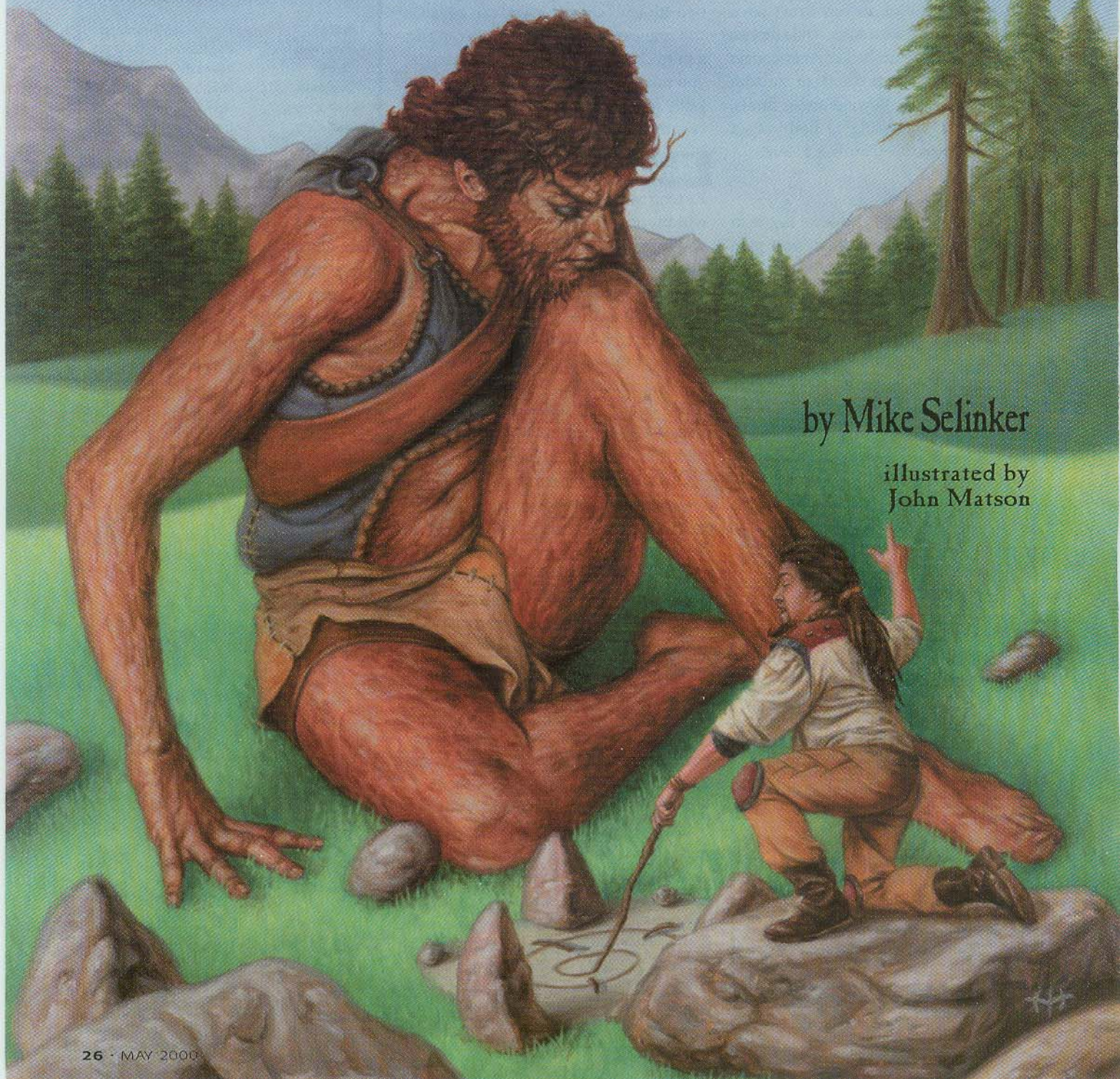


POWERWORD: Baffle

Creating Word Puzzles for
Your AD&D® Game

by Mike Selinker

illustrated by
John Matson



Your PCs turn the corner, right into the ambush you've spent weeks choreographing. The derro leap from the shadows, shout a cry of triumph, and are greeted with a chorus of yawns. "Whoop-de-do," the party leader says. "Another ambush."

You've got two ways to deal with this rebellion. First, you can transform the derro into tarrasques and see how challenging the encounter becomes then.

A second and more interesting choice is to challenge the players in a different way. When they see that the derro come armed not with swords but with puzzles, your players might take notice—especially if solving the puzzles is the only way they can complete their quest.

Choosing a Puzzle

When you solve a crossword or word search, you're solving the puzzle for the puzzle itself. There's no story, no character, and no reason to do the puzzle other than the challenge. When you bring a puzzle into a roleplaying game, however, you have an even better reason: It thrusts your players' mental skills into their characters' chances for success.

You know what this is like. Your players have been aching to break into the evil archmage's tower and give him what-for, but first they have to solve the riddle on the tower door. So they stop and think for a while, and so, presumably, do their characters. Even better, they're solving among friends, so what normally is a solitary activity becomes a shared experience.

You can't use just any puzzle, naturally. It might be fun for you to solve a puzzle about automobiles, but your average Paladin could stare at that for hours without thinking of one right answer. Your puzzle must cater to the characters as much as the players, and that's where the hard work comes in.

Personalize your puzzles. Build them around your PCs and the worlds they inhabit. Make references to the PCs, important NPCs, places in the game, even spells and magical items the PCs come across. Give as much thought to the puzzlemaker as the puzzle—after all, the puzzles your players solve must come from somewhere in your game world. Creating an archenemy who talks in riddles or a dragon who locks his treasures deep within mazes are ways of personalizing your puzzles.

Imprison allies who send messages encrypted in codes, and draw your players into creating codes to send back to their friends. This way, you make your puzzles more than common AD&D® game obstacles. They become challenges your players are happy to see.

