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# DUNGEONS

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# DRAGONS

by STEVE JACKSON of Games Workshop

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Fantasy Gaming is now a rapidly-growing cult both in this country and in America. The spread of the hobby, and the enthusiasm with which it is being received, resembles very closely the Diplomacy 'fever' of the 1960s resulting in the world-wide establishment of the game, which now has a very large following.

Midgard and Hyboria (see Tony Bath's articles in issues 23 & 39) were the first of the Fantasy Games, attempting to recreate mythical kingdoms in which everything possible in a 'real' fantasy world was equally as possible in the games. Players entered as rulers, warriors, wizards, merchants, dwarves—in fact, anything they liked—and simply 'lived' as these characters in the fictional worlds of the games. Both these games were played postally and players were notified by the non-playing umpires or Gamesmasters (who controlled their own games) if and when any events relevant to their particular characters occurred. These games were planned to run, theoretically, *forever* as there were no real ultimate objectives for any of the characters. However, the practical difficulties involved in running such 'total-depth' games, eventually forced them to close.

The contemporary Fantasy Games, of which Dungeons & Dragons is the best-known, are a vast improvement on their fore-runners in terms of playability. Basically, Dungeons & Dragons (or 'D&D' as it is usually abbreviated) is an attempt to recreate fantasy adventures using greatly modified tabletop wargaming rules to control movement, combat and magic. As warriors, magicians and priests, players venture down dungeons in search of treasure and adventure.

There are many additional rules and innovations, though, which make D&D completely unlike any other sort of game. The use of magic is an obvious one which springs to mind, but there is also the way that the *imaginings* of the players and the Gamesmaster play a vital role in each adventure. No pre-set board, as such, is used; the dungeons are unknown to the players beforehand and must be explored to be discovered. The rules of the game need not be known by novices; they learn as they play and their original lack of knowledge counts as their own inexperience. Also, the objectives of the game are unlike any other.

In actual fact, the term 'game' applies only generally to D&D. Ultimately it has no end, and in this respect it is similar to the Midgard family. In practice, though, it is played as a series of 'adventures' or 'episodes' during which a party of players go down the dungeons and return (if luck is with them!). But there

is no winner or loser; an adventure simply takes place. In fact, it is a largely non-competitive game—perhaps 'co-operative' is more appropriate. The members of the party going into the dungeons are really simply pitting themselves, as a group, against the Gamesmaster. But don't be frightened off by the thought of a non-competitive game; players may decide to compete for treasure or pick each other's pockets down the dungeons—*anything* is possible in this game!



## THE DUNGEON-GOD

Baffled? Then perhaps I'd better explain the general mechanics of the game. First of all, a Gamesmaster (GM) is vital to the whole show. This person is to a certain extent like the banker in Monopoly, but he may not play the game at the same time. By 'play' I mean join the other players and go in with the party—in fact the GM has much more important things to do, and probably has more fun than the rest anyway.

The GM has prepared beforehand a 'Set of Dungeons' which are drawn up on graph paper, to scale. These dungeons will be, at their simplest, a series of rooms connected by passages. They are arranged in a series of levels, rather like floors in a building. Level 1 is the level at which the party will enter, and various stairs, sloping passages and magical devices will connect this downstairs to levels 2, 3, 4 and so on, each of which will have its own labyrinth of rooms and chambers connected by passages. At least three levels are needed to start a game, but there is no limit to the maximum a GM might have in his dungeons.

The next step is to place treasure and/or monsters in these dungeons. Various rules and guidelines are given for monster and treasure placement, but the final decision rests with the GM. Generally speaking, a fair proportion of the rooms will contain treasure, which is always guarded by a monster of some sort. Monsters can also be stationed in empty rooms, corridors and so forth. The GM can also arrange any tricks, traps, secret passages, magic rooms, cryptic signs, little old men, etc., that he likes within the dungeons, which may help or hinder adventuring parties on their journeys.

The levels of the dungeons are always arranged in increasing levels of danger, going downwards. The first level will contain small amounts of treasure guarded by fairly weak monsters, but the second and third levels will be more treacherous, with more valuable prizes. And woe betide any newcomer wandering as far down as the sixth and seventh levels; hungry Wyverns, Minotaurs,



Vampires and Dragons lurk in the depths! An example of a simple dungeon (level 1 only) is shown below.

The GM will no doubt give the area a 'setting' as well, to enrich the character of his dungeon. A disused prison in a ruined city was one of the first dungeons I ever went down, while my own were set in long-abandoned smugglers' caves on a deserted beach.

