



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®] MUSEUM

CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF THE EPIC FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®] MUSEUM



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Written by Craig Jelley
Edited by Stephanie Milton
Designed by Maddox Philpot
Production by Giulia Caparrelli

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM

Welcome to the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM



HISTORY CHECK

D&D TIMELINE

1960s

- Gary Gygax creates the rules for Chainmail with Jeff Perren.
- Dave Arneson develops the role-playing fantasy game, *Blackmoor*, which uses Chainmail for combat.
- Gygax and Arneson first collaborate on *Don't Give Up The Ship*

1973

- Gygax forms Tactical Studies Rules, Inc. with Don Kaye

1974

- DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* is released

1975

- Supplement I: Greyhawk and Supplement II: *Blackmoor* are released
- TSR launches its quarterly periodical, *The Strategic Review*

1976

- Three more supplements - *Eldritch Wizardry*; *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes*; *Swords & Spells* - are released
- TSR replaces *The Strategic Review* with monthly magazine *Dragon*

1977

- Advanced DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* is released
- A simplified version of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*, the *Basic Set*, is also released

1978

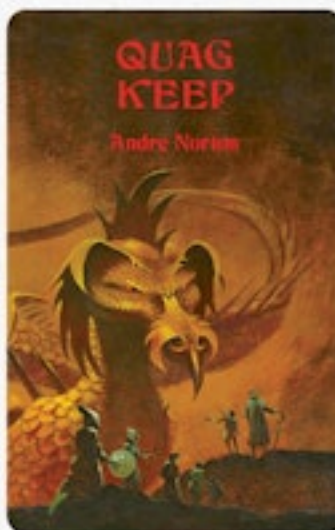
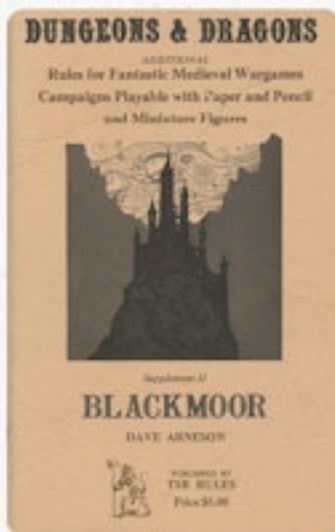
- The first D&D novel, *Quag Keep*, lands on shelves

1979

- Ed Greenwood begins sending contributions to *Dragon* magazine based on his own *Forgotten Realms* setting

1980

- TSR releases its first *Endless Quest* solo gamebooks
- TSR launches its calendar range with *Days of the Dragon*



1981

- The *Basic Set* is refined and re-released, then expanded with the *Expert Set*

1982

- The first D&D video game, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: Cloudy Mountain* is released for the Mattel Intellivision

1983

- The *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* animated series first airs in the U.S.

1984

- Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman write the first *Dragonlance* novel, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*
- Frank Metzer revises the *Basic* and *Expert* Sets, and expands again with the *Companion Set*

1985

- Metzer continues to expand the splinter branch, adding the *Master Rules*
- Gygax departs TSR after Lorraine Williams buys a controlling share of the company

1986

- The first D&D comic is approved, a Spanish-language adaptation of the animated series, *Dragones y Mazmorras*
- TSR launches *Dungeon* magazine, another monthly offering alongside *Dragon*
- Metzer makes a final addition to the *Basic Set* splinter, adding *Immortal Rules*

1987

- The *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, created by Ed Greenwood, is released alongside his first *Forgotten Realms* novel, *Spellfire*

1988

- The *Crystal Shard* - the first R.A. Salvatore novel and Drizzt Do'Urden's debut - is published
- Pool of Radiance*, the first entry in the *Gold Box* series of D&D video games, lands on PC
- TSR partners with DC Comics to release four new comic book series

1989

- Advanced DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: Second Edition* is released

1991

- The *Basic Set* splinter, known as *BECMI*, is compiled into one book, the *Rules Cyclopedia*



INTRODUCTION



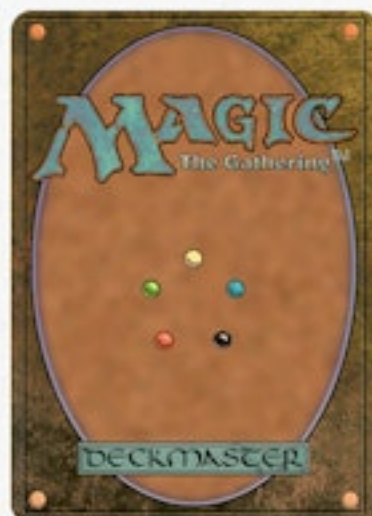
Since *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* grew out of the wargaming scene in 1974, it has been a behemoth of the tabletop. It was synonymous with the roleplaying genre that emerged in the 70s and immediately established itself as the definitive fantasy game, spawning many imitators along the way. But it was just the first chapter in *D&D*'s story, and over the next five decades, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* would innovate and reincarnate to keep its place atop the roleplaying perch.

Not content with merely remaining a role-playing game, *D&D* began to expand into other media, from Saturday morning cartoons, comics and novels to video games, movies and podcasts. It became not just a paragon of excellence in tabletop gaming, but a multimedia giant. As early as the 80s, even if you didn't play *D&D*, you knew about *D&D*.

As *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* continued to grow with every subsequent edition, it cast a spell over a wider audience from all walks of life - young and old, the casual and the hardcore. What started as a novel game for pockets of niche enthusiasts has now become a mainstream passion for people in every corner of the world.

In the forthcoming pages, you'll discover the history of the world's most popular role-playing game, the series of events that put it on its path to the top of the role-playing pyramid and the innovations that wowed audiences across multiple media forms.

- 1993 • Wizards of the Coast launches *Magic: The Gathering*, a collectible card game
- 1997 • Wizards of the Coast purchases TSR for a sum of \$25 million
- 1998 • *Baldur's Gate*, developed by Bioware, is released for PC
- 1999 • *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* is launched
- The first and only Planescape-set video game, *Planescape: Torment*, releases on PC
- 2000 • *Dungeons & Dragons: Third Edition* is released
- The Open Game Licence is added to third edition, allowing it to be used as a basis for other products
- 2001 • *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, an action RPG spin-off from the PC smash-hit, releases on PlayStation 2
- 2002 • *Neverwinter Nights*, the first online D&D game, goes live
- 2003 • Wizards revises its first entry and releases *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 3.5*
- 2004 • The R.A. Salvatore-penned *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* launches on PS2, Xbox and PC
- Physical *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazine production is halted and changed to online PDF formats
- 2007 • Wizards begins to tease a new edition with the *Wizards Presents* series
- 2008 • *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: Fourth Edition* is launched
- 2009 • *Pathfinder*, a major competitor to D&D based on 3.5e, is launched by Paizo Publishing



- 2010 • Wizards partners with IDW Publishing to release original comics
- The *Player Essentials* board game series kicks off with *Castle Ravenloft*
- 2013 • Wizards releases *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: Fifth Edition*
- *Neverwinter*, an MMORPG based on *Neverwinter Nights*, goes online
- 2015 • *Dragon**, an online magazine, is released, replacing *Dungeon and Dragon*
- 2016 • The first season of *Stranger Things* is streamed on Netflix
- 2018 • Wizards brings *Magic: The Gathering* to D&D with the *Guildmaster's Guide to Ravnica* campaign setting
- A middle-grade D&D novel series, penned by Madeleine Roux, begins with *Dungeon Academy: No Humans Allowed*
- The *Stranger Things DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Starter Set* is released
- 2019 • *Acquisitions, Incorporated*, a sourcebook based on the podcast of the same name is released
- Wizards' official actual play podcast *Rivals of Waterdeep* kicks off
- 2020 • A new campaign setting based on the world of livestream *Critical Role - The Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* - is released
- The long-awaited *Baldur's Gate III* is released, twenty years after its predecessor
- 2023 • *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: Honor Among Thieves* lands the number one spot at the box office on release



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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM

SECTION 1

FIRST EDITION



The story of Dungeons & Dragons began with TSR's publication of the First Edition, which has come to be known as original Dungeons & Dragons or OD&D. Though it owed a lot to wargaming, it served as the harbinger of the decline of that genre's popularity. The world was ready for a new type of tabletop game and D&D was at the forefront, laying the foundations and setting the standard for the genre known as role-playing games.

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 gnomes to six different deadly dragons.

Although role-playing as an individual was a feature in David Wesley's *Brounstein* 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. Gygax had borrowed this idea from the only game that he knew used a D20, *Troctics*, 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 Gygax'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 Gygax 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.

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3

HAT OF DISGUISE

CHARACTER CREATION

For those gamers familiar with commanding armies and armadas, playing as an individual in *Dungeons & Dragons* was something of a system shock. They could create their very own adventurer in this exciting new tabletop game. Better yet, they could send their adventurer on a multitude of incredible adventures. The character became an extension of the player – an alter ego that couldn't exist in the real world but could become a hero in D&D.

Transitioning from managing whole armies to managing a single player might have led some newbies to assume that D&D would be a much simpler endeavour. How wrong they were. Even in OD&D, there were so many character aspects to consider that creating one often proved a tricky task, not to mention the free rein it gave players to weave a narrative around their new adventurer.

The original OD&D set detailed just four races and three character classes, but this quickly evolved with the release of the supplements. Players could choose to build their character as a paladin, thief, monk, ranger, assassin or druid after the release of the first three supplements. The third supplement, *Eldritch Wizardry*, also introduced the elven race known as drow, as well as the first handful of subraces from the elven lineage – high elf and wood elf to name a couple. The unique characteristics you could assign your character had increased exponentially within just a few years of the game's initial release.

The next consideration was the hero's stats. The chosen character class had some effect on the hit points that a character could have, but there were no class bonuses to stats and the system of rolling 3d6 for each attribute could be brutal if Lady Luck wasn't on your side. Some players still use that system today – and even then it's usually the best three scores from 4d6 – but the less masochistic player uses a 'point buy' system, where a set amount of points are spent on the skills they want to specialise in.

As characters progressed through adventures, they gained experience points and levelled up, which meant that their hit points, attack and saving throw bonuses increased. OD&D had less customisation per level than later editions, but it still fed the micromanaging urge of wargaming transplants. Depending on the chosen class, progressing through levels also unlocked new skills, spells and weapon proficiencies, making your character ever stronger.

The most interesting choices players could make were the ones that were tied to the narrative elements of the game. The alignment system – a choice between lawful, chaotic and neutral – meant that players could justify their character's choices based on their in-game moral compass rather than their own, and perhaps oppose other members of the party. There was no formal mechanic for creating backstories, either, so if you chose to adventure lawfully, you could play peacekeeper, guard, bounty hunter, or a multitude of other roles.

This encapsulated what made OD&D so popular: given just a few options within a handful of parameters, you could create thousands of unique characters. With a dash of narrative, the role-playing potential for a player is vast. Throw that character in a party of four and the possible dynamics are incalculable. Unleash that party on a fantastical world of magic and randomness and the possibilities are truly infinite.

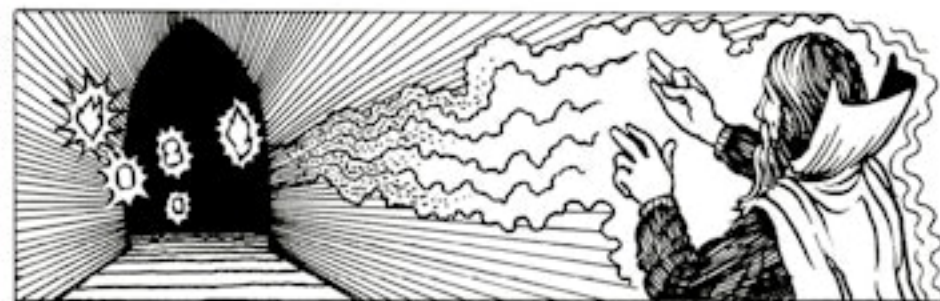
KEY TO PLATE

1: First Edition Races

The range of character races that were available to players in the original version of D&D.

2: Spellbound

An illustration from OD&D showing a magic-user – one of its three classes – casting *Dancing Lights*.



READ MAGIC

THE NOVELS OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

The first *Dungeons & Dragons* book was the result of an innocuous invitation from Gary Gygax himself. He asked the acclaimed fantasy writer Alice Norton – who went by the pseudonym Andre Norton – to play a game of D&D with him. It was set in Gygax's own *Greyhawk* campaign and immediately inspired an idea for her next novel. *Quag Keep* was published in 1978 and told the story of a band of players who were transported to the realm of *Greyhawk* when they touched mystical miniatures while playing D&D. TSR featured an excerpt in an issue of their *Dragon* magazine, which was a resounding endorsement from Gygax and the TSR team. It released to modest reviews and commercial success, but it opened the door for other players and writers to put pen to paper.

TSR saw that demand for fantasy publishing was growing and commissioned a series of innovative solo gamebooks known as *Endless Quest*. During the 1980s alone, 36 *Endless Quest* books were created, as well as a four-book mini-series, *Crimson Crystal Adventures*. Each book allowed players to make choices as they progressed through the narrative, which led to one of several possible endings. Though it was no substitute for the deep personalisation, complex role-playing and myriad scenarios laid out in the tabletop version, fans could play through D&D's rich settings and storylines all by themselves.

It wasn't until the middle of the 1980s that TSR would return to straight fiction, when author Margaret Weis and game designer Tracy Hickman teamed up to write *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. It was the first in a trilogy based on a new campaign setting, *Dragonlance*, that Hickman himself helped to design. It was created as an additional option for D&D players who wanted more of the *Dragons* in their D&D. Both the campaign setting and the novels were instant hits with fans and, though it has since become a game in its own right, *Dragonlance* was one of the most popular creations in D&D for well over a decade.

Knowing that novels set in the D&D universe were commercially viable, TSR opened the floodgates. Alongside their huge *Endless Quest* series, they published novels based on the core D&D rulebooks and campaigns, more from the *Dragonlance* setting, and even some written by Gygax in the *Greyhawk* universe. The popularity of D&D fiction attracted established authors and also allowed unknown authors to forge names for themselves. Along with Gygax, Norton, Weis and Hickman, esteemed fantasy names such as Ed Greenwood, Tim Pratt and Jean Rabe have all written official novels for *Dungeons & Dragons*.

No D&D author, however, hit the stratosphere like R.A. Salvatore. Mary Kirchoff, who was in charge of submissions at TSR, didn't like the story of his unsolicited manuscript – but she did like Salvatore's writing style. When TSR was looking for a writer to flesh out their new *Forgotten Realms* setting – pioneered by Ed Greenwood – Salvatore won the commission and wrote *The Crystal Shard* in less than two months. It sold over half a million copies and kicked off a trilogy that eventually reached the *New York Times* bestseller list. Salvatore became a prolific contributor to D&D fiction, the *Forgotten Realms* and the fantasy genre, and it is in no small part down to his greatest creation: Drizzt Do'Urden.

