TSR : The Founding Company

RPG Review Cooperative News … Interview with Frank Mentzer … A History of TSR … TSR Game Reviews (Gangbusters, BEC D&D, Alternity) … Credit and Recognition … Endless Quest … TSR Computer Games … Great Beasts for AD&D2e … The Chevaleresse … Dungeons & Dragons 3 Movie … Papers & Paychecks
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrivia, Coop News, Letters, Editorial</td>
<td>many contributors</td>
<td>p2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with Frank Mentzer</td>
<td>with Frank Mentz</td>
<td>p5-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of TSR</td>
<td>by Lev Lafayette</td>
<td>p9-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit, Recognition, and The Pillow Test</td>
<td>by Tim Kask</td>
<td>p14-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Origins of TSR’s Endless Quest Series</td>
<td>by Martin Plowman</td>
<td>p17-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSR RPG Reviews</td>
<td>by Lev Lafayette</td>
<td>p22-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Beasts for AD&amp;D</td>
<td>by Karl Brown</td>
<td>p36-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chevaleresse: An AD&amp;D Character Class</td>
<td>by Vince Garcia</td>
<td>p55-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSR Computer RPGs</td>
<td>by Andrew Pam</td>
<td>p59-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dungeons &amp; Dragons 3 Movie Review</td>
<td>by Grant Watson</td>
<td>p61-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers &amp; Paychecks Update</td>
<td>by many people</td>
<td>p63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next Issue: Transhumanism</td>
<td>by many people</td>
<td>p64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## ADMINISTRIVIA

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### Editorial and Letters

**RPG Review Cooperative News**

For an organisation that exists as but a part-time club of around thirty fellow gamers (plus twice that number who haven’t joined yet), and a financial turnover that is sufficiently insignificant that it doesn’t even warrant a bank account, the RPG Review Cooperative has achieved above expectations. But of course, if you aim fairly modestly with a realistic set of achievable expectations then anything that is within a ballpark figure of those objectives indicates that the organisation can survive.

As per the last report, the Cooperative continues to publish our monthly newsletter, Crux Australi, with movie nights for those based where our Association is founded (we’re lucky to have a classic art deco in the local area which regularly shows great classic SF and fantasy films, along with contemporary offerings). We continue to operate an online store for members to sell their surplus gaming items, and advertise a dozen existing game sessions organised by members. Our journal is part of the Australian National Library archives, and with a set of ISBNs our cooperative publishing venture is on its way as well.

On the matter of our online store, we’re seeing a quite a number of people making inquiries which is very encouraging. The association pays for the store as a whole, and members make use of it for their own recompense. As for the library we have received recent donations that have pushed us well over the one hundred item mark - however the big news is that the MARS library is finally packed and ready for transportation from Western Australia.

Now just a bit of history: In 1988 the Murdoch Alternative Reality Society was founded by RPG Review Cooperative founding president Lev Lafayette (you can see that this is clearly a habit for him *sucker*). For some five years he was
active in that gaming and genre fiction club and as a result it built up a substantial games library in that period.

Some fifteen years after that later MARS finally went into haitus or closed (deepening on your leanings towards optimism vs pessimism), and for several years the club library with with the last secretary of the group. Following discussions between the RPG Review Cooperative, the former Murdoch University library special collections representative, and the former MARS secretary, the library will be moved to the RPG Review Cooperative.

It is a little larger than it was in 1993.

As reported in the last issue the first publication for the Cooperative is a fundraiser for the group; the game "Papers & Paychecks", based on Will McLean's cartoon in the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Master Guide. Wizards of the Coast has been kind enough to allow the group to use McLean's original cartoon in advertising the game, and so far it has received quite a lot of positive support including Jonathan Tweet and Ken St. Andre. So far it seems that the game will make its publication target, meaning that both the core rules and the Coworkers supplement will both be published.

We're not doing too bad at all for our first year.

Editorial; TSR

The roleplaying game hobby is inextricably linked to what was originally a small company in Lake Geneva, literally starting in a family home basement, and then growing into a multi-million dollar business. Tactical Studies Rules, TSR Hobbies, TSR – the various name changes are indicative of a business that grew quickly, perhaps too quickly, and whose successive leaders attempted in their own way to provide direction. So what better people to talk about the company than the person behind what was arguably their most successful product – the BECMI series of Dungeons & Dragons, Frank Mentzer, who is interviewed in this issue of RPG Review, and is supplemented by an article from the first employee of TSR, Tim Kask.

What a catalogue of items that company brought; obviously an enormous variety of roleplaying games from the enormously successful Dungeons & Dragons, and also other fairly major products such as Marvel Super Heroes, Gamma World, and Star Frontiers, all which still enjoy a modicum of interest today. Other games may not have been as successful but are certainly enormously influential in the hobby – in particular I am thinking of Empire of the Petal Throne and Amazing Engine. In addition there was a range of licensed RPGs; the Buck Rogers Adventure Game, the Conan Adventure Game, Indian Jones (the remains of a copy which became the Diana Jones Award). Finally a range of other games that sort niche genre points; Boot Hill, Gangbusters, Top Secret, and Alternity.

Many of the RPG games produced by TSR have been reviewed in the past issues of RPG Review. The 30th issue of RPG Review included Marvel SH. Issue 19 reviewed Gamma World, whereas issue 25 edition included reviews of the numerous incarnations of Dungeons & Dragons, with particular supplements reviewed (for example) the AD&D Monster Manual and Monstrous Compendium in issue 20. There is no real desire to repeat reviews that have already
been conducted, so in this issue your editor has provided reviews of some of these other games; Boot Hill, Gangbusters, the first three games from the BECMI D&D series, and Alternity. Apologies for Top Secret, Buck Rogers etc fans – space did not permit in this issue!

Also as reviews, Martin Plowman provides a superb overview of the 'Endless Quest' series, whereas Andrew Pam, continuing his role as reviewer of related computer games, provides an overview of the computer RPGs that were directly based on TSR game mechanics and setting. The issue is not entirely review based of course with Karl Brown providing an epic article on playing various Great Beasts for AD&D 2nd edition - which of course post-3.x is now somewhat of a norm. Also with a sense of retrospective, Vince Garcia provides an overlooked alternative to the (male) cavalier class for AD&D - the chevaleresse. Finally and appropriately we have Grant Watson providing a review on the Dungeons & Dragons 3 movie – I didn't even know there was such a thing.

This issue is, by its very nature, an “old school retrospective". After all the company on which it is based around folded some twenty years ago. There is an now an entire generation of RPGers who have no experience of TSR as a company. As social phenomenon, the RPG hobby should always be looking forward thinking in terms of what future possibilities exist for the hobby, as threats and opportunities. Insofar that we look towards the past it should not be for nostalgic reasons, because those times are literally past. But rather, it is for learning what was good, what was not, what changed, and understanding the dynamics. There are enormous lessons to be learned from the rise and fall of TSR; from the determined Independence of its origins, to the rapid rise of the hobby, and the difficulties of managing the business, and to its eventual collapse.

But RPG Review has done two issues in succession which have been based around such evaluations in the past tense – this and the previous “Old School Revolution” issue. It is certainly well about time to look in the other direction. The next issue will be based on the topic of trans- and post- human RPGs with a heavy emphasis on Eclipse Phase, certainly the most exciting contribution in this field in recent years (with a valiant hat-tip towards GURPS Transhuman and numerous other smaller publications). Until then however, let us relish the story that was Tactical Studies Rules – a small company which founded an industry in the basement of a family home.

Lev Lafayette, lev@rpgreview.net

PS: The image above is a first print Dungeons &Dragons which recently sold on Ebay for $22,100 (http://www.ebay.com/itm/172430642326).
Hi Frank, welcome to RPG Review.

*Our first question is a bit of typical one, but yours is quite a famous story. How did you get into roleplaying games in general, what were you playing, and especially how did you end up at TSR?

I was unemployed in 1973 after college, and partied in the Philadelphia suburbs. Friends would visit my apartment to play board games (sometimes all weekend), and one day in 1976 Don showed up with an early D&D set. This eventually led to a dozen or more regular players wasting amazing amounts of time. I was the jobless rocker wannabe so I never had any money, and I had to make up my own adventures. That need was the driving force behind my creativity, and I had plenty of spare time. Another friend Dave saw an ad in Dragon magazine, late 1979, and badgered me into applying for a job at TSR. They took a chance on me, I moved to Wisconsin, and off we went. (And I had dinner with Dave just weeks ago; old gamers stay in touch.)

Q: Famously soon after starting at TSR you won the award for the best dungeon master (cf., "He's the Top Dungeon Mentzer", Dragon Issue 43, November 1980). How did you go about winning this award?

I had been at TSR for a few months, and word of the "DM Invitational" spread naturally. Everyone at the company was welcome to give it a shot, and several Famous Names from elsewhere were already in, like Len Lakofka (Leomund himself). Finding myself in gaming paradise, I was busy trying to not get fired, so I didn't think much about it. Some but not all of the trials were held at the offices, the old building on Sheridan Springs (now an antique shop). The entrant had to create a scenario and run it for a trio of players: Gary Gygax and Brian Blume (co-founders/bosses of TSR) and Jim Ward (Deities & Demigods, much more). They had experienced the best and worst of everything in the long history of roleplaying (6 whole years, wow), and they tried it all. The more they got caught, the sneakier they got.

I remember seeing my turn on the calendar a week away, and finding the time to throw together a dungeon. (I later developed it more fully as R2 'Hydell'.) I think I won the contest by 1 point on a 300 scale. The announcement and awards came at GenCon that summer, and by October I was pulled out of Editing to start the RPGA network. That was just me and (the late) Bill Hoyer at first, though it grew quickly. Bill had been with Gary since the earliest days, in the old Lake Geneva game club of 1972. He was a great connection to the roots.

Q: What advice would you have to aspiring DMs who want to improve their game?

Nope, sorry, too broad. Books are written on that; in fact, there's one coming up from Kobold Press (Wolf Baur & other perps), in which I have a minor essay.

Q: Your big and most famous project was, of course, the BECMI editions of Dungeons & Dragons. *Many* questions arise from that set of products. Firstly, how did the revision process differ from the existing Moldvay and Holmes edition of Basic and Expert D&D? Secondly, what was the design decision to release the product in a staged manner? One cannot help but notice the gradual and incremental expansion in the rules and setting, along with the recommended minimum age for play (10+ for Dungeons & Dragons Basic, Expert, and Companion, 12+ for Master, 14+ for Immortal).

Well, a bit of history is in order. Dr. Holmes offered a rewrite, which was published in 1977. That really started the 'boom' period. In January 1980, Tom Moldvay and I started work, and he combined all that had been learned about the game in 6 years into an even more understandable form. The Holmes approach had only half that, and he played most
in California; Tom had the input of TSR itself, Gary and all.

Before D&D arose, Gary and the Lake Geneva club interacted with the group in St. Paul-Minneapolis, featuring Dave Arneson of course. That club also included Mike Carr and Dave Sutherland, and they moved down to join Gary & Brian with the new company. Tim Kask came up from his college group in Southern Illinois, completing the 'first Five'.

The primitive artwork of the original 1974 set had been upgraded for the Holmes, shaped by Dave Sutherland's covers and interiors. By 1980, it evolved to the cleaner superhero styles of Dee and Willingham (and warped by Otus). But as greater distribution drove mushrooming sales, new markets brought new standards. To play in New York City, you had to look the part. That brought Elmore, Easley, Parkinson, and many more to shape the new image.

I had built the RPGA for more than a year, and Gary tapped me as his "creative aide", meaning that I'd spend time on writing things he wanted to but couldn't, due to business demands. I developed the 'red box' Basic set intro, then he shredded parts, and I revised, mostly by interoffice memos. The 5-6 executives with private offices and secretaries were handily nearby and mostly not hobby gamers. I couldn't pressure the execs into reading or playtesting, but I could and did drop it onto the secretarial pool. Some of them took it seriously, and I made a lot of changes to handle the issues that became apparent.

Gary and I had settled on a 36-level spread, so I planned for that across five boxed sets. The material increases in complexity; you need to be more mature, more dedicated, to ingest and implement the new concepts and procedures. Red box worked well but my personal favorite is Companion. We had all been reading about castle construction and realms since the original set, but I was the first to write it up fully with dominions and their unique resources, mass battles, and lots more.

Q: What about Mystara? How involved were you in the development of that game world? Whilst it featured throughout the BECMI series, the Gazetteers were written by others. What about your own campaign world, Aquaria, which featured in the R modules and the Eldritch Ent. publications?

I was pretty busy writing the five boxed sets, completing Temple of Elemental Evil, and knocking out RPGA tournaments and other side projects (like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Book of Marvelous Magic*) while assisting TSR International with planning, reviewing toy licenses, and more. Any RPG needs support materials, and that whole tamale landed on Bruce Heard. He coordinated the entire line, and built the world from my broad strokes. Note that I took used a lot of the basic geography from Moldvay's edition, for continuity. Gary's friend from France, Francois Froideval, contributed to the world map too.

My own campaign -- formerly Aquaria* -- is an ongoing story, and will soon come to fruition I think. It began loosely in 1977 and by 1979 was based in eastern "Valon sector", a map from Judges Guild. (It has been so heavily modified over the years that it bears almost no resemblance now. JG was a pillar of the hobby's development, and I happily credit them here as the seminal inspiration for my setting.)

*Because it's not about fish (though *squid* are important...)*

In 1982, I set the RPGA tournament "Egg of the Phoenix" in my realm, and asked Gary for permission to link it to his World of Greyhawk setting. He wanted it vague enough that his continent was unaffected. I still have his handwritten note, approving the preface in module R4 that explains the connection. (As far as I know, only Arneson and Kuntz had similar written approval.)

Everything I wrote while at TSR (1980-86) belonged to them, by contract, and is now owned by Wizards. The legal stuff is simple, if technical; the 'treatments' I wrote are TSR's, but the campaign predated that time and is mine. I resumed it in 1988, then online in 1992 (in a chatroom). It continues to this day, every Tuesday night, and we're almost to the grand finale. The campaign will at long last be Over, Done, Finished, after 25 years.
I could wax lyrical about the campaign itself but there is too much; I cannot even sum up. So I'm writing it up for two booklets, modeled on Gary's original Greyhawk boxed set. Darlene has agreed to do the maps in her classic original style. That Kickstarter should appear not far into the new year.

Q: There is a technological aspect to many of your fantasy publications as well. For example, the scenario 'Needle' has science-fantasy aspects to it (force fields, lunar travel), as does 'The Egg of the Pheonix' (time travel, extra-planar travel). In 'The Immortal Storm', the PCs are brought to modern day New York! Could you elaborate on how you think that fantasy and science fiction should intermix, especially in a gaming context? On a meta-game level, how do you feel about technological inputs into traditional table-top roleplaying games?

I never read much Fantasy; my idols were Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke. Bradbury was great but very 'romantic', not 'hard science'. My college work started in Math/Physics. So sure, it leaked in.

It's all fiction, whatever the genre -- even hyper-realistic modern or near-future stuff. The world-picture varies, and ideas come from everywhere... so why segregate concepts because of arbitrary 'fantasy' or 'science fiction' labels? Whether it's warp speed or resurrection, it's fantasy fiction.

That said, technology is the bad guy in my campaign. Therein, everything in existence is in a binary war: gods & magic VS mortals & inventions. It's the old hubris trap, extrapolated infinitely. I wrote about that scope in the D&D Immortals set, and I apply it in microcosm in my campaign. Do you like clerical spells? Clerics hate Tek (it's anti-god), so behave.

Q: One of the big turning points in your career was joining Gary Gygax from New Infinities Productions after he was ungraciously removed from TSR. Could you describe what was happening at TSR at the time, and what led you to decide to leave?

I was ready to leave when Gary did, but he said to stay put. We agreed never to talk business. Once he had NIPI set up about a year later, he called, I resigned, moved out, and started work in a new office, along with Kim & Pam Mohan (he of Dragon magazine) and Petty Petticord (RPGA). Gary had his own firm (Trigee), and didn't actually work at NIPI. Sadly, his choice of boss (Baker) didn't raise the funding he'd promised, nor did the next President (Turnbull). Also, the Person Ousting Gary (to whom I only refer by those initials, the POG) started a lawsuit, draining the last of the money, and that was that.

For salacious details about the day of Gary's dismissal, refer to Jon Peterson's excellent research, blog, and videos (as well as his definitive Playing at the World).

Q: Æsheba was an interesting campaign setting which you contributed to, but the flagship publication for New Infinities was Cyborg Commando. This game of alien invasion and cyborg soldiers and a unique resolution system has not been well-received by reviewers. Can you describe the system and setting design and playtesting process that went into Cyborg Commando? What can be said in its defense?

It's incomplete. We were ordered to publish it, finished or not. That bad decision was driven by a terminal cash crunch. The game could be finished, explanations provided for everything that wasn't, and given a better presentation overall (see Red Box). 

Q: After New Infinities was forced into bankruptcy in 1989, you left the gaming industry for a number of years. Could you describe what you did in that intervening period? Were you doing much gaming on a social level, if not a professional level?

Gary gave me good advice, and I took it. As he worked on early bits of "Dangerous Dimensions" (renamed to Dangerous Journeys) we had a blunt talk. He advised me to leave, go do something else, because the POG was going to keep throwing lawsuits and he could take it (he thought) and I couldn't.
I was newly married, and we both lost our jobs. Those hard times contributed to our amicable divorce. I had moved to Milwaukee by then, and eventually found the right gal. She got a degree in Baking & Pastry Arts, and we opened a commercial bakery and store in Minocqua, northern Wisconsin (mentioned by Charlie Sheen in "Hot Shots"). We added two more stores, one a classic 'mall coffee shop' with baristas.

Gaming was okay in Milwaukee, but 'up north' there wasn't much. I went to conventions as usual, including GenCon (continuous since 1980) and one in Lake Geneva. In the mid-aughts (2000s) I started getting more convention requests, including some in Europe. Numerology had struck; the good old Red Box was having a 20th anniversary, and folks started remembering me.

We had to fold the bakery in 2008 for various reasons, luckily just before the recession hit. Spurred by newfound appreciation, I gathered my friends Ward Kask and Clark, and we formed Eldritch Enterprises Ltd. in 2012. Tragedy struck almost immediately; Jim had open-heart surgery, then I had a heart attack (stents). We produced a dozen good adventures (fantasy & science fiction) in 5 years, but we've all moved on to other things now, and Eldritch is on hiatus.

I've now formed a company (Loxley) to handle my work from here on. There are plenty of excellent publishers in hobby gaming, so I plan to develop concepts and products to whatever degree and hand off the production and distribution. One of them, mentioned above, is a Kickstarter for my campaign set. There are at least a dozen more projects of similar magnitude.

And yet, that's not what I want to do; it's what I have to do, to get those ideas out of my head and onto drawing boards. I've also begun consultations with new partners and associates, to form a non-profit organization that benefits Hobby Gamers. We're making initial plans and moving forward; more to come next year.
Icarus Beware the Sun: A Short History of TSR

with Lev Lafayette

The story of TSR is readily available and serves as an informative rags-to-riches-to-rags. It is of great importance to the tabletop RPG hobby, for those who wish to go down the independent publisher path, and, for business in general. Indeed it probably could serve as an interesting case study for an MBA course - but that will have to wait. Most of the subheadings in this brief article follow the corporate identity of the organisation at the time, which indicates how an organisational change can lead to a change in collective psychology, (specifically Tactical Studies Rules, TSR Hobbies, and TSR), but also how a change in leadership can do the same.

Tactical Studies Rules

The company started in 1973 as partnership between Gary Gygax and Don Kaye to publish Dungeons & Dragons, after offers had been rejected by other publishers, with $2,400 in starting capital (median family income in 1974 was $12,051 for comparison). Using Kaye's basement as the operations base of the new company, they published 1,000 copies of D&D. Their first publication was not, however Dungeons & Dragons, but Cavaliers and Roundheads, a miniatures game, which generated initial income. The company was also producing a regular newsletter, The Strategic Review.

Within the first year however D&D proved to be the big hit, and at the end of year Brian Blume added a further $2,000 to the company. Don Kaye was President of the company, Brian Blume was Vice President, and Gary Gygax was Editor. The company sold out of its first print run of D&D and published another 1,000 copies in January 1975, which itself only took five to six months to sell.

TSR Hobbies

During this period Don Kaye died suddenly and his wife Donna Kaye looked after the administrative and accounting tasks. But she was relatively disinterested in the hobby and as a result a new corporate structure was developed which purchased Donna's share of the company. The original TSR Hobbies stock agreement, executed by Gygax and Blume on August 1, 1975, awarded Gygax 150 shares of stock and Blume 100; however subsequent investments from the Blume family included some $34,000 immediately after establishment and included 200 shares to Melvin Blume, and another 140 to Brian Blume. Gygax now served as President of TSR Hobbies, and Brian Blume as Vice President and Secretary, the company also acting as a marketing arm for other groups, including the Dungeon hobby shop in Lake Geneva which became the effective headquarters of the company.

TSR and Dungeons & Dragons began to expand; another 2,000 item print run of D&D in October 1975 which also sold rapidly, and an increasing stock of games (including Dungeon! and Empire of the Petal Throne, Boot Hill, and Metamorphosis Alpha). Tim Kask was hired in the autumn of 1975 as Periodicals Editor, and the became the company's first full-time employee. In 1976 the supplements Greyhawk, Blackmoor, Eldritch Wizardry, and Gods, and Demigods & Heroes, and began hosting GenCon, all contributing to an impressive $300,000 in revenue. The company also hosted the first GenCon in 1976 which included the first D&D open tournament, and started Dragon magazine. Of note was Warriors of Mars which was based on the world of Edgar Rice Burroughs. This was published without permission from the Burroughs estate and had to be pulled from distribution.

At this stage the company was skyrocketing; a basic set for D&D was released in 1977 as the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons line came into existence with the Monster Manual, Players Handbook (1978), and Dungeon Masters Guide.
Other RPG lines were established such as Gamma World (1978). Rights were granted to Grenadier to produce miniatures and to Games Workshop in the United Kingdom which resulted in local printings of the AD&D there. Failed negotiations over a potential merger led to the establishment of TSR Hobbies UK in 1980, headed by Don Turnbull, which would result in expansions into Europe, the production of the UK series of scenarios, the Fiend Folio, and Imagine magazine. The World of Greyhawk was also released in 1980, as was the Top Secret roleplaying game. The company structure underwent some changes as well. Melvin Blume's shares were transferred to Kevin Blume, leading to a board of directors consisting of Kevin (president of operations) and Brian Blume (president of creative affairs), and Gygax (company president and CEO).

Revenues continued to grow; by 1981, TSR Hobbies had revenues of $12.9 million and a payroll of 130, and in the following year it reached $20 million in sales (Wall Street Journal, Jan 7, 1983), starting two new RPG lines (Gangbusters and Star Frontiers) as well as starting their own AD&D miniatures line and toys. The D&D line received a shot in the arm with the release of The Isle of Dread (1981) which opened up that game to the Known World Mystara setting. Distribution rights for D&D and AD&D were expanded to twenty-two countries, with D&D and AD&D game being translated first into French, followed by many other languages including Danish, Finnish, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, and Swedish. An educational department was established to develop curriculum programs for reading, math, history, and problem solving, which led to the the Endless Quest book series.

