

Interview with Todd Lockwood,
the Best Cover Art,
Character Roles, and Into the World

THE SAGA

June 2023



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Writing: Michael Bielaczyc, Dane Clark Collins, and Todd Lockwood

Cover Art: Michael Bielaczyc

Interior Art: Michael Bielaczyc and Todd Lockwood

Design by Michael Bielaczyc

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Table of Contents

- Introduction4
- An Interview with Todd Lockwood6
- Appendix i(magination): Our Favorite Art18
- Into the World: The Druids38
- What is your Character's Role in the Group?43



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JUNE 2023 INTRODUCTION

Hello all!

It has been quite a journey for me since the April issue. Nothing bad, but super busy! We had two Renaissance Festivals that I had to manage and work at, taking away all my weekends but fulfilling seeing so many awesome people.

I have also been working on the SagaBorn 1.5E Core Rulebook non-stop. This is a labor of love, and while I have had many wonderful contributors, a whole lot of the workload has rested on my shoulders. I have drawn 40 new art pieces for the book, designed the print layout, edited, tweaked, tested, reedited, reviewed editing (and I am sure there are still some small mistakes), and finally prepped for launch.

I am happy with the final product and am very excited to see it out in the wild.

Now, I know back in January, I wrote about making my own complete D20 system. So why put all this work into the 1.5 system that is an OGL 1 system linked to that greedy big dragon corporation? To be honest, its because I had already done so much work on 1.5 and while we are in a stalemate with old OGL stuff (they announced putting 3.5 and 4E in Creative Commons, but have since gotten suspiciously quiet), I just wanted to get this out and start making all the fun stuff. The Core Book is just a Core Book, right? Its all the places, people, and evil empires that need overthrowing that are exciting. So the SagaBorn 1.5 book will come out and hopefully be a fun retro system for people to play in that is safe from the big bad dragon.

With that, I hope you all enjoy it and this small little zine I squeezed in between all the other creative work.

—MIKE

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An Interview with Todd Lockwood



Almost twenty years ago, I headed out to my first Sci-Fi convention to meet one of my art idols. I packed my best work, hoping he might notice and maybe comment on a thing or two. At the opening ceremonies of Mid-South Con 22 in Memphis they mentioned they had a con-suite with free beer. Todd turned with a happy grin and said, "Free beer?!" With that, I turned to my brother Paul and said, "I'm gonna have a beer with Todd Lockwood."

We had that beer, a good talk, and some laughs. And that has continued for the last 19 years. He has been an inspiration, a mentor, and a friend.

His work for 3rd Edition of the big dragon game defined how I ran my games at the table. Much like the inspiration that sprang from Elmore's work in 2E, Todd's work in 3e defined the genre for us. In the '80s and '90s, if a cover had Elmore's work on it, I bought it; the same could be said of books in the early 2000s with Lockwood's work.

He redefined how we saw dragons (thank goodness) through his amazing design work, and now with his fiction, how we think about dragon riders. Todd agreed to sit down and answer a few questions for this issue, and we are grateful he did!

Mike:

So with such an impact on the visual style of D&D, how much of your early roleplaying has influenced your work now, in both art and fiction?

Todd:

Were it not for role-playing, I probably would not have become a fantasy artist. I grew up on science fiction. I was a science fan, first and foremost, though not an outright nerd. Astronomy and geology, biology, on and on—pretty much everything but chemistry interested me, and all of that found inroads to my art and writing. The better you understand your world, the better you can write about/draw/paint it. Anatomy is very important for artists, obviously, but too often ignored is the fact that *everything* has anatomy, not only people and animals. Trees have anatomy. Mountains have anatomy. Clouds and rivers and landscapes and planets all have anatomy. When you understand it, you see it. And then you depict it with greater ease and more dynamism. It's true for sociology, too. People have patterns, societies have shapes. It's all fascinating to me.

So without D&D, I might not have picked up a love of fantasy lore. I had read Tolkien before I started playing D&D in 1977 (the little white box), but a lot of fantasy literature didn't hit me right. Too many promising series fizzled out or became cash-cows. RPGs

kept my head in that game. I =adored= D&D. Earthdawn might have been my favorite system, but mostly I loved an opportunity to invent.

I grew up writing and drawing, making my own comic books so that I could tell my own stories. When art became my means of income, writing took a back seat, but D&D kept my muse fed with scraps from the gaming table.

And it must be said that had it not been for my time at TSR and then Wizards, I would not have been in a position to pursue writing again.

Now I find myself doing what I did as a kid to entertain myself—drawing and writing. And sometimes, it even helps pay the bills.

Mike:

I loved The Summer Dragon, and beta-reading The Autumn Dragon I am super excited to see where we go from here. I know you have a deep love for dragons, and I can see your interest in the “anatomy” of how dragon-riding would work in the books. Did your old RPG campaigns involve dragon-riding? If not, what was the egg the book series hatched from?

Todd:

Dragon riding did not figure at all into my campaigns. But politics and rivalries, history and mythology certainly did. How The Summer Dragon came about is not what you would expect, I think.

In the early 2000s I watched as America tilted toward war. Following 9/11, it seemed like the country would charge into a prolonged foreign conflict. My son was coming of draftable age, and I feared how the Bush/Cheney crowd would take advantage. Would they reinstitute the draft? I immersed myself in history and politics and news. I started an email newsletter for my friends, a digest of the most important articles I found each day about events and background.

It expanded to a mailing list of over 300 people, but it was wearing me out, and other news aggregators had risen doing the same work much better than me—many of which still thrive. I knew that I had to turn all this passion and intensity to something creative, or it would burn me out.

So I imagined a picture book about a war, an allegory in which I could say a few things about a few things. Because D&D 3E was out and doing well, I felt that dragons would make a great vehicle (goes without saying!). I was known for my dragons. I like painting dragons. No brainer. Then I knew I would need some sort of narrative, and a protagonist to follow through the tale. I figured that if I was going to paint the same person again and again, I should make it a pretty girl. Maia was born.

I stumbled through the early drafts as I slowly came to realize that I had more to say than pictures alone could tell. My old writing muse roused, hungry. While I learned the craft to the best of my ability, attending workshops and lectures, studying the lessons of other authors, the tale evolved and became more than just my rant.

That may seem pretentious or something, but that's how the book came to be.

I always had a love of world-building and narrative and character, so I suppose it was inevitable. I wish I was faster. I wish I had more time on my hands and didn't need to shill for a paycheck. I have other irons in this creative fire that I really want to let out. And the sequel to *The Summer Dragon in the Evertide* series is still in progress. She's put up a fight.

I would love to see a great mechanic for dragon-riding in an RPG!

Mike:

