

Back to Basic X



A quarterly Fanzine dedicated to the simpler time of RPGs—
covering the Basic and Expert editions of Dungeons & Dragons.

To Have and To Hold — A Note from the Fanzine Creator

One of the side effects of our hobby crossing over into mainstream culture is that it has increased the number of serious collectors of both new and old material. While newer material seems to ever increase in page count, offering gorgeous art and professional layout, the older books and accessories of the pre-2000's have become increasingly hard to find and more expensive as well. Newer players are not only excited about backing a Kickstarter book for \$100 but will also often pay more for a much smaller book—made with simple black and white illustrations—that was written by one of the few RPG companies of the '70s and '80s. Prices of older material is on a drastic rise—just one look at eBay and Facebook Marketplace for uncommon or rare products from TSR, Judges Guild, or Chaosium will indicate that prices are climbing while availability is shrinking.

The appeal of the older books is

obvious—these are the products that started it all. In a time when new creations and ideas seem to be few and far between and companies are satisfied with repackaging and reproducing materials more than once or twice, new collectors are eager to get the originals (i.e. the first versions printed decades earlier). An influx of new money from younger collectors has shaken up the marketplace, driving prices of hard-to-find books to an all-time high. Most serious and older collectors (i.e. collectors that have been collecting for awhile, not their age necessarily) already have their copies of the rare books, carefully acquired through trades, GenCon auctions and the early days of eBay. Even many of the semi-serious collectors (I can count myself in this group) have completed much their collections by now and are standing back, watching the frenzy of buying and selling with amazement. And if you haven't completed your lists by now, you're in trouble. A whole new group of buyers, will-

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ing to spend absurd amounts of money on books, has entered the market. These folks are going to quickly buy those things you've been patiently waiting on for years.

So, what can you do if you're an old school collector just trying to find those last remaining pieces to fill in the collection holes? Unless you're willing to spend top dollar, you're going to

have to wait for aging collectors to pass their collections on to their spouses and children who may not have the same passion in the hobby and are willing to sell them off. At some point in the next couple of decades, the number of huge collections that will likely hit the market will suddenly make many of those impossible-to-find pieces available again. I know mine will probably be out there too. *Thom Wilson*

Publishing News

In this issue, I'll review the final installments in the **B/X Essentials** line, "**Monsters**" (book 4) and "**Adventures and Treasures**" (book 5). Unlike the previous three books, these two are primarily for the game master, useful for game preparation or at the table during game play. The books are 48 pages in length, each filled with useful information to build and run your B/X game.

Gavin Norman of Necrotic Gnome has perhaps produced one of the best B/X monster books money can buy. This book is arguably my favorite in the series. Every Basic and Expert monster is listed alphabetically in this guide with simple-to-use and easy-to-read stat blocks and bulleted abilities. The stat blocks are highlighted in a green color making them pop out to the reader. Every critical stat point is listed, including the creature's saving throws and XP value. These two additions alone are enough to make this book superior to many of its predecessors! GMs will not have to look up creatures' saves or XP values in other charts found in other materials. Additionally,

THACO and treasure types are listed, rounding out the most complete stat block of any monster guide I have seen.

Little space is wasted on detailed creature descriptions, instead reducing appearances, habitats, and other interesting details to one or two sentences. Veterans of B/X and other fantasy RPGs will enjoy the simplicity here -- there's not a lot of space dedicated to describing well-known fantasy monsters that have all become so familiar. Creature abilities are bulleted under their stat blocks. Each bullet point provides enough detail to quickly find the monster's special abilities. Abilities shared by the same creature types are bulleted before the stat blocks for each variant of the creatures. For example, the Bear (found on page 7) lists the "bear hug" special ability, shared by all the listed bear variants. Each variant (black, cave, grizzly, and polar) lists their own abilities specific to their variation, but all share the same general ability for "bear hug". There's no need to list this ability repeatedly under each variant, saving space and avoiding redundancy.

This book has now replaced my current B/X monster guide -- it is easy to use and provides all the pertinent details I need, both in prep and at the table.

At first, it may seem strange to find the adventuring guidelines of the Basic and Expert rulebooks in the first 16 pages of what seems to be a treasure-heavy book when examining the last book in the series, "Adventures and Treasures". But Necrotic Gnome transitions the pages seamlessly, steering readers from "placing treasure" in encounters to the treasure type tables themselves. Although readers may flip directly to the magic item tables and item details, there are useful nuggets of information for GMs in the adventure design and encounters pages. I especially enjoyed the wilderness encounter tables which use a double die roll result to quickly and simply indicate both the master and sub-table encounter details.

The treasure section is 32 pages and is filled with the classic (including both unusual and rare) treasures of B/X. The treasure type pages bullet-list out the percentages and number of different valuable items by type. By page 20, though, the reader finds themselves in the meat of the book -- magical items!



The full 5-book line of *B/X Essentials*.

Unfortunately, the author was unable to keep to his original intent of avoiding cross-referencing other books, but understandably so—many magic items have properties that mimic spells. To list each item property by describing the spell already listed in the "B/X Essentials Cleric and Magic-user Spells" book made no sense. Thus, many items refer to the spell guide when necessary, but Necrotic Gnome wins here by providing the exact page of the spell in the book referenced. As a GM, I can live with this approach.

The last three pages of the section ends with great insight and detail for sentient swords. Of course, I'd have loved to have seen the author expand this to sentient items, but I appreciate that he kept it close to the original guides.

As with each book in the five-book series, the cover art of these last two books was illustrated by the same artist, Andrew Walter. Many of the interior artists return in the final two books as well. Each of the monster illustrations stand out, especially Kyle Latino's Giant Leech on page 27 and Matt Ray's Gelatinous Cube on page 19. Both books' covers have a different base color, making it easy to look for the guide you're looking for on the shelf.