TSR

In 1983, the company was split into four companies, TSR, Inc. (the primary successor), TSR International, TSR Ventures and TSR Entertainment, Inc. Gary Gygax left for Hollywood to lead TSR Entertainment, Inc., which would eventually become Dungeons & Dragons Entertainment Corp.). It attempted to license D&D products to movie and television executives, but resulted only a single license for what would become the Dungeons & Dragons cartoon, which itself lead to a 100 different other licenses and a two year series. Product diversification increased, including some unexpected ventures the Greenfield Needlewomen business perhaps being the most unusual.

There were some impressive acquisitions in this period (SPI, Amazing Stories). With the release of the Dragonlance saga and books in 1984, TSR became the number one publisher of science fiction and fantasy in the U.S. With a new game world, a series of game supplements, and a trilogy of novels written by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, the first novel in the series, The Dragons of Autumn Twilight, reached the top of The New York Times Best Seller list. The company expanded the RPG line with licenses to produce Marvel Super Heroes, Indian Jones, and the Conan roleplaying games. Expanding the scope and market, TSR introduced the HeartQuest series of positive choose-your-own-adventure romances from 1983 onwards and the All My Children game in 1985, based on the ABC daytime soap, with more than 150,000 copies sold. In 1986, TSR introduced Dungeon Adventures magazine, a popular bi-monthly magazine featuring adventure scenarios for D&D.

There was serious trouble in paradise however. TSR had grown at an incredible rate, but there control and management of the organisation was poor. The creative directors, such as Gygax, had been outmaneuvered in corporate ownership. The financial directors, who had provided much of the initial influx of capital, showed some disregard for the hobby. According to GameSpy (Magic & Memories: The Complete History of Dungeons & Dragons - Part II), they were running it very poorly indeed:

"Kevin and his brother Brian were -- and they were running it [TSR] into the ground. Under the Blume's management, corporate bloat and waste were epidemic. The company leased or owned upwards of 70 automobiles and the TSR..."
offices were loaded with furniture, computer systems, and equipment that went unused and, in some cases, unopened. Even worse, nepotism under the Blume's administration was rampant, with estimates that at least 90 relatives of the family had somehow ended up on the company payroll.

Despite significant revenues the company was around $1.5 million in debt. Gygax wrote to the TSR board recommending some changes, including removing Kevin Blume as CEO. The board agreed, but whilst the Blumes were no longer in control of the company, they still were the majority shareholders and effective owners, a truly delicious proposition for beginning students of political economy and corporate law to review and consider in detail. TSR also engaged in some very significant pruning of its expenses - including making some 75% of its staff redundant, many of which would go on to form new game companies such as Mayfair and Pacesetter, or work in the video game industry (Coleco was most prominent).

Removed from control of the company, the Blumes sold their controlling stock to a financial planner who worked with the company, and had been employed by Gygax, Lorraine Williams (whose family owned the license to the Buck Rogers material). Williams introduced some fairly strict rules which were not always well received:

"Williams says that once she took on the job of TSR’s general manager in the spring of 1985, she learned the true extent of the company’s financial problems— and Gygax’s complicity. "The whole structure of the place was that they had all sorts of offshore operations, and they had integrated profit-sharing plans that only benefited the shareholders, which were Gary, Kevin and Brian Blume, and some family members," she says. "I mean, [TSR UK] owned a house in the Isle of Man. You wouldn’t have believed [Gygax’s] temper tantrum when we told them that had to be sold..."

This and other successes with the Dungeons & Dragons game and cartoon, such as a lucrative licensing agreements with toymakers Mattel, LJN, and Larami, had afforded Gary luxuries such as his rental of a six-acre Beverly Hills estate once owned by fabled producer/director King Vidor, “complete with a bar, pool table, hot tub, and peach tree..." (David Ewalt, Of Dice and Men)

Whilst Gygax tried to have the sale of the Blume shares declared illegal he failed and subsequent to that he sold his stock to Williams and used the capital to form New Infinity Productions. Whilst TSR published the first of two supplements of Lankhmar, one of Gygax’s favourite fantasy fiction settings (and an early boardgame from the company) On December 31st, 1985 Gary Gygax left TSR for good. It was a true end of an era.

The Williams Era

Under the new leadership the TSR began with releasing Forgotten Realms campaign setting, and then started work on second edition AD&D, which would be released in 1989, along with the first of the "kit" books for various character classes and interesting historical settings, along with the Spelljammer setting. The year prior in another of TSR's many strange products the Bullwinkle & Rocky RPG was released, which included hand puppets and, in a more serious fashion, a very successful wargame based on Tom Clany's The Hunt for Red October.

Initially under Williams TSR's finances improved and the company was able to expand into other areas. As the license holder of the Buck Rogers franchise a board game and RPG was released, although these were not enormously successful. More product lines were forthcoming. In 1990 the gothic-fantasy Ravenloft was released which would prove to be enormously popular. The following year was another setting, the exotic and challenging Dark Sun, and the
year after that the Al-Qadim setting, loosely based on versions of Arabic fantasy stories and as an extension to Forgotten Realms, as was Kara-Tur (originally 1986), The Horde (1990), Matzica (1991), as well as expansions to the Mystara Known World setting (Hollow World Campaign Set, 1990). In 1994, the growing number of potential settings also had Planescape added, based on the extra-planar adventures, and then in 1995, with Birthright in which the players take on the role of the political rulers with divine backing.

During this period, TSR published its first hardcover novel, Legacy by R.A. Salvatore, which reached the top of the New York Times bestseller lists. Gen Con broke records for all gaming conventions attracting close to 20,000 people. The various settings had loyal followers and collectors. But as Michael Breault, an editor at TSR from 1985 to 1989 and freelancer from 1989 to 1995, some of the products did not have sufficient, if any, playtesting.

"The vast majority of modules and systems in hardback books were not playtested, to the very best of my knowledge. The designer would make them up, perhaps playtest them on his own or informally call a buddy or co-worker over to review or briefly playtest them, but as a general rule I saw very little playtesting occur. This is why I always refer to people in my position as editor/developers, because we were basically the only check against total weirdness. I remember working my way through one of Tracy Hickman's modules, intended for mid-level characters, and coming upon a room that had something like 6 or 8 liches in it. It was fricking LichCon11 in there and would have totally fried any party that kicked in that door. I knocked it down to a single lich but every so often think of the high-pitched screaming that would have resulted all over the land had I failed to see that."


Panic and Collapse

The industry however had changed, and new tastes and new technologies had come on to the scene. Roleplaying game sales were challenged by miniature wargames and card games. By 1995, TSR had fallen behind both Games Workshop with its Warhammer line and Wizards of the Coast with Magic: The Gathering in sales volume. Rather than concentrate on their core product and accept the new circumstances, or even engage in a comprehensive market review, TSR took a gamble on two fronts. On one side, they tried to enter the collectible market with Spellfire, the second ever CCG, and Dragon Dice, where players collected an assortment of dice and purchased additional booster packs of more powerful dice. It was a novel approach but ultimately not a successful one. There was some initial successes with Dragon Dice, leading to TSR to rapidly produce several expansion packs, which did not meet expectations. In addition, they decided to rapidly expand their hardcover novels, with twelve released in 1996, despite having previously only publishing one or two each year. These likewise did not sell as well as expected.

The crunch come in 1996. TSR had revenues of $40 million, but ended the year with little in the way of cash reserves. When Random House returned a large batch of unsold stock with a fee of several million dollars, TSR suddenly also found itself unable to pay for printing bills, logistics, shipping bills, and in a cascading collapse, even warehousing. Thirty staff were made redundant at the end of the year, with the company ended the year with $30 million in debt. The following year, Lorraine Williams sold the
company to Wizards of the Coast an the corporate offices in Lake Geneva were closed down.

**The Tragedy**

The rise and fall of TSR makes for a very tragic corporate story, and a tragedy in the very literal sense that there was intrinsic causes for the collapse from the outset. At each stage of the rise and fall one can see that the involvement of self-interested investors was the cause of crises that was at least equal to creative originators whose business nous certainly needed honing. It is very rare to find individuals who have both business acumen and culturally creative skills and when they do exist they usually have to choose one or the other to concentrate on. Rather it would have been far preferable that investors or controllers of the company had at least a passing interest in the hobby itself and were dedicated to seeing the hobby and the company that they represented flourish.

The lesson learned here is arguably universally applicable to other industries; medical firms should actually have CEOs with a least a passing interest in medicine or diagnosis, computing firms should be lead by people who at least have an interest in computer technology and so forth. The move towards a "business specialist" for its own sake encourages a self-interest when in reality a company interest (and even wider, the product interest, and even wider, a social interest) such predominate instead. Another lesson learned is resolve conflicts through mediation, especially on matters concerning organisational positions. It is also necessary to understand new social environments, the Internet being a particular case. TSR’s aggressive policy of intellectual property protection in the early days of the World Wide Web against individuals and non-profit associations was notorious and led people and organisations to desert any sense of brand loyalty.

In addition some of the business decisions that were made were also tragic in their lack of foresight. It was almost as if successive business leaders in TSR had an initial primarily interested in breaking from hobby culture to the mainstream, but then no idea what do from then. For the millions of people exposed and influenced by TSR’s roleplaying games, especially those in the hey-dey of its growth, the demise is particularly painful. It is clear that little market analysis was conducted and that consumer feedback collection was haphazard. Lurching from crisis to crisis, the policy was crash through or crash. Sometimes a company can be lucky and crash through a few times, and engage in a period of growth after such successes. Eventually however, it will crash.

Ryan Dancey, who worked for Wizards of the Coast in reviewing TSR at the time of acquisition provides a vivid first-person account of visiting TSR in its last days and a clear-cut explanation of the problem: "Inside the building, I found a dead company... I read the severance agreements between the company and departed executives which paid them extraordinary sums for their silence.... I toured a warehouse packed from floor to 50 foot ceiling with products valued as though they would soon be sold to a distributor with production stamps stretching back to the late 1980s...No customer profiling information. No feedback. No surveys. No "voice of the customer". TSR, it seems, knew nothing about the people who kept it alive. The management of the company made decisions based on instinct and gut feelings; not data... TSR died because it was deaf."

These matters are, of course, important lessons in running any business. But of course there is one fact that must be returned to from the beginning of this short history - that D&D started off as independent publications that had been rejected by other publishers because it was too strange. In that sense the gut instinct of the original designers that the game was something that others desired was indeed true and - not to put too fine a point on it - it changed the culture of the time. Sometimes gut instinct, especially when starting an organisation, is the right way to go. But when you have a mature product, a strategic plan is required, marketing need to be developed, testing of product needs to occur, and the customer base must be listened to. There is no such thing as a leader who has no followers - and as a result the leader must always listen to what their followers have to say.
Credit, Recognition, and the Pillow Test
by Tim Kask

During the past several years several people have asked me various questions on the same topic or subject, and my feelings about it. I guess it has come time to state it publicly, once and for all.

Gary Gygax and Brian Blume hired me to be the company editor, that company first being Tactical Studies Rules, and then TSR Hobbies. I edited some of their business letters; I edited some of Gary’s stuff; I edited whatever game the company was working on (but more as a proofreader in those instances); I edited Strategic Review and then when I edited Blackmoor, all of our lives changed a little that day.

The word “edit” was pretty loosely applied back then. In the heyday of newspapers there was a person or desk called “Rewrite”. This person took the facts as dictated from the reporter not actually writing their own story and made them coherent. I did a ton of that. Another skill necessary for a good editor is making the words that you have flow; they are there for a reason and should be pleasing to the mind reading them, they should be euphonious in your head. Sometimes this means substituting words and other times reconstructing sentences and paragraphs. But the most called-upon skill in those days was my ability to divine what the author meant and re-write in his voice, at the same time filling in all the gaps. In some cases those gaps were rather substantial, and I ended up creating significant portions of transitory and “tying together” material. In some of the D&D supplements it was as much as 30% of the content. This continued, to one degree or another, for Eldritch Wizardry and Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes. With the former I wrote lots of stuff, for the latter not so much.

This was what I was hired to do. Gary put his trust in me that I was not going to screw up the basic system and gave me my head. So, technically, I wrote a small chunk of OD&D. In accepting that trust and responsibility, I certainly had a major hand in directing the evolution of the game as we know it today. It was what I was hired to do; this is why I am only ever listed as the editor. I was one of many that were thanked in the fronts of the AD&D books, and I was OK with that.

To be bluntly honest, had I known then that D&D was going to become what it did become, I might have argued for, and gotten, “more credit”. But we first TSR employees were a team when it came to creating stuff. A lot of our early product was worked on en masse; we all had a hand in it. When it came to stuff like new spells and potions, I do not think it possible, without Mr. Wells’ time machine, to clearly say who did what in the majority of cases. Certain artifacts and magic items were proposed by various individuals; for some of those I can remember authorship.

We “First Five”, Gary, Brian, Dave Sutherland, Mike Carr and myself (founders of what is now called The Old Guard by GaryCon) shared ideas freely.

A couple of years ago I revealed the process for what became Basic and 1E. Before then, no one had every asked me
about it and I had not felt it necessary to blow my own horn. I revealed that I was certainly godfather to 1E and Basic, having spent nearly seven workdays closeted with Gary making decisions on which was which and what went where, as well as what got nerfed and what got beefed up. Then I sort of withdrew from that part of the company to concentrate my efforts on my division of the company, Periodicals.

A chance to do a professional, “slick paper” magazine about games and gaming is what most drew me to TSR in the first place; getting to help on this new game was a side dish. Gary promised the chance to turn The Strategic Review (beginning to notice a fondness for certain letter combinations?) into a “real” magazine with advertising and some color. As a recent grad of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale with a fresh degree in Communications, and former junior college newspaper staffer, I was ready.

Gary and I had discussed a magazine at some length before I was asked to come on board this “new venture” he was brewing. I thank whatever fate or providence or my lucky stars or whatever for my wife, Cheryl, nearly every day. She had the faith in me, and the letters RN behind her name, and enabled to me to pursue this crazy dream with Gary while she provided the majority of our support those first years (we had our first child, Amanda, before I went to Wisconsin). We started two magazines: Little Wars and The Dragon Magazine (how I originally named them).

LW was devoted to all things historical; we had several sets of historical minis rules as well as some historical boardgames then. Sadly, our success in fantasy almost fore­doomed any success in historical; we were very soon known as “those fantasy guys” and not taken seriously for anything else. I still maintain that William the Conqueror – 1066 was an outstanding innovation in boardgaming that blended in the feel of minis long before similar systems of today. Eventually, LW was absorbed back into The Dragon as it became more well-rounded.

The Dragon proved the adage that a rising tide lifts all boats. Gaming took off at the same time and we rode the rocket. The mag was very successful financially and generated a lot of profits. A substantial number of artists got their first stuff published by me; some went on to TSR. Several new writing voices were first published in one mag or the other. Several years later a couple of them showed up as “talking heads” on a couple of history programs. It was heady stuff to find new talent; I hated to leave the mag more than anything I have ever done.

What we “First Five” had really done hit me in the gut whilst I was watching the second LotR movie. We had cleared the forest and pulled and burned some of the stumps, then planted that first meager crop. Our efforts then made this possible now.

Granted, as I have stated elsewhere several times, we were at a confluence of culture and events and society that enabled this to happen, but it damned sure was not something inevitable or anything like that. We busted our asses and in so doing created all the jobs that came after; we laid one hell of a foundation in 1975.

I wonder how many Harry Potter books were sold to old players, buying them for their kids?

The social impact of what we devised, without a name then but called role­playing now, has been surprisingly significant. One of the great pleasures for me now at cons is hearing how our silly little game impacted people’s lives, sometimes for keeping them from mischief, other times enabling them to come out of their shells and learn to interact with others. Gary and I had already recognized the latter, having congratulated each other once for (here I paraphrase) giving nerds something in common to talk to each other about.

There is little that delights me more than someone recounting the two summers they adventured and stayed out of real­life trouble with their pals, or how playing the game enabled them to find self­confidence.

After I left TSR I founded a new magazine, Adventure Gaming, with the support of the now­defunct Ral­Partha (which lives on in memory and spirit in Iron Wind Metals). It only lasted 13 issues, falling victim to the failed “trickle­down” policies of the Reagan administration; hobby and book shops were disproportionately hard hit by the melt-down. So I
got out of the business I had helped take off.

I was many things for the next 20 years: Dad, Husband, soccer coach, salesman, draftsman, softball player, HS soccer announcer, soccer ref and still played the occasional boardgame, and then got a Masters in Educ. So I could teach. My children are of an age that was not impacted by Sat. morning D&D, so I essentially stayed away from the hobby for 22 years. When I came back to GenCon in 2006, I was stunned.

I live in Cincinnati, which is less than two hours from Indy. I came in from the East, running West on Southeastern Ave. When I got to the intersection with Washington, I saw little flags hanging on the light poles welcoming GenCon. I saw signage everywhere saying the same. I was gobsmacked by the numbers of the opposite sex (I never know how to refer to them; if I use the word “ladies” I offend some; if I use the word “females” I offend others; if I use the word “girls” I offend them all.) There were kids, too. What a wonderful metamorphosis had transpired.

Every time I see others RPG’ing, I smile inside. I helped make that happen, I helped make that matter, and I had helped to touch to those lives. What we created spawned an entire library of knock-offs, an industry devoted to capturing that magic that we discovered in ’74 and ’75. We made, literally, millions of memories possible. We created hundreds of jobs, possibly thousands depending upon how you choose to analyze it.

So when I am asked why it seemingly does not bother me that others’ names might be better known than mine, I tell them that it really does not matter to me that my name is not on a marquee in lights. I walk through game cons with the same thoughts I have each night as I go to sleep: I know what I did. I rest incredibly easy every night knowing that I had a hand in something that has had such a profound impact on society and culture. Future historians might puzzle over the cultural significance of droopy pants and how or where it started. No such questions exist for the birth of role-playing; those historians simply say “1974-1975 and “The Little Brown Box”.

I have been “a gamer” for over 55 years now. My gaming history is demarcated by “pre-RPG” and “post-D&D”; I avidly play all three main types of gaming: boards, minis and RPG’s. And they are all different now because of what we did from 1975 to 1980, when we lit the fuse that ignited the gaming experience. So I lay my head on my pillow each night knowing that.

What recognition I have received has concerned my magazines more than my other work at TSR, and that’s OK.

And you know what? Next year I plan to go to my 50th HS Reunion. When I walk in there, I know that out of 700+ fellow alumni and alumnae, none of them has had the impact on modern culture and society that I was a part of. And most of them will have no idea how I helped change modern popular culture, and that’s OK, too. I know.

The Origins of TSR's *Endless Quest* Series

by Martin Plowman

Even an endless quest has to start somewhere. TSR’s *Endless Quest* series was only one of a handful of competitors in the booming gamebook market of the 1980s to seriously challenge the primacy of Bantam’s *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. Created in 1982 by Rose Estes in TSR’s newly formed Education department, *Endless Quest* were always among my favourite gamebooks as a kid. Based on the campaign settings for various roleplaying games made by TSR including *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Gamma World* and *Star Frontiers*, it wouldn’t be a stretch to say that *Endless Quest* made me want to write my own *D&D* adventures, which in turn paved the path for me to become a writer myself.

But the story of how TSR came to publish *Choose Your Own Adventure*-style books for the 9-14 age bracket is even more interesting. I’d always assumed the series was commissioned by TSR’s Education wing to raise pre-teen literacy, a not unreasonable assumption given that this was the original purpose behind the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. The answer, however, is much stranger, and revolves around two unlikely events: the so-called “D&D moral panic” that gripped the world in the ‘80s, and Rose Estes’ impulsive decision to run off and join the circus.

In 1982 TSR was on top of the world. *Dungeons & Dragons* was a bona fide household name, their other games franchises were doing well, and the company had just broken the magical 20 million dollar mark in sales. No mere *games* company had ever come close to enjoying this kind of success, and if the shadows of financial strife and internal dissension that within a few short years would see the permanent departure of founder Gary Gygax and the dismemberment of TSR into four successor companies were already looming, they were barely smudges on the golden horizon.

Nevertheless the company’s execs sensed they were at a crisis point, and one that strangely enough had its roots in a missing person’s case. In August 1979 a 16-year old college student named James Dallas Egbert III went missing from his dorm room at Michigan State University. With the local police drawing a blank the Egbert family hired the services of private investigator William Dear, who found Egbert nearly three weeks later in Morgan City, Louisiana, where the severely depressed student had fled after a suicide attempt.

In the ensuing media circus the image of a deeply troubled youth would emerge. (Sadly, Egbert’s story does not have a happy ending, with the teen ending his life barely a year after being found by Dear.) But at the time one aspect of the case stuck in everyone’s minds: Egbert had been an avid player of that strange new game that nobody could understand unless they were a genius or a bit unstable.

As the details of the Egbert case became public the elements of a full-blown urban legend emerged. Egbert had been sneaking into the maze of his college’s steam tunnels to play a twisted, live action version of *D&D*; strange rituals and drugs were involved; Egbert and other players...
of the game were psychotic fantasists who had lost touch with reality. It was only a short step of fear-addled logic to conclude that Egbert’s disappearance and death was somehow connected or even caused by the game.

Before long moral crusaders around the world were condemning D&D for its perverting influences on youth. If the Beatles had brought censure on themselves for being “bigger than Jesus” in the 1960s, then you could safely say D&D was bigger than the Beatles in the 1980s.

One perhaps surprising side effect of the ensuing D&D moral panic was the flowering of pop cultural responses inspired by the game’s sudden and unwanted notoriety. By 1981 two full-length novels fictionalizing the Egbert case had appeared, John Coyne’s Hobgoblin and Rona Jaffe’s Mazes and Monsters, the latter being adapted into a 1982 made-for-television film starring a 26-year Tom Hanks (this film also most likely holds the distinction of being the first movie ever made about roleplaying games). The moral panic arguably reached its peak in 1984 with Jack T. Chick’s “Dark Dungeons” Christian fundamentalist comic, in which the association between D&D and Satanism was forever cemented.

TSR watched this moral panic unfold with dismay. And probably with good reason. If kids in middle America, or rather their parents, stopped buying D&D then they could say goodbye to most of their profits. Viewing the problem as one of public relations, TSR founded an “Education” department in 1982 whose job was to repair the image of the game and its parent company.

In 1982 Rose Estes was a working journalist and single mother with three young children to care for. Estes took the job in TSR’s new Education department despite having only a sketchy idea of what all the fuss was about. She’d never played D&D herself; mainly she just needed a steady income, and besides TSR’s headquarters in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, seemed like a better place to raise a family than Chicago or Milwaukee.

While researching this article I began wondering if Estes might be willing to cast some light on how Endless Quest came about. So, I did a bit of Internet searching. Though she didn’t maintain an author page, I found what I was certain must be Estes’ Facebook profile. I mean, it had “TSR Hobbies” listed as her workplace, but precious little else to say that this was the same Rose Estes who’d created the Endless Quest series and gone on to write 38 books over three decades.

The Facebook page did say, however, that Rose was the owner of the Hauser Gallery in Seal Rock, Oregon. So I sent her an email there, telling her how much I loved her books when I was growing up and that I was planning to write a review of Endless Quest all the way over here on the other side of the Pacific in Melbourne, Australia.

To my surprise, Rose wrote back that same day – which, given the time difference between our locations was around 2 A.M. for her. She would be happy to ponder my questions, she said, but would it be ok if I waited until the next morning (her time) so she could get some coffee into her first?

