

Since mankind first began building societal relationships, gathering to participate in trade, strengthening their numbers or negotiating treaties between warring groups, games have been with us. Whether for settling disputes, bonding or simply relaxation, as mankind has evolved, so has the concept of playing games. Through the years, for every game that endures, there are many more that enter the scene, claim their fleeting fame, and fade just as quickly into obscurity, forgotten, only to be replaced by the next passing fad. Those that do withstand the passage of time often spawn numerous clones and copycats, with only enough alterations to avoid the march of copyright lawyers. So, when an idea that endures begets another concept with as much staying power as the original, it's an idea well worth exploring.

In 1993, game designer Richard Garfield applied for and received a patent for the first collectible card game, *Magic: The Gathering*. Consisting of pictorial cards representing various spells, creatures and more, each with different abilities and effects, the game quickly sold out in its first print run. Incorporating the concept of stepped-rarity, such as common, uncommon, rare and ultra-rare, both players and collectors alike began emptying their wallets in pursuit of the most powerful and most difficult to obtain cards.

Upon bearing witness to the immediate success of this pioneering concept, many game developers, both industry behemoths as well as independent entities, were eager to jump aboard the band-wagon, and hopefully increase their company's bottom line.

One of these companies, long a household name for many, was TSR, the creator and overseer for all things *Dungeons and Dragons*. Based in Lake Geneva, WI, the company was also eager to cash-in on the popularity of the burgeoning Collectible Card Game market.

Though then president, Loraine Williams, thought that CCG's were nothing more than a flash in the pan, the green-light was given for their own card game, utilizing myriad characters, items and settings from their vast wealth of intellectual properties and artwork from the top fantasy artists of the time. Developed by James M. Ward, Steve Winter, Zeb Cook, and Tim Brown, *Spellfire: Master the Magic*, was introduced in mid-1994, and immediately took off. With its familiar fantasy settings, such as *Ravenloft*, *Dragonlance* and *Dark Sun*, as well as beloved characters from within those realms, the game quickly gained the appeal of an established fan-base.

Not content with simply poaching market-share from *Wizards of the Coast*, TSR wanted to be a dominating presence in the Collectible Game market, and was simultaneously working on an entirely new concept, again started by Mr. Ward, and developed by Lester Smith. In 1995 TSR turned the collectible game market upside down with its novel concept, by replacing the standard component of most games, the "playing card" with polyhedral dice. In hindsight, a reasonable progression, as the hallmark of their core product was dependent upon dice rolls to advance the game's storyline.

The idea of using dice in lieu of cards was born at Toy Fair, held every year in New York City, where manufacturers get the opportunity to showcase their best and brightest ideas, all vying for the chance to unveil the next sure thing in the world of toys. A German designer used the event to reveal his concept of a six sided die that had removable pips, to allow the faces to then display other images beneath. TSR was impressed with the design concept, and negotiations began to license the design for their own use, but the parties involved could not come to a satisfactory agreement, and it soon became apparent that licensing would be cost prohibitive.

Down, but not out, TSR chose instead to fall back on standard dice manufacturing methods, and began designing conventional molds with then unconventional iconography, each indicating either a different game mechanic, or, in the case of the ID Icon, a wild face, thereby generating any needed results. In response to Jim Ward's idea, Lester Smith quickly drafted a concept of what a game of this type should entail, including everything from what the world looked like, (a mix of Tolkien, John Brunner and Roger Zelazney, as well as a smattering of other fantasy writers visions) to the appearance and vocal intonations of Esfah's inhabitants.

To: Jim Ward
cc: Dori Hein, David Wise
From: Lester Smith
Re: A Bible for the DRAGON DICE™ Game, revision one

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THE WORLD OF ESFAH

Crossbow cocked, Barakh the dwarf peered over the city wall, looking for a target among the raiders. All along the wall to either side of him, coral elf archers did the same, though they nocked coral-headed arrows to bows of whale bone. Cradling the carved stone stock of his dwarven weapon, with its iron-tipped missile, Barakh felt another surge of homesickness, but he forced it aside with a growl. Battle was not the place for feeling sorry for oneself, no matter how alien the surroundings, no matter how cut off from one's own people.

Barakh had come to the Selumari city as part of an entire cohort of Vagha warriors. He and his dwarven brothers were sent by their king to bolster the city's defenses against swelling hordes of goblin and lava elf raiders, in a gesture of goodwill toward the Selumari. Now the others were all dead, slaughtered while repelling an assault that had nearly taken the city. Of course, a multitude of coral elves had died bravely as well, but that did nothing to ease the ache of his loss. What made things worse was that, had they been fighting in their native mountains, dwarven magic could have saved many of the Vagha. Even the gravest of wounds could be healed with a timely spark of life spell. But the Selumari city lay on the sea coast, where damnable damp salt air interfered with Vagha fire magic. And so, his brethren had perished, while coral elf mages healed their own dying with air magic and surrounded the city with deep fogs that did as much to obscure the raiders as to shelter the defenders.

Peering out into that fog, Barakh took aim at a fleeting shadow and fired. With a cry of pain, the shadow dropped. Barakh grinned. From the sound, the victim was one of those thrice-damned Morehl, the lava elves that infested the darkest grottos of his homeland. The goblins were foul enough, but there was a madness to the Morehl, an evil that threatened to engulf the whole world. Well, now there would be one fewer to plague it. Barakh ducked to cock and reload his crossbow.

Above his head, all along the wall, ghostly flames suddenly sprang to life. The coral elves staggered back, startled and half blind.

"Never fear!" Barakh shouted. "It is only fairy fire!"

The coral elf to his left took heart and, ducking behind a merlon, rubbed his eyes and blinked to clear his vision.

No one else seemed to have heard him. From outside the city, a crackle of lava elf pistols sounded, and blinded Selumari fell all along the wall, bloodied and broken. The raiders roared a cheer.

Cursing, Barakh drew upon what little magic he could. A pale flame flashed across the sky, and a thin cloud of ash began falling over the immediate area, further obscuring attacker and defender alike. It wasn't much, but it might give the Selumari enough respite to reman the wall.

From deep inside the city, a horn sounded a low, mournful note.

"It's the signal to retreat," said the surviving coral elf. "The main gate must have been breached. Our only hope now is to reach the quay and escape aboard ship."

"What?" Barakh cried. "My people died to hold this city! We can't just give it up."

The Selumari laid his blue-skinned hand upon the dwarf's golden one.

"Will our deaths bring them back?" he asked.

Barakh ground his teeth. The coral elf's calmness was infuriating.

Gathering up his crossbow and quarrels, the dwarf drew his axe and gestured toward the stairs.

"You first," was all he said.

Ten minutes found the pair nearing the quay. Three galleys lay at anchor there, their coral hulls floating lightly on the water. Barakh had heard that such ships could even sail through air.

Scores of Selumari waited to board ahead of them. Even so the dwarf's eyes, it was obvious that they couldn't all fit.

"Do you see anything wrong with this plan?" Barakh asked his companion, sarcasm edging his voice. He spat angrily over the edge of the quay, onto the sand.

The coral elf took in the crowded quay and the trio of ships. He gazed down the beach, and out across the water. He stood still for a moment, head cocked, as if listening to something the dwarf could not hear, then drew his cutlass. He swung the blade a few times, then rolled his shoulders to loosen the muscles.

"Let's not give up hope yet," he said. He stepped back to where the pier met city street, and took up a defensive posture, facing the city. Columns of smoke were arising here and there within it, and the wild cries of goblins and lava elves echoed down the streets. The horde was coming.

Barakh stared at the coral elf's back for a moment, then let out a pent breath. He hefted his axe and stepped to the elf's side.

The Selumari glanced at him and smiled.

"I'm glad to have you here, brother," he said.

Barakh nodded, too moved to speak.

From the crowd behind, other Selumari joined them, forming a defensive line across the quay's head. All laid a companionable hand momentarily upon the dwarf's shoulder as they did so, as if drawing strength from this alien's dedication to their people's defense. Barakh felt a growing bond with these elves, regardless of their strange ways. He understood, now, in a new way, the words of the ancient Book of the Land, that the Vagha and Selumari were brothers, united in their dedication to the world. It was a concept he felt sure the Troggs and Morehl, in their worship of death and destruction, could never understand. For a moment, he felt sorry for them.

Then the horde came into view. Down every street they swarmed, converging on the quay, putting torch to anything that would burn, and smashing everything that would not. Their glee in destruction was chilling to behold.

The invaders spotted the knot of defenders at the quay's head.

With a deafening cry, they charged.

Barakh braced himself, convinced that death lay only moments away, and saddened that he would not live to carry his new understanding back to his own people.

Suddenly, from out of the sky, a veritable cloud of tiny winged people descended. Lightning bolts flashed from their ranks, lancing into the mass of Troggs and Morehl.

A cheer rose among the Selumari. "The sprites have come!"

Between the Selumari and the onrushing attackers, a thick band of frost settled. Swiftly, it grew into a tall, defensive wall. The invaders crashed against it with cries of pain.

Barakh blinked in startlement. From behind, he heard a great splashing of waves, and droplets of chill salt water fell upon him. Turning, he watched a giant man of living coral rising slowly out of the sea. The giant took one ponderous step over the wall of frost, and the invaders cried in dismay.

Cheering mightily, the coral elf warriors pounded Barakh upon the back.

"You have brought us luck!" they shouted.

Barakh gave them a stunned grin.

"You're all invited to my home, for a victory celebration," he said. "I have some friends back there I'd like you to meet."

PREFACE

Although the Dragon Dice™ game is primarily concerned with fantasy battles between dice armies, its conceptualization has taken into account the nature of the world in which those battles take place. This bible reveals the direction of that thought.

INTRODUCTION

The following text is from the introduction to the DRAGON DICE game rule book.

In eons past, when time was young and creation malleable, the four powers of Nature—earth, air, fire, and water—brought forth two races of beings to care for their fledgling world. One race, the Selumari, or coral elves, was created to husband the fluid forces of air and water. The other, the Vagha, a dwarfish race, embodied the stability of earth and the tempering power of fire. Together, these two peoples worked to nurture their infant world into something glorious and beautiful.

But Nature had a nemesis in Death, the spirit of entropy. In imitation of Nature, Death brought into being its own races: the Morehl, or lava elves, who worshipped fire and destruction, and the Troggs, a race of goblins, who sprang from earth and corruption. From the instant of their creation, the Morehl and Troggs sowed conflict, defiling the very world that gave them life and corrupting the older races who tended it. Soon, hordes of dispossessed Selumari, Vagha, Morehl, and Troggs swept back and forth across the land in endless battle.

WORLD NAME

Esfah. It means "brightness" in the language of the world's inhabitants.

NATURE OF THE WORLD

The universe Esfah exists in is simple and elemental, in the same manner as the story of Eden or the setting of most fairy tales. For modern examples of this sort of setting, see John Brunner's *The Traveller in Black* or Roger Zelazny's *Shadowjack* and Dilvish books (*The Changing Land* and *Dilvish the Damned*).

The world itself is violently beautiful. As with Tolkien's Middle Earth, every mountain is the tallest, every lake the deepest and bluest, every forest the thickest and greenest, and so on. But Esfah is younger than Middle Earth, so its mountains are more volcanic, its seas stormier, its seasons more violent. Esfah was created from the magical elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and it hasn't entirely "gelled" yet.

Because of its youth and magical origins (see below), Esfah is quite malleable. Through magic, the land can be reshaped—mountains leveled, flatlands hollowed into seas, even the shape of the continents changed. This is an important fact in that it precludes any one people from collecting in and dominating a particular area. Instead, the races of Esfah are scattered across the globe.

ORIGINS OF THE WORLD

Nature and Death are somewhat personified in the mythology of Esfah, as revealed in the introductory paragraphs of the DRAGON DICE game and its various Kicker Packs. Neither entity physically sets foot on the world as do the deities of most AD&D worlds; rather, each is a sweeping spiritual force behind the world's conflicts.

As the DRAGON DICE game reveals, Nature brought the world into existence as a paradise and created the coral elves and the dwarves as its caretakers. Between them, these two races encompass the world's four elements.

Then Death intervened, spawning the goblins and lava elves to despoil the paradise. Each of these races is linked to one of the world's four elements, but each also embodies death as an element.

With the release of each new Kicker Pack, a new race is introduced into the conflict as Nature and Death continually escalate their battle for the world.

THE MAGICAL ELEMENTS

The spells available for each element in the DRAGON DICE game reveal something of that element's nature. Note that some of the spells bear names similar to spells in the AD&D game, but the similarity ends there. The magic of the DRAGON DICE game is unique.

Each race can cast magic of the elements with which it is aligned, and the nature of the terrain the caster occupies can enhance that magic. (For example: Coral elves do better with water magic when they are near large bodies of water.)

Earth (Gold): Earth magic is used primarily for protection and movement. Initial spells are as follows:

Stoneskin: Makes the target army more difficult to damage.

Dust to Dust: Puts to rest the spirits of the dead, making them beyond the reach of death magic.

Path: Allows instantaneous movement of small units to a distant location.

Transmute Rock to Mud: Mires an opposing army to keep it from maneuvering.

Summon Gold Dragon: Summons the essence of elemental earth in the shape of a dragon. (See "Dragons" below.) A gold dragon's breath attack turns creatures to stone.

Air (Blue): Air magic is a bit more destructive in nature, though it can restore life to the recently slain. Initial spells are:

Hailstorm: Inflicts damage on a target army.

Breath of Life: Resuscitates the recently slain.

Lightning Strike: Inflicts great damage on a single creature.

