

DARKSPYRE

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Valley of Tears

by Scot Noel

Lord Borel stood, raising a cup to his departing guests and watching, as did each of his fellows about the hall, while their visitors turned to go. Would they make it to the doors without being attacked? He watched for indrawn breaths, for a twitch of muscle. None came.

First to leave, the God of Intellect bowed and smiled. Small, animal eyes this god possessed, and with them he searched the hall for the figure of Borel, for his host. Upon finding him, the tallest of the gods laughed. He laughed and tapped with long fingers at the bandolier of books which hung from his shoulder, then tapped again at the ring of tomes encircling his waist.

Borel tensed, breathing deep until his armor set tight about his chest. His hand, concealed in a gauntlet of the same red, leathern stuff, threatened to crush the cup he held. Instead he laughed. His black beard parted to show broken teeth, and he laughed as loud and long as the god before him.

Next to rise, the God of Magic struggled beneath a weight of runes, against a necklace whose inscriptions held power, an energy, perhaps, still greater than his own. Yet rise he did. His own belly quaked at some untold jest. His laughter, far less human than the first, filled the council hall with dread. Those nearest him turned pale at the noise.

Here, Borel guessed, between giant old men, between these two alone, lay ability and will enough to bring down the Kingdoms of Man.

Yet there was a third. Short and blackened he stood. Cloaked in sword-worn leathers, it was he, easily, who seemed most vile among the three. The God of War. If death truly lay in wait for the chieftains about Borel's table, impatient for their blood, it lay no further than the smirk of this last of the gods, in his leering and crooked smile.

If I must choose among them, thought Borel. Let it be he who meets my sword.



"Demons!" cried the Prince of Whitney upon the closing of the doors, yet still he glanced cautiously about. "The Gods of the Three Ways are a myth. Smoke will be my tribute to these beggared, ugly wraiths, sword-points my salute!"

"Why now, a thousand and a thousand years after the event?" asked Etenkral, his chain mail scratching the table as he rose. "If we are beholden, why now? They created us and left us be. They can let us be some more." A chorus of eager voices joined in agreement.

"Please sit and do no more damage to my wood," said Borel. He looked to no one, but seemed truly to be studying his nails in the light of a brazier. His voice rose above them, commanding the ear in the most natural of ways. It was as if his ancestors had come to life once again. "This I will tell you: the Gods of the Three

Chesschantra



Ways are a myth. Whose gobbling mouths took up our meats and downed our ale this day, I know not. But they are as Death. Hear them out!"

"Borel is afraid," said one.

"To hear them tell it, we must be tested," said another. "And they will approve or disapprove. It is not for me. Such plans give monsters ascendancy over us."

"We have dined. . ." Borel paused. Too many voices. After counting ten heartbeats, then another two,

he turned and sent flying with a single kick the brazier. Coals and light scattered above the heads of those nearest, the clatter of metal echoing into silence. Slowly, he began again. "We have dined in the past with pirates and we have honored thieves. Our tributes are not for the weak, nor our honors for the dainty and the pure."

"True," said Lord Ardl, the oldest among them, and Borel's friend. "But your point?"

Borel smiled. He almost laughed aloud. "We negotiate with power, my friends. That is the common sense of uncommon men. Be wise. For the sakes of your sons and daughters," he looked to the proudest father of them all, to Etenkral, "hear these demons out." With that he seated himself, and, in reaching for the remnants of a game hen, he chewed and he listened.

About his table in the light of greater and lesser flames, Borel saw complete the Nobility of Man. Twenty costumes, twenty kingdoms, and as many voices and conflicting ways: he knew them all. Once his family had united them, by stealth and by sword. By The Sword. Yet in these days they assembled before him for no greater reason than the size of his feasting hall. It was the largest in the land.

"For the moment we are at peace with one another," said Etenkral. Tall, nearly

the height of the gods, he swaggered about the table, stopping in turn to slap each of the chieftains on shoulder or back. "Now each of these demons has brought a thousand servants with him to the valley. If I have but you, Whitney, and you, Souers, and if Queen Methys of Elba joins us—"

"We will outnumber them two to one," interrupted the Queen.

Borel began to hear it, something outside the walls, beyond the great brass molding of the doors. Voices. For long moments it seemed no more than the whisper of a coming storm.

In the midst of arguing men, Ardl eased himself from his chair and said, "We will need magic." Unheard, his words went trampled by stronger voices. At this, Borel slammed his fist to the table and signaled his friend to repeat himself amid the ensuing calm. "We have little magic," Ardl continued. "Will swords chop up the stone men? Will arrows cut bolts of fire from the sky?"

There was much grumbling, and the noises Borel had heard before, outside, grew louder still. Ardl seated himself while hushed voices talked of an old fool and Borel fixed in memory the owner of each disparaging comment.

"Look no further than Lord Borel's bed for sorcery," advised Etenkral. "He hosts the witch Chesschantra nightly there." Borel watched Queen Methys blush and turn away. Etenkral continued, "Even now she prepares for him. Listen and you will hear the winds sigh and the waters rise, all the demons of lust rushing here. If she has not spent herself already in summoning three other unholy forms."

"Chesschantra stands with us," said Borel. "And I will remember what you have said, Etenkral."

"It is The Sword we require," said Souers, looking to Borel "Long ago your family ruled with it. We all know—"

"That blade is a myth," Borel interrupted. Eyes turned, emotions quickened.

"As the Three Gods are a myth?" asked Whitney.

"If once he had it," Etenkral said, "he sold it surely. Borel will sell anything for a book, or a witch."

Borel threw back his chair. A dagger appeared in Etenkral's hand. They closed for combat. But as they met, the great brass doors opened once again and upon them rushed a cacophony of voices, that noise heard by Borel so imperfectly at first: panic. A major of Borel's Guard, his right eye gone, his tunic a rag of blood, stepped inside.

"My Lord, I take full responsibility." He looked as if he expected to be struck dead on the spot. "We had no options."



Outside, only moments before, the sun had fallen below the crest of mount Suriban, casting the world in hues the color of anger and blood. The dead seemed strewn with the carelessness of a wild melee, while the living moved about in confusion. Women wailed. Borel was the first to venture out across the courtyard of his palace. Ardl followed, and behind him came the remainder of the chieftains, one by one.

Many of Borel's guard lay dead. Their armor was split, their bellies opened wide. A dead girl, a serving wench, seemed to watch Borel's approach from within

glassy eyes. Nearby stood a stone golem. Sand ran from its mouth and from one shattered arm, and the whole of it seemed as lifeless as any mundane stone. Bodies lay everywhere. Merchants and cooks, jugglers and soldiers, their blood mingled on its way to the white stone drains.

"Your men gave a good account of themselves," said Etenkral. He stooped to retrieve a hat, a silky, effeminate thing, wide of brim and topped by a garish feather. It had come from a servant of the War God, and Etenkral spat on the dead thing's face. A step further on lay a jester, one of Intellect's fools. This creature had found himself separated from his cap of bells, and his skull.

"I gave orders they be entertained," said Borel. Last he had seen his courtyard in good repair, filled with decoration and song. It had been a feast he'd ordered, not a battle. Jesters had danced, and the God of Magic's rough-hewn men had laughed a gravel laugh. Servant girls vied for position on their mountainous shoulders.

Only the War God's minions had seemed sullen, Borel remembered. They drank in silence. It was as if they found themselves unable to meet the gay promise of their flowing capes and laced collars, but instead itched and fretted, waiting nervously for war.

"It started with a duel," said Borel's major. "One of these dandies, and. . ." He stopped, wiping at his bloodied cheeks and looking about to collapse. Yet Borel knew his man. There was more, something far worse that this soldier of soldiers seemed unwilling to say.

