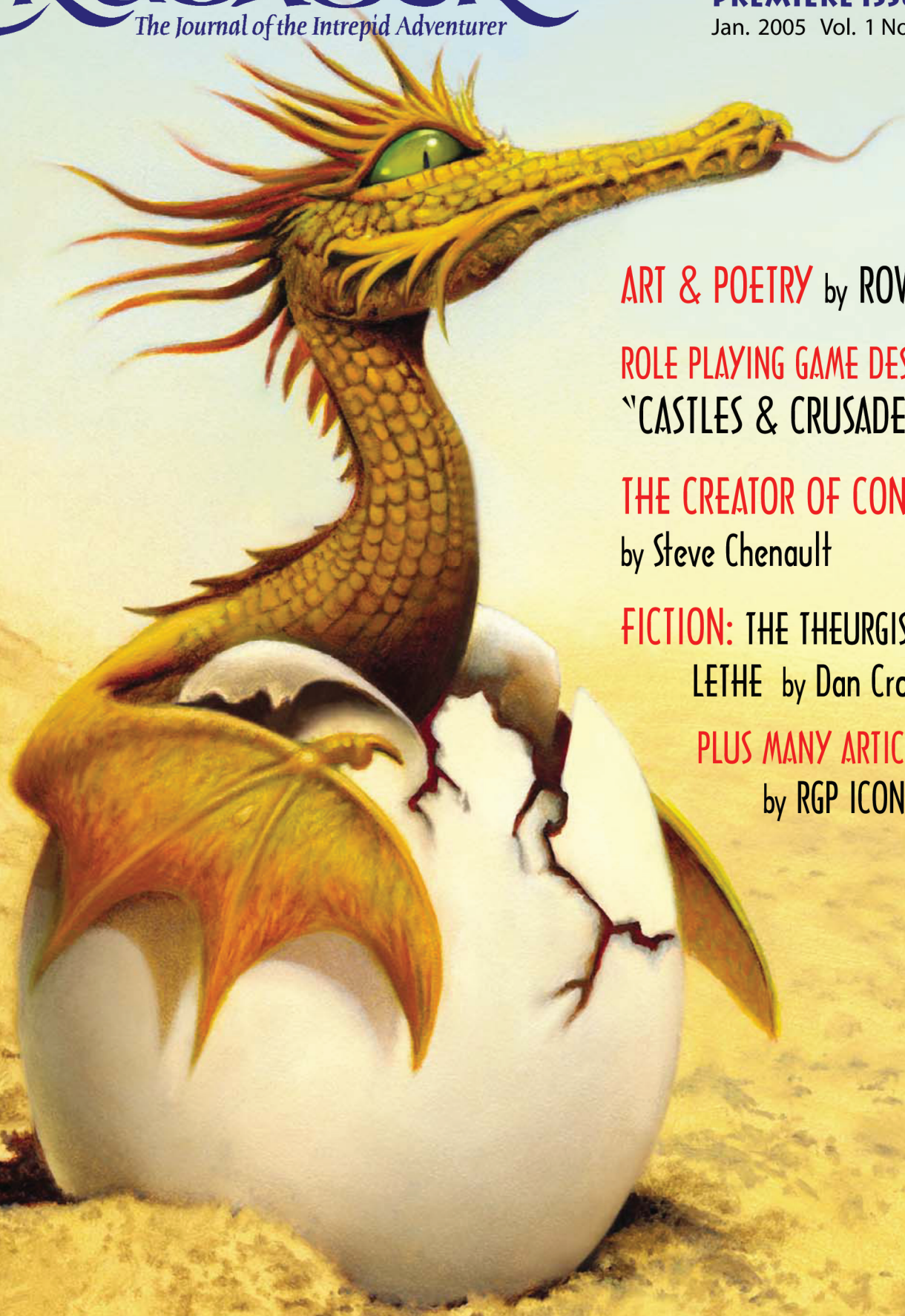


# THE CRUSADER™

The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer

PREMIERE ISSUE

Jan. 2005 Vol. 1 No. 1



ART & POETRY by ROWENA

ROLE PLAYING GAME DESIGN:  
"CASTLES & CRUSADES"

THE CREATOR OF CONAN  
by Steve Chenault

FICTION: THE THEURGIST'S  
LETHE by Dan Cross

PLUS MANY ARTICLES  
by RGP ICONS

*Rowena*

**PREMIERE ISSUE**

**VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1 JAN. 2005**

# THE CRUSADER™

*The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer*

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# *Just For the Love of* **ROLE-PLAYING GAMES...**



reetings and welcome to the first issue of THE CRUSADER™, an RPG journal designed to open your eyes and intrigue

your mind. Though the primary focus of this and subsequent issues will always be on fantasy role playing games, we will also introduce a wide range of subject matter which should appeal to the gamer but also seduce a wider audience into enjoying gaming on a classic level.

My introduction into the world of role playing games was early on, as the younger sister of three players, two of which were quite avid. My other brother played occasionally, but not to the extreme of the other two.

How well I remember when we lived in Heidelberg, Germany and D&D first became popular. One brother's closet became so filled with books and binders and game boxes and dice and miniatures that the stack towered over me, and I was nearly three feet tall!


I loved to watch my brothers play. But I had to do so quietly. I hid in a corner in their room, afraid to breathe lest I be noticed. If they became aware of my presence, I was immediately banished. It was back to my own room, or somewhere else in the house which was not nearly as fun. However, on two occasions per year--Thanksgiving and Christmas-

- my brothers succumbed to my pleas to let me play. Our family considered these two Holidays our family time which we spent only with each other. Friends were never involved in our festivities. I now regard this as my brothers' greatest gift to me.

I relished playing. My brothers would give me a character with a background and a story. Once, they gave me graphs for maps to create my homeland. I have treasured these experiences so much that I still retain much of the original material which must be at least 15 years old. Even though the characters are extremely underdeveloped, I still hang onto them because I'm very nostalgic for those wonderful days.

I'm so pleased and honored to be able to introduce to you, THE CRUSADER™ *Journal for the Intrepid Adventurer*. It comes from the same place within me that relishes the idea of sitting at that happy table once again with my brothers. Hopefully, it will reach a similar place in you.

So take a respite from your cares while you peruse what we have to offer--a plethora of useful articles, game design notes and gaming tips from the best in the biz! With fiction stories, poetry, and art, we are more than just another gaming magazine!

This issue is dedicated to everyone out there who has experienced the magic and shares with me a love fo Role  Playing Games.



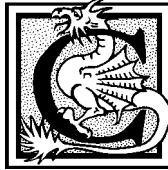
WHEN CAESAR STOOD UPON THE BANKS OF THE RUBICON LOOKING SOUTH TO ROME HE HESITATED. BEFORE HIM STOOD THE VAST, COMPLEX MECHANISM OF THE PAST, GLOWING WITH A HOST OF INTRICATELY WOVEN STRATAGEMS. WITH HIM, HE HAD BUT ONE LEGION, WEARY FROM 8 YEARS OF BRUTAL WAR WITH THE GAULS. BUT WHEN CALLED TO SURRENDER HIMSELF TO THE SENATE AND CERTAIN EXILE HE DID NOT HESITATE. HE CALLED HIS LEGIONARIES TO CROSS INTO ITALY, TO CROSS THE RUBICON. AND AS HE DID SO HE SAID ONLY THIS : ALEA IACTA EST!



# ALEA IACTA EST

## The Die is Cast

**STEVE AND DAVIS CHENAULT RECOUNT THE CREATION OF A GAME: THIS IS A STORY ABOUT REDISCOVERING WHAT MAKES CLASSIC ROLE PLAYING GAMES SO CLASSIC.**



**CASTLES & CRUSADES™** is a role playing game. Its genesis lies in

three separate fields. The first was born of its lead designer, Davis Chenault's desire to create a more linear, realistic and playable role playing game. These thoughts about the game and ideas on how to implement it long laid dormant in his ever so small brain. The second came of a desire of Mac Golden's drive to utilize the OGL and create a game that reflected his and our method of role playing. He had long been a proponent of this concept, since the company's founding in 1999 when he and Davis designed the *Sword & Sorcery* Role Playing Game. The third was a conversation between myself and Gary Gygax. Gary had pitched the idea of doing *Castle Zagyg* as simple, old school role playing game supplements. I suggested including a small four or five page OGL based rule booklet with the series that gave a basic understanding of the stat blocks. And so the project proceeded.

But very rapidly. Very, very rapidly these three ideas came together. Even as we pulled out the old rules we wrote for our non d20 game and converted according to Gary's notes, word leaked on the internet and we soon found ourselves in the center of a great debate over games, making games, and bringing back a role playing genre that represented the styles of a completely disenfranchised group of role players. It seemed that there were hosts of people who gamed like we did, where rules were stressed less and imagination encouraged. From this it quickly became apparent that people wanted what Davis wanted to design, what Mac wanted to create and what Gary and I had talked about doing: they wanted a new role playing game that leant itself to the forms of the past. The game had to be simple, concrete, easily adapted to different styles of play, allowing for freedom of the imagination over complex mechanics for combat simulation and problem solving.

From this firestorm was *Castles & Crusades™* born.

A little bit about the name. The name has a double meaning: foremost, it calls to mind the medieval content of the game. Though it may miss the boat on conveying immediately to the gamer that it is a fantasy based game rather than a historically based game, the wonderful cover of the *C&C Players Handbook*, created by Peter Bradley, redresses that issue.

The second meaning was a quiet, respectful nod to those who came before. By "those" I mean Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson, Jim Ward, Tom Wham, and others who belonged to the old wargaming club, the Castle and Crusade Society, founded in 1969 in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. By naming the game after their club we recognize that without that small cabal of dedicated, imaginative gamers, we would probably not be here now, today, presenting to you the game we are all so very excited about.

Steve Chenault  
Troll Lord Games,  
2004



I suppose many people are wondering exactly what *Castles & Crusades™* is. What type of game is it? What makes this game so special? One might think, and understandably so, that the lead designer would have an answer for the gentle reader. Well, this is where thinking and reality collide in a messy train wreck. There are two important aspects to understanding *Castles & Crusades™*. The first references a personal philosophy that informed the basic design and direction of the game. This is arguably the less important of the two but should, minimally, inform the reader of my design approach. The second element, and by far the more interesting, examines the processes through which *Castles & Crusades™* was developed, and a brief round-up of the results.

In my youth, I took a test at some time which required a certain geometric shape or arrangement of lines to be created within a box or square. It was technically impossible to do so. The test actually examined the willingness of the recipient to ignore the instructions and create the required shape. I remember staring at it for a long time before blurting out loud it was impossible. I drew the shape outside the box, and was reprimanded for yelling in class. I have always found the box restrictive and this is where the personal philosophy and game design collided. Castles & Crusades™ is gaming with a transparent box. The philosophy and game design, not coincidentally I might add, walks hand in hand with those games of yore: The Game as it was.

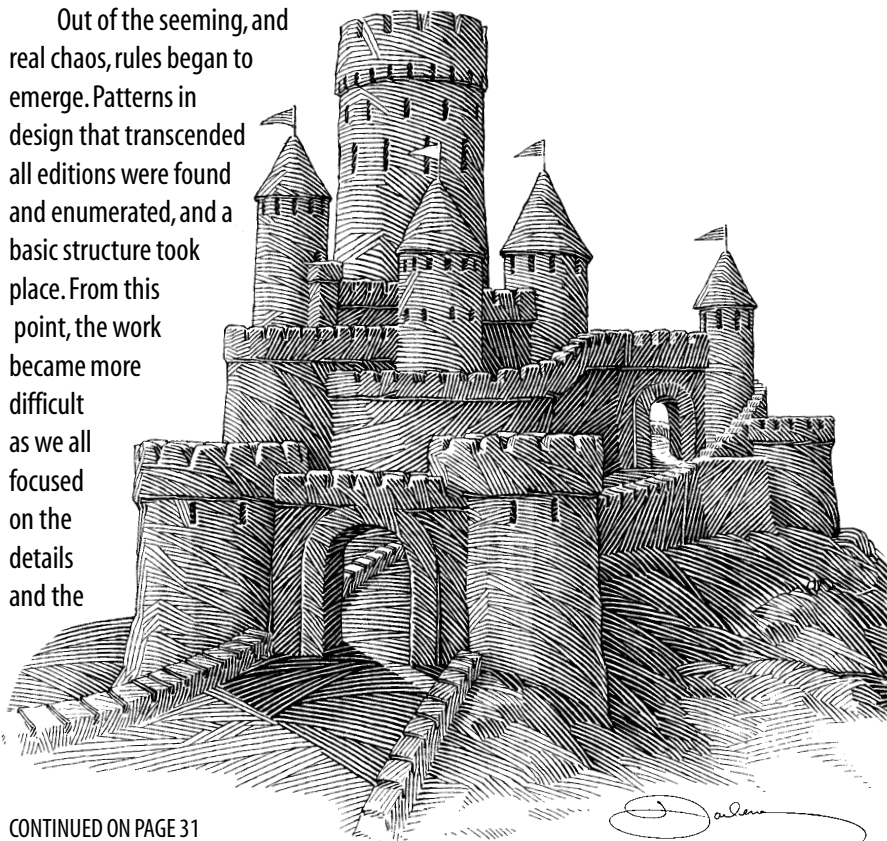
And that is precisely what we were aiming for. We wanted a game that resembled those games of yore, that encouraged and supported the manner of role playing the adventures we experienced as children and young adults and, often, still experience. To manage this, we had to boil down exactly what the underlying nature of those games and rules sets were. We had to find the fundamental dynamics of The Game. Using those dynamics, we turned to WotC's SRD and set about the task. And this is where the development of the game really became interesting. We wanted a simple game that laid out a rules matrix that was transparent, cohesive and amenable to change. These were the hallmarks of those early games and these aspects were what we chose to emulate.

Steve, Mac and I consulted one another on the development process and debated whether or not to bring in a group of designers to aid us in putting our vision to paper. I don't know who came up with the idea initially, nor is it really important, but we decided to open up the development process to anyone who had an interest in the type of game we intended to develop. We reformed the Castle and Crusade Society and sought out membership. Of course, with our objectives in creating the game enumerated for all members, we attracted a particular subset of gamers and fans; Old Schoolers and Grogards they are called, even though many are only in their twenties and have no memories of the White Box, the Brown Box or other old editions of the The Game. Those willing to sign the now infamous NDA were allowed to join in the development process. And quite a process it was, and continues to be.