KEY TO PLATE

1: First D&D Novel

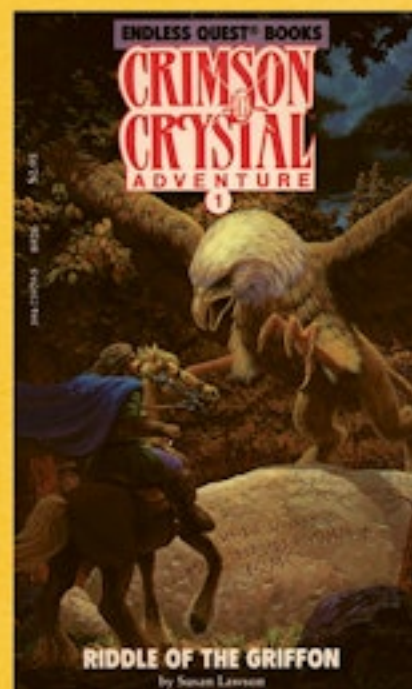
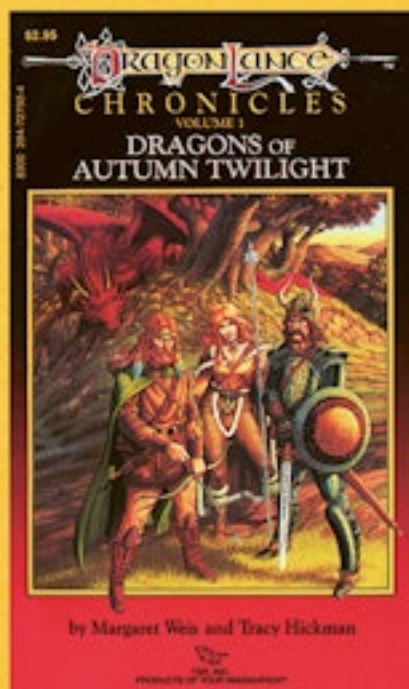
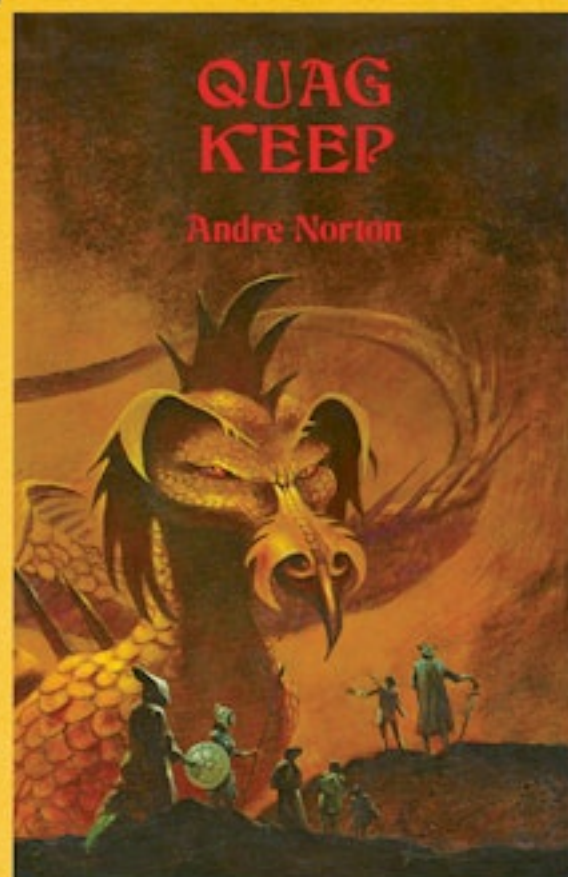
The first D&D novel, *Quag Keep*.

2: *Dragonlance Chronicles*

Front cover of the first *Dragonlance Chronicles* title *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. Weis and Hickman have written three novel trilogies for the setting.

3: *Crimson Crystal Adventures*

Front cover of *Riddle of the Griffon*, the second title in the *Endless Quest* spin-off series *Crimson Crystal Adventures*.



LEGEND LORE

THE UBIQUITOUS DRIZZT

By the time *The Crystal Shard* published in 1988, *Dungeons & Dragons* had evolved considerably. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* had been released a decade prior and TSR was on the cusp of releasing its second edition of the game. AD&D had reestablished the core rulebooks — *Monster Manual*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Player's Handbook*, all of which incorporated classes, races, and other advancements that had appeared in supplements or ephemera like magazines. More importantly, TSR had just released the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* in 1987 as an alternative location.

When R.A. Salvatore won the chance to flesh out *Forgotten Realms*, he chose to make the hero of his novel a drow by the name of Drizzt Do'Urden and set it in a frigid northern region he coined Icewind Dale. Drow had gained a reputation as villains of D&D adventures since they first appeared in the *Greyhawk* supplement, but Drizzt went against the grain and was written as a paragon of good who left his home to follow his ideals on the surface world.

Whether it was the unexpected alignment of Drizzt, the novelty of a drow hero, or the lure of his faithful Astral Plane-summoned panther Guenhwyvar, *The Crystal Shard* was a huge success and Drizzt became something of an unofficial mascot for D&D. Two sequels were commissioned to round out the Icewind Dale trilogy — *Streams of Silver* and *The Halfing's Gem*. The latter hit the *New York Times* bestseller list, which was a first for D&D fiction. By the end of 2023, there were 39 novels in the *Legend of Drizzt* series written by R.A. Salvatore. Drizzt also appears in a trilogy written with Salvatore's son, Geno, and the demi-deified drow appears in countless other books.

Drizzt's adventures also gave us the sprawling underground city of Menzoberranzan in *Homeland*, the first book in the *Dark Elf Trilogy*. Icewind Dale didn't exist until Salvatore committed it to the page either — and it's now one of the most popular regions of the *Forgotten Realms*. Drizzt also made several allies throughout his campaigns. In *The Crystal Shard*, he meets Catti-brie, Regis and Bruenor Battlehammer; Cadderly Bonaduce adventures by his side in *Candle* and the rest of the *Cleric Quintet* series; while Jarlade Baenre frequently flips between friend and foe during the course of the *Dark Elf Trilogy*.

As Drizzt's legend grew, there was no way to keep him confined to the pages of novels. He took the short hop to comics and graphic novels, many of which brought his previously-told adventures to life through dramatic illustrations. He's been spotted in video games, from *Baldur's Gate* and *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* to *Dungeons & Dragons Online*, sometimes as a playable character, other times as a recognizable NPC. He's available as a miniature, a collectible figurine, in his own board game *Legend of Drizzt*, and appeared in an animated short for a poem by R.A. Salvatore, narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch. Drizzt Do'Urden has been a D&D legend for over thirty years, and there is no sign of this icon vanishing any time soon.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Drizzt's Debut

Updated front cover of *The Crystal Shard*, the novel that introduced Drizzt to the world.

2: Dark Elf Trilogy

Cover of *Exile*, second book in the *Dark Elf Trilogy*, which tells of Drizzt's early life.

3: Drizzt & Friends

Drizzt and his companions; (l-r) Catti-brie, Wulfgar, Bruenor Battlehammer



ANIMATE DREAMS

A SMALL SCREEN ADVENTURE

Dungeons & Dragons could have been viewed as a niche hobby when it was first released in the 70s, particularly due to its wargaming roots and the complexity of its rules. However, the first sign that D&D had achieved broad appeal came in the form of a Saturday morning cartoon series of the same name. It first aired in the U.S. in 1983 and ran for three seasons, charting the adventures of a group of six friends who ride a roller coaster through a mysterious portal that transports them to a D&D realm.

Upon reaching this strange land, the kids are greeted by the Dungeon Master, a mysterious but benevolent being who outfits them with magical weapons and helps them on their quest to return home. To Hank, the leader of the group, he bestows a bow, which turns him into a ranger. Presto receives a magic hat that makes him the group's magician (or wizard). Sheila gets her hands on a cloak of invisibility, which helps her assume the role of thief, and the youngest friend, Bobby, is outfitted in a fur ensemble and armed with a cudgel, transforming him into a barbarian. Bobby is lucky enough to get a pet unicorn too!

Interestingly, two of the friends assumed roles that may be unfamiliar to players today. Cowardly Eric becomes a cavalier, a distinct class in the AD&D days that disappeared until it returned as a fighter subclass in the fifth edition. Diana was also a rare class: a quarterstaff-wielding acrobat, which was perhaps based on the acrobat-thief that debuted in *Unearthed Arcana*.

Blocking the party's route home was Venger, the Force of Evil – a nefarious wizard intent on using the kids' weapons to strengthen his powers. The five-headed dragon Tiamat also proves a fearsome foe, both to the kids and Venger. Supported by his dark spy Shadow Demon, Venger tries to thwart the plans of the kids and – SPOILER ALERT – his father, the Dungeon Master, across all 27 episodes.

The series was a resounding success when it debuted, dominating its slot for the duration of its run and being sold to over 100 territories across the world. However, the reception wasn't all positive. There was a moral panic about D&D and its perceived promotion of real-life violence, Satanism and other such things. Of course, no evidence has ever been provided for such an accusation. However, some critics worried that the cartoon contained an excessive level of violence given the young target audience, which almost prevented the series making it to air. In 1985, during the third season, one group campaigned to have the show run with warnings about its effect on real-life violence. This never came to pass, but the show was canceled shortly after – before the final episode could be created.

Fated to end without a satisfying conclusion, the animated adventures of Hank, Presto, Sheila, Eric, Diana, Bobby, and Uri still hold a place in the hearts of its fans. Its legacy didn't die when the show was canceled, and it is still widely discussed to this day. A module was released for D&D 3.5 called *Animated Series Handbook*, which had character sheets for the whole party and an original adventure set between episodes in the second series. If you pay close attention while watching *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*, you'll see a party of six characters navigating a labyrinth. Any guesses who they are?

KEY TO PLATE

1: Party Assembly

The Dungeon Master consults the displaced children.

2: Full Page Promo

Promotional poster for the *Dungeons & Dragons* animated series.

3: Wild Ride

The theme park ride that transported the kids into the world of D&D.

4: Big Bad

Venger, the series' resident villain.

5: Party Game

Box cover art for the spin-off board game *Quest for the Dungeon Master* shows the kids playing with Venger.

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2



3



2



3



WARE IDENTIFICATION

IN ALL GOOD STORES

There's a temptation to follow a popular cartoon with merchandise aimed at the younger generation, but beyond a collection of action figures based on the heroic party from the animated series, TSR resisted temptation to milk the cash cow. *Dungeons & Dragons* has always taken a considered approach to merchandise, ensuring they only release products that are genuinely desired by fans.

Of course, there were the various sourcebooks, additional campaigns, miniatures and dice sets needed to kick off adventures. Ventures into novels, films, TV and video games only stoked the fires of fandom for millions of players around the world who wanted to fly the flag for their favorite brand.

In the early days of D&D, fans were already clamoring for the art that adorned the pages of the rulebooks, especially the full color art from the covers of later editions. The works of artists such as David A. Trampier and Dave Sutherland (among others) were produced as art prints and posters, which ended up in the bedrooms of D&D fans the world over. Some of these early artworks are still revered today and available as reprints, or found on other licensed products with a retro tilt.

In 1980, TSR commissioned D&D calendars so that you could schedule your campaigns. The first calendar, known as *Days of the Dragon*, featured unique art from illustrators who had worked on covers for *Dragon* magazine, but it wasn't long before they were commissioning recognized names from beyond their own corner of fantasy fiction. Tim Hildebrandt, who had created art for J.R.R. Tolkien novels, as well as feature film posters for *Star Wars*, drew 14 new illustrations for 1984's calendar *Realms of Wonder*.

Beyond printed ephemera, which also included things like stickers and coloring books, there wasn't a lot of merchandise available before the turn of the century. Apparel was usually promotional and only available for a limited time, accessories were generally for decorating tabletop games and embellishing adventures, and collectibles were mostly miniatures, alongside a few limited-edition character figurines.

But D&D continued to rise in popularity in the new millennium, and with the advent of the licensing era, merchandise began to boom and adventurers all over the world could show off their loyalty in a plethora of ways. If you scour the Internet today, you'll find the usual paraphernalia to kit out your game table, but you'll also be able to decorate your house in D&D, dress from head to toe in D&D, and peruse massive lines of collectibles featuring favorite characters from adventures, films, comics and novels based on D&D.

If you're so inclined, you can kick off your day with a cup of official *Dungeons & Dragons* coffee, before donning one of thousands of official tees, then scattering D&D-themed cushions purchased from Jay Franco on chairs ready for your party to arrive, carry a classy satchel that's really a mimic in disguise and available from Ultra Pro as you walk out the door and let the sun glint off the beholder pendant draped around your neck that you bought from RockLove. Fans of D&D really can live and breathe (and wear and drink) their favorite game.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Figurine Line

Toy makers LJN created AD&D figurines during the early 80s, including heroes, possible monsters and miniatures that you could use on the tabletop.

2: Augmented Reality

Perfinity's retro-inspired enamel badges can be scanned with their app to bring characters to life.

3: Dungeons & Ducklings

The kids from the *Dungeons & Dragons* animated series have been transmogrified into limited edition TUBBZ dolls!

4: Unusual Merch

A special *Dungeons & Dragons* Shrinky Dink, a craft set that shrinks when heat is applied.

5: Heroic Cast

NECA have created a line of intricate 7-inch figures, including the brave dwarf Elthorn and the sinister Werduke.

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TEMPORAL JOURNAL

NEWS OF THE FORGOTTEN REALMS

It might seem odd to today's audience that you would buy a magazine to keep up with developments on Dungeons & Dragons. However, D&D was evolving at such a rate – and along several parallel paths – during the 70s and 80s that having a periodical meant you could keep abreast of the developments, additions and changes before you worked the latest supplement into your game.

TSR knew the benefit a magazine could provide when it first published *The Strategic Review* in 1975. The quarterly offering featured articles on strategies, additional rules to vary the core game and supplementary materials such as new character classes or unique magic items. However, the publication only lasted for four editions. The roleplaying genre was still in its infancy and while D&D was the most popular game of its kind, TSR knew that a magazine wouldn't survive without broader appeal.

Enter *The Dragon* magazine. TSR's second periodical released on a bi-monthly basis and featured not just D&D but other tabletop games from beyond TSR's stable. Once they were bringing in fans of other tabletop games too, they switched to a monthly cycle. *The Dragon's* mixture of articles, opinions, homebrew submissions and contributions from prominent game designers, combined with artwork from fantasy illustrators, proved so popular that fans began clamoring for a specialized D&D magazine again. In 1986, players got their wish when *Dungeon* magazine first landed on shelves. It featured ready-made adventures, with new settings and monsters aplenty. *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines had made business sense for TSR and had also become necessities for D&D players trying to navigate the ever more complex web of game editions. Though it later offered subscriptions on disks and online, *Dungeon* magazine was a victim of the internet age and ceased production in 2007, along with its sister publication.

When D&D evolved into *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* in 1977, TSR was publishing a *Basic Set* in parallel, which was a more organized version of the OD&D rules. However, it only covered characters up to level 3, so it was updated to an *Expert Set* in 1981, for adventurers up to level 14. It expanded yet again in 1983 with the BECM version, named for its five rulebooks (*Basic, Expert, Companion, Master, Immortals*), which was then compiled into a single book, the *Rules Cyclopedia*, in 1991, two years after the second edition of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* had published.