"They can be crushed!" cried Etenkral. "Look about you. Cracked stone and bloodied flesh. Who will join me? Join me and drive these dog-faced boys to the sea!" Silence. In the moment of Etenkral's frenzied speech, in the few heartbeats that lay between his opening cry and the last of his words, the truth had become known. Slowly, his sword drawn, the big man turned to Borel. Quickly, his attention passed the shamed look of his host and went on to focus where some of his own men now stood.

"Your son," said Borel.

"He fought well," said the Major. "He challenged one of the dandies, and when three attacked, he fought them all. I stepped in, and my men with me. Then it began."

"Where are the Gods now?" asked Borel.

Again, the major hesitated, as if knowing more than he was willing to tell. "The tallest is in my Lord's library. Of the Sorcerer, I know not, but the dark one who watched us fight, he returns even now for their encampment in the valley."

"Rest now, soldier," said Borel. "You have failed to protect a royal guest, and I will weigh that life against your fate. . ." Behind them, Etenkral cried out to heaven, like an animal whose leg lay snared in jaws of iron.



Borel entered the library with his sword drawn. He entered alone. Crimson light flooded in from the west, throwing long shadows across the many shelves. His boots clicked across the marble floor in small, careful steps. There.

The God of Intellect rose against the highest of the shelves, plucking from

among Borel's treasures a tome at the furthest measure of his reach. This book he smelled. Then, slowly, he allowed it to open in his hands. With tiny eyes he peered down. His beard of silver cascaded across the page.

"Written by hand," said the God. "And you have here scrolls as well, parchment copied again and again down the centuries?" His voice filled the room with the character of glass chimes. "How pitiful." He dropped the volume, which turned to dust as it fell.

Borel laid his sword across a table. He took a seat. "Who are you?" he asked.

"You do not accept us as divinities? The Gods of the Three Ways." The tall one looked about. "Do these scribblings tell you more?"

"Some things they tell me," Borel said. He nodded toward his amassed holdings of knowledge, of inked paper and parchments bound in gold. "They call me the Lord of Laeytroeb, a small land riding the back of a small world. They say lands beyond mine fill the sky at night, and our seas are not the edge and end to things."

"We created you," said the God of Intellect. "We gave you life, this world." Long fingers wrapped about a few more books, causing them to crumble. Their remnants fell like gray ash upon the robes of the god. "We set you upon a path."

"The books tell a different tale," said Borel. "Long ago a great storm gave life its cause. Lightning quickened it. The sea became its womb."

With one eye the tall one peered to the heart of the latest volume he had plucked from the shelves. He caressed the book.

His fingers ran the course of its spine. He said, "we had hoped to see you further along. Millennia have passed. You build no ships; you dig no ores; you live, still, in cold stone forts. It is a testament to your squabbling selves."



"If what you say be true, then you made mistakes," said Borel. "We are a testament to your fumbling ways."

With a snap the God of Intellect closed the book and added it to his belt. Carelessly, he reached for another. "True men, men of any worth, would have reached those stars, those other worlds, by now. We should wipe you away, begin yet another time."

"You are outcasts." Borel rose. As he approached the god his voice grew louder. "Who chased you three here? Why bully my world, and what voice from heaven will exorcise you?"

The God of Intellect brought down one finger, touching its yellowed nail to Borel's nose. A laughter of glass chimes filled the room. "Can you find no answers here, in these childish scribblings?" asked the god. Then the giant turned. He put his back to Borel and spread his arms wide, his robes making them seem like wings, their shadows encompassing the whole of one great shelf. The books began to crumble. Within moments the sounds of dust, waves of it cascading from shelf to shelf, surrounded the Lord of Laeytroeb and his tormentor both.

"You will attack us," said the God of Intellect.

"You seem intent on producing the outcome," Borel responded.

"But even now I would rather deal with you than die a useless death."

"Convince your people of that, Lord Borel, and yet may they be spared!"



With a leaden heart and a dull ache growing behind his eyes, Borel left the ruin of his library. Land, treasure, alliances: he had given up each in good measure at one time or another for a part of that knowledge now gone to dust. He had spent a lifetime, or so it seemed, locked away to learn the written languages of the world.

"Chessu!" he called as he entered the tower, and again as he reached the tower's heights. "Chesschantra, I need to hear your voice." Magic seemed everywhere. As overwhelming as had been the presence of Intellect within the library, here magic reigned. Space turned and perception folded in upon itself. Unseen hands caressed his cheeks. Winds sighed, and all the devils of lust and playful reverie seemed to dance and bound, unseen, beneath his feet.

Borel approached the witch's den through a turn in the stairs. The smell of witching potions, sweet and spiced, fell toward him on the breeze. He stepped on, hearing her voice. His breath quickened. His desire took hold. Through parted curtains he moved toward their place of sharing, and there, he saw them both.

Her golden hair, her quick animal motions, the beauty of her cries: all were here and focused brightly. Borel turned away. The God of Magic's rune necklace had glowed with the fierceness of the sun.



In the days to follow no voice rose from among the chieftains. No answer, united, was brought before the Three. Smaller kingdoms, holding tenuously against the advances of their neighbors, saw in the gods a chance for stability. Others

grumbled that no opportunity had been afforded their guests to explain their plans for Mankind. If they had only to agree to a testing of sorts, what would it be? Still others, led by Etenkral, prepared for war.

For his part, Borel outfitted two of his finest horses and rode, with a friend, for the base of Mount Suriban. They skirted the forests of the valley and headed high into rock and wind.

"A man would have challenged him," said Borel. "God or not, death or not, a man would have challenged him."

"You are a lord," said Ardr. Stopping for a moment, he allowed his horse to drink from a mountain stream. "You are supposed to have more sense than a man." Ardr paused, rubbing at his toothless jaws and considering his next words carefully. "My friend, as long as I have known Chesschantra I have measured her will to be as strong as the twenty lords combined. If she had not wanted—"

"Stop your words, old man!" Borel warned. He pulled his horse around and brought it back to the stream so that it too might drink. "Whatever her will, this matter rests between the Lord of Laeytroeb and one fat, laughing, ungrateful guest. I will wipe my blade on his yellow robes. Oh, Ardr, am I a fool?"

"No," replied Ardr.

"Am I a fool to retrieve the sword?"

"I know of no fools with your blood, Lord Borel, including those who put the sword in its grave. That blade is a danger to us as great as the Three."

Borel looked down as if contemplating the stream. Light scattered across its surface and deep, deep within, a sound of chimes moved along its rippling course. He spat at the waters and watched them wash his curse away. Gone in an instant. He turned to Ardr and said, "yet you still ride with me?"

"I am an old man," said Ardr. "An old man should see great things before he dies." Loosing the thongs from his saddle, Ardr lowered a skin of ale into the current, letting it cool. He exchanged smiles with his friend. "How will we find this place? Was not the book destroyed?"

"The God of Intellect now wears it as his prize," answered Borel. "And though it tells of the sword, it tells not where. Those pages were torn from it, long ago."

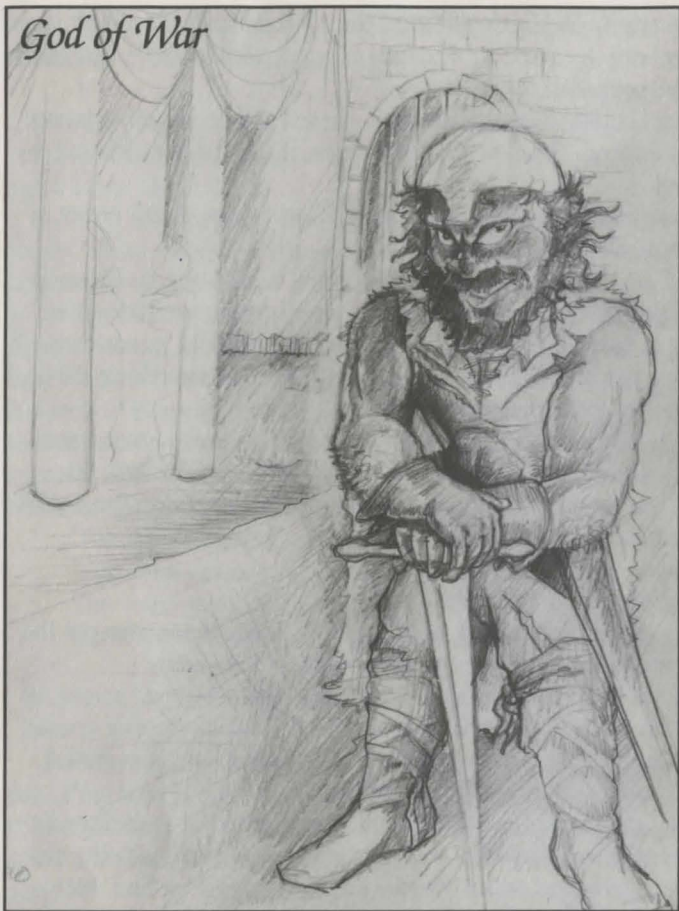
"To be hidden, where?"

