




# TALES FROM THE SMOKING WYRM

PRESENTS a break from the chaos  
in this promo you'll find mystery and adventure with our  
Silver Ball rules & advanced Telepathic Rat rules

# THE SILVER BALL

*"The horror! I remember the feeling as it passed over me—infinite cold, my appendages splayed out in all directions—then nothing! The next thing I knew I was standing outside the brothel my party had chosen to take up residence in—three weeks later!"*

—Antonious the Scribe



Many an adventurer has run afoul of the mysterious Silver Ball, often when they least expect it. Appearing out of darkened shadows, or even mid-air, the Silver Ball does not speak, or make any sound at all. Rather it glides in silently, absorbing the adventurer into its inner volume, and then just as rapidly disappearing.

Many adventurers have spent copious amounts of time trying to prevent the Silver Ball's appearance, but to no avail. Snorri Kigilsson, known by his guild as "The Sleeper", has a prodigious attraction to the Silver Ball. A fact that his body was almost always left behind as a "Mark" (see below for details), happened so often during the delve into the Vaults of the Mad Mage Knepefaris, his party ultimately chose to reduce his share of the treasure! Snorri's affinity for the Silver Ball did have advantages—allowing the party to smuggle the Brass Doors of Utkora past the Potentate of Zariim without detection by placing the doors in Snorri's bag of holding, then waiting for the inevitable Silver Ball absorption before leaving the city of Zariim.

What the ball does with its victims, no one knows. Usually they return—but this is not always the case. When they do, they may have only vague fever-dream memories of the time passed and the places they have been. In addition, they are often changed in subtle ways or return with new abilities or items.

## GENERAL

Init +10 (surprise); Atk +10 melee (absorption); AC 10; HD 10d12; MV 100; Act 1d30; SP surprise 75% of time; Absorption; Invulnerable; Reinforcement; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +10; AL N.

## ABSORPTION

When the silver ball attacks, it moves over the victim, seemingly phasing with that individual. At this time, the victim's face projects to the outer surface of the sphere in multiple images of distraught horror and fear, while their body is absorbed into the ball, and their appendages cartwheel around the surface in wild and surprising ways. A similar event (but in reverse) occurs when the victim is ejected from the ball. Upon ejection by the Silver Ball, roll once on the Random Happenings Table for each game session the player was gone. Effects are cumulative.

The Silver Ball normally (95% of the time) fully absorbs the physical and mental presence of the PC—they completely disappear. In a rare event, only the mental presence is absorbed, leaving a mindless, unsleeping, standing automaton with blank all-white eyes. While in this mindless state, the PC does not seem to need air, food, or water. If the Silver Ball reappears, the conscious mind of the PC returns and mind and body meld once more. The PC often has recollections of being “on a date” as the sole cognition of the event. While mindless, the automaton will move when commanded as long as they are called “Mark.” They will not attack or do anything other than stand passively. No one knows why this is so.

EJECTION

Upon ejection from the Silver Ball, roll on table SB-1 and consult the relevant event table(s).

TABLE SB-1: EJECTION EVENTS

% ROLL	EVENT
01-30	Memories
31-55	Physical Changes
56-80	Surprising Items
81-90	Roll again twice*
91-96	Roll again three times*
97-99	Roll again four times*
00	Nothing happens



\* On subsequent rolls, reroll any “Roll again” result

INVULNERABLE

Normal, natural, and magical attacks do no damage to the Silver Ball. Those who attack, if they hit, can see flashes of horror and pain on the faces of those absorbed into the ball. This does no actual damage to those contained within, and they hold no conscious memories of these moments when they eventually emerge.

REINFORCEMENT

Magical damage done to the Silver Ball does not harm it. Rather, it seems to grow the ball diameter by a number of feet equal to damage divided by 10.

