

# SO WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT POWERS & PERILS?

BY RICHARD SNIDER

There are many fantasy systems on the market today. There are many more role-playing systems that are not purely fantasy. With this being the case, why should you spend your money to purchase *Powers and Perils*?

There are many reasons why *Powers and Perils* is well worth the money that you would invest, should you purchase it. However, as I am the designer, I may be somewhat biased in this.

*Powers and Perils* is dedicated, first and foremost, to creating unlimited variation and possibilities as simply and easily as possible. This does not mean that, in all cases, the systems that are contained in this game are simple and easy. It does mean that, given the detail and variability that the game provides, it can be used by nearly anyone with a minimal amount of effort.

The first book contains most of the rules that are required to create a character and operate in the basic social environment of your world. The Character Generation system is designed with one purpose in mind: to create detailed and unique characters, of either sex, in any of four races, each time that they are used. The factors generated are used throughout play. Unlike some other systems, they are not rolled and forgotten. Each characteristic that is determined for a character has some use that will be important to the character's success and survival. These uses are detailed throughout the first book and many of the basic formulae that are applied in using them are included on the Character Record Sheet.

Second, the characteristic system reflects both the native ability, i.e. genotypical potential, of the character and the effect that his interests have on the person that he becomes. Within the realistic limits that nature imposes on him, each character has the capability of being anything that he wants to be – depending on how his interests modify his ability.

Third, major sections of the Character Generation system are designed to reflect the events and experience that the character would have had before his creation for use in the game. The optional Special Events section reflects major events, lucky twists of fate and other influences during his life. The range of events is quite extensive and some may require the adjudication of the Referee. The major factor reflecting the Character's past is the Initial Increase Factor. This is determined by the Age and Station characteristics, plus a random roll. These points are allocated to acquiring experience, exper-

tise, wealth and characteristic points, which improve a character's starting characteristic values.

Another feature of the system is the Special Attribute section. This section details factors that can be gained as Special Events, reflecting mystical ties and disabilities that the character may have (either because of some past event or because of his nature). The forces range from curses to awesome mental and physical powers that transcend the normal limits of the magic system.

All in all, a *Powers and Perils* character is the most unique individual that you can create in any role-playing system. His capabilities can directly influence the course of the game. He is not a paper illusion, but a heroically real and exciting individual who is intimately a part of his world.

The remainder of Book One details the Education system and the gaining of experience and expertise in play. The education system provides a good selection of basic skills. Each skill uses the characteristics of the character to determine how good he can become in that skill. Thus, powerful characters will have certain skill areas from masterful to average at best. Unless the basic rolls were exceptionally lucky, no character will be good at everything. As in real life, characters have talents and the potential level of their learned skills is directly related to those talents.

A final addition to Book One gives optional rules that can be used to expand your system. These rules detail a system for problem-solving during the game and using language realistically in play. This final layer of complexity allows the Referee to form his world culturally. With problem-solving, it gives the character's characteristics a pronounced, sometimes crucial, effect on the course of play.

Book Two details Combat and Magic. Except for the experience system, in Book One, all of the basic rules that are required for Combat and Magic are in this book.

The basic combat system compares the Offensive Combat Value of the attacker to the Defensive Combat Value of the defender. This yields a line on the Combat Table that gives the possible results of each blow. The characteristics of each character can have a dramatic influence on both values. A character with exceptional values, at a low experience level, can be the equal of a far more experienced or deadly adversary who does not have these values.

For missile fire, the primary factors are the weapon that the firer is using, his exper-

tise with the weapon and the range. Some factors apply for target size and obscured vision, but, range and weapon type determines the line that the character will use in play.

The combat system also gives detailed rules for subduing opponents and dodging an attack. The chance that an attacker may subdue an opponent is based on the opponent's HPV (Hit Point Value) and Stamina. The final percentage is a realistic appraisal of the chance that the cumulative pummeling that the target has suffered is sufficient to drive it into unconsciousness or temporary helplessness.

In dodging, the base factors are Dexterity and Agility. This factor is used throughout the system, with various modifiers, to determine whether the character can dodge the attack successfully. The rules provide for dodging melee attacks, visible and directional magical spells and missile fire.

The magic rules detail three fields of magic that the character can learn. These rules are highly detailed and variable. In my biased opinion, they are one of the major strongpoints of the system as a whole.