Wind Walk: Helps an army to outmaneuver its opponents.

Summon Blue Dragon: Summons the essence of elemental air in the shape of a dragon. (See "Dragons" below.) A blue dragon's breath attack can paralyze.

Fire (Red): Fire magic also tends toward destruction, though it can be used to heal. Initial spells are:

Ash Storm: Fills the sky with ashes, making all action more difficult.

Spark of Life: Revitalizes the recently slain.

Burning Hands: Makes a creature more damaging and terrifying in combat.

Dancing Lights: Distracts an army that is trying to cast magic or fire arrows and such.

Summon Red Dragon: Summons the essence of elemental fire in the shape of a dragon. (See "Dragons" below.) A red dragon's breath attack can incinerate.

Water (Green): Water magic is primarily protective in nature. Initial spells include:

Watery Double: Provides an illusory image that absorbs the damage of an attack.

Wall of Ice: Creates a protective wall of rock-hard ice.

Wall of Fog: Makes action more difficult at the target terrain (without dirtying everything with ashes).

Flash Flood: Used to wash armies apart during battle, farther from their objective.

Summon Green Dragon: Summons the essence of elemental water in the shape of a dragon. (See "Dragons" below.) A green dragon's breath attack can chill its victim, even causing frost.

Death (Black): Death magic draws upon the forces of entropy to cause damage and manipulate the dead. It can be enhanced by using up the spiritual energy of the recently slain. Initial spells are:

Reanimate Dead: This doesn't really bring the body back to life; it just makes it walk and fight again.

Palsy: This weakens the target, making it ill and shaky.

Finger of Death: One of the nastiest spells of the game, this kills its target without any chance of avoidance. Fortunately, it is rather difficult to cast.

Open Grave: An army affected by this spell does not fully die from any wounds it suffers. Rather, it rises to fight again shortly after being struck down.

Summon Black Dragon: Summons the essence of elemental death in the shape of a dragon. (See "Dragons" below.) A black dragon's breath attack can cause instant death.

THE DRAGONS OF ESFAH

Dragons in this setting are not living creatures, but rather are elemental forces given temporary substance, much like elementals or genies in other worlds. When summoned, they serve no one, but attack everyone in the vicinity—including the summoner.

There are two forms of dragon in each element, one with wings, and one without. The winged version is called a *drake*, the wingless version a *wyrm*. Drakes are slightly smaller than wyrms, and they are more "flighty" (pun intended). Often drakes grow distracted and fly away, dissipating back into the world's elements. Wyrms are larger and hang around until slain. These wingless dragons sometimes hoard treasure.

THE NATURE OF ESFAH'S CONFLICT

Because this world represents a mass battle game, rather than a role-playing game, its conflicts focus upon groups and peoples more than upon individuals. Consequently, characters in fiction set in this world should be illustrative of their race and occupation, rather than unique individuals. Furthermore, they should work with one another to accomplish their goals.

In other words, fiction about this world should avoid creating Gandalfs and Tom Bombadills, focusing more upon bands of companions and intertwined stories such as the Fellowship surrounding Frodo and the Ring.

THE FIRST RACES OF ESFAH

The following four peoples are typically called Esfah's "first races." They are the four introduced in the original boxed set of the game. With each race are listed the types of individuals represented by dice in the game (along with the relative rarity of those dice).

A note about languages: The various races of the world all speak the same language, but each has its own distinct pronunciation and spelling. (There has been no tower of Babel in this world.)

A note about religions: For most of the races of Esfah, service to Nature or Death is just that—service rather than worship. The goblins are an exception, inventing foul gods and worshipping them as an excuse for their own mad blood-thirstiness.

The Coral Elves

Also called the Selumari, the coral elves are attuned to the elements of air and water. Their skin is pale blue, their hair and garments pale green. They have a nobility about them, tempered with lightheartedness. Think of them as gypsies on a sunny day.

Coral elves breathe air and live on coral islands, but they are magically able to breathe water for a few hours at a time, and their sailing ships can fly through the air for short periods. They also use horses and giant eagles as mounts.

The coral elves have a lyrical style of speech, with soft, aspirated vowels.

Coral elves prefer cutlasses for close fighting, and they are expert with the bow. Also, because they are so light on their feet, they can be devastating when they charge an enemy. On the other hand, they are comparatively fragile, and cannot take much damage in a return attack. When on or near the sea, however, they become somewhat tougher defensively, able to use the shifting terrain to their own advantage.

Heavy Troops: Trooper (common), Hero (uncommon), Champion (rare).

Light Troops: Sentinel (common), Courier (uncommon), Herald (rare).

Missile Troops: Bowman (common), Archer (uncommon), Sharpshooter (rare).

Cavalry: Horseman (common), Knight (uncommon), Eagle Knight (rare).

Magic-users: Evoker (common), Conjurer (uncommon), Enchanter (rare).

Monster Allies: Coral Giant, Gryphon, Sprite Swarm, Tako.

Monster Descriptions:

Coral Giant: Due to their immense size, these intelligent, human-shaped colonies of coral are most comfortable beneath the waves. But when their coral elf friends are in danger, they make fearsome allies.

Gryphon: A gryphon has the body of a lion with an eagle's head, talons, and wings. When tamed, it makes a wonderful mount.

Sprite Swarm: Another type of ally to the coral elves, sprites are butterfly-winged fairies that bear tiny swords and cast magical spells.

Tako: These intelligent, amphibious octopuses can battle both on land and undersea, bearing weapons in their many tentacles.

The Dwarves

Also called the Vagha, Esali's dwarves are attuned to the elements of fire and earth. Their skin is golden and their hair fiery red. They prefer to dwell in volcanic canyons and are great workers of metal. In temperament, they are like the legendary norsemen, given to good-natured boasting, hearty humor, and fiery angers.

The dwarves speak with a guttural accent.

Because of their short legs, dwarves do not maneuver well in combat. But they are very tough in hand-to-hand fighting, able to dish out great damage and absorb it well themselves. Their favorite melee weapon is the axe, and those who use missile weapons carry crossbows. In their native highlands, they use their superior knowledge of the land to offset their slow movement.

Dwarven cavalry uses ponies, giant lizards, and woolly mammoths as mounts.

Heavy Troops: Footman (common), Sergeant (uncommon), Warlord (rare).

Light Troops: Sentry (common), Patrolter (uncommon), Skirmisher (rare).

Missile Troops: Crossbowman (common), Marksman (uncommon), Crack-shot (rare).

Cavalry: Pony Rider (common), Lizard Rider (uncommon), Mammoth Rider (rare).

Magic-users: Theurgist (common), Thaumaturgist (uncommon), Wizard (rare).

Monster Allies: Gargoyle, UMBER Hulk, Roc, Androsphinx.

Monster Descriptions:

Androsphinx: The most powerful of sphinxes, the androsphinx is good at heart, though its surly demeanor often disguises that fact.

Gargoyle: The reptilian gargoyle is roughly humanoid in shape, with enormous bat wings. It is resistant to magic, its very presence disrupting many spells even as they are cast.

Roc: This giant, two-headed bird is powerful enough to carry even a mammoth away in its claws.

UMBER Hulk: Something like a cross between a gorilla and an insect, the umber hulk can strike with its mighty fists, bite with its crushing mandibles, and cause confusion with the gaze of its secondary set of eyes.

The Goblins

Twisted worshipers of death and decay, the goblins are also called Trogs. Their skin is pallid yellow and their hair dirty black. They prefer to live in swampland, on islands of muck, where they can feast on bugs and worms.

Compared to the dwarves, the goblins almost chitter when they speak. Their voices are comparatively high and nasal.

Goblins are less fragile than elves, but they move more quickly than dwarves. They make for a solid but unremarkable fighting force. They use primitive stone axes, wooden shields, slingshots in combat. In their native swampland, they are able to outmaneuver most opponents, due to a superior knowledge of the terrain and some magical control over the shifting ground. Some goblins tame savage dogs, wolves, and even leopards to serve as mounts.

Heavy Troops: Thug (common), Cutthroat (uncommon), Marauder (rare).

Light Troops: Mugger (common), Ambusher (uncommon), Filcher (rare).

Missile Troops: Pelter (common), Slingman (uncommon), Deadeye (rare).

Cavalry: Wardog Rider (common), Wolf Rider (uncommon), Leopard Rider (rare).

Magic-users: Trickster (common), Hedge Wizard (uncommon), Death Mage (rare).

Monster Allies: Death Naga, Harpy, Shambler, Troll.

Monster Descriptions:

Death Naga: With the body of an enormous black python, the face of a beautiful woman, and a poison-tipped stinger in its tail, the hideous death naga lives to cause destruction.

Harpy: Filthy creatures consisting of a vulture's legs and wings with the head and upper torso of a hag, harpies love to torment other beings.

Shambler: The shambler is an animated, vaguely humanoid mound of vegetable matter that engulfs and consumes its prey.

Troll: Trolls are large, ugly humanoid creatures with thick, warty skin and an appetite for human flesh. Not only are they difficult to wound, they also magically regenerate from all damage except burning.

The Lava Elves

Also called the Morehl, the lava elves are attuned to death and the destructive power of fire. Their skin is fiery red and their hair glossy black, spiked like dark tongues of flame. They dwell in volcanic caverns, from which they emerge only to wreak havoc on the surface of the world.

When the lava elves speak, it is in a sibilant whisper, salted with buzzes and clicks like a nest of hornets.

In combat, lava elves are savage fighters, nearly berserkers. They often take insane risks, which sometimes pay off in great victory, and other times leads to horrible defeat. Like coral elves, they are somewhat fragile, but move quickly enough to be a real threat when charging.

The melee weapon of choice for a lava elf is the rapier. Rather than bows, lava elves use flint-lock pistols of their own design in missile combat, but they demonstrate the same elven propensity for ranged attacks. In their native highlands, they use the volcanic terrain to provide extra protection, making them very tough to root out.

For mounts, lava elf cavalymen use giant spiders, giant scorpions, or wyverns (winged lizards without forelegs).

Heavy Troops: Bladesman (common), Duelist (uncommon), Conqueror (rare).

Light Troops: Scout (common), Spy (uncommon), Infiltrator (rare).

Missile Troops: Fusilier (common), Dead-Shot (uncommon), Assassin (rare).

Cavalry: Spider Rider (common), Scorpion Knight (uncommon), Wyvern Rider (rare).

Magic-users: Adept (common), Warlock (uncommon), Necromancer (rare).

Monster Allies: Beholder, Drider, Hellhound, Rakshasa.

Monster Descriptions:

Beholder: This nightmarish creature is a floating sphere with one huge central eye, a toothy mouth, and multiple eyestalks. Each of its eyes has a different magical power.

Drider: A drider consists of a lava elf upper torso mounted on the bloated abdomen of a giant spider, a horrible parody of a centaur.

Hellhound: These ferocious, fire-breathing hounds are often used by evil creatures to guard subterranean lairs. But they also serve well on the battlefield, combining rapid movement with formidable melee abilities.

Rakshasa: A tiger-headed, humanoid fiend, the rakshasa is a master of illusion and an accomplished swordsman and spellcaster.

THE SUBSEQUENT RACES

Each new Kicker Pack of the DRAGON DICE game introduces a new race of creatures into the battle for Estah. In the sections below, those races are introduced with the bit of legend from their Kicker Pack, then discussed in the same manner as the "First Races," above.

Amazons

A November 1995 release?

In their struggle for supremacy over their fledgling world, the First Races began pressing other magical beings into service. The evil Morehl were the first to do so, bringing up from the deepest caverns fell creatures such as fire-breathing hellhounds and web-casting driders. The Troggs followed suit, leading trolls, harpies, and other monsters into battle. In response, the Selumari called forth allies such as the colossal coral giants from the ocean floors and swarms of sprites from the skies above. The Vagha sought the aid of gargoyles, androsphinxes, and other creatures of the crags.

The conflict raged across the face of the world, and Death delighted in the carnage.

But the powers of Nature had not abandoned their creation. Pooling their abilities, they brought to life a new race, the Amazon warriors, to aid their cause. While short-lived compared to the First Races, these humans were ferocious fighters, and they could cast magic of any element (though less fully than those races who came before them). With centaur allies, and other such creatures at their side, the Amazons rode their chariots into battle, casting their swords, spears, and spells into the fray.

The Amazons do not currently have a special racial name for themselves. If one is to be invented, it should be somewhat ancient Greek in nature, because the Amazons are basically Bronze-Age Greek, warrior women. They wear bronze armor and use spears and kukri-style swords (something like machetes with a forward bend half-way down the blade) from the backs of war chariots.

In speech, the Amazons are what one would expect for their real-world counterparts, with round vowels and a familiar range of consonants.

In combat, they are fierce warriors, and the chariots make them very maneuverable on flatland terrain. They are quite deadly when throwing spears, especially from the back of speeding chariots.

In terms of magic, the Amazons are not attuned to any particular element. Rather, they can cast spells of the dominant elements of the terrain they currently occupy. This makes them magical "jacks-of-all-trades" but expert in none.

As a race, the amazons are predominantly female, but they do spawn a few males to perpetuate the species. A few of those males do become soldiers (such as the War Chief, below), but most pursue peaceful occupations. It isn't that the Amazon males are second-class citizens, simply that there are fewer of them.

Heavy Troops: Soldier (common), Warrior (uncommon), War Chief (rare: the one male figure).

Light Troops: Runner (common), Envoy (uncommon), Harbinger (rare).

Missile Troops: Darter (common), Javeliner (uncommon), Spearer (rare).

