

by Andrew Gelman, 13311 Clifton Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
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THE FIFTEENTH HAUNTED PALACE

It's been about 60 issues since the fourteenth and 85 issues since the first. Hard to believe. I haven't played much D&D in the past four years, and have definitely not kept in touch with A&E. (#70 sits on my desk here.) It is always surprising to find that all of you continue your existence behind my back. I imagine life--A&E--to remain still, like those gold-filled dungeons where the monsters passively wait, creating the same scenario for every adventurer who walks in. Have you ever had the unsettling experience of going into a dungeon you've done before, and you have to fight monsters you've already killed? The DM, you see, forgot to cross them off the last time you went through. The worst thing is, it'll go on for a while before you realize: Wait a minute! Maybe we've been on level 4 before? Remember that old guy in the big room who only talked mysterious? Wait a sec--we already killed him! Remember, he got your fighter, then we found out he was undead and used the cleric on him? Oh yeah

By then the DM is worried: Wait, I'm sure I crossed him off But it won't work. The spell has dissipated. This is even worse if it happens in a store-bought, package dungeon, but luckily that experience was rare with me. We had one friend who would run these. He was so lazy, he'd run us through on the map provided with the set, not even recopying it. He wouldn't read the descriptions of the rooms until we reached them, then he would, very slowly, read the printed description aloud: "Room 14B was originally occupied by the Elvish Count Belerie, who splendorous treasure of 3000 GP, 1000 SP,", etc., always written in that horrible, fake formal-medieval style. Whenever he got mad at anybody, this DM would threaten to kill his characters. After a while we got sick of this, one guy said, OK, my thief commits suicide. What?? With his dagger. Wait a sec the DM didn't know what to say.

COMMENTS ON A&E 67-70

I've been out of D&D (FRP) for awhile. As you can see, I'm focusing here on the psychology of this business, rather than game mechanics. It's only fair, right? After all, my first 15 zines (there was an 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ th back there) were all about game mechanics, so it's time for a balance. That's OK, right? Otherwise Lee can refuse to print this. In any case, thanks for remembering my 70¢ balance, Lee. That's my only comment.

COMMENTS ON A&E 71-130

These are the ones I haven't seen; the past's future. Has FRP progressed since then? Is TSR worth 4 million dollars? Does A&E still have a circulation of 600? Hopefully new topics are being discussed. I always valued the great flexibility of role-playing games: you can use a mouse to test potions, ventriloquism to win a battle. You can try out all sorts of ridiculous con schemes and lies on non-player characters. You can simulate heroism, respect, solidarity, with a minimum of effort. I also remember the common language of D&D with its familiar situations: gilded holes and uniform, wilderness-like wildernesses. And the pure systems, to test your strategies: the super-powerful wizard and the "S.O.B."-type

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kobold complex. Like real life, but different.

In an interview published several years ago, the author P. K. Dick suggested that faraway places like Australia exist only as concepts--if you actually go there, the authorities must create it, like a movie set. A good dungeonmaster does this. At its best you believe--at least to the extent that the non-player characters are as real as your characters, they have lives and maybe even players of their own. D&D's great; I don't play it anymore. (D&D means all fantasy role-playing.) Well, it takes a lot of time, and after a while you move on to a new hobby, something new to be serious about. Really though, it's a great game . . .

REAL LIFE

The Fourteenth Haunted Palace appeared in the spring of 1981. This was the year of the Rubik's Cube, Rula Lenska (remember her?), and other of the usual fads. Somebody shot the President--the first such assassination attempt since 1975. I was in high school. Now I'm old enough to drink & drive in 50 states. Impressive, huh? Now you know to take all this seriously.

We played some D&D since then, went to a couple more conventions in the next couple of years. The last one we went to was Origins, or Eastcon, or Atlanticon, or something like that, in Maryland or New Jersey. Five of us went up, and we all won tournaments. It was bizarre: none of us had ever won a tournament before, in all our umpteen conventions. I won the "Ogre" tournament--there were about 6 people there and half of them didn't know the odds of rolling a "6" on a die. The tournament people gave us these \$20 certificates that were almost impossible to use. It turned out, the vendors could only get \$16 by redeeming them to the convention people, so we had to haggle to get anything worth more than \$16 for the certificates. That was one of those conventions where the place looks like it's falling apart and all the conventioners weigh about 250 pounds.