Bringing the Puzzle to Your Game

You can select one puzzle type or combine two or more. A crossword can involve word games, and a maze can have riddles that lead the PCs to secret doors. For a truly maddening puzzle, a word search can be encoded in cryptogram form. Play around with the puzzle forms until you discover the ones you'd enjoy solving most.

If you can, playtest the puzzles with someone outside your gaming group first. You don't want to go into your game grinning and come out crestfallen because you dropped an "E" from your scrambled word. If you can't playtest the puzzle before your game, at least pretend to solve it yourself. That way, you should notice any errors.

When the moment of truth arrives, give as much fanfare to the debut of a puzzle as you would to any monster or character. Maybe an archmage skywrites the riddle in the air above the battlefield. Perhaps the puzzle comes in the form of a jigsaw puzzle, and the players must find all the pieces. Maybe it's delivered by a messenger—who abruptly dies from the contact poison on the puzzle.

As the players solve the puzzles, don't be afraid to drop hints, preferably ones you've prepared in advance. At first, your players probably won't want help, but as time wears on they might grow frustrated. That's a good time for the players to turn to some close allies—their own PCs. As the players reach a point of frustration, you can have them make Intelligence checks for their PCs to gain hints.

A good hint nudges the solver in the right direction without giving the answer away. If the answer to your riddle is "a scroll," don't give a hint that says "a parchment with spells on it." Instead, the hint is better cast as a simpler riddle, such as, "While I am rolled, I contain great power, but unfurled my power can be freed."

When the players solve the puzzle, have some immediate reward ready: a secret door opens, a mage gives them potions, a key materializes out of thin air. That way, not only do the players feel a sense of creative accomplishment, they gain rewards as surely as if they'd used their time to clobber monsters.

The Question of Language

Do your PCs speak English? Most of the time, it doesn't matter. The instant you introduce a word puzzle, however, you must deal with the language barrier.

One solution is to ignore the issue. When your players are solving one of your puzzles, the PCs are too—but not necessarily the same puzzle. The puzzle is a simulation of what the PCs experience, much like AD&D combat.

Another solution is just to accept that the common tongue is English. Sure, the PCs don't know the words "modem" and "infotainment," but they have a pretty good subset of your knowledge to work from.

Designing Riddles

Riddles force the solvers to think in ways they've never thought before. Consider the sphinx's classic riddle, "What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?" This stumped so many doomed souls not because its answer is obscure—what could be more common than "man"?—but because the clever sphinx puts the solver in mind of something much less common. In fact, if the sphinx's riddle weren't so well known, it'd make an excellent riddle in almost any AD&D game.

To make your own riddles, think about what your PCs know. They know which direction the sun and moon(s) rise, who rules their kingdoms, and a heck of a lot more than we know about fighting live monsters. They don't know about vacuum cleaners or how gravity works, and they don't have the slightest idea who Sarah Michelle Gellar is. So work within their knowledge base, and you'll be fine.

Of course, you might have to work at it. Peruse any book of medieval riddles, and you'll find that pretty much all of them have one of three answers: "time," "fire," or "flax." And hard as it might be to believe, people just don't groove on flax riddles these days.

Some riddles test the solvers' knowledge of trivia, and in your players' case, the subject might be AD&D trivia. Try not to ask an obscure question that has an obscure answer; no one cares who the barmaid at Waterdeep's Thirsty Sailor is. But you can use an obscure question with a very common answer, such as this one:

What two magical liquids might allow a man to wield a weapon he could not even hold in his hands before? The answer to this and all following puzzles appear on page 35.

That riddle revolves around specialized knowledge, but most riddles center on cleverness. Such a riddle has a setup and a punchline. The punchline makes the players laugh and slap their foreheads, but it's the setup that does all the hard work. The setup should give all necessary information while working to obscure every bit of it. Watch this riddle at work:

Sir Morgan was the greatest horseman in the kingdom. In every tilt in every tournament, not once was he knocked off his horse. So noble was he that his mount received accolades as high as those of Sir Morgan himself. But when the queen gave Sir Morgan her laurel, he would not dismount as was the custom. Why not?

After you've thought about it for a few seconds, think on this: What does the word "horseman" put in your mind?

Another fun thing to do with riddles is to bring in poetry and wordplay. Rebuses, initials, homophones, and homographs (see the section on "Designing Word Games") are especially conducive to riddles. Try this one:

*My first can charge with fury.
My second serves the knight.
When one pursues the other,
It's the frenzy that's in sight.*

RIDDLE CHECKLIST

- Decide on your punchline.
- Craft your setup.
- Use wordplay and other writing tricks to obscure the answer.

Designing Cryptograms

A cryptogram is a substitution code. The simplest kind is one in which each letter is substituted for another, so that A might equal B. Cryptograms are good when you want to give the players a message but you want them to puzzle over it—perhaps as the orc army bears down upon their position.

When you make a code like this, start with a meaningful message (for example, "The treasure is under the tapestry."). The longer your message, the easier the decoding will be—but the longer it will take to decode the entire message.

Next, write down the letters of the alphabet in order. Now you have to assign different letters to each letter in the alphabet. When you reach this point, decide whether to make the cryptogram easy, hard, or ultra-hard.

An easy cryptogram uses a substitution that the players can grasp quickly. A classic code is to advance the letters forward one letter in the alphabet (A=B, B=C, and so on until Z=A). Another classic is to reverse the alphabet (Z=A, Y=B, and so on). Players will see this coming, so this is a good option if you want a quick puzzle.

A hard cryptogram is the normal variety, where the letters of the alphabet are assigned randomly (A=Q, B=F, C=S, and so on). Make sure you don't double-assign a letter; a good way to do this is to write the substituted alphabet out in its new alphabetical order. Of course, you don't have to use letters of the alphabet as your code; runes or symbols of different gods, for example, might work quite well.

An ultra-hard cryptogram messes with either the layout of the message or the one-to-one substitution of the letters. You can alter the layout of the message by running the words together, running the words backward, or even putting each word on a different piece of paper. You can even double-assign letters (such as making Y stand for both E and M), or convert two or three letters of the alphabet to one of the ten digits. So when a player figures out that 7 equals either A, M, or X, she will spend a lot of time working out the quote.