Each book in Necrotic Gnome's full collection of "**B/X Essentials**" is available on DriveThruRPG for \$4.99 in PDF or \$7.99 in print. A premium print version is also available for each for \$13.99.

Interview with a Legendary Contributor—Jennell Jaquays

One of the most versatile early contributors to the RPG industry was Jennell Jaquays—her ability as an author and artist were apparent in products at TSR and Judges Guild during the heyday of the hobby. In this issue of *Back to BasicX*, I get to talk to her about her work in those formative years.

[Thom] *What year did you get hired at TSR? Do you remember your first assignment(s) there?*

[Jennell] I joined TSR as a staff artist in September of 1993, though I didn't start working on site in Lake Geneva until the beginning of November. Despite my history as both an artist and designer, my employment with TSR was strictly as an artist. The process actually began before Christmas the previous year, in 1992. At that point, I had already been freelancing to TSR for nearly 7 years as an artist, editor, and designer. I was showing my art every year at Gen Con and was good friends with the couple who ran it. Clyde Caldwell had recently left TSR. As a freelancer, I had already picked up at least two paintings that he had been scheduled to paint: *The Dragon Mountain* cover for AD&D and *The Enemy Within* novel cover for Ravenloft. TSR's art management went to the couple who managed the Gen Con art show for suggestions. They suggested me. It took till mid-February for discussions to begin. And then, it turned out that I had worked with the Director of Graphics, Tom Lavelly, when we were at



Coleco Industries, working on the Colecovision and ADAM computer. I was the director of game design, he was in charge of package design. And he actually remembered me. I then remembered WHY he remembered me. He was part owner of a race car we were using as a prop to promote a racing video game. He let people sit in the car at shows. I got in, but I couldn't get out. My foot got stuck inside the car. They had to partially disassemble it to get me out.

But then, TSR did a hiring freeze. So, I went back to freelancing. They reached out to me several months later to start talking about an interview, but it wouldn't be until July. When Gen Con came that summer (in August), I could announce that I would be joining TSR. My first assignments were prototype covers for the new juvenile fiction line. After that, I worked on card art for *Wild Space*, a board game similar in some regards to *Dragonstrike*, which used a video to tell the story along with gameplay. The game was loosely based on *AD&D Spelljammer*, in that it used many of the same visuals.

[T] *When did you begin writing for TSR, before or after (or during) your Judges Guild work?*

[J] I began writing and editing for TSR in 1986. My first projects were small, an AD&D mini adventure and then assigned contributions to one of the AD&D lair books and then contribution to editing a D&D module. After that, they trusted me with larger projects.

[T] *Do you recall which of your work was first published in a TSR product? Was it writing or artwork or both?*

[J] My first published work for TSR was a piece of filler artwork, a wizard, in the first issue of *The Dragon* magazine in 1976. I wouldn't write for TSR for another 10 years.

[T] *Which passion came first, writing or illustrating (for TSR and other firms)?*

[J] Art was always the first passion. It's what got me into game publishing while I was still in college. My first client in games was *The Space Gamer*.

[T] *When looking at the early BECMI work, you wrote 'Talons of Night' (M5) for the Master's level. Can you recall and detail how you got assigned that project and what inspired you to write that story?*

[J] I got the assignment because by early 1987, I was actively a part of the TSR freelance editorial and design pool. My work on (19) *The Egg of the Phoenix* for AD&D (as an editor and developer) showed I could handle a larger project. The inspiration

me for the project and the types of play features that needed to be in it. These included high-level adventure, international politics, army combat, and the design and development of the interior of the *Isle of Dawn*. I no longer have my notes from that time, so I don't remember exactly what was going through my head. I apparently had some fascination with the medieval board game, *Nine Men's Morris*, because that's a recurring theme through the adventure.

[T] *Was there any work that you created during the TSR or Judges Guild days that was never published?*

[J] I know I left at least one *Runequest* adventure unfinished when I left Judges Guild in '79, a dwarven mine setting called *Shadowflame Mines*. A few of the art pieces (color paintings) I did for them were never used and may have been lost (apparently much of their history was destroyed when a tornado ripped open a storage unit). One of my first projects at TSR was to paint a number of card illustrations for a game called *Wild Space* that was never finished.

When I parted company with TSR, two of the board games I worked on with Steve Winter were never published by TSR or WotC. One was a new version of David Megarry's *Dungeon* board game and another original game called *Goblinz* (I did the cover art, created the name and logo, painted the game board and the player tokens). My last painting for them, *Thief in the Tomb of Horrors* ended up on

the cover of an unrelated book from WotC. They also lost my prototype artwork for the *Treefolk Dragon Dice* expansion—and then when SFR published the dice several years later, they went with their own cover and a major redesign of the dice icons (I did most of the dice icons for *Dragon Dice* and the expansions).

Finally, the entire Champions set for *Dragon Dice* and two expansions for *Marvel Super Hero* dice games were never published (I did all the icon art for those).

[T] What sort of things do you do to "recharge the batteries" or to spark artistic inspiration after a lengthy project or heavy workload? Since you are both a writer and artist, are there different approaches to preparing for the next project for each creative medium?

[J] I recharge batteries by doing game-related crafting projects (making my own dungeon tiles for 3D printing, painting miniatures), or reading, or watching movies. Essentially, I just get away from whatever aspect of a project that I am working on and do something different for a while. That can include creative work that has nothing to do with the creative work that I'm supposed to be working on.

[T] Are there any personal projects you'd love to work on if you had the time?