We set out with a series of goals and posted them for all incoming developers and play testers. Within a few weeks the Castle and Crusade Society grew to several hundred members and easily half of them decided to sign the NDA and join in on the discussions, analysis and development of the Castles and Crusades role playing game. Those early days were rough and tempers flared as fans of both the early style and later styles clashed on what the essential dynamics of the game were. In several cases the discussions became arguments and the arguments became...well, lets just say it was not pleasant. So we opened up a pugilistic forum and let everyone cast foul commentary back and forth while the productive work was managed within the closed rules forums. And it worked.

It worked very well. With some walking orders and a goal that included keeping the game simple by replicating the feel of the early game form - featuring malleability and adaptability, to name just a few aspects - we proceeded. Within three months over two hundred people had signed an NDA and were actively participating in the management of the project. Ideas and analysis were flowing faster than I could keep track of. Criticisms were plentiful and unsparing and we were dumping and creating rules faster than light - or so it seemed.

Out of the seeming, and real chaos, rules began to emerge. Patterns in design that transcended all editions were found and enumerated, and a basic structure took place. From this point, the work became more difficult as we all focused on the details and the



CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

#### **ABBREVIATIONS USED**

**AD&D** - Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

**C&C** - Castles & Crusades

**CG** - Castle Keeper

**d20** - game system by WotC

**GM** - Game Master

**FRPG** - Fantasy Role Playing Game

**NPC** - Non-player Character

**OGL** - Open Game License

**PC** - Player Character

**NDA** - Non disclosure Agreement

**RPG** - Role Playing Game

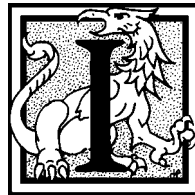
**SRD** - System Reference Document

**WotC** - Wizards of the Coast



# SIX PRINCIPLES FOR "WINGING IT"

BY CASEY M. CANFIELD



I am a lazy game referee. Over the years, I have grown accustomed to running games without hours upon hours of preparation. I have grown to detest the chore of slaving over rulebooks and writing page upon page of encounter keys, knowing full well that at best, the players will only see half of my meticulously detailed areas!

I have also grown to love the creativity of the minds around my table. I enjoy the freedom to react to them, so I can make the game more personal for all. I love presenting a wide range of adventure choices to players, and watching them decide

which paths to take. Most of all, I love being able to use a good idea when it comes to me, and not just when I get around to writing it up as part of a future adventure. Gaming time is precious. Use the good ideas quickly, I say, or risk never getting around to them.

Over the years, I've grown accustomed to improvising a large portion of my campaigns. In my latest campaign, several of my players were astonished to discover how much I made up "on-the-fly." This, of course, was music to my ears, because it meant I had been doing something correctly. At the same time, it occurred to me, and several other aspiring Castle Keepers (CKs), that the art of "winging it" isn't addressed very often in a substantive way.

Since the spirit of Castles & Crusades consists of bold adventure without excessive rules overhead, I decided to address improvisation in this column. After all, there's nothing bolder in the realm of refereeing than sitting down in front of a bunch of players with your "CK pants" around your ankles – figuratively speaking, of course. The reputation of the CK is at stake! Since I've had some small success facing down the players with nothing more than a dull pencil and a blank sheet of paper behind my screen, I hope to at least inspire others to try improvisation as a tool in their games. These tips are meant as an introduction for new CKs, and perhaps just a reminder for those with a bit more experience.

Without further ado, here are Six Principles for "Winging It."



## YOUR NOTES ARE NOT RESTRICTIONS. THEY ARE IDEAS.

You are the only one that knows the contents of your notes or printed modules. Your players aren't going to know if you change what is written. Use this to improve the game.

For example, let's say that your players suspect a friendly NPC to be an enemy spy. Although you know the suspicion is incorrect, consider altering the NPC to fit their suspicions. The reason I say "consider" is because, in some cases, improvising in this way can create more work for you. In this case, it would require that you lay down the rationale for the NPC's subterfuge and odd behavior. Take a very quick inventory of the NPC's characteristics and background interactions with other NPCs, and if none of those things represent obstacles to the change, then

"AN ADVENTURE IS AN ENTERPRISE UNDERTAKEN BY THE WILLING."

**CASEY CANFIELD** HAS BEEN PLAYING AND GAME-MASTERING RPGS SINCE 1983. CASEY CURRENTLY PLOTS THE DEEDS OF NEFARIOUS CHARACTERS AND CREATURES FROM HIS LAIR JUST OUTSIDE OF POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK.

take a chance! With practice, you will become better at recognizing those situations where improvisation is more appropriate, and you will be able to integrate more elaborate changes seamlessly into adventures.

If a complete change to the NPC's motivations is undesirable, you might try to have the NPC do some things that foster the players' line of thinking, even if the NPC is eventually found to be innocent. If an NPC that is already suspected of shady activity just so happens to have business that keeps the PCs nearby at all times – coincidentally – they will follow up on it. These types of devices make an adventure rich for very little relative effort.

The drama of the game is entirely within your control. Focus on creating an atmosphere of excitement and adventure – sticking to a plan should never interfere with that goal. Remember that the written word is not sacrosanct during the rigors of play, even if originally from your pen.

Let the players talk. They will think of things that you have not considered. Take notes, smile knowingly, be vague and mysterious, and revisit the ideas that they share after the game. If you use some of them, act as though you that is what you intended all along. Your players will feel brilliant and the game will be more fun for them.

Finally, do not lock the campaign into a narrow set of outcomes. Eventually, it will limit your ability to make changes to the game on-the-fly. One easy way to paint yourself into a corner is by running epic, world-bending campaigns. Over the years, I've discovered that the epic, world-bending campaign is great from a heroic fiction perspective, but it suffers under the stresses of a role-playing game.

One of my most recent campaigns was a "world-bender." Though the group enjoyed the campaign a great deal, eventually it collapsed under its own weight. It became more obvious, with each passing game, that my plot was too restrictive and would narrow the overall set of choices for the players, at the end.

The key is this: an adventure is an enterprise undertaken by the willing. Be careful not to steamroll your players into long, epic plots with a narrow, predefined set of outcomes. Instead, let them tailor their own destinies. Improvisation should react to and support their choices.

I will discuss the dangers of over-planning for individual adventures later on in this column.

# 2

## CREATE AND USE "STOCK" NPCs

Create a list of ten moods, like happy, sad, or angry. Imagine how you would role-play each mood, while keeping race and gender in mind. What is a happy dwarf woman like? How about an angry elf man?

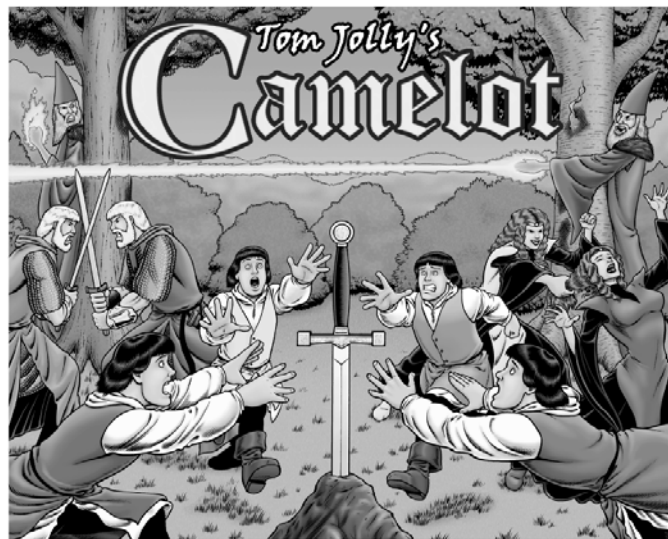
Then, create a list of ten mannerisms. Flirtatious, lazy, industrious, and fastidious are all good examples. Imagine role playing characters, from all walks of life, with these traits. A bartender who sneaks sips of his own brew might have the "drinker" trait. A "flirtatious" barmaid is practically an archetype. A guard who is very attentive to his duties is "devoted" or a "perfectionist." Imagine how you would role-play your listed traits so you can quickly remember them. There is no need to be exhaustive. The purpose is to have something basic in mind for each trait before you actually use it. You can fit your impressions to each circumstance when the need arises.

Finally, create a list of names. Write down some names you might use for each race in the game, both male and female. Make the list as long as you like –

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

**"A LIST OF TEN MOODS AND TEN MANNERISMS PROVIDES READY ACCESS TO A POSSIBLE ONE HUNDRED DIFFERENT PERSONALITY TYPES."**

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**“IF LEAVING THE FIGHT BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE, DON’T WASTE TIME GENERATING STATISTICS.”**

you can never have too many at hand. A helpful resource would be *The Extraordinary Book of Names*, part of the *Gygaxian Fantasy Worlds* series written by E. Gary Gygax, and published by Troll Lord Games.

When you need an NPC (there’s always a need for ad-hoc NPCs in taverns, for example), pick a race, gender, and occupation. These choices should reflect the immediate in-game surroundings. Then, reference your lists. Pick a mood and mannerism combination that makes sense (don’t combine angry with flirtatious, for example, unless you are a very skilled role-player), and finally, choose a name off the list. Since you’ve already pondered role-playing the traits you’ve written down, you’ll be well prepared to handle a memorable NPC.

A list of ten moods and ten mannerisms provides ready access to a possible one hundred different personality types. This is a powerful tool that only requires a 3x5 index card or two.

After you improvise your NPC, write down the name and the traits used, and any other information about the character that you divulged to the players. After you become more comfortable with improvising, you will eventually find yourself creating more details for NPCs on the fly. After the game, you can revisit your NPC to create motivations and perhaps some history. You will then be prepared to role play in more depth the next time the PCs encounter this character.

There may be a circumstance where you have just created an NPC out of whole cloth, and for whatever reason, that

NPC becomes involved in combat. You have no combat statistics for the NPC, so what do you do? Do you stop the entire session to generate statistics?

In situations like this, try to find a way for the NPC to leave the combat as quickly as possible. NPCs have an instinct for self-preservation that is probably stronger than that of the PCs! If leaving the fight becomes impossible, don’t waste time generating statistics. C&C is simple, but even this effort is a waste. Just go through the motions.

Your eyes aren’t deceiving you. Yes, I just advocated ignoring the rules and making stuff up. No, I’m

not insane. This is a legitimate technique, provided the CK applies it fairly.

Make all of the rolls as usual, but ignore their results. Just keep up appearances. If the NPC is a fighter of some skill, then you might secretly rule that the NPC will hit and be hit every third round. If a mage, you might rule that the NPC will have a small assortment of common low-level spells – spells you are familiar with. Don’t even worry about hit points – just cause unconsciousness or death when appropriate. However you decide to handle it, make sure it’s a simple method. Just keep in mind the relative capabilities of each class at each level, and try to make the NPC fall within those expectations. This way, the players will probably never know you’re winging it.

If you don’t feel confident enough to handle this, then generate applicable statistics in advance, and use them to model your improvisation. Using 3x5 index cards, you might make three different character templates for each character class: one for low-level, one for mid-level, and one for high-level characters. This will take some work, but when it’s done, you will have a series of combat statistics that you can apply to just about every situation in just a few seconds of time. In this case, let’s say I have a situation where the NPC is supposed to be a 7th level thief. If I made a 5th level thief template for my “mid-level” range, then it’s fairly easy to go from 5th to 7th level in my head, knowing that the NPC gets just two more hit dice, is roughly equivalent in combat, and chances are, thief abilities will operate at a +2 compared to the 5th level counterpart. Starting with an approximate baseline is far easier than estimating statistics out of thin air.

Regardless, you should adhere to this principle: no ad-hoc NPC should affect the overall outcome of a combat unless you intend to develop further plot as a result of the intervention. If the PCs were winning, having the NPC help doesn’t change the overall outcome. However, if the PCs were losing, then the NPC should not be directly responsible for a change in fortune. If you’ve fully caught the improvisation bug, and the PCs are desperate, you may wish to allow the NPC to make a difference, but the NPC should probably be an important contact that asks something of the adventurers in return. Use this technique sparingly. No CK should cheapen a victory for the PCs with excess NPC interference, nor should players count on NPCs to pull them out of danger.

**“NO AD-HOC NPC SHOULD AFFECT THE OVERALL OUTCOME OF A COMBAT UNLESS YOU INTEND TO DEVELOP FURTHER PLOT AS A RESULT OF THE INTERVENTION.”**





## SHOCK YOUR PLAYERS BY THINKING BIG.

Players will eventually do something for which you haven't planned, and they will expect you to react appropriately. One method of coping is to shock the players to stall for time.

In one of my campaigns, a PC decided to enter a ruined mansion by tearing a hole in the roof instead of using one of the doors. I planned for a hidden temple in the attic, but I had no details. I thought the party would take time to explore the lower floors, giving me time to decide what to do with the attic.

After determining that the PC could get through the battered and worn roof rather easily, I was still at a loss. I decided to "think big." I considered placing a

nasty creature in the attic that I knew the party could not defeat, but was intelligent enough to parley with them. The idea was to shock them into rethinking their approach, not to kill the characters. Finally, I decided to place an imprisoned lich in the hidden attic temple.

I decided I wanted the lich to be territorial but curious. I avoided the need to provide detail by simply having the lich repeat threats toward the party. The lich also refused to give them any useful information. The outcome was as expected. The party quickly got the message and left, giving me time to figure out the lich's reasons for being there – after the game session.

The lich ended up being a driving force behind the campaign that followed – all because one player decided his character would enter through the roof.

**"YOUR IMPROVISATION WILL BE FAR LESS LIKELY TO DAMAGE THE ADVENTURE IF YOU LEAVE SOME ROOM FOR UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES."**



## VAGUARY CAN BE THE DM'S BEST FRIEND

Be as vague as possible.

Many referees express a fear of messing up the adventure with improvisation. Ironically, this can come from being too prepared. If the adventure can be damaged because the players try something unexpected, consider the possibility that the adventure (or campaign) is too rigidly structured. Your improvisation will be far less likely to damage the adventure if you leave some room for unforeseen circumstances.

Let's say that I prepare a heavily fortified dwarven mine that has been captured by goblins. I draw detailed maps and create detailed area keys with many fixed monster encounters. I include detailed tactical instructions for the goblin war bands. I put the dwarven treasure that the PCs seek toward the back of the complex, assuming that the party will need to come in from the front. I spend hours on this work.