“The story of how the EQs came to exist is rather strange,” Rose wrote the next day. “Even I have to admit that.” Though it’s lazy of me as a writer, I’m going to let Rose tell her own story for a bit as she does a far better job of it than I would by attempting to paraphrase it.

“I lived in Houston for 20 years,” she continued. “Among my friends was a man named Manuel King, the son of a Russian Jew named Snake King, who was an importer of wild animals, many of whom were used in movies. Snake King married a Mexican woman, and Manuel was their son. When Manuel was a child he starred in a number of movies as ‘Bomba, the Jungle Boy’. An interesting life.

“Flash forward 20 years to Lake Geneva, WI, where I was a single mom with three children and a very small salary working for TSR. I was TSR’s 13th employee and I sort of floated around doing various tasks. There was no ‘education department’. What might have qualified for that title was me, trying to explain D&D to the public at large, primarily
attempting to ally parents’ fears that their children were becoming involved with demonology. It was a difficult task. I did not play the game, so my explanations were coming from a regular person, a mom myself and not a gamer. But, it was an uphill battle, especially after a student at the University of Michigan went missing and was said to be in the steam tunnels beneath the school where supposedly D&D was being played. This proved to be false, but still, people, parents were very confused.

“About this time, a tent circus came to town and I brought my children to see the show. Much to my surprise, I saw Manuel King and met his wife and their children. During the conversation, Manuel, who knew me as a journalist, said, ‘Why don't you come along? Travel with us for a while. It will be a great story.’ And after thinking about it, I agreed. So I took a leave of absence from TSR and joined the circus. I traveled with them for three weeks and one day we set up in Decorah, Iowa. I took the opportunity to do my laundry at a small laundromat in town. There was a small shelf of paperback books one could read while their laundry was being done. I picked up a book by R.A. Montgomery, a Choose Your Own Adventure book. As soon as I got a few pages in, it hit me hard, that this was the perfect vehicle for presenting D&D to children and their parents. So I called a friend and asked her to pick me up and I went back [to TSR] that same day.

“After reading the book in its entirety, I went to work and sat down with the Head of Sales and did my best to explain how important I thought the format was. He wasn't interested. I continued to bring it up in the days/weeks that followed until he said, ‘If you think this is such a hot idea, go home and write it yourself!’ So I did just that, by long hand on a legal pad.

“Around the first of the year, 1982, I think, TSR joined Random House at a sales meeting in Puerto Rico. TSR had a number of new game modules to release and somewhere along the line the Sales Manager mentioned my book. Random House was all over that because they knew the success that the series was enjoying at Bantam.

“Long story short, [the Sales Manager] came back, dropped my story on my desk and said, ‘Write three more, I need them by April.’ I was dumbfounded as you might imagine. But I did it. Return to Brookmere was actually the first book, even though Dungeon of Dread is said to be the first. I wrote all four books long hand, also on legal pads and wrecked my right arm in doing so. Instant carpal tunnel! The rest is pretty much history as you know it."

The first four books – Dungeon of Dread, Mountain of Mirrors, Pillars of Pentegarn and Return to Brookmere – were written by Rose and would remain on the national bestseller lists for more than six months. Eventually Rose wrote a further six books in the series, including some of my personal favourites, Revenge of the Rainbow Dragons and Circus of Fear (#6 and #10 respectively). No less than 36 titles were released between 1982 and 1987, written by a number of authors in addition to Rose including TSR luminaries Margaret Weis, Jim Ward, Mary L. Kirchoff and Douglas Niles (a second series of 13 books was released by TSR under the Endless Quest imprint between 1994-96 in a different format and without Estes’ involvement). Ultimately the series would be translated into 28 languages and sell more than 16 million books worldwide. For young readers of fantasy and science fiction growing up in the ’80s, Endless Quest was a cultural phenomenon.

At the time, the Endless Quest books stood out from other gamebooks. Typically, there’s a lot more text between choices in an Endless Quest book. Passages usually run for 2-4 pages before reaching a choice, but could occasionally go on for as many as 10 pages. Contrast this with Choose Your Own Adventure books, which rarely venture beyond two pages before reaching a branch in the story-tree, while Puffin’s Fighting Fantasy series adhered to a strict format of 400 numbered paragraphs per book, each of around 100 words.

Deviating even further from the standard gamebook model, the 2nd-person protagonist of the Endless Quest books – i.e. "you", the reader – was always given a fleshed out character with a name, gender and backstory. Return to Brookmere begins like this: “You will be an elven fighter named Brion. As Brion, you are five feet tall and weigh 100 pounds. You have shoulder length honey blonde hair, pointed ears, and brilliant grey-green eyes.”

19 RPG REVIEW ISSUE 32 September 2016
Intrigued by this distinctive take on the gamebook formula, I asked Rose why she had decided to write *Endless Quest* so differently. After admitting that she never read another gamebook after discovering that first *Choose Your Own Adventure*, she explained that character development was always her starting point for any story.

“I’m a story teller, plain and simple,” she said. “My interest, no matter what I’m reading, fact or fiction, is what the people are about, why they do what they do. For example, I wrote a history of the Chow Chow [a dog breed] in America. I wasn’t interested in what dog begat which dog, which is what most breed books are about. I wanted to know who the people were who brought the breed here and what they were all about. So my characters, then, when I was just beginning my career in fiction, to now when I’m returning to it, are still about having a backstory for the characters. I want to know as their creator, as well as a reader, what motivates them, why they do what they do. Otherwise it's one-dimensional and just an excuse to get from one action scene to the next.”

It makes sense to me now that the *Endless Quest* books felt so different. Standard gamebook design intentionally leaves a hole in the story so that readers can literally project themselves into the narrative and take the place of the protagonist. In contrast, *Endless Quest* books were built around the premise that the story still had to be about a somebody, rather than an abstract anybody.

Another feature of the series is the inclusion of talking animal companions. For example, in *The Pillars of Pentegarn* and *Revenge of the Rainbow Dragons* “you” play Jamie, a young wizard accompanied by a fox and an owl; in *Dragon of Doom*, the animal companion is Hinoki, a bright read pseudo-dragon.
“I had never had a pet until I was in my early teens and having a difficult home life and few friends, my cat became my everything,” Rose told me after I asked her about the animal companions. “I felt that he understood me when no one else did. I think putting animals in the stories gave the hero the opportunity to share their thoughts without the writer explaining it. It helped to give the animals the gift of speech so there was someone/something to act as a reflection of their thoughts. Also, when they were lonely, scared, in danger, it helped them to not be alone. Comfort and unquestioning love, something we all need at any point in our lives.”

Rose Estes wrote 10 books in total for Endless Quest, all published between June 1982 and November 1983. She kept writing a prodigious pace throughout the ‘80s and early ‘90s, adding to TSR’s Greyhawk Adventures and Ballantine’s Find Your Fate series. But in 1994 came the car accident, and everything changed. Rose suffered a blow to the head that killed the part of the brain that retrieves vocabulary. “I was writing the second book of a three book series for Berkeley, Trolltaken and TrollQuest, when this happened,” she told me. “I virtually had to relearn my vocabulary. It took six months to finish the remainder of the book and the end was very disappointing. I never wrote the third book.”

It would be 10 years before she began writing again. In the intervening years Rose met Gary Hauser, an artist and former professor of sociology whom she would marry and move to the wind-swept Oregon coast to be with. After Gary passed away in 2011, Rose ran the gallery on her own.

Beginning in 2006 she had published three books on the history of dog breeds in the US, but aside from some local Oregon media that mentioned her earlier career as a fantasy writer, Rose’s time at TSR and the Endless Quest books seemed a lifetime away.

“Frankly, I thought that everyone had forgotten me until recently,” Rose wrote in her email. “I had never really been a part of the gamers and so when the accident sidelined me and then moving to Oregon, it never occurred to me that I had removed myself from that community and no one knew what had become of me.”

But the world had changed in other ways too. With the rise of social media, online communities of gamebook fans began forming and mobilizing. As people shared their love of these books, they began wondering where the writers were now.

“Recently, I replied to a comment on Facebook,” Rose said. “Suddenly I was deluged with private messages! It was very exciting. So now, I am writing an EQ-style gamebook for BJ Hensley, and Hal Greenburg has asked me to be a part of an anthology. I'm extremely happy to be ‘back.’”

My feeling is that the interest in Endless Quest and other gamebooks will only continue to grow. Partly this is due to the nostalgia of the original Gen X and Gen Y readers of these books, but I think there is also a growing recognition that interactive forms of entertainment – interactive fiction, roleplaying games, boardgames, computer games, LARPs and the like – are going to assume an increasingly prominent position in the popular culture of this still new century.

In this emerging tradition the Endless Quest books and their creator, Rose Estes, stand out as a pioneering attempt to bring the depth of traditional literary fiction to the new medium. This path – or quest, if you will – has yet to run its course. I look forward to the day that a book is written inspired by Endless Quest and other classic gamebooks of the ‘80s that fully realises the potential this interactive medium promises.
Gangbusters

Introduction and Product

‘Gangbusters’, released in 1982, in some ways represents TSRs response to ‘Call of Cthulhu’ minus the horror but with additional emphasis on the gangsters, prohibition, and organised crime. It comes in a standard TSR-style box, albeit with a higher grade than future BECI D&D sets, a 64-page rulebook (saddle-stapled, cardstock cover), a double-sided full-colour map of Laketown City, cardboard playing pieces, a 16-page introductory adventure, and two d10 dice.

The text is dense, two column-serif justified, the internal artwork a combination of tactical displays and contextual examples. The latter, whilst below average in technical ability show some creativity and occasional humour. The writing is mostly formal and clearly written although the introduction goes engage in an acceptable fictional account. There is a single page index and, surprisingly, no table of contents. Although the book consists of 11 parts (chapters), there are no page breaks for each chapter, pages are not differentiated by chapter, and page numbers are not enlarged. The back cover does include a handy turn sequence for combat.

Character Generation

After a short ‘what is roleplaying’ section - which points out that the game does not need a ‘judge’ - it delves straight into character generation, which consists of percentile die-rolls, in order, for Muscle, Agility, and Observation, with low-rolls receiving a handicap bonus from a table; a d10 roll for Presence does the same. Derived characteristics include Driving (average of Agility plus Observation), Hit Points (Muscle plus Agility divided by 10 + 5), a Punching score (from Muscle), plus an additional Luck score (d100/2). The handicap bonus does result on some strange results; a roll of 25 (which gives a +25 bonus to 50) is better than a roll for 26 (which only gives a +15 bonus).

Most actions derive directly from these ability scores. It is noted at this stage under hit points that there are deadly wounds and temporary bruises, and a character who has taken more than half their hit points has a reduction in other abilities. Wounds and bruises are added together and compared to hit points to determine loss of consciousness, whereas a loss of hit points due to wounds results in death. A check of the Luck ability can intervene at this stage to prevent or reduce certain types of mortal damage.

The Basic Game and Introductory Scenario

The basic game is simple an example of the combat system. It begins with a check for surprise, declaration (and recording) of actions, movement with ranged weapon fire for closure, half movement for non-closure, fistfighting, more gunfire, and complete half-movement for non-closure. If this sounds a little confusing that's because it is. One aspect that is very important to calculate in this game - and appropriately too, given the setting - is field of vision. Conditions are set for surprise checks, which are based on observation. A failed check may meaning the character is surprised to up to three turns, based on a d100-Observation roll (it doesn't explain what to do with results below zero - I have always presumes no surprise).

A table of actions is provided for movement, fistfighting (which includes "Fight Fair" and "Fight Dirty"), gunfighting, and driving actions. Shooting is d100 Agility check with various and expected modifiers; weapons do a fixed amount of damage on a succesful hit. Firearms are pleasingly deadly; a shotgun will do 15 points of damage up to a 25 foot range, which will put most normal characters in the grave, and leave many PCs reconsidering their profession. Vehicle hits require a check on an additional table for effects. For fistfights, an Agility check against various actions is allowed
according to its own sequence: grapple and disarms, fair and dirty fighting (the latter does a flat 6 points of damage at a -30 Agility check), breaking golds, pistol shooting, etc.

Basic game vehicle movement is based on 'fast' or 'slow', with various additional movements or events requiring a driving check to avoid sudden braking or crashing. If a crash occurs, a random table will determine the extent of the crash, from minor body damage and stalling, to roll and explode. The randomness can lead to some amusingly deadly and unrealistic results.

At this stage it is recommended to play the introductory scenario, ending the the rampage of “Mad Dog” Johnny Drake. Four pre-generated characters are provided to participate in this reasonably good choose-you-own adventure which does require a bit of cleverness on behalf of the player(s), if they going to outsmart the devious Drake.

**Campaigns and Careers**

Returning to the main rulebook some basic, minimal, but important notes are provided for designing one's own adventures. This is quickly followed by characters in campaigns, which extends the characteristics to include background features including Age, Height and Weight, Money, and character advancement through experience points. Characters receive experience points based on their profession, with an upper limit of 15th level. Level gains provide the opportunity for a character to improve their basic ability, learn or improve skills, or add special abilities related to their profession.

Some thirty-four skills are provided with an experience point "cost" which reflects the XP required to gain the level increase in the first place. They are very much tied to the setting, including such things as "Auto Theft", "Wiretapping", "Boxing", " Forgery" etc. When a character first learns a skill, they roll as if they were engaging in character generation for a basic ability, with the various handicap modifiers for PCs - it's downright weird to be frank. Skill checks are, unsurprisingly based on d100 rolls with unspecified ability modifiers.

The section on 'Campaign Play' is primarily about the role of the game Judge in designing the campaign setting and playing the role of NPCs etc, as well as the important roll of modifying rules. This is followed by 'Careers' which is a detailed look at specific professional behaviour, responsibilities, salaries, and other perks for characters in campaign play, including some handy hints for players taking up such roles. This also includes experience point gains for characters for completing professional activity; for example a private investigator gains XP for fees on a special case, solving such cases, having criminal convicted as a result of their investigations, and - most importantly and rewarding - having crooked politicians convicted. Worthy of note, players can decide to play criminal careers.

The following chapter provides handy detailed description of crimal activities carried out by syndicates is provided, including bootlegging, speakeasies, numbers game, bookmaking, loansharking, and racketeering. A notable absence is 'vice'. Having provided such elements for campaign games, a chapter is provided on dealing with N(Cs, including their level, skills, reactions, loyalty, and so forth. Of particular note are NPC encounters especially when criminal activity is involved.

**Elaborations**

The final four chapters cover 'Special Rules', 'The Long Arm of the Law', 'For the Game Judge', and 'Optional Expert Rules'. By 'special rules' what is meant is events just outside the direct influence of the characters in the games setting; public opinion, the role of newspapers, churches, hospitals, and extended activities such as additional employment and bank loans. A very odd inclusion here is explosives.

'The Long Arm of The Law' covers more details aspects of the legal process including arraignment hearings, pleas bargaining, trials and juries, the procedure of such events, jury tampering, sentencing, and parole. Of special note is the National Prohibition Act, and the penalties related to that legislation.
The short chapter on 'For The Game Judge' simply covers in more detail those responsibilities already discussed. The 'Optional Expert Rules' includes firing while moving, range modifiers, burst fire, hit locations, cover, expert firefight rules, expert car rules, and finally a range of typical NPCs, price lists, and abbreviated historical characters as an appendix.

**Evaluation**

Gangbusters is a strange game; not so in its choice of setting, which is perfectly fine, or in its core mechanic (percentile roll under), nor indeed even in terms of the physical product, but rather how its ended up with such things. The lack of even a table of contents is terrible, the chargen and skill acquisition system is ham-fisted, the obsession with combat actions is annoying. Yet despite all this, there is a good amount of content and especially in terms of its core focus, and absolutely superb signal-to-noise ratio - when's the last time anyone has seen a complete game in 64 pages? Ultimately the two aspects of the game, the positive and the negative, balance each other out to result in a grade that is right in the middle - but that is rules-as-written, and certainly it shouldn't be too difficult for any GM to spend a modicum amount of time to fix some of the stranger annoyances.

Style: 1 + .2 (layout) + .4 (art) + .5 (coolness) + .7 (readability) + .6 (product) = 3.5
Substance: 1 + .6 (content) + 1.0 (text) + .5 (fun) + .2 (workmanship) + .2 (system) = 3.5

**Dungeons & Dragons Set 1: Basic Rules (Revised by Frank Mentzer)**

**Background, Product, Overview**

It is arguably the single most well-known roleplaying product - the Mentzer edition of basic Dungeons & Dragons. Skipping over the details if how the product came to be in comparison with other editions, it is enough to be said that this was aimed at a younger audience and as a gateway to further development. If there is any doubts about this, it should be pointed out that it's fairly explicitly stated on the box ("ages 10 and up", "After you've mastered the BASIC set, MOVE UP ... Join the professions with the D&D EXPERT SET..."). The game itself consists of a somewhat flimsy box containing two saddle-stapled cardstock covered books ("Players Manual", 64p, and "Dungeon Masters Rulebook", 48p), along with a pack of six dice with a crayon to "ink" the numbers.

The cover artwork is a now-famous illustration by Larry Elmore with internal greyscale art by Jeff Easley, both of which provide similar style. Overall the illustrations are of high technical ability, and shows some imagination, and is contextually appropriate. Nevertheless the characters seem to be a little modern in their presentation. The writing style too has some issues; aimed at players of a particularly young age it may seem to be a little dim to the older or adult reader. The text's organisation is not so much broken up into chapters but into sections, subsections, and sub-subsections, and with a poor scattering of some key functions (e.g., character generation), although each page has the sections marked. The text is three-coloumn justified with good use of white space.

A lengthy introduction to a story and game concepts takes up some thirteen pages of the Players. This is followed by a solo adventure for another nine pages. After that character generation for the next twenty or so pages, then group play and optional rules making up the remainder of the first book. The DMs book starts of with effectively a checklist of activities, a short DM-ed adventure for about ten pages, eight pages of 'procedures and rules', and then support information including twenty-two pages of 'monsters', six pages of 'treasure', and three pages of dungeon creation. Each book comes with a table of contents, there is a combined index, and about a dozen pages of charts and tables.

**Players Manual**

It is reasonable to assume that the introductory guided story counts as character generation. It is a slow introduction to
the characteristics, 'to hit' rolls, other character classes (poor Aleena the doomed), various monsters, and alignment (lawful, neutral, chaotic). Further explanatory text provides information about ability scores (that's a fairly lucky set of rolls) and their adjustments, magical and normal items, monetary exchange rates, the far superior experience point value of the gold piece versus the defeated monster, and the "very important" section on dice. A solo adventure follows where the player gains even further control of the narrative, such as it is, and perhaps confusingly, correctly elaborates the damage system. Played by the odds there is a very good chance that a player will discover the mortality of first-level characters.

Following this there is further explanatory text about the options available. There is six character classes, three with a demi-human race/class combination - Cleric, Fighter, Thief, Elf, Magic-User, Halfling, Dwarf. Each character class has a prime requisite among the ability scores which provides a bonus or penalty to experience, and notably the race's have minimum requirements as well. Each class has variant experience point to level progression, their own saving throw table, and variant determination of hit points.

The different character classes have various class-specific abilities; spells for magic-users and clerics, turning undead for clerics, various sneaky abilities for thieves, infravision and additional languages for Dwarves and Elves, mining detection skills for Dwarves, spells, paralysis immunity, secret door detection, and spells for Elves, amour class bonuses and hiding for Halflings. All of this is provided in detail, albeit with the game's limitation of covering only levels one to three.

New character generation itself doesn't actually begin until page 48 of the Players Book. Ability scores are determined on a 3d6 random roll, implied order, with characters with two scores below six, or no value above nine, optionally discarded. Depending on the prime requisite of the character ability scores can be raised with others lowered, subject to a range of arbitrary restrictions. The benefits of Charisma are illustrated as reaction adjustments, maximum retainers, and morale. High intelligence provides extra languages and low intelligence limits reading and communication. Other ability adjustment effects are scattered in subsequent pages.

A handy section is provided to illustrate the difference between players and characters, which leads into group play. Player roles for mapper and caller are suggested, along with player (and character!) consideration of why they're engaging in the adventure. Sensible hints are provided for marching order, tactics, division of spoils, and a fairly sensible description of that debated issue, alignment. An 'adventuring rules' section gives additional details for equipment, time, movement, perception, traps, and the use of miniature figures.

The 'encounter rules' are primarily the combat system. An order of: determine surprise, roll for initiative, conduct morale checks, movement, missile fire, spells, and repeat. Missile weapon range varies according to the tool used and with minor modifications according to short and long range. Weapons have variable damage in the "advanced damage system", with individual initiative and Dexterity modifiers also offered as an optional rule. Rather detailed encumbrance rules are also provided with the "coin" weight unit.

**Dungeon Masters Rulebook**

The shorter Dungeon Masters rulebook is mainly support material. Nevertheless it does start off with a handy introduction to 'The Dungeon Master's job', with the most important rule, "BE FAIR", as playing the role of all NPCs according to alignment and intelligence ("think of how the creatures feel, and how they might act"), running the game, ordering events, and preparing the game before hand. A sample adventure is providing investigating the ruins of Gyagar the magic-user and the castle of Mistamere - plus a reward has been put out for that fiend Bargle, who killed Aleena. It's a fairly tough adventure for beginning characters to be honest, but is well written with plenty of hints for beginner DMs. A ground floor level and one dungeon level is provided in detail with a recommendation for DMs to develop the third level - which will include the dastardly Bargle!

There is an argument that a handy section at the back of the book, 'Creating Dungeons', should have followed, as it
includes scenario design, maps and 'stocking' the dungeon, adding random creatures, determining contents, and
wandering monsters. It's all handy albeit basic information. Nevertheless, what does follows is several pages of
'procedures and rules' form the core of DM management of the game's activities as some thirty spot rules presented in
alphabetical order, covering most of the main issues that will arise in play. Much of it is recommendations - how to deal
with arguments, fudging results to keep characters in play, transferring characters between campaigns, etc. but also
includes a selection of higher level spells for NPCs.

This is followed by monsters and treasure statistics, which make up the bulk of the book. Whilst nearly all of the
monster statistics are based on combat abilities, at least the prospect of negotiating with the intelligent species is
discussed first. The selection of creatures is quite good using mythological, fantasy, and unique sources. Whilst the
overwhelming majority of the text is the creature's stat block, the author sometimes made effort to include temperament
and ecology in the regrettably brief descriptions, which is usually more combat elaboration. As the namesake of the
game, dragons get a special section describing the six types, their special breath weapons, and the special rules for
subduing these mighty beings. As for treasures, they are correlated by type to provide individual and group distribution.
Magical treasures is, of course, the most interesting, providing for the various swords, armour, potions, rings, scrolls,
staffs etc along with the exotic items in "miscellaneous magic", although in this basic set only a handful are described.

**Evaluation**

The physical content as a whole is average to good; flimsy box but with a useful separation of appropriately sized
books. The artwork is technically good but not very creative. The general layout is more than acceptable, organisation
of the text is somewhat less than optimal, and the writing style on the verbose and simplistic side, although that is
expected. As for the content itself, this is quite impressive. Although the game system itself consists of a number of
inconsistencies, arbitrary limitations, and narrow scope (and thus the lower substance score), it does carry out the
essential ruleset with some acumen. Most importantly, it does satisfy the overall aim - of providing an absolute
beginner, whether player or dungeon master, an introduction to the game.

