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Preview

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What if you could play a tabletop roleplaying game with familiar rules and a familiar setting, but imaginative storytelling and dice-rolling action were ramped up beyond what you're used to? That's *13th Age*! The two of us were the lead designers of two editions of D&D, and when we designed *13th Age* we did it for ourselves and for gamers like us—not for corporate shareholders.

I3th Age - The "Cool Parts Only" TTRPG

Story: Roleplaying games foster imagination and creativity like nothing else, and in *13th Age* we lean into this unique strength. Gamemasters get a familiar-feeling world designed to be customized for each campaign. Players get special rules providing them with narrative authority that draws on their creativity.

Crunch: Tabletop roleplaying games also have a tactical element in which you make tricky decisions and hope for good dice rolls. *13th Age* leans into the action by presenting players with battles where they have clear tactical decisions to make and dice rolls really matter, while simplifying the ticky-tacky rules for distance and movement that aren't as much fun.

Story + Crunch: So is *13th Age* a wide-open story game with an amazing combat system? Or is it a high-powered adventure game with a great system for supporting stories? Yes!

CHARACTERS

CHARACTER CLASSES

Each class plays differently from the others. Sorcerers spend time "powering up" so they can cast half-wild double-damage spells. Clerics cast many of their spells as quick actions, letting them use two or even three spells in a turn. Bards mix normal spells with a variety of quick actions and reactions to events around them based on which musical instruments they've mastered. Meanwhile, paladins have tricks to get foes to attack them instead of the other party members—and their defenses can handle truly punishing attacks.

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LEVELS

Your character's capabilities increase meaningfully with each level, and the increase from 9th level to 10^{th} (the maximum in *13th Age*) is just as big as the jump from 1st to 2nd. For melee-oriented classes as well as for spellcasters, your character's ability to dish out damage ramps up by level, and even epic-level battles are fast. (Monster levels go well past 10th, because of course they do.)

You don't have to wait until the next level for your character to get new toys, though. *Incremental advances* periodically reward characters with spells and features they're slated to gain the next time they gain a level. It's more fun to play with characters who change a little between adventures instead of leveling up in one big chunk!

UNIQUES

Every 13th Age hero is special in a way unlike all other heroes. The "one unique thing" you invent for your character is a meaningful narrative detail that makes your character unique in the world! In effect, each player is telling the GM something that's important to them or to their character, something that might help shape the future of the campaign.

"One unique things" that players have invented for their heroes include ...

"I am a dwarf who was born covered in scales from the egg of a dragon."

"I hear pain as music. Sweet, sweet music."

"I am the oldest elf in the world."

"I'm the only escapee from the Diabolist's Circus of Hell."

"I'm a fallen god, forced into mortal form."

"I'm the only human child born to a zombie."

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As you can see, *uniques* often tell the GM things about the world they hadn't known until the players created their characters: "Oh, the Diabolist has a Circus of Hell! That's gonna be great."

Typically a *unique's* full meaning unfolds during the campaign. Fallen gods ascend, or learn to be mortal; scaled dwarves uncover their true heritage; the human child of a zombie finds themselves at the center of a prophecy about the end of the age!

BACKGROUNDS

You determine your character's skills by defining their identity. In place of a skill list you invent your character's backgrounds: elements of your character's backstory. During play, if you can tell the GM how your background should help with an action your character is taking, you get the background's bonus to that skill check.

Most characters have two or three, representing their lives before they joined the adventuring party. For example, consider these three backgrounds...

Military chef. You'll be good at cooking, adventure-worthy herbalism, military protocol, effectively managing underlings,



buttering up superiors, and defusing arguments among young toughs before they turn into fistfights. It's also possible that with this background your character is _terrible_ at cooking.

Add a specific detail, such as *military chef in the Crusader's field kitchen*, and you might also be able to apply this background to skill checks to identify demons (or pieces of demons), to intimidate local nobility, and to recognize poisons. (Everyone knows that the Crusader eats every meal with a touch of poison; or they will when you inform the group of this in play, and the GM admires your chutzpah so much they let you add your military chef bonus to a poison identification skill roll!).

Hunted outlaw. You can probably sneak around, hide in various environments, forage, bushwhack, disguise yourself, navigate the criminal underworld, predict the strategies of law enforcement, and possibly escape confinement or restraints.

