



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®] MUSEUM

CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF THE EPIC FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME

KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN

FIRST EDITION

The First Edition of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* combined all of the bright ideas and best mechanics from the rulesets of wargaming and its homebrewed variants – as well as narrative influences from other media – to create a paragon of excellence in the relatively new role-playing genre.

It included three different volumes; *Men & Magic* was used by players to create their characters and learn the basic mechanics of OD&D; *Monsters & Treasure* contained depictions of the creatures that inhabited the dungeons of the world, as well as the magical items and loot they'd drop; and *The Underworld and Wilderness Adventures* detailed how to design dungeons, deal with encounters and run campaigns.

Compared to the hefty volumes of rules, options and possibilities that we know today, OD&D was fairly limited. It contained just three character classes – fighting-man, magic-user and cleric – and only four races – human, elf, halfling and dwarf. However, the monsters numbered in the dozens, from kobolds and gnolls to six different deadly dragons.

Although role-playing as an individual was a feature in David Wesley's *Braunstein* and Dave Arneson's *Blackmoor*, it was a rare feature in a published ruleset. OD&D gave players the ability to choose their race and class, give themselves a fantastical name and even pick an alignment – lawful, neutral and chaotic – on which to base their character's actions. It was a level of escapism unmatched by any other game.

Another feature that was alien to wargaming enthusiasts, and most tabletop gamers, was the D20 – a 20-sided die, or icosahedron if you want to get technical. A 20-sided die allowed for more varied outcomes than a standard six-sided die. Gyggax had borrowed this idea from the only game that he knew used a D20, *Tractics*, created by game developer Don Lowry, who started to produce icosahedrons for sale in North America. TSR gladly resold the dice for use in OD&D, and so the D20 was used to resolve everything from attacks to loot drops.

OD&D sold around 4,000 copies in the first two calendar years. Its limited success may have been due to its reliance on previously published wargames. For instance, players were encouraged to use the combat system from Gyggax's previous wargame *Chainmail*, even though it included a new combat system that would eventually evolve into the one that players know and love today. It also listed an entirely separate board game, *Outdoor Survival* – intended to control the exploration of the world – under equipment required to play *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*. Nonetheless, sales for OD&D continued to grow and warranted the release of five supplements that built on the base set. These included *Greyhawk* and *Blackmoor*, which were new rulesets based in Gyggax and Arneson's respective campaigns. Each supplement sought to flesh out the thinner parts of the original set, adding classes like the druid, paladin and thief, as well as new spells and magical items. By the time the final supplement, *Swords & Spells*, had released, a mighty oak had begun to sprout from the tiny acorn that was the starter set. It was still a far cry from the scale of the game we know today – the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* phenomenon was just beginning to gather steam.

KEY TO PLATE

1: First Edition Rules

The original trio of handbooks in OD&D; (l-r) *Men & Magic*, *Monsters & Treasure*, *The Underworld and Wilderness Adventures*.

2: Draft Dragon

An early draft of the dragon illustration that was to be included in the First Edition handbooks.

3: Barbarian

Early artwork by Greg Bell showing a barbarian fighting off a black pudding.



CITY SECRETS

BALDUR'S GATE

Though collaborations between TSR & Strategic Simulations, Inc. were lucrative for both companies, TSR was looking for new partners to take their franchise in new directions. During the era of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Second Edition*, they let Tachyon Studios develop a real-time strategy game known as *Blood & Magic*, permitted Westwood to create a flight simulator, *DragonStrike*, that handed you the reins of a dragon, and gave Lion Entertainment the green light to make a first-person shooter!

Though roleplaying games reigned, they were under threat from an emerging 3D era.SSI hit financial difficulties in the 90s and were bought out. After 30 entries, the D&D range drew to a close. Other companies had dabbled in roleplaying games for the brand, but none had been as prolific as SSI. TSR needed a new flagship developer to take them forward. The developer they chose was surprising, but they created one of the most iconic games ever to grace PCs.

