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Sample file

# INTRODUCTION

**A**lthough comic books are most often associated with super-heroes, they are in fact a medium, capable of telling many kinds of stories, not just those of brightly clad heroes fighting crime and saving the world. A popular genre of comics features heroes in fantastic, magical worlds battling evil wizards, mythic monsters, and even mad gods. *Warriors & Warlocks* is a sourcebook of the sword & sorcery style adventure as told in comics like *Warlord*; *Arion, Son of Atlantis*; *Arak, Son of Thunder*; *Savage Sword of Conan*; *Red Sonja*; *Nightstalker*, and many others (as **Chapter 1** explains in detail).

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

You can approach this book in two main ways: first, it serves as source material for catapulting your *M&M* superheroes into a fantasy realm, like in many classic comic tales. This could be one of the settings described in **Chapter 4** or another fantasy world of your choosing. Time- and dimension-travel frequently sends heroes to “strange new worlds,” and the process of getting there, or just being there, might alter the heroes’ powers, outlook, or personalities, allowing for an interesting change-of-pace adventure.

For example, perhaps a wizardly foe uses a spell of banishment to send the heroes to another realm where magic holds sway and civilization is still relatively primitive. Their powers weakened by the influence of arcane forces, the heroes must adopt local disguises and embark on a quest for the legendary Gate of Worlds that can take them back home, fighting the forces of evil in this world along the way.

Similarly, a wizard or demon might use magic to transform the modern world into a fantasy analog, including making the heroes into fantastic versions of their normal selves. This makes for a fun change-of-pace scenario as the altered heroes work to overthrow the villain in true sword & sorcery fashion and restore the world to normal.

You can also use *Warriors & Warlocks* to turn *Mutants & Masterminds* into a complete sword & sorcery roleplaying game, suitable for running an entire series set in a savage world of barbarians, sorcerers, and monsters. Whether or not the heroes of your saga ever discover the wider omniverse, encounter the denizens of Freedom City (or another superhero universe), or remain solely within their own world and genre are up to you. You can use one of the settings from **Chapter 4** or come up with one of your own based on your favorite fantasy adventures and the advice in this book.

Note, in both cases, *Warriors & Warlocks* is intended to support the style of sword & sorcery *comic books* (and, to a lesser degree, the pulp-era prose upon which they are based). So you may find this sourcebook—and the *M&M* RPG in general—do not provide an exact simulation of other fantasy roleplaying games (including those also based around a 20-sided die). However, they do a good job of capturing the fast-paced style of comic books where the sword-wielding hero might face a rampaging dinosaur on one page, then a boatload of pirates or an undead wizard with a superscience citadel on the next.

## OVERVIEW

*Warriors & Warlocks* is broken down into four main chapters:

