

Designers & Dragons



Designers & Dragons: The '70s Credits

Shannon Appelcline
Author and Researcher

John Adamus
Editor

Karen Twelves
Proofreader

Fred Hicks and Adam Jury
Layout

Daniel Solis
Graphic Design

Andrew Bosley
Cover Art

Chris Hanrahan
Business Development

Carrie Harris
Marketing Manager

Sean Nittner
Project Manager

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The Magic of Beginnings

The dawn of the gaming industry was magical, like the start of a new year or the birth of a baby. A bright and promising event was occurring as we watched, somewhat wide eyed with amazement and tickled by every new thing that occurred. It was like getting a new game that's so cool that we started to play before we even knew the rules.

I was in that zeitgeist up to my ears. I had just moved to California and my daughter had just been born. There I was, a young father in a new place seeking to establish myself. All options were open. Every act had long-term implications, none of which were known.

Incredibly, magic literally *did* help form Chaosium, which was like another child for me. I had not planned to start a company and help shape an industry. I designed my first game simply to fulfill a passion. My personal magic of the beginnings was a Tarot card reading that commanded me to start a company for an industry that did not yet exist. I dove into it; ignorant of what was needed, riding entirely on that passion. I published my game and went forth to sell it. Details of this courageous and naïve act are contained in Shannon's history of Chaosium, including wonderful facts about how our industry was formed.

Accurate facts and data fail to picture the excitement of the early days. At my first convention, sponsored by Avalon Hill, I discovered I was not alone in this passion. I was giddy from the discovery of other game companies. I knew AH

would be there, and also TSR, and also Archive Miniatures, run by my friend Nevile Stocken who hauled in money literally hand over fist for his line of Star Wars figures. I was especially amused to find a company led by a guy named Bizarre and publishing a game by a guy named Symbolist (actually of course Bizar and Simbolist, being FGU with the monumental *Chivalry & Sorcery* released.) Scott Bizar met my wife and in an exuberant burst of gentlemanship asked, “Do you have a sister?” He would later become my brother-in-law.

Except for a one aloof company and one sinister figure, all was bright and warm friendship. I met more people than I can remember, including a pair of Englishmen who slept on my hotel floor and later founded the first English roleplaying company, Games Workshop. TSR stood aloof, but that was apparently a corporate stand because Tim Kask, publisher of *The Dragon* magazine, the Englishmen and I spent an extremely jolly afternoon sitting under an oak tree, laughing and coughing and swapping hopes and jokes and stories. Those friendships have lasted for years.

One figure stands a generation ahead of all of us, who are now the Grandfathers of the game industry. Lou Zocchi was there, as he has been at every significant game convention ever since. Lou has had some of his own games published, and is known for his world-famous dice. We all bought our dice from him, and for a while I thought that the polyhedral dice might go down in history being called *Zocchis*. But neither his games nor his dice are the reason he’s the great-grandfather of gaming. Nor is it due to the fact he sold games out of his car for decades like an itinerant peddler with an endless pack of fun and frivolity. No, it is not because he has entertained us for 38 years with his musical saw, magic tricks and his dear companion Woody. Nor is it due to his virtuous dedication to rid our industry of the aforementioned sinister figure. It is because Lou’s heart has always been in the right place. He has been a model for us all with his generosity and willingness to share any and every bit of knowledge we needed to start this crazy business of ours. His benevolent attitude infected us all back then, to share whatever we needed to get into the business.

Other early conventions brought out the other luminaries of the gaming dawn. Rick Loomis was practically as established as Lou, but in the mail-order gaming before his first RPG, *Tunnels and Trolls*, by Ken St Andre. Frank Chadwick and Mark Miller almost shyly brought their first science fiction outer space game, *Traveller*. I particularly remember Pete Fenlon of I.C.E. who released his first RPG, *Rolemaster*, informing me proudly that it had a table for every possible combat interaction. “Small claws against full plate, we got it.”

“Cool. Our new RPG doesn’t have any tables,” I shared. That of course was *RuneQuest*.

In those days everyone gave copies of their latest product to every other publisher. We were small enough to do that, and it was done with a generosity of spirit even if their game was over the top, without much promise of success.

Not everything was fun and perfect, of course. That villain mentioned above? That was Dave Casciano, who I saw at my first Origins convention sitting under a Nazi flag cleaning a firearm. I remember thinking, “Whoa, what have I gotten into!?” He used to advertise games and collect money, but never publish the product. He was ejected before the convention opened. He kept coming back though, the herpes of the gaming industry. Once again it was our hero, Lou Zocchi who got rid of him. He, and I too, were sued by the rotter, but Lou let no expense come between him and his crusade for virtue in gaming. He spent thousands of dollars to fly witnesses to testify at federal court until the judicial system accepted that Casciano was a pirate, thief and “one bad apple among us.” Thank you Lou.

After the headlong rush of the 70’s, our industry changed. The first wave was nearly all designer-publishers like Chaosium. Afterward, we hired actual business people, like accountants and sales people; and formed a business association. Slowly, the emphasis changed from “gaming” to “industry.” Our initial small group of enthusiastic publishers grew.

While I am nostalgic for those early days, I will not complain about the business side. Such transformations are natural and necessary for the industry to thrive enough to become embedded in American culture to such an extent as to appear in such diverse outlets as *X-files* and *Futurama*. We have grown and mutated from that thrilling sprout to be a forest of creativity. We have changed from that wondrous infant into a mature entertainment medium that has withstood the impacts of computer games and collectible card games. We played that new game of “Game Industry” before it had rules, and had a great time. In addition to that glorious past, we also still have a bright future to look forward to.

That pleases me.

Greg Stafford

November 25, 2013

Foreword: The '70s

This is a book about the roleplaying industry as it existed in its most primordial days. It's about hobbyist gaming in the '70s. More specifically, it's about 13 different companies that began publishing roleplaying games in the '70s — from TSR itself, through the wargame companies and the miniatures manufacturers that leapt into the industry, to the companies that were formed specifically to produce roleplaying games.

The roleplaying industry is a very creative one, built on the backs of dreamers able to imagine different worlds. It's also a small industry, which makes it vulnerable to any numbers of disasters. That's what you'll find at the heart of this book, beneath the trends and under the skin of the companies: a story of designers and their dragons.

There are designers aplenty within these covers.

The names from TSR are among the best known: Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax, who together created *Dungeons & Dragons*; Jeff Perren and Dave Wesely, who provided some of its foundations; and Eric Holmes, Tom Moldvay, David “Zeb” Cook, and Frank Mentzer, who each rebuilt the game.

However, the stories of designers from other companies are no less important, among them: Ken St. Andre, who dared to create the second FRP; Greg Stafford, who created a game to depict his long-imagined world of Glorantha; Bob Bledsaw, who believed in RPG supplements; and Dave Hargrave, who was willing to share his own vision of *D&D*.

And the dragons, they're sadly here as well. They roosted upon the eaves of the old Dungeon Hobby Shop.

Ten different legal threats or lawsuits all get some attention within TSR's history, including: *Dave Arneson vs. TSR* (twice), *TSR vs. Heritage Models, Elan Merchandising vs. TSR*, *TSR vs. Mayfair Games* (twice), *TSR vs. New Infinities Productions*, *TSR vs. GDW* (twice), and *TSR vs. the whole internet*. And that was just the pick of the litter, ignoring more mundane issues such as Rose Estes and Will Niebling suing TSR for rights related to stock options.

TSR also faced dragons of other sorts, including board fights, ousted presidents, Californian exiles, decade-long vendettas, secret cabals, hysterical media, and a long fight with the moral minority. Dragons come in all shapes and sizes, you see.

Don't think that the rest of the industry was left out. Other publisher histories highlight a veritable flight of dragons, including corrupt printers, abrupt changes of direction, poorly received revamps, massive overprinting, fights over copyright, disagreements over contracts, near bankruptcies, thieving partners, and more.

Of the 13 companies profiled within these pages, only 3 to 4 are still in business (depending on how you count), and one of those is entirely out of the roleplaying business. As for the rest: they're all shadows of companies at their heights. That's because dragons have stamina; they keep wearing away at companies and their designers, like the sea against the shore. In the end, they always win.

The story is not in the victory or the loss, but in the fight.

Come and read the story of the first 13 notable companies to enter the RPG industry — the story of their designers and their battles against the dragons.



About the Icon: Daniel Solis' icon for the '70s is a pair of crossed swords. It represents the origins of the industry in wargaming and the game of *Dungeons & Dragons* itself, which started out as monster-slaying treks through dungeons.

A Future History of Roleplaying

Though this book focuses on roleplaying companies that began publication in the '70s, many of their stories continued beyond that decade. Thus, the trends of later times affected these early publishers. The most important future trends are detailed, in brief, below.

🎲 ***The RPG Boom & Bust (1980–1983)***. The early '80s saw a boom period for RPGs in the wake of increased media attention. Unfortunately, it turned into a bust in 1982 or 1983. Many early publishers met their end as a result. The ones that remained were forced to increase their quality of production to keep up.

🎲 ***The Storytelling Revolution (1984)***. Prior to 1984, most RPGs had been about location-based exploration. A variety of publications that year — among them *Dragonlance*, *Paranoia*, and *Toon* — moved the medium toward story-oriented play. More would follow in the years thereafter.

🎲 ***The Desktop Revolution (1985)***. The Mac computer appeared in 1984, and within a year personal desktop publishing had become possible. This allowed many new small press publishers to appear, starting around 1985.

🎲 ***The Cyberpunk Revolution (1988)***. R. Talsorian Games changed the face of science-fiction roleplaying with their publication of *Cyberpunk* (1988). It brought the creation of new space opera games to an end for at least a decade and sent a lot of publishers haring off after their own cyberpunk RPG.

🎲 ***The CCG Boom and Bust (1993–1996)***. When Wizards of the Coast published *Magic: The Gathering* (1993), they created the collectible card game genre. It was much more lucrative than roleplaying publishing, and thus many RPG publishers created CCGs of their own. Meanwhile, distributors started putting their dollars toward CCGs rather than RPGs. Unfortunately, much of the initial interest was a fad, and publishers who committed too much to the trend ended up sorry.

🎲 ***The D20 Boom and Bust (2000–2004)***. Wizards of the Coast changed the whole industry a second time when they released *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* (2000) under a license that allowed anyone to create supplements for it. Hundreds of new companies appeared to do so, while many old publishers also moved into the new and lucrative space. Existing publishers who didn't do so found it hard to stay afloat. Just as with CCGs, a bust quickly followed the boom.

🎲 ***The Indie Revolution (2001+)***. Many of the storytelling ideas from the '80s and '90s have been reborn in recent years as the indie game movement. Small

publishers are publishing games that matter to them, and they're often about stories, morality, emotions, or other weighty issues — not just fighting goblins.

A Note to Readers of the First Edition

If you read the previous, black monolith edition of *Designers & Dragons*, you'll find that the information on the '70s in this new edition has dramatically increased. The histories of Judges Guild, Metagaming, and TSR were all vastly expanded, thanks in each case to lots of new material that I was able to access (mostly more magazines from the period).

In addition, the final five histories in this book are brand new: Gamescience, Heritage Models, Grimoire Games, DayStar West Media, and Midkemia Press. The article in Appendix I is new too.

Finally, information has been updated for the scant '70s companies still publishing.

Whether you've encountered an edition of this book before, or are a newcomer to Designers & Dragons, I hope you enjoy yourself while reading many of the earliest histories of the hobbyist industry.

Shannon Appelcline

January 6, 2013



Part One:
Founding Days
(1953–1974)

Before 1974 there was no roleplaying industry. The hobbyist game industry existed, but it centered on a different type of game: the wargame. The history of these games of warfare went back to at least the 17th century, but it wasn't until 1953 that they gained a foothold among American gaming enthusiasts, and that was thanks to a man named Charles Roberts.

Roberts created the first mainstream wargame, *Tactics* (1953), and afterward he decided to leverage that game's success into something more: the first wargame company, Avalon Hill. It would be the leader of the industry for many years, and it would attract many followers, including SPI and numerous other publishers that we'll meet as they enter the RPG industry in a series of three successive waves.

In the meantime another trend was overtaking the United States. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was introduced in a few different mass-market editions beginning in the 1960s. It was one of the literary touchstones of the '60s, and buttons that read "Frodo Lives" could often be found at love-ins and peace demonstrations alike.

As much as anything the story of roleplaying games is the story of how these trends came together — of how two miniatures wargamers interested in medieval warfare and fantasy realms created a new game and a new hobby. Those wargaming enthusiasts were Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, and their game was *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974). This was the state of the hobbyist industry when the first roleplaying company, TSR, began publishing RPGs in 1974.

Company	Years	First RPG	Page
TSR	1973-1997	<i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> (1974)	7

TSR: 1973–1997

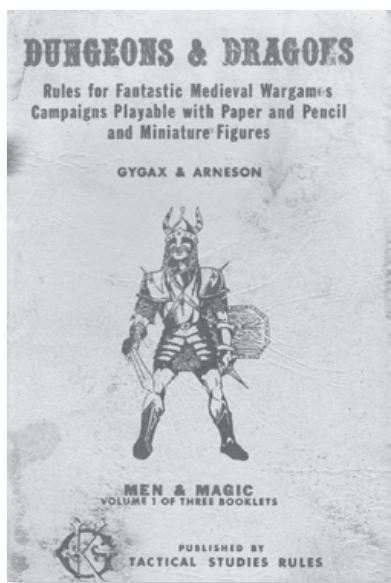
TSR founded the roleplaying industry and ruled it for almost 25 years.

A Brief Introduction: 1958+

The story of TSR begins with the story of two men, Gary Gygax (of Lake Geneva in Wisconsin) and Dave Arneson (of the Twin Cities in Minnesota), who would soon create the world's first roleplaying game. They each came into the hobbyist gaming field through the same publication — Avalon Hill's *Gettysburg* (1958) wargame — and from there they soon advanced to positions of leadership in the wargaming community.

Before we meet these men, though, we should first briefly acknowledge the sources of their stories. Traditionally, the early history of TSR is muddled, primarily because interviews with the principals have diverged and differed over the years. This has resulted in different remembrances, often from the same people.

More recently, Jon Peterson made a heroic effort to detail the earliest years of the hobby in his own *Playing at the World* (2012), a dense tome that primarily covers the miniatures wargaming scene and TSR through 1977.



1974: Dungeons & Dragons

By digging up hard-to-get primary sources from the era, Peterson put many dates on events and otherwise straightened out a lot of facts. This history of TSR mostly follows *Playing at the World's* chronology for its earliest years, but adds details from many other sources as appropriate.

With that said, let's return to our two creative gentlemen.

Gary Gygax & *Chainmail*: 1967—1971

Gygax's rise within wargaming circles began in 1967, when he helped to reform the International Federation of Wargamers (IFW) — a society that had been formed the previous year to promote the play of Avalon Hill's board wargames. He was soon after contributing to numerous wargaming 'zines.

At the IFW's Gen Con I (1968) Gygax saw a demonstration of a medieval miniatures game, Henry Bodenstedt's "Siege of Bodenbergl" (1967). This led Gygax to new interests in both miniatures wargaming and pre-Napoleonic wargame play — at the time the era was largely neglected by wargamer leader Avalon Hill. Meanwhile, Gygax began his own game design work with the *Little Big Horn* wargame (1968), released through the War Game Inventors Guild of the IFW. His revision of Dane Lyons' *Arbela* (1968), an "ancient wargame," may be more notable because Gygax distributed it under his own company name: Gystaff Enterprises.

In 1969 Gygax formed a miniatures gaming group to support his new interest: the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association. At its formation it included seven members: Gary Gygax, Donald Kaye, Rob Kuntz, Jeff Perren, Michael Reese, Leon Tucker, and either Gygax's son Ernie or Kuntz's brother Terry — depending on which source you prefer. That group in turn became the core of a special interest group within the IFW called the Castle & Crusade Society, which focused on medieval warfare.

It was actually Jeff Perren who got the ball rolling for what would become *D&D* with a two-to-four page medieval miniatures rule set. When Gygax saw these rules, he decided to edit and expand them — a tendency that we'll see repeated in the future. The results, by Perren & Gygax, were published as the "Geneva Medieval Miniatures" in Don Greenwood's *Panzerfaust* fanzine (April 1970), then expanded as the "LG TSA Miniatures Rules" in issue #5 (July 1970) of *The Domesday Book*, the Castle & Crusade Society's own periodical. This sort of amateur publication of new rules was entirely common for the period, and in general showed how the miniatures hobby was amateur, yet creative. Fortunately, Gygax would soon be able to reach a much wider audience.

This was thanks to Don Lowry, an ex-Air Force Captain who formed Lowrys Hobbies — a mail order store for wargaming — in 1970. He also began publishing some games of his own, including some “Fast Rules” (1970) for tank combat by Tucker and Reese of the LGTSA.

Lowry met Gygas at Gen Con III (1970); it proved to be an important connection when Gygas lost his insurance job just a couple of months later. That’s because Lowry was in the process of creating Guidon Games to publish more (and more professional) games. Thanks to his new availability, Gygas was able to sign on with Guidon to edit and produce miniatures wargaming rules in a series called “Wargaming with Miniatures.”

Guidon’s first book, produced in March 1971, was *Chainmail* (1971) — a further expansion of the medieval miniatures rules by Perren and Gygas. The new rules contained two new sections that are of particular note.

The “siege” rules offered the first crucial step on the road to *Dungeons & Dragons*. Whereas Perren’s original game had a 20:1 scale, and the LGTSA version of the rules had a 10:1 scale, while the siege rules suggested a 1:1 scale that had previously been used only for army commanders. In other words, it offered up man-to-man combat rules of the sort that would be at the heart of RPGs.

Chainmail’s “fantasy supplement” may have been even more important. Its 14 pages described how to introduce singular heroes, superheroes, and wizards into *Chainmail* play. Wizards even had a variety of spells such as fire ball, lightning bolt, phantasmal force, darkness, and more.

Though *Chainmail* was clearly the most important Guidon publication for the future roleplaying industry, the series would come to include books by many future RPG luminaries, among them Lou Zocchi, Tom Wham ... and Dave Arneson.

Dave Arneson & Black Moor: 1969–1972

Stepping back to 1969, we find Dave Arneson gaming with Dave Wesely, an amateur game designer who was particularly interested in games that were open-ended, run by a referee, and supportive of more than just two players. Wesely brought these ideas together in his own “Braunstein” Napoleonic miniatures games. Players in a Braunstein rather uniquely took on the roles of individuals who had specific objectives in the game. In fact, there was so much involvement with these various roles that Wesely never got to the actual wargame in his first Braunstein!

Just as Arneson began playing in Wesely’s Braunsteins, he also became more involved in the wider wargaming community, attending Gen Con II (1969) — where he met Gary Gygas — and joining the IFW. Toward the end of 1969 Arneson used these new connections to run a game for wargamers scattered across the country — eventually including Gary Gygas, Don Kaye, and Rob Kuntz. Arneson’s

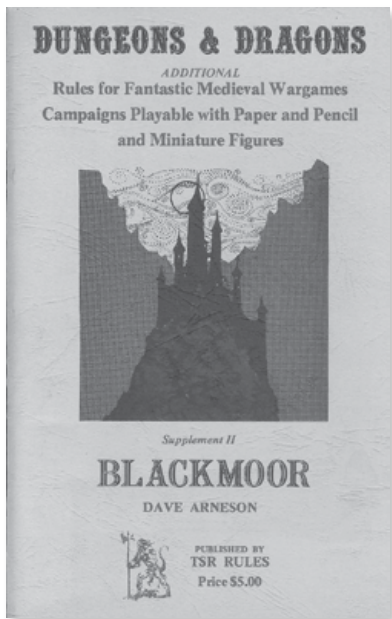
Napoleonic Simulation Campaign used Gary Gygas's Napoleonic *Diplomacy* variant for large-scale strategic play, but then used miniatures rules to fight out individual battles. Dave Wesely supplied the rules for land battles, while Arneson and Gygas supplied those for sea battles. The sea battle rules were later published as *Don't Give Up the Ship!* (1971) — another of Guidon's *Wargaming with Miniatures* books and also the first collaboration of note for Arneson and Gygas.

Meanwhile, Wesely ran perhaps three more Braunsteins, the last of which was a *Junta*-like game where players were involved in a coup d'état in a banana republic. Then Wesely's Army Reserve unit was called to active duty in October 1970. The Braunsteins, however, continued on: new variants would be run by a number of the Braunstein players in the years to come.

On April 17, 1971 (probably; there's a lot of disagreement on early Black Moor dates), Arneson did something totally new with the idea. He'd by then grown bored with his Napoleonic game and frustrated over arguments about historical details. Thus he decided to run a "medieval 'Braunstein,'" which he called a "Black Moor" — following Wesely's naming convention. The game used Gygas and

Perren's brand-new *Chainmail* game for combat, but as in the Braunsteins, players in Black Moor took on the roles of individual characters — themselves, transferred to a medieval world.

Unlike the Braunsteins, the Black Moors were run as a campaign, with players eventually gaining experience from episode to episode. Throughout 1971 Arneson's group fought fairly typical miniatures battles — facing off with the forces of the "Egg of Coot." Then, in late 1971 or early 1972, the heroes moved to a new battlefield: the dungeons beneath and around Castle Blackmoor — a castle that originated in a plastic kit of a Sicilian castle that Arneson owned.



"[S]hortly [Castle Blackmoor] was too small for the scale I wanted. But it was a neat kit and I didn't want to abandon it, so the only way to go was down."

– Dave Arneson, "A Conversation with Dave Arneson,"
Kobold Quarterly #9 (Spring 2009)

Miniatures vs. Board Games

Broadly, *Dungeons & Dragons* and the roleplaying industry sprang from the hobbyist wargaming industry that preceded it. However, wargaming in the '70s was actually split into two parts that are easy to conflate.

On the one hand you had *board game wargaming*. This was the professional industry that kicked off in 1958 when Charles Roberts incorporated Avalon Hill and published *Tactics II* (1958). By the '70s board game wargaming was big business for Avalon Hill and their up-and-coming competitor, SPI. There were also a number of semi-professional or small press board game wargaming publishers, of which the original Gamescience was one of the first.

On the other hand you had *miniatures wargaming*. Instead of moving pieces around boards, players moved miniatures across sand tables or other open terrains. Miniatures wargaming got its start around the same time as the board games, with the publication of Jack Scruby's *War Games Digest* (1957–1962) – the first of many amateur 'zines for the hobby. However, the miniatures hobby didn't grow like the board game hobby did. It instead remained small and semi-professional without any big publishers; rules were more likely to be detailed by a fan in a 'zine, rather than by some "authority." There were good reasons that miniatures wargaming remained small: it required more time, more effort, and more creativity. It was a niche within a niche – something that wasn't for everyone.

Though the creators of *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) got their start in wargaming through board games, both Gygax and Arneson soon moved over to the more creative miniatures field. TSR was founded as a company intending to publish miniatures games, while *Dungeons & Dragons* grew directly from miniatures wargaming play.

Then, as the initial roleplaying boom grew, manufacturers of board games jumped on the bandwagon. It made sense, as they already had the professional (or semi-professional) infrastructure needed to publish – something that was largely missing from the smaller, more community-oriented miniatures creators. In the '70s you therefore saw the smaller producers of wargaming board games – folks like Chaosium and GDW – coming on board, then in the '80s the giants of wargaming board games – SPI and Avalon Hill – jumped in as well.

In *Designers & Dragons*, "wargame" is often used as a short hand for "wargaming board game" because that was the commercial side of hobby. Ironically by the '70s, it was also too big (and too staid and too conservative) to publish something truly innovative. *Dungeons & Dragons* could only have come from those creative amateurs and fans that were members of the small community of miniatures wargamers.

What's with the Scale!?

Early editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* included rather cryptic notes that said 1" = 10' inside and 1" = 10 yards outside. The use of inches as a measurement showed the game's origin in wargames – it was a standard unit of measure on sand tables.

The differing scales for inside and outside were an artifact of *D&D*'s two-part origin. *Chainmail* had used a 1" = 10 yard scale because Gygax thought it was a good size for fitting a full battle on a 5'x10' table. When Arneson moved *Chainmail* into the dungeons of Blackmoor, he changed the scale to 1" = 10'.

The topic was especially confusing in the early days of *D&D*, requiring Gygax to write an entire article on the topic in *The Dragon* #15 (June 1978). Things got cleaned up a *little* bit in *AD&D* (1977–1979).

The immense creativity of the miniatures wargaming community of the late '60s and early '70s is on full display as we consider how these game concepts bounced from one amateur designer to another. Jeff Perren created medieval miniatures rules, which were expanded by Gary Gygax and became *Chainmail*. Dave Wesely created Braunsteins, and then Dave Arneson combined *Chainmail* and Braunsteins to create Blackmoor. In turn John Snider and others ran their own Blackmoor variants while David Megarry condensed the simple essence of Blackmoor dungeon crawling into a board game that he called “The Dungeons of Pasha Cada.”

And now we come to the final link in the chain of creativity that would create the modern roleplaying hobby.

Late in 1972 Dave Arneson and Dave Megarry traveled to Lake Geneva to demonstrate Blackmoor (and The Dungeons of Pasha Cada) to Gary Gygax, Rob Kuntz, and other members of the LGTSA. Gygax was impressed and told Dave Arneson that he wanted to collaborate on an expanded version of his rules — much as he had with Perren just a few years before. They tentatively named their collaboration ... “The Fantasy Game.”

Publishing the Fantasy Game: 1972—1973

In many ways, it was a perfect time for Gygax to work on a major project. As we're already seen, he lost his insurance job in 1970. By 1971 he was rather famously fixing shoes in his basement ... and editing miniatures rules for Guidon Games. However, by late 1972 Don Lowry moved to Maine. Gygax's work on the *Wargaming in Miniatures* series ended shortly thereafter.

Thus Gygax had plenty of time to work on his newest project. The first draft of his fantasy game rules probably went out late in 1972 at perhaps 50–100 pages. A second draft followed sometime around May 1973, after many months of playtesting both at Lake Geneva and in the Twin Cities. It may have been as long as 150 pages. In both cases the dating and page counts changed over time in interviews, and this has been complicated by the fact that these drafts were long thought lost to the mists of time.

However the recent discovery of the “Dalluhn Manuscript” (1973?) in M.A.R. Barker’s papers *probably* offers a view of what these original drafts looked like, though its origin and authorship remain in question.

When Gygax released those two initial drafts of his fantasy rules to friends and designers, they *weren’t* called “The Fantasy Game.” Gygax *knew* that wasn’t a very catchy title, and so he brainstormed better names for the game. He did so by drawing up two columns filled with evocative words, then polling his players about what names they liked. The Fantasy Game could have been called “Swords & Spells” or “Men & Magic” or “Treasures & Trolls,” but everyone (or perhaps just Gygax’s daughter or perhaps his wife, depending on which interview you prefer) liked “Dungeons & Dragons” best — so this was the name that Gygax and Arneson used.

The second draft of *Dungeons & Dragons* was mature enough that Gygax was ready to sell it (along with Megarry’s “Dungeons” game, which he was now representing). He tried Guidon Games first, but they were by now downsizing and not interested in publishing Megarry’s board game or the large *Dungeons & Dragons* rule set. Gygax may have offered the games to Avalon Hill too — though this point is in contention. If so, he met with failure there too. This all *might* have discouraged Gygax if a group playing the prototype *Dungeons & Dragons* game hadn’t shown up at Gen Con VI (1973). They were very enthusiastic about the game — a fact that Gygax’s boyhood friend, Don Kaye, noted with interest. Kaye suggested to Gygax that they form a company to publish the game themselves.

On October 1, 1973, Gygax and Kaye formed Tactical Studies Rules — named in part after the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association — based largely on \$1,000 that Kaye raised by cashing in his life insurance policy. That wasn’t enough to print *Dungeons & Dragons*, which was organized as a large three-book set. Instead the newborn TSR published *Cavaliers and Roundheads* (1973) — another miniatures game design by Gygax and Perren — as its first release. They hoped to use it to bootstrap themselves up to the more expensive *D&D* production.

Unfortunately, the returns from *Cavaliers and Roundheads* were insufficient; more cash would be needed to publish *D&D*. In December of 1973, Brian Blume made this possible. He was a gamer that met Gygax at Gen Con VI (1973) and then joined the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association. He offered the \$2,000

needed to publish the first thousand copies of *D&D* (1974); he was quickly accepted as the third partner in Tactical Studies Rules.

As the company's corporate structure emerged, Kaye took on the offices of President and Treasury, Blume became the Vice President and Sales Manager, and Gygax assumed the roles of Editor and Advertising Manager. Dave Arneson, it should be noted, was not a partner in TSR. Though he was the co-designer of *D&D*, he had no money to contribute to the new company and thus was not offered equity. In fact, he wouldn't even join the company full-time until 1976.

There had already been clashes between Gygax and Arneson during the development process of *Dungeons & Dragons* — as Arneson sometimes felt he was being ignored while Gygax bulled forward on the game. The continued isolation of Arneson following the game's release would result in problems that would haunt *Dungeons & Dragons* for the next 25 years.

Selling the Fantasy Game: 1974—1975

Thanks to Brian Blume, *D&D* became available for sale in January 1974 as a box of three digest-sized books. 150 copies sold in February. Half the print run was gone by summer, and by the end of the year TSR printed 1,000 more copies. Photocopies of the rules heavily supplemented *D&D*'s actual print run in those

early days — mostly because there wasn't much distribution for hobbyist games at the time. Slowly the game caught on.

However, it didn't have to happen that way. Blithely describing the upward trajectory of *D&D*'s sales ignores the many challenges it faced in its first year. To start with, it was a totally new and different sort of game. Even Arneson and Gygax were unsure whether their game would be successful — or if it was instead just some crazy whimsy.

The existing communities of wargamers helped *D&D* to get some attention (and some distribution), but that path was also fraught with dangers. Some

How Much Did That Cost!?

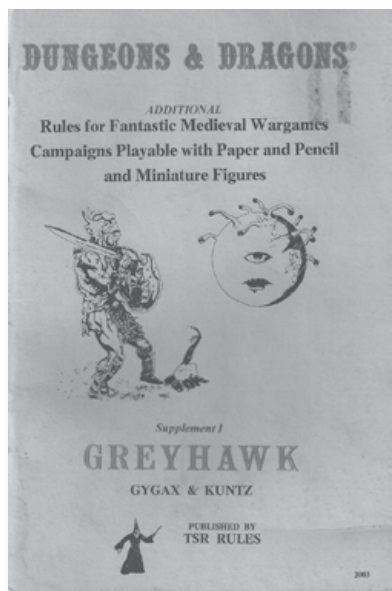
When *Dungeons & Dragons* was released, one of the most common complaints was that at \$10 (\$45 today) it cost too much. In fact, when photocopies of *D&D* began to distribute, it was only in part due to the fact that the game was hard to find. There were others who just weren't willing to pay the price. However these complaints didn't deter TSR, who the next year published the even *more expensive* *Empire of the Petal Throne* (EPT) at \$25 (\$103 today).

The cost is widely accepted to have held *EPT* back, but that clearly wasn't the case with *D&D*. If cost had been a real consideration among early players, then Flying Buffalo's *Tunnels & Trolls* — a steal at \$3 (\$12 today) — might have won them over. *T&T* did pretty well in the '70s, but it was of course *D&D* that dominated the market.

wargaming purists didn't believe that fantasy elements should be introduced into medieval wargames. Others were perfectly happy with Napoleonic wargames and didn't see the need for medieval gaming at all.

