

Ex-RPGNet Reviews

Sailor Moon: Character Diaries

by [Justin Alexander](#)

February 6th, 2015

Tagline: The best character sheets done for any game, ever. Period.

WHAT IS THIS?

This is a review of three associated products for Guardians of Order's [Sailor Moon Role-Playing Game](#) (which [I've reviewed elsewhere](#)): The [Knight Character Diary](#), the [Dark Warrior Character Diary](#), and [Sailor Scout Character Diary](#).

Essentially these are character sheets from a company that dreams *really* big (each 56 page pamphlet is for use with a single character). Each diary contains a 14-page character sheet, forty diary pages, a title page which you can personalize, and a dozen or so pictures (appropriate for each type of character) which you can use for your character portrait.

HOW GOOD IS IT?

Very, very good – surprisingly enough.

Personally, I don't buy character sheets. The last time I bought a packet of character sheets was back in 6th grade, when I was an avid AD&D player and those of us in the group who could afford to splurge on store-bought character sheets (instead of writing it out on notebook paper) became possessed of a certain prestige.

In point of fact, I didn't buy these – they came in the form of reviewer comp copies from GoO. But if I was playing in a *Sailor Moon* campaign I'd be sorely tempted to break my habit now that I've seen these.

For starters, the 14-page character sheet is absolutely wonderful. Often when you see extended character sheets like this all that's really contained on them are lots of lines which are supposedly dedicated to "character history". There are certain elements of that here (a page dedicated to it, but laid out rather nicely in segmented portions of your history – "Silver Millennium" and "Earth Childhood" in the Sailor Scout diary, for example), but by-and-large the extended sheet consists largely of closely targeted questions meant not only to spur your creativity, but also to facilitate ease of reference.

What this reminds me most of is another memory from my avid AD&D days (it's nostalgia time). Back then I participated heavily on the FidoNet AD&D echo (like a Usenet newsgroup, but propagated at a much slower speed between individual BBS message boards). While there I happened to pick up something called the "Personal Code", which was designed by a wonderful young woman named Alesia Chamness. It was a replacement for AD&D's alignment system which encouraged the individual player to develop his character through a series of targeted questions. It was useful for defining your character



in writing, for spurring creativity, and for developing your existing ideas. Really great stuff, and highly reminiscent of what you're getting in this diaries.

The diary itself is done really nicely. The left-hand pages are plain white with a border which is evocative of the character type in question (a rose is in each corner of the border in the *Knight Character Diary*, for example). The facing pages, on the right side, takes advantage of the rich wealth of artwork which is available to GoO for this game line (in the form of animation stills) – the entire page is taken up by a grey-muted image (again, appropriate to the character type). Because they're muted images you can easily write over these, and they end up providing a fantastic feel to the entire product. You're not just buying a book of blank pages, you're buying something that really ends up enhancing the recording of your character's life and exploits.

Finally, the stock pictures at the end (which are designed to be xeroxed, cut out, colored, and pasted onto the title page which leads the book) are useful for the artistically-disinclined.



WHAT WOULD I CHANGE?

Not much. I'd probably drop the price down to \$4.95, rather than \$5.95. Crossing the \$5 barrier to \$6 makes these books seem just a *little* too pricey to me. On the other hand, I'm sure that GoO has priced these where they have because that's where they can make a profit.

As for the actual content of the pieces, the only I'd change – or rather, expand – are the stock photos. I feel rather limited by the fact that the only picture they have are of the characters from the animated series itself. It's really bad in the *Knight Character Diary*, because all you're basically getting are a variety of pictures of Tuxedo Mask. Again, though, I don't see any way for GoO to have done anything differently – they're constrained by the artwork which is available to them.

IS IT WORTH IT?

If you're the type who buys character sheets as a matter of course, then I would say definitely yes. The price may seem a little steep at first – but, trust me, you're getting your money's worth.