However, there's something wrong when the PCs arrive on the scene. They deduce that in a mine, there must be ventilation shafts. This is when the cold

feeling strikes my gut – they aren't planning to enter through the front!

I can force them to do so by declaring all of the ventilation shafts collapsed. I could have the shafts guarded, but adding more guards would increase the overall difficulty of the scenario. My maps don't include the shafts, so I could say there aren't any. That's not a reasonable position to take, considering that most mines really do have vents.

So, unless I am unfair to the players in some way, much of my preparation work has been wasted, simply because the players thought of something that I did not.

To prevent this, build some breathing room into your scenarios. Create a scenario that reacts to the actions of the players. In this case, I would have mapped the complex, some possible treasure locations, some patrol patterns, the total number of enemies (and their basic distribution about the place), and the statistics of the leaders. Everything else would be left until the PCs approach. To paraphrase an old saying – no plan survives contact with the enemy. In this case, just leave the planning until the PCs contact your dungeon.

For a fraction of the preparation time, I am not only prepared to handle a frontal assault on the complex, but I can readily adapt the scenario to

**"TO PARAPHRASE AN OLD SAYING – NO PLAN SURVIVES CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY."**

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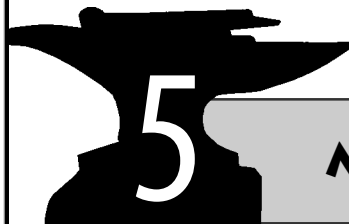
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**"JUST BE CAREFUL THAT YOU'RE NOT DOING IT TO PUNISH THEM FOR OUTSMARTING YOU."**

account for unpredictable player actions, like the search for a mineshaft. I could drop the shaft into one of the rooms in the complex, move the treasure a little farther away, and put a few more goblins in the path to the treasure. However, I would have the freedom to say that the shafts weren't guarded or alarmed in order to reward clever thinking by the players.

I feel the need to temper this advice with a warning: be careful not to fall into a classic trap. No CK should be adversarial toward the players. The ability to improvise is often abused by CKs who feel the need to "win." This sort of behavior is immature and unfair. It should be avoided. As CK, if you find yourself tempted to change the details of your scenario to make it more difficult on the players, consider very carefully your reasons for wanting the change.

If you make a planning error, and the overall challenge level of your scenario is found to be too low, then feel free to make some changes in order to increase the challenge to the PCs. Just be careful that you're not doing it to punish them for outsmarting you.



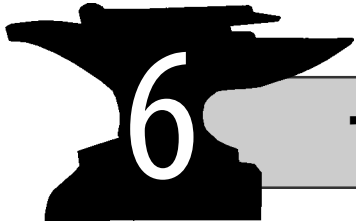
## MINE THE MEDIA

Keep a discerning eye peeled for atypical plots, mysteries, or other challenges from unusual media sources. You can reasonably guess that none of your players will expect you to use an unlikely source as inspiration, and the results probably won't be clichéd. Sure, you could lift ideas from J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert Jordan, Terry Goodkind, George R.R. Martin, or Tad Williams, but I wouldn't recommend any of those sources over a good plot from an old episode of "Magnum, P.I.," especially for experienced players. Popular fantasy novels are an excellent source of inspiration, but I recommend a great deal of care in borrowing specific ideas from them.

As you watch films and television, read the newspaper, or read novels, try to recognize the basic features of each story. Consider what might need to happen in order for this storyline to be usable to you. Consider using only parts of the story. Perhaps the plot itself isn't very useful, but the interaction between two of the main characters is very interesting and might be helpful in a different plot. Perhaps only a riddle, trick, or trap is of use to you.

Another useful exercise is to choose your favorite fiction novel, and consider how the plot might have gone differently. Consider how the characters would react to the new situations based on what you know about them. Consider how future events in the story might be altered or eliminated in favor of new events. All of this will help condition your mind to consider these issues when improvising in your games.

You can make notes of your observations on paper, or if you trust your memory, you can keep them in mind during your game sessions. When you discover you need to improvise something for your game, you will have plenty of ideas ready for use.



## TAKE PLENTY OF NOTES

**"IMPROVISATION  
REQUIRES  
PREPARATION, TOO"**

**A**s a general aid toward improvisational Castle Keeping, this sentiment warrants repetition. There's nothing worse than making up a character on-the-fly in one session, and not being able to remember his name in the next. Players do write down details. I've had a few embarrassing moments where players had better notes than I. Several of these moments were related to plot-important information such as puzzle clues, the operation of mechanisms, or other crucial bits of information. When I didn't properly recall the details I had spouted forth the previous game, the players called me on it, and I had egg on my face. The moral of this story is that improvisation requires preparation, too – you must take notes, and you must read them after each game!

Your notes should cover what the PCs actually did during the game, but also what they considered doing, their assumptions about the adventure, what they intend to do next, and any other ideas that the players had during the game. This is valuable information useful in creating ironic and dramatic situations.

Additionally, your planning and improvisation will require accurate knowledge of

information known by the PCs. Write down any discovery that the PCs make, and a brief sentence about the discovery. Players do enough talking between themselves to give you plenty of time to jot down your thoughts.

Finally, you can reduce your note-taking burden simply by offering your players a small XP reward if they hand you some neatly written notes after each session. Not only does it help you do your job, but they will find those notes indispensable if you keep the game challenging.

I hope you find these ideas useful for your own game!



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# THE Theurgist's Lethe

I don't remember much of my life before I was murdered; only wispy images that bubble up from my unconscious; memories like fireflies that wink out in the darkness of my mind before anything can be grasped. Each morning, I sit upon a cold stone bench in an alcove beside a narrow temple window, gazing out over verdant fields under a cerulean sky.

Today, I look still through that window and, as it has been in all the weeks since my resurrection, my sense of identity or purpose is as ephemeral to me as the clouds.

Those clouds are dark today, casting long shadows over the rolling hills. Sometimes I feel it's my secrets that are kept in those shadows, soon to be shredded by a cloudburst and lost forever.

Alas, it is clearest and brightest of days that seem to conceal the most truth. When it storms, I feel closer to my own essence; as if my soul were trapped in some dimensional maelstrom for which these vaporous clouds are but a metaphor.

Then, as the winds pick up and a chill wafts through my narrow window, there is a knock at my door. I turn toward the sound and regard the plain, ironbound, wooden door as if it leads to another dimension.

"Who knocks?" I ask.

"It's me, Lydia. I've brought your meal, as before." Her voice is soft, slightly muffled behind the door and, as always, oddly unsteady.

"I suppose I could use something to fill the empty spaces between these bones." I respond. I feel my voice was growing stronger again, less hoarse. I like the resonance of it; perhaps I was once a politician?

The door creaks open, and Lydia steps in, wearing a brown cassock and holding a ceramic bowl of gruel, her hazel eyes sympathetic. She gazes at me intensely, her large eyes emphasized by the dark, almost violet hair that frames her thin, youthful face. The gaze has a hunger in it, but is not that of a predator; it is an unex-

plainable hunger that I am unable to fathom.

The steam from the bowl wafts to my nostrils, carrying in its smoky tendrils a veritable command to eat, if not enjoy.

"Here," she says, shoving the hot bowl under my nose.

"Thank ye," I mumble, taking the bowl and turning toward the window. It is growing darker outside, the morning sun obscured by the clouds. I sit there, eating a few bites, but the woman stands still beside my cold shoulder, as if waiting for something.

So I turn and rebuke her, "Thank ye, I said. Not enough for you? Or shall you stare at me all the while?"

"Be well, Sir Lethe," she answers coolly, leaving the room and shutting the door gently behind her. The bolt is set, and once again I am alone, free to listen for the secrets of a past spoken cryptically in the rising wind.

Alas, the storm brings me no intelligible news, and the day progresses uncaringly forward. I shall not be depending on the wind and shadows for answers much longer, nor will gruel be enough to keep me quiet. By the morrow, things must change.

And it matters not how I obtain the knowledge that I require.

## ASSAULT ON JORD'S SHRINE

Most bards would begin their tale somewhere in the middle, to recount with contagious lyricism the brave deeds of some intrepid hero of yore. Yet the name and face of such a hero barely matters, as the life and feats of such a one tends to follow a discernable pattern. Typically of humble beginnings, in spirit if not in socioeconomic standing, a man either high-born or lowborn, but not of middling decent. Disgusted by the corrupt nature of potentates, or the insipidity of the life of social responsibility, our knight-errant would strike out to follow the call to adventure and thus enter the proverbial dark forest, whatever the particular manifestation of that dangerous realm.

There he will valiantly face the Dragon, and in the aftermath of its vanquishment some epiphany comes, an ineffable notion that would blaze forth in his mind, teaching him not only of the darkness in the world but of mankind and their path to salvation. And with this grail, containing the light of knowledge, he returns from crossing the Abyss, to restore society to a state of utopia, and the future generations of the realm would be indoctrinated as to the moral meaning of the hero's exploits. Perhaps one day such a one would be understood as demigod.

Alas, the man with whom this tale begins was never a hero.

He was thrust abruptly into a different kind of dark forest, without benefit of a mystical call to chivalrous exploits, his past unknown even to himself, while locked away each day in a small room of some remote shrine, served gruel by a woman who appears to know him, then told he was murdered and subsequently resurrected from the dead. Today he dreamt again of Death's pale visage, his closest memory, while sleeping upon a hard, wooden framed bed, with rough sheets and wool blanket pulled up around his ears. His body was chilled by the moist, chilly air of a windy, spring morning.

A distant roll of thunder awoke him from his fitful slumber.

He sat up in a small bedroom, blinking the sleep from his eyes, hoping that had been dreaming. Unfortunately, everything was as it had been since his awakening from the coldest of slumbers.

Along the left wall was a fireplace, its log wreathed by an undying flame that flickered with a cold, violet hue. The exit from the room was a single, iron-bound wooden door, across from a narrow window adjacent to his bed. The door was always locked, except at meal times.

Toward the center of the room stood a chair next to a small, cherry-wood table, on top of which was an urn holding an arrangement of bluebell and daisy flowers, a crystal glass and pitcher of water, and a bowl containing apples; recent gifts from the attractive woman who served him his meager meals each day.

Swinging his legs over the side of the bed, he placed his aching feet down on the woven hemp mat

and arched his back, cracking his vertebrae back into place. His entire body was in pain, but he felt he was recovering well enough, considering a recent run-in with death.

He splashed his stubby, unshaven face with fresh water from the wash basin beside his bed, then curiously opened the reflective lid of the chamber pot. The pot was empty and odorless, as he suspected. His captors were either thieves or rich, as they certainly had access to some consummate magic, he thought.

The wardrobe cabinet located several feet from the base of his bed, contained a humble but not uncomfortable brown cassock, which he wrapped around his body, pulling the cloth sash tight around his thin waist while walking to the table and pulled out a rickety chair. After pouring a cool glass of water from the pitcher for himself, he settled into the chair and faced the door, with the cool morning breeze at his back, and waited for Lydia, the woman who served him breakfast. This morning will turn out quite a bit differently than the others, he decided.

The shadows of the room receded as the sun continued to rise in the eastern sky, sending a sliver of bright light through the bedroom window. The light of the fireplace faded in proportion to the sunlight, slowly changing from violet to a pale silver flame, the latter color normally signaling the arrival of his morning gruel.

Sure enough, a polite rapping came at his door. "Enter," said he, and the door creaked open.

"Good morning to you, Sir Lethe," said Lydia, as she entered the room with a steaming bowl. She smiled and said, "Since you've recovered so quickly, I've brought you this morn' a thicker porridge. You're stomach ought to handle it just fine."

Taking the steaming bowl into his hands, he mustered up his best, warmest smile and looked the fair lady directly in the eye. "Why do you call me Sir Lethe?" he asked pointedly, while stirring his porridge.

Lydia pursed her lips, appearing contemplative. "Because you have forgotten who you are," she replied cautiously. "I call you by that name because it connotes one who has returned to this world from out of oblivion. You see, you suffer from the forgetfulness associated with death."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

"Again, I ask you, why was I brought here and raised from the dead?" He said abruptly, his voice hardening.

"You ask that every morning," snapped Lydia, planting her palms down on the table, leaning in toward him. "I have begged you to be patient, and yet you continue to hammer on me!" Then, her voice lowered, "Each morning I've prayed that you could demonstrate a bit of sang-froid. . ."

"No," roared Lethe suddenly, heaving the wooden table into the air, "You keep me here prisoner, but I will be held no longer!" Lydia cried out in fright, stumbling back in a rain of apples, daisies and bluebells. The table toppled heavily on its side, sliding into the bronze screen of the fireplace, two of its legs cracking asunder.

"Please, don't!" pleaded Lydia as she backed away. Her long, dark hair was mussed, her robe drenched in water and covered with porridge.

Lethe strode to the door and slammed it shut, then turned to face his captor, his eyes red with anger. "Tell me who I am," he yelled forcefully, guarding the door.

"I can't yet," she cried, seizing a poker from the fireplace to wield defensively. "You could be under some evil influence!"

"You're right," Lethe retorted with a convulsion of laughter, "but I think that influence is you!" Now was his only chance for escape, while he had her off balance, and he didn't fear her impromptu weapon, thinking that he could physically overwhelm her if need be. Yet something in her voice made him hesitate, some maddening familiarity that stayed his hand. He could not bring himself to advance against her.

Lydia removed a small, engraved symbol from her side pocket and shut her eyes momentarily, bowing her head, as if in prayer, while still gripping the poker in one white-knuckled hand. "I rebuke you," she whispered.

"Damn," Lethe swore, sensing some kind of numinous force filling the room, and so launched himself at Lydia, hoping to take her down to the floor while avoiding crushing her. With all of his strength, he grappled her, knocking the poker aside, forcing her lithesome body to the ground. She cried out in pain as the air exploded from her lungs, but her body simultaneously blazed with a mystical force that envel-

oped Lethe, causing him to gasp as if tackled by a man with the same momentum. With a blinding flare, and at precisely the second her back hit the floor, his body was flung up and backward, twisting in the air and landing heavily on the overturned table, splitting its top in half.

With a groan, he rolled off the splintered table and rose to all fours, his face dripping blood onto the stone floor. Apparently, he'd seriously underestimated this woman. A pair of sandaled feet appeared beneath his nose, swiftly kicking him in the head, his body rolling to the side from the force of the blow, and his skull cracked the fallen urn.

"Never hit me again, my love," seethed Lydia, still wheezing, standing above his crumpled form. Her voice sounded not only angry, but emotionally wounded.