Breaking most codes takes pure brute force, with players looking for common letters like E and S. Repeated words are helpful, and words like "a" and "the" show up often. Watch especially for double letters and—these are dead giveaways—letters after apostrophes. (In the world of characters like Drizzt Do'Urden, however, maybe they're not so obvious after all.)

Here's a code that you can solve. Start by looking for common letters, duplicated letters, and other cues. (The apostrophe is really an apostrophe.)

The king has been magically spirited away in the night. Scrawled in the mosaic tile on the king's royal dressing room floor is the "message" in Figure 1.

Figure 1



(By the way, wouldn't it be cool if the way you got to the object mentioned in the code was to follow the arrows through a twisty maze? Sometimes a puzzle can serve two masters.)

CRYPTOGRAM CHECKLIST

- Craft your message.
- Write down the alphabet in order.
- Assign a different code letter to each letter of the alphabet.
- Write the coded letters above the letters in your message.
- Double-check the letter assignments.

Designing Word Searches

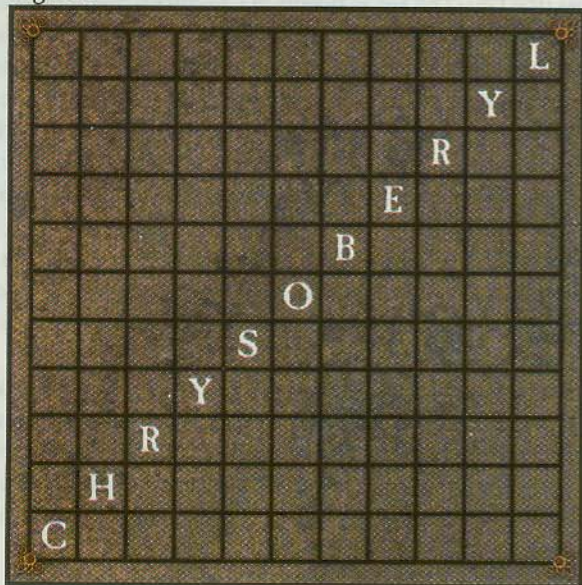
Word searches—puzzles containing words vertically, horizontally, and diagonally—have a reputation for being very easy, and most deserve it. But you can play around with conventions of word searches and really perplex your players.

First, you need an idea of what you want to hide, such as the names of monsters or important NPCs. Here, a puzzle about gems will serve as an example.

Once you've figured out what you want to hide, write down a list of words and short phrases that relate to your subject. Generally, you want to limit the length of the words in your list to twelve letters or fewer, because it's pretty easy to find a twenty-letter phrase in a word search. You're going to need at least a dozen words; some big word searches contain fifty or more words. You might not use all the words, but it's better to have too many than too few. For the gem puzzle, the list of precious stones might be this: *agate, amber, amethyst, cat's-eye, chrysoberyl, coral, diamond, emerald, garnet, jade, jet, moonstone, onyx, opal, pearl, quartz, ruby, sapphire, and topaz.*

Once you have your list, get out some graph paper and get ready to put your words in the grid. In the center of the graph paper, put one of your longest words running in a straight line in some direction. (Words are easy to find if they run down or to the right, moderately hard to find if they run up or to the left, and hard to find if they run diagonally.) This long word is your anchor word. In the gem search, the anchor word could be chrysoberyl.

Figure 2



Sources for Fantasy Puzzles

Most of the best AD&D game puzzles come, from published adventures, like 1998's *The Crypt of Lyzandred the Mad*, by Sean Reynolds. With only the barest plot, Sean provides dozens of puzzle-based encounters for any AD&D game. All the puzzles are language-neutral—a nice touch.

If you're willing to dig, another great puzzle find is 1983's *Maze of the Riddling Minotaur*, by Jeff Grubb. Using "magic pen" technology to hide the answers, Jeff scatters many short riddles through the module. The only problem is that most of the magic pens dried up a decade ago. (A little lemon juice might do the trick.)

Outside the AD&D world, many books give great puzzles for fantasy games.

- Muriel Mandell's *Fantastic Book of Logic Puzzles* (Sterling Publishing) is all about dragons and wizards.

- Barbara Seuling's *Monster Puzzles* and *Monster Madness* books (Xerox Education Publications) focus on ghost- and vampire-based puzzles.

- Susannah Leigh's *Puzzle Dungeon* (Usborne Young Puzzle Books) is what it sounds like: a puzzle dungeon for kids.

- *Riddle Rooms #1* and *#2* (Cloud Kingdom) are game-based sourcebooks that provide cunning puzzles that can be used in any game.

- Robert Abbott's *Mad Mazes* (Bob Adams Publishers) contains highly unique mazes based on gods, minotaurs, and pirates.

- Larry Evans's *Gorey Games* (Troubador Press) gives somewhat gruesome puzzles based on the macabre work of Edward Gorey.

- Most puzzle books by Martin Gardner, such as *Perplexing Puzzles and Tantalizing Teasers* (Dover Publications), use fantasy material in their puzzles.

- Edward Wakeling's *Alice in Wonderland Puzzle and Game Book* (United States Games Systems) unites the story with puzzles and a deck of Alice cards.

- Christopher Manson's *Maze* (Henry Holt) is a fantasy dungeon maze that runs throughout the book, and one of the most impressive puzzles ever published.

- Lego has released a series of puzzle books such as *Castle Mystery* and *Curse of the Mummy*. (Lego Books).

Start crossing some of the letters of your anchor word with other words. In **Figure 2**, chrysoberyl is crossed by six words from the list. Note how both emerald and amber not only cross chrysoberyl, but each other. That's how a good word search uses its letters economically. See **Figure 3**.

Now fill the grid with other words from the list, starting with the longest words. Don't be afraid to move words. Try to balance words going in each of the eight directions, especially diagonally. Here, the gem puzzle contains all but one of the words from the list, plus two more theme words. See **Figure 4**.

