

RPGA™ Network Item Design contest results

by Frank Mentzer

We received almost a hundred items for the contest. Nearly all were allowed; only two were disqualified for contest rules violations. Most of the entries were for fantasy (the D&D® or AD&D® games), but several were for the STAR FRONTIERS®, GAMMA WORLD®, or TOP SECRET® games. The judges for the contest were Frank Mentzer, Penny Petticord, Jon Pickens, and James M. Ward.

As noted in the contest announcement, entries were judged first and foremost on originality, usefulness, and adherence to game rules.

After arriving at the best three, the judges' "general opinion" ratings were double-checked with a point-scoring system. Each judge gave scores of 1, 2, or 3 for each of the primary categories. Those results were triple-checked by "weighing" the categories, as follows.

Usefulness was first. Players and game masters alike prefer useful items to any others, all else being equal.

Originality was second. A gadget for weighing treants may be very original, but might be used one game in a thousand.

Adherence to rules was third. Variations of rules are commonplace; we all change the games a bit to fit individual taste. If a detail violated existing game rules, it was a severe drawback; but new additions and further developments of existing rules were permitted, if consistent with the letter *and* spirit of the game system.

The Grand Prize winner, receiving a Lifetime RPGA™ Network membership, is Steve Berman of Cherry Hill, New Jersey. His item is the "Talisman of the Beast" for the AD&D game.

The First Runner-Up, receiving a 10-year membership extension, is Pierre Savoie of Kingston, Ontario. His item is "The Taser Rifle" for the STAR FRONTIERS game.

The Second Runner-Up, receiving a 5-year membership extension, is J. Michael Shield of Kennewick, Washington. His item is the "Cordial of the Dryad" for the AD&D game.

Three entrants receive Third Runner-Up prizes, each receiving a 1-year membership extension. Those winners are:

Kevin C. Hibbard of Donnelly, Idaho, for "Loriell's Gown" (for the D&D and AD&D game);

Dave Smith of Butte, Michigan, for "The Skeleton Key" (for the D&D and AD&D game); and

Richard Weissler of Newport News, Virginia, for the "Cloak of Flame" (for the AD&D game).

The judges also wish to add two Honorable Mention prizes to the list! The following entries were noteworthy, but didn't quite qualify for top prizes:

Blyden B. Potts of Morrisonville, New York, for "The Quiver of Wonders" (for the D&D and AD&D games). This item included seventeen different arrows, some with delightful effects.

Shawn Long of Hurdle Mills, North Carolina, for the "Rod of Leverage" (for the D&D game). This ingeniously simple but extremely useful item uses charges, and enables the user to move or throw heavy items.

These "special winners" will receive letters of Honorable Mention signed by the judges.

Many thanks to all who entered. Some members were very

enthusiastic, sending in several entries — such as the imaginative Douglas A. Peters, of Spotsylvania, Virginia; the artistic Thomas Gryn, of Telford, Pennsylvania (whose drawings were most enjoyable); and the prolific Mark Foley, of St. Louis, Missouri. Keep up the good work!

Winning entries

Note: These items have been revised and rewritten so that they may be more easily used in everyone's games.

Grand Prize: Talisman of the Beast (for the AD&D game)
Rating: Usefulness #1; Originality #3; Rules Adherence #1.

This is a talisman crafted in silver, bearing an exact likeness to a forest creature. It hangs on a silver chain styled as leaves, with a rune inscription on the back.

The runes are the command words for the item, scribed in Druidic runes. One command is given for the Common tongue, and the other for the speech of an animal. When the item is worn, the bearer need only speak the proper (common) command to *Shape Change* (in 1 segment) into the animal whose likeness is on the talisman. The ability to *Speak with Animals* of the same species (at will) is also bestowed while in animal form. There is no limit to the duration; and the wearer need only speak the proper (animal language) command word to return to normal form.