If you don't typically buy character sheets, then there's a goodly chance you aren't going to break the habit with these. On the other hand, I'd suggest taking a peek at them next time you're in the store. They just might surprise you.



Style: 5

Substance: 4

Author: Karen McLarney
Company/Publisher: Guardians of Order
Cost: \$5.95
Page Count: 56
ISBN: n/a

Originally Posted: 2000/03/12

What I said about not buying character sheets was nothing but truth: When I first started roleplaying, I photocopied the sample sheet off the back of the BECMI basic manual (which produced the double-sided 8.5 x 11 character sheet 2-up on a single sheet) and got so used to using it that when I bought a pack of the official sheets they seemed weird to me. I don't think I've ever actually paid for an official character sheet ever again.

Of course, in the digital era that doesn't mean as much as it used to: Although I don't buy them, I have used a variety of official sheets over the years. And a really great character sheet — like the Sailor Moon Character Diaries — really can transform a game. Most recently, the character sheets for [Numenera](#) and [The Strange](#) are like that: The former through sheer beauty and utility; the latter through the excessively clever method it uses for handling characters shifting between alternate realities.

For an explanation of where these reviews came from and why you can no longer find them at RPGNet, click [here](#).

Ex-RPGNet Reviews - The Great Dalmuti

by [Justin Alexander](#)

February 13th, 2015

Tagline: A really great card game, although with fewer twists than we've come to expect from Master Garfield.

THE CONCEPT

“‘One day I will ride a horse like that,’ said the child to the woman as they watched the noble procession. ‘Yes dearie.’ ‘And I will have a palace, and lots of cake.’ ‘Maybe,’ she said, remembering the marble-lined halls of her youth. ‘But today let’s just try to finish planting to the stream.’ **The only place that peasant and princess change places faster than in a fairy tale is in The Great Dalmuti!**”

Life isn't fair... and neither is [The Great Dalmuti!](#)

According to the introduction of the little multi-lingual instruction pamphlet of *The Great Dalmuti* (English, Spanish, German, and French rules are all presented in one), Richard Garfield first encountered the rules for this game while attending graduate school. As he says: “I had never seen a game like it before; it rewarded the player in the lead and penalized the player who was falling behind. The game was played for no other purpose than to play. There was no winner or loser at the end; there was only the longest-lasting ‘Dalmuti’, and the ‘peon’, the player most talented at grovelling.”



THE RULES

There are twelve ranks of cards. The ranks symbolize various levels in a fantasy society – with the Great Dalmuti at Rank 1; the Baronesses at Rank 4; Peasants at Rank 12; etc. The rank also doubles as the card's effectiveness (with lower numbers being more effective) and as the number of cards of that type in the deck (thus there is one Great Dalmuti in the deck, four Baronesses, twelve Peasants, and so on). There are also two Jesters, who are assigned Rank 13 – but can also act as wild cards when played in conjunction with other cards.

At the beginning of the game everyone draws a random card, which assigns their rank: The player with the highest card is the Great Dalmuti; the second highest becomes the Lesser Dalmuti; the lowest becomes the Greater Peon; and the second lowest becomes the Lesser Peon. Everyone in between becomes a Merchant (of varying ranks depending on where their cards fell).

Here's the really cute part of the game: You have to change the seating arrangement according to your rank. The Great Dalmuti can stay where he is, but everyone else needs to array themselves out to his right, until you finally return to the Greater Peon to the Great Dalmuti's left.

All the cards are dealt at this point (by the Greater Peon) and the goal is simple: Get rid of all your cards. Before play begins, though, is a stage of taxation – in which the Greater Peon gives his best two cards to

the Greater Dalmuti in exchange for two of his cards (which the Dalmuti selects), and the Lesser Peon gives one of his cards to the Lesser Dalmuti in exchange for one of his cards.

