

# THE STORY OF TSR

1975-1999



My life has truly been a fortunate one, almost a fairy tale existence—which is somehow appropriate for the business I'm in, since running Wizards of the Coast has been a dream job for me. On three occasions in the history of Wizards of the Coast I have been so excited that it verged on euphoria. The first time was when I held in my hands a printed copy of our first product, *The Primal Order*<sup>™</sup>, written by yours truly. The second time was when Richard Garfield described to me the concept of a trading card game, which led to *MAGIC: THE GATHERING*<sup>®</sup>. The third time was when we acquired TSR.



Peter Adkison  
President, Wizards of the Coast

You see, my role in the history of TSR, prior to 1997, was that of a fan. I, quite simply, love the AD&D<sup>®</sup> game. It is one of the most amazing games ever invented. In fact, it's one of the most amazing *things* ever invented. It ranks right up there with the wheel, electricity, computers, and pizza. I met my wife while playing AD&D, and I started Wizards of the Coast initially to produce roleplaying products. So when the opportunity arose to acquire TSR, I jumped at the chance. When the deal was finalized it was one of the greatest days in my life.

I feel very honored to have had this opportunity, and I sincerely hope that in the next twenty-five years we at Wizards of the Coast can produce AD&D products that you will be proud of.

Peter Adkison  
Renton, Washington  
April 1999

# The Wink of an Eye

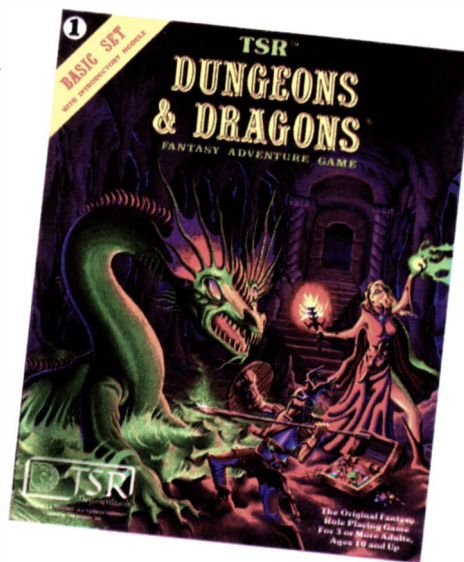
By Gary Gygax

The name DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® is something to conjure with today. Such is its power that it is likely to be recognized nearly anywhere in the world when spoken. That power comes from the fact that it was not merely the first fantasy role-playing game, but it was the first RPG, period. When the D&D® game was published, it was the advent of a new form of game, and its coming gave birth to a whole industry. But you know all about that. Only a few years ago, though, things were different...

In 1972 the name did not exist. Imagine yourself sitting before a small Royal portable typewriter. It is winter. A newly written manuscript of only 50-page length is there. The pages explain how to create a "character," a wholly imaginary game persona whose calling will be that of a "cleric," "fighter," "magic-user," or "thief." How will this be done? By rolling dice, three normal dice, what we now call in the shorthand that has since developed, 3d6. Each roll made is to indicate the relative capacity of the character in six heretofore unheard of "statistics"—Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Dexterity, Constitution, and Charisma. These are "old standards" now, but in 1972 this was a breakthrough. This was a quantum jump from tabletop games with miniatures. Not only was the action of the game to be centered on such characters, but they would grow in power as they successfully progressed through "adventures."

More astonishing, the play was mostly *imagined*, not depicted on a table. The impartial and disinterested role of the "judge" or "referee" typical for a military miniatures tabletop game now expanded considerably. That individual, destined to become known as the "Dungeon Master," had the critical part in the new game. He it was who had to devise the nature of the adventure, impart all of the imaginary details of the environment, and then assume the roles of all active entities that the players' characters encountered therein. Astonishing stuff! But the rules lacked a name.

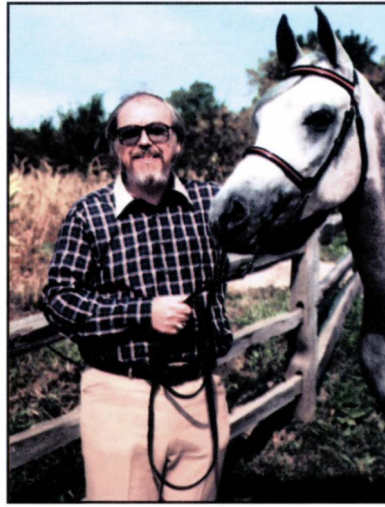
Pondering this problem, I created a list of words, writing them in two columns. Having had some considerable experience in naming games by that time, thinking of potentially "good" names for the new design was not difficult. You can see for yourself some of the "rejected" choices on the covers of the three booklets that eventually came to comprise the finished product, the first edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. That's right—men, magic(al), monsters, treasure, underworld, and wilderness were on the list. So were castles, dragons, dungeons, giants, labyrinths, mazes, sorcery, spells, swords, trolls, and so forth. I cannot recall all the



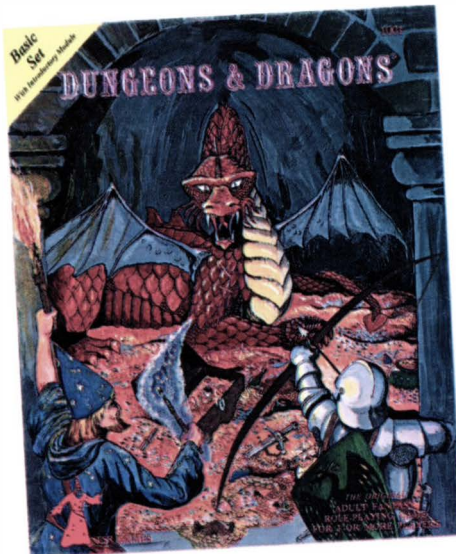
choices, but there were about 15 words in each column. I took a poll of my players (two of whom were my children Ernie and Elise). After reading aloud from the list, there was no doubt. Youngest daughter Cindy's delight at the alliterative pair chosen confirmed my own personal favorite. After all, I had before that time created the "Castle & Crusade" society as a special interest group for the International Federation of Wargaming. It followed that a medieval-based new game should have a similar name, one evocative of its nature.

When the scant manuscript was copied and mailed off to some two dozen or so gaming comrades, mostly IFW members, of course, a few days later, it bore the title, "DUNGEONS & DRAGONS." When 1973 was welcomed in, it is likely that some 200 people had heard of the new game. By the spring of that year I had expanded the manuscript to three times its former size and divided it into three portions. By then it was, in fact, just about the same as the three booklets that were soon to be published. My own experience from intensive Dungeon Mastering, and much feedback from the wildly enthused recipients of the initial draft of the game rules, made creation of the enlarged version a matter of delight, no effort at all.

By then, of course, copies of the copies of the first manuscript



Gary Gygax




were proliferating. I sent out only some 50 copies of the expanded new version of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game manuscript because of time and costs. Letters and even telephone calls requesting that I "Please, please mail me the new stuff," and so on were coming in daily by then. It was apparent to me that the game was destined to be a hit. I was sure most wargamers and even a lot of fantasy and science fiction literature fans would love the new D&D game. (OK, I was

pathetically underestimating the appeal, but nobody is perfect.) One copy was even sent off to what was then the leading game publisher, a company I had long admired, for whom I had written articles and done game design work. They laughed hysterically, I was later informed, then when I telephoned to see if there was interest, they declined.

When through the auspices of the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association I staged GEN CON® in August 1973, one of my D&D game campaign group came to the event for the first time. Don Kaye saw the turnout, noted the interest in the fans there, and after the event was

over asked, "Do you really think you can make a success of a game publishing company?" No need to detail my response. In October Tactical Studies Rules was born, and in December of 1973 the 150-page manuscript went off to Graphic Printing in Lake Geneva. We were in a great hurry to



get it done, and I was concerned about editing. The printer assured us that the work would be corrected as it was typeset—the retyping on an IBM typewriter of my draft—for burning of printing plates. Hah! The work was copied faithfully, so the errors were and are all there, just as they appeared in my original draft. Ah, well. At least it was finally in print!

The first sale of a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game was made late in January 1974. Thus, 1999 is the Silver Anniversary, the 25<sup>th</sup> year after the publication of the game. By the summer of 1974 we had sold some 500 copies. Amazing! Counting all of the illicit photocopies that were floating around, and the players who didn't own their own set, it is a safe bet that no fewer than 10,000 persons then knew of and were enthralled by the D&D game. Before the end of the year we had to reprint, and this time we ordered 2,000 copies. There was no doubt anywhere now. The game was a success. Little did we know how great a success it was to be.

Before publication, in 1972 and 1973, people looked blank, or perhaps a little askance, when hearing about the D&D game. Its name was odd-sounding to most, and the concept of a game without player opponents, one that had no winner, lacking a conclusion, was so new, literally unheard of, that many simply could not comprehend it. Imagine, if you will, attempting to find new “converts”—then, as now, the true enthusiast is always seeking to add fellows to the “ranks”—and having to explain roleplaying from the most basic concepts on up. Even with thousands and thousands of dedicated players actively out doing just that, and by 1975 that was the case, it was daunting. Still, we managed. My own gaming group was but a handful in 1972. In 1973 it had grown to a dozen. When the D&D game was actually published, the number of people showing up for one of the several weekly sessions in the basement of my house was often in excess of 20. To accommodate all those eager RPGers, I made Rob Kuntz co-DM of my “Castle Greyhawk” campaign. We merged our dungeons and worked both as a team to manage huge groups of player characters adventuring simultaneously and also ran several separate sessions each week with “only” a dozen or so players in each.

Through the power of the game, the burning enthusiasm it engendered, this sort of thing occurred all over the U.S., Canada, and then beyond. England and other English-speaking places discovered the D&D game; then those able to manage the language even though it was not their native tongue were playing. Just two years after its release, when only about 10,000 copies had been sold, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game had a following on at least three continents. In due course it went on to gain a million or more fans, as the game was translated into many languages.

The fact is, this game is unique. It is the first roleplaying game, the original fantasy RPG, and more. The D&D game has the “nuts & bolts” from which all roleplaying games coming after drew in some measure to develop different approaches to the new game form. Beyond that, it is in and of itself special. This little game is a marvel in that it touches some primal chord in so many persons. It resonates with the mythic, strikes deep into the subconscious where the heroic dwells. This is a basic and uncomplicated roleplaying game. It has little structure, few rules, but unlimited horizons. It offers such vistas of fantasy as were never beheld before it came into being. Welcome to the “new” multiverse that the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game offers.

Is it still viable? Of course! Despite being around for a quarter of a century and more, it is *new*. Considering that much of the stuff upon which it is actually based is older than mankind's recorded history, that being the hero and the mythic quest, this “old” game is barely an infant. Indeed, it has such power that despite it being in competition with more detailed, complex, and better supported fantasy RPGs published by its own company and those from competing game publishers too, there is still a considerable following who play the D&D game in its largely original form. That this is the case after all these years, and seeing that this set has not been available for so many years, it is remarkable in the extreme.

Time marches on. The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game does not stand still, it moves ahead as well. The game form and the genre are so absolutely compelling as to *demand* change as well as honoring tradition. Without placing a value judgment, consider that the advent of the

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game brought vast numbers of new roleplaying enthusiasts onto the gaming hobby. "Advanced" is an apt term, for the new game did further many of the base concepts of the D&D game while adding much and detailing a vast amount of new information so as to expand the realms of fantasy yet further. What innovations lie in the future? I cannot say, but as with all lovers of this game, I am certainly looking forward to them with eager anticipation. So many possibilities, so much to explore, endless adventures ahead. . . .