Style: $1 + .3 \cdot \text{layout} + .6 \cdot \text{art} + .4 \cdot \text{coolness} + .7 \cdot \text{readability} + .3 \cdot \text{product} = 3.3$
Substance: $1 + .3 \cdot \text{content} + .3 \cdot \text{text} + .4 \cdot \text{fun} + .4 \cdot \text{workmanship} + .4 \cdot \text{system} = 2.8$

**Dungeons & Dragons Set 2: Expert Rules (Revised by Frank Mentzer)**

**Background, Product, Overview**

The immediate successor to the Basic Set has some strong similarities. It is still pitched at the same audience ("ages 10
and up"), and still comes in a box of the same quality. This time however there is but one 64p saddle-stapled rulebook
with cardstock cover, with a separate Player's Information form pages 3-21, and a Dungeon Master's Section from page
22 onwards. Elmore's cover art is another dragon versus warrior conflict, albeit with the notable difference that this
time they are outside - a theme for the entire product. Again the text is three-column justified with a serif font, and a
similar general page layout. Also included is eight central pages of charts and tables, including two glorious maps of
the "The Grand Duchy of Karameikos" and at a larger scale, "the D&D Wilderness". The writing style and organisation
of the content is, however, vastly improved, indeed still among the best available. The content is logically sequential
and expressed with clarity, simplicity, and density.

In addition to the rulebook, there is a scenario, "X1 The Isle of Dread". This ocean-going, jungle, wilderness, and
dungeon adventure comes with a three-panel cardstock cover, and consists of a 32-page scenario booklet in the standard
three-column justified text. In summary form, it is a very dense scenario pack with the opportunity to spend several
sessions working one's way through the myriad of possibilities. It is a little challenging to review this simultaneously
with the main rulebook coming from different authors, but they are of from same product so it has to be done. Also, it
must be mentioned, the Expert Rules contains another collection of dice and inking crayon.

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26 RPG REVIEW ISSUE 32 September 2016
Expert Rulebook

The Expert rulebook starts with a brief introduction outlining the core themes of wilderness and growth, before moving on to the Player's Information. This is also provided in summary form, starting with hit dice, hit points and name level, the existence of level limits for demihuman characters (a "simple but firm rule"), the use of horses, class titles, and spell use clarifications for re-memorising and reversing spells.

From there it is a quick move into providing the full list of abilities and limitations, including a complete set of spell descriptions where relevant, of the various character classes, extending the level range from one to fourteen for human classes, and twelves for Dwarves, ten for Elves, and eight for Halflings. Of particular note is that when human characters reach 'Name' level (usually 9th, 8th for thieves, and anytime for halflings) a castle or stronghold can be built which will attract followers and a community. Following this is an extended equipment list to particularly include land and water transport, outdoor travel issues, and a more detailed encumbrance system - and that's it for the Player's Section.

The Dungeon Master's section starts with an expansion of "Procedures", the various spot rules first applied in the Basic Set. Of particular note is wilderness combat (e.g., aerial, naval), construction costs for castles and strongholds, the cost of mercanaries, and magical research for spells and items. Following this is the design of a D&D campaign world and wilderness, sensible guided advice for setting, maps, townships, non-human ecological niches, and extensive remarks on townships and their businesses. Following this is a sample wilderness and home town for the region of Karameikos, and the small township of Threshold - which includes the return of Bargle The Infamous! The example provides, in summary form, the politics, intrigues, trade goods, and travel options - all in less than a page. In addition there are some twenty sample adventure seeds, although to be fair many are just scenes that would require extensive elaboration.

As a final part, this is followed by order of events for wilderness travel looking at movement, terrain, encounters (extensive ecological tables), waterborne adventures and a shipping chart (movement, crew, capacity, "hull points", armour class), and the issue of weather. There are optional rules for modification of water movement according to wind, and various aspects of encounters and combat at sea. Of particular note is that wilderness encounters are far more random in terms of power level. Whereas dungeons have this cute idea of the highest levels of a dungeon being weak and lower levels being tough, in the wilderness you're just as likely to encounter a Giant Bee as you are to encounter a Giant Roc.

Unsurprisingly there is an extended monster list for over fifty new appropriately tougher (e.g., giants, elementals, vampires) and more often exotic creatures with a range of new combat abilities, with a small extension of "No. Appearing" to include wilderness encounters. Ever-associated with monsters is their treasure, and the Expert rules extend prior offerings. Of particular note is the prospect of cursed items, and intelligent swords ("don't worry, many fighters have swords more intelligent than they are"), with the possibility of ego, purpose, and extraordinary powers. Likewise extended are the variety of magic rings, scrolls, potions, miscellaneous magic items and the like. The rulebook concludes with a set-piece narrative with the call to get ready to play Module X-1

X1 The Isle of Dread

After providing a single-page snapshot of the evocative, if sometimes questionable, geopolitical regions of the large scale wilderness map the introduction provides a kicker, the discovery of a section of a ship's log by Rory Barbarosa indicating the possibility of a "Black Pearl of the Gods" in an inland city on an island on the Thanegioth Archipelago. Options are provided for the PCs to acquire water transport, including buying boats where the speed and strength is proportional to the cost.

The Isle of Dread itself has various wandering monster tables appropriate to the ecological niche. This is a "lost world" island, with dinosaurs, lycanthropes, undead, and various dragons all appearing as "wandering monsters". At least from
the outset the first probable set encounter is with the relatively friendly village of Tanaroa, and their associated neighbours. They are interesting in their own right (matriarchal village chiefs, patriarchal clan leaders, zombie ancestor cult).

In addition to this is a number of keyed encounter areas which has elements of both a "hex crawl" sandbox. Unfortunately the encounter areas are not usually strongly associated with each other, but they do retain an element of ecological appropriateness, and threat. There are a few exceptions where an emergent narrative can result (e.g., the possibility of a conflict between a new trade route and pirates), but this is the exception. New creatures are also introduced in this context, including a whole range of dinosaurs and other prehistoric beasts, the "phanaton", a sort of intelligent gliding monkey-raccoon, and intelligent (and Chaotic) giant spiders, and the neutral cat-humanoid Rakasta - all along with several other communities of intelligent races. This is, to say the least, a very rich environment.

Apart from the general island itself there is also an further niche environment on top of a less inaccessible central plateau. On top of this is another village community with its own political intrigue the leads to the adventure to the ruins of an old temple at the appropriately named 'Taboo Island'. This is the "dungeon" part of the adventure and has all the inappropriate design features of the era. Nevertheless it does also have some interesting features, such as various water blockages, boiling pits and the like. It does contain a fascinating and dangerous amphibious species, the kopru, albeit in small numbers. All the promises from Rory are here, but obviously some tall tales have extended the message somewhat.

Overall, the Isle of Dread is an interesting, if flawed, scenario. It really packs as much as it possibly can into a relatively small region whilst retaining a sense of ecological consistency. However the encounters themselves are relatively isolated from each other preventing the emergence of some potentially powerful interactions. It would have been preferable if more attention was given to the potential dynamics within the sandbox, rather than trying to apply quantity.

**Evaluation**

The Expert ruleset is an excellent product overall, greatly expanding the scope of the Dungeons and Dragons game in a highly efficient manner, even if the game system itself continues to suffer some issues of scope and arbitrariness. Whilst the physical product itself is not substantially different to prior publications, the organisation of the text and writing quality is vastly improved. With the addition of an open campaign world numerous opportunities present themselves, and the supporting text around Karameikos is very helpful. Not only that, the Isle of Dread takes the wilderness expansion to an exotic and ultimately even alien locale. Whilst there are genuine criticisms of the rules, the setting, and of the scenario, this is certainly a candidate for "best sequel", in the Dungeons and Dragons world of products.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .5 (art) + .6 (coolness) + .6 (readability) + .3 (product) = 4.0
Substance: 1 + .6 (content) + .6 (text) + .5 (fun) + .6 (workmanship) + .4 (system) = 3.7

**Dungeons & Dragons Set 3: Companion Rules (Revised by Frank Mentzer)**

**Background, Product, Overview**

The third boxed set for BECMI D&D retains some consistency with the previous editions, at least in the physical box. However, unlike the Expert boxed set we've returned to a two-rulebook set (Player's and Dungeon Master's, at 32 pages and 64 pages respectively) and with no separate scenario. There is, of course, consistency in the typeface and physical format; saddle-stapled books with cardstock covers, three-column justified with a serif font, with quality greyscale art from Elmore and Easley. Both books contain a table of contents and prominent section titles.
Text organisation requires some elaboration. The major sections of the Players Companion consists of an introduction, new armour and weapons, unarmed combat, strongholds, other character activity, and class descriptions. For the Dungeon Masters Companion the top level sections are The Campaign (part I: General Guidelines, Part 2: The Fantasy World, Part 3: The Multiverse), Procedures, Monsters, Treasures, and Adventures. As can be readily determined even in review the organisation could have done with some improvement.

**Players Companion Book One**

The opening pages of the Players Companion sets the scene and scope for the book. Basic Set characters were effectively dungeon-crawlers, Expert Set characters engaged in wilderness exploration, whereas Companion Set characters are primarily involved in the development of significant lands of rulership (that is, a step up from the management of an single stronghold as per the higher level Expert level characters) or as a traveller. This distinction is reflected in character class rules, but remains a game system expression rather than a hard requirement.

Before delving into this in detail however, the game does introduce new weapons (bastard sword, blow gun, bola, heavy crossbow, blackjack, et, trident, whip), some of which have saving-throw based special results, and with increased bonuses according to level. The blow gun, which causes 25% of total hit point damage on a hit to high level characters may look too good at first blush, but given that it has very limited range, requires a successful 'to hit', and for a character to save versus poison at +5, the prospect of a band of kobolds causing a major nuisance is limited. An unarmed combat system is provided which is actually quite workable, albeit with many case exceptions. The only truly disagreeable component to these combat sections is that we've had to wait this long for them - they're not really "Companion" material as such.

Marginal notes on the management and location of strongholds, available to demi-humans at maximum level or humans at name level are provided, along with short descriptions and costs of stronghold staff, before moving on to the character class level improvements themselves. As per prior editions a full experience and spell table is provided, along with saving throws, and higher level spell descriptions for each class. Further, each human class is provided with the game effects of being a "land owner" or a "traveller". For example, Clerics who chooses the former path can rise in the religious hierarchy, whereas the latter path means that they become more of a missionary. In addition some character classes (Fighter, Cleric) gain the option of choosing a new type of class at name level - a 9th level Neutral Cleric may, for example, decide to become a Druid. For demi-humans advances in attack ranks and other options are provided beyond level limits. Also described are the powerful clan relics (Forge of Power for Dwarves, Tree of Life for Elves, Crucible of Blackflame for Halflings) which as associated with strongholds, but are not under the ruler's direct control, but rather a hereditary Keeper.

**Dungeon Masters Companion Book Two**

The Dungeon Masters Companion starts off with some mature suggestions for expanding and managing the campaign. It recommends PCs explore new "Basic level" characters in the game. It recommends geographical diversity within the wilderness map's key features. It suggests planning a rate of level advance based on game session metrics. Several pages are spent on dominion establishment and management, although some of the actual mechanics are sometimes questionable - the population growth rates, for example, are far too excessive as was income generation, and the expenses system is insufficiant contextual. The Dominion Events charts are utterly implausible and destructive. However, abstract income for services adds to experience points, an interesting and welcome suggestion. Actual play management of the system became increasingly onerious as the dominions expanded. Overall the dominions section is not very well thought-out or play-tested. It is best considered as a set of guidelines and reworked.

The next major component is an abstract mass combat system, also known as "The War Machine". This requires a fair bit of set-up for the initial calculation of troop strengths, although helpfully there is a Quick Battle Rating system as well. It is fairly well-balanced and careful eyes will notice the significant advantages gained by having well-trained and well-equipped troops with consistent leadership, even if they are average in other respects. Combat results are modified.
according to force ratio, morale, terrain and environment etc, and there is an optional tactical system where further modifications are based on comparing the attacker's and defender's strategic approach (attack, envelop, hold, withdraw etc). PCs also have the option in engaging in 'heroic activities' during battle. In stark contrast to the Dominion rules, the War Machine is very well-designed.

Following this are brief rules and descriptive material for 'the Multiverse'. In Companion level games, PCs may find themselves engaging in extra-planar adventures, at least in the "Inner Planes" of the ethereal and elemental. Of particular note are the rules of dominance and opposition relationships between different elemental magical types which a careful magic-user will find very opportune for exploitation, typically providing a double-effect for spells. In many ways this constitutes a special section for the 'Procedures' chapter which, unlike previous editions, only takes up a few pages of the book. These include rules and necessary elaborations and clarifications for aging, demi-human crafts, poisons, magic items prices and so forth.

The bulk of Dungeon Masters books in the BECMI series, but usually relatively quick to review, is the monsters and treasures. Like other issues of BECMI D&D, the monsters are scaled more or less to the character level, and there is minimal regard to issues of ecology and an over-emphasis on combat ability on an individual level. More interesting in this edition however is a clear separation between creatures of the "prime material plane" (e.g., beholder, dragons) and creatures of other planes (e.g., elementals), although there is some which cross the boundary between the ethereal and the prime (spirits, haunts). The treasure section is relatively unexciting, although there is a couple of items which are integrated into the new mechanics, such as the Rod of Ruling (which gives a bonus to Dominion confidence checks) and the Rod of Victory (which does the same for mass battles using the War Engine).

Finally, there is a set of three sample scenarios which, with a bit of work, can be fleshed to a single game session of activity. Each is designed to explore a facet of the new rules, which is interesting in itself. The first involves a tournament and a jousting list, the second an exploration of the unarmed combat rules with a pirate, and thirdly - and certainly most importantly - the notorious Black Eagle Barony has finally decided to show its hand and take on the Grand Duchy of Karameikos, using the "war machine" rules. It is a somewhat contrived battle designed for the Duchy to finally put an end to the evil Barony, but nevertheless useful for both illustration of the mass combat system and for pushing the metanarrative forward.

Evaluation and Conclusion

There is much to like in the D&D Companion set, and little to dislike. Certainly the physical production qualities are below average on contemporay standards, although the organisation of the text, writing style, and format are on par. As for the game system as a whole, as it expands it loses, albeit by degrees, the relatively high level of arbitrariness and narrow scope, even if some components were better placed in early editions. Some aspects of the rules were not (e.g., Dominion management), it appears, sufficiently playtested whereas others (e.g., War Engine) allow for an expansion of scope in a manner that is sufficiently abstract. Mainly however, this represents a solid expansion in setting and style with a high degree of integration and consistency. For that at alone it deserve credit.

Style: 1 + .5 (layout) + .5 (art) + .6 (coolness) + .6 (readability) + .3 (product) = 4.0
Substance: 1 + .7 (content) + .6 (text) + .7 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .5 (system) = 4.2

Alternity : Player's Handbook

Background and Product

Alternity was an ill-fated game. Published in the same year that TSR was acquired by Wizards of the Coast it had only a brief moment in the sun before it was snuffed out by the D20 juggernaut, which included some its ideas in the D20 Modern and D20 Future supplements. The game itself however retained a small but loyal fanbase who are obviously
overjoyed with the recent announcement that a new edition will be published next year by the Sasquatch Game Studio. Still, it seems opportune to review this game again.

The Player's Handbook is a solid hardback; 256 pages, well-bound. The cover art is simple yet also impressive insofar that it manages to capture a feel that is both high science fiction, yet also a little on the gritty side. There is a single page table of contents and a four page index which occurs with some sample character sheets and a compiled set of tables. The colour-interior presents text mainly as three-column ragged with a sans-serif font, with highlighted areas as side-bars. Page numbers are clear, each page also has the chapter title. The text is quite formal and not always easy reading, which matches some of the organisation of text. On the other hand, the internal artwork is attractive, skillful, and deliberately a little murky, giving an alien ambience.

**Core Mechanics**

The opening chapter is 'fast play' rules, providing the key concepts, professions, ability scores, durability (read: hit points), skills, and equipment. Also included is a rather interesting core mechanic; roll d20 (the control die) and try to roll under the skill score (skill score) or ability score (feat check), add a situation die for modifier steps (d4, d6, d8, d12, d20) etc, either positive (making it harder) or negative (making it easier). A portion of the success roll equates with a degree of success; under the chance is an Ordinary success, half value is a Good success, and a quarter is an Amazing success. These ratings are used in skills, feats, initiative, damage, etc. A scenario is built in scenes (combat, encounter, challenge). Each scene is divided into action rounds, each round into four phases; a character may act once per phase, and is able to act in a number of phases per round according to an Action check (read, initiative). All events in a phase occur simultaneously. Damage is differentiated into stun damage, wound damage, and mortal damage; the former two knocks one out, the latter kills. Several sample character sheets concludes a magnificently detailed and informative the opening chapter.

**Character Creation**

Character generation begins with working out a concept before moving into species selection. Options include elfin-like psionic Fraal, the cybernetic Mechalus, the small and draconic Sesheyan, the lizard-like T'sa, and the large and lumbering Weren. The various species each have their own special abilities and are quite balanced overall. Humans, in a common trope, receive bonus skill points for being adaptable. Following species selection, professions are selected from one of six choices; Combat Spec, Diplomat, Free Agent, Tech Op, or Mindwalker – the latter being a psionicist, obviously. Each profession has its own special abilities, and minimum ability score. Abilities scores are assigned from a pool of 60 points to Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Will, and Personality, with a range from 4-16 according to species and profession requirements and bonuses.

Characters receive a number of skill points and Broad skills according to the Intelligence. Skills are separated into Broad skills and Speciality skills and are both associated with an ability, which determines base ratings and degrees of success. A character must purchase a Broad skills before purchasing a speciality skill; a number of free Broad skills are provided according to species. Skill ratings depend on the associated ability and any skill points spent in the skill – however only speciality skills can be improved in this manner. Characters may also purchase up to three Perks with skill points or gain bonus points by selecting up to three flaws. Characters may also select attributes such as motivation, moral attitude, and other personality traits. After determining equipment from a profession-determined random roll for starting wealth, the character is good to go.

**Skill Use and Character Improvement**

There are three chapters in the Player's Handbook dedicated to character activity. The first of these, 'Heroes in Action', begins with a lengthy discussion of the role playing aspects of 'doing things', before moving into high-level observations of campaign styles and challenge scenes. The core mechanic is explained in even more detail, with the addition of critical failure (20 on the control die) and an explanation of extreme negative step numbers (additional d20

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31 RPG REVIEW ISSUE 32 September 2016
penalty die) to represent the ability of heroes to engage in nearly impossible tasks if they are lucky. In addition to this the chapter provides a set of spot rules for variations on standard actions (e.g., combined actions), the effects of wounds, combat actions, the environment, and “last resort” actions, a metagame mechanic based on the character's Personality value.

Skill acquisition and default levels have already been explained. In addition there are complex skills, which require multiple levels of success to reflect difficulty or dramatic tension. Results from skill checks have five degrees of success ranging from critical failure, failure, success, good success, and critical success, which is used to compare the results of skill vs skill conflicts. In addition to skill use there is feat use, base on ability scores. Overall there is some 150 broad and specialist skills, not including those (e.g., languages) which require specific instances. They vary according to skill point cost and some have professional prerequisites. The scope and balance between the skills is quite commendable, providing a more extensive range of social, intellectual, and technical skills and a less fine-grained implementation of combat skills. Each skill is described in a few paragraphs, with skill-specific modifiers noted. In addition to this there is a short chapter of 'Perks and Flaws', which are bonuses and penalties that are not easily described in an Ability or Skill-like manner.

A chapter of 'Sample Careers' provides skill packages, signature equipment, and an easy-to-prepare background for various professions. These also have a point cost, although it is never so great that the player cannot allocate a few personal interest skills. The 'Attributes' chapter is essentially brief descriptions of character motivation, the defining purpose of the character, and their traits, as roleplaying hooks. These are not integrated into the game-system as a whole, but are rather for colour. Finally, for advancement, characters earn between 1 and 3 “achievement points” per adventure. At 6 points the character reaches “level 1” and these are converted into skill points which can be stored or used to improve or purchase new skills points or last resort points; then 7 points are required, then 8, and so on. Level bonuses can also be used to increase action checks, ability scores, fatigue ratings, gain new perks, remove flaws etc. There is an argument, and a justified one, that there are too few skill points available at character generation and even in future character development to build a well-rounded character.

### Equipment

The Equipment chapter starts with a random roll for money on hand, based on profession, although there are perks and flaws which modify these significantly. Equipment is based on “progress levels” from 0 to 9+, the latter representing “information age”, “fusion age”, “gravity age”, “energy age”, and beyond. The equipment list itself is broken up into personal equipment (subgroups of clothing and accessories, communications, medical, professional, sensors, survival, and misc), and services. It's a fairly sensible list, and the prices seem to be based on more contemporary standards for these sort of things.

Entire additions chapters are, however are based on computers, weapons and armour, and vehicles. A common aspect of each of these is that the equipment contained therein require specific related skills. The 'Computers' chapter makes a partially accurate (and mostly inaccurate) description of the systems from a very high level but as with many RPG games very much underestimates the speed of progress. It also makes the common assumption that core programs are purchased piecemeal along with a collection of “hacking programs”. It mainly works as an abstract system, but computer scientists will grin or grimace. The description and model of “the Grid” is very much in the style 1980s and 1990s conceptualisations of cyberspace; immersive, visual, and visceral.

The chapter on 'Weapons & Armor' supplements the sections that provide the core mechanics and heroic actions. As with other equipment it is differentiated according to progress level, with a handful of each provided at each level (e.g., melee weapons have a club, dagger, and staff at PL0, and a star sword and tri-staff at PL8). A paragraphs or so of description is provided for each, along with the expected charts dealing with mass, cost, range for missile weapons, damage according to success, etc, or in the case armour, the amount of damage it absorbs according to whether it is low-impact, high-impact, or energy. Note that in most cases this is a variable value, randomly determined (shields and helmets being exceptions with a fixed value). For example Heavy Assault Gear from the Fusion Age will protect for
d6-1 LI, d6 HI, and d6-1 En.

'Vehicles' follows pretty much the same format as the previous two chapters; a summary of examples with differentiation based on Progress Levels. The skill system differentiates the broad Vehicle Operations skill into Air, Land, Space, Water, although the humble bicycle, the ultralight motorised hanglider, and the Fusion Age jet pack come under Acrobatics (Daredevil). Overall about 40 personal vehicles are described in a few sentences each, before the chapter moves on to vehicle combat, which pretty much a 'fire and movement' system with dramatic effects (such as crashes and collisions) and is explicitly stated as such. A few pages are dedicated to space vehicles, which of course is a genre necessity. A handy chart of station, skill, and roles on such vessels is provided, along with a similar ruleset for space vehicle combat.

**Mutants, Psionics, Cybertech**

'Mutants', 'Psionics', and 'Cybertech' are variants on a common trope of science fiction are can be evaluated together. They are, in a sense, an extension of the character prior to equipment so it is a little unusual to place them after the equipment chapters except to emphasize their uncommonness. The 'Mutants' chapter has options for random generation of origins or personal selection, which can generate positive 'Mutation Points' and negative 'Drawback Points'. The positive points allow for “ordinary mutations” such as enhanced abilities and senses, “good mutations” like dermal armour and radiation tolerance, and “amazing mutations” such as flight, and energy absorption. The equivalent negatives (“slight”, “moderate”, and “extreme”) range from sensitivities to extreme physical change and deadly immunities.

