Stevermer) goes to London to mingle with high society and attend coming-out parties. The two are therefore reduced to communicating through letters, and *Sorcery and Cecelia* is made up entirely of their correspondence.

In this case, magic is afoot in Kate's and Cecelia's early 19th-century England. One somewhat unsavory sorcerer is abroad near Rushton Manor in Essex, while another is hatching a curious plot in London to lure the Marquis of Schofield into a fatal marriage. The details are understandably misty at first, as Kate wanders by accident into one scheme while Cecelia becomes entangled in the other, and only rather late in the game do they realize just how the two matters are connected.

It would be enlightening to know just how much editing was needed to turn the authors' original letters into the finished manuscript. The letter game seems unlikely to lend itself to smooth and orderly plot development, while the novel unfolds with expertly effortless timing and a satisfying sense of suspense. One or two minor revelations near the climaxes (one per cousin) are plucked from nowhere, notably a point of ancestry and a rather abrupt fourth wedding, but these are clearly for atmosphere and do not detract from the overall structure.

What is possibly most startling about the letters is their uncanny ability to convey a sense of time and place. Though the novel's world is seen only through Kate's and Cecelia's eyes, the letters convey a sense of breadth and scope that assures readers that there is much more to the setting than what is given in the text. The illusion is so well constructed, in fact, that the novel presents something of a paradox. On one hand, the cousins' tale is complete in itself, and a sequel would seem both difficult to construct and logically inappropriate. But the courtly and magical England in which the novel takes place is a fascinating setting, one that would be great fun to revisit. (I'd suggest writing the authors a letter, but I'm afraid they'd get caught up in the game and stop writing novels.)

THE DEMON HAND

Rose Estes
TSR, Inc. 0-88038-542-1 \$3.95

THE CRYSTAL SHARD

R.A. Salvatore
TSR, Inc. 0-88038-535-9 \$3.95

Rose Estes' third GREYHAWK® Adventures novel and R.A. Salvatore's first tale of the FORGOTTEN REALMS™ setting share more than common ancestry in the worlds of gaming. Both focus on multiple rather than single protagonists, and comparing the two authors' craftsmanship offers practical insight into the process of developing successful characters.

The Demon Hand is the third book in a trilogy about Mika, a Wolf Nomad drawn by accident into an intricate web of demonic intrigue. That's fine — except that Mika is out of action for most of the book, caught in a snare he cannot bypass. Estes instead builds the body of her tale around his harpy daughter, Chewppa, and TamSen, the son of TamTur, Mika's wolf companion. (The mind boggles at the genetic possibilities for the next generation.) Unfortunately, none of these would-be heroes will win much sympathy from readers. Mika, as in earlier books, is too much a victim of fate to be heroic. Chewppa suffers from a comparatively small role in the plot and a serious language barrier. And TamSen, who is really the star of this book, must compete for center stage with Mika and Chewppa as well as with his twin sister, TamLis, who abruptly changes roles at the novel's close.

Estes has written this tale with a strong narrative presence. Description generally prevails over dialogue, and the texture of the writing is that of a historian, not a poet. The result is a sense of distance between the story and the audience — a real problem in the absence of a strong central figure.

R.A. Salvatore takes a different approach with *The Crystal Shard*, a novel with an equally generous cast. His narration stays closer to the events it describes, rather than stepping backward to comment on larger contexts. More significantly, Salvatore deals with his characters in twos and threes rather than by themselves, so that dialogue and action, not description, convey the heroes' personalities.

"Heroes" is an accurate word this time. Though the barbarian Wulfgar is initially a reluctant captive in the relative civilization of Ten-Towns, hard work and maturation forge him into a warrior strong enough to slay a legendary dragon (in a nicely crafted scenario, at that) and restore his own tribe's honor. Regis the halfling owes more to the AD&D game than to Tolkien, but his slightly unsavory sense of larceny makes his eventual part in saving Ten-Towns all the more entertaining. And Drizzt, the exiled drow, is handled with uncommon finesse and care. (Salvatore may be the first novelist to find a practical use for the traditional AD&D game alignment system.) These are individuals that readers will enjoy meeting and getting to know.

One other comparison is worth making. Both novels rely on demons from the Abyss for much of their villainy, and in this regard, Salvatore's Errtu is a much deadlier adversary. Errtu is diabolical in action as well as origin, where the blustering Maelfesh of *The Demon Hand* is little more than a major-league killing machine. (It's also unsettling that Maelfesh is supposed to be several times more powerful than the semilegendary Iuz, whom Estes casually swept aside a couple of books back.)

The Crystal Shard occasionally has

rough qualities typical of a first novel (which it is), notably where the shard itself is concerned. Salvatore's writing loses confidence as he tries to get inside his villains' minds, but it is more absorbing by far than Estes' latest work. Estes is capable of better writing (see DRAGON® issue #105 concerning her *Children of the Dragon*); the Mika trilogy suffers more from carelessness than from true lack of skill. As the AD&D game's original home-world, the world of Greyhawk deserves more consideration.

THE LEGACY OF LEHR

Katherine Kurtz
Avon 0-380-70454-4 \$3.50

It's always pleasant to discover that a writer known exclusively for one creation — the popular world of the Deryni, for instance — has the skill and versatility to tell stories of entirely different worlds and times. This time, Katherine Kurtz offers a locked-spaceship mystery with a remarkable capacity for deviousness.

Little is known about Lehr cats, it seems, except that they look and sound decidedly fierce. Four of them are aboard the luxury liner *Valkyrie*, on their way to an Imperial rendezvous, and they seem to have brought disaster with them. The alien Aludrans claim the cats are demons. Mather Seton and Wallis Hamilton, the cats' guardians, believe the cats have psychic abilities. And Captain Lutobo thinks the cats are responsible for the murders going on aboard his ship. (The cats have an excellent alibi, but then who left the bloody paw prints and cat fur at the scene of the crime?) Then there are the rumors of vampires beginning to make the rounds. . . .

Mather and Wallis are the nominal protagonists of Kurtz's unusual whodunit, but the story is well-stocked with engaging and obnoxious characters, all portrayed with spirited enthusiasm. (In gaming terms, there are almost no NPC roles. A referee could assign players to nearly all the parts — including the killers — without giving away the plot.)

Besides succeeding as a mystery, *The Legacy of Lehr* also holds up surprisingly well as science fiction. Most of the detective work involves advanced applications of very traditional investigative chemistry. While Kurtz quotes most of the usual powers attributed to vampires, she takes advantage of just one important principle in order to execute a suitably pyrotechnic climax.

One final note: This novel was originally published in hardcover (Walker & Co., 1986, \$15.95) as part of a so-called "young adult" science-fiction imprint called Millennium. The books in that series are all liberally and strikingly illustrated, and they are well worth investigating. (I'm referring to the hardcover edition as I type, so I don't know how much of the art may have made it into the paperback — but it is an attractive plus.)

OF CHIEFS AND CHAMPIONS

Robert Adams

Signet/NAL 0-451-15110-0 \$3.50

One of the occupational hazards of reviewing books is that you have to read everything that comes in. (Make that try to read everything; if I really read all the books scattered around my apartment, I wouldn't have time to eat and sleep regularly, let alone write this column.) Though the average reader can put a book down if it stops being interesting, the reviewer has to keep going, hoping that either it will get better or a meteor will hit the building and the book will be lost in the rubble.

In the case of *Of Chiefs and Champions*, neither hope was realized. This fourth volume in an open-ended series suffers badly from incoherence, to the extent that it makes no better sense even to those who have read the first three volumes.

The series premise revolves around a group of contemporary characters transported from modern society into an alternate 16th-century England engaged mostly in a series of bloody wars and skirmishes. It's science fiction, not fantasy; the mechanisms involved are time projectors (supposedly invented by one group of scientists but controlled from somewhere else), and no magic is in evidence.

Not one element of the story manages to succeed. Actually, "story" is misleading — the book has two plots, one involving original hero Bass Foster in Irish political intrigue, and another in which munitions heir Arsen Ademian commandeers a time carrier and uses it to rewrite the script of a conquistadors-and-Indians war in North America. Behind both of these is an emerging major subplot involving the true masters of the time projectors, who have nothing to do with the near-future scientific group who supposedly invented the technology.

Characterization is equally puzzling. Minor characters wonder why the heroes enjoy war so much (the violence is occasionally rather graphic), and they don't get good answers. Bass's wife Krystal, after spending the first book as a heroine and the next two as a lunatic, is recovering this time as author Adams backpedals; she's the second major potential villain to be sidetracked this way. Meanwhile, Arsen has discovered that his time carrier allows him to reprogram people's minds and erase their mental problems, thus shorting out another series of character conflicts in favor of hack-and-slash action.

A notable side issue is the matter of Adams' intended audience. The fast pace, emphasis on "action," and slick packaging suggest a typical teen to college-age readership — and certainly the exterior does nothing to discourage younger fans. But Adams offers enough gore, sex, and spicy language to seriously question his tale's appropriateness for many school-age readers, and there is just enough subtext for someone to argue (unconvincingly) that Adams is trying to address serious

psychological and literary questions.

Of Chiefs and Champions begins and ends in the middle, picking up unfinished threads from previous volumes, stitching in several new threads along the way, and leaving a tangle at the end that looks like a ball of yarn after a fight with a playful cat. The incompleteness is extreme even in a genre coming to expect cliffhangers at the ends of books, because there is simply no telling what Adams ultimately has in mind for this series. I have the sinking feeling that Adams doesn't know, either.

Reviewing the reviews

Scott A. Shepard of Castanea, Penn., writes to disagree with comments made on David Eddings's *Guardians of the West* in issue #125, in which I suggested readers wait for the paperback version (now available, along with the hardcover sequel, *King of the Murgos*, which I haven't yet read). It's not the sort of letter that requires a detailed response here, but it does suggest that some clarification may be in order concerning the nature of this column.

"I took your advice in the matter, not buying the book," the letter says, "even though I considered the . . . Belgariad to be the best fantasy series I had ever read." It's gratifying (and a bit intimidating) for a reviewer to know that his comments are influencing the reading public. But it's important to remember that reviews are subjective — just because I didn't like the book doesn't always mean you won't. A gamer I know considers Dennis McKiernan (of the Iron Tower trilogy) one of his favorite authors; regular readers of this column may recall that he's one of my least favorite.

Scott Shepard's letter doesn't say whether he bought the hardcover or the paperback edition of *Guardians of the West*. Why make a distinction? I tend to assume that most readers of this column are still students and therefore have limited book-buying budgets. Especially in a time when more fantasy and science fiction is being published in hardback, cost is an important consideration as you wander through the bookstore, and so it also becomes an element worth mentioning occasionally in reviews.

The "Recurring roles" section is a concession to three problems: the sheer quantity of books available, the need to keep track of what popular and preferred writers are up to, and the equally important need to avoid writing about the same authors all the time. Sequels and such really don't need in-depth reviews, and a quick comment or two is usually enough to indicate whether a book delivers on the promise of its author or predecessor.

Two factors that contribute to the choice of books discussed in this space may also be of interest. I keep an eye on "young adult" books because many DRAGON Magazine readers fit this description, because there's a lot of good fantasy being

published in that category, and because most other reviewers only rarely notice it. I also read a great deal that won't get reviewed herein, not because it isn't good, but because it doesn't overlap sufficiently with role-playing games. (I push the boundaries as much as I can, especially for the best books, but there are still limits.)

Recurring roles

The Center of the Circle (Bantam Spectra, \$3.95) continues Jonathan Wylie's trilogy about the Servants of Ark in the same reliable fashion characteristic of the first book. The addition of a second telepathic cat is perhaps a shade overdone, but the writing continues to be solid and the books are very attractively designed. The third volume, involving a female wizard, sounds especially intriguing.

A sequel of a different kind is *Elf Defense* (Signet/NAL, \$3.50). Esther Friesner's new novel relies only minimally on the earlier *New York by Knight*, but it is a truly inspired tale that is literally preppy fantasy, involving a chic New England village invaded by the minions of faerie in the course of a very unusual divorce proceeding. There is a great deal of wickedly logical silliness, but there is also a firm silvery thread of power that comes into its own late in the novel.

Barbara Hambly's *The Silicon Mage* (Del Rey, \$3.95) concludes the story begun in *The Silent Tower* in fine style, and it promotes the odd discovery that some cliffhanger endings are justified. The tangled adventures of Joanna Sheraton and the perpetually unpredictable wizard Antryg Windrose gain immeasurably from having been broken in two, and the very existence of an omnibus book club edition seems somehow inappropriate. (There is a literal *deus ex machina* at the end of this one, but even Antryg admits it, so there are really no grounds to complain.)

Ordinarily, the paperback publication of a title previously reviewed in hardcover isn't grounds for comment. But when the book is *Deep Wizardry* (Dell Laurel Leaf, \$3.25), all bets are off. Diane Duane's story of magic in the Atlantic off Manhattan is still her very best work to date, and still an inspired blend of everyday humor and mythic power.

