Designers & Dragons

A HISTORY OF THE ROLEPLAYING GAME INDUSTRY

'70 '79

SHANNON APPELCLINE

Designers
&Dragons

The Magic of Beginnings

The dawn of the gaming industry was magical, like the start of a new year or the birth of baby. A bright and promising event was occurring as we watched, somewhat wide eyed wit amazement and tickled by every new thing that occurred. It was like getting a new gam 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 bee born. There I was, a young father in a new place seeking to establish myself. All options were ope 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 n planned to start a company and help shape an industry. I designed my first game simply to fulfill passion. My personal magic of the beginnings was a Tarot card reading that commanded me to start company for an industry that did not yet exist. I dove into it; ignorant of what was needed, ridir entirely on that passion. I published my game and went forth to sell it. Details of this courageous ar naïve act are contained in Shannon's history of Chaosium, including wonderful facts about how ou 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 discover of other game companies. I knew AH would be there, and also TSR, and also Archive Miniatures, ru by my friend Nevile Stocken who hauled in money literally hand over fist for his line of Star Wa figures. I was especially amused to find a company led by a guy named Bizarre and publishing a gam by a guy named Symbolist (actually of course Bizar and Simbolist, being FGU with the monument *Chivalry & Sorcery* released.) Scott Bizar met my wife and in an exuberant burst of gentlemanshi 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 m more people than I can remember, including a pair of Englishmen who slept on my hotel floor ar later founded the first English roleplaying company, Games Workshop. TSR stood aloof, but that wa 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 ar 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 gam industry. Lou Zocchi was there, as he has been at every significant game convention ever since. Lo has had some of his own games published, and is known for his world-famous dice. We all bought ou dice from him, and for a while I thought that the polyhedral dice might go down in history bein 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 a endless pack of fun and frivolity. No, it is not because he has entertained us for 38 years with h musical saw, magic tricks and his dear companion Woody. Nor is it due to his virtuous dedication t

rid our industry of the aforementioned sinister figure. It is because Lou's heart has always been in th
right place. He has been a model for us all with his generosity and willingness to share any and ever
bit of knowledge we needed to start this crazy business of ours. His benevolent attitude infected us a
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 wa
practically as established as Lou, but in the mail-order gaming before his first RPG, *Tunnels an
Trolls*, by Ken St Andre. Frank Chadwick and Mark Miller almost shyly brought their first scienc
fiction outer space game, *Traveller*. I particularly remember Pete Fenlon of I.C.E. who released h
first RPG, *Rolemaster*, informing me proudly that it had a table for every possible combat interactio
"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 sma
enough to do that, and it was done with a generosity of spirit even if their game was over the to
without much promise of success.

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

After the headlong rush of the 70's, our industry changed. The first wave was nearly all designe
publishers like Chaosium. Afterward, we hired actual business people, like accountants and sale
people; and formed a business association. Slowly, the emphasis changed from "gaming" t
"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. Suc
transformations are natural and necessary for the industry to thrive enough to become embedded
American culture to such an extent as to appear in such diverse outlets as *X-files* and *Futurama*. W
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 compute
games and collectible card games. We played that new game of "Game Industry" before it had rule
and had a great time. In addition to that glorious past, we also still have a bright future to loo
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 abou[t] hobbyist gaming in the '70s. More specifically, it's about 13 different companies that bega[n] publishing roleplaying games in the '70s — from TSR itself, through the wargame companie[s] and the miniatures manufacturers that leapt into the industry, to the companies that were forme[d] specifically to produce roleplaying games.

The roleplaying industry is a very creative one, built on the backs of dreamers able to imagi[ne] different worlds. It's also a small industry, which makes it vulnerable to any numbers of disaster[s.] That's what you'll find at the heart of this book, beneath the trends and under the skin of th[e] 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 togeth[er] created *Dungeons & Dragons*; Jeff Perren and Dave Wesely, who provided some of its foundation[s;] 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 S[t.] 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 Hargrav[e,] 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 Hobb[y] Shop.

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

TSR also faced dragons of other sorts, including board fights, ousted presidents, Californian exile[s,] decade-long vendettas, secret cabals, hysterical media, and a long fight with the moral minorit[y.] 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 veritab[le] flight of dragons, including corrupt printers, abrupt changes of direction, poorly received revamp[s,] massive overprinting, fights over copyright, disagreements over contracts, near bankruptcies, thievi[ng] partners, and more.