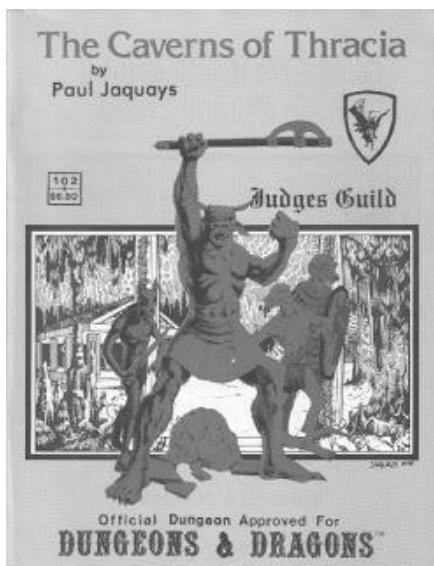
[J] I'd like to paint more miniatures and do more game-related crafting. I'd like to get deeply into 3D sculpting for miniatures, and maybe work on some video games again.

[T] What are you working on these days?

[J] I'm working on quite a few things. I have three different classic D&D-style adventures I'm developing, based on my old *Dungeoneer* adventures. I'll be playtesting one of them at Gary Con XI in March. I'm also doing a redesign of my first Central Casting character history book. I expect it to be two or even three times the amount of content of the original. All of these are for self-publishing under my own 5th Wall Games & Miniatures brand. On top of that, I'm slowly working on a set of 3D printable game tiles and accessories. And on top of that, I do game and packaging art and some game concept art for a video game studio I co-founded, Olde Skyy, Inc.

Thank you, Jennell!

Question responses © 2019 Jennell Jaquays



Another well-known book by Jennell!

Product Spotlight

We've yet to spotlight adventures for higher level characters in *Back to BasiX*—mainly due to the primary focus of B/X (levels 1-14). However, with Jennell Jaquay's interview this issue, I've decided to review **Talons of Night**, a master's level adventure.

I cannot recall ever playing or running this adventure, probably because our characters rarely advanced past expert levels. As kids, we always seemed eager to start new characters once our current characters built strongholds and recruited followers. Looking at **Talons of Night**, I can see that we missed some fun and challenging opportunities. Of course, we would have had to get through the Companions levels first.

This adventure takes characters through two key quests before dropping them into a final, difficult challenge. To say it's a bit of a railroad is accurate, but for good reason—each piece of the adventure puzzle leads to the next. Characters must assist a king, ensuring that an upcoming peace conference succeeds. The first quest leads to finding a lost artifact that is critical to the peace treaty and takes the characters to the lair of an undead king of an ancient land. The second quest takes characters out of the Prime Material plane and into the realm of a dangerous immortal who is an outcast amongst her own kind herself. Puzzles, games, and difficult physical challenges make this adventure truly worthy of the master's level series.

I'm not generally for railroad adventuring, requiring part one to always be completed before part two, and so on. However, this was the way many adventures were written in the early days of TSR's module explosion. GMs were given carefully planned plots with milestone objectives for the player characters. Many of the inter-dimensional or planar adventures of higher level systems (mainly the "M" and "I" of BECMI) required assisting GMs with challenging scenarios and complicated quests by walking them through the story details, step-by-step.

Although fairly linear, this adventure offers several challenging encounters for characters along the way to the final quest. Physical challenges (combat) are tough, with a good mix of both number and difficulty of foes found throughout. The introduction highlights the need for characters to have a few weapon skills (an optional mechanic pre-



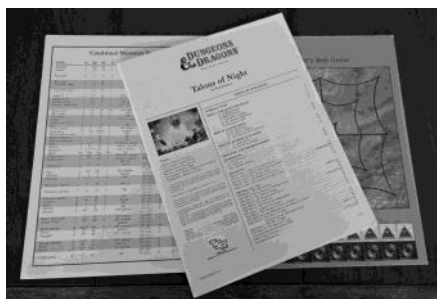
Outside cover of *Talons of Night*.

sented in the Companions set) for obvious reasons—Expert and Mastery weapons skills offer characters better to-hit and damage bonuses, speeding up combat with foes with loads of hit points. Without weapon masteries, combat in several encounters may turn into a long, drawn-out affair.

A game called the Spider's Web offers players a different type of challenge, requiring them to think quickly and work out patterns to defeat the undead king to learn the location of the missing artifact. The game board is printed in color on the tri-fold cover, and detailed instructions in the book make it easy for GMs to learn and play the role of the evil, undead mystic. It's not often that an early TSR adventure offers this type of challenge to players. The author does a great job making this game both interesting and challenging for players.

Travel distances between objectives are vast in several places in the story. Traveling through different worlds and lands could lead to a lengthy addition to campaign time, but in order for the characters to preserve peace at the conference, they need to hustle through the areas quickly, often missing or skipping side encounters to complete their mission.

Several player handouts and detailed maps are found at the book's center. A page of clues for an important encounter area offers many helpful hints to player characters. A side box highlights 'Squad Combat Rules', a mechanic for group fighting.



Booklet and tri-fold, inside cover of *Talons of Night*.

Overall, I really like this adventure. What I like most about **Talons of Night** is that it provides a sound structure for master's level adventure design for novice GMs. It's written methodically and shows, step-by-step, how the story unfolds. Jennell's writing is excellent—it's clear, concise, and with the perfect amount of detail.

Like many of the TSR books of the mid- to late-80's, it is a little light on art. Besides the handouts and pre-generated character illustrations, there are but a half a dozen illustrations in the 48-page book. However, the number of maps and handouts for players and GMs more than make up for the minimal story art. With Jennell being both an accomplished author and artist, the company really missed an opportunity to fill the book with her talented artistry.

Talons of Night is a great addition to your collection and may be a worthy challenge to your high-level campaign!

M5, Talons of Night, written by Paul Jaquays. 1987. ISBN: 0-88038-491-3; #9214, 1987 \$5.95 price; 48 pages; for 4-8 characters of 20th to 25th level.