Katherine Kurtz's Deryni are the subject of Tor's latest Crossroads gaming novel, *Deryni Challenge* (Tor, \$3.50), by Steve Billias. While it is not one of the strongest entries in the series — Camber of Culdi is treated rather sternly in the framing sequence — it still manages to maintain the line's integrity both as a gaming device and as an extension of the original author's world. One small criticism: It is only partly accurate to refer to the opening material by Kurtz as an essay. It is more correctly a part of the story than a commentary, and as such is less interesting than some of the true essays in the series, in which the authors have commented on the adaptations of their ideas.

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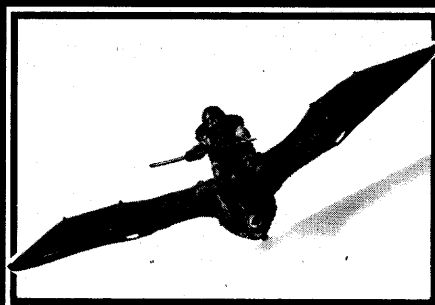
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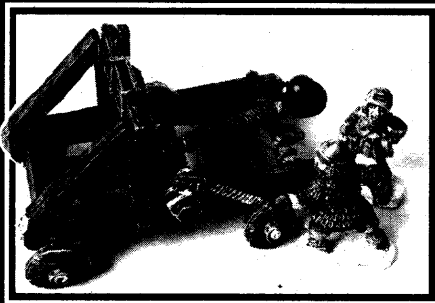
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Two visits to an Alternate Reality

The voting for the best software game of the year has picked up substantially. We would like to see each reader of this column be involved in the democratic process of selecting the best computer game of the year by voting for your favorite computer-based adventure game.

Unfortunately, most of the votes received so far have not included the computer system upon which the named game operated. Please include that information on your ballot. If you game with more than one computer system, you are entitled to a vote for each system you use. Buy a pre-stamped 15-cent postcard from the post office, put your name, address, and computer system on the card, and indicate the game that receives your vote. Mail the postcard to us at: 179 Pebble Place, San Ramon CA 94583. The results will be

published by the year's end.

Our reviews rate computer products on a scale of five stars (for the best games) down to ½ star (for the worst).

IntelliCreations, Inc.

(distributed by Electronic Arts)
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Alternate Reality: The City

Apple Macintosh version

Alternate Reality: The City (ARTC) for the Macintosh takes complete advantage of that computer's sound and graphics capabilities to bring you a role-playing game with a rather unusual premise. It starts with the player being kidnapped, taken

aboard a spaceship, and sent to an Alternate Reality. This sequence occurs time and time again as you reboot or restart the game during character development, with all such activity accompanied by graphics and music. This scene gets tiresome after a while, but you can hit the tilde key on the Macintosh to jump the program forward to the main menu.

At the main menu, you can elect to create or restore a character, make a backup of that character, initialize an Alternate Reality storage disk, or develop a temporary character. Making a backup of your character is a must; when your character dies, his statistics are erased from the disk forever. The only way to continue playing with that character is by using the character backup.

Creating a character is done on a screen that lists the statistics of Strength, Charm, etc. Numbers above each statistic scroll by at a fast pace. To assign values to each character statistic, you strike the space bar, causing all the numbers to cease their randomization scroll and be assigned to the statistics. Getting more than one good statistic value is very difficult. Say, for example, that you want a character with a high strength and dexterity who can manage fighting skills with aplomb. When you see a high score of 21 scroll above the Strength statistic, the Dexterity statistic might unfortunately be a 9. These numbers also scroll at different speeds above each statistic. Talk about a shot in the dark to come up with an acceptable character!

This method of awarding statistics can be extremely frustrating. The only way to improve upon a character's statistical assignments is to reboot the game and start from scratch. Hopefully, you'll have a good character before too long. You can then pass through a gate that stands before you; when you exit the gate, you are in the City.

The first order of business should be to find a job. After walking around the city streets, you'll be able to locate shops, inns, taverns, banks, and smithies. Naturally, folks at these places are willing to sell items to you, but this requires some coin in your pocket. You can try to earn money by applying for different jobs in the bank (security guard), inns (dishwasher or bouncer), or tavern (night clerk). Sometimes all of the available positions are filled, or your character's statistics aren't satisfactory for the job; a bouncer's job at a tavern isn't going to be offered to a wimp with a meager Strength statistic. After a job has been successfully completed, you'll be paid immediately. The people who own these places are honest and trustworthy. (Is that why they call this place an alternate reality?)

Two other staples of life (besides money) are food and drink, and these are crucial to the health of your character. At taverns, you can order a variety of things to quench your thirst and fill your tummy, such as wine, beer, roast dragon, and

bowls of chili. A warning — don't consume too many alcoholic drinks, or you'll become tipsy and won't be able to respond to commands. That's a heck of a problem when confronting a major monster.

Wisely select the inns where you sleep. Some charge a great deal for a chair by the hearth, while others are far more reasonable. Sleep restores lost hit points, and you can select exactly how many hours you wish to sleep.

Encounters in ARTC are different from those in other role-playing games. Not everyone you meet has a personal vendetta against you. When you meet an opponent, you've several choices:

Attack: You can take a swing at the opponent, but maintain a defensive stature.

Trick: You can attempt to trick the character into leaving, which doesn't always work.

Charm: This is sometimes an effective way to obtain money or equipment without fighting for them.

Offer an item: This is a bribe, for which you might even receive something in return.

Leave: You try to escape from a character because it's either too powerful or too pitiful.

Lunge: You take a two-handed swing at the opponent with great force, but leave yourself open to the bite of the enemy's weapon.

After a successful encounter is completed, you may pick up any items that the charmed, fooled, or dead opponent left behind. Normal, magical, and cursed weapons may be found, and armor can be stripped from your opponent's head, body, hands, and legs. Armor can inhibit movement but obviously protects vital parts of one's anatomy.

Time in the game is registered through movement of the world's sun; shops open and close at regular intervals as the day goes on, and creatures awaken from their slumbers to prowl for unsuspecting characters. Weather can help or hinder the character — try mapping or fighting in a snow storm. If you're wearing crystal armor (the best, but heaviest, armor in ARTC) and it's hot, you'll find your thirst quotient is up and your movement rate is down. Moral alignment is also a game factor. When you start the game, you are of neutral alignment, but this may fluctuate depending on what you do throughout the game. Giving money to the poor, not harming good creatures, receiving work from shops, and killing evil creatures that plague the lands all raise your moral alignment. Charming or tricking good creatures, slaughtering beggars on the street, and joining evil guilds lower your moral alignment.

Speaking of guilds, you'll be able to join some that can help your character. The first time your character enters a guild, its members raise one of his attributes. For example, the Blue Wizard's Guild promotes Speed, and should your character join the

Blue Wizard's Guild, it raises his Speed attribute during the first visit. You can also remove curses from yourself or your weapons at guilds. If you succeed in becoming a guild member, you can learn spells available only through that guild. You'll have to attend every session to learn that spell, though, or you won't matriculate with the magic. Healers are also scattered throughout the City to heal you quickly and remove any diseases, poisons, delusions, drunkenness, or other ailments. In order to utilize these potent capabilities, however, you'd best have the money to pay for it.

Here are a couple of small tips for this game. Charm is extremely important, as you're nearly bereft of weaponry for the first few days in the city. Charming encounters can be an excellent way to obtain money and equipment with which to defend yourself as you progress further in the game. Charming does have a price, however; it causes your neutral alignment to turn to the dark side. Also, ordering drinks for the house at any of the taverns can be expensive, but when you're down and out, someone might return the favor just when you need help.

ARTC has both strong and weak points. The strong points include the effects of alignment, weather, jobs, and time, and encounters that are not of the "slay and pay" mentality. The down side to ARTC is that after you've explored the City and developed a decent character, there's really nothing left to do but run around and wait until Datasoft releases another module. The Macintosh version of ARTC offers better graphics and sound, but that's where the differences end between this version and other system versions of the game. Saving games is a real hassle, as noted in the following review of *Alternate Reality: The Dungeon*. Considering the number of good adventure games available on the market, we would certainly place ARTC in the check-it-out category, but we'll refrain from an all-out recommendation until the disk management is handled and the character creation is improved. We did find that more viable characters can be created with this first scenario than with subsequent scenarios.

Alternate Reality: The Dungeon **½ Apple IIGS version

Talk about a game with potential to thoroughly engross computer gamers! *Alternate Reality: The Dungeon* (ARTD) is that offering. Available in formats for most popular desktop computers (with a Macintosh version in the works), this is a game we looked forward to playing. The review version was for the Apple IIGS, and the manual hinted at a number of wonders and magics to be found, beheld, and utilized to win the quest.

But the more we played, the more frustrated we became. First, the good news. You can use characters in ARTD that have been developed in the first released sce-

nario, *Alternate Reality: The City*, which is a great touch. There are several areas within ARTC that lead to other adventures, such as ARTD. You had best be lucky when first obtaining your character's statistics (as noted in the previous review), though the lack of perfect statistics is certainly no deterrent to game play. You can also generate a new character for ARTD so that you don't have to have played ARTC in order to go adventuring. That's smart marketing by Datasoft, in that it allows for all of their future modules to be played as stand-alones and not require the player to purchase earlier modules to enjoy the game.

Once in the Dungeon, the player must search out and locate a vendor of provisions and weapons. This is not hard to manage, but once the vendor has been found, your character's money should be spent wisely. Throughout the four levels of the Dungeon reside myriad creatures, wizards, guilds, fantastic fountains, secret one-way doors, and some of the most astounding adversaries any adventurer could ever face. Additionally, your alignment plays a role in how the game reacts to you!

Up to this point, we have a *definite* five-star game. So what's wrong with ARTD? Disk management. As with the Macintosh version, there is no way to copy the game to a hard disk should you wish to do so; this means *you* are *constantly* swapping disks to save your character as the game is played. You must also swap disks to reload your character after he has met death in the Dungeon. Here is a sample disk-swapping scenario for Apple IIGS users:

Elrod the Humble has just defeated a guard and has found four silver pieces and a halberd. Elrod is a 1st-level character with little in the way of hit points, cash, or weaponry. Considering that Elrod did not lose any hit points in this encounter, and the money is necessary to buy further provisions, now is a good time to save the character. The player enters "S" to save the game and is asked to place Disk #1 in the drive. (When dungeoneering, Disk #2 is in the drive.) After Disk #1 is inserted, the on-screen instructions request the user to press the space bar. When this is accomplished, the user is asked to place the character disk in the drive. (The character disk is a preformatted save-game disk on which as many as four characters can be saved and recalled into the game.)

Once the Character Disk is in the drive, the space bar is pressed again, and a message appears stating that the character has been saved and that the space bar must be pressed *again*. Another request comes on-screen asking for Disk #1. Disk #1 is inserted and the user is asked if he wishes to recall a saved character. Well, naturally you do, as you just saved the character after picking up the extra silver pieces and a new, more powerful weapon. You enter "E" to restore Elrod, and a message comes on-screen telling you to reenter your



character (SAVE GAME) into the drive. The space bar is pressed again, and a listing of the four available characters is revealed. After pressing the number key corresponding to the character you wish to retrieve, you are told to insert Disk #2 to continue the adventure. You've accomplished the Save Game — Restore Character Disk-Swapping Extravaganza!

That's far too many disk swaps. The same number of disk swaps are required even if there are two disk drives. Why couldn't the developer have written a routine that allowed the user to continue play with the same character just saved? Why go through additional disk swaps simply to continue a game with that character? Disk swaps are also needed should your character die during the adventure. The character can be reloaded, but at a cost of one of the poor fellow's statistics. Plus, when one enters specific areas within the Dungeon (such as a Guild), again you're put into the disk-swapping mode.

It also borders on next to impossible to develop a viable character; we thought *The Eternal Dagger* from SSI was tough for character development. We must have passed 40 character starts through the "gate" that opens character creation with ARTD. We ended up with a rather ineffective individual who was (thankfully) intelligent enough to understand human speech and to buckle on a sword as well. *Alternate Reality: The Dungeon* has what it takes to become a major adventure hit — if only the developers could improve the disk handling for the game. The current game mechanics take most of the fun and adventure out of the game.

MicroProse Simulation Software
180 Lakefront Drive
Hunt Valley MD 21030
(301) 771-1151

Airborne Ranger

Commodore 64/128 version

* * * * *

From the crack programmers at Microprose comes *Airborne Ranger!* This action-packed game allows you to infiltrate enemy territory, kill enemy troops, and steal devices. You create your own Ranger who can be promoted and, based on his performance, be decorated for bravery and well-performed missions.

There are 12 assignments and six difficulty levels in this game. One of the player's options is to operate through all 12 missions in random order. Missions include kidnapping an enemy officer, rescuing POWs, taking snapshots of a new stealth aircraft, and picking up a code book. Another mission involves sabotaging an airplane, which requires great stealth. If you alert too many guards, the plane takes off and you fail in your mission.

Once the mission and difficulty level have been selected, you are prompted to identify a graphic display of a military ribbon or medal that appears on-screen. This is the game's method of "copy protection," making certain that the player of the game has the user's manual, within which the medal or ribbon can be found. Once the player supplies the correct answer, the adventure starts.