The basic chance that any spell will succeed is based on the Magic Experience Level of the caster. This factor is modified by the caster's expertise level in the spell that he uses, the magic defensive value of the target and, in cases that the Referee specifies, factors that reflect the mystical environment that the magic-user is attempting to cast the spell in. The basic game gives complete details for over one hundred spells that the various types of magic-users can learn. The effects of each spell vary with the attributes of the target and the expertise that the caster has with that spell. For example, at Experience Level 0 (EL0), a Lightning Bolt will score 1D10 points of damage. At EL6, it scores 7D10 + 6 hit points. At all times, the power, duration and level of effect of each spell, and the chance that it will work at all, is greatly influenced by the expertise of the caster in using it. This realistically reflects the competence that the individual magic-user has in tapping the forces his magic is derived from. Magic is a highly detailed and realistic part of the game. It can be the difference between life and death.

Another unique feature is its Innate Magic rules. Some creatures, and certain characters, will have the ability to draw powers directly from themselves, as part of their nature. They draw this force without having to deal with supernatural forces. This gives them certain advantages and limitations that can have a dramatic effect on the game. In some cases, an innate magi-

cian will have the potential to be a force in and of himself. These rules intimately draw the characters and creatures that have this ability into the supernatural framework of existence. They gain the power to use various magics and an increased defense against those magics that they are innately powerful in. This is a radical and exciting deviation from the standard systems extant in fantasy role-playing today.

A final level of realism that *Powers and Perils* can provide, if the Referee chooses to use it, is using supernatural languages in casting magic. Given that the power of learned magic is drawn from extra-somatic supernatural forces – the language of the forces concerned with a given power – using a supernatural language will dramatically increase the chance that the caster's spell succeeds and will increase its power if it does succeed. Thus, a Darkness spell that is cast in the Tongue of Darkness, at a given EL (Expertise Level), will have a greater effect than the same spell cast in a mortal tongue.

Book Three is the home of the basic encounter system, the descriptions of the worlds of *Powers and Perils*, and the Creature Encounter section. The encounter rules give the Referee guidelines and rules for handling encounters in play. Detailed rules exist for ambush, avoidance, waking when faced with emergencies and other important activities. The basic system divides the potential activities of the party into four possible categories. It then details the rules that will apply for each, with special tables or rules that should be used in the given situation. In total, it is a good basic system that the Referee can use when his players move around in the world.

The descriptions of the worlds are only guidelines. The worlds are defined as the Upper, Middle and Lower Worlds. It would be impossible, in the space provided, to fully detail all of the special factors that apply to these areas. Therefore, I decided to provide basic details that would allow the Referee to use those worlds as he sees fit.

The Upper World is the home of the supernatural forces of Law, Chaos and Balance. It is also home to various elder forces and strange undefined, forces that are not truly allied with any of the major alignments. In a simplistic view, the Upper World can be viewed as both Heaven and Hell, the abode of the major Gods, except for most of the Elder Gods, and a land of extreme danger.

The Middle World is the land of man and normal creation. It also serves as a "no-man's land" between the forces of the Upper World and the forces of the Lower World. This is the area where all campaigns should be based. As a general rule, the game should start in the Middle World to give Characters a chance to improve before greater dangers are risked.

The Lower World is controlled exclusively by the Elder forces. The rules detail the variations that this entails for the various power groups within this alignment. Examples highlight the differences in

the land and indicate other factors that will be important if a party ventures into this land.

The Creature Encounter section details over one hundred and fifty creatures and animals that can be used in play. Every major detail that can influence how the creature is used, what it can do and what it is capable of doing is covered. The powers and limitations and all factors of a creature's appearance, racial hatreds, etc, are found in its description. In most cases, they are highly detailed, colorful and informative in their presentation.

At the end of the third book, you will find rules that allow the Referee to vary the attributes of existing creatures, create entirely new creatures and a section that gives the reader some insight into the basic cosmology established for this game. These optional sections allow total variability in the encounters that a party may face. With Creature Variation, creatures can range from a minor irritant to a major obstacle, from a small cub to an old and rugged monster.

The Creature Generation rules transcend variation. They allow the Referee to create entirely new creatures for his game, rather than modify the individual statistics of existing ones. With the detailed systems that are provided in this section, the type of creature that can be created is unlimited. They can be rolled randomly, as written, or the Referee can simply decide what he wants from the options available.

In both cases above, the use of the system can be somewhat time consuming, especially in the case of Creature Generation. I suggest that these factors be used, now and again, as a change of pace in play. They will be valuable in this role.