The Magic Shop

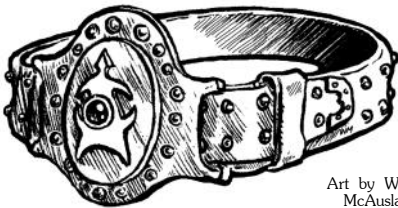
Not every useful magical item found in your adventures has to be a sentient sword or armor. Sometimes, that strange or unique item can be just as useful in the right situation.

Magnetic Belt

A fur-lined, wide belt with a porous rock at its center fits any waist size. The strange rock is a meteorite fragment that has been negatively charged, producing reverse magnetic polarity. Any magnetic metal that comes within 10 feet of the wearer of this belt is strongly repulsed. Attacks made with weapons of iron, nickel, or steel are at -2. Damage by successful attacks made from affected weapons are "softened" (reduced) by 1d4 damage due to the repulse of the metal.

Note that the wearer of this belt cannot wear iron, nickel, and steel armors or use weapons made from these metals.

Value: 2,500 GP.



Art by William McAusland

Ring of Asphyxiation

Wearers of this cursed item believe they have found a Ring of Water Breathing. However, when worn underwater, the ring immediately causes the wearer to gasp for air, instantly eliminating any chance of holding their breath.

Value: 1,000 GP.

Necklace of Acid Orbs

Two to twelve small emeralds hanging from thin strands of silver on a thick chain make up the Necklace of Acid Orbs. Each emerald can be removed and thrown a distance of 30'. When the emerald makes contact with a hard surface, it explodes dealing 1d4+1 acid damage to all within 10' of the contact point. The acid from the emerald deals an additional 1d4+1 damage to affected targets initially struck by the attack in the next combat round, or to any who move into the original area of the explosion.

Value: 5,000 GP.



Art by William McAusland

Bracers of the Novice

The Bracers of the Novice appear as gold bracers encrusted with dozens of small gems. Each new combat round, the bracers change to a random class, providing a bonus or ability to the wearer (found table below). When combat ends, the bracers deactivate.

Value: 25,000 GP.

Bracers of the Novice

1d4 Roll	Ability
1	(Fighter) +1 to-hit, damage
2	(Thief) Hide in shadows
3	(Cleric) Random Cleric Spell (1st level) *
4	(Magic User) Random MU Spell (1st level) *

* roll on spell list or allow player to pick (GM choice)

Mythology

The two new creatures in this issue's Mythology section are found in the Quarterly Dungeon Crawl on pages 11-15.

Mummy, Sewer

Crypts built too close to city sewers are often eventually flooded, filling the burial chamber with sewage, refuse and filth. Magically-animated mummies in these water-filled crypts may escape their confines and wander forgotten sewer tunnels in search of prey. Unlike most mummies, their waterlogged wrappings make them immune to fire damage.

Armor Class: 3
Hit Dice: 6**
Move: 60' (20')
Attacks: 1 Touch
Damage: 2-12 + disease
Special: Immune to fire, sleep, charm, and hold spells

No. Appearing: 1
Save As: Fighter: 6
Morale: 12
Treasure Type: D
Alignment: Chaotic



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Art by Purple
Duck Games

Slime Crawler

One of the only known creatures to be wholly unaffected by slime, the Slime Crawler seeks out prey of all types in sewers, dungeons, and dank caves. They will eat nearly any living thing but seem to prefer slime, elves, and halflings best. They never seem full, constantly seeking their next meal before they have finished their current victim.

Slime Crawlers are immune to cold and non-magical attacks.

Armor Class: 7
Hit Dice: 4*
Move: 20' (10' climb)
Attacks: 1 spit
Damage: Spit 2-8
Special: Paralytic slime, immune to cold, normal attacks

No. Appearing: 1
Save As: Fighter: 4
Morale: 12
Treasure Type: Nil
Alignment: Neutral

Sewer Crypts of Skardus

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 4th to 8th level.

Background: Sewer denizens below the fallen city of Krixdos once followed the great wererat king, Skardus. His reign of just and fair rule below the corrupted city made him well-loved and respected by thousands of under-city citizens.

By the time Krixdos fell, the sewer population far outnumbered the remaining city dwellers above. Unfortunately, corrupt and diseased Krixdosians fled to the sewers, seeking the rumored safety and prosperity under the wererat king. A war for rule of the tunnels soon reduced both sides to insufficient numbers, and eventually, the sewers were deserted.

Skardus and a handful of his remaining devoted minions took their own lives, but promised to return someday to wreak vengeance on those that had disrupted their way of life.

Upon the ashes of Krixdos, a new city was built. Its current inhabitants are unaware of the history of the city and its sewers. In their effort to expand the new sewers into an older area of the tunnels, the engineers found a hidden entry into an unknown area. Several engineers have entered to explore the tunnels but none have returned. A bounty of rubies and emeralds (total value of 10,000 gp) is offered to whomever can

find the lost engineers and clear out the tunnels for possible expansion and use.

1. Sewer Entrance

A hidden door was found in an older sewer tunnel below the far edge of the new city. Ancient blocks of stone and mortar have been pulled down, revealing an open space beyond. Shovels, picks, and wooden boxes have been left near the entrance, as if the engineers fled the area quickly.