A deploying screen first appears, consisting of an overview of enemy territory. You must pilot your Osprey supply aircraft to an area of relative safety where a supply drop can be undertaken. Timing is critical for the drop, because if the supplies strike a boulder or fall into a trench, the equipment is damaged and cannot be used for your mission. The supply drop also requires strategy. If you drop the supplies too soon, you'll find yourself running short of needed equipment before the mission is completed. If the supplies are dropped too late, you'll be without any

supplies other than those with which you personally enter the mission. After the drop zone has been identified, you parachute into position.

After a safe landing, you'll be carrying a carbine with four ammunition clips, three grenades, a time-bomb, a LAW rocket, a knife, and a first-aid kit. You are also wearing a bulletproof vest which can absorb gunfire. Should you take wounds in an unprotected area, you can actually survive three hits before succumbing to injuries. If you dropped your supplies correctly and can reach them safely, you'll locate additional equipment, consisting of two more clips for the carbine, three additional grenades, another time-bomb, a second LAW rocket, and another first-aid kit. Each first-aid kit allows you to heal one wound.

Most missions require stealth as you crawl from trench to trench, trying to avoid observation by the enemy. At first, you use only your knife to make certain those enemy soldiers that you come across receive a silent death. You can run, but only for limited amounts of time. Looking at the map supplied can also help plan an appropriate strategy to avoid stepping into a minefield or being Swiss-cheesed by a machine-gun nest. These missions do have a time limit. Should you miss the prearranged pickup time by your allies, you'll miss your ride home to safety and eventually be captured by the enemy. The Ranger is not doomed should this happen, though. MicroProse thoughtfully added another mission entitled "POW Rescue" that allows another Ranger to rescue any POWs, including captured Rangers.

At the conclusion of the mission, you are issued results concerning the number of points gained from the mission, plus any bonuses (such as for blowing up military outposts) and promotion details.

This game is great for all types of gamers. The arcade element is present,

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July 4th, 1988

Number 12

FIRST ANNIVERSARY EDITION

FIRST ANNIVERSARY ADVENTURE GIVEAWAY

Hello friends. Exactly, one year ago we introduced the *Daily Planet Gaming Supplement* and gave you the stats for the new Wonder Woman™. Oddly enough, Dan Greenberg's and George Perez's *Strangers in Paradise Adventure + Sourcebook* featuring her is coming out next month. It includes the first mythological setting for the DC™ Heroes Role-Playing Game system.

In that *DPGS*, we also gave away copies of our first newsletter. To top ourselves this year, we're giving away **FREE** DC Heroes RPG Adventures.

The first 250 gamers who send in their names and addresses will receive a **FREE** adventure of our choice.

If you want a **FREE** adventure, just send a card or letter, and we'll get it right out to you. It's our way of thanking you for reading this page every issue, and to commemorate a year of this **FREE** silliness. Send letters to:

Mayfair Games, Inc.
P.O. Box 48539
Niles, IL 60648

SUMMER CONVENTION SCHEDULE

Meet our madcap Mayfair personnel at the following conventions this summer season:

Atlanticon June 30-July 3
Baltimore, MD

Chicago Comic Con July 1-3
O'Hare Ramada Inn

San Diego Comic Con Aug. 4-7

Gen Con® Origins 88
Mecca Center
Milwaukee, WI
August 18-21

Look for our booths at these conventions. We'll have giveaway posters on our products even the non-DC™ Heroes Role-Playing Game stuff. (Can we say that here? Really? Oh well, too late. Heh-heh.)

We will be running DC Heroes RPG demos at Atlanticon, Gen Con®/Origins, and Chicago Comic Con.

Come out and meet us. Look at our new releases. See what we have planned. It'll be exciting. It'll be fun. Besides, you'll get a chance to nag us all you want.

THE NEW MANHUNTER™

MANHUNTER *alias* Mark Shaw™

DEX: 10 STR: 5 BODY: 6
INT: 6 WILL: 9 MIND: 5
INFL: 9 AURA: 4 SPIRIT: 6
INITIATIVE: 25 (35) HERO POINTS: 60

Powers:

Danger Sense: 5
Directional Hearing: 4
Extended Hearing: 4

Skills (*linked):

Acrobatics*: 10
Charisma*: 9
Detective (ID Systems, Law, Police Procedures)*: 6
Martial Artist*: 10
Spy (Coding, Photo Interpretation)*: 6
Thief: 6
Vehicles: 6
Weaponry*: 10

Connections:

Task Force X (High)
The Key (Low)

Motivation:

Thrill of Adventure

Wealth:

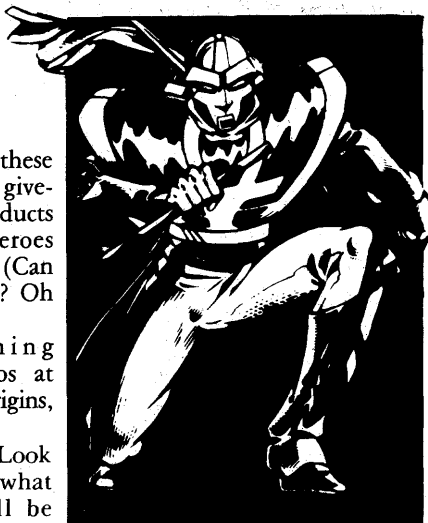
Struggling

Occupation:

Bounty Hunter

Race:

Human



Equipment:

For information about Manhunter's Power Baton™ just send us a self-addressed stamped envelope, and we'll send it out to you.

Background:

Mark Shaw was a district attorney on the East Coast who found himself increasingly despondent over the lack of justice that he saw in the judicial system. He was approached by the group of semi-mythical beings called the Manhunters™ and recruited into their organization.

As a Manhunter, Shaw fought against the Justice League of America™ until the true android nature of the Manhunters was revealed.

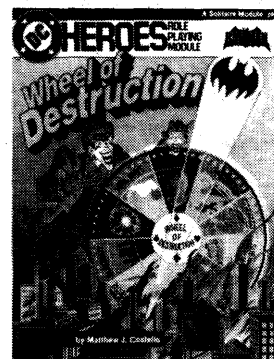
Shaw forsook the Manhunter name and became known as the Privateer™, working alongside the JLA™. However, the mental conditioning he had received from the Manhunters soon reasserted itself and he began committing crimes under the new identity of Star-Tsar™. When the Star-Tsar was unmasked by the Red Tornado™, Shaw was sent to prison.

Shaw remained in prison for several years, eventually freeing himself from the Manhunters' influence with psychiatric help. When the Manhunters attacked Earth during the Millennium™, Shaw was recruited by Task Force X™, a.k.a. The Suicide Squad™, as an expert on the Manhunters, to help defeat them.

Afterwards, Shaw's sentence was commuted to time served.

In order to vindicate himself, Shaw became a bounty hunter and assumed the identity of the new Manhunter in order to restore his dignity and his commitment to the ideals for which he originally stood. He now specializes in tracking down and capturing costumed criminals.

CHECKLIST:



□ WHEEL OF DESTRUCTION

This is the first solitaire module for the DC Heroes RPG system and has stayed on the top of our list for over 3 years.

The Joker™ has taken over the televisions of Gotham City™, and is broadcasting *his* idea of a fun game show: Wheel of Destruction, where each space on the giant spinning wheel equals one of Gotham's landmarks. If he isn't paid the ransom he demands, he spins the wheel to see which landmark gets destroyed. You have to find out from where he's transmitting and stop him.

Simple? Well, no. The Joker's crazy, not stupid.

JUST OUT

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This Sourcebook details the history of the largest peacekeeping force in the DC Universe™ with heroes from over a dozen worlds.

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World War II action at it finest, as Blackhawk™ battles an evil Nazi plot.



Mayfair Games, Inc.
P.O. Box 48539
Niles, IL 60648

but it isn't like a Rambo-type game where the player has unlimited ammunition and everybody can see everybody else, no matter where they are positioned. This game requires stealth and strategy, and is exciting to play. Accompanied by terrific graphics and sound, *Airborne Ranger* is destined to become another classic software adventure.

Accolade, Inc.

550 South Winchester, Suite 200
San Jose CA 95128
(408) 296-8400

Power!

Commodore 64 version

Phew! We've just completed another round of serious arcade flight with *Power!* Running on the C64 and C64/128 mode, *Power!* has the player operating a rocket-powered hovercraft whose mission is to destroy an enemy transfer beam that is protected not only by long-distance enemy raiders and mines, but also molecular disorientation that sucks the energy from your attack craft. With your energy depleted, you are at the mercies of the opposition — a most unenviable position!

You may control your hovercraft in either a normal joystick operational mode or with vectored movement. The latter mode, experts feel, is the best method for craft piloting, resulting in higher scores. When you push forward on the joystick, the hovercraft accelerates. When pulling back on the joystick, speed decreases. We found the vectored method of game play did improve our scores, but don't expect to master this arcade offering in just a couple of tries. This is a hard game to win. With extremely smooth graphics and screen scrolling, *Power!* is a fine addition to any C64 game library.

Strategic Studies Group (Australia)

(distributed by Electronic Arts)
1820 Gateway Drive
San Mateo CA 94404
(415) 571-7171

Decisive Battles of the American Civil War — Volume 1: Bull Run to Chancellorsville ****

Commodore 64/128 version

Roger Keating and Ian Trout continue the SSG tradition of superior tactical wargaming software. As the first release in their Decisive Battle series, *Bull Run to Chancellorsville* offers the player the opportunity to command the first battles of the American Civil War. We reviewed the C64/128 version and found the game extremely engrossing as well as educational. A version for the Apple II computer family is also shipping.

Completely menu-driven, game mechanics at first may seem to be complex and hard to understand but are soon broken down into palatable command subsets. This allows even novice wargamers to fully control divisions with tactical dexterity within a matter of minutes. Six Civil War battles are included in Volume I. The developers also include with the software two Game and Design Menus plus full-color maps of the various battlefields, which enables users to easily maneuver through the various menus for play or game construction and to plan effective strategies around terrain.

Also included with each SSG game are *Warpaint* and *Warplan*, programs that allow the player to design tactical wargames. Only the graphics of the game leave something to be desired. When realizing, however, that one doesn't play an SSG game for the graphics display but the realistic, tactical feel of 19th-century battle, the graphics become secondary in nature. Volume 1 is highly recommended and, with the included tutorial, will have the Blue and Gray armies involved in strategic maneuvering under the command of one or two players. You can also request that the computer manage either the Confederate or Union army, with play also governed by applying one of three handicap levels to each side. There are few recreational/tactical software companies that take the time to research historical data and include revealing, in-depth notes like SSG.

Spectrum HoloByte

A division of SPHERE
2061 Challenger Drive
Alameda CA 94501
(415) 522-3584

Tetris

IBM version

The second offering in this company's International series, this strategic arcade puzzler was written by two programmers in the U.S.S.R. We reviewed the IBM version on a Tandy 4000 and have become hopelessly addicted to the game. A C64/128 version has also been released. Differently colored and variously configured four-cornered pieces drop from the top of the screen. By rotating these elements as they are falling, you must try to fit them into available spaces at the bottom of the screen. The positioning must be accomplished before the objects reach the steadily increasing bottom layer. The goal is to close all gaps at the base of the screen and thereby score points. There are nine levels of difficulty. This is a most perplexing game and is extremely enjoyable as well. So far, Spectrum HoloByte has scored big with all of their International series offerings, and Tetris is no exception.

Data East USA, Inc.

470 Needles Drive
San Jose CA 95112
(408) 286-7074

TNK III

Commodore 64/128 version

Tired of spending \$30.00 for games that just aren't worth the price of admission? *TNK III* is a less-than \$10.00 arcade game that is actually worth the cost. The graphics certainly aren't awe-inspiring, but for the price are more than passable. You command a tank that can fire machine guns and cannons to destroy any opposition enroute to your destination, passing enemy infantry, missiles, tanks, and gun emplacements on the way. Scattered around the game are elements that enhance your tank and can be retrieved by your tank moving across each item's icon. These goodies are usually protected by an enemy tank or assault infantryman, however. This is a worthwhile game for the price.

Clue corner

There are several gamers who have written to us regarding the availability of quality adventure games that run on IBM microcomputers or compatibles that do not require a color graphics card. One such writer is Anthony D. George, Jr., of Gainesville, Fla. Well, one such game at the top of our list is *Might and Magic*, from New World Computing. This extremely

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involved fantasy role-playing adventure game is distributed by Activision and should be available in one of your local retail computer stores. The game will run with a Hercules Graphics Card (HGC) or compatible, and it sounds as though the Paradise Hi-Res card fits the HGC compatibility requirement. Most of Accolade's games (including our favorites — *Mini-Putt*, *Test Drive*, and *Ace of Aces*) also operate in HGC mode, although the named titles are not actually adventure games. Rainbird, an English software developer whose programs are now being distributed by Activision, has released both *The Pawn* and *The Guild of Thieves* adventure games so that they operate in either graphic or nongraphic mode. In the latter mode, you have a basic but high-spirited text adventure. Lastly, one of the great classics that we *still* play after nearly seven years is *Rogue* from Epyx, Inc. Also, check out *Talisman*, as reported in the "news and new products" section of this month's column. We hope this information helps you and others who do not yet possess color graphics capabilities with your IBMs and clones.

