

Barbarian Conquerors of Kanahu (BCK) is a sword & sorcery, horror, and science-fantasy setting sourcebook for the **Adventurer Conqueror King System** (ACKS). BCK presents new monsters, magical items, technology, spells, classes, and variant rules, all packaged together in Kanahu, a dangerous world of pulp fantasy that embraces the new material. The setting itself, the world of Kanahu, is a gonzo sword & sorcery milieu with dinosaurs, Cthulhoid creatures, giant insects, crazy sorcerers, muscled barbarians, city-states, and even some science-fantasy elements. It also draws on the myths of the Ancient Near East and pre-Columbian Mesoamerica for inspiration. The book contains material fully compatible with the ACKS core system, and almost everything from the Kanahu setting is readily transferrable to other ACKS settings.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I, Omer G. Joel, am a freelance Hebrew-English-Hebrew translator from Yavne, Israel. I live with my spouse, Einat, and our two cats Saki and Chicha – as well as an entourage of wild house geckos and even a painted dragon (*Stellagama stellio*) who grace the walls of our house in the warmer months. Besides science fiction, fantasy, and tabletop role-playing games, my interests include herpetology, cooking, history, and computer gaming. I am proud to present this book after more than two years of intermittent work, and despite the terrible burden of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) I suffer from, which at times leaves me at a particular dire state. But I fight on, and write, and here is the result of my work.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the love of my life – Einat Harari. May you eventually learn to play and love these games, which are now my domain! It is also dedicated to my regular gaming group – Avi, Shaked, Lir and Gilad – who bring light and laughter to my otherwise rough life and with whom I have play-tested much of the material in this book.

THE BARBARIAN SUBGENRE

Barbarians of Kanahu belongs to what might be called the “Barbarian subgenre”. This genre is an amalgam of three distinct but related genres. The first is sword & sorcery literature, exemplified by the likes of Howard's Conan and Moorcock's Elric. This genre counterpoises corrupt, decaying cities and empires with rough-edged barbarian upstarts. It contrasts the decadence of urban life with the vigor of those untainted by it. This might have been inspired by the fall of decadent Rome to the Germanic “barbarians” who set themselves as kings of its ruins, or even by Samson's divine-inspired exploits against the urbanized Philistines.

Furthermore, beyond sword & sorcery, as mentioned above, there are two more genres of note which are also relevant to the Barbarian sub-Genre. The first is sword & planet, exemplified by Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom, a fantastic vision of Mars.

This genre explores similar themes to those of sword & sorcery but does accept certain “science fiction” elements such as alien planets, radium pistols, flying craft, and other technological wonders. Sword & planet still follows the vision of a morally-ambiguous ‘outsider’ protagonist, archotypically an earthling on Mars, using his might to smash the decadent villainy of the local society.

The second is science fantasy proper. This book, however, presents a “science fiction” milieu closer to a fantastic setting once the outer trappings of starships, and rayguns are stripped off it. This genre is exemplified by space princesses, dashing interstellar rouges, space combat which looks suspiciously like WWII air combat, and a relative disregard of actual science when it conflicts with the plot. The same tropes of the barbarian subgenre also apply here: it is easy to envision the mighty lost-world barbarian smashing through the ranks of raygun-wielding aliens with his massive sword, answering their advanced technology with his brute strength.

A basic tenet of this genre is that the sword is trustworthy while spellcraft is not. There may be mighty sorcerers on the side of Law, but Chaos always lurks in wait for those who dabble in the arcane. The ultimate epic confrontation of this genre is that of a warrior, preferable of barbaric stock, who raises his sword against black magic, monstrosities, and the forces of Chaos. This brings us to an important feature of **Barbarians of Kanahu**: While this setting is influenced by H.P. Lovecraft's superb horror stories, it does not share the nihilistic tone that many of them carry. Unlike Lovecraft's protagonists, who typically end up dead, mad or worse in the face of cosmic horror, **Barbarians of Kanahu** is about swordsmen who, like Conan or Elric, face such horrors with bravery, and wrath - and have a chance of putting them to the sword.

So this is a heroic genre of what is essentially the noble savage who smashes decadent urbanism with his greatsword, and then is crowned a deserving King of the city he conquered by the might of his sword arm. This is very different than the heroism seen in more classic High Fantasy, where heroes of pure, or almost pure, Good face off against the forces of absolute Evil. Here we see the anti-hero, the barbarian thief, rouge, pirate, and iconoclast, sacking civilization, and then reforming it in his own image.

The chivalry of a more civilized age has little place in such a barbarous world. Heroes of the barbarian genre, Lawful as they are, are anything but chaste knights who pursue a life of virtue. While they raise their swords against Chaos, and may put their lives on the line for Mankind (or Lizardkind), the barbarian heroes know how to enjoy life while it lasts, and take the deserving spoils of their victory – luxury, power, and lust. Many are not above thievery, piracy, deception, and revenge, but at the end of the line, they stand their ground against the monstrosities of Chaos. This conforms to the alignment descriptions in ACKS, as well as to the conventions of the genre.

