"WHEN THE NEW DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE™ game was taking shape, I stated that it would make a fine engine for an interactive-style game. As usual, my words come back to haunt me . . ."

▶ . . . I need to stay away from periodical editors and Usenet newsgroups, I suppose. Jeff challenged me to put my keyboard where my mouth is, and show that the SAGA™ system can be the basis of a good interactive game. So, here goes:

## SAGA Interactive Adventure Rules

These rules are most useful if you own the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE game. Although they can be used as a base for any interactive fantasy game (with possible expansion to other genres), the SAGA system is the rules foundation for the DRAGONLANCE game. The SAGA rules are available in the boxed set or can be had by purchasing a Fate Deck. This game is suitable for 3–6 players, including the Narrator.

### Hero Creation

Creating a hero character generally takes place as described on pages 10–17 in the *Book of the Fifth Age*. Players, however, are encouraged to change the order in which the steps take place. If a player has his heart set on playing an elf, then the Narrator should permit him to decide that as the first step, and then assign cards accordingly.

If a player cannot meet the requisites for the race due to a poor draw, the Narrator can either let the player redraw, or raise requirements to their minimum.

The Narrator should not feel squeamish about letting the player raise or lower statistics or codes to the minimum requirements of the role. There are very few rules that should be slavishly adhered to in the SAGA Interactive game. One of them, however, is the rule that story and character takes precedence over all the rules.

However, narrators who are generous in the fashion described above need to be wary of abuse. A 3 of Hearts assigned to Spirit will exceed the base requirements for the Kender race, for example. The player who wishes to play a Kender mystic should assign it there, and then work on improving his hero's Spirit attribute through play, not put it in Nature or Demeanor and then try to get the Narrator to permit him to raise his 10X in Spirit to a 10C.

### Creating Adventures

When inventing stories for the SAGA Interactive game, most of the general notes that appear in *Book of the Fifth Age* apply. The same is true when it comes to Narrating scenes. One thing Narrators of an Interactive game must consider, however, is the difficulty of encompassing large swaths of terrain and tremendous epic battles.

The best interactive games are small. The key word here is "interactive." A normal SAGA game revolves around characters and story, but the SAGA Interactive game must do so even more. The Narrator still controls the world's characters, but the heroes have a much more tangible presence. It's harder for heroes in interactive games to travel far (unless different parts of the house are designated as different parts of the world) and battles are harder to conduct.

Instead, the Narrator should try to center his adventures in one or two locations, making an evening's adventure basically one extended scene. Further, the adventures should be mystery- or puzzle-oriented, so the players have to engage their minds rather than resolving confrontation through combat. An example of what I would consider a suitable SAGA Interactive adventure would be something along these lines:

The heroes have journeyed to the tiny island of Elad's Hope, answering the summons of a powerful sorcerer. The message they received hinted that he

# LIVE THE SAGA

## SAGA™ INTERACTIVE RULES

by Steve Miller

based on the SAGA Rules System by William W. Connors

had uncovered a powerful artifact that would lead to the doom of either the forces of Good or the forces of Evil. He intends to sell it to the highest bidder. (A hero with a Wealth score of at least 8 is needed, unless the heroes want to try to steal the item.)

The heroes arrive on the island as a storm is brewing. The wizard will reveal the nature of the artifact after dinner, but he is murdered before dinner can be served. It appears to be an accident, but when his apprentice also turns up dead, it should be clear that the heroes are trapped on a tiny island with a murderer.

There is at least one character on the island for every hero. The object is to interpret clues to identify the murderer, find the artifact, and figure out what it can do. (Of course, it might be that the whole artifact thing is a ruse. The sorcerer is still alive, and brought the heroes and characters together to make them think one is a killer, turn them against each other and then kill them all himself. He has no artifact, but wishes to eliminate the most powerful champions of the world's factions so he can take over.)

That is a simple and cliched adventure summary, but it illustrates the point that an adventure can be created without a lot of fights or location changes. The tension is still there—if the heroes don't find the murderer or the artifact, chances are they'll end up very dead.

## Hero Actions

Hero actions are resolved as explained in the *Book of the Fifth Age.* However, the optional methods are very important in the interactive game because they provide a clear-cut way to resolve hero-versus-hero disputes, which are more likely to happen in an interactive game, due to the lessened interaction between players and Narrators.

Whenever Actions are taken, the auras of the cards must always be checked. When heroes are acting against other heroes, the aura serves as something of an initiative system. A white aura causes that player's action to happen before the other player's hero gets to perform a counter-action. Black auras mean the hero goes last, even if the other player used a red aura card for his hero's action. If the players played cards with the same aura, their actions resolve simultaneously.

## Magic

The biggest difference between the SAGA Interactive game and the SAGA Dramatic Adventure game is the way magic works. Rather than using the spell point system of the dramatic adventure game, the interactive game views magic the same way it treats Actions. This change makes the interactive game a bit speedier than the dramatic adventure game when it comes to magic.

When a wizard wants to cast a spell, he has a base target number of 4. As the player describes the magical effect his hero character wishes to bring about, the Narrator can raise that target number. Characters and other heroes still get to resist the magic, if appropriate. (The Narrator can use the spell-building guidelines from the *Book of the Fifth Age* to determine what appropriate target numbers for a spell are.)

To have the hero cast a spell, the player plays a card and adds the value to his Reason or Spirit (depending on the kind of magic). If the value of the card plus the hero's attribute score exceeds the target number, less any resistance that might be offered by a target, the spell is successful.

Spell points also work a bit differently in the SAGA Interactive game. Again, this change is to minimize bookkeeping.

Heroes still determine their pool of spell points by squaring their Reason or Spirit score. However, instead of devoting spell points to building spells, they lose a set number of points for each spell they cast—the Reason or Spirit score subtracted from 12, with 10 being the maximum number subtracted. Powerful spellcasters become even more powerful under this system, while weaker casters will run out of points quickly.

Points can also be used to decrease the difficulty of a spell. For every spell point a hero burns off, he can reduce a target number by a difficulty of 1.

## Monsters and Characters

These are created and run exactly as described in the basic game. However, if Narrators wish, they can apply the initiative system for heroes vs. heroes to major characters of his game, too. The Narrator would turn a card from the Fate deck to decide this.

## Last Word

These rules are barely more than an outline. If you attempt to use them in a SAGA Interactive game, or even in the normal SAGA system, please let us know how it went. I've set up an email address exclusively for SAGA and FIFTH AGE comments at: Ergothian@aol.com. Any feedback you want to offer via the Internet should be directed there. The snail-mail address is the same as for POLYHEDRON; just put my name on the envelope.