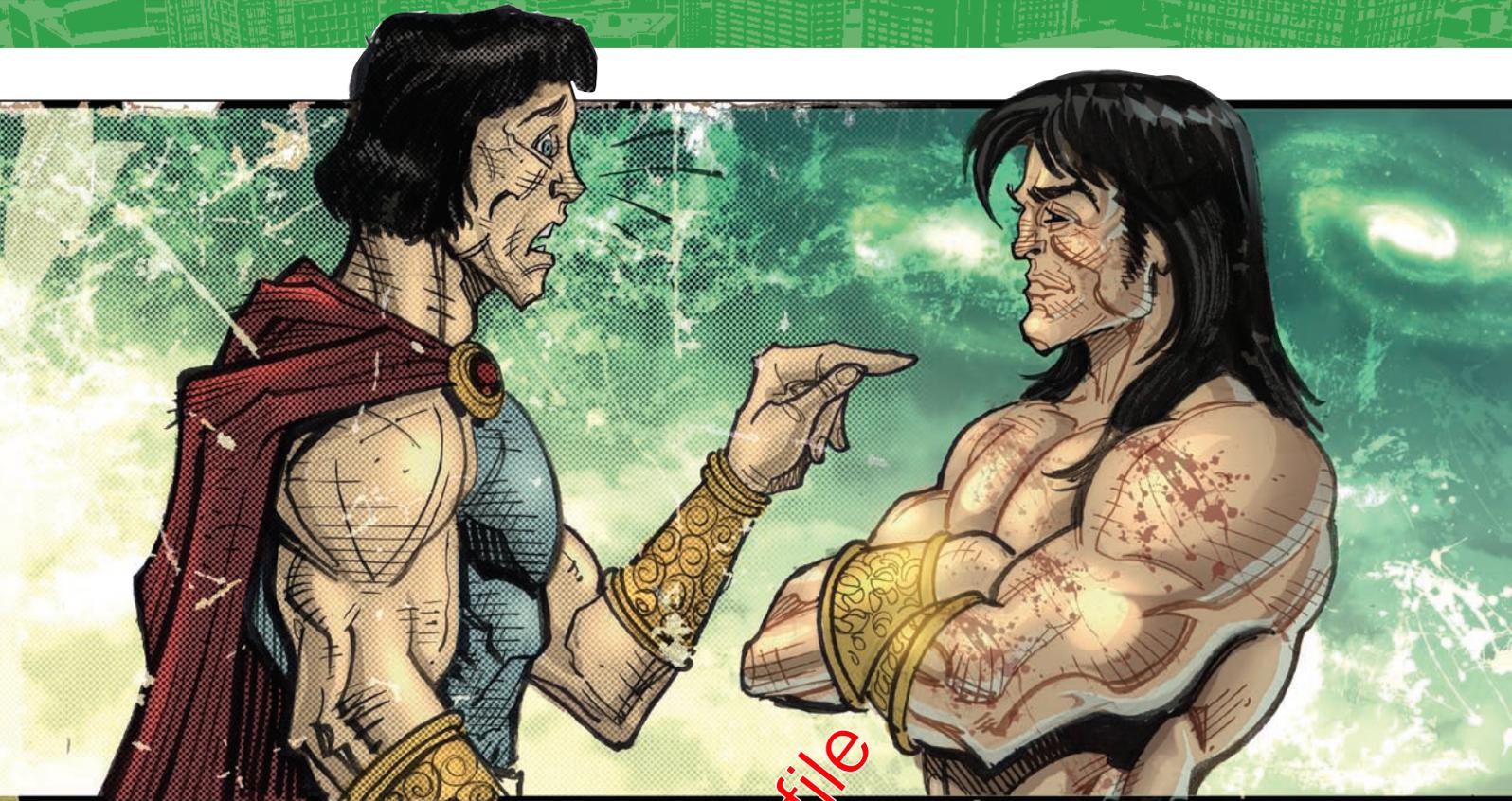
**Chapter 1** looks at the sword & sorcery genre of comics: its history, development, and progression from the mid-20th century to the present. It includes some related historical material like the fantasy pulp tradition that inspired the comics, and the film and television that followed them.

**Chapter 2** details how to modify and use the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rules to suit the sword & sorcery style of play. It offers character design advice and information, including ready-made archetypes for sword & sorcery heroes for different types of games. This chapter also offers new skills, feats, and powers, and new uses and interpretations for existing ones.

**Chapter 3** is about running a *Warriors & Warlocks* game, including how to handle different aspects of the genre, design adventures, and create and run adversaries ranging from master villains to their various minions. It features a number of villain archetypes and game stats for monsters and other common foes. It also includes information on magical and enchanted items Gamemasters can include as treasures or objects of heroic quests. The chapter concludes with a selection of ready-made series frameworks for different power levels, and mass combat rules for handling the kind of battles found in fantasy adventures.

**Chapter 4** provides three complete settings for sword & sorcery adventure: Green Ronin’s award-winning Freeport, City of Adventure (described in detail in the *Pirate’s Guide to Freeport*), Freedom’s Reach (from *Worlds of Freedom*), and the savage Lost World (from the *Freedom City* setting). This chapter includes all the essential *M&M* game information you need to run a series set in these worlds of adventure, allowing you to expand on them for your own use. You can also use them as settings for individual adventures or even a crossover series between multiple fantasy realms, modern-day superheroes, and more!