Borel smiled a broken smile and with two fingers tapped the space between his eyes. Together they laughed, and after a hearty drink, resumed their course.

About the base of mount Suriban wound many, deep ravines, a tribute to her steep cliffs and the violence of winter rains. In that at least, Borel had been granted luck. For over half the year the place he sought lay under water. In a month, certainly in another two, the path he chose would be scoured clean in a chaos of foaming waves.

They rode the last leg of the journey in silence. Shadows closed about them and the rocks grew tight. It soon became necessary to ride single file, and then to lead their nervous mounts through the growing gloom. They were close. Borel listened, as he knew he must, for the sound of waters, muffled and deep.

Hours passed as Borel felt his way in the darkness. He moved not far, but searched in a limited space. At last he found an opening, and confirming in his mind that it must be the entrance he sought, he bade farewell to his friend Ardr and slipped into eternal night.



No torch could help Borel here. He pushed forward with the roof of the cave at his back and the floor tearing at his belly. He had not gone far before he found it necessary to shed his leathern armor like a snake shedding its skin. Never before had he known complete darkness. No moon, no stars, no shades of gray came to rescue his beleaguered eyes.

Time expanded. Without the sun, without conversation, every moment became now,

every motion the only motion. Then the angle changed. The cave widened. For a time Borel found himself sliding, headfirst down a slope of rain-slick stones. Curses, his own curses, echoed in his ears.

The sliding stopped. After a moment's rest, Borel pushed forward. Incredibly, the roof of the cave seemed even closer to its floor. And things lived here. Borel felt them scuttle past. One, tangled in his beard, caused Borel to cry out. In the confined space, it seemed an eternity before he could pull back his hand and extricate the thing. Beetles. "Big enough for a man's dinner," mused Borel.

Time passed. How many hours, Borel did not know. He thought of the Sword, of its legends. Long ago men had given it a name. Warmonger. No pretty title was this, nor images heroic did it bring to mind, but what it said, it said truly.

Once upon a time, supposedly, the gods had delivered unto man a blade of magic. One symbol. One people. Into the hands of Borel's ancestors they had placed the thing and then vanished back to their realms above. Whether it could throw lightning as they said, or destroy with a touch, Borel remained uncertain. He knew only that some quality of the weapon terrified men.

At last Borel found himself unable to move a handbreadth further on. Though he pushed and scabbled at the rock with great energy, he seemed only to worsen

his position. He was wedged tight. His blood pounded in his ears, and no attempt to move forward or back lent him any success. The weight of Mount Suriban pressed mercilessly down. Each breath became less. His lungs felt like they were being squeezed toward some dark, eternal emptiness.

Borel calmed. He worked for cool, shallow breaths, and put his mind to work. What had allowed his ancestors to pass this point? He thought and he listened. From far below, the sound of trickling water reached up to greet him. Had they come this far, then let fall the blade? So close he could not imagine failure, Borel began once again to exert his strength. Centered in his thoughts, he held an image of the Sword and of one god's death.

Slowly the pressure eased, allowing Borel to continue on his way. How? thought Borel. It was as if the mountain itself had tested him, and finding some quality within to its liking, had let him pass. The mountain, or something else.

Soon the path widened and the roof arched high above Borel. Now a new terror and a new problem confronted him. When confined in the narrow throat of the mountain, he could proceed toward his goal as surely as a marksman's arrow. But now? Reach to either side and there was nothing. Listen, and the sound of flowing water was all around.

Lights began to appear. Borel raced toward the first of them and stumbled, cutting his knee badly against a rock. Turn his head this way or that, and the same lights appeared, nebulous flashes of white and green. Bursts of blue and red joined the others to taunt him and draw him forward. After a time of shouting and falling, with desperation growing in his weakened frame, Borel found the source. They were his lights. Phantoms of his mind, or of his sun starved eyes, they took no heed to whether he covered his eyes or held them open.

"Ardr!" he said into the darkness. Suddenly, he found his own voice a comfort. And though his friend stood in another world so far above, he continued. "Ardr! there is a thin veil between panic and me. Guide my hand, my friend."

After a deep breath, Borel knelt on the rock before him. He might as well have been alone, trembling on the plain of eternity itself. But his right hand pressed down with a certainty all its own, reaching forward until it broke the surface of an icy pool. Chain mail, scaled metal: his fingers met the object and retreated. His mind raced. Surely it had been the hilt of a sword, of The Sword. Water splashed as he plunged his hand back after the object and grasped it tight.

Though he could not see it, he heard, and he felt, and he knew the blade as it broke the surface and came all at once, exposed, into the air of the cave.

I will take you out, said a soundless voice. Borel shuddered at the experience of another's thoughts within his mind. And we will find him.



Betrayal, Borel felt it emanate from the blade. It was the single strength that kept him going, the ray of blackness that cut deeper than the night about him and led him home. Bloodied by his encounters with rock and stone, he emerged at last. His trials had been no less during the ascent. If anything, the Sword had lent him its will. It had nurtured him and strengthened his grip, at times seeming physically to aid him in his climb through that tortuous chimney of stone.

"My lad, you are alive!" cried Ardril. Involuntarily, Borel smiled. He moved blindly toward the voice. His light starved eyes shut tight against the glare of sun and sky. "It's been days!"

"My Lord, let me help you." It was another voice, the voice of the major. A hand gripped Borel's extended arm and led him for many steps, until sunlight washed with impressive heat along Borel's spine. "I followed the duct," the soldier continued. "Far enough to find your armor. I retrieved it."

Both Ardril and the major worked to clean Borel's wounds. In turns, they relayed to him the events of hours past, of the news the major had ridden hard to deliver.

"Lord Etenkral is dead," said the Major. "He rode down the God of War and fought him straight. Those who saw it say the little one released a bolt of flame. It consumed Etenkral and his charger both."

"Etenkral's death united the twenty," added Ardril. "Every armed man in all the world, it seems, marches into the valley of Suriban. And there the Three await."

"What of Chesschantra?" asked Borel. At last his vision began to accept the brilliance of the day. His first sight was of the major, the man's face now scarred, a patch covering his right eye. "What of her?" he repeated. He had not spared this fool's life to be greeted by silence.

"She has left the palace," the Major admitted at last. "You will find her in the valley, in the tent of the Magic One."

Borel felt the strength drain from him. He turned from the major. For the first time in his life he could not look another in the face. His fingers reached involuntarily for the object he had dragged with him out of the earth.

No length of polished metal greeted him, no glitter from the sword. The tip was broken; a piece the length of his middle finger was missing from the blade. The body of the weapon lay scaled and blackened. Borel's breath caught in his throat.

"What is this, My Lord?" asked the Major.

"Listen to me, lad," said Ardril. Borel felt the hand of his friend come down upon his shoulder. "The witch has made her choice. Forget her, she is not worthy."

Borel stood, brushing Ardril aside. He looked to the major. There he saw a weariness unlike any he had seen before in a man. Perhaps it was fever, or the effect of wounds but a few days old. Or perhaps he saw himself, a reflection of his own exhaustion in the major's gaze.

