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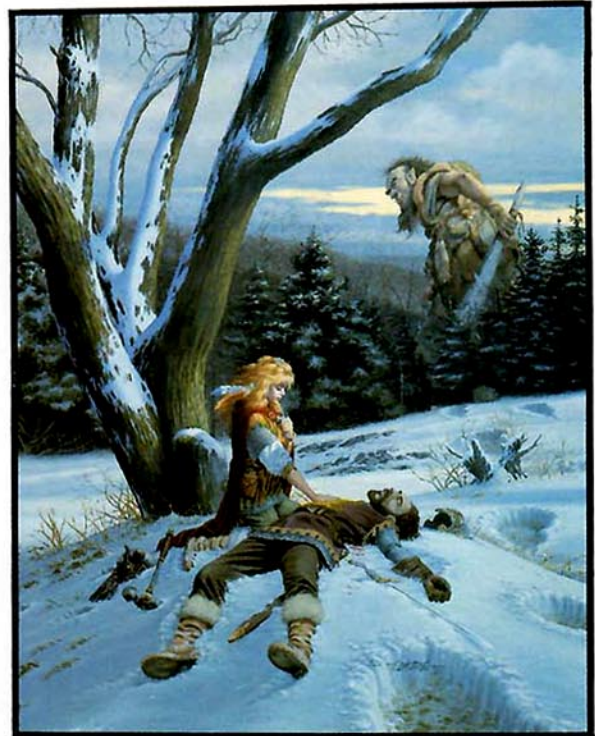


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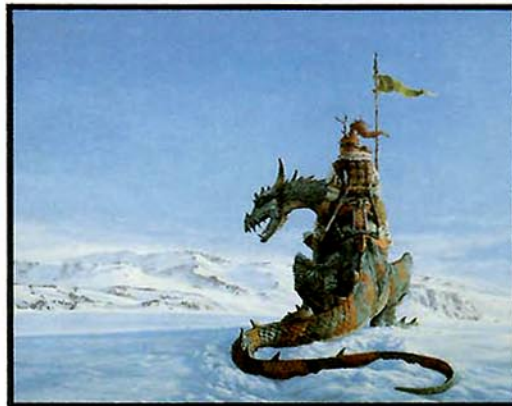
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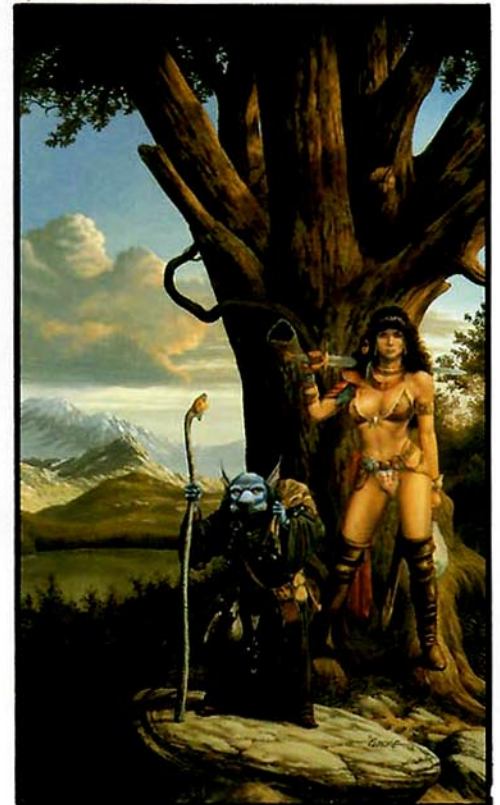
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Good Morrow!

Welcome to this, our thirteenth and most special issue! *Gateways Magazine*, devoted to role-playing games, genre fiction and storytelling of all kinds, is proud to present its first issue devoted entirely to Fantasy in all of its facets and glories. And how better to convey just that, than by reuniting the current dream team of heroic fantasy — scribes Tracy Hickman, Margaret Weis, and artist extraordinaire, Larry Elmore!

This issue's stunning cover, *Challenge of the Gateway*, was commissioned from Elmore himself by GPI. Those of you interested in Elmore's work, or in a career in painting, are sure to find Jape Trostle's lengthy interview with him most fascinating.

How do you tell two of the hottest fantasy authors what to write for your humble periodical? Well, you tell them to write anything they like! The results? *Raistlin* fans are in for a special treat from Margaret Weis, and Tracy Hickman follows last issue's *When Make Believe Hurts* with some grown up views on the morality of role-playing games. Both articles are sure to provoke lively response.

Gateways does not often run full-length game scenarios, but Lion Rampant's presentation of *Faerie Tale* was too hard to resist. The story of a confrontation between Night and Day, this easily adaptable adventure is as exciting as it is beautiful.

Finally, the First Lady of Dragons, Anne McCaffrey, has been so kind as to offer *Gateways* a rare, exclusive glimpse into her life and her work. Bill Fawcett also brings us a sneak preview of next fall's *The Dragonlover's Guide to Pern*, which includes an original McCaffrey account of the events leading up to a hatching.

All this and AD&D II! Enjoy!

Alan J. Berkson
Assistant Publisher

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Howling At The Moon

GATEWAYS Magazine strongly welcomes your comments and suggestions. *Howling At The Moon* is your regular forum for opinions, debates, discussions, cries and whispers. If you have something to tell us or to tell your fellow gamers, write to: *Howling At The Moon*, Gateways Publications Inc. JAF Box 965, New York, N.Y. 10116



Dear Gateways:

I just finished reading my copy of *Gateways* #11, and I found it to be excellent! Cyberpunk is one of my favorite genres, and is currently a popular game in my area. I enjoyed your coverage of cyberpunk; however (there's always one, isn't there?) there are a couple of points which I feel moved to comment on.

Ian Harac's article "Jacking Into Cyberpunk" provided both a thorough review of the game and a thoughtful analysis of the genre itself. However, Mr. Harac neglected to mention one of the most important elements of cyberpunk; that is, style. True, the cyberpunk world is depressing and nasty, but the razor-sharp, laser-quick beauty comes from humanity's continual efforts to make their rotten world more attractive. Style and flair are essential. As the game says, "It's not what you do, but how you look doing it." Plenty of cybermods exist for purely cosmetic purposes. One of the most important stats in *Cyberpunk* is Cool; not just used for keeping in shape under fire, Cool provides the basis for status, power, and interactions with the rest of the world. One of the most frequent types of combat is not with guns and lasers, but with Cool and cosmetics. A pair of Fujimoto silver-tone eyes can be even more impressive than a smartgun.

I was also disappointed with "A Spark in the Darkness", Alan Berkson's interview with Mike Pondsmith. After getting a brief glimpse and a short conversation with Mr. Pondsmith at Gen Con, I was eager to get more insights into *Cyberpunk* and other projects Mr. Pondsmith is working on. Instead, most of the interview is spent chivvying Mr. Pondsmith into giving a "Just Say No" lecture. Yes, drugs are a serious problem in our society, and yes, it is important to remind gamers that *Cyberpunk* does not promote drug abuse. As even a casual glance at the game shows, drugs are designed to be addictive and deadly, not to mention expen-

continued on page 4

GPI Presents:

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Corrections: "Ral Partha Surfs the Sea of Lost Souls", artwork appearing in *Gateways* #12 was done by Doug Mize, not Dennis. Rick Celano's studio is called "Strange Productions".

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COVER: "Challenge for the Gateway"
COVER ARTIST: Larry Elmore

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From The Tower

We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal...

What a daring thing to say. Given the time and the political temperament of the world, what an absolutely audacious thing to claim.

That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...

Until that time, life and liberty were generally simple abstracts which governments could, indeed, endow or revoke with ease. And happiness? Never before had a document purported to guarantee the right to try and make yourself happy. The very notion of a common man (or woman) having the right to be as happy as they could make themselves was a startling and almost frightening thing to say — at that time. We like to think that we've come far since then. Keep these ideas in mind, we'll get back to them in a moment.

Way back at the start of the film industry, there was a style of business called the *Studio System*. Under that system, actors and actresses were thought to be "owned" by a particular studio, and often legally forbidden to work at another one. Thousands of eager, inexperienced, but talented artists flocked to Hollywood to be in show business, and thousands of them unwittingly signed contracts which literally made them indentured to the studio where they first worked. Film lore is full of horror stories of studios keeping big name stars in reserve, not allowing them to take roles in pictures they were interested in. A studio could ruin an actor simply by not giving him work. It was a dark time for the movie industry, and today's stars, with their rights to videotape sales, options to direct, and freedom to work wherever and for whomever they choose, are no doubt glad that they don't have to put up with such an unfair system.

Many years ago, in the comic industry, there was a system that was called "*Work For Hire*". Work for hire was just that — you showed up for work, did what you were supposed to do, and got paid for it. Factory work. In the early comic book industry, however, there was much more to "work" than putting machinery together. Artists and writers created original heroes, villains and stories. They breathed life into characters who would become icons of popular culture. They churned out page after page after page of artwork, dialogue, and plot, and took home their weekly paycheck. They even felt good about getting it. Having a job drawing "funny books" and getting regular money for it must have been seen as a pretty good racket back then.

Unfortunately, even as folks began collecting comics, and buying them in the hundreds of thousands, the industry still did not abandon the work for hire system. The movie industry had to, because what they were doing amounted to illegal business practices. In America, no man or company may own a person's ideas. Or so it was understood.

But it wasn't understood by the comic book industry, and it still is being fought today. Some comic companies have leadership that has read the **Bill of Rights**, and allow the creators of original work to own it, and to profit from its popularity. Others have certain publishing groups under the main house name, where they offer similar rights. Still others are operating in the equivocal of the Dark Ages.

Last November, a distinguished group of artists and writers met, and discussed the state of the industry. No, they did more than discuss. They drafted a **Bill of Rights for Comics Creators**. Here are a few of their ideas.

That each comics creator has:

The right to full ownership of what we fully create.

The right to full control over the execution of that which we fully own.

The right to prompt payment of a fair and equitable share of profits derived from all of our creative work.

The right to full control over the licensing of our creative property... and so on.

At first glance, these rights would seem rather basic. Almost self-evident, in fact. They are not.

So, when artists who have worked for one company loyally for 30 years have to sue for the return of their original art, when writers have to watch as their characters are taken over by other people on the marketing decisions or whims of company management, and when creators are forbidden to utilize what they have created, it just goes to show you that we haven't come as far as we sometimes think.

Although most Gateways readers don't have to worry about these "industry problems" right now, perhaps it's time to take a hard look at what's going on around us. After all, every inhabitant of the thirteen colonies didn't get together to write that little document I quoted at the start of this column. But their descendants take it for granted. Let's work together to make Creator's Rights a reality, so future creators can do what they do best and reap the rewards of their art. We need to make these simple rights something we can all take for granted. Why?

Because, in the gaming industry, as well as the comic industry, there's a practice called "Work for hire".

Remember that this in itself is not a bad practice. In young industries, it is the norm. But the gaming industry is growing up, even faster than the comic industry did. In fact, many creators cross over between the two industries, working on comics and games together. With so many bright, talented creators out there, both industries can only gain by allowing these people to do what they do best.

Well, having said my daring and audacious words for the day, I take my leave of you. I usually type my name at the end of the column, but today, I feel compelled to sign it. As large as I can.



Sandra Antonioni

Executive Editor

Howling, cont'd from pg. 2

sive and not worth the trouble: "Just like in real life," adds the writer. There was no need to waste space endlessly repeating the anti-drug message. While I had anticipated an in-depth interview, I was slapped with repeated themes on a message I heard very clearly the first time.

Anyway, I enjoyed the issue overall. Keep up the good work. I applaud your efforts to fight drug abuse (the ad on page 59 was excellent) but, please, don't start a trend of turning every article into a redundant group of pleas.

Sincerely,
Laurel Goulding
Ann Arbor, MI

Ed. reply: Thank you, Ms. Goulding, for your thoughtful letter. You bring up an important point which I would like to address. We knew when we began our coverage of cyberpunk that we would run into a problem with one of the more realistic and frightening aspects of that genre, the use of addictive substances, legal within the tale or not. If we were discussing the cyberpunk books and movies alone, we would have given the topic no more than the casual glance any thinking person might grant. After all, we, and we suspect, most of our readers, know that the use of addictive drugs is dangerous.

But there is an unfortunate and sometimes hysterical attitude which many uninformed people take when they look at role-playing games. Unlike other, more wide-spread forms of entertainment, RPGs are often accused of encouraging the behavior of the players by instructing them in activities their characters might get involved in during the game. Again, we know better.

But our circulation takes us into the hands of many people who are new to RPGs; we are not limited to the hobby industry alone. We have received many letters from young people who never heard of role-playing before they picked Gateways up at a comic book shop, and we have another pile of letters from parents who ask us what, exactly, an RPG is.

We tried to walk a fine line in our cyberpunk coverage, providing a look at the genre and two important games for the older or more experienced gamers, and a strong statement about what the games are not about for those new to either the style of writing or the rules of gaming. Still, we appreciate your comments. Please write again, and let us know how we're doing.

(No salutation)

"Zen and the Art of Idiots, or, Never Print Anything By Dolts Again"

Mr. Wujcik, I take exception to almost everything you said. 1) DEE-N-DEE - True, [it is] an out of date game, but I would not be able to be pissed off at you if it didn't exist. There would have been no RPGs period. 2) "Game Masters and Players no longer thought of miniatures as important." To name only one company, Games Workshop sells one million figures a month. 3) "Old Napalm's Dungeon" - The delusion of an 11 year-old mind. Most gamers grew up a long time ago. (Games like that) are only classics in the minds of Monty's everywhere.

I could go on, but lastly, for such an experienced gamer, how could you not know of the many randomness combat systems available? Nova Games' *Ace of Aces* and *Lost Worlds*, *Blitzkrieg*, by Avalon Hill, and the *Light-saber Duel Kit* by West End Games. There are more, but I want the pinhead to suffer.

Robert K. Peterson
Somerdale, NJ

Ed. reply: Mr. Preston, meet Mr. Winter.

Dear Gateways:

Erick Wujcik deserves a vicarious round of applause for his article, "Zen and the Art of Diceless Role-playing," in Gateways issue #12. It should be required reading for every game referee.

A slightly different approach is rule-less, rather than diceless role-playing. Many years ago we experimented with a game called simply "the Campaign." It had no rules whatsoever. Each player gave the referee a typed description of his character. There were no statistics, no classes, no skills. You described the character the way you would describe a real person. The referee created the adventure and adjudicated everything off the top of his head. If a character tried something that involved luck, the player rolled percentile dice. The referee interpreted the result; high numbers were good, low numbers were bad.

One of my most memorable role-playing experiences was the night Captain Kirk, a nudist druid, and a computer enhanced sociopath journeyed up the Amazon to knock out a neo-Nazi rocket base. I believe the dice were rolled three times.

This sort of game isn't for everyone (for starters, it requires a very talented referee), but I think it does a player good to look up occasionally and try something really different. We need to be reminded that the game is not about the dice or the rules, but the role-playing and the adventure.

Thanks for bringing out some fresh insights.
Sincerely,
Steve Winter
East Troy, WI

Ed. reply: Fresh? If you played that way "many years ago", and we played that way "a few years ago", we suppose that diceless and rule-less gaming isn't all that new. By the way — who did you play? The nudist, the sociopath, or the starship captain?

Dear Ms. Antoniou:

...I am sorry that I have not written Gateways before, but now I would like to comment on what a superior job you and your staff are doing. Gateways is a wonderful publication with a refreshing point of view. It never ceases to remind me why I became interested in gaming in the first place. It has successfully returned RPGing to fun instead of RULE-playing games. Thank you, and keep up the good work.

Sincerely yours,
Bill Smith,
North Bangor, NY

The Tome



The Master Villain creating a worthy arch-foe

M. Greg Gliedman

There exists in all genres that most rare of creatures — the master villain. He (or she) is someone of extraordinary abilities and intelligence; more than capable of defeating our heroes and often presenting a threat of global proportions. A villain, who upon the discovery of his presence in an affair, makes our ordinarily stalwart heroes feel a chill down their spine and wonder just when the inevitable confrontation will take place; asking in the back of their minds, "can I stop him this time?"

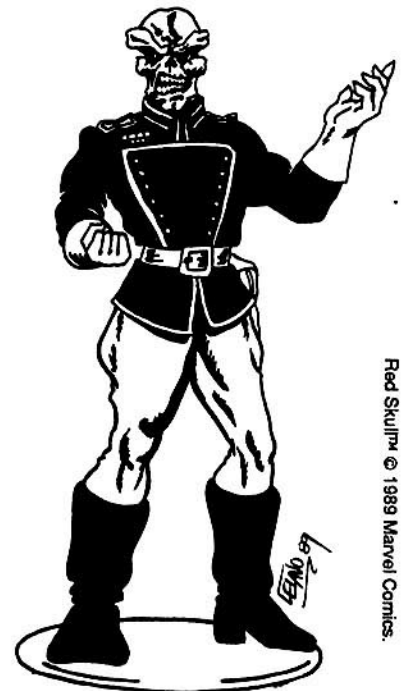
But how does one create a master villain? What differentiates between a master villain and one who presents a threat but is confidently met head on by the heroes? The first answer given would have to be power. A villain able to crush the hero like a grape certainly presents a threat. But where that is an important factor, often a master villain is not the most powerful villain a hero faces. There are numerous examples in comics of villains who possess tremendous power, but for one reason or another could not be considered master villains (both Juggernaut of the X-Men and Validus of the Legion of Super Heroes come to mind). Perhaps even more important than power is the intelligence of the opponent. It is very rare, in any type of fiction, for brawn to triumph over brains. One of the first true "superheroes", Heracles (Hercules to the Romans), was the premier physical specimen of his time. He was said to be as strong as the strongest gods, and he was without peer among mortals in combat. Yet this original superman did not only rely on strength. In fact, upon examination of his twelve labors, you will note an odd pattern: Virtually all of them require him to use his intelligence to outwit an opponent or solve a problem. His great strength is useless against the Hydra, for example, as the monster simply regenerates. Finally, he discovers its weakness to fire and

only then does he triumph. Nowhere does his legendary muscle come into play. Oddly enough, this myth reads very much like a comic story. Change the Hydra from a serpent to a super-villain and put Heracles in a skintight suit and the story of a seemingly undefeatable villain having his weakness discovered becomes all too familiar to longtime comic fans. (That's all right though; nothing was cliched in 1500 B.C.)

The most dangerous type of villain is one who can deal with the hero on an equal (or even more dangerous, superior) mental level, or, a villain who is just as likely to outwit the hero as the reverse. As powerful as a 400-foot tall lizard is, he is stupid and the players can trick him. A true test of a hero's mettle comes when he faces an opponent who cannot be tricked as easily. The best example of this is Captain America. He regularly fights and defeats opponents far more powerful than he is, but as soon as the Red Skull, a powerless older man appears, the readers know a real challenge is on the horizon. Note that intelligence is more than the ability to build a gadget. It is the ability to plan and to predict the actions of an opponent. A scientist who builds a battlechair (or something) and confronts the hero head on isn't showing intelligence, he is merely gifted. A truly intelligent villain seeks to avoid heroic interference; often, his or her plans are discovered by accident and in the "nick of time".

On the other hand, intelligence combined with power is a deadlier combination. A villain that schemes and anticipates the moves of his opponents, generally uses his or her head, and, can fight the heroes to a standoff or better is a force to be reckoned with. These villains are usually the most feared in a campaign, but it is important to remember not to let the villain get carried away by his combat abilities. If intelligence takes a back seat the criminal is no longer a master villain.

But it takes more than power and intelligence to make a master villain. Past these simple ingredients are other factors. The first is the reputation of the villain. More important than being dangerous and intelligent is the belief of the players that he is dangerous and intelligent. If your master villain is routinely stomped and hauled off to jail, he will not hold the respect of the heroes very long, regardless of how tough he is. The master villain must always be a tough fight every time he or she appears. Beating an arch-enemy should never be easy (that's what the "arch" stands for). Secondly, the plans of an arch-villain should be large in scope. A master villain whose grand plan is to "rob every 7-11



Red Skull™ © 1989 Marvel Comics.

in the state!" might be tough, intelligent and effective, but the scope of his crimes is relatively small. James Bond's opponents on the other hand, always have a very large operation. **Goldfinger** wanted to ruin the world's economy, **Drago** wanted to start a new super race — these guys meant business. This added a sense of urgency and importance to the films, which, in turn, made the adventures more exciting.

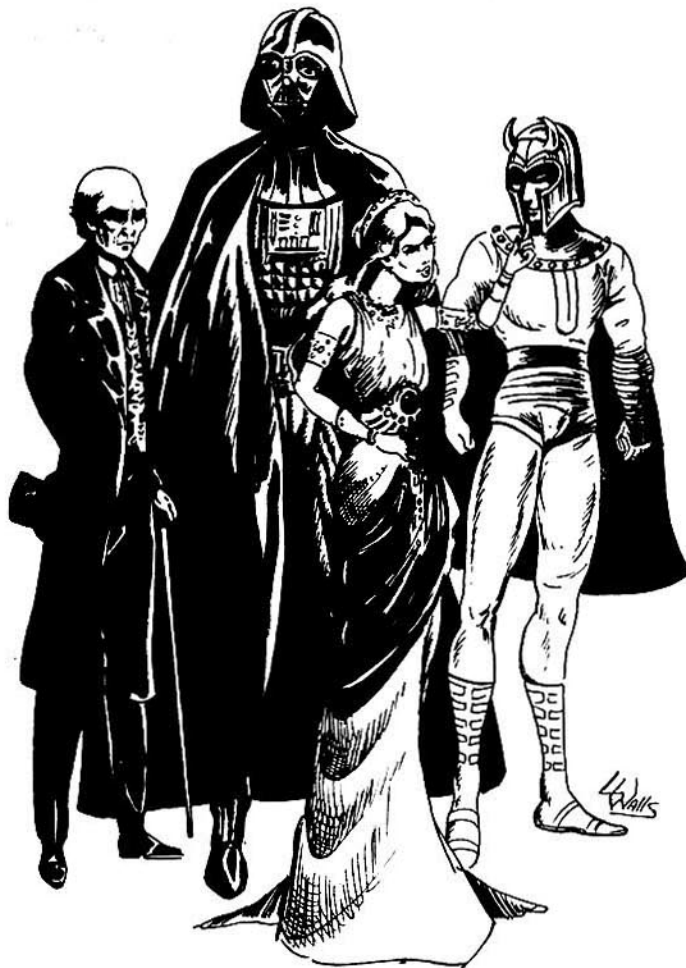
Third, the master villain in comics is rarely defeated. The outcome is usually a pyrrhic victory for the heroes. After battling hard, they narrowly prevent the master villain's grand scheme from succeeding, but the fiend behind it all escapes. The knowledge that the hero has never "really beat" the villain adds to the villain's rep. Giving the heroes the slip can come through a typical escape, diplomatic immunity, legal tricks at the trial — anything. But when the villain gets caught and stays caught, that should be an event. Make the escape match the genre; perhaps the villain is related to the hero and cannot be brought in without damaging the hero's reputation, or, perhaps the evidence isn't strong enough (two very common occurrences in the Arthurian tradition).

When dealing with differing genres, it should be noted that a villain or villain type who works in one may not work in another, and the ways they should be used vary as well. Fantasy villains, for example, have a tendency to die rather quickly (owing to the fatal nature of most games) and rarely do fantasy villains develop past the stage of being the malicious intelligence that lurks behind every event. While **Sauron**-like demigods are by no means unacceptable masterminds, do not let all your master villains in your **Fantasy Hero** or **Dungeons & Dragons**-type game be that way. By the same logic, don't make all your master villains fit into the typical "mold" for a genre (all espionage villains being cold, calculating, slightly insane megalomaniacs, for example).

An equally vital thing to make sure of is that the villain is special. If world threatening sagas are thrown out constantly, with a different mastermind behind each one, then the sagas and masterminds lose their effect. Having adventures where the scope is not quite so large and the oppo-

nent not quite as tough is necessary to reinforce the sense of urgency and uncertainty of a true saga. And while no adventure should be a cakewalk, there is nothing wrong with the occasional throwaway encounter where the player characters bump into **Slothman** making his escape from the scene of some crime. It is by contrasting the different villains that the mastermind becomes more dangerous. If **Ubermensch**, **Worldraver** and **Master Menace** are all your players face, they lose their effect; if you intersperse these encounters with slightly more mundane ones then the sagas increase in effect. I am not lobbying for stupid adventures, just less lethal and world threatening ones.

Another concept not used often enough is that of the "noble villain". These are characters that are pursuing what they perceive to be noble and beneficial goals — however these goals clash with a hero's ideals and beliefs. The noble villain perceives himself as a hero, albeit for a different side (and many others — including some of our heroes — might agree with him). The greatest example of this type of opponent is **Hector**, the Trojan Prince found in Homer's *Iliad*. Hector is on the "wrong" side, the people of his city having committed a greivous misdeed against the Greeks (in fact it is Hector's own brother who has provoked the war). Hector acknowledges the mistake his brother has made, yet even though he hates to fight, he rushes to the defense of his home city. Although to the Greeks he was an enemy, he was simply acting to defend his home



and family from invaders. In another life, perhaps the great Greek hero Achilles and Hector would have been comrades in arms and friends. As it happened, each proved responsible for the other's death.

The concept of a relationship between hero and villain, while often overdone (I was one of those who winced at the end of **Return of the Jedi** where we are informed that everyone is related), can be exploited quite effectively. When it comes to blood relations, an excellent example is the saga of **King Arthur**. Two of Arthur's greatest enemies were his relatives: his half sister, **Morgan LeFey** and **Mordred**, his illegitimate son. The result of these relationships was that Arthur, because of family loyalty, could never bring

Continued on page 70

In his first interview since leaving TSR, Larry Elmore, the fastest growing artist in the field of science fiction and fantasy illustration, talks to Jape Trostle about his views on his former employer, the Dragonlance Saga, the history of 20th Century Art, the future of Fantasy Illustration, and motorcycles.

Larry Elmore & the State of the Art

Jape Trostle

If you ask most people to list the best known fantasy artists, several names would be forthcoming. Frazetta. Boris. The Brothers Hildebrandt. Elmore.

Elmore?

If Larry Elmore continues on the path he is currently taking, he hopes his name will hold as much household recognition value as his aforementioned contemporaries. His colorful illustrations have graced the covers of best-selling novels, national magazines, and dozens of games and gaming products from TSR, and his name is already familiar to the large audiences which have enjoyed the Dragonlance Saga and the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing game.

While his reputation in the mainstream is growing, success has been long in coming for Elmore, and many times he's seemed to have succeeded in spite of himself. Born forty years ago in rural western Kentucky, he spent a majority of his life in and around Louisville. Though fairly unfamiliar with the art world, he liked to draw, developing enough of an interest in art to attend Western Kentucky University and study art education. Then, one day a professor who noticed Elmore's talent took him aside and convinced him that there was more to being an artist than just being an art teacher, and that he should concentrate on his talent. It was also during this time that he came across the first work of Frank Frazetta and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Graduating in 1970, his admission to the real world was derailed when he was drafted by the Army. He thought he was going to Viet Nam, but was instead assigned to Fort



HOW I LOOK AFTER WORKING ALL NIGHT TO MEET A DEADLINE... WHICH SEEMS TO BE MOST OF THE TIME!!

Knox, "just down the road." After the army assured him he would spend all two years of his enlistment in Kentucky, Larry went ahead and married long-time girlfriend Betty.

Almost immediately, he received his orders to transfer to Germany. For 14 months he was in a combat engineer outfit and drove an armored personnel carrier on training missions. After being discharged and returning to the states, he again took up with the army, this time as a civil servant doing illustrations and training manuals. He also began working on a hobby of his in the evenings after work: fantasy painting. While he worked diligently at his art, and occasionally sold original paintings, he did little to promote himself or break into the commercial market; he didn't think his work was strong enough.

Then, in 1975, a friend sent samples of Elmore's work to *National Lampoon*, who liked it enough to request more.

Soon after he was asked to do a back cover for *Heavy Metal* magazine. In 1979, another friend was sending a batch of artwork to TSR to try and get free-lance work and badgered Elmore into including samples of his work. The friend's work was rejected; Elmore's wasn't. Although he had only played D&D once, he began to freelance for TSR. By 1981, TSR offered him a full time job. He repeatedly turned it down until Kevin Blume — who along with his brother Brian and Gary Gygax were principal stockholders in TSR — came to Kentucky and offered "whatever it would take" to get Elmore and his family to move to where TSR was located in Wisconsin.

For the next six years, Elmore was a prolific part of a

small artistic bullpen that included Keith Parkinson, Jeff Easley, Jeff Butler, and Clyde Caldwell, who, in round-robin fashion, created a strong and consistent look for TSR's gaming products. At first, things went well in Lake Geneva, with schedules that allowed for solid, quality work to be done. Then, when TSR began to cut back on personnel in the mid-80's, Elmore and the others had to take on more burdens and turn out more work in shorter periods of time. Elmore and Parkinson found themselves effectively taking on the responsibilities of over-all Art Director, which cut into their painting time. In addition, Elmore was getting more requests for freelance work; even though TSR frowned upon it, he had a hard time turning down the offers. In his last three years at TSR, Elmore found he had trapped himself: he had his normal, ever-increasing workload, the responsibilities of art director pro temp and of being the senior staff artist whom people turned to for advice, and his free-lance work after his day job. Burnt out, displeased with the quality of his work, Elmore knew he had to quit something.

While he still does a good bit of work for TSR as a freelancer, his time is now mostly taken up with other projects. He currently shares a studio with Keith Parkinson and Bill Willingham (of *Elementals* fame). They call themselves, appropriately enough, the Art Dogs. The name is fitting, especially for Elmore, who still espouses the hard-working qualities of his western Kentucky up-bringing. His voice carries a soft, rural mid-western twang to it, one which becomes slightly more perceptible when he talks about things which excite him, like the work of other illustrators whom he admires, or his vintage 1967 Pontiac GTO. He currently lives in Lake Geneva with his wife Betty and their two children, Jennifer and Jeremy. While he has little opportunity these days to read or take up a hobby, he does manage to find time to work on his Suzuki Intruder motorcycle, or find long back roads on which to drive his GTO faster than his wife would like. In spite of his growing fame, he is sincerely modest about his work and accomplishments, almost as if he's the humble, hard-working country boy surprised to find himself in the big city.

The following interview is taken from a lengthy conversation which took place right after Larry Elmore had finished the latest installment of *Snarf Quest*, the monthly comic strip he does for *Dragon Magazine*, and was relaxing in between projects.

JAPE TROSTLE, GATEWAYS: What initially interested you in fantasy art? Even before you started getting paid for your work you were interested enough to come home and paint every night.

LARRY ELMORE: [Growing up] we lived in a house that had no TV, and for a time, no electricity. And everything takes on a different aspect, especially in a house at night with the long shadows and the lamps and things. We lived near these woods — to a kid, woods are deep and dark and sinister — and I remember one night these boys coming up out of the woods at sunset and they would sit with my dad on the porch and play music and tell stories, folklore and such, into the evening. There was a lot of story telling. It got me interested in fantasy...or things "bigger than life". My dad would tell me these stories about elves and fairies, and adventures in the woods, and my mom would read to me

out of these books — *Robin Hood* and *Treasure Island* and such. It was all part of entertaining ourselves.

Then, in college, I started reading about history. I began to get curious — I mean, I didn't know what these people, Celts and Vikings, looked like, so I just started to draw. I was trying to paint barbarians or something (laughs). The closest I could get to anything was Viking ships. Remember, there weren't too many books [on the subject] published at this time, at least none that had a lot of visuals. We're talking about the 60's; by the 70's there were a lot of visual things coming out on the Celts and the Vikings and all this, but in the 60's you couldn't find much.

But I started reading about the Celts and the druids, and I used a lot of their designs in my work — sort of an "Elmore Celtic".