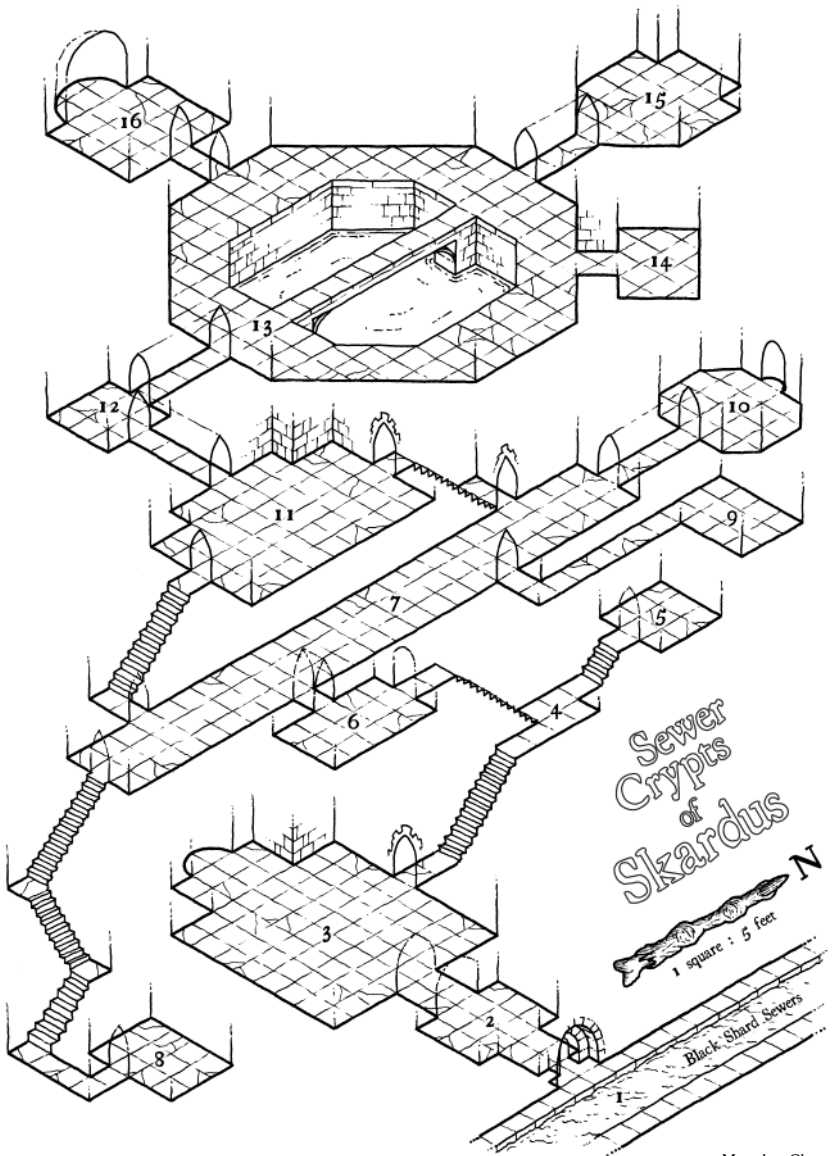
2. Antechamber of the Dead

Bones of thousands of large rats have been piled in the middle of the room. When disturbed, many of the fragile bones fall to dust. Two partially decayed human forms lie face down near the pile. When examined, the bodies will be found to be those of two missing engineers. Their faces and limbs have been thoroughly gnawed upon, leaving large holes of missing flesh and muscle throughout. The bite marks are relatively fresh.

A search of the engineers will find personal effects, including a strange silver key found in one of their hands.

3. Minion Burial Tomb

After assisting Skardus in his suicide ritual (in area 13), his devoted minions sealed off the tunnels and took their own lives. Lying upon five stone slabs in this area, the wererat devotees ingested poison and succumbed to death. The reopening of the tomb has reawakened the creatures, now existing as undead. They have begun the ritual of



Map by Glynn Seal

awakening their master, Skardus, found in area 16. One to four **Wererat Ghouls** will be in this area, guarding the lower level of the crypts.

Minions, Wererat Ghouls (1d4):
 (AC 6, HD 3+1*, HP: 16 ea, #AT 2 claws/1 bite, D 1-3/1-3/1-3 + paralysis, Save F3, ML 10, XP 75 ea, no lycanthropy disease)

All memories but the ritual to reawaken Skardus have been forgotten by the wererat ghouls. Their sole purpose is to protect and prepare their master for his quest for revenge.

Each minion wears a silver chain and sapphire pendant, worth 1,500 gp.

4. Hall of Misdirection

A strange, glowing glyph on the wall between the two staircases is legible by any who attempt to read it (it magically translates to a language the reader knows). If the reader fails a saving throw versus Rods, Staves, and Spells, he or she will be convinced that they have found Skardus' tomb in area 5. Those that pass their saving throw will read the word "Death" instead.

5. Tomb of Fiery Death

An ornate tomb filled with piles of treasure and a single stone sarcophagus is found at the top of the stairs. Characters will see a wrapped individual lying within the sarcophagus, that slowly rises if any enter the room. The treasure is an illusion, designed to bring trespassers into the room. A false mummy rises from its resting place, only to explode in a ball of fire when characters approach the treasure or its sarcophagus. The mummy explodes for 6d6 damage, enveloping the room in fire (a successful saving throw versus Rods, Staves, and Spells reducing the damage to half). Once destroyed, the room appears empty but for a blackened sarcophagus.

6. Eternal Guardians

Twelve skeletal warriors stand guard along the east and south walls of this small hall. Armed with pole arms, the skeletons attack any who enter the area from the north.

Skeletons (12): (AC 7, HD 1, HP: 8 ea, #AT 1 weapon (pole arm), D 1-10, Save F1, ML 12, XP 13 ea)

7. Hall of the Departed

Stretching over 125 feet, this long hall is filled with the bones of faithful minions and denizens of the sewers who stayed behind when Skardus ended his life. Piles of bones are found every few feet, comingled with various creatures of all shapes and sizes.

For each 20 feet travelled by characters, there is a cumulative one in twelve chance that hundreds of the bones magically animate to form a hideous, bone amalgamation.