The Greater Dalmuti then leads the first round by playing one or more cards of the same rank. Play proceeds to his right (through the Lesser Dalmuti to the Greater Peon) with each player being able to play either *more* cards of the same rank which was last played, or a set of cards in a higher rank. The round proceeds until no one can (or will – you’re not forced to play just because you can), and then whoever played last wins the round and leads the next.

The first player to run out of cards becomes the Great Dalmuti in the next round; the second player out becomes the Lesser Dalmuti; and so on until you reach the last player (who becomes the Greater Peon).

There are some other flairs (for example the ability to call a Revolution and an optional scoring system), but that’s the gist of the game.

SUMMARY

You may be asking yourself why you should buy this game. After all, I’ve told you almost all the rules; Garfield didn’t invent it; and you can play it with a regular deck of cards.

Well, quite frankly, because the deck of cards which is being furnished to you is really great – and cheaper than buying the several decks of cards which you would need to in order to assemble the specialized deck needed to play.

Win-win.

Which, of course, leads to the obvious question: Is the game worth playing?

Absolutely. The bigger the group, the more fun it is. It’s open-ended, while remaining competitive, and the interactions (both socially and strategically) which the dynamics of the rules lead to are really entertaining.

Garfield says one thing in the instruction manual that really captures, I think, why he has had such incredible success in designing (and, in this case, presenting) card games that capture the minds and hearts of their players: “If you’ve enjoyed *The Great Dalmuti* and don’t usually play regular card games, give them a try. For me there are more hours of amusement in a single deck of cards than in all the world’s movies combined. And I love the movies.”

Amen.

Style: 4

Substance: 4

Author: Richard Garfield

Company/Publisher: Wizards of the Coast

Cost: \$7.95

Page Count: n/a

ISBN: 1-880992-57-4

Originally Posted: 2000/03/12

Ex-RPGNet Reviews - Mindtrap

by [Justin Alexander](#)

February 20th, 2015

Tagline: A game of mind-benders which prove to have answers that are either too simple or simply cheats.

[MindTrap](#) is a very simple game: You get several hundred cards and a disposable pad of Escheresque mazes. Each card is printed with a mind-twister. A correct answer advances you one square along the maze - a wrong answer doesn't do anything. First player (or team of players) to the end of the maze wins.

Ta-da.

Because of the Escher-inspired design of the maze there are two different paths you can follow to victory - one short and one long. Although the rules don't mention it, you could conceivably use this as a crude form of handicap.

The game is competently put together, but at its heart it fails to be something to waste your money or your time on because of two fundamental flaws with the questions they ask:



Far too many of them prove to be either too simplistic or cheats. Simplistic because they are basically "mind twisters" of such a cliched sort that you were trading them with your buddies in elementary school.

Cheats because some of the answers are basically varieties of, "Hey, look at this piece of information we didn't give you! It solves everything!"

Don't waste your time on this overpriced, glossy paperweight. It's another good example of why [Cheapass Games](#) is so desperately refreshing.

Style: 3

Substance: 2

Author: MindTrap Games, Inc.

Company/Publisher: Pressman Toy Corp.

Cost: \$35.00

Page Count: n/a

ISBN: n/a

Originally Posted: 2000/03/12

This review marks the end of a series of reviews written between October 1999 and March 2000 in which the only RPG-related products I reviewed were a set of character sheets for Sailor Moon. The reason for this was remarkably simple: I was between gaming groups and I wasn't actually

playing or reading RPGs. But I was able to get together with people and play board and card games with them. I initially wasn't writing reviews about them, but then I started getting e-mails from people wondering why I had stopped writing reviews. Since I wasn't actually digesting any RPG material, I responded by reviewing the games that I was playing.

For an explanation of where these reviews came from and why you can no longer find them at RPGNet, click [here](#).

Ex-RPGNet Reviews – Dragon Magazine Archive

by [Justin Alexander](#)

February 27th, 2015

Tagline: A great bargain for a wealth of material, and a wonderful little taste of history.

