

ABRAXAS ADVENTURE #1

ASSAULT ON THE ASTRAL RIFT

by

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Introduction

The early morning sun pierced the leafy canopy and filtered down to the forest floor, speckling the leaf-strewn path with irregularly-shaped pools of light. Arthur Crayton paused in his walk, head tilted slightly to one side, ears attuned to the murmurs and rustling sounds of the woods.

"There it is again," he said half-aloud. A sharp "snap" from somewhere off to the left. Straining to see through the dappled undergrowth, he detected a slight movement in the stillness. He held his breath; the fern-sweetened air pressed in on him. It was a glimpse. Nothing more. What must have been the side of a large animal flashed briefly in an intense patch of sunlight.

Crayton stepped off the path and, as quietly as possible, made his way toward the creature which appeared to be unaware of his presence. The brambles tugged at his trousers but something urged him onward. Some force compelled him to get closer; to catch sight on this mysterious beast. The air thickened noticeably around him almost as if charged. The feeling that lightning was about to strike flickered across Crayton's mind, yet an insistent energy drove him on.

He approached the animal from behind and could make out its equine features clearly. "It's a horse," he thought in disbelief, "but its size!" The animal, head lowered nibbling on a bush covered with blue-black berries, must have stood ten feet high at the shoulders!

Crayton stepped forward. The sound of the cracking twig was deafening in the quiet of the woods. The animal's head snapped up, its eyes white with alarm. Crayton froze in place. In the second before the beast was to turn and bolt, Crayton ran his eyes over the snow-white, glistening hide, the huge muscles tensing beneath the skin. But what held his attention as if mesmerized, was the animal's head. A horse's head to be sure, larger than most. Eyes with irises the palest of greys. And atop the forehead, a single powder-blue horn, spiraled like a rare sea-shell.

The creature turned to run, its powerful legs propelling it forward. Its horn caught a low-hanging branch with a sharp crack. Crayton would later swear that he saw a flash of light or energy where the horn made

contact with the tree. He pursued the beast to a sunlit clearing and to his amazement, the animal turned and stared across the distance between them with the look a breathless gazelle might give an outdistanced lioness. Then the animal simply turned and, as it moved, disappeared bit by bit through an opening that wasn't but must have been there.

In a daze, Crayton retraced his steps through the woods and gradually became aware of that familiar energy in the air. He was drawn back to the spot where he had come upon the animal and there at his feet was a small blue object. He turned it over in his trembling hand.

This blue object glowing ever so softly. This little bit of unicorn horn.

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Professor Abraxas sits facing us. The sun, sinking in the West, filters through the trees and dapples the lawn in warm, amber patches of light. We are in a large formal garden outside the gates of Castle Howard where a unicorn has recently been sighted. That small blue object the Professor turns over and over in his hand must be the evidence...the small bit of horn. His eyes look so distant. One wonders if he is reliving that last, fatal expedition in which all of his party expired at the hands of...we know not what. That experience, as well as his injuries, are preventing him from accompanying us on our journey. His face is newly lined with worry for our safety...or could there be just a hint of fear as well.

We are restless yet wait for him to speak, not wanting to interrupt his thoughts. He shifts his gaze slowly from the bit of horn held in his calloused fingers to our eager faces. He speaks. "This journey you are about to begin will not be easy. It is a journey filled with peril, a journey suffused with uncertainty. Some of you," he pauses, "may not return."

We shift uncomfortably in our seats as his words take effect. "One of you is a first-class pathfinder. Your skills must be sharply honed to be of greatest use to this party. Keep your senses clear. Heed the signs or you may be lost forever.

"You, the linguist, can be of great service. Believe

me when I say that you will meet creatures the likes of which you have never encountered before, and if your mission is successful, will never meet again. Keep your ears atuned. You must be vigilant or you will surely miss something.

"And you, the Spell-caster. Your powers are great but you will encounter some with powers far greater. Learn as you go. Increase your magic. Use it for the protection and guidance of the group.

"And last, the seer. Your powers are more subtle. You understand so much and yet impart so little. Be wary. There is magic where you are going. Magic with the thin skin of truth and the worm-ridden core of certain devastation."

He glanced at the setting sun, the deep furrows on his brow, retreated into darkness. "I must speak quickly for you must be under way before dark falls. The sighting of the unicorn is positive proof that at least one Astral Rift exists in or near this hotel. We have reason to believe that this is just the tip of the iceberg. As you all know, there is a parallel universe existing alongside ours but in another dimension. It is a strange, forbidding place but it has always been there. Occasionally, a rift opens between the two worlds and occupants from one universe move into the other.

"That other world is a world of dark forces and magic. Its inhabitants are strange to us and in bygone days, when dragons or unicorns were sighted here in our world, it was almost surely because they had wandered through one of these accidental rifts.

"A universe conceived in magic, however, is certainly doomed. Magic takes energy and when that energy is used up, there can be no more. This is a fact all too clear to Xamplayn, the evil sorcerer of the other world. Unfortunately, on our last expedition through one of the accidental rifts, he and his minions had retained enough power to defeat us. But worse for us, Xamplayn learned something which, if not stopped, will lead to our total destruction in this universe.