Periodicals eventually succumbed to the diminishing appetite for print media. However, *Dungeon* and *Dragon* were reincarnated in digital format as PDFs from Wizards of the Coast in 2007. These digital 'zines were now dedicated to the current fourth edition, but included the same blend of game content and contributions from figures behind the game. After a short hiatus, the two titles were combined in 2015 to form *Dragon+*, an online magazine that showcased the latest campaigns and incorporated contributions from the emerging worlds of streaming and podcasts. Wizards made the decision to end *Dragon+* in the first half of 2022. However, D&D hasn't been without an official periodical for long in its 50+ year history...

KEY TO PLATE

1: Flagship Issue

The first edition of *The Dragon* magazine, released in June 1976.

2: Magazine Evolution

As well as dropping the 'the' from the title, the art gracing the covers was significantly upgraded in subsequent years.

3: Sister Publication

Dungeon was released in 1986 and reached 150 issues before its run was ended.

4: Paizo Era

Between the years of 2002 and 2007, *Dragon* was created by Paizo Publishing, who later created the roleplaying game *Pathfinder*.

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FORGE DOMAIN

FORGOTTEN REALMS FOUNDATIONS

It's hard to picture *Dungeons & Dragons* without the Forgotten Realms, but if not for one creative and enterprising writer, settings like Greyhawk, Mystara or Dragonlance might have become the *de facto* synonym for D&D instead. That writer was Ed Greenwood, born in the outskirts of Toronto in 1959. It wasn't much later, around the mid 60s, that he began to put pen to paper on a magical fantasy world.

Before it was the most popular setting in D&D, the Forgotten Realms was the locale for every story that popped into Greenwood's imagination. For him, this setting was a parallel universe where adventures unspooled, heroes rose to battle monsters and great evils lurked in every corner. Some DMs even suggest that legends of our Earth are migrants from the more magical plains of Abeir-Toril.

As Greenwood entered his mid-teens and OD&D hit the shelves, he saw this new fantasy role-playing game as the perfect stage for his universe and began to run homebrewed campaigns amid the landscape of the Forgotten Realms. Familiar locations such as Waterdeep and Shadowdale were already central to the setting, and it proved to be a success with his group.

Over time, Greenwood's passion for D&D grew, and he now had a way to share the Forgotten Realms with D&D fans all over the world. He started sending hefty missives to *The Dragon* magazine in 1979, beginning with a profile of a monster he called the cunst. He sent in a series of articles detailing everything from magic items and spells to game mechanics and lore. The editors at the magazine continued to publish them, allowing the Realms to reach a huge audience, but little did they know they were allowing Greenwood to lay the foundations of a major part of D&D.

Fast forward to 1986, and the post-Gary Gygax era at TSR. The company was looking to move away from Gygax's Greyhawk setting and enlisted writer Jeff Grubb to come up with an alternative. Grubb had been assigned to research the Forgotten Realms setting that had been cropping up in *The Dragon* and immediately earmarked it as a frontrunner. On talking to Greenwood, Grubb discovered that not only were the articles the tip of the iceberg, but Greenwood was keen to part ways with the rights to the setting on the condition that TSR would publish his novels. Grubb leaped at the opportunity and the pair began working on the official campaign setting, which was released in 1987, the same year that TSR published Greenwood's first Forgotten Realms novel, *Spellfire*. The rest is history. The Forgotten Realms began to grow in popularity with the official seal of approval, particularly following the release of the second edition tome *Forgotten Realms Adventures*. Greenwood joined TSR and continued expanding the setting alongside other writers, and the Realms became synonymous with D&D.

Whether you're a fan of Elminster the wizard, R.A. Salvatore's novels, the *Baldur's Gate* video game series, *Honor Among Thieves* or countless other Forgotten Realms spin-off media, you've got one man to thank Ed Greenwood.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Forgotten Realms

One of Ed Greenwood's original maps for his homebrew Forgotten Realms campaign. Notable locations like the High Forest, the Sword Coast and Waterdeep are visible and still exist in the game today.

2: Setting Logo

The current logo for the campaign setting, which has been ever-present since 2000.

3: Dockside

The city of Waterdeep as it's depicted today. Everything from campaign books to video games have graced the hectic port.

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM

SECTION 2

SECOND EDITION



Fifteen years had passed since the first edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* had been released. Revisions, additions, corrections and branching paths had made the game somewhat of a puzzle, even before players could embark on a campaign. The second edition, released in 1989, set out to weave the branches of D&D back together, incorporating rules, settings, and innovations from supplements, novels, magazines and other strands of roleplaying. But this era would be far from smooth sailing — help was needed from a revered fantasy game publisher to steady the ship.

KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN

SECOND EDITION

Before the release of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Second Edition*, the market for role-playing games had grown increasingly competitive. With the *Rules Cyclopedia* branch turning the heads of many players, TSR knew that they needed to refocus D&D.

Second edition made several simplifications to the rules. It was no longer necessary to check a complicated matrix to see if a hit landed – instead, you could simply check the enemy's Armor Class (AC) against your To Hit Armor Class (THAC0) stat to determine the minimum successful roll. Saving throws were united across classes, though still split into five separate types. Non-human races had some class and level restrictions, but the rules were relaxed enough to give players greater freedom.

TSR also expanded the game to encourage players to continue questing for years. Second edition welcomed back the settings of Greyhawk, Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance, but also ushered in Dark Sun, Spelljammer, Ravenloft and Planescape to its stable, allowing adventurers to tackle post-apocalyptic worlds, space operas, gothic horrors and whole new planes of existence. Characters could become adept with their choice of weapons using new Proficiency rules, making them deadlier in combat, and mages – no longer magic-users – could follow an organized school of magic.

TSR took this opportunity to embed some of the classes that had appeared in D&D ephemera into the base game. Bards and barbarians, both introduced in the era of the first edition, now made the list of core classes. Along with specialized wizards, who could dabble in schools such as necromancy and abjuration, other classes could be outfitted with kits – sets of abilities that could tailor a class to a preferred playstyle. Thieves could choose a burglar kit to increase their stealth and lockpicking skills, while druids employing the shapeshifter kit could morph into stronger beasts.

To mitigate the negative publicity of the 'Satanic panic' in the 80s, which attempted to link murders, suicides, and general bad vibes with the brand, TSR removed all references to devils and demons in the game, replacing them with the Yugoloth, Baatezu and Tanar'ri. Assassins were cleansed to remove abilities that could be seen as gratuitous and they were no longer restricted to an evil alignment. TSR ensured the new edition focused on heroism, teamwork and adventure, and went on the offensive to educate religious groups, parents, schools and other concerned parties.

Critically and commercially, the new edition was considered a success, though it didn't quite garner the sales or acclaim that its predecessor did. Perhaps some were still wedded to previous editions in years-long campaigns, or maybe they just preferred the complexity that had been stripped from the streamlined second edition. Regardless, 2e reigned supreme for over a decade as D&D crept into pop culture, found hosts of famous fans and spread its tendrils through media old and new.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Core Rules

The second edition core rulebooks might be more recognisable by name: (i-v) *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Monstrous Compendium*.

2: Inside Mystara

The *Hollow World* Campaign Set took place within the planet of Mystara, a campaign setting that originated from Basic's *Known World*.

3: Apocalypse Then

Dark Sun allowed for roleplay in a post-apocalyptic setting.

4: Starships

First added to the stable in 1989, the *Spelljammer* setting allowed players to voyage into fantasy space.



ILLUSORY REALITY

DIGITAL REALMS

As *Dungeons & Dragons* continued its ascent through the 70s and 80s, computers began to invade homes around the world and companies started producing simple, text-based games to play on them. Games such as *Zork* and *Colossal Cave Adventure* became immensely popular. The latter was developed by Will Crowther, a programmer, amateur spelunker and D&D fan who combined his memories of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky with the witty repartee of a Dungeon Master to create CCA.

Colossal Cave Adventure pioneered the text-based adventure genre in 1976. *Zork*, *Adventure* and *Rogue* followed in its path and PC gaming gained a huge following. TSR hopped on the bandwagon in the early 80s with an entry in the Intellivision console library: *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Cloudy Mountain*, followed by *AD&D: Treasures of Tarmin*, which also released on the Mattel Aquarius home computer. *Cloudy Mountain* was a top-down adventure where you controlled a bow-wielding hero, whereas *Treasures of Tarmin* was a first-person quest, much like early shooters such as *Doom* and *Wolfenstein*, in which you plumbed the depths of a labyrinth to defeat a minotaur. Both were well-received, but when Intellivision proved to be a commercial flop, the gaming arms of Mattel were dissolved and D&D games disappeared from the market. In the intervening decade, more D&D-inspired games appeared on computers, such as the *Ultima* and *Wizardry* series, which had more attractive graphics and faithfully toed the roleplaying line. Though TSR had dabbled in the console market, it seemed like PC was the true home for D&D games, and they relaunched with a double salvo.

Developed by Strategic Simulations, Inc., *Heroes of the Lance* was a side-scrolling action game that followed the narrative of the *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* novel by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman. You controlled eight heroes from the story, each with their own weapon and skills. Much more faithful to tabletop D&D was *Pool of Radiance*, which let you customize a party of six before setting off on an adventure through the Forgotten Realms. It had random encounters, turn-based battles, character leveling and everything that D&D players had become accustomed to. *Pool of Radiance* sold three times as many copies as *Heroes of the Lance* and set the benchmark for D&D games that followed.

It was so popular that TSR chose to repeat the formula en masse. SSI continued making games that mimicked the tabletop experience with the 'Gold Box' series, which included three sequels for *Pool of Radiance*. TSR collaborated with Stormfront Studios on a new series in the Forgotten Realms' Sword Coast with *Gateway to the Savage Frontier* and rebooted their Dragonlance offerings with *Champions of Krynn*, which followed the RPG blueprint that *Pool of Radiance* had established. The Gold Box series was hugely successful and set the gold standard for roleplaying games on PC and beyond.

These early PC games are revered to this day and have a loyal fanbase. They inspired countless imitators and provided a foundation for computer RPGs that would one day support the monoliths of the genre – monoliths that would come from the D&D stable. Monoliths such as *Baldur's Gate*.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Handheld Adventure

Mattel's handheld D&D adventure involved exploring a 10x10 dungeon with just three buttons.

2: Double Feature

A promotional poster for Mattel's first pair of D&D games for the Intellivision, *Cloudy Mountain* and *Treasures of Tarmin*.

3: Gold Box

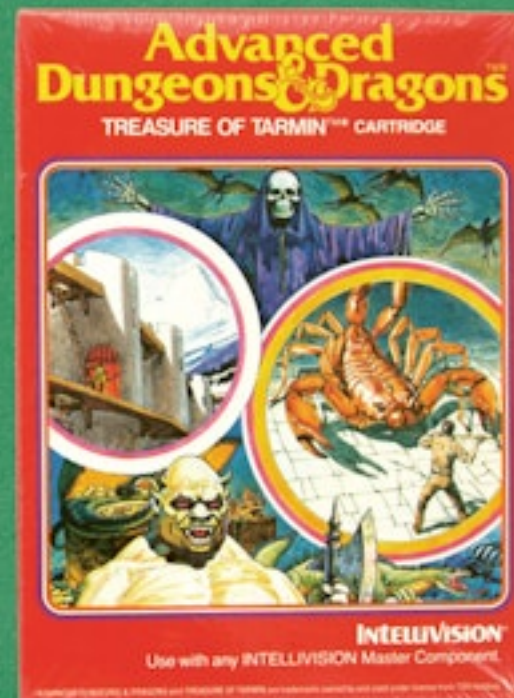
SSI's *Pool of Radiance* kickstarted the Gold Box era of D&D video games and had intricate pixel artwork.

4: Red Box

The box art of *Treasures of Tarmin*, which started the 'red box' trend.

5: Intellivision Origins

The box art for *Cloudy Mountain* focused on the D&D branding and fantasy art, even omitting the full title.



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. Action 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 Utter 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: Worthy 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.

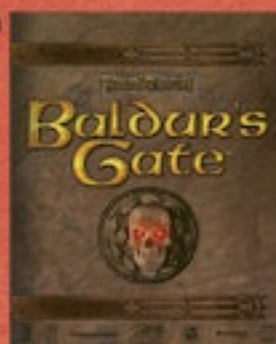
6: A Quick Polish

Enhanced editions of *Baldur's Gate* and *Shadows of Amn* were released in 2012 and 2013 respectively.

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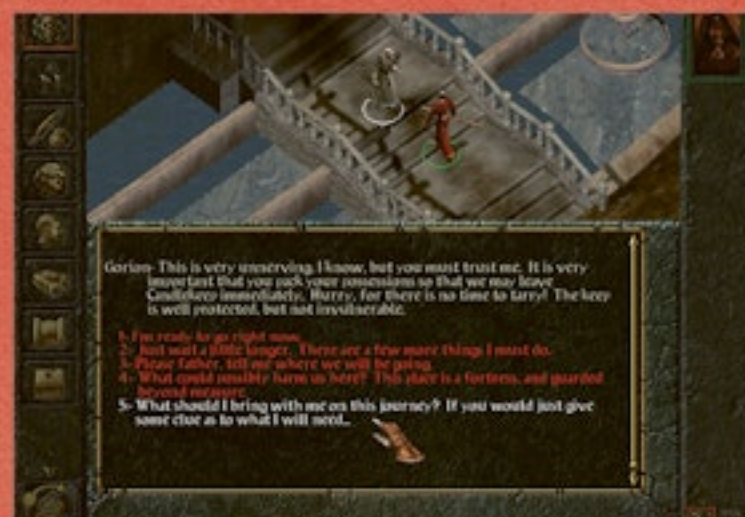
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DEAL WITH DESTINY

WIZARDS SAVE THE DAY

The landscape at TSR had shifted considerably since *Dungeons & Dragons* first released. The company had been spun off into four separate entities – TSR, Inc. still handled the game itself, while another, TSR Entertainment, Inc., led by Gary Gygax, attempted to license films and TV adaptations. It found early success with the animated series, but Hollywood had little interest in D&D at the time. Sales of the rulebooks declined in the early 80s and TSR started to rack up debt chasing more lucrative opportunities. There were boardroom disputes and redundancies for up to three-quarters of all TSR staff and Gygax sought help from his new Hollywood contacts. Gygax appointed Lorraine Williams, custodian of the *Buck Rogers* franchise, manager at TSR in an attempt to steady the ship. However, it proved to be trickier than first anticipated for Williams, and something had to give. Unfortunately, that meant buying out Gygax and assuming a controlling share of the company. Fortunately, Williams was able to bring TSR back from the brink and oversaw the release of *AD&D: Second Edition*, countless novels and TSR's first forays into the video game space. It all appeared to be going well for over a decade, until it wasn't ...

Accounts vary regarding the precise reason for the company's dire financial straits at the beginning of 1997. Print runs with publishers were too high, leaving TSR with warehouses of unsold stock. The various settings – which now included *Al-Qadim*, *Birthright* and *Mystara* – had compartmentalized the player base so much so that supplements released for each setting were only purchased by a portion of D&D players. Ventures into collectible card games were not as lucrative as management had accounted for.