**MUTANTS  
& MASTERMINDS**



# CHAPTER ONE: SWORD & SORCERY

Unlike many other genres reflected in the annals of comic book glory, the category casually referred to as “sword & sorcery” (or S&S for short) owes a considerably greater debt to its literary antecedents than most. The term itself was coined by and for fantasy literature (by the esteemed Fritz Leiber back in 1961) and many of the most memorable characters and stories drawn into the four-color milieu made the leap from one medium to the other almost wholesale, such as Robert E. Howard’s Conan the Barbarian. Similarly, many of the characters or storylines seen over the years are either obviously derived from the works of writers such as Howard and Michael Moorcock, or are ultimately based around ideas first introduced in novels and short stories. There are titles that have stood out for their departure from such derivation, some of them quite well done, but for many years prior to the relative boom of the 1970s, “sword & sorcery” in comics was simply another way of saying “pastiche of existing pulp-fantasy properties.” Thankfully, this is far from the end of the story.

Before delving too deeply into the history of various members and contributors to the “sword & sorcery” comic genre, it’s worthwhile to look at what the term “sword & sorcery” means. Comic-book writers over the years—including Roy Thomas, Len Wein, Mike Grell, Kurt Busiek, and many others – have never adhered *too* stringently to a formal definition of their story elements; writers are primarily interested in telling entertaining stories, after all, with any other considerations coming a distant second to that goal. Understandably, then, comic-book tales using elements associated

with stock “sword & sorcery” ideas have ranged far and wide from anything critics might prefer to define more narrowly. A few elements are usually required:

## A FANTASTIC WORLD, NOT QUITE OUR OWN

No matter how similar it may seem to the real or historical world, there are those edges that separate the environment from the modern age. These departures from the mundane often include magic and monsters. Technology is usually either absent (perhaps yet to be undeveloped or, alternately, lost in some great cataclysm), or is isolated, inaccessible, or otherwise pushed to the background somehow. When technology does figure into a storyline, it’s generally as a mournful comparison to the current state of affairs, or some moral tale of how decadence and civilized advancement weakened mankind, setting society up for an inevitable spiral into barbarism.

What civilization there is operates at a medieval level, if even that advanced; this could simply be the state of the world’s development, or alternately a post-apocalyptic hell where mankind has “devolved” to primitive tendencies. Magic exists and has changed aspects of land and beast; alternatively, the twisted fruits of mind-bogglingly advanced science become (or possibly supplement) the exotica that populate the landscape. To paraphrase Arthur C. Clarke, there is little to distinguish sufficiently advanced science from magic.

## VIOLENCE IS THE NORMAL STATE OF MAN

Savagery is a constant companion to the plotline. This is illustrated through the incredibly dangerous environment; or through the irrational, small-minded, or bloodthirsty inhabitants the protagonists must encounter. Honor and shining morality add little to one's chances of survival, no matter how needed such idealism might be in such a world, so anti-heroes are often as good as it gets.

## ONLY THE STRONG PROSPER

In a world where violence is the standard and death a constant, it takes the exceptional to surpass the demands of survival alone and make a mark. Most frequently this "exceptionalness" is a matter of physical strength or endurance, but it could also be impressive skill at arms, a quick and nimble mind with hands to match, or even access to arts or equipment of an unusual and perhaps arcane nature. It might even simply be an incredible degree of luck, demonstrating that a likeable character carries favor with the universe above and beyond the expected degree of plot immunity. It doesn't matter what makes the difference for the story's central characters, only that there be *something* that makes that difference.

The action is *now*, it is *personal*, and it revels in the *fast pace* that surrounds our heroes. Like the pulp stories that also helped influence the genre, plotlines move, *move, move!* The concern is with what's happening to the protagonist, not the monolithic happenings influencing the world in which he operates. As opposed to High or Epic Fantasy, the matters at stake are personal. Good and

Evil, Order and Chaos, or any other such philosophical struggles may well be background influences, but only as they interact with the hero de jour, not the world itself. Grand quests are left to the likes of J.R.R. Tolkien and his peers. In sword & sorcery tales, the antagonist is expected to be put to a swift and decisive end, his gold spent on wine, women, and song. (Yes, there *are* some strong women characters in *some* sword & sorcery series. However, and in all frankness, they are a definite minority in a genre of the mighty-thewed and testosterone-saturated heroes traditionally aimed at a more male-dominated demographic.)

