



# Dungeons and Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History

*Kyle Newman , Jon Peterson , Michael Witwer , Sam Witwer*

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**Dungeons and Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History** Kyle Newman , Jon Peterson , Michael Witwer , Sam Witwer

**An illustrated guide to the history and evolution of the beloved role-playing game told through the paintings, sketches, illustrations, and visual ephemera behind its creation, growth, and continued popularity.**

From one of the most iconic game brands in the world, this official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS illustrated history provides an unprecedented look at the visual evolution of the brand, showing its continued influence on the worlds of pop culture and fantasy. Inside the book, you'll find more than seven hundred pieces of artwork—from each edition of the core role-playing books, supplements, and adventures; as well as Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance novels; decades of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines; and classic advertisements and merchandise; plus never-before-seen sketches, large-format canvases, rare photographs, one-of-a-kind drafts, and more from the now-famous designers and artists associated with DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. The superstar author team gained unparalleled access to the archives of Wizards of the Coast *and* the personal collections of top collectors, as well as the designers and illustrators who created the distinctive characters, concepts, and visuals that have defined fantasy art and gameplay for generations. This is the most comprehensive collection of D&D imagery ever assembled, making this the ultimate collectible for the game's millions of fans around the world.

## Dungeons and Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History Details

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## From Reader Review Dungeons and Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History for online ebook

### Julian says

The commentary on the early days of D&D, including detailed commentary on the art (and where they stole it) were fascinating and better than several other accounts I've read. Toward the end, it lapsed into a pean to 5th Edition D&D which happens to be (surprise!) a major product of the book's publisher. Overall it's a fun book for completists and those who really care about the 70s and 80s of D&D, particularly the art. A deeper discussion of trends, influences and styles since the 1990s would have been interesting.

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### Vivian says

Don't let the visual history fool you, this is a fairly thorough history of Gary Gygax, D&D, TSR, etc. From basement game play to corporation to being bought out with all the rollercoaster ride that implies. The compilation of visuals include illustrations from the various guides from the onset booklets to the hardcovers to the floppy disks to the CD Roms and all the editions as well as some fun odd bits like a belt buckle to a pin. So, from an information and chronicle approach this works well, and you can really see the different trends just from the artwork. That said, I think you probably need to have some emotional connection to D&D or gaming history interest to get into this.

Personally, I hit D&D in the second wave when an older sibling brought it back from college. So, I had the first set of harcover manuals. I thought the origin of the game out of military miniatures and warfare super interesting since I had no knowlege of it. I also found the later manifestation of the rules bizarre as TSR went through growth, expansion, and finally being bought out by the founders of Magic, which is a clear derivative of D&D.

While reading this I got to see the hardcover collectors' edition, and it is spectacular. Far more satisfying than an ebook and worth the money with all the extras: prints and the infamous Tomb of Horrors. This then turned into the discussion of which versions everyone in the room was familiar with, unearthing of hand-painted figures and guides from eons ago, confessions of favorite parts of the game and challenges--getting everyone to commit to a time and place. I guess the online forums have helped people with that. For me, the cartography was my favorite part.

\* NOTE: This rating reflects the ebook media which just isn't satisfying for art books in general. Art history, yes. Art, no. I'd easily add a star for the hardcover edition, if not two, which has good paper and color quality.

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### Itamar says

A beautiful book, full of D&D art and some of the game's history. The history part is not very deep and does not go into a lot of detail or human stories, but this is less of D&D's biography and more of "look at the

pretty pictures" within context.

Highly recommended for those interested in the Art of D&D.

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## **Jonathan Hicks says**

When I hit the D&D hobby in 1984 there was one image that burned into my brain, an image that called out to my imagination and set the tone for my fantasy tabletop gaming for years to come. It was the Larry Elmore cover of the Red Box D&D Basic Set. The warrior lunging forward as the dragon protected its hoard; it was colourful, dynamic and inspirational.

The interior art of the game was just as good, with Elmore and Jeff Easley adding flavour to the content. I read the books over and over again and the artwork as well as the game itself became a huge part of my first few steps into the larger gaming hobby.

As I progressed through the game, moving on to 2nd edition rules, the artwork was always fluid and dynamic. I played in the worlds of Dragonlance, Forgotten Realms, Ravenloft and Spelljammer and the art style changed with the settings. Even during my incredibly long hiatus from D&D I still purchased Dragon magazine to keep myself updated and inspired as even in these pages the artwork shone. The rules and the worlds were the driving force behind the game but it was the art that bought it to life.

From the early small books to the colourful volumes on gaming store shelves today, the artwork of Dungeons & Dragons has always been dominant and the images that graced the covers of many of the products have become iconic in the hobby. It changed and morphed over the years with many different artists bringing their own style and imagination to the mix, changing as the game did over the decades.

Obviously, there was a story to tell.