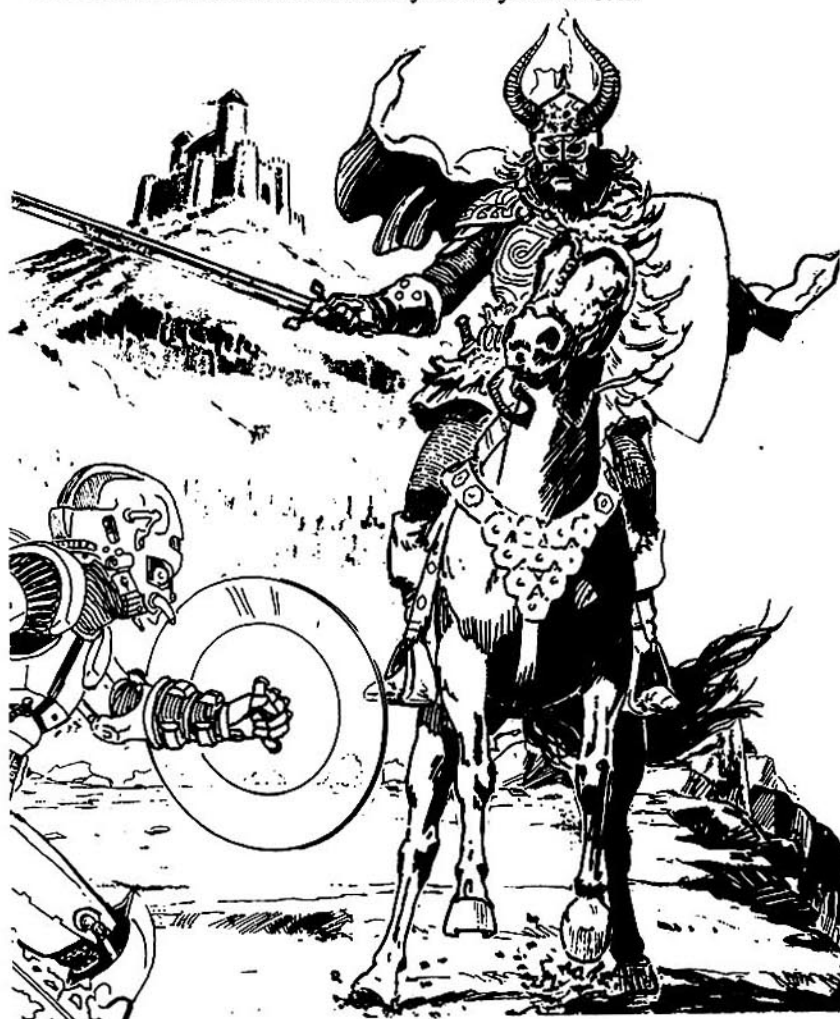
GATEWAYS: You sort of redrew history?

ELMORE: (laughs) Yeah. I was really fascinated with them. And my first fantasy work, I was trying to be historically correct! But with some of these [paintings] you can be historically correct and be really exciting, and with some you can be real boring. So if you add a little touch of imagination, it turns the painting to fantasy and always makes it a little more exciting.

GATEWAYS: During this time were you also reading some of the popular fantasy titles like *Lord of the Rings*?

ELMORE: I was reading mostly history, but one day I went out to a book store to check something out and there, lo-and-behold, I saw these book covers by a guy named Frazetta that was exactly the way I wanted to paint. These were the first *Conan* covers he did.

GATEWAYS: And that was the style that you had been



looking for?

ELMORE: Yeah, and it really made me mad! I thought, "Here is how I want to paint, and here is a man already doing it." Of course, I couldn't paint as good as he, and I still don't think I can. But — oh, man! — this was exactly what I wanted to do.

I can see why some people wouldn't like Frazetta — you can gripe about his anatomy, you can gripe about his colors and his use of light — but I haven't seen anybody yet who can show a burst of energy and power and strength in a painting as he can. I don't know how he does it.

So I bought the books and read some of them. Then a friend saw I had them and said if I liked them I should try reading J.R.R. Tolkien. [Lord of the Rings] was "new", so I read those. It opened worlds to me.

GATEWAYS: When you were working for TSR doing the various module covers and the Dragonlance material, would you go and read the manuscripts the whole way through?

ELMORE: Yes, I started that way. At first I would read whole books, you know, then illustrate them. By the time I finished there, they would come and give me a paragraph and say, "This is what we want." And because of time, I'd give them just that. And they took the attitude of "Just give us a cover." I'm not trying to talk badly about TSR, but it was a rough time. That was during and after the purges, and there was a lot of pressure on everyone — the writers and designers and artists. They've cut back on their artists — given them more time and slack — since Keith and I left.

GATEWAYS: So you read through all the Dragonlance books?

ELMORE: Oh yeah. I must have read the whole thing — at least the first three books — twice through.

Dragonlance to me was fascinating. Tracy Hickman came to my house, guess it was '84, '83, and said, 'I've got this story I want to tell you. If you like this story, maybe you could do some artwork, on your own time, and we're going to try and sell this to the board [of directors] and get TSR to produce it. I've got lots of ideas for it.' So he was over here one evening and told me the whole Dragonlance story. He said we had to make a great presentation or it didn't stand a chance. I did some quick oil roughs of some of the characters and scenes and everything, and he used those at the meeting. He got up in front of the board and acted out the whole story, using my roughs for reference. And two days later, he told me it was a go.

When we first started to work on Dragonlance, it was great. Nobody knew what Dragonlance was. We were working right with Tracy, and by that time Margaret was cranked in on it — and with them it was like magic: he told the stories and she wrote them — and we were working hand-in-hand with them on developing the illustrations. And then some things started to go wrong. The first thing planned to come out — visually — was the calendar. One of the designers came up with a layout for it, and it looked like a farmer's insurance calendar. Pretty dull. So we decided we needed a bold, unifying look and direction; something that was different than other things at the time. And I suggested a sort of Celtic-type look and feel. I showed [Art Director] Jim Maslov pictures of Celtic weapons and designs to capture the flavor of what it should look like. So he designed a logo along that line, and we tried to set up the calendar with

that feel. When people at TSR saw it, they began to give us more of a free hand.

It really was fun. It was the one project, probably the only project, during the time I was there, that was spawned by the creative people without management completely turning it around. There were several times it was almost killed, and we really had to push for it. Tracy was good at griping, and I was never shy about going to management and telling them what I thought about things. Without that pushing, I think Dragonlance might have been killed.

GATEWAYS: Did TSR gather up a group of artists to deliberately give their products a consistent, polished look?

ELMORE: Oh, yes. That was the idea. Now, each artist worked his own way, though a lot of people have remarked that we, particularly Keith and Jeff and I, had similar styles — though we didn't think so. But when we were working on Dragonlance, or something with recurring characters, we would try to keep it consistent. So we had a deal: whoever would paint a character first, say Raistlin or something, however we would paint them, then that's how we would all paint from then on.

GATEWAYS: Would you get a chance to look in on what the others were doing with the various characters and say "Yeah, I can live with that"?

ELMORE: Sometimes. It would depend on the artist. Some of the stuff wasn't exactly what we had in mind, but once it was published and out there, we all went along with it and followed suit. And sometimes we were doing the paintings before the whole book was finished and even though we were working with Tracy and Margaret, when the books finally came out and we read them the whole way through, we thought we missed catching the flavor on some of the stuff.

GATEWAYS: Do you still have a good relationship with TSR?

ELMORE: Yeah, we get along fine. They didn't want me to leave, obviously, but I feel I've done better work for them since I left than when I was there.

GATEWAYS: You currently share a studio with Bill Willingham, who does the **Elementals** for Comico Comics, and you yourself do a monthly three-page strip for **Dragon Magazine**. Did you ever consider doing a comic title of your own?

ELMORE: Well, as a kid I was into comics. Then I got out until I was working at Fort Knox and friend of mine started to get me back in a bit. He kept saying the way I drew, the way I illustrated, I'd be a natural for comics. Then I ran into Tim Truman, "Mr Comic Book", and he got me interested in reading more. So I started to buy some titles — a big cross section — of the new stuff that was being done. And I thought I'd like to give my hand a shot at some of this stuff. Eclipse Comics gave me a shot of doing some short stories for them. I did about four or five six/eight/ten page stories for them, and it was a lot of fun. I really liked doing comics, but I think I got my full dose when I did a full issue of a special **Air Maidens** episode. That was a lot of work. I really started respecting the comic book artist, then: "You have to do one of these a month?!" I'd go crazy. I know a lot of the work is divided up, but I like to do all my own work, and after penciling a whole book, I'd think "What? I have to go through it again?"

GATEWAYS: Do you have any current favorite titles that



you read?

ELMORE: Let me think a moment. Well, no, right now I don't. I try to read what some of my friends are doing, like Tim Truman's Scout.

GATEWAYS: You do work in a variety of mediums: pen and ink, acrylics, oils. Do you have one favorite medium to work in?

ELMORE: Oils. Oh yeah, oils.

GATEWAYS: Why?

ELMORE: Well, I just think they're more versatile. I can do more things with oils. Sometimes, acrylics — especially if you're doing science fiction or high-tech stuff — are the natural choice. The way they dry fast, you can get quick, hard edges. Whereas with landscapes or anything organic — people, for example — oils are the natural choice. If you try to do flesh tones with acrylics, you have to do a lot of blending — it's not something that happens naturally. I like oils first and foremost — mainly because I like working with landscapes and people.

GATEWAYS: A good majority of your painting seems to encompass landscapes. You have very few interior shots. Where do you get your visual influences from? Not just the landscapes, but the settings themselves.

ELMORE: Are we talking about the actual settings, or the art influences on the backgrounds?

GATEWAYS: Uh, the art influences.

ELMORE: hmm...Well, the art influences, the way I paint, the colors I use...N.C. Wyeth. Howard Pyle. Also, Maxfield Parrish, some of the colors he uses on the landscapes. I look at some of their work and it just inspires me. I don't try to copy it; I just do my own work. But with their inspiration I do my own stuff and it's different. Some of the old illustrators — some of the Brandywine School of artists — I

thought those guys were great! They did things that were just unreal — and you could always learn from them just by looking at their work. Those are the main influences. I've been with Tim Hildebrandt several times, talking to him, and I try to get as much information out of him as I can (laughs). What he does with color and light is fantastic. When I first started to paint seriously, that was the time the first Tolkien calendar came out. That blew me away when I saw it. So they've always been big heroes of mine. But when you talk with Tim Hildebrandt, he goes back to the same people I was talking about.

GATEWAYS: You mean the Wyeths; the Brandywine School?

ELMORE: Yeah, and it really surprised me. I thought "Wow! These are my heroes, too." And then you look at Frazetta's work and you can see where that was coming from — the same school of illustrators. And you see this in a lot of illustrators work today — in advertising artists, too — in that we take our painting seriously. We're trying to really paint — really paint! — not just trying to sell something. I don't know if that's good or bad; I got into it for the fun of the painting. But you tend to take your colors, your painting, more seriously.

GATEWAYS: Have you ever been to the Brandywine Museum?

ELMORE: (sighs) No. Keith [Parkinson] got to go there this summer and it was closed for renovations. He didn't get to see it, and came back really disgusted. He saw just enough through the windows to tear him up (laughs), and he couldn't go in and see everything.

GATEWAYS: I was there a few years ago, and they had all of Wyeth's work from the Robin Hood and Treasure Island books on up. And, looking at them, and when they were done [1917], you realize he set the pace for Rockwell, and the Hildebrandts, and almost a whole century of illustration.

ELMORE: He did! And you know what's funny? When I was going to college and studying art, their names were never mentioned. I didn't know Andrew Wyeth had a father until I saw a traveling art show at my school, and there was this painting of a door (laughs), just a door. And I was mesmerized by this painting. I looked down at the name and it read "N.C. Wyeth". I thought "who in the world is that?" I was familiar with Andrew Wyeth, so I asked one of my teachers who was this "N.C.", and he said, "Oh, that's Andrew Wyeth's father...he was an *illustrator*." I tried to find something on this guy, but there was nothing published on him.

GATEWAYS: Illustrator is a bad word in the fine art world, like you have to wash your mouth out after you say it.

ELMORE: Yeah. (laughs) And this bunch at the Brandywine School took the knowledge of what the impressionists and post-impressionists were trying to teach us — instead of what others were doing with their speckles and squiggles and blobs scattered about the canvas — and painted and carved and dived right into their paintings and worked with form and color.

GATEWAYS: What are your views on this dichotomy in the art world, where only recently and begrudgingly are illustrators like Rockwell and N.C. Wyeth being accepted by the fine art community as — maybe — great American artists.

ELMORE: You know...that...(pause)...I get really angry when I think about that. When I was in college, a teacher asked us what our favorite artist was, and everyone else mentioned names I've never heard of — like I said before, I knew almost nothing about the art world when I went to college. I knew of N.C. Wyeth, though I wasn't familiar with his name, from the old books my mom would read me. But I said my favorite was Norman Rockwell and was nearly laughed out of class. And you look at what he painted and the way he painted — forget about the subject matter, the way he painted was unreal. But that wasn't even a consideration at that time. That was the '60's, and the peak of the abstract expression movement when it all came to a head with Pop Art and everything: Andy Warhol and the whole nine yards. And I would go around to museums and see these paintings and...and it looked like someone had crapped on a canvas, and these little women in furs would look at these humungous pieces of garbage and read a three page history on the philosophy of the artist and then they'd look at the piece and hold their hearts and say 'Oh my God, its beautiful. I see what he means.' And I'd look at it and say, 'It's garbage. I don't care what he says. If he wants to be a philosopher or something, then he should go write a book.' I never did "get it."

I painted the way I wanted to: realistically. And by the time I finished school, I was one of their top artists. They even tried to get me a fellowship at Pratt, but (laughs) I got drafted instead.

GATEWAYS: Oops!

ELMORE: All that fine art — a guy would have these big canvases with these black and white blobs on it and he was trying to show composition, or you get another guy with three colors who piles them up in a corner and tries to show something about color. Well when you start painting realistic paintings and try and get across a thought or feeling or mood, and try to illustrate a story, you have to deal with all this composition, and color more subtly than I ever dreamed of.

GATEWAYS: Do you think that eventually — and it's begun to happen with Rockwell and Wyeth — that many of these illustrators — including fantasy illustrators such as Frazetta and the Hildebrandts who are not even considered by the fine art community as artists — will be accepted to some degree? Not soon, but maybe in the next century?

ELMORE: I think so. I really do. I've always thought that the best artists in America are the illustrators. Not just fantasy illustrators, but illustrators in general. You can see great things being done just by picking up a book or magazine. And I don't know who will be the outstanding names in art in this century, but I do believe a lot of these illustrators — maybe Frazetta and the Hildebrandts — could be the hot property in the next century, because they were the ones who were doing something different! Not just paint smeared out on a canvas. I've seen 20 year-old kids in college squirting paint on a canvas and their 30 year-old teachers standing behind them holding their hearts at these "masterpieces". They're not painting with genius — they look around, see what is popular, and just copy it. With me, and the Hildebrandts, and Wyeth, you work a lifetime at your art. You look at the old masters' works, you read about them; they worked a lifetime and were still learning. About

light, about shadow and paint. To me, that's an artist. Unless you're a freak of nature, you don't do your masterpiece when you're 18. You don't spatter it out and say 'This is It'. If that were all there was to it, we would all be great artists. **GATEWAYS:** We've talked about the mediums you use, and all are traditional, dating back hundreds of years — except for the acrylics. Are you familiar with some of the recent developments made in computer graphics? How do you think this is going to affect — not just illustration — but art in general?

ELMORE: I think it will have a big affect — it's like finding a new toy. There will be a lot of playing with it and a lot of wild special effects art done, but I think that kind of art — well, it's hard to frame it and put it on the wall. Sure you can take a photograph of it and frame that, but it's a photograph on the wall. Every artist could have a terminal



with high resolution graphics and push a button, and off the work goes to New York and the publisher gets it on his computer and gives it to the printer on his computer, but there's no original — unless you want to look at the floppy disc somewhere. But I think as we get used to it [computer art], we'll go back to the more traditional values. If people want a painting in their home, it means more to them if they have a painted, signed, and framed original hanging on the wall. There's a difference between doing something on a computer with color, and painting on a canvas. With a canvas, you're mixing colors and you're right there with a brush and your nose to the board. You can control some things, but it's a physical buildup of the paint, a physical involvement of the paint, and what you call 'happy mistakes' that make the difference. Maybe you'll use a little too much in one place, but you see a pattern there, and you're able to pull it out and use it in the overall look. It's something that can't be duplicated on a computer. That's a slicker type of medium. I think that's why I don't like some of the

slick, airbrush-type advertising art — it's too mechanical.

GATEWAYS: So you don't think computers are going to replace or supersede more traditional mediums?

ELMORE: Oh, it could in the marketplace, in advertising. Especially if it got very cost effective. Then it'll pay for itself. Now it's expensive, but in 10 years, who knows? It might get to a time when people prefer the ultra-slick look of computer paintings over oils, but there's something in the paint — in the oils — that's hard to duplicate. Painting might get more and more expensive because there will be fewer and fewer artists who work in the medium, because more people will rely on computers to do their art.

GATEWAYS: Following along this subject of the future, let's talk about the future of fantasy art. This type of genre has been around for centuries, since Hieronymous Bosch's triptychs of the 15th century, but has enjoyed a particularly strong revival in the last few decades. Basically, Frazetta began this new interest, and it snowballed with Boris and the Hildebrandt Brothers. You, along with Parkinson, Michael Whelan, and a few other up-and-coming illustrators are part of this second wave of artists who were first influenced by these earlier painters. Since the genre is now firmly established, where do you see it going? And since all styles travel in cycles, do you think that "fantasy illustration" as it is known today has peaked out yet?

ELMORE: No, no I don't think it has peaked yet. I just turned 40 this summer — though I don't think I feel it and I don't act it — and I'm just now getting to the point where I think I'm producing good artwork. I feel that for me, in the next ten years, I'll be doing some of the best art of my life. And Keith Parkinson is 10 years younger than me. You won't have as many "single names" as you've had in the past, but the field is spreading. You have a large portion of the audience that grew up with *Star Wars* and simply accept science fiction and fantasy, whereas the older generations — my age, about 40-45 is the breaking point — the number of people over that age who like science fiction and fantasy dwindles fast. Below that, the numbers increase drastically. You get down to children, and it's just part of life for them.

It's like your record store, and rock and roll. First there was Elvis. Just Elvis. Then you had the Beatles and the Beach Boys. And now you've got...a zillion kinds of rock radio stations, and you can listen all day to a certain type of station and to a certain set of artists, some of whose names are bigger than others. But through it all, you've got a couple of names that cross all branches and types. I think the science fiction and fantasy market might be the same way. As it expands, there might be a certain group of fans that just loves a certain kind of style; a certain group of artists.

GATEWAYS: Do you think things are going to keep going on like they have been?

ELMORE: With me, if I get my way, I'll paint more and more "noble landscapes". So you might have a lot of people who like that, and another group that likes the "hard edge" science fiction. And there might be more names to emerge — some big — as the field widens. That's what I hope to see. The bunch that's my age will still be goin', and Boris and the Hildebrandts will be painting until they die, and then you'll see a new school comin' along that'll

take everything we've learned, and maybe we might see a whole new different look as the kids who are 10 today, get to be about 30.

If you plot it on a graph, sure you have peaks and valleys all along, but in general, I think the graph is curving up. More and more people are interested in it. And they're more open minded. The reason I got interested in it was because it was more challenging. You don't have to limit yourself to a single set of rules. You can change and bend the rules. The young people coming up? They'll do things their way, and they won't think twice about it. Today, there are darker lines drawn, more obvious when you cross over.

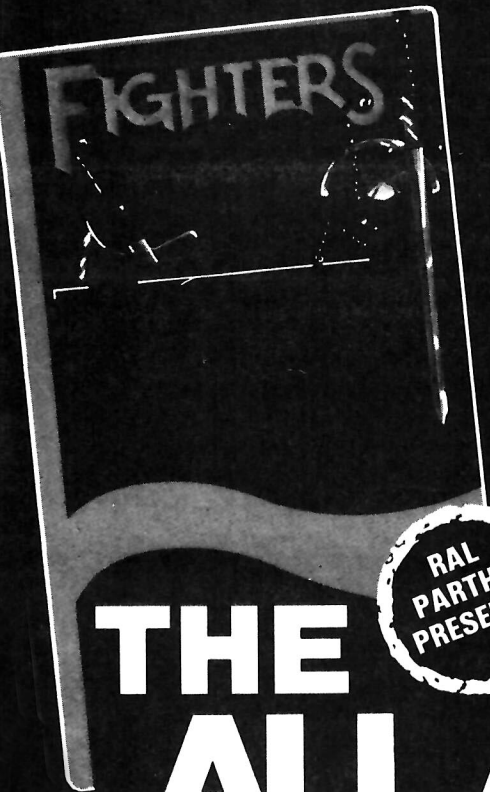
GATEWAYS: Well, you do have a growing following who do like your work; you are making a definite name for yourself. When you meet up with people at conventions and such, how do you handle it? You spend most of your time alone in a studio, or with a small group of artists, editors and writers, and all of a sudden you are someplace faced with a large number of people who really like your work and want to tell you just that.

ELMORE: You see, that's really strange to me. And I can't get over it myself. I don't see myself the way the fans see me. You work so hard in the studio... and you really don't get this response there...you think 'Nobody cares'. Then I go to Gen Con — and people come up, especially older people, and it slowly soaks in...these people really like my art! (laughs) It surprised me; I couldn't take it seriously at first....It is somewhat overwhelming. I mean people come up and tell me they love my work and they think I'm the best artist in the world. And I say, 'You can't be serious, there are far better artists out there than me'. I just try to do the best at what I do, and I didn't expect to get this kind of response...to see people act the way they do. I mean, I don't know how to act. This girl was dressed like one of the characters I had painted and wanted to meet me. She looked just like how I had painted the character, and someone introduced us, and — she played her part well — she drew her sword and got down on one knee like a knight and said she was glad to meet me. And I didn't know what to say, what to do! And I want to return the favors and the attention somehow, if I could, and it gets me in trouble lots of times because I want to do things I can't fulfill. I mean I'd love to give everyone a print, but I can't. I couldn't afford to! But it does make me want to paint better for them.

GATEWAYS: Okay, one final question. What are some of your other interests, outside the industry?

ELMORE: Reading? Art? (laughs) There's not much time for it these days. What I do to unwind is really the opposite of what I do. I like to ride motorcycles. I used to ride trail bikes, but around here there aren't a lot of trails, and besides, I'd probably get shot by some farmer. I do ride street bikes. I want to get a Harley, but my wife won't let me (laughs). I like old cars. Like my GTO. One of the old muscle cars; cars with an ungodly amount of power, that sort of thing. I've always enjoyed that. When I was a teenager, that's all there was. So, I like to drive fast. It's an addicting thrill, I have to admit. I'll probably be 65 and still be tearing up the road, trying to get locked up or something (laughs). But that's what I do to unwind.

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Flights of Fantasy

Susan Kreider

Consider the traditional fairy tale heroine — **Snow White, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty** — so beautiful and romantic, so helpless, so...well, stupid! So frustrating for readers who, when they grew up, found the same passive princesses and damsels-in-distress carried over into the grown-up fairy tales of fantasy and science fiction. With the changing times, new kinds of heroines began to appear in the pages of fantasy novels. Some, alas, quickly became new stereotypes, notably the feisty female warrior and the plucky-princess-turned-swordswoman. But many of the heroines were real people, women of wit and courage and ability who had complex and adventurous lives. Aidris Am Firm, Cherry Wilder's **Princess of the Chameln** (Baen Books, \$2.95), is one of these.

Orphaned by assassins' knives when she is eleven, Aidris is thrust abruptly into the intrigues and schemes that are court life at Achamar, the capital of the Chameln lands. But there is no safety for her there: an attempt on the lives of Aidris and her cousin forces her to flee the city and Chameln lands, into exile and a new life as a Kedran, or battlemaid, in neighboring Athron.

Establishing the bittersweet mood of **A Princess of the Chameln** is what Wilder does best. Her formal narrative and dialogue immediately create a sense of historical distance and age. Aidris's remembered details of season and weather, clothing, sights and sounds are all quite convincing and add to the sense of distance; but despite the many colorful scenes described, the November mood persists, and so does Aidris's loneliness.

Aidris is not the standard plucky princess: becoming a Kedran is not a rebellion or feminist statement, but a perfectly acceptable alternative for women throughout most of Hylor.

Wilder uses no "extras": she brings in each character purposefully. There is a nicely drawn contrast between Aidris and the two friends she comes to hold dear: Sabeth, the beautiful but ordinary singing-girl with romantic dreams of being royal; and the big and not-too-bright Ortwen Cash, a Kedran only until she saves enough of a dowry to marry.

Different, too, are the lands and cultures of Hylor. Athron has a very late Medieval feel, while the Duchy of Lien seems post-Elizabethan in its formal dress and manners. The Chameln lands themselves are widely diverse. In the capital, the embroidered and beaded tunics, breeches and boots worn by most folk seem to suggest Medieval Russia rather than Western Europe. The Northern tribes roaming the broad Chameln plains on horseback seem inspired by Tartars or Mongols. This is a setting gamers should note.

A Princess of the Chameln is the first book in the **Rulers of Hylor** trilogy. **Yorath the Wolf** and **The Summer King** follow.

The black dragon, Morkeleb, has invaded the Deep of Ylferdun, driving men from their homes, ravaging the land, and feeding on any who dare to challenge him. Morkeleb must be stopped before rebellion and famine destroy the Kingdom, but only one man living has ever accomplished such a feat — John Aversin, the Lord of Alyn Hold. With the kingdom in confusion, a boy named Gareth slips away and rides north to the bleak Winterlands seeking the **Dragonsbane** (Del Rey, \$3.50).

Lured by Gareth's promise of the King's aid to the Winterlands, Aversin agrees to return with Gareth to attempt the desperate deed again. Riding with them is Jenny Waynest, the half-taught Witch of Frost Fell, John's Mistress. At Court, however, they find that Gareth has been less than truthful with them. Gareth is not the King's chosen messenger, but his son, and the King himself, is enthralled by Gareth's own mistress, Zyrene, a powerful sorceress.

Once again, Barbara Hambly presents fascinating and believable characters at the center of her story. Jenny Waynest is not the standard young witch. Jenny is thirty-seven (in a nice touch, Hambly makes her three years older than John), and though she tells Gareth it would be "an act of cruelty for a witch to bear any man's child," she has borne John two sons. Her struggle with power is not that she has it, but that her power is limited; that for her, magic is "a depth and a stillness, rather than the moving brilliance that it was for the great." And yet, for all her wanting, she believes that her passion for John and their sons has distracted her from her study of magic, that she will never be more than the local magewife.

Her distraction is certainly understandable, for John Aversin is *the* most sympathetic and appealing hero in any novel, fantasy or otherwise. Middle-sized and unprepossessing in appearance, Aversin is both a true scholar with a keen, intuitive mind, and a warrior with the strength and cunning to have slain a dragon. Though he suspects Gareth's half-truths, the need of the Winterlands is so great that he is willing to face the dragon if it will aid his people.

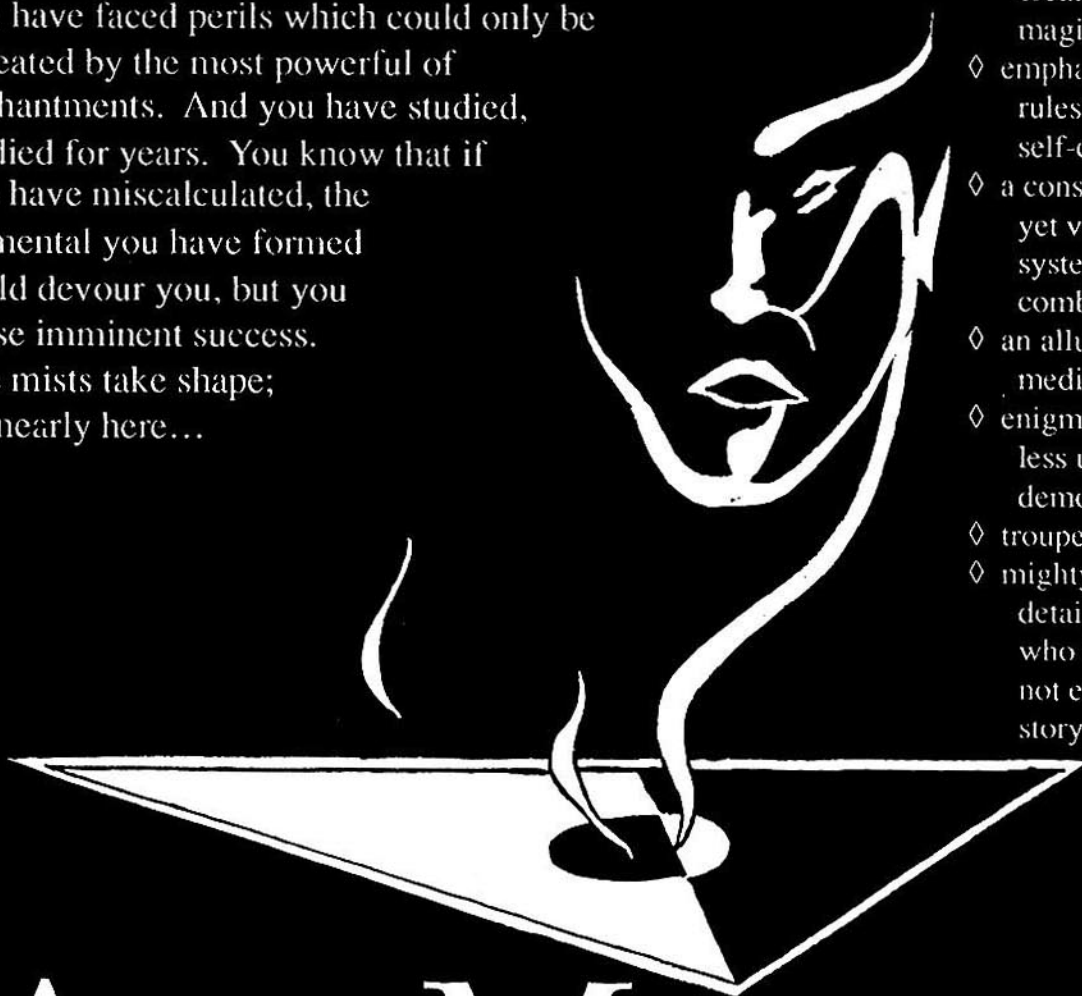
Young Gareth is a study in innocence lost. Tall, gangly, and the target of the Court's decadent sense of humor, Gareth has taken refuge in the study of romantic ballads and the chivalric life they describe. Zyrene the sorceress slips sometimes into the stereotypical Evil Witch Queen, as Hambly's third-person narrative is limited to Jenny's point of view. However, as an example of what Jenny could become without the love that troubles her so, Zyrene is very effective.

By far the most intriguing character in **Dragonsbane**, however, is the dragon himself, Morkeleb. Hambly has created a truly alien way of thinking for the dragon. Indeed, she has even come up with the first really convincing explanations for such mysteries as why dragons hoard gold.

It is only with her ending that Hambly fudges a bit. The last page of the penultimate chapter ends the story quite effectively, and the reader may come away from the book with the impression that the last chapter was added on under an editor's pressure for a happy ending. Those who require such things will be satisfied. Those who don't, still won't be too disappointed with this fine fantasy novel.

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"There's a Little Raistlin In All of Us..."

Two Important Factors in Creating Believable Characters

Margaret Weis

Creating flesh-and-blood characters in either fiction writing or in gaming doesn't have to be difficult. Of course starting out is the easiest part. Most of us have little trouble coming up with imaginary people to populate our fantasies. We can devise physical descriptions of heroes or villains, drawing on our own fantasies, favorite movie or book characters, or real people. We can give them sex, height, weight, color of hair and eyes, race, nationality, alignment.

Taking it another step further, we can come up with a story for our characters. Sometimes this means creating a world and story for the character. Other times it means creating characters for the world and the story. Most of the time it means doing both. (Another article.) But, now, let's say that we have the characters, we have the world, we have the story. Now we must breathe life into them.

At Gen Con last year, Tracy and I were discussing the **Darksword Trilogy** with one of our readers.

"Do you realize that you don't have one evil character in that whole series?" he said. "They're all human!" What a great compliment! More than anything else, Tracy and I strive to make our characters human (even if they're not!). To me, there are two important factors involved in bringing characters to life, either for role-playing games or for your own fictional works. These are: 1) motivation. 2) feelings.

Character Motivation

I was an editor for several years and read a lot of manuscripts. With few exceptions, I discovered that almost all writers whose works failed did so because they made the following mistakes: 1) characters had no motivations, 2) characters had motivations but these were weak and unbelievable, and, 3) characters had believable motivations but the writer discarded them when the motivations got in the way of the plot.

Motivations are the guiding rules your character lives with. Most importantly, they are rules he cannot live without!

I once read a manuscript where all the good characters loved each other dearly and hated all the bad characters and



all the bad characters hated the good characters and each other into the bargain. And not one of them had any good reason to love or hate anybody.

Editor: "Why does everyone like the Paladin?" Author (astonished): "Because he's good, of course."

Editor: "Then why does the Wizard hate him?" Author: "Because the Wizard's bad."

These are *not* believable motivations. All of us who have been unfortunate enough to be in a party with a holier-than-thou Paladin knows that to be good is not necessarily to be liked! And, as Sherlock Holmes remarked, "the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money."