Once you've put in as many words as you want, make sure they're all still there. When you've got the words in place, fill in the empty squares. The simplest way to do this is to toss in random letters. But you can also put a message into the empty

Figure 3

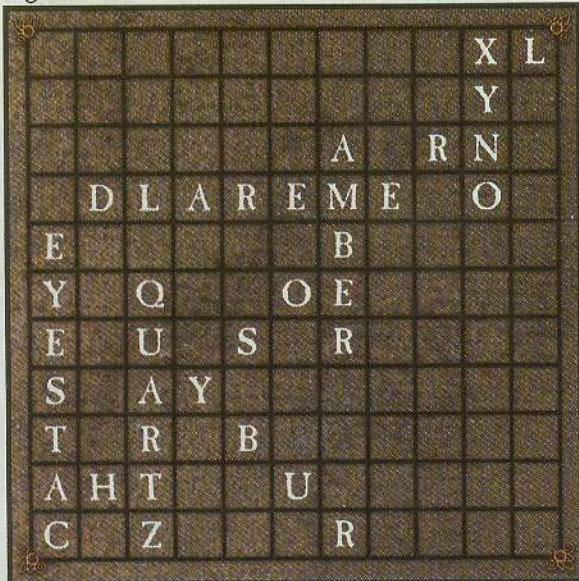


Figure 4

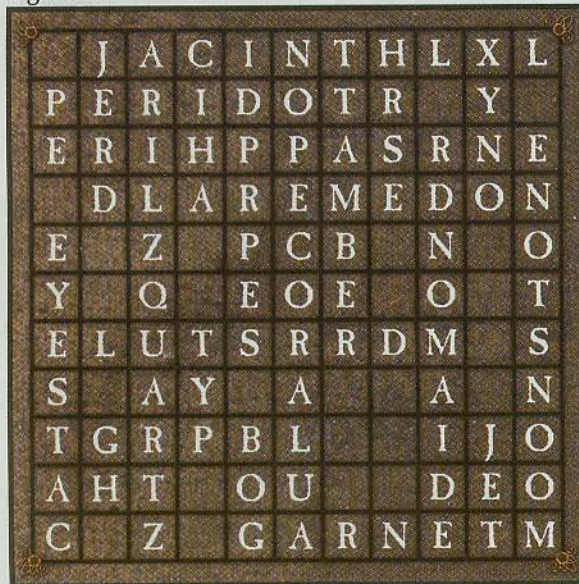
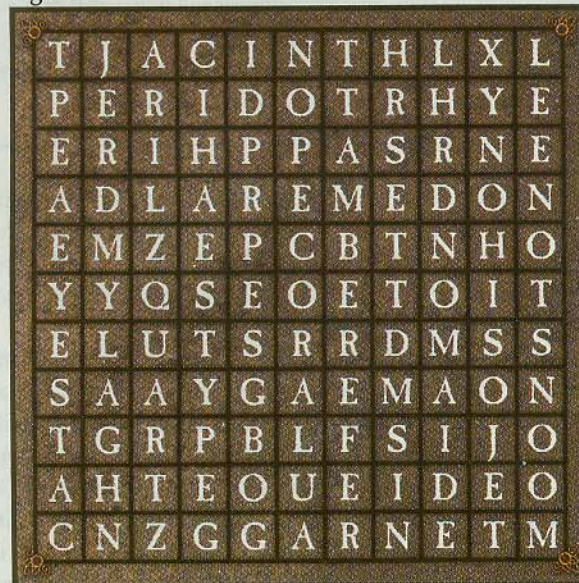


Figure 5



squares, usually reading left to right. The gem puzzle features 20 theme words and 25 blank squares, so all it needs is an apropos message for a puzzle about precious stones. See figure 5.

Now here's something that can be put into the lid of a chest full of gems. The message in the chest might read:

*Here are inlaid twenty stones
But only one can you take home
Find the message buried deep
And name the one that you should keep*

Since the solvers don't get the word list, it's a bit harder. They'll have to discover what's in the puzzle on their own. And just to make sure the PCs don't take the whole chest of gems, the chest will explode in a 20d6 *fireball* if the PCs are so presumptuous as to ignore how clever this puzzle is.

WORD SEARCH CHECKLIST

- Choose a theme.
- Craft a word list related to the theme.
- Place an anchor word onto a sheet of graph paper.
- Cross the anchor word with a number of words from the list.
- Border and fill in the rest of the grid with words from the list.
- Double-check that all the words are still in the grid.
- Fill in the unassigned squares with random letters or a message.

Designing Quotation Puzzles

In roleplaying games, puzzles are often used to deliver messages into the hands of the player characters. Quotation puzzles fit that need exactly.

