

# Search for the Nile Revisited:

## Designer's Notes, Addenda, Clarifications & Response

by David Wesely

**ED. NOTE:** As soon as he had finished his article on *Search for the Nile*, (Published in TD last month) Gary Gygax mailed a photocopy to Dave. Because of press-time, the inherent delays in using the U.S. Mails, etc., Mr. Wesely's reply was not in time for the last issue, and it came in the form of a letter. However, it makes an excellent follow-up article and provides some fascinating ideas and insights. Having been infected with "SftN Fever" by my publisher, I am now among the ranks of admirers of this fascinating game.

### Length

As we say on page 2 of the rule book exploring the whole of Africa at one sitting is a marathon task. Our playtesters found it to take about 8½ hours. Of course fans of *Drag Nach Osten* will find this to be nothing - but for people with more moderate gaming tastes, we recommend a 20-turn limit. That is, each player is given 20 turns to get organized, get into Africa, make some significant discoveries and (if he survives) to publish them. (Knowing when to quit is the most important skill in the game. The greatest killer of expeditions is STUPIDITY. In a 20-turn game one is forced to pick an objective that can be accomplished in a reasonable time - e.g. finding the source of the Benue, not the Nile.) A 20-turn game, with a full six players (120 turns in all) can be played in about 2 hours, once the players are used to the rules. While some turns can be much longer-with mapping, discovery of natives, negotiations, battles, more negotiations, trading, and hunting all happening in a single turn - the average player turn will run about 1 minute in length.

I wish we had been more specific in our recommendation as to time-limit games. In the rules we left limits to players' discretion; this has evidently left a number of players with the impression that you have to try to explore the whole map in each game.

After playing a 20-turn game, we recommend that the players leave its results on the map, and treat the unerasable, published hexes from the first game as preprinted, known territory in the next. If effect, while the map as printed shows Africa as known in 1821, and the players first game will start in 1821, the next game will start at some later date, say 1831. As a result, starting with the first 20-turn game, every player's mapboard will develop its own unique history which will be passed on from game to game, and the exploration of Africa becomes a "campaign" rather than a "monster game".

### Survival

It is important to note that *players*, not *explorers*, score points, while *explorers*, not *players*, die.

Of course the explorer must survive each expedition to score points for his player but the death of an explorer will only prevent the player from scoring points for the expedition in progress; he will not lose points already scored for previous expeditions.

Thus the players are immortal; you can think of them as being newspaper editors or heads of scientific societies sending out expeditions while they stay safe at home, or you can assume that each player is "reincarnated" as the heir of the deceased explorer, ready to pursue the family tradition of African exploration. Rationalization aside, we found that "bang, you're dead and out of the game" rules discouraged vigorous play and made sheer cowardice the best strategy. Thus, players are encouraged both to stick their necks out and to "retire" dud explorers in favor of new ones as the game goes on.

### Organization of Rules

We debated the layout of the rules, being familiar with the *Strategy & Tactics/ Moves* discussions of narrative versus outline versus order of play versus grouped by subject, etc., formats. After six drafts of the rules we settled on the present set as being the most acceptable to playtesters who had previously not seen the game.

In so far as possible the rules are written in a "main sequence" format. That is, everything a player could conceivably do in one hex in one turn is covered in the order it would occur. Alternate activities that would branch off of this pattern are listed after the main sequence and the reader is directed to them by title. Within each major activity, i.e., *Natives*: a similar pattern is employed. We deleted a graphic "decision tree" representation of these relationships along with a "flow chart" for determining the presence

& direction of rivers when it became obvious that the only playtesters who wanted us to include these diagrams were the computer-trained ones who could read them!

The "main sequence" format breaks down when there are topics that must be referred to from several other rules, e.g., NATIVES: POISONING EXPLORER could follow NATIVES: NEGOTIATION, EXPLORER SPECIALTIES: EVANGELISM or EXPLORER SPECIALTIES: MEDICINE. To handle this the rules do have a TABLE OF CONTENTS which gives the location of any rule to which one is referred.

### Completeness of Rules

As you remark, the rules are reminiscent of the original D&D@. In part this is because both attempt to leave room for imagination and creativity on the part of the player. This similarity also arises from the fact that both sets of rules had to be cut down to be published, with the hope of releasing further material as supplements. Our first supplement, called "*Tributary*" is being prepared for release around December 1, '78 and will answer a good many questions that other people have asked us.

### Clarifications

DISASTERS: O.K. I'm game. Although I prefer to make retribution for being too stingy to hire a guide more certain, your suggestion is more realistic.