He rose, nursing his nose, to the sound of the door slammed shut, and the lock turned. What the hell was going on, he wondered as he struggled back to his bed. My love? She apparently had some history with him, and if her words were true, it would certainly explain his hesitance to assault her, even if a prisoner.

"Great, my true love is holding me prisoner and beat the crap out of me. What next?" he exclaimed, angrily kicking the bedwarmer.

The afternoon passed with no noontime meal. The clouds departed, and the day turned out to be one of blue skies and a warm temperature suitable to springtime. And though the rain had passed, the maelstrom in his mind did not cease; Lethe contemplated his plight.

While it was true that Lydia locked him in his bedroom each day, she had done him no actual harm until he assailed her. He was beginning to think that her motive may actually be to protect him, but from what? If she were indeed his lover, and he was foully murdered, it would make sense that she'd want him resurrected. But why would somebody have wanted him dead in the first place?

Also, it was odd to him that he would be able to identify every common thing, could recall knowledge pertaining to the world he lived in, was able to function basically as an adult, and yet was totally unable to remember a single thing about his life. He was no expert on the phenomenon of returning from the dead, but was it truly common, he wondered, for a man raised to leave his identity on the other side of the spiritual divide? Was it a theurgical blunder, or a



deliberate removal of his memory? He had to know, and that need must supersede any uncertainty concerning use of force. Next time there would be no more hesitation.

That night, there came another knock at his door. It was a different knock, more forceful than Lydia's, only two raps.

"I'm entering. I bring either your evening meal or a solid beating if you are recalcitrant," warned the acerbic voice of a woman on the other side of the door.

"I would prefer food," Lethe said dryly.

A key was turned and the door swung open, revealing a woman advanced in years, wearing a white velvet blouse under a dark green frock, holding a gnarled applewood cane in one hand and a bowl of porridge in the other.

"Wise choice," she said, entering. Her face was wrinkled and weary, framed by thin silver hair, but her teeth white and her eyes bright, full of youth and power.

"Tell me why I'm being kept in this shrine," demanded Lethe, his voice nasal due to his pressing a wet, bunched up rag to his broken nose. "No more games."

The old woman's eyes lit up with mirth at his angry, muffled voice. "You were brought here a corpse, so whatever your complaint, rest assured that your situation has improved. Now eat your food and ask no more questions until we are sure that it is in your best interest to reveal more of the story."

Shaking with frustration, Lethe retorted in an urgent voice, "I'm not some ignorant child to be shielded from the harsh realities of the world!"

"Hush! You are being shielded from the harsh reality of yourself. You cannot afford to know more, not until we are sure you are in your right mind."

Lethe stood up suddenly and shook his fist, seething. "You bet I'm out of my mind! I'm being told now that I'm being kept safe from my self? What next? Are you to say that I was my own murderer too, that you are you the matron of an insane asylum?"

"It would seem so, judging by your actions good sir, but you are creating that sort of environment for yourself" said the old woman. "And to tell you more would perhaps, in a sense, force you in the direction of suicide. We certainly can't have that."

"What in the nine hells is that supposed to mean?"

"Any further outbursts and I will be forced to

treat you as if you are insane, perhaps bind you to your cot for the night." She brandished her cane.

They locked gazes for a moment, but Lethe sat down, defeated. He could not bring himself to accost the old woman; his body hurt too much and his resolve quickly faltered.

Placing the bowl of porridge on the floor, the woman turned to leave. "Eat your porridge," she advised tersely, "it has strong medicinal herbs mixed in." Then, hesitating, she dropped a white cloth on the floor and said, "Clean yourself up . . . you look gruesome."

Lethe cast his eyes down to stare at the white wash cloth she dropped at his feet. The door was almost shut when he asked in a calmer voice, "what's your name? Can you tell me that much?"

"Riona," she responded, "High Priestess of Jord . . ."

". . . Jord the earth goddess. Daughter of Nott and Annar, sister of Dagr, half-sister of Delling, and first wife of Odin, mother of Thor," finished Lethe pedagogically, surprising himself. "How did I know that?"

"Lucky guess." She shrugged, then shut and locked the door.

Dropping the damp, bloody rag to the hemp mat at his feet, he bent over and picked up the wash cloth, ignoring his meager dinner. It was embroidered with the images of trees, doves, a fox, and a lioness in the center, and oddly warm to the touch. He wet the cloth in the wash basin, then pressed it to his nose, felt a sudden flash of warmth penetrating deep into his skin, and startled, brought it away from his face. With a short cry of pain he realized the bones in his nose were reconstructing at a preternatural speed; the blood running down his nostrils turned to salty water dribbling down his chin. The process ceased after a few seconds. Gasping in astonishment, he sneezed the remaining water from his nose.

He sat stunned for a moment, rubbing his nose, but grew even angrier and more frustrated. The magical healing Riona's wash cloth provided placed her in an aggravating maternal role, as though he were a child administered medication by a chastising mother. Balling up the magical cloth, he hurled it across the room, which hit the wall with a dull thud. "Thanks a lot!" he yelled sarcastically. Nobody answered.

Sitting down, Lethe reviewed his situation. Lydia



CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

# Serendipity

by DARLENE

DARLENE is a "Medievalist" who has found a home in the book arts—graphics, typeface design & cartography. In 2004, DARLENE started on a map project for Troll Lord Games: 2 full color maps created for Gary Gygax's "Castle Zygag." DARLENE also created a typeface used in Paizo Publishing's version of the Greyhawk Map.

Currently, DARLENE is the top marketing & graphics designer for a multi-million dollar corporation. She also enjoys designing & illustrating books for Aethyrea Books, her husband's company. In 2003, Inner Traditions published "The Path of the Priestess" which includes 30 of her illustrations.

DARLENE lives in the haunted Uwharrie Mountains of North Carolina with her gamer-husband, the author and historian Vincent Bridges and their four cats: LiLu, Orson, MoJo, and Selina.

*\*The typeface used above is the type DARLENE designed for Paizo's Greyhawk map. See pages 19-20 for an example of DARLENE's newest typeface design: Mid-Realm Uncial Italic.*



The connection was convoluted—through my husband who was in an e-group with the mother of an associate that worked with Gary—but E. Gary Gygax finally made e-mail contact with me about a year ago. Turned out, Gary didn't really want anything. He was simply curious to solve a 20-year mystery. One day in 1984, I simply disappeared. Nobody seemed to know what had happened.

Gary kindly added in his e-mail, "everyone thinks your The World of Greyhawk maps are amongst the best ever done." Yes, I remember them. I'd created the 2-map set twenty-five years ago. I was more than a little surprised to discover that it has become somewhat of a classic. So for the next few months, Gary and I reminisced a little and caught each other up on our recent histories. We also swapped stories about editors, the curse of Stone Manor, house ghosts, the importance of quality time with one's family and the nature of fame. I could frame the story of my disappearance in any of a number of ways. So I choose to frame it as a quest for truth and beauty. . .

When I freelanced for TSR as an illustrator, I also pursued calligraphy, medieval illumination, and book binding as art forms. When the opportunity presented itself to study these disciplines abroad, I jumped at the chance. During the fall of 1983, I lived and studied amongst university art students in Cortona, Italy. Before one year had passed, I would be offered a stipend to pursue a Master's Degree in design at Indiana University in Bloomington. I left Lake Geneva at summer's end in 1984, around the same time I legally dropped my surname.

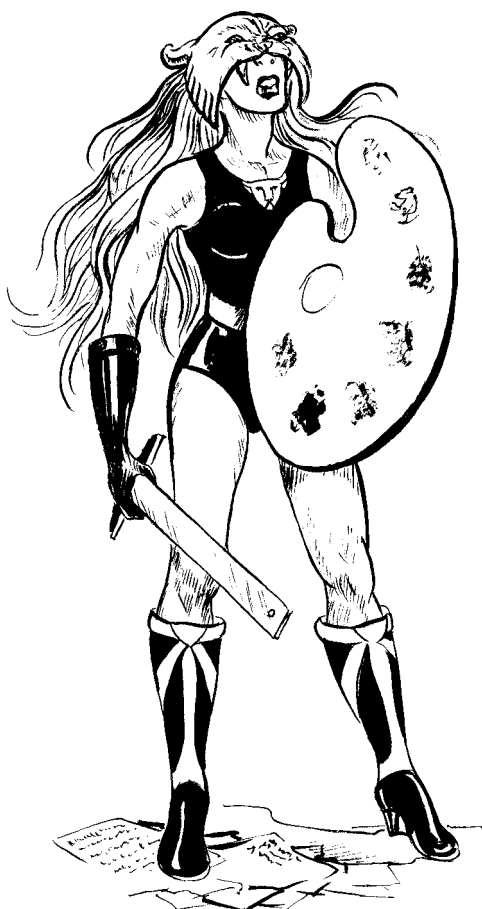
The world of the university replaced illustrating magazine articles for *The Dragon* and gaming modules for TSR, Inc. My disappearance wasn't meant to be mysterious. My life just took a 90 degree turn from everything I knew as I frequented the hallowed halls of higher learning. And now, just as suddenly, I'm back. It's almost exactly 20 years later. How interesting to realise that for me, everything has remained as it was: frozen in time at the moment I'd left, like an insect preserved in amber.

Gary's timing is suspiciously curious. Only a short while before he contacted me, I was at party where the subject of Dungeons & Dragons came up. I saw a man become visibly awestruck when he discovered I was "THE" Darlene who illustrated *The Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG)*. As is the case with all artists, I'm embarrassed at my early work. But I admitted to him that I was, indeed, partially responsible for some drawings in that publication. Wide eyed, the twenty-something opened the knap sack he had with him and pulled out an old tattered copy of the DMG.

The young man opened the book to a specific page and pointed, "YOU drew this?" he asked. I had not seen the art in years but I recognised it as mine and nodded my head. "Wow," he said, "I spent hours as a kid staring at this drawing. . ." He paused, then added, "it spoke to me. . ." As we paged through The Guide, we became connected through some old images we had both experienced, but in very different ways. This moment became another moment, frozen in time.

I smiled and told him how glad I was that he responded positively to my work. My husband, who witnessed this young man's adoration, grinned. "Hey," he elbowed me, "you have a fan!" So it would seem.

From time to time, amidst our e-mail discourse, Gary mentioned his desire for a good fantasy map. The first few times, I didn't take the bait. I was still too squarely within the bounds of "the real world." How would anyone be able to afford me? But the seeds Gary planted must have sprouted because I became interested in the challenge of using computer technology to create a fantasy map. No such technology was in general use when I laid out the very unwieldy Greyhawk 2-map set directly on my drawing board in 1980.





The original map art was so big, to reproduce it, a camera had to be located with a lens large enough so as not to distort the hex pattern. (They found one, 90 miles away, in Madison.) With the computer, problems of this sort could be eliminated. I wondered if it would be possible to retain the “feel” of a hand done-map while utilising precision vector software. I was seduced by the challenge of finding out. When I asked Gary to send me the maps he needed, he must have felt some satisfaction in knowing he had me!

But I accepted the cartography assignment cheerfully because it appealed to the poet within me. Since I created the original Greyhawk map, it seemed only fitting to also create this new world of Gary’s as well. This tribute to Gary would also honor a part of the life I’d left behind—a tribute to what once was with a nod to what will be. That’s all I had really planned to do before returning to the “real” world.

But, the great gaming gods had other plans for me . . .

How many coincidences must happen before the possibilities dawn that reality is being manipulated by forces beyond our control, compelling us to move in certain directions? Is it our destiny to willingly go down these paths? What happens if we refuse?

What are the odds of my 10-year family reunion in Wisconsin being scheduled at the very time as a gaming convention in Milwaukee? This very coincidence made it possible for me to make the acquaintance of the Chenault brothers on Gary’s porch. They happened to arrive about an hour after my husband and I did on a Sunday evening. It was the crowning event of our weekend visit. (Although I didn’t think anything could top learning of the existence of the “Beast of Bray Road,” a were-beast which appeared and began haunting the area of the family property the same year my father died) . . .

At any rate, when the Trolls arrived, I had 2 colored 16” x 20” printouts of the maps I had done for Gary spread upon his porch table. Steve and Davis responded well, showing sincere appreciation for my cartography work. So I must have succeeded in imparting to the computer file, a certain quality of something hand rendered. Their reaction was very reassuring. They immediately wanted me to do more maps for them. But I wouldn’t commit. I was still under the impression that I would not be staying long in the world of Role Playing Games.

Our early evening visit with Gary Gygax was very pleasant. My husband Vincent, a life-long gamer, expressed his sincere appreciation for Gary’s work. Gary, in turn, mentioned his enjoyment of seeing Vincent in a 2-hour documentary, “*Nostradamus:500 Years Later*” which aired on the history channel just the weekend before during the Fourth of July holiday.

However, the highlight of the evening came when Gary’s son, Alex, entered the scene and surveyed the motley crew at the table on the porch eating pizza and Italian food. Alex inquired if everyone might be related. Of the group of six at the table, four were stout men with beards and long, grey-streaked ponytails. Alex was right. They looked so much alike that we were stunned to take notice of the obvious. (You don’t suppose their similar appearance betrays a set of traits identifying them as gamers? . . .)

So how did I get from Gary’s porch to being a designer of and contributor to TC? Let’s call it serendipity. Just like the first time, when I was a witness to and a part of the early years of RPG. So I cannot shake the feeling I’ve been placed here precisely at this moment in space/time by “the gaming gods” to add my energy and voice to the new possibilities this journal has to offer.

Beyond that, it’s an odyssey for all concerned. And how poetic to return to the RPG industry applying the very skills I’d left it to acquire! Let this Journal be one of discovery and rediscovery, enjoyable for many people, on many levels.