Meantime, I think I will step back a moment. Even though it seems like yesterday, the blink of an eye, it *has* been a long time since I played a real D&D game. It is so easy to roll up a few characters, my players won't mind, and what DM worthy of the name can't "wing" an adventure as he was meant to by these rules? So, I leave you to your own devices. Pardon me, but I think I need to get in some gaming.

Gary Gygax  
Lake Geneva, Wisconsin  
March 1999





# Twenty-Five Years of TSR



**1966** Gary Gygax and several other wargamers, all frustrated by the shortage of commercial wargames on the market, formed the International Federation of Wargamers to promote the publishing of new wargames.

**1969** A company called Guidon Games published a set of rules for recreating medieval battles in miniature. The rules, titled *Chainmail™*, were written by Gary Gygax and Jeff Perren. Besides the usual battle rules, they included a subset of rules in which each miniature figure represented just one man. This by itself was not a new concept, but its presence in *Chainmail* would become important in a few years.

**1970** In Minneapolis, Dave Arneson devised a battle scenario in which a group of medieval adventurers had to sneak inside a besieged castle through the sewers and

open the gates. The raiders entered the dungeons expecting to find human guards, but instead they met fantastic monsters, including a dragon made from a plastic brontosaurus body with a clay head. The game was very popular.

**1971** Back in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, GEN CON 4 was devoted almost exclusively to the hottest new game on the market, *Panzerblitz*, from the Avalon Hill Game Company. A small, unnoticed event also took place. Dave Arneson brought along his castle sewer game. One of the players was Gary Gygax.

Gygax had already developed supplemental rules adding elves, dwarves, wizards, monsters, and other fantasy elements to the *Chainmail* rules. But he saw potential in Arneson's game that went beyond what either of them had so far done separately. Gygax suggested that they collaborate to create a new set of rules specifically for fantastic adventures. They called it *The Fantasy Game*.



**1972** Guidon Games published Gygax's updated version of *Chainmail* containing the fantasy supplement. At the same time, Gygax tried to sell *The Fantasy Game* to an assortment of game publishers, but no one wanted it.

**1973** Gygax was determined to make a living as a game designer, so he quit his job as an insurance salesman. Designing games was not very lucrative, however, so he repaired shoes in his basement to supplement his family's income.

In October, Gary Gygax and Don Kaye formed a partnership to publish a game. Kaye put up \$1,000 to cover costs and Gary wrote the rules: *Cavaliers and Roundheads*, a miniatures game of the English Civil War. The partnership called itself Tactical Studies Rules, after the name of the local gaming club—the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association.



**1974** Brian Blume, a man whom Gary met at GEN CON the previous year, became the third partner in the company. He brought with him the financing to publish the first thousand copies of *The Fantasy Game*, newly renamed the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* Game.



Brian Blume

For the first year the company operated out of Don Kaye's dining room and front porch at 542 Sage Street in Lake Geneva. The game was assembled by hand in a generic box with labels stuck to the top and sides. In one year, the entire print run of 1,000 sold out.

**1975** In January, Don Kaye, age 37, suffered a fatal heart attack. Kaye left his share of Tactical Studies Rules to his wife, but she was not interested in the gaming business. Gygax, Blume, and Kaye's widow dissolved the partnership. By mid-year, Tactical Studies Rules was no more. The company had lasted less than two years. Gary and Brian then pooled their resources to incorporate and form a company called TSR Hobbies Inc. in July 1975. Gary was the only paid employee, earning \$85 per week.

The new company moved its offices to the basement and dining room of Gary's house at 330 Center Street. It immediately began publishing a gaming newsletter called *The Strategic Review*.

The first game product published under the TSR Hobbies lizardman logo was *Empire of the Petal Throne* by Professor M.A.R. Barker. The game was rich in culture and color and featured the art of one of Barker's students, David C. Sutherland. EPT, as it was called, was a tremendous leap forward in material quality, with beautiful color maps and a comb-



bound book all printed on quality paper. It sold for the outrageous price of \$25 at a time when most games retailed for \$5 to \$10. In spite of the high price tag, the first print run sold out quickly.

This success was followed by two supplements to the D&D game, *GREYHAWK*® and *BLACKMOOR*®, and a third roleplaying game set in the Wild West, the *BOOT HILL*® game.

Meanwhile, TSR Hobbies continued producing rules for miniatures games and also published the *DUNGEON!*® board game, a family game that captured the basic elements of the D&D® game.

The company also hired its first nonpartner employees: Rob and Terry Kuntz, Tim Kask, and Dave Meggary.

**1976** The Dungeon Hobby Shop opened in a gray house on the southeast corner of Williams and Broad Streets in Lake Geneva. The back rooms and second floor became the company offices.



Former *Dungeon Hobby Shop*

Several more employees were hired as game designers and artists, and their names would become synonymous with TSR Hobbies in those early years—Dave Arneson, Mike Carr, and David Sutherland.

*The Strategic Review* newsletter was discontinued in June, having lasted seven issues. It was replaced with *The DRAGON*<sup>®</sup>, the first professional magazine devoted to fantasy and science fiction gaming. The same year saw the first publication of *Little Wars*, a magazine devoted to military miniature gaming.

August saw another milestone when TSR Hobbies hosted the GEN CON game fair for the first time. The very first DUNGEONS & DRAGONS open tournament was held, starting a tradition that has continued unbroken ever since.

Many new games, mostly miniatures rules, were published in 1976. (One of these was *Little Bighorn*, a wargame about Custer's Last Stand. Quite a fuss stirred up at the GEN CON game fair when three companies showed up with brand-new wargames about this battle, two of them featuring the same painting on their covers.)

But the real news was in the roleplaying end of the business. The company's growing legion of fans was thrilled to see D&D supplements 3 and 4—*Eldritch Wizardry* and *Gods, Demigods, and Heroes*—and the *Metamorphosis Alpha* game, the first-ever science-fantasy roleplaying game, by James M. Ward.

**1977** The original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game had been written for a college-age consumer. Even gamers with ten to twelve years of schooling behind them sometimes had trouble figuring out the unusual, vague, and often contradictory rules in the early editions. Making matters worse, the game's increasing popularity meant that it was attracting players at younger ages. A fan of the game who was also a teacher, J. Eric Holmes, rewrote the rule books with an eye toward making the game easier to learn and play.

The first D&D Basic Set displayed a ferocious dragon on a color box cover. Though the rulebook still was not a model of clarity, it was a tremendous step forward for a growing, hungry market.



The people playing the game wanted more monsters, so TSR Hobbies published the *Monster Manual*, with over 350 monsters to challenge players. *Monster Manual* was the first hardbound book ever published by a hobby game company and was an instant success.

TSR Hobbies also introduced the first playing aids for the D&D game in 1977. *Dungeon Geomorphs* were modular dungeon and cavern maps



Kevin Blume

that could be arranged in countless ways to help the DM create dungeons faster. *Monster and Treasure Assortments* were filled with pre-generated monster encounters and treasures, also to reduce the

time a Dungeon Master had to spend preparing a dungeon for players.

The company logo switched from a lizard man holding a halberd to a wizard brandishing a wand (from "the game lizard" to "the game wizard").

As the business grew, Gary and Brian realized that they needed someone with more business background to manage the day-to-day affairs of the business. Brian's brother, Kevin, joined TSR Hobbies as head of the financial department.

**1978** Sales doubled, and doubled again, driven by the unimagined success of the D&D Basic Set and of roleplaying games in general. The size of the staff also doubled. The

company decided to break with its past and concentrate all effort on roleplaying and board games; miniature game rules and *Little Wars* magazine were discontinued.

Enormous developments occurred for the D&D game. A new version of the game was released, the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS rules. The D&D rules were simple and open-ended and often required a referee to create his own rule to fill a gap. The AD&D rules were comprehensive and detailed and included rules to cover most common situations. The first product released in this new series was the *Players Handbook*. It provided all the rules for creating heroes and huge lists of spells for clerics and magic-users.

A second new product category was the published adventure module. Up to this time, referees had to create their own dungeons following the examples in the rules. But in 1978, TSR Hobbies published a series of six adventures that had been used as tournaments at the Origins and GEN CON game fairs.

By the end of the year, the little, gray house on Broad Street was too small to hold the rapidly growing company, so the operation moved several blocks to downtown Lake Geneva into the Hotel Clair building on the corner of Broad and Main. The street level was turned into The Dungeon Hobby Shop and the basement served as the shipping department and warehouse. The old gray house was turned over to *The DRAGON* and became its staff offices.



Hotel Clair Building

**1979** By 1979, the founders of TSR Hobbies were completely occupied with running the business and no longer had time to create enough new products to meet the customers' ever-growing demand. The solution was to hire a full staff of game designers and developers. Old plaster and debris was cleared from the second and third floors above the Dungeon Hobby Shop and new offices built to accommodate this staff.

The second AD&D manual was published. The *Dungeon Masters Guide* was especially for the game referee.

While demand for the book was high, supply was frustratingly low as a result of problems caused by the printer. Every book in the first print run of 40,000 copies had 16 pages from the *Monster Manual* mistakenly bound in. The entire run had to be recalled and reassembled. Half of the second run of 40,000 copies was ruined by a loose wire on the boxing machine that cut a deep gash on the cover of every other book. This print run was also recalled so the good books could be sorted out and shipped while the scarred covers were replaced. As a result of this shortage of supply, demand for the book went through the roof.

Other products of note included an adventure titled *Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan*, which introduced many features and formats; character record sheets; a referee's screen; and the colorful, award-winning, fantasy board game *Divine Right*.

But of all the things that happened in 1979, the event that was destined to have the greatest impact on TSR Hobbies took place completely outside the company. A young college student from Lansing, Michigan, named James Dallas Egbert III disappeared without a trace. Egbert was a frequent D&D player. A detective investigating the case speculated that Egbert and several other students had created a live-action version of the D&D game that they played in utility tunnels beneath the campus. He suggested that Egbert had been inadvertently killed by the heat when steam

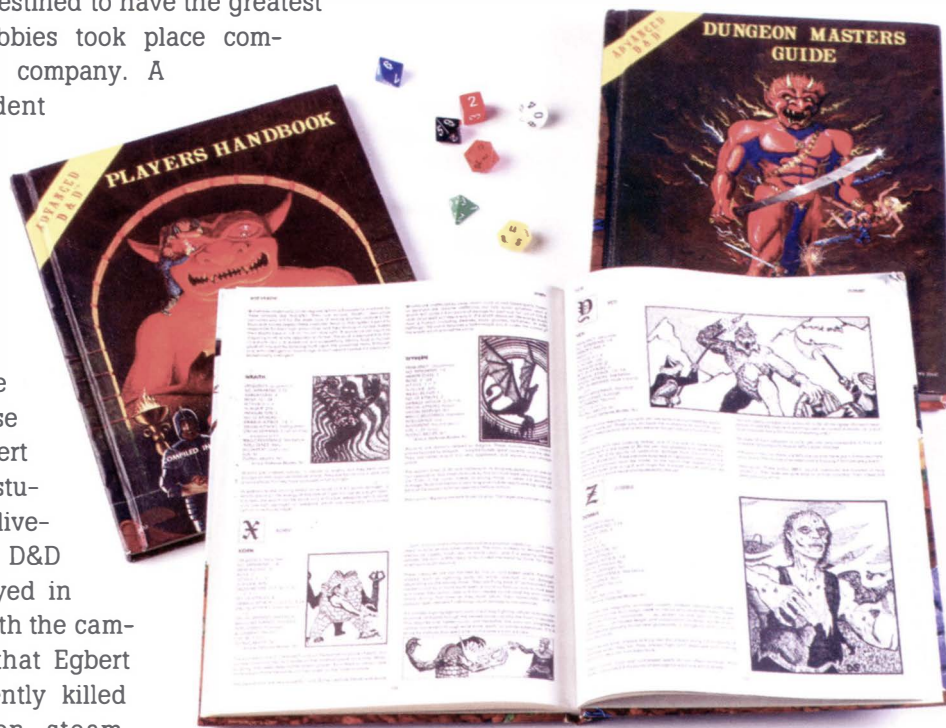
rushed through pipes in the tunnel. In fact, Egbert turned up a short time later, alive and healthy. He had left the campus without telling anyone and gone to stay with a friend; the D&D game had nothing whatsoever to do with the incident. Egbert's return, however, was not as widely reported as his disappearance. Undoubtedly there are people who still believe that he died in the steam tunnels.