The talisman will function normally seven times per week. If used an eighth time, the talisman traps the wearer in the animal shape. This effect is permanent until *Dispelled* by the Great Druid, or by a *Wish*, as the talisman was created by the first of the Great Druids. In addition, the talisman is not detectable as magical except by a druid's *Detect Magic* spell, a *True Seeing* spell, or a *Wish*.

Only eight talismans of the beast exist, each a unique item. Each bears the likeness of a different forest creature.

First Runner-Up: The Taser Rifle (for the STAR FRONTIERS game)
Rating: Usefulness #2; Originality #2; Rules Adherence #2.

SKILL BONUS USED: *Projectile*
DAMAGE: *Stun (needle damage is negligible)*
AVOIDANCE ROLL: *Current STA or less (no effect)*
AMMO: *20 SEU clip (or powerpack connection)*
SEU USE: *2 per hit*
RATE: *1 shot per turn*
DEFENSE: *Anti-Shock implant (suits and screens are ineffective)*
RANGES: *PB (0-2), Short (3-5), Medium (6-10), Long (11-20), no Extreme (20m natural limit)*
MASS: *5 kg*
COST: *900 Cr (new disk-and-wire assemblies 50 Cr each)*

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This rifle has four disks mounted near the front, each connected to a 20m coil of insulated wire. Each disk is 10 cm in diameter, with a short barbed needle in the center, a steel plate around it (3 cm diameter), and velcro (fasteners) on the remainder of the surface.

The user may fire one disk per turn. On a successful hit, the disk attaches to the target and a surge of electricity is delivered through the wire. The victim is stunned for the first turn (during the power surge) and remains helpless for d100 turns. A successful stamina check means that the victim has resisted the stun.

After the initial turn of power surge, the disk can be removed and reeled back to the rifle in one turn. As there are four disks, immediate recovery may not be needed. In addition, each reel may be set to recover automatically while the user continues to use others. Note that the wire may snag on obstructions in some terrain or may not be easily removed from certain creatures. The wire has high tensile strength but is easily cut, enabling the user to flee if necessary without losing the gun itself.

Second Runner-Up: Cordial of the Dryad (for the AD&D game)
Rating: Usefulness #3; Originality #1; Rules Adherence #3.

This is a clear liquid with emerald or amber tint, a rich, sweet taste, and a distinctive scent (as that of a forest after a summer rain). It is made of the distilled essence of a dryad's tree. This process is known only to certain druids. When consumed by a dryad, the cordial enables the creature to survive comfortably for 24 hours while away from her tree at distances greater than the usual 36" limit (almost always to accompany and serve a druid). Special note: potion miscibility does not apply to this item.

If consumed by any other creature, the cordial's effects are based on the user's sex, as follows.

Female: No effect occurs for three rounds. In the fourth round, the user falls asleep. This "beauty sleep" lasts for 2-5 hours, during which all imperfections, blemishes, etc. disappear. The character gains one point of Charisma and becomes magically attractive to males of the same race (only), sometimes to the point of causing arguments among them. (Optional: Also gain four points of Comeliness.) With practice, the user can control this as a limited *Charm Person* effect (+2 bonus to victim's saving throw; note that the effect still applies only to males of the same race). The potion's effects last for 1-4 weeks, after which all ability scores return to normal except for the permanent gain of the point of Charisma. (Optional: plus two points of Comeliness).

Male: No effect occurs for three rounds. In the fourth round, the user becomes weak and light-headed, and falls asleep. This "transition sleep" lasts for 3-12 hours, during which the victim becomes a female and loses two points of strength. No special powers are gained. The change lasts for 2-5 weeks, after which the character returns to normal in all respects except for the permanent loss of one point of strength.

Multiple use: The second cordial consumed by any one person has double the given duration; the third has double that duration, and so forth. Additional effects are as follows:

Female: The user may actually become a dryad: 10% chance for the second cordial, 25% for the third, 50% for the fourth, and 100% for the fifth. If this change occurs, she is immediately bound to the nearest suitable tree.

