

# MASTERING IRON HEROES



## A SOURCEBOOK BY MIKE MEARLS

*Requires the use of Iron Heroes, published by Fiery Dragon Productions  
Requires use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Third Edition Core Books, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.  
This book utilizes updated material from the v. 3.5 revision.*

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For supplemental material, visit the *Iron Heroes* Website:  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION: RUNNING ACTION FANTASY

- WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK? .....4
- USING THIS BOOK: DMS .....5
- USING THIS BOOK: PLAYERS .....6

## CHAPTER ONE: ABILITIES

- ALTERNATE ABILITY SCORE
- GENERATION METHODS .....7
  - MODIFIED POINT-BUY .....7
  - RANDOM METHODS .....8
- METAGENERATION METHODS .....9
  - CAMPAIGN-BASED GENERATION ...9
  - SETTING-BASED GENERATION ....10
  - STORY-BASED GENERATION .....11
- ABILITY SCORES AND NPCs .....11

## CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTERS AND THE CAMPAIGN WORLD

- TRAITS .....12
  - TRAITS BY REGION .....12
  - BRINGING REGIONS TO LIFE .....12
  - OTHER CONSIDERATIONS .....13
- THE CLASSES IN THE CAMPAIGN .....13
  - CLASS RESTRICTIONS .....13
  - DROPPING CLASSES .....13

- PLAYER INPUT .....15
  - GROUP WORLD CREATION .....15
  - SHARED WORLDS .....15
  - CREATIVITY ON THE FLY .....16

## CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER CLASSES

- VILLAIN CLASSES .....17
  - DEMONIC BRUTE .....18
    - CLASS ABILITIES .....19
  - APPEARANCE AND DETAILS .....20
- DREADED SORCERER .....21
  - CLASS ABILITIES .....21
- WARLEADER .....23
  - CLASS ABILITIES .....24
  - WARLEADER EQUIPMENT AND DETAILS .....25
- NPC CLASSES .....26
  - NPC CLASS ADVANCEMENT .....26
  - MULTICLASSING AND NPC CLASSES .....26
- ARISTOCRAT .....27
  - SKILL GROUPS .....27
  - FEATS .....27
  - CLASS ABILITIES .....27
- COMMONER .....27
  - SKILL GROUPS .....29

- FEATS .....29
  - CLASS ABILITIES .....29
- EXPERT .....29
  - SKILL GROUPS .....29
  - FEATS .....29
  - CLASS ABILITIES .....31
- WARRIOR .....31
  - SKILL GROUPS .....31
  - FEATS .....31
  - CLASS ABILITIES .....32
- NPC CLASS CHALLENGE RATINGS .....32

## CHAPTER FOUR: COMBAT

- ZONES: INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS ..33
  - TYPES OF ZONES .....34
  - CONDITION ZONES .....34
  - EVENT ZONES .....37
  - ACTION ZONES .....39
- TERRAIN EFFECTS .....41
  - GENERIC TERRAIN .....41
  - AQUATIC TERRAIN .....42
  - ARCTIC TERRAIN .....43
  - ARCANE TERRAIN .....43
  - FOREST TERRAIN .....44
  - DESERT TERRAIN .....45
  - MARSH TERRAIN .....46



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MOUNTAIN AND HILL TERRAIN . . . . .46  
 URBAN AND INTERIOR TERRAIN . . . . .47  
 MOBILE TERRAIN . . . . .49  
 MOBILE TERRAIN IN COMBAT . . . . .49  
 WEATHER EFFECTS . . . . .50  
 PRECIPITATION . . . . .50  
 WIND . . . . .50  
 TEMPERATURE . . . . .51  
 COMBAT IN DARKNESS . . . . .52  
 FINDING AND ATTACKING TARGETS . . .52  
 MOVING IN THE DARK . . . . .53  
 RUNNING ENCOUNTERS . . . . .53  
 UNDERWATER COMBAT . . . . .54  
 MISCELLANEOUS STATES AND  
 CONDITIONS . . . . .54  
 FALLING DAMAGE . . . . .54  
 INCORPOREAL . . . . .55  
 INVISIBILITY . . . . .56  
 STARVATION AND THIRST . . . . .57