Cavalry: Charioteer (common), Battle Rider (uncommon), War Driver (rare).

Magic-users: Sage (common), Visionary (uncommon), Oracle (rare).

Monster Allies: Like the Amazons themselves, these allies spring from Greek Mythology.

Centaur, Chimera, Hydra, Medusa.

Monster Descriptions:

Centaur: Consisting of a human upper torso connected to the body of a horse, centaurs are both powerful fighters and fast runners.

Chimera: Part lion, part goat, and part fire-breathing dragon, the chimera is a deadly beast.

Hydra: This multi-headed reptilian monster is a fearsome opponent in melee, able to engage many troops at once with its many biting mouths, savage claws, and a long, whipping tail.

Medusa: A beautiful woman with snakes for hair, the medusa can turn her opponents to stone with the gaze of her eyes.

The Firewalkers

A February 1996 release!

As the battles among the First Races and the Amazons grew more severe, a race of beings from beyond the young world took notice. From their chaotic cities in the roaring fires of the world's sun, this race grew more and more fascinated by the titanic battles unfolding, and decided to take part.

Large groups of these humanoids—elementals who were part fire and part air—descended to the young world, settling in the mountains and planes where they scorched their surroundings black and lifeless.

They brought their fiery magics and monstrous beings like the mighty Phoenix and the murderous Salamander down from the sun and offered their services to armies that would have them. The newcomers were dubbed the Firewalkers, for they had no name for themselves. While startled by the ardor the Firewalkers had for battle, the generals gladly accepted their aid. Many commanders soon found that the Firewalkers view the great war as a game, and they truly do not care what side on which they fight!

As revealed above, the Firewalkers apparently have no name for themselves. Their culture is so alien to the other races of the setting that they are viewed simply as useful, though dangerous, mercenaries. Exploring their origins on the sun, and the nature of their culture, could be an interesting twist for DRAGON DICE licenses and books.

The fact that these creatures come from the surface of the sun itself reveals something more about the magical nature of Esfah's universe. The firewalkers are attuned to the elements of air and fire. In fact, they are actually composed of these two elements. This Kicker Pack adds a few new air and fire spells to the original mix, primarily illusionary and fiery ranged attacks.

When they speak, firewalkers sound like a roaring furnace. Presumably, they speak the same language as everyone else.

In combat, these beings are extremely fast. In terrain with large, open skies, they can fly across great distances at incredible speed.

The melee weapon of choice for firewalkers is a flaming trident. For ranged attacks, they toss balls of fire.

Heavy Troops: Guardian (common), Watcher (uncommon), Sentinel (rare; the one male figure).

Light Troops: Explorer (common), Adventurer (uncommon), Expeditioner (rare).

Missile Troops: Firestarter (common), Firemaster (uncommon), Firestormer (rare).

Cavalry: Shadowchaser (common), Nightbane (uncommon), Daybringer (rare).

Magic-users: Sunburst (common), Sunflare (uncommon), Ashbringer (rare).

Monster Allies: Fireshadow, Genie, Gorgon, Phoenix, Salamander.

Firewalker Creature Descriptions: The following descriptions give a quick sketch of individual firewalkers.

Adventurer: Although part of the army, these Firewalkers are primarily interested in loot and glory.

Ashbringer: Second only to the general, these are the leaders among the Firewalkers.

Daybringer: When the light that surrounds these troops can be seen, it often is too late for their foes.

Expeditioner: The mainstays of the war-effort, these troops strive to keep order among their unruly brothers.

Explorer: Observant commanders will spot these scouts hours or days before the Firewalker army attacks.

Firemaster: A crucial part of the army, these troops bend air and fire to their will as their weapons.

Fireshadow: Rumored to be an Elder Firewalker, these creatures wield mighty weapons of flame.

Firestarter: From behind the lines, these young Firewalkers terrorize other races with fire from the sky.

Firestormer: Officers of the Firewalker forces, these warriors lay waste to entire armies with rains of fire.

Genie: Born of air and nourished by fire, the mighty genies bend elemental forces to their will and fulfill wishes of destruction with their magical powers.

Gorgon: A bull-like creature, fierce fire-breathing gorgons are mere pets to the Firewalkers.

Guardian: These large Firewalker troops never retreat willingly from any conflict, no matter what the odds.

Nightbane: Often soaring above the battlefield like a fiery comet, nothing escapes this warrior's notice.

Phoenix: It is said that as long as the sun burns in the sky, these majestic fiery birds will never see defeat.

Salamander: A hate-filled fire-creature, this monster craves battle not for excitement, but only for carnage.

Sentinel: Patrolers of the outskirts of Firewalker troop formations and camps, these warriors attack any foes who approach without warning.

Shadowchaser: Always hungry for battle, these warriors press foes until the field is won.

Sunburst: Though they are apprentice spellcasters, sunbursts are also formidable fighters as well.

Sunflare: A blazing passion for battle and powerful magic makes the sunflare feared by nearly all foes.

Watcher: These heavy troops often guard the scorched, barren lands seized by Firewalker armies.

Undead

A May 1996 release?

The powers of Nature were aghast. All across their young world lay the scars of war. Once-green meadows were trampled to mud. Tree-covered mountain slopes were blasted by spells. The sands of the ocean shores were stained with blood. And everywhere, the dead lay scattered like broken dolls.

The spirit of Death laughed at Nature's despair. Rising on wings of blackness, it swept across the face of the world. And in its wake, the dead stirred. Skeletons, zombies, wraiths, ghouls...and worse...arose to march against the cities of the living.

A new era of warfare has fallen upon the land. Will Death prevail at last?

There is no racial name needed for the undead. They are simply the bodies of those killed in battle, restored to a hideous semblance of life by the powers of Death. The types are revealed in the listing of units below. Like the Amazons, the undead cast earth, air, fire, and water magic based upon the predominant elements of the terrain they currently occupy. But in addition, they are expert with death magic, even possessing a few black spells unknown to any other beings.

Those undead which actually speak typically do so in a dry, rattling whisper.

In combat, the undead are difficult to slay, but they are slow, and they have almost no ability at all with ranged weapons. On the other hand, they do possess a few special powers that allow them to do such things as convert other creatures to undead. This and their general toughness make them formidable in face-to-face combat.

The melee weapon of choice for the undead is the scythe, in imitation of the traditional tool of the Grim Reaper. For shields, they often use gravestones. Instead of cavalry, undead forces use wraiths and other such immaterial spirits for quicker movement, and instead of missile troops, they have a secondary class of magic users.

Heavy Troops: Zombie (common), Wight (uncommon), Mummy (rare; the one male figure).

Light Troops: Skeleton (common), Revenant (uncommon), Death Knight (rare).

Skirmishers: Wraith (common), Spectre (uncommon), Ghost (rare).

Light Magic-users: Ghoul (common), Ghost (uncommon), Vampire (rare).

Heavy Magic-users: Apparition (common), Heucuva (uncommon), Lich (rare).

Monster Allies: Skeletal Steed, Fenhound, Carrion Crawler, Minor Death, Dracolich.

Undead Creature Descriptions: Following are simple descriptions of the individual undead creatures. For fuller details, see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™ Compendium*.

Apparition: A spell-casting type of undead, apparitions look like skeletons loosely wrapped in filthy bandages.

Carrion Crawler: These monsters are gigantic, worm-like that feast upon the dead and can paralyze with a touch.

Death Knight: Cursed to endless undeath, these beings are knights who betrayed their honor in life.

Dracolich: These fearsome undead dragons are nearly as powerful as their living counterparts, and they cast spells too!

Fenhound: These spectral hounds bay chillingly as they hunt guilty souls.

Ghast: Like ghouls, ghosts feed upon corpses, but they are much more prone to murder for their meals.

Ghost: These vaporous beings are among the most powerful of undead spirits.

Ghoul: Hideous, once-human creatures, ghouls feast upon the flesh of corpses.

Heucuva: Dressed in ragged robes, these beings are the skeletal remains of disgraced holy men.

Lich: These once-living wizards magically bound their spirits to their own dead bodies, seeking to avoid oblivion.

Minor Death: Like their grim master, these reapers of souls are not to be trifled with.

Mummy: The preserved remains of once-living people, mummies serve as protectors of burial places.

Revenant: These vengeful dead crawl from their graves to vent their hatred upon the living.

Skeletal Steed: Created to serve as mounts for other undead beings, these animated animal skeletons bear their riders tirelessly.

Skeleton: These magically animated bones clack and rattle unnervingly when they move, sending shivers up their opponents' spines.

Spectre: Another type of evil spirit, spectres are only partially material, but they haunt the living world.

Vampire: While ghouls and ghosts feed upon corpse flesh, vampires drink the blood of those still living.

Wight: Like zombies, wights are animated corpses, but possessed of wicked cunning and purpose.

Wraith: These undead spirits appear as man-shaped clouds of inky blackness.

Zombie: The most rudimentary form of undead, the zombie is little more than a mindless, animated corpse.

The Feral

An August 1996 release?

As the war for this young world rages on, Nature once again stirs the soup of creation and calls forth a new race to battle for the preservation of life. Imbued with the speed of Air and the strength of Earth, this new race is a primal force of Nature. Its members are wild, savage, full of vitality—they are the Feral!

While elves and dwarves and humans have been able to hold their own in the war, Nature decided to build this new race from different stock. It turned to the beasts of Earth and Air, giving them intelligence, power, and size enough to become Champions of Life.

These animal people possess great courage and ferocity, tempered by intelligence and compassion. Though they possess a humanoid form, every member of the Feral is remarkably beastlike. From the swift-flying falcon-folk to the magical badger-folk to the powerful lion-folk, the Feral have a primitive but extensive civilization that thrives on every horizon—where the sky meets the land.

These primitive new people are attuned to the magical elements of earth and air. If they have a name for themselves, it has not yet been discovered. They strongly resemble the animals from which they were created, though with human-sized and -shaped bodies. They wear hand-made jewelry and some scraps of clothing where necessary. When they speak, they retain some of the vocal characteristics of their animal origins.

In combat, the feral are as fierce and savage as their animal cousins. They wield primitive spears for ranged attacks, using their natural claws for hand-to-hand fighting.

Heavy Troops (hunters): Lynx-folk (common), Leopard-folk (uncommon), Tiger-folk (rare; the one male figure).

Light Troops (stalkers): Hound-folk (common), Fox-folk (uncommon), Wolf-folk (rare).

Missile Troops (fliers): Falcon-folk (common), Hawk-folk (uncommon), Vulture-folk (rare).

Cavalry (racers): Antelope-folk (common), Horse-folk (uncommon), Buffalo-folk (rare).

Magic users (shamans): Weasel-folk (common), Badger-folk (uncommon), Wolverine-folk (rare).

Monster Allies: Elephant-folk, Rhino-folk, Bear-folk, Owl-folk, Lion-folk.

Creature Descriptions:

Antelope-Folk: These common racers look like bipedal, humanoid antelopes. With slender forms and long horns, these swift runners are fast and quick to avoid damage, but not good skirmishers.

Badger-Folk: These uncommon shamans are humanoid badgers with good magical skills. They have short legs, long claws, and heavy pelts.

Bear-Folk: These huge black bears stand 10-feet tall and walk upright. Considered leaders by the rest of the Feral, especially the shamans, bear-folk are powerful warriors with a hint of magic.

Buffalo-Folk: These rare racers are huge humanoid buffaloes with massive down-ward-curving horns. They are built to run and fight.

Elephant-Folk: As tall as the bear-folk by much broader, these leaders are revered by all Feral. Like humanoid elephants, these feral are strong and massive, with thick skin and a long, prehensile trunk. They have the ability to rally other Ferals.

Falcon-Folk: These common fliers are humanoid falcons whose speed and accuracy with spears is well known. They have long, pointed wings and bright feathers.

Fox-Folk: These uncommon stalkers are sleek, humanoid foxes with good speed and melee skills. They have upright ears and pointed snouts.

Hawk-Folk: These uncommon fliers have short, hooked bills and strong claws. Their wings make them fast, their keen eyes make them deadly with spears.

Horse-Folk: These uncommon racers run on two hooved feet. With long manes blowing behind them, horse-folk are extremely fast with a good melee attack.

Hound-Folk: These tenacious common stalkers are small, humanoid canines with some speed and melee skill.

Leopard-Folk: These uncommon hunters are large humanoid felines with spotted fur and deadly claws.

Lion-Folk: Taller than the greatest hunters, these humanoid lions are revered by hunters and stalkers alike. Long, heavy manes mark these leaders, as do their powerful roars.

Lynx-Folk: These common hunters are the smallest of the humanoid felines. Their thick, soft fur and tufted ears belie their melee skills.

Owl-Folk: These leaders are revered by both fliers and shamans for their combination of both skills. As humanoid owls, they have large eyes, hooked talons, and feathery wings.

Rhino-Folk: These leaders aren't as large and bulky as elephant-folk, but they come close. They have thick hides and two horns rising out of their foreheads. Racers revere these humanoid rhinos.

Tiger-Folk: These rare hunters are the largest of the hunters. Striped fur and claws mark these humanoid felines noted for their melee prowess.

Vulture-Folk: These rare fliers are the largest of the winged Fera!, with dark plumages and bald heads. They are excellent marksmen with spears, able to deliver deadly bullseyes as they fly past.

Weasel-Folk: These common shamans have some magical power and they save well. These bipedal wessels have long, slender bodies, long tails, and brown fur.

Wolf-Folk: These rare stalkers are the largest of the humanoid canines, with pointed ears, sharp teeth, and powerful claws. These melee experts are also capable of rare bursts of speed.