"Are we ready?" Borel inquired.

"Yes, My Lord," said the Major. "Troops and weapons, food and supplies. I have readied everything, prepared it all. We wait only for your word."

"Then the word is given," said Borel. His hand spasmed, growing tighter about the hilt of the tarnished blade.

"No, not so!" cried Ardril. He grasped Borel's shoulders. In desperation, he tried to force the younger man's eyes to meet his own. He could not. "The twenty have no plan; you have no plan. There has not been time!"

"What would you have me do, old man?" asked Borel. His right arm began to move with an easy swing.

Ardril saw the twist of the ancient blade, saw the tension in his friend's face. He said, "if that is the sword, use it! Unite the twenty with you, become our King again. I trust you, lad. You alone can outwit these demons three."

For a heartbeat, Borel seemed to consider the words. Then, between clenched teeth he said the name: "Chessu."

"May she rot in—" The words caught in Ardril's throat, and he would regret them with each second of his remaining life. Up came the ancient blade, the rusted hulk. In Lord Borel's hands it became a bludgeon. And as it fell it whispered after its victim's blood: kill. Borel struck again and again, and as he did the sword began to lose its scales. Blood cleansed it. Anger honed its blade.

"My Lord!" cried the voice of the major in Borel's ears, and at last, slowly, Borel began to ease his swings, to realize the enormity of his violent outburst. And yet, with Ardril dead, he regretted nothing. He thought only of the God of Magic, of Chesschantra, and of death.

"Soldier, I have never called you by name," said Borel. He signaled the major for his armor. He sheathed the well-pleased blade.

"I am William, my Lord. Son of the Smith of Baggaley."

"Well, William, son of Baggaley, hold you now my lands and the castle of Laeytroeb." Borel pulled his armor safe about him and felt William fix the cinches tight. "See too to Ardril's rest. Bury him well. Do these things and your debt to Etenkral is paid."

"Where will my Lord go?" asked William.

"To war," answered Borel. Taking the reins of his horse in hand, Borel pulled himself into the saddle and turned toward the valley. To war, echoed the weight of steel, the awakening demon - echoed Warmonger at his side.

By the fourth day of battle neither man nor god felt the warmth of the sun upon his back. Once thick with ancient forest, the valley of Suriban had been transformed. Ash fell like rain from the burning trees, and clouds from the firestorm blotting out all light save their own internal, hellish illuminations.

Riders, humans, charged down a dry stream bed. Their horses balked at uneven stones, and waves of smoke rushed with them into an enemy position. These were Borel's men. Their lord rode with them, and, together, they outflanked a force of the War God's men.

Heat swept along every sinew, across every fiber of Borel's being. It was a cutting, vicious heat. But in his hand, like a coal from the depths of hell, Warmonger sparked a crimson sparkle and fell to sweep away blades and hands and cursing voices. It drove him on. It moved and maneuvered, wielding Borel and his followers as if they were the weapon and it their master. It gave each the luck of the kill and more. To the right, Warmonger would command, and to the right they would go. Often through deadly flames, they rode untouched. Destroy. Attack. And on they went.

Ahead, its peak obscured by clouds of roiling gray, lay a giant's tent. Yellow. Borel recognized it at once. Here was the color of the Magic One, and the Lord of Laeytroeb spurred his horse up from the darkling stream and into the clearing.

Crossing charred earth and a glitter of embers, Borel raced for the tent. His horse grew wild, uncontrollable in the heat. And riding in to block him came two of the War God's men. One rode with an arrow in his throat. The other controlled his mount by will alone, having lost an arm but hours past. This one held in his remaining hand a mace of skulls. Their flowing capes smoldered. They grinned broadly, glancing to one another as if to say goodbye before rushing Borel. In a defiant charge they came. And Warmonger greeted each.

The thunder of storms coursed his demon blade, and Borel saw the lightning rise. From hilt to tip of sword, the charge cracked, a blue-light whip to strike the first rider full in the face. The enemy tumbled, glowing, from his mount. The second, he with the mace of skulls, saw his weapon cleaved in two. Twisting back along its path, Warmonger cut deep through laced cloth and cape and cracked in an anger of electric blue. Now! said Warmonger, and Borel knew the blade had reached its evil heights, awakened fully, and at last.

He charged for the wall of the tent and cut it wide. Within, he dismounted. The sword led him on, eager and tearing through this curtain and that. Then he found them. Alone.

Borel stopped, dead still at the sight, watching as the two forms mingled upon a bed of ivory. But no love, no unfolding of great desires passed before him. The God of Magic was dying, and Chesschantra weaved the spell. Between her fingers and the god's throat, a noose of magic cords tightened. With a start she turned away from her deadly task and met Borel's eyes with her own. At once, she knew!

"Get out!" the witch ordered. "You were a fool to bring that here, and to think ill of me!"

Raising the blade high, Borel said, "Warmonger has routed them. These gods are gods no more!"

"I had things well in hand," Chesschantra said. Her eyes spoke of deeper meanings, and she might have struck out at him, had she been free to do so. She looked away and down to the weakening form beneath her. "He barely struggles now. So much like a boy he was. And as with you, My Lord, so easily maneuvered."

"The armies of the Twenty ride with me," Borel said. He threw the words out in proof or challenge, finding some need to defend himself gnawing at his heart. Warmonger glowed sullenly at his side. "We set the valley afire and rode unseen along their flanks."

"And who, My Lord - my demon armed warrior - pray tell me who among you devised this clever strike?" It was almost as if Chesschantra knew the answer, even before the words had passed her lips. And Borel shuddered to think of the possibilities, of the plans within plans that had whirled on about him, unseen by both gods and men.

He answered quick and true. "Queen Methys of Elba devised our assault."

"And so, poor Borel, there are those of us who know what we are about." Chesschantra said the words without cruelty, but with a pity neither Borel nor the sword within his grasp could tolerate. The blade began to move. "I take from you the last of life," said Chesschantra, and she reached for the rune necklace of the god.

"No!" Borel screamed. "He is mine!" The sword swung high in Borel's grasp,

forcing Chesschantra from her goal with an arc of lightning blue. The god gasped, his hands reaching for his throat as the witch tumbled from him. Then came down the blade, not upon the immortal one, but across Chesschantra's struggling form. Seeing the cut, she blocked it with the last of her strength. Lightning magic and shield magic clashed. Destroy her, urged Warmonger, but Borel could not, and though it required all his strength to with-

draw the blade, he managed it. At his feet lay Chesschantra, unconscious, but alive.

The ground shook.

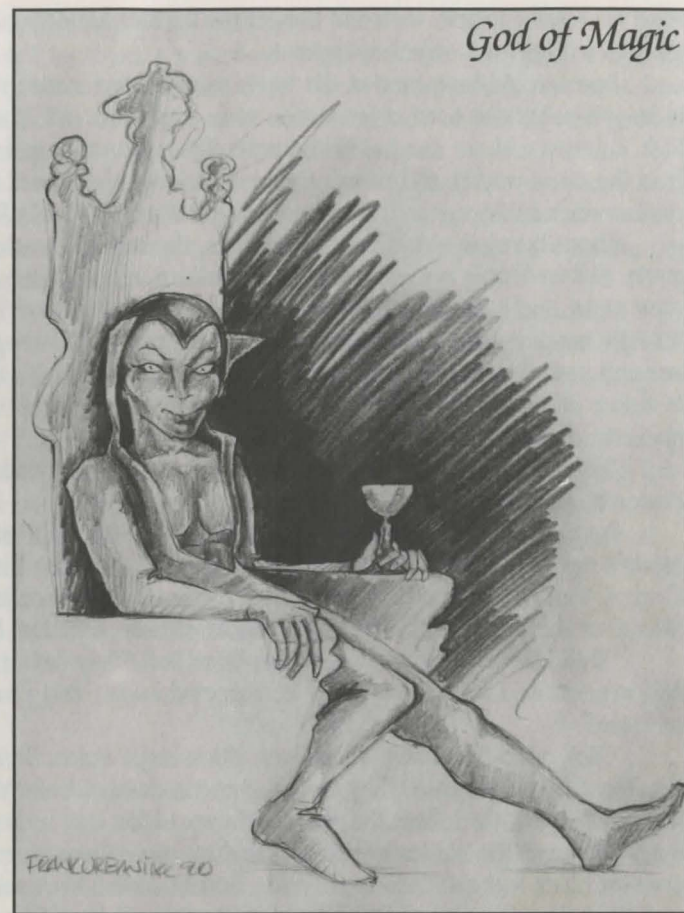
"Lord Borel, Lord Borel!" came a handful of voices from outside the tent. A moment later two of Borel's Guard entered, their faces blackened by smoke. "Stone men," they informed him. "More than we can fight alone."