Bone Amalgamation (1): (AC 4, HD 6*, HP: 30, #AT 1 bony claw, D 2d4, Save F6, ML 12, XP 500)

Once an amalgamation animates, the chance for another to be created resets to one in twelve. The creature will not leave the hallway and may return to a pile of bones if the hallway is vacated.

There is a one in six chance to find a single treasure item within a destroyed amalgamation.

8. Healer to the King

Skardus' personal healer and trusted confidant was slain in an uprising months before the king took his own life. His form was buried here, safeguarding many of Skardus' minor treasures.

A single stone sarcophagus covered in centuries of dust is found in the chamber at the bottom of the long staircase. Although the healer is long dead, a Yellow Mold inhabits the sarcophagus, growing under the lid. Any movement of the lid has a 50% chance of causing the mold to squirt out a cloud

of yellow mold spores, covering a 10'x10'x10' area. Any caught within the cloud must save versus Death Ray or choke to death in six rounds.

Yellow Mold: (AC automatic, HD 2, HP: 10, #AT 1 spores, D 1-6 + special (poisonous spores), Save F2, ML NA, XP 20)

The decaying body of the healer is surrounded by piles of **gold**, **silver**, and **platinum** coins (750, 1750, and 250, respectively), hundreds of loose gems (1d6x1d100, half valued at 10 gp each, the rest 25 gp each), and two magical items. The skeletal figure holds a **Rod of Cure Disease** (as the 3rd level Cleric spell) and a **Staff of Commanding**.

9. Fallen Concubine

Although Skardus was never married and produced no offspring, he was devoted to a wererat female warrior with all his heart. Agadossa the Radiant was a stunning yet unforgiving warrior. After she succumbed to poison intended for the king, Skardus buried her here in an elegantly decorated crypt.

Agadossa lies upon a rose-hued marble slab, her bony arms folded across her chest. A golden tiara encrusted with rose diamonds rests askew her fleshless skull. A glyph of lightning has been placed upon the tiara—anyone who tries to remove it must make a saving throw versus Death Ray or Poison to avoid receiving 4d6 lightning damage. The tiara is worth 25,000 gp. A search under the slab will reveal her famous sword, "**Thornbite**". It is a **+2 sword, +3 versus Undead**.

10. Bones of the Betrayers

A crypt once reserved for Skardus himself was converted to a room of suffering for betrayers, assassins, and foes of the king. Piles of charred and broken bones hint to the tortured deaths of many creatures who once desired to usurp the king of the sewers. An evil presence is felt when the room is entered. If any of the bones are disturbed, a short wind gust blows through the room, cursing any living being within with madness and paranoia. Unless a saving throw versus Paralysis or Turn to Stone is made, the affected individual feels like his or her friends and compatriots are out to get them for one week. Additionally, affected characters are at -1 to-hit and saving throws for 24 hours.

11. Hall of Despair

Characters entering this room will initially see several forms curled up in balls or huddled in corners, sobbing uncontrollably. A successful saving throw versus Rods, Staves, or Spells will reveal only dead in the aforementioned locations. Three engineers are found in the corners, with horrified and terror-stricken visages.

Any who failed their initial saving throw must roll under their Wisdom or fall into a state of complete, disabling despair. Those affected in this manner will be unable to move or function until they make a successful roll under their Wisdom every twelve hours thereafter. Despairing characters can be carried but will not walk or move on their own.

12. Wardrobe Chamber

Hundreds of coats, capes, cloaks, and caps hang from hooks along all four walls. Dozens of boots and shoes are piled in the southwest corner.

Ten slightly magical cloaks, each identifiable by a golden crown insignia allow special passage through area 13. When wearing the cloaks, characters will be invisible to the Slime Crawlers that live within the pit in the area beyond. These cloaks are otherwise useless outside the crypts.

13. Ritual Chamber

Skardus committed suicide in this chamber long ago, his blood dripping into the pit below. Several **Slime Crawlers** were birthed from the blood and organs of the dying king and have remained here, vigilantly waiting for Skardus' return. Characters not wearing the magical cloaks will be instantly attacked by 1d4 Slime Crawlers (see page 10).

Slime Crawler (1d4): (AC 7, HD 4, HP: 20 ea, #AT 1 spit, D 2-8 + special, Save F4, ML 12, XP 125 ea) *Details on page 10.*

14. Supply Chamber

Supplies and utensils required for rituals and embalming are found in this small, deserted room. Clay pots, empty boxes, and rusty knives are stacked on failing shelves. A thorough search will reveal a **ritual dagger +2** that can cut through one foot of stone per turn.



15. False Tomb

A decorated archway hints to possible riches beyond in the darkness. However, stepping through the portal randomly teleports the victim to another place within the crypt.

Random Teleportation Locations—d6

Result	Location	Result	Location
1	Area 5	4	Area 6
2	Area 8	5	Area 3
3	Area 11	6	Area 13

16. Crypt of Skardus

Skardus, recently reawakened by his devoted minions, is regaining his strength in his burial crypt. The king has returned as a **Sewer Mummy** and is already plotting vengeance on the long-dead race of Krixdosians. He is attended by the remaining **Wererat Ghouls** from area 3.

Skardus, Sewer Mummy: (AC 3, HD 6**, HP: 36, #AT 1 touch, D 2-12 + disease, Save F6, ML 12, XP 725) *Details on page 10.*

Minions, Wererat Ghouls: (AC 6, HD 3+1*, HP: 16 ea, #AT 2 claws/1 bite, D 1-3/1-3/1-3 + paralysis, Save F3, ML 10, XP 75 ea, *no lycanthropy disease*)

The mummy remembers but one spell from his previous life, *Hold Person*. He can cast it twice per day.