**CHAPTER FIVE: TREASURE, REWARDS,  
 AND EXPERIENCE**  
 WEALTH, REWARDS, AND CAMPAIGNS . .58  
 HANDING OUT TREASURE . . . . .59  
 THE COMPLICATIONS OF WEALTH . .60  
 LEGENDARY TREASURES . . . . .61

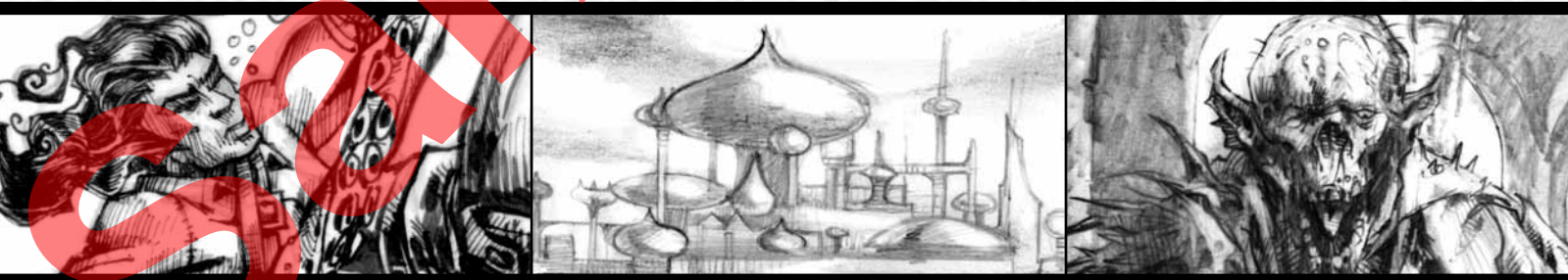
WEALTH FEATS . . . . .61  
 GAINING WEALTH FEATS . . . . .62  
 USING WEALTH FEATS . . . . .62  
 THE WEALTH POOL . . . . .62  
 COHORT . . . . .62  
 FOLLOWERS . . . . .63  
 MANSE . . . . .64  
 MONEY BUYS INNOCENCE . . . . .65  
 POLITICAL CONNECTIONS . . . . .65  
 SOCIAL INFLUENCE . . . . .66  
 REWARDS OTHER THAN MONEY . . . .66  
 FAME . . . . .66  
 POLITICAL POWER . . . . .66  
 EXPERIENCE POINTS . . . . .67  
 MONSTERS AND CHALLENGE RATING .67  
 MARKS: A SIMPLER ALTERNATIVE . .68  
 GAINING LEVELS . . . . .68

**CHAPTER SIX: MAGIC AND MAGIC ITEMS**  
 MAGIC ITEMS IN THE GAME . . . . .69  
 MAGIC ITEM ABILITIES . . . . .70  
 THE USE MAGIC DEVICE SKILL . . . . .71  
 RESEARCHING ITEMS . . . . .71  
 EXTENDED STUDY . . . . .72  
 BLIND ACTIVATION . . . . .72  
 MAGIC ITEM DESCRIPTIONS . . . . .72

MAGIC ITEM CREATION . . . . .72  
 ARMOR . . . . .73  
 POTIONS . . . . .75  
 WEAPONS . . . . .78  
 WONDROUS ITEMS . . . . .80

**CHAPTER SEVEN: CAMPAIGN OPTIONS**  
 ALTERNATE EXPERIENCE SYSTEMS . . .84  
 FLAWED HEROES . . . . .84  
 GOAL-DRIVEN EXPERIENCE . . . . .85  
 GOLD, GREED, AND FORTUNE . . . .86  
 METAGAME MECHANICS . . . . .87  
 GLORY POINTS . . . . .87  
 TACTICAL ENTERTAINMENT . . . . .90  
 COMBINING METAGAME RULES AND  
 ALTERNATE EXPERIENCE AWARDS . . .90

**APPENDIX: IMPORTING GAME MATERIAL**  
 CLASSES . . . . .92  
 BASIC CHANGES . . . . .92  
 IMPORTING SPELLCASTERS . . . . .92  
 TRAITS . . . . .93  
 SKILLS . . . . .93  
 FEATS . . . . .93  
 WEAPONS AND ARMOR . . . . .93  
 OPEN GAME LICENSE . . . . .94



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INTRODUCTION:

# RUNNING ACTION FANTASY

Welcome to *Mastering Iron Heroes*, a guidebook to running *Iron Heroes* campaigns. This book is meant as a companion piece to the *Iron Heroes* variant player's handbook. It looks at game play from the DM's viewpoint, with an eye toward implementing the new rules and material from *Iron Heroes* into a campaign.

