

The Way It Was

The universe is full of role-playing game-based novels these days. Indeed, it seems impossible for any company to launch a new game line without releasing a few novels to set the stage for would-be dungeon masters.

Long ago, however, this was not the case. When Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman wrote the first DRAGONLANCE novel, they were breaking new ground. There were those who said that this venture would cost TSR its shirt and be a huge bomb. These skeptics, I'm glad to say, were wrong.

In the years since the publication of that first novel (way back in 1984), the DRAGONLANCE line has proven to be one of the most popular in the RPG industry. Without taking the time to count them, I'd say that there have been about a zillion^{*} related products produced over the last decade. These have included novels, role-playing games, computer games, calendars, and more. Indeed, there is even talk of an animated DRAGONLANCE movie these days. Not bad for a product that was doomed to failure.

The most recent novel in the series (as of this writing) is *Dragons of Summer Flame*. This book details the events that conclude the War of the Lance and the Fourth Age (or Age of Despair).

* Sue Weislein tells me that a zillion is roughly equal to 60 books and 40 game products, plus all that other stuff.

The Time has come to look to...

DRAGONLANCE[®]: FIFTH AGE[™]

Inside information on TSR's upcoming
new Role-Playing Game

Under Construction World Under

What is Soon to be...

One of the first questions that anyone familiar with role-playing games will ask is: What makes DRAGONLANCE: The Fifth Age different from other fantasy games? Well, quite a few things, actually.

Not Another AD&D World

I can hear the doubters out there already. Do we really need another AD&D game world? Especially when it's really just an old game world being reworked?

Well, I don't want to upset those doubters, but DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE is neither of those things.

First, FIFTH AGE isn't an AD&D campaign setting. In an effort to make the world of DRAGONLANCE more dramatic and give it the literary feel of the novels, the decision was made to produce a whole new role-playing game system. DRAGONLANCE isn't AD&D anymore, it's become a whole new game designed for people who love to play roles more than roll dice. I'll talk more about this a little later.

How about the idea that FIFTH AGE is just a slight reworking of the old DRAGONLANCE campaign setting? That's not the case either. The events that transpire in *Dragons of Summer Flame* have transformed the world of Krynn. To be sure, much has remained the same on Krynn and Ansalon, but there have been some sweeping changes that will make players and DMs alike scramble to fit the pieces of this new world together.

Roles vs. Rules

Perhaps the most important thing, is the fact that FIFTH AGE has been designed with an eye toward drama and role-playing, not rules and game mechanics. As such, it makes use of many techniques that will be new to even the most jaded role-players.

Examples of this philosophy will be found throughout the game. For the most part, however, they focus on the control that a player has over the actions of his character and the flow of the storyline.

To be sure, many role-playing games place a great deal of emphasis on the telling of stories and the importance of dramatic elements. For the most part, however, the game mechanics used in such systems don't do much to foster such play. Simply making a game "rules-light" doesn't make it better for role-playing. There still comes a time when the rules get in the way of drama and characterization.

While it isn't possible to eliminate the rules, steps have been taken to minimize their interference with play in the FIFTH AGE game. Many of the duties that traditionally fall on the shoulders of the referee have been designed so that the players will be handling them. This leaves the referee free to focus on the drama and pacing of the adventure, giving it a much more literary flavor.

The Hand of Fate

While many adventure games use dice or other random number generators to resolve the outcome of actions, FIFTH AGE employs an 81-card Resolution Deck. During the game, every player holds a hand of cards (lovingly called The Hand of Fate during our playtests). When the time comes for a player's hero to attempt some feat, he selects the card to use. Thus, a player may hold better

by William W. Connors

cards in his hand for use during critical junctures in the scenario.

Because of this selection process, the random aspects of play are greatly reduced. A player has far more control over the fate of his character in the FIFTH AGE game than he does in most other RPGs.

Freeform Systems

Various aspects of the game (such as movement, the passage of time, and magic use), which are usually highly regulated in adventure games, are dealt with in an abstract, freeform method. There is no game board, battle map, or other such limiting element. Thus, drama and adventure take the place of odds calculation and table reading.