Book Four details the Human Encounter system and Treasure. In human encounters, a distinction is made between encounters with normal humans and encounters with Character-class humans. This is due to the fact that, as seen from the perspective of the game, the character is an exceptional, heroically powerful, member of his species. He is different. Where the Referee determines that specific characters will come into play in his game, he can create them beforehand. When they are encountered randomly, the statistic charts that are found in the back of Book Four can be used to quickly get a set of statistics for them.

The likely actions of any group encountered varies with the number of people present and their motivation for being where they are. These factors are determined with the two basic rolls that are taken for the encounter. The possible motivations in a given encounter are further varied by the area of the world the encounter occurs in: Barbarian, Civilized and Wild. A barbarian area is populated by a human group that does not have a state-level of organization or fixed, extensive cities. The size can range from small bands to major chiefdoms with tens of thousands of warriors. A civilized land is a state-level culture that has major

cities and a formal, more or less restrictive, governmental apparatus. Wild lands are areas where human habitation is the exception, not the rule. The humans live in isolated settlements, small bands or have retained a totally wild nature. The major forces in a land of this kind are the creatures, not man.

The human encounter section also covers the interactions that the party can have when they enter a city. The rules divide cities into encounter areas and lists types of encounters that are likely to occur in that area.

The value of Natural Magic items is that they grant advantages to magic-users and non-magic-users with little or no cost on the character's part. In most cases, they serve as amulets in granting these powers. But in some of the more powerful items, it is only fully usable by a trained magic-user. These items are the exception, not the rule.

Natural Magic items are plants, minerals, gems, certain creature-derived items and other types of natural material.

Book Five details a county in the nation of Donara and provides a simple scenario for learning the game. It is designed in such a way that, should the Referee choose to do so, it may be used after the initial scenario has been completed. It is not intended as a one time, use-and-toss product.

The County Mordara scenario details the cultural environment of the area and the major characters that the players may deal with. All characters in the basic scenario are completely detailed and ready to use. Other characters that will come into to play if the Referee wishes to continue using the scenario are highly-detailed and interesting people. The information that is provided for them is sufficient to determine any factor that is not specifically listed. Their descriptions give the Referee a general idea of their past history and current goals.

Beyond the details above, the scenario provides a basic flow for the adventure that the Referee may use or ignore as he chooses. It also gives notes that explain the other uses that the scenario can have and a future timeline that details the events of the next year if the party fails in their effort to stop the events that the non-player characters have put into motion.

*Powers and Perils* is a detailed, intensely variable and, I think, exciting fantasy role-playing game. Due to the sheer volume of the material that it presents, it requires the active participation of the Referee in using it. It is not a passive, static system devoted to creature bashing. To be used to its fullest, the dynamic systems that are its heart must be actively exercised by the Referee. It can be used to hack and slash your way through the various encounters that will occur but the potential exists to make it much, much more than a simple gore-generation machine. *Powers and Perils* challenges your imagination, and provides rules to spark your creativity, so that you can form fantasy adventures that are keyed to the ability of your group. It will be what you make it.

# Powers & Perils

## THE NATION OF DONARA

Mordara is a county in the nation of Donara. Donara was founded by the leaders of a host of barbarians and mercenaries that conquered the kingdoms of E'lici and Salaq between the years 894 and 1000 of the common calendar.

Currently, Donara is a feudal monarchy that is oriented towards Law. Local nobles are independent in their fiefs, though their power is somewhat lessened by the presence of a strong king.

Politically, Donara is bounded on the north by Caldo and the Elder Mountains, on the east by Aratad, Ticasi and Shiben, on the west by the Wild Forest and on the south by the Sea of Tears.

The traditional enemies of Donara are Aratad, the Empire of Ced (*located to the east and south of Ticasi, Shiben and Aratad*) and Clima (*a Chaos oriented island located in the Sea of Tears*). Donara's major problems are banditry in the north, civil unrest in Pelara and continual revolutionary activity in Salagara. Beyond this, they are at peace and relatively stable.

## CURRENT EVENTS

In the year 1100 (*the year 207 on the Donaran calendar*) Mordara is a relatively happy, productive, county. However, it is not utopia. Prisoners still work the mines, though they are fed more regularly and receive some care for their illnesses.