In contrast to the special abilities of the Mutants, the Psioncists ("Mindwalker" profession) has broad and specialist skills, with psionic energy costs. The skills are interesting, crossing a number of Abilities, including Constitution, Intelligence, Will, and Personality. Most of the abilities are what one would expect, but some of the more exotic ones include the biokinetic and morph skills, navcognition (c.f., 'The Void Captain's Tale'), and datalink. As for the cybertech chapter it is a short selection of PL6 and 7, subject to surgery and a physical tolerance rating.

**Conclusion**

The Alternity Player's Handbook is a solid piece of work. It is visually appealing and well-bound. It's major drawback as a product is the choice of font and colour-scheme, which is relatively minor but consistently annoying throughout the product. The style of the text also a more significant stylistic issue which hardly makes the product a pleasure to read. In terms of substance, the game system makes excellent use of the innovations up to its publication - a hint of GURPS is noted, for example. The core mechanic is viscerally interesting and relatively easy to use, but as an innovation doesn't really add more than what is done with standard modifiers. More impressive is the scope of a generic product in an average-sized product. Alternity as a whole is certainly recommended and despite its unfortunate limited publication, retains a small but dedicated fan-base for good reason.

Style: 1 + .7 (layout) + .7 (art) + .7 (coolness) + .4 (readability) + .8 (product) = 4.3  
Substance: 1 + .8 (content) + .8 (text) + .7 (fun) + .6 (workmanship) + .7 (system) = 4.4

**Alternity : Gamemaster Guide**

**Background, Product, Overview**

Comments applied on the review of the The Player's Handbook also apply to the Gamemaster Guide. Like The Player's Handbook it also a solid, well-bound hardback; and even with an identical page count of 256 pages, well-bound. The cover art of an wizard-like alien provides a right-hand continuation panel to that on the Player's Handbook. The interior art continues with variations between full-colour and bluescale which shows both a degree of talent and an even
higher degree of creativity. Like the Player's Handbook the colour-interior presents text mainly as three-column ragged with a sans-serif font, with highlighted areas as side-bars. Page numbers are clear, each page also has the chapter title. The text is quite formal yet seems a little easier to read than the Player's Handbook. An appendix provides a few pages of conversion from Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. In addition there is a single page for the table of contents, five pages of index, ship charts, NPC records, and system charts.

The opening chapter of the Gamemaster Guide is “fast play” rules, outlining the role of the gamemaster as director. Key concepts are outlined. Useful description is provided on narration, use of supporting cast, pacing, and rules moderation – especially the use of the core mechanic. Finally, there is a good single-session opening scenario involving space, aliens, and intrigue; it plays very well and does provide reasonable opportunity for new places to explore the game system.

**Gamesmaster Interventions and Environments**

The first several chapters are based around various forms of Gamemaster intervention in the game. There is a description (again) of abilities, some aging modifiers and a thorough age category chart by species. Options for ability score generation with options by species and profession (a combined value would have been good), generation of new alien species. Some elaboration is provides for professions, careers, skill selection, and the generation of experienced heroes.

There is description of sample degrees of success, and a handy table of modifiers for detection and visual ranges, overland movement rates, and a significant variety of combat modifiers for surprise, melee, and ranged weapons, along with terrain modifiers, and more elaborate modifiers to injury, the possibility of resuscitation after death, and damage to property. Related to injury are rules for disease and poison, drowning and falling, fire, and starvation. More extreme environments include the effects of gravity, raditions, atmospheric conditions, and heat and cold - which comes under the handy acronym, GRAPH.

The chapters on 'Skills' and 'Perks and Flaws' basically provides elaborations, clarifications, and repetition of what is in the Player's Handbook on such matters. The material does provide handy GM advice on the use of such things, but there is far too much here than simply replicates what is fairly obvious or has already been stated elsewhere. The chapter on 'Supporting Cast' details the creation of NPCs and introduces the "Nonprofessional" profession. NPC are divided into villains, allies and sidekicks, employees and followers, experts, and extras. Again, much of this is descriptive text, although the 14 sample NPCs with 4 power levels is a very handy addition. Equally there is not much that can be said about the 'Attributes' and 'Achievements' chapters. Again, it is initially mostly descriptive, although there is an interesting set of rules for social status differentiated into authority, wealth, and fame, which leads into a handy set of rules for income and finances, although these certainly could have been more elaborate.

**Running The Game and Equipment**

The chapter 'Running The Game' is pretty much a checklist of things a good GM should do, looking at pre-game preparation, in game descriptions and roleplaying, engaging in stylistic actions, moving the narrative and ending the session and keeping records. More advice is provided for setting scenes and various types of challenges, and managing encounters. It's useful material but hardly a completely new model for GMing.

The two chapters on 'Vehicles' and 'Spaceships' sit strangely with the rest of the book, as they are both dense, rules and system-heavy chapters. An ample elaboration and tables on various vehicle accessories and weapons is provided, as well as detailed vehicular combat, provided in both narrative and visual manner. The spaceship chapter has detailed rules for ship construction, including a very extensive array of various spaceship systems (engines, drives, support systems, weapons etc). Then there is a relatively short interstellar movement system followed by a detailed spaceship combat system. A third chapter 'Alien Artifacts' constitute a type of equipment in their own right with design rules for form, purpose, powers, and drawbacks. It's pretty much a collection of cool powers with quirks in a table with descriptions.
Campaigns and Adventures

Two chapters are dedicated to campaigns; 'Campaign Design' and 'Campaign Architecture'. The former takes in considerations such as the temporal location of the campaign (contemporary, near-future, far-future), genre (alternate history, colonization, combat, cyberpunk, exploration, future earth, horror, space opera, superheroic, technothriller), tone (realistic, heroic, superheroic), progress levels, space travel, communications, and alien life. Again it's heavily descriptive, but also impressive in its scope. In contrast the 'Architecture' chapter is quite rules heavy, with an emphasis on sector, star system, planet design, and civilization. This is all done properly, as a result is quite detailed – but along with the material in GURPS Space it stands out how to reach a level of being detailed and realistic enough without requiring too much knowledge of astrophysics.

The 'Adventure Design' chapter is similar to the two previous chapters but on a different scale, and is almost entirely descriptive. Adventures, like campaigns, require a background, supporting cast, and a reason for the adventure to occur. They can be spontaneous or planned, with the latter having stronger integration into plot and more defined acts and scenes. Useful euphemas are suggested (handouts, illustrations, maps), before moving on to a handful of adventure plot hooks, which are about 2/3rds of a page each.

Optional Rules and Bestiary

One would expected the optional rules chapter is rules heavy, although this is preceeded with effectively descriptive campaign elaborations for mutants, psioncists, and cybertech – and by elaborations artificial intelligence, robots, and androids. It turns out that the main optional rule section is for FX ("special effects"), by which is meant a selection of “magical” powers, whether invoked by arcana or faith, or of the super power variety. Like similar abilities, these are expressed by broad and specialist skills with energy costs. It is not so much an optional rules chapter as an additional rules chapter.

Finally there is a chapter on 'Animal and Alien Statistics', which outlines ability scores, attacks and defenses, and skills, with a few paragraphs of description. This provides the foundation for approximately a score of Terran animals, and a similar number of aliens – which are described in terms of an earth-like equivalent type ("a number of generic alien creature types"). This is seriously lacking in creative imagination. A bovine alien (as an example) is simply not alien.

Overall

The physical product and style of the Alternity Gamemaster's Guide is excellent, a solid and attractive product. In terms of creativity and substance however it is quite spotty all the way through. The detailed material for vehicles, starships, and campaign architecture is very welcome – these are excellent chapters. But the rest of the book is far too fluffy, and it's not particularly good, insightful or interesting fluff. It is plodding, repetitive, and largely not required. As a result, in terms of substance, the Gamemaster's Guide fares quite poorly to its companion volume, and as essential as it is for the game as a whole, it is a little sparse and a little shallow.

Style: 1 + .7 (layout) + .7 (art) + .4 (coolness) + .6 (readability) + .8 (product) = 4.2
Substance: 1 + .4 (content) + .3 (text) + .3 (fun) + .4 (workmanship) + .4 (system) = 2.8
Great Beasts for AD&D

by Karl Brown

“Take a walk on the wild side”

This article first appeared in Phantasmagoria, the annual of the Murdoch University Alternative Reality Society in 2004. It describes rules for incorporating non-humanoid PCs into 2e AD&D.

This article provides rules for non-humanoids to take on character classes and advance in level just as humanoids do. This information may provide referees with more variety in their NPCs and after careful consideration perhaps PCs could also fill these roles in some campaigns, after all where would Frodo be without Gandalf's amazing steed Shadowfax or Gwaihir the Windlord King of the Eagles? If non-humanoids were good enough for Tolkien's Middle Earth why not your campaign?

The rules given here along with the guidelines for race design found in “They Might Be Giants” could be used to make rules for all kinds of monstrous non-humanoids such as couatil, hippocampus, lammasu, otyugh, trappers, or even slithering trackers. However, even if good aligned, such monstrous races are unlikely to meet acceptance in many referee’s campaigns and few fantasy works contain such creatures as companions of the principle characters. For this reason this article describes bestial but not monstrous races.

Beasts are at a disadvantage in a word dominated by humans, as well as the physical problems of size, diet, and handedness, there are the social problems of looking more like a beast than a person and perhaps being fearsome to behold. However, many other races have limitations on going into demihuman or human settlements and buildings, such as sylvan elves, firoblg, centaurs, aaraerokra, ogres, wemics, and drow. Campaigns that accommodate these races should also be able to include beasts. Beasts, and most other unusual races, work best in campaigns where much of the time is spent in the wilderness.

With one exception the races presented here will suit most 'standard' AD&D campaigns. Worgs and ravens will be easier to integrate than giant eagles, unicorns, or dolphins. Giant eagles are large and claustrophobic making them better suited to outdoor adventures. Unicorns work better in more epic or highly magical campaigns. Dolphins are not suited to many campaigns but are included to demonstrate the flexibility of the rules. Dolphins could be used in campaigns set mostly on or under the sea in the tradition of Sinbad's voyages or Atlantis after the fall.

Though in this article the races presented are intelligent breeds of beasts these rules could be used to design races for characters reincarnated into the bodies of normally unintelligent animals. However, reincarnation is a rare event in most campaigns and the referee could simply substitute a beast from this article similar in form to the animal rolled. Given the rarity of reincarnation I have presented only beasts born with higher intelligence here.

This article makes use of the AD&D 2nd Edition core rules: "Player's Handbook“™ and "Dungeon Master's Guide”™. The races presented here use the format and rules from "The Complete Book of Humanoids“™ so this supplement is also required to use these rules. Other sources were useful in compiling this article but are by no means necessary for its use. Background information was gleaned from the "Monstrous Manual”™, the "Monstrous Compendium”™ (the latter provided more detail than the former on giant eagles) and "Monster Mythology”™. Other titles in the 'Complete' player's supplement series, especially "The Complete Ranger’s Handbook”™ were sources of inspiration and proficiency descriptions. "The Complete Bard’s Handbook”™ provides the information on the bard kits, other than 'Humanoid Bard' (from "The Complete Book of Humanoids“™), mentioned in this article. Some spells mentioned in the article were sourced from the “Tome of Magic”™ and “Complete Wizard’s Handbook”™.

To use this article the rules for proficiencies and spell components must be in use.
The Nature of the Beast
Role-playing beasts or incorporating them to best effect requires a handle on the way beasts are portrayed in our stories. Beasts are outsiders to the organized and civilized world of humans, dwarves and other industrious races, they have strong instincts guiding their actions and often savage tendencies but they are not monsters. Beasts are of nature whereas humans are apart from it and monsters are in opposition to it.

Like beastmen and aarakocra, beasts are generally inexperienced in the ways of civilization and this may lead to problems. A beast might not realize that a sheep belongs to somebody (even before it has been stalked and killed) or that the uniform of a town guard represents a lot of power. In addition beasts are rarely counted as people even when their intelligence is known. This prejudice is due to human(oid)s being used to treating similar animals as chattel or game and unused to dealing with people in other than a humanoid form. If they don’t react with fear NPCs may casually try to buy, sell, enslave, or hunt the beast. On the other hand a guard will pay scant notice of a crow entering a compound, unless the guard is a hungry orc… In general the campaign complications given in “the Complete Book of Humanoids”TM could equally apply to beasts.

The difference between beasts and other characters is one of belonging; the others belong around the hearth, the beast belongs in the cold of the wild. Humans and humanoids are creatures of civilization, such people can forsake the city or tribe to live within the wilds as rangers, wood elves or druids but even then there is a choice; those human(oid)s lost to the wilderness can return ‘home’ and few can survive as wild beasts without even simple tools. Beasts are born to the wild and will die part of it, for them there is no real element of choice. Just as humans lack the claws, fur, and instinct to be truly of the wild, beasts cannot handle the tools or restraint necessary to enter the cultures of human(oid)s as an equal. Even beasts found in the city are ‘nature invading’; they survive on refuse, vermin, or handouts and are not fully part of civilization.

Though often portrayed as savage, beasts are not monsters. Monsters are not only outcast from society but are outside of the natural order, less ‘natural’ than even humans. While a beast can be savage at times it is not within most to be blood-crazed, killing wantonly out of hate or pleasure. Even if a monster is good aligned its supernatural nature can unwittingly disturb the natural ecology of an area. The appearance of monsters such as sphinx, cockatrice, and gorgons alone marks them as unnatural. These rules could be used to create truly monstrous races but before doing so a referee should seriously consider whether these ultimate outsiders belong in her campaign. Of the beasts presented here only the worgs come close to the unrelenting savagery of true monsters and have the ability to upset the ecology of an area. The worg is the evil wolf of fairy tales yet enough of the wild wolf remains that not all are beyond hope.

The difference in outlook between a human and a beast is even greater than the difference between the orcish and human points of view. Just as beasts are outside of society and live within the wild the wild is within them as well. The beast has strong instincts represented in part by the monstrous trait bestial habits and sensory non-weapon proficiencies, but also by the ‘Instincts’ given for each breed. Bestial habits represent the beast’s inclination to let out the behaviors humans and humanoids suppress; to bark at strangers, relish raw flesh, stamp nervously, or scratch himself. The proficiencies represent the way beasts are in tune with the ebb and flow of the natural world and their superb senses: homing instinct, weather sense, empathy and such. The ‘instincts’ listed are specific urges felt by her kind. When the opportunity to follow an instinct arises and a character wishes to resist a wisdom check is needed. Successfully resisting an instinct is still frustrating and distracting and a –2 penalty to ability and proficiency checks as well as a –1 to ‘to hit’ rolls applies for an hour afterward. If at the end of the hour another opportunity to follow her instincts presents itself and the character still wishes to resist the whole procedure is repeated. If for some reason a beast is unable to satisfy an instinct (perhaps she is tied up) then the same penalties as for resisting apply.

Characters that are reincarnated into the form of beasts will still have their personalities shaped by life as a human(oid) and can disregard much of the background and role playing sections given for their new race. However, mind and body are an inseparable whole and the influence of the character’s new brain and form could alter the personality within. The smell of fresh grass/flesh will summon up hunger, the feel of the wind in your feathers/fur as you hurtle along and...
the comforting warmth of what is now your own kind are just some of the influences tugging at the mind within. The character must make a wisdom check each day to resist the call of instinct. On the first failure she gains bestial habits (-2 reaction adjustment) on a second failure all of the instincts listed for the new form now apply. Some characters see the wisdom of not resisting the change and choose to forego the wisdom checks, automatically gain the habits and instincts of the new breed. Even after the ordeal when high adventure is rewarded with the return of the original form the character may feel awkward in her woman’s body and empathy toward her former bestial kind may linger. This may be handled through roleplaying alone but if specific rules are desired the character continues to follow the old instincts until the check to resist instinct has been successful six times.

Rules & Tools

AD&D defines much of what a character is by the use of tools. The limited tool use abilities of non-humanoids have been compensated for in this article by a reduction in the amount of experience necessary to rise in levels. For each race total the % for one limitation from each category below. The racial descriptions in this article contain an extra heading 'Experience Point Adjustment' which begins with the armor and tool use codes in parenthesis () followed by a description and the adjustment as a multiplier or +/- %. Note that problems of scale or availability are not counted here. A fairy will gain no additional advantage because he is too small to neither use ordinary weapons nor will a giant, such characters can use any tool made to their size. Similarly, just because lizard man plate mail is not available at the market does not mean a skilled smith could not conceivably craft this item. Rarity of equipment grants no %xp since it may be overcome.

Of course if a beast has many other advantages these may cancel out the adjustment to xp due to limited tool and armor use. The races presented in this article were designed with the help of the guidelines presented in “They Might Be Giants” which is also featured in this year's Phantas.

Armor use:
1 Armor or barding not practical (owl, faerie dragon, octopus, raven, slithering tracker) -10%
2 Armor or barding limited in type (badger, centaur, merman, warhorse, wolf) -5%
3 Armor able to be created in all types (elf, firbolg, human, lizard man, minotaur) -0%

Note also that unless the species or one like it is commonly armored then barding will cost 2-5 times more. In most campaigns dogs and horses are commonly armor clad and in African or Asian campaigns elephant barding may also be considered ‘common’. Worgs are similar enough to dogs for worg barding to be considered common. Another consideration is wizards and priests that under the standard rules never use armor. If this is the case in your campaign the referee may not apply xp adjustments for armor limitations for these characters. Alternatively, as in the author’s games, if variant rules allowing armor use by restricted characters and/or the referee believes the limitations the characters body shape places restrictions on the use of other worn items such as warm weather clothing or magical cloaks, robes, and boots then the % for armor use could be applied.

As an aside for those interested “Casting Iron” by Paul Mitting in Australian Realms magazine provides workable rules for armor-clad wizards.

Weapon and tool use:
1 Unable to use weapons or tools (dolphin, giant eagle, raven, slithering tracker, worg). Cannot apply the bonus for dexterity to thrown or missile weapons except objects dropped from above. Unable to use the Open Locks or Find/Remove Traps thief abilities and Pick Pockets (-20%) is not available unless size small (S) or smaller. Spells requiring material components cannot be cast except those that require only a holy symbol as the symbol need only be prominently displayed -35%
2 Able to grasp items and point wands but due to weak grip, lack of coordination, or limited range of movement cannot wield weapons or perform fine manipulation such as writing (faerie dragon, otter, otyugh, raccoon, possum). Cannot apply the bonus for dexterity to thrown or missile weapons except objects dropped from above. Able to cast most
spells requiring material components. Spells requiring the specific fine manipulations of material components (simple pointing, crushing, waving, or similar is OK) cannot be cast. Unable to use the Open Locks or Find/Remove Traps thief abilities but able to Pick Pockets (-15%) -25%

3 Able to wield crude blunt weapons such as clubs and maces. Cannot apply the bonus for dexterity to thrown or missile weapons except objects dropped from above. Cannot perform fine manipulation such as writing (baboon, carnivorous ape, kraken, shambling mound, su-monster). Able to cast most spells requiring material components. Spells requiring the specific fine manipulations of material components (simple pointing, waving, or similar is OK) cannot be cast. Unable to use the Open Locks but can Find/Remove Traps (-20%) and Pick Pockets (-10%)-15%

4 Able to wield crude blunt weapons such as clubs and maces. Cannot apply the bonus for dexterity to thrown or missile weapons except objects dropped from above. Can perform fine manipulation such as writing and manipulating lock picks. Spell casting unaffected. Able to learn the thief abilities Open Locks, Find/Remove Traps and Pick Pockets. (elephant, orangutan, homonculous, muck dweller, oblivix) -5%

5 Able to use all weapon types and tools and learn thief abilities Open Locks, Find/Remove Traps and Pick Pockets. Spell casting unaffected. Can apply the bonus for dexterity to thrown or missile weapons Combines strong grip and precise manipulation. (gnome, human, thri-kreen, tako, yet). 0%

If a beast ever gains the ability to regularly assume a form that has better tool or armor use, then the character must use the %xp for her most able form. If a beast is permanently transformed into a humanoid form then the characters %xp adjustment is taken to be that of the new form. In either case the character will not loose levels due to this but must earn higher amounts of experience from then on or until the power to assume the more convenient form is lost. Access to other forms is most usually by learning polymorph spells, or gaining the ability to cast magical effects that mimic these spells from innate powers, magic items, or wishes. However, magic items that polymorph a character non-permanently do not alter the xp adjustment and neither does the use of non-permanent magic by others on the character.

Humanoid characters permanently changed into an animal, such as by polymorph other or reincarnation, may adopt the %xp of the new form. This never results in a character gaining a free level, if a character's experience is enough that a rise in level is indicated their experience points are reduced to one point below that needed for the bonus level. The character will then earn experience points normally and will probably advance at the end of the current adventure.

**Weapon proficiencies:**
These are another problem for non-tool users. For this reason the following non-weapons proficiencies (only) can be bought with weapon proficiencies at an exchange rate of:

1 weapon slot=2 non-weapon slots.
The penalty for choosing 'out of group' still applies.

These proficiencies cover unarmed offence and defense as well as abilities to avoid combat. Many abilities related to the extraordinary senses of animals are represented here: Alertness, Blind Fighting, Danger Sense, Dodge, Fast-talking, Hiding, Intimidation, Natural Fighting, Observation, Tumbling, Wild Fighting

Alternatively single class fighters, only, may spend 2 weapon slots to specialize in a natural attack with the benefits of melee weapon specialization. Only one such specialization is allowed.

Acquiring polymorph type abilities or permanently changing form never alters a character’s existing proficiencies, but further proficiencies gained will be restricted as per the new status.

**Nonweapon proficiencies**

Nonweapon proficiencies are another area of concern, though in some instances a shift in perspective is all that is needed. For example, many beasts have riding proficiency in these instances the beast knows the signals commonly
used by riders to control mounts and how to move without jolting or dislodging a rider. In other instances the character may know all about a skill but be physically unable to do it e.g. sailor or stonemason. So while a non-humanoid could obtain almost any proficiency some are more useful or appropriate than others. For this reason, as with the Book of Humanoids™, characters are restricted in the choice of their initial proficiencies to those listed for their race and any kit they take. Later proficiencies need not be taken from these lists. The following proficiencies may be more appropriate than others:

Ancient History, Animal Lore, Appraising, Direction Sense, Endurance, Heraldry, Hunting, Local History, Read Lips, Religion, Running, Survival, Spellcraft, Swimming. Read/Write (notes under spell casting), Tightrope (especially size T characters), Tracking, Weather sense

Combat
For those of tool-use types 1 or 2 only the following rules for rangers and thieves apply.
Non-humanoid rangers may make an extra natural attack every second round instead of being able to use two weapons.
Non-humanoid thieves may ‘backstab’ with one natural attack in an attempt. For example a character with a two claw and bite one routine may backstab on the first attack used under the conditions of backstab, she elects a claw, the other claw attack and the bite attack are treated as normal attacks. This beast version of back-stab may be used against humanoids and creatures very similar to the thief, for example a Great Raven may backstab humanoids as well as crows, ravens, pigeons, parrots and other similarly sized and shaped birds but not finches, storks, swans, emus or axe beaks.