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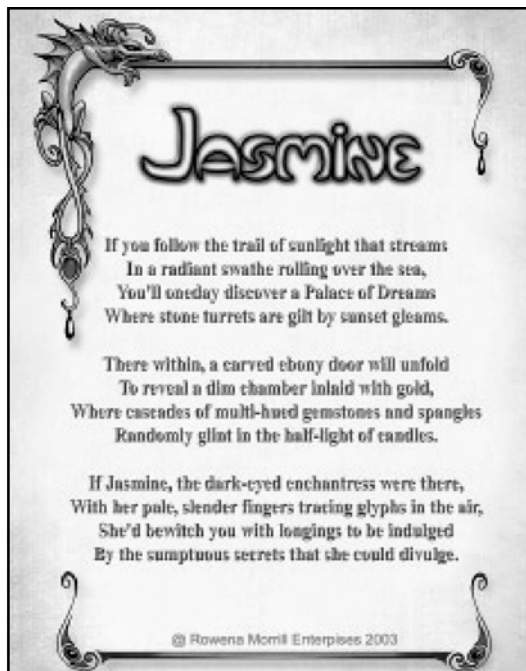
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# Rowena

**R**owena is one of the best known names in the world of science-fiction and fantasy illustration. During a career that has spanned over two decades, her paintings have appeared on hundreds of book covers, on calendars, portfolios, trading cards and in magazines such as *Playboy* and *Omni*. Books of her own work have included *The Fantastic Art of Rowena, Imagine* (in France), *Imagination* (in Germany), and *The Art of Rowena*. She has also been included in many antholo-

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gies, such as, *Tomorrow and Beyond and Infinite Worlds*. Rowena began her career in New York where she lived for 16 years. She presently lives in upstate New York gaining creative inspiration from the beautiful countryside. ©



**Rosamunda**

Many a bitter tear was split  
For a noble damsel fair and chaste.  
Adorned in jewelled, embroidered silk,  
She was a paradigm of courtly grace.

Beloved by many, but never attained,  
This rose, while eluding love's spiderweb chains,  
Was captured in troubadour's tragic refrains.

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**STONE DEMON**

In India I happened to see  
A wildly dancing deity,  
So full of life, though cut from stone,  
He danced to music devoid of tone.

I stood at his feet gazing into his eyes,  
And came to be so mesmerized  
That I fell into a dreamlike trance  
And joined him in his endless dance.

So in India, if you happen to see  
A devilish, dancing deity,  
Holding a maiden of flesh and bone,  
Entwined with him in living stone,  
Remember my story, since it may foretell  
That you could become ensnared as well.

DESCENT OF *The Goddess*  
*Ishtar* INTO THE LOWER WORLD

[FROM THE CIVILIZATION OF BABYLONIA  
AND ASSYRIA, M. JASTROW, 1915]

To the land of no return, the land of darkness,  
Ishtar, the daughter of Sin directed her thought,  
Directed her thought, Ishtar, the daughter of Sin,  
To the house of shadows, the dwelling, of Irkalla,  
To the house without exit for him who enters therein,  
To the road, whence there is no turning,  
To the house without light for him who enters therein,  
The place where dust is their nourishment,  
clay their food.  
They have no light, in darkness they dwell.  
Clothed like birds, with wings as garments,  
Over door and bolt, dust has gathered.  
Ishtar on arriving at the gate of the land of no return,  
To the gatekeeper thus addressed herself:

Gatekeeper, ho, Open thy gate.  
Open thy gate that I may enter!  
If thou openest not the gate to let me enter,  
I will break the door, I will wrench the lock,  
I will smash the door-posts, I will force the doors.  
I will bring up the dead to eat the living.  
And the dead will outnumber the living."  
The gatekeeper opened his mouth and spoke,  
Spoke to the lady Ishtar:  
"Desist, O lady, do not destroy it. I will go and announce  
thy name to my queen Ereshkigal."  
The gatekeeper entered and spoke to Ereshkigal:  
"Ho here is thy sister, Ishtar ...  
Hostility of the great powers ...  
When Ereshkigal heard this,  
As when one hews down a tamarisk she trembled,  
As when one cuts a reed, she shook:  
"What has moved her heart [seat of the intellect]  
what has stirred her liver [seat of the emotions]?  
Ho there, does this one wish to dwell with me?  
To eat clay as food, to drink dust as wine?  
I weep for the men who have left their wives.  
I weep for the wives torn from the embrace of  
their husbands;  
For the little ones cut off before their time.  
Go, gatekeeper, open thy gate for her,  
Deal with her according to the ancient decree."  
The gatekeeper went and opened his gate to her:  
Enter, O lady, let Cuthah greet thee.

Let the palace of the land of no return rejoice  
at thy presence.!

He bade her enter the first gate, which he opened  
wide, and took the large crown off her head:  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove the large crown  
off my head?"  
"Enter, O lady, such are the decrees of Ereshkigal."  
The second gate he bade her enter, opening it wide,  
and removed her earrings:  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove my earrings?"  
"Enter, O lady, for such are the decrees of Ereshkigal."  
The third gate he bade her enter, opened it wide, and  
removed her necklace:  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove my necklace?"  
"Enter, O lady, for such are the decrees of Ereshkigal."  
The fourth gate he bade her enter, opened it wide, and  
removed the ornaments of her breast:  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove the ornaments  
of my breast?"  
"Enter, O lady, for such are the decrees of Ereshkigal."  
The fifth gate he bade her enter, opened it wide, and  
removed the girdle of her body studded with  
birthstones.  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove the girdle of my  
body, studded with birth-stones?"  
"Enter, O lady, for such are the decrees of Ereshkigal."  
The sixth gate, he bade her enter, opened it wide, and  
removed the spangles off her hands and feet.  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove the spangles off  
my hands and feet?"  
"Enter, O lady, for thus are the decrees of Ereshkigal."  
The seventh gate he bade her enter, opened it wide, and  
removed her loin-cloth.  
"Why, O gatekeeper, dost thou remove my loin-cloth?"  
"Enter, O lady, for such are the decrees of Ereshkigal."

Now when Ishtar had gone down into the land of no  
return, Ereshkigal saw her and was angered at  
her presence.  
Ishtar, without reflection, threw herself at her  
[in a rage].  
Ereshkigal opened her mouth and spoke, To Namtar,  
her messenger, she addressed herself:

"Go Namtar, imprison her in my palace.  
 Send against her sixty disease, to punish Ishtar.  
 Eye-disease against her eyes,  
 Disease of the side against her side,  
 Foot-disease against her foot,  
 Heart-disease against her heart,  
 Head-disease against her head,  
 Against her whole being, against her entire body."  
 After the lady Ishtar had gone down into the land  
     of no return,  
 The bull did not mount the cow, the ass approached  
     not the she-ass,  
 To the maid in the street, no man drew near  
 The man slept in his apartment,  
 The maid slept by herself.

[The second half of the poem, the reverse of the tablet, continues as follows:]

**T**he countenance of Papsukal, the messenger of the  
 great gods, fell, his face was troubled.  
 In mourning garb he was clothed, in soiled garments  
     clad.  
 Shamash [the sun-god] went to Sin [the moon-god],  
     his father, weeping,  
 In the presence of Ea, the King, he went with flowing  
     tears.  
 The man sleeps in his apartment,  
 The maid sleeps by herself."  
 Ea, in the wisdom of his heart, formed a being,  
 He formed Asu-shu-namir the eunuch.  
 Go, Asu-shu-namir, to the land of no return  
     direct thy face!  
 The seven gates of the land without return be opened  
     before thee,  
 May Ereshkigal at sight of thee rejoice!  
 After her heart has been assuaged, her liver quieted,  
 Invoke against her the name of the great gods,  
 Raise thy head direct thy attention to the khalziku skin.  
 "Come, lady, let them give me the khalziku skin, that I  
     may drink water out of it."  
 When Ereshkigal heard this, she struck her side, bit  
     her finger,  
 Thou hast expressed a wish that can not be granted.  
 Go, Asu-sbu-iaamir, I curse thee with a great curse,  
 The sweepings of the gutters of the city be thy food,  
 The drains of the city be thy drink,  
 The shadow of the wall be thy abode,  
 The thresholds be thy dwelling-place;  
 Drunkard and sot strike thy cheek"

Ereshkigal opened her mouth and spoke,  
 To Namtar, her messenger, she addressed herself.  
 "Go, Namtar, knock at the strong palace,  
 Strike the threshold of precious stones,  
 Bring out the Anunnaki, seat them on golden thrones.  
 Sprinkle Ishtar with the waters of life and take her  
     out of my presence.  
 Namtar went, knocked at the strong palace,  
 Tapped on the threshold of precious stones.  
 He brought out the Anunnaki and placed them on  
     golden thrones,  
 He sprinkled Ishtar with the waters of life and took  
     hold of her.  
 Through the first gate he led her out and returned to  
     her her loin-cloth.  
 Through the second gate he led her out and returned to  
 her the spangles of her hands and feet  
 Through the third gate he led her out and returned to  
 her the girdle of her body, studded with  
     birth-stones.  
 Through the fourth gate he led her out and returned to  
     her the ornaments of her breast.  
 Through the fifth gate he led her out and returned to  
     her her necklace.  
 Through the sixth gate he led her out and returned her  
     earrings.  
 Through the seventh gate he led her out and returned  
     to her the large crown for her head.

[The following lines are in the form of an address - apparently to some one who has sought release for a dear one from the portals of the lower world.]

"If she (Ishtar) will not grant thee her release,  
 To Tammuz, the lover of her youth,  
 Pour out pure waters, pour out fine oil;  
 With a festival garment deck him that he may play  
     on the flute of lapis lazuli,  
 That the votaries may cheer his liver. [his spirit]  
 Belili [sister of Tammuz] had gathered the treasure,  
 With precious stones filled her bosom.  
 When Belili heard the lament of her brother, she  
     dropped her treasure,  
 She scattered the precious stones before her,  
 "Oh, my only brother, do not let me perish!  
 On the day when Tammuz plays for me on the flute of  
     lapis lazuli, playing it for me with the porphyry ring.  
 Together with him, play ye for me, ye weepers and  
     lamenting women!  
 That the dead may rise up and inhale the incense."





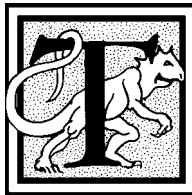
# AULD WYRMISH

## "In Defense of 'House Rules'"



BY  
**MIKE  
STEWART**

WHO BEGAN HIS INTEREST IN ROLE PLAYING GAMES IN 1978 AND NEVER LOOKED BACK! HE IS CURRENTLY A POST-GRADUATE STUDENT OF MEDIEVAL HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS.

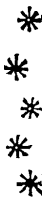


he concept of local RPG groups creating 'house rules' seems to have become rather undesirable among today's gamers. Not only undesirable, but apparently an idea to be stamped out with extreme prejudice! I think the current emphasis on RPGs that strive to create 'a rule for everything' have contributed to this point of view; instilling in gamers an obsession with uniformity, balance, and meticulous detail.

As someone who started gaming back in the late 70s, I find this point of view to be disappointing. Back 'in the day', we didn't make house rules just to cover gaps or errors in play. We did it to try out something new, because while the given system in the game

worked it didn't fit our view of the genre, a desire for more emphasis on our

chosen method of play (realism, abstractness, etc.), or a plethora of other reasons.



**PROVIDE AN OUTLET  
TO THE IMAGINATION**

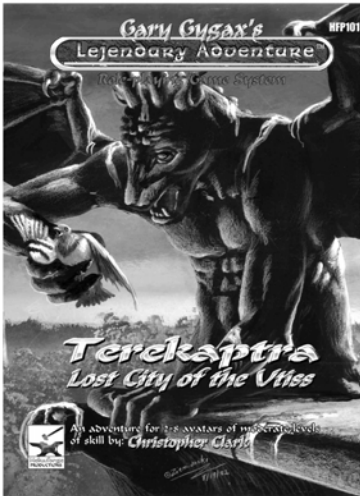
The point was, we did it because it was fun! It was a chance to let the nascent game designer in all of us out for a bit and try something different. Some things worked, others were horrific to behold. For instance, I created a thief allocation points system for my 1E AD&D game which eventually was created by a fine mind at TSR for 2E AD&D. I also came up with a system of written/spoken alignment tongues for spell use that players had to say at the table, and say them correctly or the spell would fail. NOT one of my better ideas. Heh.

But today's gamers who are indoctrinated to 'Adhere to the rules!' or that 'Uniformity is GOOD!' are missing out on a unique opportunity; a chance to make their campaign truly their own and provide an outlet to the imaginations for themselves and their players... even if they occasionally fall on their face. Trying out a house rule variant often allows a GM/player to appreciate the original rule, once he understands the context of the rule's design, and the problems that variant systems might cause.

What the community needs is a full return to that mode of thinking and to embrace a game which encourages its players to try something different, to grant the GM a firm foundational system that continues to function smoothly even with house rules added on to suit local tastes. A system robust enough to withstand removing a rule here or there rather than a single change causing a massive domino effect, causing the whole system to break. In other words, it is nigh time for a rules-light system that is both fun and affordable.

I believe *Castles & Crusades*™ fulfills the above criterion quite nicely. Rules light, yet flexible to allow as much detail to be added by a GM as desired. But also sturdy enough so that even when reducing the system down to its the most basic parts, even removing entire sections, the system maintains its basic playability and primary function as entertainment.

But don't take my word for it—just wait and see!

**Adventure awaits!**

In the dim recesses of the nearly forgotten past, the reptilian Utiss enslaved mankind, driving him to the brink of extinction.

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One of those cities has been found.

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claimed that he suffered from the forgetfulness common to those rare individuals raised from the dead, and Riona added that he was being "shielded from the harsh reality" of himself. Perhaps this forgetfulness was something that could be cured, but they took no steps to correct the problem. Or it could be that the two women were in fact the cause of the entire cycle of his death, resurrection and resultant memory loss. In any event, the problem ran deeper than a bloody nose. One thing was certain; these women wanted him alive, and the younger one wanted him to believe he was once deeply loved by her.

A frontal assault, in retrospect, was a bad idea. Not only was it likely the women possessed powers he could not match in strength, he concluded he lacked the temerity to hit a woman. Grimly, he wondered how many times before his death he was forced to come to that realization. Probably it was a woman who murdered him, he thought sarcastically. "Oh enough!" he chided himself, then laughed aloud and spoke to the empty room, "ought death make one a misogynist?" No, but there were other ways to deal with his situation, like running for the door next time it is opened. But in the meantime, sleep beckoned. . .

The moon slid slowly across the night sky as Lethe dozed; the sounds of crickets punctuated by the occasional hooting of an owl providing an almost musical accompaniment to his dreams. Then, in the deep blue light of early dawn, distant voices, the thudding of hooves, and the sound of clanking armor broke through the haze of his sleep, causing him to stir. He cracked open one eye, watching the door opposite his window, and listened intently. Did he dream those voices?

A terrible clamor resounded from somewhere within the shrine—a door bashed in, the fervent battle cries of men-at-arms, the scream of a young woman taken by surprise. These signaled to Lethe that he was definitely not dreaming.