The notoriety of the case brought the D&D game to the public's attention. Astounded news reporters wrote and aired hundreds of feature stories on the gaming craze no one had heard about. Sales skyrocketed as many mass-market chains began selling D&D rulebooks and gaming accessories to a suddenly expanding market.

Morley the Wizard, the company mascot, made his first appearance in radio ads for the GEN CON game fair.

By the end of 1979, TSR Hobbies employed more than 100 people and was once again looking for additional office and warehouse space.

**1980** With sales still spiraling upward and no end in sight, TSR Hobbies leased a warehouse and office complex on the north side of Lake Geneva. Among other things, it housed the company's new print shop and typesetting department.



In an effort to improve its image as a professional company, TSR Hobbies



changed its logo to that of a wizard's face beside a cursive "TSR." Unfortunately, the new logo upset some people, who believed it to be an occult, man-in-the-moon symbol (the same problem has afflicted both Procter & Gamble and companies that manufacture clocks with moon faces).

The D&D game became a favorite among military personnel, and American servicemen stationed abroad introduced it to many countries. In an effort to meet growing demand for the game worldwide, a branch company, TSR Ltd., was formed in England.

The quality of roleplaying products continued to improve with the first fantasy world for the AD&D game, the World of GREYHAWK® setting.

TSR Hobbies also introduced another genre for roleplaying by publishing the TOP SECRET® espionage game. In the summer of 1980, FBI agents contacted TSR Hobbies. The Bureau was investigating rumors of an assassination plot regarding a "Mr. Jones" in Tel Aviv. A Lake Geneva resident had found a note concerning the assassination on TSR stationery and turned it over to the local police, who passed it up the line. The note had been written as part of a TOP SECRET playtest.

Also in 1980, TSR Hobbies formed the ROLE PLAYING GAME ASSOCIATION™ (RPGA®) to promote quality roleplaying and to unite gamers across the nation.

**1981** TSR Hobbies added a mainframe computer, and all authors and editors switched from typewriters to computer terminals, making TSR one of the first game publishers to become completely computerized.

Sales continued climbing as TSR products found their way into more mass-market stores. TSR was listed in *Inc.* magazine as one of the 100 fastest-growing, privately held companies in the U.S. At this stage the company employed over 200 people and it was bursting at the seams. A former medical supply building with attached warehouse next door to the new offices was acquired. In the summer, ground was broken for a new warehouse attached to the new building, and the old warehouse was converted to office space.

The RPGA published the first edition of POLYHEDRON® Newszine, a 16-page, black-and-white newsletter for members.

**1982** With sales doubled yet again(!) and breaking the \$20,000,000 mark, TSR introduced two new roleplaying games—the GANGBUSTERS® game of the roaring '20s and the STAR FRONTIERS® science fiction game.

The D&D game continued growing around the world. Exclusive distributors were established in 22 countries, but the game was only available in English. The first translation of the game was into French. Three separate translations were completed, one by a computer company, a second by a French exchange student, and the third by a French gamer. Finally, an amalgam of all three translations was released. Many other



*Burlington Warehouse*



translations followed: Danish, Finnish, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Swedish, and more. Eventually, TSR products would be translated into more than 16 languages in 30 countries.

Over the years, TSR had received hundreds of letters from teachers, parents, and students testifying how playing the AD&D game had improved people's performance in school. In response to these letters, TSR Hobbies formed an Educational Department to develop curriculum programs for reading, math, history, and problem-solving. Its greatest success came with the release of the *ENDLESS QUEST*® book series, which allowed the reader to make choices that affected the outcome of the story and the fate of the hero. In only two years, TSR Hobbies led the field in multiple-plot books, with a total of 36 books in the series.

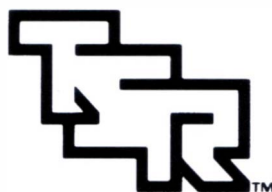
By year's end, the company employed more than 350 people.

As a philanthropic gesture toward the city, TSR funded a salvage operation for *Lucius Newberry*, a 115-foot passenger steamship that sank on Lake Geneva in 1891. Unfortunately, very little was found other than the ship's badly corroded boiler, and no artifacts were ever put on display.

**1983** This was a watershed year for TSR, both good and bad.

Seeking to diversify, TSR Hobbies acquired or started up several new business ventures: a needlecraft business (Greenfield Needle Women), miniatures manufacturing, toy and gift ventures, and an entertainment division tasked with pursuing motion picture and television opportunities.

The company also acquired the rights to all of the trademarks and copyrights of SPI (Simulations Publications Inc.), the most prolific publisher of wargames, and to *AMAZING*® *Stories* magazine, the world's oldest science fiction magazine. Over the coming years TSR would eventually publish dozens of wargames under the SPI brand, along



TSR Hobbies, Inc.

with the magazine *Strategy & Tactics*. Although sales of wargames always seemed to fall short of corporate expectations, the line was popular internally; it gave designers and editors with historical interests an outlet for nonfantasy designs.

In recognition of all this expansion, the company's stockholders elected to change the name to TSR, Inc., and the logo was changed to three

block letters with no attendant art.

The biggest triumph in 1983 for TSR, Inc. was the release of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* cartoon TV series on September 17th. This cartoon series spawned over a hundred different licenses and led its time slot for two years before moving into syndication.

Even as licenses and games were booming, however, TSR, Inc. was suffering financially from the failure of many of its new business ventures. While licensing was successful, TSR's own attempts to manufacture toys, miniatures, and needlecraft kits resulted in a multimillion dollar loss.

By summer, the company's financial situation was so bleak that the only way to prevent bankruptcy was to massively reduce the payroll. The corporate staff of approximately 300 was reduced by 15% in a single day. Three whole divisions were shut down, but none of the laid-off workers came from the research and development division. While the game designers and editors were reassured that their jobs were safe, there were also warnings that those layoffs might not be the last.

Indeed, before the year was out, a second round of layoffs trimmed the company by another 35% and reduced it to less than 150 workers in only five divisions. No department was spared in the second cut, including R&D.

was ambitious from the start, but no one foresaw that it would grow into the enormous line of novels, game products, calendars, computer games, and art books that it eventually became, with millions of fans. The *DRAGONLANCE* saga made TSR the #1 publisher of fantasy and science fiction novels in the nation.

This year also saw TSR signing license agreements to publish the *MARVEL SUPER HEROES*® game, *THE ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES*™ game, and the *CONAN*™ game.

April 4th, 1984—"A Day that will Live in Infamy." In spite of all this success, debt mounted, and the company was compelled to lay off even more workers. The staff was reduced again by 35% over two more layoffs. The number of remaining employees dropped to less than 100 as a result of layoffs and other departures. All remaining employees were required to accept a 5% pay deferment until the crisis had passed.

The shock to employee morale of these layoffs, coming in what seemed to be a banner year, was almost worse than the first two layoffs in 1983. The once merry halls of TSR were somber, and the office buildings that were designed to house 300 workers seemed desolate and empty.

A small group of ex-TSR designers and editors—some who had been laid off, some who resigned—formed a new company, Pacesetter Games, in nearby Delavan, Wisconsin. Pacesetter would last for several years and publish such games as *Chill*, *Star Ace*, and *Wabbit Wampage*.

**1984** After two years of development by a dozen creative staff members, TSR released the *DRAGONLANCE*® saga. The story focused on the different dragons of the AD&D game, as dragons were one of the most popular elements of the game. But the real centerpiece was the cast of heroes who set out to save their world. The plan

**1985** The biggest seller of 1985 was a new hardbound book, *Oriental Adventures*, written by Dave Cook with Gary Gygax.

TSR also tried its hand for the first time with four mass-market board games. The walk-away



winner of the four was the *All My Children*<sup>™</sup> game based on the #1 ABC daytime drama; over 150,000 copies were sold.

The GEN CON Game Fair, seriously in need of more space, moved to downtown Milwaukee.

**1986** Looking for a way to feed the ravenous demand for short adventures on a timely basis, TSR introduced *DUNGEON*<sup>®</sup> *Adventures*, an all-adventure bimonthly magazine.

A new investor, Lorraine Williams, granddaughter of the man who introduced the world to Buck Rogers, joined the company. Late in the year, Kevin and Brian Blume agreed to sell their stock in the financially troubled company to her. By the end of the year, even Gary Gygax had sold his interest in TSR, Inc., with an eye toward starting a new company.

**1987** In its first year, TSR's new management eliminated all of the company's back debt and posted a profit of over a million dollars. The recovery was under way.

The biggest news for fans was the release of the immense *FORGOTTEN REALMS*<sup>®</sup> campaign setting. It was based on material published in *DRAGON*<sup>®</sup> *Magazine* by a Canadian DM, Ed Greenwood. The Realms setting was an instant hit, and FR's success launched the product development department in a new direction.

A small team of designers and editors also began working on a project that had been speculated about for years: the second edition of the AD&D game. It was the most massive, coordinated task ever undertaken to that point, and it would take almost two years to complete.

**1988** The announcement that TSR was working on AD&D 2nd Edition created a stir throughout the hobby: pessimists predicted the end of roleplaying, optimists predicted a golden age.



TSR also decided to venture into the world of whimsy with the release of the tongue-in-cheek *BULLWINKLE AND ROCKY*<sup>™</sup> game. It was the first (and still the only!) roleplaying game to feature a spinner and hand puppets.

TSR surprised most of the industry by publishing one of the best-selling wargames of all time—*THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER*<sup>™</sup>, based on the best-selling novel by Tom Clancy.

Internally, TSR reorganized the product development division by forming product groups, each one responsible for only a few related product lines. Teams of designers, editors, graphic artists, and marketers were charged not only with overseeing the daily production concerns of their lines but also with managing long-range planning and growth.



Lorraine Williams



For the first time ever, the GEN CON game fair joined forces with its major competitor, Origins, to create the largest U.S. gaming event of the decade.

**1989** The biggest event of the year was the long-awaited release of the AD&D 2nd Edition products. The prepublication promotion was intense, and retailers ordered up to ten times their normal allotment of a new product. Even so, when the product arrived on the shelf on Friday, shelves were bare by Monday.