Chapter 2: **The Rules of Kanahu**



The basic **ACKS** rules have been designed with a sword & sorcery flavor in mind. That said, there are still many more opportunities to inject an even more intense sword & sorcery, sword & planet, or even science-fantasy experience into your game. This chapter will introduce several new rules and rulings to support the genre. Note that all rules provided here are optional; the Judge is encouraged to pick those rules which best fit his game.

HEROIC ABILITY SCORES

By default, the *Adventurer Conqueror King System* assumes that adventurers are no gifted than the average person. If they become great, it is because of their achievements in play, not because of special advantages during character generation. As a result, the ability scores for **ACKS** adventurers are generated by rolling 3d6 in order. If the optional Generating Multiple Characters rule is in effect, where players roll up five characters and select the best to play with, then adventurers are perhaps among the top 20% most talented people, but still drawn from the common stock. However, the archetypical barbarian or sorcerer of pulp sword & sorcery tales is a cut above the average person. He is a mighty hero or despicable villain remarkable in his talents and ambitions, not a mere farm-boy who realizes his dreams of glory by grit and blades.

To account for this, *Barbarian Conquerors of Kanahu* offers the following optional methods for rolling up characters with better ability scores.

- **Heroic:** Roll 4d6 for each ability score in order. Drop the lowest die, tally the remaining dice, and record that result.
- **Legendary:** Roll 5d6 for each ability score in order. Drop the lowest 2 dice, tally the remaining dice, and record that result.

Heroic characters will have ability scores in approximately the same range as the top fifth of normal characters (11-14, averaging 12.24). Legendary characters will have ability scores in approximately the same range as the top fifth of heroic characters (12-16, averaging 13.43). If desired the Judge can have players roll up five characters when using either method.

EXAMPLE: Avi is creating an adventurer for use in a Kanahu campaign. The Judge has decided to use the optional "Legendary Ability Scores" and "Generating Multiple Characters" rules. Avi therefore will generate five characters; for each character, he will generate six ability scores, rolling 5d6 for each in order and dropping the lowest 2 dice. This combination of optional rules creates very powerful characters! Avi's results are, in order for STR, INT, WIS, DEX, CON, and CHA: #1 STR 13, INT 17, WIS 11, DEX 15, CON 13, CHA 13; #2 STR 13, INT 11, WIS 15, DEX 16, CON 11, CHA 15; #3 STR 6, INT 14, WIS 16, DEX 12, CON 12, CHA 13; #4 STR 14, INT 9, WIS 16, DEX 14, CON 17, CHA 14; #5 STR 15, INT 15, WIS 16, DEX 13, CON 14, CHA 17. He decides to select character #5. He selects Dragon Incarnate as his character class, reducing CHA to 13 to increase STR and INT to 16. His final character has STR 16, INT 16, WIS 16, DEX 13, CON 14, CHA 13.

HEROIC FUNERALS & PHARAONIC TOMBS

The red sun sank low, bringing the relentless chill of Egyptian dusk; and as it stood poised on the world's rim like that ancient god of Heliopolis—Re-Harakhte, the Horizon-Sun—we saw silhouetted against its vermeil holocaust the black outlines of the Pyramids of Gizeh—the palaeogean tombs there were hoary with a thousand years when Tut-Ankh-Amen mounted his golden throne in distant Thebes. Then we knew that we were done with Saracen Cairo, and that we must taste the deeper mysteries of primal Egypt—the black Kem of Re and Amen, Isis and Osiris. - Imprisoned with the Pharaohs (H. P. Lovecraft)

The god of the dead, called Mawat in Kanahu and Anubis in Sakkara, looks favorably upon a proper burial. Entombment in a proper tomb with grave goods pleases him, and for this he grants a boon to the deceased's heirs. In game terms, the true beneficiary of a fallen adventurer's heroic funeral is the player of the deceased character. His new character may enter the game with experience points equal to 90% of the gold piece value of money spent on the funeral and/or interred with his character (including the gp value of any magic items interred). He also gains all unspent Fate Points (if any). The new character should be a friend or relation of the deceased, and is assumed to be guided and inspired by the spirit of the slain.

A character can invest in building and furnishing a tomb during his life. This was the custom of Pharaohs in ancient Sakkara: The mighty lord would erect a magnificent pyramid during his reign in which to inter his embalmed remains after his death. Such a burial would then ensure his heir ascended the throne with the glory and might befitting a grand Pharaoh. In game terms, once the character dies and safely sleeps in his tomb, the above rules apply to his heirs as well.

Should players abuse this rule by having their characters loot the tomb of a deceased player character following his funeral (to get back the treasure they interred therein), Mawat's wrath will know no bounds! He will immediately turn the transgressors into mummies, forever cursed to protect the tomb in restless death as the god tortures their vile souls for eternity.

THE HAND OF FATE

The Hand of Fate guides heroes and villains alike, granting them a boon at one time and ill fortune at other. To represent the powers of fate, characters in *Barbarian Conquerors of Kanahu* campaigns may be awarded one or more Fate Points.