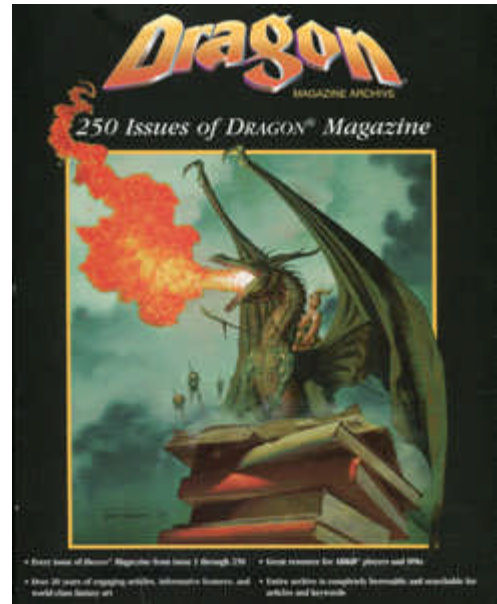
Allow me to salivate.

The [Dragon Magazine Archive](#) collects, on five CD-ROMs, the first two hundred and fifty issues of *Dragon Magazine*, as well as all seven issues of *The Strategic Review* (the house organ which Tactical Studies Rules published prior to *Dragon*). It thus collects more than twenty years worth of material – thousands and thousands of pages of the finest roleplaying material ever set to paper.

For forty bucks. (Some places are selling it for as much as \$70 – don't let 'em fool you. Amazon.com is selling it, here, for \$28.)

So, like I said: Allow to salivate.

Elsewhere on RPGNet I have written a lengthy “[100 Issue Retrospective](#)” which covered the magazine from Issue #162 (the first issue of *Dragon* I ever owned) through to #262 (the most recent at the time I wrote the retrospective). In it I discussed at quite some length the merits and history of *The Dragon*, and I heartily encourage you to take a look at that for more background information concerning the magazine.



To summarize my feelings, I consider *Dragon Magazine* to be one of the most significant icons in the roleplaying industry – and certainly one of the most enduring. I remember well removing the subscription card from my red-boxed [Basic Set](#) of D&D (hands up everyone who was introduced to roleplaying through that nostalgia-ridden product), mailed it in, and waited with eager anticipation for my first issue to arrive in the mail. When it did, I felt instantly connected to a larger world of roleplayers.

Because so many roleplayers are introduced into the industry through some form of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and because it is a natural progression to purchase a subscription to *Dragon* (particularly in the years when TSR was advertising the magazine in the introductory sets of their games), I imagine this is feeling which I share with many others. To a very real extent, *Dragon* (like D&D itself) serves as a major portal into the hobby of gaming.

Thus the *Dragon Magazine Archive*, in addition to providing you with an amazing wealth of material, lets you take a peek into what was passing through this gateway in years past. For years when you were in the hobby (particularly the early years), it's a nostalgia trip of immense proportions. For the years when you weren't, it's a glimpse into an “arcane past” which is fascinating and invigorating.

But, lest we forget and assume there is nothing here but nostalgia, let us remember that within this archive you will find thousands of articles and reviews and columns. You simply *cannot* find a better bargain, in terms of a dollar-to-content ratio, then you will find in this package.

FAVORITE BITS

Despite owning the *Archive* since my birthday (about four months now), I've been able to do little more than skim through the thinnest layer of material – most of it concentrated in the earliest years of the magazine. As a small sampling, let me point out some of my favorite bits:

Strategic Review #1: After a lengthy discussion of spears in man-to-man combat, Gary Gygax writes: "Coming Next Issue . . . POLE ARMS, and Their Relationship to CHAINMAIL."

Maybe I'm just warped, but I found this intrinsically amusing. (If you have no idea why it would be, you're just too young.)

Other notable "before they were famous" moments including one of the earliest discussions of the dual-axis alignment system (complete with the diagrams that would later crop up in first edition). My favorite, though, is the article of random dungeon design (for solo play) which would later serve as the basis for one of the most famous sections of the 1st edition DMG.