Wolverine-Folk: The most powerful of the basic shamans, these humanoid wolverines have dark fur, rounded ears, and great claws. Though more concerned with magic, they can deliver a fearsome melee attack when necessary.

The Swampget

A November 1996 release?

As the war for control of the young world continued, many members of all races sought to escape the endless conflict by fleeing to distant locations. The spirit of Death refused to allow these refugees any solace, however. In the fetid swamps where the powers of Water and Death mingled, a terrible magic was unleashed. This magic mutated the refugees into hideous creatures, spawning a new race for Death to cast into the mix. From this mire, Death called forth the Swampget!

The Swampget are humanoid snakes who worship foul water and the blackness of death. They embrace death as the greatest gift, seeking to bestow it upon all the other races. Water and Death mutate all races into Swampget.

Swampget take three forms. Purebloods are the closest to the first races, humanoids with scaly flesh, snake eyes, and venomous fangs. Half-breeds are part snake. They have the appearance of a pureblood with one or more body parts that are all snake—a snake head, a snake tail instead of legs, or snakes instead of arms. Abominations are all snake—giants with humanoid arms.

Striking from their mysterious homelands, the Swampget carry the gift of watery death, seeking to increase their numbers by mutating others so they can take control of all the world!

The swampget are similar to the yuaa-ti from the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* Accessory. In the *DRAGON DICE* setting, they are attuned to the magical elements of water and death, and they specialize in spells that poison and destroy.

As the text above reveals, each swamp-get is a humanoid creature which has mutated slightly, taking on snake-like body features. The more mutated the creature, the rarer it is. In game terms, the common dice are "purebloods," the uncommon are "half-breeds," and the rare are "abominations."

Swamp-get speak with a snake-like sibilance.

They are thoroughly evil fighters, with a fierce hatred of all other living things. In melee combat, they use jagged swords; for missile attacks, they use barbed spears.

Heavy Troops: Ravager (common), Annihilator (uncommon), Destroyer (rare; the one male figure).

Light Troops: Attacker (common), Raider (uncommon), Invader (rare).

Missile Troops: Sprayer (common), Stormer (uncommon), Deluger (rare).

Cavalry: Bog Runner (common), Marsh Swimmer (uncommon), Wave Rider (rare).

Magic-users: Bog Adept (common), Marsh Mage (uncommon), Swamp Wizard (rare).

Monster Allies: Crocosaur, Swamp Beast, Swamp Giant, Mudman, Ormyrr

Pureblood Descriptions:

Attacker: This light trooper is a slit-eyed humanoid who wields a wicked long sword and carries a bow.

Bog Adept: With forked tongue and scaly flesh, this mage commands limited arcane might.

Bog Runner: This humanoid with fangs and webbed feet can race along the surface of water or mud at speeds that make him hard to hit.

Ravager: This heavy trooper has scaly flesh and fangs, and he wields a great sword with snake-like speed.

Sprayer: This forked tongue, slit-eyed humanoid makes deadly use of a bow that sprays arrows like a heavy rain.

Half-Breed Descriptions:

Annihilator: This heavy trooper has a snake head and wields an extremely sharp great sword.

Marsh Mage: This wizard has a snake tail instead of legs and commands powerful magic.

Marsh Swimmer: With a snake tail and flexible torso, this half-breed plows through mud and water at great speeds.

Raider: This light trooper has snakes instead of arms that deliver deadly bites when in combat.

Stormer: This snake-headed humanoid fires his bow to deliver a storm of deadly arrows.

Abominations:

Deluger: This abomination wields a magical bow that floods the enemy with deadly arrows.

Destroyer: This giant snake-man wields a great magical sword in his humanoid arms.

Invader: This light trooper fights with sword and bow, but also has a poisonous bite.

Swamp Wizard: This snake-man crackles with arcane might.

Wave Rider: This lightning-fast snake-man travels on waves of water or mud.

Monster Descriptions:

Crocosaur: This monstrous crocodile stretches over 30-feet long and has rending jaws, a thick hide, and a powerful tail.

Mudman: This huge pile of humanoid mud animated by the power of water and death defends the Swampet with great fists of sludge.

Ormyrr: This giant, upright worm with two pairs of arms and a froglike head has great strength, a constricting tail, and magic abilities.

Swamp Beast: This monster hides beneath the murky water until it emerges to attack, though sometimes a tooth-filled head rises up on a long, slender neck from a bloated body.

Swamp Giant: This giant half-breed has one arm that is a large, poisonous snake. Like the coral giant, it prefers to remain in water, for the sake of buoyancy.

The Plantfolk and the Scalders

Tentatively planned for 1997 are two new races, using the last reasonable combinations of dice color.

First, Nature responds to the swampet by bringing vegetation to intelligent life, creating the plantfolk (possibly with a different name). The plantfolk will be attuned to earth and water.

Then, a race attuned to fire and water will join the fray. Tentatively based on fiery islands, these creatures are tentatively called the scalders.

The Dragonlords

TSR has released a limited run of promotional dice: the Kings' Die and the Dragonlord Die. These are not for sale, but only for giving away at conventions, and there are relatively few of them in existence.

The Kings' Die simply depicts kings for the four First Races and the Amazons. In terms of background story, it doesn't add much to the setting.

The Dragonlord Die represents a unique type of being that adds considerable mystery to the setting. A dragonlord is a humanoid creature with batwings and slightly draconic facial features. Dragonlords are able to cast any color of magic, and they are fearsome fighters, being as tough as any monster in the game. In addition, they can tame dragons, forcing the elemental creatures to serve as their mounts, and directing the dragons' attacks toward whomever they wish.

Currently, there is no definition as to who the dragonlords really are or what their final purposes must be. They sometimes join the armies of one or another race and help to fight a particular campaign, but there is no history written for them as yet.

Are they personifications of Nature? Are they personifications of Esfah itself? Like Tom Bombadill, these creatures can add depth to the world by virtue of their mystery.

MAGESTORM

Back and forth across the world battled the armies of darkness and light. As they each pushed ever harder for victory, their struggles grew continually more savage and desperate. Monsters had been pressed into the fray, and new races had arisen to take part in the struggle, yet the bloody war raged on with no end in sight.

Death reveled in the chaos, darkly joyous with the destruction, terror, and pain it brought.

Saddened at the bloodshed, the forces of Nature pressed grimly on, determined to defend life and beauty.

While Nature dealt death to preserve life, and Death birthed more living servants to slay its enemies, the spell makers on each side began tapping the magical energy of those twin paradoxes. With it, they forged new spells. Some generated protections for individual champions. Others created magical weapons and armor to bolster their armies. Still others manipulated the elementary dragon spirits, conjuring up tamer versions to serve as troops.

With renewed vigor, the combatants launched themselves into the fray!

August of 1996 sees the release of a larger-than-Kicker-size expansion to the DRAGON DICE game. That expansion is currently titled *Magestorm*.

The premise is that the twin paradoxes of Nature dealing destruction and Death bringing servants to life has provided enhanced magical resources to the spell casters of the various races. Through that energy, these mages are able to create magical items and to conjure elementals more tractable than the dragons.

Magical Items

These include magic swords, shields, footwear, missile weapons, and magic enhancers. Because item dice each have only one type of effect, they are slightly more predictable than the regular dice. This makes them good for bolstering a magic-heavy army with some melee ability, for giving an army of heavy troops enhanced movement, etc.

Item Types:

Maneuver: Speed Slippers, Winged Sandals, Seven-League Boots.

Melee: Flicker Foil, Dawn Blade, Vorpai Sword

Missile: Trueflyer, Eyebiter, Heartseeker.

Magics: Sight Stone, Ring of Stars, Magi's Crown

Saver: Bronze Targe, Silver Buckler, Gilt Shield.

Artifacts: Blade Golem, Dragon Staff, Flying Carpet, Mantlet, Trebuchet.

Equipment Descriptions:

Blade Golem: A human-shaped metal machine bristling with swords and knives, the blade golem is like a razor-edged whirlwind in melee combat.

Bronze Targe: The bronze targe is the smallest of enchanted shields, and the easiest to create.

Dawn Blade: This mystic sword glows with an intense light that unnerves opponents.

Dragon Staff: To create this powerful artifact, a spell caster must use a huge gem stolen from the hoards of an ancient dragon.

Eyebiter: This magical arrow always seeks a foe's most vulnerable spot.

Flicker Foil: A light and supple blade, the flicker foil easily slips past shields and blocking weapons to wound the enemy.

Flying Carpet: While it could be used as a field blanket, a flying carpet is most useful as a means of rapid maneuver.

Gilt Shield: This, the largest of magical shields, bears a spike in its center as a sort of secondary melee weapon.

Heartseeker: The heartseeker arrow is capable of piercing all but the toughest of magical armor.

Magi's Crown: Only the most accomplished of magicians know the secrets of crafting this mind-enhancing crown.

Mantlet: An enormous shield on wheels, the mantlet can protect several soldiers at once.

Ring of Stars: Energized by starlight, a ring of stars makes even a novice spell caster a power to be reckoned with.

Seven-league Boots: The magical boots carry their owner in great leaps and bounds across the countryside.

Sight Stone: Most spell casters carry a carefully polished gemstone to lend them clarity of vision while shaping spells.

Silver Buckler: These magical shields are often carved with depictions of their owner's combat exploits.

Speed Slippers: Sure of tread and light of step, speed slippers help a soldier to maneuver quickly and quietly.

Trebuchet: An enormous, weighted, throwing machine, an enchanted trebuchet can cast huge boulders over long distances with great accuracy.

Trueflyer: Carefully crafted, and fletched with the feathers of the bird of paradise, trueflyer arrows are cherished by archers far and wide.

Vorpal Sword: The vorpal sword has a tendency to strike for the neck of an enemy, ending combat quickly.

Winged Sandals: Over smooth ground or rough, these enchanted sandals carry their wearer like the wind itself.

Dragonkin

Like dragons, dragonkin are physical manifestations of the elements of the world. But unlike dragons, dragonkin can be commanded as extra troops in an army.

In appearance, dragonkin stand upright like humans, but have scaly skins and very dragonish features. They do not have wings, but do have claws on hands and feet.

Dragonkin are not very intelligent or self-aware. They must be commanded by someone else, and they must remain in the terrain where they were conjured. Once the battle there is over, they dissipate, rejoining the elements in the terrain they were conjured from.

Currently, there are no individual names for the individual dragonkin dice. There are, however, classes of troops, as detailed below:

Heavy Troops: Common, uncommon, and rare.

Light Troops: Common, uncommon, and rare.

Missile Troops: Common, uncommon, and rare.

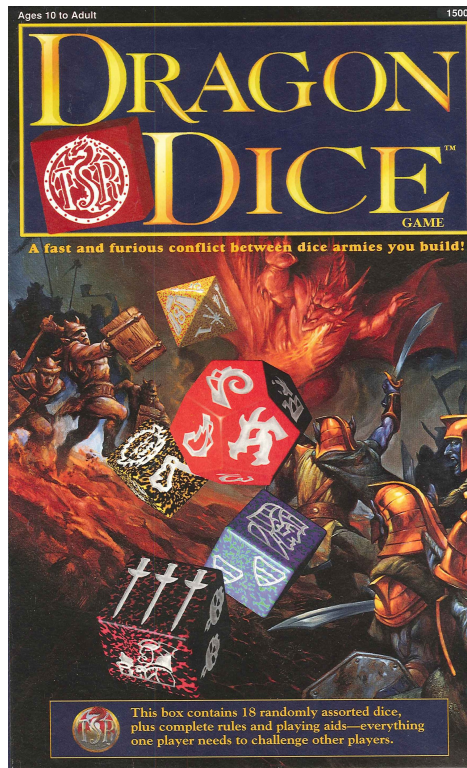
Skirmishers: Common, uncommon, and rare.

Dragonkin have breath weapons like regular dragons, though with considerably less effect.

With this detailed vision of Esfah as a guide, TSR began recruiting from their vast pool of some of the most well known, talented and prolific designers, writers and artists within the Role-Playing game development community to bring the struggle between the races of Nature and Death to light.

With an extensive bestiary to choose from, going back to the earliest days of Dungeons and Dragons, the team of designers, including Jennell Jaquays, William Olmesdahl, Stephen Daniele and others had a wealth of creatures with which to populate Esfah, and many of the most popular made it into the ranks.

According to Jennell Jaquays, the most problematic issue with the initial design was adhering to the manufacturer's constraints on line width and overall Icon size. Once overcome, however, the myriad unique inhabitants of Esfah rapidly began to take shape.



The game that developed, though simple on its surface, contained a complex depth that appealed to both dice chuckers and strategists. The components are straight-forward: six-sided dice, in differing sizes, represent the various races that populate the mythical world of Esfah. Containing a mix of two colors, corresponding to the four cardinal elements, or death, each race was designed with inherent strengths and weaknesses.

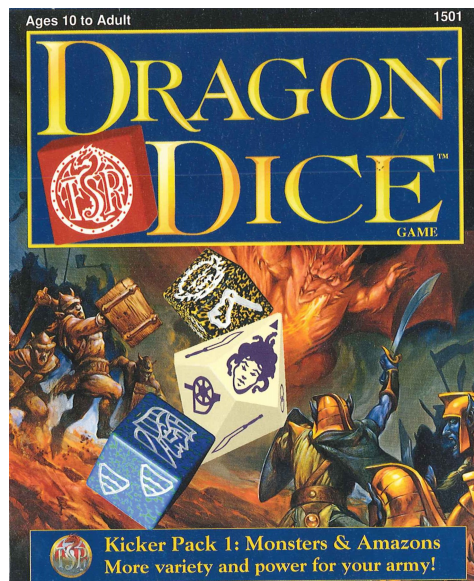
The eight-sided dice, also a mix of two colors, minus the death or black element, are representative of Esfah's topography. Each combination denotes a different terrain type, and certain races gain additional benefits from fighting in a terrain they are accustomed to. These Terrains were Coastland, Highland, Flatland and Swamp. The only dice in the game with numbers, the faces of the terrains also display symbols indicating the relative distance, and

therefore the action that could be taken, between armies at that terrain.