This same author also had a difficult time admitting that her hero might actually have a flaw. The hero was handsome, generous, good, noble, righteous, never lost his temper. He didn't even sweat! Yawn. We are none of us perfect and it is therefore difficult to either create a believable, perfect human or to write about one. And, just as there are few truly good people, so there are few truly evil ones. This is one reason Tracy and I believe that the wizard Raistlin from the **Dragonlance** books has so much appeal. He is riddled with flaws and they are flaws with which all of us can empathize. As Par-Salian says, "There's a little of Raistlin in all of us."

We understand the Wizard's lust for power to compensate for his physical weakness, his need to dominate those whom he views as inferior. Raistlin is cold, unfeeling, even cruel. He manipulates people to his own end. Yet what made Raistlin believable as a character is that there are times when he shows compassion, caring, understanding, and love. In order to make this kind of complex characterization work, however, we had to be careful to explain what motivated the wizard. For example, Raistlin could cold-bloodedly murder poor Gnimsh, yet go out of his way to be kind to a disgusting gully dwarf. The wizard's desire for power motivates him to kill the gnome that stands in his way. Raistlin's motivations for being kind to Bupu, however, stem from the good part within him, the part of him that remembers how it feels to be bullied and tormented by those

stronger than he was.

As you can see, some of Raistlin's motivations stemmed from his childhood, which we referred to in the book but never saw. It is crucial that the person creating a character knows as much about the character as possible and this is why I like to write biographical sketches of major characters. Such sketches provide Tracy and me with a wealth of information about that character and give us a guideline for the character's motivations.

When I am writing or taking our characters through the story, I continually ask myself (or Tracy), "Why is our character doing this? What is his or her motivation for acting this way?" If we discover that we are having to manufacture explanations about this character's behavior because it doesn't ring true, then we know we've lost him!

Motivation applies not only to major decisions in a character's life but to minor ones as well. And it is often the minor decisions that are truly important in making a character seem real. Unfortunately, these are too often the ones that are forgotten or swamped by the story.

Gothic horror novels are great for setting up situations such as this: The heroine is walking down the hall of the dark and gloomy castle during a thunderstorm. She comes to a closed door and starts to open it. We *know* something awful is lurking behind that door. "Don't open it, you fool!" we shriek. Of course, she does and the vampire leaps out and bites her neck and that's that. But unless the author has provided us with a believable motivation for the heroine to open that door, we are liable, at this point, to toss the book into the trash compactor.

Example: "Mehitabel crept through the hallway of the deserted castle. At the end of the hall stood a closed door covered with cobwebs. Although she sensed danger behind it, Mehitabel opened the door."

Editor: "Why on earth does Mehitabel open that door? Why doesn't the fool woman just forget it and go back to bed?"

Author (hurt): "Mehitabel has to open the door or else I might as well feed the rest of the story to the dog!"

So now the author has to provide Mehitabel with a motive for opening the door. His next draft reads: "Although she sensed danger behind it, Mehitabel felt strangely compelled to open the door."

This is better but still not good. It takes the character's freedom of will away from her. She is now being motivated by an outside force. It's also pretty obvious to the reader that the author again has no idea why Mehitabel is

opening that door. If the author decides that he's going to take her freedom of will away, he should play it up. "Although she sensed danger behind it, Mehitabel felt strangely compelled to open the door. Closer and closer she crept, the light from the candle in her hand causing ghostly shadows to flit all about her. Her hands were icy cold, her heart pounded. She tried to turn and flee but she had lost her will to act on her own. And now she began to hear a voice calling her name, commanding her to open the door."

Of course, there are all sorts of motivations an author can provide for a character's actions if the author simply takes time to think and work them out. A human's insatiable curiosity can be a prime motivating force. Curiosity has undoubtedly killed more people than it has cats.

"Creeping down the hallway of the deserted house, Mehitabel is startled to hear organ music! She sees a light shining from beneath the door that leads to the music room! But wait! This castle has been abandoned for six hundred years!"

Mehitabel's instinct for self-preservation is screaming, "Who cares if it's raining and hailing and sleeting and this is the only shelter for one hundred miles? Get the hell out of here, woman!" But Mehitabel's human curiosity (or a kender, if he happens to be accompanying her) says, "Wow, Mehitabel! Let's go in there and find out who's playing Bach in the middle of the night in this spooky old castle!"

Having a character motivated by a mundane reason can also be quite effective, particularly if the action leads to extraordinary consequences. "Mehitabel approaches the door of her closet. 'I think I'll wear my nightie with the little pink bows,' she says to herself, flinging open the door. Suddenly Mehitabel sees — not pink bows — but a long black cape! She feels teeth sinking into her neck."

Provide your characters with motivation and the readers will believe in the characters and in their actions.

It is also possible and extremely interesting to have a character whose motivations are hidden from the reader. In this instance, the author *wants* the reader to keep asking himself, "Why is this character doing that?" The trick to making this type of character believable is that the author knows the answer, even if he doesn't share it.

Simkin, the Fool from the Darksword series, is just such a chaotic character. He is completely amoral. His actions seem impulsive and no one can ever be really certain whose side he is on. We had rules and guidelines for Simkin



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but these become apparent only toward the end of the novel. Simkin's primary motivation is to provide himself with excitement. He does this by stirring up trouble for all those with whom he comes in contact. We keep this a mystery to our readers, however, by never getting inside Simkin's head. (Thank heavens!) Which leads us to the next important factor in character development: a character's feelings.

Character Feelings

So, now we have our characters properly motivated and they are performing actions and making decisions left and right. But if the reader doesn't know how the character feels when he is performing these actions or being acted upon, the reader will yawn and say, "Why should I care about Mehitabel one way or the other? Let the vampire have her."

I once edited a manuscript that was quite good with lots of action except that the writer rarely bothered to explain what his character was thinking or feeling. Too often the writer assumes that the reader will automatically feel what the character feels.

Editor: "What is Herman feeling when he walks into the room and finds Shelia standing there, pointing a gun at him?"

Author, shrugging: "He's feeling terrified, of course."

Editor: "Why is he terrified?" Author: "Well, isn't everyone terrified when someone's pointing a gun at him?"

Not necessarily, and — more to the point — the reader will not be terrified unless he sees and feels Herman's ter-

ror. For example, what if Herman has removed the bullets from the gun and knows it is empty? He now has a whole range of emotions from which to choose that probably don't include terror. He could feel betrayed. Why is my loving wife, Shelia, pointing a gun at me? He could feel triumphant. Ah, ha! Shelia fell into my trap! I know now she's the murderer!

Explain to the reader how the character feels, what he is thinking about. This isn't difficult, either. It simply involves analyzing our own emotions and giving these to our characters. Of course, most of us will never know what it is like to fight a black dragon, but all of us have experienced fear. One of the most important skills a writer can learn is the ability to step outside of himself and look at himself in the act of experiencing some strong emotion. What happens to you when you feel fear? What about grief? pain?

Memories can aid us. Strong emotions tend to be imprinted on our minds. I can still remember the fear I experienced when a killer tornado struck not far from my home. Or when lightning hit a transformer about ten feet from my house. Or when my son and I got caught in a vicious undertow that was dragging us out to sea. Bring back these memories, play them over in your mind, and try to recall every detail of what you were thinking and feeling at the time. You'll be amazed at how much you remember.

Memories like this can also be very painful, but if you can discipline yourself to convey that pain onto paper and share it with your reader, you will have created a powerful scene. A friend of mine, working on a book about an in-

cident from his own past, had to write a scene where a policeman, who had befriended the writer when he was a youth, was killed. My friend had to force himself to relive that situation. It was emotionally devastating, but the scene he wrote in the book is a moving tribute to the policeman. It also helped my friend work out guilt and grief that had festered in him for twenty years.

We can come to feel just as strongly about characters we make up. Tracy and I once received a letter from an angry fan who wrote, "You probably don't care about Sturm. He was just a character to you. But I loved him! How could you kill him?"

After having lived with Sturm through two books, gone through his trials with him, shared the pain of his gradual disillusionment about the knighthood, we knew Sturm Brightblade probably better than we knew our own friends! When I wrote the scene in which Sturm died, I cried so I literally couldn't see my computer screen. Tracy wept when he read it. Laurana's grief over Sturm's death is our grief. We were able to put ourselves into her place and share her anguish with the reader by drawing on our own feelings for the noble knight.

A character's feelings lead the reader to experience those same feelings vicariously. We share Mosiah's fear when the *Duuk-tsarith* wrap him in the coils of the loathsome *Kij* vine. We experience Tanis's fear when the black dragon surges up out of the well. What, then, happens when you have a character who doesn't feel fear?

This very personality trait made Tasslehoff Burrfoot one of the most difficult characters Tracy and I had to work with. He was also one of the most delightful, but there were times I literally wanted to wring his neck. A reader should be terrified of Lord Soth, but that's difficult if you see the death knight through the eyes of a kender. (My goodness! That guy in the fancy black armor doesn't have a head! Isn't that fascinating!) Fortunately, since Tas was tender-hearted, we could use the kender's fear for his friends to inspire fear in the reader. Or, as in the second book of *Legends*, where we needed Tas to feel threatened by Raistlin, we inflicted both a stunning shock (Tas sees his friend the gnome murdered by the wizard) and the plague on poor Tas. This, we thought, ought to weaken the spirits of anyone — even a kender!

Characters in Role-playing

This discussion has been generally about creating characters in terms of novels. Many of you are probably wondering how to translate this into creating a believable character in role-playing. Motivation is important. Know what motivates your character and stick to it. Tracy plays a marvelous Paladin who is so hopelessly good you want to drive your sword through him. He once refused to allow a party to break down a door because he couldn't stand the thought of destroying other people's property.

Give your character flaws or personality quirks that make him interesting and allow these flaws and quirks to motivate him. A person playing a kender in any situation should be able to drive the other members in the group crazy, besides landing them in all sorts of trouble! ("Look, Flint, there's twenty trolls in that room. I've never met a troll before.")

Remember, too, that the factors motivating your character may be different from the factors that are motivating everyone else in the party. If you're Wyle E. Coyote, you are after the Road Runner — no matter what quest the rest of the party is on! Sturm and Tanis and Goldmoon are going into the dragon's lair to search for the Disks of Mishakal but if you are playing Raistlin, you're going in there to look for the spellbook of Fistantantulus. Such diverse motivations make life interesting and challenging for both you and the other players.

Feelings are harder to convey. It is not often the Game Master will stop and say, "You've just come face to face with Lord Soth. What are you *feeling* right now?" But there are ways of expressing your inner feelings and you don't have to be an Oscar-winning actor. In one of the *Dragonlance* games, the person playing Caramon was extremely solicitous of his twin Raistlin. Every time Raistlin coughed, Caramon would run to his side and offer to brew tea or fling an extra cloak over him or make his twin sit close to the fire. Caramon was constantly asking Raistlin how he felt, telling him to put on warmer clothes, urging him to eat more. Whenever there was danger, Caramon leaped out in front of his brother to defend him.

The guy playing Raistlin really began to get a bit irritated and it was suddenly very easy for all of us in the party to understand how such smothering love can be debilitating. We could sympathize with and understand why Raistlin angrily rebuffed his brother and sought to escape his "affection". Neither of the two was really play-acting his role, but through their words and deeds they were both accurately portraying the love-hate relationship of the twins.

In conclusion, remember that characters are very much like children. Treat them as you would treat a child. Respect them. Respect their ideas. Listen to them when they talk to you. Let them grow and mature on their own without constantly hovering over them. Don't try to make of them something that they are not. Love them (even the bad ones). Care for them; nurture them.

On the other hand, never let them get out of control. Don't let them take over the story and run away with it. Continually remind them that you are the parent. You brought them into this world. You are responsible for them and their actions. They have to follow your rules.

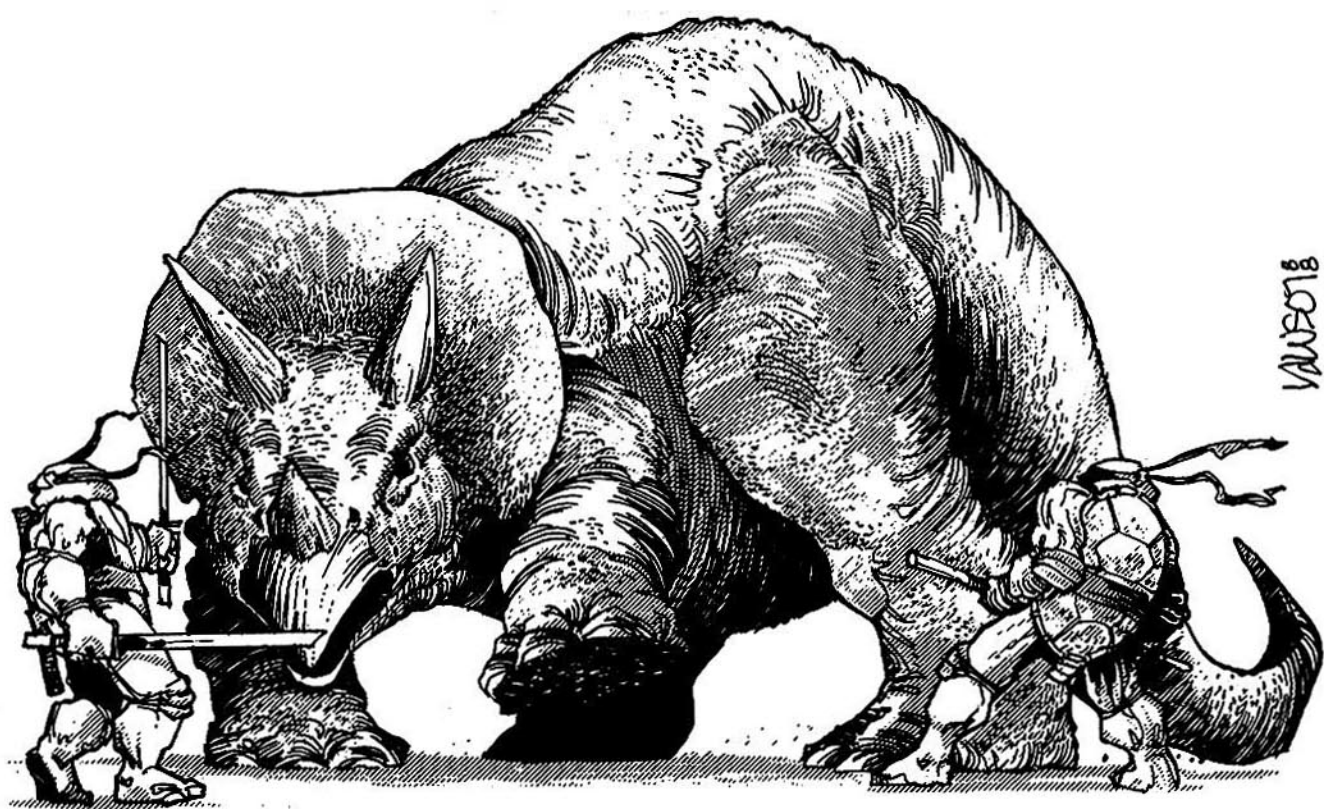
Don't worry. Someday, when your characters go out into the world on their own, they'll thank you for it.

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Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, Second Edition™!

The Untold Story Behind the Revamping of the The World's Most Popular FRPG

Laura Antoniou

It's been a long time since the first books of **Advanced Dungeons & Dungeons** were released. Yet there are many players who recall waiting for the **Dungeon Master's Guide** with an anticipation worthy of important events such as graduation, or an 18th birthday. In fact, that was very close to what was felt back then. **AD&D** was a game for advanced players. For more demanding ones. As the books began to come out at an agonizingly slow pace, the game became more and more popular, the demands grew, and a new aspect of readership appeared.

The players demanded that the books be better. Bigger. Smaller. Soft-covered. In spiral books. In loose-leaf binders. More monsters. Fewer monsters. More classes. No classes. Kill the assassin. Kill the Bard. Kill the Monk, the Paladin, the Druid. Save the Druid. Get rid of the Cleric. New rules. No more rules. More charts, or weapons, or magic items or spells. Spell point systems, and new rules for illusions. The list went on and on, and continues to this day, as it no doubt will in the future. There is nothing ever done that lacks critics, and there are few critics who will not state their opinions, asked to or not.

In this case, they were asked.

TSR released a multi-page questionnaire asking **AD&D** players all sorts of questions about the game and about their suggestions to make it better. And although they hardly used the opinions of these thousands of individual readers as the sole guide to the revamping of the **AD&D** system, it was amply clear that some changes were not only desired by the gamers, but were expected. As Dave Cook, one of the primary designers of the second edition told us, "We would go to conventions, and fans would pull us over in the halls and

demand to know, 'Hey, what are you doing with our game?' And we would go through our half hour explanation of what changes were going to be made, and almost every time, the guy would say, 'But that's the way I do it in my game already.' With **AD&D, Second Edition**, we're giving them the comfort of making it all official."

There are some obvious changes, even to the casual gamer. The first thing that will be noticed is the size differential between the new editions of the **Players Handbook** and the **Dungeon Master's Guide**. (By the way — there was a solid faction that wanted the title of the new DM's book to be the **Dungeon Master's Handbook**. As all of the pre-release pictures we've seen show **Dungeon Master's Guide**, we assume that was the title finally agreed upon.) The **PH** is now roughly the size of the old **DMG**, and vice versa. Why? Magic.

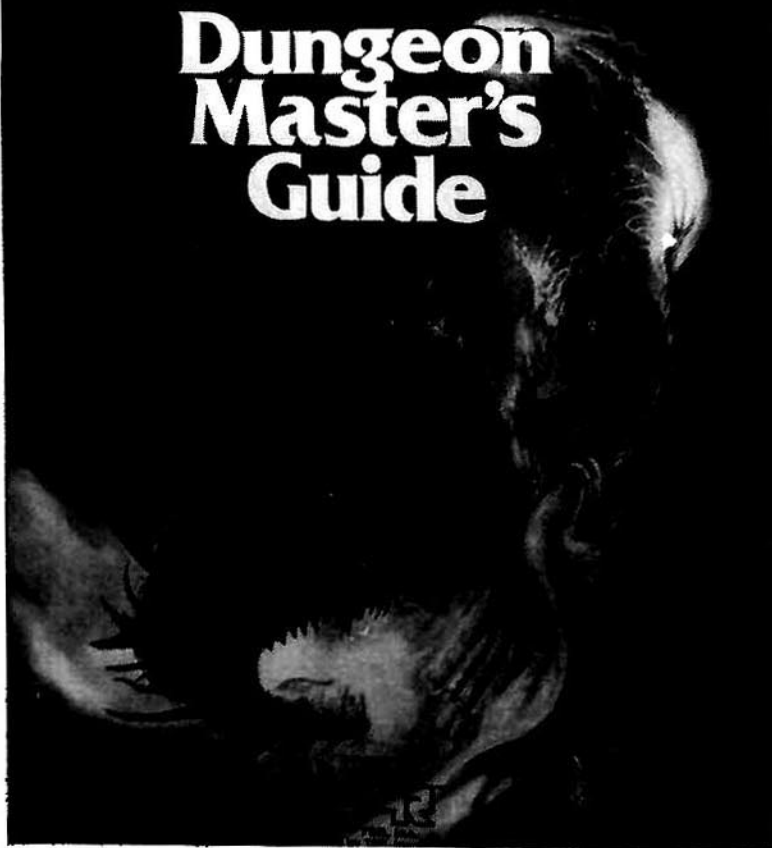
"One of the major reasons why the new **PH** is so big is because it contains *all* the spells for all the magic using classes, including the spells from the **Unearthed Arcana**," explained Cook. "Remember how in the old edition, we had to refer the reader all over the place? 'See the description for this spell in the cleric list under the same name', that sort of thing? Now it doesn't happen like that."

While many players, (especially new ones) will appreciate this, it is a little startling for an older one to see a book designed for players nearly twice the size of the book designed for the DM. There was some concern that this reversal would make it seem that the players of the game had a knowledge burden even greater than that of the DM. Steve Winter, the primary editor for the new edition, noted that there were different ways to see this.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons[®]

2nd Edition

Dungeon Master's Guide



"Remember that the complete spell section is much, much bigger than the old one. And of course, every player is not going to sit down and say, 'Wow, I gotta learn all this stuff'. They learn what their character needs to know. And also, maybe the player has a responsibility to learn what their character can do. With all of this information in a book for players, they don't have to ask 'How do I do that?', or 'What can I do?'. It's all there for them."

Missing from the pages of the new PH are two player characters who have their own followings, but have been a point of contention for many years. One Player Character who retires with grace is the Monk, a class which belongs in the world of *Oriental Adventures* anyway. The other is the dread Assassin, whose place as a PC has been hotly debated for as long as the original PH has been in print. For some months, TSR teased gamers by releasing inflammatory rumors concerning who or what was going to be dropped from the new edition of AD&D. Some, like the Cleric, were absolutely false, and designed to get strong reactions. Others, like the persistent claim that the Bard was not long for the world of AD&D, were truly tests of how much gamers liked the classes. Therefore, the Druid and the Bard will remain in the system. But really — did the gamers hate the Assassin that much?

"The Assassin was a character that has created many problems for GMs," stated Cook. "As a class, it just doesn't work right, and the assassination chart was too subject to interpretation and abuse. Besides, anyone could theoretically be an assassin. That's just someone who gets paid to kill."

"People who wrote to us requesting that the Assassin character be taken out gave some very clear and rational arguments concerning the place of such a character in a game," added Winter. Could this be interpreted as buckling under pressure from people who thought that such an "evil" character had no place in a game which is often, tragically and falsely, accused of encouraging anti-social behavior? "Certainly not," Winter laughed. "We've gotten plenty of letters about how the character was played wrong, and how its presence was ruining the the game for the other players. This is an old controversy."

So what about that other topic that gamers love to toss around, the problem of non-player characters? Having appeared regularly as "unofficial" parts of the system, some NPC classes have become very popular. Do they have a place in AD&D II? Well, sort of.

"The real problem with Non-Player Character classes was that a lot of them were actually kind of bogus," admitted Winter. "Really, the best ones tended to

unbalance the game, and the others were just not interesting. Also, that whole system was unfair, saying that only characters outside the adventuring party could have those skills. So, most of the skills that showed up as NPC abilities are now proficiencies, like the various sage skills, archery, or whatever. People have to remember that a character class, especially in the new system, is not a narrow minded profession, but an archetype. For example, there is nothing stopping a Fighter from taking archery skills and making himself a specialist in bowmanship."

"One of the things going against the Druid was that he was all archetype," noted Cook. "But the mail we received in praise of the class far outweighed the mail against it, so we kept him in. Of course, we're going to have a lot about character differences and variations in the class books we're putting out starting in the fall."

Yes, it's true. Each major character class type in the new AD&D will eventually have its own book. The *Fighter's Book*, slated for release before Christmas '89, which will contain everything you always wanted to know about the single most played character class, with special notes and sections about the revised Barbarian and Cavalier. "After all," Cook said, "some of these titles aren't real classes, just characters with attitudes."

The streamlined new DMG will be missing a few sections, part of the effort to make the book a reference book for the GM only. For example, the large and complex combat tables have been replaced by the simple THACO equation — the method of determining success in combat by calculating the roll required from the basic "To Hit Armor Class 0"



number. Also, surprise and initiative rules have been restructured to flow more evenly with the rest of combat, and the much debated segments are missing entirely. (Imagine the cheers of thousands of formerly confused gamers.) "A lot of people couldn't figure out exactly how to use them, and ended up just ignoring them any way," said Cook. "Now, we have a much simpler system where speed factors and casting times can modify initiative."

The second most obvious physical change is in the monster books. Here, answering the prayers (for better or worse) of gamers since the earliest days of gaming, all of the monster books are being designed to fit in a specially designed loose-leaf style binder. Nearly each monster will have its own page (or side of one), and new creatures can be added as easily as punching three holes in a sheet of paper. This is not without its problems, and TSR personnel will be watching this most drastic change carefully. When chatting with the men who slaved over hot word processors to get the finished project together, the **Monster Compendiums** came up often as the work which took the most time and effort. After all, even after the decisions were made about paper weight, binder cost and organization, there was the problem that many gamers could honestly identify with. There were just too many monsters.

Steve Winter recalled the techniques used to whittle the monster books down to a size that could be handled both by the editors and by the consumer public. "We each got one copy of each of the monster books, and we went through them with yellow markers. Of course, after all these years, we had a good idea what the players hated, and what they

loved, but we also realized that you just can't keep everyone happy. When we got down to it, every monster had its own fan club out there, and we had to rely on our judgment.

"So we would write in the books, 'kill this one', or 'save', or 'whatever'. Three votes for kill or save was automatic, and the monster went or stayed. Discussion, and we argued. And argued. And argued. I mean, it wasn't as easy as 'It's dead Jim'. Someone would want to get rid of everything, but someone else wanted to save everything. We had this long, drawn out discussion about Modrons, for instance."

"But we were limited by space," Cook reminded him. "We only had 144 pages to work with, 20 of which was general material about monsters."

"It would have been nice to include every monster — no matter how stupid," Winter acknowledged. "But we ended up with 160 monsters in the first pack of sheets. How many monsters are going to be used in a typical adventure anyway? It's hardly a limited choice. The first pack provides players with the classic monsters, but also provides a range of them, from simple to high level. And there will be more packs in the future, some of them specializing in different worlds, or even on different planes. We're thinking about one pack just on extra-planar monsters."

"The sheets are really nice, with some great new art and interesting ways of describing the monsters," said Cook. "Whenever we had a monster or class of monsters that kind of belonged together, we would put them all on one sheet, for easy reference. Like slimes, molds and jellies, for example. I mean, what could we really say about them? So they're all together. Also, and I remember this one because it looked really good, we put all the big cats together, so you don't have to look them up separately. It turned out to be a much bigger job than anyone thought."

"A general guide to go by is: the more esoteric the monster, the more likely we are to have a picture of it," added Winter.

So, you have two new guide books, a new way of looking up monsters, and some more new books about the different character classes. Is this still AD&D? Can owners of the old AD&D still play, using the new adventures and supplements that will come out under the new logo? And will existing players be able to adapt their campaigns to the new system? And what about the existing adventures? Will they still be viable under the new system?

In a word, yes. Although AD&D II is based strongly in the proficiency system, simple adjustments will allow any older adventure module or current game campaign to use the



new rules. Players who insist on playing the older version of the game can simply ignore the differences in the new adventures, or just rely upon the already extensive library of adventures already available. For the most part, the new edition is a better game, keeping the strengths of the system while cutting back on material that was either in dispute, or the cause of confusion.

"My biggest concern is that people will look at it and say, 'Oh my god, it's changed', and not want to deal with it," said Winter. "But really, all we've done is what people have been asking for for years. We cleaned it up."

"I feel that we're offering players a lot more options," Cook noted.



So, eleven years after the first appearance of the AD&D logo, five years after the project was seriously discussed, and two years after it was announced, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Second Edition* is a reality. As the leading fantasy role-playing game in the world, it has a chance to determine the playing futures of hundreds of thousands of gamers. In fact, the first printing of the *Player's Handbook, Second Edition*, will be at least 100,000. Think of it. In days not really so long ago, the first printing of a little game in a little beige box, was less than one percent of that.



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"FAERIE TALE"

A COMPLETE ROLE-PLAYING ADVENTURE

FROM LION RAMPANT

Written by Mark Rein-Hagen

This story-adventure is for *Ars Magica*, the role-playing game of powerful wizards and their loyal companions; but is readily adaptable to other fantasy role-playing systems. It involves an encounter with a group of enigmatic and innately magical forest faeries who descend from the medieval tradition. It is largely a role-playing story, but some trying combat will occur, and the characters might not have the benefit of their armor and weapons. The faerie forest will be a strange and mysterious place where wild, whimsical things happen. This is a story to have fun with; we hope you enjoy it.

SUMMARY

In this story, the characters attend a grand festival celebrating the winter solstice. It is hosted by Lady Bellantia, a beautiful faerie who reigns over a portion of a faerie forest. Their object is to learn about faeries and to gain gifts from them. During the day, they delight in her company, but at night the faeries of light (members of the Seelie court) depart to their places of sanctuary and the dark faeries emerge (members of the Unseelie court). Properly played, this sinister dichotomy can bounce the characters back and forth between comfort and fear, relaxation and anxiety, celebration and combat. The characters uncover and (hopefully) foil a plot by the dark faeries to make the day shorter and shorter, and for the night to last eternally.

To better portray the faeries, the Storyguide, or Game Master, should indulge in whimsy and imagination while running the daytime scenes and emphasize the dark and mysterious while running the nighttime encounters.

The story can take place in any faerie forest in your campaign, preferably one that has not already been thoroughly explored. (But then what faerie forest is ever fully explored?) The

Illustrated by Jeff Menges

Lady might rule over the entire forest if it is small or over one section if it is especially large. Mundane woods surround the faerie woods and serve as a buffer between humanity and the "gentle folk". It takes place in winter, so be sure you describe the cold and perhaps the snow; as they are appropriate to the local climate.

PREPARATIONS

There are two things that lead up to this story but that should be introduced in previous adventures:

- 1) the tale of the midwife
- 2) the poem of Lady Bellantia (located on page 35)

At some point in their adventuring career, the characters should hear the Tale of the Faeries' Midwife. It is a local legend telling the story of an actual woman said to have lived eighty or so years ago. She was an excellent midwife, and one night a group of very ugly faeries came to call, asking her to help birth one of their own, in exchange for some gifts. Wisely, she consented, and was led into the woods. The labor was long, and when sunrise came, the mother faerie had not yet given birth. All the other faeries went underground, leaving the mother-to-be alone with the midwife, who now realized that she had been dealing with the dark faeries of the night. When the babe was born, she grabbed him and ran away, leaving the mother behind. She laid the child by a pool where she hoped a good faerie of the day would come and find it, to take it as her own; and then she fled the forest altogether, fearful of being trapped there for eternity.

This story describes the birth of Hermone, one of the faeries that the characters will meet in the adventure, but the players should not realize this until some point late in the adventure.

At some point in their travels, probably in a re-



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spectable city tavern somewhere, the characters will encounter an old man, who speaks at length to other patrons of his younger years of glory. His name is Sir Velgarde, a bachelor knight who once served in the household of a local baron. A patient character will hear many well told ballads of

honor and warfare. In each story, the knight tells how the memory of a beautiful woman named Lady Bellantia gave him the strength and courage to persevere.

If he is asked about it, Sir Velgarde will tell the characters about the one immortal day when he was a guest at the Court of Lady Bellantia, the most beautiful woman he ever met, a magical faerie living in the nearby forest who gave him gifts and a memory of loveliness that has lasted unscathed for nearly fifty years. He composed a love ballad for her just before he left, and she was so touched that she promised that anyone who ever read it near her woods on the day of the winter solstice would be invited to the grand festival just as he had been. (Sir Velgarde will readily recite it to the characters.)

When he came back from the forest, his priest-confessor strongly warned him against ever returning to the evil haunts of the faeries, where his soul was at risk. However, since that day, he has carried a passionate longing for Lady Bellantia's company. If the characters show an interest in the poem, Sir Velgarde will encourage them to go the festival, going on at some length as to what a marvelous and magical thing it is to behold. If they seem like they might be inclined to attend he will, in private, beg them to bring him along.

Sir Velgarde also will mention Lady Bellantia's generosity towards her guests. The promise of free gifts might interest the characters if the idea of partying with faeries doesn't already. He will readily show them the bronze ring Lady Bellantia gave him (and which increases his longing for her) but under no circumstances will he sell it or even take it off.

SETTING OFF

The decision to travel to visit Lady Bellantia must be made by the players themselves; try not to use any form of coercion. The curiosity of the characters should be aroused by the tales they hear, and the entire adventure precipitated by their decision to venture to the forest. The characters should expect a festival of some sort and perhaps some unpredictable faerie antics, but there is no reason for them to expect a lot of combat. Make it clear to the players that this will be a role-playing adventure.

PLOT OUTLINE:

First Day - Introductions & Storytelling. First Night - Seeing the Ritual. Second Day - Festival continues. Second Night - Finding the Spy, Climactic Battle. Third Day - The Lady's Gifts.

THE FIRST DAY

Following Sir Velgarde's advice or personal guidance, the characters hike into the woods and reach the point where it begins to become magical. Branches move without a wind, flowers are found in a snow drift, trees take on strange shapes and may look like something from the characters' past. If they continue to walk about, they eventually find themselves back where they started, even if they have the assistance of an astute forester; they cannot enter the faerie area of the forest simply by walking in (these effects are similar to the spell *The Shrouded Glen*). Only when one of the characters recites the poem aloud can they gain entrance. (Have a player actually read the poem. They had better become accustomed to hamming it up if they are going to get along with the faeries.)

Within a few minutes of the poem being read, the faerie Zacarus peers out from behind an oak tree and calls out to them: "Welcome, mortals, to the lands of Lady Bellantia. Follow me now, or you'll be late for the festival, late for the festival."