Bioware was founded in 1995, around the time the revised edition of AD&D: *Second Edition* was released, and had found backing for their first game, *Shattered Steel*, from publisher Interplay. It was a mech shooter that gained positive reviews on release, but it was far from an RPG. It was a risk for TSR to enlist their help — they had no track record in the genre and only one published game.

The risk paid off. A passionate and inspired team of over 60 developers contributed to 1998's *Baldur's Gate* and smashed the expectations of Bioware and publisher Black Isle, an Interplay subsidiary. The game sold out its initial run of 50,000 copies immediately and remained in the top 10 bestselling games well into the spring of 1999. Critics fawned over the beautifully rendered Forgotten Realms, character customization, party mechanics and battle system. The game was declared an instant classic.

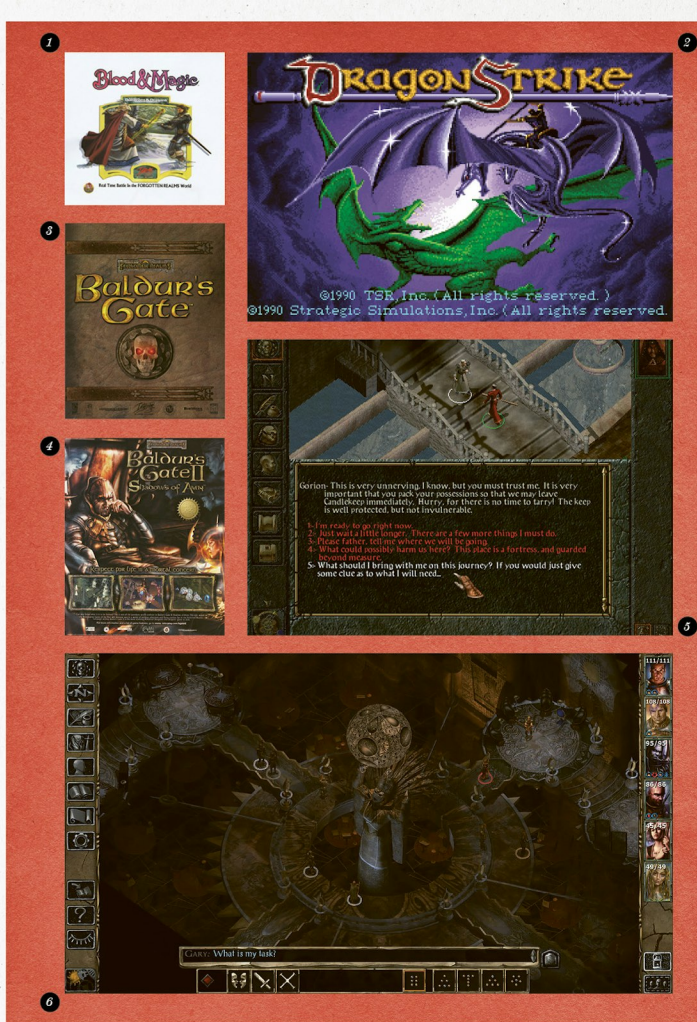
Bioware released an expansion pack, *Tales of the Sword Coast*, so that players could continue their adventures in the Forgotten Realms. It was lauded by critics and fans, but wasn't enough to quench their thirst. Bioware kick-started its proprietary Infinity Engine once again and produced *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*. It had additional character classes, kits that allowed for greater customization and tweaks that Bioware, who would later lend BG's mechanics to the *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect* series, had learned from their first RPG effort.

The game was another commercial success and critical darling, releasing to rave reviews and millions of dollars in sales. Once again, they could justify a sequel, 2001's *Throne of Bhaal*, and the *Baldur's Gate* juggernaut showed no signs of losing steam. A RPG spin-off *Dark Alliance* was developed by Snowblind Studios and released on Playstation 2 in the same year as *Throne of Bhaal*.