The AD&D 2nd Edition releases included the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, *Player's Handbook*, *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®* Volumes 1, 2, and 3, *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*, and *The Complete Thief's Handbook*.

AD&D 2nd Edition launched itself into space shortly afterward with the introduction of the *SPELLJAMMER®* space fantasy supplement.

The RPGA network expanded into a truly international organization with branches in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the U.K., Israel, and Australia. Rather than declining with the departure of Origins, attendance at the GEN CON game fair increased by 11%.

**1990** The momentum that started with the release of AD&D 2nd Edition continued with the publication of the *RAVENLOFT®* campaign setting. The gothic horror of Ravenloft was considered a risky venture, but Count Strahd von Zarovich became one of the most popular and enduring villains of the AD&D game.

TSR also reawakened Buck Rogers in the XXVc: *BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY™* game. Buck faced a grim future in which Earth was dominated by the Russo-American mercantile conglomerate of Mars. For the first time in three years, TSR released a *DRAGONLANCE* calendar. It sold out within a month of its release and was one of the top ten calendars for the year.

With an eye toward diversity, the company opened a West Coast division to develop entertainment projects and a series of science fiction, horror, and action/adventure comic books. The five comic titles introduced in 1990 were *Agent 13*, *Buck Rogers*, *Intruder*, *R.I.P.*, and *Warhawks*. Each comic included a small, playable mini-game in the back that reflected some aspect of the issue's story.

**1991** Game fans were introduced to the savage world of Athas through the *DARK SUN®* campaign setting. And in a bold move, TSR launched a new version of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game aimed specifically at complete beginners. It was by far the easiest to learn introduction to roleplaying games ever published. At last, new players had a simple introduction to



roleplaying that didn't frighten them. Soon the entire hobby was reaping the benefits of TSR's investment in the future of gaming, as new players were attracted into the adventure gaming market.

TSR also entered the collector card market with the first of three annual sets of collectible cards featuring the fantastic art of TSR's illustrators.

Along with a new image for the D&D game came a new logo for TSR: the golden "ingot" logo, printed in foil.

**1992** Good fortune and great sales continued for TSR, Inc., with emphasis on the D&D game and new players. But there was something new for the experienced player, too, in the *AL-QADIM®* game line. The first AQ product, *Arabian Adventures*, set a new graphics standard for the industry that would not be topped for years, and also demonstrated once again just how versatile and sophisticated the AD&D rules can be.

The book department published the first hardcover, game-related novel. *Legacy*, by Bob Salvatore, leaped to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list within weeks of its release and hung on for months.

Topping everything off, TSR began rebuilding its offices and also broke ground on an addition that would double the size of the warehouse. The HP mainframe computer, which was used by all departments for all purposes since 1981, was replaced for word processing by a network of personal computers.

The GEN CON Game Fair once again combined with Origins and broke all previous attendance records for any U.S. gaming convention; over 18,000 people attended. Only the game fair in Essen, Germany, which draws 100,000 attendees, was bigger.



the MAGIC: THE GATHERING game from Wizards of the Coast. TSR was the first to respond with SPELLFIRE®: *Master the Magic*, a trading card game featuring the well-known names and settings of the AD&D game. While SPELLFIRE developed a loyal following, MAGIC's supremacy in the trading card field was as strong as AD&D's in roleplaying, and no competitor would ever truly threaten it.

TSR also turned heads with the publication of the PLANESCAPE® campaign setting. This graphics- and attitude-heavy world shattered any misconceptions that TSR was stuck in a 1980s rut. The enigmatic Lady of Pain's blade-wreathed face could be found everywhere.

Face-to-face roleplaying entered the digital age when TSR began including an audio compact disc in selected products. The versatility of the audio CD meshed well with the free-form structure of a roleplaying game.

**1993** A year of renewal: The FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign set received a new look, the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM products were repackaged as the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™*, and Buck Rogers returned in the *HIGH ADVENTURE™ Cliffhangers* game.

TSR tried a new approach to the problem of introducing players to roleplaying in the DRAGONSTRIKE® game. The basic concepts of roleplaying are difficult to explain but easy to demonstrate, which is exactly what the DRAGONSTRIKE game did in a revolutionary, 30-minute video tape.

**1994** Almost overnight, trading card games became a phenomenon that reached the level of mania, surpassing even *Trivial Pursuit* at its height. Every game publisher felt the effect of the stupendous success of

**1995** On its face, 1995 seemed to be another banner year for TSR. Achievements were many: new versions of the *Player's Handbook* and *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*, the *BLOOD WARS®* card game, *PLAYER'S OPTION®* and *DUNGEON MASTER®* Option rule books for the AD&D game, the ground-breaking *BIRTHRIGHT®* campaign setting, and the *DRAGON DICE®* game.

The most significant item on that list is the *DRAGON DICE* game. In an effort to compete with the still-mushrooming card game frenzy, TSR developed a collectible



dice game. A tremendous amount of money and effort was invested in developing this product, and the cost of manufacturing was staggering.

Initial sales indicated that the expense was well justified. Games flew off the shelves. Dice manufacturers could not ship dice across the Pacific Ocean fast enough to keep up with demand.

**1996** Buoyed by the tremendous success of the DRAGON DICE debut, orders were placed for additional sets. The timing turned out to be catastrophic. Shortly after orders were placed, the market topped out. Sales hit the ceiling and leveled out. Demand for DRAGON DICE basic sets dwindled to a trickle. Shiploads of new dice were already on their way, with no buyers lining up to take them.

At the same time, TSR's largest distributor and creditor fell on hard times of its own. Loans were due, games were piling up, the industry had been irrevocably altered by trading card games, and sales of traditional roleplaying products were down across the board.

Even as its fortunes were failing, TSR could still hit critical, if not commercial, gold with prod-

ucts such as the DRAGONLANCE® FIFTH AGE® role-playing game.

In December, layoffs again wracked the company, hitting every department and every division. The buildings and the entire assembly division were sold to reduce debt. The buildings were leased back and, for the time being at least, work continued as usual.

**1997** This was the most traumatic year in TSR's history. Crippled by distribution problems, assailed by creditors, TSR ceased publication entirely in January. Staff members continued their daily work, writing, editing, illustrating, and typesetting new products, but nothing was printed. The only constant feature was uncertainty. Rumors that the company was being sold were rampant. Rumors that the company had been sold were common.

In April, it became widely known that serious negotiations were underway with Wizards of the Coast, publishers of the MAGIC: THE GATHERING trading card game. Wizards had surpassed TSR as the largest company in the industry in 1995. In June, the deal was official—TSR, Inc., the grand old wizard of the adventure gaming industry, had



*TSR's Remaining Staff Gathers at the Sheridan Springs Office*



*TSR's New Home: The Wizards of the Coast Corporate Office*

been sold to the new kid on the block, Wizards of the Coast, headquartered in Renton, Washington. New money and new life flooded into the Lake Geneva office. Stockpiled manuscripts were shipped to printers. The GEN CON game fair, which looked as if it might be canceled for the first time in 30 years, went off smoothly.

When the convention was over, the Lake Geneva offices slowly emptied out. The operation was moved to Renton, along with most of the TSR staff. It was an exciting, busy time filled with mass moves, apartment hunting, acclimating to new offices and a new, much larger city, and to a new corporate environment. It was a sad time, too, signaling the end of one era and the beginning of another.

**1998** In its 24th year, TSR was born again. It rose from the ashes of its own immolation and stretched its wings anew.

The R&D department was settled into its new offices in Renton and ready to show the industry again what it could do. Exciting new products like the ALTERNITY® sciencefiction roleplaying game and STAR\*DRIVE® setting, the *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* AD&D adventure, and the MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ Adventure Game using the SAGA® roleplaying system were significant departures from established AD&D formulas.



**1999** Twenty-five years had passed since a small group of fledgling business partners published the very first edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game using money from a cashed-in life insurance policy. How could anyone have known that their effort would spawn a multimillion-dollar industry, launch dozens of other companies, and

inspire millions of people worldwide to pick up imaginary swords and embark on countless careers of heroic adventure? It was a real-life adventure from beginning to end.



# Gen Con® Game Fair



*The TSR Castle, GEN CON*

GEN CON got its start in 1967, when a group of wargaming friends and acquaintances from Milwaukee and Chicago got together informally and played games for an entire weekend. They had so much fun, they decided they should organize their get-together as a real convention and invite fellow gamers from all over.

The very first official GEN CON was held in 1968, even before there was a TSR. (The name GEN CON was an acronym for "Geneva Convention." It was chosen both because that's where the gathering was held and as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the famous international agreement regarding the treatment of wounded soldiers and prisoners of war.)

The site was Horticultural Hall at 330 Broad Street in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The convention was hosted by the local game club, the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association. About 100 people attended. The only events were historical wargames, because that was the extent of the adventure gaming hobby at the time.

The convention was a success and continued growing annually. The site bounced around between Horticultural Hall, the American Legion Hall

in Lake Geneva, and the George Williams College campus in Williams Bay.

By 1976, attendance had risen (slowly) to 300. That was the year when three-year-old TSR Hobbies, Inc. took over as host. Fueled by the popularity of the D&D game, GEN CON started on a rocketship rise in attendance that hasn't slacked off since.

In 1977, the growing con moved to the Lake Geneva Playboy Resort. That drew over 1,000 fans, forcing another move. In 1978, GEN CON settled on the University of Wisconsin—Parkside campus. In spite of the site's flaws (the dealer's area was a sweltering gymnasium, the buildings were maze-like, and some events were located 2½ miles away at Gateway Technical Institute), Parkside was a green and pleasant spot to spend a weekend. The convention stayed there for seven years.

By 1985, however, the convention had outgrown even the UW—Parkside campus. About 3,500 people attended the convention in 1984, and over 4,000 were expected for the coming year.

TSR took a big step and moved GEN CON to Milwaukee's MECCA (Milwaukee Exposition Center and Convention Arena). For a few years, the con

seemed dwarfed by its surroundings. It used only two side halls the first year, sharing the center with a floral industry convention.

In 1988, GEN CON combined with Origins, the second biggest game convention in the U.S. Attendance soared from about 6,500 in '87 to over 10,000.

And the convention kept growing, year after year. In 1992, when GEN CON combined with Origins for the second time, everyone thought that 18,000 had to be the ceiling; but by 1994, even that astounding record was surpassed by almost 40 percent, when 25,000 people flocked to Milwaukee!

In 1997, TSR's financial crisis triggered grave concerns among fans whether the convention would be held at all. But it went on as usual. To celebrate all the changes and renewed life at TSR, the show even had a free open-air concert in the street, featuring the band The Violent Femmes.