He is excited to see mortals, especially those who are going to be at the party with him. "Right this way, oh, do follow me, it's not much farther now, don't get impatient, I'm not walking too fast for you am I, here, this way, up this hill now, it's not far, yes, yes, I'm Zacarus, by the way, do you come from far away?... " ad nauseum. It is hard for him to stop talking long enough for them to answer any of his questions.

When the characters have gone a mile or so, Zacarus suddenly stops and gracefully spins on one toe to face the characters. In tones of reverence he says: "We are approaching the court of the most illuminous Lady Bellantia. I, Zacarus, Lady Bellantia's personal spokesman, will formally announce you to the court, but I will need to know your names — and your titles of course." He then tries to memorize the characters' names (as well as any titles they might provide), but without great success. He mispronounces some names and mixes up some others.

Zacarus then leads them further into the forest until he stops again, whirls about and, looking a bit disgusted and a little embarrassed, says: "And you'll have to do something about... well about that horrible bark you are wearing."

He is looking at one of the characters wearing lots of metal armor or carrying a large metal weapon. Faeries find iron (and steel) offensive as well as harmful, and Zacarus will not take them to the Lady's court if they wear or carry iron with them. They will have to think of something to do with their armor and weapons, such as putting them all in a bundle and leaving the bundle to the side when they get to the court. If they are very clever, they may think of a way to sneak it with them, but faeries are very sensitive to it. Warriors might feel exposed and vulnerable without the weapons and armor they are accustomed to — hint to the characters that they could role-play this out.

THE LADY'S COURT

Soon the characters come to a clearing about forty paces across where winter's touch is barely felt. The surrounding trees, though bare of leaves, are covered with a layer of

glistening frost, and the air is warm and moist with only a gentle breeze. Lichenous rocks of all sizes fill the area, and these serve as seats for the Lady's court. At the far end of the clearing is a large, broad, flat rock with a mound of moss piled on top; it is the Lady's throne.

The Lady Bellantia regally sits atop her throne with the dwarfish Hermone crouching at her left side. He is holding her hand and clipping her fingernails with a pair of silver scissors. (Later, he will secretly pocket the clippings.) Seated out on rocks about her are eight other faeries, and six more can be seen standing around her. There are shy fauns and gaily dressed elves, tiny pixies and gossamer winged sprites, but don't try to describe them all at once. The faeries all face up to the newcomers and in surprise stand stock still and stare at them. For those moments of silence, the beauty of the glade, even in winter, becomes deeply apparent. It is a magical place. (The aura is Faerie +8, as well as +4 magical.) Those wearing *parmae magicae* (protection from magic) do not sense the beauty as strongly.

Finally Zacarus takes several steps forward, bows to the queen, and says: "Our beloved Lady Bellantia, she who causes the warm winds to blow and the flowers to bloom, who protects the glow of day and who soon shall drive back the dark night, mistress of the sun and lady of the bountiful fruit, may I present your esteemed guests, who hold you in almost as much esteem as do I..."

At which point he attempts to introduce the characters. If he gets any of the names wrong, or switches the names of the two characters, the faeries will call them by the names Zacarus gave them, forever.

Then Zacarus says to the characters: "As surely you have surmised, yon beauty can be none other than the splendid Lady Bellantia, and we, her humble court."

The characters may greet the faeries in whatever way they find appropriate. Encourage them to be ostentatious. When the introductions start to get tedious, the storytelling begins.

If Sir Velgarde Has Come Along...

Lady Bellantia recognizes Sir Velgarde instantly and ushers him to her side. With a touch, she restores him to the age of 24, his age when he visited her the first time. He will enjoy himself immensely at the party and always sits at Bellantia's right side. He retreats with her into her tree each night and heartily eats and drinks the faerie food. Knowledgeable characters realize that these actions will prevent him from ever leaving the forest. Sir Velgarde also knows this; he has abandoned the mundane world and endangered his soul, all for the sake of his lady love. He mostly ignores the characters (unless they offend the Lady) and spends his time associating with the faeries.



STORY-TELLING

Lady Bellantia stands and speaks to all who are gathered: "Let us come to know our guests, and let them come to know us, through tales shared. Tell us, Zacarus, a tale wondrous and beautiful, that our visitors may learn something of us."



With this, Zacarus, the portly spokesman, tells a tale of Imiere, a young faerie who was lost in the strange wilderness beyond the woods. There he saw all manner of bizarre things: fat, ponderous creatures with horns on their heads that made the sound of a bell as they walked (cows with bells about their necks), a tree that had been bent into strange shapes whose leaves were all thin and yellow and clumped atop it (a hay wagon), a field that grew stones instead of bushes, where people without their bodies roamed (a graveyard, the faerie could see its ghosts). Finally, as the sun was returning to the sky, a horrible clanging sound (church bells) filled his ears and sent him scurrying back to the safety of the gentle forest.

When he is done, Lady Bellantia asks the characters to tell a story of their own. They might recount one of their previous adventures or tell a story they heard from others. If one tells the story of the mortal midwife taking a night faerie to the world of the day faeries, Hermone will recognize the tale and discount it. "Such preposterous things these mortals say of us. No child of the night could live with those who relish daylight!"

If the characters do not tell a story, they will seem rude.

A very bad first impression. If they tell a good one, they will be very well received during the coming days and the storyteller will gain a special gift from Bellantia (see Bellantia's Gifts).

After the characters have told a story, Marnice tells one. She is a young faerie, and does not yet realize that faeries must hide much of what they know from the mortals. She starts to tell the story of the characters' visit to Lady. She might say, for example, "Once upon a time, six mortals came to visit Lady Bellantia, thinking they were just coming for a pleasant visit with our kind lady. One was a wizard of fire magicks, one a simple warrior who had never put his sword to the proper test..." Make up details to describe the characters. If one of the characters has a secret of some kind, she might mention something about that. She then recounts things that have not yet happened. "On the first day, when the sun set, they were taken to a place of safety to protect them from the dark lady's minions."

At this point the other faeries prevent Marnice from continuing. She is revealing too much. Lady Bellantia apologizes for the improper story and has Hermone tell one instead. The characters can keep trading stories with the faeries as long as the players are having fun.

If the Characters Cause Trouble

You should make it clear to the players that it would not be a good idea to threaten the faeries, to fight with



them, or to, in any way, insult Lady Bellantia. The magical power of the faeries is thoroughly spoken of in legend and lore, as is their fondness for vengeance against those who are ungracious and disrespectful. If the characters do cause trouble, the lesser faeries all flee in panic, but Lady Bellantia will stand firm and tell them to leave her court forever.

If they do not leave, she will retreat to her large oak tree which stands just behind her throne, and withdraw all her aid from them. The winter winds will feel like blades of ice, and the woods will stretch on; seemingly forever. Getting back to the safety of the farmlands or the covenant (the home of the wizards) will be extremely difficult. Furthermore, the dark, Unseelie faeries may well attack. It will not be a pleasant journey home.

If the characters truly abuse Lady Bellantia or her subjects, she can curse them so that woods will always be hostile to them. Forests will be, for these characters only, colder, hotter, muddier, thicker, and more extreme, and in every way more dangerous and uncomfortable. Forest animals will hate the characters. Perhaps they would be able to lift this curse by returning to Lady Bellantia and performing a service of penance for her.

WELCOMING FEAST

After storytelling, Bellantia says:

"Let our guests be welcome at our table, and let them share in the joyous bounty of our forest."

She rises, touches a barren hazel tree, and within minutes it sprouts leaves, and then luscious fruits of all kinds: apples, pears, berries, cherries and several others the characters are not familiar with. Faeries climb and fly to the fruit, picking it, playing catch with each other, engaging in mock fights; and eventually carrying it first to Bellantia, then to the guests, and finally to each other. No faerie eats food that it has picked itself. Hermone eats no food of his own; he only eats what Lady Bellantia has left of her food.

The characters may realize (by making a Faerie Lore + Intelligence roll of 6+ or Legend Lore + Intelligence roll of 9+) that eating faerie food can be dangerous, or Sir Velgarde may warn them. In extreme cases one can be trapped in the faerie world forever, though some have eaten of it without ill effect. With this knowledge, the characters can decide to eat or not to eat, as they see fit. The faeries think that refusing food is rude, despite any explanations offered, but will tolerate their guests' behavior.

Should anyone indulge in the food offered, roll on the following chart, and do so again each time a human eats the food at this celebration. Let the players give their characters bonuses up to +3 (if they eat little) or penalties up to -3 (if they eat a lot), but don't let them see this chart. A character with a penalty also gets an extra botch roll.

FAERIE FOOD CHART (ROLL D10)

Roll/Effect

Botch - The character will die if he or she ever leaves the faerie forest. (A botch is a 0 followed by another 0, and an extra botch roll means you roll an extra time to see if you get that second 0.)

0 or less - Severely Disoriented, the character hiccups loudly, sings off key, babbles incoherently, and generally has a great time. Indefinite duration.

1 - Granted Second Sight with an ability score of 0. This means the character sees things in a spiritual way as a faerie would.

2 - Random animal sounds instead of human speech emerges from the imbiber's mouth for duration of stay in the forest. Magi suffer penalties with spoken spells.

3 - Forest Affinity, the character becomes comfortable in forests and can survive in them easily through intuition.

4 - Special curse relevant to the character's nature or background, for duration of stay.

5 - Character gains an intense love of the forest forever.

6 - Character gains an intense devotion to Lady Bellantia, permanent.

7 - Some feature, such as nose or fingers, grows or shrinks for duration of stay.

8 - The food & drink bring deep satisfaction to the character, they may doze off and dream beautiful dreams.

9+ - No effect.

DARKNESS APPROACHES

As darkness falls, the faeries make their way one by one to the trees in which they will spend the night. They fear Ciertina's power and do not dally as the sun begins to set. They cannot emerge until dawn. Before Lady Bellantia goes to her tree, she gives each character a living leaf from the hazel and tells them that it will protect them from the dark lady's magic.

Hermone, realizing that they will be in the dark lady's land that night, and anxious to keep the characters from finding out her plot and his part in it, ensures that he is the last faerie left outside. Feigning concern, he tells them:

"You must come away from here and go to a place of refuge. When the sun sets, all manner of vile, vicious, bloodthirsty creatures come out of the ground, and you will be slain without our protection."

Hermone takes the characters a hundred paces from the court to a ring of mushrooms ten feet across (the ring, not the mushrooms). It is up to them to remember to collect their discarded steel and iron equipment. Then he says:

"Stay here in this faerie ring, and you will be protected from the dark lady's minions. But if you step out of the ring, even so much as one little toe, you will surely die. Very well then. You won't leave, will you?"

Hermone is lying because he does not want the characters to leave the ring and possibly witness the ritual that will take place. He lies with great effect, only a Guile + Perception roll of 16+ would let a character guess that he is lying. This roll should only be made if the player asks to do so, and it should actually be rolled by the Storyguide (GM).

The First Night

On the first night, the characters see the ritual that Ciertina is using against Bellantia. The most profitable course of action is to wait in the faerie ring until the ritual is over, then investigate the site, and then return to the faerie circle for safety.

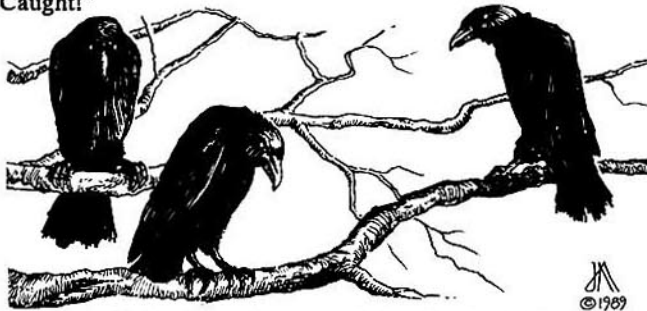
In the twilight, the forest is still, and the bitter winter winds pick up again. Characters see no movement and hear only the eerie creaking of swaying trees.

Soon, however, they notice dark shapes crawling out of the ground and moving about the trees. These are the dark faeries. As long as the characters remain within the faerie circle, they will not be noticed, even by creatures within just a few feet of them. Nor will the faeries of the night enter the circle. Thus the characters will have the chance to see a few interesting creatures without being attacked. The assorted goblins spend much of their time pulling sadistic pranks on each other and teasing the weakest among them. The silver wolves simply prowl around aimlessly, their noses stuck to the ground. Use your imagination and make up a few weird things they might see.

If anyone looks back toward the court, they will see much motion there, but in the dark it is hard to tell exactly what is going on there. A spell to see farther than normal would let a character see that dark elves, goblins, and hags are congregating where the Lady had had her court during the day. Near midnight, the place will be imbued with a silver glow, as the ritual to the powers of the night and the moon comes to its high point.

Ideally, the characters should find some way to see what is going on at the site of the ritual after the ritual is ended and it is safe. If the characters heed Hermone and refuse to set foot out of the ring, you can find some way to draw them out. It won't be a fun adventure if the characters spend their nights cowering inside the ring.

Any character who sneaks out of the faerie ring to investigate the ritual while it is in progress stands a good chance of getting caught. On the way to the ritual site, there is a 50% chance that they will scare up a murder of crows that flies in the air around them calling out "Caught! Caught!"



Even if the characters are not found out by the crows, they will have to make Sneak + Dexterity - Size rolls of 8+ to get a clear sight of the ritual without being spotted by those attending. If characters are found out either by the crows or the ritual attendees, they will be attacked by a formidable force. Getting back to the faerie circle is the safest course of action.

If they spy after the ritual, having the alarm sounded on them only means that they will be attacked by a few silver

wolves and goblins, enough to make them fight and let them know what they're up against, but not so many that they're a real threat. A silver wolf or two charge in from different directions, eager for a kill, while goblins gather at a distance until there are several of them before attacked en masse.

Once these opponents are defeated, the characters will be safe, unless they spend a great deal of time snooping around and/or talking among themselves. A few goblins will watch them from a distance, and eventually Ciertina will arrive after gathering a strong fighting force.

When they investigate the ritual site, the characters will see Lady Bellantia's fingernail clippings, which Hermone provided, on the throne rock, but there are no other physical signs of the ritual. The clippings will disappear at dawn if they remain on the stone.



The Ritual

Every night Ciertina gathers the Witches of Shadowdeep to perform the ritual of Deepening Night. They gather in a circle around the flat rock that serves as Bellantia's throne during the day, and which also serves as Ciertina's center of power at night. Hermone comes out of the tree he went into at dusk and offers Lady Bellantia's fingernail clippings, which are necessary for the ritual, to Ciertina. It is obvious that he is very fearful of her. Then the Witches of Shadowdeep begin their chanting, while Ciertina sings and Hermone skulks back to his tree. At midnight, the light of the moon shines forth from the flat stone (and reflects off the ice on all the trees), and the ritual is complete. The next day will be shorter than the one before it. As the characters have come just after the winter solstice, the days should be getting longer again, but within this faerie forest, the days are getting increasingly shorter. If the ritual is interrupted, the next day will be longer as Nature tries to right herself.

The Second Day

As the gray sky above the eastern horizon slowly turns pink, the dark shapes that move about the woods stop and sink mysteriously into the ground. During the twilight, at first the forest is silent, then the birds begin to chirp and sing, and then the daylight faeries climb out of their trees.

The characters can now start to understand what is happening between the two Ladies of this forest, but Bellantia is mainly concerned with throwing a good party for her guests. Continue the storytelling, initiate a few faerie-character conversations, perhaps have Bellantia ask the characters to think up a game for everyone to play, and encourage the characters to confer with each other as they try to deal intelligently with the faeries.

Character Options

- Question Hermone about why he said that they would



die if they stepped out of the faerie ring (provided they did indeed leave the ring and survived). He says "That's what scares you mortals, right? Death? I tried to use that quaint fear of yours to keep you in the faerie ring. I was afraid for your safety."

• Talk to the Lady about what happened during the

night. She replies, "Please try to enjoy our little festival. Not all that happens in these woods is pleasing to the heart, and I would be an ungracious host to burden you with news that does not concern you." If pressed for information, she says, "You would also be ungracious to force sad words from my mouth." She will not discuss the dark lady's ritual.

But other faeries are likely overhear the characters' attempt to get information, and they will want their help. Zacarus and perhaps some other faeries take one or more characters aside, out of sight and earshot of the Lady's court, and here they explain that the days are still getting shorter. They beg the characters to do what they can to stop the ritual and assure them that the lady will be very pleased with them if they do so. Have the faeries choose characters who have been less involved in the story so the players have something important to do.

• Ask Lady Bellantia for more gifts by which to protect themselves from the dark lady and her minions. She says she will grant what she can to them before night falls. As twilight nears, she gives a gift or two from the list of Bellantia's Gifts (see below) whichever ones you think are appropriate. She gives special gifts to those who have shown themselves especially good company during the party, such as any who played an instrument for the faeries to dance to. A few minor gifts are more than enough, unless the characters are definitely outclassed by the dark faeries.

PARTY

Most of the day is taken up in song, dance, stories, games, and feasting. The characters can participate however they want, and the revelry should be ad libbed as appropriate. Choose a faerie or two, and feel free to invent some of your own, to play out more fully, and have these faeries involve themselves with the group more than the others.

If the characters eat or drink faerie food or wine, roll on the Faerie Food Chart.

Be sure to involve those characters who would otherwise be outside of the action. You may even let a player role-play one of the faeries. Try to get everyone in a "lets have fun" mood. The liberal employment of Whimsy Cards is certainly advised.

THE WIZARDS' DUEL

During this day Siamosel, a blue sprite, challenges one of the wizards in the party to a wizards' duel, and the other faeries pressure the character if he or she declines. For the fun-loving faeries, a duel means a contest to see who can put

on the best show. Once this aspect of the duel is made clear, the wizard should have no qualms about accepting.

The mortal wizard goes first, as Siamosel explains that she is new at magic and wants an example to copy. The mortal magus is expected to cast some showy spell to delight the onlookers, and Siamosel will try to match it. For each spell that Siamosel casts, roll on the chart below. If the spell is nature oriented, Siamosel gets a bonus of up to +3. If it is anti-faerie in any way, she gets a penalty of up to -5 and extra botch rolls. She may refuse to try to duplicate any spell that Lady Bellantia would find offensive.

After several spells, or after any disaster of Siamosel's the contest ends, and the audience chooses a winner. Play it by ear. If the wizard has been a performer in addition to being a spell-caster, he or she is likely to win.

SIAMOSEL'S SPELLS

Roll/Effect

Botch - Disaster, possibly life-threatening

0 - Sputter, fizz, pop, but no effect

1-3 - Small version of the spell, with a strange side effect.

4-6 - Passable but inferior version of the spell

7-8 - Equal version of spell, with extra side effect

9+ - Glorious, showy, exciting version of the spell, a show-stopper

VIAROCHE'S OFFER

The tiny sprite Viaroche takes an interest in one of the characters. He is inquisitive, jovial, energetic, and as fun-loving as even a faerie can get. He will try to interest the character in various games, such as tag and hide-and-seek.

Viaroche will offer to come with the characters to the "twisted land of the bitter Lady Ciertina." The characters might not appreciate the magnitude of this offer, but other faeries who hear of it will gasp in surprise and fear. If the characters accept, they will have a valuable ally with them, but they will also be risking the life of a delightful little sprite. If the characters accept, he will join them in the faerie ring when the sun sets.

THE SECOND NIGHT

Once again the faeries quiet their festivities as the sun nears the horizon and slip into their trees as it sets. Hermone will make certain that the characters retreat to a distance, since he doesn't want them to see him come out of his tree and join the dark faeries. If Viaroche is with them, he becomes very scared. He will spend most of his time in the left ear of the person he has befriended, but then that character cannot wear a helmet that covers the ear.

To the characters it will seem that this night is much like the one before (provided they were not spotted then), but the traitor Hermone will tell the Dark Lady that there are mortals about who may try to stop her ritual.

Ciertina's strategy depends on what she knows. If the characters were not caught outside the faerie ring last night

and if they move toward the court just after sundown, Ciertina will not know about them yet. If they were in a fight on the first night, Ciertina will be prepared for their return, and if they wait a while after sundown, Hermone will have told her of them.

If she is ready for them, Ciertina will have goblins hiding in shallow pits and behind trees between the ritual site and the faerie ring. Silver wolves will be around a hill off to one side but ready to race in when the alarm is sounded. The ritual will proceed as it did the night before.

The strategy of the ambushers is to drive the characters back to the faerie ring after possibly killing one or two of them. Ciertina wants survivors who will spread stories of her power rather than useless corpses.

If they play it right, the characters have the chance to find out that Hermone is the traitor. They can slay many of Ciertina's minions, but they probably cannot harm her personally. Finding out about Hermone is sufficient to counter the ritual as he will then no longer be able to provide Ciertina with the fingernail clippings she needs. Unfortunately, the characters also have a good chance of being killed if they're not subtle.

First, they should spy instead of attack. Spying can give them the information they need to move about safely, and that a frontal assault would be needlessly hazardous. Spying also lets the characters see that there is an ambush being laid for them. Detection spells or Viaroche's aid will do the trick nicely.

Ultimately, Ciertina has an almost limitless supply of goblins and silver wolves to throw at the characters, given time to gather them from throughout the forest. They should realize that they are on her home ground, and that

trying to stand up to her attack is very dangerous.

VIAROCHE'S AID

Viaroche can scout ahead for the players, very handy for reporting that there are goblins and wolves waiting in ambush

for them and describing a safe path around the enemies. He might also be able to investigate the ritual and see that Hermone is the traitor, but only if the characters won't be able to see it for themselves. It's more effective for the story if they see Hermone with their own eyes.

Unfortunately, Viaroche is weaker than normal during the night, and he risks being harmed each time he flies to investigate something. The first time he flies away, a bat flies past the characters in the same general direction Viaroche went. This should remind them how dangerous spying can be for the little sprite.

Each time Viaroche spies out an area, roll a die and compare it to the ease factor you set. Make the ease factor 2, 3, or 4. If he fails to meet or beat the ease factor, the characters hear Viaroche squeal out the name of the character befriended and that is the last they see or hear of him.

ORCHESTRATING THE BATTLE

At some point the characters should be caught while sneaking around, and this will signify the start of the battle. Failed Stealth rolls and such might indicate being caught, or



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you can pick an appropriate time for it to occur.

To keep the battle moving, there's no need to know where all the goblins and wolves are at each moment. Remember that there are lots of them roaming through the woods, that they are disorganized but numerous. Ciertina and the witches will remain

at the ritual site throughout the battle unless somehow overpowered. If the battle becomes too long and the players know that Hermone is the traitor, speed things up by throwing a massive goblin horde at them. Viaroche's pleading can also hurry them back to the faerie ring if that helps pace the action.

(Players often dislike having their characters run from danger, even though it is the most logical step to take in these circumstances, so make it easier on them by giving them one last set of combatants to fight while they flee. For instance, if a huge mob of goblins is chasing them as they head back to the ring, set a small group of goblins in the way so they can defeat this smaller band and feel like their last combat was a victory rather than a rout.)

THE THIRD DAY

On this day the characters can reveal to Lady Bellantia who the traitor in her court is. At first she will not believe them, but when she sees Hermone cringing and almost in tears, she looks down at him for a time, solemnly nods her head, and banishes him from the forest. (The characters may meet him someday wandering the outside-world, stripped of his faerie powers.) With this knowledge, she can protect herself from the dark lady, stop the completion of the ritual and eventually restore her land. However since the festival is over, it is time for the guests to leave, and the faeries do not avoid making this clear. Lady Bellantia is probably grateful to the characters and gives them various gifts as a reward. Give gifts that fit in with the theme and scope of your saga and with the idiosyncrasies of your characters. If you use some other game system than *Ars Magica*, you may have to alter the powers of the gifts we list below.

The number and value of gifts given depend on what the characters have done. Each relevant activity has a point value associated with it. Add up these points and choose gifts whose scores add up to this total (give or take a few points).

POINT VALUE/ACTIVITY

- 1 - For each character who participated in the festivities
- 1 - For each character who had faerie food or wine
- 2 - For each notable performance (story, dance, etc.)
- 4 - For bringing Sir Velgarde
- 12 - For revealing the traitor
- 1 - For every act of kindness
- 1 - For each rude incident
- 4 - If Viaroche dies in the dark lady's land
- 1 to -5 - For destruction of trees (such as by fire

spells used at night)

Varies - For gifts already given (subtract point value of gifts)

THE GIFTS

1 - Healing - Lady Bellantia will heal a character of wounds incurred fighting the dark lady's minions, even grievous wounds.

1 - Teaching - Lady Bellantia will explain the ways of faeries, worth 2 experience points in Faerie Lore per day. Lady Bellantia might be able to teach other things as well.

3 - Romance - Lady Bellantia will allow a character to pay suit to her, and will dote upon him in return. If the character has sufficient charm and social grace it could develop much further. This could incur the wrath of Sir Velgarde.

1 - Sun Berry - If you throw one of these small, golden berries into the air, it will float there for an hour shedding gentle but thorough light in a twenty foot radius. Usable once.

2 - Her Ring of Copper - Anyone who calls Bellantia's name while wearing this ring will vividly remember her beauty and kindness, granting the character strength of heart, which translates as +3 on rolls to resist fear, mental domination, despair, etc. A character who overuses this power might develop a deep longing to return to Bellantia and serve her. Only the person to whom Bellantia gives the ring can use this power, and the power does not work in the Dominion. She has only one.

3 - Crown of Mistletoe - The wearer will not be attacked by any animal unless the wearer first attacks that animal. The mistletoe will stay fresh unless kept for a long time in the Dominion (the area under strong church control).

4 - Greater Healing - She touches and heals a character of an old wound, such as a missing hand or ear. Do not do this if it will ruin the character's image.

5 - Branch of Transformations - By striking an object or being with this branch, one can turn it into something else. The character must choose the new shape, speak a simple poem (at least two lines) about the transformation, and strike the target with the branch. This has the transforming power of up to a 30th Level spell, such as turning a person into a badger. The effect is permanent. The branch remains alive (and grows leaves in spring, loses them in fall, etc.) until it is used three times, and then it dies. Bellantia has two of these.

6 - Stag's Heart - This heart is to be exchanged with that of one of the characters. Lady Bellantia will summon a enormous white stag with an huge rack of antlers and officiate over the ritual that will exchange the two organs; the stag's heart for the character's heart. The stag's heart provides the character with great bravery (+3 to Brave rolls), a supernatural ability to leap and jump (add +5 to appropriate rolls), and a mighty endurance (+3 to all endurance rolls). What's more, whenever the character is in great need and is in or near the forest, the stag-kin who now possesses his or her heart may come to the rescue. At some point, however, the character may feel a strange need to come to the stag's aid as well.

LADY BELLANTIA AND FUTURE STORIES

Now that the characters have made friendly contact with Lady Bellantia, they can return repeatedly to her court. Her home in the forest can become a kind of delightful hidden sanctuary deep in the forest. Bellantia can be a source of valuable information, adventure opportunities, strange magical items, and unique role-playing opportunities.

DAYLIGHT FAERIES

Bellantia, the Lady of the Sunlit Grove — She is as tall as a human, lithe, and fair, dressed in a flowing, shimmering, silver gown. When role-playing her, make your gestures slow, gentle, and graceful; use your wrists and hands a lot. She has many great powers which she rarely uses but that would serve her well if she were directly threatened. Each time she uses a faerie power (which would be whatever tickles your fancy), she would temporarily lose a few points of Faerie might.

Faerie Might 38, Size -1, Int +2, Gracious +5 vs. Vulgar -7

Act of Kindness, 1- Whenever Lady Bellantia bestows any sort of kindness upon her subjects or guests, the person involved will feel especially blessed and self confident, and for the remainder of the day has double their effective self confidence.

Hermone, the Lady's Servant — A four-foot human-like faerie with a squat torso but disproportionately long arms. His nose is long and reddish, and his cheeks are rosy but crumpled and pock-marked. He wears a blue tunic and pantaloons of bright green. A cap with a large, white feather is always on his head.

Hermone is the faerie of the night who was taken by the mortal midwife and left in the land of the daylight faeries. He is acting as a spy for Ciertina. He loves Lady Bellantia, but he fears that should she find out his true origin, she would cast him from her court. Ciertina has threatened



to reveal his proper station if he does not help her gain more power, and Hermone would rather serve Lady Bellantia while betraying her than not serve her at all. He is a dark faerie at heart.

Faerie Might 8, Size -2, Int -1, Deceitful +6 vs. Honest -5, Fatigue n/a, Def +6, Soak 0*, Body Levels: 1, -5, Incapacitated

* Iron weapons do +50% damage to Hermone.

Zacarus, the Lady's Messenger and Spokes-

man — Portly, five feet tall, and cheerful, dressed in bright clothes with ruffs and a few bells. His personality is half clownish and half dignified noble. He has a bronze sword at his side, and could put it to good use if he needed to.

Faerie Might 15, Size -1, Int 0, Regal +4 vs. Silly +2, Sword: 1st +3, Attack +7, Dam +7, Fatigue n/a, Def +8, Soak +5*, Body Levels: 0, -3, -5, Incapacitated

* Iron weapons do +50% damage to Zacarus.

Vlaroche, a Tiny Sprite — He is the size of a bee, and his transparent wings create a soft buzzing sound when he flies. He is very energetic and friendly. Though he speaks in a whisper, his voice is quite loud.

Faerie Might 6, Size -5, Int 0, Fatigue n/a, Def +14, Soak 0*

Body Levels: None, any damage destroys him.

* The touch of an iron weapon, even if Soaked, destroys him.

Marnice, a Young Faerie — She is a sprite about two feet tall, garbed in a light, flimsy, green tunic. Dragonfly wings sprout from her back.

She is very curious about the mortals and not skilled in the deceitful ways of dealing with them. Faeries have to censor their words and actions around mortals, and Marnice hasn't quite learned this yet. Give anyone who speaks to her for any length of time an experience point in Faerie Lore. Also make up some tidbits of gossip about the court to pass along.

Faerie Might 4, Size -3, Int -2

Slamosel, the Wizard Sprite — Two feet high with butterfly wings, clothes of shifting colors, and a small magic wand. She is learning how to cast better and better spells with her wand, and she will take interest in the magi of the party. Each time she casts a spell, she loses 1 point of Faerie Might for the rest of the day.

Faerie Might 17, Size -3, Int +2

Other Faeries of Daylight — Also attending the celebration are various faeries of all shapes. Some look like large butterflies or colorful birds. Some are traditional elves (diminutive and industrious, as in the fairy tale *The Shoemaker and the Elves*), some are sprites with satin wings. They interact with the characters however you wish. Try to develop one or two additional personalities of your own to throw into the role-playing whenever things slow down.

THE MOONLIGHT FAERIES

Ciertina, Lady of the Benighted Forest — She rules the night woods, and now, thanks to the help of the Witches of Shadowdeep, she is gaining power over her arch-rival, Bellantia. She is a tall, thin, pale woman wearing a





flowing black robe, trimmed in silver. Move with short, harsh motions when you role-play her.

The hazel leaves the characters have protect them from her magic. Otherwise they would be dead at her hands in a matter of seconds. She is extremely powerful, and one of the most magical

of all the faeries.

The numbers listed for her powers are the points of Faerie Might temporarily lost when the spell is cast.

Faerie Might 35, Size -1, Int +4, Calculating +4 vs. Impulsive 0

Powers: Deflect Wood, 1- Instantly at will she can deflect any wooden weapon, including arrows in flight, so they veer harmlessly to one side. She uses 1 Faerie point per weapon.

Invisible Stride Among the Trees, 1- She can walk behind or into one tree and immediately walk out from behind another up to seven paces away. She can do this up to six times per round (once per second). She uses this trick to escape or to sneak up on opponents.

Shape of the Wolf, 5- If desperate, she can turn into a silver wolf to escape.

All of her more aggressive powers are protected against by the hazel leaves, you may wish to have her try to cast some nasty spells at the characters, and be surprised when they fail.

The Witches of Shadowdeep — These old women, mortals all, are helping Ciertina cast the magic spell that is making night increasingly longer. They are highly magical, but they have little strength to help in a physical fight. They are evil. As long as all seven of them are together, they can perform their various Chants, but as soon as one is threatened by imminent attack, hit with a spell, or so on, they will disappear in smoke and a clap of thunder to some distant place of safety. They are all exceedingly aged, with deep wrinkles, toothless mouths, and gray hair. They are draped in ragged clothes of green and brown. The characters will most likely never see them move about, as all they typically do is stand and chant. They seek to gain power over those they hate. The characters, as a result of this story, may fall into that category.

Witchly Might 28, Size -1, Int +2, Soak -2, Body Levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Unconscious

Powers: Chant of Burning, 2 points each per round- If a battle is raging near them, they chant a monotonous series of nonsense syllables. Each round they focus their attention on one of the characters, who is then hit by the ill effects. All can hear the chanting in the background, but the one on whom the malignant power is focused can hear it pounding in his or her ears. The heart of the target's body feels like it is burning, and the hands, feet, and spine tingle, but no actual damage is done. The target must make a Stamina roll, and if they do not get an 11+, they drop everything they carry, fall to ground, and writhe in pain for two rounds.