## OTHER ELEMENTS

These are the hallmarks, dialed up or down the continuum to taste, and most other elements are fluid. Cropping up with unpredictable frequency are history (or pseudo-history, as seen in "sword & sandal" stories), folklore and mythology, and some elements more commonly associated with science fiction (resulting in what some call "sword & planet" stories). Sometimes civilization is treated as a paramount goal, in other stories a corrupt and corrupting influence to be treated with contempt. There is a similar amount of variation in how these tales treat technology and magic, especially the latter. Magic ranges from a valuable tool to a dangerous trap that ensnares and destroys the mind or the soul. Technology empowers, or it weakens, depending on the needs of the story being told. In short, outside of a few traditional elements, writers in this genre suffer under few constraints in entertaining their audience.

## LOOKING BACK

The comic book has traditionally been the arena of the superhero, and other types of stories have come and gone, risen and fallen with the changing tides of popularity over time. The sword & sorcery genre in comic books is a pretty direct example of this unpredictable nature, as its slow rise to recognizable frequency and its periods of difficulty in finding an audience have starkly proven, despite its granite-stable popularity in related media like literature and roleplaying games.

Though the original influences trace back through Fritz Leiber and Michael Moorcock to Robert E. Howard's pulp creations and further into the shadows of history back to Beowulf, Sigurd/Siegfried, the Norse Eddas, and various sword-swinging, monster-slaying myths of many lands, the actual sword & sorcery genre as seen in comic-book form arguably begins in comic-strip form with the exploits of a character held in little esteem by the comic fan of today: Prince Valiant. Though often the butt of parody in modern times, our bowlcut-haired hero bravely swung sword aplenty after his debut in comic strips in the late 1930s, contending with wizards and monsters in his pseudo-Arthurian backdrop... at least in the first years of his publication. After a while, Valiant settled down to a nominally more historical and far less fantastical tradition of storylines (or as non-fantastical as any Arthurian backdrop can get), eschewing the sorcery and dragons in favor of more down-to-earth scoundrels, soap-opera romance, and long-term political subplots.

The following years were sparse in their offerings, with the standouts starting with Gardner Fox's Howard-inspired short series "Crom the Barbarian," starting in 1950. The next standard bearer is perhaps Joe Kubert's *Tor*, introduced in 1953. *Tor's* inclusion is open to debate in that his background—a prehistoric wanderer served only by his trusty stone axe – omits the central conceits of magic (or the advanced technology that sometimes substitutes for it); however, his fights against savage opponents and terrible monsters firmly support the remaining criteria. In 1955, DC introduced a number of pseudo-historical sword & sorcery characters in its *The Brave & The Bold* title, namely The Golden Gladiator, The Silent Knight, and The Viking Prince. Aside from these heroes (none of whom generated sufficient popularity to reliably carry their own comic), fans of the genre still had to wait several more years.

In 1960, DC Comics introduced The Atomic Knights. The Knights aren't noteworthy in and of themselves, though their stories do match up to several of the outlined sword & sorcery motifs. However, in later years they would be tied in with several other of DC's post-apocalyptic characters introduced in the 1970s into a shared backdrop: an Earth toiling to survive following something called The Great Disaster. Many of the adventures set there merit inclusion in the previously mentioned "sword & planet" subgenre. Also, their use of a post-apocalyptic-nightmare setting would be reflected in the following two standouts later this decade: Clawfang The Barbarian

## BY THE POWER OF MARKETING!

Cross-pollination is a frequent occurrence between comic books and other media where sword & sorcery is an accepted taste. Initially, this was mostly seen in comic book writers heavily adapting elements from the stories and characters they had read in their youth (such as Lovecraft, August Derleth, or Howard's works being used for inspiration for various comics in the 1960s and 1970s), or with toy manufacturers realizing the potential marketing bonus of comic books about their properties (such as *The Masters of the Universe* or *Crystar*.) However, in the last couple of decades, the most obvious example of this exercise has been with roleplaying games. Starting with DC's publication of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* and *Forgotten Realms* in the late 1980s, other fantasy gaming properties have been "helped" in their marketing through comic-book offshoots, including recent forays into *Dungeons & Dragons* properties (such as *Dragonlance*, *Eberron*, and the Drizzt Do'Urden *Forgotten Realms* novels), *Ptolus*, as well as *Warhammer Fantasy*. This has also been reciprocated with games based on comic properties, such as *Ironwood*, *Artesia*, and *Demon Wars*. These media crossovers have also ventured into the realm of television, with Topps comics' adaptations in the 1990s of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (which Dynamite Entertainment relaunched in 2006).