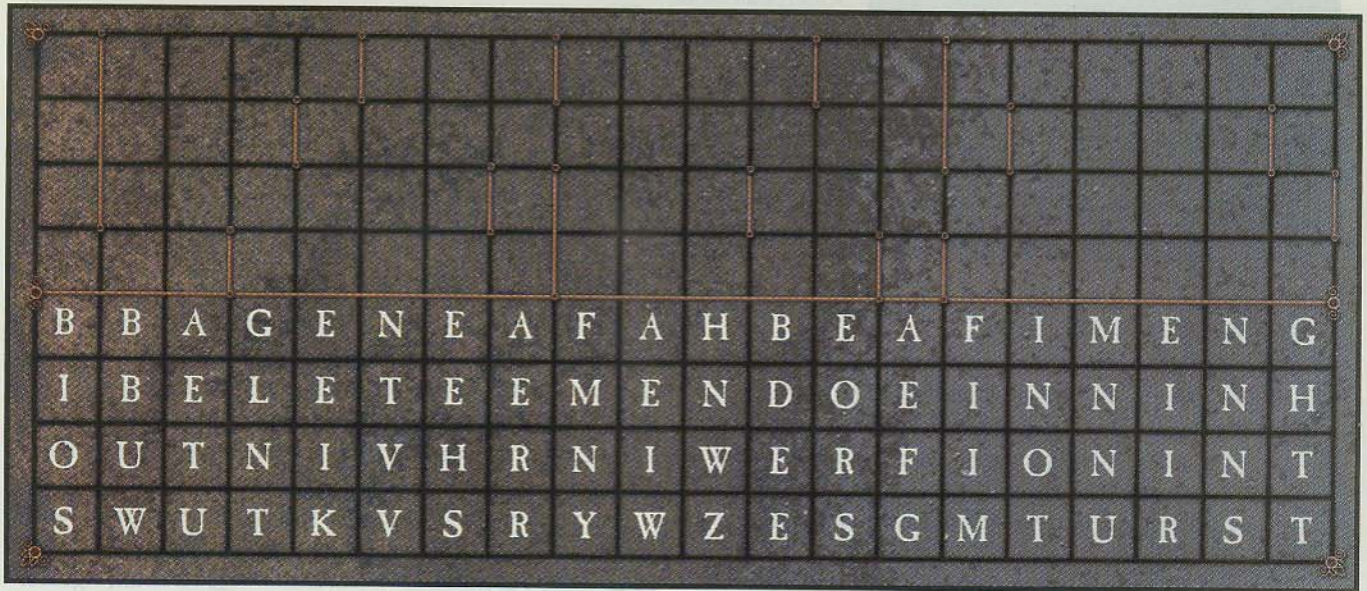
A simple quotation puzzle is the quote box. For a quote box, you lay out your message in a grid pattern. Then you take the letters from each column and alphabetize them, requiring the players to use word patterns and process of elimination to restore the quote to sensibility.

First, you need a message. It should be short, no more than one hundred letters or so. You can make up the message, or you can pull it from text that your PCs might conceivably come across (the *DRAGONLANCE*® poems in *Chronicles* might be okay, but probably not the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ book). You can introduce real-world quotes into your games, but only ones that make sense in the game world. As an example, a quote from a moody song by the New Age singer Enya might make perfect sense in an AD&D game, plus it's excellent for a puzzle dungeon. As long as the message makes sense in your game world, you can use it.

Once you've picked a quote, count the number of letters it contains. You can ignore spaces and punctuation, though you should count hyphens and apostrophes. Divide the total by 3 (very easy), 4, 5, or 6 (very hard).

Then take a piece of graph paper and count squares across equal to your new number, rounding up. Count squares down equal to the number you used to divide the total. Bounding this area gives you a space to place your quote. The Enya quote is eighty letters and contains no spaces, so it needs an area twenty squares across and four squares down.

Figure 6



Now, one letter per square, write the quote across. When you reach the end of a line, continue in the leftmost square of the next line. When you're done, if you have any blank squares at the bottom right, fill them in with black squares.

Below your quote, write down the letters in each column in alphabetical order. Then copy these letters onto a new sheet of graph paper and leave a blank area for solving. Mark the divisions between words with bars, even if they occur at the ends of lines. See the final grid for the Enya lyric in Figure 6.

Be sure to note any black squares. You can also do a quote box where black squares separate words. This airs out the puzzle, giving a variable number of letters in each column. You can construct these the same way as above, only you need to account for the black squares as letters when you're counting out the quotation.

To solve these puzzles, watch for one-letter words (usually A or I), repetitions of common words like "the" and "of," and key words to the subject matter of the quote. Also, a column with lots of the same letter (like the one second from the right) is easier to place than one with many different letters.

QUOTE BOX CHECKLIST

- Choose a quote.
- Count its letters.
- Divide by the depth of the quote box (usually 3, 4, 5, or 6) to get the width.
- Write the quote on a graph, starting a new line each time you reach the width.
- Block off the ends of words with bars.
- Write the letters of each column in alphabetical order below that column.
- Copy the alphabetical letters below a blank grid that represents the quote.
- Double-check the letter assignments.

A second and more complex type of quotation puzzle is the acrostic, where you take a quote of up to 180 letters and scramble these letters among smaller words.

Again, start with a message, using the same guidelines as for a quote box. The longer your message, the easier it will be for you to get a nice variety of words. Then, write down the message on a piece of graph paper, writing consecutive numbers above each letter (so your first letter is 1, your second is 2, and so on).

Now, start pulling out letters for shorter words that have nothing to do with your message. Try to make each word use letters from different places in the message. Your first couple of words will be easy to find, but then you might be left with a combination like BHHHKUZ at the end. So go back to earlier choices and break them up. If you get stuck, try to break up words that contain letters you don't have left, especially common ones like Es and As. Eventually, you'll end up with a series of words that you can clue for the solver. (If you want to get fancy, try to make words whose first letters spell out the name of your quote's source or a key NPC.)

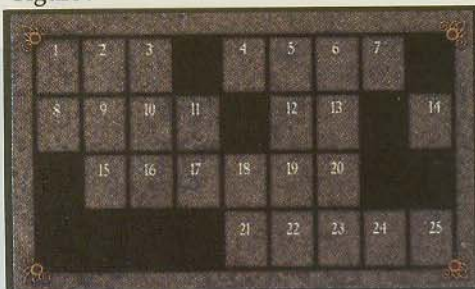
Write your finished word list out on the graph paper. Then assign one numbered letter to each letter in the word list. So if your quote's first letter is A and your first word is "gorilla," the last letter of that word can be assigned the number 1. Assign each letter only once, trying to spread the letters from each word in the quote among as many words from the list as possible. Check and double check your assignments.

Then write clues for each word in the list. Next to each clue, put blanks equal to the word's number of letters. Below each blank, put the corresponding number of the letter you assigned to that blank's letter. Do a blank grid with the numbers in it, and give the results to your doubtlessly impressed players.

For an example, here is a message that might well save the PCs' lives.

In a square room with exits on each wall, the PCs find a message on a scroll. See Figure 7.