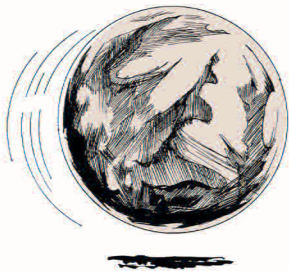


TABLE SB-2: MEMORY

D30 MEMORY

- 1 Returns drunk, smelling of elderberries and partaking in an epic quest for a Holy Hand Grenade—whatever that is?
- 2 Raves about the man with “hourglass eyes” for a full 1d4 days
- 3 Remembers walking the halls of a castle called...GrayEagle? Or something like that.
- 4 Talks about their time eating a fine dinner with “Master D’Harts”.
- 5 Falls out of the Silver Ball, wakes with a start, yelling, “Wait! I am not dead! Don’t loot my body—I need my kidneys!” Does not know why.
- 6 Knows that they are now wanted for murder in the town of \_\_\_\_\_; fairly certain they are innocent, but not entirely sure.
- 7 Knows what the next room they will walk into is purposed for, and if it is trapped.
- 8 Remembers being sealed in a coffin and buried; becomes claustrophobic.
- 9 Remembers giving a braided chain of the finest silver to a barmaid named “Brandy”.
- 10 Returns raving about a dwarf that left him hanging from a rope on the side of a cliff.
- 11 Remembers sailing the high seas with the renowned pirate Baldman Jones.
- 12 Remembers being tortured by a being with one lidless eye wreathed in flame, and having only four fingers on a blackened hand.
- 13 Recalls joining a drinking club at a port called Deepwater.
- 14 Has an irrational fear of turnips and complains about a blue dwarf who walks around collecting rocks.
- 15 Speaks constantly about travelling with a group of teenage adventurers and their friend “Dungeon Master”. Fears something called Tiamat is hunting them.
- 16 Returns rimed with frost; any liquids in possession remain frozen for 2d6 turns.
- 17 Believes he must seek atonement to return to the good graces of \_\_\_\_\_ (a deity chosen at random).
- 18 Talks about “this one time at Bard Camp” a lot.





D30      MEMORY

- 19 Remembers living a full life into old age. Roll on *DCC* Table 1–3; character can now perform skills associated with that occupation (in addition to those already known).
- 20 Believes they have ridden “Shai-Hulud” in the great deserts. Carries with them a small tin of spice.
- 21 Recalls months patrolling the borderlands while serving in the militia of \_\_\_\_\_. “THE MINOTAURS! OH GODS, THE MINOTAURS!!!
- 22 Remembers a blade swinging towards their neck, their opponent shouting “There can be only one!!!”
- 23 Feels a strong sense of loss from an unrequited love.
- 24 Remembers being assigned to “cleanup duty” (or was it “to clean up doody”?). Smells like a gongfarmer for 2d7 days.
- 25 Remembers fleeing town with their fellow carnies, the townsfolk chasing them with torches and pitchforks.
- 26 Recalls researching among stacks of books and parchments in an old dusty library. Gain +2d to your next check to \*know\* something.
- 27 Ejected with tears streaming down their face. Recalls hearing the most moving piece of music in the whole of existence.
- 28 Remembers sailing to the edge of Áereth. Returns soaking wet, wearing only a loincloth. 1d12 rounds later, the Silver Ball returns and ejects the character’s belongings in a heap.
- 29 Blood... SO. MUCH. BLOOD.
- 30 Character has no memories of what occurred, but will experience a strong sensation of déjà vu at some point in the future (at Judge’s discretion).

TABLE SB-3: PHYSICAL CHANGES

D30      PHYSICAL CHANGE

- 1 If male, discovers their scrotum has been tattooed red. If other gender, roll again with 2d14.
- 2 Has a new tattoo on an obvious body part: (1) face; (2) hands; (3) neck.
- 3 Skin develops a different tint (see *DCC* Table 9-1: “Humanoid Skin Color” for suggestions)
- 4 Hair has changed color.

## D30 PHYSICAL CHANGE

- 5 Emaciated, as if starved and overworked for weeks. Returns with no more than half their normal hit points (can be healed normally).
- 6 Gains an extra digit on an appendage: (1) left hand; (2) right hand; (3) left foot; (4) right foot.
- 7 Missing one hand with visible teeth marks on the stump. Strangely, they look like teeth impressions from a dwarf.
- 8 One hand is now different, somehow...sinister?
- 9 Hands switch places (left hand is now on right arm, and vice versa). This imposes a -1 penalty to Agility for 1d4 weeks while the character retrains how to manipulate objects.
- 10 Character's age changes by 1d12-6 years.
- 11 Character's height changes by 1d12-6 inches. There is no change in weight.
- 12 Finds a large amount of red dust in their hair, and various orifices. The dust exudes from their pores for 1d3 days.
- 13 Has a nasty rash in their nether regions. The local alchemist might be able to help you with that...
- 14 Has vague gill slits on the neck. If already has gills, develops inflatable air sacks under arms.
- 15 Speaks 1d3 new languages.
- 16 Now slurs their "s" sounds oddly.
- 17 Whenever the character speaks, the sounds occur 1 second later than they should. This doesn't hinder spellcasting; it's just weird.
- 18 Now possesses a map, tattooed onto the back of the character.
- 19 Eyes now have: (1) slitted pupils; (2) no pupils; (3) normal pupils, determine color randomly.  
One eye has been replaced with a glass eye, but the character can see as if it is a normal eye. If taken out, ceases to function when taken more than 3' from the character's body.
- 21 Gains a third eye: (1) middle of forehead; (2) palm of hand; (3) chest; (4) back of head. There is a 10% chance this eye has infravision 30'.
- 22 Small horns grow on the character's head. They resemble those of a: (1) bull; (2) ram; (3) goat; (4) demon; (5) only one horn instead of two, of the previous styles.
- 23 Develops a tail: (1) monkey; (2) scaly snake; (3) forked demon; (4) rat; (5) stubby dog; (6) bushy cat; (7) horse.
- 24 Teeth, especially canines, are sharper. Character prefers red meat ver other choices (the rarer, the better!).