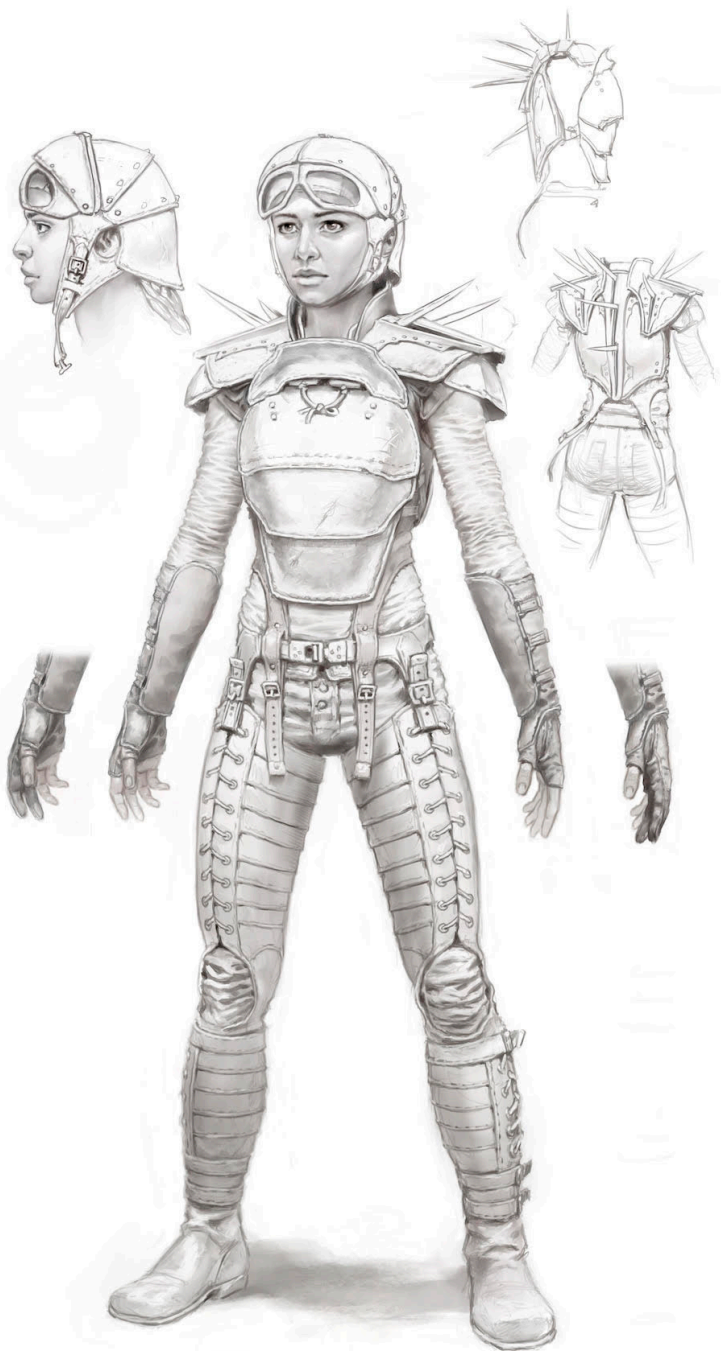
I think that is great! I enjoyed slowly becoming aware of the military complex that the Dragonry was a part of. And I also enjoyed how my understanding mirrored Maia's realization of what she had been a part of. So much fantasy has always relied on both the military and the feudal system to be righteous and honorable. I liked how in the Summer Dragon some of the questions of our own militarization crept in. And I am sure it will continue to evolve.

As for your work influencing my own creativity, I have never had dragon riders in any of my fiction or tabletop games in the past, but my current game has an elfling wyvern rider, and it has been super exciting. I like all the drama that it creates having a huge dragon with the party; like it's a bit harder showing up at the inn and blending in. One topic of discussion that comes up often is how the saddle and weapons would work. I think back to your descriptions in the book, but man, would I love an illustrated guide to Gurvaan. Please tell me that's on your creative roadmap.

Todd:

It sort of is evolving already. I did a deep dive into the harness and armor that a dragon-rider in my universe would wear. I'll share an image. I spent a lot of time thinking through attachment points, ease of donning and doffing, utility, and such, and drew it up by layers in a PSD file. I wanted it to look vaguely sort of US Military utilitarian, not fancy and adorned (though I'm sure that wealthier folks, like the Emperor, have the spiffiest duds).

I've also been working (on the side) on the harness and gear of the lancers and top-gunners. It's easy to imagine a thing and write about it. Designing something that looks cool -and- would function in the real world is a lot harder. Perhaps I ought to have started with just the saddle—that part is pretty straightforward...



10: HELMET—VISOR UP

Mike:

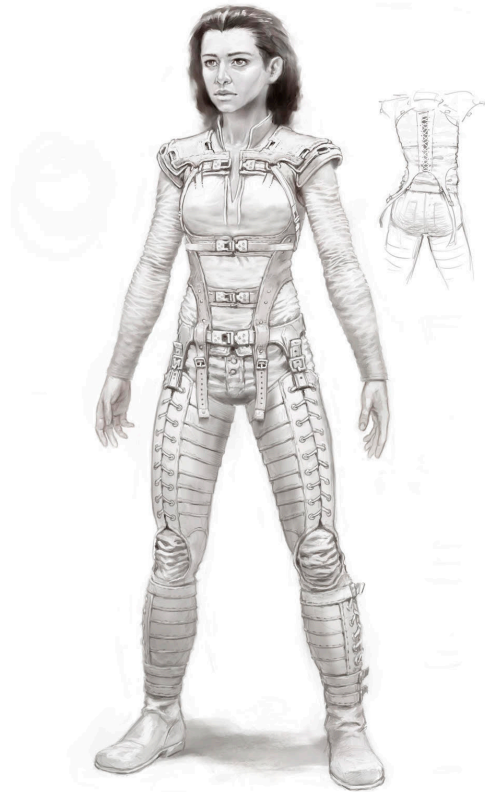
Wow, those designs are so good! That really makes me double down on the need for an Illustrated Guide. Thanks for sharing those.

While we are discussing the Summer Dragon and you are working on finishing up the sequel, what would you say is the hardest part of following up on your first novel?

Todd:

Everything. It's the middle of the three-book arc, and middles are the hardest. It's my second novel ever, which I am told is the hardest novel you'll ever write. I've rewritten the first half of this twice now, roughly 65,000 words. It's too long, it tries too hard. I got caught in the world-building (a trap I avoided in the first book). I have a lot of winnowing to do. I want this book to be at least almost as good as the first one. Ideally, obviously, I want it to be even better, so... NO PRESSURE, SELF!

I'm in a strange period in my career. A transition is happening and I'm not sure where it's going. But I know my intention now better than ever. I want to set aside the work I've always done for other people and do the work I want to do for myself. I think I'm finally able to. Two projects in particular have been in the works for a very long time. I want to focus on them. Both are complex and intricate and detail-oriented, which shouldn't surprise anyone who knows my work. I have a detail fetish or addiction or obsession. There might be something wrong with me. Anyway, one of them obviously is the Evertide trilogy. It is near and dear to me.



5: ARMOR STRAPS

The other is much older, and it couldn't be more different. I began somewhere in the early 90's, when my kids were all little. It's a children's picture book with a very familiar song turned into a very whacky fantasy. I will say no more yet, but I have worked on it off and on throughout the years since. Life kept interrupting. But with a granddaughter now in my mind I've resurrected it again. I have to say that dusting this project off has helped me rediscover my joy of creating, with a project that means something to me, in a period in which I've faced creative obstacle after creative obstacle. I'll figure out how to integrate it with my Patreon...

Mike:

I think, when artists get to put aside the commercial side of art and make the art they really want, something beautiful comes out. It can be hard to do, as we make work to share, and often those people who like it would like us to do more of what they want. We can feel pressure since sharing is in our nature. I went through a process in 2020 that was very painful and my art-making ceased. During that time, I realized I was not happy making art, or at least the art that people demanded of me. My art peers pushed me to work harder and harder on the work they wanted to see. Friends and patrons wanted more fan art. Or portraits. Or landscapes. So I just shut it all down. I started all over. I found I was really happy working in a simple comic book style and have been exploring that for the past couple of years. And while some may not like it, and some may even be vocal about their distaste, that doesn't matter, because I am happy.

So that is just a long way to say I can't wait to see anything that you produce. And I hope it makes your spirit sing.

We will end the interview with what will either be an easy question or the hardest one so far. In the Appendix I(imagination) this month, Dane and I listed our favorite cover paintings for various genres. So, what are your top three favorite cover paintings from anything?

Todd:

In no particular order, but the first two are easy:



The White Dragon, by Michael Whelan, for the book by Anne McCaffrey with the same title.



The Integral Trees, by Michael Whelan, for the book by Larry Niven with the same title.

Picking a third is harder, because there are so many...

Death Dealer, by Frazetta



Any number of cover paintings for the Saturday Evening Post by Norman Rockwell

Anything by Frederick Remington or Charles Russell that might have made it to a cover somewhere.