Figure 7

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|
|  | Caterpillar fabric | 13 | 22 | 4 | 15 | | | | |
| | Murder, legally | 2 | 10 | 23 | 12 | 25 | 16 | 8 | 5 |
| | Fruitful, like land | 6 | 19 | 11 | 1 | 24 | 17 | 3 | |
| | Non-divine person | 21 | 9 | 20 | 7 | 14 | 18 | | |

ACROSTIC CHECKLIST

- Choose your message.
- Write the message on graph paper, putting a number above each letter.
- Pull out some letters for new words, checking the boxes next to the numbers.
- Break up and reassign letters from previously chosen words until you have a full set of new words.
- Double-check your letter assignments.
- Create a blank grid with numbers in place of the quote's letters.
- Write clues for each new word.
- Next to the clues, put blanks for the new words and number each blank with the corresponding number from the quote.
- Double-check your number assignments.

Designing Crosswords

Crossword like the ones in the Sunday *New York Times* definitely fall into the don't-try-this-at-home category. Interlocking that many words is a lot of work—more work than you'll need to get your players puzzling. Besides, crosswords have weird conventions—no two-letter words, no uncrossed letters, symmetry along the diagonal axis, and so on—that you just don't need to follow. And worst of all, imagine those crosswords with only the knowledge base of a medieval fantasy knight. No pop music, no sports, no politics. It just ain't happening.

But don't fret. There are crossword types you can do that will befuddle your players without making you work too hard.

Let's say you want to give your players a clue about the one weapon that will slay the magical horror from beyond. A good way to go about this is to hide the answer in a criss cross, a puzzle where related words cross each other. To make one, you fit a list of words into a grid, and then ask your players to do the same thing. It should be a subject that allows for many short words, such as weapons and armor.

After you've got a list of possible words, get out the graph paper. Lay in a long word either across or down. Then cross it with a few other words. For example, the first crosses might look like Figure 8.

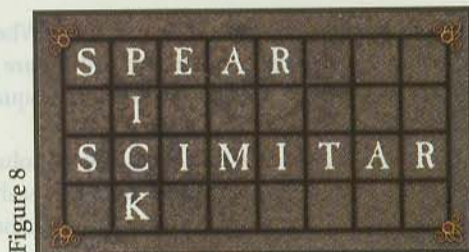


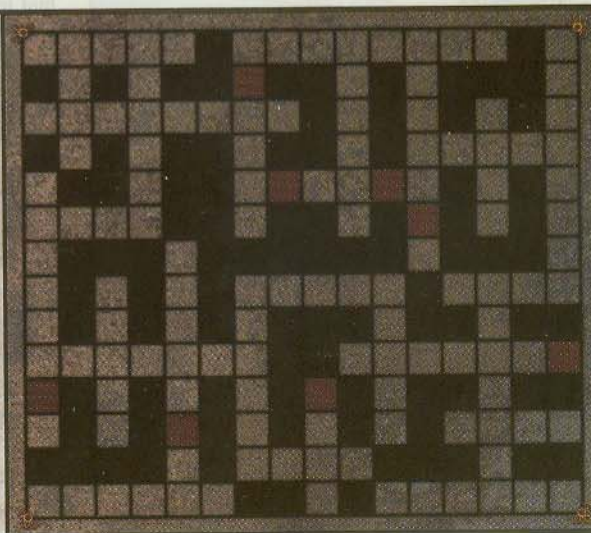
Figure 8

After placing your first words, continue adding words to the puzzle. Like in Scrabble, you can't put letters next to each other unless they form a word (and in this case, a word that's part of your word list). Once you've gotten the words crossing each other to your content, create a blank grid with black squares separating words. Finally, provide your players with a copy of the word list. See Figure 9.

Evil priests chant to open the gate that will release the ancient horror. It is too late to stop the summoning. Now, only solving a long-dead weaponsmith's puzzle will reveal the weapon needed to kill the beast.

The shaded squares spell out the puzzle's ultimate solution. Reading across, the players should see the one weapon their PCs need.

Figure 9

| | | |
|----------|-----------|--|
| ARMORS | PICK |  |
| ARROWS | RANSEUR | |
| AWL PIKE | SCIMITAR | |
| AXES | SCOURGE | |
| BARDICHE | SHIELD | |
| BILL | SHORT BOW | |
| FLAIL | SICKLE | |
| FORK | SPEAR | |
| GLAIVE | SPETUM | |
| GUISARME | STAFF | |
| JAVELIN | STONE | |
| MACE | SWORD | |
| MAIL | VOULGE | |
| PARTISAN | WHIP | |

CRISS CROSS CHECKLIST

- Choose a theme for the criss cross.
- Craft a large word list related to the theme.
- Place a long word from the list on graph paper, and cross it with other words.
- Continue until you've placed as many words as you desire.
- Make sure no partial words were created in the process.
- Create a blank grid alongside the word list.
- If you want a hidden answer, shade the appropriate squares.

A criss cross can become a regular crossword just by adding clues. Instead of a word list, each word in the grid gets a numbered clue. The arms puzzle might become a weapon merchant's bill of goods, with the clues being not definitions but prices. So the clue for "short bow" would be "30 gold pieces," assuming the merchant was selling at *Player's Handbook* prices.

A word of caution, though: Converting a criss cross into a clued crossword runs the risk of baffling your players in an unintended way. An eight-letter word crossed by only two other words (see "partisan" above) makes for some tough solving if the clue is at all hard. Be careful, or your players might lynch you.

You can avoid this problem by designing a fully crossed crossword, but this takes quite a bit of practice. To start off, take a piece of graph paper and draw a 4x4 box. See Figure 10.

Try filling in words across and down. You'll probably have some difficulty the first few times, so here are a few tips.

- High-point letters in SCRABBLE are hard to use, like in the word "quiz."
- Use words that alternate vowels and consonants, like "animate." Clumps of consonants make your life hard; the word "strengths" is hard to place.
- Putting an "S" in the lower right corner never hurt anyone.
- The easiest vowels along the bottom row and rightmost columns are Es.

Once you've placed your words, you'll need clues. Your clues should be exact definitions of the words in the grid. A good clue for the word "orcs" might be "Piglike humanoids." However, "Eat halfling flesh" would be a bad clue, because it defines a verb (and an odd one at that), not the noun "orcs."