STARTING FATE POINTS

Characters may begin with 1d6 Fate Points, representing the fickle Hand of Fate.

SPENDING FATE POINTS

A Fate Point may be used in the following ways:

- A character may spend a Fate Point after making an attack throw, proficiency throw, or saving throw to re-roll the throw. Additional Fate Points can be spent to re-roll again if desired. However, a character can **never** re-roll a natural 1. (This rule ensures that save-or-die effects are always dangerous, regardless of how many Fate Points a character has.)

- A character may spend a Fate Point after making a damage roll to re-roll the damage. Additional Fate Points can be spent to re-roll again if desired.
- A character may spend a Fate Point to cleave after a successful attack throw, even if not otherwise eligible to do so (e.g. because the target of the attack was not slain, or because the character has already cleaved to the maximum amount that round). Doing so does not count against the character's maximum number of cleaves per round.
- A character may spend a Fate Point to cast a 1st level spell or perform a ceremony from the character's repertoire in lieu of expending one of his daily slots, expending spell points, or suffering stigma. Additional Fate Points can be spent for higher level spells, using the spell point progression (see *Heroic Fantasy Handbook*, p. 103).
- A character may spend a Fate Point to temporarily gain one rank in any proficiency available to his class or to temporarily gain a thief ability (excluding backstab) at one-half his class level. The effect lasts 1 turn (10 minutes).
- A character with 0 or fewer hit points may spend a Fate Point to immediately recover to 1 hp. Unless the character has **savage resilience**, he is considered to have been knocked out and will need one night's bed rest or magical healing. He must roll 1d6 on Row 21-25 of the Mortal Wounds table. If the character does have **savage resilience**, then he is considered to have been "just dazed" and does not need any bed rest. He may roll 1d6 twice on Row 26+ of the Mortal Wounds table and choose the preferred result.

Once expended, a Fate Point cannot be used again until it has been recovered. The player should record the running total of his character's Fate Points expenditures on the character's sheet.

EXAMPLE: Zarnor Serpent-Slayer is an 8th level barbarian with 4 Fate Points. 8 ruffians confront him. In the ensuing melee, Zarnor slays one ruffian, and makes a cleave. Unfortunately, the result of his attack throw is a natural 1 – a miss! Rather than lose the opportunity to keep cleaving, he expends a Fate Point and re-rolls the throw. This time, the result is a 16, which hits. Zarnor kills the second ruffian and keeps cleaving! Zarnor's player records the expenditure, noting that Zarnor has 3 of his 4 Fate Points remaining.

RECOVERING FATE POINTS

Characters may recover expended Fate Points in one of two ways, through **spending** or **solace**.

Recovering through Spending

In lieu of using the Prodigality rule (below), a character may regain any expended Fate Points by spending the monthly wage of a character of his level (*ACKS*, p. 51) to no other tangible game benefit whatsoever. This could include extravagant sacrifices to the gods; alms to the poor; anonymous tithes to churches; reckless spending on wine, women, and song; elaborate funeral pyres for deceased henchmen; and so on. Spending on goods that can be easily transported and resold (such as gems, jewelry, magic items, or trade goods) does not count.

EXAMPLE: Zarnor Serpent-Slayer is an 8th level barbarian. During a recent adventure to seize the hoard of a war-chief from Enyom, Zarnor expended 2 Fate Points. He wishes to recover his expended points by spending. As an 8th level character, Zarnor's monthly wage is 3,000gp so he must spend 6,000gp to no tangible game benefit. Zarnor sacrifices 100 edmontosaurs to his god Hadad (2,500gp value) then spends another 3,500gp on wine, women, and song in a manner befitting the sagas.

Recovery through Solace

A character may recover any expended Fate Points by taking solace in an illuminated pinnacle of good (if Lawful) or a shadowed sinkhole of evil (if Chaotic) for one month. The time is reduced to two weeks in a hallowed pinnacle or blighted sinkhole, and to one week in a sacrosanct pinnacle or forsaken sinkhole. If Lawful, the time must be spent contemplating art, music, nature, poetry, and/or divinity. If Chaotic, the time must be spent in depraved and hedonistic pursuits. Neutral characters may not recover Fate Points from solace, nor may characters with a WIS of less than 9.

EXAMPLE: Eved-El, an 11th level Cleric in the service of El-Elyon, has recently expended 3 Fate Points in a confrontation with an arch-priest of Dagon. He wishes to recover his expended points by solace. He could take solace in his settlement's temple to El-Elyon (an illuminated pinnacle of good) and recover his points in one month. However, he knows of a holier place, a shrine to El-Elyon built on a spot where the god himself once walked (a sacrosanct pinnacle). After four days traveling to the shrine, he spends seven days in contemplation there, then returns home. In total, it has taken him (4 + 7 + 4) 15 days to recover his 3 Fate Points. (Note that Eved-El could have recovered his points much faster had he spent his monthly wage of 32,000gp to no tangible benefit.)