In Seattle, Washington, Wizards of the Coast was poised to swoop in and save the day. Formed in 1990 by Peter Adkison, Wizards had a long history of publishing roleplaying games, like *The Primal Order* and *Ars Magica*. But it was its collectible card game *Magic: The Gathering* that shot Wizards into the stratosphere when it was released in 1993. It was created by legendary game designer Richard Garfield and sold millions of cards in its first year alone.

Wizards was keen to save one of tabletop gaming's most iconic franchises, so agreed to acquire TSR for a sum of \$25 million, wiping out the debt that they'd accrued and gaining stewardship of D&D along with other TSR properties. Now that money had begun to flow through TSR again, it could pay suppliers and contributors, unlocking the release of games that had been stuck in limbo and turning TSR into a money-spinner once more. Wizards continued to use the TSR branding on products for a few more years, but eventually removed it in favour of its own, even allowing the trademark to run its course without renewal. Now Wizards was at the helm, D&D entered a less chaotic era. It was more streamlined, more focused and ready to take the world by storm all over again.



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WIZARDS
OF THE COAST

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KEY TO PLATE

1: Brand Recognition

Wizards of the Coast logo used during the early days of their D&D reign.

2: Sleek Update

After 22 years, Wizards swapped its logo out for a more modern one in 2021.

3: Kingdom Battles

The medieval domain-expanding *Birthright* campaign setting was one of dozens available for D&D.

4: Grateful Community

Artwork showing the Wizards founder Peter Adkison shielding TSR from stormy times, created around the time of the acquisition.

5: Happy Home

A handful of TSR staff members at headquarters in Lake Geneva, Washington, circa 1997.

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ASTRAL PROJECTION

PERMEATING POP CULTURE

To say that *Dungeons & Dragons*' influence has been far-reaching is an understatement. The game was already testing the waters in other forms of media like novels, games and television during the early 1980s, so it's no surprise that the wider media landscape has been borrowing references from D&D ever since.

Gary Gygax spent years trying to crack Hollywood with TSR Entertainment, but D&D was already there – it made a cameo in huge blockbuster movie *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* in 1982. That was just the tip of the iceberg. *Futurama: Bender's Game* was a feature-length reboot of the animation that saw our favorite bending unit transform into Titanius Anglesmith when he joined a game of D&D. Less well-known and considerably lower budget is *The Gamers*, the first in a trilogy of cinematic love-letters to the game and the tabletop.

Not every film cast D&D in such an affectionate light. *Mazes and Monsters*, an adaptation of Rona Jaffe's book, had a ludicrous plot where players of the eponymous D&D-inspired game began to blur the lines between their lives and those of their characters. Adult animated comedy *Paradise P.D.* sends up the whole Satanic panic debacle in an episode called *Dungeons and Dragnet*, in which a preacher wages war against a 'cult' of D&D players that includes bumbling cop Kevin.

It could be argued that D&D has had the biggest impact on the small screen. As well as *Bender's Game*, the *Futurama* series regularly references D&D and even features Gary Gygax in one episode. In Matt Groening's other creation, *The Simpsons*, Homer plays D&D with college friends before he's slain by an elf. A later episode transforms the town into Springfieldia, where dragons and gelatinous cubes roam. *SpongeBob SquarePants* has also dabbled in a game of *Dunces and Dragons* with his pals in Bikini Bottom.

D&D has frequently been referenced in non-animated shows such as Judd Apatow's *Freaky and Geeks*, where young adults frequently reference D&D and other corners of counter-culture. *The Big Bang Theory* regularly mentions D&D, and was one of the first shows to hint that D&D was breaking into the mainstream. Who can forget the episode where Leonard is invited to a game that includes TV star Wil

Wheaton, action hero Joe Manganiello and basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar?

Perhaps the most accurate depiction of a game of D&D comes from Dan Harmon, a creator best known for *Rick and Morty*. It's his critically acclaimed sitcom *Community* that delivers the best D&D moments, dedicating two full episodes to the game. In one, the study group, DM'd by Abed, attempts to cheer up a depressed classmate, while another sees the group attempt to mend the bond between Buzz and his estranged son with a short campaign.

Along with games like *Tiny Tina's Wonderlands*, where the titular Tina runs a campaign of *Bunkers & Badasses*, songs from Weezer in which Rivers Cuomo wails he has a 12-sided die and a *Dungeon Master's Guide*, or comics depicting home games like *Knights of the Dinner Table*, D&D has infiltrated every corner of entertainment. Having teetered on the brink of truly breaking free of its nerdy status and reaching the mainstream for years, it would eventually succeed thanks to a certain series that released on Netflix in 2016 ...



KEY TO PLATE

1: Cartoon Hero

Gary Gygax was immortalised in animated form when he made an appearance in *Futurama* episode *Anthology of Interest*.

2: Level 1 Actor

Though *Mazes and Monsters* has failed the test of time, some of its actors haven't. A young Tom Hanks starred in the film adaptation before hitting the Hollywood big time.

3: Cameo Role

Elliott's older brother and his friends play D&D in *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*. Some stories from the set suggest that Steven Spielberg was involved in a campaign with young co-stars like Drew Barrymore.



CHARM PERSON

CELEB FANDOM

The episode of *The Big Bang Theory* that featured huge household names rolling dice and kicking goblin butt wasn't a hastily arranged cast of actors looking for a payday. With the possible exception of William Shatner and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, all of the other players are dyed-in-the-wool *Dungeons & Dragons* fans, players and DMs. Wil Wheaton, of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fame, has played games on stage with Jerry Holkins and the *Acquisitions Incorporated* crew. Kevin Smith, director of slacker comedies like *Clerks*, has a real-play podcast with his partner-in-crime Jason Mewes, called *Crimson Mystical Mages*.

Joe Manganiello is such a fan that when he appeared on *Late Night with Stephen Colbert*, he spent most of his interview discussing D&D with host and fellow aficionado Colbert. But Manganiello isn't the only action star that enjoys D&D. Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson has tried his hand at D&D, while Terry Crews assumed the role of Thodack the blacksmith in a game DM'd by Matthew Mercer of *Critical Role* fame. Vin Diesel has been rolling dice since the original edition of D&D and was the inspiration for a game called *Vin Diesel DMing a Game of D&D Just For You*.

There are more obvious luminaries that play the game too. R.A. Salvatore was famously a player of D&D long before he found fame with *The Crystal Shard*, as was Paul S. Kemp, the author of *The Erevis Cale* trilogy, among countless contributors to D&D canon. However, writers from further afield have gained inspiration, story-telling skills, and character design experience too. Junot Diaz, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, welcomed his friends to a game at his home when he was young — a similar path to the one trodden by David Mitchell, author of the classic *Cloud Atlas*.

To see how deep the D&D love goes in celebrity circles, look no further than Wizards of the Coast's official livestreamed adventures. They feature the usual suspects — Brennan Lee Mulligan, B. Dave Walters, Matthew Mercer — but they've also played host to stars such as actors Jack Black, Matthew Lillard and Michelle Rodriguez, as well as comedians Reggie Watts, Seth Green and Tiffany Haddish to name but a few.

Perhaps the most inspiring story of celeb fandom is Deborah Ann Woll, best known for playing Karen in Netflix's *Daredevil* series. She played a character in *Force Grey: Lost City of Omu*, an official stream from Wizards and its partners, and made appearances on *Critical Role* as a guest character, before DMing her CR friends in Wizards' *Stream of Many Eyes* event. She regularly appeared in official Wizards events, as well as other tabletop ventures, all whilst penning her first adventure module *Heroes' Feast: Saving the Children's Menu*, an accompaniment to Ten Speed Press' hugely popular *Heroes' Feast* cookbook series. She'd taken a circuitous route from player to contributor to the game that she loves.

Celebrity interest in D&D is indicative of the broad impact that the game has on people from all walks of life. From kids entering their first campaign to tables around Hollywood populated by action stars, comedians, writers and late-night hosts, they all take part to create, enjoy and inspire others.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Bang for your Buck

Wil Wheaton (left) and William Shatner (right) play D&D with Penny (Kaley Cuoco) in *The Big Bang Theory*, which regularly references the roleplaying game in its twelve-series run.

2: D&D Stalwart

Action star who wears his D&D adoration on his sleeve, Joe Manganiello.

3: Spin-Off

Saving the Children's Menu is Deborah Ann Woll's first adventure for D&D and stems from the hugely successful cookbook *Heroes' Feast*.

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3

COMPREHEND LANGUAGES

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS LEXICON

Almost every niche of society seems to develop their own way of speaking, innocently obfuscating their cozy corner with jargon, slang, and contortions of a language that others only recognize on the surface level. To an outsider, it can seem intimidating to parse the terminology associated with certain areas, and *Dungeons & Dragons* is no different.

If a layman were to look in on a game of D&D, they might see the host of a roleplaying game voicing an ensemble cast, as players act out a scene where they are one roll of the dice away from death. To a member of the community, they'd be watching a DM voicing NPCs as the PCs, who are critically low on HP, roll a d20 to avoid a TPK. To translate for any laypeople flicking through this book, a Dungeon-Master is voicing non-player characters, as the player characters, who are all low on health points, roll a twenty-sided die to avoid a total party kill, or the death of an entire team of characters.

It's hard to draw a straight etymological line back to D&D for every term, but it certainly excelled at popularizing them. NPCs and HP are common video game parlance, as is XP or experience points, while the D-numeral combination has increased in popularity as people discover that dice can have more or fewer than six sides. Of course, acronyms are harder to fathom in their reduced state, and other D&D terms can be parsed with an educated guess.

For example, if the player characters are going on a campaign, it's unlikely that it's a political one — although you never know in the world of D&D — so it's merely a short leap to conclude that they're embarking on a long journey or quest. If that campaign is a homebrewed one, it's easy to work out that it was lovingly created at home, possibly by a single person, tailor-made for the consumption of a few close friends.

The community has always been creative with the language — and that's in addition to the various names, theologies, monsters and tongues created for D&D. They popularised using loot as a verb and proceeded to do it to the corpse of every monster they felled; they shortened critical to crit after growing tired of the extra syllables when they rolled a 1 or 20 — a critical miss or hit respectively. If they were powerful enough and landed a crit on an enemy, they could combine words and one-shot them, defeating their foe with a single blow.

Some of the terms best associated with D&D have little to do with the game itself. Take session zero as an example — this is a gathering between DM and players intended to discuss content and raise red lines before the quest begins. People gathered around the tabletop can engage in *table talk*, or non-dialogue chats about how to approach the obstacles placed before them, though they must be wary of *meta-gaming* accusations — making decisions based on the knowledge and hunches of the player, rather than the character. A DM can allow an action that doesn't quite adhere to the rulebooks if it's a particularly awesome idea — known as the *rule of cool* — but you'd better hope there isn't a *rules lawyer* around the table, because those guys insist on playing to the letter of the law.

Whether it's your first time playing D&D or your four-hundredth, you'll find the language of the game evolves continuously. Consider it a constantly evolving side-quest as you go forth on your adventures.

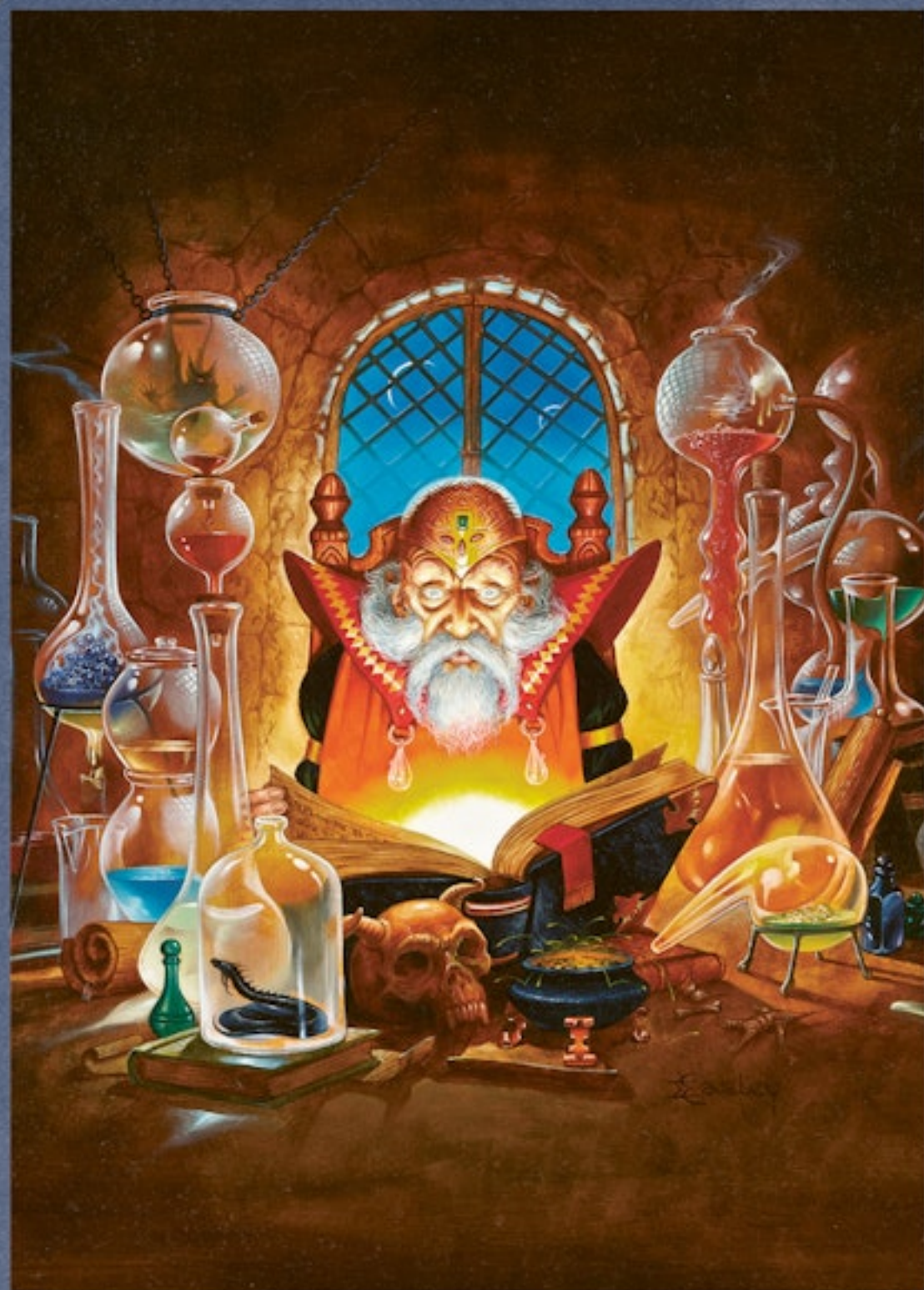
KEY TO PLATE

1: *Unearthed Arcana*
Cover artwork for *Unearthed Arcana*, created

by Jeff Easley. The first edition of the book was
created by Gary Gygax at a time when TSR

was in dire financial straits.