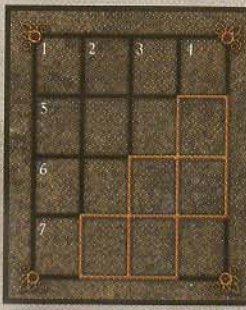
Punny clues are especially fun. "Monster with a fiery temper" might be a good clue for "salamander," for example. Sometimes putting a question mark after the clue will alert your solvers that a groaner is coming.

Partial entries often are fine as well, as long as they're not too long. For example, "Portable ____" is a fine clue for "hole" (a lot better than "Courtney Love's rock band" would be, since it's unsolvable by the characters).

You can increase the size of the grid as you try more crosswords, adding black squares to separate words. Until then, Figure 11 provides a 4x4 crossword for your players.

A magical shield's power will come to life only if painted with a cer-

Figure 11



ACROSS

1. *Harp of charming user*
5. *Love, poetically*
6. *Legendary Athasian gladiatrix*
7. *Understood*

DOWN

1. *Moneychanger, perhaps*
2. *Prayer closer*
3. *Live like a ranger*
4. *Use Nolzur's marvelous pigments*

tain emblem. This puzzle on the inside of the shield identifies the emblem.

CROSSWORD CHECKLIST

- Draw a grid that you think you can fill.
- Place any black squares that you need to separate words.
- Place words going across and down, reshaping the grid as necessary.
- Double-check that all letters are crossed in both directions.
- Place numbers in a blank grid so that each across and down word has a number.
- Write clues in numerical order for the across and down words.
- Double-check your numbering and clue assignments.

Designing Word Games

Word games come in as many varieties as there are words to manipulate. They're usually come across by chance, or by analyzing list of related words for ones with wordplay possibilities. If you're looking at a list of weapons for ones which could scramble into other words, you'll find "lance" can become "clean," "spear" can become "pares," and "sling stone" can morph into "singletons."

Here are a dozen word game archetypes, each with an example puzzle.

WORD GAME CHECKLIST

- Find a word, word list, or message you want to manipulate.
- Play around with several word game types until one works.
- Double-check your wordplay.
- Craft a clever method of delivering the wordplay puzzle.

Initials: A full set of words is given, but only one letter of each is needed. It can be the first, last, middle, or any other letter whose position you can indicate. So the Realms rogue Volo might sign his name Valuator Of Lost Objects, a bit of hyperbole that spells out his name in the capital letters.

A witch's magic potion recipe might consist of: Tail of aurumvorax, heart of troll, head of remorhaz, essence of kenku, and the dying breath of a ____.

Rebuses: Like in the old game show "Concentration," rebuses take short words and put them together to form a new word, such as "cut" and "lass" joining as "cutlass." Usually you'll want to clue each part and the whole word. Rebuses

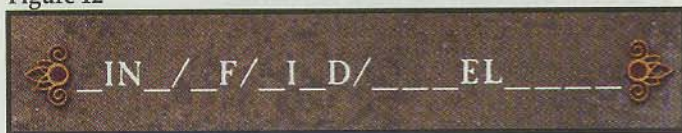
often are in pictographic form, so you might see a picture of a young girl bleeding from a small wound to get “cutlass”

Your PCs might hear a high-level mage intone: “I gather my components for a spell of eldritch power. The first part’s a restriction; the last part is a flower.”

Completions: A completion gives you only part of a word or phrase, and you must fill in the rest, such as “helmet” is seen in “earth elemental.” Usually this is done by giving part of the word filled in a series of blanks.

A rebellious soldier could impart the following statement: “When I deserted, they called me an ‘infidel.’ And for my punishment, they seized my only magical item. As you see, it is appropriate to my woeful state.” (Figure 12)

Figure 12



Hidden Words: Sometimes the trickiest thing to do with words is hide them in plain sight. In the priest spell list alone, the word “lamest” is hidden in “flame strike,” while “calves” is in “magical vestment.” You can hide most words in messages, and you’d be surprised how long it takes to find them.

A wizened viking priest could ask the PCs to scan this oath and find as many Norse gods as they can: “Fall, O killer, and stab raging god incarnate, as if it were the Lord of Death Ordained that I’d unleashed in a mighty rage.”

Anagrams: Scrambled words make some of the most delightful puzzles. Merely rearranging the letters in a message can give your players pause. But it’s even better when the scrambled letters turn into something else meaningful. “Titaness,” for example, can scramble into the word “instates.” If you want help with your anagramming, mix up SCRABBLE tiles, pick up a Franklin word finder from Radio Shack, or download a shareware anagram program from the internet. (Some examples are *Anagrams 1.0*, *Ars Magna*, and *Karma Manager*.)

A downtrodden alchemist might present the PCs with a huge urn of ashes. She also has nine scraps of paper that she has spelled out to the word “cremation.” She will gladly reward the PCs with a rare pegasus feather if they can tell her what the ashes were before they became ashes.

Additions and Deletions: A letter can be added to or subtracted from a word to make an entirely different word. The letter can be added or subtracted at the front (“laughter” to “slaughter”), the back (“harp” to “harpy”), or anywhere in

between (“strange” to “strangle”). You can add or delete multiple letters, like taking out the entire middle of the spell “blindness” to make another spell, “bless.”

A dwarven weaponsmith holds out seven of his creations and tells the PCs that they may have all of these weapons of quality if they but tell him what the weapons have in common. The weapons are: a mace, a sword, a dart, a dirk, a whip, a spear, and a partisan. What unites these seven disparate implements of war?

Containers: Similar to additions, containers take one whole word and put it inside another to make a totally different word. For example, “rid” can go inside “tents” to make “tridents.” Here’s an example puzzle for you FORGOTTEN REALMS® fans.

A man who lies about everything tells your PCs, “I am thinking of a goddess whose name is a word meaning ‘now’ inside a word meaning ‘foot.’ Which goddess is it?”

Reversals: A reversal involves spelling a word backward. Good reversals involve making another word in the process, like “live” and “evil” (or “lived” and “devil”). Place and character names throughout AD&D products often are reversals of their authors’ names, such as the archmages Zagyg and Drawmij. Similar to reversals are palindromes, words and phrases that read the same forward and backward (such as the archmage Boccob).