25	Chest aches. Discovers recent scars bisecting torso both vertically and horizontally (as if from an autopsy)
26	Pale from what appears to be blood loss. Returns with half the hit points they had before absorption by the Silver Ball, and 1d5 Con damage (both can be healed normally).
27	Walks with a hunch for 1d5 days.
28	Head increases/decreases in size by 25%. Previously worn headgear no longer fits.
29	Gain a minor corruption ( <i>DCC</i> Table 5–3). Luck may be used to avoid (as a wizard).
30	Gain a random mutation from <i>DCC RPG Annual Volume 1</i> , “Random Mutations” table (page 165). If not available, reroll.

TABLE SB-4: SURPRISING ITEMS

Items from this table will typically be found in the character’s pockets, a pouch, or a backpack, and may not be immediately obvious (unless otherwise specified), or in hand if particularly large (such as a weapon).

1	A golden orb with a ruby-encrusted cross on top.
2	Plans and recipes from an inn called the 12 Monkey Balls.
3	A small vial of red liquid.
4	A new ring on their finger. It speaks to them when their eyes are closed and they focus on trying to sleep.
5	A pouch containing 1d6 glowing purple mushrooms.
6	A pair of silver scissors.
7	An ivory scrollcase. The nearly crumbling papyrus inside describes a distant mountain land called “Leng” and the debased men and creatures that live there.
8	A small idol of a bipedal tentacle-faced thing with wings.
9	A new silvered one-handed weapon (determine type randomly). If the character was not previously proficient with this weapon type, they are now.
10	A large, red abdomen tarantula in their pocket. The tarantula speaks and begs for protection—it is just a child. On a failed DC 15 Will save, the character feels they are the tarantula’s parent.

D30 ITEM

- 11 A golden key that has wings and flies.
- 12 A flask of rotgut whiskey. Within is the preserved body of a pixie.
- 13 A large pitchfork made of an odd colored metal.
- 14 A heart, wrapped in waxed paper, in their backpack. Roll a d5; on a “1”, the heart still beats, and will continue to do so until destroyed.
- 15 A short-handled hoe that can effortlessly digs through any ground or stone to form perfect rows for planting.
- 16 Walks oddly, complaining of something in boot. When they look, it is a gem\*.
- 17 Gains a body piercing of the Shandaloo, the dreaded dark halflings that worship the Unwyrm.
- 18 A map, tattooed on the hide of an unknown beast1.
- 19 A rusty key in their mouth that they know opens a tower of elephant god worshippers.
- 20 A loaded, primed flintlock pistol in their hand; they know it belongs to a space hippo who wants it back desperately.
- 21 A telepathic rat. Treat as a guardian familiar, *DCC* p.316, or see article, this volume.
- 22 A folded sheet of stiff vellum in their hand; it is decorated with simple drawings, and inscribed with the words “WORLD’S GREATEST MOM/DAD!”
- 23 A small pouch hanging on a cord around their neck. Inside is a vial labelled “DRINK ME”, and a cookie with icing that reads “EAT ME”.
- 24 A small hand-wound music box that plays all but the last stanza of “Pop Goes the Weasel”, and in a minor key.
- 25 A ragdoll with numerous stab wounds. The blood seeping from the wounds appears to match the blood on the dagger in the character’s other hand.
- 26 Clenched in their fist, a “WANTED” poster depicting their face. Text describing their crimes is missing, as is the entity offering the reward, but the amount is a princely sum (commensurate with the character’s level)
- 27 Their hand stuck in a wasp nest, wasps included (treat as an insect warm, *DCC* 419)
- 28 Wearing rusty manacles (locked).
- 29 A book, clutched tightly to their chest\*.
- 30 A half-empty flask of rotgut whiskey.