Of the 13 companies profiled within these pages, only 3 to 4 are still in business (depending on ho[w] you count), and one of those is entirely out of the roleplaying business. As for the rest: they're a[ll] shadows of companies at their heights. That's because dragons have stamina; they keep wearing awa[y] 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 that 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 older 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 th[e] information on the '70s in this new edition has dramatically increased. The histories of Judges Guil[d] Metagaming, and TSR were all vastly expanded, thanks in each case to lots of new material that I wa[s] able to access (mostly more magazines from the period).

In addition, the final five histories in this book are brand new: Gamescience, Heritage Model[s] 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 hobbyi[st]* *industry.*

Shannon Appelclin[e]

January 6, 201[4]

Part One: Founding Days (1953-1974)

TSR: 1973–1997

Before 1974 there was no roleplaying industry. The hobbyist game industry existed, but 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.

TSR (1973-1997)

- First RPG *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974)
- Link: here

TSR: 1973-1997

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

1974: Dungeons & Dragons

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.

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 th[e] play of Avalon Hill's board wargames. He was soon after contributing to numerous wargaming 'zine[s.]

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

In 1970 Gygax formed a miniatures gaming group to support his new interest: the Lake Genev[a] Tactical Studies Association. At its formation it included seven members: Gary Gygax, Donald Kay[e,] Rob Kuntz, Jeff Perren, Michael Reese, Leon Tucker, and either Gygax's son Ernie or Kuntz's brothe[r] Terry — depending on which source you prefer. That group in turn became the core of a specia[l] interest group within the IFW called the Castle & Crusade Society, which focused on medieva[l] warfare.

It was actually Jeff Perren who got the ball rolling for what would become *D&D* with a four pag[e] 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 th[e] "Geneva Medieval Miniatures" in Don Greenwood's *Panzerfaust* fanzine (April 1970), then expande[d] as the "LGTSA 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 commo[n] 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 ma[il] order store for wargaming — in 1970. He also began publishing some games of his own, includin[g] some "Fast Rules" (1970) for tank combat by Tucker and Reese of the LGTSA.

Lowry met Gygax at Gen Con III (1970); it proved to be an important connection when Gygax lo[st] his insurance job just a couple of months later. That's because Lowry was in the process of creatin[g] Guidon Games to publish more (and more professional) games. Thanks to his new availability, Gyga[x] was able to sign on with Guidon to edit and produce miniatures wargaming rules in a series calle[d] "Wargaming with Miniatures."

Guidon's first book, produced in March 1971, was *Chainmail* (1971) — a further expansion of th[e] medieval miniatures rules by Perren and Gygax. The new rules contained two new sections that are [of] particular note.

The "man-to-man combat" rules offered the first crucial step on the road to *Dungeons & Dragon[s.]* Whereas Perren's original game had a 20:1 scale and the LGTSA version of the rules had a 10:1 scal[e,] these new rules suggested a 1:1 scale that had previously been used only for army commanders. [In] other words, it offered up 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 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 L 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 designe who was particularly interested in games that were open-ended, run by a referee, and supportive more than just two players. Wesely brought these ideas together in his own "Braunstein" Napoleoni miniatures games. Players in a Braunstein rather uniquely took on the roles of individuals who ha specific objectives in the game. In fact, there was so much involvement with these various roles th 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 wid wargaming community, attending Gen Con II (1969) — where he met Gary Gygax — and joining th IFW. Toward the end of 1969 Arneson used these new connections to run a game for wargamer scattered across the country — eventually including Gary Gygax, Don Kaye, and Rob Kunt Arneson's Napoleonic Simulation Campaign used Gary Gygax's Napoleonic *Diplomacy* variant f large-scale strategic play, but then used miniatures rules to fight out individual battles. Dave Wesel supplied the rules for land battles, while Arneson and Gygax supplied those for sea battles. The s battle rules were later published as *Don't Give Up the Ship* (1971) — another of Guidon's *Wargamin with Miniatures* books and also the first collaboration of note for Arneson and Gygax.