Spell-casting
It is assumed that beasts have their own versions of the verbal and somatic components for spells. Where a human priest might wiggle her fingers and whisper arcane words a dolphin would utter a complex series of squeals and squeaks, wiggle her flippers, and turn circles on the spot. In the majority of cases material components need only be manipulated in a basic fashion allowing beasts with only crude grasping paws to (tool use 2 or 3) to cast them. Beasts without grasping paws (tool use type 1) cannot cast spells with material components other than a holy symbol. It is assumed that a holy symbol need only be prominently displayed to function. However, some spells require specific manipulations of components, such as the need to apply chalk, lampblack, and vermilion to the face for friends, or tying of a leather thong for free action, which prevent their use by some beasts. Creatures able to perform fine manipulations (tool use 4 or 5) can use material components normally. Beasts generally learn spells from others of their kind those who learn spells from humanoid sources or from a beast of a very different shape must translate the components into a form they can use. In mages lowering the chance to learn spell as follows represents this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool use</th>
<th>% to learn spell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-20%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-15%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-10%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-5%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*+5% if verbal components only, i.e. for tool use 1 a spell with only verbal components is at –15%.

In campaigns were priests learn spells the translation is handled by a straight wisdom check. For spells with verbal components only cast by a beast able to speak humanoid languages no translation need be made. No translation is needed for material components though access to some spells requiring specific manipulation of materials may not be usable (see Tool Use).

A referee should think very carefully before waiving the restrictions on spell casting detailed above since this ensures that spell casting beasts suffer equivalent restrictions to warrior beasts who have limited access to weapons, the main tools of the their trade, and rogue beasts who cannot use musical instruments, lock picks, or pick pockets.

As with dragons character’s using winged flight may glide but not actively fly in the same round that they cast spells. A gliding character travels at half the movement rate of the previous round and looses 1000’ of altitude per round. This rule could also be applied to winged humanoids.
Wizards

Wizards face the additional problem of spell books. Tool use of 2 is required to manipulate books and scrolls, though those with a tools use of 1 can read from a book or scroll if someone turns the pages or unrolls it. Alternatively an unseen servant or cantrip could turn pages and unroll scrolls; wizards with a tool use of 1 should have one of these two spells in their initial spell book. Tool use 4 is required to write into a spell book, those wizards without this will need the copy spell and this should be included in the initial spell quota for a wizard’s first book along with read magic. These spells required to be in a beast’s spell book are like read magic in that they count against the number of spells the wizard begins with; they are not bonuses. This leaves beast wizards with a tool use of 3 or lower with less choice over the spells they can begin with, one of the reasons they need less experience to advance.

Priests

Of the races presented here, only the dolphins have priests described in another AD&D source (“Monstrous Mythology”). The deities of the eagles and the unicorns described in "Monstrous Mythology" do not have priests. A referee however may design priesthoods for beast deities or allow beasts to join other priesthoods in her campaign. Certainly "The Complete Priests Handbook" contains a number of priest classes that might be suitable for beasts described here: Animals, Birth, Children, Evil, Good, Healing, Hunting, Mischief, Moon, Nature, Oceans, Sites, Sky, Weather, and Wind. For all the races presented here priests are available at the whim of the referee and for this reason the level limits and multiclass combinations for priests are given in parenthesis ()

Magic items

Beasts will be unable to use many magic items, some cannot pronounce command words, and others have inappropriately shaped bodies, or lack particular appendages. For example, a unicorn cannot use rings. Other than these physical, tool use and armor use restrictions beasts can use magic items allowed to their class. Of course there already exists in the game many items that other players could not use but a beast might such as horseshoes of speed and a DM could create more. The availability of magic items is one tool in the referee’s kit to balance characters, beasts or otherwise.

Encumbrance

The AD&D rules can allow small characters to carry a considerable amount of mass. As an optional rule all characters (beast or otherwise) can carry up to twice their body weight anything over this amount indicates the character is dragging the gear, which may be damaged as a result at the referee’s discretion. A character with wings cannot fly when carrying over twice her body weight. Centauroid or quadrupedal creatures of size L or larger gain a bonus to their encumbrance allowances (in pounds) as follows: Large +200, Huge +280, and Gargantuan +400. A character that is semi-bipedal, such as a bear, moves as if one level of encumbrance higher than her actual load if walking on two legs. ‘L’ or larger semi-bipedal creatures gain the extra encumbrance allowances for quadrupeds but only when they move on all fours. All other rules for encumbrance, including movement rates are unchanged. Those who have access to “Here be Dragons” by this author in Phantasmagoria 2003 might allow dragons the encumbrance bonuses above.

Senses

The senses of animals in the real world are different from those of humans. However, since sensory differences between humanoids are not given detailed treatment, neither are those of non-humanoids. In some instances abilities of animals that would have been obvious to Dark Age observers are detailed as advantages.

The effects of how differing animals see color, hear infrasound, discriminate between scents and other details are left out or glossed over. For example, the worg’s sense of smell is treated as a tracking proficiency.

Followers

Beasts typically do not build fortifications at high level. In some classes this will prevent the attraction of followers. If followers are attracted the referee should provide ones that suit the beasts background perhaps using the 'creature
level’ from the "Dungeon Master's Guide" (p99) or ‘spell capacity’ from “They Might Be Giants” where appropriate, as a guide in making the substitutions. Alternatively, these rules could be used to create NPCs of appropriate level.

**Dolphin**

**Ability Score Adjustments.** The initial ability scores are modified by a -1 penalty to dexterity and wisdom, and a +1 bonus to strength and constitution. Minimum and maximum ability scores are as follows: Strength 8/18, Dexterity 3/17, Constitution 8/19, Intelligence 6/18, Wisdom 3/17, Charisma 7/18.

**Class Restrictions**

Class restrictions and maximum level are Fighter 12, Ranger 10, Priest (12), Trishina 12, Shaman (7), Bard 11.

**Experience Point Adjustment:** (1,1) No armor or tool use. Unable to cast spells requiring material components other than a holy symbol. –45% from needed xp. *Humanoid Bard kit only, exchange this kits musical instrument required proficiency for whistling/humming.

**Hit Dice:** Player character dolphins receive hit die by class.

**Alignment:** NPC dolphins are lawful good. PC dolphins may be any alignment but are usually lawful good.

**Natural Armour Class:** 5.

**Background:** The dolphins of the AD&D game are based more on Greek myth and the idealized dolphins of modern fantasy and the new age rather than the behavior of real dolphins, which by turns can be tender and shockingly brutal. Those looking for information on the real behavior of dolphins should look elsewhere. Similarly, the senses and physical abilities of dolphins have been 'watered down'.

Dolphins are sea-going mammals of which there are a number of species that differ in size and coloration. Common species are black, gray, blue-gray, off-white or a combination of these colors. The larger species can be as intelligent as humans and are part of an oceans wide cetacean culture. Dolphins have a single dorsal fin, two flippers, and a powerful fluked tail. They breathe through a single blowhole. A dolphin’s mouth has numerous pointed teeth for grasping fish and is adapted to feeding underwater. Dolphins communicate by high-pitched cetacean languages consisting of sounds mostly out of the range of human hearing.

Dolphins live in groups called pods that survive on a completely carnivorous diet of fish. Dolphins do not drink but obtain the moisture they need from their food. The pod raises the children and dolphins protect their young with their lives. Most pods roam the oceans following their curiosity and the migrations of fishes. A small proportion of fantasy dolphins live in organized communities staying within a set territory, training swordfish or narwhales as 'guard dogs', and keeping the area clear of evil creatures, sharks, and killer whales. Fantasy dolphins are peaceful and never war among themselves.

Dolphins, as part of the worldwide cetacean culture, are on good terms with most whales, and respectful of the giant whales and leviathans that rule the oceans.

Unlike other larger whales, who show little interest in the affairs humans, dolphins enjoy good relations with humans. They often accompany ships and will aid humans stranded in the water. In many areas dolphins have designed signals to warn sailors of pirates, evil sea creatures, and storms.

Sea elves and dolphins are often allies and some pods live within sea elf communities. The dolphin's principle deity Trishina is the partner of the sea elf god Deep Sashelas and the priests of both deities preach interracial protection and cooperation.

**Languages:** dolphin, sea elf, underwater common, and whale common. Dolphins' high-pitched voices can only pronounce cetacean languages, other languages that they know they can understand but not speak.

**Role playing Suggestions:** Dolphins are likely to become adventurers by accompanying a ship crewed by the rest of the party or by joining a group of sea elves in an underwater campaign.

Dolphins are peaceful, even tempered, and lawful good. They despise evil creatures and sharks. Priests of Trishina are pacifists except in the defense of the young. Other dolphins may not be as devoted to pacifism but it is a rare dolphin that revels in violence. This distain of violence comes from the high value dolphins place on non-evil life. Dolphins will usually come to the aid of other good creatures in distress.

Dolphins come from an alien environment and will be confused by the strange behavior of land creatures, which often fear the water, burn food, and use unusual tools. Should a dolphin acquire the means to venture on to the land he will be surprised by the weird world above the waves full of new animals, plants and people.
**Special Advantages:** Dolphins are fast swimmers moving at 30. They move freely underwater and have a bonus swimming proficiency. They can hold their breath for twice their constitution minutes (rounds). Dolphin sonar enables them to ‘see’ within dark or murky water with a 360° range but does not function in air. In combat a dolphin can butt, bite, or tail slap any of which do 2d4 damage. Dolphins can swallow and regurgitate small blunt objects at will. A dolphin may carry up to 5 pounds in this manner. Dolphins often carry digestible objects internally within a small waterproof scroll case.

Dolphins are never completely asleep, they remain semi-conscious with one eye awake, and so only suffer a -1 penalty to surprise during rest. A group of four or more resting dolphins swim in a circle with their awake eye facing out; in such a group ‘sleeping’ dolphins are not penalized for surprise.

**Special Disadvantages:** Since breathing is a conscious action for dolphins, an unconscious dolphin does not breathe and will be holding her breath until she awakens or dies.

Should a dolphin be determined to explore the land he faces three barriers: immobility, dehydration, and fatigue. On land, dolphins are unable to move around without aid and count as prone in combat. Although a ‘bath litter’ could be constructed, the only convenient methods for land mobility would be magical spells or items.

Dolphin skin requires a lot of moisture; a covering of wet cloth (two cloaks or a blanket will do in an emergency) must be worn and wetted down with equivalent to a full waterskin three times a day. If this is not done the dolphin will loose 2pt of constitution every 8 hours. If constitution reaches zero he dies of dehydration. Constitution lost from dehydration returns at 1pt per day once the dolphin returns to a watery environment.

Left on the land the dolphins internal organs are crushed by her own weight since her ocean going skeleton does not support her body. Most notably the lungs are compressed and breathing becomes difficult. Every hour, or if the endurance proficiency is possessed every 2 hours, constitution is reduced by -1. Lying on her side or back, or suspension in a harness or a stretcher does not prevent this exhaustion. Only water or the buoyancy of levitation prevents the loss of constitution. When constitution reaches zero death, from exhaustion and bruising, results.

Constitution lost through this fatigue can be regained by resting in water, or levitated, at a rate of one point per hour. Wingless flying (like the spell fly) buoyed by magic provides the same benefits as levitation but flying with wings (as with the ‘wings of flying’) or on a conveyance (such as a flying carpet) does not prevent fatigue since the dolphin's mass is not negated.

**Monstrous Traits:** Bestial Habits (gluttony for live fish etc.) Reaction adjustment-2.

**Instincts:** Failing to prevent harm to children of any race. ‘Philandering’.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Alertness, blind fighting, danger sense, dodge, fast talking, hiding, intimidation, natural fighting, observation, wild fighting.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Animal lore, animal training (narwhale, swordfish), astrology, crowd working, dancing (dolphin styles), direction sense, distance sense, eating, herbalism (seaweeds), hunting, jumping, local history, navigation, riding (dolphin), survival (oceans), swimming, tracking, weather sense, whistling/humming.

**Dolphin Average Height and Weight**
Male/female. Hgt in Inches (From tail tip to snout). has Base 60/48 and a Modifier of 4d6. Weight in pounds has a Base of 560/320 and a Modifier of 6d20

**Dolphin Age**
Starting Age has a base of 5 and a variable of 1d6. Maximum age has a base of 50 and a variable of 3d10 (average of 65).
Middle Age occurs at 32 years (-1 Str/Con; +1 Int/Wis), Old Age at 43 years (-2 Str/Dex; -1 Con; +1 Wis), and Venerable at 65 years (-1 Str/Dex/Con; +1 Int/Wis)

**Dolphin Thieving Skill Adjustment**
Pick Pockets NA., Open Locks NA., Find/Remove Traps NA., Move Silently +10., Hide in Shadows +10., Detect Noise +15., Climb Walls NA., Read Languages -

**Dolphin Multi-Class Combinations**
(Fighter/Priest)
Giant Lynx

**Ability Score Adjustments.** The initial ability scores are modified by a +1 to constitution and dexterity. Lynx are aloof and solitary resulting in a –2 to charisma.

Minimum and maximum ability scores are as follows: Strength 7/18, Dexterity 9/19, Constitution 5/18, Intelligence 9/18, Wisdom 8/18, Charisma 3/16.

**Class Restrictions**

Class restrictions and maximum level are Fighter 12, Ranger 10, Thief 12

**Experience Point Adjustment:** (2,1). Barding only, no weapon use. Unable to cast spells requiring material components other than a holy symbol. –40% from needed xp.

**Hit Dice:** Player character lynx receive hit die by class.

**Alignment:** NPC lynx are neutral. PC lynx may be any alignment but are usually neutral.

**Natural Armour Class:** 6.

**Background:** Giant lynx appear to be larger more powerfully built versions of the common lynx. They have the same bobtail and tufts of fur on the ears and cheeks. The giant lynx also has the advantages of high intelligence and language. Given these traits the giant lynx has replaced its common cousin in many sub-arctic forests where the two species live.

Lynx are solitary nocturnal hunters who feed on small game such as badgers, fish, foxes, hares, grouse and young deer. This lone existence begins early, most leave their mothers at six months of age, and continues throughout life except in especially harsh winters. At these lean times when game becomes scarce groups of lynx will use their language abilities to cooperate in hunting and increase their chance of survival.

**Languages:** Giant lynx. Giant lynx cannot speak any language other than their own tongue, of caterwauling and yowls. At first level they know no other tongue. The other languages they learn they understand but cannot speak.

**Role-playing Suggestions:** Giant lynx are solitary hunters they form no permanent communities, nor organized religions, and are expected to fend for themselves even before they are fully grown. They dwell in harsh wildernesses unsuitable for extensive farming and civilizing and remain aloof from the goings on in the world beyond. Normally there is little reason for a giant lynx to seek out others of her own kind let alone bands of strange adventurers.

However, in harsh winters and other periods were game is scarce lynx see the benefits of cooperation and work together for survival. When a particularly harsh winter or other disaster, such as over-hunting by humans, strikes a lynx may be driven to cooperation with other races for survival. After the crisis has passed the lynx may have learned the benefits of cooperation and elect to stay with the group. Similarly, to halt a threat to the wilderness she relies on a lynx could cooperate with a druid, ranger or other wilderness character.

Within the party a lynx will tend to be aloof more ‘traveling with’ rather than ‘belonging to’ the group. They have no experience with civilization so concepts such as deference to uniformed officers and ownership of livestock are unknown to them. This sometimes causes problems when dealing with shepards on the fringes of the lynx’s territory.

**Special Advantages:** A giant lynx has keen senses. Lynx can see in the night and other non-total darkness to a range of 60’. A giant lynx can detect traps with a base chance of 60% modified for race and dexterity as the thief ability ‘find/remove traps’. A lynx cannot remove any traps she detects. A lynx’s excellent sense of smell entitles them to a +1 to surprise checks and grants a free tracking proficiency. A lynx can climb trees with a base chance of 50% modified for dexterity and race as per the thief ability ‘climb walls’. This ability racial skill applies only to trees, not walls or cliffs.

Lynx are agile and cunning opponents. On a successful dexterity check a lynx receives no damage from falls of 10ft or less and half damage from falls of 60ft, falls of greater than 60ft result in normal damage. A giant lynx can leap 15 ft across, or 10 ft up or down. They can hide in forested terrain with a 90% chance of success. If hidden the lynx can leap out imposing a –6 the opponents surprise roll. In combat giant lynx claw and bite for 1-2/1-2/1-2. A lynx moves at the standard rate of 12.

A lynx is adapted to the cold forests. A giant lynx's oversized paws enable him to traverse snow as if he was wearing snowshoes. The lynx’s thick fur acts as very cold weather clothing for the purposes of resisting the cold. Lynx are carnivores and can go days without food after a large meal; all lynx receive a free eating proficiency.

**Special Disadvantages:** Lynx are at -2 for saving throws against foul odors. Lynx are creatures of the wilderness.
and will not willingly enter a building, village city, or other settlement unless there is great need. To enter a building or settlement a lynx must pass a saving throw vs. death to overcome her fear. If the check fails the lynx may not enter. Once inside the lynx must make a save each day. If she fails, she will want to leave by the most direct route.

In civilized spaces the lynx fights with penalty of –2 to her ‘to hit’ rolls. Should she fail her claustrophobia check the penalty is increased by –1 for each additional day within the settlement. If she fails to reach the open spaces she may attempt further saving throws each day to overcome her fear. These saves are made at the same penalty as the current ‘to hit’ roll penalty.

**Monstrous Traits:** Appearance, Bestial Habits, Monstrous Smell, reaction adjustment -4

**Instincts:** Lynx are independent territorial felines. Except other giant lynx during harsh times, they will not abide the company of other felines (including domestic and wild cats, wemics, tabaxi, sphinx and other felinoid creatures).

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Alertness, danger sense, dodge, hiding, intimidation, natural fighting, observation, tumbling, wild fighting. Rear claw, if the two forepaw attacks are successful this proficiency allows two extra attacks in a round using the rear claws (1-3 damage each).

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** animal lore, distance sense, direction sense, eating, endurance, foraging, hunting, jumping, survival (sub-arctic forest), swimming, tracking, and weather sense.

**Race Average Height and Weight**

Male/female. Hgt in Inches (At the shoulder. Body length, not including tail, is about twice this figure.) has Base 17/16 and a Modifier of 1d6. Weight in pounds has a Base of 38/36 and a Modifier of 2d6

**Race Age**

Starting Age has a base of 5 and a variable of 1d6. Maximum age has a base of 50 and a variable of 3d10 (average of 65). Middle Age occurs at 32 years (+1 Str/Con; +1 Int/Wis), Old Age at 43 years (-2 Str/Dex; -1 Con; +1 Wis), and Venerable at 65 years (-1 Str/Dex/Con; +1 Int/Wis)

**Race Thieving Skill Adjustment**

Pick Pockets NA., Open Locks NA., Find/Remove Traps Special., Move Silently +10., Hide in Shadows +15., Detect Noise +15., Climb Walls 0., Read Languages -

A giant lynx cannot disarm traps but has a bonus to detect them of +15. A lynx receives a racial bonus of +5% to climb trees not walls.

**Race Multi-Class Combinations**

fighter/thief

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"Whaddya mean we gotta talk to this lynx?? The last monster we talked to ate half of the party!"

**Giant Eagle**

**Ability Score Adjustments.** The initial ability scores are modified by a -1 penalty to dexterity and a +1 bonus to strength.

Minimum and maximum ability scores are as follows: Strength 11/19, Dexterity 8/17, Constitution 9/18, Intelligence 6/18, Wisdom 3/17, Charisma 3/18.

**Class Restrictions**

Class restrictions and maximum level are Fighter 12, Ranger 10, Priest (12), Shaman (7)
**Experience Point Adjustment:** (2,1) Eagles pay the normal amount of experience for their class. Although tool use is limited, it is conceivable that barding might be constructed for a giant eagle and the eagles are mighty opponents. Eagles are unable to cast spells requiring material components other than a holy symbol.

**Hit Dice:** Player character eagles receive hit die by class plus a one time bonus of 4 hit points at first level.

**Alignment:** NPC giant eagles are true neutral. PC eagles may be any alignment but are usually true neutral.

**Natural Armour Class:** 7.

**Background:** Giant eagles are more sociable than their smaller cousins; the nests of as many as twenty individuals can be found in the same area, even so individual eagles are prideful and hunt alone or in pairs. Eagle pairs are mated for life and maintain the same nest until death or the nest is destroyed. Territorial to the extreme, eagles will attack anyone venturing within 50' feet of the nest. Eagles use no tools and live by hunting.

Eagles mistrust humans and their civilization believing it to be a threat to the balance of the natural world. Humans and humanoids sometimes take eggs from nests to be raised in captivity. Needless to say, eagles take a very dim view of this practice. Eagles consider dwarves and elves to be less of a threat and often form friendships with individuals, or sometimes groups, from these races. Eagles have also been known to form alliances with cloud giants for mutual protection.

The eagles may aid their allies in time of danger, typically by providing reconnaissance, but normally remain aloof from the concerns of other races. However, giant eagles may be roused into action if there is a powerful threat to the balance of the world or if civilization encroaches too much upon their lifestyle.

**Languages:** Giant eagle, hill dwarf, mountain dwarf, high elf, gray elf, wood elf, cloud giant. Eagles cannot physically speak any language except their own though they can understand what is being said in the other languages they learn. Giant eagles communicate with their allies through a form of telepathy.

**Role-Playing Suggestions:** Eagles may be drawn into adventures in a number of ways. Eagles may watch over bands of elves or dwarves on important missions. Where the encroachment of civilization becomes too much the eagles may send an envoy in an attempt to resolve the matter. Finally, in the face of a powerful threat to the balance of the world one or more eagles may range the lands providing information or acting as couriers for besieged forces. In this way the motivations of eagles are much like those of druids. Very rarely an eagle will question the isolation from other races and devotion to the 'balance' between good and evil, law and chaos, and strike out to observe other races. Eagles raised in captivity often have very different values to their wild cousins.

Whatever the reason for becoming adventurers, all eagles have several things in common. Firstly, like lizard men, giant eagles have an outlook very alien to mammals. They are born from eggs, use no tools, and are motivated by survival, a concern for nature, and maintaining the world's 'balance'. Eagles have very little use for treasure but commonly decorate nests with a few items. Eagles are proud and independent, spending days on the wing alone or with a mate. They have no experience with civilization so concepts such as deference to uniformed officers and ownership of livestock are unknown to them. Fortunately eagles are loath to enter settlements so situations rarely arise from this lack of understanding.

Eagles typically remain aloof from adventuring parties and are usually best described as associates rather than full members of a company. While the others travel with tedious slowness over the ground or seek shelter in towns, the eagle will range far and wide hunting for food and watching the activities of other races from his godlike vantage point. Often an eagle companion will be little more than a speck in the sky until she strikes down an enemy like a 'bolt from the blue' or deems to land and share her observations.

The pride of wild eagles makes it unlikely that one would consent to being a mount, though they may pluck lighter companions out of trouble on occasion. Captive eagles, not knowing any better, are sometimes willing mounts though only the strongest can carry an armed human.

**Special Advantages:** Eagles can fly, with a movement speed of 48 and a maneuverability class of D, if encumbrance is moderate or less.

Eagles can attack with their beak inflicting 2d6 points of damage and with two claws for d6 damage each. On a dive of 50 feet or more an eagle’s speed and damage from claw attacks is doubled and a bonus to the attack roll equal to +4 minus the weapon non-proficiency penalty of the character's group (PHB p50). For example an eagle warrior would receive a bonus of +2 and a priest +1 to dive attacks.