Jeff Easley's covers for the Player's Handbook and Monster Manual II (both for AD&D) rocked my world, because suddenly D&D had great art. He wasn't the last D&D artist to rock my world. Also Brom. Also Keith Parkinson. Also also also...

David Wilcox's cover for Multiplication, by Grover Washington Jr. was completely different than anything else, and may not have stood the test of time as much as I would have liked, but it came at a time when I was entering into art school and took note of anything connected to music I loved. There was an airbrush artist I liked named Charles White III, but it doesn't intrigue me as much now as it did then. Perhaps because I was forced to be an airbrush artist early in my career, but came to hate it because it was unpleasant to do.

Anything by that western artist whose name I can't remember, but I learned that Keith Parkinson studied him too.... Ah, Frank C. MacCarthy

Arthur Rackham or the guy who illustrated Alice in Wonderland.

That Winnie the Pooh artist. Dr. Seuss. Chuck Jones. Rembrandt.

That was a really evil question.

Mike:

Sorry for saving the hardest for last. It is both a fun question and a hard thing to answer. Todd, thanks so much for hanging out and talking for a bit. I can't wait to see what you do next.

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Appendix: i

Covers We Love

It's time for that discussion of imagination again, the Appendix i of our creativity, where Dane and Mike discuss the things that made them the creatives they are.

What is a book without a good cover? These are the covers that lit our imagination on fire when we were young and probably still shape us today.

TOP 3 FANTASY NOVEL COVERS OF ALL TIME: (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

Mike:

Eye of the World by Darrel K. Sweet

This is such a good visualization of the entire group in the novel. A real feeling of adventure. When I read this book, I kept coming back to the cover, it's such a nice piece. It does exactly what a cover for the first novel should do, starts an adventure, and lets you visualize the characters.



Dane:

Elric of Melniboné (The Elric Saga, Vol 1). Art by Brom

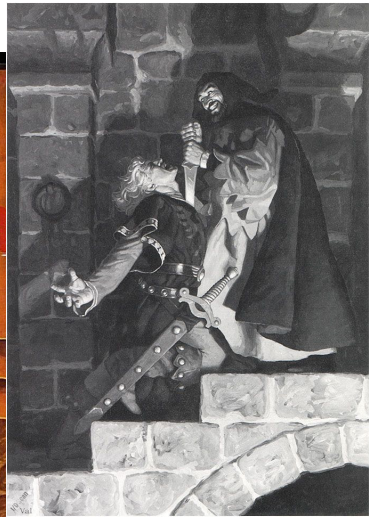
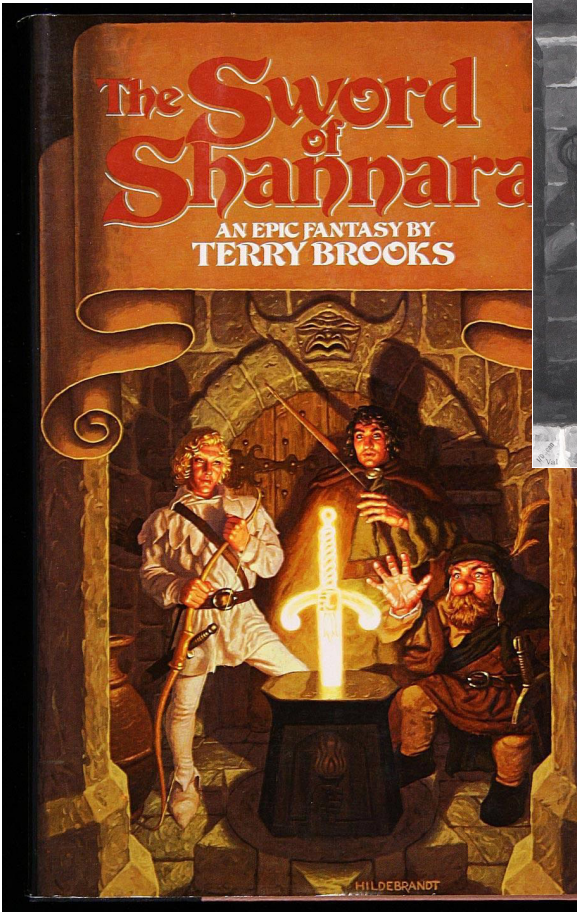
I've always liked the Elric covers, but in choosing one, I was surprised that I think the most powerful is book 1 of the series that was only recently released.



Mike:

The Sword of Shannara by the Hildebrandt Brothers

As a kid, I loved this novel, and I studied this painting over and over. It also helps that there were a ton of black and white interior illustrations for the book, making this a go-to art book for a young kid. But it did always puzzle me that the cover never actually occurred in the book. Young artist Mike said, “I’ll never allow that to happen when I make art!” What I didn’t know back then was sometimes the company paying for the illustration doesn’t want an exact scene from the inside!



Dane:

Conan 1. Art by Frank Frazetta

That image always disturbed me. I was curious. I had to read that book. There's so much raw emotion in the image.



Mike:

The Crystal Shard by Larry Elmore

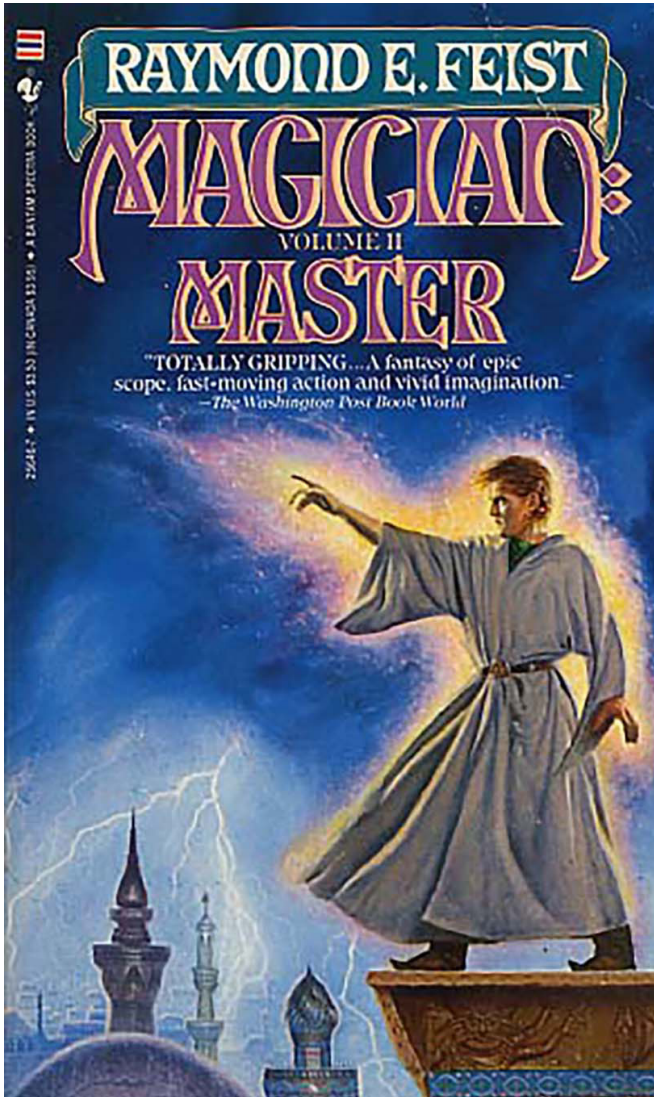
Ok, so any book with Elmore's art on it was an instant buy, right? I loved them all. Dragonlance was a world I liked more than Forgotten Realm's, but in most of the Dragonlance covers, the characters were pretty static. This cover has Larry in top form and also tells a story.



Dane:

Magician: Master. Art by Kevin Eugene Johnson

Seeing the magic emanating from Pug still makes me feel a surge of imaginary energy.

