

DragonNotes

A Regular Feature For DragonQuest Players

By Gerry Klug

With this issue of *Ares*, I take over the writing and responsibility for *DragonNotes*. The great advantage of being able to write a bi-monthly column is that I can communicate with the *DragonQuest* playing public directly and offer help, suggestions, information, and guidance for all you hardy souls who play what I consider to be the number one FRP game on the market.

First, let me introduce myself. By the time you read this, some of you will have seen my name mentioned in the credits for *Universe* (elsewhere in this issue you will find an article on that game by me) and realize I am involved in science fiction role-playing. But *DragonQuest* players will not know why I came to inherit this column and take over the spiritual guidance of the *DragonQuest* line of products.

Being a role-player for five years prior to beginning work for SPI, I played many games including *D&D*, *AD&D*, *The Fantasy Trip*, *Traveller*, *En Garde*, *Gamma World*, *Runequest* and *Boot Hill*. My emphasis has always been in fantasy role-playing, however, and I was in the process of attempting to design my own game when SPI released *DragonQuest*. Rapidly I discovered *DQ* was the best game available and thought SPI might need freelance adventure designs. I offered to do one and they accepted my offer (you will find the results of that assignment in this issue, titled *The Camp of Alla-Akabar*). The relationship was cordial and mutually agreeable, so they offered me a staff position to work on the new SPI science fiction role-playing game, *Universe*.

After a while it became obvious I was the person most familiar with *DragonQuest* (being the only person here who actually played it regularly) and I was then assigned to write this column. I enjoy *DragonQuest* immensely, playing the game twice a week. I GM a campaign which has existed since September of last year, and play characters in a friend's campaign which was started last August. Hopefully my experience with the game and the information I have garnered since working at SPI will aid us all in enjoying the game even more than we do now.

Recently I attended Michicon, a convention sponsored by Metro Detroit Gamers in Rochester, Michigan. This was my first opportunity to communicate directly with loyal *DragonQuest* players (and other role-players in general), and also their first chance to let me know their feelings about the game. The message to me was loud and clear: give us more support material (adventures, supplements, etc.) and re-design the original cumbersome combat system. On both counts we are proceeding rapidly.

As this column is being written, I am in the midst of a redesign of the combat system, which will replace the old one by the third printing of *DragonQuest* and should be ready some time this fall. Reaction to the combat system has been good and blind test

copies are going out shortly. The third printing means a few very good things: 1) *DragonQuest* has sold about 15,000 copies in one year and sales continue to rise, 2) it will probably appear in the stores in a new form, as a hard bound book, 3) massive addenda changes will be incorporated into the new printing. All this became possible because the popularity of the game continues to grow, and I feel very strongly this is because of the enthusiasm the regular *DQ* players are communicating to the "unbelievers." Keep up the good work!

Among the upcoming supplements and adventures are Steve Jackson's *World Generation* and Paul Jaquay's *Enchanted Wood*, both due out in the fall. Since they have been described in this column before, I won't talk about them again, save to say they are both tremendous designs. Also, we are actively soliciting freelance adventure designs and are continuing the design work for *Alusia* follow-ups as well as boxed city, boxed world, and the *DragonQuest II* projects.

I feel this column should be a way of disseminating additional rules material to *DragonQuest* players. Although the rules are certainly not errata free, most GM's I talked to found their own answers to rules questions within the books which already exist. What concerned them most was additional material and rules not covered in the original game which they felt was desperately needed. In partial answer to their request, below is another adventure skill, **Horsemanship**. This skill is treated in all respects as **Stealth**, and will appear (in a slightly revised form, thanks to the combat system changes) in the next printing of *DragonQuest*.

[83.4] An adventurer will use horsemanship to direct animals which he rides.

An adventurer may use his horsemanship with any animal or monster which he would ordinarily ride (such as horses, donkeys, camels, elephants, etc.). Enchanted or Fantastical monsters do not necessarily fall into this category, and the GM must make rulings governing these situations.