"Take the witch," Borel ordered. "Back to the castle with her and no stopping you."

The guards did as they were told, one of them lifting Chesschantra across his shoulder and hurrying her from the tent. The other looked to his master for answers, bewildered by the thunder of stone feet nearly upon them.

"Go!" thundered Borel. Warmonger echoed the command, and, in terror, the second man hurried out of sight. Borel stepped toward the God of Magic. Raising his sword high, he remembered his promise to clean its blade upon the robes of the Magic One. Warmonger sparkled in his hands, and, upon a deep breath, Borel let it fall.

The world exploded in a rush of stone bodies, tearing through the tent as might a stampede of giant beasts. Warmonger cut stone and stone beneath as two of the giants fell to block their master's death. Others reached out with hands at



ease in crushing temple walls and batted the Lord of Laeytroeb high and back through a falling rush of yellow curtains.

Borel would have died at the blow, as would any mortal without Warmonger in his grasp. Yet the Lord of Laeytroeb rose. And as he did, Warmonger stabbed high, entering a stone man below the waist. The creature stumbled. Sand poured from the open wound, and though the beast tried to hold back its fate, the grains ran between its fingers and, in moments, it fell dead at Borel's feet.

About Borel, in a rumble of movements, the rest of the stone army formed a circle. Still as temple columns they stood, statues with only one opening among their ranks. And it was into that opening the God of War moved silently, quickly. In his right hand he held a sword twice the dimensions of Warmonger. Black as coal he seemed now, with muscles of polished ebony tight beneath his sword-torn leathers. In stance and bearing he reminded Borel of some great animal, taut and ready, about to strike. Panther? Leopard? It mattered not.

"You have won, little man," said the God of War. "You and that traitorous demon at your side."

Borel could feel it in Warmonger, a hatred welling up from the depths of the blade's evil soul. It knew this being before them. It had once belonged with the God of War, or perhaps they hailed from the same dark place in the evening sky. Whatever the relationship, Warmonger spoke clearly: Fight him! Attack!

"Withdraw your forces," urged the War God. "They have proved themselves and wearied us. I will let you pass." He stepped aside. "And you will give us peace to leave."

"No!" cried Borel and Warmonger with a single voice, their eager rush taking the War God by surprise. They closed. Swords clashed. In Borel's grasp, Warmonger reached out to deflect the War God's next blow and to counter with its own. Again and again the blades lashed out, flashing razors maneuvered through a deadly game of block and cut. Then it was over. Borel tumbled back and away, retreating with three less fingers on his left hand. And of the God of War, his sword lay all about like the pieces of some shattered mirror.

Now! cried Warmonger, cried the voice of the demon deep within Borel's brain.

In the hands of the god, fireballs appeared. Warmonger countered with lightning. Borel remained all but helpless, unable even to shield his eyes from the growing light. Then came the clash, the eruption of energies never meant for the world of man. Demon sword and Battle God, each tested the will of the other in one fiery, eternal instant. Then the world dissolved. In a rush of winds, everything seemed to be driven and consumed and destroyed. Borel saw a great darkness open before him, and into it he fell unknowing and unaware.



When consciousness returned to the Lord of Laeytroeb, it came in fits and starts, in images torn from a dream of death. It was a dream in which armies burned and castles fell, and the land lay dark beneath a rising smoke of destruction. And it was true. Bodies lay everywhere. Scattered about were bones and blackened skulls, the remnants of men and weapons, of horses, armor, carts, and the bare

poles that once flew the flags of many nations.

The valley itself lay dead, a wasteland stripped of forest and opened to the howling wind. And of sounds, Borel heard but two, the rush of that now ceaseless wind and the wailing of women, an army of women that now moved down from the villages. They crossed the dying embers to find their dead.

At first Borel could not be certain whether he imagined the movement, or if the trembling of the earth beneath him was real, holding in its restless vibration some new danger, some terrible purpose. Then it came. He turned toward the center of the rumbling. He saw it rise.

From the center of the ashen land, a tower rose. Its sides sloped to a steeped top, a spire. The land stopped its shaking, but the tower remained. It waited there, and as he watched, Borel saw three forms retreat into its unholy walls.

At last Borel rose. With a heavy heart he surveyed the destruction, the utter and inescapable misery his pride had unleashed upon the world. He reached for the sword at his feet. For an instant, in that darkest time, Borel had hoped to turn Warmonger against his own flesh. But the blade was silent. It, as Borel, seemed drained of life. Only one thought kept him on his feet, one possibility to turn him back across his awful course.

"Chessu," he called across the broken land. "Chessul!"

And with a single step, Borel began his journey home.

EPILOGUE

In days to follow an apparition appeared before the survivors, in straw huts and in castle halls alike, and with a ghostly voice it issued the Challenge of the Three. In time the gods would return. From their Darköpyre, as they called it, they would unleash such terrors as the armies of the Suriban Valley had never dreamed.

Yet the gates of Darköpyre lay open, and, for mankind, the Three held out one hope. "Send us your champions," proclaimed the apparition. "One by one, let your bravest enter here. Find we but one who can pass the trials of our tower, and you, all of you, may live!"

For many years the challenge meant no more to peasants and farmers than the taunting of some victorious enemy. Without their leaders they cared little for ghostly threats. To them the Valley of Suriban became known as the Valley of Tears, and, among them, Borel alone bore the guilt for his part in so many deaths.

To Chesschantra and the Lord of Laeytroeb, a daughter was born, and in her tenth year Borel set out across the wasteland, sword in hand. He loved his small one greatly and was determined to champion her cause. She must have life, and a life without fear.

Though Warmonger remained dormant in his hand, asleep through all these years, Borel carried it with him beyond the tower gates. Neither the lord nor his demon blade was to be heard from, ever again.

Eventually, others followed, men and women alike trying to meet the challenge, or trick the gods, or learn enough to defeat the Three. The Kingdoms of Man had fallen. This was a new age, the age of champions, the age of Darköpyre.

It had begun.

II. THE TASK AT HAND - DARKSPYRE

It has been several years since the great battle at the *Valley of Tears*. The gods of the Three Ways, WAR, MAGIC, and INTELLECT have brought forth from the ashen ground **DARKSPYRE**... The final test of mankind.

Not a single champion has returned from the spiralling structure, portending that no one has succeeded in passing the trials and tests that lie within. Since your character has shown the ability to quickly learn the basic arts of magic and war, and also being of clear mind, possessing a natural talent to think quickly and come up with solutions, he or she is the next chosen champion.

Once **DARKSPYRE** is entered, the champion should thoroughly explore each level. Creatures must be fought, both with melee weapons and magic, and traps must be escaped. Many puzzles bar the champion's path, only his intellect will help him pass. To progress from one level to another, a "gateway" must be found and entered. Once an individual passes through this interdimensional doorway, there's no turning back.