Much of his wealth was lost in the battles between the Krixdosians and his people, but a single chest of treasure remains. It is filled with **gold** (1,750) and **platinum** (699) coins, a **Staff of Power**, a **Wand of Fear**, a **Horn of Blasting**, and a box of **six Potions of Healing**.

Spellbound

In this issue of Back to BasiX, we'll look at arguably some of the best spells in the 3rd and 4th level lists for clerics and magic-users. Note that this list is the opinion of the author and may be debated by readers.

Although clerics have a small list of available spells at each level, there are definitely some better choices among the rest.

Cleric Spells

Level	Spell
3rd	Continual Light
3rd	Cure Disease
4th	Cure Serious Wounds
4th	Protection from Evil, 10' Radius

As characters begin to take on greater foes with horrific abilities, the third level spell *Cure Disease* becomes essential. Mummy rot and lycanthropy are cured instantly with the spell. Green slime, normally only affected by cold and fire, is also damaged by this spell.

Continual Light is a fantastic spell to replace cumbersome torches and lanterns. It is also an offensive spell of sorts. Casting the spell directly in the eyes of a foe blinds them until the effects are dispelled. That can be indefinite!

The clerical support spells truly surface in the fifth level list. *Cure Serious Wounds* is an absolute must-have. Healing injured characters for 2d6+2 damage is essential after serious battles.

Protection from Evil, 10' Radius is an overlooked spell but has some fantastic properties. Characters within the sphere of radius gain a +1 to saving throws and foes are at a -1 to-hit any within the divine protection. Furthermore, it protects those within the 10' area from melee attacks from enchanted creatures such as elementals.

Magic-user Spells

Level	Spell
3rd	Fireball
3rd	Lightning Bolt
4th	Polymorph Self
4th	Wizard Eye

Magic-users begin to dish out serious damage at fifth level when they are able to cast 3rd level spells such as Fireball and Lightning Bolt. Fireball affects any creature within its explosion radius of 40'x20', dealing 1d6 damage per level of the caster. With a range of 240', this spell is a nightmare for foes.

Lightning bolt deals the equivalent damage of Fireball but instead affects targets within a straight line of its 50' bolt. This spell also benefits from a "bounce back" effect, ricocheting off hard surfaces to return on its original path. This spell could backfire on the caster if they fail to negotiate their surroundings properly. Both Fireball and Lightning Bolt are automatic damage-dealers—even a successful saving throw versus Spells inflicts half damage to foes.

At seventh level, the magic-user gets a few creative spells in the 5th level list. Changing his or her appearance with Polymorph Self opens up options in game play, letting the magic-user change their form completely. The caster can play around with a different body for at least 13 turns (caster level plus 6 turns).

Although Charm Monster is a good option, I really like Wizard Eye. Allowing magic-users to "see" at a range of 240' with normal sight and infravision, this spell allows the group's mage to scout the area while the rest of the group deals with matters directly in front of them. Not being able to pass the eye through objects is a hindrance, but the range and infravision make up for the drawback.

Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 8

Once the stalwart trio completes their battle with the skeletal minotaur in Area A16, they'll head north into the old temple.

Northern Hallways

Two parallel hallways lead north through a cluster of study chambers and small class rooms. Novice monks spent much of their free time in these rooms, studying old texts and scrolls or learning important lessons about their mysterious patron. Most of the rooms are of little interest. However, two rooms (A17a and A17h) have information useful to the adventure.

Four of the rooms in this area (A17a, A17b, A17i, A17j) were set up as small classrooms. Each classroom has several straw mats for students and a single chair for an instructor. Clay tablets and ash pots are found within each room, likely used for note taking during instruction.

The other six rooms (A17c-A17h) were private study rooms, each with a single table and a few chairs. Bookshelves were once filled with scrolls and old texts. However, time has deteriorated most of the paper, turning the scroll and books to dust.

A17a. Class Room

A pile of refuse made from broken furniture, discarded robes, and ruined tapestries fills the center of the room. A soft chirping noise can be heard from within the pile. If the pile is disturbed, a trio of **Oil Beetles** will emerge, ready to protect their makeshift home.

Oil Beetles (3): (AC 4, HD 2*, hp 9 each, #AT 1 bite, 1 oil spray, D 1-6, blistering from oil, Save F1, ML8, XP 25 ea)

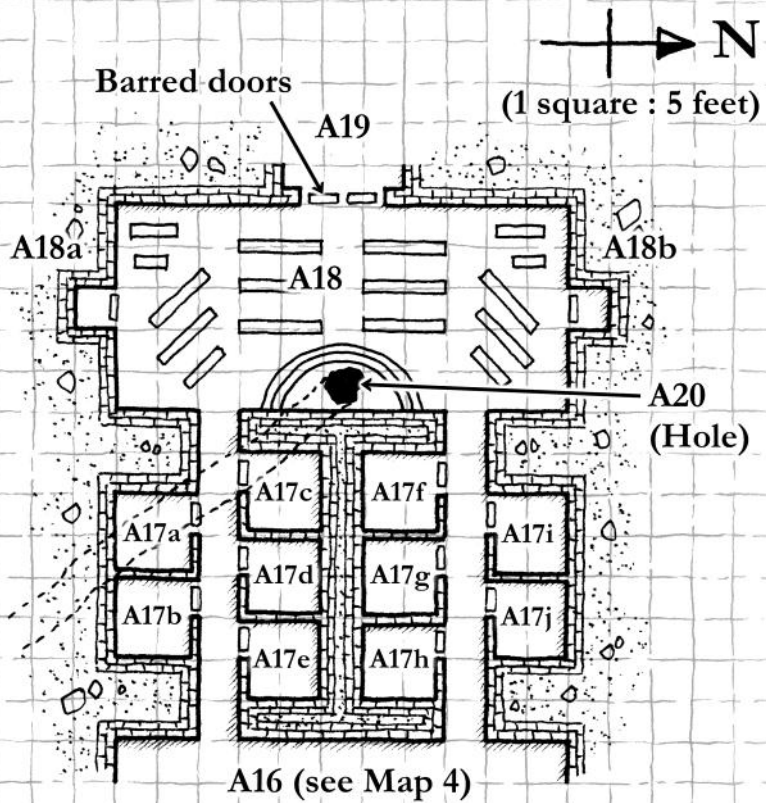
A hole at the bottom of the refuse pile leads to the tunnel below (see Area A20). A search of the pile will reveal **27 sp**, **12 gp**, and a **Ring of Protection +1**.