So long as there continues to be an audience and entertainment potential, it's unlikely these "partnerships" will disappear.

and Blackmark. Clawfang was the star in an anthology title called *Unearthly Spectaculars* put out by Harvey Comics in 1966, while Blackmark was the star of proto-graphic-novel stories created by Gil Kane and Archie Goodwin in 1968. Clawfang came and went with nary a ripple, though Blackmark would later see reprints thanks to Marvel and later still Fantagraphics.

The decade rounded out with the arrival of Nightmaster from DC Comics in 1969. Nightmaster was Jim Rook, a musician drawn from Earth to a dangerous fantasyscape and gifted with a magic blade to fight the powers of darkness. Though his initial outings had a short run, the character has been revisited in the pages of *Swamp Thing* and most recently as a founding member of the DC super-team, The Shadowpact.

Once more, a decade had passed without any great success in finding a comic title with staying power that would resonate with the purchasing public. However, this series of lackluster results would come to an end the following year.

The 1970s saw a surge in the popularity of fantasy in comics, perhaps due to the corresponding interest in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and the relaxation of some of the restrictions of the Comics Code in 1971, which allowed for more "adult" fare. A number of attempts were made to capitalize on this popularity, though only a small fraction of those attempts had any staying power. The most famous and profitable of these attempts was, of course, Conan the Barbarian (also known as Conan the Cimmerian).

In 1970, Marvel Comics published Starr the Slayer in the anthology series *Chamber of Darkness*. Starr, an adventurer and king of the fictional kingdom of Zardath, was noteworthy not for any elements of the character or his adventures (though Warren Ellis is reusing the character idea in Marvel's *newuniversal* series), but instead for teaming writer Roy Thomas and artist Barry Windsor-Smith. This pairing on Starr inspired Thomas—who had already snuck healthy doses of H.P. Lovecraft into *Doctor Strange* a couple of years earlier – to encourage Marvel into trying a full series of gritty fantasy. Later that year, Marvel sent Thomas looking for an existing sword & sorcery property to adapt. Initially drawn to Lin Carter's Thongor of Lemuria based on assumptions of the costs involved, difficulties there instead sent the young scribe after a goal he originally thought unattainable: Conan. Roy Thomas was successful in his licensing negotiations, and Robert E. Howard's dark-haired adventurer and comparative anti-hero proved a far greater success than either Thomas or his bosses ever expected. Marvel ultimately published 275 monthly issues of *Conan*

*the Barbarian*, 55 issues of *King Conan*, and 235 of the black-and-white comic magazine *The Savage Sword of Conan*. Thomas and Windsor-Smith would reunite to work on Conan, and for many fans, this would remain the most memorable work for both.

The genre finally had its most recognizable standard bearer, a role the mighty Cimmerian probably continues to serve in the minds of many fans today.

Marvel's success prompted others to try to capture the lightning, and following years would see many attempts to emulate the "essence" of the mightiest of barbarians (some from Marvel's own stable of creators). *Kull the Conqueror* (1971), another of Howard's works, came and went under his own title, though his tales would occasionally see print as backup features in Conan's titles. Other comics' translations of fantasy characters found their way into the pages of Conan as well, such as Michael Moorcock's Elric (plotted by Moorcock himself). Unfortunately, the lightning simply refused to be caught. Over the next few years, many new titles were all tried and all ultimately abandoned after failing to garner even a fraction of the Conan fanbase. These include Gold Key Comics' Dagar the Invincible (1972) in *Tales of Sword and Sorcery* and *Durak the Barbarian* (1975) in his own title, Richard Corben's Den (1973), Fritz Leiber's own *Fafhrd and The Gray Mouser* in the DC title *Sword of Sorcery* (1973), Lin Carter's *Thongor of Lemuria* (released in 1973 once the character was more available to license), Atlas Comic's *Ironjaw* and *Wulf The Barbarian* (both practically little more than Conan with the serial numbers filed off), reprints of the 1950s' DC Comics' character Tor and the creation of a very similar *Kong The Untamed* (1975).