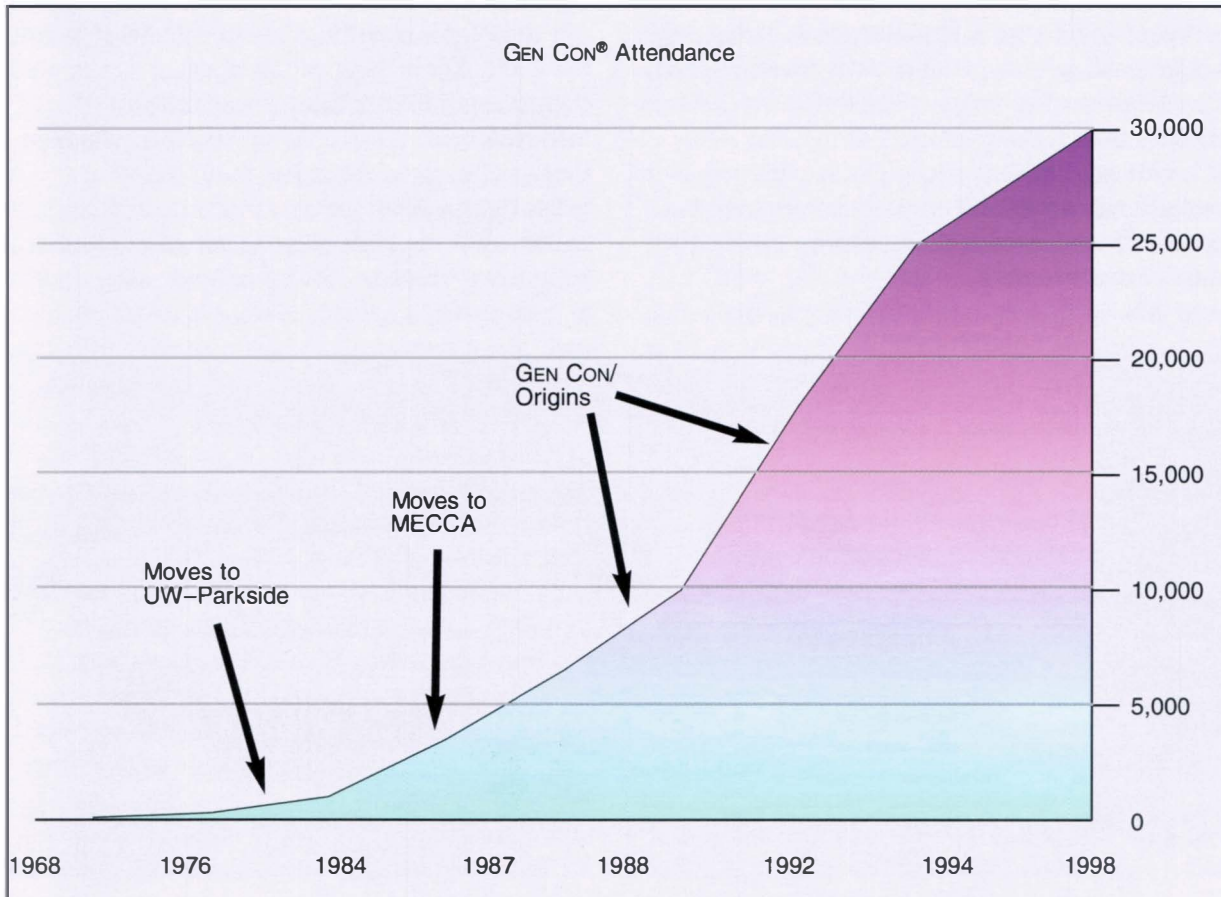
As soon as the doors closed on 1997's show, workmen began tearing apart the old MECCA and building a new, larger facility next door. It was finished just in time for the 1998 GEN CON, and once again attendees had elbow room. The show



*Games in Session*

expanded from two floors to three, the dealer's hall nearly doubled in floor space, and plenty of tables and chairs were available for open gaming. Continuing the tradition established the year before, conventiongoers were treated to a street performance by They Might Be Giants.

Only the Game Fair in Essen, Germany, draws more dedicated gamers than the GEN CON game fair. And if GEN CON continues growing, even that could change.



# Reminiscences

**Kim Mohan**, Longtime Editor

The sight of bare feet and the smell of burning pipe tobacco.

Those are my earliest memories of TSR Hobbies—more specifically, the house at 723 Williams Street that was otherwise known as the TSR Periodicals World Headquarters.

I had heard from a friend of mine that a small company in Lake Geneva was involved in publishing a magazine. I was, as they say, between jobs at the time, having decided that the pressure of daily deadlines in the newspaper business was not for me anymore. So I decided to look into this TSR place.

In July 1979, on a Friday (might have been the 13th), I knocked lightly on the door and let myself in. The first thing I smelled was the smoke. The first thing I noticed that I wasn't really prepared for was the bare feet.

Tim Kask, editor of *The Dragon*, was stretched out in a high-backed desk chair, puffing on a pipe with a curved stem. His feet, sans sandals, were propped up on the corner of his desk. Picture a halfling who's 5-foot-9 and goes about 230 pounds, and you've got him pretty well pegged. "Hi. What can I do for you?" he said, eyeballing me over the tops of his toes.

I told him I had nine years of experience as a professional writer and editor, I was looking for a job, and I wondered if there was an opening for another staff member.



*723 Williams Street*

My job interview consisted mostly of listening to Tim talk—about the magazine, about himself, and about his good buddy Gary Gygax. Apparently I was a good listener, because he decided to send me home with an armload of manuscripts to see what sort of an editor I was.

I didn't know a thing about the D&D® game, but I did know how to fix spelling errors and sloppy sentences. I came back on Monday with those manuscripts all fixed up and ready for type-setting. Tim liked what he saw. He led me to a table that was pretty much cleared of debris, pulled up a chair for me to use, gave me a red pencil and another stack of manuscripts, and lit



*Walworth Warehouse*



*LRP Building*

his pipe. Then he went back to his desk and, I suppose, took off his sandals.

I'll always be grateful to Tim Kask for bringing me into the TSR family. I lost track of him after he left the company, but I'll never forget the way we met and the great times we had making those early magazines. Wherever you are, Tim, I hope you get a chance to read this someday.

**John Danovich, Former Marketing Director**

Back in the LRP Building, every time it rained the floor would flood to a depth of an inch or two. Normally this wouldn't be a problem, but in that building the electrical outlets were in the floor. All the computers and electrical devices were plugged into outlets that were under an inch or two of water. To avoid electrical shock, I would wear plastic garbage bags on each leg, attached by huge rubber bands, while walking through the building.

The previous owner of the building was a van conversion company. The office walls were remodeled using upholstering material! The sales area was a light brown vinyl with snap-on buttons (very good ammunition in rubber band wars).

The air was full of printing fumes from the TSR print shop, which was right across from the TSR miniatures division, which produced noxious fumes of its own. The eye-burning odor of Testor's glue, DuPont ribbon epoxy, mold rubber, and printer's ink was only slightly less irritating than the incense that one of the sculptors burned constantly to cover the smell of the Testor's glue, DuPont ribbon epoxy, mold rubber, and printer's ink.

No history would be complete without a Jim Ward story. At GEN CON 14, a copy of the brand-new *Deities & Demigods* hardbound, autographed by Jim, was in the auction. The asking price was \$15, but no one bid. The price was reduced to \$14, then \$13, then \$12, \$10, \$7.50, etc., but still no one bid. The price went down even more—\$1, 50 cents, 25 cents—still no bids. The frustrated auctioneer offered to give it away if someone would only take it off his hands. Finally, the auctioneer offered to pay someone 50 cents to remove the offending book. A lad of 11 or 12 meekly raised his hand, the auctioneer shouted "SOLD," and presented the man-cub the book and two shiny quarters. As the boy turned to leave, Jim Ward stopped him and said, "I would have paid a dollar for it." So the kid responded, "OK, give me the dollar." And Jim did.

**Skip Williams, Veteran Designer**

In the summer of 1981, I was leaving the TSR building (then located at Main and Broad streets) early in the morning after burning the midnight oil in preparation for the GEN CON game fair. Upon passing a side door leading into the hobby shop's basement, I noticed two youths hauling boxes of T-shirts and Frisbees out of the basement and into a car parked nearby. At the time, it was not uncommon for Joe Orłowski to hire temporary employees to work odd hours when preparing for large mailings or a convention, so I struck up a conversation with the pair. It was not long before I realized that the two actually were robbing the place!







*TSR Sheridan Springs Office (Before the Remodel)*

I unwisely told the pair I knew what they were up to, and even more unwisely leaned over to get a good look at the license plate on their car. I can't say if the burglars were more frightened or annoyed, but they hopped in the car and roared away into the night before I could get the number. I ran straight to the Lake Geneva police station, where I gave a breathless account of my encounter. When the police checked out the building, they found everything locked (the burglars had closed the door behind them) and decided to do nothing. I went home and went to bed.

Early the next morning, the police gave me a call. The hobby shop staff had come to work to find the store ransacked and the cash register gone, but nothing else missing except the T-shirts and Frisbees. In their ignorance, the burglars had passed up thousands of dollars worth of games, books, and figurines (some of them quite rare) in favor of things they recognized. Needless to say, the police were much more interested in my story.

The burglars were never caught, but in true TSR fashion the rumor mill quickly went to work. According to one version of the story, I had actually helped the crooks load their car with loot.

**Jon Pickens**, Editor

In the early years, TSR kept a sand table in the basement of the Dungeon Hobby Shop for playing miniatures battles on. In one classic battle, the renaissance Turks, under Jeff "Loser-of-Cannons" Perren, took on the Holy Roman Empire under

Gary Gygax. The Turkish army had a large purple war banner emblazoned with Gary's picture and the words "Omar's Used Camels." There is, unfortunately, no record of the outcome of the battle, but the banner was displayed proudly in the hobby shop for several years afterward.

Chuck Ramsey, who edited *Strategy & Tactics* Magazine for several years, was born on June 6th (D-Day). On one birthday he arrived at his cubicle to find it under assault by hundreds of plastic WWII soldiers swarming up the outside walls on pin-and-thread grappling lines.

To celebrate their first anniversary at TSR, designers Mark Acres and Doug Niles turned "cubeland" (the cubicle offices) into one giant dungeon adventure. Everyone rolled their own stats, and the object was to get to an area called "Nirvana" in one piece. Clues and dangers were hidden in everyone's cubes (in the cube of Ed Sollers, a Texan, a Dexterity roll was required to avoid a deadly pot of chili). A clue was left on one of the three department Apple computers (the others said "This is a poisoned apple; you are dead"). "Nirvana" turned out to be the conference room, where coffee and donuts were had by one and all.

The number of people attending department meetings in the conference room on the third floor of the old Hotel Clair was reduced after someone noticed that the door frame was warping and the weight of the staff was making the whole building lean outward.

The local group that had arranged to host GEN CON East in 1982 abandoned the convention two weeks before the show without telling anyone. Determined to make the convention succeed, TSR airlifted a third of the company (including every game designer and editor except Steve Winter and Troy Denning, who were up to their necks trying to finish the *STAR FRONTIERS* game) to New Jersey to staff the convention.

**Steve Winter**, Former Editor and Designer

When we still had offices above the Dungeon Hobby Shop, the managers who worked in that building took turns coming in early to unlock the doors. One morning a crowd of employees was gathered outside on the sidewalk because the doors were still locked. Whenever this had happened before, someone usually showed up within a few minutes to open things up. After about 15 minutes I'd had enough of waiting, so I climbed up the fire escape and through a window into the art department on the second floor (the windows in the whole building were so loose in their frames that snow blew through them in winter). Then I trooped back downstairs and unlocked the door from the inside.

As I was doing this, Kim Eastland was eating pancakes in the restaurant across the street. Kim had just been hired to head the RPGA network, and this was his first day on the job. He was alarmed by what he saw (not that I had broken in, but that people needed to break in to get to work) and notified Dan Matheson, head of security, about the incident.