Somewhere within the ever changing halls of **DARKSPYRE**, lie five unique runes of power. Each represents a single characteristic used in the creation of mankind... *strength, agility, endurance, accuracy, and talent*. Once all five stones have been found, it is time to enter, one by one, the levels of the THREE. Each of which was created by one of the gods, fashioned after that celestial being's specific sphere of control. These are the final tests in which the champion must prove that he can use that which he learned in his quest through **DARKSPYRE**.

Before entering the final three levels, the character needs the five runes to unlock five magical portals. Behind each, there is a special gift left by the gods to aid the character in the final moments of the adventure. These items possess such magical power, it is beyond the comprehension of most mortal men and women.

If no champion overcomes **DARKSPYRE** within the next 300 years, the world shall be destroyed by lightning and fire, and a new one shall be formed. The era of mankind will be nothing more than a brief memory in the history of time. But, if one can prove mankind worthy of existence, the gods shall grant upon man the gift of life, the right to live without the further interference of celestial influence. The champion who succeeds shall be remembered for ages to come! Though, time runs short, 200 years have passed, 10 champions have fallen, and now it is your turn.

III. THE CHARACTER - A TALE OF CHAMPIONS

A character must first be created before you can begin playing the game. Unlike many other role playing games, the character generator in *Darkspyre* is implemented in a story telling fashion with the character you are creating the focal point of the story. As the story unfolds, you're asked questions and must make decisions. The answers to these, determine the character's strengths, weaknesses, and initial capabilities.

Right or Left Handed

Throughout the game, you can put objects, weapons, shields etc... in both the character's right and left hands. For this reason, you're asked if the character is to be right or left handed. This is most important in hand-to-hand combat situations, because the character is able to wield a weapon more effectively in his predominant hand.

Male and Female Characters

A character can be either male or female. The female character suffers no penalties, and are treated the same as male characters. Except, of course, for the graphics used within the game. The graphic representation of the character will match the chosen sex of that character.

Attributes - The Stuff Characters are Made of

There are six attributes (also referred to as characteristics) used in creating a character. Throughout the game, each of these attributes play an important part in how the character is influenced by various circumstances. An attribute can never exceed 20, unless by some magical means. The attributes are:

Strength - This attribute represents the character's physical strength. It affects things such as:

- * The amount of damage inflicted by weapons in hand-to-hand combat situations.
- * The initial hit points the character begins the game with.
- * The amount of weight (in Kilograms) the character can carry without becoming encumbered.

Agility - This characteristic determines how quickly and proficiently the character can perform an action. It primarily influences how fast the character can move.

Endurance - This is the character's ability to perform actions over a long period of time without becoming tired. It influences things such as:

- * How many hit points the character begins the game with (along with strength).
- * How long the character can fight or perform strenuous actions, such as carrying excessive weight, without experiencing fatigue.

Accuracy - This measures the character's natural ability to hit a target at a distance with a thrown weapon, projectile, or spell.

Talent - This is the character's natural born ability to understand the workings of magic and the casting of spells. A talented character can learn spells and read scrolls much quicker than those who are not as talented.

Power - This attribute represents how effectively the character can cast spells. A higher spell power rating means the character is capable of casting more powerful and longer lasting spells.

Rolling the Dice - Generating the Attributes

There are several methods of generating your character's characteristics. You are able to choose the method that best suites your preferences. The various methods are:

Method #1 (The "QUICK" method) - All of the numbers are generated and assigned to the attributes by the computer. Although this is the fastest method of generating the characteristics, it offers the least amount of control.

Method #2 (The "ASSIGN" method) - A "pool" of points is generated. These points can then be assigned to the attributes in any fashion, until the pool is exhausted. A single attribute cannot be assigned more than 20 points. This method allows complete control over setting up the attributes, but doesn't produce the rare exceptional characters that are sometimes generated in method #1.

Method #3 (The "BASE ASSIGN" method) - This method is a combination of methods #1 and #2. The computer generates and assigns a certain number of points to the attributes, as well as generating a smaller pool of points. The pool of points can then be assigned to the attributes by the player.

Quickstart Characters

Though many game players enjoy the process of creating their own characters, there are those that view this process as a delay from getting immediately involved in the game. For this reason, you can opt to bypass the character generator, and play the game with a champion that's instantly created by the computer. The only thing you have to do, is give thy champion a name.

Weapon Proficiencies and Magic Skill Classes

Once the character's attributes have been generated, you must then choose an initial magic skill class. An initial weapon proficiency class is randomly assigned to the character by the computer. Weapon proficiency classes represent how skilled the character is in using a weapon from that class. The more a character uses a weapon, the better he becomes at using weapons from that specific proficiency class. It probably isn't a good idea to rely heavily on a single class of weapons. You may find at later stages in the game, that the champion has lost his preferred weapon or it has broken, and there are no more weapons close by that exist in that class. You would then find the character using a weapon that he's not very skilled at wielding. The weapon proficiency classes in the game are:

Two Handed Weapons - It requires both hands to wield the weapons from this class. They are larger and heavier weapons capable of doing more damage than smaller and lighter weapons. Some examples are the *claymore* or *great scythe*.

Long Edged Weapons - These are various swords that require only one hand to wield. Some weapons from this class are the *longsword* and *scimitar*.

Short Edged Weapons - Weapons from this class are also swords, but they are somewhat shorter, lighter, and smaller than their long edged counterparts. Some examples are the *short sword* and *dagger*.

Clubbing and Hacking Weapons - Members of this class are used by swinging or clubbing at the enemy. Some examples are the *war axe* and *mace*.

Pole Arms - This class includes all thrusting weapons such as the *spear* or *trident*. Weapons from this class also require both of the character's hands.

Small Thrown Weapons - These are weapons, such as the *throwing knife* or *throwing axe*, which are not meant to be used in close quarters combat. Instead, they are extremely well balanced and intended to be hurled at an opponent.

Projectile Weapons - This proficiency class represents all weapons that shoot a projectile, such as a *light crossbow*.

To avoid having a great number of fairly useless spells by the end of the game, the spells in *DARKSPYRE* are set up in a tiered format. This means that as a character increases in skill at using a specific type of magic, the spell in that magic class transforms into a more useful version of the same basic spell. There are six different types of magic the character has at his disposal. These are:

The art of **WIZARDRY** - These are offensive spells the character can use to attack his enemies.

The art of **CONJURATION** - These are spells used to summon the aid of other worldly beings and creatures.

The art of **ENCHANTMENT** - These are protective spells the character can use in his or her defense.

The art of **HEALING** - Spells from this class are used to heal wounds and restore lost abilities or lessened attributes.

The art of **DIVINATION** - These are informative spells that help the character during the tests and trials of *DARKSPYRE*.

The art of **SORCERY** - These are miscellaneous spells that effect the objects and environment surrounding the character.

Hit Points

The character is given an initial amount of hit points. Hit points represent the amount of damage the character can sustain in combat. Once the character's hit points reach zero (0), he has died. The character's beginning number of points are calculated by adding his **STRENGTH** and **ENDURANCE** points plus a random number.

$$* \text{ Strength + Endurance + Random Number = Hit Points}$$

Throughout the course of the game, the character will find ways to both permanently and temporarily increase his hit points.

Spell Power Points

A second rating the character is given, is spell points. Spell points represent the amount of magical energy the character can currently expend. Each time a spell is cast, it will drain a portion of the character's spell points. If the character doesn't have the proper amount needed to cast a spell, then

that spell cannot be used. The amount of spell points required to cast a spell varies greatly, and depends on the type of spell and at what magic skill level it is being cast at. Initial spell points are generated by adding the character's TALENT and POWER plus a random number.

* **Talent + Power + Random Number = Spell Points**

The character will find ways in the game to temporarily increase his spell points. Spell points can never exceed 100, Not even through the use of magic.

Once you have completed generating your character, it is time to begin the game. The best of luck!

