

FANTASY FORUM:

A Message From ED SIMBALIST

Dear David:

10 July, 1978

We just received #1 of The Apprentice and liked it very much. We appreciate your intention to present a balanced 'zine and not to deal exclusively with TSR's D&D.

Thanks for your review of Chivalry & Sorcery. You are quite correct in your view that C&S is founded on the insight that "realism" is essential to good fantasy gaming. This opinion is not shared by Mr. E. Gary Gygax, however, who wrote in a recent letter to White Dwarf (#7) that "realism in a game must go out the window," particularly in fantasy games. Perhaps this more than anything else illustrates the absolute void that separates Chivalry & Sorcery from Dungeons & Dragons. It is a difference which, in the case of C&S, makes a coherent and integrated CAMPAIGN possible in a WORLD setting but, in the case of D&D, makes such a campaign so difficult to develop that a campaign designer will, as you say, exhaust himself "building crutches" to prop up the realism he desires.

Let's be honest. Few experienced fantasy role players are really playing D&D as it is printed in the rules. Variant games are played instead. You yourself recommend that a D&Der use C&S for background, while your 'zine has already begun the well-worn process of designing systems for D&D which should have been included in the rules to begin with!

I am tired of hearing people say that they are "D&Ders" when they are FRPers (fantasy role players)! By making D&D a synonym for FRP game, one gives TSR's product free advertising and perpetuates the myth that D&D is the ONLY FRP game available, with all others merely being cheap imitations. D&D is not alone! You do not know how refreshing and welcome it was to us to see that The Apprentice is a "Magazine of Mediaeval Fantasy Gaming."

It might interest you to know that the designers of Chivalry & Sorcery are Canadians, not Americans. The rules began as a variant on D&D, then we threw out the baby with the bathwater because we despaired of ever whipping D&D into shape for the type of world-scope (or at least national-scope) campaign we desired. We started from the beginning, worked out our own concepts, and paid not the slightest attention to what anyone else had done or was doing in the area of fantasy role playing.

We firmly believed that, however "fantastic" and "imaginative" the action might be, the rules had to be supported by "internal consistency." That is, the world had to be governed by recognizable and believable "laws" --both the laws of nature and of magick. ONLY in that way could Game Masters and players be able to REALLY enter the imaginative worlds of fantasy that

result from the setting up of a campaign.

There are those who feel that realism is some form of "straitjacket" that restricts what one can do with a fantasy campaign. Clearly, these people have not been faced with the problem of developing a WORLD in which to carry out role play. But there is a significant difference between the narrow confines of the allegedly "open-minded" dungeon and an entire WORLD. Thus Chivalry & Sorcery talks about GAME MASTERS, while D&D talks about Dungeon Masters. There is more to a fantasy world than dungeons. There is more to fantasy than fighting monsters with simple dice roll system.

REAL fantasy is accessible through Chivalry & Sorcery. The feudal system is typical of a vast number of fantasy worlds in both fiction and legend. We have a C&S Sourcebook out now which fills in more "gaps" in the realism area so that players are given an even wider number of options for action and planning as they pursue a character's day-by-day career in a campaign. The naval rules, Bireme & Galley, while a complete set of historical naval rules in themselves, have a C&S section at the end which permits players to adapt them for their fantasy campaigns. You should note that both of these publications are not intended as a "rip-off" set of supplements which players MUST buy to play C&S campaigns. The basic set of rules is sufficient for that; anything else we produce is purely optional. However, our "supplements" are fully integrated with all C&S systems so that players can introduce whichever elements they desire into their campaigns without having to "exhaust" themselves designing "crutches" to make the systems work.

I would like to repeat that all C&S systems are designed to be OPTIONAL. In short, one is not obligated to play a strictly feudal campaign at all. Modifications of feudal law or feudal society, for example, are easily effected. Players, in short, are encouraged to "meddle" somewhat with the rules to produce the type of fantasy world THEY desire. When you buy a set of rules, after all, you purchase the right to use them as you wish. We tried to design C&S to make player variants easier to develop.

For those desiring Viking characters and worlds (the Nordic dimension opens up a vast range of fantasy for role play, beginning with the Northern Kingdoms of Howard's Hyborea; while the feudal dimension sustains the kingdoms like Aquilonia), our new Swords & Sorcerers volume will be released next month. Provision is also made for Mongols and Steppe Nomads, Picts, Gaels, and Celts, so that a wide range of "barbarian" societies and characters is now possible using C&S systems. Swords & Sorcerers also introduces many new Magick User types, as well as a new magical system for Rune Magick which is in no way conflicting with the existing C&S Magick system. As is our policy, which is plenty in one package, Swords & Sorcerers is a lengthy set of rules additions containing, we hope, a lot of welcome systems and information.

You have written that C&S will either be welcomed into a large number of campaigns or be excommunicated for its nitpicking of realism. As a designer who just received a very adequate royalty cheque, I can assure you that C&S is alive and healthy. As for the "nitpicking realism," what Game Master or

player can say that many of the situations we tried to anticipate do not come up in the course of a well-run campaign? We provide many systems in the expectation that, SOONER OR LATER, the situation will arise and, when it does, it is nice to have some means of dealing with it besides the arbitrary and not always well-informed decisions of the Game Master. For let us be realistic. Many Game Masters have not the depth of knowledge or the time to prepare for every unexpected situation and needs guidance and information. Role playing is perhaps the most complex of all games, and it is perhaps better to err on the side of too much rather than to leave practically everything to the Game Master and the players.

Our random tables for monsters, etc., are purely optional and are intended as a guide as much as for game play. We encourage campaign designers to make their own tables, using ours as models. After all, YOUR world will not be the world WE play in. Each fantasy campaign is unique, the expression of its designer, and we aim to make it possible for players to develop their own.

We have been mildly criticized for the lack of monsters in C&S. Monsters are the prerogative of the campaign designer to develop, include, or ignore, as he desires. The ones we did present are authentic representations of those appearing in actual legend. The C&S Sourcebook contains a section on how to design monsters--any monster--and gives the basic reasoning to follow. This includes conversion of your favourite monsters from any other game, as well as conversion of authentic monsters from myth and legend, or from fantasy fiction. To my knowledge, the way to approach monster designing itself has never been discussed professionally before.

One thing to remember when designing monsters in NOT to use D&D as an absolute authority on the characteristics, nature, etc., of monsters actually appearing in legend and in fantasy fiction. As a Tolkien fan, you will appreciate the fearsome quality of Orcs and Uruk Hai. D&D turned them into practice-types easy to knock over by even a level 1 or 2 character. The same is true of D&D trolls and dragons. When "real" monsters are used, go to the sources--the actual legends and fictional works--for REAL specs. Be true to the legends and they will always serve you well. TSR often tried to "improve" on the real articles; the results I shall not comment on. C&S was my answer!

I have waxed overlong, so I shall close with my best wishes for your new 'zine. Keep up the good effort and always strive to maintain the high standard you began with. If you have any questions, write me care of Fantasy Games. Also, any comments given here and the article included with this letter may be printed in part or in full. Only be sure to print any of my comments on D&D in entirety (if you so decide), so that the complete context is maintained. TSR is overly sensitive about criticism and tends to over-react.

Best regards,
Edward E. Simbalist
C&S Editor