\* This entry pairs well with *The Dungeon Alphabet*, by Goodman Games



# TELEPATHIC RAT



Mutant Crawl Classics introduced a stalwart companion of many an adventurer: the telepathic rat. In typical Dark Master fashion, Jim Wampler left the telepathic rat up to the devices of players and judges around the world to develop further. We have found that telepathic rats now show up everywhere in our games, whether they are *MCC*, or *DCC*, in nature. So wonderful are the antics of these plucky sidekicks, and useful at the gaming table, that we have even taken to using these wonderful Plague Rat puppets sold at Shakespeare's Globe theatre (<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com>) to personify them in game. Herein we detail how we have developed the telepathic rat for use at the table.

## TELEPATHIC RAT

Init +4; Atk bite +1 (1d3); AC 14; HD 1d3; MV 40' or climb 20'; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2; AL same as "master"

## DESCRIPTION

Looks like a typical rat in appearance (8-12 inches long weighing up to 1 pound); colouring varies between 1) brown, 2) grey, 3) black, and 4) albino white with red eyes. 10% of telepathic rats have an abnormally sized brain pan, that often protrudes as a large, hairless, tumor-like growth on the top of the skull. These rats are less lovable, but roll twice for special ability, and the player chooses which effect occurs. There is also a 5% chance that the rat is \*not\* a rat, but is, in fact, a miniature giant space hamster instead. Giant space hamsters are the lovable scourges of the phlogiston, and will be detailed at another time.

Initial contact with the rat is disconcerting. It is as if something is softly gnawing at your mind—at first, barely noticeable, then increasingly insistent—until you acknowledge the prying by letting it into your thoughts. Make a Will Save at DC10 to ignore a rat's thoughts. Telepathic rats prefer to sit on a

shoulder or ride in a pocket and will follow simple commands. Your rat is a loyal companion that brings various new abilities and possible liabilities. Roll on the following table.

## ROLL ABILITY

- 1 Ailurophobia—You develop a distinct and irrational fear of cats
- 2 Prey sense—You develop an acute sense of hearing and sight. You are aware of creatures that may be laying in ambush of you. +1d for detecting ambush.
- 3 Pack rat—You find that you now have become a collector of small shiny objects. You ‘collect’ these items even if they aren’t yours to take. DC 5 to resist palming objects from shops. DC 10 to resist snagging items found on group adventures.
- 4 Contortionist—You can squeeze your body into tight places and twist to escape from confining bonds. Gain +1d on any check to escape confinement/grappled.
- 5 Mingle—You begin to dress in a way that allows you to adapt to your surroundings. Gain +1d to all hide checks.
- 6 Nocturnal—You feel the urge to move about at night and sleep during the day. DC 5 to resist.
- 7 Swim—You are a natural swimmer. No rolls required except in exceptional circumstances and those are made at +1d.
- 8 Scamper up walls—You can now climb walls and sheer surfaces with ease and grace. Roll as a 5th-level Thief of your alignment. Thieves higher than level 5 use their level and add +1d.
- 9 Squeaky—Can emit high frequency vocalizations outside of human hearing range that can be detected by other vermin and small mammals. 50% chance you can communicate with said creatures.
- 10 Prim—Feel the urge to groom other party members. If not shunned for grooming the party, party members heal one more hit point a night due to the general lack of arthropod vermin that otherwise infest everyone.
- 11 Burrower—You LOVE to dig holes and will actively do so if given the chance. And if you can dig one large enough you will like to climb on in and den for the night. You dig twice as fast as the normal person.
- 12 Chisel-like teeth—Your front teeth extend, strengthen, and wear down with use, keeping a sharp point. You gain a bite attack for 1d3 damage, or increase an existing bite attack by +1d.
- 13 Eusocial—You find that you crave the company of others and would prefer to huddle together when sleeping and do not like to be isolated.
- 14 Night sight—You can see better in the dark, gaining limited infravision or 20 feet. If already have infravision, extend another 20 feet.
- 15 Bonded—You can see through rat’s eyes, hear through its ears. You gain bonus hit points equal to the rat’s when it is within 100’. Suffer its hit points in temporary stamina loss if rat is killed.
- 16 Roll twice on the table using a d14.