IV. ARMOR, SHIELDS, AND HELMS

While exploring *DARKSPYRE*, you will find it necessary to equip the character with the various types of armor scattered throughout *DARKSPYRE*. From simple *animal furs*, to elaborate suits of finely crafted *plate mail*, armor sustains damage that would otherwise be inflicted upon the character. NOTE, armor in no way effects the opponent's chance of hitting or missing the character with an attack.

As armor becomes more and more battle worn, it becomes less effective at its primary purpose, PROTECTION. Some armor types can be reduced to an almost useless state, whereas plate mail, though beaten and battered, always offer a certain degree of protection.

A descriptive armor rating system is provided that enables you to determine the protective value of the armor the character is wearing. This rating is displayed with the name of the armor when it is displayed on the character screen. The ratings, from the least effective to most effective armor protection, are:

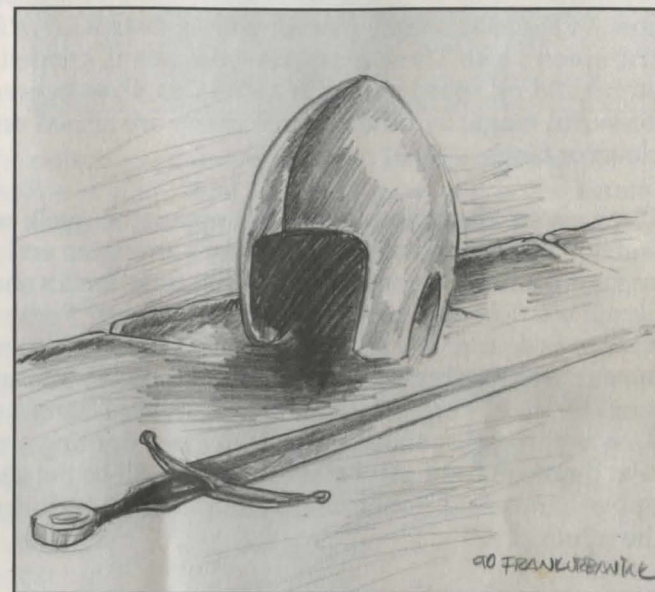
- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. unarmored | 9. reinforced |
| 2. well-clad | 10. fortified |
| 3. safe guarded | 11. iron-clad |
| 4. well-protected | 12. steel-plated |
| 5. stoutly-clad | 13. unyielding |
| 6. rugged | 14. impervious |
| 7. mighty | 15. invincible |
| 8. shielded | |

Various helms and shields can also be discovered. When donned by the character, they offer added protection against attacks. A shield can even be used as would a clubbing weapon in hand-to-hand combat. The most

deadly variety of these are adorned with armor piercing spikes, and are large and of great weight. Shields, like armor, become weakened through continuous use. While the sturdier varieties offer more protection, they can also withstand much more abuse. Helms only provide minimal protection, and even when beaten and dented, always provide that small amount of added protection.

V. THE WEAPONS OF WAR

Throughout the course of history, man has developed a large number and variety of the tools of war, each developed with a particular purpose in mind. For example, the *falchion*, is a type of short sword with a curved blade and single razor sharp edge. This weapon was designed for speed and close quarter melees. It lacks the weight and power of heavier blades, but is a most effective slash and thrust weapon.



All of the weapons in the game offer from one to three types of attacks, based on the weapon's design. Some attacks can be executed quite quickly, while other maneuvers are a little more complex, and when wielding a larger and heavier weapon, take longer to attack with. As the character becomes more proficient in the use of a weapon, attacks can be made with greater effectiveness. Also, some attacks may be replaced by one that only a skilled warrior is capable of performing in combat.

It has been the ill fate of many, to have their weapon break in the heat of battle. Even the finest craftsmanship can only withstand so much abuse. Therefore, it's a good idea to have a secondary weapon close at hand. Some warriors even surrender the added protection of a shield and fight with weapons in both the right and left hands.

A fortunate few, may even come upon weapons empowered with magical properties. These swords of power are rare indeed, said to made from special alloys and gifted with special capabilities, magical weapons are light as a feather and superbly balanced.

VI. DENIZENS OF DARKSPYRE

The twisting corridors and shadow laden rooms of **DARKSPYRE** are occupied by creations of all sorts. Given life by the gods of **WAR**, **MAGIC**, and **INTELLECT**, and placed within **DARKSPYRE** as a part of the champion's test. These creatures were not all created equal, some move with blinding speed, others at a slow crawl, weapons are used by some, powerful magic by others, while many are armed only with sharpened claws or fangs.

The greatest champion knows his opponents well, while the observant warrior will take notice of his enemy's strengths and weaknesses. When engaging a new opponent for the first time, tactics should be developed. *Should you fight with sword or cast a bolt of flame? Perhaps the creature is slow and can be defeated at a distance with a crossbow? The animal's strength lies in numbers, can they be separated and engaged one on one? the creature's tough hide repels the sword's edged, how about the crushing blow of an axe?* It is questions such as these, that should be asked when fighting a new opponent. The next time you meet in mortal combat, it will be the character that has the upper hand. And remember, hack and slash techniques are not always the solution.

VII. TRAPS AND PUZZLES - LOOK BEFORE YOU STEP

All of the dangers that await the character in **DARKSPYRE** are not made of mortal flesh, the god of **INTELLECT** wishes to see brains as well as brawn. While travelling through **DARKSPYRE**, the character will come across many devices that may trigger traps, open sealed doors, or teleport him or her elsewhere. The best way to learn, is through experience, it wouldn't be any fun if we told you exactly what to look out for, now would it?

When first encountered, a trap or device is in its simplest form. This is done to give you an idea of the mechanics behind the trap or device. However, later on, the same traps and devices are used in different ways, and in different combinations, **So** always *expect the unexpected* and *learn from your mistakes!* At first, pulling that chain may simply open the door across the hall. Later you may be engulfed by poison gas spewed forth from some unknown source.

Don't be discouraged, there's always a reason behind something that happens. There's nothing in the game that happens *just because*, in which you have no chance to thwart the final outcome. As in the above ex-

ample, perhaps the poison gas came from tiny obscure holes in the wall that you didn't notice at first. Well, the next time you come across a pullable chain next to small holes in the wall, be prepared!

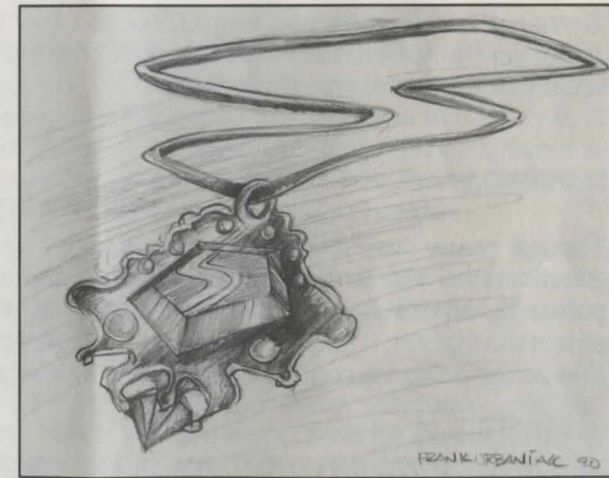
VIII. OBJECTS

There are a variety of objects the character can find and use. These objects range from keys, potions, and tokens, to the runes of power. Some objects may be found on the ground, while others are sometimes dropped by a creature when it is destroyed.

All objects must be placed in the character's hands before it can be used. Once placed in a hand, the available actions that accompany the object will appear in the menu selections to the right of the character's graphic representation on the character screen. For example, a spell on a scroll can be *cast*, a potion *quaffed*, or a magic sphere *hurled*.

Each object has three graphic representations, one for when it's displayed on the 3-D overhead map, another for the inventory blocks, and a third for when it's placed in the character's hand.

Picking up and dropping objects is covered in the technical supplement.



Potions

It should be noted that not only can potions be found on the levels, but they can also be created from some select objects by using a liquefy spell. Potions bestow upon a recipient a variety of effects, some temporary and some permanent. It's best to keep track of what potions do!