For those who are thinking about purchasing Sir-Tech Software's *Seven Spirits of Ra*, be advised that the program currently is having some problems with some of the video adapters in use in IBMs and compatible computers. Regardless of whether you are running the program in CGA or EGA mode, some of the graphics boards are not compatible with the program. You won't see the graphics on-screen, although the program's sound will continue to be heard on what appears to be a blank screen. According to the company's director of corporate communications, Sir-Tech is hard at work correcting this nasty problem. We'll let you know when an upgrade has been released for what could be a fine adventure game.

Gregory Zenon of Webster, Mass., offers the following sage advice for players of *The Bard's Tale*:

"For party survival, especially at the lower levels, two things really help: plenty of firehorns and lotsa gold. The best way to obtain these items is through a little subterfuge. . . . here's how to do it. Use your Homemade character disk and then the back side of the boot disk. First, (S)tart. Then load your party from your character disk. Go to Garth's and sell everything. Get back to the Guild; remove everybody onto the back side of the boot disk *except* "6." Load MEMBER 1 ("1") from your character disk. Pool all gold to "1." Insert the back side of the boot disk and remove "6." Load the rest of your party from your character disk and presto: lotsa gold! You can repeat this process until millionaire status is attained.

"To obtain firehorns, (S)tart the game and load the member with the least necessary equipment. This will probably be your Monk, "M" from your character disk. From the back side of the boot disk, load

El Cid. Trade El Cid's firehorn to "M" and move El Cid to your character disk. Load El Cid from the back side of the boot disk again and trade his firehorn to "M" once again. Move El Cid to the character disk and keep this going until "M" has a full load. When you're in the dungeons, just trade firehorns from your party to the Bard whenever the Bard needs them. When you run out of gold and firehorns, simply replenish them!"

Bob Stam, of Horicon, Wis., writes with hints for both *The Bard's Tale* and *The Bard's Tale II*.

"In *The Bard's Tale*, even though a magic mouth tells you the name of the Mad God, Tarjan, on the third level of the starter dungeon, don't forget the fourth level — it contains a passage to Mangar's front door! The eye is also needed to get into Kylearan's Tower. Once you've entered this tower, don't forget to answer a magic mouth in a dark room, or the required door won't appear. Lastly, three silver objects are *most* helpful in defeating Mangar.

"As for *The Bard's Tale II*, for those who are searching for the second level of the tombs, remember: 'Some things change unseen, and not always for the better! If someone approaches you and offers to sell you something for 5,000 gold pieces, BUY IT! On the third level, let the old go first and drink your poison, for the giant awaits. Finally, in the Grey Crypt where no magic works, remember the monsters that you face!"

For *Might and Magic* enthusiasts, Bruce Gulke of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisc., offers the following help:

"The answer to the Ice Princess's question is none other than Love. Also, you'll find a druid at A-2, 0-15. . . . Be certain to obtain a King's Pass for Castle Alamar from him. Contrary to the description of the Astral Spell in the player's manual, you can reach the Astral Plane in another way: If you have the diamond key, you can enter the diamond door at E-3, 1-4, which takes you directly to the Astral Plane. The Inner Sanctum itself lies in the center of the Astral Plane. To enter, however, you

need a special card. To obtain this card, first go back to the gypsy located outside the town of Sorpical and learn the party members' signs. Next, go to the large, unmarked island in the SW of A-4. Answer the questions asked by the cloaked figure correctly and he will give you a coral key. This key lets you enter the Volcanic Isles dungeon, which is located behind the huge slab of coral. Inside, find the Volcano God and ask him for a present (give you something). He is hidden, but his gift is the asset you need. Your male characters . . . should be most careful at the intersections in Portsmouth. And don't forget that the pictures on the map that depict creatures . . . are not there just for show."

More *Might and Magic* hints were received from Russ Mitchell, of Newport, R.I. He writes:

"Those having trouble gaining experience . . . might first try checking in at Algary's Inn. They must then go through the left wall and jump into the Sewage Pit. The ensuing combat will award an average of 300 or so points per combat. If the party is being slaughtered because of a lack of magic weapons, save up the gold and go to Dusk. For those with parties of at least 7th level experience, try jumping from the Red Dragon encounter in B-2 to the Wyverns in C-3. This not only adds to your experience at a most rewarding rate, but it also nets the party a bunch of gold."

Finally, to Scott Plumb who thought our review of *The Eternal Dagger* was too unkind in that we found the frustration of trying to obtain viable characters defeating to the game's purpose, all we can do is quote from his letter: "I got really frustrated and nearly destroyed my computer, but after three months of work, it paid off." We're delighted you had three months to work with *The Eternal Dagger* and must conclude you have the patience of a saint. For us, there are other exciting adventure games that require far less time to learn and enjoy.

We would also like to thank the following readers for their letters, to which we unfortunately haven't had time to respond: Austin Parvofiello; Tim Baier of



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Huntington Station, N.Y. (tell Crispin to keep cooking, because help might be around the corner); Garrett Immer of Hagerstown, Md.; Eric Carberry of Stockton, Utah; Dave Ward of Madison, Wisc.; Randy Auschrat of Edmonton, Alberta; Andy Egan of Madison, Wisc.; David Rohen of Plattsmouth, Nebr.; and Robert Speicher and Scott Stanley. We'll publish more hints in future issues.

Lastly, a personal word of thanks to Michael Penner, who revealed the existence of an exciting adventure game for Atari ST users: *Dungeon Master*. We are now working on this superb offering as the feature review for one of the next issues of this magazine. For those who can't wait for the review of what we expect will be a five-star game, contact FTL Games, 6160 Lusk Boulevard, Suite C206, San Diego CA 92121; phone: (619) 453-5711.

News and new products

Data East USA, Inc.

Kid Niki has been released for the C64/128 (\$29.95), Apple II computer family (\$34.95) and the Nintendo Entertainment System (\$44.95). Based on the coin-operated version, this is a ninja adventure game that turns the player into a radical warrior battling to save his girlfriend, Princess Margo, from the Stone Wizard. Also released is *Speed Buggy*, an arcade-style racing simulation, for the C64/128 (\$29.95) and the Atari ST (\$44.95). For really good bargains, check out the company's Moving Target budget software line, which has products priced at less than \$10. Two recent additions include *TNK III* (reviewed earlier in this column) and *Q*Bert*.

Electronic Arts

1820 Gateway Drive
San Mateo CA 94404
(415) 571-7171

As usual, Electronic Arts continues to pump out new recreational products. A new offering which Electronic Arts will be distributing is *Alien Fires — 2199 A.D.*, developed by Paragon Software. This is a futuristic role-playing adventure game in which the player transcends the barriers of time to find the scientist and creator of an awesome time machine. For the Commodore Amiga, the price is \$39.95. Interstel's latest offering is *First Expedition*, a real-time, first-person adventure set on the futuristic ocean world of Yorland. You must brave the perils of a sea long ago abandoned by your people to find the three Sun Spheres that will ultimately save your planet from destruction. This offering is for IBM micros and compatibles and is priced at \$49.95. Amiga users will *not*

get soaked with *Return to Atlantis*, a role-playing game in which the player, as an agent for The Foundation, receives 14 missions to complete, all underwater. The price is \$49.95. A most unusual new program is *Gone Fish'n*, a bass-fishing simulation for the Atari ST. The game comes complete with all of the activities fishermen experience, including keeping an eye on weather reports, reviewing fishing logs, selecting a fishing hole, and buying fishing lures. You also catch fish! The price is \$44.95

Matchup

16D Oak Road
Medford MA 02155
(617) 395-4190

This game software developer has released version 2.1 of *Tyler*, the company's word game software. Like Selchow & Righter's SCRABBLE® game, it can be configured with the player's choice of board size and layout, number and value of pieces, and several other variables. The game also has a 200,000-word vocabulary that includes just about any word that can be found in a collegiate dictionary. For the IBM or Macintosh computer, the game costs \$50.

MicroIllusions

17408 Chatsworth Street
Granada Hills CA 91344
(818) 360-3715

Utilizing a split-screen play mode, *Galactic Invasion* has been released for Amiga users. This is a space dogfight that pits galaxy against galaxy, and has players invading and capturing while collecting material necessary to build the ultimate galactic warhead with which to defeat the enemy. As a member of the company's One to One Series, this offering is priced at \$24.95. Also from MicroIllusions is a new program that will teach you how to play blackjack, or to brush up on card skills before the "big game." Named *Black Jack Academy*, the program is now available for Amiga, C64/128, and Apple IIGS at \$39.95. The IBM version includes both 5¼" and 3½" disks and is \$42.95.

PBI Software, Inc.

1163 Triton Drive
Foster City CA 94404
(415) 349-8765

A new arcade space adventure game for the Apple IIGS has been unveiled by PBI. *Alien Mind*, players must neutralize aliens and regain control of an experimental space station. Utilizing the IIGS's stereo sound capabilities, the game also presents smooth animation sequences with continuous scrolling of the play screen. The price is \$54.95 for this two-disk adventure.

Polarware, Inc.

1055 Paramount Parkway, Suite A
Batavia IL 60510
(312) 232-1984

At long last, Polarware has reentered the adventure game market with *Talisman: Challenging the Sands of Time* for the Apple II and IBM micros, with the latter system needing either a CGA or HGC card. Priced at \$19.95, this game takes the player to ancient Persia where he must rid the land of an evil and powerful genie — using an ancient Talisman that the player must first find!

SubLOGIC Corporation

PO. Box 4019
Champaign IL 61820
(217) 359-8482

Stealth Mission is a game from one of the graphics leaders in the software industry. This game offers state-of-the-art simulation sophistication and playability with easy flight control and navigation, and automatic landing and refueling systems, plus a real time-pause feature. You fly either an F-19 Stealth fighter, a swept-wing X-29, or a Navy F-14 Tomcat with eight different missions and 10 skill levels. A targeting computer helps you detect,

track, and lock onto enemy targets. *Stealth Mission* is also fully compatible with all of SubLOGIC's Scenery Disks! For the C64/128, this flying feast is priced at \$49.95.

XOR Corporation

5421 Opportunity Court
Minnetonka MN 55343
(800) 635-2425 toll-free
(612) 938-0005

Four new recreational programs have appeared from XOR. First is *Pro Challenge*, a football simulation game that includes 27 offensive and 14 defensive plays, available for IBM micros and the Apple Macintosh at \$49.95. The second game is *Basketball Challenge*, also for IBM micros and the Mac, a five-on-five real-time college basketball simulation in which the player acts as the coach for one of 20 college teams. The third offering is *Oligopoly*, a worldwide monopoly game that finds the player traveling to 52 countries to buy and sell, also for IBMs and Macs at \$49.95. The final new product is *Bermuda Square*, a puzzle based on a mathematical equation that states that the number of squares from 1 through 24 equals the square of 70. You must try to fit 24 different-sized squares into a larger one that measures 70 by 70 — no easy chore. For Macs and IBMs, the price is \$29.95.

Program conversions**Electronic Arts** (415) 571-7171

Tomahawk for IBM micros/compatibles

MicroProse (301) 771-1151

Pirates! for IBMs and compatibles (****). Note that some minor problems may occur when playing this game with a joystick. Be certain to calibrate your joystick properly; otherwise, the joystick-controlled cursor may not access the proper on-screen menu selections, and you'll also have difficulty in winning the arcadelike combat sequences. Otherwise, this offering is as fine as the other system versions.

SSI (415) 964-1353

Sons of Liberty for C64/128 and Apple II

We plan to cover the game entertainment systems starting with our next column. These stand-alone products are not computers, but are hardware devices that attach to your television set or monitor and operate on commands written on cartridges. For those in the know, these cartridges are basically Read Only Memory (ROM) chips with the data encoded on them. The systems to be covered include the likes of SEGA and Nintendo.

Please don't forget to vote for your favorite software game. Until next month, game on! □

GAZETTEER



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Not only does this D&D® Gazetteer accessory offer loads of fascinating and useful facts about the land and people of the Northern Reaches in the D&D® game world, it also includes a full-color poster-size map of the Reaches and a complete set-up for a Viking Village. With the cutouts included in this action-packed accessory you can construct your own Viking village.

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by Ken Rolston

Available Now

The Elves of Alfheim

by Steve Perrin

The Dwarves of Rockhome

by Aaron Allston



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Just How Big Is This Bomb?

New AP tables for Mayfair's DC™ HEROES game

The Gamemaster's Manual of Mayfair's DC™ HEROES game gives several benchmark tables on page 4 relating Attribute Points (APs) to different types of measurement: time, weight, distance, volume, and information. But, as friends and I realized during a late-night gaming session, there is no table relating APs to area, the measurement that fits between distance and volume. How large an area can be affected by a superpower? Then I realized there was no table dealing with explosive force, either. How do you know how powerful a supervillain's bomb is? This article resolves these problems by presenting benchmark AP tables for area and explosive force.

