

Bookworms

Spelljammers: The Cloakmaster Cycle

by Marlys Heeszel

Imagine yourself in space, a dark, dimensionless void that seems to stretch on forever. The temperature is as warm as a mild spring day, but there is no wind, no moisture in the air, not even the kiss of sun on your skin to account for the warmth. Your ship sails effortlessly forward, but there is no sense of motion as you glide through an unknown universe. Stars surround you, not the friendly, twinkling stars of home, but cold, still lights, alien in their unfamiliar constellations.

The ship you travel on may resemble something out of a childhood history book, with white sails stretching upward into the inky vastness of space, ghostly in their silence. Or it may be something from your worst nightmare, perhaps a Neogi Mindspider or Beholder Tyrant ship. You might be flying in Krynnspace or Realspace, or even moving soundlessly through the whirling colors of the phlogiston, for this is a spelljamming ship, controlled by a magical helm that allows it to go beyond atmospheres and solar systems, into the very reaches of the cosmos.

Enter the world of spelljamming, where ordinary ships can fly and entire planetary systems are enclosed in crystal spheres. TSR, Inc. introduces a new series of SPELLJAMMER™ Novels in 1991, in which characters from Krynn to Abeir-Toril and beyond are allowed to travel across the vast distances of space almost as quickly as they can cross their home planets. These space travelers have ships that are as widely varied as the planets they come from.

The first of the two books released in 1991 is **Beyond the Moons**, which went on sale in July. Author David Cook also wrote book one of the *Empires Trilogy*, *Horselords*, and the *Oriental Adventures* hardbound rulebook. Cook is also senior designer of the AD&D® 2nd Edition game.

In **Beyond the Moons** we meet Teldin Moore, a farmer on the planet of Krynn. Teldin isn't aware that life exists beyond Krynn's three moons until a spelljamming ship crashes on his farm, destroying his home and changing his life. A dying alien gives Teldin a magi-

cal cloak and a cryptic message to deliver it to "the creators." The only remaining survivor of the crash is a giff, Private Gomja, who appoints himself Teldin's personal bodyguard.

Unfortunately for Teldin, the neogi know of the cloak's powers and hire mercenary killers to retrieve it. Teldin and Gomja travel first to Astinus of Palanthas, hoping to learn the secret of the cloak's origins. Once there, they are told they must ask the gnomes of Mount Nevermind, who live far across the ocean. The two strange companions resume their quest, pursued by an ever-growing band of cutthroats.

The second SPELLJAMMER book for 1991 is **Into the Void** by Nigel Findley. Findley has written numerous game modules for TSR, Inc., including SPELLJAMMER modules, and has been a contributor to DRAGON® Magazine.

Into the Void, which will be released in October, takes Teldin Moore into space after he boards a gnomish sidewheeler ship, or dreadnought, in an attempt to escape the neogi. When the gnomes' ship is attacked, Teldin is rescued by a hideous mind flayer, who offers to help in the search for the mysterious cloak's creators. On the wondrous journey through space, Teldin learns the basics of spelljamming. He also experiences firsthand the power of the cloak he wears when the hammership he travels on is brutally attacked. When the ship finally reaches Toril, Teldin finds the ancient arcane he seeks, only to experience the ultimate betrayal.

One of the prime requirements in writing fantasy is the ability to suspend reality. Nowhere is this more evident than in the world of spelljamming, where characters from the DRAGONLANCE® world, FORGOTTEN REALMS® world, and GREYHAWK® world freely intermingle. I asked the authors of the first two SPELLJAMMER books what special difficulties they encountered in their work.

David Cook faced the challenge of writing the first book in a new series. He told me, "Because **Beyond the Moons** was first, I was able to start with a clean slate, which was appealing. On the other hand, I had the responsibility of establishing the groundwork for the balance of the Cloakmaster

Series. In the story, a huge ship comes down out of the sky and crashes on Teldin Moore's farm. Teldin isn't very worldly, but he does know that ships can't fly. He is given a cloak about which he knows nothing, and teams up with an alien giff to learn more about it. I found myself liking the giff and also enjoyed having the chance to write about gnomes."

Nigel Findley had a different challenge when writing **Into the Void**, which takes place mostly in space. He had to deal with the consequences of fantasy physics. For example, when a small ship would maneuver next to a larger one, the gravity field of the larger vessel would dominate to the extent that it limited the other's actions. Findley especially enjoyed the freedom that writing about spelljamming gave him. He said, "Writing **Into the Void** was a lot of fun. If I needed a particular character with a certain background, I could pull somebody in from a totally different sphere. I had access to anybody I needed."

Findley has wanted to do an exploration of trust and betrayal for some time and felt that Teldin Moore's situation was ideal. "Teldin has the anxiety that someone would naturally feel when behind enemy lines. He knows he's being paranoid, but is constantly forced to ask himself whether he is cautious enough. His survival depends on not trusting too much, as well as on knowing who is trustworthy." Part of Teldin's journey takes him through the phlogiston, an eerie space corridor that connects the various spheres. It is, according to Findley, the perfect phantasmagorical environment for strange things to happen.

Unusual events are bound to occur as the SPELLJAMMER series gives characters the opportunity for new adventures in far distant worlds. In 1992 we will join Teldin Moore as he continues to search for the origins of the mysterious cloak and learns about the wonders and dangers of spelljamming among the crystal spheres. No one knows what new worlds will be found as we travel beyond the familiar into the mysteries of space. □