DC introduced *Kamandi*, the so-called "last boy on Earth," second of their post-apocalyptic triumvirate, in 1972, and then *Hercules Unbound* in 1975. Following Hercules, implied to be the mythic hero himself, the connections started to be drawn for this shared setting. Marvel's *Killraven* (1972), a cross between "sword & planet" and Kirbyesque apocalypse, starred a genetically enhanced freedom fighter fending off H.G. Wells' returned Martians across a shattered Earth. *Stalker* (1975), the swordsman who sold his soul for power and must thereafter fight to reclaim it; *Claw the Unconquered* (1975), essentially Conan with a demon's claw for a hand; and *Starfire* (1976), courtesan turned sword-woman and freedom fighter, were successive efforts from DC, none of which lasted for more than a handful of issues (though the characters would later get reused in other stories).

Of the many attempts to match Conan's success during these frantic years, only one really even came close: Red Sonja. The comic

## DEMON DOGS!

One of the more interesting pieces of trivia surrounding the early 1980s and its mini-boom of sword & sorcery animation is the level of comics' talent that lent their weight to the effort. *Thundarr the Barbarian* (1980), the sun-sword-wielding source of this sidebar's title, benefited from visual design by no less a luminary than Jack Kirby, who was working from the original design notes of Alex Toth. The series itself was the creation of Steve Gerber, of *Howard the Duck* fame (among many other works). *Masters of The Universe* (1983), having originally debuted as a comics property, saw early work on the animated version from Paul Dini and J. Michael Straczynski. And the animated version of *Dungeons & Dragons* (1983) was cocreated by none other than Mark Evanier.

version of this character was greatly altered from her original form as conceived by Robert E. Howard. The heroine Red Sonya (with a "y") was transplanted from late medieval Europe to Conan's Hyboria; she first appeared (complete with infamous chainmail bikini) in the mighty Cimmerian's title in 1973. Red Sonja may not have kept any title afloat for very long, but her staying power has kept her continually resurfacing over the years, appearing as backup, guest star, or star of her own magazine.

DC did enjoy some success when they gave Mike Grell free rein to venture far from the Conan mold with *Warlord* (1975). The titular hero was Travis Morgan, an American military man lost to the savage tracts of the lost land of Skartaris. A land of both magic and remnant technology, Skartaris was later shown to be a lost colony of sunken Atlantis, tying the stories and characters into the rest of the DC universe. The series easily outlasted its peers of the time (other than Conan, of course), inspiring the powers-that-be in DC editorial not to give up on the field despite the company's spotty record there in previous years.

Three other creators who also dared to stray from expectations enjoyed some degree of success, with Dave Sim's *Cerebus the Aardvark* (1977) and Wendy and Richard Pini's *Elfquest* (1978). Sim's anthropomorphic protagonist (who couldn't really be called a "hero"; even "anti-hero" pushed the bounds of accuracy at times) saw mixed popularity but incredible longevity, though it moved from sword & sorcery into other realms relatively soon in its 300-issue run. *Elfquest* was the story of a tribe of lost elves searching for a safe home in a hostile world, encountering danger from man, monsters, and even their own kind in stories that ultimately mixed fantasy and science fiction. The series still sees occasional reprints today.

Following on *Warlord's* showing, DC went on to try other series that mixed fantasy and sword & sorcery tropes with its established properties. *Arak, Son of Thunder* (1981), *Arion: Lord of Atlantis* (1982), and *Amethyst: Princess of Gemworld* (1983) all found audiences, but none achieved the staying power enjoyed by Travis Morgan and Skartaris. The first two showcased different periods in the history of the DC universe, while the last varied the "modern person lost in a fantasy land" motif of *Warlord* with the story of a young girl dragged into a world of wondrous magic and terrible evil to take her place as a mighty defender on the side of the angels. The lack of commercial success enjoyed by the majority of their efforts was apparently taken to heart by the major publishers; following these titles, both DC and Marvel kept their attentions mostly