Chant of the Wheel of Flames, 3 points each per round-

The witches can form and control a huge floating wheel of flames, thirty feet in diameter, which spins slowly and has thirteen spokes. When it is first formed, it is be over 100 feet in the air and it will take at least three rounds until it can come to the ground on top of the characters. The flames only hurt living, breathing creatures; trees, plants, clothing and all accouterments will be unharmed. Any person engulfed in the flames takes +20 damage per round. The flames can never get closer than 1 foot to the ground so if a person lies flat they can avoid being injured.

Goblins — Most of Ciertina's subjects are stunted, misshapen goblins of wildly varying features. Almost the only thing they have in common is that they are vaguely human looking and tend to be ugly. They have gray to green skin and wear poorly tailored black linen clothing. They fight with large (for them) tarnished, bronze knives, but they are not stalwart warriors. Any goblin struck by iron will certainly flee rather than stick around for more excruciating pain. If they botch their Attack rolls, their brittle knives break.

Faerie Might 8, Size -2, Int -1, Knife: 1st +6, Atk +6 (+7)*, Dam +9. Dodging: Fat +2, Def +6 (+9)*, Soak +1**, Body Levels: OK, -1, -5, Unconscious

* Higher number for when the goblin uses the Stealthy Sidestep.

** +4 damage from iron & steel

Powers: Stealthy Sidestep, 1 Faerie Point- The goblin appears to be a foot or two from where it really is. It works on as many people as the goblin cares to affect, and costs 1 Faerie point per round per person affected. In melee, this advantage gives the goblin +3 on Def and +1 on Atk. Those affected suffer -4 on missile weapon rolls against the goblin.

Silver Wolves — These fierce beasts are Ciertina's major fighting force. They fight without fear and completely without mercy. Once one has made a kill, it stops for one round (if it is not being attacked) and howls. Their purple eyes reflect no light. Once they are killed, water pours from their wounds and the characters may discover that their hearts are made of ice. If the hearts can be prevented from melting, they are worth 3 animal vis each (wizards and alchemists would pay well for them)

Faerie Might 12, Size 0, Cun 0 Bite: 1st +5, Attack +6, Damage +8, Fatigue +4, Defense +7, Soak +5*, Body Levels: 0, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

* +50% damage from iron & steel

Other Faeries of the Night — Crows, dark shapes in the distance, giant bats, and dusky elves wander around through the dark. They are not part of the Ritual of Deepening Night.

FAERIE MIGHT

Use the Faerie Might scores for magic resistance rolls and magic penetration rolls. If a faerie's Might is reduced, the resistance stays at the maximum level while the penetration bonus drops to the level of remaining Faerie Points.

A NOTE TO THE STORYGUIDE:

The faerie woods of day and night offer the characters the chance to experience humor, and even absurdity alongside anxiety, fear, and possibly death. As the Storyguide (GM), it is up to you to manipulate the feelings of your players to these ends. If the daytime scenes become too absurd, tone them down. If they're too mundane, throw in a strong dose of chaos and simply confuse the players to death. In the nighttime scenes, however, there should be no joy, no levity, no humor; only a grim sense that death could lurk behind any tree. If the players would take any of the details of the nighttime scenes as silly, or if you can't portray them seriously, change the details to match the mood. The events of this story were not written this way because "that's the way it really happens" but because we want to produce a given effect in the hearts and minds of the players. However, since you know your players best, change any detail that runs counter to the effect you desire.

The poem

The Shortest Day

*A Lady sweet, queen of pure white Light,
Invited me to faerie-land, just after night,
To ease the pain of my mortal plight,
And so I was welcomed upon the Shortest Day.*

*She gave me her hand, and offered me a meal
At a feast so beautiful it could not be real
Oh, such joy my heart did feel.
As we laughed upon the Shortest Day.*

*A gift I brought, a blue spruce bough,
It leaned and drank from her cup. I knew not how
But the branch did grow. It towers now,
And we sang upon the Shortest Day.*

*Tales we told as the sun dipped low
An evening of such beauty that I could not go
My joy at this lady I attempted to show
As we spoke upon the Shortest Day.*

*The Shadows grew, she pulled away.
The tables were cleared. She would not stay.
Her gift, a kiss, a bronze ring, no more could I
stray.
And we wept upon the Shortest Day.*

*As darkness began to gather might.
The Lady's tears did blur my sight.
She turned on heel and made her flight.
Alone was I, upon the Longest Night.*

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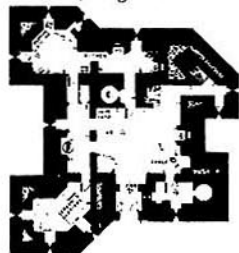
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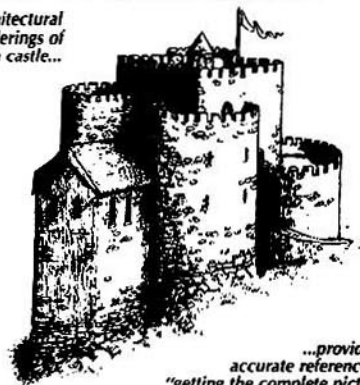
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Forces of the Night

Dark Fantasy Returns to the DC Universe

Vincent Cecolini

People are fascinated with the dark side of life. No one is able to explain why they enjoy being frightened, but people wait on long lines to view the latest scare flick, and they purchase horror novels at a feverish pace, anticipating shocks, thrills, and chills in return. Perhaps people want to stare their fears in the face — at a distance. Maybe they use the genre as a catharsis; venting tension built up during the day's endeavors.

But horror fans, like any other type of audience, often tire of the current trend and look for something new to satisfy their appetites; their tastes mature. No longer content with plotless reasons to murder teenagers, audiences have forced the horror industry to accommodate their needs by providing a more imaginative and intellectual product.

Horror comics have also gone through a transition. In the mid-1970s, after the success of William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*, readers saw the arrival of Marvel Comics titles such as *The Son Of Satan* and *The Ghost Rider*. Although inferior by today's standards, these titles were stepping stones for today's top selling comics.

Written in a style which encompasses some high quality prose, an eerie sense of poetry and book-length complexity, and complimented by spectacular sequential artwork, horror comics have come a long way. There are many titles on the market that exploit the reader's desires for nonstop thrills. Out of the numerous major and independent companies, DC Comics stands out with such titles as *Swamp Thing*, *John Constantine: Hellblazer*, *Sandman* and *Black Orchid*.

What makes a comic horrific? How can a writer and artist consistently entice readers, keeping them at the end of their seats, nervously turning

each page as their fears are brought to life each month?



THE SWAMP THING

While first appearing in the early 70s, *The Swamp Thing* could be considered the first major horror comic of the 80s. Created by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, *Swamp Thing* is the tragic story of Alec Holland, a young scientist working with his wife, Linda on a "bio-restorative" formula out in the Louisiana bayou. The experiment was sabotaged with a firebomb and Alec, engulfed in flames and drenched in his own chemicals, disappears into the swamp. Days later, Holland rises from the mire, a half-human/half-vegetable creature dressed in weeds and moss.

The series introduced regulars such as Matt Cable, a private investigator and Abigail Arcane, niece of the *Swamp Thing*'s arch enemy, Anton Arcane. Abby would become a major character in later storylines when she recognized the humanity and eventually fell in love with the *Swamp Thing*. Much of this original series, which was canceled in mid-1976 (though it is now hailed as classic in the annals of comic fandom), has recently been reprinted as *Roots Of The Swamp Thing*.

The creature returned in 1982 in *Saga Of The Swamp Thing*, continuing his quest to regain his lost humanity, but the real horror began when Alan Moore took over with issue #20 of the still-floundering series. He did something unusual, even in comics. He literally gutted the character

identity and created a new origin, which would ironically be discovered by the oft-dismissed DC super-villain, the *Floronic Man*.

At that point presumed dead by his would-be murderer, General Sutherland, the *Swamp Thing* was frozen and readied for a series of insidious experiments. Hoping to find out how Alec Holland became such a monster, Sutherland enlisted Jason Woodrue, a noted botanist (and the *Floronic Man*), to conduct tests. His findings would be shocking — Alec Holland did not survive the sabotage which transformed his body; he was dead by the time he hit the swamp. It seemed that the plant life inherent in the swamp that absorbed his remains also absorbed his consciousness, thus creating a being that resembled a man.

When defrosted, *Swamp Thing* found Woodrue's tragic notes and went on a rampage, killing Sutherland in the process. Returning to the swamp, he lay dormant, suffering through a series of horrific nightmares, until Abby's cries for help awakened him. One of the most memorable exchanges between the *Swamp Thing* and Abby came when she asked him if he is Alec. He replied somberly, "No. Not Alec."

The *Floronic Man*, thought to be *Swamp Thing*'s evil counterpart, then gained control over the world's vegetation, manipulating it to wreak havoc on the human population. It took a re-emerged *Swamp Thing* to explain that humans and plants must co-exist; without one there could not be the other. As the plants reneged on their alliance with Woodrue, he was defeated and placed in the Arkham Asylum by the garishly costumed band of superheroes, the *Justice League*. (*Swamp Thing*, as do all other denizens of his dark world, exists squarely in the DC Universe — the same one which houses *Superman*, *Green Lantern* and

Wonder Woman.) The new origin of the Swamp Thing has been reprinted in a graphic novel entitled *Saga of The Swamp Thing*.

But at this early stage of the new series, the Swamp Thing had yet to realize how significant his presence would be as an intermediary between humans and the plant world.

He began to slowly confront his identity and adapt his abilities, battling demons and monsters, both supernatural and human. Issues #25 through #27 depict one of the most horrific tales to date, dealing with a demon monkey which manifests itself into a child victim's most hideous nightmare.

In issue #37 he is introduced to an arrogant but mysterious Englishman named John Constantine, who comes to see the Swamp Thing hoping to get answers, but ends up helping the creature discover his potential abilities. Constantine would at times be-

come an annoyance, showing up suddenly, asking for help, and throwing a monkey wrench into the relationship between the Swamp Thing and Abby. By that time, Abby and Swamp Thing had become an "item" after a tragic accident left her husband, Matt Cable, in a coma.

Through a series of trials which exposed him to the darker spectrum of humanity's pains and sins (Moore's electrifying *American Gothic* series-within-a-series known in fan circles as DC's supernatural *Crisis on Infinite Earths*), Swamp Thing discovered that he was in actuality an Earth Elemental, the latest in a long line of planetary guardians. In issue #37 it took him weeks to regrow himself, but by issue #73 he would regularly transport himself, anywhere throughout the world and across any of a dozen types of energy fields. He also learns of the strange and majestic *Parliament of Trees*, a South American oasis for re-

tired Elementals, who in turn, look down at their latest champion for daring to love a human.

Alan Moore would provide terrifying stories that captured the true essence of American fear, while forcing the reader to confront a variety of social horrors. Unfortunately, his all-consuming passion for his masterpiece, *Watchmen*, would cause him to tire of the series, and it began to lack its earlier intensity. His last issue would be number 64.

Readers wondered if there was another writer who could achieve the same ingeniously crafted suspense for which Moore had become so

well-known. Rich Veitch, having consulted carefully with Moore long before-hand, was both prepared and gutsy enough to take the job. Starting with a bang in Swamp Thing's explosive confrontation with an angered Parliament of Trees, and continuing with a year-long quest for a successor (Swampy wanted nothing more to do with being an Elemental after the American Gothic crisis nearly destroyed Abby — he simply wished to settle down and love her forever) after an ill-chosen replacement was destroyed. Abby herself eventually agreed to give birth to the next Earth Elemental despite the fact that the meddlesome, enigmatic John Constantine would have to reenter their lives to be a type of surrogate father.

While some comics series have had less than average artists, *The Swamp Thing* has had three of the most recognized in the business. Bernie Wrightson, Stephen Bissette, and Richard Veitch have all made large contributions to the series by supplying imaginative artwork which always succeeded in adding depth and dimension to the stories.

With the Swamp Thing's abilities fully exploited, and his place in the world with Abby realized, it seemed that it was time for the unlikely couple to live happily ever after. Unfortunately for this strangely beautiful and accessible couple, they are situated in the DC Universe, and this means trouble lay 'round every corner. Most recently, the events surrounding the recent Invasion of Earth by several aggressive DC alien races, have forced Swamp Thing into the time stream, making for some fascinating encounters (the first being with Sgt. Rock of Easy Co. during one of his very last World War II missions, and the second with *Enemy Ace*), and an excellent time for new readers to jump onto the series. Incidentally, there will be a new Swamp Thing film soon reaching theaters. Fans of the current series hoping for the picture to capture some of Moore and Veitch's lush atmosphere should not hold their breath.

JOHN CONSTANTINE: HELLBLAZER

At a time when English horror literature has become popular it is only



fitting that **John Constantine, Hellblazer**, receive his own monthly title. John Constantine, looking suspiciously like rock singer **Sting**, and possessing all the luck of television's journalist/monster chaser **Karl Kolchak**, **The Night Stalker**, has been a part of the DC Universe since his cameo debut in 1985, as the mysterious, often noxious and sometimes annoying confidante of the Swamp Thing. Skillfully mixing comedy with tragedy, his solo series is a realization of what other horror comic writers have been striving to achieve for years. Timing was important for the creative success of this series; the subject matter and graphic horror depicted would not have been published in the past as it is intended for mature readers. When he first appeared in the Alan Moore scripted **Swamp Thing** issue number 37, entitled "Growth Patterns," John Constantine was an arrogant, esoteric, and unpredictable Englishman; all that was known about him was his interest in the black arts and weird phenomena. His presence would have a great influence on the Swamp Thing's endeavors; he would usually show up unexpectedly and tease the Swamp Thing with insight into the creature's potential abilities. Unlike the Swamp Thing, who is gentle and looks out for the welfare of both plants and animals, Constantine has a different reason for battling the dark side of life. While the Swamp Thing's series explores social horrors, Constantine's solo series often deals with political terror.

John Constantine seems to exist in a vortex of synchronicity; he skips along the paths of coincidence and luck which give rise to fortune and calamity. His appearances in the Swamp Thing encompassed issues 37-40, 44-50 (he was Swampy's guide to the gruesome goings on during American Gothic, eventually uniting many of the DC Universe's greatest mystics to strike a balance between good and evil which is acknowledged to this day), #55 (he popped up at the Swamp Thing's funeral), #65, #67 (which also contained a seven page preview of the **Hellblazer** series), #70, #71, and 73-77 (where he played a key role as

surrogate father to Swamp Thing and Abby's future offspring — both series are unquestionably for mature readers).

Some readers, trying to reason out the background and make-up of the mysterious Englishman, conceived the notion that his character might have been an agent of God since his initials, J.C. are the same as Jesus Christ. This theory, a comparison to the symbolic character, Jim Conklin, in Stephen Crane's **The Red Badge Of Courage**, was slyly refuted by



writer **Jamie Delano**, and, in the eighth issue of **Hellblazer**, Constantine accepts a blood transfusion from the demon **Nergal**.

Though less than 20 issues old, the **John Constantine: Hellblazer** series has shed new light on his dark, terror-filled past, making his character increasingly complex, yet still keeping him a conundrum to his erstwhile fans. Constantine is an intermediary between reality and the supernatural. Once called Magic's Consort, a High Wire Act on the Line between Heaven and Hell, he is a man on a mission. Often thought of as an anti-hero, he seems dedicated to the struggle against evil to the point where his actions can actually seem callous. He has discovered that men and women have to face their own inner demons.

Superficially, Constantine can be

seen as amoral, stopping at nothing from achieving his goals. In **Hellblazer** number two, he was forced to sacrifice a friend to an evil spirit his friend had accidentally unleashed in his pursuit of a drug fix. The demon, **Mnemoth**, was one that affected its victims similar to the way in which the gypsy curse affected Billy Halleck in Stephen King's novel, **Thinner**. Constantine used his friend as bait for the spirit and with the help of the Haitian kingpin, **Papa Midnite**, he bottled the spirit in his friend and proceeded to imprison him behind a brick wall. Despite (or because of) his actions, Constantine does have a guilty conscience, a closet full of skeletons and ghosts which constantly haunt him.

Though Constantine appears to have psychic abilities, neither Moore or Delano have actually stated whether the character is angel or sorcerer. One thing is for certain, the specter of the "Newcastle incident" has shaped the life of this compelling character. Once the lead singer for the new wave group **Mucous Membrane**, in the late 1970s, Constantine brought his friends and bandmates back to the vacant club where they made their debut, unaware of the atrocity they were about to encounter. Through dark, detailed narrative and stomach wrenching graphics, both Constantine and the reader recently relived (**Hellblazer** #11) the terrible incident that would turn his casual interest in the occult into his calling.

After discovering a series of dismembered and disemboweled corpses, Constantine and company found the club's only survivor, the club owner's daughter who told a tale of a devil cult and child abuse. Instead of fleeing, Constantine decides to face the conjured beast and defeat him, not realizing the consequences his imminent victory would have. The story climaxed when, after losing the child, Constantine faced the demon, who predicted his future and took him briefly into the pits of hell, changing his life forever.

Hellblazer may well be the first comic to make its readers sleep uneasily. Writer **Jamie Delano** has a talent for creating monthly fear that is fresh;

a task hard to accomplish in this day and age. Delano fills the reader with a sense of dread that is successfully achieved through believable, living characters, tight detail, and the power of horrific suggestion. Delano speaks to the reader on an intellectual level, dealing with topics other comic books usually avoid.

By mixing fictional, supernatural horror with realistic horror, the reader is enlightened as well as thrilled, chilled, and entertained. Besides dealing with the hunger spirit, Mnemoth, issues #1 and #2 deal with drug addiction. Issue three was written, tongue in cheek, about demon yuppies, whose commodity is human souls. In this issue, Constantine risks his soul shrewdly haggling with hell's financial leader, the demon Blathoxi, in order to trick the greedy demons. The issue is also a political parody of the British government, connecting the value of human souls to the reelection of Margaret Thatcher. Issue #4 introduces religious extremists, the Resurrection Crusade and hell's own Damnation Army, which Constantine would later be caught between during repeated clashes.

Issue #5 hits close to home for many American readers since it deals with the aftermath of the Vietnam War. A guilt-riddled veteran tries desperately to come to grips with his experiences at a time when a middle American town is praying for the return of soldiers missing in action. The results are terrifying when the troops miraculously return, bringing the war with them. Constantine is only a witness to this weird phenomena, and by not taking action earned a substantial amount of fan criticism.

What makes horror literature so powerful is its use of detail and dialogue to force the reader to conjure up his own demons; something that is all too often lost in horror films. Until now, comics have also lacked this ability. Dave (Black Orchid) McKean's horrifically surreal covers set the tone for what is to follow. Artist John Ridgeway succeeded with frighteningly dark imagery that at times seemed to want to jump off the page at the reader. Most importantly, it left enough room for the reader to draw his own conclusions. Unfortunately, Ridgeway would leave the ser-

ies before it was ten issues old. Those who thought his shoes would be hard to fill were quieted when Richard Piers Raynor and Mark Buckingham took over as artists. It would not be fair to say that the artwork improved, but Raynor and Buckingham's brilliantly repulsive work on the now classic issue #11 speaks for itself.

What makes **John Constantine: Hellblazer** so interesting is that the reader can identify with him. Deep inside there is a part of us that is like him; having to battle the demons that darken our lives. Though Constantine may seem calculating and callous, he is also shown to have all the frailties a mortal can bear. He can't drive. His bones break, and he catches ferocious colds. The blistering case of acne he is stricken with as a result of his battles with Nergal do not fade for several issues. In fact, what may be most horrifying of all is the fact that so much life and limb is spared as a result of the Hellblazer's eerie, often grotesque adventures.



THE BLACK ORCHID & SANDMAN RETURN

The story begins with an orchid set against a vivid sunset sky. What follows is a fast-paced journey through love, darkness, madness and terror. After numerous delays and setbacks, DC has finally released a three issue mini-series, in prestige format, featuring the **Black Orchid**.

A woman of mesmerizing beauty, the Black Orchid is named after her trademark calling card, a specially scented flower she leaves at the scene of her endeavors. Since her first appearance in **Adventure Comics**, issues #428 through #430, she has remained a mystery, emerging out of nowhere to battle crime and then vanishing without a trace.

She has appeared in various titles, such as **Suicide Squad**, **The Blue Devil**, and **DC Challenge**. But until now, there was little known about

her. Readers were aware that she could fly with grace, possessed the strength of a dozen men, and had plant-like, bulletproof flesh, but the full extent of her abilities had yet to be exposed. Some readers believed there might have been more than one person assuming the role of the mysterious Black Orchid. The new mini-series answers the questions posed since her creation in 1973 by Sheldon Mayer.

As Part One of the story unfolds, the Black Orchid, a master of make-up, has assumed the alias of Ms. Emma Halliwell, a secretary taking minutes in a corporate boardroom meeting. The agenda is to strategically plan future business endeavors, such as illegal drug distribution, prostitution, and pornography. This is organized crime in the late 1980s and the Black Orchid has infiltrated its core looking for a principle, unaware that it is none other than Superman's archenemy, **Lex Luthor**. As the meeting is called to a close, the Black Orchid's cover is blown and she is captured. Immobilized by steel cords, she is left behind to perish when the building is set ablaze.

With the introduction of her childhood friend, Doctor Philip Sylvian and another plant-like woman, her origin is slowly revealed. He reminisces about a group he was once a part of group consisting of botany professor Dr. Jason Woodrue (the Floronic Man), Pamela Isley (**Poison Ivy**, whose pertinent beginning recently appeared in **Secret Origins** #36, written by **Black Orchid** author Neil Gaiman), Alec Holland (the **Swamp Thing**), his future wife Linda, and Susan Linden, Sylvian's love.

Doctor Philip Sylvian is haunted by a recurring nightmare from his past. Sylvian was on a date with Susan when her ex-husband, Carl Thorne, suddenly confronted them and killed her. Obsessed with the deceased woman, Sylvian crossed her DNA with an orchid and created blossoms; plant-like women that were replicas of Susan.

These creatures who are amazingly beautiful and possess unique abilities; are called Black Orchids. When the current Black Orchid perishes, another is prematurely uprooted. Confused by her spotty, underdeveloped memory, she goes to Sylvian for answers.

When Susan Linden's bitter and psychotic ex-husband is released from prison, he confronts his former employer looking to pick up where he left off. Indeed, it is Lex Luthor who turns him down due to past insubordination, and Thorne leaves to face Dr. Sylvian once more.

Thorne murders Sylvian in the second issue, and begins destroying his work. He stumbles upon the horrific sight in a green room; the rooted Black Orchids that he at first believes to be statues of his late ex-wife sculpted out of plants. After destroying most of them, he realizes his mistake when he reaches a childlike version of his wife who opens her eyes and speaks his name. He flees in terror and tells his story to Lex Luthor who sees the discovery as a possible lucrative business venture.

The nearly grown Black Orchid and the childlike replica, flee, the last surviving reminders of Sylvian's tribute to his dead sweetheart. Still looking for answers, the more mature Orchid seeks out the remaining members of the group Sylvian had talked about, hoping to find out what she is, unaware that she is being hunted by Lex Luthor and Carl Thorne.

After unsuccessfully confronting the insane Poison Ivy in Arkham Asylum (with a little help from a certain **Darknight Detective**), the mature Black Orchid sets out for the Louisiana Bayou Country in hope of locating Alec Holland. The final issue, on sale at press time, explosively draws together many of the darker elements of DC's supernatural universe, and should firmly establish the Orchid among the strangest and most sensual of them all.

The Black Orchids are modern day Frankenssteins, hapless creations stemming from a scientist's obsession. The dark horrific atmosphere which provides the setting for this tale of love, death, greed and revenge is achieved by the powerful, hauntingly surreal painting of Dave McKean, who is also responsible for the **Hellblazer** and **Sandman** covers. Unlike other sequential artists who specialize in pencil and inks, McKean not only conveys the action clearly with each panel, but also the emotion of each character through his use of flowing colors and unique tones. His artwork may well

set new standards in the industry. McKean's painting is complimented by the tight, poetic writing of Neil Gaiman. The British author's work is as atmospheric and moody as his artist. Gaiman is currently authoring the newest monthly addition to DC's dark fantasy cadre, **Sandman**.

As yet, little can be found on developments in Gaiman, Kieth and Dringenberg's **Sandman: Master of Dreams**, save to say that it is also "for mature readers" and is more than worthy of sharing shelf space with **Orchid**, **Swampy** and **Constantine**. Those who still hold a nostalgic twinge for the occult figures of DC's yesteryear are certain to find this weird new presentation of an old favorite both baffling and thrilling. In **Sandman**, Gaiman is not afraid to poke just a little bit of fun at the darker, stranger corners of the DC Universe, and fans will be treated to a free-for-all of bizarre guest appearances with each issue. Nods to the old **House of Secrets**, **House of Mystery** and **Witching Hour** comic characters (each gleefully stomach churning and portrayed in an eccentrically animated style) are worked into the plot, which has the God of Dreams angrily searching for his rightful relics after being held captive for seventy years by evil, if bumbling, would-be sorcerers. The relics, incidentally, are currently held by such luminaries as poor John Constantine — and the aforementioned Justice League!

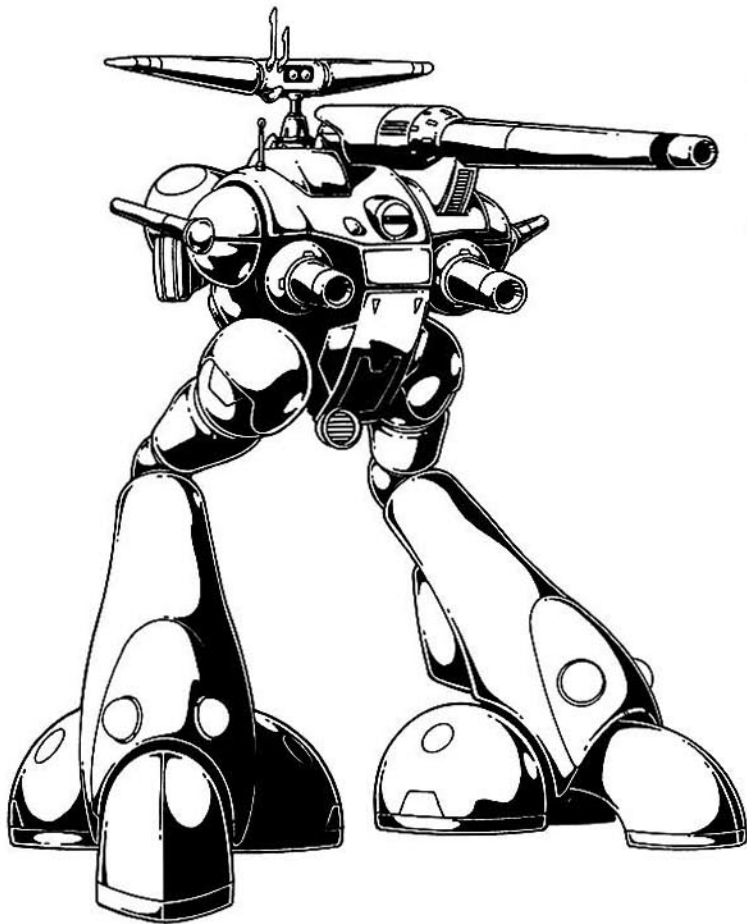
By shipping to direct market comic book shops and not to newsstands, this new wave of DC supernatural series can easily circumvent the Comics Code Authority seal of blandness and therefore leap for the jugular. The freedom provided in developing a direct sales following for these books has made them quite popular, as readers have grown up a bit over the past decade and seem well-prepared to enjoy mature reinterpretations of many of their childhood heroes. The trend is certain to continue (Marv Wolfman has only to sign the dotted line before resurrecting DC's crack[ed?] team of occult investigators, **The Night Force** with Gene Colan.), thereby assuring us that, on a regular basis, comic books — for the first time since the EC nightmares of the 1960s — can actually be frightening.

Revised DC Heroes RPG to Include Strong Dark Fantasy Elements

Due for release this June, the second edition of the **DC Heroes Role-playing Game** will include many of the elements which have given rise to the popularity of Dark Fantasy in DC comic book universe. Debuting in the revised RPG are four of the most popular characters of this genre: **Swamp Thing**, **Hellblazer**, **Sandman** and **Black Orchid**. These characters have never before appeared in **DC Heroes** or the many supplements for the game. The new edition features each character on a Character Card with a full color illustration and statistics for use in role-playing.

In addition to the cast of dark fantasy characters, the revision features a special section in the *Background/Roster Book* which describes magic, mysticism and occultism in the DC Universe. Mystical powers have been included among the other powers used in the creation of heroes for the game, and players will have the opportunity to create their own characters for use in adventures set in the dark, often seedy, magical atmosphere created in the comics.

Perhaps the most exciting development for the system in general is that the *Rules Manual* also includes new Genre rules for the game. Players will be able to customize their game to play in this or most any type of atmosphere. As dark fantasy has had a recent surge in popularity, it would seem that the interests of role-players have followed this line. The second edition of the **DC Heroes RPG** will offer information on these popular characters, their world and their powers as verified by editors at DC Comics. As with their **Batman** and **Watchmen** supplements, the information will be found nowhere else.



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Since the publication of **ROBOTECH II: The Sentinels™**, we have been deluged by inquiries asking if this will be the last of the Robotech™ RPG books. *Absolutely NOT!!*

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The Red Dagger Inn



Edited by Charles and Sydney Barouch

THEIF OF FATE (BARD'S TALE III)

A lot has been happening at the Inn lately. We've seen startling amounts of technical expertise being applied to computer games. *Pool of Radlance*, an exceptional simulation of a non-computer game and *Fairy Tale Adventure*, an example of how effectively you can use the color, imagery and sounds of the computer to enhance the game, springs to mind as two premiere examples of what is being done with new software these days.

Thief of Fate (Bard's Tale III) from Electronic Arts/Interplay, tries mightily to join these programs on the cutting edge of technology, and in fact it seems to succeed. This new addition to the *Bard's Tale* series is faster and cleaner than its predecessors while still evoking the same feelings. If we were only concerned with the technology involved, this would be a rave review.

However, the most important test of a piece of software at the *Dagger* is whether or not it's a good game. On that question, *Bard's Tale III* earns a solid maybe. You see, it depends on how you approach it. For people with disks full of *Archmages* from *Destiny Knight (Bard's Tale II)*, it is a wonderful game that gives you more and tougher adventures in the lands surrounding *Skara Brae*. If you are new to *Bard's Tale* and believe in a bit of healthy cheating, you will still find this game worth owning. If you are among those that believe that games shouldn't require devious planning or dozens of hours of previous gaming, this game isn't for you.

You see, *Thief of Fate* is more than just hard, it's excessively brutal. The people at Interplay had to create a world that wouldn't bore the die hard players. They had to allow characters to continue on from *Bard's Tale* and *Destiny Knight*. That left them two options. They could strip transferred characters of almost everything, or they could make the game horribly tough. Tough won.

The important thing to remember is that you have an edge over other players, however. In the column, we will give you hints and tips that will make it possible to survive the rigors of *Thief of Fate* long enough to get to the good parts.

Section I: Hints for the New Player

1) In the wilderness and in *Skara Brae* itself, you will be attacked by small groups. Always take at least five characters. While the four in front take all the risks, the fifth one will still share evenly in the experience points. This will allow you to get a character up the first few levels.

2) Monks, Magicians & Conjurers are most important.

3) Save your characters often using the remove function in the Refugee Camp. Resist the temptation for 'just one more combat' until you are at least sixth level in most char-

acters.

4) Shortly after you enter *Skara Brae*, there is a building full of goodies. Find it as soon as you can. Also, try to find a map from *Bard's Tale* (the original game). At least two places on that map are still doing business and it is important that you find both of them early on.

5) Any time you find something of value, use the following trick to multiply it by seven: Return to Camp. Fill every slot in your party. Pass all of the Gold and all of the good equipment to the first character. Press 'R', then '1', then <ESC> to remove that one character. Add the character back, using the 'A' command. Now pass everything to the character that is now in the first slot. Once you have done this for all seven, shut off the computer without saving the game. When you reboot, all of the characters will have identical gold and spares of the equipment you have discovered.

It is particularly important to do this with things that have limited charges. Each time you use that item before multiplying will reduce the charges left on each copy that you make.

6) Once you have a third level Monk, multiply him using the following trick. Then your Monk-clones can take the first four positions and protect your magic-using characters: After saving the game with the 'L' option in the Camp, reboot. As soon as you see the Bard singing, type in a 'U' to get to the Utilities menu. Select the option that lets you import characters. Select the option that lets you import from *Bard's Tale III*. Use your character disk as the SOURCE and as the DESTINATION. Each character that you select will obviously already exist on the disk (since you used the same disk both times). When it asks you 'Rename or Destroy', pick Rename and the software will clone the character for you. All of his XPs, Equipment, and Gold will be intact.