Since no fantasy setting would be complete without a dragon or two, these fearsome beasts are represented by single color 12-sided dice. Though summon-able into the game by any player, dragons, being what they are, hold allegiance to no one, and will attack any player at the terrain it occupies.

With the basics hashed out, the dice molds were ordered, and soon production on the first four races, Dwarves, Coral Elves, Lava Elves and Goblins began in a Chinese manufacturing plant. Each mold consisted of two parts, but due to an oversight, were allowed differing orientations and the result of this was some of the then most sought after dice for collectors, the “Mutant Goblins”. Displaying either two ID Icons, or none, there are 8 known errors from the earliest run. The oversight was quickly corrected, however, by keying the molds so they only fit together one way, so few of each variation exist.

Upon its release, the Dragon Dice game yielded millions for TSR's bottom line, and was awarded Game of the Year at Origins in 1995. Containing 18 dice, a dice bag, and several inserts, the Starter set provided enough dice for one player to begin their domination over the lands of Esfah. With the Starter sets moving off the shelves of book and gaming stores, TSR knew they had a hit on their hands, and the first expansion, or Kicker was put into production.



Monsters and Amazons added two new aspects to the game, with the introduction of 10-sided dice, which represented powerful monsters, allied to the various races, that could be added to an army, as well as the only race of humans to populate Esfah, the Ivory colored Amazons, the first single color race within the game. Inherently elementless, the Amazons added a new mechanic to the game, in that their magic color was tied to the colors comprising the terrain they occupied.

The launch of Kicker pack 1 was not without its own issues, however. Primarily, this is where stepped rarity was introduced within dice of the same size, namely the monsters. Of the 5 races contained in the Kicker, there was one of each race with a rarity of ten percent. Given that each race was assigned 4 monsters, to find a particular race's rare monster unit had a probability of

2.5 percent, which frustrated many completionists.

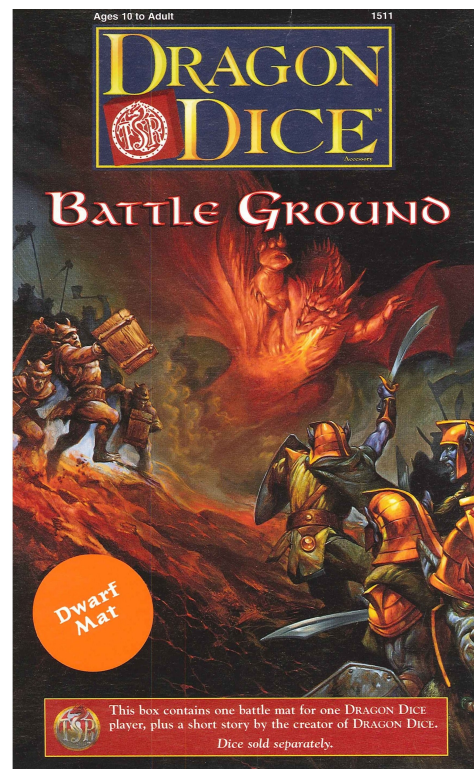
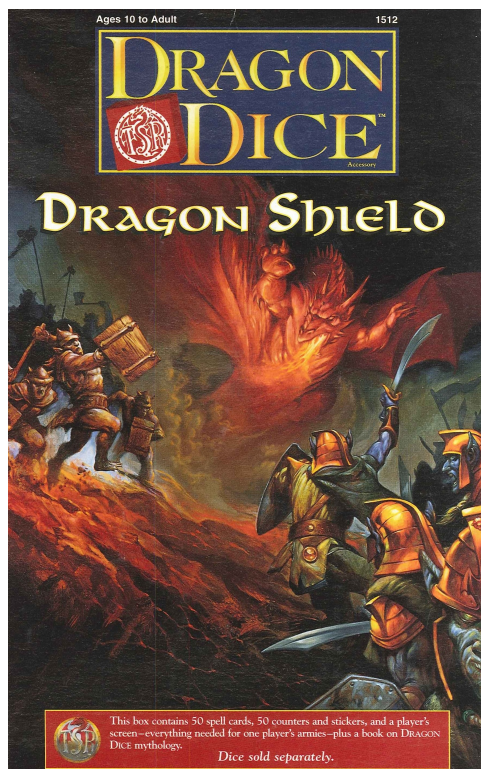
Compounding this was the result of a communication error between TSR and the manufacturer. When the order for 10,000 units was placed, the factory was instructed to package one-third of the product with a Rare (3-Health) Amazon die, and the other two-thirds with one or more Uncommon Amazon (2-Health) dice. This was misinterpreted, and resulted in the majority of units shipped to TSR, Inc.'s Wisconsin offices containing the Kickers with the Rare Amazons, and the Uncommons being sent to TSR UK. This necessitated extensive over-seas trading for many players to obtain their respective geography's missing dice.

As with any strategy-based game, as the fanbase grew and TSR sanctioned events run at gaming conventions across the globe, different tactics for victory began to at first emerge, then quickly dominate tournaments, thereby bringing to light the imbalance of some of the rules for gameplay. The first of these, though not a game-breaking element, was often questioned for the logic behind it...Routing. When defending against an opponents attack, a player is rolling for either save icons, (stylized shields), or ID icons, which denote a wild face. If there were more ID icons than actual save icons rolled, the attacking player was given the option of turning the terrain die down one face, and initiating another attack. This could theoretically result in multiple attacks against an opponent if ID icons were rolled in abundance.

The second mechanic that was quickly rethought was the Charge. When attacking an opposing player at a Melee face on the terrain die, the acting player had the opportunity to announce a Charge, which would allow them to not only count melee and ID icons to count towards damage, but maneuvers as well. While charging forced the attacker the opportunity to defend against a counter-attack, the damage inflicted was often worth the trade-off. The end result of this rule, however, made certain races and units the predominate component in most winning players arsenals, the large Dwarven Calvary Mammoth Rider, which had a 5/6 probability of dealing damage every roll. This tactic relegated most of the other units to date to the sidelines in exchange for a quick and decisive victory.

Finally, and the most frustrating for some players, was the ability to double any magic icons at a terrain with a unit's corresponding color. Since no terrain contains the Death element, Magic doubling for black spells was implemented by choosing a corresponding number of health from an opponents dead unit area. These dead units were then buried, and taken out of play. This resulted in the preponderance of magic based armies containing black. Eventually coming to be known as "High Magic" the strategy referred to as Turtling quickly became the norm. Instead of the goal being to control two of the three terrains in play, it became a matter of compiling your entire army at one terrain, and unleashing as much damaging magic at an opponent as the icons would allow, with the intent being complete annihilation of any opposing army.

Through observation, as well as player feedback, the game went through its first revision of the rules-set, with Routing and Charge being eliminated, and magic doubling being reworked to allow only ID Icons to be doubled, in an attempt to balance gameplay.



The final push to end 1995 on a high note for Dragon Dice was the release of two accessories designed to act as player aids. The first was the Battle Ground accessory, which was a screen printed cloth mat, available in one of five color combinations, denoting the five races produced to date. The mats displayed designated areas for various mechanics to assist with keeping track of a player's units, such as Home terrain, Frontier, Reserves, etc. While generally well-received, the Battle Ground mats received one major complaint from many consumers. Upon opening the shrink wrap, players noticed an overpowering odor, resulting from the materials used in their manufacture. While this did dissipate over time, some claimed that the mats retained their smell for many months.

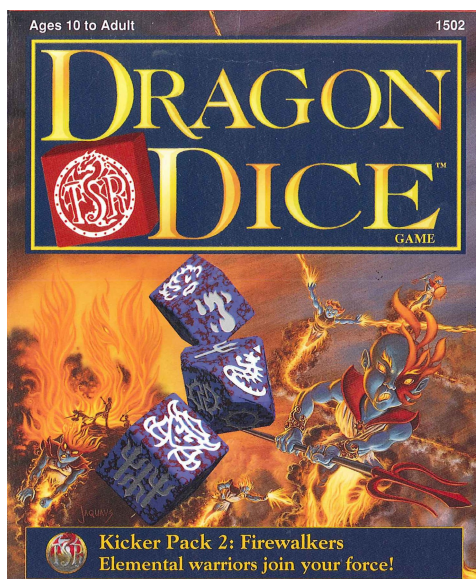
Lastly, was the Dragon Shield. This contained a five paneled screen depicting the various faces of all of the racial units produced up to that point for easy army construction, and to allow players to assemble armies in secret. Also enclosed was a set of spell cards, which could be placed at a player's terrain, and a handful of small tokens, allowing tracking of spells that could be cast multiple times on the same terrain or army.

Each of these add-on's contained short novellas, as well, expanding upon the mythology of the world of Esfah.

1996 saw rapid growth in the product line, with four new races, each adding new elements to how the game was played, as well as an expansion that added an entirely new aspect to the game, and a less than successful push to distribute Dragon Dice through mainstream avenues.



The push into 1996 began with trying to gain inroads in conventional toy stores, with the introduction of the Battle Box. Unlike the Starter Set, the Battle Box was designed to allow two players to immediately begin learning the game, by doubling the amount of dice included. It also contained a simplified version of the current rules, the various rules booklets found in the starter set, as well as a traditional style Game Board with designated spaces for each group of dice. Though targeted for sale to a slightly younger demographic, the Battle Box failed to capture the attention of its intended audience.

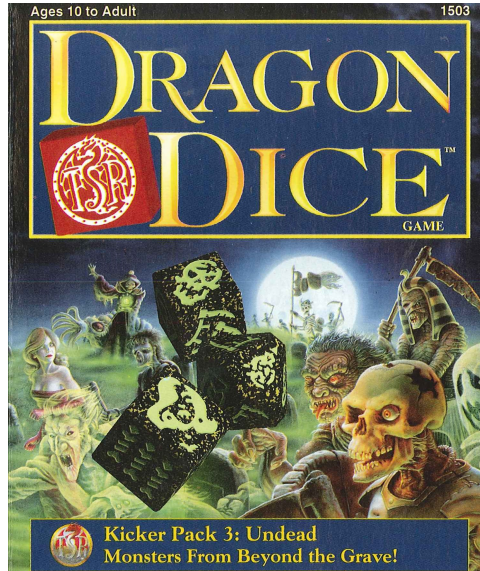


Next on the product calendar was Kicker Pack 2, Firewalkers. Designed again by Lester Smith, with Steve Miller collaborating, this race, while being a jack-of-all-trades, but master of none, had the benefit of being able to move from certain terrains without the need to retreat to reserves beforehand. While most units within the Firewalkers race could garner results in most situations, the Fireshadow eclipsed all others in this regard with its Create Fire Minions icon, which generated 4 points of whatever action was being rolled for. This distribution of actions made Firewalkers a fun race to play, though a difficult one to master.

TSR, having high hopes for the new race, produced an excessive amount of product, which unfortunately, resulted in many units ending up languishing in warehouses, both at TSR and

with Distributors, remaining unsold.

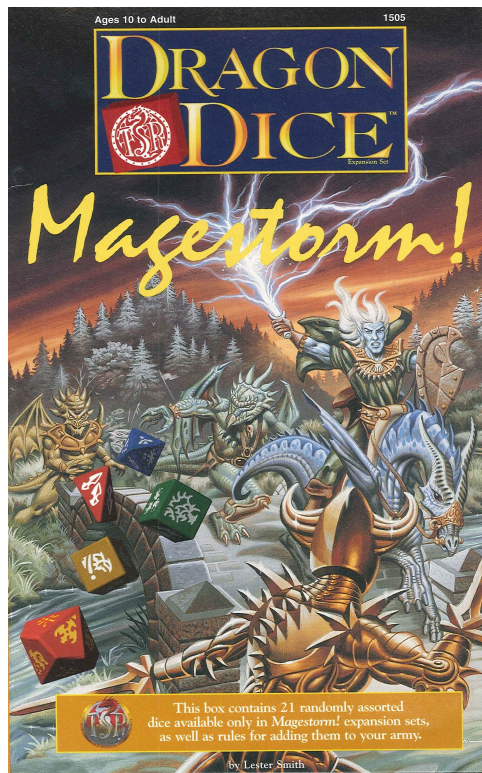
Also within this Kicker, was the first race with five 10-sided monster dice, as compared to four for the originally produced races, with each monster roughly corresponding to the five different classifications of units. This would be the norm going forward.



Next out of the gate was Kicker Pack 3, Undead. The final racial set where Lester Smith was directly involved, these units, though made with black and ivory colored plastic, were thematically strictly black, or Death, for obvious reasons. Several alterations were made to the games conventions with these units. First was the absence of ranged missile units. Instead, these units were replaced with ones classified as Light Magic, in conjunction with the standard mages being branded Heavy Magic. Secondly, Undead were granted the concept of stepped-damage, making the larger units very difficult to eliminate from the battlefield.

Jennell Jaquays recalls working with Mr. Smith on the Undead for one rather peculiar reason: “I remember working with Lester on the Undead, specifically because he used the word “décolletage” to refer to the vampire’s chest region.”