## THE BIG BOYS

Marvel and DC have both fielded sword & sorcery titles during their decades on the market. If there exists a significant difference between the companies in how they approach this genre, it's probably in how much original work has gone into their individual choices. Marvel has limited itself mostly to licensed properties, though it has done well with both Conan and Red Sonja in turn. DC, on the other hand, tends to concentrate more on original properties, such as Warlord or Arak, Son of Thunder. (Their adaptation of Leiber's Fafrhd and The Gray Mouser in *Swords of Sorcery* was a brief and failed experiment in finding and using famous licenses in the genre.) It could be argued that, with the exception of the lengthy run on the stands of Mike Grell's *Warlord*, DC has had considerably less fortune with their own creations than their rivals have had with their interpretations of Robert E. Howard's fictional progeny; however, DC retains the rights to use their characters year after year (as evidenced by Arion's 2006-2007 appearances in Kurt Busiek's run on *Superman*) and Marvel has had to abide by the vagaries of on-again, off-again licensing deals. Determining the underlying wisdom of each company's policies is therefore left as an exercise for the reader.

In both cases, characters from these titles have been woven into the fabric of each company's shared universes. Just to name a few, Arak is the ancestor of the World War II era hero Flying Fox, for example, and Arion's Atlantis is part of the history of Aquaman's home. Stalker was used as a monumental threat for the Justice Society, and both Nightmaster's Myrra and Amethyst's Gemworld were eventually tied into DC's cosmology. Over at Marvel, it was standard practice for quite some time to treat Conan's Hyborian setting as the distant past of the Marvel Earth in general, allowing for Claremont's memorable usage of the Kulan Gath character, among other things. The 2007 team-up of Red Sonja and Spider-Man, regardless of any other possible confusion over the state of licenses, opens the matter to speculation as to whether this should still be considered policy or not.

limited to one-shot graphic novels or limited series, such as Chris Claremont's medieval *Black Dragon* (1982) or *Marada the She Wolf* (1982, reworked from what was originally a Red Sonja story); or Christy Marx's *The Sisterhood of Steel* (1984); or properties where their investment was buoyed by partnership in merchandising or animation involvements, such as *Masters of the Universe* (1983) or *The Saga of Crystar, Crystal Warrior* (1983).

Across the pond, the British comic magazine *2000 A.D.* would amass quite a loyal fan following when it introduced Sláine, a Celtic barbarian fantasy character—very much in the vein of Conan but with a few exotic abilities to boot—who starred in stories borrowing liberally from Celtic myth and folklore. But back in the United States, the 1980s would round out with only adaptations of existing fantasy literature properties, namely the anthology series *Wizards' World* (1985) and the adaptations by smaller companies of Moorcock's Hawkmoon (1986's *Hawkmoon: The Jewel in the Skull*) and Corum (1987's *The Chronicles of Corum*), or the licensing of fantasy settings and character elements from TSR's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying game (1988's comic with the same name and 1989's *Forgotten Realms*). These too were short-lived, either intentionally as with the Moorcock properties, or through rapidly diminishing sales as with the *Dungeons & Dragons* titles.

The following decade dropped off from the output of the 1980s and was not overly kind to fans of sword & sorcery. Though there were some well-done and well-received fantasy series during the 1990s, neither *Thieves and Kings* (1994) nor *Castle Waiting* (1996) fall into the sword & sorcery canon. (Though well-written, and definitely set in fantasy-influenced worlds, both share much too sedate a pacing in plots and far too low a violence quotient for our criteria.) The decade started strong with an excellent effort on adapting Robert E. Howard's *Cormac Mac Art* (1990) to graphic series form, plus Bill Willingham's adults-only *Ironwood* (1991), which showcased the magic-driven worlds he had earlier introduced in his *The Elementals* series but injected heavy doses of nudity and sex far too openly for mainstream publication. However, it wouldn't be until the end of the decade that the market would see anything more noteworthy introduced.