Meanwhile, TSR continued to have cash flow problems, and this kept them from purchasing much official advertising for their new game. Still, word leaked out. It went from friend to friend, from gaming group to gaming group, from city to city. Word spread through conventions. Gary Gygax wrote articles about *D&D* in various wargaming journals, while even *The Space Gamer* would diverge from its usual science-fiction coverage to talk about *D&D* in issue #2 (1975). Gen Con VII (1974) might have been the turning point; when wargamers gathered at Lake Geneva, TSR had a captive audience for their new game. When those wargamers returned home, word of *D&D* went with them.

In his own gaming group, Gygax saw a microcosm of the game's success. Gygax's *D&D* group had started off with LGTSA members Gary Gygax, Ernie Gygax, Don Kaye, Rob Kuntz, and Terry Kuntz in 1972, and then had grown to a dozen players in 1973. By 1974 it sometimes included over 20 people, including even more future TSR employees such as James M. Ward. Rob Kuntz became the co-dungeon master of Gygax's "Greyhawk" game, allowing each dungeon master to referee groups of only a dozen players.



"Each level [of Castle Greyhawk] was named, the first being the Vaults, then came the Dungeons, the Lower Dungeons, the Crypts, and so forth. Past Catacombs and Labyrinth the daring delver eventually came to the Lesser and Greater Caves, then the Caverns, and finally, at level 13 to Maze where the Mad Archmage, Zagig, was manifest."

– Gary Gygax, "To Forge a Fantasy World: Greyhawk's Creation," *Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Essays on Roleplaying* (2000)

This also caused the first major expansion of what would become the world of Greyhawk. Before, it had been entirely Gygax's creation, but now Rob Kuntz brought in some of the elements of his "Castle El Raja Key," which he'd been

running for Gygax since 1973. Some levels of El Raja Key were incorporated directly into Castle Greyhawk, while others became the source of the TSR module *WG5: Mordenkainen's Fantastic Adventure* (1984).

More than any other reason *D&D* probably enjoyed rapid growth — both within Gygax's gaming circle and elsewhere — for the same reason that its future was initially in danger: it was an entirely innovative game. Creating unique, individual characters and playing them over the course of an extended campaign was largely unheard of in 1974. For wargamers, *D&D* offered a whole new set of more personal tactics, while for fantasy board game players, *D&D* offered an opportunity to interact with fantastic realms in a more intimate manner. *D&D* was the first of a whole new wave — really, a whole new medium — of gaming and there was nowhere to go but up.

Of course, TSR didn't know that back in 1974 and so the rest of their first year was spent on a lot of stuff *other* than *D&D*. Thus their next publication was a return to miniatures wargaming: the *Tricolor* (1974) rules allowed for Napoleonic

play. *Warriors of Mars* (1974) — based on Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels — was a bit more in tune with *D&D*. Though predominantly a large-scale wargame, it included rules for 1:1 scale individuals and could even be played with a referee. However, it wasn't exactly what *D&D* players were looking for and it disappeared within a year — apparently due to lack of a license.

As we'll see, unlicensed publication would be a problem for *D&D* too, a few years down the road.

One last product from TSR's first full year is of some note. *Star Probe* (1975) by John M. Snider was scheduled for 1974 but slipped into 1975. It was a science-fiction board game of the sort that was just emerging as its own new field — as could be seen in Metagaming's *The Space Gamer* (1975–1980). *Star Probe* was supposed to be the first game in a trilogy, but by the time TSR released the second game, *Star Empires* (1977), they'd already found their niche,



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and it wasn't in science-fiction board gaming after all. They eventually returned the rights to the games to Snider in 1980.

Though TSR didn't publish anything else for *D&D* in 1974, Gary Gygax didn't stop thinking about the game. In May he wrote up a new character class for publication in *Great Plains Game Players Newsletter* #9 (June 1974): the thief. Today, we think of the thief as a foundation of the RPG game, but for six months in 1974, *D&D* only included clerics, fighting men, and wizards. Gygax's article was typical of the sort of low-level marketing he was doing in 1974—writing about *D&D* for various local periodicals. However, nothing else he wrote that year had the scope and importance of a whole new character class.

By January 1975 TSR was clearly in a stronger place because they were printing up the first issue of their own amateur magazine, *The Strategic Review* (1975–1976), which supported *D&D* and *Warriors of Mars* alike. By this time, TSR had also acquired rights to three games from Guidon — *Chainmail*, *Don't Give Up the Ship*, and *Tractics* (1971) — and so there was some support for them as well. Though that first issue only covered TSR products, in the future Gygax said they would “try to cover as much as possible” of the hobbyist scene.

TSR was a company on its way up. Then, on January 31, 1975, everything changed. Don Kaye, aged just 37, died of a fatal heart attack.

A Year of Innovative Products: 1975

Though Kaye's death was a personal tragedy for everyone involved, the *D&D* juggernaut could not be stopped. The young game company relocated from Kaye's dining room to Gygax's basement and it kept creating games — and this year the focus would be more on the fantasy and roleplaying that marked the company's biggest innovations.

“Tactical Studies Rules is not a giant company; it is not even a large one. But we are growing now, and in the future we might attain substantial size.”

– Brian Blume, “TSR – Why We Do What We Do,”
The Strategic Review v1 #2 (Summer 1975)

TSR's next book, *Supplement I: Greyhawk* (1975), by Gary Gygax and Rob Kuntz, was already under development; it was published later that spring — ahead of schedule thanks to a “surge of income.” *Greyhawk* was the first supplement to *D&D*, and thus another innovation because supplements were largely unheard of in the wargaming industry. Though games were frequently revised and reprinted, continually expanding a game was something new.

Greyhawk introduced plenty of rules tweaks, new spells, and new magic items; it also made the thief available to a much larger audience. One of the rules tweaks was an “alternative combat system”; before that *D&D* had relied on *Chainmail* for combat. Now it was actually a standalone game.

Ironically, TSR printed their own third edition of *Chainmail* (1975) around the same time.

TSR's next product, *Boot Hill* (1975), by Gygas and Blume, had been in development for over a year. It was the first game that can (probably) be called TSR's second RPG — and thus the second RPG in existence. It was still heavily based in miniatures warfare — the core being a man-to-man combat system for Old West gunfighting — but each player had individual and unique characters. It would become a more full-fledged RPG, offering more options, in its second edition (1979).

When Did That Appear!?

Though we take a classic set of classes for granted in modern-day *Dungeons & Dragons*, most were actually built up over a series of publications from 1974–1976. Gary Gygas later returned to the topic with a few new classes in *Dragon* magazine in the early '80s, though today they're somewhat less known. Since third edition *D&D*, new classes have become somewhat more common; a few of the most notable ones are listed here:

- *Chainmail* (1971) – heroes, superheroes, wizards
- *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) – clerics, fighting men, magic-users
- *Game Players Newsletter* #9 (June 1974) – thieves
- *Greyhawk* (1975) – paladins, reprint of thieves
- *The Strategic Review* v1 #2 (Summer 1975) – rangers
- *Blackmoor* (1975) – assassins, monks
- *The Strategic Review* v1 #4 (Winter 1975) – illusionists
- *The Strategic Review* v2 #1 (February 1976) – bards
- *Eldritch Wizardry* (1976) – druids
- *Dragon* #63 (July 1982) – barbarians
- *Dragon* #69 (January 1983) – thief-acrobats
- *Dragon* #72 (April 1983) – cavaliers
- *Dungeons & Dragons 3E* (2000) – sorcerers
- *Miniatures Handbook* (2003) – marshals
- *Complete Arcane* (2004) – warlocks
- *Dungeons & Dragons 4E* (2008) – warlords

The road to TSR's third RPG began with *War of Wizards* (1975), a game of dueling sorcerers by M.A.R. Barker. It was set in the same world as the actual RPG, *Empire of the Petal Throne* (1975), which was published a few months later for Origins. *EPT* was a new RPG designed by Professor M.A.R. Barker in the wake of *D&D*'s success. Its game system cleaved near to *D&D* in some ways, including: its six (slightly different) characteristics, its familiar priestly spells of healing and detecting, and its d20-based combat system that cross-referenced character level and armor class. However it also featured one of the industry's first skill systems and some other variations.

EPT's biggest difference from *D&D* was that it focused on a huge, well-detailed setting, the world of Tékumel. This was at a time when *D&D* had pretty much no setting. Gygax's world of Greyhawk, Arneson's world of Blackmoor, and Kuntz's world of Kalibruhn were dungeons and little more, while Judges Guild's *City State of the Invincible Overlord* (1976) still lay in the future.

Despite the strength of its setting, *EPT* had a few strikes against it. Most notably the boxed game retailed for \$25, which would be over \$100 in today's money, and was two to five times as expensive as anything else on the market. TSR also offered no roleplaying support for Tékumel except in *Dragon* magazine, though they did put out one more Tékumel strategy game, the miniatures-based *Legion of the Petal Throne* (1977).

Following publication of *Empire of the Petal Throne*, Tékumel roleplaying was largely consigned to limbo for the rest of the '70s. Gary Rudolph tried to fill in the background of Tékumel with his Imperium Publishing (1977–1978), which produced a half-dozen or so generic books on armies, languages, and other topics. Though Imperium was short-lived, its publication of M.A.R. Barker's *Book of Ebon Bindings* (1978) remains a milestone for the industry, as it was an actual (and graphic) manual of demonology. *EPT* roleplaying would not receive a revival until after TSR sold the license to Gamescience in 1980; Tékumel's story gets more attention there.

TSR's last RPG release for 1975 was the second *D&D* supplement, *Blackmoor* (1975), which came out toward the end of the year. By now, TSR was running *late* on its schedule, a change from the start of the year. Then, they'd been buoyed up by unexpected profits, but now they were weighed down by the demands of running a company — pretty much the flip side of the same coin.

Where *Greyhawk* offered up Gygax's extended vision of *D&D*, *Blackmoor* instead showed *D&D* as Dave Arneson imagined it. Arneson had not been able to work with the final proofs of the original game, so this was his first opportunity to present his unique take on it. He introduced the new classes of monks and assassins (ironically the two classes which would be removed years later in *AD&D*

second edition), added more monsters, and presented something entirely unique and innovative: an adventure called “The Temple of the Frog.” No one had ever before published an RPG adventure for other people to run: Arneson’s “Temple” was a first. It also had another neat feature: science-fantasy elements, including battle armor, a teleporter, and even a scout craft! Science-fantasy of this sort was surprisingly common in early games by Arneson, Gygax, and others.

Two releases very late in the year kept TSR firmly in the wargame industry. Gary Gygax’s *Classic Warfare* (1975) had been in development for seven years — since Gygax first became interested in ancient miniatures. Mike Carr’s *Fight in the Skies* (1975) on the other hand was a new edition of a classic game, mostly recently published in Guidon Games’ board games line; it also brought Carr closer into the orbit of TSR.

A final notable TSR release of 1975 wasn’t a wargame or an RPG but instead a board game: Dave Megarry’s *Dungeon!* (1975), which we’ve previously met as “The Dungeons of Pasha Cada.” It was published for Origins, alongside *EPT*. Some sources report that Megarry got as much as 10% of TSR’s stock in exchange for the game, which shows just how important Gygax thought it was to the company (or at least how important it *had* been in the evolution of *D&D*).

As we’ve already seen, *Dungeon!* derived from Arneson’s Blackmoor playing sessions, but where Arneson had envisioned a more continuous game with characters that grew from session to session, Megarry instead designed a one-off board game where players trooped through a dungeon on a singular basis. *Dungeon!* was the start of another entirely new gaming medium: the adventure game. Although these games have never been as popular as RPGs, they continue now in the modern day, currently spearheaded by Fantasy Flight Games with releases like *Descent: Journeys in the Dark* (2005) and *Runebound* (2004).

In other words, TSR didn’t just innovate the gaming industry *once*.

A Year of Innovative Changes: 1975

This wave of innovative publishing in 1975 occurred against the backdrop of a constantly changing company that was evolving and expanding in several ways.

This kicked off with Gygax and Blume reorganizing the company, an unfortunate result of Don Kaye’s death in January. It took a few months, but in July 1975 they officially formed TSR Hobbies Inc., a new company controlled by Gary Gygax, Brian Blume, and Brian’s father, Melvin Blume. Gygax originally held 60% ownership of the new TSR, but as part of the reorganization the new partners had to buy out Kaye’s widow, Donna, and pay other fees. Gygax was unable to contribute a fair share of these costs, and so his ownership eventually dropped to

30% of the company, leaving him a minority stockholder — an issue we'll revisit down the road.

Simultaneously, TSR was becoming increasingly professional in another way: they were picking up distributors that helped them ship their games worldwide. That summer they announced Models and Figurines as their Australian distributor and Walter Luc Haas as their European distributor. A few months later Games Workshop came on board as an exclusive distributor in the UK, and by the end of the year TSR was also working with Lou Zocchi in the US.

Some of this international distribution was doubtless on a small-scale. Games Workshop, for example, sold just six copies of *D&D* when they initially ordered it from TSR. However, those small-scale orders soon began to ramp up, and doubtless contributed to *D&D*'s increased success throughout the year.

Where that first print run of 1,000 copies of *D&D* sold in about 11 months in 1974, a second print run of 1,000 copies and a third print run of 2,000 copies sold out by the end of 1975, putting a total of 4,000 copies of TSR's ground-breaking game into circulation after two years. Year by year, those numbers would continue to climb.



What Was In Those Issues!?

The seven-issue run of *The Strategic Review* (1975–1976) offers an intriguing look at the early evolution of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Here are things of note from those early issues (including some repeated character classes):

- *The Strategic Review* v1 #1 (Spring 1975) – mind flayers, solo dungeons
- *The Strategic Review* v1 #2 (Summer 1975) – pole arms, rangers, ropers
- *The Strategic Review* v1 #3 (Autumn 1975) – lurkers above, naga, piercers, shambling mounds, shriekers
- *The Strategic Review* v1 #4 (Winter 1975) – clay golems, illusionists, ioun stones, pole arms
- *The Strategic Review* v1 #5 (December 1975) – raksashas, trappers
- *The Strategic Review* v2 #1 (February 1976) – alignments (law, chaos, good, and evil), bards, sage advice
- *The Strategic Review* v2 #2 (April 1976) – catoblepases, DMing advice for towns

TSR simultaneously started distributing other publishers' games — a pretty common tactic at the time, as the hobbyist industry was pretty fractured. They advertised their first distributed items in *The Strategic Review* #3 (Autumn 1975): a set of three fantasy board games. To be precise, they were three fantasy board games based on the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien: Fact and Fantasy's *The Battle of Helm's Deep* (1974), Fact and Fantasy's *The Siege of Minas Tirith* (1975), and LORE's *Battle of the Five Armies* (1975). By the end of the year, TSR was also selling quite a few of Lou Zocchi's Gamescience games, but it's those three unlicensed Middle-earth games that would be of particular note, as we'll see later.

With success on many different levels, it's only natural that TSR started hiring staff. Gygax had long dreamed of becoming a professional game designer. He was hired as TSR's first full-time employee in mid-1975. By the end of the year, there were three more new employees. Tim Kask was brought on full-time shortly after Gen Con VIII (1975) as Periodicals Editor. He would edit the last 3 issues of *The Strategic Review* and the first 35 issues of *The Dragon* — a new magazine we'll get to momentarily. Then Terry Kuntz joined on October 1 as Service Manager, followed by Rob Kuntz.

Just around the corner, however, there was an even more notable hire — and one that seemed long overdue.

A Year of Expansion: 1976

In January 1976 Dave Arneson — the co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons* — moved to Lake Geneva to join TSR as Research Director. It was part of a general exodus from the Twin Cities, which also brought designer Dave Megarry, editor Mike Carr, and staff artist Dave Sutherland to the company early that year.

"The Dungeon is open for business, tho' we won't have our Grand Opening, until April, because we seem to have a problem in receiving the inventory we ordered. When the inventory is complete, it will be the most complete line of wargaming goodies in the Midwest. Y'all stop by, hear?"

– Tim Kask, "In the Cauldron," *The Strategic Review* v2 #2 (April 1976)

Meanwhile, TSR was changing locations once more. Just as TSR opened 1975 by moving into Gygax's basement, it started 1976 by moving into its first professional home, "The Dungeon Hobby Shop." This Main Street building provided TSR with professional office space, but it was part of a larger plan. Back in 1975 TSR began mail order sales to plan for retail sales. Now, The Dungeon Hobby Shop allowed them to sell their own products to the Lake Geneva public — as well as those from a variety of other small publishers that they were already working with.

As you'd expect, the new year saw more historical publications — but at the same time TSR brought some of its earliest products to an end.

"The Dragon will be our magazine of fantasy, s & s, sci-fi, and roleplaying games, including Diplomacy."

– Tim Kask, "In the Cauldron," *The Strategic Review* v2 #2 (April 1976)

That began with *The Strategic Review*, which published its seventh and last issue in April 1976—but only so that TSR could spin off a new division, TSR Periodicals, and two new magazines, *The Dragon* (1976–2007) and *Little Wars* (1976–1978). TSR claimed that *The Dragon* was the first professional magazine dedicated to the fantasy and science-fiction industry. Though there were existing newsletters such as Games Workshop's *Owl and Weasel* (1975–1977), APAs like Lee Gold's *Alarums and Excursions* (1975–Present), and magazines dedicated primarily to science-fiction and fantasy board games such as Metagaming's *The Space Gamer* (1975–1980+), *The Dragon* was probably the first professional *roleplaying* magazine.

The Dragon was of course better looking and bigger than *The Strategic Review*. Prior to Kask coming aboard, *The Strategic Review* had been just 12 pages long and didn't have a cover. There had been slow improvements since, but when *The Dragon* appeared, it was clearly in a new publishing category. *The Dragon* #1 (June 1976) had a full-color cover from the start, and weighed in at 32 pages.

Tim Kask's *The Dragon* was also surprisingly independent. As already noted TSR Periodicals (Dragon Publishing from 1980–1984) was its own division — but Kask was *really* serious about this division. TSR actually had to purchase advertising in *The Dragon* and conversely if *The Dragon* needed a TSR product, they had to go buy it!

This was all part of Kask's belief that the magazine should *not* be a house organ. As a result games from other publishers — particularly GDW's *Traveller* — got notable coverage in early issues of the magazine; if *The Dragon* still covered TSR products more than anything else that was because, according to Kask: "you can only publish what is submitted."

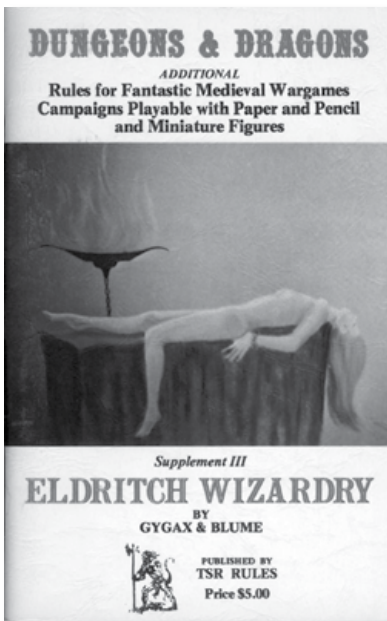
This belief was also displayed in *how* the early *Dragon* covered TSR's games. Even when Gary Gygax started writing his "From the Sorcerer's Scroll" column (1978–1980, 1981–1983, 1984–1985), it was on Kask's terms and under his editing. *The Dragon*'s early attitude of independence may have come across best a bit after Kask's tenure in *Dragon* #55 (November 1981), which featured some surprisingly tepid reviews for one of TSR's biggest releases for the year.

"[W]e have bid farewell to the safe, secure world of the house organ, and have entered the arena of competitive magazine publishing."

– Tim Kask, "Dragon Rumbles," *The Dragon* #1 (June 1976)

TSR's other new magazine, *Little Wars*, showed that the company hadn't left wargames behind yet. One of their most interesting games in the category appeared that year at Gen Con IX: *Lankmar* (1976), designed by Harry Fischer and Fritz Leiber. It was a hex-based wargame, most notable because the creators of the fictional characters of Fafhrd and Grey Mouser had designed the original game — though Gary Gygax, Rob Kuntz, and Brad Stock then redeveloped it. It also represented the beginning of a long relationship between Leiber and TSR — a major bump in the road would come later.

1976 also saw the publication of two more *D&D* supplements, completing the original *D&D* rule set. Gary Gygax and Brian Blume's *Eldritch Wizardry* (1976) appeared in May. It included the first psionic rules (thanks in part to contributor Steve Marsh), the druid character class (thanks in part to contributor Dennis Sustare), and the classic set of *D&D* demons and artifacts. Next up was *Gods, Demi-Gods, and Heroes* (1976), the first list ever of gods to kill, which was released at Gen Con IX (1976). Rob Kuntz came up with the original idea and James M. Ward — now an English and History teacher — offered to help because of his knowledge in the field of mythology. That very busy Gen Con also saw the release of Gary Gygax's *Swords & Spells* (1976). It was the "grandson" of *Chainmail* and presented a new miniatures system for use with *D&D*.



Though *Gods, Demi-Gods, and Heroes* (and *Swords & Spells*) marked the end of the original *D&D* rulebooks, a few additional supplements did appear. Rather than being rules, these new releases were TSR's first gamemaster's aids: *Dungeon Geomorphs* and *Outdoor Geomorphs* (1976–1977) and *Monsters & Treasures Assortments* (1977–1978). However, other than these simplistic maps of dungeons and lists of loot and guardians, TSR left the supplement field to others, some of who were already publishing products, as we'll see shortly.

TSR also published a fourth RPG in November, James M. Ward's *Metamorphosis: Alpha* (1976) — a light science-fiction game with some fantastic elements. The game came about after Ward told Gygax that TSR needed “a science-fiction version of the *D&D* game” and Gygax suggested that Ward write it. This led Ward to create a game set aboard a colony ship — which Ward saw as a dungeon in space thanks to its natural confines. Although the game was *D&D*-like, it didn't have an experience system. Players were instead expected to gather tech items to improve their characters. Ironically, one of the few other games ever to exclude an experience system was another SF game: GDW's *Traveller* (1977). With its strong setting aboard the starship *Warden*, *Metamorphosis: Alpha* was a success, selling strongly over the next two years.

Near the end of 1976 Dave Arneson chose to leave TSR over creative differences: he didn't like the more commercial direction in which the company was moving. Despite his departure, Arneson would continue receiving royalties on *D&D*, leading to some problems which we'll get to very shortly. Arneson's departure was unfortunately part of a general exodus, which included Dave Megarry and Rob Kuntz — costing TSR many of its earliest creators.

Plenty of newcomers appeared too, such as Skip Williams, a young resident of Lake Geneva who had been playing *Chainmail* with James M. Ward and Rob Kuntz since 1974. Williams would have quite a varied career: he joined the Dungeon Hobby Shop as a clerk (1976), later directed Gen Con (1980–1983), and was a staff member at the RPGA (1989) before becoming a designer at TSR. He was also the most long-lived “Sage” of *Dragon* magazine (1987–2004). In the far, far future, Williams would be the only member of the old guard working on Wizards of the Coast's third edition *Dungeons & Dragons* (2000) game.

Though Arneson complained TSR was becoming too commercial, that also meant that it was becoming a solid and professional publishing house.

It was also facing something entirely new: competition.

Allies & Competitors: 1976–1982

In later years TSR became widely known as a litigious company that held on to its intellectual property tightly. Therefore it's somewhat surprising that in its early years, while still on its way up, TSR was much friendlier when working with other companies and offered a few different licenses from 1976–1977.

Minifigs of England was probably TSR's first licensee, in early 1976. They picked up the rights to produce *D&D* miniatures, which they initially used to create a line of demihuman miniatures (1977) — including dwarves, elves, goblins, hobgoblins, orcs, gnolls, kobolds, and hobbits(!). The Old Guard simultaneously licensed rights for *EPT* miniatures.

Around the same time TSR arranged a deal with a small company called Wee Warriors, who was interested in publishing *Dungeons & Dragons* supplements. Though there was never any official use of the *D&D* trademark, four of Wee Warriors' *D&D* supplements were exclusively distributed by TSR.

On a much smaller scale, TSR's Tim Kask gave a young man by the name of Paul (now Jennell) Jaquays a casual license to publish a fanzine named *The Dungeoneer*. It was an amateur publication, but one of the earliest RPG periodicals of any sort, out the same month as *The Dragon #1* (June 1976).

TSR offered their most notable license to Bob Bledsaw, who asked for the right to publish *D&D* supplements. Despite their experience with Wee Warriors, TSR really didn't see much profit in gaming supplements, and so they initially offered Bledsaw's Judges Guild a casual, royalty-free license. After the publication of *City State of the Invincible Overlord* (1976), TSR started asking Bledsaw for money, and in return gave them the right to use the *Dungeons & Dragons* logo.

The stories of both *The Dungeoneer* and Judges Guild can be found in the history of the latter.

Around 1977 TSR also offered up a license to Games Workshop, their exclusive UK distributor. At first GW just produced their own editions of TSR books in Britain. Later, however, they published a few original products bearing the *Dungeons & Dragons* logo, including character sheets (1978), hex sheets (1978), and *Dungeon Floor Plans* (1979).

Meanwhile, *Dungeons & Dragons* (and thus TSR) was picking up competitors too. Flying Buffalo's *Tunnels & Trolls* (1975) was first. GDW's *En Garde!* (1975) — another early game that straddled the line between RPG and miniatures — soon followed. Later that year Flying Buffalo's *Starfaring* (1976) opened up a new genre of space-operatic roleplaying, though GDW's *Traveller* (1977) soon eclipsed it.

None of these other games ever caught up with *D&D* — and in fact no one ever truly competed with TSR in the roleplaying field. However TSR became much more protective of their own rights when they saw the dangers that competition could offer. They dropped Wee Warriors from their distribution in 1977 — or Wee Warriors left because of unpaid money, depending on who you ask. TSR then opted not to renew GW's licenses around 1980 and similarly ended Judges Guild's *D&D* and *AD&D* rights in 1980–1981. Though TSR moved over to Grenadier — an American miniatures licensee — in 1980, they would end that license too in 1982.

After their early deals with Minifigs, Wee Warriors, Judges Guild, and Games Workshop, TSR would withdraw from most licensing in the RPG field. As a result, in the late '70s some publishers began producing “generic fantasy sourcebooks”

that were intended for use with *D&D* while others published complete games clearly derivative of *D&D*. The histories of DayStar West Media, Grimoire Games, and Midkemia Press cover some of the earliest examples of this trend.

Meanwhile, TSR began threatening and suing companies that used their trademarks without permission. The earliest of these threats were (not surprisingly) against companies that made use of the phrase “Dungeons & Dragons.” The *American Wargamer* ’zine got a letter in March 1976 because they’d published *Dungeons & Dragons* character sheets. *The Space Gamer* and Flying Buffalo got a letter around the same time due to Flying Buffalo’s ads that contrasted *Tunnels & Trolls* and *Monsters! Monsters!* (1976) with *D&D*. Heritage Models was another early target for its use of the words “Dungeons & Dragons” in advertising. There would be many more.

The Tolkien Connection: 1974–1977

In talking about TSR’s early interactions with the legal world, we should also touch upon their unlicensed use of J.R.R. Tolkien’s mythology — and how it earned TSR some nasty legal letters of their own.

In the ’60s, the copyright status of Tolkien’s books in the U.S. was surprisingly up in the air. Ace Books published a totally unauthorized version of *The Lord of the Rings* (1965), in advance of the authorized edition by Ballantine Books (1965). These books considerably influenced the youth culture of the ’60s. This in turn caused gamers to become interested in fantasy gaming. We’ve already seen this resulting in some unauthorized wargames created in 1974 and 1975 by super small publishers LORE and Fact and Fantasy.

It was against this background that Gygax and Arneson created *Dungeons & Dragons*. As a result, they probably didn’t think much about appropriating some of Tolkien’s creations and incorporating them into *D&D*. Thus hobbits were a player race and barrow wights, ents, nazgûl, and orcs were all mentioned as well.

Exactly how much Tolkien *really* influenced *D&D* is a different question. In *The Dragon* #13 (April 1978) Rob Kuntz wrote, “Tolkien’s does not fit well within the *D&D* game style.” More famously in *Dragon* #95 (March 1985) Gygax himself wrote, “The seeming parallels and inspirations are actually the results of a studied effort to capitalize on the then-current ‘craze’ for Tolkien’s literature.” He claimed that Tolkien wasn’t a major influence on *D&D*. He further said that if it looked like Tolkien was an influence, it was because they both used the same folklore as sources, and then if that *still* looked like Tolkien was an influence, that’s because he was trying to fool people into buying the game.

Wee Warriors: 1974?—1978, 2000—2006

Wee Warriors is a company that got in on the ground floor of the RPG business. They *could* have been another Judges Guild or even GDW, but instead they lasted for just a couple of years and are today a footnote in an RPG history.

The company was founded by Pete Kerestan, perhaps as early as late 1974, the same year that *D&D* itself was released – though there are some doubts about the 1974 date, as the earliest definitive date for a Wee Warriors publication is the September 1975 release of *The Character Archaic*. In 1974 Kerestan was still in the army, but had time to play around with printing character sheets in El Segundo, California. It wasn't until 1975, when Kerestan got out of the army and set up his own hobby shop, that Wee Warriors became available to the public. Kerestan was aided in his endeavors by author/artist Judy Kerestan and artist Brad "Morno" Schenck.

The earliest Wee Warriors supplements were sold out of the trunk of Kerestan's car, a time-honored tradition in the young roleplaying field. However in 1976 TSR picked them up for exclusive distribution. Four of the first Wee Warriors products got more widely sold in this manner: *The Character Archaic* (1975), *Palace of the Vampire Queen* (1976), *The Dwarven Glory* (1977), and *The Endless Dungeon* (1977).

These Wee Warriors products were generally ground-breaking. *The Character Archaic* was the first commercial character record sheet (usable with both *D&D* and *Empire of the Petal Throne*), while *Palace of the Vampire Queen* was the first standalone adventure. *Palace* and *Glory* were both set in the Kingdom of Baylor, which comprised a very early campaign world – one that was further expanded by a later publication, *The Misty Isles* (1977), which set Baylor amidst a series of islands.

The TSR/Wee Warriors agreement ended in 1977. Wee Warriors states that it was due to non-payment on TSR's part. Afterward, Lou Zocchi distributed the Wee Warriors line. Wee Warriors continued to put out a few RPG supplements, such as *The Misty Isles* and the even later *Dungeon Designer's Kit* (1978), but beyond that they moved on to small board games and wargames with *Dogtags* (1978) – a game of "man to man squad actions in the European Theatre 1944" – being one of their last releases.

Another teeny company called Cosmic Frog Productions was associated with Wee Warriors throughout its life. That was the company name for artist Morno. He advertised it as early as 1975, for those looking for "fantasy and legendary illustration." One of Wee Warrior's later wargames, *Dragonlord* (1977), was entirely the work of Morno and thus was listed as a Cosmic Frog co-production.