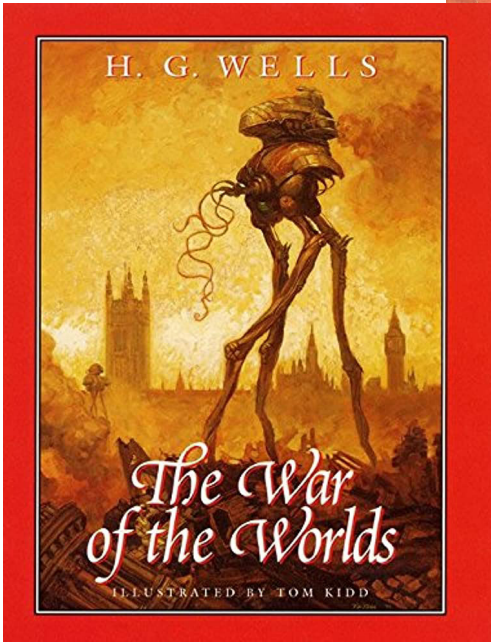
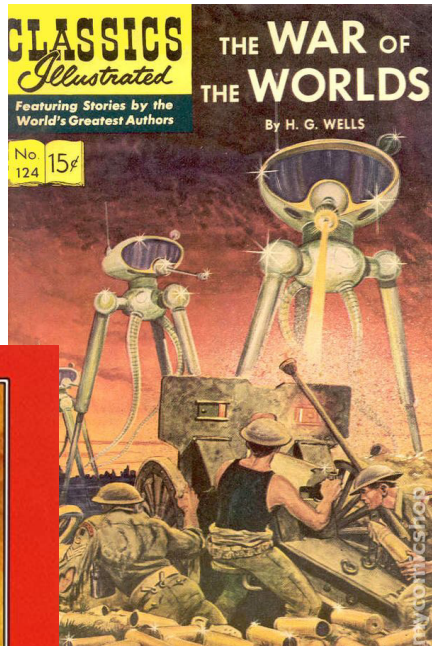
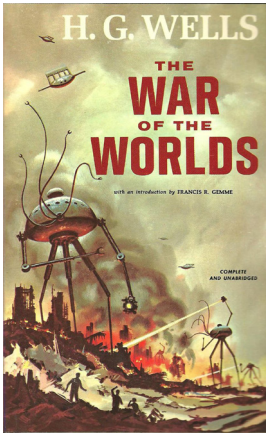


TOP 3 SCI FI NOVEL COVERS OF ALL TIME: (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

Mike:

War of the Worlds: Various

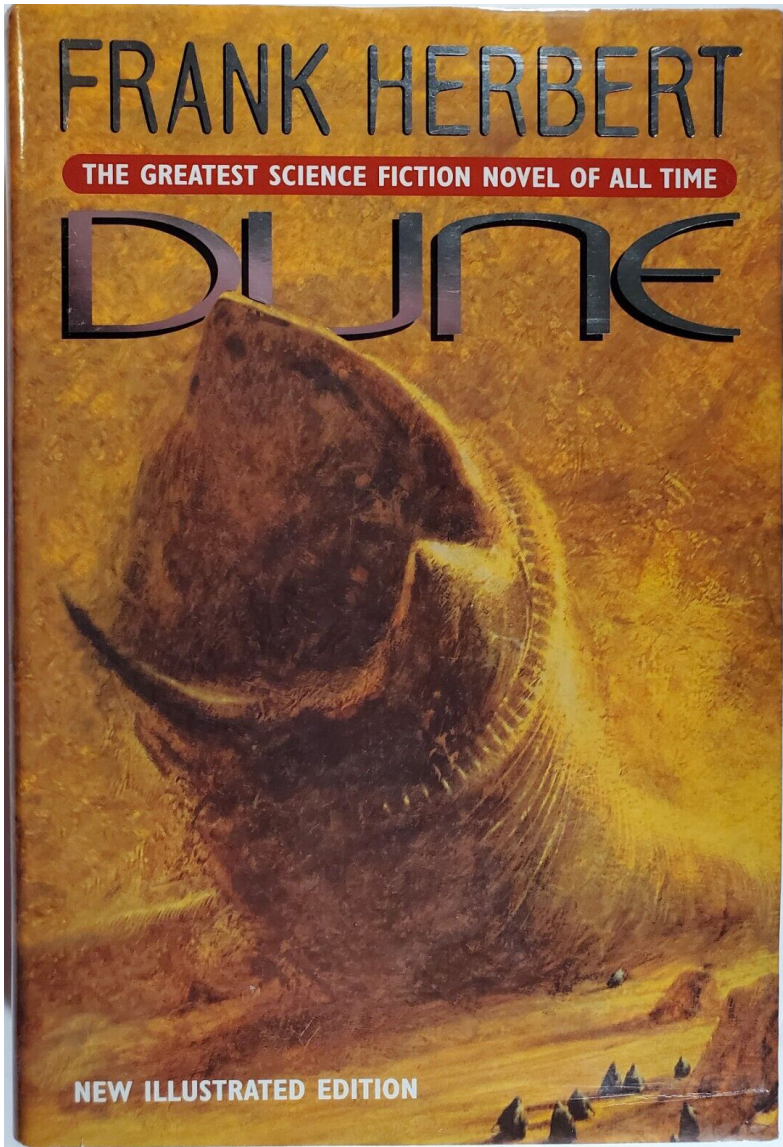
What is it about War of the Worlds that inspires so many great covers? In my head, I always thought it was just one, but looking them over it's like they each have their own great flavor and style.



Dane:

Dune by John Schoenherr

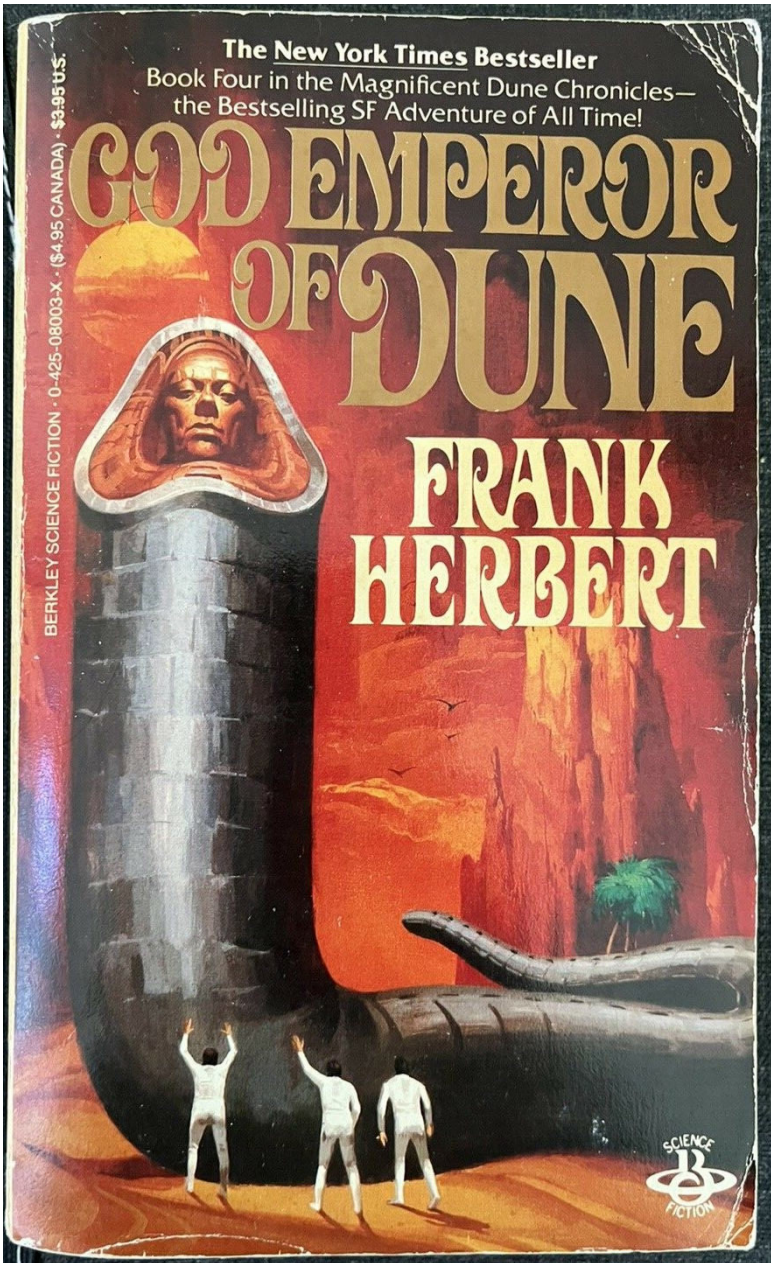
The sandworm looks enormous, and the people are so tiny and helpless. The texture of the piece makes it feel like you're in a sandstorm.