The character's player will roll percentile dice whenever his horsemanship is called into play. A character's horsemanship is equal to $[\text{Adjusted Agility} + \text{Willpower}] / 2 + [\text{Rank} \times 8]$. In the above equation, round all fractions down. The type of mount a character is riding will modify his horsemanship as follows:

Donkey	-10
Mustang	-12*
Quarterhorse	0
Dire Wolf	-10
Draft Horse	-5
Palfrey	+17.5
Warhorse	-5*
Camel	-15

Mule	-8
Pony	+10
Elephant	-10

An * indicates a negative modifier unless animal is trained by the rider; in that case, the modifier is 0.

The GM should also take into account the familiarity the character has with the individual animal type and apply modifiers thereby (e.g., the first time a character finds himself atop a camel should be worth at least an additional -15).

A character's horsemanship is called into play whenever he wishes his mount to perform an unusual or difficult action. Also, in every Pulse in combat a horsemanship roll must be made. Any mount can be directed into moving at a walking pace or even a brisk trot; an unusual or difficult action would be to break into a gallop (or charge), turn sharply around, come to a halt once goaded into a gallop or charge, jump an obstacle, etc. During combat, horsemanship is called into play during every pulse to: a) keep the mount controlled, b) regain control if it is lost, and c) direct the mount to take any specific Action, whether Maneuver or Martial. Remember, only a Warhorse can be directed to enter into Close Combat by its rider, and all other mounts will attack only if directly assaulted.

A successful roll (equal to or less than the modified percentage) will result in the mount obeying the directions of the riders. A roll above the modified percentage but less than the modified percentage + the rider's Willpower indicates the mount either does nothing or continues to do whatever it was doing. A roll above both of these indicates the mount will either disobey the rider, buck, attempt to throw the rider, or some other unpleasant result. The actual occurrence must be decided by the GM and should become worse the farther the roll is above the modified percentage.

If the GM judges the rider has totally lost control of his mount, the rider may take no other action until he has regained control (presuming he managed to stay mounted).

Using horsemanship costs no Action Points while in combat unless no other Action is taken that Pulse, in which case use constitutes a Pass Action. A trained horseman receives certain abilities as he rises in Rank:

Rank 3: Pays normal Action Point cost for Martial actions

Rank 5: May use weapons of 2 readiness points

Rank 7: May use two weapons at once

Horsemanship has a maximum Rank of 10 and an Experience Multiple of 125. Every adventurer has it at Rank 0 when beginning play. Rising in Rank is accomplished as **Stealth** (see 87.6, paragraph 2).

When I read the rules for *DragonQuest* for the first time, I was astounded they had

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left out (overlooked?) overland movement rates. How *did* one get from point "A" to point "B"? Apotation? Elevators? Subways? So, one of the first things I did was create an overland movement chart which I have used ever since in my campaign with little modification. What changes were made concerned mounted movement rates, for which I consulted Al Nofi once I began to work at SPI; he provided me with extremely valuable information regarding strategic cavalry movement throughout history. Thus, I believe the accompanying Overland Movement Chart is accurate not only in a "fantasy" sense (working in a campaign) but in a "historical" sense as well.

Some of you are undoubtedly asking, "Why do men on horses move at the same rate as men on foot?" Well, it has been shown historically that while horses can indeed move much faster than a man in short bursts, over the long haul the amount of movement events out. The greater speed is neutralized by the fact horses have to stop and water, graze, etc., while humans need to stop less often.

[83.5] OVERLAND MOVEMENT CHART

TERRAIN	RATE OF EXERCISE			
	LIGHT	MEDIUM	HEAVY	STRENUOUS
Cavern	5/-	10/-	15/-	20/-
Field	15/15	25/25	30/40*	35/50*
Marsh ¹	-/-	5/5	10/10*	15/15*
Plain	15/15	25/25	30/40*	40/50*
Rough ²	10/5	15/10	20/15*	25/-
Waste ³	10/5	15/10	20/10*	-/-
Woods ⁴	10/5	15/10	20/15*	25/-

Number before the slash indicates movement in miles per day on foot; number after indicates mounted movement (assuming horses). Rates for other animal types must be adjusted by the GM. The day assumes a total of 8 hours marching.

The effects of adverse weather must be adjusted by the GM.

Notes:

-: That type of movement at that particular exercise rate is impossible.

1: Movement rates assume some sort of passable terrain; total swamp is impassable except by canoes (sometimes).