They receive no attack penalties for aerial missile fire.
Eagles can cast telepathy at will as an innate power (for those not possessing the "Tome Of Magic" the description of this spell has been included as an appendix). The eagle has a casting level of four or their own level whichever is lower when using this power.

Eagles have very keen senses of sight and hearing so that they are impossible to surprise unless it is dark, nighttime, or they are blinded, even then they are only surprised 1 in 10. Eagle vision functions like a telescope of up to x10 power. Eagle hearing also enables them to hear noise like a thief at a base chance of 50% below middle age, 40% at middle age, 25% at old age and 10% at venerable age. These base chances are modified for race and other factors just like the thief ability.

An eagle’s feathers act as very cold weather (arctic) clothing.

**Special Disadvantages:** Giant eagles have a land movement speed of only 3. Eagles have large wingspans, about 20', and so require plenty of room to fly. Giant eagles take damage as large creatures. As large carnivores an eagle’s food costs 3 ½ times that of a human and weighs five times as much, fortunately most prefer to hunt rather than visit a butcher.

Eagles suffer from claustrophobia and will not willingly enter a building, cave, or other enclosed space unless there is great need. To enter an enclosed space an eagle must pass a saving throw vs. death to overcome her fear. If the check fails the eagle may not enter. Once inside the eagle must make a save each day. If she fails, she will want to leave by the most direct route. In enclosed spaces the eagle fights with penalty of –2 to her ‘to hit’ rolls. Should she fail her claustrophobia check the penalty is increased by –1 for each additional day inside. If she fails to reach the open air she may attempt further saving throws each day to overcome her fear. These saves are made at the same penalty as the current ‘to hit’ roll penalty.

**Monstrous Traits:** Size, appearance, monstrous hearing, bestial habits, reaction adjustment -7.

**Instincts:** Wild eagles mistrust humans resulting in a fear of human mobs and settlements. Entering a village, town, or other human settlement is a failure to follow the latter. Eagles raised in captivity by humans should choose two other races they instinctively mistrust.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Alertness, blind fighting, danger sense, dive (costs a full weapon proficiency slot and raises the ‘to hit’ bonus for a dive attack to the full +4), intimidation, natural fighting, observation.

A referee a giant eagle may also take the following skill adapted from the abilities of dragons at a cost of one weapon proficiency each:

**Plummet:** an airborne eagle, or one jumping down from at least 30’, can land on a victim. The victim is pinned and crushed by the eagle’s claws body for damage equal to a bite. An eagle can crush two victims but must roll a separate attack against each one. Opponents that are missed are assumed to have escaped. In addition to the damage those hit must save vs. petrification, penalized by -2 or be pinned down. Pinned opponents can be automatically crushed for equivalent to bite damage again in the following rounds unless the eagle moves off them. Every round, an opponent may repeat the modified petrification save in an attempt to wiggle free. Cannot be combined with a dive, a character may do one or the other.

**Snatch:** In a snatch, a flying eagle swoops and attempts to grab an opponent in one of its claws then take them aloft. If the attack is successful, there is a 50% chance that a humanoid opponent’s arms are pinned and the creature may be squeezed for automatic claw damage every following round. If the eagle foregoes squeezing this attack can be used to rescue allies. Eagles can carry one snatched creature at a time. An airborne eagle can carry creatures size M or smaller, only one opponent can be snatched in a given round, and encumbrance still applies.

**Transfer:** a snatched opponent may be transferred to the mouth on a successful attack roll doing bite damage if desired. If the transfer fails, the creature is dropped.

**Wing buffet:** grants two extra attacks as long as opponents are to the sides of the beast. The buffets do d6 damage and the opponent must roll their dexterity or less on a d20 or be knocked down. Can be combined with a dive attack but if this is done the eagle must land that round if used.

A giant eagle may also take the following skills adapted from the abilities of dragons at a cost of one non-weapon proficiency each:

**Stall (Str):** A special flight maneuver. An eagle flying low to the ground may halt its forward motion and hover for one round, once this round is over the eagle must then land. Not only does this allow an eagle to stop suddenly but also has benefit in combat. A hovering eagle can bite and use her claws. If the referee deems that the ground below the eagle has loose earth or that the surrounds are wooded then a cloud of dust and leaves with a radius of 15 yards blinding...
creatures and preventing spell casting. The debris has these effects for one round.

Wing Over (Dex): allows a proficient eagle to perform a turn of 120-240° on a successful proficiency check. On a failed check the eagle turns only to the limit of its maneuverability class and looses 100’ of altitude, if at less than 1000’ the eagle must land. An eagle may not gain altitude in the same round a wingover is performed.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Animal lore, astrology, direction sense, distance sense, eating, hunting, navigation, survival (mountains or forests), tracking, weather sense. Riding (giant eagle) is available to those raised in captivity.

Giant Eagle Average Height and Weight
Hgt in Inches (From tail tip to snout), has Base 110 and a Modifier of 5d4. Wingspan is double height. Weight in pounds has a Base of 760 and a Modifier of 6d10

Starting Age
Starting Age has a base of 18 and a variable of 1d8. Maximum age has a base of 70 and a variable of 4d20 (average of 110).

Middle Age occurs at 55 years (-1 Str/Con; +1 Int/Wis), Old Age at 84 years (-2 Str/Dex; -1 Con; +1 Wis), and Venerable at 110 years (-1 Str/Dex/Con; +1 Int/Wis)

Giant Eagle Thieving Skill Adjustment
Pick Pockets NA., Open Locks NA., Find/Remove Traps NA., Move Silently -20., Hide in Shadows -20., Detect Noise +15., Climb Walls NA., Read Languages -

Giant Eagle Multi-Class Combinations
(fighter/priest)

Great Raven
Great ravens are new creatures, detailed here for the first time. The referee may assume that they are an intelligent sub-breed of huge ravens (as presented in the “Monstrous Manual”™), or that all huge ravens are in fact great ravens.

Ability Score Adjustments. The initial ability scores are modified by a -2 penalty to Strength and a +2 bonus to Constitution.

Minimum and maximum ability scores are as follows: Strength 2/9, Dexterity 9/18, Constitution 9/19, Intelligence 8/18, Wisdom 8/18, Charisma 3/18.

Class Restrictions
Class restrictions and maximum level are Fighter 6, Mage 12, Priest (12), Shaman (7), Witch-Doctor (7), Thief 8, Bard 11*

*Only the following kits charlatan, humanoid bard, lore master, and riddle master.

Experience Point Adjustment: (1,1) Unable to use tools or armor, or cast spells requiring material components other than a holy symbol. A great raven wizard must have copy and either cantrip or unseen servant among their initial spells. —45%

Hit Dice: Player character ravens receive hit die by class.

Alignment: NPC great ravens vary greatly in alignment. PC great ravens may be any alignment.

Natural Armour Class: 6.

Background: Great ravens are an intelligent breed of the huge ravens described in the “Monstrous Manual”™.

Among themselves ravens are social birds living in flocks called ‘murders’. Self-appointed scouts that seek out dangers, food, and interesting happenings patrol the murder’s edges. Ravens mate for life and are devoted parents.

Ravens both suffer and benefit from the superstitions and beliefs of other folk. Individual ravens live up to these beliefs to varying degrees. To the warriors of the north ravens are portends of deaths to come, and carry the souls of the fallen. The peasants of milder climates to the west see them as thieves of crops and firebirds bringing embers into barns. In cities sages and wizards respect the birds intelligence and curiosity. Wizards especially consider a raven companion a boon. Curiosity perhaps in part explains the why explorers returning from the New World report that the peoples there regard ravens as tricksters and collectors of secrets.

Great raven murders often associate themselves with other peoples out of interest, mutual benefit, or simple opportunism. Murders have provided watchful eyes on elven forests and dwarven passes; scholarly companionship for monasteries and hedge wizards; and followed the migrations of war bands for grislier reasons. Small murders have even been drawn by larcenous tendencies into the employ of thieves’ guilds.
Languages: Great Raven, common, the ability to communicate with normal crows and ravens, hill dwarf, mountain dwarf, high elf, gray elf, wood elf, rock gnome, and forest gnome.

Role-Playing Suggestions: Ravens are social and curious but most prefer the company of their own kind and have the good sense to stay out of the way of adventures. Even ravens who prefer a more solitary existence are more likely to seek the companionship of scholarly monks, or academically inclined wizards rather than thrill seekers. Those that follow battles stay well back until the action is over. The reasons why some ravens leave behind their murders for a life of adventuring are many.

Some are outcasts from their murders, perhaps they begin to question following the harvest of battle, or break the rules of the quiet monastery where the murder dwells.

A second reason to become an adventurer is to collect the shiny or curious treasures that many ravens covet. In rare instances larcenous ravens become part of a city’s thieves guild acting as spies and fetches. Few thieves regard ravens as full partners instead treating them as useful pets and tossing them the odd trinket to keep the birds happy. A raven thief may tire of this treatment and leave to seek their own fortune.

Those who are the companions of scholarly priests and sagely wizards may find themselves drawn into adventure when trouble knocks on the library door.

Some fighters also take a raven following the battles as a good luck charm or mascot and then find the bird to be a useful ally. When the wars lull soldiers oft become adventurers.

Whatever the reason for becoming adventurers all ravens have several things in common. Firstly, like lizard men, ravens have an outlook very alien to mammals. They are born from eggs, use no tools, and are motivated, in varying degrees, by social needs, survival, collecting (rather than wealth), and curiosity.

Within a party how much the raven is a boon companion depends on to what degree each of these instinctive traits manifests in his character: gregariousness, survival, acquisitiveness, and curiosity.

Highly gregarious ravens not only seek the company of others but also their approval and as such are usually easy to live with, even more solitary birds often have close ties with a few companions. However, others become overly dependant on others and this may lead to problems.

Survival instinct tends to make the birds cautious or pragmatic, this may lead to them abandoning companions when the going gets tough. To be fair, the limited access to weapons and armor makes ravens vulnerable in a fight and understanding allies will take this into account.

The acquisitiveness of these birds is linked to their appreciation of beauty rather than the desire for wealth. Many covet bright colored and shiny objects and some build up substantial collections of jewelry, gems, and coins, as well as baubles of little worth. Problems can occur if collecting becomes indiscriminately larcenous. Even the most aesthetic bird has a gem or coin secreted away in their nest. In others collecting becomes tied to curiosity: scholarly ravens may have maps, scrolls, or books kept in a residence they share with human or demihuman academics. Still others collect information for which some ravens show an insatiable curiosity. While a well-read, or well-traveled, companion is a boon in some ravens curiosity leads to annoying nosiness; they are forever sticking their beak in where it doesn’t belong.

Special Advantages: Ravens can fly, with a movement speed of 27 and a maneuverability class of C.

A raven can attack with his beak inflicting 1-2 points of damage each time. They receive a +1 bonus (total-3) to called shots to the eye with their peck (initiative for this attack is at +1 penalty).

They receive no attack penalties for aerial missile fire.

Able to survive on rough fare great ravens receive a +1 bonus to saves against ingested poisons and diseases for every 3.5 points of constitution. This number is the same as the saving throw bonus of dwarves against magic.

Special Disadvantages: Great ravens have a land movement speed of only 1.

Monstrous Traits: Bestial habits bestial speech. Reaction adjustment -4

Instincts: Choose one: Gregarious birds must avoid being alone unconscious or asleep companions don’t count. The raven must have company whenever it is awake; Survivalists are in opposition to their instinct if they remain in combat or other immediate danger (e.g. inside a burning house) once they are at 20% (round up) or lower of their maximum hit points; Curious birds are compelled to get closer to and investigate anything that is unusual and not obviously dangerous, this could include faeries, unexplained colored lights, halflings in a desert etc.; Acquisitive birds are perhaps the most troublesome, the player should choose one class of small fairly common items (e.g. coins, gems, scrolls, keys,
rings) that the bird must attempt to steal if left unattended and in plain view. Objects in packs, worn, or carefully watched do not trigger the instinct. An acquisitive bird may not be of lawful alignment.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Alertness, blind fighting, danger sense, dodge, eye peck (costs a full weapon proficiency slot, reduces penalty to −2, and initiative to +0), fast talk, hiding, intimidation, natural fighting, observation.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Ancient history, animal lore, animal noise, appraising, astrology, begging, direction sense, eating, etiquette, foraging, fortune telling, gaming, heraldry, information gathering, local history, looting, navigation, persuasion, poetry, read lips, read/write, religion, spell craft, survival (hills or forest), tracking, trailing, voice mimicry, weather sense, whistling/humming.

**Great Raven Average Height and Weight**

Hgt in Inches (Wing span is double height.) has Base 11 and a Modifier of 6d4. Weight in pounds has a Base of 5.5 and a Modifier of 1d4

**Great Raven Age**

Starting Age has a base of 12 and a variable of 1d8. Maximum age has a base of 50 and a variable of 3d20 (average of 80).

Middle Age occurs at 40 years (-1 Str/Con; +1 Int/Wis), Old Age at 60 years (-2 Str/Dex; -1 Con; +1 Wis), and Venerable at 80 years (-1 Str/Dex/Con; +1 Int/Wis)

**Raven Thieving Skill Adjustment**

Pick Pockets -20., Open Locks NA., Find/Remove Traps NA., Move Silently -, Hide in Shadows +15., Detect Noise +15., Climb Walls -20., Read Languages -

**Raven Multi-Class Combinations**

Mage/Thief
(Priest/Mage)
(Priest/Thief)

**Unicorn**

**Ability Score Adjustments.** The initial ability scores are modified by a -2 penalty to dexterity and a +1 bonus to strength and a +1 to constitution.

Minimum and maximum ability scores are as follows: Strength 14/18, Dexterity 3/16, Constitution 11/18, Intelligence 6/18, Wisdom 6/18, Charisma 8/18.

**Class Restrictions**

Class restrictions and maximum level are Fighter 12, Ranger 11, Priest (12), Shaman (7), Bard 12+* *Meistersinger kit only, at 5th level the unicorn only transforms her head and gains only bite attack of the companion animal.

**Experience Point Adjustment:** (2,1) Unicorns can use heavy warhorse barding and their limited use of tools is more than made up for by their abilities. They are unable to cast spells requiring material components other than a holy symbol. However unicorns have many advantages so x2.5 the normal amount of experience is required for advancement.

**Hit Dice:** Player character unicorns receive hit die by class plus a one time bonus of 5 hit points at first level.

**Alignment:** NPC unicorns are chaotic good. PC unicorns may be any good alignment but are usually chaotic good.

**Natural Armour Class:** 2

**Background:** Unicorns look much like powerfully built horses with gleaming white coats and long silky manes and forelocks. The stallions also have white beards. The eyes of a unicorn are sea blue or fiery pink. However, no one could mistake a unicorn for a horse since they sport an elegant horn upon their foreheads and their hooves are cloven and ivory-yellow.

Unicorns live alone or in small families in a clearing within a forested territory around 400 square miles in size. The trees within the territory are marked by the unicorn’s horn with the glyph of the family. Sylvan creatures and other unicorns recognize the markings indicating the forest is under protection. Rangers have a 10% chance of determining that a forest is unicorn protected. Unicorns will not enter the territory of another family unless invited and they will not
Unicorns typically avoid contact with other races except sylvan ones, such as dryads and pixies, and encounters with others are often limited to conflict in defense of the home forest. Unicorns leave honest travelers and hunters untouched but those that hunt for sport, or maliciously damage the forest are attacked. The severity of the attack is determined by the unicorns sense of justice; young children tossing stones at birds will be given a good scare, but rampaging and burning orcs will be shown no quarter.

The other instance where unicorns deal with others is when they deem to become the mount of a human or elven maiden of good alignment. Unicorns maintain this tradition as a method of promoting the cause of good beyond their forest homes. The women chosen for this honor should be those absolutely devoted to the cause of good as much as any priest or paladin, though peasants and other common folk are as likely to be chosen as priestesses.

Languages: Unicorn, high elf, sylvan elf, sprite, pixie, dryad, nymph.

Role-Playing Suggestions: Unicorns could abandon their secrecy for a number of reasons and join a party. Dire threats to their forest territories may see a unicorn seek aid in defending the trees and creatures under her protection. Alternatively, a young unicorn may set out from his family home intending to find another suitable forest and start family. Finally, the unicorn could choose to become the mount and companion of a woman devoted to the cause of good. This person could be a hero (perhaps another PC) or simply a peasant woman who sees her companion as an opportunity to thwart the plans of the brutal and greedy.

Unicorns are a proud race and they will not abide being used as beasts of burden or mounts unless the rider is good aligned and the situation grim. The only exception to this rule is the good women chosen by some unicorns as companions. Unicorns are grazers that have few needs and shun civilization. They are one of the few intelligent races that have no need for wealth. Given this perspective they will be amused by the avarice of others and by anyone trying to bargain with them with anything but services.

Unicorns do not give their trust lightly, and then only to good creatures, but once their friendship is won they are unswerving in their loyalty. This protective streak motivates unicorns to watch over the welfare of their friends in whatever way they can, a unicorn will scrutinize new hirelings, warn against hotheaded and unwise assaults, and offer other cautious advice, and if all else fails die defending her friends.

The selfless devotion of the unicorn to good makes the role similar to a paladin in many ways. The unicorn will also find common ground with rangers and druids with whom they share a love of nature. Like the classes mentioned the responsibilities of a unicorn help balance the character.

A unicorn is uncomfortable in the villages, towns and cities of other races and will typically retire to a nearby wood while her companions are within settlements. Given the stir that a unicorn would cause on entering a village or city this is probably just as well.

Special Advantages: Unicorns are swift gallopers; they have a movement rate of 24. The horse-like body of the unicorn adds 200 pounds to the amount a unicorn can carry at each level of encumbrance. For example, a unicorn with 14 strength is unencumbered at 255 lbs, lightly encumbered up to 285 lbs, at moderate encumbrance to 315 lbs, heavy to 345 lbs, and severely encumbered to 370 lbs.

Unicorns can attack with their two fore hooves for 1d6 damage each and with their horn for 1d12 damage. If a unicorn wishes to kick with her rear hooves no other attack can be made that round and the ‘to hit’ roll is always penalized by the weapon non-proficiency of the character’s group (PHB p50), each rear hoof inflicts 1d6 damage.

Alternatively, if there is at least 30 feet of open space between the unicorn and her opponent she may charge foregoing her attacks with her hooves but inflicting 3d12 damage with her horn. A unicorn’s horn is a magical weapon and while it inflicts no extra damage because of this all attacks with the horn are at +2 ‘to hit’ and creature normally only wounded by +2 or +1 magical weapons may be harmed.

Unicorns have very keen senses and can detect the scents, and sounds of creatures within 240 yards outdoors or 240 feet indoors. Only creatures capable of crossing this distance and making an attack within a single round can surprise them, most commonly those with movement rates of 48 or more, or teleport capability. Although hoofed, unicorns are able to move with great stealth through forests so that opponents suffer a -6 to rolls to avoid surprise in these environments. Unicorn hearing also enables them to hear noise like a thief at a base chance of 50%. This base chance is modified for race and other factors just like the thief ability.

In addition to the above sensory and combat abilities unicorns posses a few magical powers. They are 20%/level resistant to poisons, death spells, and charms or hold from magical source (spell, item, innate power etc.).
Resistance reaches 100%; they are completely immune even if some cause would normally lower resistance. PC unicorns determine their saving throws against spells as if they were wizards at the same level as their lowest class (other saving throws are as per their class). In addition to these protections, at fifth level and above, unicorns may teleport themselves and any equipment or riders they are carrying anywhere within the limited range of 360 yards once per day.

Unicorn rangers that worship the unicorn god Eachthighern (ek-tee-arn) the "Lord of Horses" may choose two spheres from the following list when they reach spell-casting level: animal, healing, plant, protection; rather than being restricted to the animal and plant spheres normally awarded to rangers. Once chosen, these spheres are never changed.

Special Disadvantages:
Unicorns take damage as large creatures.

Unicorns cannot bear cruelty inflicted upon innocents or normal animals, harm done to good aligned companions, or wanton destruction of nature, such as burning of forests or hunting for sport. If a unicorn does not make all possible effort to prevent these occurrences when they are encountered not only is an instinct roll required but also the unicorn looses all of her magical benefits. If the unicorn was under fear or other magical influence then the powers are lost until an atonement is undertaken, if the unicorn was willfully neglectful then the loss is permanent. The magical abilities lost are: loss of the +2 magical bonus to the unicorns horn, loss of resistance/immunity to poison, death magics, charms and holds, loss of access to wizard saves against spells, and loss of teleport ability. In addition priests, shamans and rangers of sufficient level loose their priest spell casting powers. The same losses occur if the unicorn’s horn is severed. The horn will not grow back and must be magically restored by regeneration or a wish.

Since unicorns scorn the possession-laden lifestyles of others all unicorns, regardless of class, are limited to whatever treasure and goods they can carry. Like rangers though they can own any value of treasure but anything they cannot carry must be traded into a portable form or donated to a wealthy ‘institution’ (An NPC group, in the case of unicorns often a hard up village of elves or faerie folk).

Monstrous Traits:
Appearance, Monstrous Hearing, bestial speech reaction adjustment -4.

Instincts: Avoid serving as a mount or beast of burden (except to carry a ‘chosen woman’, or known good aligned creatures in dire emergencies). Avoid settlements. Unicorns cannot abide cruelty inflicted upon innocents or normal animals, harm done to good aligned companions, or wanton destruction of nature; a unicorn feels compelled to prevent or halt these occurrences when they are encountered.

Weapon Proficiencies: alertness, blind fighting, danger sense, hiding, intimidation, natural fighting, observation, rear kick (costs a full weapon proficiency slot and negates the non-proficiency penalty to rear hoof attacks).

Nonweapon Proficiencies: animal lore, dancing, heraldry (unicorn glyphs), jumping, running, survival (forests), riding (unicorn), swimming, tracking, and weather sense.

Unicorn Average Height and Weight
Male/female. Hgt in Inches (At the shoulder, to convert to 'hands' divide by four.). has Base 62/58 and a Modifier of d6. Weight in pounds has a Base of 1000/940 and a Modifier of 6d20

Unicorn Age
Starting Age has a base of 60 and a variable of 3d10. Maximum age has a base of 1000 and a variable of 5d10 (average of 1250).

Ageing Effects*
Middle Age occurs at 625 years (-1 Str/Con; +1 Int/Wis), Old Age at 938 years (-2 Str/Dex; -1 Con; +1 Wis), and Venerable at 1250 years (-1 Str/Dex/Con; +1 Int/Wis)

Unicorns feel no physical effects of ageing until the last month of their life. Cumulative modifiers of -1 Str/Con on the first week; -2 Str/Dex on the second week; -1 Con on the third week; and -1 Str/Dex/Con on the final week of their life apply.

Unicorn Thieving Skill Adjustment
Pick Pockets NA., Open Locks NA., Find/Remove Traps NA., Move Silently +10., Hide in Shadows +15., Detect Noise +15., Climb Walls NA., Read Languages -10

Unicorn Multi-Class Combinations
(fighter/priest)
**Worg**

**Ability Score Adjustments.** The initial ability scores are modified by a -1 penalty to intelligence, and a +1 bonus to constitution.

Minimum and maximum ability scores are as follows: Strength 6/18, Dexterity 3/18, Constitution 8/19, Intelligence 3/8, Wisdom 3/18, Charisma 3/18.