7) Clone magic-using characters once they can cast seventh level spells. Never change class on a magic-using character without cloning him first. This is especially important when changing to Chronomancer. To quote the manual: "...once you become a Chronomancer, you lose the power to use all of the spells you have previously learned".

Section II: Advanced Hints

1) Before you import characters from *Bard's Tale II*, boot up that game and check over the equipment each character has. Almost all weapons will disappear when you transfer the character, even weapons that also exist in *Bard's Tale III*. Most armor will survive unharmed. You might want to bring over multiple copies of your old characters. We recommend *Archmages* and *Monks*. If you have a high level Thief, bring him along to identify objects.

2) Get a Chronomancer in a hurry. These magicians are

useless until they reach third or fifth level, so get them early and train them up before you try any dimensional travel.

3) Try to find the spots shown on the **Bard's Tale III** map. Most of them are marked by text only and have no graphic representation. Try to figure out their purpose in the game.

4) Experience points pile up more quickly in the starter dungeon than in the outside world. Find out the secret of the Mad God's Temple by exploring the dungeon carefully.

5) When you finally do attempt the planes, make sure your party has just been healed, re-energized and saved off. The first few trips to *Arborea* can be hazardous to your health.

Even with these hints, you'll still be over twenty hours from the meat of the game. We have only given you what you need to get started. This is not a straightforward game.

LEGACY OF THE ANCIENTS

Single character fantasy seems to have become passe ever since *Wizardry* and *Ultima* got us hooked on party adventures. There are still some good ones (the *Zork* trilogy comes to mind) but there aren't many of them still out there. *Legacy of the Ancients* (Electronic Arts/Quest Software) is a good example of the genre.

It's a dead man. His corpse is still warm. There's a look of panic on his face, a gold bracelet on his wrist and a leather scroll clutched tightly to his chest.

Your character, a local peasant, takes the scroll and bracelet, only to find himself transported to the Museum of the Ancients. From there, his adventure has just begun. To win through the trials before you, and try to learn about the scroll that drew you here, you must explore the museum. Unfortunately for you, this is no ordinary exhibition hall. You see, some of the exhibits contain items that you can take, others contain images that you can step through. The museum is a gateway to various parts of your world.

It isn't a very friendly world. Travel outside of the towns is neither safe nor easy. Oh, and that scroll you took from the corpse...it just happens to be one of the most evil artifacts ever unleashed upon your world. And of course, we haven't gotten to the worst part yet.

It seems that the museum charges you to view the exhibits and you have very few coins to spend. Choose your path carefully if you wish to get any kind of playing time from the game.

Hints:

1) Get the Knife from the Arms Exhibit before venturing out. It isn't much protection but it is the best you can hope for in the beginning.

2) Resign yourself to visiting Thornberry. It really is a nice town and it's the only place you can go to start.

3) Learn to wager wisely. There are games of chance in every town. Black Jack gives you the best odds but you should try them all at least once.

4) Buy armor and better weapons as soon as possible. Prices vary significantly from town to town, so visit all the stores and keep notes.

5) Training is not only a good idea, it's also the most

fun you'll find in this game. While we'd rather not spend the entire game parrying fireballs, it is a nice change of pace from being killed in the swamps.

With these hints, you'll be able to get a good start on the game, however, there is still the scroll to reckon with, not to mention the scroll's master. Our only serious complaint is the frustration factor. It is very easy to run out of things to do. You know there is more going on, but the game relies heavily on your being able to read the designers' minds at some points.

One final note. If you enjoyed *Legacy of the Ancients*, look for *Legend of Blacksilver* from Epyx. *Blacksilver* is essentially a sequel to this game, written by the same team. Our sources indicate that it is a bigger and slightly more polished game that is very similar to *Legacy*.

BEYOND ZORK

As you may or may not know, Infocom — that last bastion of the text only adventure — has started moving into graphic circles. The change was gradual and while they are now pushing into the mainstream of adventure games, they took some interesting steps along the way.

Beyond Zork was one of those steps. It is emphatically a text adventure that was dressed up to look more like a graphic game. Aside from a border, a few gauges, and a small Automap area, this is a lot like the Infocom games we all love. In fact, the thing that separates this game from the others in its line isn't the graphics or the on-screen statis-

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tics. What separates this game is a bloodthirstiness that we never thought we'd see from this cerebral company.

Unlike the puzzles of the *Zork* or *Enchanter* trilogies, this game is designed to kill you off. A prime example is their statistics system. It seems that regardless of how you distribute your meager starting points, you won't live past the second combat. And that second combat is easy to find. You see, *Beyond Zork* is a pattern game in the worst sense. It requires you to play and replay until you learn what the software expects you to do. All games have some elements of patterning, but *Beyond Zork* carries this beyond reason.

We wanted to like this game. We love most of the Infocom games that we've reviewed or played for personal enjoyment. It is quite possible that many of you will enjoy it. There is nothing wrong with the game, per se — it just isn't part of the *Zork* family. Our only solace is in seeing the new, intensely graphic games that are coming out from Infocom now.

THE HOBBIT

No review of fantasy software would be complete without mentioning the Addison Wesley/Melbourne House software based on J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, *The Hobbit*. The packaging is quite complete and eye-appealing. It contains a copy of *The Hobbit*, a guide to *Middle-Earth* which is described as "sixteen pages of the laws, lore and the language of *The Hobbit* Software Adventure, lavishly illustrated with Tolkien's original artwork". It also contains a fairly easy to use reference card, a small map covering the areas of *Mirkwood*, the *Misty Mountains*, the *Grey Mountains*, *Rivendell*, and your starting spot, *Bilbo's hobbit-hole* at *Bag End*. Unfortunately, the map isn't very useful in playing the game.

One nice feature that is included in the user's guide is a double set of hints. The first set is very basic and designed for people who have not played adventure games before. The second set is more in depth, and the clues are written in a code (translation supplied) so that you cannot inadvertently glimpse ahead at a later clue before you get a chance to try your own ideas first.

Because the game is not new, there is no 'word wheel' — that increasingly popular form of software protection — to get in the way of such things as combat. You should have a blank formatted disk handy on which to save your game in progress.

The Hobbit is a combination of graphics and text. At each new scene, you get a full screen graphic representation of what you see. Hitting a key will then remove the picture from the screen and give you a verbal description of the area. You don't see the graphics if you return to an area; however, you can turn the graphics on and off at will by typing 'LOOK'. The format is very similar to many other text adventure games we have seen, except that we have found this game to be fairly limited in the number of words it understands. There doesn't seem to be much leeway in your actions; basically, you have to do exactly what the publishers expect you to do. We found this very frustrating.

Another limitation of the software is that it seems to be very easy to skip major parts of the story that are necessary to the completion of the game. Sometimes you have to go back and redo entire areas that you may have missed. It

seems that someone who hasn't read the book will have a very hard time understanding what is going on, whereas people who have read the book several times (and how many of us fantasy fans haven't read *The Hobbit* more than once?) may find this software boring.

The action follows *Bilbo Baggins* as he does what he did in the book; the only difference is that the software leaves out entire parts of the story. This tends to make the knowledgeable player even more dissatisfied.

After our disappointing excursion into *The Hobbit* software, we hesitated at the thought of the 'sequels'. A friend of ours who has gone through *The Fellowship of the Ring* has indicated similar experiences.

RDI NEARLY DESTROYED!

The *Red Dagger Inn* almost closed for good late last year. It seems that right after finishing our review of *BattleChess* our *Amiga* began to act strangely. It was infected with the *SCA virus*!

We frantically signed onto *Quantum Link* and downloaded a *Virus Checker* called *Virus X* by *Steve Tibbets* and quickly discovered that half of our disks were infected. Fortunately, the *Checker* was able to resurrect most of them, and the review had already been completed.

For those of you who are not familiar with the term, a computer virus is a program that writes itself endlessly onto new disks — breeding like a cold virus in a person — until all of your software is infected. The damage involved could be anywhere from negligible to complete ruin. *Legend Software* (makers of the game *Firepower* and *Roger Rabbit*) for example, lost every copy of a game they were developing to the *SCA virus*. That sort of damage could put a company out of business.

The sad thing is that the *SCA virus* was developed as a joke. The authors didn't believe that the virus would actually do any serious damage. It reminds us of another virus we were exposed to on our *Compaq*.

It seems that someone thought it would be funny to trash my hard disk. He brought two supposedly identical disks of *Public Domain* software (inexpensive, privately produced software). He gave one to a friend of ours and made sure we saw him boot it up. Then he offered us a copy.

We discovered the difference between the two disks when our copy erased our hard disk, destroying all of our software. Fortunately we had a back-up copy.

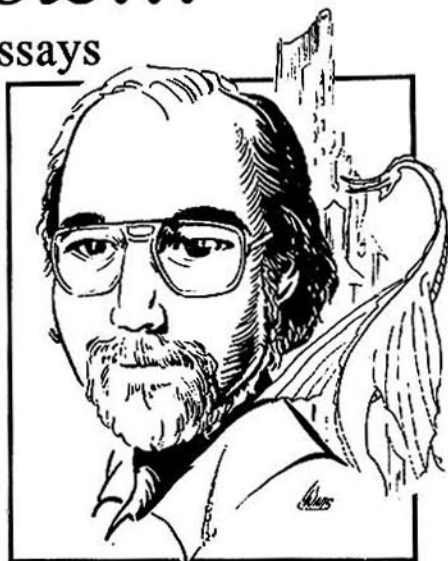
What we really want to drive home here is a lesson in responsibility. Many of our readers are likely to end up in computer related industries. Some of you might find yourselves able to create sophisticated programs like these viruses. People can now hurt anonymously; technology can now be used to maim our possessions by remote control. All we can say is please do not! If you want to prove your skills, follow the example of the people like *Steve Tibbets* who devote the time and effort to creating *Virusbusters*. Why? Because we're all in it together, gang, and hard disk destroyers, even pranksters, are no friends of ours! Let's return technology to more useful purposes, like creating *Bard's Tale IV* or *Ultima VI*!

Editor's Note: Special thanks to Ginny Reynolds and Joe Caro Jr. for their comments on games reviewed this issue.

Psssst! Here's a Note...

Fourth in a Series of Gaming Essays

by Gary Gygax



It occasionally seems that some role-playing game enthusiasts have never managed to progress beyond grammar school days. You see them all the time, harassing their poor Game Master with chronic note passing. Why players do this is often an inexplicable mystery. There they are, a whole group of folks about to have some real fun in a role-playing adventure. The GM is beginning to relate the opening of the scenario to his eager audience of a half-dozen players. Then, just as he gets to the meaningful part, the portion riddled with clues, hints, and a fair amount of factual material, one of the group furiously scribbles something on a scrap of paper, folds it, and "surreptitiously" hands it to the GM. "Psssst!"

The GM's narration is broken, everyone's concentration is disturbed, and probably a fair amount of the setting is spoiled. What for? Typically for nothing more important than a bit of detail which is extraneous to everything. The note-passer is satisfied, for the other players are now concentrating on him or her and the GM is very much aware that the individual is there. The phenomenon is worthy of consideration only because of the actual need for such secret communications from time to time. Because there are occasions when one or another player must communicate information regarding his or her character which only the GM can be aware of, it too frequently invites a world of abuse. Until the note is read, the GM has no idea as to its content...at least not at first. So what do you do when confronted with a player who is disrupting the game through abuse of a communications technique?

There are essentially two reasons why players will write notes and messages. One is to convey needed and timely information regarding the player's character, equipment, actions, and so forth. The other is to disrupt the flow of the game, and stems from impoliteness, attention-seeking, and/or an ignorance of the principles of role-playing games. Before considering the wrongful sorts, let's cover the needed cases. In any reasonable campaign these should be few and brief.

Each and every player's character will eventually develop a number of personal and confidential aspects. These secrets will pertain to that character's person, beliefs, knowledge, training, skills, ethical outlooks, acquaintances, friends, possessions, and occasionally, actions. Consider the actual play group. It might contain your best friend and others who are almost as close to you. How much do you really know about them, however? How much do you reveal about yourself? The band of adventurers, agents, associates, or whatever they are called within the campaign might well be likened to the actual persons. They are a team of closely associated characters who travel, live, and work in close

proximity to one another. They share the mundane, the exotic, the life-and-death perils, and the fabulous rewards. In this regard they might be deemed to be even more closely attuned than the best-knit group of RPG players. Still, they have some secrets and do things which the others are unaware of.

In the course of adventuring there will be instances where such confidential things occur. Information, the functioning of some item, or the acts of the character can be considered here. Suppose the individual character is a thief, for instance. While the character might indeed be most cooperative with the others in the group in general terms, he or she might, on occasion, seek to pilfer certain things. Then again, some character might know information or non-player characters or have certain "special" skills. While retaining this knowledge as personal and confidential, he or she might still wish to utilize it to assist the whole of the team. There are many other possibilities, but you have the picture.

At the beginning of an episode of play each such player should have a prepared list of general information and instructions to hand to the GM. The data will remind the GM of the confidential information regarding the character and will also be informed of what general actions the character will be engaged in which are of secret nature and not to be revealed to the others except as the player chooses or by some error on the part of that player's character. Observation by suspicious player characters might also develop details of previously unknown information regarding the character in question, but the GM will pass that sort of data to only the player or players observing and learning by means of their own secret instructions to the GM regarding their character's actions. This sounds complicated and furtive. It isn't...or shouldn't be.

This type of information passing should be limited to the commencement of the play session. Then, once, perhaps twice, during the actual play of the game the players might pass along a note to the GM. It might say, "This is a secret message of absolutely no import at all. Please tear it up now." Then again, the note might tell the GM that some associate of the player's character, his or her henchman for instance, will secretly do, or attempt, thus-and-so. (Of course, assuming that the GM is providing play for his or her usual

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group, there should be no need to remind the masterful GM of anything — at least not in writing. Silent communication by look, gesture, or pose will suffice to convey all. Then, when it is likely that some secret action would occur, the GM of superior sort makes a point of pausing and having a few private conversations with the players.)

Expert players and expert GMs keep such communications to a minimum. Basically, RPGs are group activities of a generally cooperative nature where the adventure and all that occurs therein is shared by the character team. Perhaps some messages of confidential sort must be passed, or private conversations held, but these should be infrequent and carefully staged; if for no other reason than to avoid suspicion and mistrust on all levels.

In my opinion that it is indicative of a masterful player team when there is an absolute minimum of secret player-GM communication. This is not to say that characters don't have privy information. The GM knows it, the players know it, and there is no need to move out of the game and role-playing by intrusive activity. The general instructions mentioned above, plus opportunities for a whispered word or two with the GM during breaks in play should suffice.

Also, the Master Game Master might request such information from time to time in the course of play: "I want each of you to write down the actions your character will take during the next five minutes, please." That allows for all manner of things from realistic character behavior to the secret instruction. Given all this, what is the reason for the

message-passing too frequently evidenced in many groups, and especially in convention teams?

There is a general class of impolite players mindful only of their own desires and interested only in how their character will succeed. There are those who misapprehend the game form, seeing it as a group *competitive* activity rather than a *cooperative* team, where success is generally a matter where each character assists the others so as to assure a greater degree of viability, reward, and so forth. In a situation where the players and characters are strangers some amount of secrecy is necessary, at least until things are established. When note-passing activity occurs continually in a group regularly playing together, it is indicative of inferior Game Mastering, group disharmony, or both. It is certain that the group will not be extant in a relatively short period of time.

Suspicion leads to hostilities. What occurs in the course of play tends to spill over into social interactions beyond the game. Certain games do call for secrecy, treachery, and the like. If the play group is unusually mature and the GM exceptionally able, such games can provide an ongoing entertainment vehicle for the group. However, it is the antithesis of role-playing game viability. The RPG is a social activity for a peer group of close associates, and those campaigns which survive for more than a year are those which follow that form.

Aside from the ignorant player, who else passes notes unduly? Attention-seekers and those wishing to gain per-

sonal advantage at the expense of other participants (GM most certainly included!) and their characters. Attention seeking players are typically unsure about how well they will perform during play, and about how well they will personify their character. They use the device of continual disruption to draw everyone's attention to themselves directly and their character by association. Listen to what that person is saying, watch out for the character, for there is something strange going on. Indeed there might be. Then again, the player might have some petty character and merely be harassing the poor GM with all manner of requests and instructions of unusual nature, impossible sort, or totally non-germane to the situation at hand. The Game Master can handle the attention-seeker easily enough, however. A brief message in reply to the second, third if the GM is very patient, saying, "I hate wasting my time and the rest of the group's reading notes. The next one I receive which is of useless sort in my opinion will be read aloud to the rest. Quit writing and start role-playing!"

Now we have the selfish player to contend with. These individuals are typically ones who desire notice too, of course, but they have deeper desires beyond that. Each such player typically desires to monopolize the Game Master's attention, to dominate the other players personally but by indirect means, and to have his or her character gain substantially more than the others. This selfishness extends broadly to the game, the GM, the other participants, and to the other player characters involved. In short, the note-passing player will have the focus of attention, and all else possible, and that individual willingly does so at the expense of all. The ignorant can be informed, instructed, and thus quickly mend their ways and become beneficial members of a group. Not so the truly selfish participant. These players know very well what they are doing by disrupting the game by writing and passing notes. Interestingly, it is a fairly easy matter to be rid of them in all save tournament situations. The Game Master needs only to identify the individual and then pointedly ignore the missives "surreptitiously" passed.

Pointedly ignoring the notes and their passer works wonders. Then, at some critical juncture, the Game Master should ask everybody what their character is doing. The note-passer will gesture towards the notes near the GM or mention them. "No, I don't want a secret communication. Your character isn't invisible, so tell us all what he is doing." Either the selfish individual will get the message and correct his or her play for the duration of the adventure or else that player will soon pick up and leave the game. From my personal experience at conventions, it is more likely that the latter will occur. Either things go their way, or they take their marbles and go home.

Finally, there is the problem arising when a couple of selfish note-passers are involved in a tournament and they are otherwise capable players. In fact, I've seen and experienced this, and the rest of the group has typically responded by starting to behave in the same fashion. This is a true dilemma for the Game Master. It isn't possible to simply pack up the game. It isn't reasonable to allow the barrage of scribble missives to continue. What a situation! Time is likely to prevent you from a short, remedial course on role-play gaming. The easy way out is to really set the whole

group up so that they fail at worst, have their characters eliminated at best. It's a tempting solution but not one for masterful GMs to take except in extremes. There are a few things which might turn it around, however. If you are very orderly, you might pause, inform all players that you've noted their desire for secret and independent action, and request that each furnish a complete set of general and specific orders for their character so that you can operate strictly from what is written, and that failure to note something will result in no action for the character that turn. Then, while protests are being voiced you can suggest that if the written orders are not desired, notes should be discarded as an interim step. If you tend to be a bit more chaotic, try making a little bonfire of the heap of messages before you, and light your cigarettes with the scraps of paper, (suggested only for those who are professional firefighters) or, make spitwads of them, unread, and flip them about randomly.

Role-playing games are a special and distinct entertainment form. They promote social interaction and play acting through the personification of characters involved in the adventure scenario. Though some secret information exchange is sometimes necessary, whether GM to player, player to GM, or even player to player, when notes become the usual means of communication, or even a frequent one, something is wrong. It might be the game. It might be the scenario. The Game Master could be at fault. Most likely, though, it is the player who fails to understand the nature of the RPG or doesn't care about the enjoyment of others as long as he or she achieves his or her ends. No matter what the cause, it is a matter for the Game Master to handle with alacrity and firmness. If the game is the instigating factor, be sure not to penalize players and consider it when judging performance, weighing relative lack of resorting to such behavior as highly positive in the face of a flawed system. The same is true of scenarios encouraging this form of anti-role-playing activity. Should you discern that you are the proximate cause of note-passing activity, then the matter is most easily solved. Finally, the above essay addresses actions which will redress the matter of players disrupting things in this fashion.

One last word. Do take it easy on the very young players, even if they are selfish in their motivation. If proper play is encouraged, and you gently but firmly discourage disruptive behavior, the uncertain and lacking in self-confidence can be guided towards enlightenment. It might not happen then, or even for a score of adventures thereafter, but in the long term, many such individuals can be turned into inveterate gamers and champions of the fact that no notes is good role-playing.



Dragonrealms

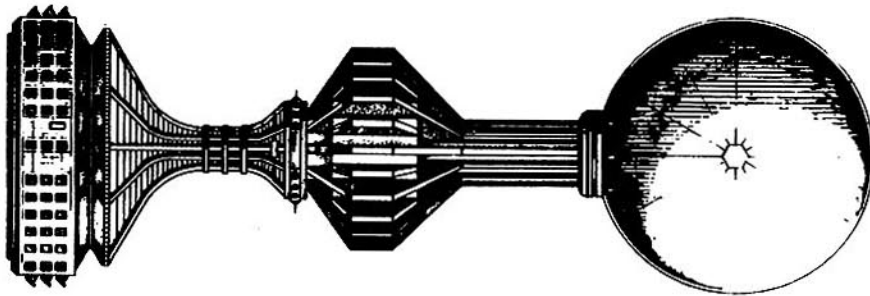
Unraveling the Mysteries of McCaffrey's Pern

Bill Fawcett

The following pages contain excerpts from *The Dragonlover's Guide to Pern*. This illustrated guide to Anne McCaffrey's world of dragons and thread will be available this fall from Del Rey Books. The guide itself will be in a large (9"x11") format and about 200 pages long, with every page packed with information and illustrations. Included will be sections on virtually every aspect of Pern; the first landing, the people, places, thread, culture, plants, animals, and, of course, the dragons.

The guide has been put together and partially written by Jody Lynn Nye, who spent months working closely with Anne McCaffrey. Jody has also authored two *Chosen Path* books set on Pern for Tor Books, several novels and short stories, and is also now working on a new *Dinosaur Planet* novel in collaboration with Anne McCaffrey (projected release early 1990). She has also just completed another illustrated guide, this one to Piers Anthony's *Xanth*.

There will also be a special section on the organization and tactics of the weyr's dragon wings, contributed by Todd Johnson, Anne's son and a pilot (of more contemporary carriers) himself. The entire guide will be illustrated by Todd Cameron Hamilton and James Clouse. (*They also illustrated The Guide to Castle Amber featured in our last issue - ed.*) Everyone involved spent months recreating Anne's images in words and art, and then perfecting them under her guidance.



RUKBAT

In the constellation known as Sagittarius the Archer, positioned at -41° right ascendency 19°25' 200 light years from the Sol system, there is a fourth-magnitude blue-white star designated as Alpha Sagittarius. The Arab astronomers who discovered it called it Rukbat Al-Rami, or "the Archer's Knee." Throughout Earth history, it has also been called Al Rami, Ruchbar ur Ranich, Rucba, Rukbah, and Rukbar, all referring to the ancient Arabic tale that gave the constellation its name.

Circling the star Rukbat are 5 planets, two asteroid

belts, a rogue planet on an eccentric orbit captured by the gravity well ... and an Oort cloud at the perimeter of the solar system...

On the third planet, among seas of liquid water, heavy volcanic and plate-tectonic activity caused the earliest single land mass to reform into three continents over the last hundred million years. One continent is gigantic, taking up more than half of the available land mass. One somewhat smaller which resembles a dragon in flight looking back over its shoulder is approximately the size of Earth's Eurasian land mass. The last very small barren continent is isolated on the other side of the world in the middle of an ocean 5000 miles wide. The planet's diameter is approximately 6500 miles...

COLONIAL LANDING: SHIPS & COMMANDERS

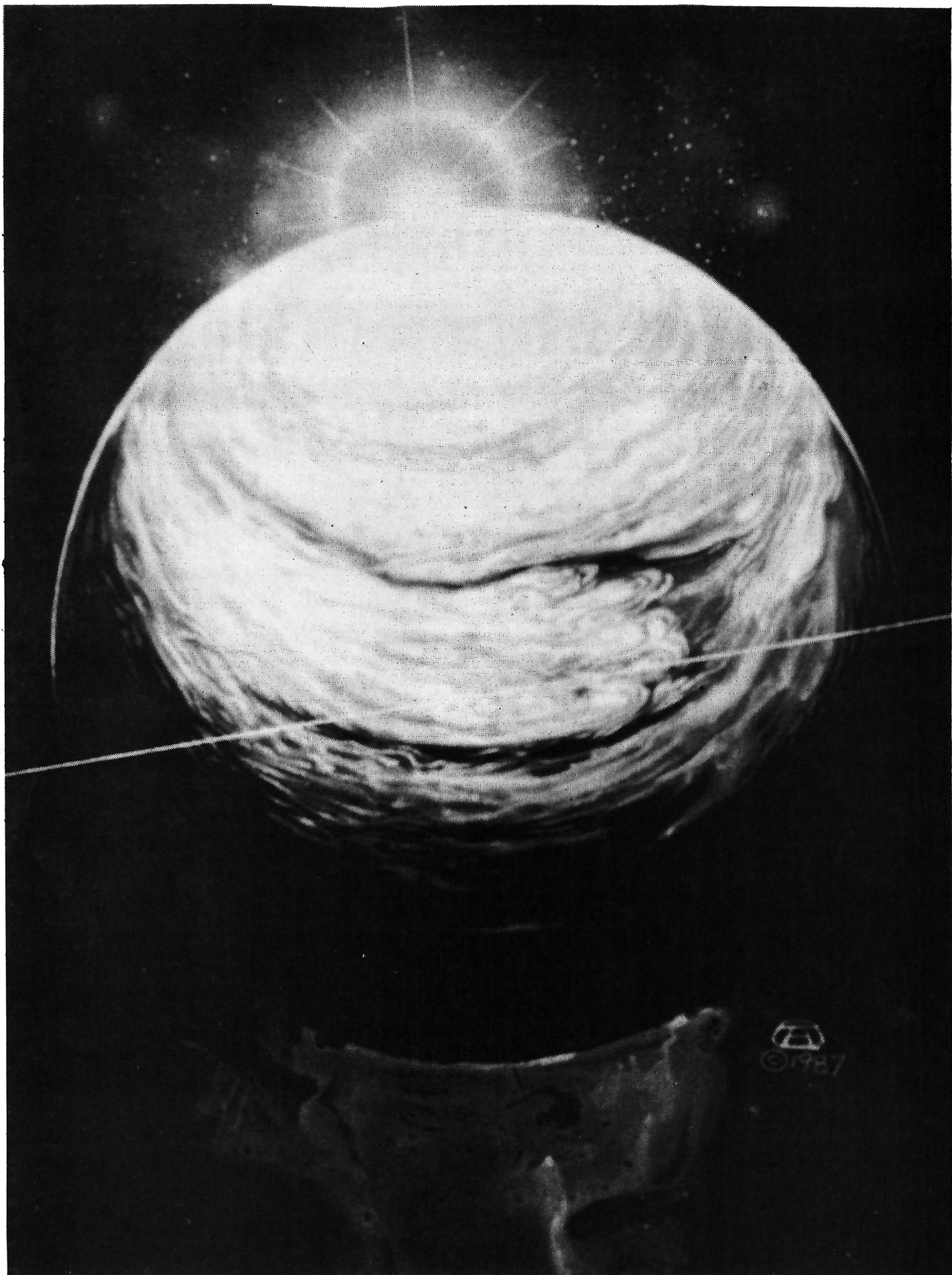
A Charter was drawn up between the group of colonists and the Council of the Federated Sentient Planets. Six thousand and twenty three people signed the Pern Charter, giving them rights to certain numbers of stake acres. Three ships, under the command of Admiral Paul Benden, a hero of the Nathi War, spent fifteen years crossing from Earth to the Rukbat system. The *Yokohama* held the same number of people, awake and in deepsleep, as the *Buenos Aires* and the smaller *Bahrain* combined...

The journey took fifteen Earth years. The crew aboard each ship alternated five year shifts out of cryogenic sleep. Only vital personnel, among them Admiral Paul Benden and his two captains, Ezra Keroon and James Tillek; and astrogator Avril Bitra, spent the entire trip awake. Benden had been the commander of the Purple Sector Fleet and led the FSP victory at Cygnus, which turned the tide of war against the Nathis. He was in his eighth decade when the colonists departed Earth. Humans of his day could expect to live up to eleven decades, so he was considered to be in late middle age...

One more sentient life-form joined the humans' exodus to Pern: twenty-five dolphins, all volunteers, slept in the cryogenic chambers. They admitted that, like the humans, they were eager to explore new seas, and to work rounding up specimens of native creatures the marine biologists wished to examine and catalog.

One of the dolphins, Olga, lied about her age in order to be allowed to make the journey with her newest calf. She wanted to make certain that he would be happy in his new home.

The *Dragonlover's Guide to Pern* also includes a comprehensive section on Dragons, including their origin,



physiology, psychology, and training.

DRAGONS

Kitti Ping was a tiny, frail woman, already over a hundred years old at the time of Landing. Because her strength was already failing, she sat in a throne-like raised chair equipped with servomechanics that helped her hands to continue her delicate work. Her skill at manipulating the Eridani techniques of biogenetics was impressive, almost legendary. When she was called upon to alter the dragonets, she threw herself entirely into her studies. After several attempts, she produced a batch of dragon embryos which she was satisfied would do what the colony needed them to do. She died at the age of 110, without having seen the results of her genetic engineering. Her assistants and her granddaughter could refer to her program as it progressed, noting each stage of development happened precisely when and as Kitti intended it.

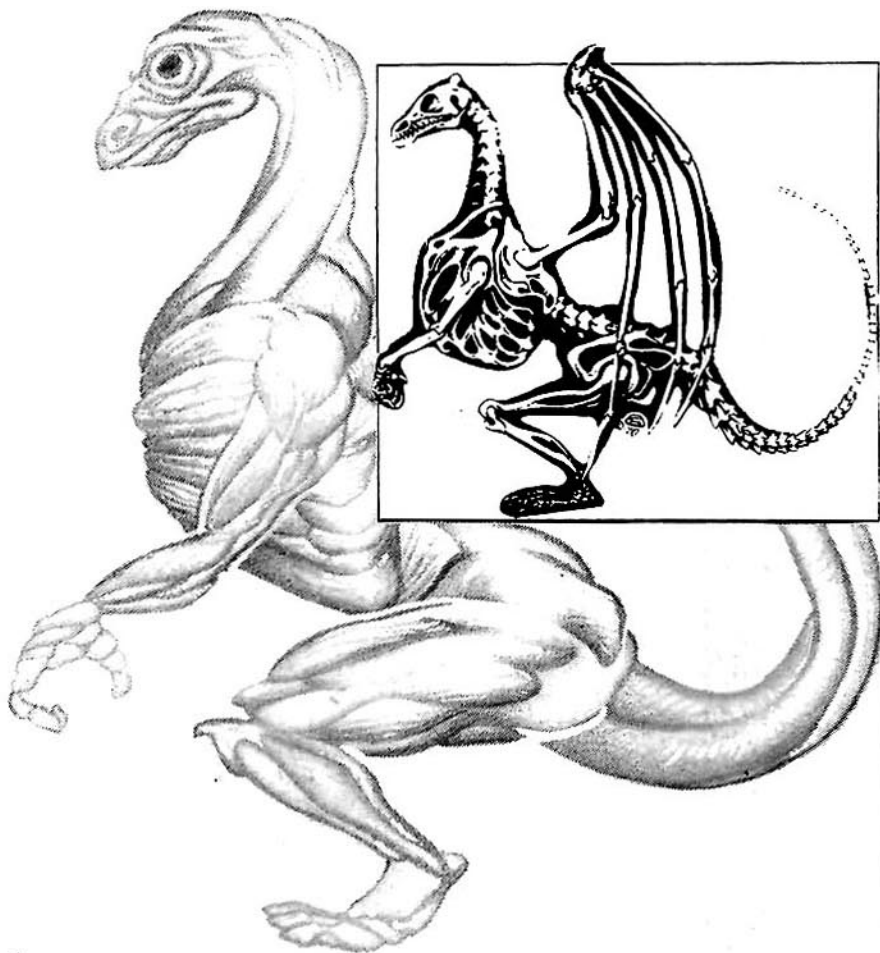
Kitti Ping had gone back to the original genetic pattern of dragonets to create dragons. As Bey's researches had been successful, Kitti gave the thirty-six experimental eggs the gene equation for five-digit claws. Kitti considered the pentadactyl hand better and more efficient for the dragons-to-be. The program which she wrote also shortened the forelegs to more modified 'arms,' and increased the strength of the endo-skeleton, so the dragon would be comfortable upright. The back legs would be massive with muscle, relying on the natural ball-and-socket joints to keep the knees from dislocating on take-off and landing. She made no changes in the basic wing design.