A connoisseur of magical weapons surveys his collection and smiles upon a locked chest. He says, “I have in this box a rare and wondrous weapon. It looks the same no matter how you look at it. It is only found deep underground, and even those who find them rarely bring them to the light of day. What is it?”

Homophones: Homophones are words that sound the same as each other, but look different, such as “knoll” and “gnoll.” Puzzles that involve soundalike words typically should be read aloud or clued with pictures, for seeing them written out may give away the answers.

An innkeeper puzzles over a letter from his sister. She sends a recipe for a drink, and says the innkeeper needs only one more ingredient to make a tasty beverage. The innkeeper offers a week’s room and board to anyone who can figure out what she means. Her “recipe” is shown in Figure 13.

Homographs: Homographs are words that look the same as each other, but have very different meanings and etymologies. The words may be pronounced alike (like “troll,” as in the monster and the action of fishermen) or differently (as in “wound,” namely the injury and the past tense of the verb “wind”). Homographs are best written down, allowing the players to make their own incorrect assumptions about what is meant.

Figure 13



A mute sage's cobweb-covered scroll might feature the riddle, "Why are all vampires terrified of flowers?"

Metatheses: A metathesis is the switching of two letters in a word to make another. The letters can be adjacent to each other ("gore" to "ogre") or set apart from each other ("ragged" to "dagger").

A skeleton of an ancient king sits on a throne, clad in the robes and accoutrements of state. A magic mouth intones, "On my frame is a symbol of my rulership. Transpose two letters in that object's name, and you will name the servant that protects me. Name it not, and the creature will attack with unabated fury." What is the object, and what protects the king's corpse?

Letter Changes: Altering one or more letters can make one word into another. You can alter the first letter ("chief" to "thief"), the last letter ("bare" to "bard"), or any letter in between ("mace" to "mage").

Your PCs discover a dusty decanter that bears this message around its seal: "Thin battle hoods tee moot eighty lemon. Candle at wits cure." Should they open the decanter?

ANSWERS

Riddles: The answers to the magical liquids question are the potion of *giant strength*, which allows the throwing of massive boulders, and the *oil of disenchantment*, which can make a recalcitrant and ego-dominant intelligent weapon into a harmless, demagicked weapon.

In the second riddle, Sir Morgan is a centaur.

The third riddle involves a rebus: ram + page = rampage.

Cryptograms: The message is, "Break the mirror and you'll see the light." Only a few words have the pattern of "mirror" (among them "cheese" and "cannon").

Quotation puzzles: The quote box's lyrics: "I walk the maze of moments/but everywhere I turn to/begins a new beginning/but never finds a finish."

The acrostic puzzle features the word list of silk, homicide, fertile, and mortal. The acrostic's quote spells out, "The left door is a killer mimic."

Word searches: The gems are circled. The word list is: agate, amber, cat's-eye, chrysoberyl, coral, diamond, emerald, garnet, jacinth, jade, jet, moonstone, onyx, opal, pearl, peridot, quartz, ruby, sapphire, topaz. (Note that beryl might also be considered in the puzzle, since it's inside chrysoberyl.) Reading the uncircled bold letters from left to right gains the message, "The amethyst is a gem of seeing."

Hidden Words: There are eight Norse gods hidden in the viking priest's message: "Fall, **O** killer, and stab **raging god incarnate**, as **if** it were **the Lord of Death Ordained** that **Id** unleashed in a mighty **rage**."

Anagrams: She has arranged the pieces of paper incorrectly. The answer "manticore" is an anagram of "cremation."

Additions and deletions: The weapons all become new words if you remove the first letter: "ace" (mace), "word" (sword), "art" (dart), "irk" (dirk), "hip" (whip), "pear" (spear), and "artisan" (partisan).

Containers: Since the man lies about everything, his riddle contains several opposites. What he really means is that he is thinking of a god whose name is "later" outside of "hand," or "Lathander."

Reversals: The collector speaks of a "drow sword."


Homophones: The innkeeper needs the letter E for his recipe. The squares contain images of homophones of letters: "bee," blank, blank, "tea," "jay," "you," "eye," "sea," blank. Filling the blanks with Es gets B-E-E-T-J-U-I-C-E, the tasty beverage. (Actually, to make that, the one ingredient the innkeeper will need is beets.)

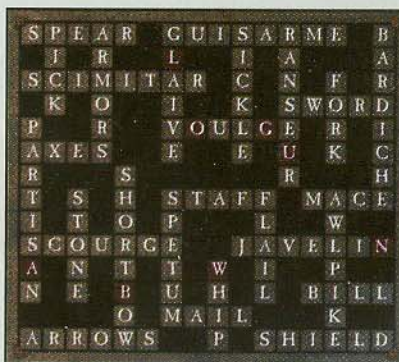
Homographs: The answer is, "Because they die in running water." The scroll asks why vampires fear "flowers," as in "things that flow." The riddle may have left you with the impression that it referred to roses, but that's the tricky part.

Metatheses: The object is a "sceptre," and the guardian is a "spectre."

Letter changes: Maybe, but they should do so only after casting protective spells. The message, when you change one letter per word, spells out "This bottle holds the most mighty demon. Handle it with care."

Crosswords: The weaponry criss cross has the following solution. The shaded squares spell out the phrase "a blowgun."

The 4 x 4 crossword has this solution. The bold-boxed squares spell out the emblem reading in a staircase pattern: "raven." 



Word Games

Initials: The dying breath of a xorn (last letter from aurumvorax, center letter from troll, first letter from remorhaz, and center letter from kenku).

Rebuses: "rein" + "carnation" = "reincarnation."

Completions: ring of mind shielding.

In addition to being a designer and a creative director of Wizards of the Coast's roleplaying games, Mike is also a world-class puzzle-maker, creating puzzles for such publications as the New York Times, Games Magazine, and this very periodical. His puzzle game ALPHABLITZ™ was Games's 1998 Word Game of the Year.