After a 20-year hiatus, weewarriors.com appeared on the web in 2000 with a promise that it would soon have "Resin products, Paper game aids, Cast miniatures." Though the website disappeared, a "weewarriors" eBay store run by Peter Kerestan soon after started selling miniatures. Some 1717 sales later, in 2006, Wee Warriors was accused of recasting miniatures from both Amazon Miniatures and Shadowforge Miniatures and ordered to cease & desist, casting somewhat of a pall on the company's rich history.

"As anyone familiar with both D&D games and Tolkien works can affirm, there is no resemblance between the two, and it is well-nigh impossible to recreate any Tolkien-based fantasy while remaining within the boundaries of the game system."

– Gary Gygax, "The influence of J. R. R. Tolkien on the D&D and AD&D games,"
Dragon #95 (March 1985)

Readers can decide for themselves how much they think Tolkien influenced *D&D*, particularly in its TSR-based iterations. However they should know that by 1978 TSR had reasons to try to minimize the game's connection to Middle-earth — because by then there had been legal threats over the issue.

The problems *probably* started with those three Middle-earth wargames that TSR began selling in 1975. By the next year they'd acquired rights to at least *Battle of the Five Armies*. As a result they reprinted it themselves, first in a bagged edition (1976), then in a box (1977).

Meanwhile, Saul Zaentz had purchased the non-literary rights to J.R.R. Tolkien's works, which he would use to produce Ralph Bakshi's animated *The Lord of the Rings* (1978). It was Zaentz — through his Elan Merchandising division — that delivered a cease & desist letter to TSR late in 1977 for their use of material copyrighted by Tolkien.

It's just as likely that the cease & desist letter came about due to TSR's nice new *Five Armies* game as from the Tolkien references in *D&D*. In any case, TSR was forced to retire the *Five Armies* game and also scrub Tolkien references out of future releases of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Around the same time, Fact and Fantasy's games disappeared, as did Minifigs UK's unlicensed "Mythical Earth" line — probably all as a result of Elan's new legal rights.

The rights held by Elan Merchandising, by the by, have shifted around a bit in Saul Zaentz's corporate structure over the years. From the '80s through the '00s you would instead have heard of Tolkien Enterprises — who features in the story of ICE — while more recently you'd hear of Middle-earth Enterprises.

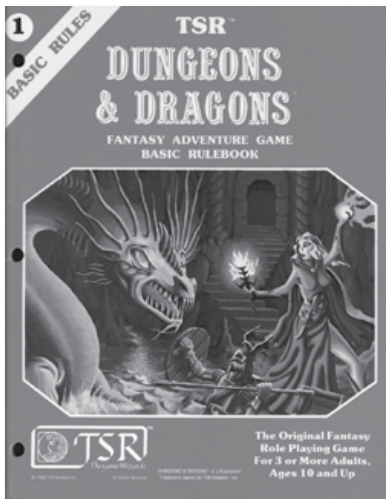
Before closing out the topic of Tolkien entirely, it's worth considering who Gygax attributed as *D&D*'s "real" influences in *Dragon #95*. There he said that the game's major influences were "Robert E. Howard, L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, Fritz Leiber, Poul Anderson, A. Merritt, and H. P. Lovecraft." Of course J.R.R. Tolkien is right alongside those luminaries in "Appendix N" for *AD&D* ... a topic that we're just now approaching.

Basic & Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: 1977–1980

Having spent some time examining how TSR was interacting with the rest of the world in the mid-to-late '70s, we should return now to their actual publications. Here we find something rather surprising: in 1977 TSR's premiere game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, simultaneously moved in two very different directions.

First, J. Eric Holmes — a doctor and professor of neurology, and also the author of a Pellucidar pastiche called *Mahars of Pellucidar* (1976) — approached TSR with an offer to write an introductory version of *D&D*. The original game targeted the college-age crowd, while Holmes wanted to expand the game's demographics to younger players — and possibly to get it into the mass market as well. He also wanted to make it possible to actually learn the game by reading the rules, which had always been a point of contention for the game. This all dovetailed nicely with TSR's desire to unify and clarify *D&D*, which had been a concern since at least early 1976, and so Holmes was brought on to create a simplified game.

Holmes' *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set* (1977) was a revision of Gygax and



Arneson's original RPG plus the *Greyhawk* supplement. It was intended to increase access to *D&D* through "maximum availability and minimum difficulty." It only took players through the first three levels of play, with the idea being that they'd then be ready to try out the original *D&D* game. The boxed set originally included geomorphs and monster and treasure lists, so that GMs could easily *create* dungeons, but TSR soon realized things needed to be even easier, resulting in first *Basic Set* adventures, a topic we'll return to.

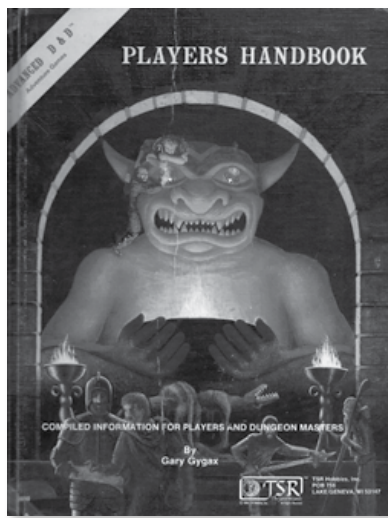
(1981 edition)

"During a lull in the action, I am apt to receive several notes from those present: 'My thief is going to pick the paladin's pocket.' 'My magic-user is casting a Detect Magic on the staff the gnome just found.' 'My dwarf is going to slip some of the unknown potion into the elf's canteen.' While I do have difficulty, sometimes, deciding (and remembering) who did what to whom, the players never erupt into bloodshed. The characters do, rather frequently."

– John Eric Holmes, "Confessions of a Dungeon Master,"
Psychology Today v14 #6 (November 1980)

The result was a best-seller that got out into the mass market, just as Holmes hoped. By the end of 1978, Gygax said it was selling 4,000 copies a month — precisely what *OD&D* had sold in all of 1974 and 1975. Within three years, Gygax would talk about there being “500,000 *D&D* players” thanks to the *Basic Set*.

Meanwhile Gary Gygax was already working on a *more* complex version of *D&D* that he called “Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.” Where the original *D&D* (and Holmes’ *Basic D&D*) was somewhat freeform and offered referees the opportunity to make their own decisions, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* instead was a more rigorously defined game system intended to codify *D&D*. This was partly done to better support tournament play, but Gygax had also grown increasingly unhappy with how *D&D* was being played differently all across the world. So he wrote a game that was less open-ended and had “more control over its audience.”



AD&D was released in four volumes. That December the *Monster Manual* (1977) was published. It would have been the first collection of RPG monsters if not for Chaosium’s publication of *All the Worlds’ Monsters* (1977), a “generic” supplement, earlier that year. Regardless, it was the first hardcover roleplaying release. The *AD&D Players Handbook* (1978) and *Dungeon Masters Guide* (1979) followed over the next year and a half (leaving the entire roleplaying industry in suspense throughout much of 1978).

Finally, *Deities & Demigods* (1980) ended the *AD&D* series with another look at gods — just like *Supplement IV* for the original *D&D*. Though today we wouldn’t consider *Deities & Demigods* a “core” book, it had been conceived as part of the four-book *AD&D* series from the start. *Deities* author James M. Ward finally joined TSR full-time just before its publication.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons was a very necessary revision of the original *D&D* game. As the first RPG, *D&D* had no guidelines for *how* to create an RPG. The original *D&D* rules had thus been errataed, modified, and amended as they were spread out among seven books. *AD&D* finally collected all that together, with several years of hindsight available. However, *AD&D* was also the starting point of many controversies and long-term problems.

First, it effectively split the *D&D* line into thirds, with the original *D&D*, *Basic D&D*, and *Advanced D&D* now all in print. People at the time just called them all *Dungeons & Dragons*, but as we'll see the lines would grow further apart, until they were truly different games.

Second, it sparked the trend of rules being more thorough and being required for "official" games. Whether designers were writing "official" *D&D* supplements and whether players were playing "official" *D&D* games caused raging arguments throughout the '80s, many of them seen in *Dragon* magazine. It was also one of the points of contention between TSR and Judges Guild in the final years of that license.

"Additions to and augmentations of certain parts of the D&D rules are fine. Variants which change the rules so as to imbalance the game or change it are most certainly not."

— Gary Gygax, "From the Sorcerer's Scroll," *The Dragon* #16 (July 1978)

Third, it created a rift between Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson that ultimately put TSR in some legal peril. Gygax claimed *AD&D* as his own property, saying that Arneson was due no royalties from it. This resulted in the 1979 filing of a lawsuit by Arneson that would last two years, before being settled in March 1981. Though the 1981 agreement was confidential, a later 1985 lawsuit over *Monster Manual II* royalties revealed some of the details: under the deal, Arneson earned royalties for some of the *AD&D* books, including the *Monster Manual*, at a rate of 2.5% of the cover price — to a total of no more than \$1.2 million dollars.

(Amusingly, Arneson won that second lawsuit from 1985 based on the court coming to the conclusion that the *Monster Manual II* was a "revised edition" of the *Monster Manual*, using the typically tortured legal logic that makes people tell lawyer jokes.)

Looking back from the 21st century, we're likely to think of *AD&D* as being TSR's most successful game, but this wasn't true in the early '80s when *Basic D&D* was selling like gangbusters. In *The Dragon* #35 (March 1980), while talking about his work on a *Basic Set* adventure, Gygax had to clarify: "This is not to say that *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* has been abandoned." The idea of *AD&D* being abandoned in favor of a simpler game was clearly a real fear. It would take a number of years for the trend to reverse, as new players decreased and TSR started selling more to its existing base of customers.

Growing Staff, Changing Priorities: 1977–1980

With all of this emphasis on RPGs, it's no surprise that TSR was slowly moving away from wargames. We've already seen some of this, such as the cancellation of the *Star Probe* trilogy after 1977. However, the trend was most obvious in the highs and lows of *Little Wars* magazine.

In 1977, *Little Wars* was doing well enough that Joe Orlowski was brought in to manage the wargame magazine; he was TSR Periodicals' second employee. Just a year later, with *Little Wars* #12 (1978), the magazine came to an end. It was theoretically merged into *The Dragon* with issue #22 (February 1979), but extensive wargaming coverage only lasted for a year or two.

Meanwhile, the Periodicals division kept growing *despite* the loss of *Little Wars*. Orlowski became TSR's Convention Director, but was immediately replaced on TSR Periodicals' staff by Gary "Jake" Jaquet. Kim Mohan joined next, during the summer. By the following year TSR Periodicals would have multiple new staff, and would even get into the distribution business for other magazines, including GW's *White Dwarf*.

The rest of TSR was growing as well. Other notable hires in the period include editors Harold Johnson and Frank Mentzer, who joined in 1979 and 1980, respectively. Then there were two entirely new *departments* that were both created *and* filled with personnel.

The Design Department came first and showed TSR's new emphasis on role-playing. Gygas premiered it with Lawrence Schick and Jean Wells in 1979. Once Schick took over as head of the department, he hired David "Zeb" Cook and Tom Moldvay, who would soon prove very important to *D&D's* next evolutionary step.

A short-lived Development Department appeared around 1980 to supplement the Design Department. It was led by Al Hammack. The developers would take a rough draft from the Design Department, playtest it, troubleshoot it, and generally polish up the manuscript before sending it on to Production. Kevin Hendryx and Paul Reiche III were two of the earliest hires for the department.

"It wasn't until Fred 9803 that my character finally lived through more than two adventures. I was on a roll."

– David "Zeb" Cook, "First Quest: Older than Dirt," *Dragon* #207 (July 1994)

Many of these new hires — including Cook, Johnson, Mentzer, Moldvay, and Wells — were a new sort of employee: they'd been players who had enjoyed *Dungeons & Dragons* before they ever came to TSR. Jean Wells, on the other hand, was a different sort of new hire for TSR; she was the company's only female designer.

Back to Basics: 1981

With a growing staff — and with *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* now complete — the Design Department was able to work on a new priority: a second edition of Holmes' bestselling *Basic Set* (1981). The new edition, developed by Tom Moldvay, explicitly broke ties between *Basic D&D* and *AD&D*, creating a division that would last for over a decade.

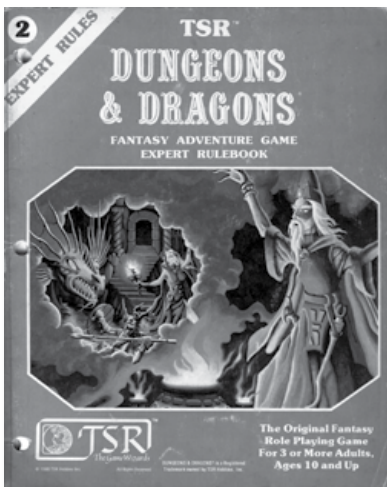
The new *Basic Set* was also simplified over the Holmes version. After the tremendous growth of the previous years, Moldvay said that the majority of *D&D* players were now in junior high or high school, and he wanted to appeal to them. Therefore the new rulebook had fewer spells, fewer character classes, and overall fewer complexities. There was even a new section on how to GM games — which doubtless used lessons hard-won from the two introductory adventures that TSR had published, a topic we'll return to.

Moldvay's *Basic D&D* was also notable for another reason. It said right in the introduction: "The purpose of these 'rules' is to provide guidelines that enable you to play and have fun, so don't feel absolutely bound to them." This was the philosophy of the original *D&D* that had been pushed out by *AD&D*'s new, more rigid mechanics. *Basic D&D* thus remained an island of creativity in the new age.

There was another important reason for the release of the new *Basic Set*. It was created to match a totally new boxed set, *Expert Dungeons & Dragons* (1981), created by fellow new hire Zeb Cook. When Holmes' original *Basic Set* was first released, there was real question as to whether it should direct players toward the original *D&D* or *AD&D*. Though Gygax did incorporate some material from the *AD&D* outlines into the original *Basic Set*, most players were forced to move on to

the more complex original game, because that's what was available.

Now, with so many new players entering the game via *Basic D&D*, the question of how to retain them was even more important. TSR had opted to create an *Expert Set* that took them from levels 4–14. Even before the release of *Expert D&D*, Gygax announced that it'd be followed by a "Masters Set" that would take players from levels 15–36, but as we'd see, this follow-up book would never appear in this iteration of *Basic D&D*.



D&D Supplements & Growth: 1978–1981

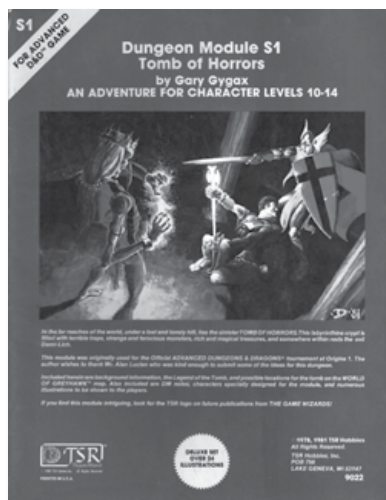
Having stepped through the major iterations of *D&D* that appeared from 1977 through 1981—and the changes in priorities and staff that accompanied them—we’re now going to see how TSR supplemented those new games. You’ll recall that in 1977 they produced just a few supplements, including some geomorphs and some random treasure and monsters lists. However, TSR hadn’t yet touched upon two major categories of supplement production, both of which were already been supported by Judges Guild: background books and (more importantly) adventures.

Though TSR didn’t publish adventures before 1978, that doesn’t mean that they weren’t writing them. Adventures, after all, were necessary for games—particularly for the tournament games that *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* would soon be empowering.

Thus Gary Gygax’s *Tomb of Horrors*—one of the most infamous dungeons ever, thanks to its traps and high mortality rate—ran at Origins I (1975). It was soon followed by Rob Kuntz’s “The Sunken City” at Gen Con VIII (1975). The next year Gygax’s *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*—infamous for its science-fantasy elements, including space ship and ray guns—ran at Origins II (1976). Then Gygax’s *The Lost Caverns of Tsojconth* ran at Winterfest V (1976). The Metro Detroit Gamers published *that* adventure (with TSR’s permission) in an estimated run of 300 copies. It became Gygax’s first published adventure, and one of the first published adventures ever—alongside the classics we’ve already met, “The Temple of the Frog” and *Palace of the Vampire Queen*.

However, tournament adventures and TSR publication didn’t come together for two more years. By that time, TSR was likely seeing the success of companies like Judges Guild and Wee Warriors and wanted to get involved in that business. By coincidence, Gygax had some free time in between writing the three *AD&D* volumes, when he needed to clear his head and work on something different.

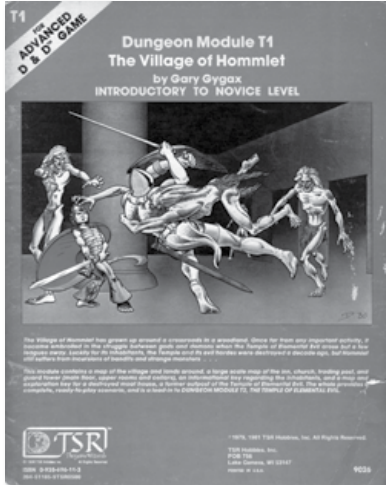
As a result, TSR ran a series of Gygaxian adventures about giants as the Origins IV (1978) *D&D* tournament, then published them beginning with *G1: Steading of the Hill Giant Chief* (1978), which was their first adventure. TSR followed that up at Gen Con XI (1978)’s *D&D* Open Tournament with a deep delving adventure



that became the “D” *Descent* adventure series (1978). TSR ended the year by publishing the already-classic *S1: Tomb of Horrors* (1978) as their seventh adventure.

The one adventure notably missing from TSR’s first year of publication was the finale to the “G” and “D” adventure series. As we’ll see, it would take a few years for *Q1* to appear.

Other *AD&D* adventures of note in these early years included: the “A” *Slavers* series (1980–1981), a set of tournament adventures originally run as the *D&D*



Open at Gen Con XIII (1980); *S2: White Plume Mountain* (1979), one of the first adventures that required thought, not just hacking and slashing; and *T1: The Village of Hommlet* (1979), TSR’s first adventure dealing with a village, not just a dungeon, and thus the first setting book truly detailing a Greyhawk locale. A follow-up to *Hommlet* called *The Temple of Elemental Evil* was promised, but didn’t appear for many years.

TSR also decided to support *Basic D&D* with adventures. Mike Carr’s *B1: In Search of the Unknown* (1979) and Gary

Gygax’s *B2: The Keep on the Borderlands* (1980) led the way. Each provided tons of GMing advice as well as an introductory dungeon. GMs were expected to fill in the contents of the dungeon themselves in *Search*, but it was ultimately decided that this made things too hard for a new GM. Thus *Keep* offered up a completely filled dungeon. *Search* was packaged with the first edition *Basic Set* for about one year, and then *Keep* filled that slot for the rest of the first edition’s run and the entirety of the second edition run. One report suggests that, as a result, over one-and-a-half-million copies of *The Keep on the Borderlands* were eventually printed, making it the most popular RPG module ever.

A few other early *Basic D&D* adventures were of some note as well:

B3: Palace of the Silver Princess (1981), by Jean Wells, was TSR’s first adventure by a female designer. Unfortunately, it also became TSR’s first adventure that was recalled, allegedly due to issues with the Erol Otus artwork. It was soon after re-released in a second printing by Tom Moldvay and Jean Wells. Because of the recall, the first edition *Palace* has become one of the rarest TSR collector items.

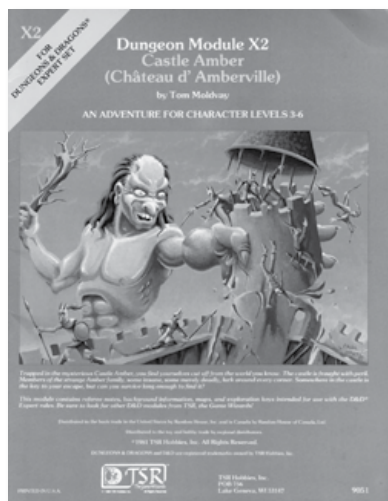
X1: The Isle of Dread (1981) was published with the new *Expert Set*. Those rules centered on “wilderness” adventuring, and *The Isle of Dread* was TSR’s first adventure about killing monsters in jungles, forests, and other wilderness areas, rather than in dungeons. It was also the first book to really define the campaign setting of *D&D*’s “Known World,” though it would be six years before the setting was more broadly expanded.

X2: Castle Amber (1981) continuing right on with that detailing of the Known World by linking it to writer Clark Ashton Smith’s province of Averroigne. *Castle Amber* was an early TSR licensed setting as well as an early (but light) Cthulhu connection — released the exact same year that Chaosium was publishing *Call of Cthulhu* (1981) itself.

Meanwhile, TSR was getting into the setting business too — which was one reason that Gygax was having problems finding time for adventures like *Q1* and *The Temple of Elemental Evil*.

Gygax’s *The World of Greyhawk Fantasy World Setting* (1980) was a folio that depicted TSR’s first complete campaign world for *AD&D*. Unlike later worlds such as the Forgotten Realms, Greyhawk was somewhat abstract, with broad sweeps of land creating a framework for a campaign world, but offering few specifics. And there was reason for that: Gary Gygax made up much of the world on the spot, drawing it to fit two maps of the precise size that TSR could publish. They were beautiful maps, though, thanks in large part to artist Darlene, who made them the main draw of the folio.

The World of Greyhawk was planned to kick off a new emphasis on the Greyhawk campaign world. Minifigs of the UK was supposed to be working on an “Armies of Greyhawk” set of miniatures rules, while TSR was planning a “City of Greyhawk” folio. Meanwhile, Skip Williams was announced as the author of “Shadowland,” depicting Greyhawk’s plane of shadow. It would have been a huge explosion of Greyhawk material — but none of it appeared, though Minifigs did create a nice line of Greyhawk miniatures (1980) to go with their existing *D&D* miniatures line. The next year, Gygax would bring in some old friends to better revitalize and expand Greyhawk, but we’ll need to wait a bit for the results of that, as much more was going on at TSR at the time.



With successful adventures and sourcebooks under their belt, by 1981 TSR was poised to take advantage of the *D&D* supplement market that was now opening up due to the termination of their long-running licenses with Judges Guild. However, these new supplements were *not* the whole of TSR's *D&D* production.

Following the release of the four core *AD&D* books, TSR decided to keep publishing one hardcover *AD&D* book each year, but their first new release came from a very innovative direction: Britain.

At the time, interest in *D&D* was growing in the British Isles thanks primarily to Games Workshop's *White Dwarf* magazine. Within its pages, one Don Turnbull was editing a regular monster column, called "The Fiend Factory," which collected together reader contributions. It was successful enough that Games Workshop decided to produce a book of these monsters, which was to be called the *Fiend Folio*. GW arranged with TSR for their *Fiend Folio* to be an "official" *AD&D*



release, as their earlier gaming accessories had been. Turnbull finished the book for GW around September 1979 ... after which time it sat around for two years! The problem was that agreements over the *AD&D* license fell apart, and it would be two years before a deal was finally made. In the end, it wasn't Games Workshop who published *Fiend Folio* (1981), but instead TSR, as their fifth *AD&D* hardcover.

Though the *Fiend Folio* certainly had some silly monsters (such as the flail snail and the much-satirized flumph), it also was influential in a number of ways. First, it got Don Turnbull directly involved with TSR — a relationship that would only increase in the future. Second, it was the first major British addition to the *D&D* game. Third, it introduced many notable monsters to the game, among them the death knight, the githyanki, the githzerai, and the slaads.

The author of those four greats was none other than Charles Stross, who has since become a *Locus* and Hugo winning novelist.

The Settings of Yore: Greyhawk

When one speaks of the oldest RPG worlds, there are two—Greyhawk and Blackmoor, for within those campaigns lay the genesis of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Greyhawk was the world of Gary Gygax. Perhaps because of its primal origins or perhaps because of the fact that it came to be owned by a company (TSR) rather than a person (Gygax), it has been one of the most malleable RPG worlds ever—mutating and changing many times over the years.

The first view of what would become Greyhawk appeared in *The Domesday Book #9* (early 1971) as a “mythical world” for the Castle & Crusade Society. A map showed familiar names such as the Dry Steppes, the Sea of Dust, and (most importantly) the Nir Dyv, a “Lake of Unknown Depth.” Jon Peterson—author of *Playing at the World*—surmises that both the city of Greyhawk and the Barony of Blackmoor appear on the map, as it was intended to be a world held in common by the Society’s members.

Greyhawk as a roleplaying setting came into existence in 1972 when Gygax began preparing dungeons for play with *D&D*. Outside of Gygax’s family, the other earliest travelers to Greyhawk were Don Kaye (“Murlynd”), Rob Kuntz (“Robilar”), and Terry Kuntz (“Terik”). These primordial players mostly stayed within the dungeons of Castle Greyhawk, which became 13 levels deep by late 1973—but Gygax did have more of the world lightly sketched out. Because Gygax envisioned a sort of “parallel Earth,” the version of Oerth (pronounced “Oith,” as if you had a Brooklyn accent) looked much like our own Earth, but filled with imaginary cities and countries.

Greyhawk underwent its next metamorphosis when Gygax brought Rob Kuntz in as a co-DM for his campaign (probably sometime in 1974, the same year that *D&D* was actually published). Kuntz had previously run his own *D&D* game, where players (Gygax chief among them) ventured into Castle El Raja Key in the world of Kalibruhn. Now, much of El Raja Key was incorporated directly into Castle Greyhawk. Afterward, Gygax and Kuntz created new levels together. By the campaign’s end in 1985, the dungeons beneath Castle Greyhawk would be somewhere between 50 and 70 levels deep, depending on who you ask.

Scant hints of Gygax and Kuntz’s earliest Greyhawk can be found in articles that Gary Gygax wrote for *El Conquistador*, *Great Plains Game Players Newsletter*, and *Wargamer’s Digest*—largely in an attempt to advertise *D&D* on the cheap. It also shows up in “The Gnome Cache,” a serialized story that Gygax wrote under the pen name “Garrison Ernst” from *The Dragon #1* (June 1976) through #7 (June 1977). However it would be years before TSR and Gygax dealt with the world in any depth.

There was another metamorphosis for Greyhawk several years later when TSR produced the *World of Greyhawk Fantasy World Setting* folio (1980). Gygax was

asked to produce a map of the world, and he decided that TSR's readers wouldn't be interested in adventuring upon a map of the real world, so he created something new. To do so, he figured out what size of map TSR could print, and then drew out a new world to exactly fit the two maps that would be included with the game. It still featured many of the locales from his original world of Oerth, but the geography was all new. Looking at a modern map of Oerth, you can just barely imagine that the Nyr Dyv – which Castle Greyhawk sits upon – was once the Great Lakes.

Following the publication of that folio, Gygax and Kuntz published some of their original Greyhawk adventures in products ranging from *WG4: The Forgotten Temple of Tharizdun* (1982) to *WG6: Isle of the Ape* (1985). However Greyhawk was simultaneously incorporating material from a variety of other authors. This began with Lawrence Schick's *S2: White Plume Mountain* (1979) and also included the "A" Slavers series (1980–1981), by a variety of writers, and the early TSR UK adventures *U1-U3* (1981–1983), by Dave Browne and Don Turnbull. The most notable addition in this period was the inclusion of Lendore Isle – the home of Len Lakofka's campaign – in *L1: The Secret of Bone Hill* (1981).

An even more expansive addition came with the incorporation of Frank Mentzer's continent of Aquaria – the home of his campaign running since 1976 and also the setting of his RPGA modules, four of which were published by TSR and the RPGA, starting with *R1: To the Aid of Falx* (1982). There's little doubt that Gygax intended Aquaria to be a previously unknown eastern continent in Oerth, but the idea was never really explored following Gygax's 1985 departure from TSR. In fact, after Mentzer's four RPGA modules were reprinted as *I12: Egg of the Phoenix* (1987), some of the characters found therein were then incorporated into *FR5: The Savage Frontier* (1988), a Forgotten Realms(!) supplement – which isn't a surprise, given the speed with which TSR was incorporating *everything* into the Realms at the time, from Moonshae Isles to Bloodstone Pass.

After Gygax left TSR in 1985, the Greyhawk setting *forked*. Gygax himself retained rights to his fictional character, Gord the Rogue – as well as a few characters whose names derived from his, such as Zagyg the Mad Wizard. Over the next several years, Gygax used those rights to publish a series of Gord the Rogue novels ending with *Dance of Demons* (1988) in which Gygax destroyed Oerth (!) and replaced it with the world of Yarth – which may or may not have been the Aearth of *Mythus* (1992).

Meanwhile, TSR responded to Gygax's departure by rolling out the Forgotten Realms.

Greyhawk *did* get some fictional attention when TSR continued Gary Gygax's "Greyhawk Adventures" novels with new books by Rose Estes, starting with *Master Wolf* (1987) and ending with *The Eyes Have It* (1989). However, TSR published only

scattered RPG supplements until *AD&D* second edition, which saw the publication of the beautiful *The City of Greyhawk* (1989) box and the *WGR1: Greyhawk Ruins* (1990) book. Neither of these locales had much in common with the original locations created by Gygas & Kuntz almost 20 years prior, showing how Greyhawk continued to metamorphize and change – though James M. Ward and some of players of those early games did *try* to get the feel right. Around the same time, TSR published Robin Wayne Bailey's *Nightwatch* (1990) novel, which was set in Greyhawk City but didn't feature the "Greyhawk Adventures" trade dress at all – showing the weakness of the setting at TSR.

1992 saw a much more substantive "reboot" of Greyhawk overseen by Carl Sargent. He pushed forward the timeline several years and gave the setting a cohesive metastory: a series of wars, chronicled in the *WGS* adventure series (1991) and *Greyhawk Wars* (1991), led to a darker, grittier state for the world, itself detailed in *From the Ashes* (1992). This new vision of Greyhawk continued until TSR cancelled the line two years later.

Wizards of the Coast opted to reboot the world again, moving the timeline ahead once more through the publication of *Return of the Eight* (1998) and *The Adventure Begins* (1998), both by Roger E. Moore. Sargent's darkness lightened and the setting regained some of its earlier, Gygasian feel.

Unfortunately, the setting's 1998 renewal quickly fizzled out – at least for *D&D*. After a handful of original adventures (1998), several "Returns" to past Greyhawk adventures (1998–2001), and a new series of novels supporting the "Return" adventures (1999–2002), Wizards of the Coast consigned Greyhawk to being the "default" setting for *D&D* – which is to say the largely undetailed background you see in the rulebooks.

Living Greyhawk (2000–2008) was simultaneously made into the official RPGA campaign (replacing RPGA's ancient Living City Forgotten Realms campaign), but other than a few Wizards publications like *Living Greyhawk Gazetteer* (2000), the Living Greyhawk campaign was considered "unofficial" – though *Expedition to the Ruins of Greyhawk* (2007), a late Wizards Greyhawk adventure, was set far enough ahead in the timeline to accommodate the Living events.

Meanwhile, Greyhawk got a *massive* expansion in another medium thanks to Chris Pramas' work on the *Chainmail Miniatures Game* (2001). It was set in the Sundered Empire, located on a heretofore-unknown subcontinent in Western Oerik. As releases for *Chainmail* progressed, Pramas snuck in an increasing number of connections to eastern Oerik, ending with a society of Drow who had ties to the classic "D" *Descent* series of adventures (1978). Unfortunately, roleplaying supplements never

codified Pramas' work for *D&D* proper, and thus it's largely forgotten today – though his histories and backgrounds can still be found in *Dragon* #285 (July 2001) through *Dragon* #296 (June 2002).