Later that day, Dan visited my office. He explained that "an unidentified employee" had been seen breaking into the building, and if he found out who it was, that employee would be fired. It was curious, however, that Dan didn't give that message to anyone else in the building.

Dan had a circle painted on the side of the roof-mounted air conditioner. When the weather got unbearably humid, as Wisconsin tends to do in the summer, the air conditioner would ice up and stop working. Dan would then climb to the roof and with a few precision kicks to the center of the circle, knock the ice loose and restore cooling power to the building.

The Hotel Clair building was four stories tall, but our offices filled only three floors. The fourth floor was nothing but a false ceiling—the third floor had originally been a two-story-tall ballroom. One day, Erol Otus decided to play a practical joke on Dave

"Zeb" Cook by sneaking up to the fourth floor, finding a spot above Zeb's office, and then making strange noises. But the only solid footing up there was a framework of 2-by-4s that held up the third-floor ceiling. Unfortunately, as Erol was picking his way to where he thought Zeb's office should be, he slipped and fell through the ceiling of Tom Moldvay's office. He hung up by the armpits on the narrow joists and dangled, eight feet in the air, with his legs flailing over Tom's desk. Needless to say, Tom was a lot more alarmed than Zeb would have been, had things gone according to Erol's plan. Erol was stuck, and it took several precariously perched people to lift him free.

In the mid-1980s I had a well-earned reputation as one of the worst clinch dice rollers in the world. This was a considerable handicap in my profession, and never so much as when I played games against Doug Niles. Whenever the two of us sat down across a game table, all the luck seemed to just drain from me and flow directly into Doug's dice hand.

We were playtesting the *Onslaught* game one afternoon. Doug played the Allies storming across France; I controlled the Germans defending the Fatherland. The game seemed to be working the way we wanted it to, and it looked like I might even eke out a small victory.

The heart of the game was randomly alternating phases for each player to activate units. In the last three turns, my luck reared its ugly head. On turn 18, Doug won a string of activations and then the turn ended before I could do anything. Then turn 19 was a perfect repeat of turn 18. As the final turn began, I had so many supplies stockpiled that, given a chance to do anything, I thought I could still hold Doug to a minor victory. But I sat in stunned inactivity watching Doug win die roll after die roll until he had spent his supply track down to zero. Then, when he was helpless, the dice tied and the game ended! I hadn't been able to do a thing!

All the frustration of three turns of helplessness boiled over in one thundering, lung-bursting expletive (the one that starts with the sixth letter of the alphabet). It echoed through the cubicles and rang down the hallways of the entire building.

I soon calmed down and apologized to Doug. Unfortunately, all the bankers and potential investors who had been touring the department with the vice president of my division at the time of "the incident" were long gone, so I couldn't apologize to them.



# Looking Back

There are many “classics” in the genre of fantasy adventure. The tales of J.R.R. Tolkien’s hobbits and the quest to destroy the One Ring lie at the heart of our ideas about “fantasy literature.” Those stories owe much to ancient tales passed from one campfire to the next, legends of Beowulf and the monster called Grendel. The idea of fantasy adventure enralls people of all ages. Children marvel at the journeys of Alice in Wonderland, while their older siblings dream of the many tales of the 1001 Arabian Nights, and their parents stare into the unseen distance and imagine the lonely spire of the white tower of Tar Valon, the twisted nightmares of Cthulhu, or deadly Thread falling from the azure skies of Pern.

Twenty-five years ago, the way that we experienced and expressed the ideas of fantasy adventure changed forever. Somewhere in the wilds of Wisconsin, on a forgotten tabletop, covered with tiny metallic castings and animated by pages of indecipherable charts, tables and game designer notes, creatures of myth and legend emerged from the abstract of the written word and took solid form. Opposing them were the stalwart icons of the fantasy zeitgeist—knights and wizards. The actions of the characters in the tale became unpredictable. Their dialogue was unscripted, spontaneous, heartfelt, and incandescent. For the first time in the epoch of human storytelling, the participants in the conflict between the light and the dark became one with their creators. Gamers rolled dice, consulted rules, and, as the form eternally dictates, triumphed over evil.

From that exciting seed grew a new type of literature—the game of storytelling. At the vanguard stood DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, with a product line that embodied the best part of every great fantasy epic crowding the shelves of the local library and bookstore: knights in shining armor waged eternal war against the dark forces that sought to destroy civilization; powerful wizards called down unimaginable forces and bound them to their will; the gods themselves walked the earth,



*Ryan Dancey*

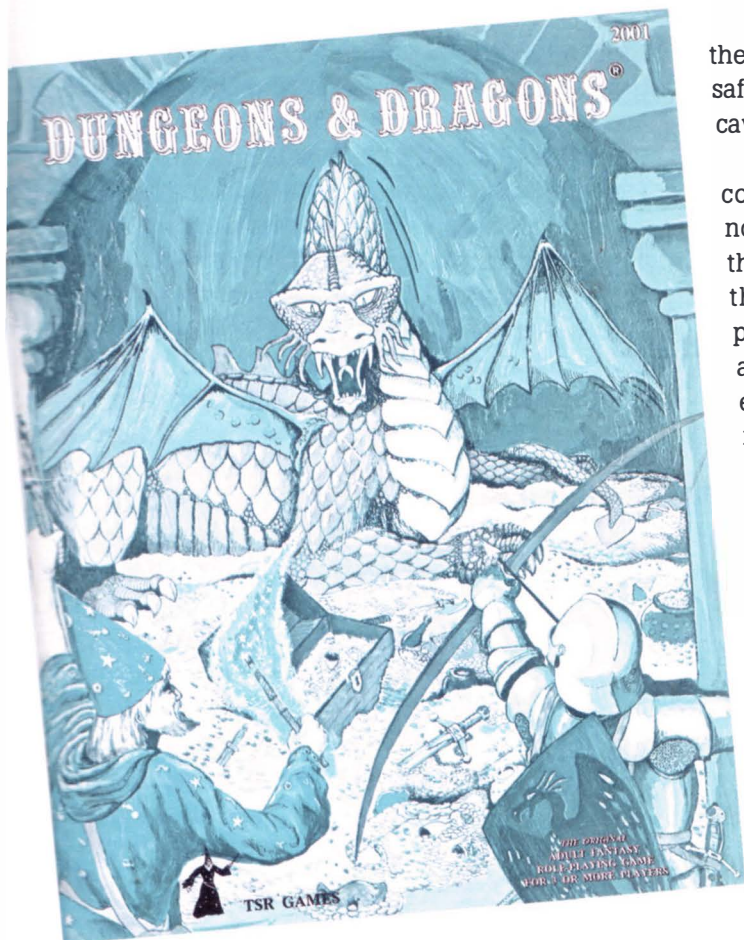
bringing both renewal and destruction wherever they passed. All over the world millions of people were creating new stories, telling their own versions of these old tales, and entertaining themselves through a pure expression of the unique creative spark that is a special part of each of us.

A quarter of a century later, this new art form has spawned its own “classics.” After the passage of so many years, it has become obvious that a few of these adventures have passed from the realm of the mundane and achieved a transcendent state. It is likely that in one form or another, our descendants will relive these classic stories and add their own special essence to the telling.

## **Basic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS**

First among those classics is the “Blue Book” version of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS rules. Though it is not the earliest version of those rules, it is the first version designed for use by those outside the inner circle of hard-core miniature wargaming enthusiasts who created the game. It takes the role of Prometheus, the titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind. These are the pages that converted a curiosity into a lifestyle. Reading this product takes you back to a simpler time, when the heady enthusiasm of youth smoothed over the rough spots and bridged any gaps in the clarity of the rules set.

More than a half-million copies of the Blue Book were published. Despite that awesome proliferation, most have vanished—the victims of inattention, climate, garage sales, and spring cleanings. For those who have come to the hobby in the many years since the Blue Book was released in 1977, few have had aught but rumors to judge the primal quality of the earliest age of the game. In the decades since, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS has become more complex, more polished, and more sophisticated. It is only now, with the perspective of many years, that we can look back to those earlier times and judge how



the Keep, a lonely outpost of civilization far from safety, and the monster-infested woods and caves nearby, were created.

It is impossible to really know how many copies of this module exist. The records are not as clear as they could be, but we do know that Keep was featured consistently in most of the original introductory boxed sets. The total print run for B2 is easily in excess of a million and a half units. Whole generations of players were terrified by the owl bear, confronted the evil priests of the Temple of Chaos, or fled in fear from the "little dog men" who lurked in the lower caverns and who were not impressed with the players' shouts of "Bree-yark!"

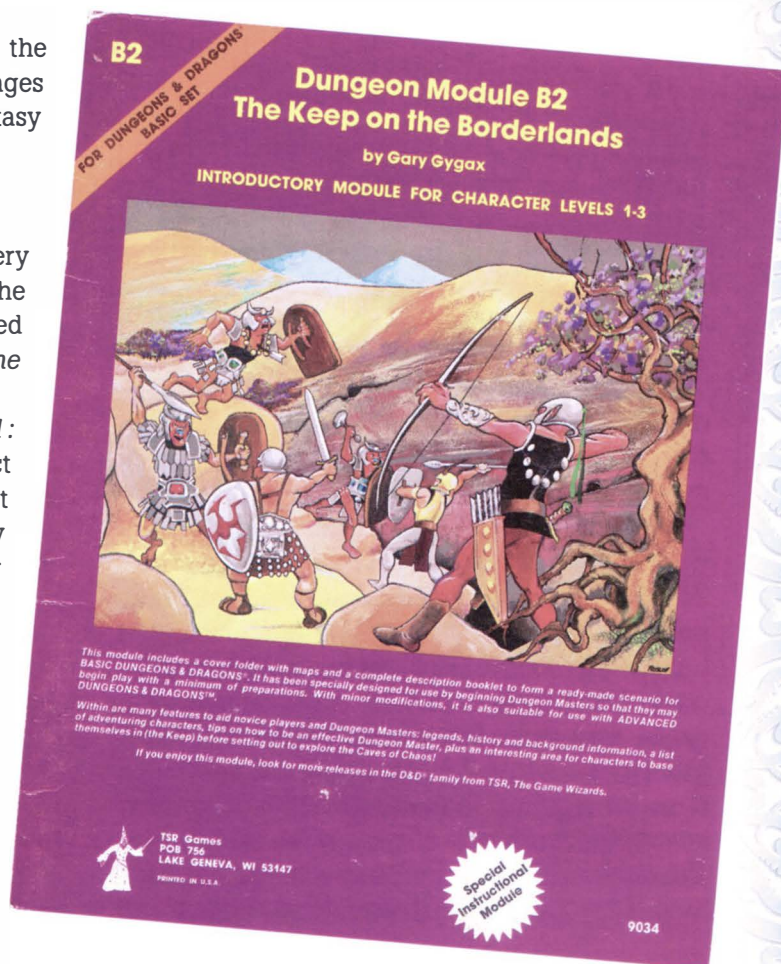
Within these pages you will find in miniature a nearly complete "campaign setting." There is a safe place of refuge, of healing and training for the characters. There are plots and subplots to unravel, and interesting townsfolk to meet and interact with. In the savage wilderness beyond, death lurks around every tree—but so does the promise of adventure and rewards of riches and magic. Something within these pages calls

magnificent was the foundation on which the game was built. Returning now to those pages is a journey that everyone who loves fantasy adventure should savor.