Mike:

God Emperor of Dune by Vincent Di Fate

Man, this one always scared me so much when I was younger I couldn't bring myself to read the book!



Dane:

The Citadel of the Autarch by Bruce Pennington

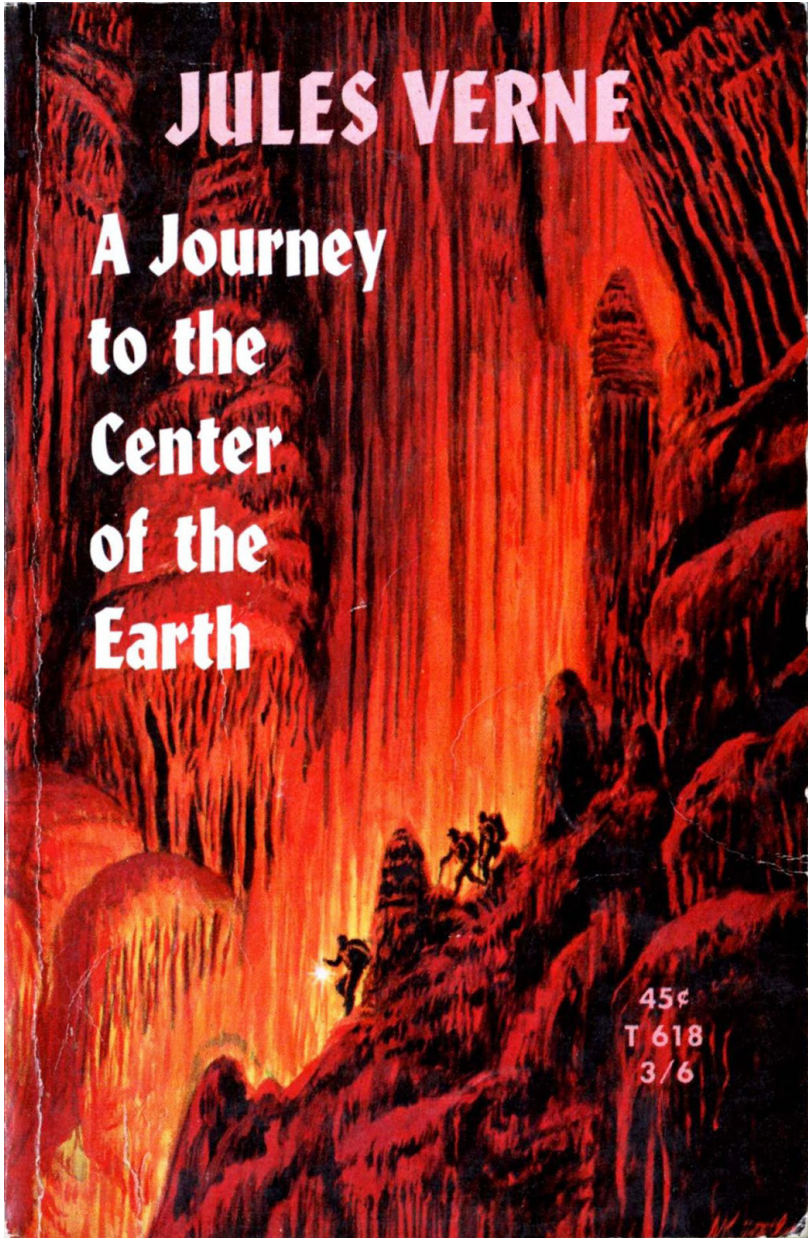
It's just a really cool picture of a futuristic city in colors I can't help but stare at for a while.



Mike:

A Journey to the Center of the Earth by Mort Künstler

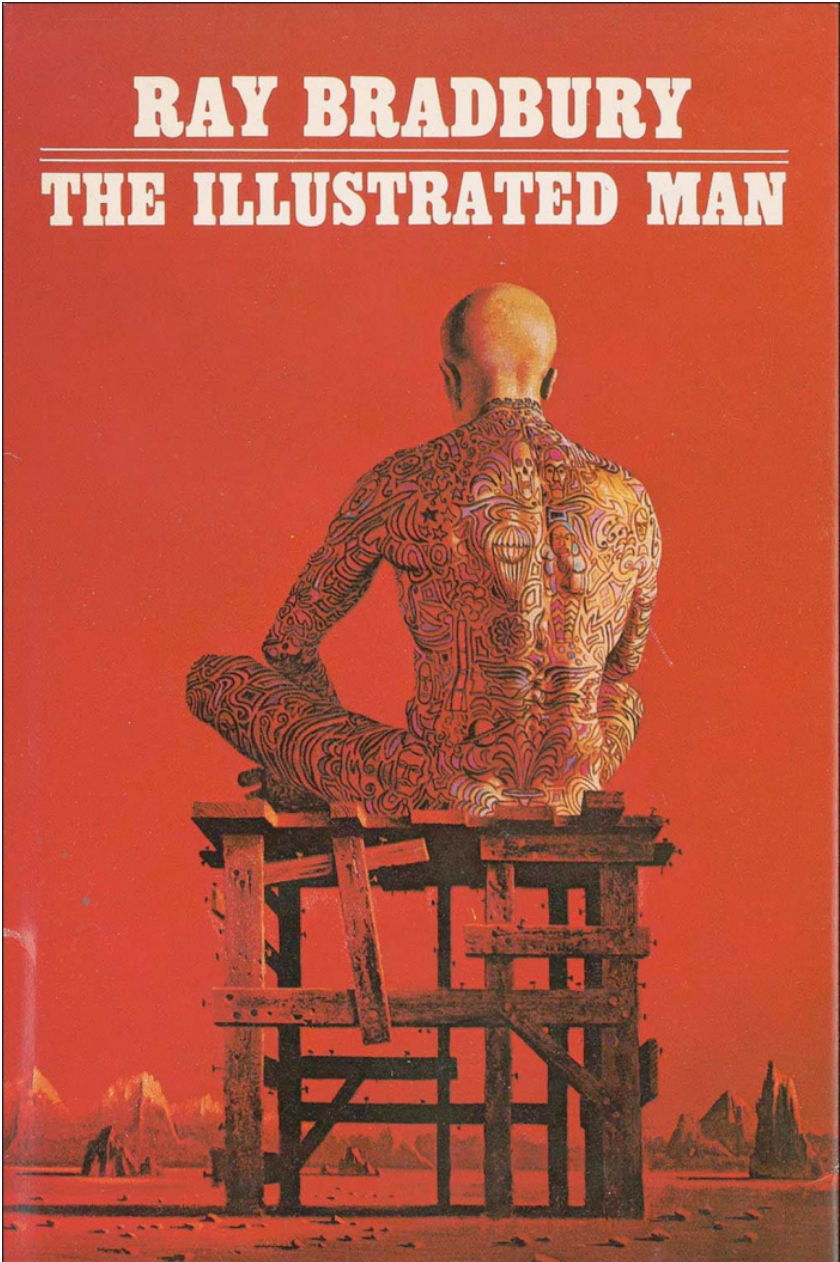
It's probably the dungeon delver in me, but this cover just sings to me.