**Class Restrictions**

Class restrictions and maximum level are Fighter 12, Priest (12), Shaman (7)

**Experience Point Adjustment:** (2,1) Worgs may be outfitted in armor much like that used by war dogs. Worgs are unable to cast spells requiring material components other than a holy symbol. -40% from the experience required.

**Hit Dice:** Player character worgs receive hit die by class.

**Alignment:** NPC worgs are neutral evil. PC worgs may be any alignment but are usually true neutral.

**Natural Armour Class:** 6

**Background:** Worgs look like large wolves. With powerful jaws, broad chests, bushy tails and upright ears, no one would mistake a worg for a dog in good light. Like other wolves, worgs show regional variations in coloring; in colder climes gray, black, or even pure white fur is common whereas in more temperate regions reddish and brown worgs dominate. The eyes of a worg can be gold, amber, or red.

Worgs are social creatures living in hierarchical families called packs. The pack is led by a patriarch and matriarch who are the only worgs permitted to breed. The matriarch and patriarch lead the pack in hunting, battle, and negotiations with their allies, the goblins. During the warmer seasons, the pack hunts large prey and, unlike normal wolves, worgs are able to bring down healthy animals upsetting the ecological balance in areas where they live. Worgs will also hunt humans and demihumans, especially if they are able to enlist the help of goblins. During the winter months raids on villages become more common as other game becomes scarce. Unlike normal wolves, worgs will only stoop to hunting hares and mice if they are unable to match the defenses of nearby villages or share the larders of goblins.

Worgs are known as war mounts of the goblins and most people assume the large wolves are simple captive beasts of the goblins. However, unless the goblins have a very powerful leader, this is not the case the worgs are independent allies of the goblins and owe their loyalty to the pack’s patriarch and matriarch. The worgs' lack of respect for formal laws, agreements, and the traditions of the goblins sometimes cause friction between the two allies. However, the alliance between goblin and worg brings such advantages of speed, ferocity, and cunning that most packs and tribes eagerly enter into such understandings.

Among races other than goblins worgs are treated with suspicion, not only do many peasants (who are superstitious about all wolves) fear them, but also they are known allies of goblins. Most communities of humans and demihumans will fear or attack worgs on sight. Like goblinoids, worg PCs must demonstrate their trustworthiness before others accept them.

**Languages:** Worg, winter wolf, goblin, common. Worgs cannot speak any language other than their own tongue, of growls and howls, and that of winter wolves. Some packs also know a sign language of postures. Worgs can also learn the combination of sounds and postures used by ordinary wolves to communicate. The other languages they learn they understand but cannot speak.

**Role-Playing Suggestions:** A worg could join a party as a companion of a goblin or other wilderness character. Alternatively, the worg may have lost favor with the leaders of his pack or rejected the cruel and bloodthirsty habits of his littermates.

Worgs are pack animals and bring this outlook to their dealings with others. Sometimes a worg may see the PCs as a ‘pass’ to enter civilization or a ‘meal ticket’, able to buy food and avoid the hard work of hunting. But such relationships tend to be short lived. A lone worg is more likely to see the party as a new pack, providing much needed companionship and protection. Worgs enjoy the hunt and with their new ‘pack’ find that they can bring down impressive and exciting prey. Worgs see all social interactions in terms of packs and hierarchies of dominance. Within the party the worg will follow a strong leader or, if there is none, he may endeavor to seize leadership and organize a pecking order within the group. Worgs will put aside all differences to defend against outsiders threatening the pack, when there is no outside threat internal quarrels are common.
Special Advantages: Worgs are swift runners; they have a movement rate of 18. Worgs can bite for 2d4 points of damage. All worgs have excellent senses of smell; they receive a +1 to surprise checks and receive a free tracking proficiency. Worg hearing is also sensitive, enabling them to hear noise like a thief at a base chance of 50% below middle age, 40% at middle age, 25% at old age, and 10% at venerable age. These base chances are modified for race and other factors just like the thief ability. Worgs are carnivores and after a large meal can days without food; all worgs receive a free eating proficiency.

A worgs’ fur acts as very cold weather clothing.

Special Disadvantages: Wolves of all kinds, especially worgs, suffer from a bad reputation with human peasants in many nations resulting in an extra -1 reaction penalty. This situation is aggravated by the worgs inability to speak human languages. Worgs are at -2 for saving throws against foul odors.

Monstrous Traits: Appearance, Bestial Habits, Monstrous Hearing, Monstrous Smell, reaction adjustment -4 (-5 with human peasants see above).

Instincts: The full moon is regarded as an auspicious time by worgs responded to by howling. Conversely, the new moon is a time of ill omen best slept through.

Weapon Proficiencies: alertness blind fighting, danger sense, hiding, intimidation, natural fighting, observation, wild fighting.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: animal lore, distance sense, direction sense, eating, endurance, foraging, hunting, jumping, riding (worg), running, signaling (howling), singing (howling), survival (forests, pick any climate), swimming, tracking, weather sense.

Worg Average Height and Weight

Male/female. Hgt in Inches (At the shoulder. Body length, not including tail, is about twice this figure) has a Base 24/41 and a Modifier of 3d6. Weight in pounds has a Base of 150/130 and a Modifier of 13d10.

Worgs are a highly variable race with some members almost twice the size and as much as five times heavier than the smallest.

Worg Age

Starting Age has a base of 1 and a variable of 1d6. Maximum age has a base of 12 and a variable of 2d6 (average of 19).

Ageing Effects

Middle Age occurs at 10 years (-1 Str/Con; +1 Int/Wis), Old Age at 14 years (-2 Str/Dex; -1 Con; +1 Wis), and Venerable at 19 years (-1 Str/Dex/Con; +1 Int/Wis).

Worg Thieving Skill Adjustment


Worg Multi-Class Combinations

(fighter/priest)
The Chevaleresse: An AD&D Character Class for Female Characters

by Vince Garcia

The Chevaleresse, or Female Paladin, is a subset of the Paladin followed by women characters. As Knights and Paladins typically consider their station and profession an elite, male-only vocation, the thought of women following the same path is anathema to all but the most open-minded of them. This snobbish attitude obviously restricts, in most cases, the true Paladin class to men, but a few women have bucked the prejudice and made their own way in the world as Chevaleresesses, often excelling over their male counterparts in zeal, ability and deeds.

The means by which a character became a Chevaleresse historically was by being the wife or daughter of a Knight, who had to defend his lands against enemies while the Knight was off serving his king. Other times, a few brave women earned the title by fighting in time of war. In a fantasy context, the character is most likely the daughter of a Paladin, taking up her father’s sword to seek some sort of vengeance or to carry on some crusade he was a part of.

A Chevaleresse thus will always have some sort of Cause she fights for, and this will result in two sorts of characters who follow this path: One who focuses on developing the skills of a warrior; and one who follows a path of religious devotion. While both will be devoted to their specific deities, the former will rely on her martial skills to make her way in the world, while the latter will rely on divine assistance and the backing of the Church, using her skills in service to both.

Requirements.


If the Character’s Wisdom is 16 or better, she gains a bonus of 10% to experience gained.

Restrictions.

While most of these characters are of Good alignment, they may be of any Lawful alignment, including Lawful Evil. Those of Evil alignment, however, are not usually long for this world as many regular Paladins--usually irritated with Chevaleresesses to start with--may view it as a religious obligation to hunt down an evil Chevaleresse if they become aware of one. All such characters have a Code of Honor that they follow, and the more aligned to Good they are, the more chivalrous and merciful the Code is. But even Evil members of this profession prize personal honor, and this fact can be used for or against them.

If the character changes from Lawful to Neutral or Chaotic alignment, she may not advance further in experience. If clerical-based, she also loses all spellcasting and undead-affecting abilities.
Humans and Half-elves may become Chevaleresses.

Multiclass and split-class characters are not allowed.

**Armor & weapons.**

Beginning weapons: 2.

Unlike Paladins, a Chevaleresse does not disdain the use of ranged weapons, and may certainly choose proficiency in a bow or crossbow if desired. However, the longsword is the preferred arm of these warriors, and they typically start with proficiency in both that and the dagger.

However, as they usually lack the same amount of background in arms and horsemanship as a male character, they are rather weak warriors through their beginning levels as they learn the tricks of the trade. But this is made up by their zeal and dedication, and once they’ve learned the ropes by 5th level, they start to excel and quickly surpass many of their male counterparts in ability.

As do Cavaliers and Paladins, the Chevaleresse prefers Knightly armor, and they will scrimp and save to obtain platemail as soon as possible. They may certainly wear full field plate, but many are more comfortable in platemail.

They attack and save on the Fighter table.

**Gold and tithing.**

As does a Paladin, a Chevaleresse must donate a percentage of her income to a temple, sovereign, the poor, or some sort of NPC institution soon after each adventure. A tithe of 10% is considered the minimum acceptable amount to remain in good standing with her deity, but the more generous she is, the more her deity might be counted on every so often to intervene and grant her a bonus to a critical saving throw, combat or treasure roll. (DM discretion.)

Like Paladins, a Chevaleresse is limited to 10 permanent magic items--but only up to the point she chooses to build her own stronghold or monastery. If she constructs her own base, she may thereafter keep what magic she finds without restriction.

They may use magic items appropriate to fighters, and roll a D10 for hit points up to 12th level, then add two hit points per level above that.

Constitution bonuses for Fighters apply.

**Retainers.**

Chevaleresses may hire a squire and small retinue of retainers of similar general alignment until they build a base. Thereafter, they may hire whatever number of servants/mercenaries/retainers they feel is necessary.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level/HD</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Possible Cleric Spells</th>
<th>Resistance</th>
<th>Special Ability</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/D10</td>
<td>0-2500</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A, A</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/D10</td>
<td>2,501-5,000</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/D10</td>
<td>5,001-12,000</td>
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<td>4/D10</td>
<td>12,001-25,000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(E), F, (F)</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>2,385,001+</td>
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**Resistance Bonus.**

Discipline is something that is second nature to Chevaleresses, whether it be through inner strength gained through prayer and meditation or sheer grit and determination to persevere. The benefit of this manifests in a bonus to any saving throws vs. effects of fear, charm or paralysis. In the case of fear especially, if no save is usually permitted against a certain type of fear, a Chevaleresse is automatically entitled to a save vs. paralysis to resist that fear, but without any sort of bonus, including that usually imparted by magic items.

**Special Abilities.**

The same special abilities are shared by both sorts of characters up to 5th level. After that, those of the clerical Chevaleresse will be noted by (bracketing) the letter of the ability on the table.

A. *Weapon proficiency.* The character may choose proficiency in a weapon of his choice.

B. *Horsemanship.* At 3rd level, the character has mastered the handling of a warhorse. Additionally, she is able to improve the movement rate of a normal horse by an additional 2".

C. *Choose path.* At 5th level, the character must make a life path choice, following either the Church or the path of the Warrior. If she chooses the Church, the Chevaleresse binds herself to a temple or religious institution of her deity and makes herself available in service to them. From this point, a minimum tithe must go to this institution or its affiliated temples (if not already going to them) and she thereafter sacrifices some of her potential martial ability in order to gain clerical abilities including turning undead and spellcasting (Wisdom bonus applies), though she cannot use clerical scrolls. She may expect support and aid from temples affiliated with her deity in return.

If the character instead chooses the path of the Warrior, she continues to improve her fighting abilities but gains no clerical talents.

D. *Extra attack.* At 5th level, the character may make three attacks every two rounds.
(E). Turn/Dominate undead. At 6th level, the clerical Chevaleresse gains the ability to Turn (or Dominate if Evil) undead as a Cleric five levels beneath her current level.

F (F). Weapon (or shield) expertise. At 6th level, the Chevaleresse may choose a special expertise in one weapon she is proficient with, gaining +1 to hit and damage with it. Or, this and its accompanying skills may be applied as a shield mastery bonus to AC.

G. Rally. Chevalereses have a natural air of inspiration and courage about them. At 8th level, this manifests in a bonus to her party members of a second saving throw if a save to resist fear is initially failed. This save allows allies a chance to rally and recover themselves if she sees them panicking and calls for them to stand their ground. Or, if no save is normally allowed, allies gain a save vs. paralysis, with no bonuses, to resist the fear effects.

H (H). Weapon mastery. At this level, the character may elect to improve her skill with the weapon she already has expertise in, increasing her bonus to +2.

I. Build stronghold. At 11th level, the character may build whatever sort of stronghold she can afford, attracting 4D4 faithful 1st level men-at-arms led by a 5th level captain, and an equal number of 0-level servants. If the character clears the land of monsters in a 20-mile radius, at least 6D6 families may choose to form a village and settle in the area if she provides protection for them. The character will thereafter reap modest taxes that may be increased through trade and development.

Clerical Chevalereses never build strongholds or castles but may build monasteries, attracting clerics instead of men-at-arms, whom she will be a protector of. A village may again spring up around the monastery if she clears a similar area of monsters. Modest or better donations to the monastery will follow and can increase, depending on the development of the area.

(J). Use clerical items. At this level, the Chevaleresse may use clerical magic items except for scrolls and items of summoning.

K. Ride special mounts. At 12th level, the Chevaleresse may tame and ride unique mounts such as a hippogriff or pegasus if the character is Good or Neutral. If Evil, the character may tame a Worg or neutral ridable beast.

L (L). Extra attack. At this level, the character makes three attacks each round.

M. Cow. At 14th level, the aura surrounding the character is such that if she stands her ground and challenges hostile humans, demihumans or intelligent humanoid monsters of four hit dice or less, a save vs. paralysis must be made to find the courage to attack her. No save must be made if the Chevaleresse is outnumbered by 10 or more enemies.

N. Weapon supremacy. At 16th level, the Chevaleresse becomes a master with her chosen weapon, gaining +3 to hit and damage with it.

O. Extra attack. At 20th level, the character’s skill at arms is such that she makes four attacks each round. All multiple attacks are with the primary hand. Multiple attacks never apply with a lance.
TSR Computer RPGs

by Andrew Pam

Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) inspired a great many games, including many computer games. There are far too many for me to cover them all in a single article, so I’m just going to mention the best of each generation.

The original Dungeons and Dragons first came out in 1974, and it immediately inspired dnd on the PLATO educational software system and Dungeon on the PDP-10 minicomputer, both released in 1975 but neither available today. Likewise, the first edition of Advanced Dungeons and Dragons released in 1977 led to a few games on Mattel’s Intellivision home console and on the Apple II home computer. But AD&D 2nd edition, released in 1989, is where things really took off.

Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) released a very popular series of “Gold Box” D&D computer games in the Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance settings, starting with Pool of Radiance for home computers and the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1988 and War of the Lance in 1989. Pool of Radiance is arguably one of the most influential computer RPGs because it established a whole set of principles that other games followed, including the ability to transfer characters to later games in the series and connections to the tabletop game modules and novelizations. Fans even reimplemented the game as an award-winning Neverwinter Nights 2 module in 2007.

The best of the early Gold Box Forgotten Realms games was probably Eye of the Beholder (1991) and the best of the Gold Box Dragonlance games was probably Death Knights of Krynn (1991), the sequel to Champions of Krynn (1990). The recent Legend of Grimrock games are clearly inspired by Eye of the Beholder and worth checking out if you would like to play a similar dungeon crawl with modern graphics.

Later in 1994-1996 SSI released games in the Dark Sun and Ravenloft settings which are also fondly remembered, but perhaps the best of all 2nd edition computer games is Planescape: Torment (1999) with its memorable Planescape setting and enjoyably written plot and characters. It is still great fun to play even now and has recently inspired an entire new Numenera tabletop RPG from Monte Cook games and a corresponding Torment: Tides of Numenera video game currently in beta test and Steam Early Access.

The runner up for best 2nd edition computer games are undoubtedly the Baldurs Gate and Icewind Dale games (released 1998-2002), which like Planescape: Torment were based on a game engine called the “Infinity Engine” created by BioWare and also licensed to Black Isle Studios. There is an open source reimplemention of the Infinity Engine called GemRB which allows you to play those games natively on Windows, MacOS X, Linux, Android, iOS and other platforms and Beamdog, a company founded by former BioWare staff, have released Enhanced Editions of the Baldurs Gate and Icewind Dale games that run in modern graphics resolutions on current hardware.

There were some computer games released in the Mystara, Spelljammer, Al-Quadim and Birthright settings, but none are particularly well-remembered today. However with the release of AD&D 3rd edition in 2000 and 3.5 edition in 2003 came a new wave of computer RPGs, starting with the excellent Neverwinter Nights series (2002-2006) launching a new 3rd edition “Aurora Engine” from BioWare that enabled the creation and sharing of user-created modules and supported persistent worlds with up to 64 players, followed by the 3.5 edition Neverwinter Nights 2 series.
(2006-2009) from Obsidian Entertainment on their “Electron Engine” that supported up to 96 players!

Also notable was a company called Troika Games with *The Temple of Elemental Evil* (2003), a remake of the classic module from the Greyhawk setting and the first computer game to use the 3.5 edition rules. Unfortunately it was initially very buggy but after a number of official and community patches addressed those issues it came to be well regarded as perhaps the most faithful implementation of the 3.5 edition tabletop rules. It was one of the first games to include a same-sex marriage option in the story.

There were a couple of games using the *Eberron* setting, a real-time strategy game called *Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard* (2005) and a massively multiplayer online game called *Dungeons & Dragons Online* (2006), although that later changed to the more popular Forgotten Realms setting. *Dungeons & Dragons 4th* edition was released in 2008 but does not seem to have inspired any computer games. Finally the recent release of *5th* edition in 2014 has so far resulted in one computer game, *Sword Coast Legends* (2015) which also offers a Dungeon Master mode.

None of TSR’s other roleplaying games such as Boot Hill, Gamma World and Top Secret seem to have resulted in any computer games, though a Gamma World game was started in 2011 but cancelled before release. Thankfully if you enjoy D&D there are plenty of great games available and I urge you to pick up some of the games mentioned above.

You can still buy all the Gold Box games from GOG.com as the Forgotten Realms – The Archives collections, the Dungeons & Dragons: Krynn Series, Dungeons & Dragons: Dark Sun Series and the Dungeons & Dragons: Ravenloft Series, all packaged with the DOSbox emulator for Windows, MacOS and Linux. You can also buy The Temple of Elemental Evil, Dragonshard and all the original Infinity Engine games, the Enhanced Editions and the Neverwinter Nights games at GOG.com. The Enhanced Edition games are also available on Steam as is Sword Coast Legends.
First there was 2000's *Dungeons & Dragons*, a hilariously awful movie that made quite a bit of cash purely by being the right film at the right time. *The Lord of the Rings* was coming, everybody was getting rather excited, so Warner Bros figured they'd give an aspiring filmmaker named Courtney Solomon the chance to adapt his favourite role-playing game to the big screen. It had a few big names in it - Jeremy Irons, Thora Birch (pretty much killing her career stone dead after such a promising break in American Beauty) and Marlon Wayans - and while not hugely expensive had enough of a budget to avoid entirely embarrassing itself. Most of the embarrassment came from the direction and the really, really awful script.

Five years later a UK/Lithuania co-production (no really) saw the original film get a sort-of sequel: the only actor to return was Bruce Payne, who played Jeremy Irons' henchman in the original. This production managed to feel a bit more authentic in terms of adapting the game, and had an ordinary but not shockingly awful screenplay. It was a pleasant D-movie distraction: hardly worth hunting down, but enjoyable enough if you were addicted to elves and dragons and had a Sunday afternoon spare. Personally I'm an absolute sucker for low budget high fantasy cinema. I go into every movie with a lot of hope, and go out of them hoping the next one will be better.

It turns out that in 2012 someone else had another go at a *Dungeons & Dragons* movie. This one is *Dungeons & Dragons 3: The Book of Vile Darkness*, directed by Gerry Lively (who also directed the second film).

Someone will correct me I'm sure, but I think this is the first feature film ever adapted from a role-playing game supplement. *The Book of Vile Darkness* isn't just a name, you see, it's a rulebook filled with additional bits and pieces to add into your *Dungeons & Dragons* game. The film is filled with elements from the rulebook, so regardless of the film's quality it's going to be geek-out heaven for the average D&D obsessive. The book's writers even get an onscreen credit, which is more respect that Marvel Studios usually show their creators.

As for the film? It's pretty dreadful. I found it difficult to remember any of the characters names, so they tended to be assigned code-names. "Pretty Boy" is the last survivor of an attack where evil minions kidnap his father, forcing him to team up with a wandering party of evil adventurers to infiltrate the enemy stronghold and get him back. The adventurers include "we wanted Keira Knightley but clearly couldn't afford her", "Danny Dyer was busy" and
"Mhahahahaa evil bug wizard". And on it goes.

There are one or two surprising highlights: there's a CGI dragon towards the beginning of the second act that's genuinely well realised and designed, given the budget constraints, and the adventurers hunt it down inside a dungeon. It's taken three films, but they've finally made a Dungeons & Dragons movie that has a dungeon with a dragon in it. Evil bug wizard also has a neat eye on a stalk that's similarly well done.

I think there's enormous potential to make fun movies out of pulp fantasy. The plots are simple, the audiences are generally forgiving of limited budgets, and once you've established your setting and your quest you've got a blank canvas to create entertaining characters and great dialogue. I go into every fantasy film like this hoping that this is the one, and that someone's finally cracked the formula. Hercules and Xena managed it on TV 20 years ago. Sadly, based on The Book of Vile Darkness, filmmakers are still struggling - but I live in hope.


62 RPG REVIEW ISSUE 32 September 2016
Papers & Paychecks Kickstarter

The RPG Review Cooperative, Inc., is hosting a kickstarter to publish “Papers & Paychecks”, a roleplaying game based on Will McLean's classic cartoon from the Dungeon Master's Guide in 1979. Designed by Lev Lafayette it comes with cover art from Dan 'Smif' Smith, famous from the GURPS line of RPGs.

We have a target of $5000 AUD with pledges ranging from a PDF of the game (only $5) to limited publishing rights ($200). Net proceeds from the Kickstarter will go to supporting the RPG Review Cooperative, a non-profit and volunteer organisation dedicated to promoting and advocating the roleplaying game hobby (such as this journal), reviewing its products, providing services to members (such as an massive RPG library), and social events (gaming nights, movie nights etc).

"Papers & Paychecks" posits a world that is downright hostile to the player characters using the metaphysical foundation of resistentialism. This is a supposedly joke philosophy based around the widespread anecdotal evidence of an apparent malice of inanimate objects against people: "Les choses sont contre nous" ("Things are against us").

Add this to a regular mix of cringeworthy managers, bumbling technicians, mad scientists, scheming administrators, wacky researchers, dodgy tradies, and brutish labourers, and you have the ingredients of the tragi-comedy that is "Papers and Paychecks", inspired by such TV shows as 'Drop The Dead Donkey', 'Corner Gas', 'The IT Crowd', 'The Office', 'Utopia', and Interns.

Papers & Paychecks uses familiar “old-school” design structures, but with newer narrative-driven elements. The core mechanic – as the original cartoon illustrates – is based on 2d6 vs target number but with the option of additional consequences.

The Kickstarter concludes on December 24th, making a pledge an ideal present for gamer friends.


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NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

Transhumanism
Interview with Rob Boyle, Eclipse
Phase reviews, GURPS Transhuman,
Skyrealms of Jorune, Cryptomancer
Review and Designer's Notes

ECLIPSE PHASE
The PC is the one on the left.