If *Iron Heroes* is a new game engine, think of this book as your owner's manual. It takes a step back from the raw mechanics and shows you how to tinker with the basic game experience and modify it to fit your vision of the game.

## WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

*Mastering Iron Heroes* consists of seven chapters and one appendix. Here's what you'll find in each:

**Chapter One: Abilities.** This chapter discusses ability scores and presents several variants for creating characters. These variant rules make it easier to create a campaign with a specific flavor or tone by allowing players to create characters that better match the power level or basic theme of the campaign.

**Chapter Two: Characters and the Campaign World.** This chapter details ideas for juggling the character options from *Iron Heroes* to fit your campaign. It gives suggestions for customizing the story elements of the character classes, restricting PC options to characters from specific regions in your campaign world, and so forth. The basic idea behind this chapter is that it's much easier for players to grasp your campaign world if their characters have a clear, easy-to-understand place within it.

**Chapter Three: Character Classes.** This chapter presents character classes for the DM's use. It covers the *Iron Heroes* versions of the aristocrat, commoner, expert, and warrior, along with a new concept: villain classes. A villain class is a handy tool for creating a powerful NPC to oppose the player characters. Rather than go through all the steps needed to create a foe for the group, you can build one using a villain class. The villain class focuses on the few key abilities that a bad guy needs to oppose the party. It cuts down on the details that aren't crucial for a villain.

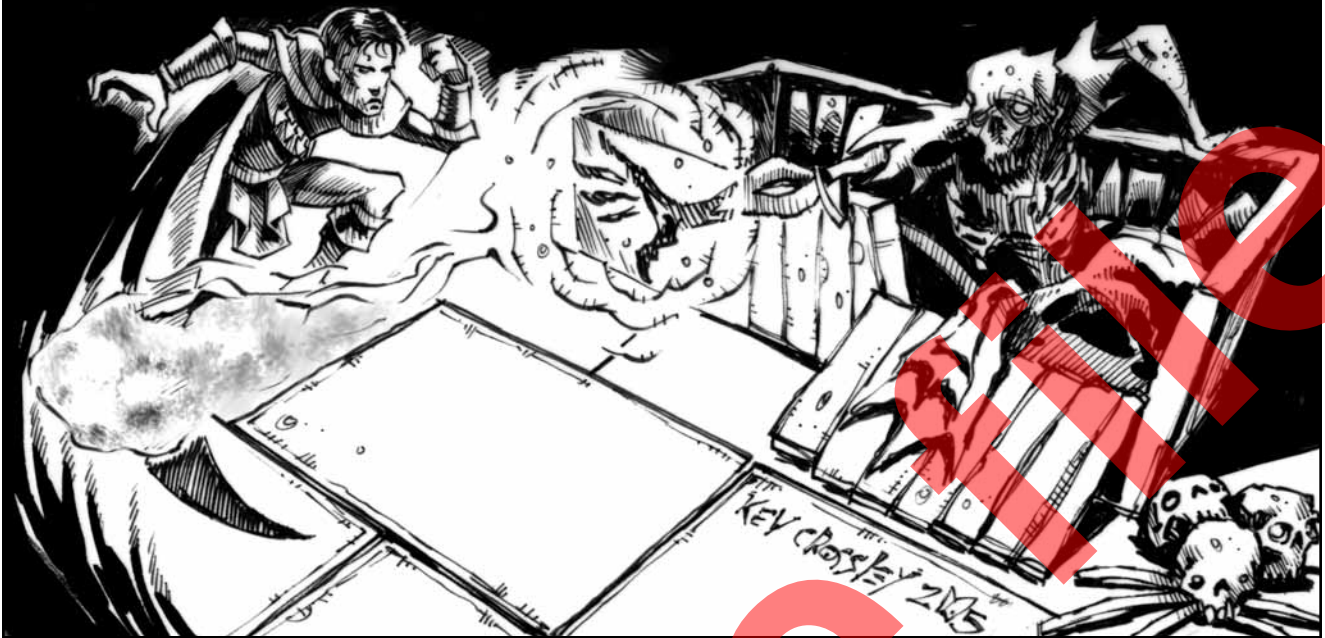
**Chapter Four: Combat.** This chapter looks at combat in terms of designing fun, challenging places for the characters to engage their enemies. It introduces zones, which help you