Dane:

The Illustrated Man by Dean Ellis

My imagination went crazy with this one, imagining all the possible horrible stories in an alien future on the man's body.



TOP 3 GAMING COVERS OF ALL TIME: (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER):

Mike:

Cities of Mystery by Larry Elmore

This painting inspired so many adventures when I was younger, and I would say it has a big impact on how I see the city of Kowal in my current writing. The start of an adventure or a horrible end to one?



Dane:

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Players Handbook by Jeff Easley

2010

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by Gary Gygax



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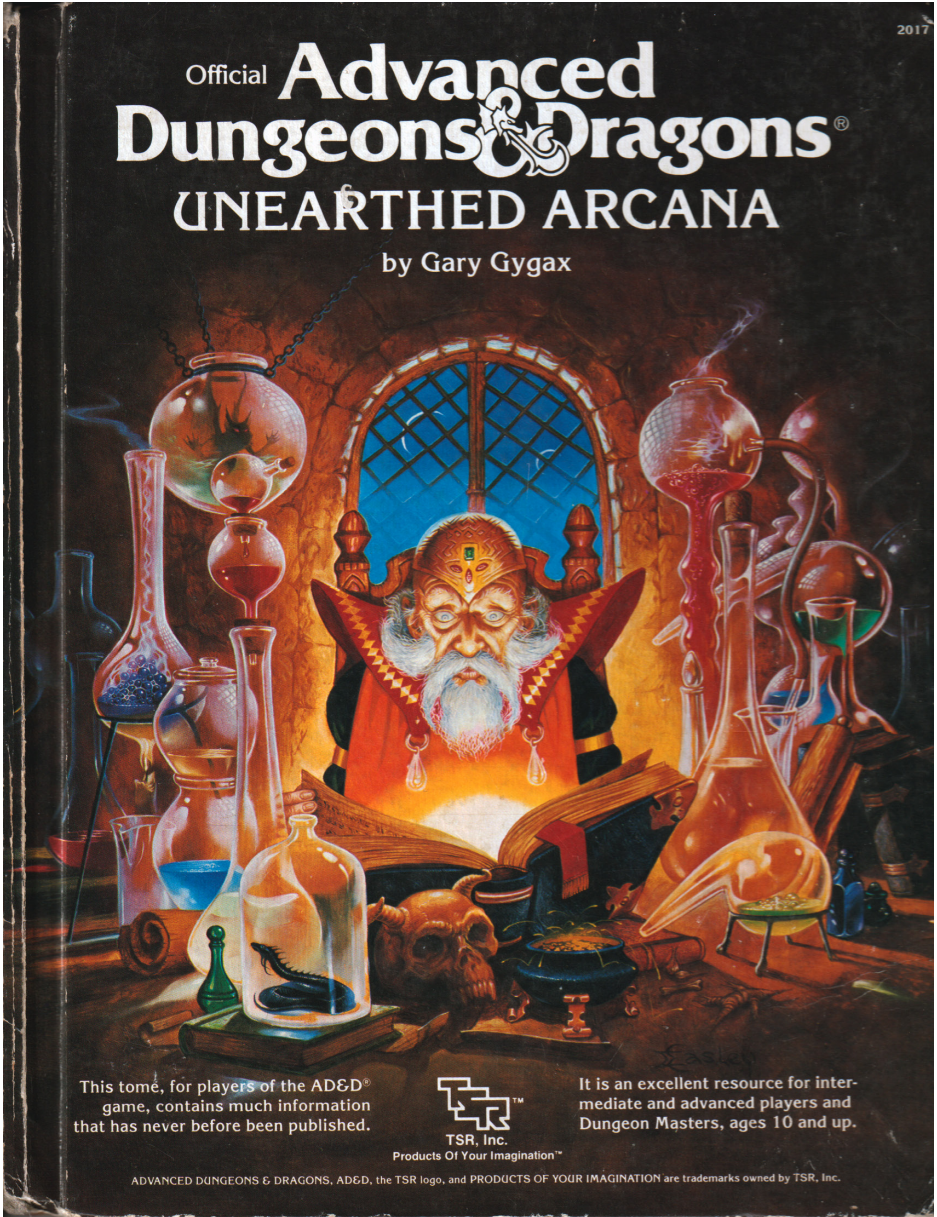
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Mike:

Unearthed Arcana by Jeff Easley

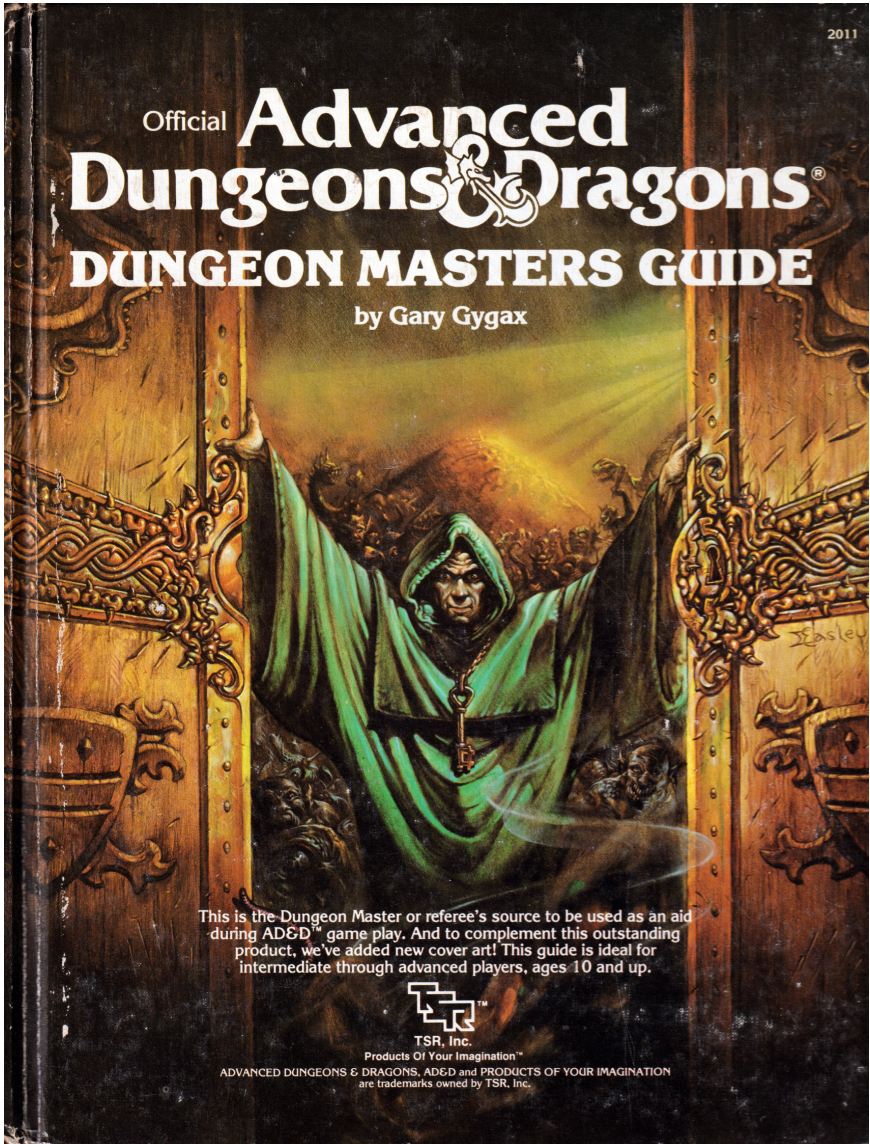
I loved the old wizard in this cover, and as I get older I have started picturing myself in this way!