Acres of APs

Players of DC HEROES games should note that the items in Table 1 are given for

ease of conceptualization. A field hockey field is much easier to visualize than a half acre. But these items do not necessarily represent the upper range of each AP level. For instance, a soccer field is only slightly larger than a football gridiron, not twice as big — but the football gridiron lies just under the upper range of area covered by 14 APs of area, while a soccer field is just above that (thus 15 APs).

To calculate the actual number corresponding to the upper range of area, start with a numerical measurement from the table; for example, 250 square miles (Chicago) equates to 31 APs. Divide by 2 each time you go down 1 AP, and multiply by 2 each time you increase by 1 AP. Note that there is a slight change in this procedure involving calculations that double 64 (I use 125 for the result, not 128) or halve 125 (I

use 64, not 62.5). This is done to make the numbers easier to handle.

Let's calculate the size of Washington, DC. (29 APs) from the 250 square-mile size of Chicago (31 APs). From 31 APs (Chicago) to 30 APs, you divide 250 by 2, yielding 125 square miles. From 30 APs to 29 APs (Washington), you divide 125 by 2, yielding 62.5, but changing it to 64 square miles. Therefore, Washington, D.C. is about 64 square miles in size (it's actually 67). The square-mile areas of other real-world cities, states, islands, and nations can be found by consulting an almanac and converting the result to APs using Table 1 and the above calculation method.

Note: There's a mistake in the Volume table of the Gamemaster's Manual (page 4). The first three entries that refer to "square feet" should read "cubic feet." The same table on the Gamemaster's Screen is printed correctly.

Measuring megatons

The APs given on the explosive force APs table, Table 2, are the number of APs experienced (as both Acting Value and Effect Value) by a character standing at the center of a blast — that is, at 0 APs from (within 10 feet of) an exploding object. For each AP of distance beyond 0 APs, a physical explosion drops by 2.5 APs in its force. This only applies to physical,

Table 1
DC™ HEROES Area APs

APs	Area
0	½ square yard
1	Coffee table
2	2 square yards
3	4 square yards
4	Ping-Pong table
5	16 square yards
6	Bowling alley
7	Boxing ring
8	125 square yards
9	Singles tennis court
10	Baseball diamond
11	Olympic-size pool
12	Ice hockey rink
13	Field hockey field
14	Football gridiron (1 acre)
15	Soccer field
16	4 acres
23	1 square mile
29	Washington, DC.
31	Chicago (250 square miles)
32	Los Angeles
34	Rhode Island
40	United Kingdom (125,000 square miles)
42	Texas
43	Alaska (1,000,000 square miles)
45	United States of America
47	Soviet Union
48	Asia
49	Atlantic Ocean
50	Pacific Ocean
51	Surface of the Earth

bomb-type explosions, not to ray-beam weapons. (This drop in force, like the gun-use system in the game, means that explosions are less likely to kill heroes than would be the case in the real world.) If a character is one mile (10 APs) away from a 100-megaton nuclear explosion (46 APs), he would experience an AV/EV blast effect of $46 - (2.5 \times 10) = 21$ APs, which makes one hope that the character in question is at least equal to Superman®.

An important note about explosions is that an explosion not caused by a ray beam is always considered “killing” combat if the force at its center is at least 4 APs. Such blasts continue to be “killing” combat even after distance has dropped their force levels below 4 APs. Explosions with less than 4 APs of force at their centers are not automatically “killing” combat; if the person initiating the explosion does not declare “killing” combat, a character might be injured, but death cannot occur. Incidentally, after I designed Table 2, I checked the Gamemaster’s Manual and found that the 3 AP stun bomb used by Nightwing™ and 8 AP plastic explosive used by Batman™ fit exactly within this table’s design!

Nonphysical (ray-beam) blasts in the form of a directed beam from weaponry such as Lex Luther’s™ Warsuit can be at any level of power and are not “killing” combat unless so declared. These types of

weapons will always subject a target to the full APs of the attack because the target will be hit (which is like being at the center of an explosion). Only the target will suffer the effect of the force of a beam blast, although if the beam misses its intended victim it may hit an innocent bystander, building, etc. Beam blasts have a range equal to the range of the weapon or superpower being used.

But explosive force delivered by physical means (missiles, bomb shells, etc.) is a different matter. A physical explosion of 28 APs or less will usually be nonnuclear or chemical in nature. A physical explosion above 33 APs will usually be nuclear in nature, and even a 33 AP nonnuclear explosion will be extremely rare, as it would require 20,000 tons of TNT. Natural disasters like asteroid strikes and volcanic blasts could create multimegaton explosions, but are (hopefully) incredibly rare. Military arsenals are unlikely to stock that amount of chemical explosives in one location, so most chemical explosions should be kept to considerably less than 28 APs in power. In the case of matter-antimatter nuclear explosions, the matter and antimatter must be equal in quantity (e.g., a 1 gram matter-antimatter blast will have ½ gram of matter and ½ gram of antimatter involved).

Furthermore, nearly all chemical-type physical explosions involve fiery blasts, so characters having a vulnerability to fire (as does the Martian Manhunter™) will suffer more than other characters. It is important to differentiate between an explosion and an explosive force, however. A water main might crack open with a force of 10 APs, but that’s an explosion due to water pressure, not combustion; thus, it is not a fiery attack.

There are some ambiguities in Table 2 herein – for example, between 15 and 19 APs. These arise because of the use in the DC HEROES game rules of upper limits in tables. If you take 100 lb. of TNT at 15 APs, doubling it each time you go up 1 AP, you only have 1,600 lb. at 19 APs, which is 400 lb. shy of the 2,000 lb. of TNT that make up one ton. But the values in the table were calculated in terms of joules, a measurement of energy. One hundred pounds of TNT would release about 20 joules of energy, and the upper limit at 15 APs is 25.6 joules. The upper limit at 14 APs is only 12.8 joules; too small for 100 lb. of TNT, so 15 APs was used. Other ambiguities come about for the same reason, but the table is accurate for the forces listed, which should be suitable for most situations. Other force levels used by the Gamemaster will not differ by more than 1 AP from their actual value.

Nuclear notes

Any mention of nuclear blasts brings up the question of fallout and other lingering radiation. (Ray-beam attacks leave no lingering radiation.) I personally recommend that players assume physical nucle-

ar blasts are “clean,” with no lingering radiation. Besides, characters will not normally hang around after a thermonuclear explosion and can wash off any radioactive dust (assuming your Gamemaster hasn’t turned the whole planet into a flaming ball). The APs of power in the table are for all radiation, heat, light, and blast effects at the time of the explosion, so a character who survives at the time of the blast and leaves the area will not die of radiation. This treats death by a nuclear blast as instantaneous, rather than trying to figure out if a character dies only after several days of radiation illness. Whether a character who dies from the effects of the actual blast lived long enough to put his estate in order is left to the Gamemaster to decide.

But for those of you who must have them, here’s what to do for post-blast radiation effects. Decide if the nuclear explosion was an air-burst or ground-burst explosion. An air-burst’s post-blast radiation effects are easy to work with: There aren’t any. Matter-antimatter explosions don’t leave lingering radiation, either; the leftover material is inert.

For a ground-burst explosion in which the nuclear fireball ate into the ground and formed a crater, characters within the area covered by the explosion and subjected to the direct effects of the blast suffer an attack by the radiation once a week. The radiation level begins at the blast’s AP level minus 30 for the week in which the blast occurred. This is the value of lingering radiation that exists within 10 APs (1 mile) of the center of the blast area. For each AP of distance beyond that, the radiation level decreases by 2 APs of AV/EV value. The lingering radiation value at the center drops at the rate of -1 AP for each week after the blast until it reaches 0 APs (normal background radiation).

Lingering radiation, no matter how weak, is “killing” combat like the blast that created it. A character in a radiation zone (anywhere that the radiation level is above 0) must undergo an attack by the radiation AV/EV against character STR and BODY at the end of each week. Furthermore, any damage from radiation effects does not heal while the character remains in the radiation zone; a character continues to risk damage once a week until he leaves the zone, the zone radiation drops to 0, or the character dies.

For example: Jonah Hex™ enters an area two weeks after an atomic bomb of 20 kilotons (34 APs) was detonated there. The lingering radiation in the first week was $34 - 30 = 4$ APs. Now, in the second week, it has dropped by 1 AP to 3 APs. Hex gets no closer to the blast center than 11 APs (1 AP beyond the 10 AP primary radiation zone), so he suffers an AV/EV attack of $3 - (2 \times 1) = 1$ AP by the lingering radiation, not enough to kill a superhero like Hex. At distances greater than 11 APs from the center of the blast area, no radiation exists.

Table 2
DC™ HEROES Explosive Force APs

APs	Force
1	1 gram of TNT
4	1 oz. TNT
8	1 lb. TNT
9	1 kg TNT
10	Hand grenade
12	10 lb. TNT
15	100 lb. TNT
19	1 ton TNT
23	10 tons TNT
26	100 tons TNT
29	1 kiloton nuclear weapon
33	10 kiloton nuclear weapon
36	100 kiloton nuclear weapon
39	1-megaton nuclear weapon
43	10-megaton nuclear weapon
46	100-megaton nuclear weapon
57	1 gram matter-antimatter
62	1 oz. matter-antimatter
66	1 lb. matter-antimatter
67	1 kg matter-antimatter
83	Energy emitted by the Sun in 1 second
96	Energy emitted by a nova
110	Energy emitted by a supernova
141	Energy emitted by the Sun during its lifetime as a main-sequence yellow star (10 billion years)

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DRAGONMIRTH

POOR GUY — HE'S
NOBODY'S FOOL



by Richard Tomasic

TOMASIC

by Joseph Pilbury



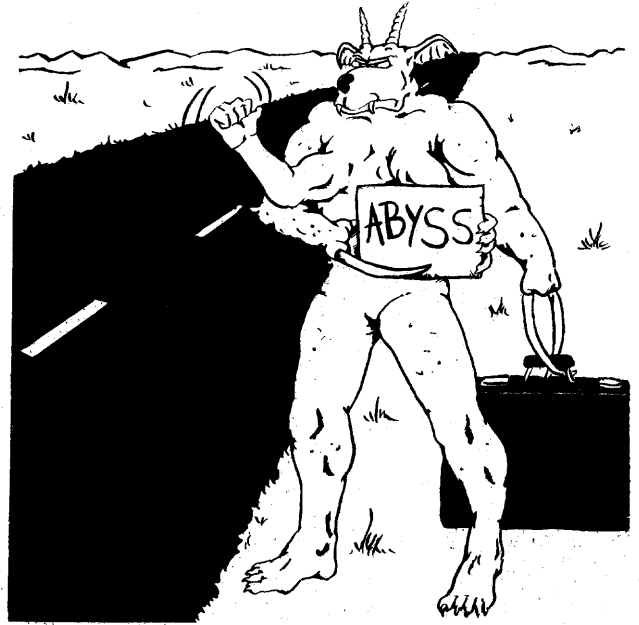
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by Walt Hackensmit



by Bruce Simpson



by Ray Nadeau



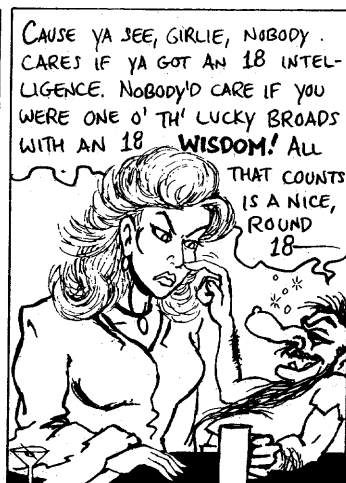
MEYER by Dwain Meyer

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?



by David Zenz

by Barbera Ward and John Adams



CONVENTION CALENDAR

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, succinct, and under 150 words long.

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) and telephone number(s) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December 1988 issue is the last Monday of October 1988. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, PO. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the copy deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR UK Limited, The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD, United Kingdom. Early listings pay off!

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 either Robin Jenkins or Roger E. Moore at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to Rik Rose at TSR UK Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

* indicates Canadian convention.

• indicates European convention.

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SCIENCE FICTION ART EXHIBITION June 27-August 22

The Orlando Science Center in Orlando, Fla., will feature a collection of art and artifacts from Michael Whelan, Vincent Di Fate, Kelly Freas, and other artists. The show will also have motion-picture artifacts, a film lecture series, and a film festival. Admission is \$4 for adults, \$3 for children, and \$10 for entire families. The Orlando Science Center is located in Orlando Loch Haven Park, just off Interstate 4 in downtown Orlando. Write to: Orlando Science Center, 810 East Rollins Street, Orlando FL 32803-1291; or call: (407) 896-7151.