**M**astering *Iron Heroes* seeks to enrich campaigns in three ways. First, whenever possible, this book provides new options and ideas for existing rules. No two DMs run their games in an identical manner, and this book tries to account for that fact by offering new options, rules variants, and ideas for how to implement the rules in a campaign. For example, Chapter One provides alternate rules for generating a character's ability scores depending on the nature of your campaign.

Second, this book expands on some of the concepts given in *Iron Heroes*, particularly magic. Chapter Six even contains guidelines and rules for using magic items in *Iron Heroes*.

Finally, *Mastering Iron Heroes* tries to place as many rules as possible within the context of your campaign world, regardless of the form it takes. Commentary for new rules or variants discusses how a change alters the nature of the game and how best to apply it.





create interesting battlefields, and provides samples organized by terrain type. Whether you want to run a fight in the desert or in the mountains, this chapter gives you the tools needed to build a fun encounter.

**Chapter Five: Treasure, Rewards, and Experience.** This chapter looks at the role of treasure in *Iron Heroes*. In a game that removes magic items as a reliable source of power, money takes on a much different purpose. The characters no longer must save their cash for a powerful new magic weapon or wand. Instead, they can spend it on lavish homes, bribes, and other useful features. This chapter also provides advice on other kinds of rewards and on granting experience points.

**Chapter Six: Magic and Magic Items.** This chapter provides rules and advice for magic items in *Iron Heroes*. It focuses primarily on the mechanics for creating items, since most magic devices are unique items in *Iron Heroes*. Magic swords, armor, and other items tend to extract a terrible cost from those who wield them. An adventurer might use a magic item for a short time, but if he grows to depend on it, he might lose his life or soul along the way.

**Chapter Seven: Campaign Options.** This chapter is a toolkit designed to show you how to make small changes to the rules to create enormous differences in the tone and attitude of your campaign. It focuses on the rules for experience points (XP). By rewarding different actions with XP, you can shift the basic focus of the game to almost anything you want. A traditional monster-hunting game awards XP for defeating foes, but in a game where intra-party conflict, thievery, and greed reign supreme, a DM might award XP based on how much gold a character acquires.

**Appendix: Importing Game Material.** Finally, the appendix offers suggestions for DMs on how to convert material from other games for use in *Iron Heroes*.

Bonus source material and ideas to augment the information in *Mastering Iron Heroes* appear on Fiery Dragon's website. To find the links to these free web enhancements, visit the book's product page online at the following address: <[www.firedragon.com/MasteringIronHeroes](http://www.firedragon.com/MasteringIronHeroes)>.

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## USING THIS BOOK: DMS

*Mastering Iron Heroes'* primary purpose is to help guide you through the process of running and managing a campaign. *Iron Heroes* uses the same core rules as other d20 System games you've played, but its changes and additions are significant enough to alter the game's character noticeably. If you apply the same strategies and ideas to *Iron Heroes* that you use in other games, the game might not turn out exactly the way you want. In most cases, the changes are obvious. In other cases, it helps to consider the issues that come up.

If you already have an *Iron Heroes* campaign in progress, Chapters Three through Six provide a good overview on new rules and ideas that you can incorporate into your game immediately. A few highlights include:

**Combat Rules:** Chapter Four provides plenty of support for *Iron Heroes*-style combat. It introduces combat zones, tools you can use to create interesting environments. Zones are stunts that the DM adds to encounter areas for PCs and monsters to use. This chapter also provides rules for various terrain features.