Dane:

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition Dungeon Master's Guide by Jeff Easley

One of my favorite pieces of fantasy art of all time.



(Mike: I also think of this one all the time!)

Mike:

The Silver Dragon by Todd Lockwood

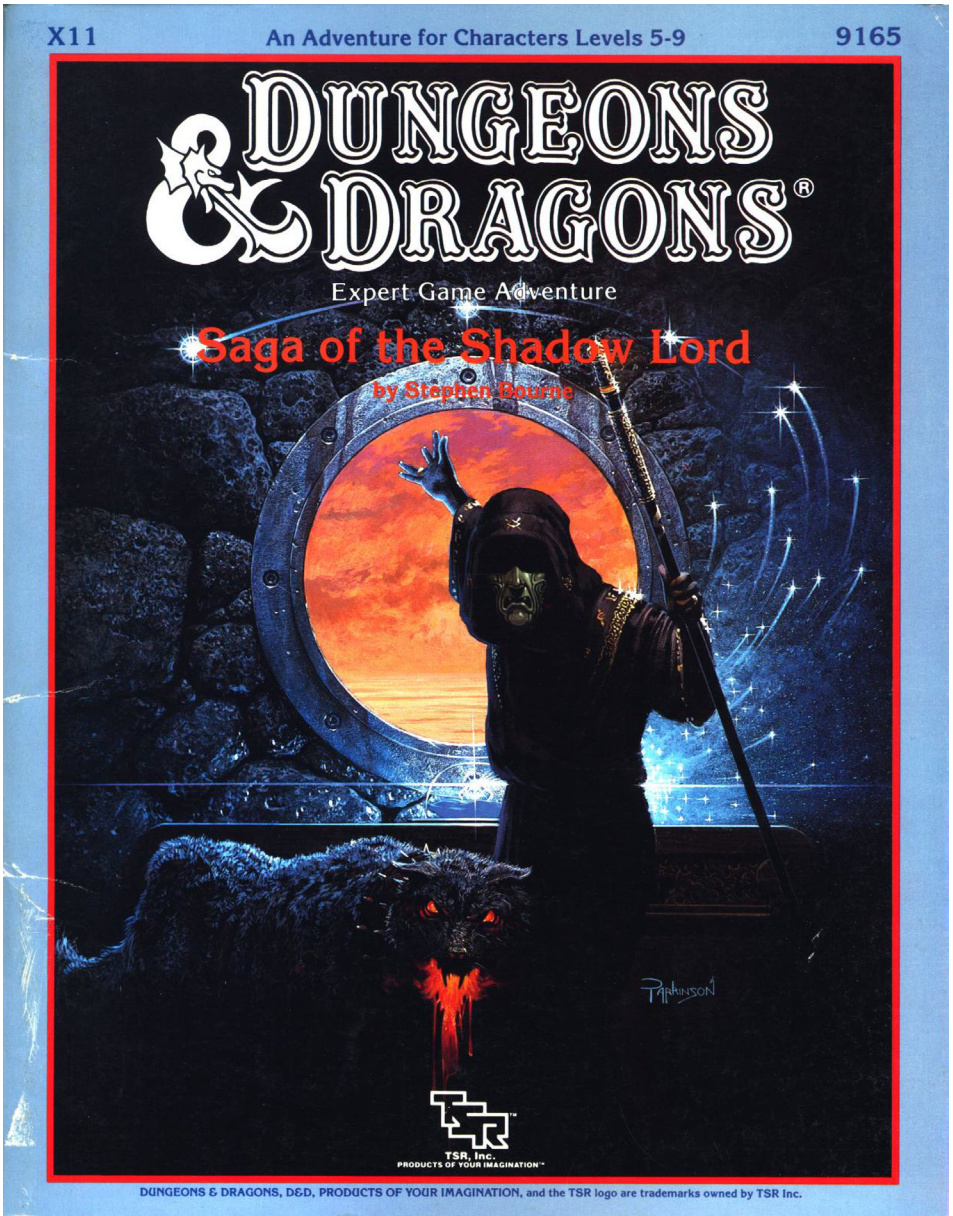
What can I say? Look at that damn dragon! Seeing this painting changed how I would think of fantastical creatures forever. This was a dragon that made sense. And was so beautiful. Plus, the A+ Northwestern mountain surroundings. Every bit of this painting is amazing.



Dane:

Saga of the Shadow Lord by Keith Parkinson

This has to go on my list because it was my first module, and it made a lasting impression. It was what drew me into the game in the first place. The colors, the creepiness, and the hellhound.



Ok, we covered so many, but I had two more that hold special places in my visual library.



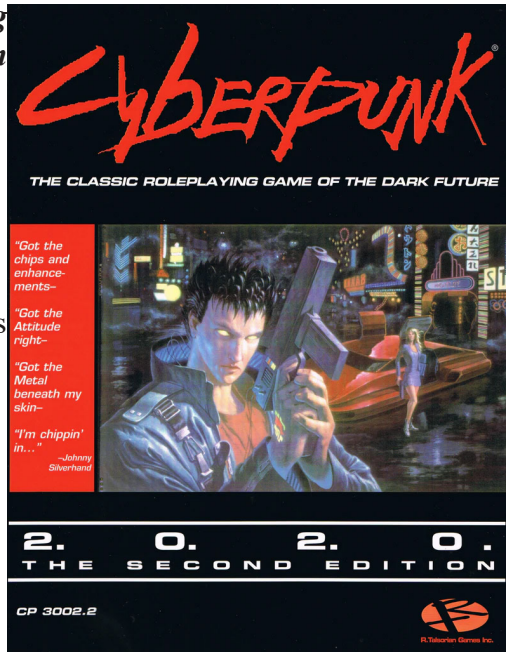
Flying Citadel by Keith Parkinson.

I still draw castles this way! Though not always floating.

Cyberpunk 2020 by Doug Anderson

This just captures the dark future I want to run in. Not the silly/sad future we are currently living in.

This just lives in my mind. And its so of its time. Always raining, always a neon jungle.





DARK RETURN

INTO THE WORLD

DRUIDIC ORDER (DRUIDS)

No one is sure where or when the Druids first started. Some claim they were wizards who lead a religion of the old gods in the far north. Others claim it was formed from a council of sages before men built their first city. The one thing that is known is that the Druids have always played a part in the forging of Atheles.

In the far past, they were a group of solitary scholars and thinkers. They practiced magic and science, pushing the boundaries of both, in a castle lost to time. Something happened, something the Druids did not record, which caused the downfall of this community. The Druids then looked outward.

The Druids have been revered. They have been hunted. They have been valued as counselors. They have been burned at the stake for foretelling. In the current day, they serve as lore keepers and knowledge seekers. A few regions keep their council, like Endamas and Norhan, while others shun it, like Tirian and Uthgard.

LAWS, BELIEFS, AND CULTURE

The Three Axioms

- You are the shield for the world, its creatures, and its spirit.
- You must defend yourself and others but never strike a preemptive blow.
- You must abide by the truth as you know it.

The first core tenet is that Druids protect the world and the living beings that inhabit it. The second core tenet of the Druids is that no preemptive aggression is allowed. A druid learns to defend themselves, but that is never to be used as unprovoked offense. The third core tenet is that Druids must abide by the truth. A Druid is to be truthful in all dealings and counsel, to the best of one's own knowledge.

The Druids have a strict policy against attachment. A druid can have their own belongings, but these belongings must be able to be carried on your person. A druid must also follow a strict rule against romantic bonds. A druids can love another, but they can not form an exclusive and confining bond with another. Many believe this is based on the religious belief that Arias, mother goddess, refused all vows and bonds with her many loves. Others believe this is to stop the suffering of attachment and desire.