The dragons needed a certain amount of boron to remain healthy, just as humans needed calcium in their skeletal systems. They would be able to eat carbon-based animal meat safely now because another of Kitti's programs introduced the ability to metabolize the trace elements of boron in the larger herd animals' diets into muscle tissue, not to pass it through the excretal system. This ensured that sufficient quantities would be passed on to the dragons from their diet of animal meat.

Kitti used mentasynth to enhance the already strong telepathy that the dragonets exhibited. Her tinkering did not interfere with the natural tendencies of the species. The new dragons would be able to teleport from place to place almost instantaneously as their dragonet ancestors had. They would Impress easily as permanent companions to creatures other than their own species, and would now grow large enough to protect human habitations from Thread...

WING TACTICS

The Wing may be arrayed in any number of different ways: in a straight line; stacked by Wingseconds into three lines; in a forwards Vee or backwards Vee; flying upwards or downward or level. Each different position and angle of flight entails different advantages and dangers. Every rider is expected to know how to fly faultlessly in every possible Wing formation. The Wing drills until it can go between, climbing or diving and turning in any direction and come



out of between in the same formation it started with.

A dragon must be allowed room in the Wing to enable him to maneuver. Because of this, the space left between the dragons is greater than a dragon's flame could cover. Wings take turns dropping dyed rope as Thread at each other and the whole Wing practices flaming, drilling to ensure that each dragon and rider has instinctive knowledge of his covered area. Great care is taken in training to avoid two dragons going after the same clump of Thread — it represents wasted effort and means that another section of the sky has been left uncovered.

After Wing training comes Flight training. The Flight is regarded as the least force required to fight a Threadfall unaided, (but almost certainly with casualties). The Weyrleader organizes the training by Flights. When there is time for such training, it is an invaluable tool for the Weyrleader to try new riders in different positions, to juggle tired or under-strength Wings to form Flights capable of meeting Threadfall and to practice new tactics or hone old ones...

—Todd Johnson

WATCH-WHERS

In an effort to produce more dragons after her grandmother's death, Wind Blossom Ping attempted to use the Eridani equations on dragonet genetic material. However, Wind Blossom did not have the same grasp of bio-genetics as Kitti Ping and the results of her tinkering were not totally successful.

What hatched from the eggs she engineered looked like

ugly malformed dragons. Their wings were stumpy pinions that looked functional but were not. They were smooth-skinned and colored like dragons, but that was almost the only point of resemblance.

When full grown, the creatures weighed between six and eight hundred pounds, about the size of a small, low-slung horse. Whers' feet were arranged with two claws and a single pad supported the body weight. In spite of the bad design of their feet, they could move with surprising speed.

Whers were Impressive, and they adored their mates with the same empathy as dragons. They were also very territorial and if not properly introduced, would kill anyone they believed was invading their home. Their eyes had malformed lenses with countless little facets that aimed light directly back into the fovea like a magnifying glass. Wind Blossom had tried to smooth out the natural faceting of the eyes. As a result, whers were photophobic, and had poor focal length, but were effective guardians at night, even down to total darkness. Their senses of smell and hearing were as keen as their night vision. The creatures were not as intelligent as dragons, but they could serve a purpose.

BENDEN WEYR

Benden Weyr was founded during the First Interval by Michael Connell, also called Mihall, eldest son of Sean and Sorka Connell, and his wife Torene. Pern needed more dragons, and Fort was at last up to full strength. Mihall Connell was the first to bear the title of Benden Weyrleader. Though he was only in his twenties when he led his force of

dragons and humans eastward, he was the one allowed to establish the new weyr because the administrators in Fort realized he was a canny leader who inspired trust in those who followed him, and would lead them responsibly.

The Weyr was named to honor Admiral Paul Benden, over his objections. It was established in the 18th year of the colony.

Mihall grew up in the Lower Caverns of Fort Weyr under the care of a foster mother. Sorka loved her children, but she had little time to look after them, as most of her time was involved in taking care of Faranth. She was confident that the foster mother she chose would give them the care and attention which she had not time to lavish on them herself. Would-be dragonriders had to make the same decision to give up the care of their children into someone else's hands. A young dragon required too much care to allow a man or woman to spend adequate time and love raising well-adjusted children. Extending the family to include fosterers and the half-brothers and half-sisters who sometimes resulted from mating flights between riders married to other people was the first wedge into monogamous relationships in the weyr.

Mihall Connell grew up wanting to ride dragons. He spent as much time in the Weyr as he could, learning about the care of dragons, and helping out in the Lower Caverns. The records are unclear, but it is believed that his bronze came from the fourth hatching of Faranth's eggs.

Mihall, called M'hall to save time (the shortening of dragonriders' names came to be a tradition) inherited his

For the intrigue, for the joy of battle, for the pleasure of amassing wealth, or just the challenge of playing in a game with this depth and scope. . .

MIDGARD

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mother's love of animals, but also his grandfather Porran Connell's native shrewdness. He had the knack of being able to think his way around a situation, and to find the solution which took the least work and trouble. At his urging, the miners who helped construct Benden Weyr opened up and smoothed out caverns and corridors which already existed in the volcanic matrix, rather than chopping whole rooms out with the steadily depleting resource of the stonecutters. Thus, Benden Weyr has a more natural feel to it than Fort.

Torene was brought up in Ruatha by Red and Mairi Hanrahan. Torene showed an aptitude for anticipating the needs of sick creatures, almost as if she could sense what they were 'saying.'

As soon as the children were old enough and showed an inclination toward weyrlife, they spent more and more time at the Weyr. The holders encouraged empathic children and adults to start getting to know dragons as soon as possible. Young Torene had extraordinary empathy, which made her a natural candidate for a queen egg. She worked well with animals, like her husband's mother, Sorka Connell. Once she impressed, it was discovered that her ability to hear other dragons' 'voices' didn't fade as the bonds between weyrmates grew stronger. Torene's strength of purpose was one of the key elements of forming a second group of dragonriders which was independent from the first.

Benden's architecture is not as elaborate as Fort Weyr's, but the style is the same. These two Weyrs and Holds, and Ruatha, their contemporary, feel old. The rooms are of irregular shapes but have smooth walls. Storage niches are cut at intervals in the walls of corridors and large chambers for storage. Colored cement is used for accent, and for filling in broken places in the stone...

Benden is less fancy on the inside than Fort, and is built on a smaller scale. By the end of the first Pass, there were over 20,000 people in the Northern Continent. Benden Weyr was swelling as Fort had. Most of the Ancient Timers'



rooms were sealed as the Holders moved out to stakeholds across the continent. The only folk left in Benden Weyr beside the dragonfolk were those who worked in the lower caverns as support staff for the Weyr...

The first thing that would strike a visitor who had seen both Fort and Benden Weyrs would be that

Benden seems to be a nicer place. It has a warmer ambience than Fort. Part of it seems to have been better made than the rest. The original portion was smoothed out with stonecutters, in the days when there was still fuel to run them. When supplies began to run out, the inhabitants of Benden Weyr merely knocked the rough corners off natural caverns and cavelets, and smoothed the floors of corridors. But while supplies were high, the hallways were cut high and square, and walls were slugged to perfect smoothness.

The labs and hydroponic tanks in the rear corridors of Benden Weyr are only now being rediscovered. The knowledge to use the devices sealed in these rooms has long disappeared. A design printed on the wall is a reproduction of Kitti Ping's genetic code of the dragons, which the current Weyrfolk can't translate. (A dragon hasn't got DNA, but a similar building block). It is possible that the design has a further purpose, or why else was it so carefully copied on the wall in a laboratory far from the biogeneticists at Fort?

THE WEYR: SUPPORT STRUCTURE

The Weyrs get their food and other goods from tithe trains that come in from the Holds that they protect. Manora, the headwoman in Benden, is the overall manager of the Lower Caverns. She keeps in close accord with the Head Cook, who is in charge of arranging meals from the time the food arrives to the moment it is set on the table. She has stewards and bookkeepers to look after the each detail. Several women or men are needed just to keep track of supplies. Men, women, and children work at tasks assigned to them by Manora, who keeps master lists of their talents and responsibilities.

Manora and her well-trained assistants can gear up for emergencies or births very quickly. There is a step-by-step set of instructions to follow for each situation.

Girls who are found on Search who do not immediately Impress wait for their chance, but they also live a normal life in the Weyr. They might fall in love and have babies, and find other functions to fulfill. Even if they never Impress, they are not sent away. Once a girl has been chosen on Search it means that she is found to have superior empathy and strength of character, two traits which the Weyr wishes to perpetuate in its bloodlines.

Not all women who live in the Lower Caverns were found on Search. The Weyr has a yearned-for lifestyle among young, adventurous folk or those so desperate to leave the place in which they were born that they'd rather go holdless than stay. Women who were unhappy in their home Holds frequently sought a place in the Weyr. If they could provide a good reason for being taken in, such as possessing a necessary skill, they'd be allowed stay for life. If they'd been abused in their holds, they were often placed in other holds, away from their abuser. Women in the Weyrs need not marry



if they didn't want to, nor have child after child until they are old and worn out, as they might be expected to in the Holds.

Weyrwomen often welcomed these empathic or talented women to the Lower Caverns. A great attempt was always made by the Weyrwoman to find exactly the right person to foster her children, because a queen dragon required so much care, and she was not the only duty for which a Weyrwoman had responsibility. As a foster mother, Manora is one of the most sought after women in the Weyr. She has had as many as eleven or twelve fosterlings at a time...

The Weyr's firm belief is that there is no reason for a child to be unhappy. Fostering brings out the best talents and joy in a youngster who would otherwise be neglected by his rider parents and grow up hating dragons for taking them away, to the detriment of the entire Weyr. The whole system of dragonriders was established as total support and care for dragons. The support system for the dragonriders, the lower caverns, needed also to be well run for the benefit of all those who rely upon it...

A weyrbred man or woman who fails Impression can always fall back on the job for which he was trained. If he or she has no specific talent, the dragonriders' women put their heads together to decide what this person can do. Men who grow up in the weyr who don't Impress or don't want to Impress can easily work in the weyr as support personnel, providing they can get along with those who live there...

IGEN HOLD

Igen Hold lies above the marshy flats on the eastern

edge of the great desert which stretches all the way southwest to Keroon Bay. Igenites are hardy folk. Their chief items of trade are river grains (rice), ovines, runnerbeasts, and the opals and turquoises which the local minecrafthall digs out of caves and gorges which were once sea bed. Though they cannot compete with Lemos for the lushness of Lord Holder Asgenar's hardwood and fruitwood forests, Lord Laudey has taken advantage of the Weyrs' new attitude on wood and is allowing Igen's forests to burgeon.

Igen lies south of the imaginary line of demarcation between the temperate and tropical climate belts.

There are few holders in the bleak expanse of the desert, so most of the population is to be found along the coastlines. Those who have vast herds live with them to the northwest of the Hold in the grassy plains east of Igen Weyr, and the Hold's farmlands lie to the south along the river. The Hold itself overlooks a shelf of rock high above the Igen River, a broad, shallow, muddy red stream that flows south, dividing Igen from Keroon...

Because of the hot, dry climate, the holders adopt styles of dress unique to Igen. Burnoose robes are common, as are broad brimmed hats, high crowned with lots of room to cool the scalp underneath during the long days. Under the wide hats protecting their faces from the sun, Igen women wear veils and snoods over their hair to keep out the dust. They favor bright colors and resemble fantastic insects in the shimmering landscape of the desert...

Lord Laudey of Igen allows the Holdless folk to shelter without charge in the great cavern complexes near the Igen River, providing they break no laws nor bother any holder.



The wanderers suffer the greatest hardship during Threadfall. Those who were not rendered Holdless as a matter of justice for wrongdoing, but simply prefer the road under their feet to a roof over their heads, are not welcome in Holds already crowded by those who have a right to be there. In many places, for the privilege of safety during a fall, the Holdless may be cheated of their marks or forced to work many hours for mere shelter.

The Holdless are not necessarily a criminal element. Among the complement of passengers aboard the three colony ships were nearly a thousand men, women, and children from several tribes of gypsies and wanderers that once lived in many nations on Earth. The brands of thief and vandal were not applied to them when they awoke on Pern. Instead, it was the wanderers who were disconcerted. They were used to doing odd jobs and stealing to make their way, but on Pern, they found that they could ask for what they wanted; what the colony had was free to all. In present day Pern, the difficulty most Pernese have with the wanderers has less to do with the old gypsy reputation than their acute discomfort that anyone would be willing to live without the security of a stone roof against the menace from the sky.

GAMING PERN

Mayfair Games has offered a **Dragonriders of Pern** boardgame for several years now. In the boardgame you are a Weyrleader who must both compete politically for the allegiance of the Holds and fight thread. A unique system recreates threadfall in similar patterns to those in the Pern novels (there is a detailed chart in the guide). This boardgame has won numerous awards. It also contains one of the most accurate and colorful maps of Pern available, painted by Tim Hildebrandt and containing the names and locations of holds not found elsewhere outside the guide. There is also a threadfighting game from Nova, which uses a competitive

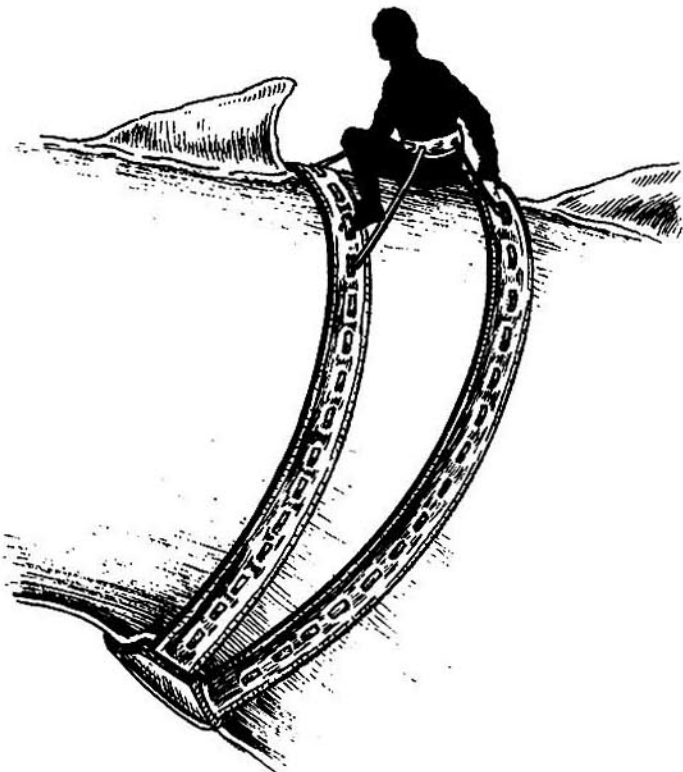
system similar to that found in their Ace of Aces book/game series (but fighting thread instead of each other). There are also two chosen path gamebooks from Tor Books and written by Jody Nye. These are **Dragonharper** (featuring Robinton) and **Dragonfire** (featuring Menolly).

Currently there are no Pern role-playing games. Having worked on the guide and boardgame, it is not hard for me to see why none exists. Most of the problems on Pern are natural forces or political. Not the most exciting of topics. While strange animals exist, men have learned some important lessons from the war they fled to Pern to avoid. Open warfare is simply not part of their culture. Nor would the dragonriders allow it. And since everyone needs the dragons, at least every few hundred years, the riders are themselves normally immune from attack.

There are unsavory types to be found on Pern, the dissenters and the simply homeless. All are referred to as the "holdless". The lifestyle of these holdless is examined in detail in Anne's upcoming Pern book *Renegades of Pern*.

Because of its unique nature, there are really no popular role playing systems appropriate for creating a Pern campaign in. If such a role playing campaign were to be tried, here are a few suggestions and rules:

1. Dragons NEVER fight with other dragons.
2. There are no exceptions to rule one.
3. Pern is a world with an educated, aware population with modern attitudes. This is not a fantasy world. There is no magic, or even aliens. You may want to use a science fiction system's game mechanics.
4. Prestige is often as important on Pern as wealth.
5. Weaponry is still at the bow and blade level, though the knowledge to construct more effective weapons is available. Flamethrowers are commonly used to fight what thread that makes it to the ground.
6. There are no religions on Pern, nor political parties, or even elections. People are what they personally are, you can't judge someone by race or occupation. There is no evil cabal on Pern, no plots, no expanding empires, though that was tried.
7. If you are trying to role play the world of Pern, remember that many of the novels are romances. Pern is about people, and dragons. The challenge is survival of an isolated colony and their attempts to make a better, more caring world in the face of a natural menace.
8. The North Continent is as large as Eurasia, but the total population is less than 200 million, spread thinly. Most residents of Pern are farm holders.



The First Lady of Dragons: Anne McCaffrey

Meeting Anne McCaffrey

There are no street numbers in Ireland. Instead each home is named. Anne McCaffrey lives in Dragonhold. Anne is not physically large, but meeting her you quickly understand how she has become a grand dame in science fiction. There is a presence about her that demands your attention. Perhaps presence is too harsh a word. There is an appeal, something that makes you want to talk with her. You know she will listen, and you're right.

Silver haired, though Jody tells of finding red and blue streaks in it the first time she met her, there is no question of Anne's Irish roots. Her features are those of the classic Celt, right down to the green eyes. She is quick to smile, very much the realist, and her voice can fill a concert hall. The latter she attributes to a background on the stage. She is all the professional when writing and a dream to work with. Taking her writing, but not always herself, with great seriousness.

Anne loves music, animals (she has several cats and dogs), good food, Ireland, and horses. If there is one real devotion in Anne's life, it has to be horses. Her horse farm, where she rides regularly, is considered one of the most prestigious boarding locations in the Dublin area.

Ireland and Pern

To prepare the *Dragonlover's Guide to Pern*, Jody and Todd (and I) journeyed to Anne's home in Ireland. There we spent dozens of hours interviewing Anne to clarify and expand the facts they had researched from the novels. Then a final draft was completed. As a result of this visit a large percentage of the Guide is comprised of new facts.

Simply visiting Ireland helps you to understand Pern. Anne has lived there for almost 20 years. The people and places of Pern reflect much that can be found in Ireland. This ranges from the fertile fields and rolling hills, to her



independent and enduring people. Once you have seen the tinkers camps on the sides of the highways, it is far easier to picture the holdless.

If you are ever lucky enough to be in Ireland, then there is one spot anyone who has ever read a Pern novel must see. This is the Sally Gap. It's located about twenty miles west southwest of Dublin. You reach the Gap by first driving past a series of "mountains". A few of these will seem familiar, particularly the tallest, a Sugarloaf to the north. Then you will find yourself passing through rolling hills covered with more shades of green than you ever imagined existed. If you stop and ask the rare shepherd you might pass, he will explain that these treeless hills are covered deep in peat which is the main source of heat and power on the island. Finally, as you round a curve you can look to your left and down into a giant, green bowl. As you watch the sun will glint off the stream that pours down one steep side of the half mile deep and two mile wide valley. At the bottom of the valley is a small lake. The water in it is so dark blue that it looks almost black, but highlighted in silver where sunlight glints of waves raised by the valleys near constant wind. Like Pern, Ireland has a near constant breeze off the ocean. All that you'll need is a few dragons swooping down to have the complete the image of a weyr. *bf.*





THE DRAGONRIDERS GUIDE TO PERN* CONTAINS AN ORIGINAL SHORT STORY WHICH DESCRIBES AN ENTIRE HATCHING CEREMONY AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CANDIDATE. HERE, PUBLISHED FOR THE FIRST TIME, IS THE STIRRING OPENING OF AN ANNE McCAFFREY TALE CALLED, SIMPLY,

To Felessan's speculative eye, the eggs hardening on the Hatching ground looked different. Well, maybe

not very different. Maybe not different at all. Perhaps it was just his knowledge that this time, this Hatching, he was to be put to the egg for his first try at Impression, and that put the eggs in an entirely new light. It delighted and scared him that he was considered worthy to Impress one of Pern's great dragons. Not that he ever doubted it, of course, but still, it was nice to be reassured.

The sun shone through the high openings to the Weyr bowl outside, striking glory from the mottled eggshells. Since F'lar had taken him and other boys in the Lower Caverns aside two nights ago to tell them that they were eligible to be Candidates, and were they interested in Impressing — as if anybody with sense wouldn't be — Felessan had made several side trips while on other errands to pass through the great echoing cavern. Which egg held a bronze dragon, and which a blue? To Felessan's knowledge, no one had ever been able to work out a system to tell the smaller eggs apart. Of course, the queen egg was easy to see. It was mostly gold, like its occupant, it was bigger than all the rest, and it rested between the claws of its broody golden mother.

Ramoth opened one great jeweled eye about halfway and regarded the boy passively. To his relief, it showed the blue of sleepy contentment rather than red or yellow of annoyance. Felessan was afraid she was sizing him up, and passing judgment on him, "might make a blue rider, but no more than that," as the elders and senior weyrlings had been doing for two days now. He didn't see where the others got off making remarks about him. Faranth only knew how they'd tricked the dragons they rode into choosing them in the first place! He clapped a hand over his mouth, for fear of letting the unkind thoughts become words. What if Ramoth heard him? Who knew what affected Impression?

The sleeping chambers were crowded this last seven-day, with the new boys found on Search from Hold and Hall swelling their ranks. Most of them were strangers, but Felessan recognized Borand, who was from Lemos Hold. He'd once come along with a supply train, and the two of them, with many other boys from the caverns, had spent a long, hot afternoon stacking cloth sacks of river grains in the storage caverns under Manora's eye. He was glad his friend had come to Benden. Only two of the other boys his age in the Weyr were standing to the egg this time, and the others were eying them with an air of suspi-

"IMPRESSION"

cion. He didn't know why none of them had been picked as Candidates this time. He was hardly sure why he had. All the boys

had stayed awake long after lights out two nights running, too excited for sleep, discussing what they knew about Impression.

How did one Impress a dragon? All they'd had from the senior riders were oblique warnings that meant nothing. "Don't do this, don't do that, mustn't ever do this...." And most enigmatically, "Don't let your dragon eat too much." "You must never be afraid of your dragon," F'nor had cautioned them, before handing them over to Felena for fitting of their robes. "He will never hurt you." That was all very well, but how did you attract one in the first place?

The Candidates numbered nearly twice as many as there were eggs in the sand. F'lar liked to give the dragonets a wide choice, but it always meant that there were just that many disappointed boys left standing on the ground when the Hatching was finished. Felessan shrugged. Just so long as he wasn't one of them, he didn't care. It was worse with the girls, of course. Anywhere from two to ten of them, and only one queen dragon to Impress.

The boys had all had a chance to touch the eggs. Felessan shivered when he'd stroked one of the elongated ovals and Ramoth looked at him. He remembered the time he and Jaxom had sneaked in to have a look at the clutch from which Ruth had eventually hatched. It hadn't hurt the dragonets, but Felessan feared for sevendays that someone would know he'd done it.

"Another day to go, they say," a boy from the mine-craft hall complained as Felessan returned to the sleeping chamber to get his hunting snares and knife. Hunting was his talent, and he was proud of it. "I'm to break up fire-stone 'til the noon meal. I could have done that at home."

"My duty is to hunt tunnel snakes in the storage tunnels below the kitchen cavern," Felessan offered. "Want to come with me?"

"No, thanks," the boy said, patting his stomach. His name was Varon. He was a chunky lad with a head of black hair and dark freckles dusted across his cheeks. "I might get stuck where a wisp like you would fit through."

"I'll come," a red-haired boy smiled. He was called Catrul, and came from a small hold in Bitra. He was built much like Felessan, with long legs and a skinny frame that spoke more of missed meals than hereditary slenderness. He took from his pack a two-tined hunting knife that Felessan eyed with envy. It was just the right configura-

tion to take the head off a tunnel snake with a single chop. "I'd rather do that than scrub pots. The scaled kind is good to eat."

"These are smooth-skinned," Felessan said, apologetically. "May I try your knife?"

"If I can borrow one of your snares," Catrul countered, handing over the shining blade. "Let's go."

* * *

Catrul was as adept with snare as with knife, and Felessan rejoiced that his new friend enjoyed the adventure of hunting as much as he did. The trick of killing tunnel snakes was to avoid their sharp claws and teeth, and strike at their unprotected backs and necks. Two carcasses lay in the narrow passage between them and the kitchen. Another beast crept closer and closer to the place where Catrul had spread a snare. The beast, invisible in the darkness, passed cautiously over the single grains of glows dispersed along the corridor. Felessan and Catrul could measure its progress by how quickly the glows disappeared and reappeared. Another man-length, another — "Pull, Catrul!" With a whoop, the red-headed boy sprang to his knees and fell onto his back, yanking the cord taut.

From the side, Felessan dove over the flailing pair of stabilizers that were the tunnel snakes middle limbs, and yanked the tail and hindquarters back and down. There was a snapping sound as the tunnel snake's neck broke. It twitched in a frenzy for a few seconds, and then fell still.

"Whee-ooooop!" Felessan caroled. He picked up the carcass by the tail and shook it.

"Not so loud!" Catrul complained. "You'll scare all the rest off."

"I don't care," Felessan shouted, enjoying the way his voice echoed all the way into the depths of the Weyr. In the distance, it broke into two sounds, a shrill echo almost above the range of hearing, and a vibrato thrum that bounced off the solid stone walls around them.

"Ow!" Catrul said, pressing his hands over his ears and crouching against the dark floor. "That's loud!"

"Yow!" Felessan cried again. The echo sprang away, but the thrumming filled the cavern around them, and continued on long after the higher pitched sound died.

"How'd you do that?" Catrul asked, listening to the sound in wonder. He swept the glows together in a trembling palm and felt for the basket.

"I'm not doing it," Felessan looked around, big eyed. "That humming sounds like it's coming from above. The Hatching! The eggs are Hatching!"

"Now? It couldn't be now! We're not ready!"

Felessan was already running through the dark passage toward the kitchens and coiling the snares up as he ran. "We'd better get ready. It's happening!"

They dashed through the Living Cavern and into the Inner Cavern. The humming was louder out here, and people were rushing back and forth, hurrying to make all ready for the guests who would be arriving to witness the Hatching. Felessan looked around for Manora, but he guessed that his foster mother was at the hearths, overseeing the preparations for the Impression feast.

"Come on," Felessan said, pulling Catrul toward the bathing pool. "Can't face the egg dirty."

"We'll be late!" Catrul cried, pulling off his clothing and climbing into the warm, swirling water. He and Felessan reached for the jar of sweetsand at the same time, and it fell between their hands into the pool. Both of them dove for it, and came up sputtering. In their haste, they churned up the bathing pool until there was as much water out of it as in it.

"Better wet than dirty," Felessan assured his friend, leading him back to their sleeping chamber to change.

Felena was waiting with the pile of clean white Candidates' robes over her arm. As Felessan and Catrul appeared, clutching bathing sheets around them, she handed a robe to each of them and bade them hurry. "The bronzes are already on their ledge," she said.

"But it's too soon," the boys cried. "I don't know what to think yet. How will I know what to do?"

Felessan was worrying about the same things, but he said nothing. He just concentrated on pulling the thin white cloth on over his wet skin. With a nervous hand, he smoothed his shock of hair back on his head. Catrul and the Minecraft lad were white and solemn. The robes had been the final touch. It had dawned on them. No matter what they thought or hoped, the event was upon them, and it would be all over very soon. They would Impress now, or not, as the dragon pleased. Felena led the boys, barefoot, through the stone corridor to the Hatching Ground.

Around them in the passage, drudges were hastening to refill the glowbaskets with fresh glows, throwing weird shadows across their faces. At the end of the tunnel, there was a real blaze of light. Lit by the oblique rays of the midday sun, the Hatching grounds were filling up with people. Felessan was suddenly terrified. Practically all of Pern would be watching him. Borand caught his eye and threw a brave thumbs-up to him, even though his face showed he was nervous, too. The closer they got to the chamber, the warmer the floor became under their feet.

As instructed, once they reached the sands, they spread out, forming a loose semi-circle around the rocking eggs. Ramoth coiled on the egg mound, protecting the queen egg, hissing and snarling, her forked tongue licking out at the air, her eyes awhirl with a red light. The four female Candidates stood at a respectful distance, but their eyes were on the big egg.

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Journeying Across Harn

Columbia Games Maps Out a Superb Fantasy World

Ian Harac



The standard course of game design these days seems to go as follows: First, design a rules system; then, design a world around it. **Harn**, which began in the olden days of gaming, takes a somewhat different tack. It was released first as a generic 'world' for players of all fantasy games, then as a role-playing system in its own right. In the years of its existence, it has gained a reputation for detail and quality that is unsurpassed, and even a cursory glance at the material shows that this reputation is earned.

Unlike many games with tremendous amounts of detail, though, **Harn** makes no pretense about 'ease for beginners' or 'levels of play'. The material is massive, and designed for the advanced gamer. Another general trend that **Harn** bucks is that of scope. Whereas most games choose to take a very large area and detail it loosely, **Harn** has concentrated on a relatively small area (an island around the size of Madagascar) and developed it to an unequalled level of detail. This detail, despite some of the claims of the developers, leaves little room for expansion or modification by the Game Mas-

ter. The whole land is so complex and interwoven that it seems as if disturbing even a portion of it would collapse the whole. Other opinions may vary, but I, for one, wouldn't want to tinker with it. On the other hand, of the three continents on the world of *Kethira*, only one (Lythia) is going to be developed, leaving about half the world for GM's to do with as they wish.

Rather than attempt to encapsulate the vast trove of data contained in the many **Harn** supplements, I will concentrate on just two aspects — the role-playing game and the general 'feel' of the system.

The game is very similar to most role-playing games, though, as might be guessed, inextricably linked to the culture and world of **Harn**. Character creation is complex, with over fourteen 'key attributes', such as Strength, Piety, and Agility, and many calculated and derived attributes. Height, weight, hair color, eye color, family occupation (cross indexed by culture and social class within that culture, natch) and many other factors are provided. Any character emerging

from this system will have a rich and detailed background. After all this, comes skills.

There are many skills, ranging from the fantasy standards like sword fighting and riding, to more complex ones such as Mathematics and 'Lovecraft'. (The rules say that this last skill cannot be improved by self-teaching. Woody Allen would disagree.)

The weapons skills have a few nice surprises. One of these is the inclusion of culture-specific weapons. Many game worlds tend to assume that fantasy cultures will never develop a weapon that has not been used on earth in the middle ages. This is not likely, and the creators of Harn are aware of this. A number of 'new' weapons are included. My personal favorite is the *Mang*, a very nasty looking *Gargun* (Orcish) sword.

The combat system is complex, to say the least. (You expected otherwise?) Each combatant figures out a bunch of modifiers to his/her/its applicable skills, then rolls to determine a level of success, from critical failure to critical success. Then, these results are cross indexed on another chart, and then the results of the combat round are applied. This bogs down rather quickly. Even so, considering the fine attention to detail throughout the Harn universe, it would be extremely disappointing if the combat system did not follow suit. A combat system on the level of the *Marvel Super Heroes Role-playing Game* would be woefully out of place within this universe.

Magic is perhaps the weakest point of the game. This is both deliberate and understandable, once the context of Harn's creation is considered. Harn was born as one of the first fully detailed worlds in a time when most games were of the "kill the monster take its treasure" variety. It was designed as a 'universal' supplement, one which could be thrown into any game world and emerge fairly well intact. The creators were aware that one of the first things any GM did, upon acquiring a new 'module', was add several tons of magic and monsters. Thus, they made Harn weak in both. There is little magic, and only a few 'monsters', on the theory that the addition of others would not unbalance the world too badly.

The other reason is one of research. Most of Harn is based on documented historical fact, only slightly altered to fit a fantasy universe. Anyone willing to put the necessary time into it could probably uncover most of the roots of Harn in any good library. Magic, however, does not lend itself to such researches. 'Real-World' magic tends to be long, ritualistic, and unreliable, thus rather unsuitable for game play, as are real-world religions, for much the same reasons. If the spells of a fantasy mage were of similar efficiency to those of a 'real' sorcerer, there would be very few spell-casters in any fantasy game campaign.

Magic in Harn is based on the order of *Shek Pvar*, a sort of semi-secret brotherhood of magicians, inheritors of an arcane art from a long-vanished culture. They are divided into six groups, dealing with the elements, nature, and so forth. It is not necessary to be a member of this group to use magic, but it sure helps.

The spells listed for the *Shek Pvar* are not very many, and the ones listed are somewhat weak overall, though there are a few 'good ones' flung in. Most of them are considerably less effective than are similar enchantments in other

fantasy worlds. This, like most of Harn, is done for reasons of verisimilitude. Strong magic, of the found in most fantasy games, would alter the culture out of recognition; to be honest, no fantasy culture is really logical, given the presence of strong magic. Assuming that magic would not affect a medieval culture is like assuming the invention of the printing press in Roman times wouldn't affect history. Most gamers politely ignore such contradictions, just as they ignore the *U.S.S. Enterprise* going 'Whoosh'. A willing suspension of disbelief is what is required here. Harn, however, has an internal consistency that cannot be easily denied, and weaker-than-average magic is the price that must be paid for it.