Riona cried out vehemently from somewhere beyond the bolted door of Lethe's room. "Unhand me you filthy, horse spawned, cretinous louse!"

Lethe was unsure of the layout of the shrine; in fact, he couldn't even remember being brought to his room for the first time several weeks ago, but judging by the volume and clarity of Riona's outburst, she couldn't be any farther than down the hall to his

south, which would be a quick left beyond his door. I bet they'll regret locking me in here, he thought, then jumped up from his bed and picked up the bronze fireplace poker.

Then a horrified, strangled cry issued from the mouth of Riona's assailant, though the nature of his affliction was beyond Lethe's ken. "Die by nature's thorns, impudent mongrel," spat Riona.

Lethe hesitated. Should I break down my door? he wondered. He had tried such a maneuver before, leaving his shoulder bruised and the door still standing. Scanning the room, he spotted the magical embroidered cloth balled up on the floor. Deciding that it certainly could be useful in case of a broken shoulder, he picked it up and stuffed it in the pocket of his robe. Maybe with a good running start and a bit more determination, he thought, I'll be able to break down that door. . .

"You've breathed your last, foul witch," boomed a male's voice from beyond the door, seemingly opposite from where Riona stood, his voice rising above the shouting of men in the background. The sound of heavy, metal-shod boots thudded swiftly by Lethe's door.

"Flee or be slain by one entity vitalitas" intoned Riona cryptically, to which the man responded with laughter. "Yeah, whatever lady."

Enough of this! decided Lethe, as he propelled himself at the door, leading with his one unbruised shoulder. With a loud CRACK he hit the door hard, causing the wood to buckle, but unfortunately not to give entirely. He bounced back from the door, his shoulder hurting.

Whipping himself into a frenzy, he launched himself at the door again with a frustrated yowl, slamming into it with all of his might. Again and again he hurled himself at the door, until his sight turned to patterns of confused colors and began to blur, and all the while the sound of battle rose to a cacophony, the screams of dying men filled the shrine and rang throughout his brain. And then, finally, the door burst open and Lethe stumbled out into the corridor, dropping his poker, and fell over some man's unconscious body, hitting the far wall with uncontrollable momentum. Rising to his knees, his hands grasped for any handhold to support him. As it happened, the wall was oddly covered in vines and moss, so he found himself clinging like a drunkard to its surface waiting for his vision to clear.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



# From the **BIZARRE** to the

## The Stories written by Robert E. Howard about Conan

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*The Hour of the Dragon*  
*Beyond the Black River*  
*Shadows in Zamboula*

*Red Nails*

*The Devil in Iron*

*The People of the Black Circle*

*A Witch Shall be Born*

*Jewels of Gwahlur*

*The Frost Giant's Daughter*

*Queen of the Black Coast*

*The Vale of Lost Women*

*The Tower of the Elephant*

*The God in the Bowl*

*Rogues in the House*

*The Slithering Shadow*

*The Pool of the Black One*

*The Phoenix and the Sword*

*The Scarlet Citadel*

*Black Colossal*



ROBERT E. HOWARD is perhaps best known as the creator of Conan, a Barbarian who traveled in the mythic world of Hyboria. In a series of short stories and novellas Howard traces the wandering footsteps of the Cimmerian giant as he thieives, plunders and slays his way through history. In all, nineteen pieces were published about this character and five others remained unfinished at the time of Howard's death. This was, to quote one of Howard's biographer's, only the tip of Howard's literary iceberg.

He wrote profusely in other fields; tales of historical fiction, medieval and modern, Oriental pieces, boxing stories, westerns, some grim and serious, others outrageously humorous. He even dabbled in detective stories, attempted to write science fiction and wrote several pieces for the "spicy" pulps, those magazines oriented towards an adult audience. Howard's interests, always literary, branched out into poetry, both regular verse and prose. In this light it seems almost as tragic as his suicide that he is almost primarily remembered for his Conan tales.

This was a character which Howard loved, and thought his most evolved, but it is a character which represents a genre of writing which Howard did not want to be restricted to. Furthermore, it was a genre of literature which he had all but abandoned in the last two years of his life, instead turning his attentions to his native west and the creation of more historical pieces, namely western tales. To further deepen the tragedy, the perceptions of Howard's fantastic creations, Conan specifically, have altered in our modern interpretations. It is the changing perceptions of Robert E. Howard's literature which this paper addresses, for as with much in American popular culture, Howard's writings have gone from the bizarre to the bazaar and have both suffered and benefited thereby.

Robert E. Howard was born in Peaster, Texas in 1906. It was a small rural community, and typical of all the towns in which his father, a giant imposing man, practiced medicine. The family traveled a great deal, but eventually, when Howard was 13, the small family of three settled in the tiny west Texas town of Cross Plains. Howard was a small child and by his own account harassed and beaten upon by older children. This fact, coupled with an absent father and a semi-nomadic lifestyle, led the young Howard to develop an extraordinary attachment to his mother. Mrs. Howard was a lonely woman who suffered from a tubercular infection for most of her adult life, and as the years went by, she was a woman who began to resent her marriage and her life choices. The one gem in her eye was her son. If a woman can be guilty of being too much of a mother then Mrs. Howard stands accused. She shielded her young son from outside influences, protected him from schoolyard bullies, read him poetry and indulged his anti-social behavior. According to one biographer, L. Sprague De Camp, she even tacitly approved his youthful desire to die when she did (De Camp, 82-83).

Be that as it may she never discouraged young Howard from his youthful desire to become a writer and make his living with his pen. And for all the faults which their relationship had it was one which allowed Howard the freedom to create a



# BAZAAR...

spectacular host of fiction for a fast and furious ten years. He published his first story in 1924, after, according to his own account, "three years of writing without selling a blasted line" (Herron, 136). It was several more years before he began to regularly publish stories, mainly pugilistic tales of the wandering sailor Steve Costigan. From 1929 to 1932 a small army of stories were published in this genre to magazines such as "Fight Stories" and "Jack Dempsey's Fight Magazine." He was also contributing several historic adventure stories to "Weird Tales" and it was during this time that the Solomon Kane and King Kull stories were written. Other fantasies led him into the genre of heroic fantasy and subsequently to the creation of the Conan tales. For the next three years he devoted much of his time and energy toward spinning fantastic yarns of dark magic and bizarre creatures; the heroics of the primitive over the civilized. This last theme never left Howard's work and it can be found in his early westerns, a genre which he branched into in 1933 and wrote profusely in until his death.

The theme of primitive savagery was one very close to Howard. He chided his pen-pal, H. P. Lovecraft, constantly about the relative merits of the primitive as compared to the civilized. And although Lovecraft vigorously attempted to convert Howard to a more benevolent view of the civilized world he never managed to convince him. This theme of brute strength carried into his life style. He exercised and ate a great deal until the small sickly child of his youth was no more and he stood over six feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds. He took up boxing as a sport and often carried a knife or gun, prepared to fight enemies imagined or real. Howard grew up in Texas; a world which had memories of a more savage time, when Comanches raided settlements, lonely cowboys like James Wesley Hardin and Billy the Kid shot and plundered their way through life, when the frontier was not a settled place of paved roads and gas stations. These memories of a bygone world found an echo in Howard's pen.

It was an echo which he ardently wished to capture in his own writing. Howard read profusely his entire life in subjects ranging from history and anthropology to the occult and philosophical. And of course the adventure tales of such notable writers as Edgar Rice Burroughs and Jack London, both writers whose subjects were often placed in some kind of historical context. In a 1936 letter to Lovecraft he discussed his desire to write fictional history: "There is no literary work," he wrote, "to me, half as zestful as rewriting history in the guise of fiction. I wish I was able to devote the rest of my life to that kind of work. I could write a hundred years and still there would be more stories clamoring to be written, by the scores" (Herron, 137). Apart from a few stories de Camp rewrote as Conan tales, Howard's historical fiction is almost completely ignored today. He has been taken to account for failing to accurately recount events, place names and dates as well as ignoring technological innovations. As if in answer to these criticisms Howard once wrote, "my characters do and say illogical and inconsistent things—inconsistent as far as general things go—but they are consistent to my conception of them" (Gale Research, 128).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25



ROBERT E. HOWARD

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FROM BIZARRE...TO THE BAZARRE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

Our modern view of Howard seems to misinterpret the importance of history in his writings. De Camp, Lin Carter and other fantasy authors have taken over the Conan sagas, consistently retelling swash buckling tales of the barbarians continued adventures. All stories of repute I am sure, but they lack that particular essence which gave Howard an edge in writing Fantasy, an essence he thought essential to the proper telling of a tale. That essence of course is history. Even the Conan stories, much like the Kull and Solomon Kane stories and other weird tales, all contain an element of history. This belief was, for Howard, common practice. One of his cover letters to Clayton Publications stated: "In writing this tale, I have dipped into both history and legendry, striving to interweave historical facts and folk-lore myths in a realistic and logical manner. It is my belief that practically all legends have some solid foundation of

fact, though they may be so changed and distorted as to be unrecognizable"

(Herron, 138). If we look closely at Conan we find that he travels in an age after the sinking of Atlantis and the "rise of the sons of Aryas", in Howard's thinking some 12,000 years ago. Fiction no doubt, but historical fiction.

Howard's historical fiction, even when cloaked in the guise of a fist swinging sailor or the brawny muscles of a wandering rogue, manages to enthrall the reader. Lovecraft, his contemporary, recognized this quality in Howard's writing just as modern interpretations have forgotten it. "I always gasped," he wrote after Howard's tragic death, "at his profound knowledge of history ... he had the imagination to go beyond mere names and dates and get at the *actual texture of life* in the bygone periods which he studied" (Gale Research, 129).

Those who have followed in Howard's foot steps have spent a great amount of energy attempting to limit the way in which readers should view Howard's literature. De Camp, who took over the Conan mythos, remarked in an essay that most of Howard's literature "would simply have never been ... but for Conan's



popularity" (De Camp, 132). He continues to debunk the Solomon Kane stories and Kull stories as poor forbearers to Howard's real creation, Conan. Also he and other authors, such as Lin Carter, have argued against searching for any hidden meanings or philosophies in Howard's literature. In his introduction to the novel Conan the Conqueror, published in 1950, Dr. John Clark, the editor, states: "Don't look for hidden philosophical meanings or intellectual puzzles in the yarns-they aren't there" (Herron, 156). However much this may fit the case of their own writings about Conan and other swash buckling heroes it is a much too shallow analysis of Howard's fiction.

Howard may not have set out to write the great American novel nor change the face of literature, by his own account he was a writing mercenary. "I took up writing," he wrote in a letter to Lovecraft, "because it seemed to promise an easier mode of work, more money, and more freedom than any other job . . . If it was in my power to pen the grandest masterpiece the world has ever seen, I wouldn't hit the first



key . . . unless I knew there was a chance for me to get some money" (Herron, 135). However much this may be the case, and we have only a few reasons to doubt the sincerity of this statement, Howard certainly wove into his tales an image of the way he interpreted history and the view he had on life. In an article entitled "Conan the Existentialist" Charles Hoffman makes the point plain: "Howard instilled his personal world-view into his fiction, yet he chose to avoid the heavy, blatant symbolism used by many a more famous author . . . consciously constructed or instinctive, Howard's system of phenomenology is remarkable for its strength and consistency" (Herron, 156). Conan is the existentialist, whether Howard was aware of it or not, for he doesn't answer to the whim of destiny nor fate but, like Howard himself, he chooses his own path.

De Camp and others argue against this. They applaud Howard for the strength of his prose, unprecedented in fantasy literature, but they shy away from any reference toward interpreting a deeper meaning, intentional or not, in the creations of Robert E. Howard. They do this first by shunning the whole of his literary work as being inferior and not up to par with the Conan tales. Following it by a rejection of Howard's outlook on life, whether realistic or not, Howard's love of individual freedom and an unrestrained society is reflected in the tales of his many heroes. Howard idealized a world which was primitive and barbaric, where the noble savages overcame the decadent empires of old. This his life philosophy is blatantly apparent in his writings. To further debunk modern interpretations of Howard's creations is a simple passage in the short story "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune":

ood  
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 Strange lights beckon from her high towers and the howls of cursed creatures are heard upon the wind-swept slopes of the Four Tors. Ever did men look upon that place with horror and dread. Countless have tried. Countless have died. Only a few have survived the horror that is and always will be Castle Zagyg™.  
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CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

His eyes focused after a moment to reveal a macabre site; dead men hung from the ceiling in the torch-lit hall, their feet swinging limply above the stone floor, their necks broken by noose-like vines and similar flora that covered the short length of the hallway. Others were hanging upside-down, their eyes punctured by long, sharp thorns that extended from the vines, their mouths filled with suffocating moss. The rest lay dead on the ground, held fast by constricting vines, covered in moss, various weapons strewn like useless toys around their bodies. Riona was nowhere in sight. Good thing I decided against the frontal assault, thought Lethe grimly.

Looking around he caught his breath and saw the hallway ended at both ends at a single wooden door, each busted in, their hinges torn from the walls, their wooden bars cracked beyond repair. He bent over and yanked a spiked club from the curled fingers of a vine-strapped corpse and, grabbing a lit torch from a wall sconce, headed toward the din of battle, which seemed to have moved further into the heart of the shrine. But before he'd made it two paces forward, his heart jumped into his throat as he unexpectedly found himself tilting backward, totally off balance. His ankle had been seized by somebody's powerful grasp, his leg pulled out from under him, and he fell hard onto the stone floor, dropping his torch.

Fallen, Lethe was straddled by a large, bearded, wild-eyed man, wearing battle-worn chain armor, who punched him repeatedly in the chest with wild, frenzied blows. Luckily, he'd managed to hold tight to his spiked club and so brought it up with an arching blow aimed to the side of the man's skull, but the assailant sensed the shift beneath him and tumbled off before getting brained. Then, the man got to his knees and grabbed the torch from the ground.

"What are you here for?" gasped Lethe, rising to his feet while wielding his club defensively.

"You are to be executed on grounds of sedition against our god" growled the man and lunged to attack with the burning torch. Lethe sidestepped the attack, pivoting on one foot, and struck the man on his back with his club. The man fell forward with a yell of pain, but rolled with the impact, his armor preventing penetration of the spikes, and twisted to avoid landing on the torch. He ended up on his back.

"Who am I?" asked Lethe flatly, standing back.