Moorcock's Elic took part in the dense anthology-like *Michael Moorcock's Multiverse* in 1997, but was only one part of the overall story in that title. In 1998, Joe Madureira's *Battle Chasers* hit the stands. In *Battle Chasers*, magic, monsters, swords and swordplay, and interesting characters were all pitched at practically superhuman levels with memorable art; it was immensely popular, but ended abruptly when its creator left the industry. *Artesia* (1999) followed a year later (originally published by Sirius Entertainment), introducing a powerful female heroine fighting in a world with complex politics, history, and internal mythology, and an intriguing enough storyline to keep it running for several years at two publishers.

The first years of the 21st century have seen some degree of rekindled interest. First, Crossgen Entertainment, Inc., published several entrants in the realms of fantasy during its brief existence as a comic book publisher. *Mystic* and *Scion* (both 2000) combined traditional elements of fantasy (veering from subgenre to subgenre, high fantasy to low, depending on story arc) with science fiction influences. *Sojourn* (2001) merrily took cues from both sword & sorcery and High Fantasy, and *Brath* (2003) was a fairly straightup barbarian epic. The Conan license has been put to good use again starting in 2003, this time by Dark Horse Comics, and Red Sonja has appeared again on the stands thanks to Dynamite Entertainment. The Dabel Brothers have adapted the works of Martin, Weis, Jordan, and Feist into comic book form, with *The Hedge Knight* (2003), *Dragonlance: The Legend of Huma* (2004), *Wheel of Time: New Spring* (2005), and *Magician* (2006), respectively. The bloodier side of the coin has seen print with R.A. Salvatore's *Demon Wars* (2003) and Warren Ellis' Norse-influenced *Wolfskin* (2006).

Speculation is safe that publishers will keep trying to capture the audience for sword & sorcery so long as its success elsewhere shows a market exists, no matter how many stops and starts that may involve. Speculation is equally safe that some of those efforts will involve properties that have proven they can be revisited multiple times and still sell, such as our friend from Cimmeria (though the brevity of the 2006 relaunch of DC's *Warlord* should remind publishers that name recognition is not enough by itself). Aside from those wagers, it's anyone's guess, as the past 40 years have certainly shown us that sword & sorcery can be broadly defined in the four-color realm.

# CHAPTER TWO: BY STEEL & SPELL

**F**lashing blades and stalwart hearts, prepare for battle! So, you've decided to adventure in a challenging world of terrible magics, bloodthirsty sellswords, and foul monsters, have you? Well met and grace of the gods be with you! Of course, you're going to need a character first. Luckily, this chapter covers pretty much everything you'll need on top of the core *Mutants & Masterminds* rules to do just that.

This section covers the modifications and restrictions to the standard rules required to design characters suitable for a sword & sorcery game. If a particular trait is not addressed here, assume it is acquired in the same manner as described in the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook.

## DISTINCTIONS

What separates characters in this kind of game from those in a more "standard" *M&M* game?

Mechanically, not much. With the exception of a few additional restrictions intended to reflect the "flavor" of the genre, the mechanics stay the same. Characters can even be transplanted over from more conventional settings (such as, oh, *Freedom City*) without any great difficulty—though GMs will want to watch how the numbers stack up so that the power disparities aren't unwieldy for the story in mind. This is a handy and enjoyable story tactic various writers have sometimes used in the big two comic companies to great effect over the years, in fact.

No, the real distinctions are in background and personality. Most games set in this genre will be placed in settings far removed from Modern Earth and its advantages. Violence is generally more prevalent, and most heroes will have had to adapt to the more demanding challenges of simply surviving to adulthood. Even the cerebral character types will usually have had to learn how to take care of themselves; bloodshed is simply a harsh truth and expected occurrence in even everyday life. Many of the skills, equipment, and mindsets we might otherwise be accustomed to seeing in play are simply absent.

## POWER LEVEL

We are going to define a few discrete power levels for use in sword & sorcery series. These are by no means the only possibilities available in the genre, of course; arguably, Gamemasters and players could craft interesting series at any PL given individual tastes and approaches to the settings. However, for ease of organization, this book will be using *Heroic* (PL 6), *Cinematic* (PL 8), and *Epic* (PL 10+) as our descriptive levels.

### HEROIC – POWER LEVEL 6

At this power level, the protagonists are very much mortal in every meaning of the word. Challenges frequently carry the threat of terrible injury and death, and even a single otherwise unremarkable opponent can bring about a brave hero's early demise. Surviving the