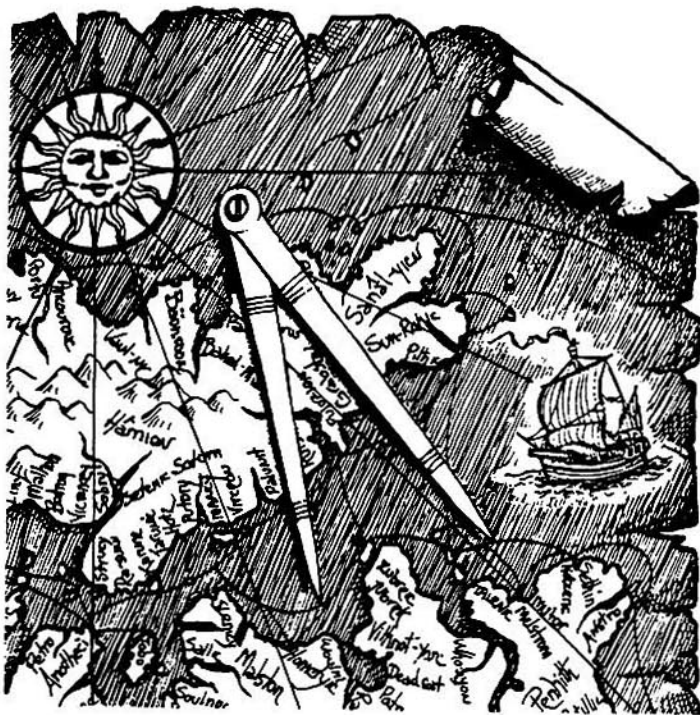
Also, the rules state that the spells included are merely samples, and that most wizards prefer to make their own spells. This is fine. It encourages creativity and diversity. Unfortunately, the game has no point-based system for balancing magic, such as *Fantasy Hero*, or sufficient examples of spell power (*a la Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*). Hopefully, those gamers sophisticated enough to desire a world like Harn will not create world-shattering spells; but even the most advanced gamers occasionally fall prey to mindless power-lust.

Monsters are the other great warper of reality in fantasy gaming, and one which, in my opinion, Harn handles better than they did magic. While there are a few 'natural' beasties running around Harn, the majority of strange monsters are the creations of an experimenting deity. They are sexless, don't reproduce, and when they are killed by adventurers their souls return to the god for reshaping into new creatures. The god in question has only a finite amount of souls available, so the monster population remains stable. Magic can be worked out reasonably well, but attempting to justify 30 some-odd species of dragon ecologically is a little tough.

Religion is also covered, though not in much detail. (No, that's not an oversight. There is an entire book, *Gods of Harn*, devoted to the religions. It would have been redundant to put them in the role-playing game.) There is the usual pantheon of gods, and some decent information on player-character priests, the skills acolytes receive in training, and the invocations priests can request from their deities.

The section on magic items is perhaps the most disappointing. Many of them seem to be merely AD&D items, renamed to fit the naming conventions and mythos of Harn. This is below the standards set by the rest of the book. The remainder of the 'Treasure' section, though, is above average: A fine set of tables, charts, and the like for the generation of found treasure and hordes, including, for the most part, non-coinage treasures.

Finally, one word of absolute praise must be stated for the most outstanding feature of the Harn series as a whole: the maps. They are, without doubt, the finest pieces of fantasy cartography I have seen. The islands, rivers, bays, inlets, roads, etc are all beautifully done, and look real. The placement of towns is incredibly accurate. Having studied maps of medieval England (the general basis for Harn) I can safely say that no other fantasy world has shown this great an understanding of what the human and natural geography of a medieval country looked like. The various Harn books



are almost worth buying simply for the maps.

Getting the essential information on Harn is not easy. Due to the amount of detail, the data is spread out over a large number of sources. The general overview is in the *Harn Master Module*, which consists of the Harn area module and the 'Harndex', an index of important people, places, and things. This encyclopedic means of presenting information for a game world has never appealed much to me, as it is difficult to simply sit down and read a list of alphabetized data and attempt to see any pattern to it. Fortunately, the Harn overview module provides a narrative description of the history of Harn, which makes using the index considerably easier.

There is one other supplement to the role-playing rules that should be mentioned. This is the *Pilot's Almanac*, an extremely detailed set of rules for maritime travel. Unlike similar supplements for other games, this does not concentrate on game statistics for sea serpents and rules for 'Tidal Wave' spells. Rather, it contains rules on ships, ports, sailing, skills, and ship design. GMs can now have fleets of specially created Merchant Galleys and Warships.

So much for the rules governing play in Harn. What about Harn itself? The island consists of a number of kingdoms, barbarian hordes, and three non-human races: *Sindarin*, *Khazdul*, and *Gargun*. (Elves, Dwarves, and Orcs). The kingdoms are mostly representative of standard types: Empires, Leagues, and such. All have a number of features which make them unique and interesting to play; none particularly stands out as devastatingly original.

The various 'Kingdom Modules' describe each major region in detail — lots of detail. The *Kaldor* module has genealogies and family trees for the nobility that rival those in Tolkien. The module on *Melderyn*, the so-called "Wizards Kingdom" has expanded rules on magic and more on the origins of the Shek Pvar and the mysterious 'Earthmasters' who dominated Harn during its earliest eras, leaving long before human occupation.

There are also two books detailing the major settlements of Harn: *Cities and Son of Cities*. These include maps (of course), economics, encounter charts, and descrip-

tions of the major buildings. None of the cities are particularly large, as befits the culture and technology of Harn. There are only about 600,000 people on the whole island, leaving most settlements rather small.

For those who want the big picture, there is a continent module, called *Lythia*. This does not endeavor to detail the entire continent to the level that, say, *Melderyn* has been detailed. Rather, it gives a brief overview of the continent and the world, including the solar system that Harn is placed in. There is one other potentially inhabitable planet in the Harnic system, which could mean a very unusual supplement.

But what of the GM who wishes to use pieces of Harn, but is not willing to sacrifice his/her current campaign world, or accept all of the premises that Harn is so carefully built on? Harn, as mentioned above, is a carefully woven, intricate tapestry, but even a great tapestry can be carefully unraveled. The research that has been poured into Harn could easily be applied a similar environment on a different world. (My own game world has an area very similar to Harn, but created before I was aware of the product's potential. I would have saved a great deal of library time had I taken advantage of this product).

Other features of Harn would prove useful to many GM's. One of these is the shipbuilding rules, mentioned above. While some of these rules are centered around the Harn culture, the majority are easily applicable to other gaming systems. This is ideal for any seagoing campaign set in a non-Harnic universe. In fact, of all the books, I think that the *Pilot's Almanac* would be the most useful for non-Harn gamers.

There are many other facets of Harn that would prove beneficial to general players. Many of the tables, such as those for the creation of family, occupation, and similar background material, are easily portable. The city maps could be used for many types of fantasy worlds, though they are better off as large towns, in my opinion. Harn does suffer a bit from low population; this is due, again, to the firm grounding Harn has in medieval reality.

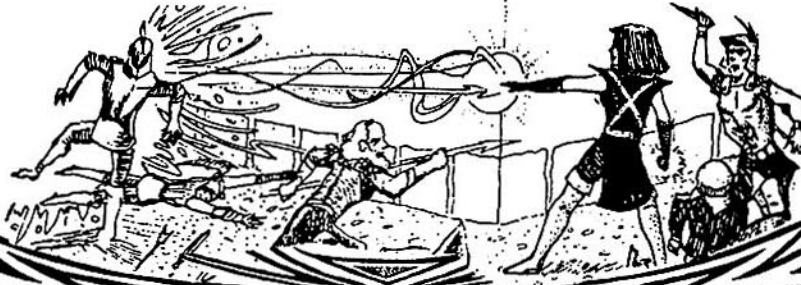
The setup of the Shek Pvar could also be translated, for those GM's who don't like signs reading "12th Level wizard; Knock before entering" adorning the towers of their mages. The Harn system helps to bring some of the mystery and awe back to magic, an atmosphere that has been lost due to the popular conception of Magic Users as mobile artillery. I would not recommend bringing over the magic system in its entirety, however: it is simply too weak for a non-Harnic universe. Unless, of course, you are running a low magic campaign, in which case it would be ideal.

Harn is a system designed for advanced gamers, those who would not be satisfied with a more 'fantastic', less plausible world, such as *Greyhawk*. I would not recommend it for hack and slashers, or power hungry magic users as they will find little to do. Harn is a world of depth and subtlety, not flash and color. For many gamers, it might be an intriguing side trip, but not quite useful or 'fun' enough for a full scale campaign. For those gamers who demand total (or near total) realism in their fantasy universes (Which sounds contradictory, I admit) Harn is probably the best developed world currently on the market, one which allows a different and much more lavishly detailed gaming style.

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The Ethics of Fantasy

Tough Advice on Talking About Role-playing Games

by Tracy Raye Hickman

PART I: THAT EVIL GAME!

Role-playing? Oh, you mean that evil game?

How many times have you heard it? You just meet someone new — someone you really would like to get to know. You'd like to invite them into your group of friends. You try to make small talk and mention that you play role-playing games.

"Role-playing? Oh, you mean that evil game?"

It certainly doesn't only come from new — or, at least potential — friends. Maybe it's your Aunt Eva or your Uncle Bert frowning whenever they find you reading a new module. Perhaps your Sunday School Teacher or Minister has, with glaring disapproval, lumped your favorite pastime of playing 'that game' with sinful drugs, liquor, smoking, rock-and-roll-back-masking-acid-brain-melting music, nuclear holocaust, swearing, promiscuity and a host of other evils which were designed to destroy your soul.

Now what I have just said either made you angry or laugh. Remember that; it tells you from which side you approach the of the issue of role-playing games.

Also, don't get me wrong. Drugs are a stupid and destructive habit which is designed primarily to ruin your life while making the Drug Lords rich. Getting drunk may not be as bad as shooting drugs but it, too, will ruin your life. I also believe that there is something basically screwed up with the idea of pushing promiscuous sex at every turn in American films, books and advertising and then wondering blankly why there is such a large teenage pregnancy problem.

Moreover, what I just listed IS sinful. God didn't make up the rules of life's game just to mess you over. Sin is bad for you. To me, God is the best game designer and referee you can possibly imagine. I know that's true with all my heart.

I am a Christian, which means that I know Christ to be my Savior and my Redeemer. I believe in God and in Christ's Resurrection from the dead. I believe he has atoned for my sins; and yours, too.

So, what am I doing writing articles about 'that evil game'? The answer to that may be more complicated than you thought.

Goodness and Badness: Which is Which?

For a few years, I was a manager of movie theaters. I

saw all kinds of movies go through my theater and, sadly, was required to watch every movie which played. Part of it was my duty to the community and part of it was the law.

I saw some very bad movies. Gut-wrenching violent affairs whose message was to solve your problems by killing others. Sleazy skin flicks filled with adolescent giggles whose message was that the thrill of the moment was all that mattered.

Movies are apparently bad.

I also saw some very good movies. *Ordinary People* was a triumph of personal tragedy and how to cope with tragic loss. *Empire of the Sun* was a powerful experience. Hey, I still get misty when the prince dances with Aurora in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*.

Are movies good?

The Medium or the Message?

The answer, of course, is that 'movies' are neither bad nor good ... they are just, well, movies! In the parlance of the communication industry, it is the medium (like a channel on your television) over which a message (like a program on your T.V.) is sent.

This same holds true with all other forms of communication. We would be better off not listening to some of the trashy music which has often passed for 'art' or 'rock'. Yet we are also enriched by other music ranging from 'classical' to 'rock'. Some programs on the T.V. bring new horizons to our view of the world. Some programs drag us down into the gutter and offer nothing in return.

Is T.V. then good or bad? Is music then good or bad?

It isn't What it is that should concern us, but What we do with it.

It seems obvious that it isn't the method of communication, the medium, that is either good or bad. Rather, it is what we do with the medium that is good or bad. You can use quarry stones to build a cathedral. You can use the same stones to build a prison.

Gary Gygax, on the infamous *60 Minutes* treatment of role playing used the analogy of a chair. In effect, he said that he could use a chair either to sit on or to hit someone over the head with — but that didn't mean we should ban chairs.

He was saying that, like movies, television, music, books and any other form of communication you can name, *Dungeons & Dragons* is not 'evil' in and of itself. It is simply a medium of communication over which any number



or types of ideas can be sent.

Blue in the Face

All of these are very logical answers to the questions of 'evil role-playing games.' In fact, I am sure you have used many of these arguments with your Pastor, Bishop, mother/father and friends.

I'll bet they didn't listen.

The truth is that they may have been listening but they just weren't hearing you. Our biggest problem in the two sides of the role-playing issue is that neither side has ever been able to hear what the other side is really saying.

Fortunately, by understanding the problem and how to deal with it, we can do something about bridging this gap.

The Cult and the Occult: The Closed Society of Role-playing

To most people, Cult and Occult are the same thing. The words sound a great deal alike. There just seems to be something wrong with how it sounds. Members of the press, who should know a bit more about the English language than those who read or listen to them, did not help matters any when they began reporting on the "Dungeons & Dragons Cult" or the "Fantasy Cult" in role playing.

In a very real sense, role playing became as popular as it did because it was a cult — in the traditional sense of the word. According to Webster's, a 'cult' is "a. a great devotion to a person, idea, or thing esp. such devotion regarded as a literary or intellectual fad. b. a usually small circle of persons united by devotion or allegiance to an artistic or in-

tellectual movement or figure." This means that the people who were part of the 'D&D Cult' were a part of a small, closed and internally select group with common interests in an intellectual idea.

That does NOT mean, however, that the role-playing cult is OCCULT. These are two very like sounding words with very unlike meanings. Webster's defines 'occult' in three ways. "1. to hide from sight 2. not revealed: SECRET 3. matters regarded as involving the action or influence of supernatural agencies or some secret knowledge of them — used with the." While the word more accurately means 'hidden or obscure' it has come to mean, in a more traditional sense, the practice of witchcraft or sorcery.

The difference between the words is blurred further when we start speaking of Fantasy Cults. Traditional epic fantasy uses a roughly medieval setting. Such a setting includes wizards and witches, magic and spiritualism. All of these aspects are now associated with the Occult and, as such, are easily branded as Evil, Satanic and Spiritually Dangerous.

In the eyes of a Christian, Occultism IS Evil, Satanic and Spiritually Dangerous. The practice of witchcraft is debilitating to the soul and ultimately destructive.

So we must remember that the Fantasy Role-playing 'cult' is not occult — but it could be abused. An adventure can be designed to teach everything from Christianity to Zoroastrianism. To outsiders looking in, however, we appear to turn our backs on their good intentions toward something they perceive as dark and wrong.

Cults are almost by definition closed societies — in fact, it's part of the fun of the hobby. When you tell some-

one that your 'eighth-level MU got his THACO boosted to 6' it is something of a secret challenge to them. If they understand you even marginally, then they are one of those people who have played the game and are therefore 'one of you'. If all you get is a blank stare then the person you have addressed is not part of the 'D&D cult' and therefore 'not one of you'.

It is this very cult system which has, I believe, worked to make role playing such a large hobby. Anyone who read through the *Dungeon Masters Guide* (a laborious task) had knowledge and understanding of a game which his peers did not. Those who ran the games demonstrated this superior knowledge and were, in varying degrees, looked up to by others in the 'cult.' This elitism bound us all together and made us strong as a group.

However, this very closeness — and 'closedness' — has generated great problems for us in communication with others.

The greatest barrier to understanding, whether that be outsiders trying to understand role-playing games or insiders trying to help outsiders understand, is our own 'cultism.' Our close-knit society of gamers made role playing grow into an international phenomenon. We then cir-

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cluded the wagons when we perceived outsiders beginning to attack our hobby.

It is time we reached out to those who do not understand this game we play. To do so, however, will require some important work on our part. We must learn how to change our own channels so that we can both hear and be heard by others.

Of Course That Spell Won't Work on Me!: Communication

Several years ago, Dungeons & Dragons generated a lot of concern in a school district near my home. A teacher had been using the game with his gifted students and a woman in the town decided that the schools were, therefore, teaching Satanic rituals to children.

At the school board meeting, one fellow who was associated with TSR stood and, in the course of trying to explain how harmless D&D was, asked if anyone in the audience would mind having a spell cast on them. His intent, of course, was to show that 'spells' in the game are just imaginary effects.

A woman stood up and walked boldly to the front of the hall. I really must admire her courage considering that she was sure she was facing very real and very evil powers.

The TSR representative stood and threw some dice. Looking down at the result, he said, "Oh, the spell didn't work."

In a loud voice, clear as her faith, this dear woman said, "Of course it didn't work! I (am filled with) the Holy Ghost!"

These two people were not communicating!

Apples and Oranges: Hearing without Listening

"Why were you so late getting home?"

"Well, there was this guy who had blown a tire by the side of the road and I just stopped to—"

"You knew I needed that car for my appointment! You're irresponsible, boy! You must think all I have to do is sit around and wait for you all day."

"Dad, the guy was in real trouble."

"Why can't you be more considerate of me and your mother?"

"Dad, you just don't understand ..."

The boy is right: Dad doesn't understand. In fact, the way this conversation is going, they might as well not even be talking to each other. Neither of them is hearing what the other has to say even though they are face to face.

Why?

They are talking on different channels. The boy is trying to answer his father's question logically — trying to tell his dad why it is he is late getting home. Dad, on the other hand is asking an emotional question — he's mad and wants some emotional satisfaction for all the anger he is feeling. What Dad really wants is an apology and, perhaps, some sense that his son feels guilty for having wronged his father.

Both of these characters are trying to compare apples (the boy's logic) and oranges (the father's feelings). They are not the same thing and often are the primary source for

dispute.

When emotion is present in one side of a conversation, you might as well toss logic out the window. People who feel emotional about an issue simply will not hear logical arguments.

Let's replay the previous conversation in a more relevant mode:

"Have you been playing that game again?"

"Dad, there really isn't anything wrong with it — it's just a game."

"Role-playing games are the devil's work! It's rotting your brain!"

"Nothing bad ever happens, Dad, it's all just make believe."

"It's witchcraft, boy! You'll lose your soul in those dark arts! Never mind me! What about your mother?!"

Again, we have apples vs. oranges: The boy is trying to reason with his father using logic. His Dad, on the other hand, is sincerely worried about his son — an emotional issue for him — and doesn't want his boy hurt. How can you break out of this vicious circle?

Truth or Illusion?: Reality vs. Appearance

The truth of things is often judged by its appearance. When I was in High School, a Camaro body with oversized tires and racing stripes was more important than the fact that the engine was undersized and out of tune. We would polish our cars but never quite get around to fixing the brakes.

The fact is that we all judge by appearances and our fantasy games will be judged in the same way.

Let's face it, if you create a make-believe magical language for the casting of spells and go about the house all day muttering strange incantations, your mother might call in the exorcist. Never mind that your words are meaningless. Never mind that your game referee finds them mostly a bother. Mom just may be convinced that you are being drawn into the clutches of Satan.

If you invite your minister over to watch one of your games and he enters a room lit only by candles and filled with incense you KNOW how he is going to react. For that matter, you also know what mood you have just set for your players and it may not be the best mood for that particular situation.

If you are going to succeed in communicating what your game really is like, then you had best avoid even the appearance of evil.

Telling Requires Listening

Before you begin talking it is most important that you start by listening — really listening! It's rather like tuning a radio before you start transmitting. Before you can communicate, you must understand on what channel the other person is speaking and doing their own listening.

An easy technique you can use to understand where the other person is at mentally is called Reflective Listening. This is a way of repeating back to the other person what they just said — in different words and phrased as a question. It just takes a little practice.

Here's a non-reflective conversations:

"I'm mad at you!"

"I haven't done anything!"

Sound familiar? Both these people will probably come to blows shortly. Let's try it with reflective listening.

"I'm mad at you."

"Why are you mad at me?"

"Because you didn't come by last weekend!"

"I guess last weekend was pretty important to you, huh?"

"You know it. We were supposed to go hiking!"

Now, at least the listener has learned not only that their friend is emotionally upset but also WHY he is upset. Groveling apologies and flowers may now be in order.

You can open the channels with your friends, parents, ministers or anyone else with whom you find yourself in conflict by just starting on the right channel. By countering emotion with emotion (or logic with logic) you will find your conversations bearing a good deal more fruit.

Let's try the role playing conversation one more time.

Dad, as usual, starts it off but now we will apply active or reflective listening and try tuning in to his emotional frequency.

"Have you been playing that game again?"

"Dad, you seem to be really worried about this, aren't you?"

"Of course, boy! That stuff will rot your brain!"

"Dad, thanks for worrying about me but there are a lot of good things about the game that I really enjoy."

"Nothing evil will ever make you happy, son."

"I know that, Dad. That's why I wouldn't want to do anything that was evil or bad. I certainly wouldn't want to hurt you. I feel good when I play these games, but I know you're worried about it. Would you come and watch us play for a while — just for half an hour? It would mean a lot to me and maybe you would understand what we're up to when we play."

"I don't know, son."

"It would really make me feel better if you did."

Not only has the boy listened and understood his father's concerns, but has now gotten his father to come and watch a game being played. The boy has included his Dad in what he is doing — something which Dad probably wanted all along.

You can do the same with your own parents. I'm not saying that it will happen the first time out nor that it will be quite as simple as it is shown here. What I can say is that these techniques will work given patience and time.

By the way, these communication techniques also work for other things in your life which are a lot more important than the games you play. If you have trouble getting along with others over anything, give these a try.

Opening Doors Requires Taking Responsibility for What is Inside

Once you learn how to choose the right channel you will find that others will listen to you. Once you invite them into your circle they will find that there is 'nothing in the dark that isn't there when the lights are on'.

The hard part then comes on your own shoulders: showing them a game that is moral and just.

As we have said, role-playing games are just tools with which you can create anything — good or bad. After you have gone to all the trouble of talking to your concerned friends and inviting them to just observe one of your games, you must ask yourself: what is it they will see when they come and watch? Is your adventure a morality-based scenario with clear concepts of good and evil? Is it graphically violent? Does it portray evil as inviting or good as powerless?

When you finally get to show your adventure to skeptics, will they just find their own fear confirmed?

Next issue: In the second part of this three part series, I'll give you a specific example of what you might say to those who have questions concerning the moral issue of role-playing games. The third part of this series will then explain what place morality has in your games. I think you may be surprised at what you have been missing. Meanwhile, remember that your role-playing game will only reflect what you put into it. Your game can forward the concepts of lies or truth. It is entirely up to you.



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TOME, cont'd. from pg. 6

himself to kill either one of them, and often let them plot away. This is no growled "I am your father"; this is a complex relationship where an anguished father simply watches as his son seeks to ruin all he has built. A relationship between a hero and villain should not be an incidental twist; it is most effective when it plays a vital role in the interplay between the two characters. On the other hand, the relationship could be one of need rather than blood. The true archvillain of the Elric series hangs in a scabbard at the hero's waist. The demon/sword *Stormbringer* is evil and often corrupts Elric, causing the deaths of everyone he loved and the destruction of everything he built — all the while destroying his psyche. Yet Elric needs the black sword in order to live, and the sword needs Elric so that it may continue to eat souls. This is truly a unique and interesting hero/villain relationship.

Returning to Morgan LeFey for a moment, one can see another aspect that adds to a master villain; that of mystery. Just what are the motives of a particular villain, and, where do they come from? By leaving the door open on such matters the villain is more of an enigma and will keep the hero guessing.

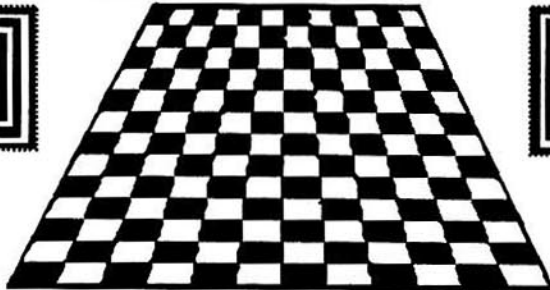
Lastly, don't humiliate your master villains. At first



glance, Foxbat (of Champions) seems like the master villain type — a group leader, intelligent, and somewhat powerful — but the adventures he is used on (and intended to be used on) are forays into the ridiculous. No self respecting villain rides in a vehicle called the "centipedemobile". He is comic relief, to amuse the players between "real" encounters. While it is perfectly acceptable to have these villains (everyone does), it is very important not to use your master villains that way. Sherlock Holmes would have quite a tough time referring to the evil Professor Moriarty as the Napoleon of crime after he sees the infamous professor go on "Britain's first annual criminal's scavenger hunt."

Using these guidelines it will be simple for you to design and run an arch-criminal that will cause your players to continually watch their backs. They'll soon realize the dangers of a powerful and intelligent villain, and you'll soon realize your games are far improved.

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Gateways Classifieds

By popular demand, Gateways brings back a regular feature for fantasy role-players, Game Masters and all fans of the Genre...Gateways Classifieds! Every issue, on this page, you may insert or peruse messages which will reach gamers throughout the known world. It's very simple! Find the category your message belongs in, write your words down, mail them to us, and we'll print them! And remember--to help gamers keep in touch, Player/Game Master Wanted Ads are free!

The categories are: **Merchandise for Sale** -- please include your telephone number with your ad. No dealers, please. **Merchandise Wanted** -- be specific. Don't say "old Gateways wanted", say "Gateways 2 through 5 wanted". **Events** -- you can advertise conventions, tournaments, concerts, special screenings, etc. **Personals** -- have fun! Anything goes under personals: secret messages, congratulations, gloating, rave raves, announcements, even challenges! **Services Offered/Needed** -- Model painting, mapping, drawing, arts and crafts, module design, any service of use to gamers. And finally, those free ads, **Player/Game Master Wanted** -- please be specific! Mention 1) Type of game 2) the location at which it will be played or how far you can travel, and 3) age/level of experience required.

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I'm looking for experienced FRPG players to start a new campaign or a group needing a new player within 30 minutes of Naperville, Illinois. Just about any game system. Also interested in designing a game set in an underworld. Contact: John Stephenson, 2529 Beau Bien Court, Apt. D, Lisle, IL 60532.

Beginning Freshman at Alfred State seeks Gamemaster/Group preferably on campus. Willing to play just about anything. Contact: James Cunningham, R/C Hall Room 323, Alfred, NY 14802.

Players Wanted! We are currently seeking players for AD&D and Warhammer FRP. Only serious gamers of High School age or higher. Experience is a plus, but not necessary. Our group is located in Port Edwards, near Wisconsin Rapids. Note: Our games have a bit of a Cthulhoid influence! If interested, contact: Bruce Gulke, 3376 Port Road, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494

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Players and Dungeon Masters wanted! I need players or Gamemasters in the NC Concord or Charlotte area. Games played: **Marvel Superheroes, DC Superheroes, Battletech, and AD&D.** Please, please write me! Jamie Spencer 6207 Monticello Drive, Concord, NC 28025

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Classifieds

Support diversity in role playing. Join the Society for the Prevention of Elves today. Let's make the multiverse a better place to live in by keeping those ravaging hordes of elves in line. SPOE forever! — GM Shifty

I, Pentagran, holder of the One Ring, search for the 19 lesser Rings to end the spread of evil.

Hey Ruth! What do you think? Write and let me know! See ya at WorldCon!

Don't worry, guys. When I'm rich and famous, I'll remember every moment of the past. Or maybe you should worry...

It's not good hack 'n' slash if you feel guilty about it.

Happiness is having an M.L. — J.S.

Congrats to the 2 subscribers that got engaged: Outrider & Portnoy! ZOWSOS

Common Sense. CBGB's. WOW!

Midnight Angel happy in the dark. We bid the Kat good luck as she crosses onto the wrong side of the tracks.

Mark Maltby (d. Jan. 19, 1989): introduced Traveller & Bushido to the Detroit area back in 1977, founding GM to the Wayne State Weregamers, & the Detroit Gaming Center. Count Llynwellyn, from one SOB to another — Wolfgang von Lettow.

The Cosmic Streetcorner

Whirling and sparkling, the Streetcorner sails closer to the Synchronicity Storm, preparing to brave yet another turn. Gateways is about to enter its third year of publication. This issue marks the culmination of a number of our very own quests in that we've managed to unite the finest talents and in the field of fantasy. All this spinning together for one grand issue has just got to be synchronicity. We wouldn't know what else to call it! But then again, there have been times of late where we've paused, stood back and wondered, well, where do we go from here?

GPI is not a company that chose adventure games as a topic for a specialty magazine because of how potentially lucrative that would be. Our staff and contributors all started out as role-players with stories to tell and characters to portray. As publisher I've felt it necessary for us to continue to play the games, experiment with them, and keep at least one step ahead of most of the trends and developments of an industry that is quickly growing out of its own adolescence. Now, when I say we've wondered where we're going, I guess I meant that as role-players, and as people, we're growing up, too.

A lot of the attraction in role-playing games as they stand is in the average player's desire to escape, to get away for a little while and enter a world where good and evil are as distinguishable as the colors on your helm's plume or your cowboy hat. Due to the nature and rules of the game, you must join a party of some sort of adventurers and embark upon some kind of quest. Although this usually results in raucous fun and a number of dramatic confrontations, the pattern, to any experienced gamer, becomes more and more clear. In fact, at conventions across the country, we have been consistently amazed at how an evening's scenario like a barroom brawl generated in a fantasy world outside of Baltimore can be so similar to a cantina riot on a science fiction world imagined in San Diego! There can be many clever twists and trappings to the themes of a party against the forces of evil, and many have become classics in their own right, but how many times, whether done in one afternoon or stretched over three years, can this campaign be run before it becomes Pepsi left open overnight for all involved? As a group of storytellers and players, we've been having a tough time coming to grips with just that!

As a group who have a vested interest in this industry and its product, we cannot let that happen to us. Although there is less time to run and play (as there will be for most people who get older and therefore must take up the various responsibilities of adulthood), we knew we had to come up with storylines and games that would hold our interest despite the fact that we had jobs to do and romantic knots to untangle. I'd dare say our games matured:

Staring out at the lights of Tokyo as they burn through an air thick with tension, I know that something is happening that will change the course of world history. My hotel suite is equipped with a media center that could screen dozens of channels from across the globe, and they are all focused



on the event taking place a few short blocks away. I am the comptroller of an American megacorporation investigating "accidents" at our Japanese R&D labs, and my gut instinct is that what is about to be revealed is somehow directly connected to why I'm here. Suddenly, the president of my company's Japanese arch-rival appears upon a podium to present Emperor Akihito with the discovery of 2009 — the Sacred Sword of Emperor Entoku, lost in an ancient battle, forged in legend by the Goddess Amaterasu-Omikami. Before my eyes Japanese manifest destiny is reborn, and my associates and I face our greatest challenge....

On a rain-slicked street in Brooklyn I tell my partner, Manolo, to ram his Charger into the TV van parked in front of the Dimartelli home. He does so with pleasure, and I nearly bust my head on the windshield for all my bright ideas. We have to laugh when we hear all those thousands of dollars worth of equipment crunching down inside, though. That trash journalist hotshot Thomas and his camera man stalk out of the house, and we exchange words like machine gun bullets. Thomas had been all over my precinct since this drug deal went bad in Hell's Kitchen last night and some knot-head got killed — live on TV, on the eve of the November 1996 elections. This mob boss's kid was there, and so was some psycho assassin. Scum snuffing scum, this was some job I had....

Games with stories where cause and effect are not necessarily measured in whether the dragon lives or dies, but in the subtleties of small decisions, tense and life-like. Role-playing that emphasizes dialogue and the many strange and wonderful facets of human nature. Thoughtful scenarios that have their own special feel and inspire conversation afterwards — these, and not necessarily the latest supplement to *Realms of Chaos* are adventures for "Mature Players". While it may be tougher to play in the gray, to establish a milieu where characters must decide for themselves how to do what's best, think of how much more meaning the action will have; how exquisite the quieter moments can be.

Jeffrey Gomez
Publisher

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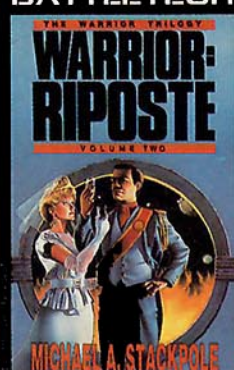
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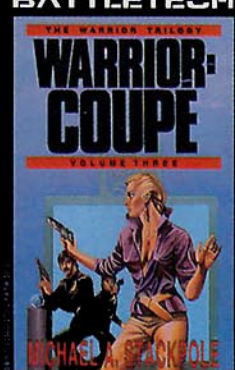
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