ACQUIRING ADDITIONAL FATE POINTS

It is up to the Judge how Fate Points are acquired after character creation. Choose one or more of the following methods:

- **Advancement:** Characters could gain 1 Fate Point each time they advance in level. This is the default method.
- **Deeds of Renown:** Characters could increase their allocation of Fate Points by 1 or more each time they accomplish some notable task. This method allows the Judge to reward his adventurers for advancing through a story-driven arc, should that style of play be to his taste.
- **Fulfilling their Fate:** Characters could increase their allocation of Fate Points by 1 or more each time they fulfill a prophecy that has been made about them, revealed by the fate spell, etc. This method is similar to Deeds of Renown, but less heavy-handed in that the adventurers may find ways to fulfill their fate that surprise the Judge.
- **Sacrificing to their Gods:** Characters could increase their allocation of Fate Points by 1 or more by making a great sacrifice to their gods. A great sacrifice might be a legendary magic item, a loved one, an eye or hand, or a monetary

sacrifice equal to 75% of the character's accumulated XP. This method works well in games with the flavor of ancient myth, where the gods take an active hand in the affairs of heroes.

Unless the Judge rules otherwise, characters can never have more Fate Points than their starting Fate Points plus their level of experience.

EXPLODING 20S

When making throws, unmodified 20s do *not* automatically succeed. Instead, when a character who throws an unmodified (natural) 20, the d20 **explodes**: The character immediately rolls another 1d20 and adds the new result to 20. Subsequent rolls of 20 continue to explode without limit.

EXAMPLE: An archer with a base attack throw of 11+ fires an arrow at Marcus, a high-level fighter in magical armor with an AC of 15. The archer needs to throw an (11+15) 26+ to hit the fighter. He rolls a natural 20. He immediately rolls 1d20; the result is a 7. The peasant has therefore rolled a (20 + 7) 27 against Marcus, which is a hit. Had the peasant's second d20 roll have been a 3, the peasant's result would have been a (20 + 3) 23, and he'd have missed. Had the peasant's second d20 roll have been an 18, result would have been a (20 + 18) 38 and the peasant would have dealt a critical hit (see below).



CRITICAL HITS

If the result of an attacker's attack throw exceeds its target value by 10 or more, the attacker has dealt a **critical hit** to its target. When a critical hit is dealt, the target suffers double damage and must make an immediate saving throw vs. Paralysis. If the save fails, the target suffers a critical effect in addition to double damage. The target's saving throw should be modified by 4 points per category of size difference between the attacker and the target, as per *ACKS* p. 110.

The attacker determines the critical effect dealt by rolling 1d10 on the appropriate column on the Critical Effects table. For purposes of the Critical Effects table, "characters" are combatants equipped with arms and armor, while "monsters" are combatants relying on natural weapons and toughness.

Brawling: After seeing the result rolled on the Critical Effects table, the attacker may opt to inflict a Brawling critical effect in lieu of the effect rolled. For instance, an attacker who fears being carried off by a flying creature could substitute a Brawling result for a Clamber result.

Combat Trickery: After seeing the result rolled on the Critical Effects table, an attacker with Combat Trickery proficiency may substitute the special maneuver with which he has proficiency in lieu of the effect rolled. For instance, an attacker with Combat Trickery (Disarm) who deals a Force Back critical hit can inflict a Disarm instead.

Shields May Be Splintered: If the target of a critical effect is equipped with a shield, he may choose to substitute a Damage Shield result in lieu of a Damage Armor, Force Back, Injure Hide, Impair Attack, Impair Move, Knockdown, or Stun effect dealt to him. This represents the character desperately absorbing the blow on his shield.

Swallowing Whole: A monster capable of swallowing a target whole that deals a critical hit may choose to swallow its target rather than roll on the Critical Effects table.

Die Roll	Effect vs. Character	Effect vs. Monster
1	Brawling	Brawling
2	Damage Shield	Fatigued
3	Damage Armor	Injure Hide
4	Disarm	Impair Move
5	Force Back	Force Back
6	Knockdown	Knockdown
7	Sunder Weapon	Impair Attack
8	Stun	Stun
9	Wrestle/Clamber	Wrestle/Clamber
10	Attacker's Choice	Attacker's Choice

Critical Effects

Attacker's Choice: The attacker may choose any desired critical effect from the appropriate column (Character or Monster).

Brawling: The target suffers an additional 1d4 damage from a strike from the attacker's gauntlet, pommel, or shield rim. If the attacker has no metal weapons, the damage is nonlethal, but otherwise the brawling damage can be lethal or nonlethal, at his discretion.

Damage Armor: The target's armor is damaged, reducing its effectiveness by 1 point. Armor that loses all effectiveness is ruined. Damaged armor can be repaired at a cost of 10gp per point of effectiveness. Magic armor cannot be damaged except by magic weapons or monsters of 5 HD or more.

Damage Shield: The target's shield is damaged, reducing its effectiveness by 1. If the shield is non-magical, this will destroy it. Damaged shields can be repaired at a cost of 10gp per point of effectiveness. Magic shields cannot be damaged except by magic weapons or monsters of 5 HD or more.

