

## SWORD & BACKPACK RPG

In the world of Sword & Backpack you are a young explorer just beginning a career of high adventure in a fantastic and dangerous land. You live in a vast kingdom of boundless natural and supernatural wonder, of glorious cities and quaint country hamlets, of gloomy dungeons and haunted ruins. You are eager to see and experience ALL of it and, because you're young, you don't have much to your name save a trusty sword (or spellbook, or lockpicks), a roomy backpack and your handy copy of *Sword & Backpack: The Young Adventurer's Almanac, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*, a marvelously compact compendium of stories, maps and practical nuts and bolts advice for those pursuing a profession in swords, subterfuge and sorcery.

### HOW TO PLAY

The Sword & Backpack RPG doesn't have many rules in the traditional sense. There are no stats, points, levels, or other hallmarks of gaming to keep track of, and the rules it does have should be considered more like rough guidelines rather than hard and fast edicts. It's a philosophy more than it's a system. The only essential items needed are:

- A small notebook
- A pencil
- A 20-sided die

We recommend a 3½" x 5½" grid-paper Moleskine, as grids lend themselves naturally to mapping and other adventuring purposes. The Storyteller and Adventurers will paste or tape the pages from this initial document and future expansions into their books. Storytellers use their books to write adventures, keep records, and more; Adventurers' books are used to describe their characters,

detail their exploits and keep track of their progress; track the contents of their Backpacks, Spellbooks, Belts and Kits; make maps, sketch monsters, and whatever else is deemed necessary of chronicling. The more unruly and beautifully haphazard your book, the more fun you're having. Organize it however you see fit. Essentially, it will become your personalized copy of *The Young Adventurer's Almanac* and, ultimately, it will be the book that tells your own epic tale.

In addition, each player should possess a personal 20-sided die. The die is used to resolve combat, make skill rolls, and so on. Sharing a die is fine, but it's weak magic. In *Sword & Backpack*, dice aren't just tools, they're a direct line to fate, a link to the great mystery. As such, they should be respected. Your personal die should be carried in one's pocket at all times. It's a totem. Respect it as such.

### THE YOUNG ADVENTURER'S ALMANAC

*Sword & Backpack: The Young Adventurer's Almanac, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*, is at first glance an unassuming book. It's hardbound, 3½" wide x 5½" tall, 200 or so pages. Its cover is simple – worn cloth accented by a faded foil-stamped title. Each copy of the Almanac carries a minor yet stubborn enchantment that renders the volume well nigh impervious to major damage. Fire can singe its pages, water can stain its cover, but place it directly into a fire and it will not burn, and if submerged it will not warp or dissolve. Projectiles, however, will pierce the book, so using it as a shield from arrows is not advised. (Though if pierced, the standard enchantment on the book will eventually repair the damage once the projectile is removed.)

### THE STORYTELLER

The Storyteller narrates the course of events to the players of *Sword & Backpack*. Their responsibilities include describing the action in the tale, keeping events moving along briskly, prompting the players to roll their dice at the appropriate moments, and generally setting the proper adventurous mood. A Falstaffian figure, in a way.

### THE ADVENTURERS

The primary adventuring professions in *Sword & Backpack* are Warrior, Rogue, and Sorcerer. Warriors tend to focus on swordplay and feats of physical strength. Rogues favor trickery and larceny. Sorcerers are usually cerebral types who enjoy the study of arcane secrets. No one is expected to be a "type," however – while your character's interests are focused, Warriors can still be sneaky, Rogues can read grimoires to learn the odd incantation, and Sorcerers are encouraged to learn the rudiments of swordplay. In the world of *Sword & Backpack*, adventurers usually travel together in groups of three with each member coming from one of the disciplines. Imagine the adventuring party as a fantasy version of a basketball team – the Warrior is the center, the Rogue the guard and the Sorcerer the forward. Each profession complements the other two, and three is the arcane number. In each player's book, a handful of pages should be given over to...

### THE BACKPACK

The backpack is one of the most – if not THE most – important tools that an adventurer can possess. It is, after all, where you store all of your gear. Choosing what to carry in the backpack is one of the most crucial decisions in an adventurer's career. Before an adventure, the

adventuring party should have a short talk amongst themselves about who's carrying the food, the flint and tinder, the torches, and so on. Depending on the player's adventuring profession, the Backpack section in their book should also have one of the following sub-categories:

### THE SORCERER'S SPELLBOOK

A sorcerer begins adventuring with three spells chosen from the first Magic Supplement. Choose carefully, for learning new spells can be a difficult proposition. A Sorcerer might also want to decide upon a focus for their magic, something that helps them get into the proper frame of mind for spellcasting. A wand? The horns of a small animal? A carved staff? A smooth river rock? It's your choice. Strange hand gestures are also a must, so limber up your joints.