Scrolls

All of the spells in the game, are initially found on scrolls. A good many of these spells, but not all, can be permanently transferred into your spellbook. Once a scroll is used, whether the spell is cast or put into a spellbook, it will turn to dust.

IX. ENCUMBRANCE

The character is capable of carrying only so much weight before he begins to fatigue. As the character begins to tire, he will move and react slower. The two attributes that effect how much the character can carry and how quickly he tires is *strength* and *endurance*.

There are times when you would like to carry along all types of extra armor and an arsenal of extra weapons, but this isn't possible. Choose what you wish to carry wisely.

X. POISON

Though many warriors see no honor in its use, no one can deny its effectiveness. Many times, you may find the character engulfed in a poison cloud or struck by a weapon laced with venom. Once the poison enters the system, it continues to cause damage until the character either dies or the poison is counteracted with magic or an antidote.

XI. THE GAMING ENVIRONMENT - LET THE GAME BEGIN

DARKSPYRE is a real time role playing game played from 2 screens, the 3-D overhead map and the character screen. Real time means that everything is happening instantaneous, there are no breaks in the game play, like in a menu driven game. Portions of both the 3-D overhead screen and character screen are displayed at the same time. This prevents the need to go from one screen to another amidst game play.

All of the important icons and character information is displayed at the top part of the character screen. This allows you to have the top portion of the character screen visible, while wandering about on the 3-D overhead

map. The character screen can be moved up to reduce the size of the map, and increase the amount of the character screen shown.

The 3-D Overhead Map

The 3-D overhead map is used to display the level of *DARKPYRE* currently being explored. The outer fringes of each level are surrounded by stars, This area can never be ventured into, it is there solely to inform you that you are at the edge of a map. To get from one level of *DARKSPYRE* to another, you must find the "gateway" and enter it. Once the character leaves a level, there is no turning back, so make sure you have explored as much of the level as possible. Of course, there are those circumstances that leave no other option other than a quick exit!

The Character Screen

You will find all the needed information and game play icons on the character screen. The character screen consists of the following:

- * At the top of the screen is an area where all text messages are displayed.
- * Below this, and to the left, is a graphic representation of the character. At the top of this picture is the character's current hit point rating. When you wish to put something on the character or in his hands, it is done on this representation. A helm is put upon the head, armor is put upon the body, a necklace is placed around the throat, and most other objects are placed in one of the character's hands.
- * To the right of the character representation, are menu selections for objects in the right and left hands, and the spells the character currently has memorized.
- * Also to the right, but just below the menu selections, are the character's inventory boxes. When the you wish for the character to carry an item, it is placed into one of these inventory boxes. The number of items carried can never exceed the amount of boxes available. Therefore, at times, you may find it hard choosing what the character should take along and what he should leave behind.
- * In the bottom left hand portion of the screen, is a small window with three icons at the bottom. The window is used to display the current status of the character's *attributes*, *weapon proficiencies*, and *magic skill levels*. Since only one group of these can be displayed at a time, there are three icons used to switch between the information being displayed.

* In the lower left hand portion of the screen, is another status window that displays the character's *hit points*, *spell points*, and *encumbrance* status. These are represented by bars, which increase or decrease in length as the character uses spell points, takes damage or picks up more objects.

* At the very bottom left hand part of the screen, is a small scroll that prints out the *name*, *weight*, and *condition* of objects in the character's inventory. This information is automatically displayed when an object is chosen. It is here, that an armor's protective rating is displayed.

XII. RUNES OF POWER

In addition to the five special runestones that represent the five basic characteristics of man, there are 20 other symbols of power. Each is endowed with a certain magical trait reminiscent of its symbolic representation.

REPRESENTATION

<u>Norse</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Norse</u>	<u>English</u>
Uraz	STRENGTH	Wunjo	CHARM
Othila	SEVERANCE	Fehu	WEALTH
Ansuz	OMENS	Raido	QUEST
Gebo	ALLIANCE	Hagalaz	DESTRUCTION
Mannaz	ILLUSIONS	Laguz	PROGRESS
Algit	PROTECTION	Ehwaz	AGILITY
Eihwaz	ACCURACY	Berkana	ENHANCEMENT
Inguz	TALENT	Odin	HIDDEN
Nauthiz	FORCE	Sowelu	UNITY
Perth	INITIATION	Isa	STAGNANT
Teiwaz	ENDURANCE	Dagaz	DISCOVERY
Keno	OPENING	Thurisaz	GATEWAY
Jera	SUSTENANCE		

XIII. THE HALL OF CHAMPIONS - A TRIBUTE TO FALLEN HEROES

Only the most successful champions are worthy of the honor bestowed upon them when their name is entered into the *Hall Of Champions*. It is the world's way of remembering those who championed the world, fighting for the right of man's existence. It is also a reminder that failure will bring about the end, and as the list of names grow, time for mankind runs short.

Beside each name entered into the Hall, is a scoring system that lets you know how well a previous character has done. The character earns points for doing almost everything, destroying creatures, gaining weapon proficiencies and magic skills, finding objects, passing from one level to the next, and so on.

XIV. DESIGNER'S NOTES - THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Our first and foremost objective in designing *DARKSPYRE* was to create a fantasy role playing game that was fun and addictive while retaining depth. It is our *opinion* that many games today lack this basic element of gaming. Don't get us wrong, we do feel it is important to exploit the ever increasing capabilities of today's personal computers, but a game should also depart upon the player a sense of enjoyment. For this reason, we still offer the superb graphics and incredible sounds and music, but we also offer the "FUN".

DARKSPYRE is played with a single character and not a party of characters. We did this for a number of reasons. One of which was to create a strong link and sense of character association between the game player and his character. Next, since *DARKSPYRE* is played in a real time gaming environment, it is much simpler to operate a single character than it is to control many. Lastly, the personal computer offers a high level of *interaction*. The vast majority of which, if not all, is one on one between the computer and the user. This is the reason there are not a great many multi-player games for the personal computer. Therefore we decided to follow this rule in the creation of *DARKSPYRE*. Just like the user uses a computer, you use your character, an alter ego of sorts, to interact in the world of *DARKSPYRE*.

All of the elements that make up *DARKSPYRE* are implemented in a *learnas you play* fashion. Who needs hundreds of pages of documentation? Does anyone really read all of that stuff *anyways*? We provide enough information and documentation to introduce you to the game, get you started playing, and to answer any future questions that may arise. The rest, you can learn or find out by playing *DARKSPYRE*. Besides, that's all part of the fun. If we described each of the creatures you could encounter

or explained all the traps and puzzles, etc... we would be ruining the sense of excitement you may feel encountering a new monster or new level with different traps. A state of constant change maintains the players interest, while repetitiveness and the lack of a challenge creates boredom.

Something every game should have is an easy to use interface, and we feel we've done a darn good job with *DARKSPYRE*. Whether using the mouse, a keyboard, or a joystick, the game is simple to operate. This is very important, since the game is real time, you need to be able to interact quickly and easily. While playing *DARKSPYRE*, it shouldn't take long at all before maintaining your character and executing actions becomes second nature. We're especially proud of the joystick interface, which operates exactly like the mouse. Only a small portion of gamers have a mouse, whereas many more have joysticks, because it's a much less expensive investment. For this reason, we wanted to make the joystick extremely easy to use. Controlling the cursor is a breeze and making selections is a piece of cake.

As a final note, we here at **EVENT HORIZON SOFTWARE** hope to provide our customers with the best product support possible. If you have any questions or comments about *DARKSPYRE*, we would like very much to hear them! Please send them to the following address, along with a self addressed stamped envelope:

EVENT HORIZON SOFTWARE

ATTN: Christopher Straka

R.D. Box 200

Darragh, PA 15625

We will make sure that you receive as prompt of a response as circumstances permit. If you have any technical problems, our product support line is :

1 - 412 - 446 - 2400