1





DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM

SECTION 3

THIRD EDITION



With Wizards of the Coast at the helm, it was time for the next chapter of Dungeons & Dragons to unfurl. With the third edition, WotC aimed to streamline the sprawling universes of D&D as well as some facets of the game itself. There were some tricks up Wizards' sleeve too, and it conjured up innovations that remain in the game today, as well as an ingenious idea that would allow the game to grow exponentially without leaving it in the red like TSR before it.

KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN

THIRD EDITION

A new millennium dawned, the world hadn't ended due to the Y2K bug, and Wizards of the Coast was preparing to evolve its flagship roleplaying game. The eyes of the community were firmly fixed on the new custodians of *Dungeons & Dragons* – fans were eagerly anticipating news of the third edition and a potential new direction for the game.

'Advanced' had been shorn from the title for the first time in 23 years, a signifier of a new, streamlined game. Wizards placed greater onus on the d20 to resolve checks and attacks so that players weren't scrambling for a multitude of dice, and saving throws now boiled down to just three checks – fortitude, reflex, and will. Modifiers on ability checks were more uniformly applied, with a set formula to derive each one from the six core ability scores. Finally, there were no class restrictions tied to race and players could enjoy unadulterated freedom when creating a character.

Wizards also added mechanics such as feats – special abilities that players could use when they reached a certain level – and skills that could be upgraded with points earned during the campaign. They overhauled multi-classing, making it easier to manage, and implemented prestige classes. These high-level builds were pseudo-evolutions that players could only assume if their character met certain criteria.

Perhaps the greatest innovation that Wizards introduced for 3e was nothing to do with the game itself. They released *D&D: Third Edition* with an Open Game License (OGL), which meant that the game could be used as a basis for supplements and even other games! *D&D* had always had a huge homebrew community so fans and publishers being able to share their additions freely was a huge boon.

It also meant that the universes of *D&D* could continue to expand on the sprawling settings. Birthright, Planescape, and other previously popular settings were relegated to the fringes when the third edition released, even though many were still popular. The OGL meant that fans, players and other companies could meet the needs of those bases, instead of Wizards assuming the risk. It was a genius move and one that was welcomed by all.

Third Edition was welcomed with great fanfare. The new streamlined approach opened a door for fans unconvinced by previous complication, while the core rulebooks were more focused, giving *D&D* a stronger identity. It wasn't without flaws – some suggested that it was quite rigid in reality, and the OGL would spawn the greatest pretenders to *D&D*'s throne, like *Pathfinder*, which was originally created by Paizo Publishing and based on the 3.5 edition that released three years after the original.

But the competition was not good enough to steal the crown of *Dungeons & Dragons* and the era of third edition was relatively stable. It sold exceptionally well and garnered a wider fan base than ever before, perhaps spurred on by the third-party products that supported it. If there had been any apprehension about Wizards driving *D&D* forward, it was firmly put to bed with the third edition.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Common Theme

Once more, *Third Edition* began life with the three core rulebooks: (l-r) *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Monster Manual*.

2: Late Publications

Artwork from the *Dungeon Survival Guide*, a stat-light book that landed towards the end of the third edition era.

3: In The Shadows

The assassin was one of the prestige classes implemented in third edition, requiring an evil alignment and set skill ranks to obtain.

4: Schools of Magic

Wizards could specialise in different magical fields, like this conjuration wizard casting *Summon Monster*.



BARDIC INSPIRATION

THE ART OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

When Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson were budgeting for the publication of *Dungeons & Dragons*, they put aside \$100 for artwork, dishing out a few dollars for each piece, which is why most pages are full of stat blocks or rules. Gygax and Arneson, neither of whom claimed to be an artist, contributed art to the original books, to avoid the expense of enlisting the help of professional artists.

The original books also included pieces by Milwaukee artist Cookie Corey, TSR co-founder Don Kaye, a distant family relation of Gygax, Keenan Powell, and Greg Bell, whom Gygax knew through hobby shop owner Jeff Perren.

Nonetheless, the art proved just as popular as the game itself upon release and it wasn't long before D&D was drawing in artistic luminaries from the world of fantasy publishing. David C. Sutherland III contributed artwork to the first supplement *Greyhawk*, before assuming the role of Artistic Director at TSR until 1997. Dave Trampier provided the cover for AD&D's *Player's Handbook* and contributed artwork to the core AD&D rulebooks. Fantasy artist Erol Otus illustrated the cover of *Deities and Demigods* before working on art for video games like *Mail Order Monsters* and *Star Control II*.

The second edition featured artwork from Larry Elmore, who had previously illustrated covers for the *Basic Set* – the edition that began the splinter of parallel runs to AD&D. Elmore remains one of the most revered artists to ever commit ink to paper for D&D – his drawings were particularly detailed and usually contained dragons, so it was no surprise when he contributed art to the pitch for the *Dragonlance* setting. Providing a significant amount of artwork to sourcebooks clearly wasn't enough for him, as he also wrote and illustrated a comic strip *SnarfQuest* in *Dragon* magazine between 1983 and 1989.

When D&D reached its third incarnation, the visuals were pared back to become more sketchy. The core rulebooks appeared to be illustrated primarily in pencil art, favoring intricacy over extravagance, while the supplementary entries in the series are a darker, more brooding take on the fantasy genre, inked by artists such as Wayne Reynolds, Gerald Brom and Todd Lockwood.

By the time the fourth edition rolled around, the art had evolved into a much more modern version of fantasy. Gone was the swords-and-sandals style that had become so associated with D&D, and in its place were vivid colours, sleek interpretations of races and monsters, and considered compositions. This theme continued into the fifth edition, where the approach could be seen from the fiery hells of *Descent Into Avernus* to the frigid north featured in *Rime of the Frostmaiden*.

No matter what era of D&D players prefer, the art has always been spectacular in its own way. It is a foundation stone that helped to make the roleplaying game so popular, and has been built on for decades by some of the most recognizable artists in the genre.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Frosty Reception

Tyler Jacobson's cover for the fifth edition adventure *Rime of the Frostmaiden*, showing the titular villain Aurl.

2: Inferno

Perhaps Jacobson's most recognizable cover, for *Descent into Avernus*, shows the god of violence Bhaal.

3: Style Guide

Height chart comparing the size of many of the D&D races, from the minuscule halfling on the left to a dragonborn on the right.

4: Dragon Hoard

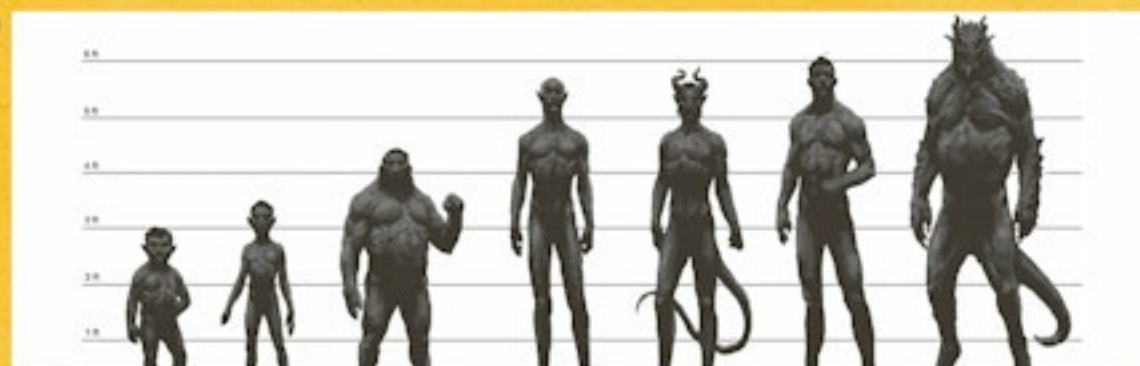
Dragons have been a mainstay of the series and intricate explorations of chromatic and metallic dragons can be found in almost every book.

5: Devil in the Details

Artwork in the fourth edition *Monster Manual* paid close attention to depicting all of the beasts you could face off against.

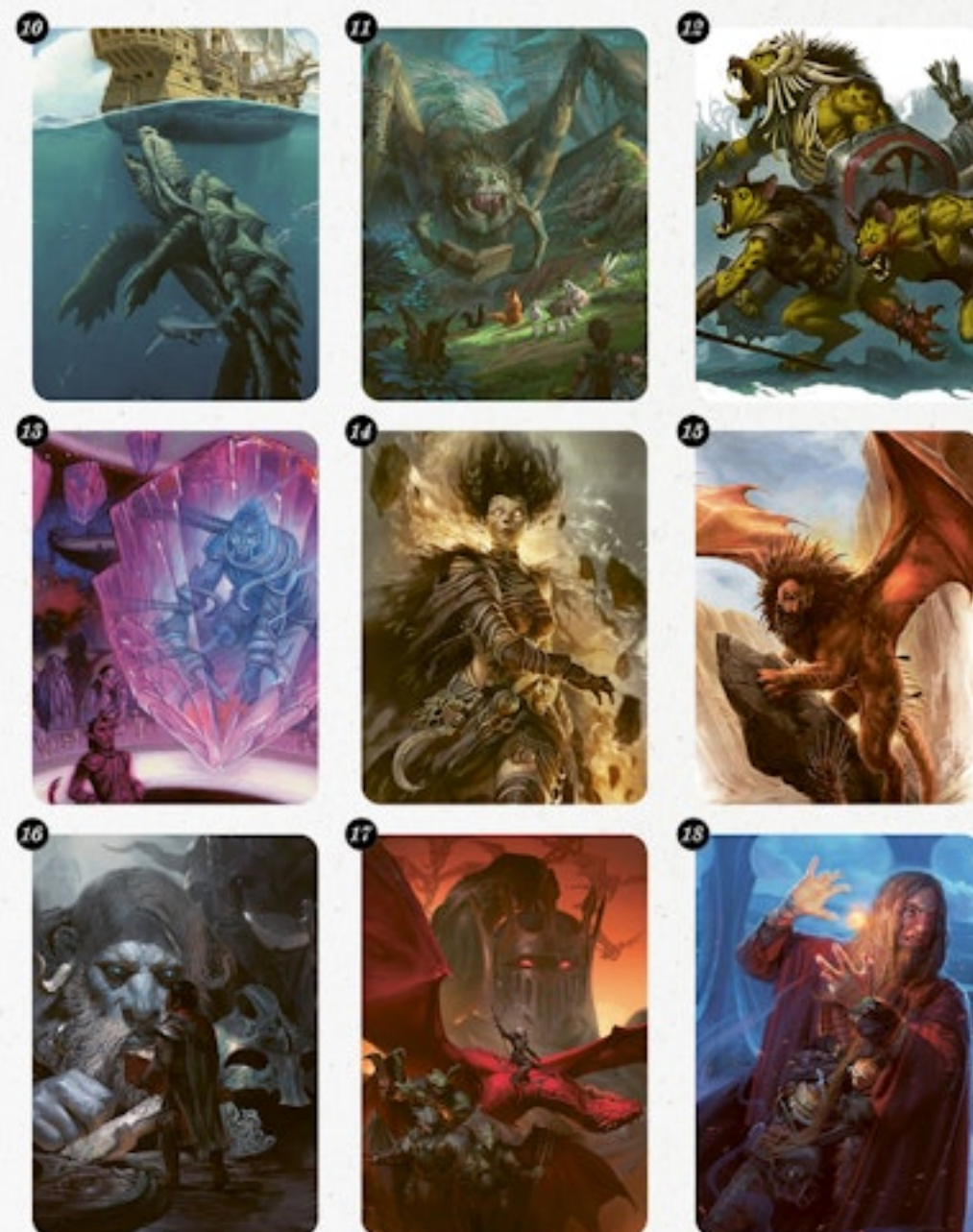
6: Art Invasion

A page from the third edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* shows how art started to be incorporated more into the handbooks.



COLLEGE OF CREATION

GALLERY



KEY TO PLATE

- 1: David C. Sutherland III
- 2: Dave Tromp
- 3: Jeff Dee
- 4: Erol Otus
- 5: Larry Elmore
- 6: Gerald Brom

- 7: Tony DiTerlizzi
- 8: Todd Lockwood
- 9: Wayne Reynolds
- 10: Mark Zug
- 11: Magali Villeneuve
- 12: Steve Prescott

- 13: Chris Seaman
- 14: David Rapoza
- 15: Jason A. Engle
- 16: Tyler Jacobson
- 17: Cynthia Sheppard
- 18: Kieran Yanner

FONT OF INSPIRATION

EXPANSIVE CAMPAIGN

Every edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* lets players embark on months-long adventures with their friends, but eventually their quest will end. Even in the earliest days of the game, Gygax and TSR knew that the fans would need more. At the time of release in 1974, there were few games that demanded any expansion beyond a new edition to tighten up rules and correct mistakes, but D&D always was a law unto itself.

The five supplements released for OD&D, from *Greyhawk* and *Blackmoor* to *Swords & Spells*, set a precedent that every edition would follow: the base game is a platform to build upon. Looking back from the comprehensive days of fifth edition, it's more accurate to say that early supplements were 'fleshing out' rather than expanding the game, but the classes, races and settings in those five books were, at the time, additional toys for players.

The most obvious way designers could increase the longevity of the game was to release new settings. *Greyhawk* had become the default setting with Supplement I, but when it evolved into AD&D, new settings, including the hugely popular *Dragonlance*, were added, as the *Basic Set* splintered off and introduced *Mystara*. New settings appeared in books for each incarnation; second edition brought us *Forgotten Realms Adventures*, *Ghostwalk* strutted onto the scene in 3e and the *Eberron Campaign Guide* dropped during the reign of the fourth edition.

But simply transplanting characters from one realm to another wasn't enough for most. Fortunately for those folks, they've always been serviced with expansions that can be applied to all settings. Take *Deities and Demigods* for AD&D – it added stat blocks for a host of supernatural beings and brave heroes from several mythological pantheons, making it possible to take a party through a D&D-flavored twelve labors if the DM so wished. Of course, the domains expanded elsewhere too. The *Book of Marvelous Magic* added 500 magic items; second edition's *Player's Options* series transformed the way combat, skills and spells worked; and there were four additional entries in the *Monster Manual* series for third edition.

With fifth edition now in its second decade, it's clear to see how much the game can evolve. It has over half a dozen official campaign settings and a similar amount of supplements such as *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*, but now it also has massive modular adventures to tack on to campaigns. Beginning with *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*, these hefty adventures are brand-new games in their own right. Each has a unique mixture of new stories that unfold in a popular setting, character subclasses, brand-new Big Bads and monster minions to put in player's paths, such as the snowy owlbear that debuted in *Icwind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*. There's no sign that the adventures will stop coming, either; *Vetera: Eve of Ruin* was the marquee release of 2024 and marked 11 consecutive years of adventures. When a game that you love consistently brings you more of everything, why would you need to play anything else?

KEY TO PLATE

1: Beyond The Pale

Ghostwalk was set in the city of Manifest, a mausoleum that welcomed spirits of the dead.