A17h. Private Study Room

Three small tables, each with a single stool tucked underneath, are clustered tightly in the center of the room. The skeletal remains of a novice monk lie slumped over one of the tables, a bony hand protruding from worn and ragged robes. The text beneath his hand appears untouched by time.

A search of the room will find nothing of interest besides a singular book on one of the private study tables. The book is turned to a page that details the initial discovery of the red meteorite that fell from the skies decades before the abbey was built. The tome is entitled, "The Crimson God's Gift."

An excerpt: "*A reddish, porous rock sat smoldering in the ground, radiating an intense heat that made it unapproachable for days. When its temperature finally subsided, the farmers pulled it free and loaded it into a wagon, intent on bringing it into town for the elders to examine. One such farmer, Argus Harken, who had been afflicted with Pox and was nearing the end of his days, was found to be free of the disease by the time he reached town. Later, we found*



Crimson Abbey of the Broken God Map 5

Map by Glynn Seal

that his handling of the sky-stone cured his Pox. Within weeks of the stone's discovery, the elders began erecting the abbey in the mountains to safeguard the healing stone and to keep it from the hands of those with ill intent."

The tome is protected with a magical enchantment that negates the effects of time. However, removing the book from the abbey will dispel the enchantment and restart the aging process.

A18. Old Temple

In the earliest days of their devotion to the Crimson God, the monks used this temple to worship with believers, including sick travelers and townsfolk. The temple was abandoned after the monks closed the abbey following their discovery of the sentient being within the gem in the remaining meteorite fragment. A new temple was built far underground, to serve the Crimson God as instructed.

One last battle between monks of the old and new orders raged in this temple. The bodies of three dozen monks are found throughout the room, many with broken limbs and cracked skulls. Ten skeletons have ruby headbands (as found on the skeletons in area A3). As before, if these headbands are touched or removed, all **ten skeletons** animate, seeking to destroy trespassers.

Skeletons (10): (AC 7, HD 1, hp 4 each, #AT 1, D 1-4, Save F1, ML12, XP 10 each)

A **staff +1, +2 versus Evil** is found under the body of a monk of the old order. Although his robes are deteriorating and worn, they are noticeably different than the others found in the room. In fact, this monk was the head of the order, one of the founders of the abbey. Brother Khroltus was a devout and good man, and rejected the new order's views of servitude.

The temple doors are barred from the inside, preventing access from the outside world. Four giant wood beams are placed across the entrance – each beam requires a total of 50 Strength to move.

A18a,b. Cleansing Rooms

Before travelers could touch the Crimson God's artifact and be cleansed of their diseases, they had to wait for one full day in one of the two cleansing rooms. Here, they would speak truthfully of their lives, confessing their wrongs and their new desires to serve the Crimson God. Each room is enchanted with a truth-

telling spell that prevents lies from being told within. Monks were able to test those seeking healing by finding their true intentions.

A20. Missing Statue

Once, a great faceless statue of the Crimson God stood upon the temple dais. After the old order of monks were defeated, the new order tore down the statue and removed the hammer artifact from the statue's stone hands. Most of the statue has been carried away, through the hole in the floor and tunnel beyond, to their new temple near the remaining meteorite fragment (area to be found in an upcoming issue of *Back to BasiX*).

Note that the intrepid trio of Bindor, Ensa and Whystal will next investigate the hole leading to the new order's evil temple...

Wandering Monsters—North End	
1d8 Roll	Monster Encountered
1	Skeletal Minotaur (1)
2	Oil Beetles (2)
3-8	Nothing Encountered
<i>Subtract 1 from roll if group is noisy.</i>	

Ensa Rassal, Magic User

Strength: 9
 Intelligence: 16
 Wisdom: 12
 Dexterity: 11
 Constitution: 9
 Charisma: 15
 Level: 1, AC: 9, HP: 2 (1)
 Gear: Robe, dagger, Wand of Magic Detection, map of the Crimson Abbey. Spell: Magic Missile (used)

For those keeping track of the characters of the story, poor Ensa has lost a hit point after the skeletal minotaur sent her flying!

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Gen Con 2019 (52)	Aug. 1st—4th, Indianapolis, IN
ShireCon II	Sept. 21st, Falls Village, CT
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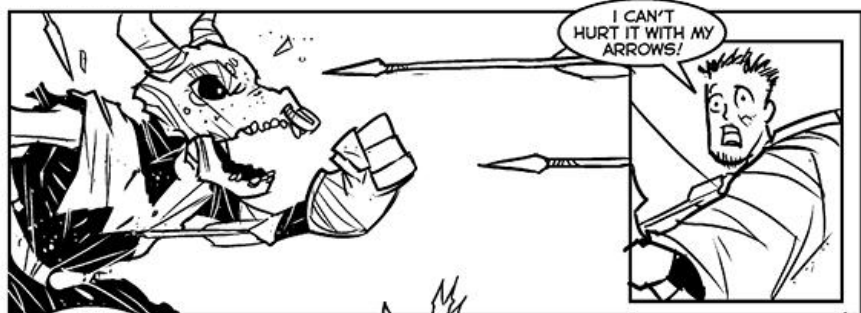
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