Undead saw the creation of yet another set of error dice coveted by collectors, that of the “Mongrel Undead”. Consisting of the Undead mix of colors, the icons are those of the previous race, Firewalkers. Currently, only two varieties have been found, both being single-health units.



As the summer months of 1996 began to roll in, TSR was gearing up for the years ultimate gaming convention, held at that time in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Gen-Con. Mid-year also saw the release of the first retail product containing entirely new gameplay elements since Monsters were released. Originally slated for two separate expansions, Magestorm! consisted of Dragonkin, single colored six-sided dice that were brought into play throughout the game via an all-new spell, Minor Terrains, smaller versions of their larger counterparts that could be implemented by winning a Maneuver attempt and opting to bring the minor into play in lieu of turning the major, and for the first time, a staple of many fantasy games, Magic Items and Artifacts. Also consisting of a single color, these items were available to be added to an army's construction in exchange for an equal number of health of racial units.

Artifacts utilized the standard 10-sided polyhedral design, but the four-sided Items were truly unique in appearance. According to James Ward, Dragon Dice sales were doing well, and the game was brought to the German based Essen Game Fair in 1995. An attendee, William A. Sides, of South Carolina, approached the TSR booth, stating he was a big fan of the game, and had dreamt of a die that hadn't been done yet. He then produced a drawing of an unconventional four-sided die, with an elongated, lozenge shape. A deal was struck to use the design and these became the games Magic Items. With a good-faith agreement in place for the Item dice, and an early August release planned for the expansion, Mr. Sides scrambled to hammer out the details and submit a patent filing for his unique design before the official unveiling. Finally, on August 7th, 1996, a proposal was received by the Patent Office, less than 24 hours before the commencement of Gen-Con '96.



US005690331A

United States Patent [19][11] **Patent Number:** **5,690,331****Sides**[45] **Date of Patent:** **Nov. 25, 1997**[54] **FOUR-FACED DIE**

4,632,397 12/1986 Rivkin 273/145 CA
5,004,244 4/1991 Johnson 273/146
5,375,845 12/1994 Cooter et al. 273/146

[75] **Inventor:** **William A. Sides**, North Charleston,
S.C.**OTHER PUBLICATIONS**[73] **Assignee:** **TSR, Inc.**, Lake Geneva, Wis.

Dragon Magazine, Issue No. 183, Jul. 1992, p. 13, published
by TSR Inc., Lake Geneva, WI.

[21] **Appl. No.:** **698,033**

Allen Varney, "The Current Clack", Dragon Magazine, Issue
No. 234, Oct. 1996, p. 120, published by TSR Inc., Lake
Geneva, WI.

[22] **Filed:** **Aug. 7, 1996**[51] **Int. Cl.⁶** **A63F 9/04**[52] **U.S. Cl.** **273/146; D21/41**[58] **Field of Search** **273/146, 288-291;**
D21/41, 51

Primary Examiner—Benjamin H. Layno
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Jenner & Block

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A die has four faces in the shape of isosceles triangles. The die uses an efficient amount of material and can be read without the player having to pick up the die. Each face of the die has placed thereon an indicium corresponding to only a single face. The die provides an equal chance for each of the four faces to be selected.

[56] **References Cited****U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS**

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3,208,754 9/1965 Sieve 273/146
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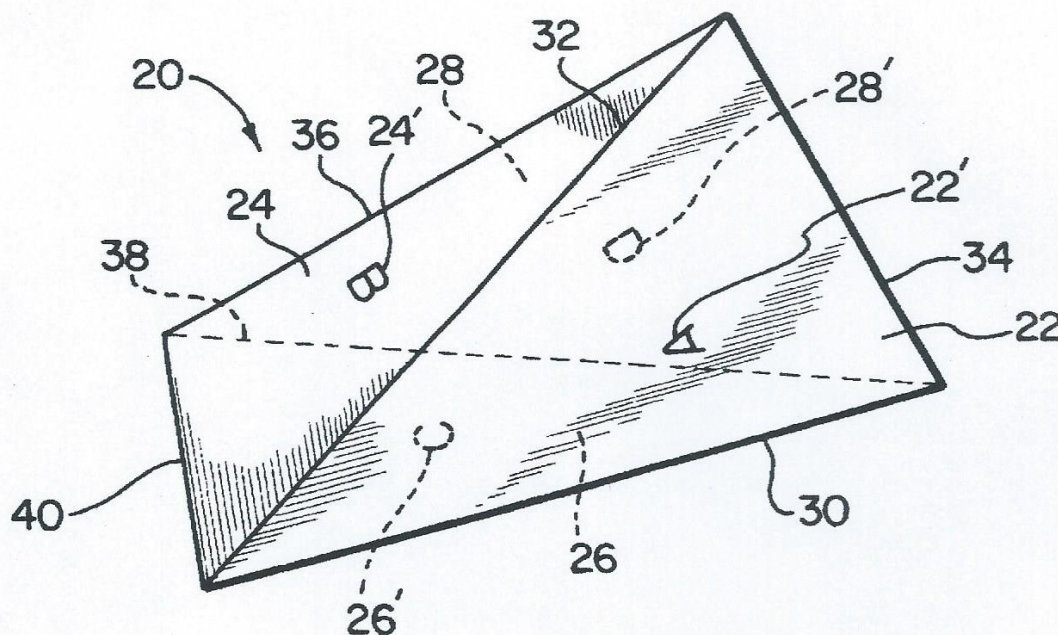
12 Claims, 1 Drawing Sheet

FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

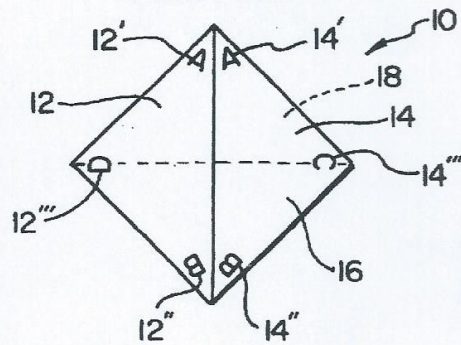


FIG. 2

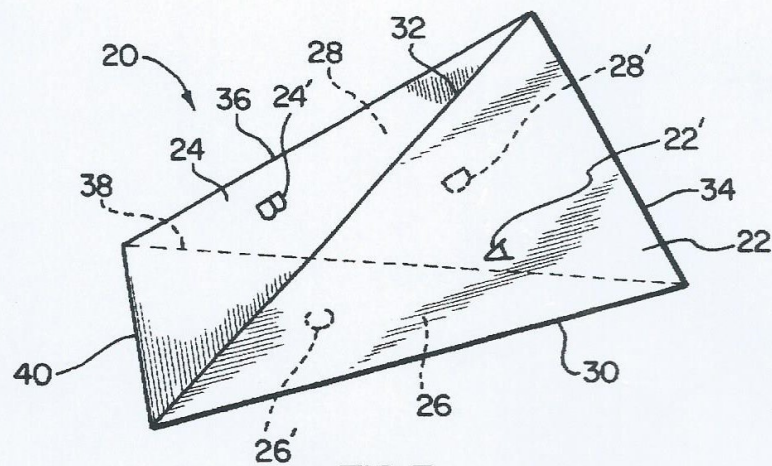
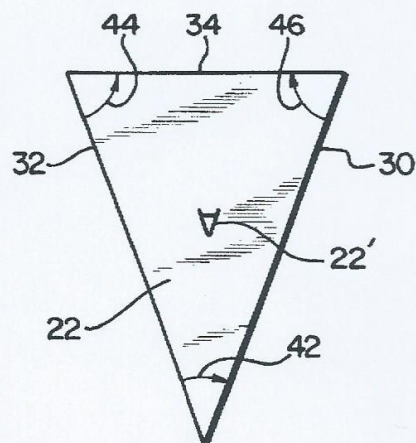


FIG. 3



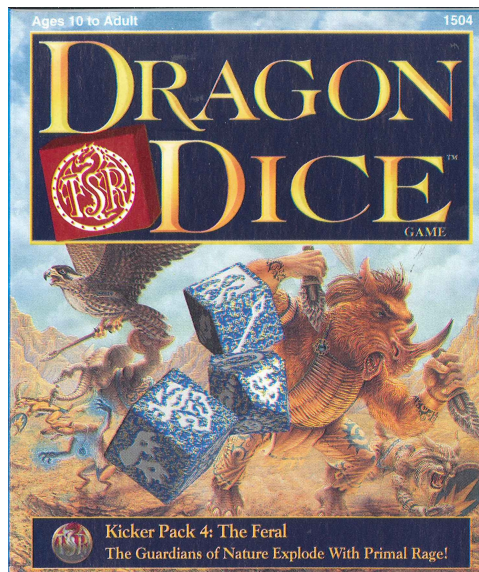
Gen-Con '96, then owned by TSR, saw Dragon Dice as one of the most played games for the conventions duration, and TSR was more than happy to offer support. As well as offering attendees an opportunity to challenge strangers to tournament play, where wins were tallied near the end on the weekend, and a winner chosen, the “grand prize” that year was a complete Magestorm! Set of dice. With 100 Items and Artifacts, 16 Minor Terrains and 45 Dragonkin, to obtain a full set through normal channels would require a bare minimum purchase of 8 boxes, provided none contained any duplication of dice within. A more realistic scenario, therefore, would warrant the purchase of two to three cases.

With the Item dice design revealed for all to see, it wasn't long before the distinctive shape caught the eye of more traditional dice enthusiasts and role-playing gamers, and one person, unaware that the design had been awarded a patent, approached a U.K. manufacturer to produce wedge-dice with numbers, as opposed to Dragon Dice symbols. When the quote turned out to be beyond their financial means, the endeavor was dropped. What follows is in their own words how the situation played out:

Some time later, the Wedge D4's started to appear in shops in the UK. I was curious because the size, proportions and numbering were all the same as the ones I had proposed. They were also being sold under the name Wedge dice - the name I had originally given them. I did a bit of detective work and discovered that, sure enough, the company that was making and distributing these dice was none other than the one I had approached. I contacted the company to complain and they pointed out that dice had already been patented by someone in the US. I did some more detective work and found out that the inventor was a gentleman by the name of William Sides. I contacted him to ask him about the patent.

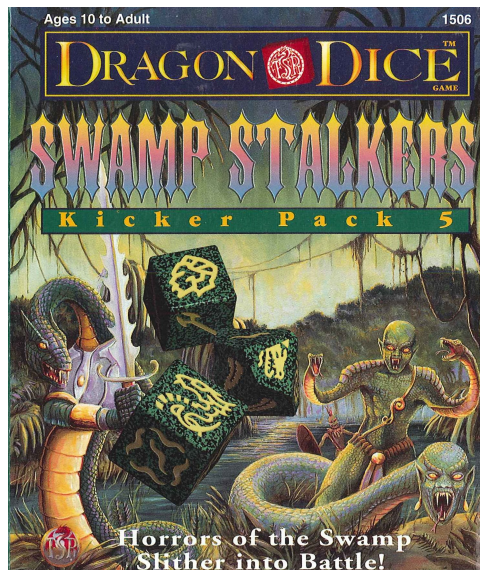
It turned out that he did indeed invent them and that he held the patent in conjunction with Hasbro (who owned the Dragon Dice game at that point). He knew about the numbered Wedge D4's but informed me that they were an infringement of the patent he held with Hasbro. He had never given his permission for numbered Wedge D4's to be made and was not pleased that he wasn't receiving royalties for them. Even though he knew they were out there, he didn't know who was producing them. Of course, I did - it was the company in the UK I had contacted. I even knew who their US distributors were. What's more, when the patent agent representing the British company had contacted me, he had inadvertently admitted in writing (!!!) that the company he represented didn't have the right to produce numbered Wedge D4's. In other words, they couldn't claim ignorance of the patent which is a legal protection against compensation in British law.

I told all of this to William Sides. Soon after, Hasbro issued a cease and desist order against the British company and production of the numbered Wedge D4's stopped.



With Gen-Con's conclusion for another year, TSR turned their sights to the next Dragon Dice release, Kicker Pack 4: The Feral. The first race with a new designer at the table, these units are credited with Bill Slavicsek at the concepts helm. In order to keep racial abilities varied, and thereby retaining market-share, The Feral were granted the ability to increase their ranks via Feralization. Through this ability, an army containing one or more Feral units may, if available, take a one-health Feral unit from the dead unit area and add it to the given army. As with many of the introduced racial advantages, The Feral became the go-to race for many players, allowing for the replenishment of an army's ranks without the reliance upon magic.

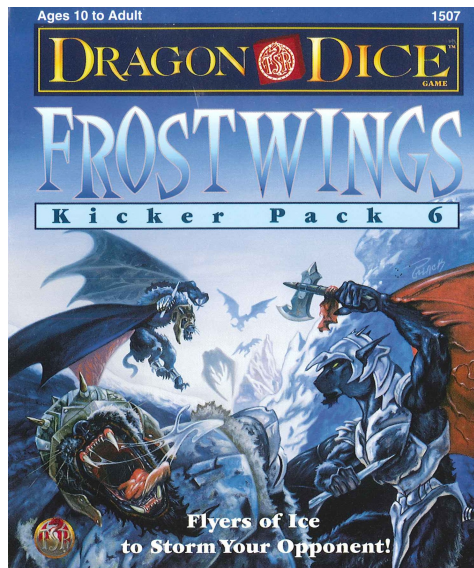
Due to an oversight in the creation of the molds for Feral, TSR had to issue an official errata to the rules for the race. Normally, each 6-sided unit contained a number of icons per side equating to the number of points of results being rolled for, (aside from the ID Icon), and thereby granting each unit a median average of results. This held true until the release of Feral, and the large Tiger-Folk unit's Double-Strike. Intended to have 3 smaller icons, this unit was instead produced with one large icon, which was interpreted as doing one point of damage, instead of three. To keep the median result of this unit within the expected range, the errata was quickly released.