ORGANIZATION

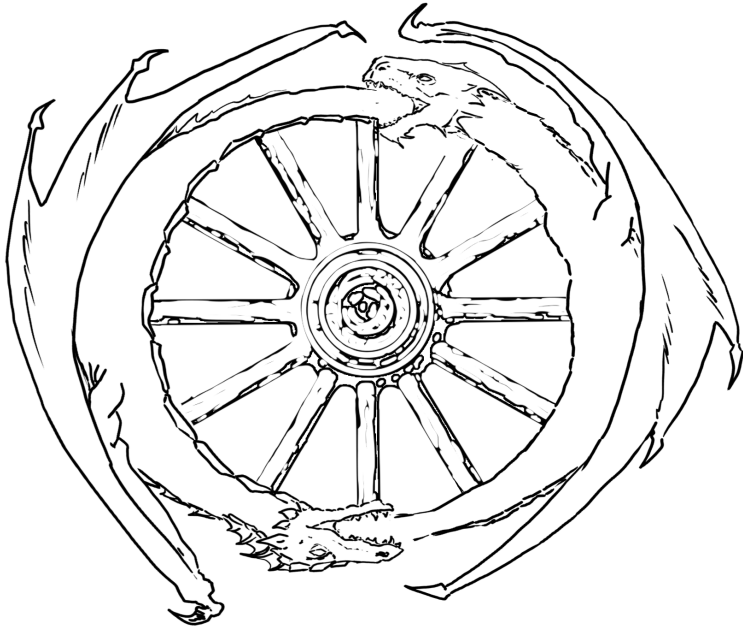
The Druidic Order is divided into Circles, each with a region. Each circle varies in exact beliefs, though the core beliefs are always upheld. Druids often gather in “groves”, a descriptive, if not symbolic, gathering or community of druids. These are places of refuge for all who need it.

Each Circle has an Arch Druid who is chosen by the Circle's council every 7 years. The Arch Druids form the Grand Council.

SYMBOLS

While the Druidic Order does not believe in symbols or flags for their organization, a long standing druid symbol is two dragons swallowing each others tails. One is silver and one is black. Spokes of a wheel fill the inner circle, embedded in the dragons bellies. Some druids still wear this as a reminder of the past and a pledge to the future.

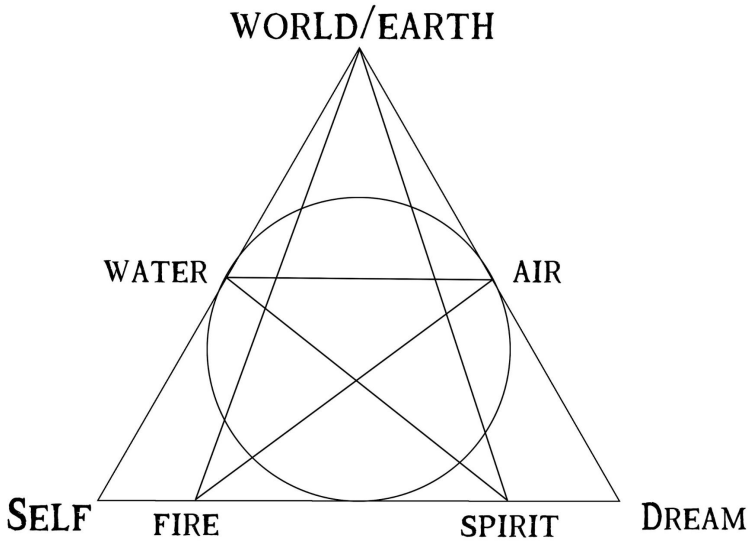
A lesser known symbol is a circle, half white and half black.



The druids also have a chart that they believe explains the relationship between self, the world, and magic.

From Encyclopedia Uteria

The Druids are a group of magic users who have watched over the lands for thousands of years. They believe in finding balance in peace with oneself and the world around you. In the past the Druidic Order had groves set up in every major city and were often sought as counselors and advisers. They are no longer sought in this way, though two cities, Bordon and Seahaven, still have open and populated groves.



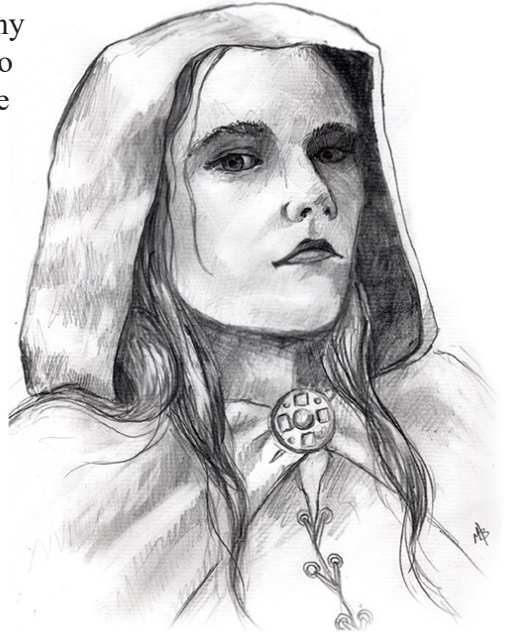
From the Tome of the Arts:

The ancient Druids were formed from tribal magic users who found themselves drawn to the forests, deserts, and other natural places of Uteria. They were heavily influenced by the Elves, seeing magic as part of everything around, a fabric of the world that extended beyond the self and into the stars. Still, following the tendency of humans, they tried to define it, finding the five elements of magic - fire, water, air, earth, and spirit. They also defined the three sources - self, world, and dream. This differed from the view of magic by the Elves, which simply put is there is no magic, there is life.

As the Druids progressed, they formed larger communities, knit by a want to make the world a better place. They became the advisors to kings, the lorekeepers, and observers. They built Groves, or places of meeting and meditation, a direct influence from the Elves. These Groves were found inside or around all major cities. In Selardor, the capital of the Aradan Kingdom, the king's castle was built in the center of a Grove itself.

During the Great War, the Druids spent their time defending cities attacked by aggressors, never taking to the offense. Though there was some internal debate to this course of action, it held until the end of the war and the Disappearance. After the war the Druids lost much of their power, many looking to them as archaic and blasphemous in the time that followed. Those of the Church persecuted them, causing the Groves to fall, and the Druids to become all but extinct.

Seahaven was the one refuge for the Druids. Not as touched by the war as many other places, they were allowed to keep their Grove and tomes in the city proper. As magic has come back into the world, the Druids have begun to expand, finding those who share their views and beliefs to join their ranks. They spent their time rebuilding Groves or searching for old ones, hoping to find some of the vast knowledge lost by war.



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SAGABORN INKLINGS

ROLE IN THE GROUP

When playing games, I often find myself struggling to find where I fit in a new group. Or even afraid that I may be stepping on others' toes with my choices. So I came up with a simple way for the whole group to visualize and discuss their roles.

Your role in the group helps move the game forward, as well as introduces interesting roleplay scenarios. These should not be taken lightly or strictly. Can a group have two leaders? Of course! But that may lead to some clashing between the two, which should be viewed as fun roleplay and not cause friction between players. This chart is not meant to be the end-all-be-all for character roles and development, but it does give a starting point and lets you know what you wish your role to be within the group.

While the in-game characters may not know this information, I would suggest that this is shared among players and not kept secret. This way, the people at the table are aware of how the others want to play and should be encouraging more story development.

Roll 1d12	Character Group Role
1-2	Follower
3-4	The Helper
5	Comedic Relief
6	Bookworm
7	Face
8	Leader

Fun for all ages.

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On the front cover we have Vex riding his advanced animal companion, Soaron. Here is another illustration of him, minus his riding gear.

Vex is played by my brother in law Clayton Pollard and has been vital in testing the SagaBorn 1.5 System. Thanks bro!



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It should be.

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