



PLATE 1 *The standard races are well represented in the land of Highpoint.*



INTRODUCTION

THE DARK AGE HAS BEGUN. WITH EACH PASSING DAY THE MOON GROWS LARGER IN THE SKY, TO THE POINT WHERE IT IS NOW LITERALLY FALLING TO EARTH, PARTICLE BY PARTICLE, IN AN EXCORIATING LUNAR RAIN THAT FLATTENS CASTLES AND KILLS ANYTHING FOOLISH ENOUGH TO WALK THE LAND OF HIGHPOINT BY NIGHT. THE MOON IS SO CLOSE THAT LUNAR MONSTERS CAN DROP TO THE SURFACE, WHETHER BY CHOICE OR AS INVOLUNTARY BYPRODUCTS OF THE LUNAR RAIN. DAY BY DAY, THE LUNAR DRAGONS SWARM IN EVER-GREATER NUMBERS, WHILE OTHER ABERRATIONS STALK THE SURFACE. IF THE LUNAR RAIN DOESN'T SKIN YOU AT NIGHT, THE LUNAR DRAGONS WILL EAT YOU DURING THE DAY.

Colonizing the underdeep was the only hope for those who once controlled the surface. Elven archmages and orc warlords were no match for the lunar rain pounding their cities night after night. Wave after wave of refugees sought shelter underground. But the entire world tried to cram into a limited number of havens, and they found only constant warfare. Each battle's winner had mere days until the next wave appeared, desperate to force its way into any covered shelter it could find.

Deep underground, the ancient dwarven stronghold of Duerok was safe from the dragons and lunar rain — but not from the refugees. Duerok's dark age was ferocious. Pushed back by the relentless waves of invasion, the dwarven city-state lost both land and lives. Some invaders swept past Duerok, retreating deeper and deeper underground in their quest for safety. Most did not. Duerok was under siege.

The lunar dragons ran rampant over the surface world. Surging hordes of refugees pressed at every entrance to the subsurface. The lunar rain razed the surface yet again each night. Chaos, death, and disaster threatened from every quarter. Was any hope left?

Yes.

A stooped, white-haired dwarf named Parilus came to Duerok one day, claiming to be the eldest of the Master Gearwrights. Only the most ancient dwarves remembered the Gearwrights Guild, which was but a footnote in stories of a mythical Age of Walkers passed on from their grandfathers' grandfathers.

Parilus taught the dwarves to build great mechanized walkers powered by steam. He showed them how mighty a ten-ton metal man could be, how its heroic metal hide could resist the lunar rain and beat back the dragons. He guided them through the construction of their



first thousand-foot-tall city-mech and watched proudly as it defeated dragon after dragon.

Then, unseen and unfollowed, he vanished.

Now, one hundred years later, the Second Age of Walkers is at hand. Five dwarven city-mechs housing populations in the thousands patrol the surface areas around Duerok. Armored well enough to protect against all but the most cataclysmic meteor storms, the city-mechs brave the lunar rain, though even their tough metal hides must be constantly refurbished.

These five city-mechs, known as the Stenian Confederacy, are now the center of surface life on Highpoint. The safe zone they protect is a new haven for trade and settlement, colonized by fleets of smaller mechs. Even as the lunar rain abates — some say the moon's surface must have been stripped to bedrock by now — the mechs become further embedded in the social structure. Trader-mechs form crucial links between the budding new surface settlements. Explorer-mechs comb through the ruins of the surface cities, while righteous adventurers fight mech to claw against the lunar dragons. Prospector-mechs scout for scant supplies of ore and coal, and tensions run high when supplies run low.

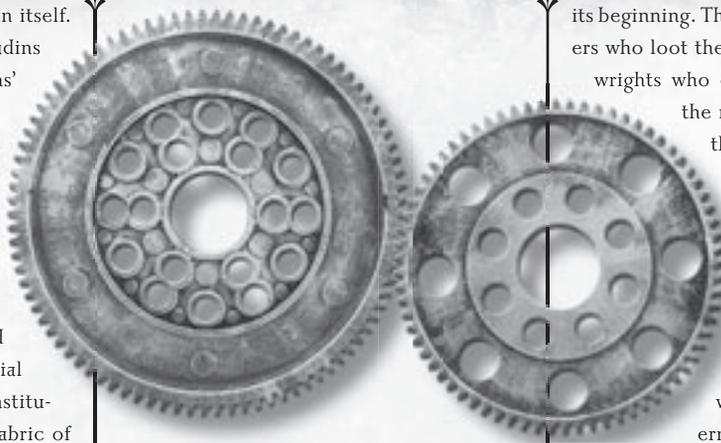
Resource disputes have brought the Stenian Confederacy into conflict with its neighbors. The disparate human nomad tribes, united for the first time in centuries by the charismatic demagogue Shar Thizdic, have constructed a steam-powered city-mech of their own. Now Shar sends his so-called Legion into routine skirmishes with the Stenian Confederacy. Mercenaries play both sides, profiting in the new demand for metal, fuel, and mechs.