# WHAT IS THE SMOKING WYRM?

*"Nanos gigantum humeris insidentes."*

—Attributed to Bernard of Chartres by John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, 1159

*"We are dwarfs, but dwarfs who stand on the shoulders of those giants, and small though we are, we sometimes manage to see farther on the horizon than they."*

—William of Baskerville, *The Name of the Rose*

*"In a world where I feel so small, I can't stop thinking big."*

—Neil Peart, *Caravan on Clockwork Angels*



In 1974 Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson co-wrote, and Gygax published, *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)*; fantasy roleplaying was born. The game was, by today's comparison, stripped down. The boxed set contained the bare essence of what was needed to play. From the three 36-40 page rulebooks that resided in the original game set there quickly spawned a wonderful homebrew world of unofficial fan-based magazines, fanzines for short, that supported the fledgling product line with different ideas from different gaming clubs. Within a short time period dozens of fanzines supported the game.

Fanzines such as *Alarums and Excursions* (1975), *Dungeoneer* (1976), *Troll Crusher* (1977), *Underworld Oracle* (1977), and *The Oracle* (1982), all added new content, ideas, and pushed new ways to play the game beyond what Gygax and Arneson presented. These fanzines presented an open, consumer-controlled, forum for discussing roleplaying games. In the early days of our common interest, they represented the easiest way for enthusiasts to reach out to one another, and present their own ideas. The fanzine is the way for dwarves to literally stand on the shoulders of giants—to push the medium, to present ideas in public at a time when the cost of doing so was high.

*D&D* was revised and split into two games with the Holmes edition of *D&D* coming out in 1977 and *The Players Handbook for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D)* releasing in 1978, followed in 1979 by *The Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG)*. Notably, Gygax included the famous Appendix N in the *DMG*, and this list of twenty-eight authors would reveal that even our founding giant rested upon the shoulders of other authors.

Can giants stand on the shoulders of giants? Or, do we all just grow smaller each passing cohort, and thus we are all always dwarves, even if our ancestors envision us as giants?

Other publishers emerged. And by 1984 the roleplaying industry went into overdrive.

*AD&D* launched a second edition, and dove headlong into the worldbuilding phase of the game, adding in quick succession settings such as *Dragonlance* (1984), *The Forgotten Realms* (1987), *Spelljammer* (1989), *Planescape* (1994), and many more to the long-established *World of Greyhawk*. Horror made a large resurgence and literally overwhelmed the industry with Mark Rein-Hagen's powerhouse *Vampire: The Masquerade* (V:tM, White Wolf, 1991), which was quickly codified into the *World of Darkness*.

V:tM returned to the Appendix N concept, listing out novels, movies, roleplaying games, and even philosophical writings as the giants upon which the setting stood. Here, for perhaps the first time, D&D became an acknowledged inspiration, along with a host of new literary authors.

AD&D died, and D&D lived as Wizards of the Coast (WOTC) purchased the ailing TSR and infused life into the game with the monumental third edition. D&D third edition marked a massive turning point, with the Open Gaming License (OGL) and d20 licenses allowing, for the first time, direct connections to a now-venerable rule system reborn with modern twists. For his part in moving the OGL forward, Ryan Dancey should be sainted, because it freed the D&D rule set as we know it to be eternally tinkered with in a mutually beneficial manner. In a deeply philosophical way, the OGL promotes the dwarves standing on the backs of giants, leaning into the problem of seeing further than before. With the OGL, D&D embraced the idea that we should build off one another in a mutually beneficial way.

And so the phrase “Standing on the shoulders of giants...” or *nanos gigantum humeris insidentes*, was born. In the OGL something magical happens—giants give permission to dwarves to spawn something new, to create—to build off what they have created. The OGL is the Nash Equilibrium Theory in operation—and we have seen in real life that everyone can win—that dwarves can stand on the shoulders of giants to see just that bit further. Because seeing further together is better than just one viewpoint seeing further than the other. Just as the OGL created *Dungeon Crawl Classics*, Goodman Games has likewise allowed third party publishers to flourish by creating his own DCC license which augments the OGL.

All these games that came before us have inspired us to produce *Tales from the Smoking Wyrms*. Our goal is to create the content we have always wanted to see, and also explore the past of fanzines, going back to the beginning to see what might still be relevant today. In this issue we present the Cthulhu patron, the Silver Ball, our take on the classic Paladin class, advanced Telepathic Rat rules, Cullpepper's Herbal, the Onward Retainer comic strip, and we lay the groundwork for much more work in coming issues with the Ritual rules. The ritual article is the first part of a three-part article, covering lots of ritual examples.

As we worked on these articles for this first issue of *Tales from the Smoking Wyrms*, we stood on the shoulders of giants. Maybe we have been able to see a little further together, but it is hard to tell from this vantage point.

# TALES FROM THE SMOKING WYRM

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