You might also be a *former hunted outlaw in the Wild Wood*. This more-or-less gives you the same set of skill advantages while begging the story of how your circumstances changed; it can also give you firsthand knowledge of druids and their ways, as well as the monsters and magic unique to that region.

Warrior poet. Depending on you, this background could represent a refined character analogous to a samurai who composes haiku in the midst of battle; a hard-drinking trouble-maker analogous to a Nordic mercenary who ad libs mocking verses filled with alliteration; or it could be something entirely new of your own devising. It's a fairly obvious background for a bard, but it might be more fun for a cleric or sorcerer!

Add the detail that you're a *warrior poet of the Grey Wardens* and you've added a new organization to the game: warriors associated with the ancient ruins of the high elves on the shore of the Iron Sea. Will you claim special insight into ancient and possibly not entirely ruined traditions? (You should!) Are you gonna come up with other surprising things the Grey Wardens have been involved in? (Very probably.) And will the GM eventually entangle you with NPC Grey Wardens in a story line that makes use of your sword and your poems? (Oh yeah!)

Сотват

One of the main reasons people play d20-rolling fantasy games is to experience exciting battles with deadly villains and strange monsters. When combat gets bogged down, or drags on due to poor dice rolls, it's a bummer. That's why we made combat fast and dramatic for everyone, including the GM!

THE ESCALATION DIE

13th Age is full of innovations that you can port straight into any d20-rolling fantasy campaign, and the escalation die is the most useful and portable of these rules. The escalation die is a d6 that tracks a bonus on player-character attacks. The escalation die begins off the table at 0. At the start of the second round of combat it goes up to 1, giving all the player characters a +1 bonus

to attacks. It keeps increasing by +1 at the start of each round until it gets to 6—that's a +6 bonus on each player character attack!

The bonus the escalation die provides gives battles a clear shape. The first round is usually the hardest for the heroes: the enemies are at full strength, and the escalation bonus is 0. As the battle progresses the tide shifts in the heroes' favor, which helps bring the fight to a quick resolution once the outcome is clear. Players love the escalation die so much that naturally we've created challenging monsters who mess with it, and dragons get to use the bonus for themselves.

Rob has a ginormous d6 that we use for our escalation die, and we love seeing that thing turn over to a higher number at the start of each round.

Positioning

Combat in 13th Age is tactical without the need to count squares. Position is defined by where combatants are relative to each other rather than by where they are on a grid. Rules for position create straightforward tactical options—especially the rules for opportunity attacks, attempting to disengage, intercepting foes, and attacking at range.

BALANCE

The combat system is balanced so that using up resources in one fight makes a difference in later fights. In D&D, the ability to easily recover spells and hit points means that losses in an early fight often don't much matter for a later one. In 13th Age, the resources you gain from a long rest have to last you through four average fights, or three tough fights, or some equivalent combination of battles. How well you do in your first fight has a big effect on what you have left to take on the last fight!

Monsters

Monsters are balanced so the GM can easily create both tough and easy battles, and adjust their difficulty in the moment if they've misjudged. Monsters' abilities are streamlined, so that everything in a monster's stat block really matters at the table.

Mooks

Low-powered monsters are configured as "mooks," which are dangerous only in mobs—but they are quite dangerous in mobs! Heroes can cut through mooks in quantity because their hit points are low, and because excess damage against one mook spills over onto the next mook. Taking out multiple foes with a single swing feels great.

TRIGGERED ATTACKS

For many monsters, a special attack triggers off the number rolled on the basic attack. For example, the hellhound gets to use its *fiery breath* attack if its *savage bite* attack roll is any even number—even a miss. As a result each hellhound uses *fiery breath* about every other round, and the GM doesn't have to track which ones have to recharge their attacks and which don't because it's left up to the dice. Triggered attacks also mean that monsters have a life of their own in play, and can do things that surprise even the GM!

Spoiling The Heroes' Fun

Your hero being unable to act for even a single round sucks. Monster powers that might shut characters down in other games have been reworked so that the heroes are always engaged at least minimally in the action. For example, a character paralyzed by a ghoul in $13^{th}Age$ gets a 50/50 save to recover each round.