Nowadays, Greyhawk is “unofficial” all around, for it has returned to the hands of its fans and its earliest creators. The *Oerth Journal* (1995-Present) has long been an online source for fannish Greyhawk material, while *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines both gave some attention to Greyhawk while being published by Paizo Publishing, because some of their editors (including Erik Mona, one-time editor of the *Oerth Journal*) were fans; all three of Paizo's *Dungeon* adventure paths (2003–2007) were officially (though lightly) set in the world of Greyhawk.

Gary Gygax returned to writing about Greyhawk in the last years of his life by publishing *Castle Zagyg* through Troll Lord Games (2005–2008). Those books represented his best attempt to recreate the Castle Greyhawk of 1972–1985, but were far from complete at the time of his death.

Rob Kuntz has also begun republishing his old campaign materials, including some dungeon levels that were either written for Castle Greyhawk or incorporated into it via Castle El Raja Key. This has most notably included *RJK1: Bottle City* (2007) and *The Original Living Room* (2007), both of which were parts of the shared Castle Greyhawk.

The constant reinvention of Castle Greyhawk – the most famous dungeon in Oerth – shows how much the entire campaign world has changed. The actual dungeons that were run from 1972–1985 have never been published. They were hinted at in some early supplements, but those hints and the modern-day Gygax and Kuntz recreations are the only insights we have into those original games.

The first actual printed version of the dungeon was the farcical *WG7: Castle Greyhawk* (1988), which had nothing to do with the original and which was thankfully followed by the more serious *WGR1: Greyhawk Ruins* (1990) a few years later. The latter supplement was recently remade into the 3E-compatible *Expedition to the Ruins of Greyhawk* (2007), published by Wizards of the Coast, but written by some familiar names from Paizo, such as Erik Mona and James Jacobs.

TSR also published three modules that represented extraplanar regions originally connected to the castle back in the original Lake Geneva campaign: *EX1: Dungeonland* (1983), *EX2: The Land Beyond the Magic Mirror* (1983), and *WG6: Isle of the Ape* (1985).

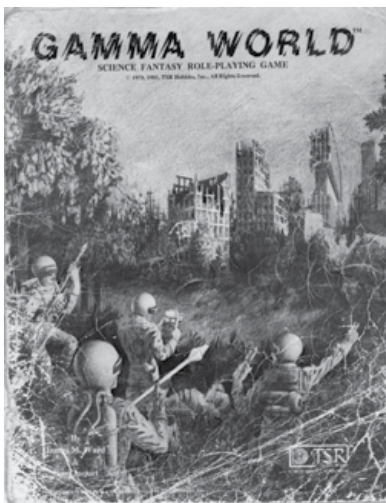
Besides all of these Castle Greyhawk variants, parts of Castle El Raja Key have also been published, as is more fully described in the history of Creations Unlimited.

So which Castle Greyhawk is the real and correct one? As with many things RPG, the answer is, “the one in *your* campaign.”

Mutants, Gunfighters, Spies, Gangsters & Knight Hawks: 1978–1983

Another way in which TSR continued to grow in the late '70s — and through into the '80s — was via the publication of numerous additional RPGs. *Boot Hill*, *EPT*, and *Metamorphosis Alpha* were published in 1975–1976 but not supplemented, then TSR took a year off from alternative games in 1977. Starting in 1978 they gave it another shot, releasing five RPGs from 1978 to 1982.

First up was *Gamma World* (1978), a post-apocalyptic game full of mutants that had actually been called “Mutant” in-house. It was authored by James M. Ward and Jake Jaquet and was effectively the second edition of *Metamorphosis: Alpha*, painted on a larger canvas. At the time TSR thought that a planet-based game could offer bigger possibilities for roleplaying, but Gygax later said they thought that they'd damaged the game by pulling it out of its starship setting. Nonetheless it sold well — apparently better than science-fiction RPG leader *Traveller*. It just never got the same attention because TSR had bigger fish to fry. Nonetheless, a second edition of *Gamma World* (1983) would appear a few years later.



Meanwhile, *Metamorphosis Alpha* dropped out of print, because TSR felt it competed with their new *Gamma World* game. There were plans to release “Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega” as a boxed supplement to *Gamma World*, but it never appeared — though many years later it would be published as a supplement to a totally different game.

“[I]t’s a natural tie, to go from the spaceship ‘dungeon’ to the wilderness ‘world.’”

– James M. Ward, Interview, *Polyhedron* #3 (Winter 1981/1982)

Boot Hill was revised the next year with a second edition (1979), this time featuring rules for campaigns and a few scenarios, making it more than just a man-to-man combat game of gunslinging (though that would always be its strength).

TSR’s sixth RPG, Merle Rasmussen’s *Top Secret* (1980) was the first espionage RPG. It had started out as a “programmed” game, with flow-chart-like choices, but had evolved into a full roleplaying experience. Like most of TSR’s early games, *Top Secret* showed its *D&D* roots with characters and levels, but it also had a notable

innovation: “Fame & Fortune” points, which players could expend to offset unfavorable events. It was one of the first game mechanics that presented player characters in a heroic light and also one of the first mechanics that gave players some ability to influence the outcome of the game — a general idea that would be the heart of the “storytelling” branch of roleplaying that appeared in the mid-’80s and



flourished in the “indie” games of the ’00s. *Top Secret* was the top espionage game in the industry until the publication of Victory Games’ *James Bond 007* (1983).

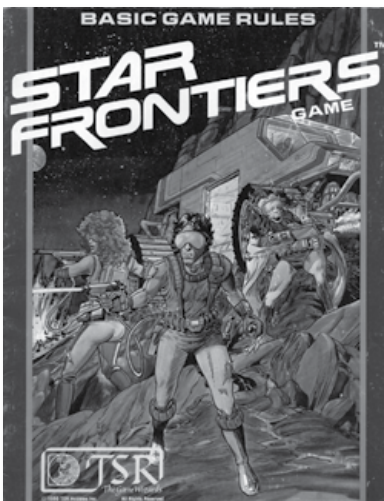
Top Secret was also the first TSR RPG that was supported immediately upon publication, reflecting TSR’s new emphasis on adventures and other supplements. The original set of *Top Secret* supplements ran from 1981–1985. At the same time, supplements also starting appearing for *Gamma World* (1981–1983) and *Boot Hill* (1981–1982, 1984).

TSR spent 1981 retrenching its lines, publishing almost 20 supplements for *AD&D*, *D&D*, *Boot Hill*, and *Gamma World* — but mostly for *AD&D*, which was clearly their top seller. 1982 saw the publication of two more RPGs: Rick Krebs and Mark Acres’ pulpy *Gangbusters* (1982) and the staff-created science-fiction game, *Star Frontiers* (1982), TSR’s seventh and eighth RPGs.

These games increasingly defined the new TSR model for RPGs: simple games that could capture the introductory market for a genre. They were both well-

designed, with *Gangbusters* in particular getting some critical acclaim. *Star Frontiers*, however, was initially dinged for its lack of ship combat rules, a lack that would be overcome by its *Knight Hawks* expansion (1983) — released around the same time that the core game was rebranded as *Star Frontiers: Alpha Dawn* (1983).

The pulp genre has never generated great sales, and so *Gangbusters* faded away after five supplements (1982–1984), including two by Tracy Hickman, who we’ll meet in more depth soon. *Star Frontiers*, however, was the first of



the TSR RPGs other than *D&D* to surpass a dozen publications (1982–1985), including two licensed modules set in the world of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001* (1984). As we'll see momentarily, TSR was looking at a lot of licenses by that time.

Though they had published eight RPGs by 1982, TSR had not developed a house system, as was now being done at companies like Chaosium and Hero Games. Instead TSR had eight different gaming systems, and though a number of them had similarities to *D&D* — including classes, levels, hit points, and armor class in various games — others did not. *Star Frontiers*, as an example, used all percentiles.

A Hysterical Interlude: 1979–1982

Before we step fully into the '80s, we must discuss one last '70s event of pivotal importance to the entire roleplaying industry. In 1979 a Lansing, Michigan, college student named James Dallas Egbert III disappeared without a trace. Private detective William Dear correctly determined that Egbert had disappeared into the steam tunnels beneath Michigan State University, but incorrectly linked it to *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Even the authorities thought the connection to *D&D* might be legitimate, and so they sent photos of Egbert's bulletin board, full of strangely arranged tacks, to TSR — hoping that they could puzzle out what it meant. Tim Kask later recounted that he, Gary Gygax, and Brian Blume spent three days trying to figure out what this “super-secret map” might mean.

Meanwhile, Dear went public with his suppositions and created a sensation. *Dungeons & Dragons* was suddenly in the news as a result. This was ultimately to the benefit of both TSR and the RPG industry as a whole. *D&D* had already been on an upward trend as it grew increasingly professional with the release of the hardcover *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* books, but this hysterical publicity helped sales to skyrocket as the game was suddenly brought to the public's attention. When cities like Heber City, Utah, tried to ban the game, sales improved.

"I had projected growth for the year to go from approximately \$4.2 million to \$8.5 million for that fiscal year. Because of the 'Egbert Affair,' TSR grossed \$16.5 million.

– Gary Gygax, "An Interview with Gary Gygax," *OD&Dities* #9 (February 2003)

Egbert was found not long after all the hoopla kicked off. Unfortunately he took his own life about a year later, in August 1980. A fictionalized novel about the affair, repeating all of Dear's mistakes and misconceptions, was published by Rona Jaffe as *Mazes & Monsters* (1981) and then made into a TV movie starring Tom Hanks (1982).

Though the first hints of anti-*D&D* hysteria had originated way back with the 1976 publication of *Eldritch Wizardry*, and though William Dear was now giving it (much) more attention, it would be later in the '80s — when Patricia Pulling entered the picture — that things hit a fever pitch, as we'll soon see.

Rapid Expansion & Growth: 1980—1983

1980 and 1981 were the years in which TSR — and therefore the roleplaying industry — truly came of age. *D&D* and *AD&D* were now available in new, polished editions. TSR was finally paying attention to supplements — not just for *D&D*, but also for its other games. Public hysteria had put the games into the limelight, which was ultimately great marketing for the company.

1980 also saw three major expansions for TSR.

First, Frank Mentzer formed the Role Playing Game Association (RPGA), based on a proposal from Jake Jaquet. It was an organization primarily intended to create a global community of gamers. In its early years it supported TSR's then top sellers: *AD&D*, *Gamma World*, and *Top Secret*. Much of this focus was directed toward tournaments, including Gen Con's *D&D* Open event, which the RPGA took over. The RPGA would later extend its reach beyond tournaments to run what James M. Ward called a "Living City" campaign, where thousands of people worldwide could be involved in the same massive campaign world. The RPGA was also the producer of *Polyhedron* (1981–2002), a long-lived gaming magazine that was published for over 20 years, until it was taken over by Paizo Publishing in 2002.

TSR Sales: 1975—1982

Thanks to information in *The Dragon* #35 (March 1980) and *Inc. Magazine* (1982) we have a good picture of TSR's early growth. In *The Dragon*, Gygax said that TSR's gross sales were \$50,000 in 1975, \$300,000 in 1976, \$600,000 in 1977, almost \$1 million in 1978, and over \$2 million in 1979. *Inc. Magazine* then reported \$9.8 million in sales for the nine-month period ending in June 1981 and \$27 million for the year ending in June 1982.

Though the James Egbert affair and the publicity surrounding it are usually offered as the reason for the roleplaying industry's terrific growth at the start of the '80s, TSR was already doing quite well before that — doubling their sales every year. Going from \$2 million in sales at the end of 1979 to (to take an average) \$20 million by the end of 1981 was an improvement over that — but it "just" represented the company quintupling its sales during one of those years, rather than their usual doubling.

"I was in process of negotiations with Simon & Schuster when the woman who was then the VP of Sub-rights Licensing at Random House telephoned me. Not surprisingly, this was instigated by her two sons, both of who were then avid D&D gamers."

– Gary Gygax, "An Interview with Gary Gygax," *OD&Dities* #9 (February 2003)

Second, TSR signed an exclusive book industry distribution deal with Random House, beginning with *Deities & Demigods*. This made TSR's games available to many new players.

Third, TSR decided to increase its international presence by founding TSR UK, which opened for business on March 31, 1980. Don Turnbull, editor of the *Fiend Folio* — which at the time was still in legal limbo — led this new venture. TSR UK would shortly become TSR Ltd, which oversaw Europe generally.

For the most part TSR Ltd. was responsible for the distribution of products into Europe, but it also produced a number of British-originated adventures. This included two *AD&D* adventure series, beginning with *U1: The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh* (1981) — published shortly after the *Fiend Folio* finally made it to print — and later *UK1: Beyond the Crystal Cave* (1983). The series of UK adventures would continue into 1986 and would later include some well-received *Basic D&D* adventures as well.

TSR's international presence blossomed when the first translation of the *Basic D&D* rules appeared in France (1982). Many more would follow, with translations of TSR products eventually available in 16 languages.

TSR's success became more obvious when they were listed as one of the six fastest growing privately held companies by *Inc. Magazine* in 1982.

"I quit playing the game about two years ago to get some objectivity,' says Kevin B. Blume, 30, chief operating officer. 'I love to play, but it wasn't that difficult to forego. Now I'm playing a much larger game called business. That's why we're intuitively good businessmen—because games are a great way to learn.'"

– "TSR Hobbies Mixes Fact and Fantasy," *Inc. Magazine* (1982)

With sales heading dramatically upward, employee counts started jumping in leaps and bounds too. In June 1981 TSR employed 130, but that became 170 in June 1982, and reached a height of perhaps 374 in early 1983. There were many notables among the newest hires. Designer (and future Manager of Designers) Troy Denning and editor (and future Manager of Editors) Steve Winter joined in 1981. Artist Jeff Easley, artist Larry Elmore, designer Jeff Grubb, designer Tracy

Hickman, *Polyhedron* editor Mary Kirchoff, designer Douglas Niles, artist Keith Parkinson, and miniatures maker Duke Seifried all joined in the busy 1982. Finally, periodicals editor Roger E. Moore came on board in 1983.

As was the case since the late '70s, many new hires were already *D&D* fans — such as Niles, who was introduced to *D&D* by one of his high school students, none other than Heidi Gygax. Others were published *D&D* authors of various sorts. Grubb was hired (after much pestering) because of his great work on the 1981 *AD&D* Open Tournament. Hickman, meanwhile, had run his own *D&D* small press DayStar West Media, which had published two adventures by himself and wife Laura — *Rahasia* (1979) and *Pharaoh* (1980) — as is recorded in that company's short history.

TSR's coming of age was perhaps best represented by *Dragon* magazine and its transformations. Up through the '70s, *Dragon* was still clearly a hobby publication as overseen by Tim Kask. However Kask left TSR following *The Dragon* #36 (April 1980) to start his own magazine, *Adventure Gaming* (1980–1982). His new venture was more generalist than *The Dragon*, but otherwise looked a lot like Kask's first magazine with an emphasis on (generic) FRPs, *Traveller*, and wargaming.

Jake Jaquet had already taken over as editor of *The Dragon* a few months previous. Under his regime, *The Dragon* became *Dragon* and began to grow even faster than before — jumping from a circulation of 10,000 in 1980 to 70,000 in 1982. Jaquet would humbly acknowledge that this was more due to the growth of *D&D* than anything he did. Meanwhile, the magazine began to grow up too.

Dragon #49 (May 1981) — the same issue where Jaquet moved up to the publisher role and newspaperman Kim Mohan became the magazine's editor-in-chief — featured the first cover by a big-name artist, Tim Hildebrandt. Three months later *Dragon* #52 (August 1981) featured a cover by top fantasy artist Boris Vallejo.

The Blumian Revolution: 1981–1982

Meanwhile, a new employee had arrived at the highest levels of TSR, after Kevin Blume bought out the shares owned by his father, Melvin. As a result, 1981 was The Year of Three Presidents; though Gary Gygax remained the nominal president, Kevin Blume was put in charge of operations (which meant he managed the company day-to-day) and Brian Blume was placed in charge of creative. Together, as the Board of Directors, they discussed any disagreements. Or as Brian Blum explained it: “We have an unwritten working arrangement where we sit down and thrash out major issues.”

Increasingly, however, the Blumes were unhappy with Gary Gygax and his conservative approach to the business. It was an issue that had predated Kevin's

entrance to the company, seen as early as the release of *Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits* (1980) in late 1980.

The long-delayed conclusion to Gygax’s epic *GDQ* series was written by Dave Sutherland rather than Gygax himself. Gygax put a good face on it in the preface to the adventure, but years later he revealed that it had been released against his objections. Sutherland had even changed the final antagonist of the series from the servitors of the Elder Elemental God to Lolth — and the result didn’t necessarily make a lot of sense.

The newfound power of the Blumes became more obvious during “The Great Purge” of April 1981 when TSR fired a dozen employees for “bad attitude”—said bad attitude apparently including support for Dave Arneson and resentment toward management, who at that time had their own headquarters away from the rest of TSR. Many of these firings were attributed to the new COO, Kevin Blume.

“We often felt that the Blumes and Gygaxes and their associates, like Will Neibling, were arrogant and greedy, were in over their heads as businessmen, and treated the company and its employees like NPCs in a big game they were playing.”

– Kevin Hendryx, Interview, grognardia.blogspot.com (June 2009)

Paul Reiche and Evan Robinson were two of the first let go, then artists Bill Willingham and Jeff Dee followed when they complained — resulting in the Art Department dropping down to just two members: new Art Director Jim Roslof and popular artist Erol Otus. As we’ll see, Roslof would fill the Art Department with many star artists from 1981 onward. Developer Kevin Hendryx was another victim of the purges, which continued into the summer.

Things came to a head between the Blumes and Gygax in 1982 when the Blumes used their majority stock ownership to effectively take control of TSR. Gary Gygax, who had been CEO since the company’s foundation, was forced to step down; Kevin Blume replaced him. Afterward Gygax was either exiled to the West Coast or retreated there (depending on which interpretation you prefer) to deal with potential TV and movie opportunities.

The SPI Takeover: 1982

Shortly after the Blumes’ boardroom takeover, TSR acquired SPI, one of the old-time wargame companies. SPI had been trying to break into the RPG industry, most notably with their tactical game design, *DragonQuest* (1980), but now they were facing increasing financial difficulties, as is more fully described in their own history.

By 1982 SPI was looking for buyers, and in lieu of that, asked TSR for a loan. It was secured against SPI's assets. What happened next isn't entirely clear. Depending on who you believe: SPI inevitably wasn't able to pay back the loan, and so TSR foreclosed; or TSR loaned the money *knowing* that SPI wouldn't be able to repay it and foreclosed almost immediately; or SPI took the loan *knowing* that TSR would immediately foreclose, effectively creating a sale that avoided other creditors.

"TSR would acquire controlling interest in SPI by obtaining Simonsen's, Wagner's, and Hessel's stock; purchase the note of some \$400,000 from the venture capitalists, and then recall it. The note had been secured by SPI's assets, inventory, accounts receivable, copyrights, etc. The result was that TSR would control SPI and its assets, but not its liabilities. In principal a nice plan."

– Howard Barasch, *The Insider* #1 (June 1982)

In any case, on March 31, 1982, TSR announced that they had "initiated a legal and economic chain of events" to buy SPI. The takeover was seen as unfriendly by the staff and thus by April 7, eight former SPI employees had announced that they were leaving the company to form Victory Games — a new subsidiary of Avalon Hill. Here they would create *James Bond 007* (1983), the espionage roleplaying game that would knock *Top Secret* off its pedestal. Redmond Simonsen, the star designer of SPI, was fired by TSR on May 3, 1982, for "management incompatibilities," and from there things went downhill fast. Within a few months there were very few SPI employees left. David Ritchie, the final SPI holdover, left for Coleco in late 1983—after his wife was laid off from TSR — though he'd return after Coleco's gaming department collapsed a couple of years later.

Meanwhile the Blumes found the legalities of the SPI acquisition trickier than they'd imagined. They'd originally declared that they'd "bought assets but not liabilities." However the printers that SPI had owed money to disagreed with this assessment, and refused to release the plates for printing SPI's games until TSR paid \$40,000 of SPI's debt a year later — which had an impact upon TSR's immediate plan to get back into the wargaming business by reprinting 40 or so of SPI's games. Likewise readers with subscriptions to SPI's magazines, *Strategy & Tactics* and *Ares*, were very angry that TSR decided not to honor them.

Things got nastier in December when a Chapter 7 bankruptcy petition was filed against SPI in New Jersey, attempting to involve the Federal Government in the matter, and when a suit was filed against TSR in New York regarding salaries for SPI employees. The rumor mill suggests that the Office of Consumer Protection

in Madison, Wisconsin, was also considering a class-action lawsuit against TSR because of the unfulfilled subscriptions.

In the end TSR got very little in exchange for the money it had loaned to SPI. TSR published SPI's science-fiction and fantasy magazine, *Ares*, from issue #12 (1982) through issue #17 (1984), then incorporated it into *Dragon Magazine* from issue #84 (April 1984) to issue #111 (July 1986). They initially thought that SPI's RPGs, *DragonQuest* and *Universe*, might be complementary to *D&D*, but ultimately did very little with them. TSR *did* publish wargames into the '90s, some of them featuring SPI's logo, but this never resulted in a particularly large movement back toward wargaming; the loss of SPI's designers made sure of that.

Meanwhile, TSR earned considerable ill will in the wargaming community, many of whom felt that TSR purposefully killed off SPI.

The Lawsuits, Round One: 1982–1984

This wasn't the only publicity hit TSR took in the early '80s; their relationship with the rest of the industry was also deteriorating. We've already seen that TSR began issuing legal threats as early as 1976. By the early '80s it was increasingly common for other members of the industry to receive threatening letters from TSR's lawyers. Steve Jackson commented on one such incident when TSR threatened him for using a beholder in a cartoon in *The Space Gamer*.

TSR's most notable legal action of the early '80s was the first *Role Aids* lawsuit. As we've already seen, other companies were increasingly presenting *AD&D* supplements as "generic" because of an inability to get a license from TSR. Mayfair Games decided not to toe this line. When they came out with their new *Role Aids* line (1982), the covers clearly stated that they were "suitable for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*."

"I strongly advocated arranging a licensing agreement with Mayfair [G]ames for their 'Role Aids' product line, but I was outvoted in the board meeting considering the question."

– Gary Gygax, "An Interview with Gary Gygax," *OD&Dities* #9 (February 2003)

Trademarks — of which *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was one — are a frequent source of legal disagreement. Mayfair is just one roleplaying company that sought legal counsel to correctly use a trademark without authorization — with Heritage Models, Kenzer & Company, and the early Wizards of the Coast being other examples. Mayfair did their best to make the legally required distinctions obvious by including explanatory text on the front or back covers of their supplements.

Trademark disputes also often go to court, even when legal advice has been followed. TSR thus sued Mayfair over the *Role Aids* products. In 1984, however, the two parties reached an out-of-court settlement. Mayfair was allowed to continue publishing their supplements provided that they followed certain restrictions over the use of *AD&D* trade names and how the *AD&D* trademark was depicted on the cover. The *Role Aids* line continued for many years, though as we'll see this would not be the final lawsuit on the topic.

The Book Explosion: 1982—1983

Though the Blumes' expansion into wargames didn't work out, the same can't be said for another major initiative the same year. In 1982 TSR pushed further into the book trade after TSR employee Rose Estes came up with an idea for a new sort of game, the "Endless Quest." These were books designed around the same concepts as Bantam Books' popular *Choose Your Own Adventure* books (1979–1998), but with fantasy theming drawn from the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. Estes wrote the first six, beginning with *Dungeon of Dread* (1982).

These books were quite successful, and would eventually expand into a 36-book series (1982–1987), then be revived for a second series a decade later (1994–1996). Though most *Endless Quests* featured *D&D*-style adventures, there were also releases for *Gamma World*, *Star Frontiers*, and *Top Secret* — as well as a few licenses, which we'll meet down the road. The line would eventually sell millions of books.

Realizing that *Endless Quest* was ultimately a fad, TSR worked to diversify its new mainstream publishing. James M. Ward and Rose Estes formed an Education Department intended to sell classroom modules to teachers. Jean Black, an experienced industry editor, was brought on as Education Editor for the new department. However, it ultimately failed due to TSR's decision not to hire educational sales staff; products were ready to produce, but never sold. Black would later push other educational ideas, such as books that combined the history of World War II with wargames, but TSR continued to opt out of educational opportunities.

Despite concerns over the gamebook industry, other gamebook lines did appear. New types of *Endless Quest* books were variously successful. This included: *Fantasy Forest* (1982–1983), a younger kid's line; the *HeartQuest* books (1983–1984), which attempted to jump into the romance market; *Super Endless Quest* (1985–1988), a line of full-fledged gamebooks like the *Fighting Fantasy* books then generating interesting in the UK; and the even more complex *Catacombs Solo Quest* gamebooks (1987–1989).

These gamebooks got TSR better noticed by their book trade distributor, Random House.

Meanwhile, Jean Black became the Managing Editor of TSR's new Book Department; she would use the gamebook success to aid in the release of the pivotal *Dragonlance* novels, which we'll meet shortly. History being a funny thing, TSR's Book Department in turn would lead directly to TSR's downfall, 10 more years down the road.

D&D Soldiers On: 1982–1984

Throughout all of these changes and new initiatives *D&D* of course continued to soldier on. We've already seen the story of *AD&D* through the release of the *Fiend Folio* (1981) and *Basic D&D* through the release of the second edition *Basic Set* (1981) and *Expert Set* (1981). After that, the most notable event for the line came late in 1982, when TSR revamped all of its *D&D* trade dress.

The old bold colors and diagonal banners of old adventures were gone, to be replaced with a new look for adventures that featured horizontal banners, a new *Dungeons & Dragons* logo, improved artwork, and gradiated backgrounds. They showed TSR's new professionalism in the wake of the company's extraordinary growth from 1979–1982.

The redesign spread to the *AD&D* hardcovers the next year with *Monster Manual II* (1983). The new hardcovers shared much of the increased professionalism of the adventures, but are probably best remembered for their orange spines. The entire orange-spine hardcover series featured art by Jeff Easley, giving the line remarkable consistency (and beauty) — something badly needed after the erratic logos and trade dress of the earliest hardcovers.

Before we leave the *Monster Manual II*, we should note that it marked the first deviation from TSR's yearly publication of *AD&D* books. The last hardcover *AD&D* book before it had been the 1981 *Fiend Folio*, while the next wouldn't appear until 1985. We'll discuss possible reasons for this later.

Meanwhile *Basic D&D* got a redesign that went beyond graphics; Frank Mentzer's third edition of the *D&D Basic Set* (1983) was a major revision that was also used as the launching point for a five-box series (1983–1986) that would eventually take *Basic D&D* characters from first level to godhood itself. As with the last couple of *Basic Sets*, this one said it was the one you could *actually* learn from the box, without needing a teacher. This edition, however, made the best argument, as it included solo gameplay — with the idea being that you learned as you read the rulebook. It was part of a teaching trend also being followed by companies like Pacesetter and Yaquinto around the same time.

"And by the time the story ends, you've seen how most of the game system works. You haven't read pages of rules, and you haven't been swamped by charts and tables; you've merely read an entertaining fantasy story."

– Frank Mentzer, "A New Game with a Familiar Name,"
Dragon #77 (September 1983)

Although there were many adventures for *AD&D* and *Basic D&D* alike following the revamp, it was *AD&D* that seemed the most revitalized by the changes.

That was in part thanks to Tracy Hickman, who joined TSR in 1982. TSR published both of his old adventures from his DayStar West days. Of those, *Pharaoh* got more attention because it became the first part of TSR's *I3-I5: Desert of*

Desolation series (1982–1983), which was quite well-received.

However, Hickman and wife Laura received even more acclaim for a brand-new adventure, *I6: Ravenloft* (1983). This was something entirely new for *D&D*. It was a gothic-style adventure, mixing fantasy with horror. It was also a much more cerebral adventure than the typical dungeon crawl, pitting the players against an intelligent vampire nobleman. *Ravenloft* was an instant hit that would be sold, supplemented, expanded, and sold again for years.



The other notable adventures in this time period came about as a result of Gygax's expansion of Greyhawk, which he'd begun back in 1980. It started out pretty low key, with Rob Kuntz doing editorial work on Gary Gyax's *S4: The Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth* (1982). Greyhawk got increasing attention in *Dragon* too, starting in Gygax's "From the Sorcerer's Scroll" column (November 1981-January 1982).

Then, late in 1982, Kuntz was brought back into the creative fold to kick off a full-on revival of Greyhawk, with help from long-time TSR employee Eric Shook. This began with the publication of Gary Gyax's *WG4: The Forgotten Temple of Tharizdun* (1982), which was somewhat awkwardly a sequel to *S4*. A pair of side-adventures for the much-hyped Castle Greyhawk dungeons — Gary Gyax's *EX1: Dungeonland* (1983) and *EX2: The Land Beyond the Magic Mirror* (1983) — appeared the next year. At the time, Gygax was planning for the actual Castle Greyhawk to appear down the line — following the City of Greyhawk—

so it was a nice teaser. Meanwhile, the Greyhawk focus in *Dragon* continued in Kuntz’s “Greyhawk’s World” column (July–September 1982), Gygax’s “Deities & Demigods of the World of Greyhawk” (November 1982–March 1983), and Len Lakofka’s follow-up “Gods of the Suel Pantheon” (June 1984–December 1984).

Much of the initial work was leading up to the release of the *World of Greyhawk Fantasy Game Setting* (1983), a boxed expansion of Gygax’s *Greyhawk* folio. After that, new World of Greyhawk adventures began appearing with a trade dress that matched the *World of Greyhawk* box. It was TSR’s first derivation from their standard adventure trade dress, and a real departure for ’80s marketing. The first of the new adventures was Rob Kuntz’s *WG5: Mordenkainen’s Fantastic Adventure* (1984), drawn from some of his earliest adventures.

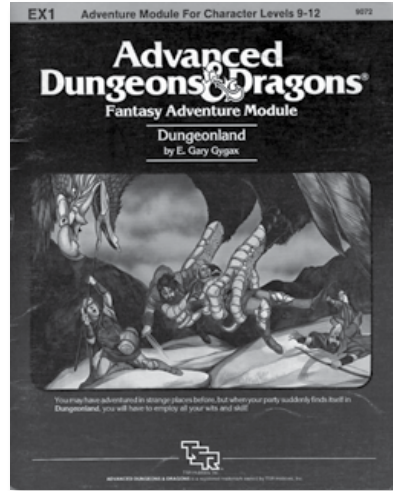
If you’re wondering about the missing adventures, *WG1–WG3*, you’re not alone; they’ve been a constant source of confusion over the years. The *World of Greyhawk* box fortunately offers up the answers. *WG1* was to be a new code for *T1: The Village of Hommlet*, while *WG3* was to be a new code for *S4: The Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth* — which certainly made more sense than the *S4/WG4* crossover. *WG2* wasn’t listed, but it presumably would have been *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, which Gygax had most recently promised for Gen Con XV (1982). It had long been coded as *T2*, so the move to follow *WG2* seems obvious.

Sadly, the Greyhawk revival would begin to fade after 1984, for reasons that we’re about to run straight into.

