THE SECRET FIRE

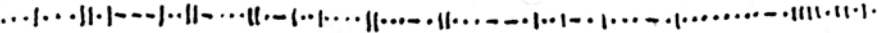## THE WAY OF TREE, SHADOW & FLAME

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FOREWORD BY JAMES M. WARD

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THE WAY OF TREE, SHADOW & FLAME

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This book was found by:
HOARACE BAYARD, 1873
(Though other hands have touted it)

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Στιⲗⲭo -Δⲁσⲕⲁⲗos των στρατιωтών

Dedication
Dedicated to the work of Andre Norton, E. Gary Gygax, Plato, Will Shakespeare, J. Krishnamurti,
The Secret Society of Neo-Platonists, Eckhart Tolle, Joseph Campbell, J. R. R. Tolkien,
George Lucas, Carl Jung, Thich Nhat Hanh, D.T. Suzuki, Ralph Waldo Emerson

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PREFACE

When I ask my home **TSF** campaign group members to describe the PC they each plan to play, I don't receive a list of statistics that simply (or in an overly complex way, for that matter) delineates the numerical parameters of a game avatar. Instead, I'm given a character/story-based description. The following excerpt comes from an e-mail from one of my players (Josh):

> "I'll be playing Gavin the Greyfoot, Guardian of the Westmarch Glens. A stout and swarthy Halfling, he lost his family during infancy in a massacre he doesn't recall. He believes he was saved by Dryads of the woods that surrounded his village and has dedicated himself to the Druidic Order. The hair on his feet has been a silvery gray since adolescence, and while he has a tendency toward the morose, he is a patient leader. He is a bit dense, but he is also enlightened, quick, hearty, and persuasive."

These character summaries contain no numbers, no in-game terminology (e.g. Trademarks, Resistances, etc.), nor even specific equipment (unless an item were to pertain directly to the character's backstory, current goal, or other element of his or her personality). Josh has instead used Descriptors, Traits, Background, and Goals generated or selected during character creation—elaborating on these using his imagination—to describe a three-dimensional persona that exists within the game world.

The objective is not to enforce a story *upon* the players, but instead to allow them to create fully developed characters who exist in a "realistic" world wherein they forge *their own* stories through expeditions, the establishment of domains, and the fulfillment of their ultimate destinies. One might describe it as a "sandbox" milieu inhabited by concrete and evocative characters free to choose their own paths. The Master Creator develops the environment and its denizens while the players decide how their fleshed-out characters wish to make their way through this world of danger, excitement, death, glory, fame, and fortune.

Lastly, and most importantly, this supplement came about through a team effort by a group of amazingly creative, thoughtful, and dedicated game designers. I can't thank them enough.

George Strayton

August 2013

WORDS FROM THE MASTER

What follows is a selection of excerpts from posts made by E. Gary Gygax, the creator of the most popular roleplaying game of all time, collected in the second printing of the volume *Cheers, Gary* published by the Gary Gygax Memorial Fund (find out more about the charity and how to make a tax-deductible contribution at http://www.gygaxmemorialfund.com/).

THE SECRET FIRE game seeks to fulfill Gary's thoughts on table-top RPGs, especially the following:

WHAT MAKES A GAME SESSION ENJOYABLE
1. Good personal relationships between all the participants.
2. Subject matter that interests the whole group.
3. Able GMing, including animated participation by that one.
4. Able play, role-assumption, and roleplaying by the players.
5. A sense of danger from the environment, but knowledge that clever play will likely overcome all hazards.
6. In-game reward for characters played successfully in the scenario.
7. Shared recounting of the adventure at its conclusion.
8. A conclusion that opens the portal to yet more exciting possibilities for play.

LETHALITY IN ROLEPLAYING GAMES
How I detest namby-pamby whiners that expect to play a real RPG without threat of character death or loss of a level, stat points, or even choice magic items! Without such possibilities, what it the purpose of play, a race to see which character can have the greatest level, highest stats, and largest horde of treasure? That is just too flaccid for words.

EDITION WARS
Edition wars are the height of foolishness. Who can argue with someone's personal taste in entertainment of any sort? Disputing which game or variation thereof is superior is much the same as arguing about what food tastes best or what color is the most pleasing, is it not? Over and above that, in general gamers have more in common with each other than do non-game enthusiasts, so why fight amongst ourselves about games.

FOREWORD

BY JAMES M. WARD

For those of you who have read **THE SECRET FIRE** you know just how interesting and creative George Strayton is. He's asked me to write this forward and I'm happy to shed a little historical data on Gary Gygax and my beginnings in the role-playing industry.