Anyway, we were a bunch of high school guys and maybe a year or two older, and D&D probably was as good, or as bad, as any other friendly recreation for our group. I'm just throwing that in because A&E doesn't get a lot of zines from former gamers, and you shouldn't think that we all quit D&D, then disown it and write solemn exposes. It warped my sense of reality, it was a dangerous cult, homosexual, drugged-out, don't-let-your-kids-do-it, etc. No. About the worst thing you can say is that it was a waste of time, but then so is life. This is all less of a hot issue now, since D&D is more mainstream, and has lost much of its early mystique as a totally new, fast-growing phenom. (Of course, maybe things still are that way, and I'm just out of it.)

NEW SPELLS AND MAGIC ITEMS

So that's the view from suburbia. (Silver Spring, Maryland, is a featureless, amoeba-like suburb of 80,000, of Washington, DC.) That's just an irrelevant detail, right? Silver Spring (could be a D&D place name, like Blackmoor) is the faceless wilderness you must ride through, avoiding unknown monsters, on the way to the big rich castle. Oh yeah, you have to go through the City-State of the Invincible Overlord too. It's always fun to add a new twist on these situations.

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Sometimes I'm with my friends from high school and we talk about D&D: we had such fun, but we can't do it anymore. In fact, we used to talk like that even back when we did play D&D; we'd analyze the experience. At first it was so much fun, just rolling up a character, going into the dungeon, opening some doors, rolling a few dice, killing a few gnolls or whatever, playing for a couple hours, going home. It was the novelty, right? We could never go back to hack'n'slash. And it was doubtless better with our miniatures. We made our own dungeons, our own rules. There was A&E, conventions. Somehow, though . . . it wasn't the same. We still played regularly at this point. And sometimes, there would be the bright moment, the thrill . . .

Just one more thing. (And it's not about that stupid DM: the time we were attacked by rats--not giant rats, just rats. It was such a surprise, we couldn't take it seriously. After all, what can they do to you if you're wearing armor? This being rigid D&D, we couldn't just chase them away. He wanted us to fight them with swords, but it seemed so silly . . .) This story has nothing to do with whether fireball damage should be split, or whether female dwarves have beards, or even whether some female dwarves have beards. Nothing to do with fatigue points or the strength of female adventurers. Or, can an orc be a cleric? Is God an Orc? a Human? Do you get experience points for shooting a kobold in the back? (once an A&E discussion) What do kobolds do in their spare time? Do kobolds throw flasks of burning oil at adventurers? Are there kobold adventurers? Do kobolds get experience points? Can you get a job if your charisma is 3? Can a kobold get a job if her charisma is 3. What does a female kobold with charisma 3 look like? Can you get used to her after awhile, if she has a high wisdom? If she has a dexterity of 18 will you not mind the charisma bit? Even if she has a beard? Just imagine the ridicule of your fellow-adventurers if you tell them you're stealing all this buried gold for the benefit of a kobold back home in town. With Charisma 3, no less! What will the magic-user say? What if you are a cleric?

CHARACTER REPORTS

They're all in a folder, along with some junk and some scrap paper and various partial maps of dungeons and wildernesses they've been in. They're levels 1 to 11, all character classes and species. If you include other people's characters that have never left my dungeon and are still in the folder, there are over 20 of the guys. Some are typed, most scribbled up, with hit points, spells, and possessions repeatedly written, crossed out, and erased. I may forget them--offhand, the only name I remember is Bosco Charginiski, and that's not even one of my characters. The notebook paper they're preserved on will age and crack. Sometime, I will forget them all and maybe throw out the folder. They are all bold adventurers--their vocation, to steal with a good heart, to steal because that's all they know how to do. They have all struggled. They will never die.

NEW RULES FOR RESSURECTION