DALLAS FANTASY FAIR, July 1-3

Bulldog Productions presents its largest show of the year. This comic-book, science-fiction, and film convention will be held at the Sheraton Park Central, 12720 Merit Drive, LBJ at Coit, in Dallas, Texas. This event will feature more than 200 dealers' tables, 100 guests of honor, an art show and auction, a masquerade, 24-hour gaming sessions, 24-hour Japanimation and video rooms, artists and writers workshops, readings, a dance, an open convention suite, and more. The anticipated attendance for this convention is 3,000. Tables are available, but write for prices. Admission fees are \$20 for all three days paid in advance, or \$25 at the door. Write to: Bulldog Productions, PO. Box 820488, Dallas TX 75382; or call: (214) 349-3367.

NANCON-88 X, July 1-3

The 10th anniversary of this gaming convention will be held at the Ramada Inn N.W. Crossing in Houston, Tex. There will be a large dealers' room and an open gaming room available to registrants. Events include AD&D®, BATTLETECH®, SQUAD LEADER®, STAR FLEE? BATTLES®, TRAVELLER®, and TWILIGHT 2000® tournaments, naval and 15mm Napoleonic miniatures competitions, and CIVILIZATION®, PARANOIA®, NUCLEAR WAR®, CALL OF CTHULHU®, CAR WARS®, FEDERATION AND EMPIRE®, and team head-to-head AD&D® games. Other events include a miniatures-painting contest, a costume contest, and more. Send an SASE to: Nan's Game HQ, 2011 S.W. Freeway, Houston TX 77098, ATTN: NANCON.

CAPITOL-CON IV, July 9

This gaming convention will be held at the Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield, Ill. Board, miniatures, and role-playing gaming will be featured at this one-day event. Write to: Bill Wilson, 3320 Gaines Mill Road, Apt. 4, Springfield IL 62704; or call: (217) 787-7092.

COLONIAL CITY GAMEFEST VI July 9-10

GAMEFEST will again be held in the Memorial

Building in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. Role-playing and wargaming events will be sponsored. Admission is \$2 per day or \$3.50 for both days. Write to: Mt. Vernon Gamers Association, 205 W. Gambier Street, Mt. Vernon OH 43050.

EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY CONVENTION July 9

This gaming convention will be held at the Brookdale Country Club in Elkhart, Ind. Featured events include RPGA™ Network tournaments (including AD&D® game and MARVEL SUPER HEROES® game events), BATTLETECH® games, and miniatures competitions. Write to: Bob Hagerty, 227 North 2nd Street, Apt. G, Elkhart IN 46516.

DOVERCON IV, July 16-17

This year's DOVERCON will be held at the University of New Hampshire's Memorial Union Building (MUB) in Durham, N.H. Features include an RPGA™ Network AD&D® game Open Tournament, along with many other events. A film festival, miniatures contest, and art competition will also be held. Registration is \$15 for both days and must be received no later than July 1 (this includes entry into three events). Registration at the door is \$15 for both days and \$10 for one (no free entry to events provided). Each event costs \$2. Vendor and game master enquiries are welcome. Write to: Information, DOVERCON IV, PO. Box 753, Dover NH 03820.

WINDSOR GAMEFEST VI, July 16-17 *

This gaming convention takes place at the Ambassador Auditorium in the University Centre at the University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Special guest of honor is science-fiction and fantasy artist Gideon. Featured events include role-playing, miniatures, and board games, a dealers' room, free movies, an art exhibit, and several door prizes. Preregistration fees are \$10 Canadian for the weekend and \$7 Canadian per day. Write to: Windsor Gaming Society, PO. Box 2055, Walkerville Station, Windsor, Ontario, CANADA, N8Y 4R5.

HAYSCON IV, July 22-23

This two-day gaming convention will be held at the Memorial Union of Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kans. Numerous strategic, tactical, and role-playing games will be featured, along with seminars, an auction, and a miniatures contest. Expected events will include CALL OF CTHULHU®, BATTLETECH®, CAR WARS®, and TWILIGHT: 2000® games, and an AD&D® game Open Tournament. Preregistration is \$10 for both days, or \$12 at the door. Write to: HAYSCON IV, 1301 Felten Drive, Hays KS 67601.

MEMPHIS FANTASY CONVENTION July 22-24

Sponsored by the Memphis Fantasy Convention Association, Inc., this fifth-annual event will be held at the Garden Plaza Hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Scheduled guests include John Ostrander, Tom Yeates, Gary Spiegel, and Allen Hammack. Activities will include extensive gaming, an art show and sale, dealer exhibitions, panel discussions, a costume contest, and a banquet. Daily admission is \$10; the entire weekend costs \$21. Send an SASE to: MEMPHIS FANTASY CONVENTION, Box 11081, Memphis TN 38111.

KINGCON IV, July 30

KINGCON IV will be held at the Best Western Inn in Mt. Vernon, Ill. Sponsored by the Knights of the Griffon, this gaming convention will

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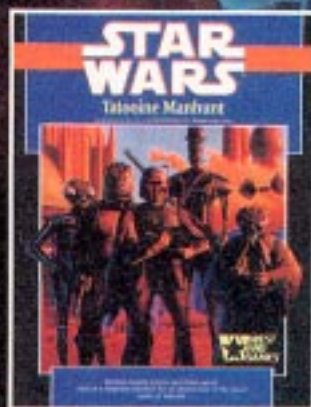
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feature a two-round RPGA™ Network AD&D® game tournament, a three-round ILLUMINATI* tournament, a miniatures contest, and lots of gaming. Preregistration is \$3 until July 20 and \$5 thereafter. Send an SASE to: KINGCON IV, 501 S. 19th Street #3, Mt. Vernon IL 62864; or call: (618) 242-7920.

PROJECT...GENESIS III, July 31

The people from PATCO bring yet another fantasy gaming convention, this time to Chiminello's Hall, 2221 N. Webber in Fresno, Calif. This one-day event will run from 9 A.M. to 11 P.M. Featured events include BATTLETECH*, AD&D®, STAR FLEET BATTLES*, CHAMPIONS*, and other game events. Both tournament and open games will be available to all, along with dealers' tables and a swap meet for those wishing to buy, sell, or trade old games and books (table space is required). Preregistration for this event is \$3 for the day if paid before July 20, and \$5 afterward. Swap meet tables are \$5 for the whole table and \$3.50 for half. Dealers should call or write for details. Judges are needed for events; those accepted receive a refund on their registration fees. Write to: PATCO, c/o Phillip S. Pittz, 5415 E. Washington, Fresno CA 93727; or call: (209) 255-4682.

OMACON 8, August 5-7

This major Midwest science-fiction, prospace, and gaming convention is sponsored by Nebraskans for the Advancement of Space Development (NASD), and will be held at the Holiday Inn Central, 3321 S. 72nd Street, in Omaha, Nebr. Write to: OMACON 8, P.O. Box 37851, Omaha NE 68137; or call: (402) 476-7176.

EASTERN N.C. TOY AND HOBBY SHOW August 6-7

This show will be held at the New Cumberland County Agro-Expo Center, just off Highway 301 South, in Fayetteville, N.C. This event includes a swap meet for collectors of comic books and antique and collectible toys, games, model kits, and baseball cards. Daily admission fees are \$3. Write to: Carolina Hobby Expo, 3452 Odell School Road, Concord NC 28025; or call: (704) 786-8373.

GAME-FEST IX, August 12-21

San Diego's ninth-annual game festival will be held in historic Old Town, San Diego, and will feature over 60 different role-playing and board game events with more than \$1,500 in total prizes. Special events include: game demonstrations; figure painting, diorama, and costume

contests; a two-day Grand AD&D® Open; a Steve Jackson Pentathlon; and The Avalon Hill Game Company Classics Tournament. Registration fees, which include entry to all gaming events for all 10 days plus a \$20 coupon book for game purchases, are \$20 if paid by August 1, or \$30 at the door. Write to: GAME-FEST IX, c/o Game Towne, 3954 Harney Street (in Old Town), San Diego CA 92110; or call: (619) 291-1666.

GOLDQUEST 88, August 12-14

This fantasy and science-fiction convention, sponsored by the Goldquest Clubs of Manasota, will be held in Sarasota, Fla., at the Airport Holiday Inn on U.S. 41. Guests of honor will be Greg Costikyan (the WILLOW*, PARANOIA*, and STAR WARS* games) and Thomas Mulkey (TWILIGHT: 2000* game). The convention will feature many board, role-playing, and miniatures games (with awards in several categories), along with miniatures-painting and costume contests. A dealers' room and 24-hour video room will be available. A pool party will be held at 7 P.M. on Friday, August 12, to open the convention. Admission is \$8 if paid prior to July 1, \$10 after July 1, and \$12 at the door. Write to: Goldquest Clubs, P.O. Box 1017, Oneco FL 34264-1017; or call and leave your name and address at: (813) 758-0421.

UNICON 1988, August 18-21

This science-fiction and fantasy convention will be held at King Alfred's Teacher Training College in Winchester, Hants, Great Britain. Confirmed guests as of this point include Patrick Tilley (author of *Mission, Fade Out*, and *The Amtrak Wars*) and Michael de Larrabeiti (author of *The Borribles*). Admission fees are £10 for attending memberships; single room rates are £10. Checks or postal orders should be made payable to WINCON. Payments made in U.S. dollars are accepted; registrants should learn the current exchange rates before sending any money. Write to: WINCON, 11 Rutland Street, Hanley, Stoke on Trent, Staffs., UNITED KINGDOM; or call: (0782) 271070.

DRAK CON '88, August 20-21

This year's event will be held in the College Dining Room at the Northern College of Education on Hilton Drive in Aberdeen, Scotland. DRAK CON will run from 9 A.M. to 11:30 P.M. on Saturday and from 9 A.M. to 8:30 P.M. on Sunday. Now in its third year, DRAK CON has the additional aim of raising money for famine relief. Events for this convention will include an AD&D® game tournament. Admission costs for

this convention are £5 for adults and £3.50 for children under 16 for both days. There will be a £1 reduction for registration bookings for one-day registrations made before July 9th (or £3 for adults and £2 for children under 16). Bed and breakfast accommodations may be booked in advance at £8.50 per night. Send an SASE to: DRAK CON '88, c/o S. Douglas, 13 Springbank Terrace, Aberdeen, UNITED KINGDOM AB1 2LS; or call: (0224) 572128. Make all checks payable to "Dragon Aid." All proceeds for this convention go for famine relief.

HOUSTON FANFAIR, August 20-21

Bulldog Productions presents this small, fun comic-book, science-fiction, and film convention. This event will be held at a hotel to be announced. More than 60 dealers' tables, more than a dozen guests of honor, a masquerade, 24-hour gaming sessions, 24-hour video rooms, writers workshops, an open convention suite, and a huge Saturday night party will be featured events. The anticipated attendance for this convention is 600. Tables are available for \$50/\$60. Admission fees are \$4 for Saturday, \$3 for Sunday, and \$5 for both days at the door only. Write to: Bulldog Productions, P.O. Box 820488, Dallas TX 75382; or call: (214) 349-3367.

FESTICON 88, August 27-28

This gaming convention will be held at the Hotel Syracuse in Syracuse, N.Y. Special events include: AD&D® game tournaments; STAR FLEET BATTLES*, TRAVELLER*, and other games; and an art show and costume party. Guests of honor will be announced at a later date. Registration fees are \$10 (which includes the first tournament fee) and \$5 for every tournament after the first. Registrations made before July 15 will receive a half-price discount on tournament fees. Write to: FESTICON 88, c/o Walden III, 547 Allen Street, Syracuse NY 13210.

GATEWAY '88, September 2-5

This gaming convention will be held at the Los Angeles Airport Hyatt Hotel. Role-playing, wargame, computer game, and family board game tournaments are offered, as well as various seminars and demonstrations, a flea market, a game auction, and an exhibitors' area. Write to: STRATEGICON, 5374 Village Road, Long Beach CA 90808; or call: (213) 420-3675.

AUSTIN FANFAIR, September 17-18

Bulldog Productions presents this small, fun comic-book, science-fiction, and film convention. This event will be held at a hotel to be announced. More than 60 dealers' tables, more than a dozen guests of honor, a masquerade, 24-hour gaming sessions, 24-hour video rooms, writers workshops, an open convention suite, and a huge Saturday night party will be featured events. The anticipated attendance for this convention is 600. Tables are available for \$50/\$60. Admission fees are \$4 for Saturday, \$3 for Sunday, and \$5 for both days at the door only. Write to: Bulldog Productions, P.O. Box 820488, Dallas TX 75382; or call: (214) 349-3367.

VALLEY CON 13, September 24-25

This science-fiction and fantasy convention will be held at the Regency Inn, Hwy 75 and I-94, in Moorhead, Minn. The author guests of honor are Robert Asprin, Lynn Abbey, and Eleanor Arnason. The artist guest of honor is Giovanna Fregnie. Featured activities include videos, an art show and auction, numerous panels, dealers, a costume contest and masquerade ball, and a variety of gaming events (courtesy of the Gamers Guild and VALLEY CON).

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Role-Playing, War Games, Models, Fantasy of all kinds. "BATTLE-TECH" - Full range of plastic kits available."