Drawing up the dungeons can take a great deal of time and this must always be done well in advance of a game. In the meantime, the GM may spread vague rumours about his dungeons and as these circulate amongst the players, 'myths and legends' build up. While the actual game is taking place, the GM sits apart from the players, keeping his maps well hidden. As they venture into the dungeons, he informs them of exactly what they can see (including rough dimensions—this is why it is convenient to draw the dungeons out on graph paper) from the position they are in. Should they come across any man, beast or magic along their way, the GM must act as its controller. When the players suggest plans which are not covered by the rules, the GM must assess their chances of success and arbitrate, and this is usually done by giving odds and success and rolling dice to determine the outcome. In short, the GM acts as 'God' for his own dungeons.

### ROLLING FOR CHARACTERS

But what of the players? In Dungeons & Dragons, players take on the lives of fantastic characters. Fighting Men, Magic-Users and Clerics are the three original classes of character, but others have since been developed.

Each player starts off as a relatively weak '1st Level' Character, but during the game, players are awarded Experience Points as they kill monsters and collect treasure. Accumulation of Experience Points enables characters to rise in levels and thus become more powerful. For example, a 1st Level Magic-User knows only one spell, but once he has reached 6th Level, he has 'learned' eight. However, before reaching 6th Level, he must have been awarded 35,000 Experience Points and this may take as many as 30 separate trips down the dungeons!

But before opting for his class, a player first must build up a personality profile of his character through a procedure which has come to be known as 'Rolling for a Character.' There are seven personality attributes: Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Constitution, Dexterity, Charisma and Gold Pieces. For each of these, a player must roll three standard dice, to obtain a score between 3-18 (or 30-180 Gold Pieces). He then considers these scores and decides which class his character will probably be most successful in. A character high in Strength will probably opt to become a Fighting Man, while Intelligence is the 'Prime Requisite' for Magic-Users, as is Wisdom for Clerics.

Having chosen a class and a name for his character, a player must then roll one dice to see how many Hits he may take—that is, the number of damage points he may suffer before being killed. First Level Magic-Users may also take one spell (to be used only once) with them. Finally each character must take a trip to the local Village Woolworth's to load himself up with arms, armour, weapons, provisions and other such odds and ends. The rules provide a price list for a large variety of such useful things and payment is made with Gold Pieces.

Thus, equipped for his adventure, he is now ready to enter the dungeons. He and his companions choose miniature figures (if available) to represent themselves and these are assembled on the table in the party's marching order. They then turn to the Games-master . . .



### INTO THE DUNGEONS!

**GM:** 'Walking through the Woods of Quendor, you are in search of the largest tree in the forest, as you have heard that its roots once led to caverns of riches tunnelled by Ground Goblins. You approach a very large, and very dead tree. Its trunk appears to be hollow. Judging by the stories you have heard, you believe you have reached your destination.'