Enter writer Michael Witwer (Empire of Imagination), director Kyle Newman (Fanboys), writer Jon Peterson (Playing at the World) and actor Sam Witwer (Battlestar Galactica). They all have a history with and a love for the game, so what happens when you get four D&D fans with a passion for the father of all RPGs together?

You get Art & Arcana: A Visual History. A glorious coffee-table tome detailing the history of the artwork of the game, the game itself, and the people, products and points of interest that pepper it's long illustrious reign.

After a heartfelt and eager forward from actor Joe Manganiello, the book begins with a brief description of the hobby, a quick guide to what the book covers and how it will cover it, and then it dives straight into the action with the original edition books, how they came about and the artwork that went into them. Did you read the books and wonder why certain drawings seemed familiar? This book answers those questions and more, you find out about the artists and their art, and you discover more details about the history and the creation of the game as you drink in the visuals.

And this is where the book shines; it's not just a pages of random artwork with notes about where they appeared, who created them and maybe an anecdote or two. Within every section of the book, from the original editions to 5th edition and everything in between (including computer games, novels and the even the Dungeons & Dragons cartoon), Art & Arcana illuminates the reader with facts and details about the development of the game, the routes it took during it's life, the decisions that were made and the effect it had

on the companies that produced the work. While it's not a biographical story with touches of drama as per Michael Witwer's book 'Empire of Imagination', it tells a story about the drive, passion, high moments and pitfalls the game and the company endured over the decades. So, while you're marvelling at the artwork and getting all misty-eyed and nostalgic over images from your childhood – or even experiencing the art for the first time if you're new to the hobby – there's an amazing story being told that puts everything into context. The artwork changes with the fortunes of the company as well as the times, and it's all here to see.

There are some incredible images in the book, some I have never seen before myself, and no matter which edition you used to enter the hobby there's something here for everyone. Are you an old grognard who remembers the glory years of the 1970s? There's something in here for you. 2nd edition player? This book has got you covered. Perhaps you just like the peripheral products like the novels and other games? There's material in here for you, as well as an insight as to how it all came about. Paintings, sketches, photographs, old advertisements, posters, covers... it's all here and it's quite, quite glorious to behold. With the accompanying story detailing a history with just as much adventure as the game itself, this is an excellent read with plenty to offer time and time again.

Whether you're an old-school gamer or you've just hit the hobby with 5th edition, Art & Arcana: A Visual History is a book that any player of D&D can't do without. If you want to relive your passion for the game's art or experience it for the first time it doesn't matter; this is a must-have book for any fan of D&D or even the roleplaying hobby in general.

Very highly recommended.

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### **James Adams says**

This is a tricky one to review. As an artistic history of D&D, it's almost flawless, but the text is a dry and cursory telling of the story thus far. For what is essentially the biography of a game, there are almost no discussions of the mechanics and ideas of its gameplay. While the crunchy stuff may not mean much to a casual consumer, I don't think this book is aimed at the casual market: Big, expensive coffee-table/conversation-piece books rarely are.

While the text is lacking, this is an art book. As such, it's amazing. While the early D&D art was crude, the evolution is great to see, piece by piece. The layout, with its asides and showcases, also delivers mightily. This is a book that nails its goal without being its best self. I absolutely recommend it to die-hards, but the average reader or art fan may want to keep walking.

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### **11811 (Eleven) says**

This had me in full throttle geek mode from start to finish. It's probably the best book in the world.

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### **Bookwraiths says**

Great book. A mesmerizing trip down memory lane for myself. The amount of historical details here is quite astonishing. Every lover of D&D will devour and adore this history of the rpg, which leaves no stone unturned in its effort to fully tell the story of Dungeon & Dragons from its early days to the present. Especially memorable are the multitude of wonderful pictures of favorite modules and artwork from back in

the 1980s. Truly, a book which should be on every D&D lovers bookshelf forever!

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### **Ethan says**

A bit hagiographic (well, a lot hagiographic) but a good crash course in some of this history. If you hang around dnd nerds often enough you probably know a lot of this stuff, but there's a lot of primary sources and a boatload of art to make the repeat info not totally worthless. As a browsing art book, really spectacular. I have a soft spot for a lot of the amateur old art, and it's amazing to see the splash pages of iconic monsters renditions in each version of the game (lmao at 1e beholder). Loved it.

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### **Malum says**

This is exactly what it says it is: a history of Dungeons and Dragons with loads and loads of art.

The history itself was ok. Anyone that is involved in the hobby probably won't find too much here that will surprise them, although it is extremely comprehensive. Gary Gygax, the satanic panic, the oversaturation of settings in the 90s, the edition wars, the magazines, software, dice games, card games, cartoons, toys, PC games, handheld games, etc. etc. etc. It's all here. Something that I did learn from all of this history, however, is that actor and notable cool dude Peter Cushing was an avid miniatures painter and wargamer. I guess that's how Grand Moff Tarkin was so good at strategy.