NAMES

In place of long descriptions, monster attacks have colorful and evocative names. That ghoul mentioned above is actually attacking you with *reeking claws and fetid fangs*, while the clay golem smashes its foes into jelly with its *bare brutal hands*.

Storytelling

A Shared Creative World

What's better than a highly detailed world where everything is spelled out? An intentionally half-created world that provides enough lore to give the GM and players a starting point. During character creation and over the course of play, everyone elaborates on the basics to create their own unique version of the setting.

13th Age is set in the Dragon Empire, a vast and ancient civilization that has catastrophically fallen into ruin twelve times, and twelve times has risen from those ruins. Everyone knows that the current age is going to fall one day, just like the twelve ages before it. Perhaps your heroes can help forestall the collapse of civilization. . . .or bring it about, and build a better, more just world in its place.

This setting feels familiar, so it's easy to understand and easy to customize. But we describe the world in very broad strokes, leaving plenty of room for the imaginations of GMs and players. There's no canon for the game that gets preserved in every published adventure or sourcebook. Some sourcebooks have sections that are meant for certain types of campaigns and not for others.

ICONS

The signature new feature in *13th Age* is the concept of "icons." It has roots in some of our favorite classic tabletop roleplaying games, where player characters have connections to gods, cults, factions, or magical traditions that make the PCs part of a living



world and provide them with both benefits and challenges in play. In 13^{th} Age we take that idea and turn it into a powerful mechanic.

Icons are archetypal figures that help define the setting and connect each character to the wider world. They are the godlike beings who rule civilization, who protect it, or who threaten to burn it down (again). You'll recognize these archetypes from many fantasy campaigns: the Emperor, the Elf Queen, the Great Gold Wyrm, the Prince of Shadows, the Diabolist, the Lich King, and more. Your campaign's tone, themes, and story arcs are heavily influenced by which icons the heroes are connected with, and how the GM and players interpret them.

At the highest level, the icons in your campaign set the stage for the action. Perhaps your campaign is about minions of the Diabolist infiltrating the Archmage's organizations, with the Priestess and the Crusader each trying to root out this evil in their own way.

At the lowest level, the icons connect one way or another to each character, as the player chooses: positive, negative, or ambiguous. Players roll icon dice to represent the effect these connections have on the unfolding narrative, empowering players to influence the story as it develops. A cleric with a negative connection to the Diabolist, for example, might be uniquely trained to spot the Diabolists' secret minions. Meanwhile, a paladin with a positive connection to the Priestess might be able to channel her power directly to restore a community devastated by a predatory cult. Whether humbly or heroically, every character can make a difference in the grand power struggles among the icons.

If the icons are so powerful, why does the world need heroes at all? Despite their might—in some ways because of it—the icons are limited in what they can do personally. They have high-level responsibilities that demand their full attention (such as running an empire, a vast criminal enterprise, or the priesthoods of every god of Light) and thus are removed from everyday life. They are offstage powers, not on-stage actors. The heroic icons need heroes to take up their cause, and that's where the player characters come in. The villainous icons work through underlings, who often end up facing the heroes in climactic battles.

Conversational Style

We wrote 13th Age for gamers like us, and in the pages of the rulebook we speak directly to you. We tell you why we wrote certain rules and how you can best use them to create the experience you want to see at the table. We each bring a different personal style to the game, and these differences give us a lot to talk about. One of us, for example, likes to design rules that protect players from suffering too much, while the other likes to create opportunities to narrowly escape serious suffering—or heroically rise above it. We often provide options for which rules to use or how to use them. The two of us don't run 13th Age the same way, and you won't play it the same way that either of us do. When it comes to how you and your friends play 13th Age at the table, we value personalization over consistency.

ΑΠΟ ΠΟΨ FOR ŤΗΕ SECOΠΟ ΕΟΙΤΙΟΠ!

Eleven years ago, many innovations in 13th Age were experiments. We had decades of experience playing, running, and designing D&D and other TTRPGs, but 13th Age was brand new. Over the years we've seen how our experiments worked at tables all over the world, and have gained more experience working on 13th Age books—especially the monumental 13th Age Glorantha. Now we've used our years of experience and feedback from countless players to make 13th Age more "13th Age-y" than ever.