The Bubble Bursts: 1983–1985

Moving back to the Blumian revolution, we can now discuss that fact that their expansions into wargames and books were just the tip of the iceberg. They were also expanding TSR into numerous other industries. Their strangest innovation was probably moving into the needlework business — where they planned to sell needlework kits in book format, something that had never been done before.

At the Hobby Industries of America Show in late January 1983, TSR also announced the creation of a new Toys, Hobby & Gift Division, under Duke Seifried. It would produce action figures and other “three-dimensional” products, most notably including metal miniatures — which was what had led TSR to



cancel Grenadier's *D&D* miniatures license in 1982, following a failed attempt to buy them.

Finally, TSR was also expanding into the wider entertainment world as well.

Though Gygax's move to the West Coast might have been seen as an exile, he actually ended up doing a lot of good while there. He'd long hoped for a *D&D* movie, but plans for that fell through. However, he did come to an agreement with the Marvel Comics film division to create a *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon. It premiered on September 17, 1983, and ran three seasons through December 1985. The cartoon was the first RPG television show, and a true sign of how much the industry had pushed into the mass market.

Unfortunately, of the many expansions and revamps of 1982–1983, the *Endless Quest* books and the *D&D* cartoon were rare successes. Meanwhile, the cost of all these new initiatives was starting to add up, especially the ones that never showed any returns, like the needlecraft business. Worse, the entire RPG industry was entering its first bust period, which would cause many publishers to fail.

The D&D Cartoon

Marvel Comics' *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon (1983–1985) featured six kids taken from the real world and transformed into heroes in the *Dungeons & Dragons* world. One of the more interesting aspects of the cartoon is what character classes they were given. As the prologue to every cartoon told you, the Dungeon Master turned them into: a ranger, a barbarian, a magician, a thief, a cavalier, and an acrobat.

The magician and the thief were of course two of *AD&D*'s big four classes, while the ranger was an understandable replacement for the very generic-sounding fighter. However, it seems weird that the cleric was left out. Paired with the absence of a paladin, it seems likely that the cartoon was purposefully avoiding any controversy that might come from using *D&D*'s "religious" characters.

The inclusion of the acrobat, the barbarian, and the cavalier is odd too, because they were all brand-new classes, written up by Gary Gygax for *Dragon* in 1982 and early 1983. It makes one wonder if Gygax wrote up the classes because Marvel wanted some more variety or if he pushed his newest creations on them.

Whichever the case, it probably helped the sales of *Unearthed Arcana* (1985), when the three new classes were presented to a wider audience for the first time.

By late 1982 there were rumors of problems at TSR, and it was soon revealed that the company had missed its growth projections by 30%—which meant that they were no longer doubling in size as they had in years past. Meanwhile, the rumor mill suggested that TSR's failed bid for Grenadier that year had involved *no cash*, which didn't seem like a good sign.

The company's more general failure became evident early in June 1983 when TSR held an employee meeting to announce that they'd lost \$250,000 in the previous six months, and to require that all employees write up an explanation of why they should keep their jobs. Then, on June 24, 1983, the Blumes initiated a massive reorganization that split TSR into four companies: TSR Inc. (the product company); TSR Entertainment Corporation (the Hollywood company); TSR Ventures (a research and licensing company); and TSR Worldwide Limited (the aforementioned European branch).

Gary Gygax would later state that the main reason for the split-up of TSR was to avoid taxes. TSR Ventures mainly operated in the Far East while TSR Worldwide Limited was more focused on Europe, and so their income could be kept out of the United States. Whatever the reason for their creation, the spin-off companies weren't terribly viable. TSR Ventures was gone by 1985, in the next major shake-up, while TSR Entertainment Corporation (later Dungeons & Dragons Entertainment Corp.) and TSR Worldwide Limited (later TSR International) would eventually be closed down by Lorraine Williams.

Meanwhile, the reorganization brought with it downsizing. 44 employees were immediately laid off — though that number would soon climb to more than 70. Among those laid off were miniatures master Duke Seifried and Gary Gygax's son, Ernie Gygax. Seifried's layoff was probably the most stunning, as he was in charge of TSR's new miniatures manufacturing — and was someone who really knew the business. Some suggested the reason was political, as Seifried had been among Gary Gygax's top supporters.

"When I was instructed by the Blumes to move to the West Coast and head up TSR Entertainment, the first thing I noted out there was a distinct dislike of TSR, this from earlier contact with the Blumes, as far as I could ascertain. Thus I immediately requested the BoD for a name change, and I got my way without any real fight."

– Gary Gygax, "An Interview with Gary Gygax," *OD&Dities* #9 (February 2003)

Unfortunately the downsizing of June 1983 was insufficient. By the end of 1983, after another round of layoffs, the company was down to 150 workers. Stockholder and long-time employee Mike Carr was among those lost. For the first time, the Design Department took casualties. A group of 12 became just 4.

The Gen Con staff took heavy losses too, which impacted Gen Con XVII (1984); turnover would continue to impede that convention for several more years. On April 4, 1984, TSR cut staff one more time. By this point the company only had 100 employees left — a number they maintained throughout the rest of the 1980s — where there had been 374 just 16 months before. Morale was terrible, and even employees who weren't laid off were leaving; one group would form a new RPG company called Pacesetter.

Gary Gygax raced back from California in 1984 when he heard from a friend that Kevin Blume was “shopping TSR on the city streets.” He discovered TSR a million and a half dollars in debt — including \$1.2 million dollars owed to advertising agencies and television stations and another \$300,000 or \$400,000 owed to vendors (which probably primarily meant printers). According to gossip at the time, the company was being offered for sale for just \$6 million dollars. TSR was also considering withdrawing from the RPGA and may have tried to sell *Dragon* magazine for a million dollars.

Gygax blamed the problems on the financial mismanagement of Kevin Blume, and later itemized the biggest issues as:

- The purchase of Greenfield Needlewomen, the aforementioned needlecraft company, apparently owned by a relative of the Blumes.
- The overprinting of later *Endless Quest* books.
- The purchase and lease of systems furniture for hundreds of employees that did not exist.
- The purchase and lease of over 70 automobiles.
- General overstaffing.

By this time, three outsiders from the American Management Association had joined the two Blumes and Gygax on the TSR board of directors. They were a lawyer, a personnel officer, and the owner of a medical equipment manufacturer. Gygax was able to convince them to remove Kevin Blume from office late in November 1984. The final vote was 4–1, with Brian Blume abstaining.

Gygax was *not* initially reinstated as CEO. Instead a pro-tempore President was hired from the ranks of the AMA: attorney Richard Koenings. However, Gygax still retained some power, because he was acting as an intermediary to a three-man Beverly Hills group interested in buying the company. In March 1985, Gygax was able to take over his role as President and CEO — and end the discussion about selling the company entirely. Though Gygax later said he did so thanks to the success of *Unearthed Arcana* (which we'll get to in a moment) allowing him

to exercise stock options that gave him majority control of the company, period articles suggest that he took back the roles before the release of that book and the exercise of those options.

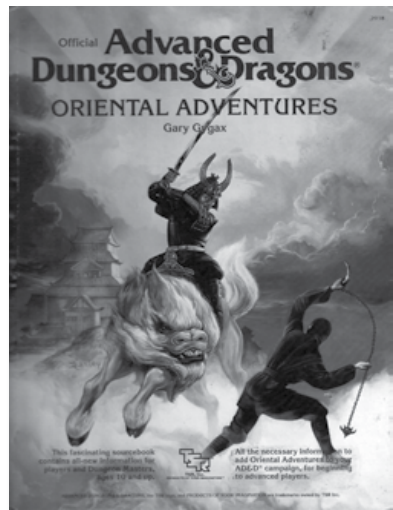
Gygax was determined to reduce TSR's debt *without* giving up its properties (like *Dragon* and the RPGA), but he did cut slower lines like *Boot Hill*, *Gangbusters*, and even *Star Frontiers*. In another cost-cutting move, Dragon Publishing was closed down and *Dragon* magazine brought fully into TSR. As a result of this, by the late '80s *Dragon* would become the house organ that Kask had feared, with multiple columns all previewing or supporting TSR's releases. TSR also closed down its short-lived miniatures production.

Gygax also put more focus on the hobby market, rather than the mass market opened up by Random House. There would be even less sexy initiatives, like lowering product orders to reduce inventory and writing off 800,000 “discontinued and obsolete games.”

To help generate new revenue for the company, Gygax proposed the release of five important new books, four of them to be published under his name. He scheduled a new hardcover book called *Unearthed Arcana* for June 1985 and then provided the concept for Zeb Cook's *Oriental Adventures*, to be released that Fall. (The latter was a natural fit for Zeb, who regularly organized Bad Japanese Movie Parties for TSR.) Gygax also planned two new Greyhawk modules: *The Temple of Elemental Evil* (at last) and *Isle of the Ape*, both for August 1985. Finally, he

proposed his first novel — following some fiction written as Garrison Ernst back in the earliest days of *Dragon* — a Greyhawk book to be called *Saga of Old City*. Just a few months later, Gygax would get *D&D*'s other creator to help in the recovery, as he lured Dave Arneson back to the fold to finally detail Blackmoor — a project that had been announced just a short time before for Mayfair.

The hardcovers would assist considerably in TSR's recovery, while the adventures and the novel would all appear to good acclaim. However TSR was also aided by two lines that the Blumes already had in process before the newest boardroom coup: *Dragonlance* and *Marvel Super Heroes*.



Dragonlance & Other Media: 1984—1985

Dragonlance was ultimately the brainchild of Tracy Hickman, who came up with the idea of a setting that made dragons fearsome once more in 1982 while he was traveling across the country from Utah to Wisconsin to join TSR. At TSR Hickman formed a sort of underground conspiracy of creators who were interested in the Dragonlance project. It was called “Project Overlord.”

Harold Johnson was the first one to join the Project; now Director of Game Design and Research, he was a critical member of the team, as he oversaw TSR’s staff of designers. It was Johnson who convinced Hickman to expand his initial idea of a three-adventure trilogy. Designer Jeff Grubb joined next — and would soon contribute a pantheon of gods that he’d created for college games at Purdue University — then editor Carl Smith. Larry Elmore provided concept artwork that was used to pitch the idea to higher ups. Eventually this group was able to make the project official and was then joined by other creators, including writer Margaret Weis and adventure author Douglas Niles.

“I got assigned to a team that was supposed to develop a line of modules, each featuring a different dragon. But we didn’t want it to just be a ‘dragon-of-the-month’ club.”

– Tracy Hickman, “The Creation of Dragonlance,” *Dragon* #315 (January 2004)

By this time the project had become a 12-adventure epic, laid out in three sets of four adventures, one for each color of dragon. Rather than just being dungeon crawls or wilderness explorations, the adventures would together tell a story with a clear

beginning, middle, and end — as a massive war was fought in the land of Krynn. The Dragonlance adventures premiered in March 1984 when TSR published the black-dragon-oriented *DL1: Dragons of Despair* (1984), by Tracy Hickman. The rest of the series would appear over the next two years — supplemented by a small sourcebook and a wargame that expanded it to 14 books total.

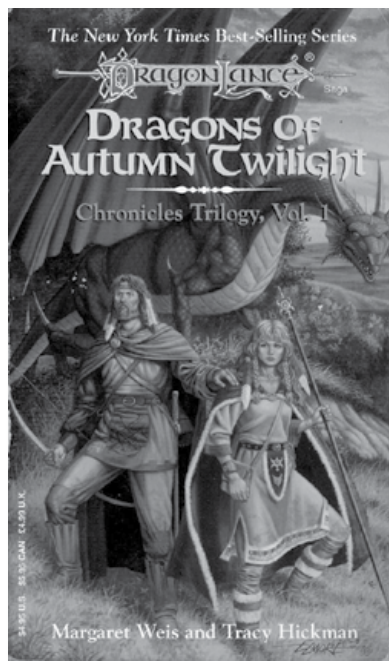
However, Dragonlance was envisioned as a complete multi-media experience. By mid-year, TSR was advertising Dragonlance miniatures, a calendar ... and fiction. The latter got started off with a pair of short



stories that helped to give depth to the adventures. “The Test of the Twins” by Margaret Weis appeared in *Dragon* #83 (March 1984), then “A Stone’s Throw Away” by Roger E. Moore followed in *Dragon* #85 (May 1984).

The plan was to embrace fiction more fully by publishing novels that told the same story as the adventures, thus leveraging the book market expertise that TSR had already built around their *Endless Quest* books. TSR’s original intent was to hire a published writer for these books, but the Dragonlance team wasn’t happy with any of the efforts produced by the authors willing to work for the low royalties that TSR was offering. Meanwhile, Weis and Hickman felt like they could tell the story better than anyone, so in January 1983 they submitted a prologue and five chapters to make their case. On the strength of that, Jean Black picked them to write *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (1984), which appeared at the end of the next year.

Besides being innovative, Dragonlance was also very successful — particularly in the fiction arena. By the time the next two novels — *Dragons of Winter Night* (1985) and *Dragons of Spring Dawning* (1985) — were published, TSR was happy to announce that a *Dragonlance Legends* trilogy (1985) would quickly follow. Thus one of the first elements necessary to save TSR from the crisis of 1984 was something instituted by the Blumes in their scant years controlling TSR.



Marvel Super Heroes & Other Color-Chart Games: 1984–1986

The Blumes’ support of a *Marvel Super Heroes* RPG would be the next element needed to help save TSR in 1985. Before we get there, however, we should first touch upon several other games that the old regime had supported.

Almost all of these new games originated in the Blumes’ interest in licensing, which weighed heavily on TSR in the 1984–1985 period. Thus, those years saw the publication of: a new *Indiana Jones* game (1984–1985); a variety of *Conan* materials including *AD&D* adventures (1984), a standalone RPG (1985), and a few *Endless Quest* books (1984–1985); two *Tarzan Endless Quest* books (1985); and of course the *Marvel Super Heroes* game that we continue to dance around (1984–1993).

The three licensed RPGs deserve some additional attention, as do two other games from the Blume years: the continuation of the *Basic D&D* game and *Battlesystem*.

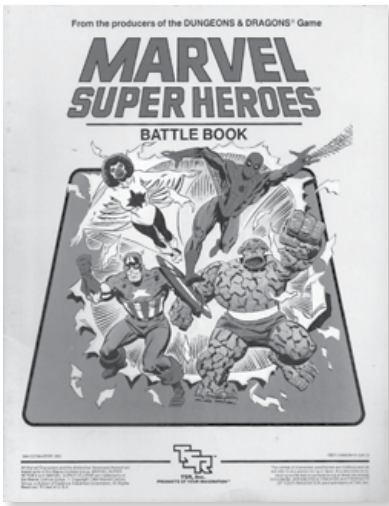
Zeb Cook's *The Adventures of Indiana Jones* RPG (1984) appeared very early in 1984, making it TSR's ninth RPG. Unfortunately, it was almost universally panned. That was in large part because there was no character generation system, requiring players instead to play seven characters from the movies. The rest of the game focused heavily on reenacting the movies as well.

The game's mechanics got better acclaim as a simple RPG system. Perhaps most notably it resolved some actions with color-coded tiered charts that provided broad categories of results for various dice rolls. We'll see this tiered chart mechanic again momentarily in a more polished form.

Amusingly, the *Indiana Jones* game lives on in a modern award. When the license came to an end — following the game line's conclusion in 1985—TSR UK was told to destroy all of their remaining copies of the game. They strategically burned parts of the final unsold copy and then embedded it in a Perspex pyramid. The pyramid was later “liberated” from the TSR offices. The partially burnt game logo within the pyramid simply reads “diana Jones”—hence the Diana Jones awards (2001-Present).

“When I was in college, I ran a homemade super hero campaign called the Junior Achievers, with super heroes like the Scientific Swami, the Crimson Ran, and the ever-popular B.M.O.C. So, when the Marvel game was up for grabs, I grabbed it.”

– Jeff Grubb, “TSR Profiles,” *Dragon* #111 (July 1986)



Marvel Super Heroes (1984), by Jeff Grubb and Bruce Nesmith, showed up next, in August, making it TSR's tenth RPG. Various reports suggest that Avalon Hill, Chaosium, FGU, Games Workshop, Hero Games, Ideal, Mayfair Games, and Steve Jackson Games all tried to pick up the license. It appears to have been a near thing for TSR, as rumors about the license first appeared early in 1983, then word got out that Marvel was having some troubles with TSR's lawyers. Nonetheless, TSR was ultimately able to prevail because of their top position in the industry and their pre-existing relationship with Marvel. Knowing that they were

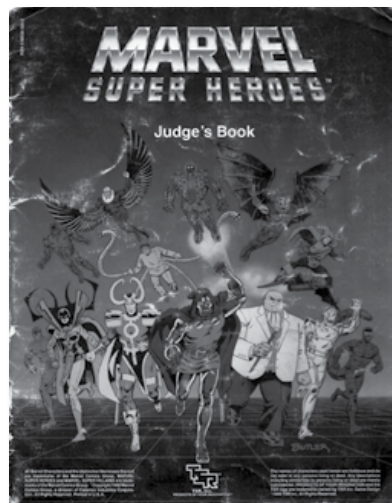
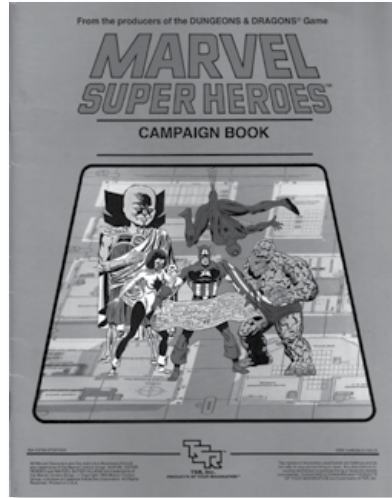
sitting on a potential gold mine, TSR hid the license as long as they could, using the internal codename “Boot Hill revision” to refer to the project up until its release.

Marvel Super Heroes is generally considered one of TSR’s best games. Correctly assessing its potential as a game that could introduce newcomers to roleplaying, designers Grubb and Nesmith put together a rule system based on simplicity — much as had been the case with the much less successful *Indiana Jones*. For example, numerical stats were replaced by 10 “ranks” running from Feeble to Unearthly.

The game’s combination of all tasks into a single “Universal Table” was even more impressive. You looked up your stat, and then made a roll using percentile dice. The result was one of four levels of success: white failure, or green, yellow, or red success. This idea of combining all task resolution into a singular system was innovative, though FGU, Pacesetter, and Victory Games were all simultaneously doing similar work. *Marvel Super Heroes* also featured another TSR innovation, “Karma Points”; much like the “Fame & Fortune” points of *Top Secret*, they let characters get out of bad situations.

Marvel Super Heroes was well-received, and if there were complaints from roleplayers about the game’s simplicity, they were eventually answered by the release of the *Marvel Super Heroes Advanced Set* (1986). Afterward, the line continued to flourish under Project Coordinator Jeff Grubb. It eventually became TSR’s all-time best-supported RPG other than *D&D* itself. Publications included around 50 RPG supplements (1984–1992), eight solo gamebooks (1986–1988), three one-on-one gamebooks (1986–1989), and around 100 “Marvel-Phile” columns from *Dragon* #88 to *Dragon* #198 (1984–1993). The game would not fade until the ’90s.

We’ve already seen that *Basic D&D* got a facelift in 1983, during the Blumes’



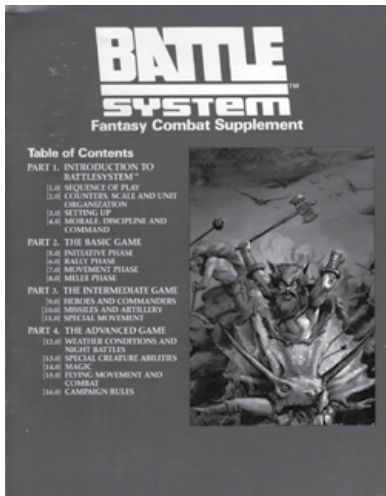
early control of the company. It now (at last!) continued past the *Expert Set* when Frank Mentzer's *Companion Set* (1984) of 15th–25th level rules appeared in November 1984.

Two final games that surely had their origins during the Blumes' control of TSR both appeared in March 1985.

Conan Role-Playing Game (1985), also by Cook, was the conclusion of the Blumes' licensed trilogy of roleplaying games and TSR's eleventh RPG system to date. (It'll also be the last we count, because game variants like *Top Secret/S.I.* and reprints like *DragonQuest* muddy the water from here on out.) *Conan Role-Playing Game* was simple like *Indiana Jones*, but it used a color-coded chart for action success that seems heavily based on the same from *Marvel Super Heroes*. Perhaps, as a result, it was pretty well-received. However, it wasn't supported for long. When Gygax took TSR back, most of the Blumes' licensed products were tossed to the side, and as a result *Conan* only saw three adventures before it ended (1985). More recently, the game has been retro-cloned as *ZeFRS* (2007).

The other game of March 1985 wasn't an RPG at all. Instead, Douglas Niles' *Battlesystem* (1985) — originally called “Bloodstone Pass”—was a mass-combat system compatible with *AD&D*. It was simultaneously advertised as “an exciting new direction” and a way for gamers to “go back to their roots” (in *Chainmail*). There were a number of other contradictions built into the design. It'd been intended as a system that could use miniatures or not; that supported armies in the thousands *and* individual PCs; and that stayed totally compatible with *AD&D* while also allowing for new and simplified combat.

Battlesystem could have been the game that allowed TSR to compete with Games Workshop's *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* (1983), but TSR was never able to cross-market *Battlesystem* or a miniatures line as effectively as Games Workshop did. There was a good reason for that. As we've already seen, *Battlesystem* got caught out by the transfer of power at TSR much like *Indiana Jones* and *Conan* did — and as a result, TSR was shutting down their miniatures production just when *Battlesystem* was produced. Ironically, the *D&D* miniatures license went to Citadel, Games Workshop's miniatures partner.



One other RPG *almost* appeared in this era. A game of robot roleplaying called “Proton Fire” was scheduled for July 1985. It was advertised as “the last word in robot role-playing”—though it might have been the *first* word too, as *Traveller’s Robots* (1986) was still a year out. Today, info on Proton Fire almost reads like an early cyberpunk game, with players helping “The University” fight against “The Corporation.” At this late date it’s unclear if the game had been greenlit by the Blumes or not — but in any case it wasn’t one of Gygax’s projects.

Though the Blumes’ immediate backlog of projects was mostly published by mid-1985, their creative influence continued afterward. We’ve already seen that *Marvel Super Heroes* lasted for almost a decade. More generally, the idea of colored universal action charts seen in both *Marvel Super Heroes* and *Conan* continued to spread to other games. *Star Frontiers* was converted to colored action charts in *SFAC3: Zebulon’s Guide to Frontier Space, Volume 1* (1985), which turned out to be the last supplement for the game. The next year, the third edition of *Gamma World* (1986) appeared with color-coded action



resolution; it was unfortunately marred by poor editing, but otherwise led to a minor renaissance of the game. *Battlesystem* similarly held on, but never to any great success. As we’ll see TSR tried to revive it again and again over the years, perhaps always watching the success of Games Workshop in the rearview mirror.

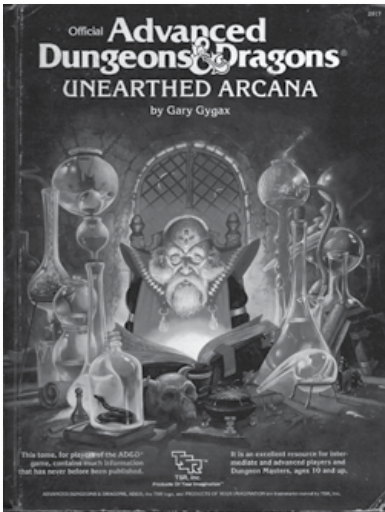
But by 1985, Gygax was once more in charge of the company, and as we move toward June, we find that it was *his* projects that suddenly dominated TSR’s production.

The Gygaxian Counter-Revolution: 1985–1986

Looking back, it’s somewhat puzzling why TSR slowed their hardcover *AD&D* production following 1981’s *Fiend Folio*. Perhaps it was the result of Gary Gygax’s 1982 exile to the West Coast, or perhaps it was the result of a focus on *Basic Dungeons & Dragons* from 1983–1986. Whatever the case, as we’ve already seen, TSR missed publishing new hardcovers in both 1982 and 1984. The importance of these hardcovers to TSR is clearly seen in the fact that Gygax immediately planned for two new hardcover releases following his return to power — but they wouldn’t be the first sign of a returned Gygaxian influence at TSR.

Gygax started writing for *D&D* again immediately following Gen Con XVII (1984). The first of that material was seen by the public in *Dragon* #90 (October 1984), as part of Gygax's "From the Sorcerer's Scroll" column that had been abandoned over a year before. His first new articles weren't that earthshaking; he gave details of the Hold Person spell, introduced a new monster, and discussed clerics in his first three columns. But then he started writing more revisionary and expansionary articles — looking at higher-level druids, cleaning up rules for rangers, and more. It was a sign of things to come. The Sorcerer's Scroll became irregular after *Dragon* #97 (May 1985), but by then it wasn't necessary, as two major releases bearing Gygax's name were published in June 1985.

The first of those was the *Basic Dungeons & Dragons Master Set* (1985), the rules for characters 26th to 36th level. It was listed as being the work of "Gary Gygax with Frank Mentzer," but one has to wonder how much Gygax *really* had to do with it, as the box was the clear continuation of Mentzer's work over the last few years. In any case, the *Master Set* showed that Gygax was happy to continue on with Blume projects that worked.



The other major release of June 1985 was (at last) the first of the new hardcover *AD&D* rulebooks, *Unearthed Arcana* (1985). The book had a long history, as it had been under consideration as far back as 1982 when it was being called the "Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Expansion." The book was also previewed over four years of From the Sorcerer's Scroll columns, from 1982–1985. Alas, those articles also revealed things that could have been in *Unearthed Arcana*, but were never written up, including the core classes of the mountebank (a thief), the mystic (a magic-user), the savant (a cleric), and the jester (a bard).

Unearthed Arcana as published was a thorough expansion of the *AD&D* game that revised many rules, offered up new magic items, and provided a plethora of new spells. Perhaps most notably it added three core classes to the game — the barbarian, the thief-acrobat, and the cavalier, all of which had previously appeared in *Dragon*.

Unfortunately, *Unearthed Arcana* was poorly playtested. It introduced many off-balanced rules and was filled with errors. TSR started printing pretty massive errata almost immediately, beginning in *Dragon* #103 (November 1985).

Mind you, these errors didn't impair *Unearthed Arcana's* sales. In fact, it sold out almost immediately and ended up on some best-seller lists for hardcovers.

The second new *AD&D* hardcover, *Oriental Adventures* (1985), appeared a couple of months later, in November. It was entirely the work of Zeb Cook, based on some of Gygax's ideas. Under development since the spring, it was more polished than *Unearthed Arcana*.

Oriental Adventures took the *AD&D* game into the Asian-influenced world of Kara-Tur. Like *Unearthed Arcana*, it offered new classes and spells, but with a singular, cultural theming. It did even better than *Unearthed Arcana* and was TSR's best-seller for the year.

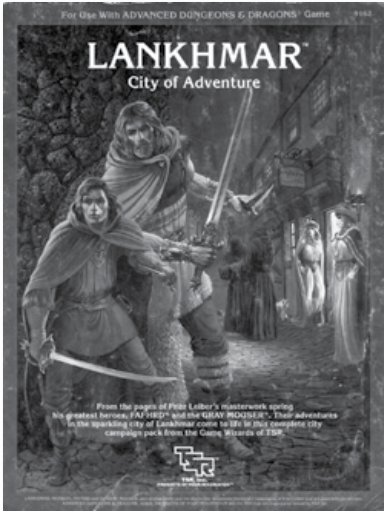
More than any of Gygax's other new initiatives of 1985, *Unearthed Arcana* and *Oriental Adventures* really helped to save the company — and were at least as important as the *Dragonlance* and *Marvel Super Heroes* projects that the Blumes had gotten rolling.

Besides supplementing the core *AD&D* game, these two rulebooks also began to change it. The new non-weapon proficiencies that appeared in *Oriental Adventures* were particularly notable. They'd be brought into *AD&D* occidental campaigns through the next two hardcovers, which would appear the next year: Douglas Niles' *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* (1986) and Kim Mohan's *Wilderness Survival Guide* (1986). *AD&D* had always been a class-and-level system with no concept of skills other than binary weapon proficiencies (which you either had or didn't) and the thief's skills (which you improved regularly through level gain). Meanwhile as far back as *Traveller* (1977) and *RuneQuest* (1978), the rest of the industry had moved on from class-and-level to more dynamic skill-based models. Now *D&D* was finally catching up.

Combined with all of the expansions of *Unearthed Arcana*, the skill systems contained in the *Survival Guides* and *Oriental Adventures* formed an unofficial 1.5 edition of *AD&D*. It would be a few years before it was made official, but *AD&D* was clearly changing.

"Lastly I stated that I planned to call a shareholders' meeting soon and at that time there would certainly be a considerable change in the composition of the board. That was an error, certainly, [b]ut I was so full of indignation at how the stooges had facilitated the near-ruin of the company I could not restrain my better judgement. Shortly after this came my downfall."

— Gary Gygax, "An Interview with Gary Gygax, Part II,"
OD&Dities #10 (July 2003)

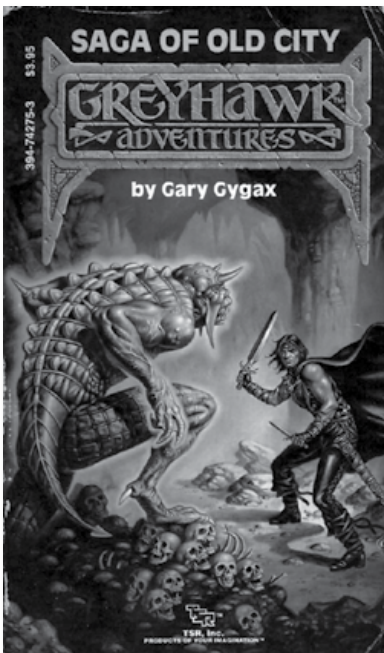


a smaller map book. It was this format that would influence Gygax's next project, as we'll see momentarily.

First though, *Lankhmar* deserves a quick note as a notable city project, not just because it provided an extensive and detailed view of a city — as Judges Guild and Midkemia Press had in years past — but also because it did so using geomorphs and blank city records sheets, which allowed each GM to detail his own city of Lankhmar as their game proceeded.

Lankhmar kicked off a line of Lankhmar supplements that was occasionally supported by TSR over the years (1985–1986, 1990–1995, 1996).

Gygax used the same “supermodule” format in August for *T1-4: The Temple of Elemental Evil* (1985), in which Frank Mentzer expanded Gary Gyax's original *Village of Hommlet* (and 200–300 pages of notes) into the long-awaited Temple, home of the fungus goddess Zuggtmoy. This was the third of Gyax's major new *D&D* releases, and like its predecessors it was quite well-received, and has since become one of the classics of the genre. Gyax's solo adventure effort, *WG6: Isle of the Ape* (1985), didn't do as well — perhaps because of its basis in *King Kong*.