### B2: Keep on the Borderlands

If there is one common experience every D&D player can claim, it would have to be the exploration of the mysterious and aptly named Caves of Chaos that appear in *B2: Keep on the Borderlands*.

The original adventure in this series, *B1: In Search of the Unknown*, was a product with little structure and a very small print run. In fact, it was designed without any specific information about monsters or treasure, so that the DM could create the dungeon on the fly. *In Search of the Unknown* taught the designers of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS a lot about how to develop a useful and playable story designed for the community of gamers. When the time came to develop an adventure that would accompany the basic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS rules, it was obvious that something a bit more sophisticated was needed. Thus,

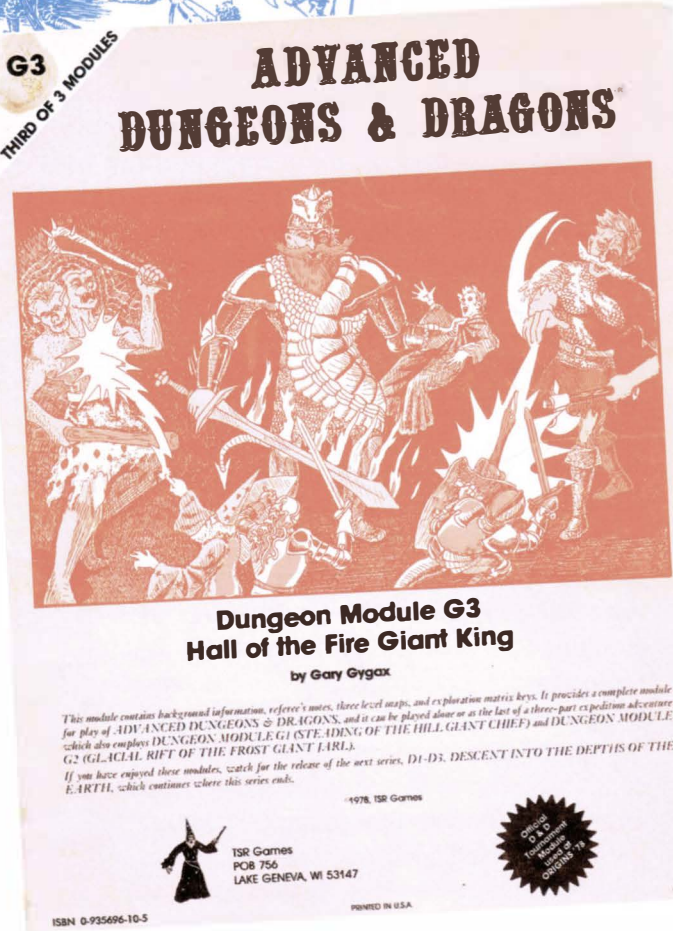
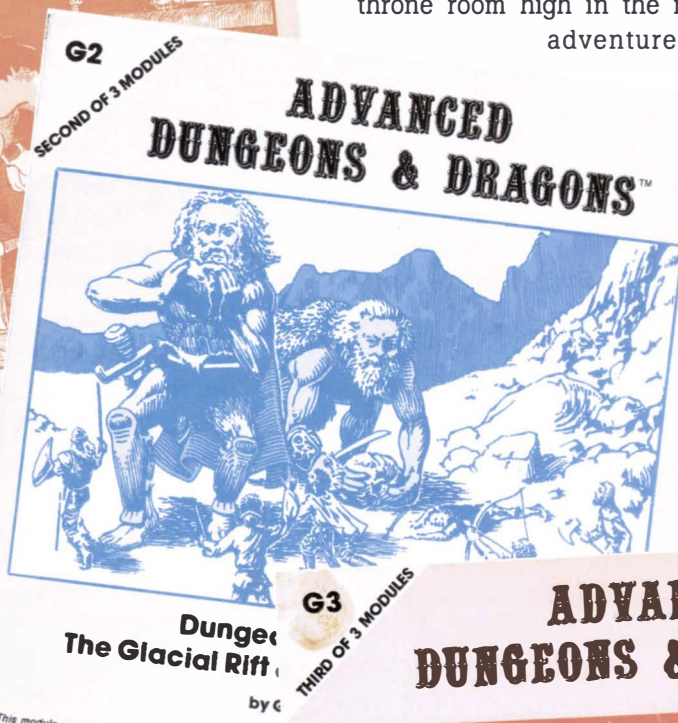
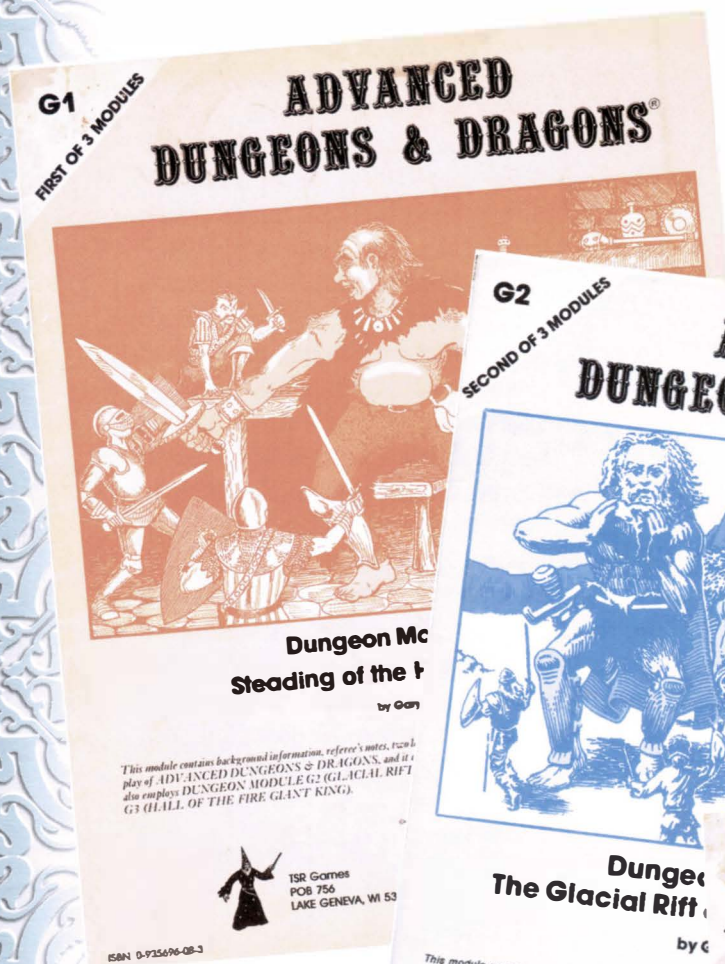


to the heroic heart in each of us, luring us further into the darkness, bringing forth the greatness that we all sense deep within one another.

so many memories and so much adventure could have been contained in such small products. In a time when every player was a "new player," these three linked adventures taught hundreds of thousands of Dungeon Masters how to create an experience more exciting than reading a novel could ever be.

Then, in an intuitive leap that happens only once or twice in a generation, the designers took that story in an unexpected direction. From the throne room high in the mountains of fire, the adventurers soon would be

plunged beneath the earth itself, there to confront the mysterious Dark Elves and the Queen of the Demonweb Pits in a story as epic and world shaking as any ever told.



- G1: Steading of the Hill Giant Chief**
- G2: Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl**
- G3: Hall of the Fire Giant King**

Turn your attention now to the three slim volumes labeled in turn G1, G2, and G3. It startles those who have experienced these seminal adventures how small and simple they truly are. If the Blue Book can be said to be the rules that launched the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, then these adventures transported the game to the farthest shores of the imagination. From the steading of the Hill Giant Chief, to the snowy wastes and the glaciers of the Ice Giants, and finally to the tremendous battle against the King of the Fire Giants, it seems impossible that

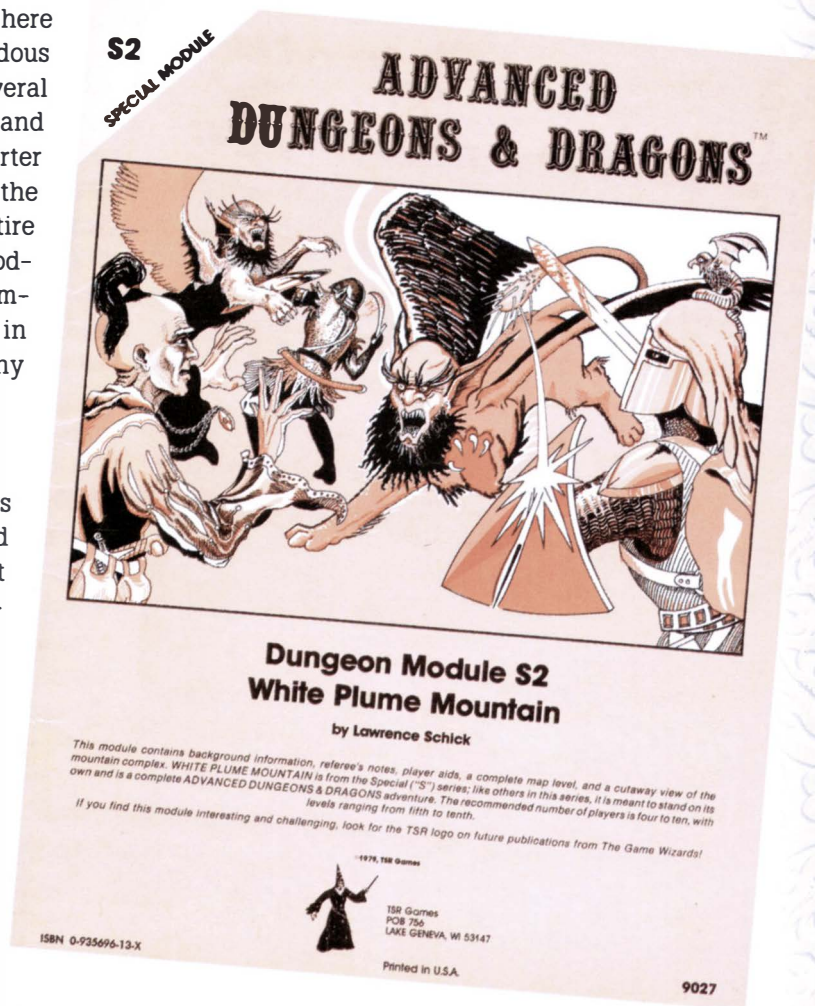
The “adventure modules” presented here for your examination generated tremendous sales. The original adventures sold several hundred thousand copies individually, and a collection of all three generated a quarter million units in sales. Combined with the further adventures in the series, the entire sequential adventure of seven linked modules (G1-3, D1-3 and Q1) have sold a combined total approaching a million units in a variety of combinations through many different printings.

## S2: White Plume Mountain

As time progressed, players and DMs began to sense a shift in the published materials for the game. No longer was it simply sufficient to overcome a challenge through brute force. This was a game for thinking people—players with an aptitude for creative problem solving and a quirky desire to outthink the game designers.