2: If terrain is mountainous, halve rates on foot and prohibit mounted movement.

3: If terrain is desert, the GM should apply strictures regarding effects of heat, dehydration, etc.

4: If terrain is deep woods, halve the movement rates.

*: In these rate of exercise categories, the horses' rate will deteriorate 33% per day. They can travel at these rates for approximately 4 consecutive days and then they will die.

Any paths or roads negate the effects of other terrain and the Plain movement rates are employed when using them.

The main advantage in mounted movement is that the rider does not get nearly as tired and can perform some tasks at the end of the journey; treat the rider of any mounted beast as expending Fatigue at a rate one less than normal (i.e., a rider mounted on a horse which is moving in the Heavy column himself loses Fatigue in the Medium column).

In the next issue, I will talk a little about Character Generation, Experience Points and Treasure. ■■

FILM & TELEVISION (continued from page 13)

responsible for many of the impressive effects in both *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Alien* (he won an Academy Award for his special effects in *Alien*), was in charge of making Vermithrax believable. The dragon was built at George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic, Inc. outside of San Francisco. After construction it was shipped to England for Johnson to use in conjunction with his small stop-frame models.

Graphic artist David Burnett was the dragon's designer. "The most important actions for the dragon come in the final battle's flying sequence," said Burnett. "Because of this action, we decided very early along to design a dragon that looked best when flying. The emphasis on flight, subsequently, dictated that the dragon look light enough to fly, and have an enormous wingspan." Vermithrax is not just a mindless engine of destruction. Since the monster was supposed to register intelligence (along with a wide range of emotions), he had to be designed with more care than the typical movie monster. "The key to Vermithrax is the relationship of the brow to the horns, much like a man's temple and forehead structure. The dragon's brow sweeps back. It has a frown and a slightly human, intelligent look. This is not a creature that is simply programmed to eat, but a creature with a mind — albeit a malevolent one.

"You won't feel sympathy for the dragon," explained Burnett, "but it will have a kind of majesty. We didn't want to end up with the Alien which was too repulsive to look at."



They needn't have worried. The dragon is a graceful, yet menacing presence. The blend of giant-sized moving pieces with stop-frame work is so deftly pulled off that in places it is hard to tell what kind of effect is being employed.

But, praise to the special effects aside, there are better reasons to see *Dragonslayer*. The film offers hope that there will be a long line of fantasy films to come. The *Star Wars* boom has brought us more science fiction and fantasy films one after another than we have ever had before. Many of them have been exploitive and poorly made, but not all. *Dragonslayer* is more than "boy-meets-monster, boy-kills-monster, boy-gets-girl."

The film is a subtle study of early 6th Century Britain. The clothing is rough and hand-stitched. There is no dyed cloth, heeled footwear, or paving on the highways. The movie is populated with real peasants, subservient to authority and tired of day-to-day existence. They obey their king out of fear, for with no freedoms, they dare not complain.

Another touch of realism is the struggle evident in the film between the vanishing magicians and the early Christians. Not willing to bend their knee to popular culture, Barwood and Robbins have portrayed the world as realistically as possible. The villagers turn their backs on their druidic roots and run off to be baptized, hoping that the Christian God can stop Vermithrax. They cheer at the dragon's death, but give the credit to their God. The king also comes out to the dragon's smoldering carcass and drives his sword into it while his counselor proclaims him the "dragonslayer." The real heroes, Galen and Valerian, are ignored by all and must move on lest they become victims of the bowdlerizers.

The characters in *Dragonslayer* are portrayed as real human beings. Galen is a brash, sometimes insufferable snot. Often arrogant and childish, he is a hero who needs to be taught a lesson. Similarly, there are brave people, sensible people, cowardly people, stupid people, and so forth populating the film. Though the dialogue is occasionally stiff, there is a believable reality. When the people and settings of a fantasy are as carefully wrought as they are here, it is easy to get an audience to accept as small and wonderful a thing as a dragon.

Christopher John

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5	Ragnarok (article)	6.42
6	Ragnarok (game)	6.37
7	Pandora's Link	6.34
8	Science for Science Fiction	6.11
9	Facts for Fantasy	6.11
10	Film & TV	6.10
11	Books	5.94
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