Finally, we come to Gygax's new fiction initiative: the stories of Gord the Rogue in the World of Greyhawk. Gygax introduced Gord in *Dragon #100* (August 1985) in a story called "At Moonset Blackcat Comes." The first novel, *Saga of Old City* (1985) appeared a couple of months later. Though it wasn't as pivotal as *Dragonlance* (or the other Gygax releases of 1985), it did well, appearing on some bookstore best-seller lists.

Though *Saga* brought 1985 to an end, it didn't mark the end of Gygax's new influence and ideas. As we've already seen, he also used his restored position to mend fences with Dave Arneson, so that TSR could publish Blackmoor material. By now, it had been almost a decade since the publication of *The First Fantasy Campaign* (1977) by Judges Guild, and thus one of the oldest RPG settings had long languished. *DAI: Adventures in Blackmoor* (1986) gave it new attention, with the Barony of Blackmoor acting as historical background for *Basic D&D's* Known World.

"One of the first things [Gary] did [after the stockholder fight] was approach me about doing a series of modules based on Blackmoor, and that seemed really exciting. He was president, I think, for three months when new people came in, and they suddenly weren't interested in working with me for various reasons."

– Dave Arneson, "Dave Arneson Interview," Gamespy (2004)

Unfortunately the resurrection of Blackmoor was very short-lived, with only three Dave Arneson supplements — and ultimately only four total — spanning just two years of time. For, as we'll see, Gygax would soon be on his way out again and his particular pet projects quickly extinguished.

Before we get there, however, we should look at TSR's finances one last time. As we've already seen there were many, many initiatives intended to improve TSR's financial viability, of which a variety of products and product lines are the most visible today. Some mass-market board games helped too, particularly (as silly as it sounds) one based on *All My Children* (1985), "a game of romance and intrigue" by Anne C. Gray (aka editor Anne McCready).

The result?

In June 1985 TSR had reported a loss of \$3.8 million dollars versus \$19 million in revenues — though some of that loss was probably funny money, calculated from product that was destroyed.

In June 1986 TSR was expected to instead show \$2 million dollars in profits.

Lorraine Williams vs. Gary Gygax: 1985—1986

It was through an ironic combination of projects initiated by Gygax and the Blumes that TSR had returned to financial solvency. Looking back, that alchemical blend of projects resulted in one of the most creative periods in TSR's history. However, there was a final factor in the company's recovery: a woman named Lorraine Williams. Gygax had met her brother, Flint Dille, while in Hollywood. They'd even collaborated on a quartet of solo gamebooks: the *Sagard the Barbarian* series (1985–1986), which were even then being published by Pocket Books.

During TSR's hard times, Dille introduced Gygax to his sister, Lorraine — both as a potential investor and as a skilled manager. Williams was brought in to TSR as Vice President of Administration. She quickly proved herself quite skilled in this role. Besides bringing her own financial backing — an interesting story we'll return to — Williams was also able to deal with TSR's creditors and get the money flowing again. This was at least as important as the various releases in making TSR healthy again. Even Gygax would later acknowledge that she was “effective” and allowed him to work on creative matters like the production of *Unearthed Arcana*, *Saga of Old City*, and the rest.

However, Gygax grew less enamored with Williams as time went on because she wasn't familiar with the industry, and was more concerned with the company's profitability than the products it produced. She also expressed contempt for gamers, according to Gygax.

Meanwhile, the Blumes were making a new power play. Though Gygax had exercised some stock options following the release of *Unearthed Arcana*, Brian Blume now exercised a stock option of his own, returning Gygax to a minority position in the company. The Blumes then made a “tender offer” for their stock and began negotiations to sell it ... to Lorraine Williams. Gygax tried to block the sale, claiming that it violated the buy-sell agreement of TSR stock. He took it to a county judge, but he failed and ultimately didn't have the funds to appeal the decision. Considerable ill will was generated between him and Williams as a result of this legal disagreement, with results we'll see a few years down the line.

Gygax was forced to acknowledge defeat. He too sold his stock and other interests in TSR to Williams and on the last day of 1985 left the company behind forever (though some disputes regarding stock and other matters lingered into October 1986). Gygax would soon found a new company, New Infinities Productions, which is described in its own history. Other long-term employees such as Frank Mentzer and Kim Mohan joined him there. Mohan was replaced as editor of *Dragon* by long-term Periodicals author and editor Roger E. Moore, who would herald in the magazines' third golden age.

Though TSR lost many of its top designers and writers between 1985 and 1986, they still had many stars, as was revealed in the brand-new “Game Wizards” column in *Dragon* #117 (January 1986), which laid out the then-current members of the Games Department — the current incarnation of the Design Department begun back in 1979. By this time Michael Dobson led the group. The Department maintained three on-staff editors — Mike Breault, Anne McCreedy, and Steve Winter; and three game designers — Zeb Cook, Jeff Grubb, and Douglas Niles. Finally, two staff members dealt with freelancers, game acquisitions coordinator Bruce Heard and freelance editing coordinator Karen Martin.

Many of these designers and editors had already made their mark at TSR, but they’d grow even more prominent in the years that followed — as soon as the final projects initiated by Gary Gygax were published.

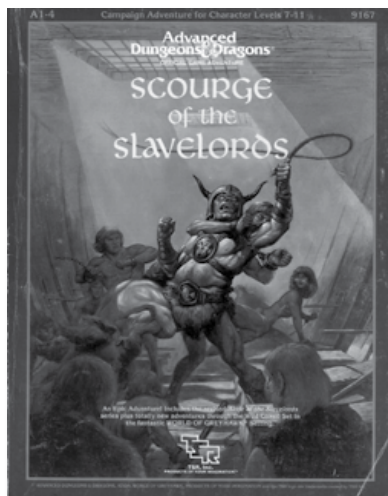
As we’ve already noted, Dave Arneson’s Blackmoor series ran through 1986 and 1987.

A few more Greyhawk books appeared as well. The first of those was *Artifact of Evil* (1986), Gygax’s second and final Gord the Rogue novel for TSR. Two reprint adventures following in TSR’s new squarebound format: *A1-4: Scourge of the Slavelords* (1986) and *GDQ1-7: Queen of the Spiders* (1986). These Greyhawk “super modules” could be cobbled together with *Temple of Elemental Evil* to form a massive campaign running from level 1–14, effectively forming one of the first RPG adventure paths (though admittedly, one which was *very* loosely connected, unlike the original Dragonlance adventures).

Sadly, these final publications marked the end of the original vision of Greyhawk. After that, it would be a few years before the new powers-that-be rebooted the world into a new form.

The old regime was similarly winding down over in the Periodicals Department — but not without a bang. Kim Mohan’s last hurrah at TSR was the publication *Dungeon* #1 (September/October 1986). It provided gamemasters with new adventures every month and though it was never as successful as its sister magazine, *Dragon*, it would be consistently published for 22 years. Roger E. Moore suddenly found himself the editor of not one but *two* magazines when Mohan left late in 1986.

With the slate wiped clean (again), there was now the opportunity for even bigger changes, just around the corner.



Enter the Forgotten Realms (and Mystara): 1987—1989

By 1987 TSR was again in pretty good shape. However, by this time Dragonlance's initial run was coming to an end. The original 12-adventure series was complete and Hickman and Weis were not only done with their two trilogies of books, but had also left TSR to get into fiction writing on their own (as is more fully described in the Margaret Weis Productions history). This left TSR looking for a new campaign world.

In many ways, TSR never had a true campaign world before. Granted, many of the early modules were set in Greyhawk, but other than the overview folio (1980), later expanded into a box (1983) and various articles in *Dragon*, the setting had largely been described through one-off adventures. As for Dragonlance, though that world was more cohesive, it also had been described mainly through adventures. Now, TSR *could* have decided to better define one of these older worlds, but with Hickman, Weis, and Gygax all gone, they instead decided to innovate by presenting an entirely new world that they would have better control over.

Or at least a *sort of* new world.

"The first sentence in which the Realms came to life? 'Now in all the lands 'twixt bustling Waterdeep and the sparkling waves of The Sea of Fallen Stars, no men were more loved—and feared—than the stoic swordsman Durnan, the blustering old rogue Mirt, and the all-wise, ancient wizard Elminster.'"

— Ed Greenwood, "First Quest: Play with Me, She Breathed,"
Dragon #218 (June 1995)

Ed Greenwood first conceived of the place that would become the Forgotten Realms in 1967 when — at the age of eight — he began to write stories about this strange land. He carried his fantasy world over to the new medium of gaming when a beautiful young university student named September introduced him to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. In 1979 Greenwood started writing for *Dragon* magazine; beginning in *The Dragon* #30 (October 1979), as part of an article about a monster called the Curst, Greenwood would sometimes offhandedly mention his fantasy world. This brought the Realms to the attention of TSR.

Jeff Grubb got things rolling in the summer of 1986 when he phoned Greenwood and asked if there was more to the setting that Greenwood was describing in his articles. Greenwood happily told him "yes" and soon began to ship Grubb packages full of maps and background information. Famously, Greenwood's first Realms manuscripts had all of the "t"s written in by hand because that key was broken on Greenwood's typewriter.

The result was the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* (1987). TSR's new setting distinguished itself from what had come before in three major ways.

First, it was the first TSR setting that was truly and exhaustively detailed — thanks to a line of sourcebooks, rather than just adventures. This long series of setting books kicked off with *FRI: Waterdeep and the North* (1987). Though a few worlds, like Columbia's Hårn and ICE's Middle-earth, were already enjoying this type of detail, the general idea of extensive setting detail was still new to the RPG industry.



Second, it was the first setting that was truly a collaborative effort — perhaps more so than any other setting, past or future. Douglas Niles' Moonshae, the Hickmans' "Desert of Desolation," and Zeb Cook's Kara-Tur were all quickly subsumed into the Realms. Many more authors would follow in the years to come. The result was a world that was so vast and varied that it could support any type of fantasy subgenre — a factor which might have made it harder for other campaign settings to find their place in years to come.

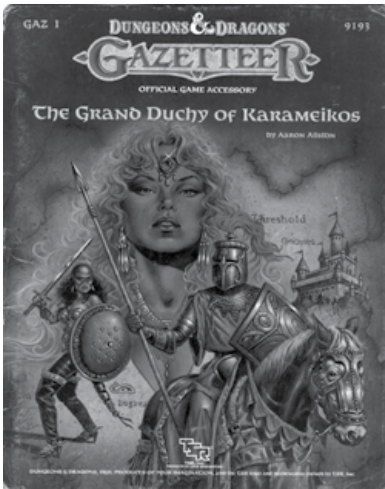
"Zeb had created a setting [for Kara-Tur] that was so big it held two Chinas. It would take months, maybe even years, to travel from one end to the other. So, when we hooked it up to the Realms we just changed the scale on the maps. To this day, very few people have ever said anything about it."

– Jeff Grubb, "The Creation of Kara-Tur," *Dragon* #315 (January 2004)

Third, as with *Dragonlance*, fiction was an integral part of the *Forgotten Realms* line, much of it overseen by editor Mary Kirchoff — recently returned to TSR after several years of writing freelance. Douglas Niles had already been working on a trilogy of Celtic-themed novels for TSR Ltd. These were modified to become the first *Forgotten Realms* books, beginning with *Darkwalker on Moonshae* (1987). R.A. Salvatore — who would soon become one of TSR's top writers with the stories of his drow Drizzt — wrote his first *Forgotten Realms* novel the next year, *The Crystal Shard* (1988). Ironically, *Drizzt* was added to *The Crystal Shard* at the last moment, when the adventure was moved away from the Moonshae Islands, where Salvatore had originally set it.

The release of the Realms also gave TSR the opportunity to offer new support for some of their older lines.

First, it gave TSR a new way to publicize *Battlesystem*. To date, TSR supported *Battlesystem* with various *AD&D* modules, including the Bloodstone sequence that began with *H1: Bloodstone Pass* (1985), which had reused *Battlesystem*'s original name. The fourth and final book of this series, *H4: The Bloodstone Throne* (1988), was explicitly placed in the Forgotten Realms, giving new attention to the system. *Battlesystem* received a second edition (1989) shortly thereafter, but the line remained relatively stagnant despite this new focus.



Second, the Forgotten Realms offered a model for developing *D&D*'s Known World. TSR thus released *GAZ1: The Grand Duchy of Karamaikos* (1987), a book transforming *D&D*'s Known World into the campaign setting of Mystara. Much like the Forgotten Realms supplements, these new *D&D* books looked at the campaign world in a more thorough and detailed manner.

Even Greyhawk got back into the act with *Greyhawk Adventures* (1988), by James M. Ward, a new hardcover volume that provided a rather eclectic set of

Greyhawk rules. Unlike the Realms and Mystara, it was *not* followed up with setting sourcebooks, but instead with more adventures, starting in the second edition *AD&D* era that we're quickly approaching.

Meanwhile, the Forgotten Realms did well, though perhaps not as well as expected. Or maybe it was just that the rumors of Dragonlance's decline were greatly exaggerated. The sales figures for both worlds stayed about the same for much of their lifetimes.

Other Media—Books, Computers & Comics: 1988–1993

The Forgotten Realms also acted as TSR's entrance into other types of media. For the first time TSR had a well-developed, evocative campaign world, and they were ready to take advantage of it.

We've already seen how this led to the publication of early Realms books by Niles and Salvatore. By 1988 novels were becoming increasingly important: that was the first year in which fiction books outnumbered game book production at TSR. Afterward synergy between the game and book lines would grow, as we'll see with the "Avatar" project that was part of second edition *AD&D*. The Realms would also lead TSR into hardcover publication, beginning with Salvatore's *The Legacy* (1992).

Meanwhile DC began publishing comics licensed from TSR. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (1988–1991) and *Forgotten Realms* (1989–1991), authored by Dan Mishkin and Jeff Grubb, were both set in the Realms. Dan Mishkin's *Dragonlance* (1988–1991) and Barbara Kesel's *Spelljammer* (1990–1991) highlighted other worlds past and future, while a James Lowder *Ravenloft* comic was in the works before DC decided to end their relation with TSR for reasons we'll return to shortly. 20 years later, these comics still remain relevant thanks to their vibrant settings and characters. IDW Publishing recently re-released the entire *AD&D* and *Forgotten Realms* series as *Dungeons & Dragons Classics* (2011) and *Dungeons & Dragons: Forgotten Realms Classics* (2011).

Finally, Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI), a computer game publisher, was publishing the first official *D&D* games for the PC. By 1988 *Dungeons & Dragons* had already *de facto* created several new genres of computer games (CRPGs), but TSR had realized very little profit from them. That changed in 1988 when SSI released the Forgotten Realms-based *Pool of Radiance* (1988), the first in their "gold-box" series. Although the graphics are primitive by today's standards, the gameplay remains excellent and was the main draw of the games.

SSI did a great job of not only adapting *AD&D* to the computer, but also making book-keeping tasks like resting and recovering spells easy. The gold-box game line continued through the release of *Forgotten Realms Unlimited Adventures* (1993), by which time SSI was on the verge of bankruptcy due to delays in the release of their next-generation *D&D* engine, which was eventually published in a somewhat unfinished state as *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands* (1993).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, TSR remained at the top of their game in multimedia opportunities.

Dungeons, Dragons & Computers

This book is about *Dungeons & Dragons* and the rich field of tabletop roleplaying games that it created. However, TSR had at least as big of an effect in another field: computer games. Both computer roleplaying games (CRPGs) and massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPGs) directly trace their origins to *Dungeons & Dragons*. Computer adventure games and multi-user dungeons (MUDs) probably had a multitude of influences, but *Dungeons & Dragons* is among them.

Public Games: 1974—1979

The whole field got rolling almost as soon as *Dungeons & Dragons* was released, with all of the initial work being done on public computers—most of them available at colleges and running the PLATO time-sharing system. Programmers dodged system administrators to try and make their secret games available, illicitly stealing CPU cycles to explore their digital dungeons and fight against computerized creatures.

One of the earliest CRPGs was probably *pedit5* (1974), which got deleted pretty quickly. Another called *dnd* (1974) more clearly showed the foundation of the genre. Other early PLATO CRPGs included *Oubliette* (1977), *Moria* (1978), *Orthanc* (1978), and *Avatar* (1979). There was also ongoing development on other platforms, such as Daniel Lawrence's *DND* (1977), which was written for the TOPS-10 operating system. All of these early games tended to feature characters killing monsters for experience points in dungeons. Surprisingly, some of them featured graphics, including wire-frame drawings of dungeon corridors.

Prelude on the PC: 1980—1989

Meanwhile, in the young personal computer industry, games like Origin Systems' *Akalabeth* (1980) and *Ultima* (1980) and Sir-Tech's *Wizardry* (1981) were bringing dungeons to whole new generations of players. In this burgeoning market, TSR licensed a few home console games, but hadn't touched the PC market.

The newly commercial CRPG market happily puttered along for years without licensing any properties from the tabletop RPG world. Origin Systems and Sir-Tech initially dominated it. Later Interplay Productions—the producers of *The Bard's Tale* (1985)—and New World Computing—the makers of *Might and Magic* (1986)—joined in.

The first few licensed games from the hobbyist field started to appear in the mid-'80s, such as a series of *Fighting Fantasy* games (1984–1987) published in Britain by Puffin Books and Adventure Soft UK, and *Autoduel* (1985), published by Origins Systems. Meanwhile, over in the multiplayer world, GEnie was rolling out the *Rolemaster*-based *Gemstone* (1987), though that was only a demo, with

the game not reaching playtesting until *Gemstone II* (1988) and full release until *Gemstone III* (1989).

The Licensing Golden Age: 1988–1993

If you consider choose-your-own-adventure gamebooks, RPG-related board games, and multiplayer releases a bit far afield, then you have to wait until the late '80s to find the first licensed CRPG. Just when *Gemstone* was under development, a dam was breaking, as many professional computer game publishers started going back to the tabletop roleplaying world for inspiration. Among the releases of this heyday were the AD&D-licensed *Pool of Radiance* (1988), *Battletech: The Crescent Hawk's Inception* (1988), *Tunnels & Trolls: Crusaders of Khazan* (1990), and a series of GDW games from Paragon Software, including: *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy* (1989), *Space: 1889* (1990), *MegaTraveller 2: Quest for the Ancient* (1991), and *Twilight: 2000* (1992). In later years, the CRPG industry would just as quickly lose interest in tabletop games, with the exception of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

The story of TSR's relation with computer games is largely the story of their relation with Strategic Simulations, Inc. Prior to 1988 SSI was mostly known as the publisher of computer wargames. They'd put out a series of somewhat successful CRPGs such as *Questron* (1984), *Phantasie* (1985), and *Wizard's Crown* (1985), but nothing to get them into the club ruled by Origins and Sir-Tech. It may well be because of that positioning – as a competent but lesser maker of CRPGs – that TSR decided to license SSI.

Pool of Radiance was by no means a brilliant game. It largely repeated what was on the market already, centering on a 3-D view of locations taking up a quarter of the screen, with character data taking up the rest of the space. It was a model that went back to at least *Wizardry*. This was combined with the successful tactical combat system of *Wizard's Crown*.

Though there wasn't a lot of innovation, there *was* a lot of expertise. *Pool of Radiance* was well-put-together and fun to play. The AD&D gaming system was very well-adapted. With those advantages and with TSR's branding, SSI very soon *did* become a major mover in the CRPG world.

Pool of Radiance was the first in a series of games that all used the same gaming engine, called the "gold-box series" by fans. It included three more Forgotten Realms games, ending with *Pools of Darkness* (1989–1991), a trilogy of Dragonlance gold-box games (1990–1992), two further Forgotten Realms games set in the Savage Frontier (1991–1992), two XXVc Buck Rogers gold-box games (1990–1992), and finally *Unlimited Adventures* (1993), a gold-box construction kit. AOL's *Neverwinter Nights* (1991–1997), a multiplayer game that used the gold-box engine, meanwhile brought D&D to the online masses.

As the gold-box engine aged, SSI was able to catch lightning in a bottle a second time when they published Westwood's *Eye of the Beholder* (1991), the first of a trilogy of black-box games that upgraded AD&D to the full 3-D graphics that were becoming increasingly common at the time. The two later games were *The Legend of Darkmoon* (1991) and *Assault on Myth Drannor* (1993), all again set in the Forgotten Realms. Dreamforge's *Dungeon Hack* (1993) was a final add-on that used the engine to create a more random experience.

Later Days: 1992-Present

Unfortunately SSI's later years largely reflected TSR's trajectory – which is to say downward. In the early '90s, SSI started to flail, publishing games set in a variety of settings using a variety of game engines. Among them were *Spelljammer: Pirates of Realmspace* (1992), *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands* (1993), *Ravenloft: Strahd's Possession* (1993), *Al-Qadim: The Genie's Curse* (1994), and finally the Forgotten Realms based *Menzoberranzan* (1994). SSI probably wasn't doing itself any favors by publishing in so many different settings (nor was TSR, for that matter). In addition, many of the games downplayed roleplaying systems, instead replacing them with quick-playing action scenes. Finally, almost all of these later games were beset with gross and frequent bugs. SSI's reputation tanked and TSR pulled their exclusive licensing.

Other companies such as Sierra and Interplay quickly picked up TSR licenses, but not much was released before TSR's demise. The drop in computer gaming revenue may be one of the factors that contributed to the company's death. Nothing notable for AD&D really came out until BioWare got into the AD&D licensing biz, starting with *Baldur's Gate* (1998). They've since become a sort of SSI for the new millennia, with their most notable games probably being the story-heavy *Planescape: Torment* (1999) and their own *Neverwinter Nights* (2002), which shipped with a toolset that let players create their own content. Unfortunately, when Hasbro granted an exclusive D&D license to Atari in 2005, much of the D&D CRPG production dried up.

In the modern MMORPG market, tabletop RPGs were ignored for a while, but in recent years that's started to change. *Dungeons & Dragons: Online* (2006), published by Atari, was a forerunner. Following D&DO's release, MMORPG interest in tabletop RPG content increased, as CCP Games, the makers of *Eve Online* (2003), bought White Wolf in 2006 and Cryptic Studios, the makers of *City of Heroes* (2004), bought all the rights to Hero Games' *Champions* universe in 2008. Ten months later, Cryptic was bought by Atari, putting licenses for the top fantasy RPG and one of the oldest superhero RPGs into the same hands. *Champions Online* (2009) has since been released. Unfortunately, both of the major licensed MMORPGs have had troubles

competing in the modern market. *D&DO* was forced over to a freemium model in 2009, and *Champions Online* made the same move in 2011. As such, their futures remain uncertain.

From 2013, it's hard to say whether this MMORPG interest in tabletop properties will continue, or if it'll just be a blip, like that surge of tabletop-licensed CRPGs that ran from 1987–1992.

The Rest of the Hysteria: 1982–1990

Before we finish our look at TSR in the '80s, we should return to a topic that we have previously touched upon: the public backlash and media hysteria directed at roleplaying games in general and *Dungeons & Dragons* in particular. The ignorance of the general public is clearly shown by the fact that *D&D* continued to be the flashpoint for anti-RPG backlash, although by now there were games much more deserving of occult labeling, such as Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* (1981). Nonetheless, *D&D* continued to be at the center of a firestorm throughout the '80s because that was the game that had come into the public spotlight during the James Egbert affair.

The prime advocate against *D&D* in the '80s was Patricia Pulling. Her son committed suicide on June 9, 1982, and she blamed it on the fact that he had been cursed in a game of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

As part of her crusade against *D&D*, Pulling formed a public advocacy group in 1983 called “Bothered About *Dungeons & Dragons*” (BADD). It supplied law enforcement agencies and other groups with published booklets such as a 40-page screed comparing *D&D* to occult books and a 60-page booklet sensationally titled “Witchcraft or Satanism???”

“The healthy growth and development of our children is being hindered by violent fantasy role-playing games, rock music . . . , pornographic literature, violent movies, and last-violent videos. What can be found in these things that build's (sic) character, integrity and high ideals.”

– Mary Dempsey, Pat Dempsey, Pat A. Pulling,
“Dungeons and Dragons: Witchcraft Suicide Violence” (Mid-'80s)

As evidenced by Pulling's more religious claims, the building hysteria surrounding *D&D* centered more and more on it being a dark, occult pastime. Fringe religious leaders became increasingly involved in this witch-hunt.

Evangelist Jack Chick famously published a comic called “Dark Dungeons” (1984). It depicted *D&D* players being introduced to real witches’ covens as they gained levels, casting real spells, and then killing themselves when their characters died. It underlined the ignorance surrounding much of the anti-*D&D* movement (and has since been repeatedly parodied).

Then there was a supervillain team-up in January 1985 when Patricia Pulling, BADD, and The National Coalition on Television Violence jointly appealed to the FTC to put warnings in front of every *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon to say that the game “has caused a number of suicides and murders.” They had further complaints too, saying the cartoon “averages over 50 acts of violence per hour. It promotes fantasies of violence and teaches the use of violence as normal problem-solving behavior.”

Remarkably TSR choose to do very little about the *D&D* hysteria — though the topic was a touchy one inside the company, especially under Lorraine Williams. Instead the prime defender of *Dungeons & Dragons* (and roleplaying in general) was a man who never had worked for TSR: Michael Stackpole, a veteran of Flying Buffalo and author of several RPG-related novels. Stackpole began his defense of the roleplaying field in Flying Buffalo’s own *Sorcerer’s Apprentice* magazine, but he really took on the mantle of RPG Defender on July 14, 1987, when he debated the Western Regional Director of BADD (another woman whose son had committed suicide) on KFYI radio in Phoenix, Arizona.

Over the next few years Stackpole was at the forefront in defending *Dungeons & Dragons* and the rest of the roleplaying community. At one point he turned BADD’s pseudo-science against them by comparing BADD’s count of roleplaying suicides to the general rate of teen suicide in the culture; according to his interpretation of BADD’s statistics, 500 *D&D* players should have been committing suicide each year, where BADD only recorded seven, thus suggesting that *D&D* should be adopted as a public health measure. This argument appeared in one of Stackpole’s more prominent defenses, an article called “The Truth About Role-Playing Games,” which was published in *Satanism in America* (1989) — a book later credited by the FBI with stemming the general hysteria about Satanism that swamped the country in the ’80s.

In 1990 Stackpole published “The Pulling Report,” a document that generally demolished Patricia Pulling’s stand against roleplaying games. After that, the anti-RPG hysteria slowly faded. There was now a new bogeyman for parents to panic about: video games. BADD dissolved in 1997 following the death of its founder.

Though TSR generally ignored the hysteria about *D&D*, as we’ll see it had some minor effects on the second edition of their game.

AD&D 2: 1984–1989

Gary Gygax first suggested a second edition of *AD&D* in *Dragon* #90 (October 1984), just as he was returning to power. It was to be designed by Gygax and Frank Mentzer, with help from François Marcela-Froideval and Roger Moore. It got put on hold for a year while Frank Mentzer was finishing up the *Basic D&D* series — and Gygax was saving the company — then Gygax offered more details in *Dragon* #103 (November 1985).

Gygax saw a second edition mainly as an opportunity to reorganize all of the core rule books — which then included the *Players Handbook*, the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, *Deities & Demigods*, three books of monsters, *Unearthed Arcana*, and *Oriental Adventures* — into four polished (but massive) volumes — matching the original four *AD&D* books from 1980. He also remained intent on adding a few missing character classes: the mystic, the savant, and the jester.

However, the Gygaxian version of second edition never came to be, due to his departure from the company. Afterward, designer Zeb Cook and senior editor Steve Winter volunteered to take on the second edition project, supervised by Game Department Head Michael Dobson and aided by researcher and playtest coordinator Jon Pickens.

“When we got the green light to start working on 2nd Edition, the first thing I did was grab spare copies of the PHB and DMG, slice them into pieces, and start taping them back together the way they belonged.”

– Steve Winter, Interview, grognardia.blogspot.com (August 2009)

The new 2e team agreed with Gygax about some of the problems with *AD&D*. Much as had been the case in 1977, before the current iterations of *D&D* were created, rules were spread across numerous books, with some of them being contradictory.

However, they also saw that the roleplaying industry had evolved another 10 years since the release of *AD&D*, while TSR's premiere game was still a clunky, old machine, full of non-intuitive mechanisms such as armor classes that ran from 10 to -10 and a combat system that was thoroughly rooted in miniatures wargames. Early rulebooks like the *Players Handbook* and *Dungeon Masters Guide* were obtuse and poorly organized, while later rulebooks like *Unearthed Arcana* were unbalanced and heavily errataed. Though the new second edition of the game started out as a re-organization under Gygax, the new 2e team was able to convince management to turn it into a true revision.

Editor Steve Winter laid out four criteria for the new project:

- The rulebooks should be treated as references. Winter considered the alternate idea of having the books be instruction manuals, but decided that reference books would be more useful for existing players. On the downside, this meant that *AD&D* would remain hard to learn, which would result in a flurry of introductory releases in the '90s, as we'll see.
- All information on a topic was to be organized in one place.
- All of the players' information was to be in the *Players Handbook* and all of the DM's information in the *Dungeon Masters Guide* — without any overlap.
- The new books had to have good value over the first edition books.

Many of these ideas seem pretty basic now; that they had to be thought about back then suggests that even the *AD&D* books had been constructed pretty haphazardly (in what Winter would call a “stream of consciousness” manner).

TSR (re)announced the new edition of the game in *Dragon #117* (January 1987). In the next issue, project lead Zeb Cook famously penned a column titled “Who Dies?” It mentioned that part of the revision would involve deciding which character classes to throw out. The column was remarkably prescient, spotlighting the two classes that were eventually removed from the game — saying that assassins had always been bad for party unity while monks had been better covered by *Oriental Adventures*. However it also threatened many other favorites, from clerics and thieves to illusionists and druids. The result was a huge outcry, thousands of letters, and a lot of debate about the new edition.

Cook would later say that he was *trying* to evoke a reaction. Whatever the purpose, it allowed players to have a real hand in the revision of the game, first through their letters, then through a massive questionnaire. Players even saved the bard, another class that Cook had marked for extinction. Of course, feedback didn't stop there. Pickens also coordinated with 20–30 gaming groups over eight months of playtesting, ending around the fall of 1988.

The second edition of *AD&D* was finally released in early 1989.

Many of the changes turned out to be cosmetic. One of the biggest was that the sizes of the *Player's Handbook* (1989) and *Dungeon Master's Guide* (1989) were reversed. Back in 1978 Gygax had decided that it was best if the players did not know the rules, and so the original *Player's Handbook* was a skeleton that didn't even detail combat. Now the entire roleplaying industry had accepted the fact that players and gamemasters were united in games — not adversaries — and the new rules reflected this. As another presentation change the new rules were printed in

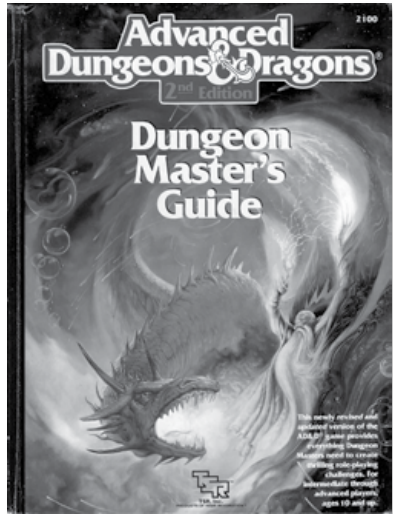
two colors, black and blue, showing a continued growth in TSR's professionalism. Finally the new *Monstrous Compendium* (1989) was released in a loose leaf binder format — though this change was eliminated a few years later.