What I came to see, however, was the art, and this big cinder block of a book doesn't disappoint. Of course you are going to get the standard art pieces that are in every D&D art book: the covers of the books/boxed sets, the interior pieces, etc. This art, of course, covers all editions of D&D from when it was being hand assembled in small batches all the way to 5th edition.

What you also get, however, is draft pieces and sketches, advertisements, photos (including one of famous Van Helsing enthusiast Peter Cushing playing with his miniatures), notes and scrawlings from artists and designers, and so much more.

So, if you are looking for history, art, behind the scenes goodies, or nostalgia, you will likely find it in here.

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### **Tobias Asplund says**

Brilliant and beautiful history of the world's greatest role playing game.

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### **Brandon Forsyth says**

I absolutely loved flipping through this gorgeous book of art from the 40+ year history of D & D. It does an amazing job of highlighting the contributions that hundreds of people have made to this game, and the ways it has sparked so many people's imaginations. I'm very interested in this game as a creativity engine, and I'm looking forward to playing more in this world next year.

## Sean Gibson says

Dungeons & Dragons is the greatest game ever created by humans. (Snorksplat is the greatest game ever created by aliens, but that's just because watching two wigblorps twerm a flabbertat is the most exciting thing imaginable, so it edges out D&D by a scrotumfuzz.)

Now, it's entirely possible that you may disagree with that (factually correct) contention, which I, in my benevolence, will allow. But, what you cannot deny is the outsize influence the game, despite a relatively modest number of players in relative terms (relative to, say, Fortnite), has had on mass pop culture.

Sure, the game alone is not responsible for the dominance of the fantasy genre across movies, games, and books (some dude named Tolkien, for example, probably deserves at least a little credit), but D&D's DNA is writ large across any number of wildly popular multiplatform creative properties—due primarily to the fact that the creators of many of those wildly popular works honed their own storytelling chops while hunched over snack-strewn tabletops covered with dice, hexagonal graph paper, and dog-eared rulebooks.

Art & Arcana celebrates an extraordinarily imaginative and collaborative game with a dazzling array of visuals that show the game's evolution from a home-brewed labor of love to a corporate brand name to something that seems to have struck the ideal balance between money-making concern and passion-fueled platform for shared storytelling, imaginative forays into distant worlds, and social inclusion. Even for someone who thinks in words like yours truly, seeing the art of D&D evolve from moderately skilled black-and-white sketches wherein anatomical correctness was more of a guideline than a rule to magnificently drawn, masterfully painted masterpieces that you can easily get lost in made for hours of entertainment.

As much as I enjoyed the art, however, I may have enjoyed the narrative even more, tracing the arc of D&D's development from Gary Gygax's basement to the hallowed halls of Wizards of the Coast. With hand-drawn maps from Gygax's own game complementing the chronicle of how D&D slowly made its way across the country and around the world, I couldn't help get nostalgic for the days before cable and the internet when a game like D&D provided the kind of creative, fantastical escapism you couldn't get anywhere else, even if I never, you know, actually lived through such days\* (I mean, I lived before the days of the interwebs, of course, but by the time I became a savvy connoisseur of pop culture in the mid-80s, technology had advanced leaps and bounds from the days of D&D's infancy).

An absolutely essential read for all D&D enthusiasts, and highly recommended for those thinking about dipping a toe in the shimmering waters of pen-and-paper RPGs: if this doesn't fire your desire to break out some polyhedral dice and slay some orcs, nothing will.

*\*I really do have a bad habit of getting wistful about stuff I've never experienced. I've even been known to get nostalgic thinking about first menstrual cycles.*

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## Shannon Appelcline says

*Art & Arcana* is a stunning visual history of *Dungeons and Dragons*. It's got all of the famous art that you'd expect to see, much of it drawn from the original sources, without branding. It's also got beautiful comparisons of a variety of sorts and great art drawn from many licensed materials, from comics and cartoons to miniatures and computer games. The gorgeous, careful layout and the high-quality printing show

all of this off perfectly.

There's also a written history here that's good. It doesn't go into great depth, but it certainly does a great job of hitting every major point in the history of D&D and covers lots of things that the average D&D player won't know. It really shines (unsurprisingly) when talking about the artists, revealing who these people that helped to create the game were. I also found the later parts of the book, covering 3e, 4e, and 5e, quite insightful in their analytical analyses of why Wizards made their decisions for those editions.

This is certainly the best art book ever released for D&D and one of the best history books. I'd label it as a "must-buy" for anyone with more than casual interest in the hobby.

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### **Mary Catelli says**

A history of D&D. Heavy emphasis on the visual elements.

Man, that early art was cheap and amateurish. Sometimes fun, to be sure. Picks up as it goes on. Also, there are maps, which gives me deep philosophical thoughts about the way dungeon crawls would be hard to make a novel out of. . . you would have to write a trilogy to cover every room in a single page.

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### **Aidan Hennessy says**

Fantastic visual look at the history of D&D.

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