**Wealth Feats:** These optional rules allow the characters to build up political and social influence, hire retainers, and purchase property using the wealth they gain through adventures. The wealth feats are designed to make it easier to keep track of money and manage it with a minimum of bookkeeping.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mike Mearls** has worked as a freelance roleplaying game designer since 1999. This prolific writer maintains a high volume of work without compromising quality, which has won him a place on many gamers' lists of favorite designers. Buoyed by positive reaction to his first d20 works, he went on to produce material for leading RPG publishers, including AEG, Atlas Games, Decipher, Fantasy Flight, Fiery Dragon, Goodman Games, Mongoose Publishing, Necromancer Games, and others. His previous Malhavoc Press titles include *Legacy of the Dragons* and *Book of Hallowed Might II: Portents and Visions* (both with Monte Cook), *Mystic Secrets: The Lore of Word and Rune*, *The Book of Iron Might*, *Ruins of Intrigue*, and *Transcendence*. His work also appears regularly in *Dragon*® Magazine. He has recently joined Wizards of the Coast as a roleplaying game developer.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Nashville artist **Jeremy Jarvis** attended New York's Pratt Institute as a Fine Arts major, intending to work in comics upon graduation. He did survive Pratt, but the desire to pencil comics had been slapped from his hand by his dark, demanding mistress: watercolor. Jeremy is known for his tongue-in-cheek attitude, his eye for detail, and the tragic ability to render that detail in unforgiving watercolor. He has illustrated widely in the fantasy and gaming industry, and his work has been included in The Spectrum Awards and The Society of Illustrators' prestigious Annual Exhibition. Visit his website at <[www.jeremyjarvis.com](http://www.jeremyjarvis.com)>.

Born in 1972 in Leeds, England, our interior artist **Kev Crossley** learned early on that a monster lived in the abandoned house down the street—after that, he saw monsters everywhere. He drew monsters all the way through school, then went to art college and university, where he was told not to. After he got a job in computer games, people started to pay him to draw monsters. Moral? Art college and university were a waste of time. Check out more of his work at <[www.kevcrossley.com](http://www.kevcrossley.com)>.

## FIERY DRAGON

**Fiery Dragon** is a game publisher producing material for tabletop roleplaying games (Game Aids, Adventures, and Accessories) as well as Counter Strike mini-games and the 7th edition of *Tunnels & Trolls*. Look for the *Iron Heroes Bestiary*, also by Mike Mearls.

Current titles are available to purchase in either print or electronic (PDF) format at <[www.fierydragon.com](http://www.fierydragon.com)>.



**Magic Items:** One of the themes of *Iron Heroes* is that magic is dangerous but sometimes useful. The rules for magic items show you how to apply that principle to swords, armor, and other gear.

**NPC Classes:** The NPC classes, along with the sample villain classes, are designed to make NPC generation fast and easy. By simply picking a level, generating ability scores, and selecting equipment, you can create an opponent for the characters in minutes.

If you haven't yet started an *Iron Heroes* campaign, then Chapters One, Two, and Seven provide everything you need to get your game off the ground. *Iron Heroes* is designed to be portable to a variety of different types of settings, from lands of high adventure to the backstabbing adventures of common criminals to fish-out-of-water stories of barbaric warriors in a strange, civilized land.

Chapter One shows you how to tinker with the ability score generation rules to create characters appropriate the campaign you want to run. Chapter Two provides some basic ideas for meshing *Iron Heroes* with your vision of the campaign. It looks at classes and traits and discusses how to merge them with your setting into a coherent, compelling whole.

Chapter Seven provides tools for shaping the game through subtle rules changes that create radical differences in game play. By altering the experience point system to change which actions earn the characters experience, you can encourage the players to pursue different strategies in the game. This sort of change transforms *Iron Heroes* from a game of heroic combat to one of duplicitous scams and double dealing, or a game where the characters pursue a specific goal, such as overthrowing the monarchy.

## USING THIS BOOK: PLAYERS

For players, *Mastering Iron Heroes* provides useful tools to expand your understanding of the game and extend your characters' abilities in new directions. The wealth feats give gold and jewels a tangible, mechanical benefit for your character. The rules for combat show you how terrain can play an important role in a fight, while the guidelines for magic items show you the sort of "treasure" you can expect to find in a dragon's hoard.