"An idiot!" retorted the man, dropping the torch and rising to his feet.

Lethe lowered his weapon slightly. "Who am I that I must be murdered?" he asked again in desperation.

The iris's of the man's dark, deep-set eyes flashed azure as he intoned a word of power—a rod of force resembling brightly glowing electrum sprang into existence in his right hand, as thin as a willow wand. "My lord Vidar guide my hand," he murmured, stepping forward to attack.

The glowing rod was brought down with devastating force, breaking Lethe's interposing club in half, forcing him backward. A second blow broke Lethe's arm and forced him to the ground. The man then stepped forward and stamped on his broken arm at the joint, crushing his elbow with iron-shod boots. Lethe cried out, feeling his bones crack asunder.

"First I destroy the traitorous arm that would strike at his own brethren," laughed the man with murderous relish, "then I crush the sinister hand that would cut our throats in our sleep!" Lethe screamed as his exposed hand was whacked hard with the glowing electrum rod, breaking every bone.

"Ludwig," called a deeply resonant and commanding voice from behind Lethe's prone body. A warm golden light filled the hall, making the man wielding the glowing rod resemble a bronze statue of some madman, his black knotted hair wildly unkempt, blood and thorns covering his armor and wreathed in vines. He stepped back from Lethe's crumbled form, regarding the supernatural presence with awe, and willed his magic weapon to blink out of existence.

"Protector, I have found the traitor. . . his death won't be so short lived this time," panted Ludwig.

"I will not protect you now," chastised the presence. "You have attacked wrongfully a priestess of Jord, who is first wife of Odin, mother of Thor. Deal with this now on your own, for your lord does not assist the ignorant, even if one acts out of fervent faith."

While the supernatural presence spoke to his assailer, Lethe hurriedly removed the healing cloth from out of his robe, wrapped it around his broken hand, and then his arm, the whole while remaining silent, shutting his eyes and clenching his teeth to bare the pain as the bones in his hand and arm quickly reknit.

The presence vanished, leaving the two only in flickering torchlight.



As the man whose name was apparently Ludwig stood in shocked silence, Lethe tightened the cloth around his fist and sprang up from the ground, striking the man full in the jaw with every ounce of strength he had left. The man fell hard, his jaw broken, howling in pain.

No time to waste. Lethe turned and ran through the closest door as fast as he could; though a refectory with smashed and overturned tables, past halls overgrown with thorny foliage and vines, hurtling through several wooden doors hanging half off their hinges, until he burst out into daylight, following an arched way along the inside wall with a columned opening along one side which lead to a wide courtyard.

The courtyard was alive; a mass of writhing, probing green tendrils. Pale, terrified men in full plate armor were constricted by vines, some of them pressed to the trunks of large hawthorn and black locust trees, others held face down by massive tree limbs, suffocating in the dirt. Two fully harnessed charges stood by the outer stone wall of the courtyard, snorting fearfully, shying away from the apparently sentient and hostile plant life. A single wooden gate leading to verdant, hilly countryside stood wide open in the outer wall, its locking bar sundered.

Lethe walked cautiously forward on a cobblestone path, smelling sweat and blood in the air, winding his way through the center of the courtyard, stepping through patches of witch grass, flowering moss, ivy, creeper vines, and ground pine. The flora moved away from him as he approached with an eerie rustling, apparently sensing his innocuousness. In the center of the courtyard was a clearing in which stood a monument of megaliths, arranged in a circle and surrounding a mound of verdant earth . . . on which the old woman Riona was prone. Her dark green frock was soaked with blood, her hair as untamed and tangled as the surrounding foliage, but she held up her head and watched Lethe come forward with glazed eyes.

"Fetch my cane, young man," she snapped in a hoarse voice, nodding her head in the direction of her applewood cane, which had fallen to the side of the mount during conflict. "The spirit has gone, so I must rely on mortal means."

Lethe picked up the cane and placed it in her gnarled hand, also aiding her as she struggled to rise. "Are you sure you ought to stand?" he asked as she rose unsteadily to her feet; it looked as if she had lost

quite a bit of blood. She stumbled as if in answer, sliding down onto her hip, but Lethe caught her fall. "The cloth," he muttered, unwrapping said item from his hand and presenting it to Riona.

"Its magic is spent," she said, tossing the cloth on the ground.

"So what do you need?" asked Lethe, frustrated.

"I need you to go and find Lydia, and quickly" said Riona. "She escaped the initial assault on the shrine, but I don't know if she is being pursued."

"She could be anywhere!" exclaimed Lethe.

Riona shut her eyes, wincing in pain, and settled into an awkward seated position, hanging onto her cane like a puppet with several supporting strings cut. "No . . . probably down to the west of here, past Hawk's Cliff. There are two old cottagers who live down in those woods. They've been kind enough to hunt for us while we've watched you here. Their names are Emma and George. You should go there, find them."

"You'll die here," admonished Lethe, "you shouldn't stay—"

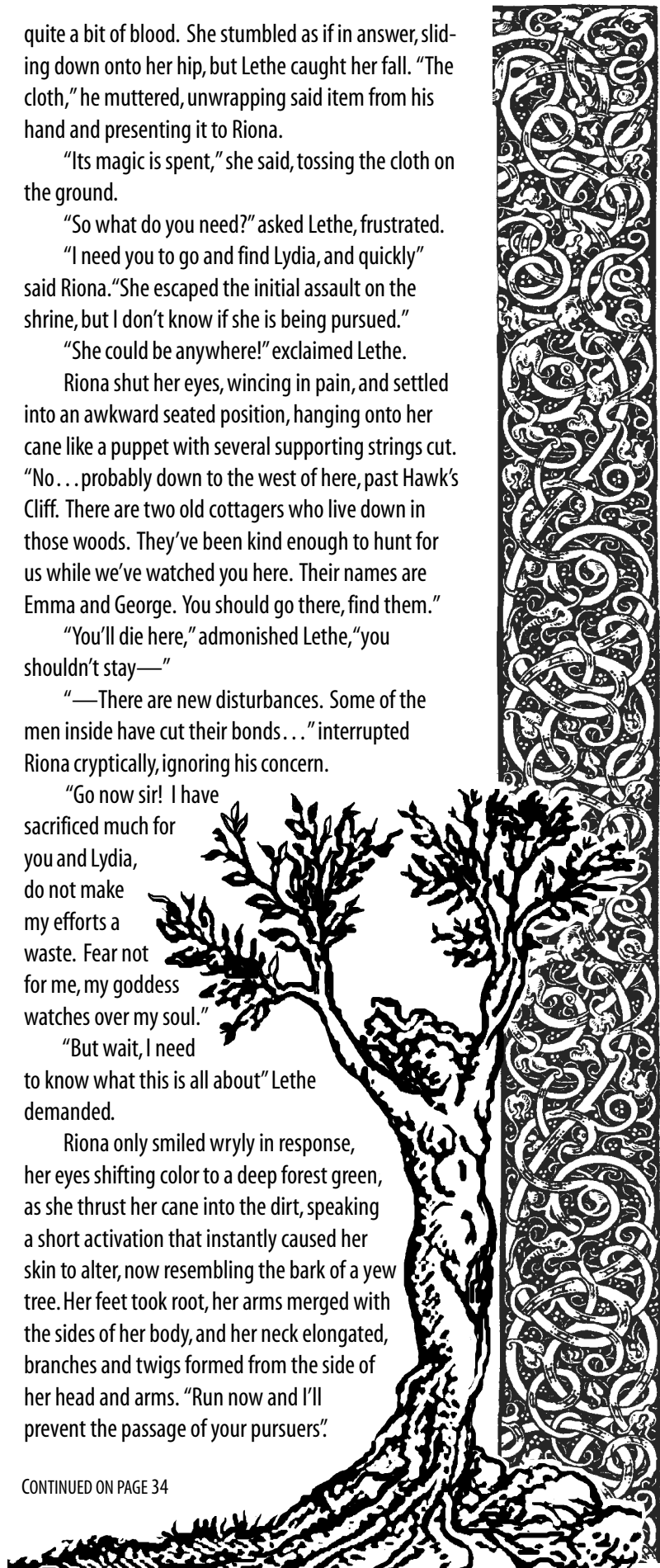
"—There are new disturbances. Some of the men inside have cut their bonds . . ." interrupted Riona cryptically, ignoring his concern.

"Go now sir! I have sacrificed much for you and Lydia, do not make my efforts a waste. Fear not for me, my goddess watches over my soul."

"But wait, I need to know what this is all about" Lethe demanded.

Riona only smiled wryly in response, her eyes shifting color to a deep forest green, as she thrust her cane into the dirt, speaking a short activation that instantly caused her skin to alter, now resembling the bark of a yew tree. Her feet took root, her arms merged with the sides of her body, and her neck elongated, branches and twigs formed from the side of her head and arms. "Run now and I'll prevent the passage of your pursuers."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



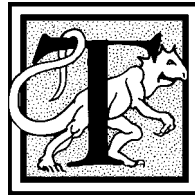
# MIMIR'S WELL

**ROBERT J. KUNTZ**  
WAS THE CO-DM OF THE  
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CAMPAIGN WITH GARY  
GYGAX (ROUGHLY 1973-  
1986). ROB HAS  
WRITTEN SEVERAL  
ARTICLES ON THE  
SUBJECT OF GREYHAWK  
AND OF GAMING IN  
GENERAL. KUNTZ LIVES  
IN WISCONSIN.

## Games As Fun?



### IMAGINE THIS...



he first day you discovered games. Really discovered them. Like: Wow, this stuff is great! Where can I get a copy? Remember that day? You were hooked. There was a feeling of never ever having been there before and an equal feeling of wanting to find that road again. To walk, nope, run along it pell-mell.

You couldn't wait, remember?

### NOW IMAGINE THIS...

The first day you discovered a Fantasy Role Playing Game (FRPG). It was like someone had let the floodgates loose, right? So much at once and not enough at the same time. And as a new participant it was all strange but exciting. There were hints of dragons, treasures and undiscovered lands. Strange places where you could roam, where your imagination was to be given a range of expression. Someone was asking for your input instead of you just rolling dice and moving about a track! How wonderful! Then they plopped lots of rules down and you remember groaning...but it was just so strange and wonderful that you continued despite the numerous rules (which you learned to choose from, condense, or change to your liking, anyway, god bless those designers with foresight).

### NOW, LET US PROCEED WITH A SURMISE...

You stare at a game-store's shelf replete with myriad choices of games to purchase. What you want is condensed fun in FRPG form. It must come with minimal instructions, allow you to provide the additives, such as using your imagination to add to it and learn and enjoy as you interface with its rules set. The learning curve must be simple but have breadth. The only obstacle would be in finding other fellows who want to enjoy a simple game like you do. It sounds too good, you say? Why yes, it is; but that's what a good RPG is all about isn't it? Simple, unadulterated, fun in a style reminiscent of the days of FRPGs in all its golden glory.

### LET US REWIND A BIT...

Before there were massive rules sets to define the military actions of regimental-sized combats, a fellow by the name of H. G. Wells created a simplistic game called "Little Wars". I had a chance to play LW at a convention one year, and oh boy, was it fun! Toothpicks shot from spring-loaded cannons! It took me back to my days of youth, which some say we cannot recapture. While some games today have progressed beyond this point and have matured the hobby, some others have also mutated the idea of a game, and thus gaming, into drudgery. Somewhere in between games being too simple (rock-paper-scissors) or ultra-complex (insert your War and Peace-sized game here) is where the maximum "fun factor" lies, hidden like a treasure waiting to be discovered and enjoyed by all.

Some folks might challenge the idea that in keeping a game simple—

"it was just  
so strange  
and wonder-  
ful that you  
continued"

"hidden like  
a treasure  
and waiting  
to be  
discovered"

especially an RPG—that you maximize its fun factor. But in the realm of FRPG, imagination is King. Without it there is no game, notwithstanding the rules used. FRP games are only as good as the people who play them. Then too those same players are only as good as their expressed imaginations. No rulebook can cover everything in life, and thus we find this constant reflected in the earliest and most successful FRP games. If there was a rule for everything in such games for your imagination, then we would soon find less reason to participate in the game, less incentive to find our own creative range, and we would certainly derive less enchantment from the experience. The very things we wish to cultivate would thus be driven from us or voided.

In other words, RPG rules should guide only. Participants should ultimately decide on direction, intensity and types of rules to be utilized. Some are basic, the types you need to actually play the game in its most simplistic and skeletonized form. Beyond that you have the additives which allow for everyone involved in its ongoing process to use to their liking. This is the base idea on which our industry was built and which Gary Gygax promulgated in his earliest written works. Simple. Fun. Mutable. This core idea has lost none of its former potency or flavor, but is in fact beginning to resurface in many games, such as in TLG's forthcoming Castles & Crusades.

### BACK TO THE PRESENT...

Many designers today, like myself, have to take hard looks at their proposed works while answering base questions every time: Is what I'm writing/designing going to be fun to play? What is the learning curve for the players? How is it different or better? Moreover, does it remain a game or just a bunch of rules piled on top of each other? These are games, not realistic portrayals or some new form of art. These are fun-filled escapades into the imaginations of those playing them. So, yes, they must contain guidelines which help us on our way to enjoy and participate in a process, but these should not limit the range of each player's imaginative expression.

That's where enchantment roots and is expressed through participating in the story, not in some dice roll which is only the tool of the player for determining outcomes during that process. Likewise each game designer is faced with avoiding endless details or page upon page of litanous description which ultimately bores the participants. We must always remember that we escape the real world for that dose of enchantment for the time in which we are playing. Does the game then present roads easily taken to find the fun, the enchantment, or are there unnecessary hurdles involved?

### KISS

"Keep it Simple Stupid." An old saying, but one which should be remembered by game designers and GMs. Finding this balance is a chore. It's an adventure in itself. But we have indicators, and they face us during play each and every time—the players. I'll guarantee that your players are having fun if they're working their imaginations as opposed to endlessly rolling dice and moving about the "track" of the game. It'll be revealed in their looks, by their excited interjections and by their intensities. It can be described as being enchanted, but in the end, it's just a whole barrel o' fun.

"Imagination is King..."

"This is the base idea on which our industry is built.. Simple. Fun. Mutable."

"we escape the real world for that dose of enchantment."



“feel,” all the while keeping core design elements in place. We managed. Against all odds, we managed—and are still managing.

So how did it all end up? If you are reading this, you likely have the rules in hand, or are a member of the society and essentially know the results. Without laboring over details and encumbering the reader with too many specifics, I am going to lay out the core elements of the game.