That's not just feedback on the first edition, by the way. We're also working off feedback on the Alpha playtest draft of *2E*, from nearly 200 gaming groups. The playtest packet you'll get access to by backing the Kickstarter—or by already being in the Alpha playtest or accepted into the playtest list—is the second packet, which incorporates the valuable feedback we got during the first round.

Τωο Βοοκς!

For the first edition we were determined to fit everything into a single core book, partly because we're allergic to the notuncommon business practice of releasing multiple unnecessary books just because people will buy them. As work on *2E* progressed we became convinced we could best serve the game, and the needs of players and GMs, with two reasonably-sized books instead of one huge book.

The 13th Age Second Edition Player's Handbook will be around 240 pages, maybe more depending on layout. It will include character creation, a chapter on the kin, classes, backgrounds, the combat rules, icon connection rules, and detailed writeups of each of the icons to help players use their connections in fun ways that shape the story. Also there's an option for using icon connections in combat, but just because it exists doesn't mean it's the best option...

The 13th Age Second Edition Gamemaster's Guide includes 160+ pages of campaign advice, rules for running the game, monsters, setting material for the Dragon Empire, treasure, and a new introductory adventure. The Kickstarter will offer the two books together in a slipcover.

There's also going to be a new four-panel Gamemaster's Screen, with a cool silhouette style we haven't seen before created by Lee Moyer!

The full team: Game design and writing on this two-book core set is by the original team of Rob Heinsoo and Jonathan Tweet. Lee Moyer and Aaron McConnell are our principal artists again, and Lee is coming up with ideas we would never have hit upon without him. We'll also be working with artists who

have been contributing to *13th Age* over the past few years, like Simone Bannach, as well as a couple new artists. Trisha DeFoggi is continuing her reign as editor. Layout artist extraordinaire Jen McCleary (*The Fall of DELTA GREEN*) will bring the pieces together and make the canvas pop.



Revisiting The Classes

The original nine classes are now better balanced than before. Classes that were a little too good, particularly spellcasters, have been dialed down a little. Classes that needed some help, like the fighter and bard, are getting beefed up. In general, classes have more options. Powers and spells that were boring, or that hardly anyone chose for their character, have been replaced with versions that players will find as worthwhile as the powers and spells that have always been strong.

Spells at each level: Spellcasters now cast all their spells at their level, so you never have to prep sub-par spells. We've taken a close look at damage progression for spells to make sure that they're balanced against each other and against the attacks of non-spellcasting classes. The spells that needed help got the help that they needed.

The fighter is in control: Speaking of experiments in 1E that didn't pan out as we envisioned, the *2E* fighter's varied attacks are now under the player's control rather than triggering randomly



based on attack rolls. In fact, all the weapon-using classes are stronger at epic-tier because epic-tier basic attacks have been improved, allowing them to keep up with the monsters' hit point curve and the spellcasters' damage curve.

The bard we've wanted to play: As a class with spells, weaponry, and charm, the bard has been hard to get right for decades. Our new version plays up the bard's trickery and flexibility, providing a lot of options for the player who likes messing with enemies and helping friends. And it's built around music! Here's a quick excerpt from the start of the Talents section:

BARD TALENTS

Each bardic talent represents a method of playing music or performing magic. You don't have to be using or even carrying the instrument you've gained music from; once you've learned its magic, you can access the magic using any instrument, song, or wand.

BRASS: HORNS & TRUMPETS

Your favored magic relies on piercing tones from horns, warhorns, trumpets, flugelhorns and other metallic instruments powered by your own breath. Trombones and tubas are a bit anachronistic for a high medieval world, but most versions of the Dragon Empire are high magic worlds and we're sure you can find wonderful medieval horns to upgun if you care.

Like other bardic talents, Brass provides a combat riff, healing magic, a miss-me effect, and a keynote.

Range: Note that the spells that are part of Brass all target nearby or far-away targets because of the Brass keynote, piercing tones.

Adventurer Feat: You gain all benefits listed as Brass adventurer feats for trumpet call, brassy, you get the horns, and piercing tones.

Champion Feat (requires adv): Ditto, but for the championtier feats.

Epic Feat (requires champion): Ditto, but for the epic feats.