"What he learned is that as long as the rift remains open the energy in this world will flow into their world as water flows from a high spot to a low one. What he reasoned is that if one rift is good, several are better. Up until recently, the rifts were a freak accident of nature akin to a tear in a delicate piece of fabric.

Xamplayn could not rely on chance so he is now making it happen. He has constructed a Magic Crystal, the ultimate Energy Sink, into which all energy is absorbed. This has weakened the fabric between our two worlds to the point where several major rifts now exist in this vicinity, all being kept open by the Magic Crystal.

"Your mission is to travel back and forth between these two worlds, learn what you can from the beings you meet and your own intelligence and destroy that crystal before its too late! It is said that it lies beyond the Cave of the Catacombs, a maze of terrifying proportions. You must discover the only way to destroy the crystal by piecing together all the clues.

He paused again. His voice took on an almost appologetic tone. "Unfortunately, I have saved the worst for last. Once you have destroyed the crystal, Xamplayn will be dead as well. It is said that he and the crystal have become one. As that evil well of stolen energy disintegrates, the rifts will start slamming shut, one by one. You must return from the other universe...find a rift to take you back, before they all close. Otherwise, you will remain there, in the other world, for all time.

"If there are no questions, then I suggest you hurry. Enter the castle before the last rays of the sun are seen. You must be on your way before dark. Magic is so much stronger...in the night...

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PLAYING THE GAME

Welcome to the world of ABRAXAS, a multi-player adventure game for the ATARI. Up to four players may participate in this game and for all but the most experienced players, it is difficult to succeed with less than two players. To prepare yourself for your journey, take a few minutes to become acquainted with the way you control the environment you are entering. We will begin by starting a new game.

To begin a game, boot the program side of your disk (that's the back of the game disk). The proper sequence for this is to first turn on your disk drive with the computer off. When the busy light goes off, insert the

program side of your disk and turn on the computer. After the program boots (a process requiring about 10 seconds), some scenes from ABRAXAS are displayed followed by the statement, "New or Saved game?." Type "N" to this prompt (If you wanted to play a saved game you would type "S"). The screen will then display four figures at the top of the screen and the description "Clairvoyant". This is character #1 and an arrow points to this character. Enter a name for this character (15 characters or less) and hit the return key. You are next asked to assign levels of ability to strength, endurance and ESP ability. Each ability must be 5 or greater with the total of all three equal to or less than 30. Choose these levels well since they determine the viability of your character. After all four character have been described, you are asked if you want to proceed to the game. Typing "Y" at this point will load the game program. A message will tell you when to turn the disk over to the data side of the disk (the front of the disk). If you type "N" instead of "Y" the process of naming and assigning ability will begin again.

Movement in this game is represented by four figures you control on a map. Each figure represents one of the four players that may participate in the game. Normally, only one character, the leader, is controlled using a joystick plugged into Port #1. The other figures will do their best to keep up with the leader. No character is allowed to be left behind! A few minutes will be required to master movement of the group but with a little play, the movement of players on the map will seem quite natural. The leader may be changed at any time by typing "L" and following the prompts. Character #1 is the leader at the start of the game. Other characters may be moved independently about the screen using a joystick plugged into port #2 (also 3 and 4, if available). Type "J" for joystick assignment and follow the prompts. The button on the joystick is used to fire weapons if available.

The map is by necessity an abstraction of the real world and is a top down view of your surroundings. The normal field of view is about 20 feet on a side. To aid you in your quest, you will be given occasional views of surroundings and creatures you encounter. Descriptions of your surroundings are also displayed at the top of the screen. These methods of presenting information are intended to supplement the information you would normally

gain by a simple visual scan of your surroundings.

Useful objects are also represented symbolically on the map and to get a description of the object, place your character on the item and type "G" to get it. The item will be added to that character's inventory and a descriptions of the item will be displayed at the top of the screen. A listing of all the items carried may be obtained by typing "I" and the character number. Press any key to return to the map. No more than nine items may be carried at one time by a character. To put down an object from the inventory of a character, type "P" for put and follow the prompts. The item number is the number displayed in the listing of a character's inventory.

Each player in this game possess a unique psychic gift that greatly increases their viability on the journey. The psychic ability is represented by the runes in the four windows at the bottom of the screen. Included with the game is a set of four cards. These cards decipher the meaning of some of the runes. One card should be given to each of the participants in the game corresponding to the character played. The runes in each of the four windows are continuously changing and most of the time will have no meaning (a problem with most psychic gifts). However, each player should keep close watch on their psychic window. Window # 1 (for character #1) is on the left, # 2 is next and so on. The number in the upper left corner of the card tells you which card goes with which window and player. An injury to a player will cause that player's window to be empty until the character recovers.

A game may be saved at any time by typing "S" and following the prompts. A saved game can only be started by rebooting and typing "S" to the prompt for a new or saved game. Up to 20 games may be saved on a single save-game disk under letters A through T. Do not use a disk with other programs or files on it since the save game feature will erase other types of data on the disk. It is wise to set aside a freshly formatted disk for the purpose of saving games for future play.

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COMMAND SUMMARY

Command	Description
J	Joystick assignment
L	New leader
G	Get item
P	Put down item
O	Open door or close door
S	Save game
I	Inventory

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