The game is old school. What is old school? I am not sure I can describe it, but I know it when I see it and this game has it. It is open, unbounded by internal traditions, malleable and offers a great degree of interpretive license if that is being sought. The game shifts from a player or a rules-generated focus back to a game masters' story telling focus. Though a nebulous concept, the latter is one of the most important aspects of Old School gaming. The game master, the person running the game, has a great deal of responsibility and power to influence the game.

The game is malleable. The 'rules set' has been treated and textured to not only allow amending, additions, changes, interpretations and bending but, actually encourages it. Each game group is unique, requiring different things from their game. We designed the rules such that many portions can be dropped, or amended so that each 'rules set' used by each gaming group is unique, better reflecting their needs in a game—not mine.

The classes have returned as true archetypes. They have sets of abilities and/or skills which they can use. Each class is quite unique and manages to focus on the literary or theatrical archetype rather than some perceived metagaming necessity. Through this, we have attempted to bring back a focus on character development through narrative rather than rules. The game focuses the character, through its class, to remain true to its nature and intent rather than as a vehicle for simply overcoming the numerous problems and adversaries in the gaming environment.

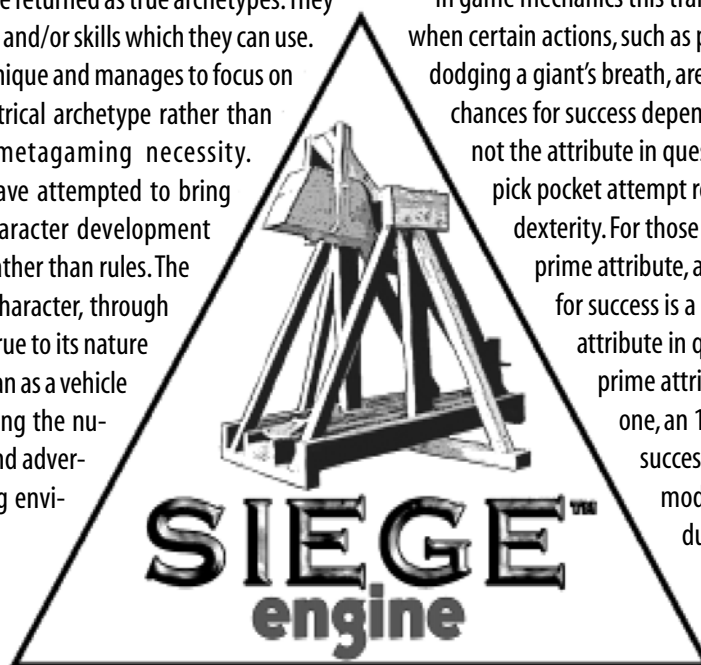
The races are more traditional and driven by

pre-game literature rather than the internally generated traditions of the game which have developed in the past twenty years. For inspiration, we turned to Tolkien and Howard, and a host of other authors that pre-dated and informed the game's fantastical foundations. An elf is indeed an elf and a halfling will be recognized by all for what it is. Each race is imbued with its unique powers and clearly separated from the rest by those powers.

As for the rules, for the most part, they will not be unfamiliar to veteran gamers. Armor class, hit points, to-hit rolls, the basic d20 mechanic, etc., have all remained a part of the game. In essence they function as they always have. The new rules, those rules that have allowed us to expand the game and make it unique unto itself, creating an environment for infinite variation, can all be boiled down to two concepts: prime attributes and the underlying game mechanic driving them.

The underlying structure of *Castles & Crusades*<sup>™</sup> rests upon the prime attributes. This is a new concept for The Game but a simple extraction from one its core concepts – attributes and training improve a character's ability to perform certain actions. A prime attribute is an attribute with which the character is better trained or more experienced in using. Hence, when performing an action that is dependent upon the prime attribute, that character has a greater chance of doing so successfully than a character who is not.

In game mechanics this translates into a d20 roll when certain actions, such as picking a pocket or dodging a giant's breath, are called for. The chances for success depend upon whether or not the attribute in question is being used. A pick pocket attempt requires the use of dexterity. For those actions which use a prime attribute, all the player must roll for success is a 12 or better. If the attribute in question is not a prime attribute but a secondary one, an 18 or better indicates success. Of course, there are modifications to the roll due to level, ability, race, circumstances and other factors. But essentially,





that is it. This mechanic is called the SIEGE Engine™ and is used for resolving many actions in *Castles & Crusades*™.

Other than these simple rules, much else in *Castles & Crusades*™ will appear familiar to any gamer. For combat, a d20 is rolled, various modifiers are added or subtracted from the roll, and if the result is greater than the armor class of the monster being struck, a hit is scored. Attribute scores are generated by rolling 3d6 and adding the results. This is done for each of the six attributes. Attribute scores have related modifiers such that the higher the attribute, the higher the modification to die rolls associated with that attribute. All very familiar to the experienced player.

Yet, the game is designed for new players as well. The simplicity of the rules, the ease of learning and the openness of the rules set all combine to make an easy to learn, fast playing, exciting role playing game reminiscent of those games of yore.

All this in only 128 pages. The final prerequisite in the design was getting all the rules into a single book so that one did not have to lug around tome upon tome just to play a role playing game. It's a game of high adventure after all. In those measly 128 pages we have included all the rules necessary for character creation, combat, spell casting, a mechanic for resolving specific as well as undefined actions and monsters with a sprinkling of treasures. All this in one book.

I am happy with the result; exceedingly so. The playtests and convention games have been going well. Many old hands and grognards enjoy playing the game, and a significant number of newcomers to roleplaying games are picking up *Castles & Crusades*™ and giving the game a chance. We like that.

I would be remiss if I did not offer a sincere and deep thanks to all the members of the Castle and Crusade Society who helped bring this project to fruition. Without them, without their experience, without their aid, enthusiasm, advice and understanding, this game would likely never have been produced. They have been of inestimable value in the creation of the rules and directing the game toward the fantastic form it's in today. I hope that they are enjoying the product of their labor as much as I am.



Davis Chenault, 2004

"See and believe," droned the wizard. "Man must believe to accomplish. Form is shadow, substance is illusion, materiality is dream; man is because he believes he is ... Yet man can be that which he wishes to be ... See and believe, if you would accomplish ..." (Howard, 152).

Howard was not an unthinking man and a closer look, with eyes less hindered by personal goals, realizes this quite readily.

Robert E. Howard did not achieve in his lifetime the standing which lesser writers have achieved today. He never broke out of the Pulp fiction market. He did, however, have a collection of stories in the works for publication as a book, interestingly enough they were not Conan tales, but rather a collection of humorous westerns loosely linked together. It has been argued that he failed to gain a wider audience because the bulk of his material was never fully developed. This may be the case, however, the strength and fluidity of his prose, and poetry, recognized universally by both fans and critics, is more than enough to guarantee Howard's standing in the literary community. I would contend that economic necessity above all else kept him in the pulp market. There were no paper back books when he was writing and he had only recourse to those markets which were paying. Also worth considering is Howard's education. He never took any writing courses, nor studied creative writing, nor read books on the subject. He wrote and he wrote a great deal. And lastly, of course, his death at the age of 30.

From de Camp's and Carter's interpretation in the 1960's to the present the misinterpretation of Howard continues, snowballing way beyond the original impetus which drove Howard so hard. Books, magazines, comic books, movies and even Saturday morning cartoons have all done their part in bringing Conan, and subsequently Howard, away from their origins and furthermore forcing the bulk of Howard's literary output into almost complete obscurity. Conan is, in short, marketable despite the fact that Howard had left off writing about the character because he felt that the barbarian no longer spoke to him.

Even so we find him in the *Savage Sword Tales* fighting miscast villains from the Marvel universe, all but forgetting the ancient and sometimes sinister apparitions which haunt the original Conan in places like the "Tower of the Elephant." On Saturday mornings we can see him, weaponless with the life philosophy of a renaissance man guiding several orphans through life's travails, forgetting the barbarian triumphant who says "I know not, nor do I care. Let me live deep while I live; let me know the rich juices of red meat and stinging wine on my palate ... the mad exultation of battle when blue blades flame crimson, and I am content." And in the comics we alternately find him in the company of a roving band of super-heroes decked out like the X-men or as a blood thirsty gladiator destroying everything which is alive.

The evolution of Howard's brawny barbarian has become altogether convoluted. What to Howard was the quintessential primitive who used his animal cunning and savage strength to survive on the margins of civilization has become a marketing tool for less creative writers. Writers whose views of the world are in no way similar to that portrayed by the original creature, Conan, nor by his original creator, nor by the whole host of his forgotten creations. Like Conan, and Kull, and Elkins Breckinridge, Howard was not superman or even a super hero, but rather a man of resolute action.



# THE GOOD OLD DAYS...

Text, Editorial and Cartoon by TOM WHAM

ONLY 7 MONTHS  
& 25 YEARS AGO



**EDITORIAL CUTS!  
ROUGH ON ELVES!**



The following originally appeared in the July, 1980 TSR company newsletter, *RANDOM EVENTS*. So it has actually been seen by only about 80 people. GEN CON had just been made a department, headed up by Joe Orlovski and assisted by Skip Williams and Jeff "Duck" Leason.

"TSR Hobbies and Dragon Publishing were both represented in force at Origins '80, held at Widener University in Chester, PA, the last Weekend in June. Will & Schar Niebling, Jeff Leason, Don Snow, Dave Cook, Al Hammack, and Ollie Cahoon traded off between running tournaments and manning (personing?) the Hobbies booth, while right next door, the DP crew of Jake Jaquet, Kim Mohan, and Bryce Knorr were busily selling magazines..."

Meanwhile...

"TSR president Gary Gygax and chairman of the board, Brian Blume are in sunny/smoggy Los Angeles as you read this, negotiating with Mattel Electronics, Inc., about the production of a hand-held electronic D & D game..."

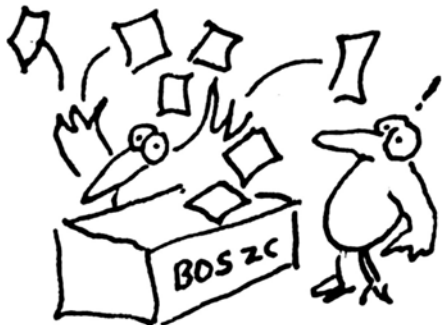
**Ahh, those were the days...**



## UPSTAIRZ

BY U. NKNOWN

TAKE DIS MANNISKRIP  
OF MINE TO DA  
BOSZCZ



HE LIKES  
THE TITLE



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THE THEURGIST'S LETHE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

"Who am I running from?" yelled Lethe, kicking up dirt.

"You run from yourself, now GO!" Riona's voice sounded through the rustling of the leaves, in the wind, causing the ground of the courtyard to tremble, cutting through the air like a force of nature.

So Lethe ran, taking the horse at the gate as his own, then raced away on horseback with his shadow ahead of him, headed due west toward the woods of uncertainty, in metaphor and in fact.

To Be Continued...



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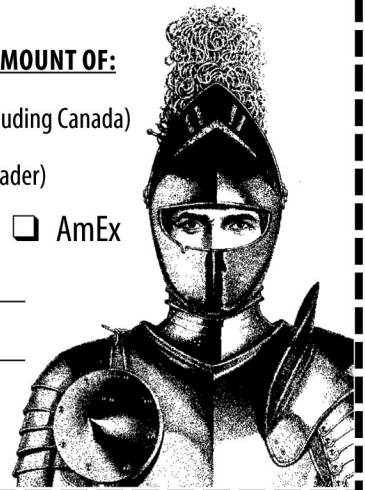
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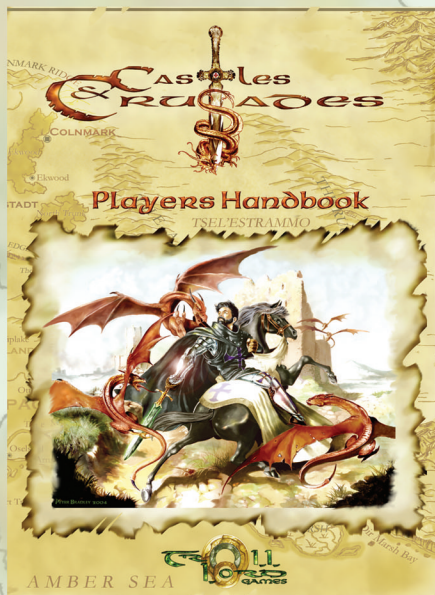
## DON'T MISS OUR NEXT ISSUE!

**The subject of our next issue is ELVES—their mythological origins, literary interpretation, how to play and how to fit them into your game! Also, if you are partial to elves, you'll love Peter Bradley's cover art! Stephen Chenault also offers a fictional story about an elf.**

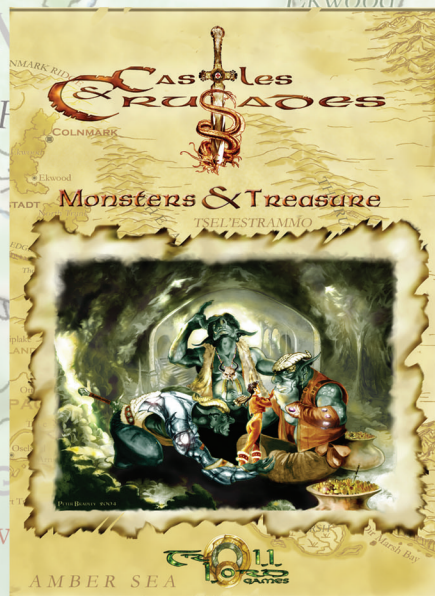
**CRUSADER COLUMNS:** Gary Gygax finally recounts how "it" all started. **The Tinker** column by Josh Chewing investigates what game design is all about. Mike Stewart provides stats regarding the wear and tear of Medieval Armor; Casey Canfield offers his wisdom on gaming etiquette; Rob Kuntz compares the "Old School" gaming with "New School." Also, in **Historical Footnotes** the history of the Long Bow and the Cross Bow is addressed.

**ART & FICTION:** David Sutherland III is honored by Paul Stromberg as "A Great Man." DARLENE shares images from her old sketchbooks and the fascinating stories behind them. Davis Chenault offers readers his **Frankenburr and the Crack Parade**. And don't miss the next installment of **The Theurgist's Lethe** by Dan Cross!

# Castles & Crusades



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