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Admission is \$4 for adults, \$3 for youths 13-17 years old, and \$2 for children 4-12 years old. Send an SASE to: VALLEY CON 13, P.O. Box 7202, Fargo ND 58109; or call: (701) 232-1954.

SUNCOAST SKIRMISHES '88

September 30-October 2

SKIRMISHES presents the eighth-annual production of this popular gaming extravaganza. This event will take place at the Holiday Inn-Ashley Plaza, 111 West Fortune Street in Tampa, Fla. Room rates are \$50 for single or double occupancy. Events include AD&D®, TRAVELER*, STAR FLEET BATTLES*, and CAR WARS* game events, along with Napoleonic, Seakrieg, and board gaming events, a KILLER* tournament, a dealers' room, SCA demonstrations, and many other role-playing and historical events. Hotel reservations may be made by calling: (813) 223-1351. Registration fees are \$18 for the weekend. Send your registration fees to receive the program booklet. Write to: SKIRMISHES, P.O. Box 2097, Winter Haven FL 33883; or call: (813) 299-6784 or (813) 293-7938.

JUST-A-CON, October 1-2

This broad-scope gaming convention will feature AD&D® and STAR FLEET BATTLES* tournaments, a miniatures demonstration series (hosted by Larry Bloom), lectures, entertainment, a host of role-playing and war games, a dealers' room, and more. Sponsored by the Commuter Information and Assistance department of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, this event will be held at the Cone Center on the UNCC campus. Send an SASE to: JUST-A-CON I, 9232-35 University City Boulevard, Charlotte NC 28213.

YOLEDO GAMING CONVENTION VI,

October 1-2

This sixth-annual event will be held at the University of Toledo, Scott Park Campus, Toledo, Ohio. This convention will feature a variety of events, including tournament and demonstration games (role-playing, board, and miniatures), a miniatures-painting contest and clinics, game seminars, computer clubs and dealers, and a game auction (scheduled for both Saturday and Sunday). There will also be a special competition for high-school game clubs, encompassing many types of games. Over 125 games and events have been scheduled thus far. Send an SASE to: Mind Games, 3001 N. Reynolds Road, Toledo OH 43615; or call: (419) 531-5540 Monday through Friday, between 4 and 8 P.M.

COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS 14

October 7-9

This role-playing, board-gaming, and miniatures convention will be held at the Center City Convention Center in Schenectady, N.Y. The convention will have at least two AD&D® game tournaments (one sponsored by the RPGA™ Network), as well as a number of other AD&D® game events. There will also be TOP SECRET®, RUNEQUEST*, BATTLETECH*, STAR FLEET BATTLES*, DIPLOMACY*, and many other game events. In addition, this convention will feature an auction, a miniatures-painting contest, and costume contest. Gaming areas will be open 24 hours a day, and will include some all-night events. Registration is \$10 for the weekend, if paid before September 22. At-the-door registration is \$15 for the weekend, or \$4 for Friday and \$7 each for Saturday and Sunday. Event fees range from free to \$3 for each. Write

to: COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS, c/o The Studio of Bridge & Games, 1639 Eastern Parkway, Schenectady NY 12309.

ROVACON 13, October 7-9

This convention will be held at the Salem Civic Center in Salem, Va. (Roanoke Valley). Gaming events this year will occupy one half of the coliseum floor, with side rooms available for workshops and panels on gaming. Julian May is the guest of honor; she will be joined by Christopher Stasheff, Hal Clement, Judith Tarr, Susan Schwartz, Richard Pini, Kelly Freas, Bob Eggleton, Jean Elizabeth Martin, Lisa Cantrell, Rebecca Ore, and Allen Woldour. Film festivals, an awards banquet, a costume party, and hundreds of dealers' tables will also be offered. Gaming Coordinator Harry Shiflett is still looking for people to help with game mastering; interested individuals should write to him at: P.O. Box 2672, Staunton VA 24401. Write to: ROVACON, P.O. Box 117, Salem VA 24153; or call: (703) 389-9400 after 5 P.M.

FRONTIER WAR V, October 8-9

The Dungeon Masters Association will present this two-day event at the Miller Park Pavilion in Bloomington, Ill. Featured events will include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, as well as a dealers' area and open-gaming space. Registration fees are \$3 per day, or \$5 for the weekend. Write to: Dungeon Masters Association, R.R. 2, Box 12, Danvers IL 61732.



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SNARF QUEST
#59
BY ELMORE

ALRIGHT, SNARF. WHAT'S GOING ON?
WHO ARE THESE LITTLE GUYS?

ARE THEY THE ONES
THAT WERE THROWING
ROCKS AT US?

I DON'T THINK DEY
WAS REALLY THROWIN'
ROCKS AT US AT ALL.

HE'S RIGHT, THESE LIL'
CRITTERS JUS' LIKE TO
ROLL ROCKS OFF HIGH
PLACES.

WHY?

FEBBIZ.

I DON'T KNOW, SONNY,
BUT GIVE 'EM ENOUGH
TIME AN' THEY CAN LEVEL
A MOUNTAIN.

YOU DIDN'T HELP THEM ROLL A
ROCK, DID YA?

YEP, I SURE DID.

OH MAN, THAT WAS A
STUPID THING TO DO!

WHY?

VEEBIT.

NEPV.

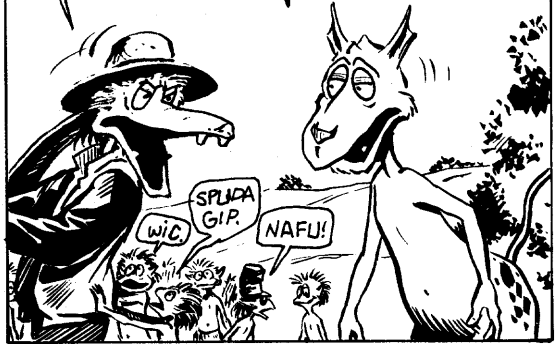
NOW YOU ARE LIKE A GOD TO
THIS WHOLE CLAN, RIGHT
NOW ONE OF 'EM IS GOIN'
TO GET ALL THEIR WIVES AN'
KIDS... THEY WILL FOLLOW
YOU EVERYWHERE AND WILL
CONSTANTLY WANT YA TO
HELP THEM TO ROLL BIG
ROCKS. THIS THING
HAPPENED TO MY
BROTHER-IN-LAW.

HEY, I KNOW, TOMORROW MORNIN'
WE WILL JUS' LOAD UP AND
DRIVE AWAY. WE'LL LEAVE
DEM RIGHT HERE!

MAYBE, YA SEE, THOSE LIL'
GUYS CAN JUST SORT OF KNOW
OR FEEL WHEN YOU ARE
GONNA RUN FROM 'EM. DON'T
ASK ME HOW, BUT
THEY KNOW.

CAN YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT DEY
ARE 'JABBERIN' ABOUT?

NO, BUT SLY CAN, WHEN HE WAS
REAL LITTLE HE USE TO PLAY WITH
THE CLAN OF ROCK ROLLERS, THAT
PLAGUED MY BROTHER-IN-LAW.



AS THE SUNSETS, EVERYONE IS
GETTING SOME SLEEP EVERYONE
EXCEPT SNARF.

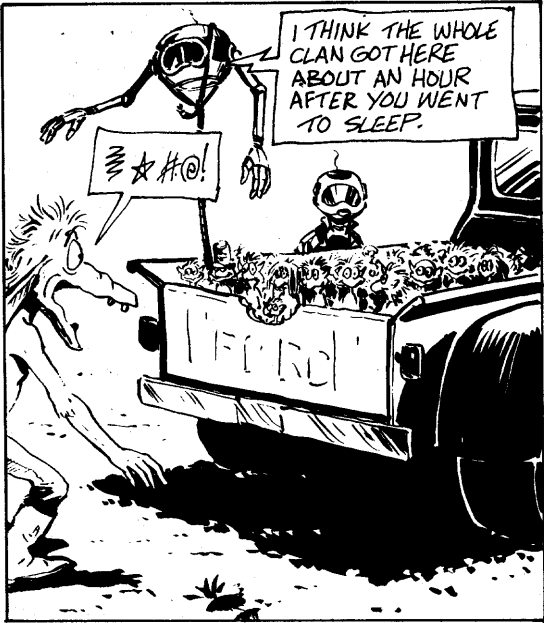
NEXT MORNING...

PSST, TELERIE, WAKE UP.
I DON'T SEE DOSE LIL'
ROCK ROLLERS ANYPLACE.
WAKE UP DA OTHERS AN'
LET'S GET OUTTA HERE.

HEY SNARF,
COME HERE.

HUH?

I THINK THE WHOLE
CLAN GOT HERE
ABOUT AN HOUR
AFTER YOU WENT
TO SLEEP.



© ELMORE '88

Palladium Books® Presents . . .

Gen Con®/Origins™ Game Fair Special Offer

The Mechanoid® RPG FREE with any purchase of \$10.00 or more!

That's right! As a special celebration of this mega-game fair, Palladium Books® will give away the Mechanoids® with any purchase of \$10.00 or more while supplies last.

The **Mechanoids®** is a 168 page, science fiction RPG which retails for \$14.95. The scenario is one of survival, as an Earth exploration colony suddenly finds itself under siege by an insane alien race of mechanical horrors.

To take advantage of this offer, simply fill out the coupon (xerox copy okay) and present it with your \$10.00 purchase at our **Gen Con®/Origins™ Booth (#301)**.

But hurry! This offer is available only *while supplies last*. We'll bring hundreds of the Mechanoid® RPGs, but the last time we did something like this, we gave away everything (600 copies) by Saturday morning.

What does Palladium Books® Sell!?!

Here's just a sampling . . .

The Palladium Role-Playing Game

An exciting *fantasy* world where magic and dragons are a reality.

Players can be any one of the 13 races, including Wolfen, Ogre, Troll, Kobold, Goblin, Changeling, Elf, Human and others.

A complete fantasy world is mapped and outlined. Its vast races, monsters, exotic creatures, weapons, history, introductory adventure and fabulous art work creates a truly beguiling world of fantasy and magic.

Highlights Include . . .

- 13 different playing races, including Wolfen and Changeling.
- 19 occupational character classes.
- Quick, playable combat system.
- Men of arms with real punch.
- A unique, new approach to alignments and experience points.
- A magic system unlike any before it, with 290 magic spells, 60 wards, 50 circles, psionics, wizards, summoners, diabolists, mind mages, witches and warlocks.
- Dragons, devils, demons, faerie folk and more!!!
- \$19.95 plus \$2.00 for postage and handling.

The Palladium RPG Book II: The Old Ones

Book II plunges players into a world of magic and danger which ultimately leads to a battle for the salvation of all human life against the minions of the demonic Old One. **Adventures** of varying length lead players through wilderness, towns and dungeons. Furthermore, the entire **Timiro Kingdom** is laid before your fingertips. *Each* city, town, and fort is mapped and described, with notes on its rulers, villains, merchants, and attitudes.

Rule additions include campaign notes and tips, the illusionist and monk as optional character classes, and encounter tables.

Highlights Include . . .

- 56 Maps
- 34 Towns and Cities, 21 Forts
- \$14.95 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

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The Palladium RPG Book III: Adventures on the High Seas

Adventures on the High Seas explores the many islands of the Palladium World. From the Isle of the Cyclops near the Sea of Dread to the pirate ridden islands of the tropical southern ocean. Includes adventures, adventure ideas, random encounter tables and over 20 islands and exotic places.

As a **sourcebook**, High Seas introduces eight *new character classes* including the gladiator, acrobat, tumbler, prestidigitator, bard, pirate and others. *New skills* include concealment, palming, juggling, targeting, falconry and 21 others.

But that's not all! *The Alchemist's Appendix* includes 32 new magic items, magic faerie food, curses, herbs and gems. *Ships of the World* describes over 20 ships including the Western Empire's "Demon Ships" and ship to ship combat.

Highlights Include . . .

- New occupational character classes including the gladiator.
- New skills.
- New magic items, herbs and curses.
- Ships and ship to ship combat.
- Adventures and adventure ideas.
- \$14.95 plus \$1.50 postage and handling.

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At last, it's back! And better than before! The second edition is slightly revised, with a handful of new animals (like the giant squid), a new cover, and a newly organized animal section that lets you find a specific creature quickly and easily. A special section, and notes throughout, make this sourcebook, useful with **Beyond the Supernatural™**, as well as the **Palladium RPG**.

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(YAWN) HOW DID THEY KNOW THAT WE WERE GONNA SNEAK AWAY?

I TOLD YA, THEY JUST KNOW WHEN YA GONNA DO IT.

SLY, TELL DESE LIL' PUKES TO HIT DA TRAIL!