Revisiting the Kin

Dwarves, gnomes, humans, and other sorts of characters are now referred to as *kin*, and each kin now has multiple kin powers for you to choose from. These options allow each kin to support a wider variety of character types. For example, the half-orc's *lethal* power now works for any sort of attack, not just melee attacks, making it useful to half-orc spellcasters. Likewise, the half-orc's new kin powers boost damage or recoveries, so they also work for any sort of class.

And speaking of working for any class, in *2E* every character gets to distribute their ability scores as they please. Any of the kin can thrive in any class.

Let's look at the kin power of wood elves, one of the most popular kin in the first edition. We confess: it was popular because its original kin power, *elven grace*, was broken. In *2E*, the kin power choices for wood elves will look like something like this (you'll notice we've replaced "day" with "arc" to refer to the length of time between two full heal-ups):

WOOD ELVES

Kin power: Choose one of *elven grace, fortunate fey,* or *Queen's eye.*

ELVEN GRACE (KIN POWER)

At the start of each of your turns, roll 1d8 to see if you get an extra standard action. If your roll is equal to or lower than the escalation die, you get an extra standard action that turn. You then stop rolling for *elven grace* until you've taken a quick rest. Alternatively, you can opt not to take the extra action and keep rolling each turn.

Champion Feat: Once per arc, roll a d4 for *elven grace* instead of a d8. If you don't get an extra action, this option is not expended.

FORTUNATE FEY (KIN POWER)

Three times per arc, but never more than twice per battle, you can reroll a d20 roll that is not an attack roll or an initiative roll and that has not already been rerolled. You must abide by the reroll and can't reroll again or benefit from any other tricky methods of replacing the reroll.

Champion Feat: You can now use *fortunate fey* rerolls five times per arc.

QUEEN'S EYE (KIN POWER)

Once per battle when the escalation die is 2+, turn your miss with a ranged attack into a hit.

Champion Feat: Once per arc, instead of turning a miss with a ranged attack into a hit, you can turn a hit with a ranged attack into a critical hit.

Εχριαίπιπς İcon Connections

The rules for icon connections and how players use them in-game have been significantly revamped based on the feedback we've heard since the game's release. We believe the new, more playerfacing rules will be much easier to understand and use in fun and creative ways. Because this rule system is unique to 13th Age, we spend a lot of time spelling out how to use icon connections, with copious examples—including many from players and GMs who shared their favorite icon connection experiences with us.

Each icon gets a fuller treatment, including possible ideas for organizations that might support or oppose each of them. Since the icons operate off-stage, ground-level organizations of your own choosing make a great way to connect heroes to the icons' goals and activities.

Players now roll to find out if there's a twist with their icon connection after describing what they want from the connection. This means each of our icon connection examples comes with one or more ideas for interesting twists that preserve the player's intent while making the story more interesting in ways they might not have chosen!

An example: Here's an example from the Icon Connections chapter describing how a player uses their connection by telling a story about something that's going to happen in the future—one of our categories of effect. The results of this connection won't entirely play out until later, but the player should at least get what they asked for.

FUTURE: MERCIFUL HEGEMONY

Positive or Conflicted Emperor \blacklozenge active hero \blacklozenge connection expressed as future story

Your imperial paladin has just used merciful logic and a difficult diplomacy skill check to prevent the people of a frontier village from hanging the two bedraggled bandits they caught during a blizzard. You decide to use your connection with the Emperor to turn this event into a definitive scene in the life of this community, promoting loyalty to the Emperor that will last for a generation.

Locking in a social victory is a great use for an icon connection, and this frontier village will probably reappear in future adventures. Maybe it will even rename itself and start a movement that affects other areas of the Empire?

Twist? The village becomes known for its leniency. Specifically, for its shrine of imperial absolution: any outlaw who spends two years tending the shrine, without getting more than 20 yards from the shrine, is forgiven their crimes and may start fresh. Is this a twist, you ask? It becomes one late in the heroes' career, when one of their committed enemies devotes themselves to caring for the shrine.

More prosaically, a straightforward twist would require the heroes to take the bandits to their destination: a two-year posting to a Sea Wall punishment legion defending against the Iron Sea.