The new rules were also rewritten from scratch. More than anything, this was probably the largest benefit of the new edition, since it made the game much more accessible than Gygax's original prose had been.

Beyond that, more was changed than some hoped and less than most feared. Many of the clunky rules, such as *AD&D*'s decreasing armor class, stuck around. On the other hand, non-weapon proficiencies were added to the core rules, and the schools of magic were fully split, providing magic-user characters with a bit more depth. Perhaps most surprisingly, the rules were once again presented as “guide-lines”—a reversal from Gygax's original goal for the *AD&D* lines. Finally, the character classes were indeed cleaned up, with Arneson's assassin and monk eliminated.

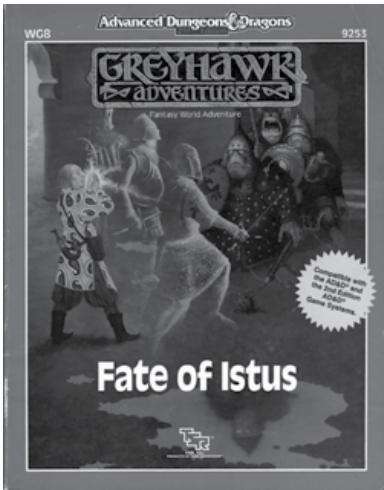
Though Cook had said that assassins were removed due to problems of party unity, their excision has always been seen by the public as part of TSR's well-documented attempt to make *AD&D* more public friendly — TSR's only allowance to the religious hysteria that had shadowed the game throughout the 1980s. Half-orcs were similarly removed as player characters, and demons and devils were eliminated entirely.

James M. Ward, who had instituted the removal of demons and devils, explained in *Dragon #154* (February 1990) that “[a]voiding the Angry Mother Syndrome has become a good, basic guideline for all of the designers and editors at TSR, Inc.” Apparently, TSR had received one letter a week complaining about the demons and devils since the original *Monster Manual* was printed, and those 624 letters, or what Ward called “a lot of letters,” had been the reason he'd removed the infernal races.



The readers were not amused, and to his credit Ward printed many of their replies in *Dragon #158* (June 1990). One reader stated that the decision “becomes censorship when an outside group dictates to you ... what you should print.” The release of the *Outer Planes Appendix* (1991) for the *Monstrous Compendium* assuaged some of the anger because it restored demons as “tanar’ri” and devils as “baatezu,” but some fans left *D&D* entirely as a result of this decision.

Despite these issues, the release of the second edition was generally a success. To explain the changes, TSR also kicked off major events in both of their active game worlds, *Forgotten Realms* and *Greyhawk*.



In *Greyhawk* this came about through a single adventure book, *WG8: Fate of Istus* (1989), whose prime goal was to eliminate monks and assassins from *Greyhawk*.

The event in the *Forgotten Realms* was much more sophisticated. It centered on a story of the gods of the Realms being thrown out of the heavens and the changes that this wrought. It began in *FR7: Hall of Heroes* (1989) and then spread out into a three-adventure “Avatar” series (1989), a three-novel “Avatar” series (1989), and even some of

the comic book stories. Unlike the “underground conspiracy” of *Dragonlance*, this event was planned from the top-down by management. It was very successful, but as TSR’s first concerted foray into the area it was a nightmare to manage, primarily due to the simultaneous creation of the three novels, the three adventures, and many of the other elements. Limited authorial control of plots and connections to a rule system that was also changing at the time caused further problems.

The synchronized launch of the Realms’ “Empires” event (1990) would go better and from there book-game synergy would increase.

TSR West: 1989–1992

The new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* wasn't the only major expansion for TSR in 1989. At the same time, TSR was heading back to the West Coast to restart the work that Gygax had abandoned in 1984 when he was forced to return to the Midwest. The goal was to get *D&D* back onto the television, and maybe (finally) into the movies.

This was to be done through a new department called TSR West that was run by Flint Dille, Lorraine Williams' brother (who we've already met) — who indeed had some experience in Hollywood via *American Tail 2* and the *Transformers* and *G.I. Joe* TV shows. TSR West under Dille was a small operation, never totaling more than eight employees, but it was nonetheless an expensive one because of the effort (and cost) expended to schmooze Hollywood.

A few publishing projects originated from TSR West, including the timely *A Line in the Sand* board game (1991), designed by Douglas Niles and Paul Lidberg, which depicted the first US-Iraq War; it was published the very day the US bombing began, thanks to Dille's ability to convince the president of the company to make things move fast. A Buck Rogers roleplaying game called *XXVc* also began its life at TSR West, but it was shipped back east when Dille couldn't finish it, where we'll meet it again shortly.

TSR West's most notable achievement was their publication of a series of "comic modules." These were standard comic books, but because TSR's comic book license was still exclusively held by DC, four pages of game material were added to each book by new hire Scott Haring (formerly and later of Steve Jackson Games), thus turning them into "comic modules." One of the lead comic modules was a *Buck Rogers: XXVc* comic — and we'll talk about why *that* name keeps popping up at this point in TSR's history. Others included *13 Assassin*, *Intruder*, *R.I.P.*, and *Warhawk*.

Production of these comics by TSR West caused friction with DC Comics, and is cited as one of the prime reasons for DC not renewing their TSR license in 1991. Meanwhile TSR West came to an end in 1992 because of its cost, and thus the TSR West comics were all terminated as well. It would be years before *Dungeons & Dragons* received any coherent comic support again, beginning with Kenzer & Company's *Dungeons & Dragons: In the Shadow of Dragons* (2000–2002).

Dungeons, Dragons & Comics

Dungeons & Dragons has a long history with the comics industry. Some it appears within the histories of TSR and Kenzer & Company. But, there's more to the story than that.

The First Comics: 1981-1982

The comic book history of *D&D* begins in either 1979 or 1980 within the Art Department of TSR. Inside that group, artists Jeff Dee and Bill Willingham were both interested in comics. In fact, Dee had already produced his own comic book superhero RPG, *Villains and Vigilantes* (1979), as is described in the history of FGU.

Because of their comic book interest, Dee and Willingham approached Gary Gygax about the possibility of starting a line of TSR comics. It was an idea whose time had probably come, as underground fantasy comics like *The First Kingdom* (1974), *Cerebus* (1977), and *ElfQuest* (1978) were coming of age and in the next decade would lead to comics more explicitly derived from *D&D*, such as Arrow Comics' *The Realm* (1986). However, Gygax turned the idea over to the *Dragon* magazine editor—perhaps because the magazine had usually included some comics—and it died there.

Meanwhile, TSR's Ad Department was thinking about comics too. They decided to produce a series of full-page ads in both black & white and color that were designed as comic strips. The first nine-page strip, probably drawn by Keenan Powell, featured a group of three adventures—an elf, a fighter, and a magic-user—exploring a dungeon, fighting a shadow, and then facing green slime. It appeared in Marvel Comics in 1981.

When Dee and Willingham saw the ad, they didn't like it. Looking back, it does have issues. The art style is crude, and the panels aren't separated like they would be in most modern comic books. Besides that, the *D&D* continuity is somewhat poor. The wizard chases away a Shadow with a Hold Monster "charm" that also lights up the dungeon. Worse, the party doesn't even have a cleric! Dee rushed off to tell the Ad Department about the problems with the strip ... and was promptly given the job of continuing it.

"Jeff saw [the first comic strip] before I did and went storming to the other building, pointing out, panel by panel, everything that was wrong with how they did what they did. And rather than fire him, they said, 'Well, that all makes sense. Why don't you do it from now on?'"

— Bill Willingham, Interview, *The Comics Journal*, 2006

Jeff Dee drew the second strip (which includes a cleric suddenly stepping out of the shadows), and then Bill Willingham drew at least six more. Steve Sullivan did the writing. These strips largely focused on the *Dungeons & Dragons Basic* and *Expert Sets* of the era. A second series of strips that ran simultaneously in 1981–1982 is less well-known. They appear to have been published in *Dragon Magazine*, *Epic Illustrated*, and/or *Heavy Metal* and may have been the work of a different creative team.

For several years, those 14 pages of comic ads would be the sum total of the TSR comic corpus.

The Dragonlance Expansion: 1987–1991

By the mid-'80s, TSR was growing increasingly sophisticated with its expansion into other media. They'd pushed into the book trade in 1982 with their *Endless Quest* (1982–1987) books and onto television screens with their *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon (1983–1985). Much of this new sophistication culminated in the Dragonlance project, which TSR simultaneously released as adventures (1984–1986) and novels (1984–1985). TSR opted to use *Dragonlance* to break into comics as well, with adaptations of the three *Dragonlance Chronicles* novels.

The Dragonlance Saga: Book One (1987), an 80-page graphic novel that adapted the first half of *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (1984) was scripted by Roy Thomas, who at the time was best known for his long run on Marvel's *Conan the Barbarian* (1970) and his golden-age superhero comics, such as the *All-Star Squadron* (1981). His *Dragonlance* comic was well-reviewed, and could have been a classic if given the right support. Unfortunately, TSR mainly distributed it using their existing connections – which put it primarily into game and book stores, *not* comic stores.

While TSR did publish four more *Dragonlance* graphic novels (1988–1991), advancing the storyline into *Dragons of Spring Dawning* (1985), they never finished the storyline. The fifth and final volume is one of the rarer TSR collectibles, regularly earning prices over \$200 online.

The DC Explosion: 1988–1991

Just as TSR was getting started with their *Dragonlance* graphic novels, they were also negotiating with one of the top two US comic companies – DC. Perhaps because of the success of the existing *Dragonlance* graphic novels, DC and TSR came to a deal; the result would be 126 different comics published in four years, spread across five major series and a few specials. They would include (for the first time ever) totally original comics based on the *Dungeons & Dragons* game and its major settings.

The *D&D* comics line kicked off with *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (1988–1991), initially written by industry writer Michael Fleisher. It portrayed a fairly typically *D&D*

adventuring party and was most notable for its location in Waterdeep, making it the first comic book depiction of the Forgotten Realms. After its initial four-issue arc, the comic would be taken over by Dan Mishkin, who then wrote the majority of its 36-issue run.

However, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* had one other writer: Jeff Grubb, TSR's "engineer" of the Forgotten Realms, who was also no stranger to fiction, having co-authored *Azure Bonds* (1988) – one of the first *Realms* novels – with his wife, Kate Novak. He was able to carry all of that experience over to a four-issue run on *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, which was considered a success. Though Mishkin then took the comic back over, Grubb wasn't ignored. DC was happy to have a TSR employee write what they figured would be "pre-approved" scripts. The result was a second comic, *Forgotten Realms*, which ran 25 issues itself (1989–1991).

"I always say that Ed is the architect of the Realms, I'm just the engineer. The Realms are first and foremost his creation, and predate D&D itself. My role was to translate his work into a usable and playable setting for games and books. He's the superhero, I'm the sidekick."

– Jeff Grubb, Interview, glnfz.blogspot.com (September 2009)

Together the two series formed the spine of DC's extensive *D&D* comics production. Two other *D&D* comic series ran at DC during the same time period: *Dragonlance* (1988–1991), a 34-issue comic primarily by Dan Mishkin; and *Spelljammer* (1990–1991), a short 15-issue series created by Barbara Kesel that marked the first appearance of the *Spelljammer* universe in comic books.

The comics apparently did well and there were plans for more. James Lowder was tapped to write a *Ravenloft* comic, while *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* #36 (December 1991) promised an issue #37 the next month. But they were not to be.

The reasons for this abrupt ending are already described in the history of TSR. In short: TSR West began publishing comic books while claiming they were "comic modules" because they included four pages of gaming material. This new line of comics caused friction between DC and TSR, and as a result, DC's line of TSR comics came to a very sudden end.

For almost two decades afterward, those four years of *D&D* comics from DC would be the high point of *D&D*'s penetration into the comic medium – both by quantity and (in this writer's opinion) creativity.

The Lean Years: 1992–2000

During TSR's final years in the '90s, comic production was very limited. Comics were also treated differently. Instead of offering big licenses to comic publishers, TSR

primarily used the medium as a new way of marketing their games—calling back to those very first *D&D* comic strips. As a result, just five more comics were published before TSR expired.

Jeff Grubb's *Dragon Strike #1* (1994) was produced by Marvel to support TSR's then-newest introductory product. A few years later TSR produced a set of four "limited edition" comics that were distributed as promotions. They were: Jeff Grubb's *Forgotten Realms: The Grand Tour* (1996), Tom and Mary Bierbaum's *Dragonlance: Fifth Age* (1996), Mike Baron's *Labyrinth of Madness* (1996), and Ed Stark's *Birthright: The Serpent's Eye* (1996). A fifth comic, Jeff Grubb's *Planescape: The Unity of Rings* (2003), was produced at the time, but not released until Wizards of the Coast put it on the web seven years later.

After Wizards took over TSR in 1997, they were pretty busy for a few years getting things back in order. Therefore it's no big surprise that they didn't do much with comic licensing. Interplay issued a *Baldur's Gate* comic (1998) to introduce characters in the video game, then in 2000, 21st Century Comics, an Italian company, offered up the only original creative content of the period.

Forgotten Realms: The Forbidden Sands of Anauroch (2000) was meant to be a series of six handsome 48-page hardcover graphic novels, released in the European style. It ended after just two issues, however, due in part to bad reviews.

Kenzer & Comics: 2001–2004

It wasn't until the '00s that *D&D* made its return to the world of comics. Two major companies would license the brand during that decade.

The first of these comics publishers was Kenzer & Company, who received several *Dungeons & Dragons* licenses after the release of 3E—as described in their own history. They used this license to publish four comic series over a four-year span: the eight-issue *In the Shadow of Dragons* (2001–2002); the four-issue *Tempest's Gate* (2001–2002); the six-issue *Black & White* (2002–2003), indeed published in black & white; and the five-issue *Where Shadows Fall* (2003–2004).

All four comics were set in Greyhawk, the first time the setting had appeared in comic form. This was doubtless due to the setting's new importance as the "default" *D&D* world for 3E.

The Devil Has Its Due: 2004–2008

D&D's next comic publisher of the era came about when licensed comic creators Dabel Brothers Productions got together with a new publisher called Devil's Due Publishing. As part of their new line, the Dabel brothers licensed *The Legend of Huma*—a historic *Dragonlance* novel (1988) originally written by Richard A. Knaak.

In the early months of 2004, Devil's Due published five out of the six issues intended to form the first arc of *The Legend of Huma*. Unfortunately, before the sixth issue of *The Legend of Huma* went to press, the Dabel Brothers decided that they were unhappy with their publisher. The result was an embarrassingly public spectacle, full of arguments and recriminations. The Dabel Brothers *did* end up going their own way. However, when they left Devil's Due, the Dabels were forced to leave *The Legend of Huma* behind. Devil's Due, meanwhile, had been happy with the comic's reception, so on March 30, 2005, they announced a new license from Hasbro to Devil's Due, covering the entire *D&D* library.

Afterward Devil's Due published the sixth issue of *The Legend of Huma*, but not the rest of the adaptation. However, they *did* use their new-fangled *D&D* license to publish *lots* of additional *D&D* material.

The rest of the story of Devil's Due's publication of *D&D* comics is both more notable and less exciting. For the most part, they adapted two series: *The Legend of Drizzt* and the *Dragonlance Chronicles*. For *Drizzt*, they fully adapted seven books—*Homeland* (2005), *Exile* (2005), *Sojourn* (2006), *The Crystal Shard* (2006), *Streams of Silver* (2007), *The Halfling's Gem* (2007), and *The Legacy* (2008). They also completely adapted the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, with *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (2005–2006), *Dragons of Winter Night* (2007), and *Dragon of Spring Dawning* (2007–2008)—retreading books previously adapted by Roy Thomas, by now newly reimagined for a different generation.

Starting in 2006, Devil's Due looked to expand its publications. The first of their new books was *Eberron: Eye of the Wolf* (June 2006), Devil's Due's only original *D&D* story and the first *Eberron* comic. It was written by *Eberron* creator Keith Baker, but ended up being a one-shot.

After licensing the *Dungeons & Dragons* trademark itself, Devil's Due also began publishing *The Worlds of Dungeons & Dragons* (2007–2008), an anthology comic that adapted short stories taken from *Dragon Magazine* and various short-story collections, such as *Realms of Valor* (1993) and *Tales of Ravenloft* (1994).

Unfortunately, that brings us to 2008. At the time, Devil's Due was publishing *The Worlds of D&D*, *Time of the Twins* (2008) for *Dragonlance Legends*, and *Starless Night* (2008) for *The Legend of Drizzt*. Though Devil's Due finished *Time of the Twins*, they only got a single issue into *Starless Night* (2008), while *The Worlds of D&D* ended with issue #7 (2008).

"We're still dealing with hundreds of thousands of dollars in book store returns that rocked us in late 2008 and into 2009, right in the middle of an already aggressive restructuring."

– Josh Blaylock, Press, bleedingcool.com

The problem was generally the economic downturn of 2008, but more specifically the same problem that once almost brought down White Wolf and contributed to the death of TSR: book store returns. Devil's Due managed to publish some comics through 2010, but their *D&D* books would never advance past those final issues in 2008.

The Rest of the Story: 2002, 2004, 2010-Present

During the years that Kenzer & Company published books under the *Dungeons & Dragons* trademark and Devil's Due was publishing adaptations of TSR and Wizards of the Coast novels, other *D&D* comic books appeared.

The first of these was *Vecna: Hand of the Revenant Book One* (2002), by Modi Thorsson, published by Iron Hammer Graphics. Like the comics then being published by Kenzer & Company, it was set in Greyhawk. Thorsson ended the story on a cliffhanger because he'd planned for more volumes, but that never came to be. Today, *Vecna* is another very hard to get rarity.

The second was *Crisis in Raimiton* (2004), an "Adventure Guide to *D&D*" that Wizards gave away on Free Comic Book Day '04. It told the story of gamers playing *D&D*, and then the story of the characters they created. Wizards' interest in the free giveaway foreshadowed the industry's interest in a free giveaway day of their own: Free RPG Day.

More recently, IDW Publishing has picked up the *D&D* license.

IDW's main *D&D* book was John Rogers' *Dungeons & Dragons* (2010) ongoing comic, set in the Points of Light world. It was the first ongoing *D&D* comic to be published since DC lost the license 20 years ago. Unfortunately, Rogers' comic went on hiatus after just 16 issues.

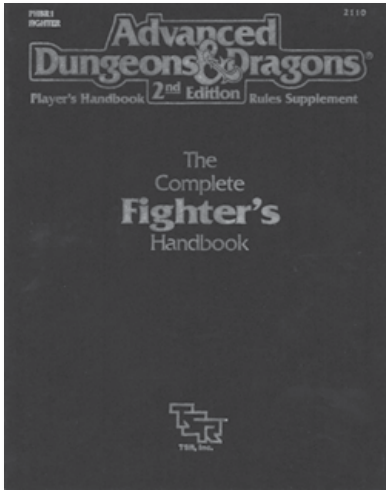
IDW has also published multiple *D&D* miniseries, including: Alex Irvine's *Dungeons & Dragons: Dark Sun* (2011); R.A. Salvatore's *Dungeons & Dragons: The Legend of Drizzt: Neverwinter Tales* (2011); Paul Crilley's *Dungeons & Dragons: Eberron* (2012); and Ed Greenwood's *Dungeons & Dragons: Forgotten Realms*.

IDW has been doing one other thing of note: reprinting the best *D&D* comics from the past. To date, they've published complete sets of DC's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* and *Forgotten Realms* comics, as well as Devil's Due's *Legends of Drizzt* stories.

If DC Comics offered the Golden Age of *D&D* comic publishing, IDW may be the Renaissance.

Early Second Edition Lines: 1989—1991

We now return to the Midwest, where we find that following the release of *AD&D* second edition, TSR was also looking at new models for selling supplements. Although adventures and setting books continued, TSR began working to sell not just to gamemasters, but also to players — a much wider demographic. The result was the *Player's Handbook Rule Supplements* (1989–1995), which was one of the industry's first series of splatbooks — each detailing a different class or race, primarily for use by players.



Starting with *PHBR1: The Complete Fighter's Handbook* (1989) each book used “kits” to better define various *AD&D* classes and races. The first four were designed in tandem, but after that, an unbalancing power slowly found its way into the series. Nonetheless the books were great sellers for TSR for many years.

Other generic sourcebooks released by TSR in the second edition era included the “DMGR” *Dungeon Master Guide References* (1990–1997) and the “HR” *Historical References* (1991–1995), which were well-acclaimed historical books — starting with *Vikings* (1991) and *Charlemagne's Paladins* (1992), which were laid out as a matching pair. Neither of these series had the broad appeal of the player books, and they slowly trailed off as a result.

Meanwhile, TSR was also looking at revising and expanding their classic campaign settings.

Dragonlance revealed the new continent of Taladas (1989–1991) on the other side of Krynn in what would later be called “the first official spin-off campaign.” This new campaign largely rose out of a desire to have another boxed set for release in 1989. Given the mercantile reasoning, it's perhaps no surprise that the new realm was ultimately unsuccessful; fans would welcome a return to more familiar lands in 1992, though the Dragonlance line would only run until 1993.

Greyhawk needed little revision, but did expand in two notable ways. First, two long-awaited supplements appeared. The *City of Greyhawk* (1989) box was an extraordinary in-depth look at one city, while *WGRI: Greyhawk Ruins* (1990) at last tackled the dungeons under Greyhawk Castle in a serious way. New adventures also appeared, beginning with *WG9: Gargoyles* (1989) and the

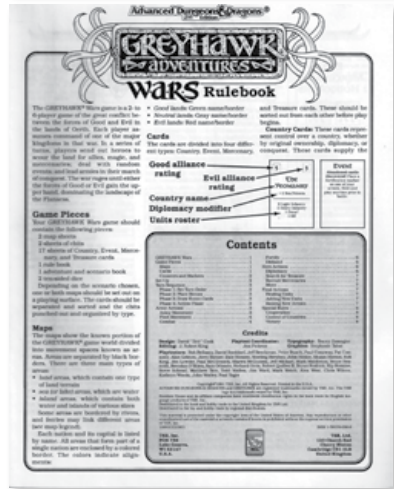
trilogy of *WGA1: Falcon's Revenge* (1990), *WGA2: Falconmaster* (1990), and *WGA3: Flames of the Falcon* (1990). They tended not to have the larger-than-life feel of Gygax's originals, and thus are largely forgotten today.

A more creatively unified third wave of Greyhawk products would kick off with the *Greyhawk Wars* board game (1991) and Carl Sargent's *From the Ashes* (1992) supplement. They pushed the world into a more conflictive period. This led to the first regional sourcebooks for the setting in Carl Sargent's "From the Ashes" era — before the line was also abruptly cancelled in 1993. After that no more Greyhawk supplements were published under TSR.

Meanwhile, the Forgotten Realms — which required little retooling — received the star treatment. That led off with Ed Greenwood and Jeff Grubb's *Forgotten Realms Adventures* (1990), the first non-core hardcover for 2e. A few other notable products were published around the same time. *LC1: Gateway to Ravens Bluff, the Living City* (1989) detailed the city owned

by the RPGA, at the heart of their current "Living" campaign. *The Ruins of Undermountain* (1991), located under the City of Waterdeep, was one of the first real "mega" dungeons — though it trailed Greyhawk's own offering, *Greyhawk Ruins*, by a year. Events such as the aforementioned "Empire" trilogy kept the setting hopping as well. Other than that, the main focus on the Realms was on its geographically oriented supplements, which continued through 1993.

With all this growth in supplements and settings alike, it's no surprise that TSR — well past the trauma of the mid-'80s — was now hiring the next generation of star creators. Editor Wolfgang Baur, artist Brom, and designer Troy Denning (the latter making a return to TSR) joined in 1989, designer Steven Schend in 1990, designer Richard Baker in 1991, and designer Bill Slavicsek in 1993. As we'll see momentarily, some of these designers would be very important to the *next* expansions at TSR.



New Settings: 1989—1993

Because TSR was not content to rest on their laurels, they continued to publish new worlds as well — ultimately too many of them, it would turn out.



The first of these new settings was Jeff Grubb's innovative science-fantasy *Spelljammer* (1989), which introduced a universe of magical starships traversing the “crystal spheres” that contained all the earthbound *AD&D* campaign worlds. It offered a method to connect together all of TSR's settings, and at the same time introduced fun new Jules Verne-esque technology that had never before been seen in the game. It was innovative and popular.

Bruce Nesmith's *Ravenloft: Realm of Terror* (1990) was next. It extended the ideas behind the Hickmans' original adventure (and follow-ups) into an entire “demi-plane” of gothic horror that sought to make *AD&D* competitive with games like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Chill*.



Following the creation of Ravenloft, TSR developed a new model of approaching world designs with a more artistic sensibility. The results were often stunningly beautiful.

Dark Sun was the first of these artistic world designs. Designers Troy Denning and Timothy Brown led the project, alongside fiction editor Mary Kirchoff.

Some of the setting's innovation came from the fact that two of its creators were veterans of the game industry with experience far beyond TSR: Denning had worked at TSR in the early '80s, but had since managed Pacesetter and worked for Mayfair; while Brown had come over from GDW.

However artist Gerald Brom also added a lot to the setting's unique artistic sensibility through his contribution of unique illustrations, which helped to set Dark Sun apart from the other TSR settings, with their more typical fantasy drawings.

Brom also contributed to the setting itself, as he would often create weird drawings of people, places, and things, which Denning and Brown would then incorporate into the game.

“We included Brom from the very beginning. He wasn’t there just to paint what we told him. . . . He would bring us sketches of ideas he had, and we’d design rules and story details to fit them.”

– Timothy Brown,
“The Creation of Dark Sun,”
Dragon #315 (January 2004)



Dark Sun was introduced because of the desire for a new “high level” *AD&D* setting intended for “experienced DMs.” TSR also wanted to try (one more time) to make their *Battlesystem* game successful, as Games Workshop was really nipping at TSR’s heels by this point. The importance of *Battlesystem* was highlighted by the setting’s original name, “War World,” but it was finally released as the *Dark Sun* box (1991). A third edition of TSR’s mass combat game, called *Battlesystem Skirmishes* (1991), was published at the same time. However, as had been the case before, *Battlesystem* didn’t take off, and the tie-in was soon removed — though Dark Sun continued on.

Dark Sun was generally well-respected for its dark themes — describing a world faced with ecological disaster — its unusual races, and overall its new look at an *AD&D* world. It was much later re-released as *Dark Sun Campaign Setting: Expanded and Revised* (1995), which advanced the timeline 10 years, as was popular to do in the metaplot-heavy ’90s.

The next year saw the release of Jeff Grubb’s *Al-Qadim* (1992), an Arabic setting that ended up placed in the southern Forgotten Realms. Like the other games of this period it had a strong artistic design, here overseen by Andria Hayday. The “cultural book” as Grubb called it — suggesting that it was an *Oriental Adventures*-like release, rather than a full-blown campaign — was well-received. Grubb would later say that was because they’d managed to hide the setting’s potential from “the suits.”

TSR’s fifth second edition campaign world, *Planescape* (1993), was released to replace *Spelljammer*, whose run had just ended. TSR wanted a new world-spanning setting, and Slade Henson came up with the answer by suggesting a new

setting built on Jeff Grubb's first edition *Manual of the Planes* (1987). The idea sat dormant for a year until Zeb Cook picked it up and ran with it.

Cook's Planescape ended up being much more than just “adventures in the outer planes.” It once again was built around a strong artistic concept, thanks



to Dana Knutson's conceptual art and to Tony DiTerlizzi's final drawings, which gave the setting a “worn, rusted, organic look.” Unlike Spelljammer this new setting had a strong geographical center, the City of Sigil, resolving a flaw in the Spelljammer setting that denied players a good home base.

Planescape also developed its own slang and in many ways changed the face of *AD&D* even more than Dark Sun had before it. Some members of the Planescape team would later say that it was so successful because upper management was focusing their attention on other things — which mirrored Jeff Grubb's similar comments about *Al-Qadim*, and showed a continuing rift between “corporate” and “creative,” just as had been the case back in the Blume and Gygax days.

From Dark Sun to Planescape (and beyond), TSR distinguished itself as a company that *wasn't* still caught in the traditional fantasy designs of the '80s. The new settings of the '90s were adult, mature, and original.

Basic D&D Ends (Triumphantly): 1989—1996

Meanwhile, TSR was continuing to support its *Basic D&D* game. *Mystara's Gazetteers* slowed down — with the last two published in 1990 and 1991—but they followed by an even more well-received “Hollow World” line (1990–1992). The Hollow World revealed the pulpish lands under the surface of *Mystara* — but it didn't do as well in sales as it did in critical acclaim.

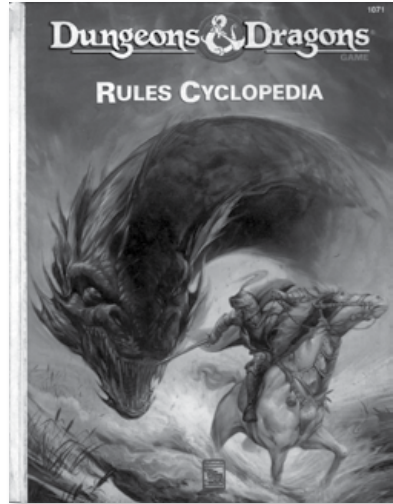
*“We should have promoted them as one big world. People playing in *Mystara* should have had adventures in the Hollow World every now and then.”*

– Bruce Heard, “The Creation of Hollow World,” *Dragon* #315 (January 2004)

In 1991 TSR also published two revisions to *Basic D&D*.

The first was the *D&D* black-box (1991), which was called “fifth edition *D&D*” internal to TSR (counting original *D&D*, and the Holmes, Moldvay, and Mentzer *Basic Sets* as the previous editions). Black-box *D&D* was an attempt to relaunch *D&D* as an introductory product (again). It featured “dragon cards” which made learning the game easy — based on an educational format established by Science Research Associates — and used miniatures and maps to make the game even more appealing. The game was put together by Dark Sun alumni Timothy Brown and Troy Denning and would be a top-seller for TSR, selling a half-million copies in the next six years.

The second *Basic D&D* revision was Aaron Allston’s *Rules Cyclopedia* (1991), a hardbound book that combined the rules previously released by TSR as the first four boxed sets, from “Basic” to “Masters,” taking characters from level 1 to 36, all in



one package. It also included some of the best info from the *Gazetteers*. The result was a nice compilation that was appreciated by the fans that were going mad trying to find info scattered across four boxes and numerous books.

However, the *Basic D&D* line was by then on its way out, except as an introductory game through the “black-box” project. A few final adventures were released from 1992–1993 to support the low-level characters at the heart of black-box *D&D* and then in 1993 all new production of *Basic D&D* came to an end after a 16-year run.

It was at first replaced with games like William Connors’ *Dragon Quest* (1992) and Bruce Nesmith’s *Dragon Strike* (1993), each of which was a board game requiring a dungeon master. *Dragon Strike* had actually started out as a revision of the black-box before morphing to its final form, showing how quickly and totally TSR’s priorities had changed in a very short time.