SURE

AFTER SOME CONVERSATION

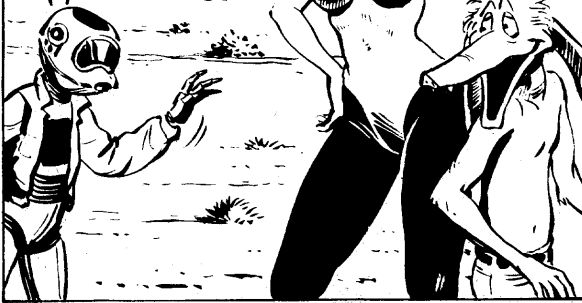
WELL, DEY WILL NOT LEAVE, DEY SAY DAT YOU ARE DA GREATEST ROCK ROLLER IN DA WORLD AN' DEY WILL FOLLOW YOU FOREVER.

@#!

I GOT IT, SNARF, TAKE THEM WITH US, WE CAN PUT THEM TO WORK IN THE MOUNTAINS MINING FOR THE GOLD.

HEY DAT'S A GREAT IDEA, OKAY GANG, LET'S ROLL!

I NEED TO BRUSH MY TEETH, GET DRESSED, MY HAIR IS A MESS.



LET US NOW LEAVE OUR HEROS AND GO BACK TO THE CITY TO SEE WHAT OUR OTHER FRIENDS ARE DOING.



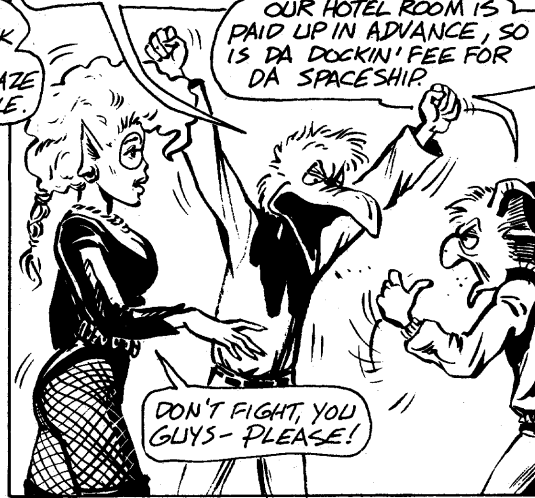
STOP IT! STOP IT!

I SHOULD KILL YOU GEEZEL, YA STUPID SQUID HEAD!



HEY, ME CAN'T HELP IT IF M'IDENTITY SLIPS BACK AN' FORTH, ME ONLY BECOMES DA EVIL SUTHAZE EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.

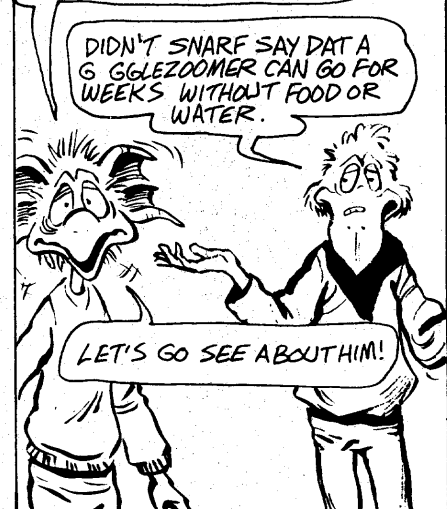
WELL, YOU DO IT JUST ENOUGH TO GET US IN A FIGHT EVERY @** NIGHT! NOW WE ARE OUT OF A JOB BECAUSE OF YOU!!



OUR HOTEL ROOM IS PAID UP IN ADVANCE, SO IS DA DOCKIN' FEE FOR DA SPACESHIP.

DON'T FIGHT, YOU GUYS- PLEASE!

SPACESHIP!! OHMYGOSH! DA GAGGLEZOOMER! WE HAVEN'T FED IT IN DAYS!!



DIDN'T SNARF SAY DAT A G GGLEZOOMER CAN GO FOR WEEKS WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER.

LET'S GO SEE ABOUTHIM!

B.B., WHAT IS A GAGGLEZOOMER?



COME ON, BABE, I'LL SHOW YOU.

I HOPE HE'S OKAY.

LATER, AT THE SHIP IN THE SPACEPORT.



HE LOOKS FINE TO ME, MAYBE A LITTLE SKINNIER.

IT LOOKS LIKE A BIG OL' LAZY LIZARD TO ME.

DON'T PAT IT THERE!

HE'S MY WITZY BITZY WITTLE 'ZOOMER. ♡

BLOOD BOWL

This is Blood Bowl - and *anything* can happen!
That's right, sports fans, the ancient ritual of the lost god Nuffia is back! And it's bigger, better, meaner and spikier than ever before!
Orcs, Humans, Dwarfs, Elves - all the major races of the Known World (and most of the minor ones too) have 'teams' of Warriors, mighty heroes who battle in great arenas for their people's honour, pride, and the sheer unmitigated hell of it!

Blood Bowl the game casts you in the role of a 'coach' of one (or more!) of these awe-inspiring teams. You decide the line-up, choose the tactics, and - at the end of the day - if you can get the best from your heavily armoured players (armed with only rippling muscles and spiked gauntlets), you can collect the ultimate prize, the honour and the glory of victory!

The package includes: two complete teams of hand-sculpted plastic miniatures in lifelike detail; a three-part Astrogranite playing pitch in high-density, expanded polystyrene; the latest edition of the mind-blowing Blood Bowl Handbook; plus completely revised and updated rules which will have you playing the basic game in minutes, but which also provide additional systems for even greater realism.

This is Blood Bowl! - where war is a whole new ball game!



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WHY CAN'T I PET HIM ON THE BACK?

DAT STRIPED AREA ON HIS BACK IS REAL SENSITIVE, IF YOU PUT PRESSURE DERE, HE WILL IMMEDIATELY RUN AT BREAK NECK SPEED IN A RANDOM DIRECTION AND WILL CONTINUE TO RUN 'TIL DA PRESSURE IS RELEASED...



...DEN HE WILL COME TO AN IMMEDIATE STOP.

WHAT IF YOU STUCK A PIECE OF TAPE ON HIS BACK?

WELL, I GUESS HE WOULD RUN HIMSELF TO DEATH.

WOW.



WE CAN'T LEAVE HIM HERE, LET'S TAKE HIM WITH US.

HOW? YOU MORON! IT'S NOT LIKE WALKIN' YER **\$# DOG. YA CAN'T WALK DIS CRITTER... IT'S A ZILLION MILES PER HOUR OR NOTHIN!



A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER...

DIS IS STUPID AN' I AM EMBARRASSED.

OH, I GOT IT, YOU GOT HIS BACK LEGS OFF THE GROUND SO HE CAN'T RUN...

SAY, IF A BUG LANDED ON HIS BACK... RIGHT?

RIGHT, FLEA BRAIN.



WHAT? FLEA BRAIN? FLEA BRAIN?

GOOD GRIEF!

DID I SAY DAT? I MUST BE GOIN' CRAZY, I CAN'T BELIEVE MY MOUTH.



WAIT, I'M SORRY, M'NERVES ARE SHOT, IT'S GEEZEL, HE'S GONNA GET US IN MORE TROUBLE WITH DIS ZOOMER, WE'RE BROKE AND NO JOBS...

AND NOW, NO GIRLFRIEND.

BYE GEEELAH.



OH NOOD, I'VE LOST MY WOMAN, I LOVED HER SO MUCH, WHAT AM I GONNA DO...

OH SHUT UP! YOU IS EMBARASSIN' ME NOW. BESIDES LOOK WHO IS BACK SO SOON.

HUH?



MY LOVE, YOU ARE BACK!?! SHUT-UP!!

IS THIS 'ZOOMER THING VERY FAST?

HEY, JUST WATCH HIS LEGS.



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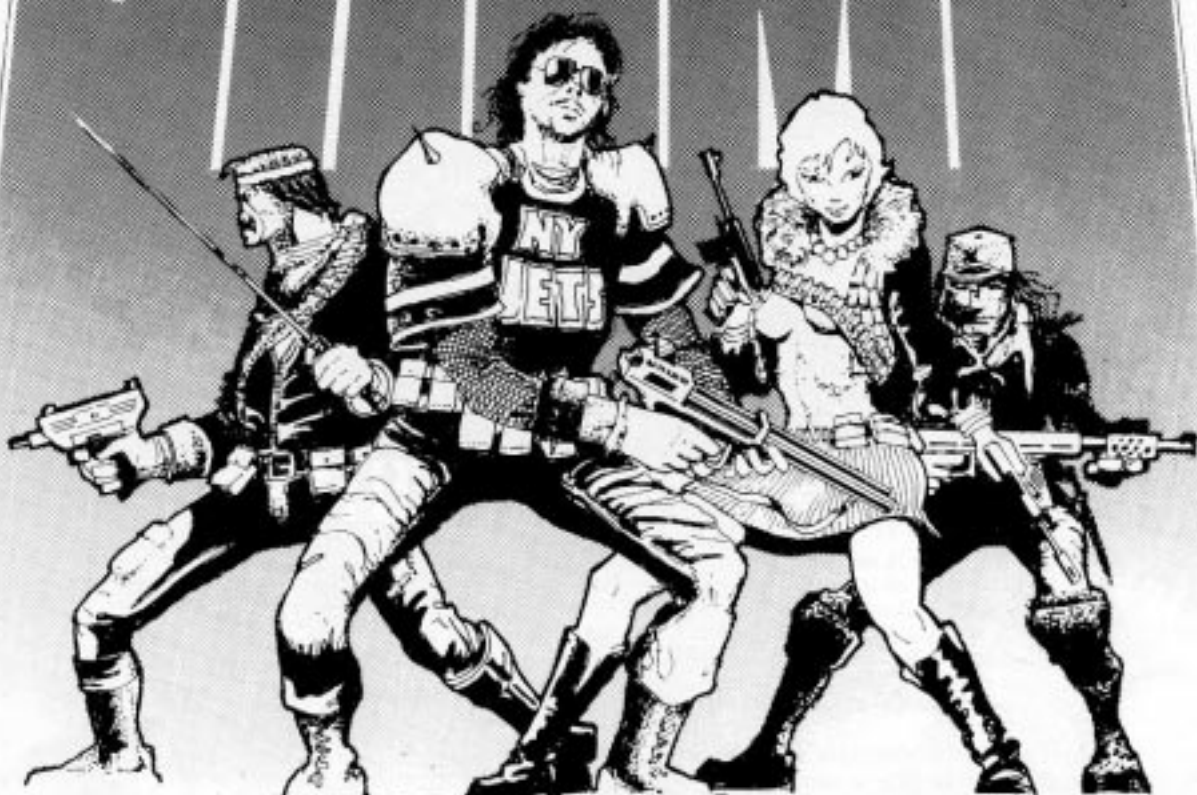
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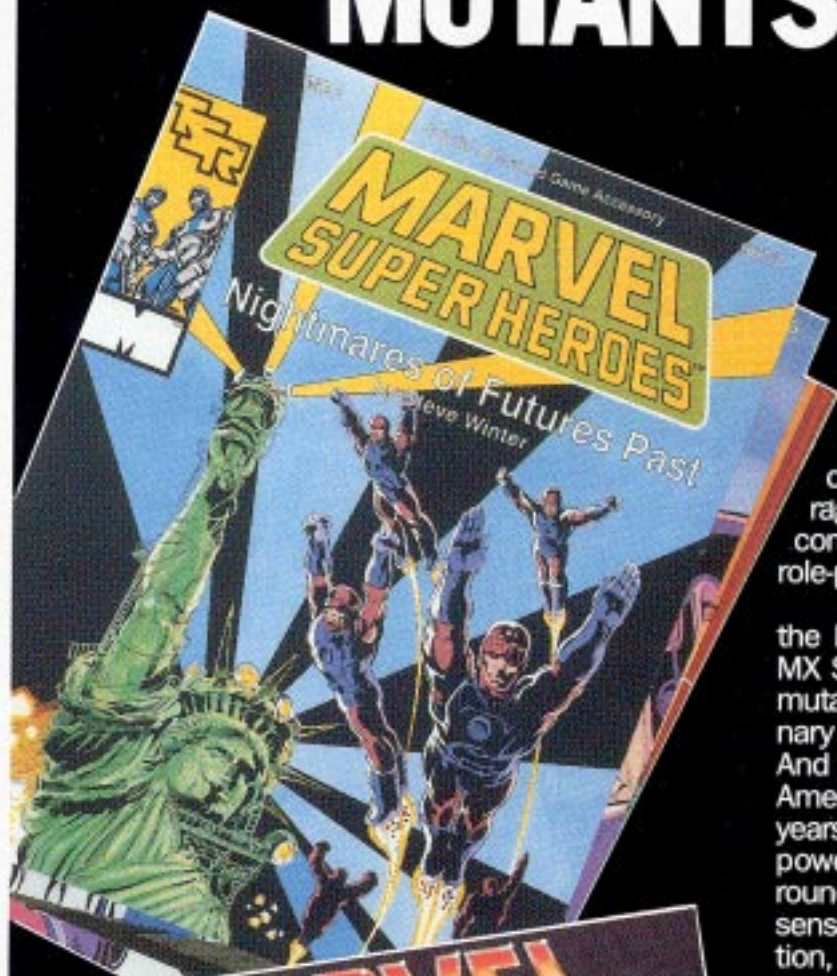
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