2: Prize Fighter

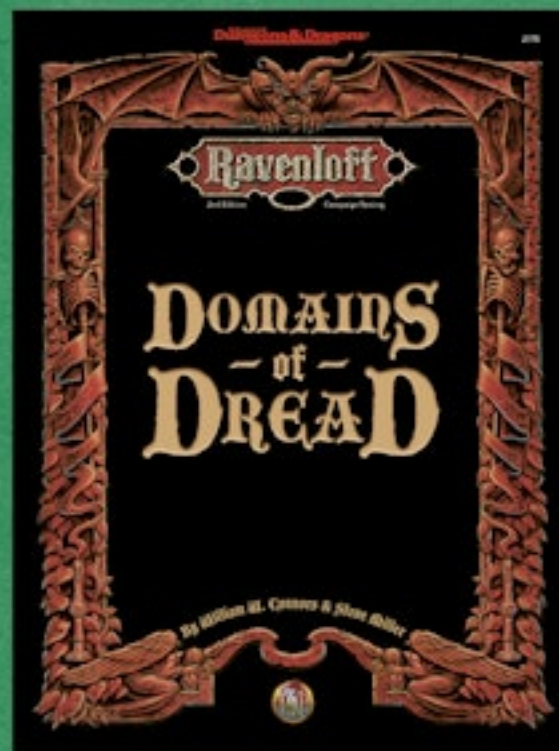
The steampunk-esque setting *Eberron* was chosen from 10,000 submissions in Wizards' competition to find a new fantasy setting.

3: Frightful Road

Gothic horror and perhaps the cursed vampire Strahd await players that enter a *Ravenloft* campaign, a setting that debuted in 1983.

4: Book of Many Things

Supplementary titles like *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* give DMs and players inspiration to approach puzzles, traps, items, spells and more in completely new ways.



AETHERIAL ARCHIVE

THE FORGOTTEN FILMS

Gary Gygax dreamed of seeing *Dungeons & Dragons* on the silver screen. He managed to get a screenplay on the desks of many film bigwigs before the TSR empire began to crumble in the 90s. Fantasies of a D&D film were beginning to fade at TSR and perhaps it would have been better if that flame of hope was fully extinguished. But just north of the border, in Toronto, Canada, there was a young fan who had similar dreams to Gygax – and he wouldn't take no for an answer. Courtney Solomon was just 19 years old in 1990 when he petitioned TSR to let him make a D&D movie. It took him over a year to persuade them. They were convinced that a player like Solomon would have a better understanding of how to capture D&D's essence on celluloid than any movie studio – little did they know how wrong they'd turn out to be. Solomon gained funding when he met businessman Allan Zeman, and in 1992 the pair set up Sweetpea Entertainment. From this point on, the film was stuck in development hell, which should have been an omen to heed. The ambitious duo envisaged a \$100 million blockbuster, but struggled to find funding. None of the A-list directors that they wanted – including James Cameron, Renny Harlin and Francis Ford Coppola – remained attached for long. Without a star name to fill the director's chair, an inexperienced Solomon took the helm. Studios came and went due to issues with the deals being offered until the project finally netted a big fish: producer Joel Silver. With blockbuster hits like *Predator*, *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* on his CV, Silver made the film a much more attractive investment to Hollywood. Silver would have preferred to turn it into a TV series, but this move was put on ice when Wizards took over the brand in 1997. The film finally gained funding of several million dollars and a year later the film began to shoot, casting rising stars like Marlon Wayans, Thora Birch and Justin Whalin alongside silver-screen legend Jeremy Irons.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was released worldwide in December 2000. Unfortunately, it was a critical and commercial flop. It was lambasted for its awful special effects, terrible script and a weak link to the original game – generally it was unrecognizable as D&D. It garnered an average score of 1.4% according to Metacritic and the reviews were savage. It began to gain a cult following from the so-bad-it's-funny crowd, as well as those who were just content to see D&D on the big screen, but it wasn't D&D as fans knew it. It was laden with stereotypes, clichés and tired tropes that the role-playing game had long outgrown. Solomon, although dejected, was not deterred. He produced two sequels, beginning with the straight-to-video *Wrath of the Dragon God*. *The Book of Vile Darkness*, the third in the arc, was released in 2012 to almost zero fanfare, with an unknown cast and an even more limited budget. The whole sorry affair had made Wizards reticent to pursue films and television. It required so much investment compared to the game, spin-off books and even the video games, and was increasingly unlikely to return their money, let alone make a profit. For a while at least, D&D films were off the table.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Justin Whalin

Most known for playing Jimmy Olsen in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, Whalin played the heroic rogue Ridley Freeborn.

2: Atlantic Crossing

English thespians Bruce Payne and Jeremy Irons share many scenes as the villainous duo Damodar and Profion.

3: Thora Birch

She played Empress Savina, and filmed *Dungeons & Dragons* before her breakout role in *American Beauty* hit cinema screens.



MASS SUGGESTION

VIDEO GAMES MARCH ON

When Wizards took control of *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1997, video games were well into their fifth generation, with the Sony PlayStation, Sega Saturn and Nintendo 64 all vying to be crowned console king. PC games too were a booming business, with titles like *Diablo*, *Civilization II* and *Fallout* all causing a stir in the gaming world with their deep gameplay, stories and replayability.

Baldur's Gate made its own ruckus when it was released in 1998, along with its later expansion and sequel, providing a blueprint for the D&D games that would follow in its footsteps. But technology was evolving and video games were gaining in popularity – there were lots of fans demanding lots of different entries in lots of genres on lots of platforms. Surprisingly, relatively few of these demands went unmet during the next couple of decades.

Just after the stroke of the millennium, Black Isle Studios, publisher of the original, developed a spiritual successor to *Baldur's Gate* called *Icwind Dale*. Set in the frigid north of Faerûn, the RPG served the fans who were looking for more in-depth dungeon-crawling combat and party management, set against the backdrop of the region's besieged Ten Towns. Black Isle had previously transplanted their winning formula to a different setting, Planescape, with *Planescape: Torment*. This game received rave reviews as an alternative to the more familiar fantasy settings that had pervaded video games in that era.

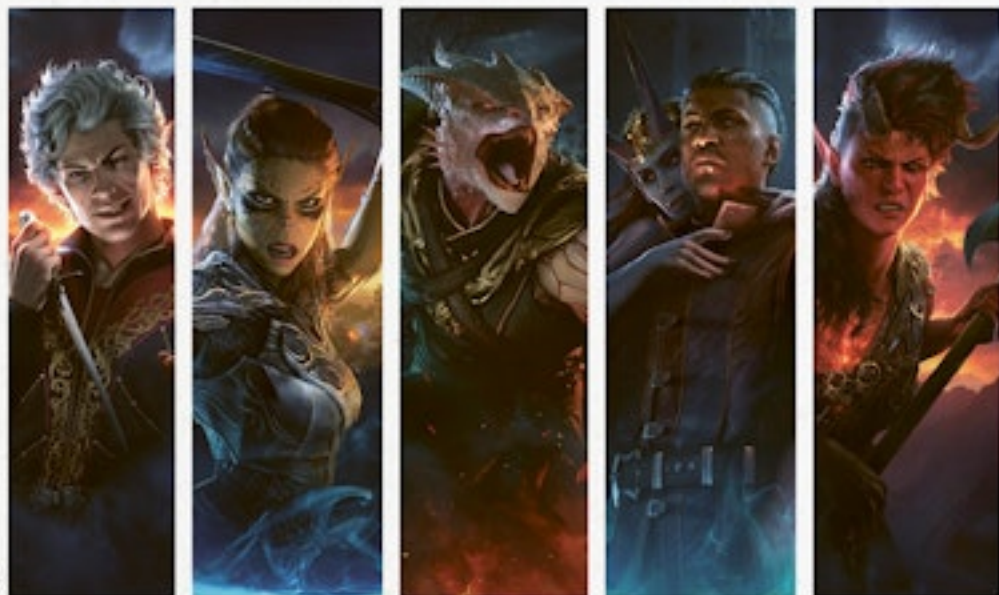
However, perhaps due to the already vast landscape of video gaming, Wizards steered all of their video game content towards the *Forgotten Realms* setting, echoing their decision to laser-focus on the more popular settings in the core game. Beyond a few Greyhawk-based games in subsequent generations and the odd expansion to a different setting from a *Forgotten Realms*-based product, video games had eschewed extraneous variety and began to build out the breadth of the fan-favorite setting.

Consoles welcomed the hack-and-slash spin-off *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* on PlayStation 2 in 2001, which was followed by a sequel three years later that also landed on Microsoft's new Xbox console

and PCs. Fans of the more action-oriented genre were delighted when *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* appeared in 2004 on the same consoles. Not only did it feature an original story by R.A. Salvatore, but it also included the voices of Hollywood heavyweights Patrick Stewart and Michael Clarke Duncan. You could even play as Salvatore's creation Drizzt! Wizards also gave gamers the option to play D&D on the go when they launched *Eye of the Beholder* on Game Boy Advance, a title that harked back to the days of first-person dungeon-crawling adventures on the PC.

Even with those forays onto consoles, portable or otherwise, D&D still seemed to call PC home. Bioware returned in 2002 to develop a new RPG, *Neverwinter Nights*, which had the online elements that were becoming an increasing necessity in PC games. The game could host up to 96 players on a server and featured an ingenious Dungeon Master Client that allowed one person to control the whole game world and run the server as if it were an adventure on a tabletop. Bioware relinquished control of the sequel to Obsidian Entertainment, but both were well-received games and kept D&D fans happy online for most of the 2000s. When *Neverwinter Nights 2* closed down its servers in 2012, fans only had to wait a year for MMORPG veteran Cryptic Studios to release *Neverwinter*, which is still available to this day, alongside *Dungeons & Dragons Online*.

It wasn't until 2023 that D&D games reached their zenith when Larian Studios picked up the reins of *Baldur's Gate* and released the threequel that fans had been craving for over 20 years. It had launched in Early Access a few years prior, but the fine-tuning that player feedback had allowed during that time turned *Baldur's Gate III* into one of the most successful games of all time. At one point after its full release, the game had over 850,000 concurrent players on the Steam platform alone and had racked up an average of 96% on Metacritic. It collected awards for Game of the Year, Best Role Playing Game, and the Player's Voice award for gamers' favorite title at The Game Awards and still maintains a fervent player base. If BGIII is anything to go by, the future for D&D video games is bright.



KEY TO PLATE

1: Diverse Cast

Promotional art showing a number of companions that can join your cause (l-r): Astarion, Lae'zel, The Dark Urge, Wyll, Karlach.

2: Dungeon Crawler

Gameplay from BG III showing the depth of systems that made the original games so popular.

3: Cutscene

Unlike the first two games, *Baldur's Gate III* enjoys its fair share of set pieces and cinematics to put it on par with other modern RPGs.



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM

SECTION 4

FOURTH EDITION



Wizards had faced a baptism of fire when they released the third edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, but survived to continue telling the tale. Fourth edition arrived at a time when the hunger for D&D had never been higher and Wizards sought to lower the barrier of entry to satiate more of the fan base. But pleasing everybody at the same time is a tough job and the fourth edition years would be anything but plain sailing.

KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN

FOURTH EDITION

Unusually for a new edition, the first *Dungeons & Dragons* Fourth Edition books weren't the core rulebooks. They were a pair of preview titles called *Wizards Presents*, released at the end of 2007, that pulled back the curtain on the decisions and development of the next evolution in the series and showcased snippets of features that players could expect to see when the core set dropped. They did an excellent job of inciting excitement and the first print run sold out prior to its release in Summer 2008.

It had the opposite effect, however, on a subsection of the player base who had come to expect longevity. AD&D was the core game for 12 years, while its second edition lasted just a year less. It had been seven years since the third edition of D&D had launched, and some players were not expecting to need to upgrade again so soon, particularly given the release of the 3.5 edition just two years previously. Many people were considering skipping the edition altogether.

But time marched on and the three usual suspects – the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* – released to a largely gracious reception. Once again Wizards had fine-tuned the mechanics of the game, simplifying the rules and making it more accessible. Skills and spells could be used at will, per encounter or per day to reduce the need for lengthy pre-battle preparations, and short and long rests were added to reset the per-encounter and per-day skills respectively.

The *Player Essentials* collection included pre-rolled characters and adventures that were easier to pick up and play. Other sets included miniatures and dice for players steadily building a tabletop inventory. However, the core rulebooks warranted an additional entry, with the *Player's Handbook* and *Monster Manual* both receiving a third. Some players felt that content had been carved from the originals to facilitate more full-priced offerings, particularly as common classes like bards and druids only made an appearance in *Player's Handbook 2*, while the monk didn't make the cut until the third.

Classes themselves had received an overhaul. Each was geared to one of four roles which had little impact on gameplay but signified the design choices behind them and how designers intended them to be used – for instance, defenders were tanks that took hits and protected allies. Each class now drew its power from one of six sources, such as martial or psionic, which codified the backstory of the classes.

There were still plenty of mechanics in the three original rulebooks to keep players at the table for extended periods. Players could earn and use additional abilities past level 11 when they reached their 'paragon path', and Wizards replaced their own prestige class system with a new epic destiny that could take players beyond level 20, harking back to the Immortals gameplay of D&D's BECMII edition.

In the age of an always-online player base, fourth edition had a tough time dethroning its predecessor, as well as *Pathfinder* – a rival built on the 3.5e OGL. However, the internet would transform the way that players engaged with D&D and perhaps pave the way for the true pinnacle of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Next Entries

The now-familiar trio of core rulebooks were just the first instalments that players needed for fourth edition.

2: Martial Prowess

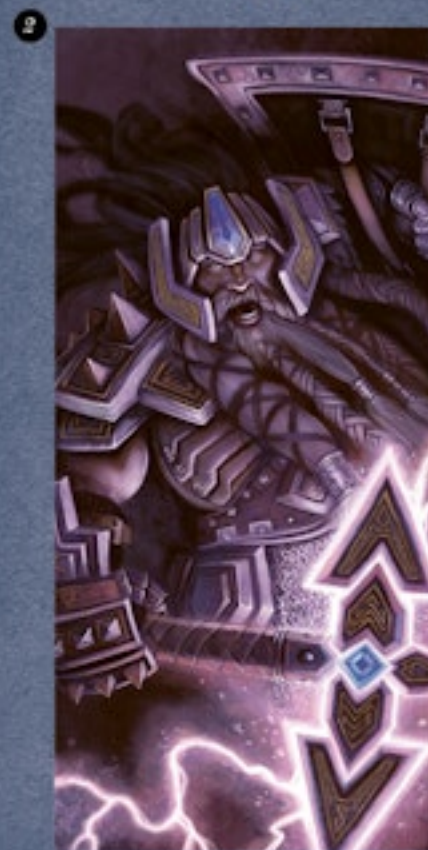
The fourth edition warlord class drew its strength from the martial power source and occupied the role of leader.

3: Never Board

As well as welcoming new fans with the *Player Essentials* collection, D&D released their sixth edition of the popular *DUNGEON* board game in 2012.

4: Fiery Beast

As with other editions, the artwork of 4e took a diagonal step and put its own spin on established creatures like the hell hound.



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 taste 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 stint.