I was immensely lucky in the Summer of '74 to meet Gary Gygax when he was trying to sell his first 1,000 **D&D** brown box sets. Just out of college, I had dreams of becoming a novelist as I taught History and English somewhere in Wisconsin. The RPG industry was in its infancy and we rolled for 20s by rolling a round die with 0 to 9 on it and then rolling a six-sided die so that on 4–5–6 we added ten to the round die roll. I hate to admit it, but it took me months to finally figure out all of the poly-dice. My first player character started out as a magic-user with a single *light* spell. I was gaming with fifth and sixth level characters and they carried me along and saved my bacon lots of times. Going down into Gary's Greyhawk Dungeon we ended up on Kong Island. At night we walked up to a village and I made the error of using my *light* spell into a very large hut. I woke up a band of warriors with bone-tipped spears and almost all of us were chased down and killed. It took a wish from Ernie (Gary's son) to bring us all back alive from my bonehead move. Needless to say, I took some brutal ribbing for months afterward.

I was hooked like you couldn't believe. Gaming with Gary on his porch was great fun, but we were also part of an agenda of his that made the experience even more interesting. In those days, Gary was writing product as fast as he could and testing the things he dreamed up on his gaming group. We were the fortunate ones to find and use things like the *Deck of Many Things, the Portable Hole, and the Staff of Power.* I have a distinct, ugly memory of holding my *Staff of Power* trying to use in on some Frost Giants when another in the gaming group was protecting us with a *Cube of Force*. That was a really bad idea on my part; *shuddering today from that memory*.

In the '70s, Gary was testing out everything when it came to role-playing. We were given lots of potions and scrolls. The idea that drinking more than one potion could cause problems was spawned from those playtests. I have a distinctly pleasurable memory of using a *Magic Jar* scroll spell on the queen of the Fire Giants. Gary hated the fact that I was successful so much so that the spell underwent a drastic change so that I never used it again. Naturally, being the best of game designers, he didn't change the spell from spite but from the need to tone down the power of the spell. Almost forty years later, I marvel at how perceptive and far advanced Gary was in his role-playing habits. He was doing things in crafting his adventures that people now are just catching on to.

There are many styles of game-mastering out in the hobby world. I was the first Monty Haul referee (really Gary was, but a bit on that later). My style of gaming is extremely frowned upon in today's gaming world. I like to give out lots of treasure and magic items in my adventures for publication and in my campaign world. Today's designers claim that being free with treasures makes the game run away with the players so that the game master has a hard time controlling the action and challenging his players. My position is that the conservative game master isn't

being creative enough. My players bristle with magical items, weapons, and even enchanted companions and they never have a problem being challenged. Along the same lines, it's considered a travesty to kill off characters in the games of today. Gary didn't have a problem with it if the characters were too dumb to stay alive in dangerous situations. We learned to run away from the Fire Giants, Hell Hounds, and Red Dragon in the huge lava cavern. Running isn't in the lexicon of today's gamers.

I was extremely lucky one day when I suggested to Gary Gygax that he design a science fiction version of his D&D game. He was kind enough to suggest that he didn't have time and that I should give it a try. I spent the summer of '75 writing METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA the first science fiction role-playing game. I was able to use my style of gaming to give my science fiction characters lots of abilities from mutations to laser pistols to power armor. The science fiction environment they found themselves in was tough and deadly, leading to the claim that there was little chance to develop characters in the game. Funny, Gary and his group were able to play for literal years in my MA campaign and never die. METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA is different from other games in that the knowledge and equipment you gather gives you more power instead of the levels you might rise in experience.

I played in Gary's games as long as I could. He was constantly testing out new magic items and styles of treasure forty years later in his gaming group. In the strictest sense of the concept he would have been deemed a Monty Haul referee. However, he was Gary Gygax and no one ever called him that. I wear the concept as a badge of honor today.

So by today's standards the gaming done in the '70s and '80s is considered "old school." Basically, most adventures in those days were a process of knocking down a door, killing the monsters inside, and collecting their treasures. Gaming today has come a long way from those days and the best campaigns are filled with storylines and noble quests. However, one of the qualities gone from the cleric, rogue, or wizard of today is the uniqueness of characters we had in those days. Today in the "min/max" world of gaming, every "good" paladin has the same ultimate skills and abilities. Every rogue quests for the same magic items and has the exact same abilities. Normally, I play magic-users. My tenth level Ren 'o the Blade wizard is vastly different in style and temperament from my fourteenth level Lidabmob magic-user. Old school characters are like snow flakes in their variety and dimension. Game play today has become more accounting than role-playing.

I'm currently working with a group of designers who all worked with Gary Gygax. We at Eldritch Enterprises make "old school" adventures where the questing is vastly different from the accounting adventures in the products of the larger companies. Which leads me to **THE WAY OF TREE, SHADOW, & FLAME** material. In this product you will find many of the elements of a Gary-Gygax-style concept. The adventures you have with this material will be remembered long after you stop role-playing.

James M. Ward
Summer, 2012