But then, all of a sudden, the juggernaut stopped. Beyond a couple of remasters in the 2010s the *Baldur's Gate* series went quiet. It's hard to say why. Corporate machinations had seen D&D change ownership in the 90s, while Bioware and Interplay went through their own tribulations — perhaps this contributed to the vacuum. Fans' desires would continue to be unmet. At least for a couple of decades ...

KEY TO PLATE

- 1: Rare Setting**
Blood & Magic was set in the rarely-visited Linnor East region of the Forgotten Realms.
- 2: Dragon Battler**
Title screen of the unique dragon battler *DragonStrike*.
- 3: Smashing Expectations**
PC box art for the first entry in the *Baldur's Gate* series.
- 4: Worth Successor**
After the rave reviews for the first entry, *Baldur's Gate II* was heavily promoted.
- 5: Consequential Words**
The dialogue choices in the *Baldur's Gate* series had meaningful repercussions for players, just like tabletop D&D.
- 6: A Quick Polish**
Enhanced editions of *Baldur's Gate* and *Shadows of Amn* were released in 2012 and 2013 respectively.



TRUE POLYMORPH

MORE WAYS TO PLAY

Whether under the tenure of TSR or Wizards of the Coast, there has always been an initiative to make *Dungeons & Dragons* accessible to a wider audience. As far back as first edition, the *Basic Set* was introduced in order to simplify the rules and give would-be fans a taster of the rich lore and gameplay. To this day, there have been hundreds of different entry points to the franchise, including entirely new games.

With fans already comfortable sitting around the tabletop, it's only natural that D&D expanded its domain to board games too. TSR was already testing the waters of D&D-inspired board games way back in 1975, when they released *Dungeon!*, which was not officially from the D&D stable, but did feature multiple classes, ever-stronger enemies, and loot for up to eight players to enjoy in a short hour-long stints.

Board games continued to emerge from the D&D workshop in subsequent decades. Two games enjoyed particular popularity: *Dragonlance*, a hex grid-based board game that had each player command a team of dragons from Hickman and Weis' popular setting, and *Dragon Strike*, which was released in 1993 and combined elements from the role-playing game with the simpler mechanics of a board game. It even came with an instructional VHS to walk players through the game.

During the fourth edition era, once Wizards had taken over, they echoed their intent to simplify the game with the *Player Essentials* collection by kicking off a new *Adventure System* board game series in 2010. They started with *Castle Ravenloft*, which featured a unique dungeon-building mechanic using card tiles, different pre-rolled characters to play as and a host of creatures to battle. They followed up a year later with *The Legend of Drizzt*, which used the same formula and featured the iconic drow elf. The series continued for a decade, opening the door to audiences that needed a bite-size entry to the realm of D&D.

Though many of the board games based on D&D were intended as an appetizer for the main roleplaying game, Wizards have spun their sprawling multiverses across an array of genres. In *Lords of Waterdeep*, you compete against other players to grow your influence in the bustling Forgotten Realms city, recruiting allies and strategizing your way to the top. If horror and survival are more your bag, take a short trip down the Sword Coast and play *Betrayal at Baldur's Gate*, where you and your party must resist Bhaal's enthrallment and endure the terrors plaguing the citadel, or succumb to the dread lord. Perhaps you prefer to play the long game and build up a legion of useful assets – *Tyrants of the Underdark*, *Assault of the Giants*, and *Dragonfire* all serve your deck-building desires.

If you want to take a step away from the tabletop completely, cards are your avenue to portable D&D fun. *Rock Paper Wizard* is a twist on the popular rock-paper-scissors formula based on the extensive spellbook of the D&D universe, while *The Great Dalmuti* is a race to cleverly shed cards from your hand. The excellently illustrated *Dungeon Mayhem* places you and three friends in the boots of a D&D archetype before you duke it out with ability cards from your character's deck. You can even collect Forgotten Realms cards in D&D's stablemate *Magic: The Gathering*.