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 *Betrayer at Baldur's Gate*, where you and your party must resist Bhaaf'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 Dalmati* 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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Cooperative exploration
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**DUNGEONS
& DRAGONS**

PHONIC ECHO

AURAL ADVENTURES

Music streaming platforms have been around almost as long as the internet itself, preceded only by peer-to-peer sharing platforms such as Napster that allowed users to download their favorite tracks and other media. When the first audio RSS feeds were invented in 2003, the floodgates opened for podcasts to fill the airwaves, covering topics such as murder mysteries, comedy shows and fandom.

People from all walks of life took to the mic to air views on sports, games, and much more, and communities now had a voice for other fans to pay attention to. Gaming outlets began to release regular commentaries on industry news and the latest products, and it was only a matter of time before fans, with their metaphorical megaphones began to talk about *Dungeons & Dragons*. Perhaps in place of periodicals, fans were turning to their streaming services to get their next hit of D&D news, and the popularity of podcasts – D&D or otherwise – began to rocket.

The internet would be nothing without invention, and it wasn't long before enterprising *Dungeon Masters* set their sights on a new kind of podcast that would birth its own genre: actual play. Rather than using podcasts to spread the gospel about their passion for D&D, DMs began to record their games and run entire campaigns spanning months or years for an entranced audience. *Critical Hit* is often credited as being the first of its kind and involved a mixture of roleplaying, dice-rolling, and table talk between the cast.

Spawned from the popular comic book site Major Spoilers, *Critical Hit* had provided a blueprint for others to build their own audio empires. The McElroy brothers, already known for their *My Brother, My Brother and Me* podcast, unleashed *The Adventure Zone* on the world in 2014, which is possibly the first bona fide hit in the actual play arena. Griffin McElroy ran a campaign using the brand new fifth edition for his brothers and dad, Clint, which combined the fantasy of the *Forgotten Realms* with trademark McElroy tomfoolery.

Many would follow in TAZ's wake: *Acquisitions, Incorporated* was the brainchild of Jerry Holkins, creator of the popular *Penny Arcade* comic and PAX gaming events, and took D&D into the muddy corporate world. *Dungeons & Daddies* is a chaotic and comedic actual play podcast created by Anthony Burch, which transported four dads into the *Forgotten Realms* in their Honda Odyssey minivan. All four podcasts are still running to this day, a testament to the huge fanbases that their respective unique spins have put on podcasting and D&D.



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2



3

KEY TO PLATE

1: *House Rules*

Dragon Talk, hosted by Shelly Mazzanoble and Greg Tito is Wizards' own D&D podcast, which welcomes a range of celebrities, game designers, DMs and more to discuss their favourite hobby.

2: *Masterful DM*

Anthony Burch, the DM of raucous podcast *Dungeons & Daddies*, which has over 150 real-play episodes.

3: *The McElroy Clan*

The familial cast of *The Adventure Zone* (1-4) Griffin, Justin, Clint and Travis. Their podcast has been so successful it has its own line of graphic novels and an animated TV show has been rumored.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

TRANSFORMING TABLETOPS

Watching a *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* stream and seeing all the paraphernalia scattered around tabletops might scare you into thinking that the barrier to entry is incredibly high and costly, but nothing could be further from the truth. Beyond the three core rulebooks, which an adventuring party could potentially share, the only other things you need are a vivid imagination, your best barbarian impersonation and a character sheet which you can download for free from Wizards' website.

But if you are looking to increase the immersion on your table, there are plenty of options. Both the players and the DM will need an assortment of dice, ranging from the lowly d4 to the dominant d20. These are available in a variety of styles and cast in many materials, including recycled plastic and heavy-wearing metal. You can invest in a dice tray that will save you denting the table and losing rogue dice across the room. If you want to avoid accusations of fudging your rolls, you can also purchase a dice tower, which will cascade your dice down a pachinko-style system to maximize randomness.

Suspicious Dungeon Masters can protect their plans from prying eyes with the help of a DM screen, which also allows them to keep their notes, various NPC character sheets and sourcebooks organized. When characters find themselves in an encounter with novel beasts, DMs can also help their players paint a picture of the scene with encounter cards for each creature that hang over the screen.

If you're planning a longer campaign, you might want to invest in miniatures, both for player characters and some of the more recurrent NPCs and enemies. Of course, miniatures are most useful when they're traversing terrain on the table – another way that you can make your playing field more immersive.

More common than the graduated terrains are battle grids – large mats of square or hexagonal grids that are used to show exploration around a dungeon, or formations in battle. These are usually laid out with set measurements for each grid tile so you can check that you're in range to hit an enemy with an ability or try to revive a downed ally. Battle grids and miniatures are an excellent combination for DM and players alike, allowing both to strategise more competently in an attempt to defeat the other.

Of course, not everything you add to your table has to have a direct effect on gameplay. You can alter the mood of your scenarios with custom decorations to fit the adventure's theme. If you're embarking on the *Curse of Strahd: Revamped* adventure, for instance, you might have bats hanging overhead and play by atmospheric candlelight. If you're taking a trip to *Icwind Dale: Rime of the Frostmaiden*, your table might be a frozen blue and blanketed in snow, with the central heating turned down low ... okay, maybe not the latter.

It's nice to have a huge tabletop arsenal to make you feel like you're on an adventure, and the options are plentiful. But the most important element of any game is you, your friends and your collective imagination.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Accessorize

Battlemaps and table furniture aren't necessary to play D&D but they can increase the sense of immersion in a campaign.

2: Metal Minis

Miniatures are available for great swathes of D&D content, from monsters and familiars to different classes of heroes.

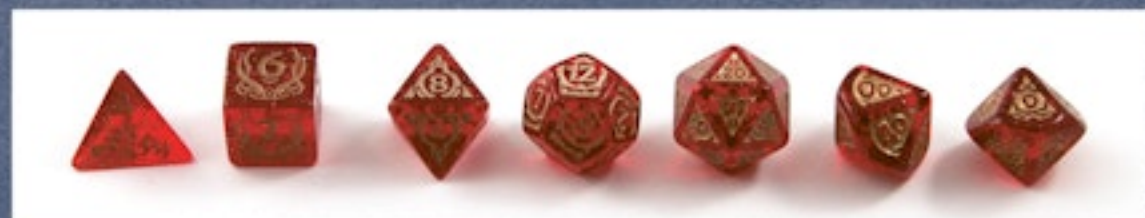
3: Roll for Initiative

A full Platonic dice set from a d4 to a d20, plus two d10s which serve as a d100.

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3



TRUE SEEING

THE STREAMING PHENOMENON

While podcasts had taken over music streaming platforms and were delivering *Dungeons & Dragons* to the ears of millions around the world, the planet's most popular role-playing game was also beginning to establish itself in the world of video streaming. Platforms like YouTube and Twitch were flooded by a bevy of creators who weren't content with just infiltrating our ears – they wanted to provide a treat for the eyes too.

Podcasts were hugely popular, but for some people, the act of passively listening resulted in them being easily distracted. Streams demanded the visual attention of the viewer in addition to listening, and gave fans a direct window to the tabletop. Now fans were able to check every roll, see the reactions of the DM and players as events unfurled, and study miniatures and maps to back-seat strategize what they would do. It felt like you'd pulled up a chair and were sitting right next to your favorite streamers.

Naturally some podcasts evolved into streams as well, expanding the options for fans to engage, or find a new home altogether, on more visual platforms. Brennan Lee Mulligan's *Dimension 20* campaigns have been serialized on YouTube, while *Acquisitions Incorporated* began their second series online, complete with after-game analysis and interviews as if D&D was some sort of competitive sport.

Other shows were born on video platforms. *Critical Role*, an epic roleplay-heavy stream from the mind of Matthew Mercer, became the paragon of what D&D streams could be. *High Rollers* emerged on the other side of the Atlantic with a campaign they called *Aerois*, which lasted over 4 years and 190 streams! Wizards themselves have stepped foot in the streaming arena too – their *Rivals of Waterdeep* started up in 2019 and featured an eclectic cast of players and characters.

With the dual-pronged approach of podcasts and streams, watching D&D became a form of entertainment in its own right. Anyone who doubts the validity of this extraordinary statement should consider that many of these podcasts and streams have had sold-out tours all over the world – *Critical Role*, *The Adventure Zone*, and *Dungeons & Daddies*, to name just a few, have all regularly played to fanatical live audiences. Some even have live audiences built into their winning formula: *Dragon Friends* is a podcast that has been delighting Australian crowds since its inception, while the UK's *Questing Time* regularly took to the stage of a pub in London to record its episodes before the COVID pandemic mandated it become an online venture.

It's no surprise that watching D&D is such a popular pastime. It has all the elements that make for good fantasy entertainment – exciting plots, Big Bads, well-developed characters and excellent acting. When this enthralling new way of experiencing D&D crosses paths with celebrities and Wizards' machinations, you can see the heights that this new art form can reach.

Perhaps the most exciting example was the Stream of Many Eyes, a three-day livestreamed event that featured popular streamers from *Critical Role*, *Rivals of Waterdeep*, and *The Adventure Zone* as well as celebrities like Joe Manganiello and wrestler The Big Show. It was an elaborate way of giving fans a sneak peek at two new adventures: *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* and *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, but with tens of millions of views, it demonstrates just how big this phenomenon can become.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Promotion Parody

Matt Mercer, DM of *Critical Role* and leather jacket aficionado, in an advert with the rest of the cast. The advert is an homage to an original promotional piece used to promote D&D.

2: Roleplayers

The cast of *Critical Role*, including DM Matt Mercer on the far right, near celebrity guest Joe Manganiello in the red box.

WHO NEEDS TO HANG AROUND?
I'VE GOT CRITICAL ROLE

JOIN THE ADVENTURE
AND BE A PART OF
THE NEW CAMPAIGN
FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

STARRING MATT MERCER, LIAM O'BRIEN, ASHLEY JOHNSON, LAURA BAILEY,
TALIESIN JAFFE, MARISHA RAY, SAM RIEGEL, AND TRAVIS WILLINGHAM



QUILL OF ENDLESS TALES

THE GRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS

By the time the fourth edition era was drawing to a close, *Dungeons & Dragons* had made headway in almost every corner of the media map. Novels, magazines, cartoons, video games, films, podcasts and livestreams all invited you inside the fantasy multiverse. But there was still one format that needed to be conquered before total media domination was achieved: comic books.

D&D's first forays into comics happened back in the days of TSR, when the cartoon was serialized in comic form as *Dragones y Mazmorras* for Spanish-language audiences by Planeta DeAgostini. It was only available in certain territories and never translated to other languages, but perhaps planted a seed in the heads of TSR that D&D comics could find an audience. They tested the waters with a more adult graphic novel interpretation of the *Dragonlance* setting, which attracted the illustrious DC Comics to join the party.

With one of the world's comic heavyweights in their corner, D&D comics began to appear regularly in the late 80s and early 90s. DC had decided to release an eponymous series for the four most popular settings of the time: *Forgotten Realms*, *Spelljammer*, *Dragonlance* and *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* – which was less eponymous and set in *Mystara*. All of them had star-filled creative teams that combined the best folks from TSR and DC Comics alike, and were successful enough to continue for at least a few years. But in 1991, after TSR had started to dabble in self-publishing 'comic modules' for various properties, the relationship between the two companies soured and they parted ways.

What came next was a barren spell for D&D comics. As TSR wrestled with financial difficulties, few comics hit the shelves beyond a couple of one-shots and a promotional series. Kenzer & Company tried their hand after the turn of the millennium and released four series set in *Greyhawk*, but these came and went with little fanfare. Devil's Due Publishing had considerably more success when they chronicled the stories laid out in the *The Legend of Drizzt* and *Dragonlance Chronicles* series, as well as other smaller arcs of original D&D stories. Their partnership lasted four years, until the economic crisis of 2008 meant that Devil's Due could no longer afford to publish comics. Once again, D&D comics were looking for a new home, just as the fourth edition of the game was hitting shelves.

Wizards finally found a heaven-made match. They enlisted IDW Publishing to work on their comics and the pair have been allied ever since. They've created original adventures through the *Forgotten Realms*, employing the setting's creator Ed Greenwood to write for them, brought fan-favourite characters Minsc and Boo to comic with the *Legends of Baldur's Gate* run and let R.A. Salvatore unleash Drizzt once again in a five-issue run – a similar size to another comic he wrote with his son Geno. They've even created crossovers with high-profile licenses such as *Rick & Morty* and *Stranger Things*. It may have taken the best part of three decades, but comics are finally a sturdy pillar, doing their part to hold up the D&D empire.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Minsc & Boo

IDW's *Legends of Baldur's Gate* series brought the fan-favorite duo of Rashemeni ranger Minsc and his miniature giant space hamster Boo to the comics.

2: DC x TSR

The *Forgotten Realms* comic series published by DC Comics ran between 1989 and 1991 and was written by TSR's own Jeff Grubb.

3: Long Reign

The *Dragonlance* series published by DC Comics was one of the longest runs for D&D, lasting 34 issues.





DUNGEONS & DRAGONS MUSEUM

SECTION 5

FIFTH EDITION



Four decades of additions, fine-tuning, setting expansions and player feedback had all been leading to this. Fifth edition was a culmination of forty years of design choices and refinement – a distillation of everything that the substantial player base had loved in every edition, but with more bells, frills and whistles than ever before. It may have been the fifth edition, but many believed that it had the potential to be the final one too.

KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN

FIFTH EDITION

Fourth Edition hadn't gained the fervent fandom that either of its previous editions enjoyed. Some fans were still playing the third edition and 3.5 too. So, in 2012, Wizards announced D&D Next – a precursor initiative to fifth edition that welcomed fan feedback to shape the future of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Over the next two years, Wizards would release initial builds of the fifth edition rules for playtesting. Half a year later, they released a free package, the *Basic Rules*, which featured snippets of the core rulebooks that would follow – this threw the doors wide open to the disparate player base. Their first paid release, the *Starter Set*, featured content that could take players up to level 5 and whet the appetite for the core rulebooks that followed in short order at the end of 2014.

The teasing of content and a sense that Wizards was truly listening to their fanbase led to a roaring commercial success, the likes of which D&D hadn't seen before. Players flocked to the new edition in their millions and were treated to the most accessible, most diverse and most comprehensive game of D&D that had ever existed. Roleplayers were overjoyed by the new background system that could help to flesh out their characters' personalities, and the reduced impact of alignment on gameplay gave them more leeway to create the perfect character for their fledgling 5e campaigns.

Players also had a wealth of options when it came to character classes. Each had distinct subclasses to choose from, so if a party of bards rocked up to the table, each was able to play in a very different way. Multi-classing was also simplified, allowing players to pick levels in tandem classes as their character advanced. Magic-users also breathed a sigh of relief that the spell system had been streamlined, with several spell slots at different strengths available, depending on the character's level.

Mechanically, fifth edition added some inventions that seem so intuitive that it's hard now to imagine the game without them. The advantage/disadvantage system could be employed by DMs in places where characters have strengths or weaknesses and involved simply rolling two d20s, taking the highest if playing with advantage, or the lower if playing with disadvantage. DMs could also award inspiration points to players who roleplayed their character well or just did something particularly cool, which effectively let the player invoke an advantage roll whenever they wanted.