The Campaign

Thirty years have passed since the end of *Dragons of Summer Flame* when the Chaos god was defeated and the pantheon of Krynn withdrew from the affairs of men. A great war, called the Dragon Purge, has been fought between the good and evil wyrms. The nature of magic has been changed beyond recognition by the elimination of the three moons and the withdrawal of the gods of magic. Even the passage of time is recorded differently, for this is the Fifth Age, the Age of Mortals.

Magic

Perhaps the most obvious example of the freeform philosophy will be found in the system used for spell casting. Players whose heroes are capable of employing magic are not tied to spell lists or other tables.

Everyone who uses magic is given a certain number of points with which to shape the mystical energies of the world. The exact effects to which these energies are put is entirely up to the player. If he wants to throw a fire ball at an enemy, he can do so. If he wishes to summon a bolt of lightning from the blue, he has but to snap his fingers. Of

course, the more powerful the spell, the harder it is to cast.

Magic in the Fifth Age is not as easy to wield as it was in earlier times.

There are two basic types of magic in the Fifth Age: sorcery and mysticism.

Sorcery

Sorcery is a primordial magic that infuses all of Krynn and dates back to the time of creation, predating the arrival of the gods of magic. Those who wield it are able to do great things, but will find that their powers are limited to affecting non-living matter only. The greatest of Krynn's sorcerers are the three members of the Last Conclave. Headed by the mysterious Master of the only remaining Tower of Sorcery, this order includes the mighty Palin and the somewhat ominous Shadow Sorcerer (about whom almost nothing is known).

Mysticism

This is the power of life and the radiant energies that sustain it. To master the mystical forces of the universe, one must master the power in one's own heart.

The mystical orders of the world are based out of the Citadel of Light, a great fortress built on the island of Schallsea. The head of these orders is the elderly, but highly revered Goldmoon, who cares for all of Krynn as a mother might for its only child.

Dragons

Few dragons have survived the Dragon Purge. There are probably no more than fifty dragons left on Ansalon; half of those are cloistered away in hidden sanctuaries. Those dragons that do remain, however, are titans of their kind. Even larger and more aggressive than the dragons of the last age, they dominate much of Ansalon.

Indeed, so powerful are these dreadful creatures that whole nations have fallen before them. Through the use of powers unheard of in ages past, they have spawned far-reaching changes in the geography and climate of the lands in which they dwell, much to the detriment of the humans and demihumans who lived there before them.

The Design Team

Well, that's just a taste of the world of Krynn during the Fifth Age. I think it's a pretty interesting place. Nearly as interesting, however, is the design team assigned to create the game products that detail it.

The leader of the team is Harold Johnson, one of the original crew that created the first DRAGONLANCE games and novels. Harold brings many years of gaming experience to the product, as well as an intimate familiarity with DRAGONLANCE line and its history.

Next, we have Sue Weinkle. After a few years of editorial work on novels in TSR's book department, Sue transferred to games, bringing a literary background which gives FIFTH AGE a depth of which few games can boast.

Third, there's Skip Williams. Known to most Network members for his years on the Newszine, Skip's *Sage Advice* column has been required reading for AD&D players since it first appeared in the pages of DRAGON® Magazine.

Fourth (don't worry, we're almost done), there's Steve Miller. He's one of TSR's new fish and combines a fresh viewpoint on the line with a desire to make his own mark on one of his favorite game worlds.

Lastly, there's me (William W. Connors). Fans of the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting will be familiar with my work on such products as *Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts*, *Web of Illusions*, and the *Masque of the Red Death* campaign setting. Along with Sue, I was one of the original proponents of the FIFTH AGE concept.

There are others, of course, who help us along. From the guiding hand of James M. Ward (who mandated that we include bigger, badder dragons) to the graphic design of Dawn Murin (who shaped the look of the RAVENLOFT and PLANESCAPE™ lines), each of us brings something different to FIFTH AGE.

We hope the final product will be something that people can embrace as they did the original DRAGONLANCE saga. I look forward to finding out what people think of our work. □