Disarm: The target is disarmed of its weapon (as the special maneuver). The weapon drops to a point chosen by the attacker who dealt the critical hit, up to 5' distant from the target.

Fatigued: The target is wearied by the flurry of blows. The target suffers a -1 penalty to attack throws and damage throws until it rests. If additional fatigue effects are rolled, the effects are cumulative.

Force Back: The target is forced back (as the special number). It must withdraw a number of feet equal to the attacker's damage roll. If this would push the opponent into a wall or obstacle, the opponent is knocked down, and takes 1d6 points of damage per 10' he has traveled.

Knockdown: The target is immediately knocked down (as the special maneuver). Once prone, the creature can move, but only to crawl at a movement rate of 5', to take an action in lieu of moving, or to end the condition by using an action in lieu of moving to stand up. If engaged, the prone creature remains subject to the movement restrictions of being engaged, so it can only crawl if using defensive movement, and cannot stand up in lieu of moving. The prone creature can attack, but suffers a -4 penalty on its attack throws. Alternatively the prone creature can stand up in lieu of attacking. The prone creature can be backstabbed by creatures capable of doing so. Attack throws against the prone creatures gain a +2 bonus, or a +4 bonus if the attacker backstabs the stunned creature. The conditions is ended immediately when the creature stands up.

Impair Attack: One of the target's natural attacks (determined randomly) is somehow impaired – muscles sprained, claws ripped, etc. The target suffers a -4 to attack throws with the impaired natural attack until it rests.

Impair Move: The movement rate of the target's primary movement is reduced by 25% or 30' (whichever is less) until the target rests. This represents a leg being wrenched, an ankle twisted, and so on.

Injure Hide: The target's hide is bruised, cut, or broken open such that its AC is reduced by 1 until it rests.

Stun: The target is stunned until the end of its next initiative. A stunned creature cannot attack, cast spells, or move. It gains no benefit to its AC from its shield (if any), and can be ambushed or backstabbed by creatures capable of doing so. All attack throws against stunned creatures gain a +2 bonus, or a +4 bonus if the attacker ambushes or backstabs the stunned creature.

Sunder Weapon: The target's weapon is sundered (as the special maneuver). If the target's weapon is a non-magical spear, staff, or pole arm, it shatters into splinters when sundered, dealing an

additional 1d4 nonlethal damage to the target. Swords cannot be sundered by non-metal weapons or natural attacks by creatures of less than 5 HD. Magic weapons cannot be sundered except by other magic weapons or monsters of 5 HD or more.

Wrestle/Clamber: The results of this critical effect depend on the difference in size between the attacker and target. If the target is the same size category or smaller than the attacker, the attacker has grabbed the target in a wrestling hold (as the special maneuver). If the target is one or more size categories larger than the attacker, the attacker has clambered on top of or mounted the target (as the special maneuver, see below).

SPECIAL MANEUVERS

CLAMBER

Instead of making a melee attack, a combatant may attempt to clamber on top of a creature that is one or more size categories larger than him. To clamber onto a creature, a combatant must succeed on a melee attack throw with a -4 penalty. If the combatant is a thief or other class with the ability to Climb Walls, the -4 penalty may be waived if the character makes a successful proficiency throw.

The creature must then make a saving throw vs. Paralysis. The creature suffers a -2 penalty to its saving throw if of huge size, -4 if of gigantic size, and -6 if of colossal size. If the creature succeeds on its saving throw, it has shrugged off the combatant's attempt. If it fails, the combatant has clambered onto the creature, and is now mounted on its back, perched on its shoulders, etc.

A clambering combatant gains a +4 attack bonus against the creature he has clambered onto. If capable of backstabbing, the clambering combatant may do so, gaining a +6 attack bonus and extra damage. A clambering combatant also gains a measure of protection against the creature's own attacks. If the creature lacks arms, tails, or other appendages capable of reaching its own back, it may not directly attack the clambering combatant. Even if the creature does have such appendages, it attacks the clambering combatant with a -4 penalty to attack throws.

In lieu of attacking, a creature with one or more combatants clambering on it may attempt to unseat the clambering combatants by bucking, rearing, colliding with walls, and similar tactics. This forces every combatant clambering on the creature to make a saving throw vs. Paralysis. Combatants who succeed on the saving throw continue clambering on the creature. Combatants who fail the saving throw slip off the creature. If the creature is more than 10' tall at the shoulder, or is flying, the unseated combatants will suffer falling damage (1d6 points of damage per 10' fallen).

EXAMPLE: Ermun, a 9th level thief (attack throw 6+), is fighting a purple worm (AC 3). On his initiative, he attempts to clamber onto the worm. Normally he would incur a -4 penalty to his attack throw for attempting a clamber, but Ermun makes a proficiency throw against Climb Walls and avoids this penalty. He needs a (6+3) 9+ to succeed in his clamber; his roll is an 11, so he succeeds. Now the purple worm may make a saving throw vs. Paralysis to shrug him off. As a 15 HD monster, it needs a 6+, but it suffers a -6 penalty due to its colossal size. It only rolls a 3, so Ermun

has clambered onto the purple worm! The purple worm's initiative is next. The Judge rules that the purple worm can only reach its own back with its stinger, but not with its bite. Rather than risk missing, he decides that the purple worm will attempt to unseat Ermun by rotating itself violently back and forth. Ermun must make a saving throw vs. Paralysis. As a 9th level thief, Ermun needs 9+; he rolls a 17 and succeeds easily.