Parties now had one of the most mechanically sound, freely roleplayed systems in the tabletop domain, with a massive variety of settings. Over the subsequent decade, parties could go on campaigns in Eberron, Ravenloft and Spelljammer, and many more. Wizards also released a library's worth of adventures with new campaigns such as *Lost Mines of Phandelver* and *Vecna: Eve of Ruin* – a 50th anniversary romp around the planes – as well as short adventure compendiums like *Journeys Through the Radiant Citadel*. With the production line showing no signs of slowing down, and a revised edition of the core rulebooks released at the end of 2024, fifth edition is here to stay.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Final Form

The core rulebook covers that we know and love today: (1-4) *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Monster Manual*.

2: And Dragons

The iconic *Dungeons & Dragons* ampersand, which has been the logo for the entirety of fifth edition.

3: Work of Art

The art in fifth edition sourcebooks is more elaborate than ever before, like this cover piece for *Lost Mines of Phandelver*.

4: Half Century

Vecna: Eve of Ruin is an adventure released for the 50th anniversary of D&D and features the long-established villain Vecna, who also appeared in *Stranger Things*.



CONTACT OTHER PLANE

THE ONLINE REALM

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit at the end of 2019, nobody predicted the global shutdown that would follow. For most of 2020, people around the world were confined to their homes, and life as we knew it ground to a halt. For Dungeons & Dragons fans, this meant no gathering for games in people's houses, no popping to the local game store to flick through the next adventures and no meet-ups at conventions or live shows from their favorite streamers.

D&D had been growing its presence online for the best part of the new millennium. Often, Wizards had been simultaneously selling its content online alongside its physical book releases – normally smaller, exclusive content that didn't warrant a physical release – so players already had a wealth of content that they could play through online with friends. The official Wizards website also had a wealth of tutorials on how to play, roll characters and much more.

But what really saved the day during lockdown were online platforms that allowed DMs and players to continue their quests through the Forgotten Realms, Eberron, and any other fifth edition setting. Services like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Discord had come to the fore as a way to unite friends, colleagues and family who couldn't meet in person. When these were combined with platforms like Roll20 and Fantasy Grounds, DMs and players could access all their sourcebooks and campaign material, manage characters, share maps of locations or battle screens and do everything they could at the physical tabletop. Some of these services even had an interface that facilitated voice chat in place of Teams or Discord.

By far the most popular platform was D&D Beyond, which is now an official part of Wizards' stable. Not only does it seamlessly integrate official purchases from D&D's online marketplace, which also offers officially sanctioned third-party adventures, but it has all the features you need to run campaigns, create characters, track their progress and mastermind encounters. It even includes a creative tool that lets you make homebrewed content like spells, monsters, magic items and even subclasses.

Wizards supported online play long before the pandemic with its Adventurers League, which supported new players in finding a home game near them, or by joining one online through the use of these platforms. When COVID hit, it started an initiative called Stay at Home, Play at Home, which released free gameplay content to drive people online. The *Ice Road Trackers* mini-adventure was intended to keep a new party busy for a handful of hour-long sessions and was set in Icewind Dale, just like the imminent core adventure *Rime of the Frostmaiden*.

The tools and platforms that were developed during this time have left a lasting legacy on the D&D community. Long-distance friends can now convene regularly using the online options across vast geographical expanses. Platforms like D&D Beyond broke down the barriers to play out of necessity, but now they host the biggest home games in the world.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Soft Landing

Homepage of D&D Beyond, the all-in-one tool that enables D&D to be played online.

2: Pre-Rolls

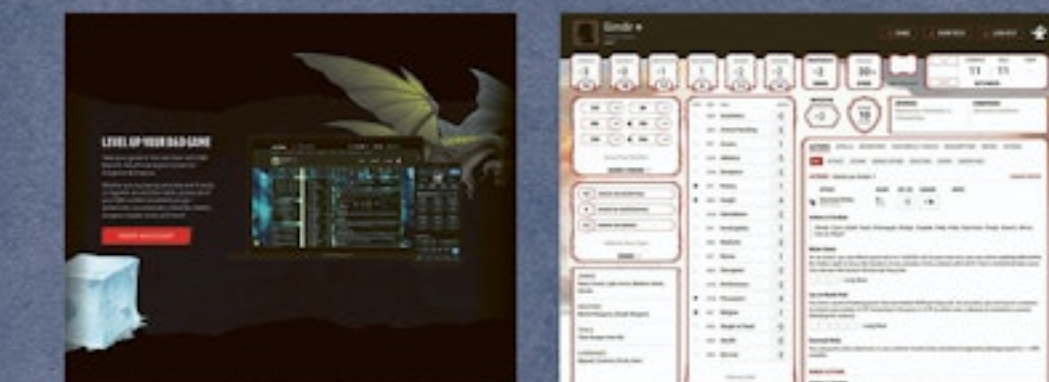
Beyond even has pre-made characters that you can use as a basis for your own hero.

3: Everyone Welcome

D&D Beyond is free to use and allows you access to the marketplace, where you can buy sourcebooks and adventures to use with your party.

4: Stats & Foats

The character sheet screen from D&D Beyond, which allows you to update your spell slots, health and more during your campaign.



HINDSIGHT HARMONY

STRANGER THINGS

The year is 2016, fifth edition has been out for a couple of years and *Dungeons & Dragons* has never been more popular, reaching tens of millions of players around the world. Despite its popularity, there was still a sense that it was a niche hobby, for nerds and geeks who congregated around tabletops or hung out at game stores. But a show was about to hit Netflix that would catapult D&D into the upper echelons of popular media: *Stranger Things*.

Set in the sleepy suburban town of Hawkins, Indiana, the show follows a group of teens – Mike, Will, Lucas, and Dustin – in 1983, when *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was at the fore. After a long D&D session, Will is abducted by an otherworldly being on the way home, and Eleven, a mysterious child with telepathic abilities, finds a home with the remaining crew. What unfolds is a series featuring a parallel dimension, powerful magic and a ruthless demogorgon set on satiating its hunger with Hawkins' residents.

Its retro aesthetic and fantasy tilt made *Stranger Things* a massive success, reaching over 14 million viewers within the first month alone, making it one of Netflix's most popular original shows and an excellent addition to the CVs of creators Ross and Matt Duffer. It became a flagship show for the streaming platform with three subsequent series – season 3 reached 40 million households and season 4 racked up over a billion hours watched. Critics praised the nostalgic representation of many American childhoods blended with the grounded fantasy and no season has averaged under 88% on review aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes. It was a cultural phenomenon.

Much is owed to the clever story and direction of the Duffer Brothers, but at the core of *Stranger Things*' DNA is D&D. Not only are the young friends D&D players, but the demogorgon was lifted from the pages of the *Monster Manual*, as was the mind flayer from the third season, as well as season four's big bad, Vecna. Of course, some creative liberties were taken with their presentation, but they're significant borrowings nonetheless. The show is essentially a party of players LARPing through their own D&D quest, peril and all.

But the influences don't stop with the monsters. Less obviously, you could liken the enigmatic Eleven's abilities to that of a sorcerer, while her 'papa' Hopper seems like a protective paladin of the young kids. You might even consider Dustin's predilection for using technology a signifier of his role as the tinkerer or artificer of the group. Whatever the complexion of the party, they face dangers, solve puzzles and eventually reach the end of the adventure, only for another leg of the campaign to kick off in the next series.

The show even uses D&D's cultural events as a backdrop in season 4. After a local teen is found disfigured in the home of Eddie, the leader of Hawkins High's Hellfire Club – a D&D group that includes Will and Dustin – the town is in uproar. Some pockets try to root out the 'evil' from their community, alluding to the Satanic panic that was rife in the decade and showing the perspective of the accused groups.

Stranger Things brought D&D to a mainstream audience with a bang, depicting its D&D players as young, smart and – most importantly – normal people, just like its audience. It expanded into comics, video games, novels and even an official D&D starter set. The fifth and final season is due to air some time in 2025. With a healthy dose of D&DNA, this season is sure to enjoy stratospheric popularity, and it'll take D&D along for the ride.

KEY TO PLATE

Z: Young Heroes

The young stars of *Stranger Things* as their D&D

alter egos: (l-r) Dustin the Bard, Will the Wise (Wizard), Lucas the Ranger and Mike the Paladin.

1



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 Gorb*.

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 Tressylhyds*.



CINEMATIC RECOLLECTION

HONOR AMONG THIEVES

Since 2000, fantasy films have carved out a lucrative niche, with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Chronicles of Narnia* saga, and the emergence of the super-heroic Marvel Universe. But these were blockbusters with huge budgets and, even then, success was not guaranteed. *Warcraft*, supposedly the first in a series based on the MMORPG phenomenon *World of Warcraft*, had crashed at the box office despite a \$160 million budget and reports are that intended sequels were canned. Films were a risky business to get into as they did not guarantee a return.

However, perhaps buoyed by the popularity of *Stranger Things*, the ever-expanding player base of D&D and the increased recognition that the brand was enjoying, Wizards took the plunge. *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* began shooting in 2021, with Hollywood hotshots Chris Pine as Edgin the bard, Michelle Rodriguez as Holga, a barbarian incarcerated along with Edgin, Bridgerton's Regé-Jean Page as Thay paladin Xerk, and Hugh Grant as Forge, the recently crowned Lord of Neverwinter. It was a star-studded cast that excited audiences when the first trailer dropped in July 2022. Much to the relief of fans, *Honor Among Thieves* would be set in the Forgotten Realms, and there were familiar locations, people and events that D&D aficionados could revel in. Simon, the party's sorcerer, was a descendant of Elminster Aumar, a creation of Ed Greenwood, the innovator behind the Forgotten Realms setting. In various scenes, you can spot tieflings, owlbears, dragonborn or other fan-favorite races and monsters. The plot heavily features the Red Wizards of Thay, a notoriously evil group led by the lich villain Szass Tam, who may or may not also be in the film...

The film was originally intended to release in the Summer of 2021. However, the complexities of Hollywood release windows and the onset of COVID affected the production of the film, as well as the public's willingness to visit cinemas, and so it was delayed to March 2023. After many complications, *Honor Among Thieves* hit the silver screen and topped the US box office in its first week of release, ultimately grossing over \$200 million worldwide against a budget of \$160 million.

The responses from critics and audiences gave a clearer picture of its success. The large majority of critics awarded *Honor Among Thieves* a favorable review, and CinemaScore, which polls audiences on their viewing experiences at movie theaters, heard enough to justify an A- rating. It was lauded for its lighthearted, action-packed approach to the fantasy genre. Hardcore D&D fans appreciated its adherence to the source materials and the dozens of Easter eggs for the eagle-eyed viewer to spot.

Wizards had gotten the product right this time. It continues to enjoy success on streaming platforms and will be a source of pride until the next entry. A sequel has been mooted, potentially on a smaller budget, but perhaps the life that *Honor Among Thieves* breathed into the audio-visual medium won't continue on a large cinema screen, and will be reborn on one much smaller.

KEY TO PLATE

1: Honor Among Thieves

Theatrical poster for *Honor Among Thieves* release, showing the major cast members.

2: Hugh Grant

The lovable actor plays Forge Fitzwilliam, the reigning Lord of Neverwinter.

3: Chris Pine

As Edgin Darvis, the heroic bard and former ally of Forge.

4: Michelle Rodriguez

As Holga Kilgore, who was imprisoned with Edgin at Revel's End.

5: Sophia Lillis

Assumes the role of the telling druid Doric, a resistance leader hoping to topple Forge.

6: Justice Smith

Plays Simon Aumar, a descendant of the great wizard Elminster.

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BOOK OF FABLES

DUNGEON ACADEMY

Dungeons & Dragons has been the paragon of tabletop and roleplaying games for decades, but fifth edition confirmed its place as the best of the best. Through the numerous adventures and peripheral media like podcasts, video games, novels and movies, D&D was widely accessible. With all these routes in to D&D, Wizards was able to welcome in a diverse audience from all walks of life... but they still had their heart set on broadening the franchise further.

D&D fare tended to skew older, whether it was the hefty rulebooks, thick novels or age-gated video games and movies. There was nothing inherently adult about playing pretend in a fantasy world, which is why a book series aimed at middle-grade readers made so much sense. *Dungeon Academy* would revel in the creatures of the Forgotten Realms, the sense of adventure, the heroes and villains.

Dungeon Academy needed a creative team that specialized in weaving tales for children. Madeleine Roux was the first piece of the creative puzzle, an author who had garnered acclaim with her young adult horror novel *Asylum*. Alongside illustrator and graphic novelist Tim Probert, they lovingly penned the first in the series, *Dungeon Academy: No Humans Allowed* in 2019.

Published by HarperCollins, who had previously produced Roux's *Asylum* series, the book chronicled the escapades of Zelli Stormclash, a human posing as a minotaur in a school tasked with educating the monsters of the Forgotten Realms. *No Humans Allowed* was an immediate success with younger fans of D&D, and sold well enough to warrant an entire trilogy of books. The series was so successful that HarperCollins commissioned a further two books in their HarperChapters series, aimed at even younger readers.

Following the success of their first D&D series, HarperCollins assembled another creative super-team – bestselling author Molly Knox Ostertag and acclaimed artist Xanthe Bouma – to kick off their latest illustrated fiction series *Dungeon Club*. Rather than being set within the Forgotten Realms, this series takes place in our world and focuses on a group of teen friends running their own D&D campaign and navigating the drama that occurs when someone wants to join the party...

D&D fiction has been enjoying its time in the sun, but that doesn't mean that non-fiction has been left entirely in the dark – quite the opposite in fact. *Heroes' Feast*, a cookbook inspired by the food of the Forgotten Realms, landed on the *New York Times* bestseller list and spawned a second entry subtitled *Flavors of the Multiverse* in 2023. With these new titles added to the D&D canon, everyone from the age of 7 to 107 can enjoy Dungeons & Dragons.

KEY TO PLATE

1: In Disguise

No Humans Allowed sees Zelli infiltrate an all-monster school.

2: Illustrated Non-Fiction

The *A Young Adventurer's Guide* series from Penguin Random House retreads the content of the rulebook in an accessible illustrated format and has spawned ten entries so far.

3: Heroes' Feast

The official D&D cookbook was a surprise hit and included foodie fare from the most popular fantasy races, such as dwarf mushroom steaks and elfen bread.

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50 YEARS OF D&D



Our journey through the illustrious fifty-year history of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* is at an end, but the world's most popular roleplaying game shows no signs of slowing down.

Now more than ever, D&D is firmly embedded in the public consciousness. Whether through the extensive library of fascinating novels, stacks of incredible comics, endless innovative video games or appearances in every audio-visual medium you can imagine, more people are enjoying the multiverse of Gygax & Arneson's brainchild than at any time in the last five decades.

With the tabletop RPG itself being constantly updated and expanded, its scope and influence is bound to welcome ever greater numbers to its fold. Regular adventures will continue to be released for dozens of far-flung settings, crossovers with popular media properties will take the game by storm and the tendrils of D&D will stretch into all sorts of avenues, all driven by the team at Wizards and the tens of millions of players who breathe life into their respective tabletop campaigns.

With *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* going from strength to strength, it's exciting to imagine what the next fifty years will bring.

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