Male: The effects may be permanent and unremovable: 20% chance for the second cordial, 50% for the third, and 100% for the fourth.

Third Runner-Up: Loriell's Gown (for the D&D and AD&D games)

This item is a simple blue-and-white peasant dress. It acts as a *Cloak of Protection* +2 for any wearer. If the user is a female humanoid, the dress shrinks or enlarges to a perfect fit. A *Detect*

Invisibility or similar magical detection can find the seven command words sewn into the hem in gold thread. Each command causes the dress to change to a different form, as given below.

Each command word may be used once per day. Each change produces fresh and immaculate clothing with matching footwear. The command only has effect when spoken by the wearer of the gown. If removed, the gown changes to its original form. (The removal or loss of footwear has no effect; the outfit will always be complete with each change.) The command words and forms are as follows.

Li: Original form (blue-and-white peasant dress) and matching shoes.

Ki: Full-length dark green gown of layered silk, with a high neckline and matching sandals.

Se: Full-length white dress with open gossamer sleeves, oval neckline, and white sandals.

De: Short black suede tunic with black breeches, soft black boots, and a long black cape.

Qi: Close-fitting, full-length, red silk dress, with bell sleeves, V-neckline, and matching sandals.

Ve: Long soft gray dress with open sleeves, "peasant" neckline, and soft grey suede boots.

Ti: Full-length blue silk dress with square neckline, long square sleeves, and matching sandals.

Third Runner-Up: Skeleton Key (for the D&D and AD&D games)

This is an ordinary but large normal key, with a faint magical aura. When touched to any lock, it may (50%) open it. (Note that this may trigger unremoved traps.) If it does not function, it cannot affect that lock. The key may also be used to negate a *Wizard Lock* or *Hold Portal* spell effect (50% chance of success) if a command word is spoken while the user touches the locked portal.

An unusual side effect may also occur. With each touch, the key may create a skeleton on the opposite side of the portal affected. The chance of this occurrence is 3%, cumulative with each use; thus, the DM and player should keep track of the number of times the key has been used. The skeleton thus created cannot be Turned by a cleric; it is a magical construct, not a true skeleton. In addition, the skeleton will be that of the race most commonly found within 120' of the key at the time of use; for example, in a bugbear lair, a bugbear skeleton will appear. (See *DMG* pg. 41 for guidelines on monster skeletons, and *MM2* pg. 109 for animal types.)

When first found, the key has a 0% chance of creating a skeleton. If sold, the item retains its current percentage. When the chance reaches 99%, the next use causes the key to *Teleport* to a random location.

Third Runner-Up: Cloak of Flame (for the AD&D game)

This item is a red or orange cloak. It functions as a *Cloak* +1 for any wearer. When worn by a magic-user or illusionist, it conveys a sense of warmth, and functions as a *Ring of Warmth*. Upon command, the cloak can create a *Fire Shield* spell effect with hot flames (*Protection from Cold* only), but this cancels the warmth. The duration of the fire shield is 1-4 turns. If the wearer casts any fire-based spell (*Fireball*, *Wall of Fire*, etc.), the cloak may be used to add one point per die of damage done. However, this causes the cloak to become non-magical for 1-4 turns thereafter.

While magical, this item inflicts 1-4 points of heat damage to any cold-based creature striking the wearer (such as an ice para-elemental). Unfortunately, it also gives a +2 bonus on the "to hit" rolls of fire-based creatures (such as salamanders) attacking the wearer.

The cloak of flame radiates magical heat at all times, except while the item is non-magical. This powerful effect cannot be negated or modified, and can always be seen by infravision, even if the cloak and/or the wearer is invisible. Its heat interferes with infravision used nearby; creatures within 15' must use normal or magical vision, as infravision will reveal only a reddish cloud of heat.