In the next combat round, Ermun attacks the purple worm. Since he is clambering, the attack counts as backstabbing. He gains a +6 attack bonus, so he hits on (6+3-6) 3+. He rolls a 17 and lands a critical hit. As a 9th level thief, his backstab deals quadruple damage, increased to quintuple damage because he landed a critical hit, so Viktir deals 5d6 points of damage to the worm. Even better, the worm fails its saving throw against the critical hit. Ermun rolls a 7 on the Critical Hit table, an "Impair Attack" result; the Judge rules that Ermun has sliced off the purple worm's stinger tip, imposing a -4 penalty to its attacks with that natural weapon.

SWEEPING ATTACK

A combatant may perform a sweeping attack in order to simultaneously attack one or more engaged opponents, up to his number of eligible cleaves. The combatant must be using a medium or large weapon (such as a battle axe, sword, or two-handed sword) or be at least one size category larger than all his engaged opponents, in order to perform a sweeping attack. Each opponent targeted by the sweeping attack may immediately withdraw 5' away from the attacking combatant if desired. The attacking combatant may then make one attack throw at a -4 penalty against each opponent who did not withdraw. If all of the opponents withdraw from or are slain by the sweeping attack, the combatant may either (i) immediately advance 5' and cleave or (ii) conduct a fighting withdrawal himself. When performing a sweeping attack and any subsequent cleaves, a combatant's total number of attacks may never exceed the usual maximum (e.g. his attack routine plus his number of cleave attacks by level).

EXAMPLE: Athelstan, a 6th level fighter with a two-handed sword, finds himself surrounded by six orcs. He declares a sweeping attack against all six orcs. Choosing discretion over valor, four of the orcs withdraw 5', but two boldly stand their ground. Athelstan immediately makes an attack throw against the two orcs, suffering a -4 penalty. He hits and slays both orcs. Athelstan can now choose to advance 5' and cleave against the remaining orcs, or perform a fighting withdrawal. He chooses the latter, slipping around the corner to where his friends have formed up.

THIEVERY

One of the most common archetypes in sword & sorcery is the thief. Thieves in heroic fantasy are bold risk-takers who infiltrate impenetrable fortresses, steal the crown jewels, and kidnap the princess on the way out. Even Conan began his career as a thief before he showed the world his barbarian might.

Thieves in **ACKS** and other d20 retro-clones tend to be much less bold, because they are harshly penalized for failure, and fail quite often. For instance, a thief in **ACKS** a thief may only try to pick a particular lock, or find and remove a particular trap, once. If he fails, he may not try the same lock or trap again until he reaches a higher experience level. To allow thieves (and related classes) to better engage in impressive pulp adventures, use the following rules.

DEXTERITY MODIFIER AND THIEVERY

Adroit and nimble thieves are more likely to succeed than their less-gifted brethren. When a character makes a proficiency throw to open locks, pick pockets, find traps, remove traps, hide in shadows, move silently, or climb walls, apply his DEX modifier to the roll. The bonuses do not apply to hijinks.

ENCUMBRANCE AND THIEVERY

Thieves, and other classes which use thief skills, benefit from being light on their feet. If the character's encumbrance is 5 stones or less, he gains a +2 bonus on proficiency throws to climb walls, hide in shadows, and move silently. If the character's encumbrance is 2 stones or less, the bonus is increased to +4. The bonuses do not apply to hijinks.

EQUIPMENT FOR THIEVES

The following new items, found in *Heroic Fantasy Handbook* (p. 78) are of benefit to thieves and related classes: adventurer's harness, ear trumpet, padded shoes, thieves' garb, thieves' tools companion kit, superior thieves' tools, and masterwork thieves' tools.

REVISED THIEF SKILLS

Open Locks: Picking a lock requires one turn and a successful proficiency throw. Characters can pick locks in one round instead of one turn at a -10 penalty. (Characters with Lockpicking proficiency can pick locks in one round at a -4 penalty.) The thief may try again if the throw fails. However, if the thief ever fails the throw by 10 or more, or with a natural 1, he immediately breaks his thieves' tools. Broken thieves' tools are useless.

Find Traps: Finding a trap requires one turn (per 10 square feet searched) and a successful proficiency throw. Characters can find traps in one round instead of one turn at a -10 penalty. (Characters with Trap Finding proficiency can find traps in one round at a -4 penalty.) The thief may try again if the throw fails. If the thief ever fails the throw by 4 or less, he suspects a trap exists (if there actually is one), but does not know its exact nature. If the thief ever fails the throw by 10 or more, or with a natural 1, he has fumbled the search. If a trap exists, he sets it off. If no trap exists, he believes one does, but he thinks he does not know its exact nature.