Despite its imposition of law and order, not all are satisfied with the Stenian Confederacy. Its security comes at a cost. Martial law is the rule of the day; military-mech pilots are mobile judge, jury, and hangman. Already, vigilante-mechs backed by the people have challenged the Confederacy's authority. Many citizens, especially the clergy, feel the Confederacy is too concerned with short-term solutions. The surface is now inhabitable, but nothing



has been done to solve the lunar rain itself. While independent clerics and paladins organize attacks on the lunar dragons' home turf, the Confederacy focuses solely on terrestrial power. As many resentful citizens of the "oppressive" Stenian Confederacy exist as do outsiders desperate to enter its safe zones.

As the lunar rain destroyed long-established settlements, so too did it eradicate long-established social customs. With few exceptions, the institutions that once held together the fabric of life are now gone. In the place of churches and nations, new forces have emerged. Faith in the old gods has practically vanished as worshippers question those who could not save them. The newly emerging mechanical-god Dotrak whispers cryptically in the ears of his prophets, while the bizarre lunar gods recruit mortals in disguise. Mobile "mechdoms" rule where kingdoms formerly prevailed. The Gearwrights Guild is more powerful than some nations once were, com-



manding entire city-mechs in its name. Its coglayers and steamborgs push the limits of technology, eagerly seeking new techniques, while new recruits explore ancient legends: Is it true that the huge metallic dwarflike sculptures buried in the Wet Desert are in fact ruined mechs from the *first* Age of Walkers?

Not all accept the new order. While nearly five human generations have passed since the lunar rain began, most elves remember

its beginning. They resent the treasure-hunters who loot their ruined villages, the gearwrights who challenge their magic, and the mech jockeys who question their history. Riding magically powered mechs crafted from the still-living remnants of their village ancestor trees, elven artifact-hunters hunt lost treasures stolen by the new mechdoms. Meanwhile, the orcs of the southern plains grow entranced by

the power of mechs, raiding more frequently as they seek to acquire mechs for themselves.

As always, the rogues profit. From an early stage, the thieves' guilds insinuated themselves into the management of the city-mechs. Even the Stenians now make concessions to the guilds. The destitute lower levels of their city-mechs are kept in line by ruthless guild organizations, which ensure available manpower to work the smelting





plants and engine rooms as long as their methods go unquestioned. All the while, a shadowy group of so-called “stalkers” practices infiltrating and disabling mechs from within. Rogues and cutthroats have fantastic new opportunities for power.

One hero stands above them all. Mech jockeys are the ace pilots who make life on the surface possible. They ferry precious loads of iron from distant mines, risking ambush by raiders and dragons. They pilot the massive military-mechs bristling with steam cannons. Independent operators ride scout-mechs into the frontiers, seeking new trade routes or ruins to loot. They smuggle contraband into the Stenian Confederacy,

outrunning the military when they can and outfighting them when they can't. Treasure-hunters travel to the endless plains, where they raid the Legion and the orc hordes; glory-hunters pit their steam-mechs against dragons, giants, demons, and necromechs. On the outskirts of the Confederacy, a loose collection of reclusive families called the Irontooth Clans rides under no flag but its own. The Irontooth practice the art of mech fu, steeped in ancient traditions but modernized for the world of mechs, and the “mech devil” pilots of the Irontooth Clans are feared above all others.

In a land where chaos comes hand in hand with opportunity, it is no surprise that efforts to solve the true cause of the problems — the lunar rain and the creatures it brings to earth — have failed repeatedly. Only the most heroic adventurer can resist the daily temptation of personal wealth and power. High-

point is essentially a Wild West environment with scattered law and great power waiting to be claimed. The old institutions are dead and gone. The competition to replace them has begun.

Now hope exists again. It is once again a time for adventure! On the fertile endless plains, elven wizard-pilots carry adventurers in search of lost elven treasures. Shar Thizdic's Legion sends saboteurs into Stenian mines, while independent mech jockeys profit from trade with both sides. Righteous paladins fight nobly against the lunar dragons, and treasure-seeking fighters hunt for their lairs. Gnome coglayers build fantastic clockwork weapons for their allies, while dwarven steamborgs replace their own body parts with steam-powered prosthetics.

All the while, the soft pinging of the lunar rain can be heard through the sturdy metal shell of your transport mech, as you bed down for the night outside the ruins of a once-great surface city. Hope exists once again ...

And it's powered by steam.

