

MEDIEVAL FANTASY MECHS POWERED BY STEAM, MAGIC, OR THE LABOR OF A THOUSAND SLAVES

DRAGONMECH



SWORD & SORCERY

3RD AGE

DRAGONMECH

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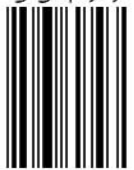
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PLATE 1 *The standard races are well represented in the land of Highpoint.*



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