Remove Traps: A thief may only remove a trap he has found, not one he just suspects to exist. Disarming a trap requires one turn and a successful proficiency throw. Characters can disarm traps in one round instead of one turn at a -10 penalty. The thief may try again if he fails to disarm a trap. However, if a thief fails a disarming throw by 10 or more, or with a roll of a natural 1, he sets off the trap.

Pick Pockets: A thief can try to suddenly grab a worn item without regard to being noticed – doing so grants a +4 bonus to the proficiency throw, but the intended victim automatically notices regardless of whether it succeeds or not. The item may not be an item in the target's hand (that is a disarm special maneuver).

PRODIGALITY

The heroes of the typical sword & sorcery tale do not hoard much wealth, nor do they act like prudent and thrifty investors. Typically, such a hero, upon winning a massive treasure, will waste a significant part of it, if not all of it, on wine, companionship, and song. Larger-than-life heroes, in this genre, lead larger-than-life lives – they party as if there is no tomorrow, enjoy the day to its fullest, and usually wake up much poorer in the next morning – ready for yet another adventure in pursuit of gold and glory. To simulate this genre convention that is to encourage player characters to live large and in a prodigal manner, you may employ the following rule.

A character gains a bonus to XP earned from adventuring if, in the prior month, he prodigally consumed more than the Henchmen Monthly Wage (see *ACKS* p.51) appropriate to his class level each month. The money must be spent on buying luxuries, throwing parties, commissioning expensive jewelry and fancy clothes, and other conspicuous consumption. To calculate the XP bonus, compare the value of the character's prodigal spending with the amounts listed on the Henchmen Monthly Wage table; the bonus is 5% per level of overconsumption. Conversely, if a character spends less than his own Henchman Monthly Wage, he incurs a -5% penalty per level of underconsumption.

EXAMPLE: A 5th level character wastes 3,000gp in one month on larger-than-life living. Consulting the Henchmen Monthly Wage table, the Judge sees that at 5th level a character earns a monthly wage of 400gp, at 6th level 800gp, at 7th level 1,600gp, and at 8th level 3,000gp. The character has consumed the equivalent of an 8th level henchman's wage this month, so next month he gains a bonus of $[(8 - 5) \times 5\%]$ 15% bonus on XP earned from adventuring. Had the character only spent 100gp (equivalent to a 3rd level character's wage) he would have suffered a 10% penalty on XP earned from adventuring the following month. When the Prodigality rule is in play, characters are rewarded for living large and penalized for miserly living!

NEW PROFICIENCIES

The following proficiencies may be added to a sword & sorcery, sword & planet, or science-fantasy campaign.

Alien Intuition: Alien blood flows through the character's veins, and this extraterrestrial heritage allows him to intuit the function and use of alien devices. The character can achieve On-the-Spot Understanding of an alien item with a proficiency throw of 11+ per item, and only suffers mishaps on a unmodified roll of 1. If the character has Alien Intuition and Alien Lore in the appropriate category for an item, he can achieve On-the-Spot

Understanding with a proficiency throw of 7+. A character gains no bonuses to conduct research into alien technology, however. This proficiency costs two proficiency slots to acquire. It should be added to the proficiency lists of clerics, mages, priestesses, Sakkaran (Zaharan) ruinguards, and other spellcasting classes. For more details, see Understanding Alien Technology on p. 94.

EXAMPLE: Kang, a 5th level mage, has Alien Lore 2 (chemicals, robots) and Alien Intuition. He could achieve On-the-Spot Understanding of a plasma pistol with a proficiency throw of 11+, or On-the-Spot Understanding of a robot or chemical with a proficiency throw of 7+.

Alien Lore: The character is well-versed in the lore of alien technology and super-science, allowing for On-the-Spot Identification of certain alien artifacts. Each time the character takes this proficiency, he picks one category of technology that he is familiar with from among Armor, Chemicals, General Devices, Robots, Vehicles, or Weapons. Thereafter, the character can achieve On the Spot Understanding of items from that category with a proficiency throw of 11+, and only suffers mishaps identifying items from that category on an unmodified roll of 1. The character also gains +1 on all proficiency throws to conduct research into alien technology. Each time the proficiency is selected thereafter, the character gains familiarity with another category of tech and gains another +1 bonus to conduct research. This proficiency should be added to the proficiency lists of clerics, mages, priestesses, Sakkaran (Zaharan) ruinguards, and other spellcasting classes. See Understanding Alien Technology on p. 94 for more details.

EXAMPLE: Kang is a 5th level mage with Alien Lore 2 (Chemicals, Robots). When he encounters a vat of blue, viscous fluid, he can use Alien Lore (Chemicals) to achieve On-the-Spot Understanding with a proficiency throw of 11+. When he encounters a plasma pistol, he cannot achieve On-the-Spot Understanding because he does not have Alien Lore (Weapons), but he does gain a +2 bonus to proficiency throws to research the plasma pistol.