Lastly, the tail-end of 1996 saw the release of the years final Kicker, Swampstalkers. Again with Bill Slavicsek at the drawing board, the horrors of the swamp brought new mechanics to the game. It also brought about the disillusionment of many long-time players and collectors. Imbued with the mutation ability, Swampstalkers earned the distinction of being the first race with the opportunity to increase their numbers beyond the pre-established amount set at the time of army assembly. For every set number of starting health of Swampstalkers, a player was allowed to bring an extra health to be kept out-of-play in their mutation pool. These could then be brought into play by targeting an opposing players units and attempting to mutate them.

The source of dismay was garnered, however, by the change in the stepped rarity of the monsters. All prior Kickers had a relatively easy chance of obtaining even the rare monster, at roughly one in ten Kickers. This was reduced to one in forty for the Swampstalkers, or a 2.5 percent chance. The die-hards were still willing to spend the funds to obtain the unobtainable, however, but not without some trepidation. With this new stepped rarity and the overwhelming power of the race Swampstalkers quickly sold out of their production run.

With 1996 in the history books, and 1997 in full swing, TSR was hard at work designing and releasing the final three color combinations for the game. They were also in the midst of crushing debt, which threatened the future of Dragon Dice, and even TSR itself as a company. Product from all lines was being returned as unsold at an alarming rate, including many of the Dragon Dice products.



Undaunted by flagging sales, Kicker Pack 6, Frostwings, designed by Bill Olmesdahl, was released early in the year. With an inherent anti-magical nature, Frostwings had the ability to reduce the amount of magic rolled by an opponent by a corresponding counter-magic roll of their own. They were also the only race to have Special Action Icons on all units, not just the large and monster dice. Every unit within this race of winged creatures had the Fly ability, making them tough to kill, and hard to outrun.

Not easily dissuaded from a chosen course of action, TSR decided, if one ultra-rare die could potentially bring in much-needed capital, two should be even more lucrative. Thus began the one in thirty-five chance of drawing a large (3-Health) Magic unit. The outrage at this decision was widespread among an already declining fanbase, at a crucial time in TSR's lifespan, with an active on-line community convinced that the rarity decision was nothing more than a cash-grab. Frostwings would turn out to be the last of TSR's completed contributions to the Dragon Dice line.

When Dragon dice entered the market in 1995, TSR was already beginning to experience financial difficulties, in part due to the emergence of the collectible game concept. And while Dragon Dice was expensive to produce, it was aggressively marketed through various tactics. Starters and Kickers were distributed not only to game and comic stores, but to book sellers as well, but the most active push was through conventions such as Gen Con, which was rife with potential players. To facilitate this push, various promotional dice were created to pique players interest. Not available through retailers, these dice were instead handed out to attendees with the hope of bringing as many new players as possible to the table. Two were produced the first year.

The most widely available die, the Dragonlord, was a white pearlized six-sided die with black ink. The first die in a race to be named Eldarim, the Dragonlord was granted the ability that gave the player a chance to control dragons. While under normal game play, a dragon will attack any army at a terrain. When the Dragonlord asserted control, the player could choose whether or not the dragon would attack. It also had the additional benefit of being able to ride the controlled dragon to any other terrain in play.

The second die, produced in much smaller quantities, was arguably the most striking die in the game, the King's Die. Unique in both appearance, and function, the Kings Die was molded in pearlized lavender, with yellow ink. Unlike other units, The kings die could not be targeted or removed from the game, and could not be moved from the Reserves area. The die depicted the five kings from the original races from the starters as well as Amazons, and along with the TSR logo which was wild, allowed for recruitment of a corresponding unit at the beginning of a players turn.

The production of these promotional dice differed from the more readily available components in both location and method of manufacture. While primarily utilizing a compression mold for the other dice, in which plastic pellets are added to pre-engraved plates with cavities, heated and squeezed, for the promotional units, TSR chose to use a UK manufacturer and an injection method. Consisting of removable plates for each side, plastic is injected under pressure to fill the void between the plates. Since each plate could be removed independently of the other sides, this created an unforeseen issue during re-assembly, the variant. Resulting in differing side orientations or plate placement, the production of these promotional dice discrepancies opened up an altogether different niche for collectors.

Support via promotional dice continued into 1996, with eleven officially released dice, distributed through various methods.

Having an extensive history of licensing agreements with various software companies for Advanced Dungeons and Dragons games, then licensee, Interplay, was tasked with developing Dragon Dice for the personal computer market. Though officially released in both the US and overseas in 1997, the dice were produced in 1996, and were only distributed in the US market. Using the same molds used in the making of the Dragonlord, a single die of one of the elemental colors was available per game. Since the available die was visible through a bubble within the game box, it was easy to collect the full set of Dragonmasters, though software prices made it expensive to do so. Unbeknownst to many, this was not the first appearance of a Dragonmaster, however. A very small number were distributed earlier through Interplay Productions Forgotten Realms game, Blood and Magic. Containing only the black Dragonmasters, this was TSR's first time distributing dice in this manner.

The next promo die also had a novel approach to distribution, quite literally. TSR's long term plans for Dragon Dice included several novels surrounding and expanding upon the mythology of Esfah. Cast of Fate, written by Allen Varney, was the first of three on the release schedule. After finding a printer up to the task, the book was commissioned to be printed with a hole in each page, just large enough to contain the die, and shrink-wrapped for distribution. Unlike the Dragonlord and Masters, which only had the ability to control a dragon in play, the new Dragonslayer would instantly kill an attacking dragon if the appropriate icon was rolled. This method of distribution was not without it faults however, as some less than scrupulous players would pilfer the die and leave the novel on bookstore shelves.

Next on the list, the set of three Medallions, were for a while among the hardest of the official promotional releases for players to obtain. Utilizing the same oblong design of the Magic Items, the Medallions were made in bronze, silver or gold colored plastic. Though identical in appearance other than color, each die had assigned to it a differing ability when the ID Icon was rolled. Made with a stepped rarity within the set, the bronze was the most plentiful, the gold

was the least-so, and silver fell in between. Though made for Dragon Dice, the Medallions were originally distributed only to members of TSR's Role Playing Game Association, or RPGA. Not unlike Olympic medals, the higher the ranking of an RPGA member, the more "valuable" the corresponding Medallion awarded. While some demographic cross-over existed, many of the Medallions distributed were quick to trade hands, languish forgotten somewhere or outright discarded. Later, sets were included in Dragon Dice Tournament Packs, pre-assembled kits used by retailers to demonstrate the game to prospective buyers and run in-store competitions.

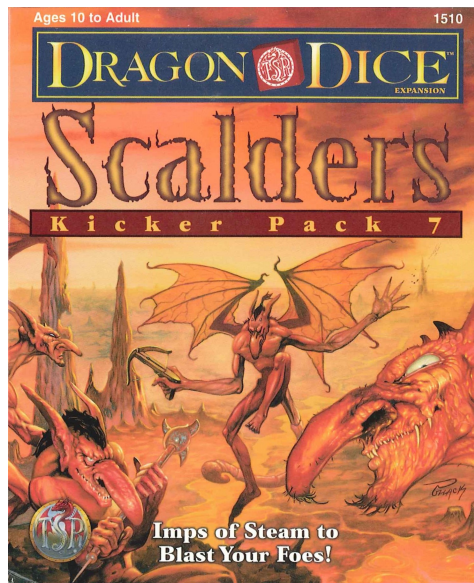
The final officially authorized promotional dice appeared at Gen Con '96, by means of a five foot tall gumball machine. Contained within were plastic bubbles holding either red, or, much less frequently, blue Dragonkin Champions. For the paltry sum of fifty cents, it was possible to get one of these dice, and many attendees did just that, often multiple times, trying to acquire the elusive Blue die. Once again utilizing the compression method, these dice were brought into the game via magic, like their smaller Magestorm! counterparts. Though most were obtained through conventions a small number of each color were packaged for retailer giveaways.

With all the released promotional dice made available in 1996, players and collectors had their hands full trying to complete their sets. Enthusiasts were in for a surprise, however, when one more die was produced, this one without the approval or knowledge of TSR, Inc.

With the manufacturing of the Medallions complete and due to the reduced number of gold Medallions produced, TSR UK found they had a surplus of gold plastic remaining. TSR, Inc. had every intention of producing the Dragonkin Champions in the three remaining colors for future distribution, but one or more UK personnel made an autonomous decision to use this excess material to cast a small run of Dragonkin Champions in gold. Though vehemently denied by the home office, these Gold Champions soon became known to the online community, thus becoming the rarest, and most coveted die to date. With denial no longer an option for the home office, these were eventually acknowledged to exist and became Yellow for purposes of game-play.

Before closing the books on TSR's chapter within the History of Dragon Dice, there is one more project that came to fruition during that time, the Dice Commander's Manual. Compiled by Dori Hein and Dave Eckleberry, this tome was a comprehensive collection of rules, dice icons and, most importantly, statistics and probabilities for each die produced to date. Though rapidly becoming obsolete in light of the many permutations of the rules, the statistical portion remained as an invaluable resource for many years for competitive players.

The stormclouds of financial ruin which had been looming over TSR for a number of years prior, finally released their torrent in 1997. The writers, designers and other related staff remaining, having endured previous rounds of downsizing, layoffs and contract terminations, were confronted with the realization that TSR, Inc., once a leader in the tabletop gaming industry, was facing insolvency. With its treasure trove of artwork, concepts and intellectual properties, the company was an appealing target for acquisition by the very entity that spurred the collectible game market, Renton, Washington based Wizards of the Coast.



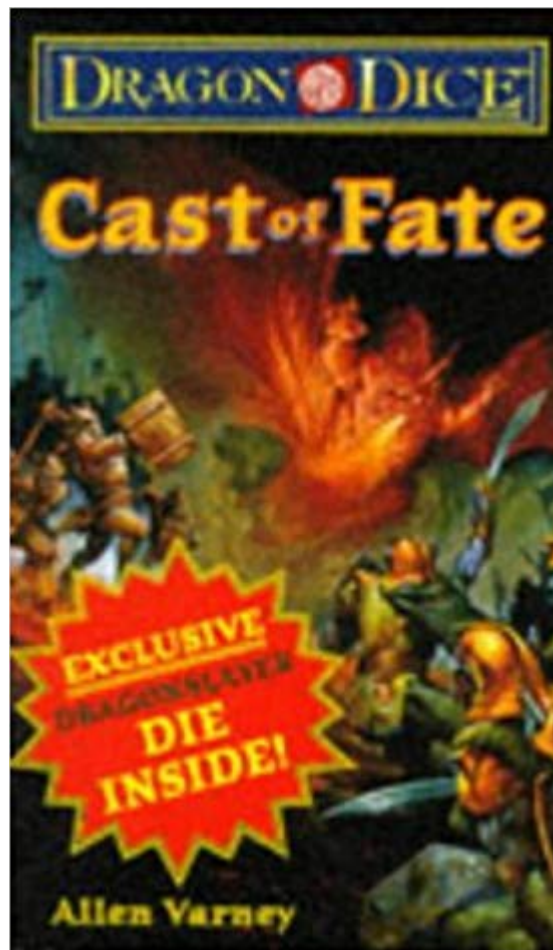
Considering the lead time for manufacture, TSR had already begun production of the penultimate Kicker in the planned racial population of Esfah, Scalders, which once again contained two ultra-rare dice, the magic casting large six-sider, the Inferno, and the elusive monster, the Unseelie Fairie, thereby further eroding the games ever-diminishing fanbase.

Prior to their demise as a stand-alone company, and with the buy-out's finalization, the latest race's printing was allowed to continue. Upon conclusion of production, the Kickers previously ordered by distributors were permitted to be shipped, but Wizards was less than enthusiastic about providing support for one of the key players in the reduction of market-share for their flagship product. The result of this unwillingness to stand behind the game, was the eventual recall and planned discarding of a large number of product produced, including many of the Scalders kickers, creating the “Holy Grail” of dice in the entire line.

With a print run of 60,000 Scalders Kickers, and the Unseelie Fairie having an appearance rate of 1 in 40, only 1,500 were produced. Considering a large portion of these were relegated to a Belgian landfill, the surviving number of Fairies is unknown, and can easily sell for several hundred dollars on the secondary market.

Once Scalders were dealt with, all plans for future races, including the concept for the final Kicker, Treefolk, and expansions were shelved, and Wizards considered the game officially discontinued.

Before closing the book on the TSR chapter, its worth touching upon in more detail, the tie-in novels planned for Dragon Dice. The company had three books on the release calendar, each with a planned promotional die.



The first, and only Dragon Dice novel published under the TSR banner, *Cast of Fate*, was already mentioned, but bears further discussion. Shortly before the release of the game, TSR tasked Allen Varney with bringing the world of Esfah to the page. Armed with only Lester Smith's fourteen page vision of this new, primal world, a single Dragon Dice Starter set and a six month deadline, Mr. Varney went to work. Thus began a rather dark time in Mr. Varney's career.

With the game not yet released, finding other players who had knowledge of the intricacies of Dragon Dice was difficult, so Mr. Varney's normal process of taking considerable care to write tie-in's that were consistent with a given game's rules could not be applied. This resulted in some glaring inaccuracies between what was depicted in his story, and what a particular unit could actually accomplish in the game.