One of the first things most people will take a look at when they get their hands on the *Archive* is the very issue of *Dragon* – and with good cause. It is a major milestone, and I have met old hands who divide the entire history of roleplaying (at least during the first couple of decades) into "before *Dragon*" and "after *Dragon*".

The very first words of the editorial content of *The Dragon* are: "This issue marks a major step for TSR Hobbies, Inc. With it, we have bid farewell to the safe, secure world of the house organ, and have entered the arena of competitive magazine publishing."

I don't think I've ever read anything so unintentionally hilarious in my life.

Perhaps the most valuable resource I found in the *Archive* were the early Tékumel articles – articles which are otherwise very difficult to obtain. While they wouldn't fully justify the cost of the *Archive*, except for the true Tékumel fanatic, they come awfully close. Easily worth \$10-15 to anyone with the slightest interest in Tékumel, which doesn't leave a lot of the purchase price left to make up with everything else. (I have posted a review of [Tékumel](#) elsewhere on RPGNet.)

Any summary of the *Archive* would not be complete without perhaps the most noteworthy inclusion:

Wormy!

[SnarfQuest](#) and [Yamara](#), the other two comics of serious note in *Dragon's* history, in my opinion, have been published in collections, but *Wormy* never has (because it's creator simply disappeared). (I believe the *Yamara* collection is still in print from Steve Jackson Games; while a new (and more complete) *SnarfQuest* collection is on its way from Dynasty Publishing – which will also be publishing new(!) *SnarfQuest* strips in their *Games Unplugged* magazines. But I digress.)

Wormy is one of the most memorable icons of the gaming industry, and has long been unavailable in any form. Now, at last, it is possible to read the strip in its entirety at an affordable price. If the Tékumel articles almost make the *Archive* worth the price all by themselves, then *Wormy* definitely has the cover charge under control.

PROBLEM PARTS

Every single problem with the *Archive* can be summed up in one word: Interface.

The interface, quite frankly, sucks. It's not just bad, it's *atrocious*. The pages take too long to turn, the general controls are unintuitive to the point of stupidity and are sluggish to respond. The provided *Table of Contents* for several issues is screwed up (although you can always just look at the magazine's contents page and work from there).

For a product like this, printing is of the utmost importance – but here the problems seem to multiply. I routinely had the printer simply print blank pages. And, unless you set the printing to grayscale, the program will print the black ink by using your color cartridge to print all the colors in the spectrum (a massive waste of expensive ink). Plus, they don't have the page numbers of the digital document match up with the page numbers of the actual magazine (because they don't take the simple step of not counting the cover and inside cover as pages).

Worse yet, though, this monstrous program takes up 40MB of RAM! It slows any attempt to multitask down to a crawl.

Bah.

Fortunately, all of the magazines are presented in Adobe Acrobat format and thus, with their free viewer, you can access them directly and without any problems – bypassing the clunky interface entirely. (Although you may still occasionally use the program for the search engine it employs – which quickly and efficiently searches through the entire collection.) There's still no way to bypass the faulty page numbering (because that's embedded in the document format), but at least in the Acrobat Reader the digital page numbers are displayed right on the screen – so that you won't be reduced to guessing how large the off-set is for this particular issue.

CONCLUSION

The *Dragon Magazine Archive* is a fantastic bargain. Don't pass it up.

Style: 3

Substance: 5

Author: Various

Company/Publisher: Wizards of the Coast / TSR, Inc.

Cost: \$40.00

Page Count: Unfathomable

ISBN: 0-7869-1448-3

Originally Posted: 2000/03/21

"Worse yet, though, this monstrous program takes up 40MB of RAM!" ... speaking of things rendered hilarious through the benefit of hindsight.

The Dragon Magazine Archive remains one of the best bargains in the history of gaming. And that remains true even though it's currently priced at \$155 on Amazon.