Destined: The character gains one Fate Point. This proficiency does not appear on any class lists. The Judge should decide if this proficiency exists in his setting. If so, any character may select it as one of his class proficiencies.

Farseeing: The character can see the fates of mortals. He may determine how many Fate Points a character has after 10 minutes (1 turn) of casual interaction or observation. Once per week, the character may cast **fate** (as the spell). The casting time is 10 minutes.

Technological Dabbling: The character may attempt to use scanners, advanced robots, cloning vats, scanners, and other advanced alien technology only useable by mages. At level 1, the character must make a proficiency throw of 18+ to use the technology. On a failed throw, the attempt backfires (use the On-the-Spot mishap table, p.96). The proficiency throw required reduces by 2 per level, to a minimum of 3+. This proficiency should be added to the proficiency lists of thieves and bards.

GLADIATORIAL COMBAT

A common trope in sword & sorcery and sword & planet literature is gladiatorial combat for the enjoyment of spectators and/or the glory of the participants. The Free City of Harat, which is the default setting of this book, was taken over by a slave rebellion led by gladiators, particularly of the lizardman kind. Today, this city is relatively anarchic in nature, and the gladiators' culture predominates - strength, bravado, and fighting prowess are celebrated, and shows of force revered by the populace. Instead of the slave gladiators of the old regime, however, now willing participants usually fight arena fights. This includes professional gladiators, warriors trying to prove themselves, and duelers who wish to solve their differences by the sword while a cheering crowd watches. Criminals may also elect to have trial by combat (typically against dinosaurs or other criminals) in lieu of other forms of punishment. If they survive, they are free to go - they have bought their freedom in blood, after all.

There are three kinds of gladiatorial combat. The first is **show fighting** - that is, mock-battles, typically staged by professionals, which are not intended to truly harm the participants (though accidents happen), but rather to entertain the audience. The second, and most common, type is **fighting to first blood**; the first character who draws blood wins. The third, and least common, type is **fighting to the death**, or at least to the permanent maiming of the loser.

The Lizard King Mazatel organizes five Great Tournaments per year in Harat's arena - one in each of the city's four major religious festivals and one on the anniversary of Harat's liberation from the Sorcerer King's tyranny. Such spectacles include numerous bouts of gladiatorial fighting, from show fighting to fights to the first blood. Participants who wish to fight to the death can request this - and the crowd will eagerly bet on such thrilling competitions of martial skill. At the conclusion of each Great Tournament, the Lizard King presents all of the winners with golden laurels and invites them to a royal feast held in the Hanging Gardens. In addition to these spectacles, individual Harati citizens often arrange their own informal matches in various inns and even in back alleys. Such matches may be fought for money or as duels to resolve conflicts outside the law.

Show fighting requires the Performance proficiency (see *ACKS* p. 62), and works per the rules of that proficiency, including its earnings. This is, understandably, much less profitable than any real combat (whether to first blood or to the death). The crowds might enjoy this show of skill and bravado, but rarely bet on it or award prizes, as show fighting is typically a staged affair and not a real bloodsport. Professional gladiators typically combine a good number of show fights with several bouts of actual pit-fighting to maximize their earnings.

Fighting to first blood is the most common form of arena combat. These matches are resolved using the regular *ACKS* combat rules; the first gladiator to reduce his opponent's hit points to below half of their maximum value wins the match. Fighting to first blood is quite risky at low levels, as a single blow might easily kill or maim the target, but higher level combatants usually survive such matches with minimal risk. Typically, each professional gladiator fights three to five such matches a year (there is a limit to how many arena games are available to each entrant, after all). The prize for a winner of such a match is 100gp per level per match; this prize is considered as "treasure" for the sake of calculating XP, in addition to the XP earned for defeating the opponent. 0-level gladiators earn 25gp per bout, and typically become 1st level veterans after approximately four bouts in the arena.

Fighting to the death is less common in Harat, where the gladiators are all volunteers; and though in more barbarous cities it is more common, even the most callous slave-owners are loath to lose their expensive slave gladiators to death. When fighting to the death does take it place, it can include matches against other gladiators or against beasts (such as dinosaurs or giant insects). In Harat, matches to the death are usually a form of capital punishment - criminals convicted for high crimes are sent into the arena, to fight each other or monsters; if they die there, at least the crowds have enjoyed their death. If they survive, they have won their freedom with shed blood, and are thus free to go (but do not receive any monetary prizes). A victorious criminal even keeps his place in Harati society - for once the price is paid in blood, the crime is forgiven by King Hardun. In rare cases, however, some denizens of Harat may elect to fight each other to the death, either as a duel of honor, or for massive amounts of gold and glory. In such a case, the winnings from a fight to the death are 500gp per level per match (level 0 characters earn 100gp per match). Fighting to the death uses the regular *ACKS* rules for combat, and the winner is the last combatant standing with 1 or more hit points (anyone dead or mortally wounded loses the fight).

For alternative and additional rules and ideas for gladiatorial combat, see the article "Morituri Te Salutant" in *Axioms* Issue 4.