EXPLORING: MOVEMENT. As you point out, through a combination of rules, *Jungle Swamp* hexes are impossible. They were intended to be impassible. However, there are two exceptions. First, canoes can follow the coast thru a jungle-swamp hex (or any other kind of hex, for that matter). Secondly, where guides can be hired in a jungle swamp hex, they know ways through the hex that may be used by either canoes, men or horses.

A related question is what happens if an expedition moves into an unknown hex and finds terrain it cannot enter (i.e., an expedition on camels finds jungle or one with no canoes finds a lake). Basically the expedition either reorganizes to eliminate the conflict (e.g., abandons/sells/shoots its camels) or goes back to the hex it came from. Even if the latter choice is made, however, the expedition will poke around on the border of the new hex for the rest of the turn - long enough to "explore" it. i.e. map it, find natives, etc. For hunting purposes, the expedition gets to hunt in the better of the two hexes. If natives are found, the expedition may succeed in negotiating with them, hiring guides and/or canoes, camels, etc., needed to enter the hex and thus overcome the obstacle. If the expedition is attacked and takes prisoners, it cannot find the native village if it cannot enter the hex. If the explorer is taken prisoner by the natives, however, and eventually escapes, he will know the paths through the hex.

EXPLORER SPECIALITIES: We developed each of the explorer specialities as branches off of the basic explorer stock. Each would have its advantages in terms of enhanced opportunities to score points (e.g., the Zoologist or Geologist who can score points by doing research in any unpublished hex. He does not have to take chances with *Unexplored* hexes; he can just slide into nice safe (well, less dangerous, as least) hexes with lots of rocks or bugs and flowers that someone else has mapped and rack up point). Each would have its disadvantages in the terms of demanding a certain devotion to one's calling (the Geologist has to risk death by thirst to stop and look at rocks in the desert. Knowing this, his player had better have him take plenty of water to avoid possible desert hexes. "Neither rain, nor sleet, nor Waziri's on the warpath will keep us from knockin' rocks"). Thus the basic explorer has quite a few advantages over his specialized competitors in the simple matter of STAYING ALIVE. You propose several "bennies" for non-specialist explorers, explorer-explorers, etc., but I would be a little afraid that these (especially in combination) would make the other specialities unattractive. Most playtesters settled in non-specialists as it was (of course, most D&D@ players would rather be Conan than Gandalf, too, so this may have more to do with the Macho image than with one's chances of winning with a given character type).

**NATIVES: AMBUSH** Hey you caught us here! We edited out the line that stated "Natives deciding to attack an expedition which is following policy number 2 will only be able to catch it if they take it by surprise". The effect of this rule is to make it *nearly* impossible for the natives to catch the explorer if he runs for it at first sight.

**NATIVES: REACTION to EXPLORER POLICY** You add together the following factors:

- EXPLORER POLICY NUMBER
- BONUSES FOR GUIDES BEING UNARMED, etc.
- DISTANCE FROM COAST
- TRIBAL ATTITUDE (initially zero)

And compare the sum to the roll of three dice. The natives are hostile if the sum is less than the die roll. Therefore, an increase in the ATTITUDE LEVEL will make it *more* likely that the tribe is friendly, as we said.

**MAXIMUM NUMBER OF NATIVE WARRIORS PER HEX** The system given in the rules to generate size of tribe can give anywhere from 1 to 216 warriors-however, with the adjustment for distance from the nearest port of entry (slave trade) the maximum and average number of warriors is significantly reduced. Since minimum and maximum sized tribes (rolling triple ones or sixes respectively) are quite uncommon, the average number of warriors per tribe is the most significant factor:

|                  |            |        |
|------------------|------------|--------|
| 2 hexes from PoE | average 16 | max 72 |
| 3                | 23         | 108    |
| 4                | 31         | 144    |
| 5                | 38         | 180    |
| 6 or more        | 43         | 216    |

This produces fewer warriors than the system you propose. Actually neither our system nor yours comes close to reality (the Zulus were largely confined to one hex of our map but they could easily field 6000 warriors). However, the typical native nation was not so centrally organized and the explorer would have only had to deal with it one village at a time. If we did this "realistically" with one-day turns and ten-kilometer hexes. . . So what we are doing is giving the explorer about one encounter per week with a typical village of the tribe in the hex and letting this take the place of a lot of dull, repetitious, encounters with every village in the hex.