**MAGIC-USER:** 'We climb the tree and look down the trunk with a lantern.'

**GM:** 'You climb 15ft and can see that the hollow tree leads down below ground level to about 20ft below the surface.'

**MAGIC-USER:** 'We all climb down to the bottom.'

**GM:** 'You find yourselves in a circular room 15ft in diameter with a 5ft wide passage leading off to the north.'

**MAGIC-USER:** 'We look down the passage.'

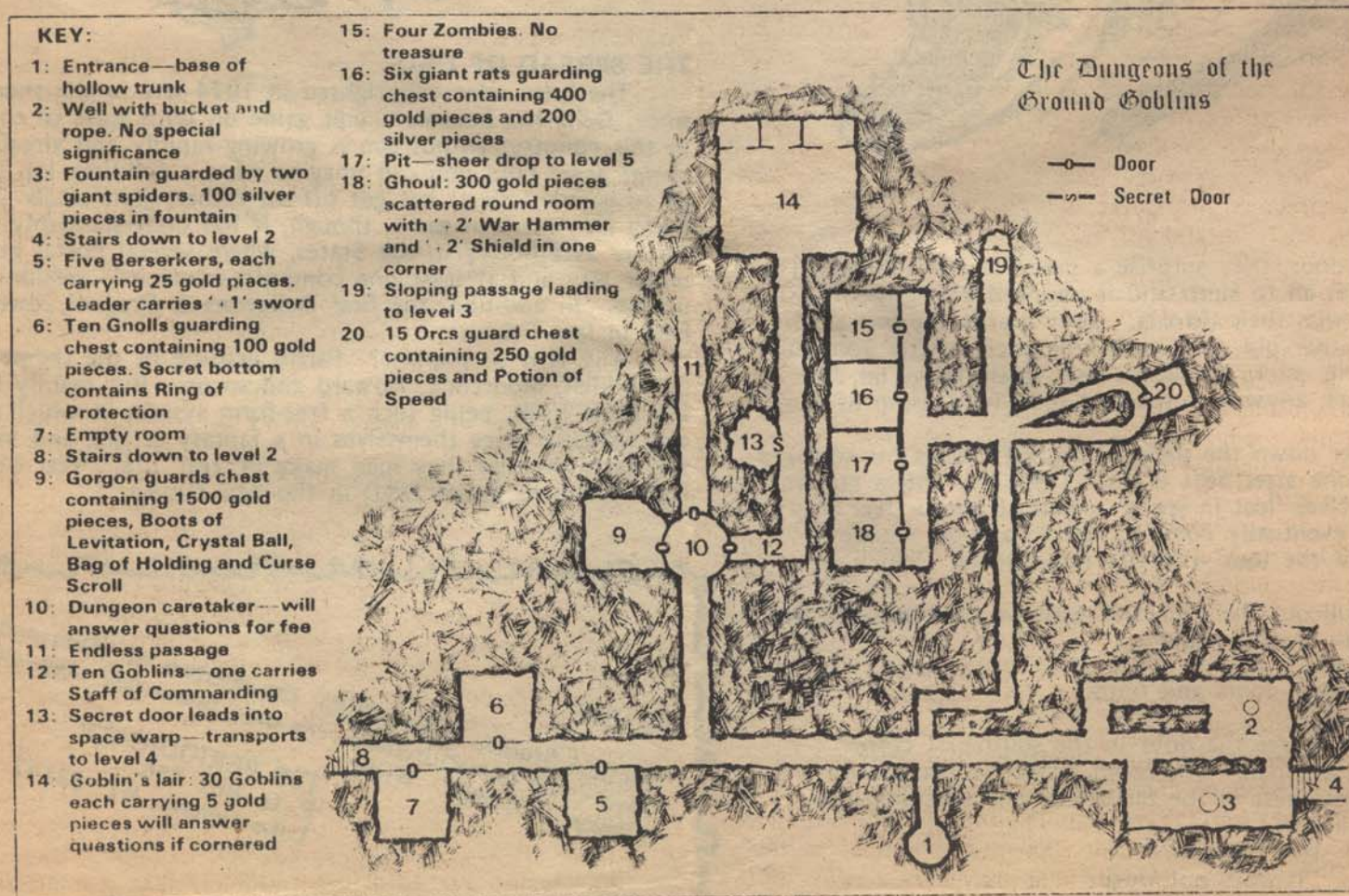
**GM:** 'It extends for 50ft and then turns to the right. You can see crossroads of some sort 30ft away.'

**MAGIC-USER:** 'We proceed to the crossroads and look left and right.'

And so it goes on . . .

As the GM calls out locations and dimensions, various members of the party chart these on graph paper maps of their own. But they must be intelligent enough to do so!

Anyway, after turning left at the crossroads and then right, they come to a large junction and find a withered old man sitting on a rock . . .





**MAGIC-USER:** 'Hail, old man—how came you to these parts?'

**GM:** 'Greetings, friends. I am the taker of care in these labyrinths. How may I serve you?'

**ELF:** 'Well, you could tell us where we can find treasure!' (Whereupon the Magic-User glares at the Elf for his tactless outburst.)

**GM:** 'Aha! Treasure-hunters, eh? Well you'll find nothing here.'

**FIGHTING MAN:** 'No, aged friend, my colleague is no doubt over-optimistic. We are a geological surveying party and would merely like to chart these passages. Perhaps you could help us?'

**GM:** (Throws dice to see whether the old man believes him—he does.) 'Certainly, fellows, I shall be happy to assist. What can I do for you, and how much is it worth?'

The party talk amongst themselves. Some would like to ask him if he'd give them a conducted tour of the dungeons; some would like to ask him what's behind the doors they can see; some don't trust him and inevitably, someone wants to leap over and lop his head off.

**MAGIC-USER:** '10 Gold Pieces for you if you tell us what's behind these doors.'

**GM:** (Rolls for acceptance.) 'Very well. Yon east door leads to a Goblin's lair. Yon north door leads to a magic passage from which no man has ever returned. Yon west door seals the Room of the Bull.'