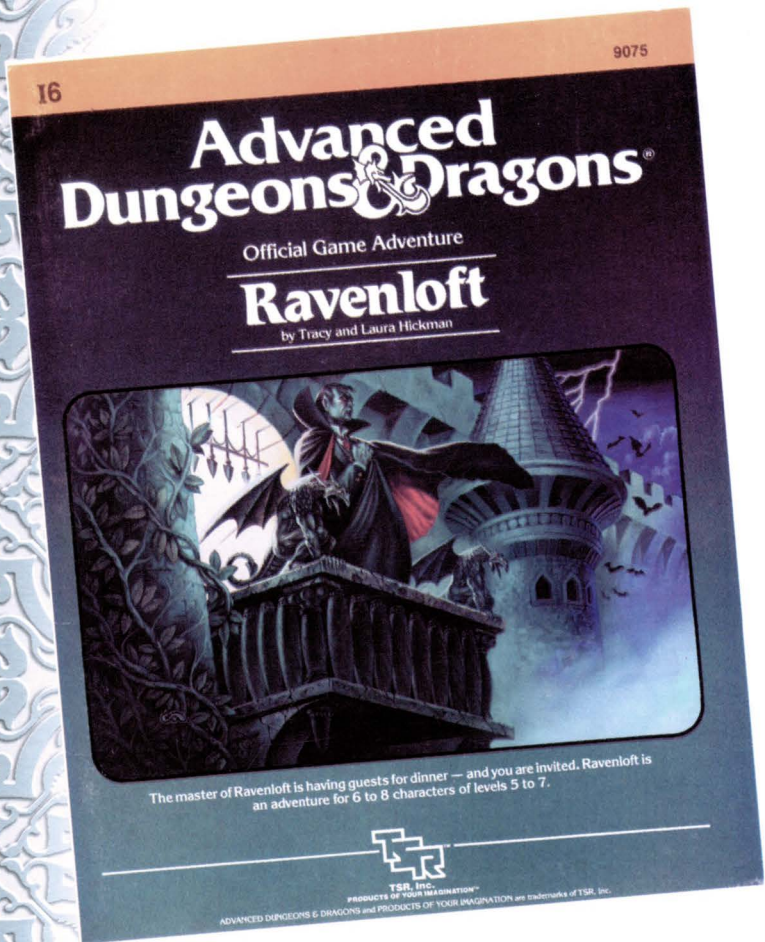
Tested in the crucible of organized convention play, resulting in a challenge tuned to defeat any easy solution but geared to reward truly innovative thinking, *White Plume Mountain* burst onto the scene hard on the heels of arguably the most deadly dungeon ever, *S1: Tomb of Horrors*. Where *Tomb* was a real meat grinder—a test of stamina and resiliency as much as it was of careful thought and planned action—*White Plume* was an adventure aimed squarely at the legions of adventurers who carried every imaginable trinket from the *Player's Handbook* “just in case.” Small birds in cages, 11-foot poles (because sometimes 10 feet is just 1 foot too short!), sacks of flour, mirrors, wolfsbane, and an innumerable list of spells, potions, scrolls, rings, and other miscellaneous magical items—nothing was too outlandish to carry into the dungeon.

Just gaining access to the dungeon was a huge challenge. Instead of being confronted by a barricade manned by vicious orcs or an illusionary door, the entrance to the catacombs beneath White Plume Mountain was guarded by nothing more than a simple riddle—a riddle that sent players digging hastily through dictionaries and thesauri, arguing among one another about cadence and phrasing, and had their characters beseeching the gods for help. Though they were



armed with razor-edged swords, commanded the elemental powers of the spheres, and could call down death and destruction without breaking a sweat, the riddle blocked their progress. Like some titan out of our own myths, the heroes were stymied by the one thing they could not overcome despite all their prowess—somewhere, beyond the edge of the story, were a bunch of teenage kids all trying to outthink a devious group of postgraduate literature buffs from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The contest wasn't really very fair at all!

Once past the guardian of language and logic, the characters entered into a twisted funhouse of frictionless surfaces, odd gravity, absences of light, and places where even the effects of random chance were altered beyond recognition. *White Plume Mountain* was one of the best selling adventures the year it was released—and the next two years. In fact, the product generated substantial sales for more than six consecutive years. At the end of its run, sales for *White Plume Mountain* had exceeded a quarter million units.



### 16: Ravenloft

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* created a whole new genre of literature. His antihero, the vampire Dracula, entered the common parlance and became synonymous with the evil forces of myth, superstition, and human sin.

In 1983, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game made its own pact with the dark forces and birthed a figure every bit as compelling, as romantic, and as vile as Stoker's undead Transylvanian count. The vampire Strahd, and his fearsome castle Ravenloft, shocked the established order of fantasy gaming, sending ripples throughout the hobby that still have not subsided.

Not only was this product a foray into the difficult terrain of horror and terror, it was also a highly sophisticated gaming experience. The adventure used a deck of cards to combine elements of the tarot and Eastern-European mysticism with the inherent randomness of polyhedral dice normally used with the game. Instead of being a static presentation, *16: Ravenloft* assigned random locations and motivations for key characters, including Strahd himself. No two adventures in the misty domain of the vampire would play out the same way. Alliances could not be trusted.

Clues once learned could become irrelevant—or even dangerous—on future retellings.

Where before intrepid adventurers confronted monstrous creatures to protect innocents and recover valuable treasures, heroes now found themselves enmeshed in a story of an entirely different order. There is a reason that so many fairy tales feature wolves and other forest creatures as the instruments of fright. As the night wore on, and day failed to arrive on schedule, as spells grew depleted and injuries mounted, the prospect of another slashing feint from the growling darkness did not seem so trivial anymore.

In this adventure, the land itself stood opposed to those who would throw down its master. An ancient curse played out a danse macabre between a flaxen-haired maiden and the evil lust of the vampire. Lessons learned in hundreds of dungeon crawls, in dozens of battles against orcs and trolls, were useless. The players were thrown back on the basics of their trade: They had to act heroically and refuse to give up hope. This adventure was not about who had the most powerful sword or the largest ruby. For those trapped in the land of Strahd, matters quickly became personal.

Eight years after publication, *Ravenloft* still generated sales. Then, the designers of the game did something unprecedented. They converted the slim adventure module you see before you into a complete living world, extending in all directions the malignant horror first set forth within those pages. The *RAVENLOFT*® campaign setting became the definitive source for fantasy adventure mixed with classic horror—a melange of genres that is as compelling today as it was when the mists first descended around a lonely band of heroes on a forgotten mountain trail.

### L3: Deep Dwarven Delve

There is a final item for your perusal. Like a last whisper of music after the concert ends, there is one last note to be played from the dawn of the Adventure Gaming Age.

In 1979, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game transformed itself from simple linear dungeon adventures into a more sophisticated storytelling medium. Changes were afoot everywhere, not only within the group of designers who had ushered the game through its birth pangs, but in the audience that had assembled to consume the materials they produced.

For those, and many other reasons lost to the mists of time, a manuscript slipped through the

cracks and vanished from the sight of those who came after. Forgotten, like a relic of childhood discarded in favor of more complex pursuits, this adventure languished in the dark of one desk drawer or filing cabinet after another. The basic game became the advanced game. The advanced game revised itself into a 2nd Edition. Small adventures grew to become boxed sets with dozens of support products featuring cultures, races, histories, gods, and stories by the thousands. Whole worlds were created, flamed and died, and were born anew. And still the lonely pages awaited discovery. Like the dry husks under the Egyptian sands, the carvings on jungle ziggurats or the porcelain soldiers in an emperor's tomb, this previously forgotten adventure opens a window for future generations to understand their past and the world that shaped them.

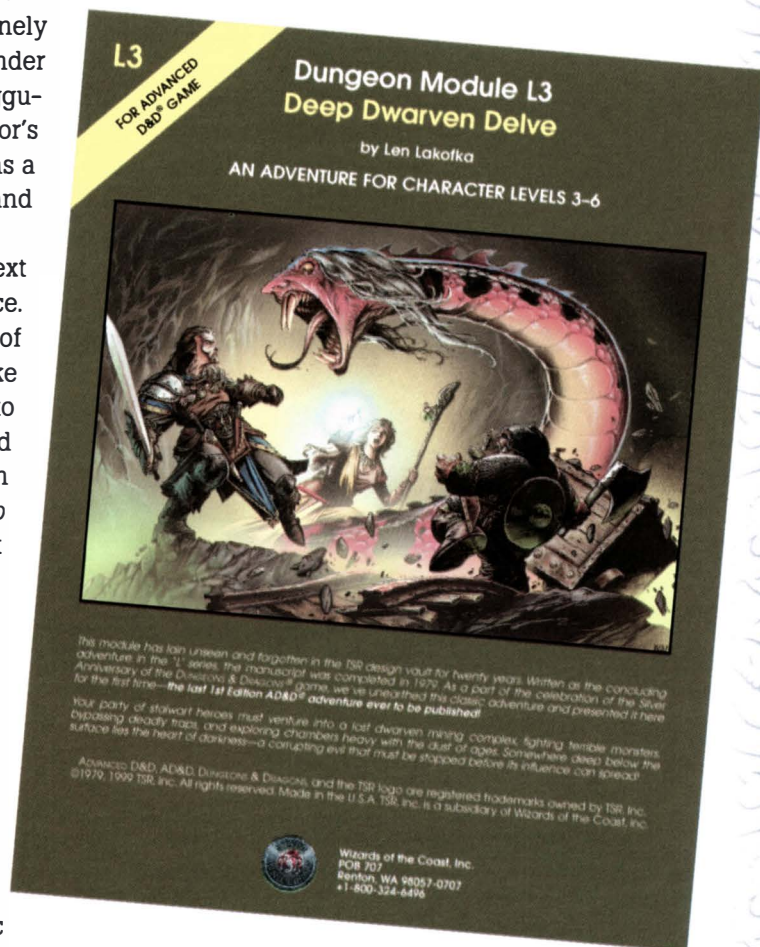
Less than two dozen people have seen the text of this adventure. Few remember its existence. When the time came to create this celebration of the D&D game's history, only a few voices spoke of the hidden treasure passed from person to person across nearly twenty years of time. And at last, at the end of a journey no less epic than that of the heroes of the game itself, *L3: Deep Dwarven Delve* will finally see the bright light of day.

The materials passed down were incomplete and still required some minor polishing to prepare the manuscript for publication. The original art—if it ever existed—was long gone. No maps remained, save faded photostats of rough hand-drawn caverns. However, the raw flavor of that time persists. The language may seem different to our modern sensibilities, but this adventure is no less compelling—especially in light of its historic value. The pacing of this adventure is fast; there are no assumptions about the larger world—only the immediate need to go deeper into the mountain, to confront ever more dangerous foes.

L3 is not truly complete. For reasons of time and resources, we chose not to recreate certain elements of the classic 1st-Edition presentation, such as the product list on the back cover. The cover artwork and interior illustrations are new—though they were crafted by a team that loves the style and flavor of those old products as much as anyone on the planet. Even though it has been touched by modern hands, you will find within its pages a magical opportunity to be young again. These words come down to you with no attached

memories—no associations of long nights in the dorm, or hot summer afternoons spent around the kitchen table. You will not meet grizzled veterans of the game with stories to tell of these halls, or these monster-infested caves.

For the world of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS players, everyone stands on the starting line of the Delve. Every clue is new. All the puzzles are unsolved. None of the traps have been sprung. Are you ready for the challenge?



This is our gift to you. We cannot produce a working time machine to transport you bodily to 1979. But we can use the power of the printed word to bring that time forward to intersect with your own life and your own adventures. For everyone who has loved this game and for those who will come after, *Deep Dwarven Delve* represents the certain knowledge that there is always something worth finding—if one only searches long enough and takes the risks that matter in the adventure of life!

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Renton, Washington  
April 1999



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