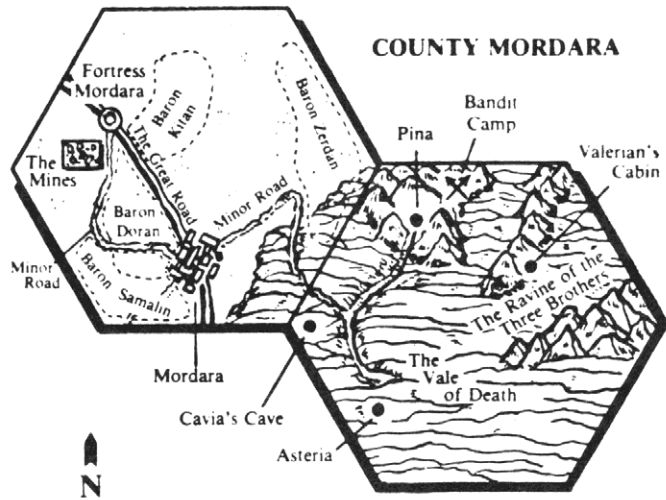
In the past year, a blight of unknown origin destroyed 40% of the crops of Mordara. This year, as the first crops begin to appear, it is already obvious that the blight remains. Nearly 80% of the crops show signs of it and, failing the discovery of a cure, the people face starvation.

Finally, in the past three years bandit activity has grown in Eastern Mordara until, at this writing, it threatens Mordara itself. Rumor indicates that a great leader has arisen among the bandits. With tongue and sword, he has forged a band with over forty members. Under his leadership, they are the terror of the road. Even House Bersan, the largest merchant family in Mordara, is believed to be paying them protection. Unless forestalled, their meteoric growth and cunning leadership will sorely wound Mordara, perhaps permanently.

## HEALER

Skill in healing a specific race or species. The Healer must learn to care for his own race before any other intelligent race. He may learn to care for animals at 1/2 the cost specified, rounded up. He need not learn to care for Intelligent creatures first. Healing that has value for one species or race will only have 1/2 value when used on another related species. (It has no value when the forms of the two species are totally distinct). **EXAMPLE**—A healer is skilled in healing horses. He can apply his skill at 1/2 value on Donkeys and Mules. It has no value on Humans, Dogs, etc.

The effect of Healing Skill increases the Healing Chance by the **EL** × 2 AND increases the Stamina Bonus by the **EL**/3, rounded up. To gain this benefit the Healer must have access to the Healing materials in a Healing Kit. (See Equipment List). If he does not, his skill is used at 1/2 value, rounded down. The increase applies only in Healing and only for one Healing Chance roll.



NOTE—Each hex equals 20 miles.

## 1.42) ELF

Elves have the following skills:

**A)** Mana Sensing **MEL2**, **EL** dependent on the Character.

**B)** The ability to hide invisibly in any forest. The **EL** equals **W + EM** or **80**, whichever is less. The **EL** is used to determine the chance that they are not observed if the person that they are hiding from is aware that something is present. Success indicates that they remain hidden. Any other result means that their presence is discovered.

**NOTE**—This skill is primarily useful against creatures whose primary sense, for observing their environment, is sight. Where this is not the case, or where magic is used to detect the Elf, the skill is relatively useless.

**C)** **EL80** in the tongue of the Elf Sidh. **EL60** in the tongue of the Faerry Sidh. If the Elf is a trained magician, **EL80** in the tongue of the Sidh.

**D)** Innate ability to enter the Upper and Lower World's. Determine **EL** based on the Elf's characteristics. **MEL** equals the Elf's **MEL** as a magic-user, or **2**, whichever is higher.

**E)** The maximum **EL** currently possible in Forest Survival.

**F)** The ability to read the intent of others, as for Empathic Power. Treat as an Innate Power. The **EL** equals **Em/10** rounded down.

## KERAINN THE HANDYMAN, Gardener at House a' Loreis, Assassin

HPV 25	OCV 13*	DCV 11	CEL 6	
S 35(+2)	St 49(+2)	D 80(+4)	A 29(+1)	C 15
I 50	W 30	E 15	Em 45	Ap 33
Height 79"		Weight 198 lbs.	Age 30	

\***EL10** Assassin. He also has Dark Sight as a Special Attribute. Determine the factors that apply as specified in Book One.

## EXPERTISE

**EL10** Assassin, **EL80** L'p'nth, **EL60** Donaran, **EL30** Marentian, **EL55** Trailing, **EL8** Climbing, **EL5** Swimming, **EL80** Delftness, **EL4** Hill Survival, **EL1** Forest Survival, **EL10** Desert Survival, **EL13** City Survival, **EL2** Badlands Survival, **EL5** Plains Survival, **EL3** Rhetoric, **EL50** Disguise Artist, **EL1** Actor, **EL25** Herbalist, **EL10** Horsemanship, **EL5** Fighting Dagger, **EL7** Throwing Dagger, **EL6** Hand to Hand, **EL6** Sword, **EL9** Bow, **EL2** Scimitar, **EL8** Tulwar.