CAMPAIGN DECISIONS

The new edition talks you through the process of deciding which icons predominate in your campaign and how they might differ from how the icons are portrayed in our default campaign setting. In your game, certain icons might be elevated to higher standing, reimagined, downplayed, sidelined, killed off, or merged with other icons.

In the original game, the looming threat of the Orc Lord was a shadow upon the Dragon Empire. In the new version, the Orc Lord has been defeated and it's up to your group to determine how that happened and what the aftermath is. Who killed the Orc Lord? How much of the Dragon Empire did he take down before he died? What new villainous threat rises in his place? We want every campaign to be its own story, so you and your friends answer these questions, not us.



Monster-O-Rama

Everything we got right with monsters the first time around we're doing more of with $13^{th} Age 2E$.

Overall, monster special attacks and abilities are amped up so that different creatures provide entertainingly diverse combat challenges. The advice for creating your own monsters offers many more examples and better guidelines for how to make troops, casters, blockers, and wreckers different from each other. We also added a section on NPCs so that GMs can more easily populate their despicable cults, outlaw bands, and villain strongholds.

DRAGONS

Dragons have gotten more dragon-y, with their breath weapons taking more of a central role in their attacks. An optional and highly flexible combat trick available to every dragon (see below!) offers a new way for them to frustrate or mangle the heroes. Dragons have always been a little too powerful by design, and in **2***E* that's for sure.

We think of dragons as the monsters' equivalents of the player characters! Each dragon has access to one or more "flipyou tricks", and as the GM you don't have to choose which trick they'll use ahead of time! (Will we keep that name? Maybe! But if not, you get to see them before they're renamed!)

A single flip-you trick lets a dragon . . .

... use its godlike reflexes to reroll initiative (start of combat only)

 \dots follow its killer instinct to add +1 to an attack roll after you see the roll.

... bring draconic levels of pain and increase its crit range by 2 after you see the roll.

... use its wily tail to prevent a hero from making an opportunity attack.

... sweep with its wing to force a hero to reroll a disengage check.

... use its magnificent scales to force a hero to reroll a hit that targets its AC (not a crit).

... focus its uncanny mind to force a hero to reroll a hit targeting its MD.

... unleash its bestial vitality to force a hero reroll a hit targeting its PD.

 \dots use its sheer draconic awesomeness to attempt to throw off one temporary effect, requiring a standard save (11+) to do so.

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ΒΑΤΤLΕ DESIGΠ

Balanced battles and adventures are a hallmark of 13th Age, and our new guidelines make it easier for the GM to customize challenging encounters of different difficulty levels. New examples of battleground hazards help give battles unique and memorable features that change the experience of combat.

magic items

Magic weapons have always been a hero's favorite treasure, and now we've made other magic items better. Magic boots add to your initiative rolls as well as disengage checks, and magic shields force enemies to reroll attacks against you. Most importantly, magic item powers related to damage or hit points scale up with your tier—they're not stuck with the effect for the item's tier. This means all magic items have worthwhile powers in the hands of epic-tier characters, even "adventurer-tier" items.

ŤHE ORIGINALEDITION IS NOTOBSOLETE

One of our goals for $13^{th}Age\ 2E$ was to make sure that the books we've published for the past eleven years—as well as the $13^{th}Age$ -compatible books published by third-party publishers—would still be useful at tables playing 2E. We've managed it!

Adventures like *Eyes of the Stone Thief, Elven Towers,* and *Shards of the Broken Sky* are perfectly playable using 2*E*. Sourcebooks like *Drakkenhall* and *Book of the Underworld* are entirely viable. Many of the playtest campaigns we heard about from the 13th Age 2*E* Alpha Playtest Packet included demonologists (*Book of Demons*) and monks, necromancers, and commanders (13 True Ways).

There are issues some GMs will want to address with a few of the mechanics in earlier books, which we'll point out in FAQs when we've finished *2E*. Our new battle-building guidelines make life harder on large parties (in a good way), and that isn't reflected in earlier adventures' battle-building advice. But overall, if you've got a 1E book with stuff you like in it, that stuff will still be relevant in *2E*.

And yes: we'll almost certainly update most of the *13 True Ways* classes in a book Rob is working on that he calls *Further Adventurers!*







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GAMEMASTER'S GUIDE

SECOND EDITION



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