This, coupled with periodic creative blocks, resulted in not only the book being handed over to TSR's editors several months late, but it also heralded the end of Mr. Varney's fiction-writing career with TSR.

Once in the hands of the editing staff, much to Mr. Varney's chagrin, the ending was completely re-written, resulting in a 180 degree change in the final arc of the main character.

When asked about his final thoughts regarding his foray into writing a tie-in novel, Mr. Varney's

final thoughts are as follows:

In the 1990s I wrote several game tie-in novels, though *Cast of Fate* was the only one published. I regret the time I spent writing them, and I wouldn't do it again. By design, the first word in *Cast of Fate* is "hack"; the last word in the book is "work"; and everything in between is...

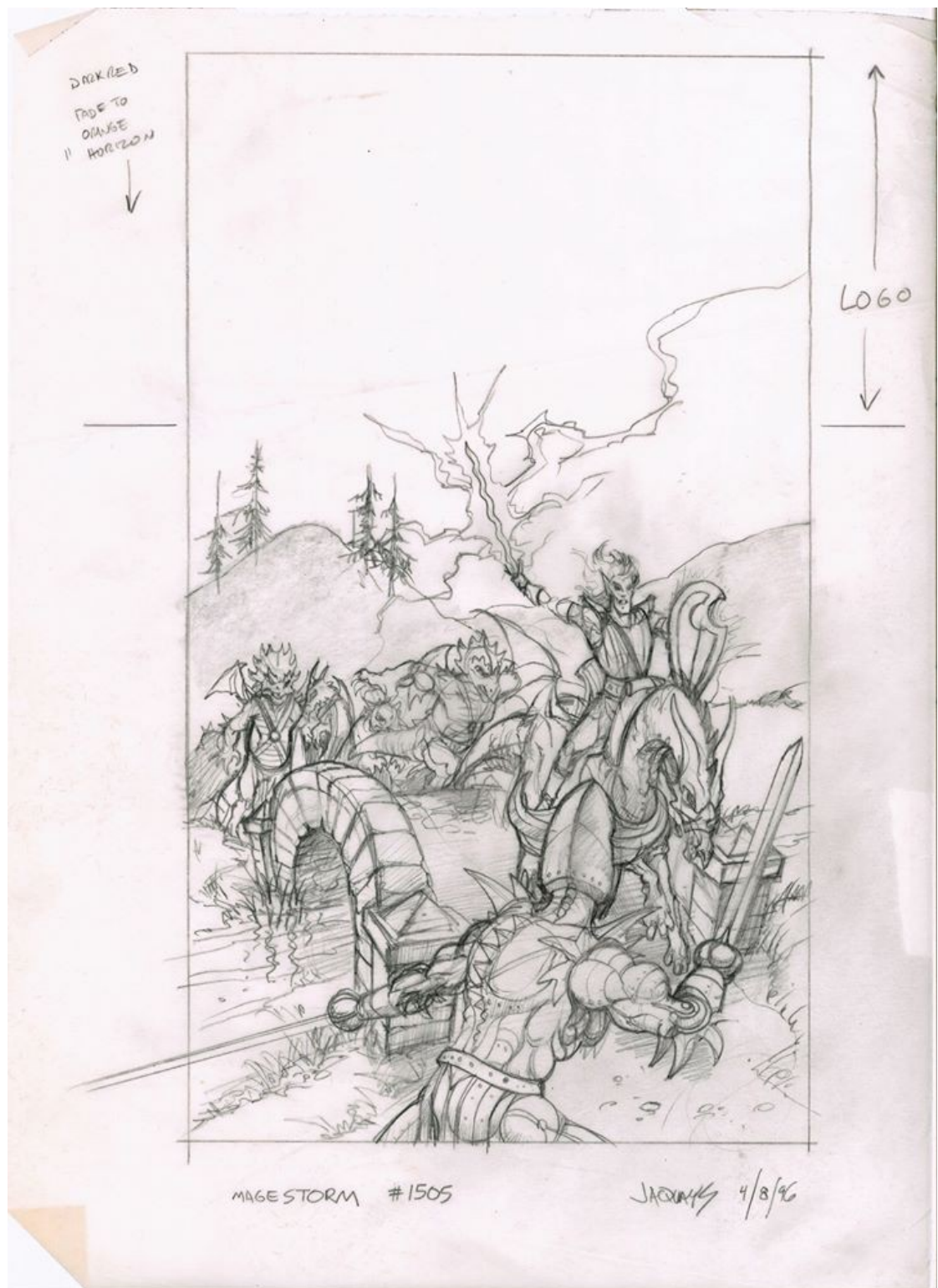
I won't say it's always a bad idea to write in someone else's setting, but don't do it just for the bucks. Write for a world you love, sure -- but there are better ways to make money.

With the demise of TSR, Inc as a stand-alone entity, the other two novels, *Army of the Dead*, and *Time of Champions* faced an uncertain future.

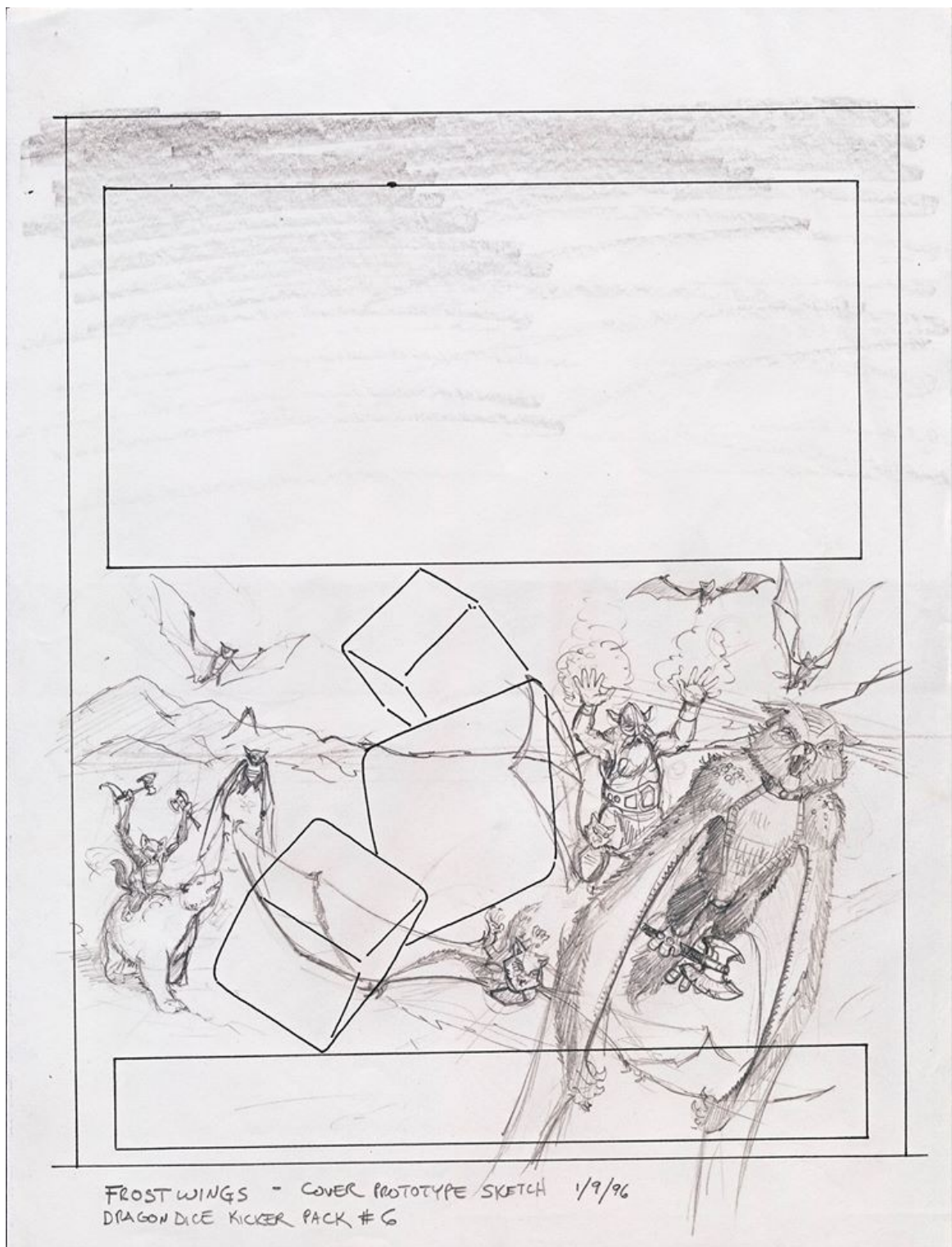
As is often the case with emerging ideas, the journey from concept to production can result in many changes along the way, as the process of trial and error uncovers both things that work, and those which don't. When the initial Icon designs were conceived and put to paper, they were done per manufacturing specifications, and submitted. Even so, some alterations were required before final approval, and some, with no feasible means of making them work in their intended context, were discarded all together.



(Original Dwarf concept artwork by Jennell Jaquays)

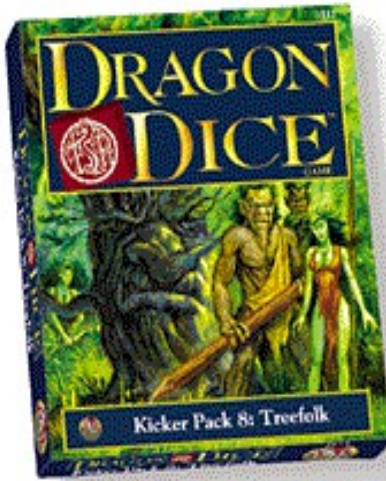


(Original Magestorm! Box concept artwork by Jennell Jaquays)

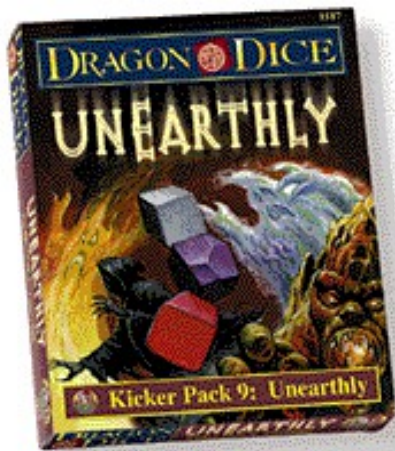


Frostwings Box Artwork concept by Jennell Jaquays)

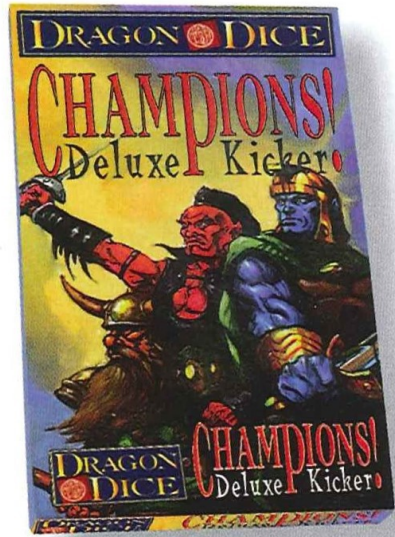
With far-reaching plans for the future of the Dragon Dice line, TSR chose to look beyond their impending collapse, and had rudimentary concepts for expansions beyond the two-color racial combinations, with planned introductions for all new dice as well as gameplay mechanics, but WoTC put an end to these proposed concepts almost immediately.



Though Icon designs and racial and Special Action abilities had been outlined and were in the works, the final two-color racial combination, Kicker Pack 8: Treefolk had not yet entered the Production phase, and therefore never saw completion under TSR/Wotc



Other than some scant design notes, very little is known about Kicker Pack 9: Unearthly, though conceptually, this expansion was intended to introduce less conventional non-Platonic dice to the Dragon Dice Game. These units were proposed to be brought into play via Magic, though their in-game function had yet to be determined before the concept was canceled.



Lastly, another concept for expanding the variety and longevity of Dragon Dice was the Deluxe Kicker: Champions. This concept was posited to contain all-new 4-Health 6-sided units representing the legendary heroes of Esfah's lore. While rumored to be restricted to one of each Champion in play at one time, how they were to be introduced into an army is again, unknown.

A PHOENIX RISES

When TSR's financial situation became insurmountable, it was acquired by Wizards of the Coast, and while all future plans for continuing Dragon Dice were shelved, it still commanded a very loyal following amongst its player base, to the point of, even though after 1996, no Company sponsored Dragon Dice events were held, games and tournaments were player organized at subsequent conventions. It was at Gen Con '98 that the spark was struck to bring Dragon Dice back from the ashes. A cadre of die-hard players, then led by Sean K. Reynolds, formerly of TSR, assembled to discuss implementing changes to the established rules, to balance the game and keep it enjoyable for future players.

Sean approached long-time player Dave Papay and tasked him with gathering together a group of players up to the task of keeping Dragon Dice going.

Using a reference to the television show The X-Files, Dave approached Rob Harland, Will Lutz, Mark Wiker, Scott Ostrander, Mike Bell and Scott Cobbs, asking them to join his Smoke filled Room to make changes to, among other items, the Swampstalkers Mutate ability. Thus, the framework for SFR was begun. Supported by Sean with dice and other swag, Dragon Dice continued to hold a place at Gen Con, Origins Game Fair and other conventions.

In 1999 Sean presented the group with the idea of acquiring the rights to Dragon Dice from Wizards of the Coast. When initially presented with the Idea by Will Lutz, Wizards' position was one of not selling any intellectual property, whether active or dormant.