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In memory of Jason Hottell, who got me
into RPGs when we were kids.
1977—2006



I would also like to once again thank Team RedBrick for all of their hard work and Angela Howard for her proofreading, as well as my old-school Earthdawn gamers: Justin “Favvy” Carson, Craig “*The Grim*” Gaurisco, Eric “*Spider-Boy*” Cole, Jackie “*What do I roll?*” Mitchell, Tony “*Brood 9*” Eisenhower, and Tom “*Tommy may I?*” Roberts.

And finally, I would like to dedicate this novel to the very special Yuri Miyazaki.

The Age of Legend



Before science, before history, an era of magic existed in our world's dim past. Magic flowed freely, touching every aspect of the lives of men and women of the Name-giver races. It was an age of heroes, an age of fantastical deeds and mythical stories. It was the Age of Legend.



As the levels of magic rose, so did the dangers in the world. The rise of magic lured the Horrors from the depths of astral space—nightmarish creatures that devoured all life in their path. For four centuries, entire nations hid underground as the Horrors devastated their lands during the dark time that came to be called the Scourge.





A century ago, the people of Cathay emerged from their dragon lairs. Trolls, dwarfs, elves, orks, and humans live side by side with exotic races: the lizard-like t'skrang, the mystical storm children, and the earthen obsidimen. Fantastical creatures dwell once more in the forests and jungles. Arcane energies offer power to those willing to learn the ways of magic.



But instead of a new era of peace and prosperity, the Imperial Dynasties that had ruled over Cathay for millennia ended suddenly and without an heir, casting the shining Empire into civil war. Through noble deeds and sacrifice, the heroes of the world forge Cathay's future, arming themselves for their daunting task with powerful magical spells and treasures, while villains plot from the darkness.

This is the Age of Legend.



Daylen's Journey

Realm of Twilight

Land of the Star

Haxi

Desert of

Swallowed Tears

Huan-Di

Tower of Secrets

Min Yan

Shao

Mount Liban

Tofrisa

Jungle of Endless Wandering

Emerald Sea

Sample file



PROLOGUE



Silence brooded over the bloodstained field and broken bodies. Dusk ran its fiery glow across the still heaps of the dying and the slain. It was here where the large force of heroes, gathered together by the Five Guardians—the great dragon protectors of Cathay—had met and clashed with the legions of the Nethermancer.

And won.

Only five figures remained amid the scatterings of limbs, weapons, armor, and corpses. Five heroes, standing above it all, still and somber, gazing about at the carnage they had helped wrought, their breathing deep and labored, their task yet unfinished.

The roar of battle still echoed in Feng Po's ears. He dragged a weary hand across his face, and his palm came away slick with blood—not his. He stared down at his sword; carved from a single piece of jade, it was an elegant weapon, one that he had carried into battle for many years.

Feng Po was a Sword Dancer adept of great renown: he had adventured far and wide across Cathay; he was the undefeated champion of the Temple of the Four Winds tourney; he had faced ancient terrors and terrific foes; and yet, as he stared at the red, sinking sun, he doubted he would ever see it set again.

He cast his gaze at his four companions. They were Jin Wang, the elf and fellow Sword Dancer, and once Feng Po's greatest rival until, a short two years ago, they were forced to join forces to defeat a common enemy; Mai the Lotus, a young human woman

and accomplished Wizard of Nan-Gu; Duso the Warrior, a powerfully built ork called the *Dragon Fist* by some; and Kai, the human Scholar from the Tower of Secrets.

They were the last of the adepts assembled by the Five Guardians to destroy Pan and his dark minions, who had terrorized Cathay over the past five years, burning, destroying, and killing any who opposed them. These dark forces had rampaged largely unopposed, and those who did have the courage to resist them were easily swept aside. But then Pan made a fatal error: he had killed the great dragon Shuou, and this terrible sacrilege could not go unavenged by the Five Guardians.

The heroes were chosen, drawn from far and wide, and tasked by the great dragons to put an end to this evil. After nearly two years of chasing Pan and his minions across the empire, the heroes finally drove them out of their final hiding place and forced a confrontation here, on this field, where the tall green grass now waved slick and red below a sky that was already alive with circling vultures.

The bulk of Pan's army had been filled with untrained cultists who worshipped the Nethermancer as a Passion. They threw themselves at the heroes in fanatical waves until their bodies stacked in small mounds, and still they fought on, dying with Pan's Name on their lips.

Feng Po had cleaved left and right, his jade saber finding a target with each stroke, his body performing the *Dance of the Steel Wind*, his adept magic moving his feet and guiding his movements. He had not seen the signal that was given to unleash Pan's monstrous creatures and powerful adepts, all of which had been held in reserve. The terrible wave crashed into the heroes' exposed flanks. From the corpse of the mighty dragon Shuou, Pan had crafted powerful magical weapons, and with these his agents unleashed their dark magic upon them. Heroes fell by the score.

But onward they fought, through the late afternoon and into the evening, and eventually Pan's great host was broken, and the Nethermancer fled with his top lieutenants, abandoning his minions to their fate while fleeing to the tall, looming peak of Mount Shan-Shi, high in the foreboding Demon Gate Mountains.

It was to that tall peak that the gazes of the five remaining heroes were drawn. They knew what had to be done. Their battle was not yet complete. Without a word they looked at one another, and in their eyes they bore the grim determination that Feng Po himself felt. He gave the others a weary nod and wry smile and flicked his saber with a flare, shedding a spray of red before snapping it home in its scabbard.

Together, the five heroes sprinted upwards the mountains, leaving the vultures to their feast. Onward they ran, their well-trained muscles carrying them closer and closer to the hilly slopes, the only sounds their footfalls and steady breathing. Far up into the forested hills they rose, stopping occasionally for Duso to track their enemies.

Far past the hour when nightfall swept down upon them, they came upon the base of a tall black cliff. It rose at a steep pitch, but the five experienced adepts flew up it like Cathayan mountain cats, the clear black sky above them littered with burning white stars, illuminating every hand and foothold. When they reached the top, they silently crept over the rim and found themselves before the head of a giant demon.

At least, it looked like a demon; carved into the side of the rocky mountain was a gaping maw, terrible and ancient, leading into a wall of dense, black shadows. Feng Po recognized it for what it was. He had explored the ruined temples of the yen'hi'ji before—the dark race of shape shifters that had once ruled over the world. Though long abandoned, the temples were always home to vile and sickly things, creatures that shrank from the light and devoured