Meanwhile, Wesely ran perhaps three more Braunsteins, the last of which was a *Junta*-like gam where players were involved in a coup d'état in a banana republic. Then Wesely's Army Reserve un was called to active duty in October 1970. The Braunsteins, however, continued on: new varian 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 di[d] something totally new with the idea. He'd by then grown bored with his Napoleonic game an[d] 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 Gygax an[d] Perren's brand-new *Chainmail* game for combat, but as in the Braunsteins, players in Black Moo[r] 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 gainin[g] experience from episode to episode. Throughout 1971 Arneson's group fought fairly typic[al] miniatures battles — facing off with the forces of the "Egg of Coot." Then, in late 1971 or early 197[2,] the heroes moved to a new battlefield: the dungeons beneath and around Castle Blackmoor — a cast[le] 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 o full display as we consider how these game concepts bounced from one amateur designer to anothe Jeff Perren created medieval miniatures rules, which were expanded by Gary Gygax and becam *Chainmail*. Dave Wesely created Braunsteins, and then Dave Arneson combined *Chainmail* an Braunsteins to create Blackmoor. In turn John Snider and others ran their own Blackmoor variant while David Megarry condensed the simple essence of Blackmoor dungeon crawling into a boar 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 moder roleplaying hobby.

Late in 1972 Dave Arneson and Dave Megarry traveled to Lake Geneva to demonstrate Blackmoo (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 o his rules — much as he had with Perren just a few years before. They tentatively called the 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, h lost his insurance job in 1970. By 1971 he was rather famously fixing shoes in his basement … an editing miniatures rules for Guidon Games. However, by late 1972 Don Lowry moved to Main 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 gam rules probably went out late in 1972 at perhaps 50–100 pages. A second draft followed sometim around May 1973, after many months of playtesting both at Lake Geneva and in the Twin Cities. may have been as long as 150 pages. In both cases the dating and page counts changed over time interviews, and this has been complicated by the fact that these drafts were long thought lost to th mists of time.

However the recent discovery of the "Mornard Fragments" (1973) and "Dalluhn Manuscrip (1973?) shed a light on what these original drafts looked like, though the authorship of the latter isn proven.

When Gygax released those two initial drafts of his fantasy rules to friends and designers, the *weren't* called "The Fantasy Game." Gygax *knew* that wasn't a very catchy title, and so brainstormed better names for the game. He did so by drawing up two columns filled with evocativ words, then polling his players about what names they liked. The Fantasy Game could have bee called "Swords & Spells" or "Men & Magic" or "Treasures & Trolls," but everyone (or perhaps ju 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 Treasurer, 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.

How Much Did That Cost!?

When *Dungeons & Dragons* was released, one of the most common complaints was that at $10 ($4 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 moreexpensive *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*. cost had been a real consideration among early players, then Flying Buffalo's *Tunnels & Trolls* — steal at $3 ($12 today) — might have won them over. *T&T* did pretty well in the '70s, but it was course *D&D* that dominated the market.

However, it didn't have to happen that way. Blithely describing the upward trajectory of *D&D* sales ignores the many challenges it faced in its first year. To start with, it was a totally new an[d] different sort of game. Even Arneson and Gygax were unsure whether their game would be successf[ul] 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 wargaming purists didn't believe that fantas[y] elements should be introduced into medieval wargames. Others were perfectly happy with Napoleon[ic] 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 mu[ch] official advertising for their new game. Still, word leaked out. It went from friend to friend, fro[m] gaming group to gaming group, from city to city. Word spread through conventions. Gary Gyga[x] wrote articles about *D&D* in various wargaming journals, while even *The Space Gamer* would diverg[e] from its usual science-fiction coverage to talk about *D&D* in issue #2 (1975). Gen Con VII (197[4]) might have been the turning point; when wargamers gathered at Lake Geneva, TSR had a captiv[e] audience for their new game. When those wargamers returned home, word of *D&D* went with them.
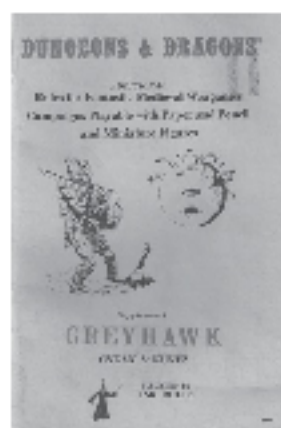
In his own gaming group, Gygax saw a microcosm of the game's success. Gygax's *D&D* group ha[d] started off with LGTSA members Gary Gygax, Ernie Gygax, Don Kaye, Rob Kuntz, and Terry Kun[tz] in 1972, and then had grown to a dozen players in 1973. By 1974 it sometimes included over 2[0] people, including even more future TSR employees such as James M. Ward. Rob Kuntz became th[e] 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, [ ] had been entirely Gygax's creation, but now Rob Kuntz brought in some of the elements of his "Cast[le] El Raja Key," which he'd been running for Gygax since 1973. Some levels of El Raja Key we[re]

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