### THE WARRIOR'S BELT

A warrior's belt is usually a stout contraption of leather and buckles upon which they stash their sword and various other useful items in assorted pouches, etc. It's a belt of utility and reflects its owner's shrewdness. It's the type of thing that, when displayed correctly upon entering a tavern, says, "I am a badass, offend me at your peril."

### THE ROGUE'S KIT

Rogues tend to collect small, tricky devices that help them break into and out of places they're not supposed to have access to, plus assorted sneezing powders, sleeping draughts, marked gambling cards, miniature weapons such as daggers, and the like. Their kit is usually spread out over their person – tucked into their boots, sewn into secret pockets, hidden up sleeves and so on.

## RESOLVING CONFLICT AND COMBAT

Conflict and chance fuels everything around Adventurers in the world of Sword & Backpack. You'll be haggling with merchants over the cost of trail food and healing potions. You'll be attempting to harness powerful magic. You'll be attempting astounding feats of bravery. And you will be fighting. Oh yes: from tavern brawling with rowdies to dueling with roadside bandits to trading spells with necromancers to kicking some monster tail, you will be fighting. You'll either succeed at the actions you try or you won't, and to determine if you do succeed you will be rolling your 20-sided die. The system for deciding whether or not an action requires a dice roll to see if it succeeds and, if it does, what sort of roll a player needs to make, is fairly simple (and somewhat arbitrary). Here's how it goes:

### ORDER OF ACTION

1. A situation occurs where the outcome isn't completely assured. The Storyteller says, "Let's settle this with dice."
2. Taking into account your experience, your attitude and your desire to succeed, the Storyteller decides upon an equitable score to roll on the 20-sided die. This can be a number above or below a certain number, or between two numbers.
3. The Storyteller can also decide that multiple rolls are required. It's up to them! (We ask that the Storyteller please not be vindictive or arbitrary.)
4. If the roll is successful, well then hail-fellow-well-met. If not, tough luck. The player can try to wheedle and hustle their way out of it. Wheedling is allowed and encouraged.
5. And that's all there is to it. Have a drink.

## THE MOOD

In Sword & Backpack, tales of epic derring-do are everyone's birthright. It's better to defend the defenseless than to revel in destruction, or see amazing new sights rather than cynically dismiss awesomeness in pursuit of treasure. This is about friends getting together and sharing stories and laughter, all the while facing danger and high adventure. The mantra here is, "Dungeons and dragons are two great tastes that go great together."

### SUGGESTED ACCESSORIES, PROPS, ETC.

- Heavy coins, like Sacajawea dollars or Loonies, to loot from treasure hordes and to spend at taverns. American quarters make good silver pieces, and pennies serve as coppers.
- Refreshments: Dungeon-crawling without ale is just spelunking.
- Music: The right soundtrack can make any gaming session that much better. We recommend the Sword & Backpack mixes, but we encourage you to put together your own playlist of adventuring greatest hits. (Led Zeppelin's "Ramble On" must make an appearance.)
- Sigil: This is your personal mark that you can draw anywhere to let the world know that you passed through. Perfect it. Be ready to sketch it at a moment's notice. Once you're satisfied, put it on your character sheet (the last page of this manual), and that to the inside front cover of this book as if it were an Ex Libris bookplate.

## SUGGESTED READING AND VIEWING

The following list makes no claims of authority. Rather, it's a short and incomplete roll call of works of fantasy that have helped inspire the creation of Sword & Backpack in some way. We hope that you like some if not all of these things, or can find something within them to spark some creativity or, the very least, amuse you on a cold night:

- The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings by Tolkien
- Forgotten Realms sourcebooks (the first box set!)
- Dragonslayer (dir. Matthew Robbins)
- Quag Keep by Andre Norton
- Azure Bonds by Kate Novak and Jeff Grubb
- Groo by Aragonés, Evanier, Luth & Sakai
- "Dragon" and "Dungeon" magazines
- The Lankhmar stories by Fritz Leiber
- Hawk the Slayer (dir. Terry Marcel)
- The Chronicles of Prydain by Lloyd Alexander
- Book of Swords series by Fred Saberhagen
- Guardians of the Flame series by Joel Rosenberg
- Your Highness (dir. David Gordon Green)
- The Magicians series by Lev Grossman
- Magic Kingdom for Sale – Sold! by Terry Brooks
- The Elric stories by Michael Moorcock
- Northworld by Lars Brown
- The Tales of Barsoom by E.R. Burroughs
- The Once and Future King by T.H. White
- Willow (dir. by Ron Howard)
- Smax by Alan Moore and Zander Cannon
- Legend (dir. by Ridley Scott)
- Dragonslayer (dir. by Matthew Robbins)
- The Conan stories by Robert E. Howard
- The First Law trilogy by Joe Abercrombie
- The Earthsea trilogy by Ursula K. LeGuin

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