Although we have generally played that one can wipeout a tribe (remove it's marker) by capturing or killing all of it's warriors, this is really not a reasonable result. No explorer is going to have enough Askaris to wipe out the kind of populations we are talking about. Victory over the inhabitants of one village isn't going to dent the total population in the hex. Therefore, what we *should* be doing is interpreting the "number of warriors" as the number in an average village in the hex (as a result of kinds of crops raised, local geography and militaristic tendencies or lack thereof). This number can change temporarily during combat, but only because only one village is being fought. Explorers moving into/remaining in the hex on subsequent turns will find that the defeated village has been brought back up to strength by immigration from other villages, or, to put it another way, they will have to take on a different village every turn.

Looting and trading will be limited by the size of the village (since one must waste a lot of time traveling from one to another we limit this to one village per hex per turn). However, no amount of repeated looting will eliminate all the natives from the hex-one just keeps looting different villages. By the way, for those who have not played the game, I want to state that the games does *not* endorse this kind of policy towards the natives. Although it *is* an available activity one can engage in, we have tried to discourage morally reprehensible conduct.

**NATIVES: TRADING** I like your proposed modifications to the limits on looting and trading. We do need to add something like this to control the "buy your way across Africa" strategy that can be overwhelming late in the game.

**NATIVES: POISONING EXPLORER** Good point. Probably should be a break for Zoologists here too, since they are liable to notice that their mushrooms are different from everyone else's at the dinner. . .

**NATIVES: ATTITUDE LEVELS** As previously stated the adjustments are NOT reversed.

**EXPLORER SPECIALTIES:** I would incline to lump the Botanist advantages you cite into the Zoologist specialty. Zoologists and Geologists were generally not popular with our playtesters who hated to waste time "rock-knocking" or "pickin'-posies". As remarked earlier, the specialist is supposed to be a dedicated professional who is going to do heroic (i.e. stupid) things for his calling be it science, medicine or religion.

**MEDICINE:** On a roll of three, after telling the natives how great he is,

the good doctor fails to halt an epidemic. The natives are (understandably) disappointed by this phony, and the tribal attitude (which influences his chances of escape, if he is a prisoner and of friendly relations, in any case) goes down one point.

The second part of the question arises from a confusion between SCORING POINTS for medical success and ADJUSTING ATTITUDE LEVELS. In short it says that the doctor gets 1 or 2 points for every disease he can report a cure for (when he gets back to Europe) but that he doesn't lose SCORE just because he failed to cure somebody\* and made the natives unhappy\*\*. He also can sit at one tribe and keep treating them rather than having to find new tribes after every success, the way a missionary does.

\*(a comment on 19th-Century Medicine's success rate).

\*\* (and/or racial attitudes).

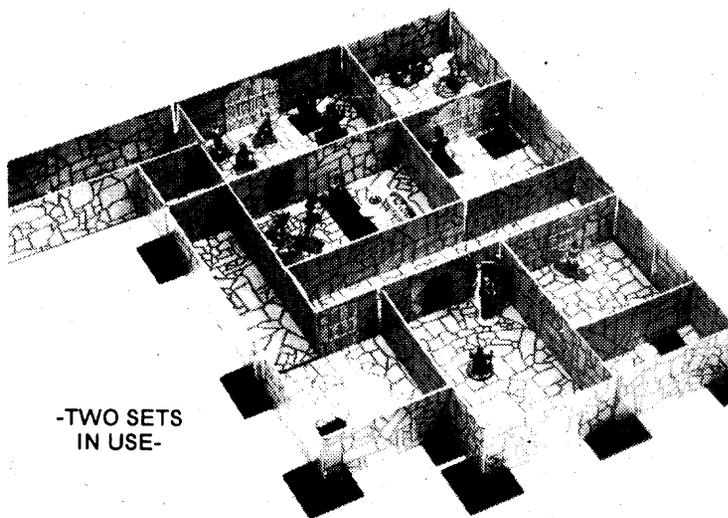
**PRESERVATION OF RATIONS:** Playtesting revealed that the game is surprisingly sensitive to changes in the food supply. Allowing players to save some or all of the food they shot made it too easy to live off the land. However, if this was coupled with a requirement to sit still for 1 turn while the meat was being smoked and cured, maybe it wouldn't get out of hand.

### *Naming Tribes*

I am really taken with your native tribe facts sheet and your TRIBAL NAME GENERATOR. We thought about using real tribal names on our countersheet, but abandoned it as too expensive and/or confusing to the players and just used numbers. Ideally, one could give a chart showing what tribe was in each hex in 1821. However, your table serves admirably to dress up the game. Being attacked by the 19's or trading with the chief of the 37's just doesn't hold a candle to encountering twelve heavily armed Ru'ug at an oasis or preaching to the YoGowauku deep in the heart of darkest Africa!

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