The party chatter and opt for the west door as the prospect of battling a bull seems the least dangerous. They pay the man and thank him. After bursting the door open, they are horrified to find a Gorgon inside! They beat a hasty retreat! The GM throws the dice and an encounter takes place—unluckily for them—in which the dwarf who charged the door is turned to stone and must be abandoned. However, the rest escape unhurt.



Trying the east door, they surprise a party of 10 Goblins. The Magic-User sends them all to sleep and is awarded 250 Experience Points. The Fighter slits their throats. They search the bodies and find nothing but a rather old, elegant-looking stick. After applying all sorts of tests to the stick, the Magic-User finally gives up, but puts it in his backpack anyway, suspecting it to be a wand of some sort.

Venturing further down the passage, the Elf checks for secret doors and discovers one after 50ft or so. The party enters but immediately feel themselves 'lost in space' unable to see or feel anything clearly. They eventually come to rest in a large, square chamber. On each of the four walls are three doors. Which do they choose?

**MAGIC-USER:** 'I pull out the stick and wish we were back at the crossroads with the old man!'

**GM:** 'Nothing happens.'

**ELF:** 'I check for secret doors and traps.'

**GM:** 'You find none.'

**FIGHTING MAN:** 'I charge the door in the south-east corner.'

**GM:** 'The door bursts open. The room inside is 30ft square. There is a large chest in the far corner and standing over it is a green dragon.'

**FIGHTING MAN:** 'I slam the door!'

**GM:** (Rolls the dice) 'It does not close.'

**MAGIC-USER:** 'I command the dragon to stay put.'

**GM:** (Noting that the Magic-User is still holding the stick) 'The dragon becomes still and silent.' (Jubilant in the party!)

**FIGHTING MAN:** 'I approach the dragon—very slowly! Does it move?'

**GM:** 'No.'

**FIGHTING MAN:** 'I plunge my sword into its neck.'

**GM:** 'It bleeds dragon blood but does not move.'

**FIGHTING MAN:** 'It eventually drops down dead. You have 450 Experience Points.'

The party rush into the room and open the chest to find 1500 Gold Pieces, 1000 Silver Pieces, a Potion and a Scroll. They are rich beyond their wildest dreams!

But they are also lost in the dungeons of the Ground Goblins.



## EXPERIENCE POINTS

When a party eventually emerges from the dungeons, the members are usually carrying quite a bit of treasure and have been awarded a number of Experience Points. These Experience Points are the real object of the game and these are awarded for killing monsters and emerging with treasure. When players first set off down the dungeons they begin as First Level characters. Every time they play again, including in different dungeon systems, each play must keep the same character, till death they do part. Characters, as they accumulate Experience Points, gradually rise in power, status and ability, to 10th Level Fighting Lords, 16th Level Wizards and 20th Level Patriarchs. These are the highest levels described in the rules, but guidelines are given for determining Experience quotas of even higher levels. Thus there is no limit to the ambitions one may aspire to and the game, as such, never really 'ends.'

The actual rules to D&D are in a constant state of flux. Additional rules are continually being issued in the form of supplementary books, of which 'Greyhawk' and 'Chainmail' are the first two. Other rules can also be incorporated. 'War of the Wizards,' a 2-player battle of sorcerers, is a completely separate game which can quite easily be brought into D&D, and many groups of players have their own 'house rules' which they play within the group.

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## THE SPREAD OF D&D

The rules were copyrighted in 1974 and in the short time since, D&D has become a cult game on both sides of the Atlantic. In this country, enthusiasm is growing rapidly and already one postal game (and you can imagine what a full-time job that must be to gamesmaster!) has got off—or rather, gone under—the ground. Being an American game, though, it has understandably developed further as a hobby in the States, where several postal games are under way and at least one computer-moderated version is being played. In addition, the first Dungeons & Dragons convention was held in late February.

Why is it so popular? Partly because of the theme—Fantasy of Tolkien, Moorcock, Howard and so on. But mainly because of the game itself, being such a free-form system in which players can virtually place themselves in a fantasy setting and make all the decisions that they may make in 'real' life. Yes, we'll be hearing a lot more about D&D in the near future.

FLASH!

Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), the creators of "Dungeons & Dragons" have come out with their very own bimonthly mag—called The Dragon (\$9/year). Write: TSR PERIODICALS P. O. Box 756 Lake Geneva, WI 53147