There was another abrupt change the next year when TSR put out *First Quest* (1994) by Richard Baker, Zeb Cook, and Bruce Nesmith. It was an introductory *AD&D* game with an example of play on a CD; after two years of introductory board games, the company was now back to introductory roleplaying, though no longer under the *Basic D&D* brand. *First Quest* was re-released as the *Introduction to Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Game* (1995), then as *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: The Complete Starter Set* (1996).

Astonishingly, this means that TSR put out a new introduction to *D&D* every year from 1991 to 1996, which sounds like an inefficient use of resources and might be an early foreshadowing of problems in the time period. It also suggests that TSR was growing increasingly desperate to bring new roleplayers into the hobby.

Despite the death of *Basic D&D*, *Mystara* was not immediately forgotten. It made the jump to *AD&D* in 1994 through several *Mystara* supplements and later a short-lived campaign setting called *Red Steel* (1994), but after that one of TSR's oldest campaign worlds died as well.

A Buck Rogers Interlude: 1988—1995

Having caught up on all of the *D&D*-related goings-on of the early '90s we now must take a step back and look at a very odd obsession which TSR was wrestling with in this same period — Buck Rogers — which we already met briefly at TSR West.

Lorraine Williams, who had taken over TSR in 1986, inherited the money she used in the takeover from her grandfather, John Dille. Dille had been the syndicator of the *Buck Rogers* comic strip, and its ownership had passed into the Dille Family Trust. Now with TSR also under her control, Williams decided to use the game company to increase the value of her family's other property.

Doing so was clearly a conflict of interest, but at the same time, an above-board one. There was no secret that Williams' family owned Buck Rogers, and when TSR started paying royalties on the character, there was no secret that some of that ultimately went back to Williams herself. On the other hand, licensing this character and continuing to publish it was probably not beneficial to TSR or its other stockholders.

TSR kicked off their *Buck Rogers* line with a Jeff Grubb board game (1988), which was sufficiently overprinted that it can still be found in large quantities today. After that they began to focus on a new setting called "XXVc," which was a reboot of the classic *Buck Rogers* universe designed by Flint Dille.

XXVc dominated *Buck Rogers* production throughout the next four years. Initial releases included the aforementioned TSR West comics (1990–1991), a series of 11 novels (1989–1993), and two SSI computer games (1990–1992). The TSR West roleplaying game, *XXVc* (1990), was finished up in Lake Geneva. It was supported by over a dozen supplements, however it didn't do that well. Besides being burdened by an obtuse name, *XXVc* was also closely inspired by the second edition *AD&D* rules, and that class-and-level system had never been well-received in science-fiction circles.

After the failure of the *XXVc* line, the original *Buck Rogers* universe returned with a new *High Adventures Cliffhangers Buck Rogers Adventure Game* (1993) and a final novel (1995).

Today, it's hard to assess how much the *Buck Rogers* publications might have contributed to the eventual downfall of TSR, but it is instructive to note that all production was halted just as TSR entered its troublesome late phase, from 1995–1997, suggesting that the products were not moneymakers.

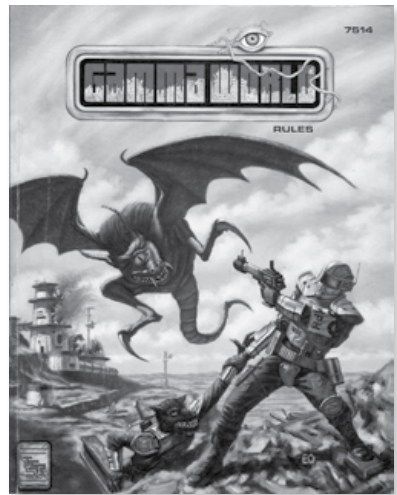
Other Games: 1987–1994

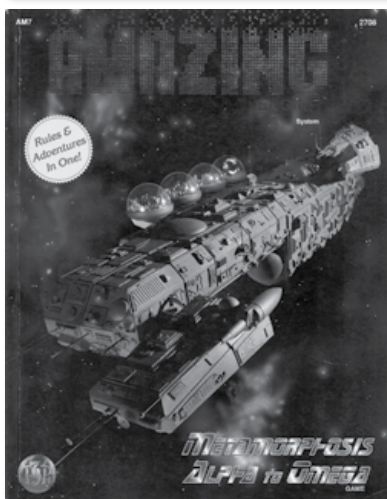
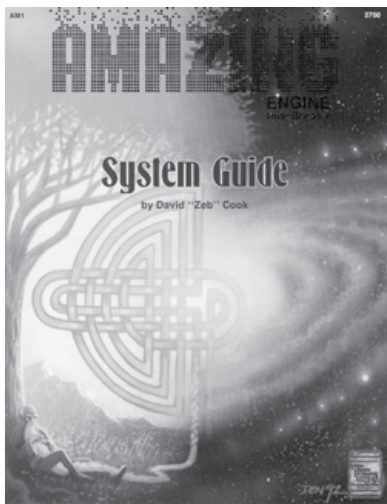
XXVc and *Buck Rogers Adventure* were of course not TSR's only non-*D&D* games in this time period. When we last checked in with TSR's other roleplaying product lines in the late '80s, they were generally influenced by simpler play and colored charts, but now that was poised to change.

TSR's next RPG release was *Top Secret/S.I.* (1987) — written by Douglas Niles and edited by Steve Jackson Games alumnus Warren Spector. It offered a new look at spies, focusing on TV and movie espionage rather than “realistic” spying. *S.I.* kept with the simpler design of the color-chart games, but did away with the actual charts. As a result, it was allowed a more varied design that really played to the genre's strengths. The result was fast playing and exciting, though the line only last until 1989.

New editions of SPI's *DragonQuest* (1989) and TSR's own *Boot Hill* (1990) appeared next. However, they were not supplemented, so the productions were probably intended only to maintain those trademarks.

The third edition of *Gamma World* faded away in 1988, but now *Gamma World* enjoyed a fourth edition (1992). It too shed the color-coded charts that had been in vogue in the '80s and — like *XXVc* before it — featured a design more closely based on *AD&D* second edition. As with





each of the previous editions, this one was supported by a handful of supplements. This time support dried up in late 1993.

Generally 1993 was the year when TSR closed down its subsidiary roleplaying lines, from *Gamma World* and *Marvel Super Heroes* to *Basic D&D*. But they were soon replaced by something entirely new — a universal game system released via the *Amazing Engine System Guide* (1993).

Zeb Cook's *Amazing Engine* was another simple beginner's system. After the initial rulebook, which condensed basic rules into just 32 pages, TSR started publishing setting books, each of which presented a different milieu for playing the game. It was a clear adaptation of the strategy that Steve Jackson Games was using to publish *GURPS* (1987). Unfortunately, TSR's settings were original but somewhat lackluster, and there was nothing driving players to the new system. The only publication of particular interest was (at last!) *Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega* (1994), a return to the *Starship Warden*, the setting of TSR's original science-fiction game.

After 1994 *Amazing Engine* was cancelled as well, as part of a new period of

belt-tightening at TSR that we'll discuss shortly.

The Lawsuits, Round Two: 1987–1994

Though we haven't mentioned TSR's litigiousness since the first *Role Aids* lawsuit of 1982–1984, TSR continued to threaten and sue its competitors throughout all of the later years of its existence. If anything, their lawsuits increased after Lorraine Williams took the helm. Many of these new lawsuits were against interests that Gary Gygax was involved in, post-TSR. This led to speculation that Williams was pursuing a vendetta against Gygax because of his failed attempt to prevent her from taking over the company.

The first suit of note was filed in 1987 against Gygax's new company, New Infinities Productions. It concerned an adventure written by Frank Mentzer for

TSR called “The Convert.” TSR had decided that they didn’t want to publish it, and so Mentzer got permission to publish it at New Infinities ... but the permission wasn’t in writing, which allowed TSR to sue anyway. The lawsuit would make its way through the courts, hemorrhaging money from New Infinities, until the company declared bankruptcy in 1989.

The next lawsuit kicked off in 1991, a revival of the old Mayfair *Role Aids* dispute. The importance of this dispute increased when Mayfair began publishing a line of supplements about demons (1992–1993), which was at odds with TSR’s new “mom-friendly” game. TSR convinced a judge that Mayfair was in violation of the 1984 agreement, though the judge noted that he felt the violation was probably accidental. Afterward TSR reached an agreement to purchase the entire *Role Aids* line from Mayfair and even published two supplements originally intended for that line: *Chronomancer* (1995) and *Shaman* (1995).

“Absent Mayfair’s joinder in AD&D’s prayer for rescission, it is assumed here that Mayfair is willing to continue to live with the specific ground rules set out in the Agreement, rather than having both parties relegated to the principles of law (such as fair use) that would apply in the absence of contract.”

– TSR v. Mayfair Games Memorandum Opinion and Order, March 17, 1993

Though the main target of this suit had been Mayfair, Gygax was also mentioned because he had penned an introduction to Mayfair’s version of *City State of the Invincible Overlord* (1987). TSR thought the cover, which said, “With an introduction by E. Gary Gygax creator of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*,” was a violation of their 1984 agreement with Mayfair. They were probably right, as Mayfair had signed away considerable rights that would have been allowed to them under fair use, including the ability to print the words “Advanced Dungeons & Dragons,” except in very specific ways. However, the judge ruled that in this matter TSR waived their rights by accepting ads for publication in *Dragon* magazine that clearly showed the so-called “Gygax statement.”

TSR went after Gary Gygax yet again in 1992 when GDW announced a new Gygax-designed fantasy game called *Dangerous Dimensions*. TSR promptly issued a cease & desist on May 13, 1992, citing trademark confusion with their own *D&D*. GDW agreed to change the name of Gygax’s game to *Dangerous Journeys* (1992) and published ... at which point TSR sued them *again*.

This time the claim was that the *Dangerous Journeys* game was derivative of *D&D*. Based on the broad claims made in the lawsuit, if *Dangerous Journeys* was derivative, then so was every roleplaying game in existence. But specious claims rarely keep lawsuits from being heard in the United States.

By 1994 GDW's attention to the court case had hurt their publication schedule badly, and as a result GDW was nearly bankrupt. On March 18, 1994, GDW and TSR arrived at a settlement where TSR bought all rights to *Dangerous Journeys* — which was a familiar tactic. By April 1, 1994, truckloads of *Dangerous Journeys* books were being shipped to TSR. Here the property joined the dusty dungeons inhabited by other RPGs that TSR had purchased, such as SPI's *DragonQuest* game. TSR made a brief attempt to sell *Dangerous Journeys* through the book trade, but after that the game was never heard from again.

More information on these lawsuits can be found in the histories of New Infinities, Mayfair, and GDW, respectively.

By 1994 TSR had also gone online, and now extended their new policy of aggressive lawsuits to another category of people ... their fans. They began to go after anyone who wrote online *AD&D* articles, demanding that they be taken down. This book's author was even served with notice ... for a collection of files about *FUDGE* and *Ars Magica*, neither owned by TSR.

I wish I still had copies of their letter and my response. Suffice to say, I was furiously angry and very nasty in what I wrote back to them. I don't think I played any TSR game for years thereafter, until long after TSR was dead and buried, and I'm sure I wasn't the only person on the nascent internet who was so angered.

This new controversy stretched on for years with no good resolution until Wizards of the Coast came into the picture.

AD&D's Nadir: 1993—1996

By 1993 TSR's market was dropping dramatically — with results that we've seen, such as the termination of the Dragonlance, Greyhawk, Spelljammer, *Basic D&D*, *Marvel Super Heroes*, and *Gamma World* lines. TSR's decision to spend money to purchase both *Dangerous Journeys* and *Role Aids* probably didn't help anything. Then Wizards of the Coast came out with *Magic: The Gathering* (1993), creating more discombobulation in the market.

However, *Magic* and questionable purchases weren't the only reasons for TSR's shrinking market. Another possible cause of TSR's problems was the fact that the *D&D* rules were a mess (again) — and for the exact same reasons at the heart of the 1977 *Basic D&D* revision and the 1989 2e revision. Rules (again) spread out across numerous books, and again there were game balance problems. The *Player's Handbooks Rule Supplements* were the main cause.

Therefore TSR released revised copies of their two core books — the *Player's Handbook* (1995) and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (1995). The changes were mostly editorial, but new Player's Option books overseen by Richard Baker quickly

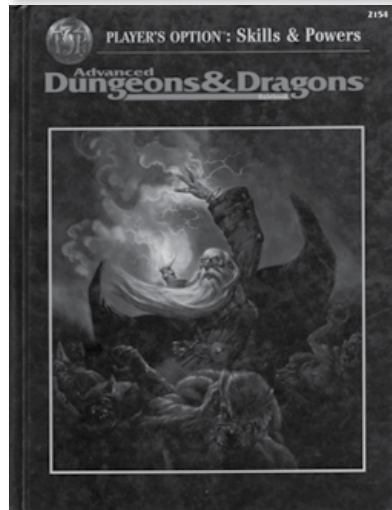
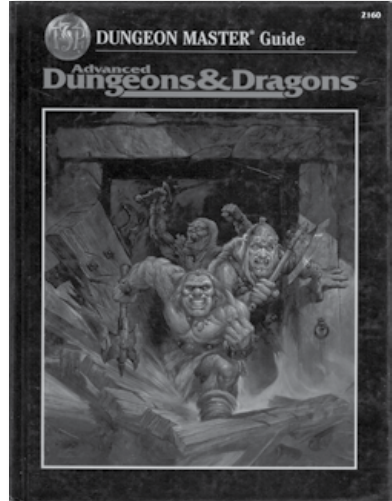
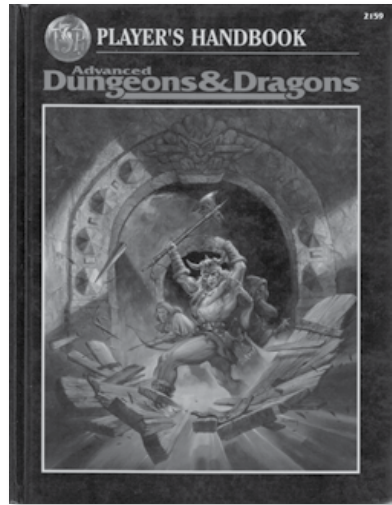
followed them: *Skills & Powers* (1995), *Combat & Tactics* (1995), and *Spells & Magic* (1996).

Though these books' new rules — which included point-based character creation, critical hits and other tactics, and piles of new spells and other wizardly rules — were all optional, they were nonetheless sufficiently big enough changes to earn the name “AD&D 2.5” from many fans. Some fans also suggest that many of these new ideas came from the *Dangerous Journeys* line, though that derivation is undocumented, if true.

In many ways the *Player's Options* releases were remarkably like *Unearthed Arcana*, put out 10 years before. They were released during a time of deep financial instability in order to boost sales through publication of core books, and the rules in the books themselves were fairly unbalanced, poorly playtested, and highly controversial as a result.

As part of these updates, TSR also updated their marketing. In 1994 they dropped the letter/number module codes that had been used on their products since 1978 (with *G1*), and then in 1995 they dropped the phrase “2nd edition” off of their products. These were both maneuvers that the company thought would make their products more approachable.

Through all these changes, there was only one line that remained remarkably stable at TSR: the Forgotten Realms, which had survived the creation of any number of other settings, some of which had come and gone. Nonetheless, the line had evolved over the years.



The biggest change was that the geographical setting books had faded away starting in the early '90s. They were replaced by a number of other lines. The “FOR” books instead looked at organization in the Realms — much like the splatbooks of White Wolf and others. They ran from *FOR1: Draconomicon* (1990) to *Giantcraft* (1995). The *Volo's Guides* (1993–1996) offered in-character looks at the Realms. There was also a proliferation of adventures, often laid out in trilogies, and finally a number of more player-oriented books — doubtless intended to sell like the *PHBR* volumes. Some of these volumes, like *Wizards and Rogues of the Realms* (1995) and *Warriors and Priests of the Realms* (1996) even shared the same trade dress.

Of course, the Realms alone wouldn't be enough to save Wizards. The same year that TSR was putting out their new 2.5 edition, *Magic* publisher Wizards of the Coast dropped its own roleplaying lines. That's when word started getting around that even industry giant TSR was now struggling to sell RPGs. However, when questioned, the principals of TSR stood strong. Chief Operating Officer Willard Martens said, “Our roleplaying game revenue increased twenty percent in 1995—as it has annually for the last six years.” Lorraine Williams stated, “We wish Wizards of the Coast well as they divest roleplaying and other products from their company, however their inability to produce successful RPG lines does not necessarily reflect the state of the industry — and certainly not TSR!”

Those words would ring ironically false before year's end.

Innovation to the End: 1994–1996

Despite financial problems, TSR remained innovative to the end. At the same time that TSR was shutting down old lines they were also kicking off new products.

One of the first was *Spellfire* (1994), TSR's own collectible card game, and their answer to *Magic*. Though it was the design of several of TSR's stars — including James M. Ward, Timothy Brown, Zeb Cook, and Steve Winter — it got off to a bad start due to a mandated six-month development period, which was incredibly short.

Spellfire grossed \$35 million in its first year and was successful enough to see 13 expansions over a two-year span, but it never received any critical acclaim and ultimately its sales didn't keep up with its production. The Gameological Society later analyzed the game's failure and offered up four main reasons: it used piles of recycled TSR art; it didn't have enough interesting cards; an oversupply of cards impacted rarity; and (ironically) it was too different from *Magic* to encourage crossover players.

Dragon Dice (1995) was an even more innovative approach to the collectible industry. It consisted of collectible dice, each of which had unique faces that

offered unique powers. At first *Dragon Dice* seemed like a hit, though as we'll see that changed dramatically within the year.

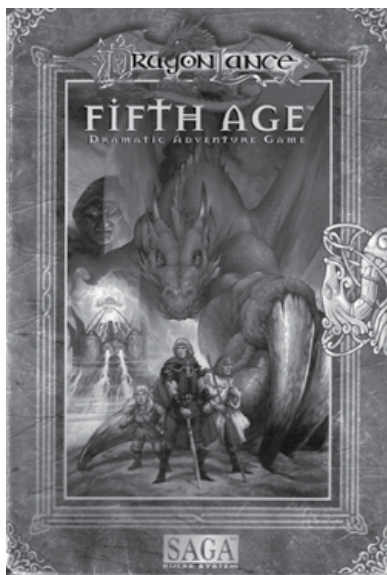
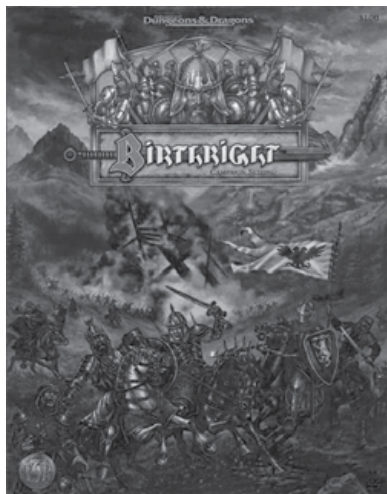
The *Birthright Campaign Setting* (1995), by Richard Baker and Colin McComb, was a product line more oriented toward TSR's existing strengths (which is to say, *AD&D*). It was a pretty typical fantasy campaign world, but the rules supported players becoming regents of great domains, thus allowing them to engage in war, diplomacy, and trade. It introduced a new strategic aspect to the *AD&D* game that had rarely been seen previously or since.

In 1995 TSR decided to revive the Dragonlance setting — perhaps remembering the role it had played during TSR's downturn of a decade earlier. Weis and Hickman returned to write new fiction, but the process was handicapped by TSR's decision to cram their intended trilogy into a single book, *Dragons of Summer Flame* (1995). The book itself didn't do TSR any favors: it alienated fans by destroying much of the classic Dragonlance setting.

TSR started to turn this discontent around by releasing a new game called *Dragonlance: Fifth Age* (1996). It was built on their new *SAGA* storytelling game system, which centered on resource management (through cards) rather than die rolls, thus giving players much better control over their game. One review highlighted this idea of “delegation” by suggesting that by giving some GM tasks to players, it gave the GM more time to worry about the story. Though there was still controversy over the setting, many people found the game system interesting and innovative.

At the same time, TSR was pushing another universal system, this one directed only toward science-fiction games, with the hope that this tighter emphasis might produce better results than *Amazing Engine* had. The game, called *Alternity*, was to be released in 1997.

Unfortunately it was too little, too late.



TSR's Demise: 1996—1997

Ryan Dancey, when later writing about the reasons behind TSR's demise, would say that he thought that their biggest problem was that they didn't listen to their fans. Though that's a pretty simplistic statement that could be applied to many business failures, and though we know that there was extensive discussion with fans while 2e was in process, a kernel of truth probably lies behind Dancey's statement. Lorraine Williams had never been in touch with the gaming field, and she had little interest in learning more about it.

"In all my research into TSR's business, across all the ledgers, notebooks, computer files, and other sources of data, there was one thing I never found—one gaping hole in the mass of data we had available. No customer profiling information. No feedback. No surveys. No 'voice of the customer.' TSR, it seems, knew nothing about the people who kept it alive."

— Ryan Dancey, DND List Serve, Date Unknown

Altogether, there were numerous problems that led to TSR's demise. CCGs were continuing to shrink the RPG industry. Distributors were going out of business. TSR had unbalanced their *AD&D* game through a series of lucrative supplements that ultimately hurt the long-time viability of the game. Meanwhile they developed so many settings — many of them both popular and well-received — that they were both cannibalizing their only sales and discouraging players from picking up settings that might be gone in a few years. They may have been cannibalizing their own sales through excessive production of books or supplements too.

It was the book trade, however, that was the final straw. Random House had been fronting TSR loans against book sales for some time. Meanwhile, TSR's book sales had sunk over the years. They were seeing less and less actual cash from the book trade because more money was going to pay off their unpaid loans. Trying to get ahead of this debt was the main factor behind TSR making a big push into the book trade in 1996. This push included sending massive reorders of Dragon Dice into book stores and increasing hardcover publication from 2 books a year to 12.

Both of these expansions flopped, and because bookstore sales are ultimately returnable, TSR was the one left holding the bag. As 1996 ended Random House informed TSR that they'd be returning about a third of TSR's products — several million dollars' worth.

With increasing cash flow problems, TSR also fell behind on its payment to freelancers and other external parties. Unfortunately this included the logistics company that did TSR's printing, warehousing, and shipping. As a result the logistics company locked down all of TSR's products, refusing to print anything more.

This left TSR in deep debt with no way to produce more products to get out of the situation. However, Martens hadn't been lying when he said sales were great. They were better than ever in 1996, with total revenues topping \$40 million. But that said nothing of actual profits — nor of the problem of returns.

Thirty staff members were laid off in December 1996. Other staff such as James M. Ward, by now the VP for Creative Services, left over disagreements about how the crisis was being dealt with. The spectre of lawsuits began to rise due to unpaid freelancers and missing royalties. Nonetheless TSR continued to fumble along through the first half of 1997. Enough money came in from products already on the shelves to pay remaining staff, but that was clearly a short-term solution. TSR needed a buyer.

"I was asked by the then president of the company to fire 30 of my editors and designers and I refused as the president wanted her company books to look better and it had nothing to do with the working ethics of those 30. I left TSR and never looked back."

– James M. Ward, Bio, eldritchent.com (2012)

Salvation initially came via Ryan Dancey and Bob Abramowitz, principals of Five Rings Publishing, a CCG firm spun off of Alderac Entertainment Group. Abramowitz met with Williams and was able to negotiate and secure an option to purchase TSR. Now he just needed the money.

For this he went to Wizards of the Coast, the aforementioned publishers of *Magic: The Gathering*. The CCG business had given Wizards the ability to purchase and resurrect TSR, and President Peter Adkison agreed to get involved.

Including payment of debts, Adkison paid about \$30 million for TSR. The deal was announced on April 10, 1997. Adkison bought Five Rings Publishing too, as part of the deal. It took a few more months to get product going once again, but Wizards was able to revive the old behemoth.

"We grew to fear the phone calls from angry readers who demanded answers we ourselves did not have. We played a lot of Lunch Money until the cards creeped out the book department. ... Eventually we just kind of sat around and hoped for a miracle."

– Dave Gross, "The Terrible Two-Hundreds," *Dragon* #300 (October 2002)

In the next years Wizards of the Coast would continue with TSR's aborted schedule from 1997, publishing books already in process for *AD&D* and the new *Alternity* and *SAGA* lines. It would take until 2000 for Wizards of the Coast to really make TSR their own. That's the year when they retired the TSR logo from their RPG books, then published their own *Dungeons & Dragons* third edition and its wide-reaching d20 license.

However, discussion of that lies within the history of Wizards of the Coast itself.

Thoughts on a Rise & Fall: 1997

Although not the first hobbyist company, TSR was the first roleplaying company. From the publication of *Cavaliers and Roundheads* in late 1973 to their last printed product in late 1996, TSR survived almost, but not quite, 25 years.

In that time they were always the top roleplaying company. *D&D* was their only unequivocal success, but *Top Secret*, *Marvel Super Heroes*, and *Top Secret/S.I.* each rose up to rule their respective genres for a while. TSR was more successful in its ability to spread out into new publishing mediums, and their book division continues to be a major focus of Wizards of the Coast as well.

As the top roleplaying company, TSR overshadowed past hobbyist giants like Avalon Hill and SPI. However in turn they were eventually overshadowed by two companies who opened up new mediums of entertainment — both companies who had started out as roleplaying producers and then innovated in a way TSR could not. Games Workshop and Wizards of the Coast, who created new industries for miniatures games and collectible card games, are discussed in their own histories.

Although TSR was sometimes professionally managed, by many accounts it was never well-managed, with the rocky transition from the Blumes to Williams just being the largest example of that. More than any individual publishing decision, it was probably this long history of poor management that ultimately cost TSR its business.

Thoughts from the Future: 2013

Any history of the creative roleplaying industry is ultimately a history of those creators as well. Though TSR died in 1997, its biggest creators lived on for over a decade more. Sadly, they have departed now, truly consigning the story of TSR to the mists of the past.

"I do stuff that I like. The books I write because I want to read them, the games because I want to play them, and stories I tell because I find them exciting personally."

— Gary Gygax, "Gary Gygax Interview – Part 2," Gamespy (2004)

Gary Gygax was the co-creator of our industry who drove its growth through its first decade, before he was unceremoniously unseated from his position at TSR, first by the Blumes, then by Williams. However, his history continues to thread its way across the industry, most notably: in the story of New Infinities Productions, his next company; in the story of GDW, who he inadvertently helped to bring

down as part of the *Dangerous Journeys* lawsuit; and in the story of Troll Lord Games, for whom he wrote Greyhawk and gaming material until the end of his life. Gary Gygax died on March 4, 2008, at the age of 69.

Following Gygax's death, two new companies stepped up to carry the torch for him. Gygax Games was created by Gygax's widow, Gail, in 2008. Thus far all Gygax Games has done is pull rights to Gygax's works from other publishers. TSR Games — a new company with an old name — was formed by Ernie Gygax, Luke Gygax, Tim Kask, and others in 2012. They have begun publishing *Gygax Magazine* (February 2013).

"I remember 30 years ago we were playing this game, which wasn't even called a role-playing game back then, and we thought we were crazy when we published it."

– Dave Arneson, "Dave Arneson Interview," Gamespy (2004)

Dave Arneson was the co-creator of our industry who quietly went about his own business after professional disagreements caused him to leave TSR. Because of his lack of capital, he never got to see the most lucrative awards for his creativity and because of his business style he only worked at TSR proper for part of 1976. Though he published books with Heritage Models and Judges Guild in 1977 and then started his own hobbyist company, Adventure Games Incorporated, he ultimately decided not to work in the industry, and eventually sold AGI to Flying Buffalo in 1985. His story continues briefly in the histories of those companies.

After TSR's publication of several Dave Arneson Blackmoor adventures in 1986–1987, the setting was largely unheard from until Arneson founded Zeitgeist Games with Dustin Clingman in the '00s. They published more Blackmoor material, some of it through Goodman Games, until the end of Arneson's life. In those last years, Arneson also gained much of the recognition from fans and conventions that he had long deserved. Toward the end of his life, Arneson turned his game design skills to the education world when he taught at Full Sail University. Dave Arneson died on April 7, 2009, at the age of 61.

Following Arneson's death, Full Sail University honored his legacy by naming a building on the campus for him. It is the only known honor of this sort for a member of the roleplaying profession.

None of the histories in *Designers & Dragons* would have occurred without the two of them. They literally changed millions of lives. May they both have found their places in the Great Wheel, perhaps Gary Gygax in the Clockwork Nirvana of Mechanus and Dave Arneson in the Olympian Glades of Arborea.

What to Read Next 

- For TSR's UK connections, read **Games Workshop**.
- For TSR's first supplement licensee, read **Judges Guild**.
- For more on Minifigs, *D&D* miniatures, and an early TSR lawsuit, read **Heritage Models**.
- For the origins of Tracy Hickman and a few *D&D* adventures, read **DayStar West Media**.
- For other companies that created products directly derived from *D&D*, read **Grimoire Games** and **Midkemia Press**.
- For one of the staunchest defenders against the *D&D* hysteria, read **Flying Buffalo**.

In Other Eras   

- For an indie FRP conceived of as the anti-*D&D*, read about *Houses of the Blooded* in **John Wick Presents** ['00s].
- For what pushed SPI into its death throes, read **SPI** ['80s].
- For other perspectives on TSR's later legal threats and lawsuits, read **Mayfair Games** ['80s], **New Infinities Productions** ['80s], and **GDW** ['80s].
- For later *Conan* and *Lankmar* licenses, read **Mongoose Publishing** ['00s]. For a later *Indiana Jones* license, read **West End Games** ['80s]. Strangely, there have been no additional *Buck Rogers* RPG licenses.
- Many other stories continue more directly in **Wizards of the Coast** ['90s].
- For another viewpoint of the TSR purchase, read **AEG** ['90s].
- For the other half of the history of *D&D*, read **Wizards of the Coast** ['90s] with a diversion into **Paizo Publishing** ['00s].

Luminaries and Personalities    

For the later careers of *D&D* luminaries, you'll need to consult a variety of articles:

- For Gary Gygax, read **New Infinities Productions** ['80s], **GDW** ['70s], **Hekaforge Productions** ['90s], and **Troll Lord Games** ['00s]. For Dave Arneson, read **Heritage Models** ['70s], **Judges Guild** ['70s], **Flying Buffalo** ['70s], and **Goodman Games** ['00s] (which has extensive notes on Blackmoor).
- For Rob Kuntz, read **New Infinities Productions** ['80s] and **Creations Unlimited** ['80s].
- For Frank Mentzer and Kim Mohan, read **New Infinities Productions** ['80s].

- For Margaret Weis, Tracy Hickman, and Larry Elmore, read ***Margaret Weis Productions*** [*'90s*], which also contains some details on the future of Dragonlance.
- For James M. Ward, read ***Margaret Weis Productions*** [*'90s*] and ***Troll Lord Games*** [*'00s*].
- For Troy Denning, read ***Pacesetter*** [*'80s*] and ***Mayfair*** [*'80s*].
- For Scott Haring, read ***Steve Jackson Games*** [*'80s*].
- For Kevin Hendryx, read ***Metagaming*** [*'70s*].
- For Tom Moldvay, read ***Avalon Hill*** [*'80s*].
- For a group of ex-staff members, who largely aren't mentioned in this article, read ***Pacesetter*** [*'80s*].

Or read onward to the second RPG company, ***Flying Buffalo***.