There are so many different ways to enjoy D&D already, but with an ever-widening range of board games on shelves, it's not a choice of whether you should play D&D, but how you should play it!

KEY TO PLATE

1: Ways to Play

A promotional page from the turn of the

century showing the range of games that spun out from the core roleplaying games. Some,

such as *Lords of Waterdeep*, were so successful that they had their own supplements.

1

OPEN ANOTHER ADVENTURE

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

COUNTERSPELL

CIRCULAR INFLUENCE

Though *Dungeons & Dragons* has been an influence on countless media types, from TV shows and novels to films, podcasts and livestreams, it hasn't been a one-way street. Beyond the numerous games that influenced the rules of D&D over five decades, it has also taken direct inspiration from the very things it has influenced, in a strange media ouroboros phenomenon.

Wizards had been steering the ships of both D&D and *Magic: The Gathering* for over two decades when some bright spark had the idea to release an adventure set in *Magic's* universe. *The Guildmaster's Guide to Ravnica* hit shelves in 2018 and brought the eponymous plane of the multiverse to the tabletop in roleplay form. Players could create a character with a unique Ravnica-flavored species – minotaurs, centaurs and vedalken were all fair game – and ally themselves to one of the ten guilds, using their unique combinations of mana and magic to quest through the setting of D&D's stablemate. Magic also lent its settings of Strixhaven – a magic school – and Theros – a city of mythological creatures – to D&D campaigns with *Strixhaven: A Curriculum of Chaos* and *The Mythic Odysseys of Theros*.

In recent decades, Wizards have jumped at the chance to embrace the latest D&D-infused hit. Dan Harmon's *Rick & Morty* has been one of the most anticipated comedies on TV thanks to its intermittent seasons. Although it rarely references D&D, Wizards collaborated with Harmon on a crossover: *Dungeons & Dragons vs. Rick & Morty*. It features an adventure module known as *The Lost Dungeon of Rickedness: Big Rick Energy*, and lets you play as pre-rolled characters including Rick, Morty and other members of the Smith family. The collaboration began with comic books, when IDW Publishing released a volume of comics with another original adventure, *The Temple of Glor*.

But the TV influences on D&D don't stop there. When *Stranger Things* became a massive worldwide hit on Netflix, Wizards capitalized on the popularity with the *Stranger Things D&D Starter Set*. Though it's themed to look like it was created in the 80s, it's a fifth edition adventure with all the mod cons that lets you play as one of the child heroes on an adventure through the Upside Down.

Next came an adventure module based on one of the most unique D&D podcasts around, *Acquisitions, Incorporated*. The adventure brings the cut-throat world of business, franchising and balancing accounts to D&D. Not only can you roll a character to take through the unique adventure, *The Orrery of the Wanderer*, but you can also roll a franchise, manage the workforce and expand your business until it's on every street corner in the Forgotten Realms. Acq. Inc. isn't the only streaming group that landed a collaboration with Wizards, though – *The Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* borrows its world, heroes and villains from Critical Role's original setting of Exandria. It was so popular with fans that they also collaborated on a second tome, *Critical Role: Call of the Netherdeep*, which greatly expands the level cap of *Wildemount*, and features a brand new adventure, unique monsters and challenging quests.

With the tendrils of D&D's influence spreading ever wider and latching on to media in all its forms, there's no telling what collaborations we'll see in the future.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Magic Crossover

Ravnica was the first sourcebook inspired by *Magic: The Gathering*, but a number of Plane Shift PDFs were released by Wizards between 2016 and 2018, bringing other MtG settings to D&D's ruleset.

2: Acq. Inc.

Pipping Critical Role to the post, *Acquisitions Incorporated* was the first sourcebook based on an actual play campaign, inspired by the podcast of the same name.

3: Retrospective

The *Stranger Things Starter Set* brought in a legion of new fans from the Netflix series, and contained a new adventure: *Hunt for the Thessalyd*.

