

# Back to BasiX

Issues 1-10







# Back to BasiX

A compilation of the B/X fanzine's first ten issues.

Created and printed between June, 2017 and September, 2019, Back to BasiX is a quarterly fanzine celebrating the B/X version of the world's most popular tabletop role-playing game. Presented in a US Trade hardcover format for the first time ever, this compilation brings together all 10 issues into one volume, complete with every piece of original gaming content, product review, and industry legend interview from the original print run! Best of all, these 216 pages are housed within a brand new color cover, created by the fanzine's original cover artist, Matthew Ray.

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Issue	Pages	Interview	Release Date
1	10	Merle Rasmussen	June, 2017
2	14	Frank Mentzer	September, 2017
3	14	David Cook	December, 2017
4	18	Diesel	March, 2018
5	18	Stephen Marsh	June, 2018
6	22	Mike Carr	September, 2018
7	22	Erol Otus	December, 2018
8	22	Jennell Jaquays	March, 2019
9	30	Darlene	June, 2019
10	34	Douglas Niles	September, 2019



B2BX10C  
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Free First Issue!

#1 — June 2017

# Back to Basic



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



*Back to BasiX* has been brewing in my busy mind for some time, trying desperately to escape. Other work has always taken precedence, especially ideas that help build a financial platform for fun and low-cost products like a fanzine! With a couple of successful Kickstarters completed, I have enough extra cash to put out a free ‘zine. Well, at least free for the first issue.

This fanzine will be dedicated to all things B/X; the Holmes, Moldvay and Mentzer work will all be considered when developing content, writing articles, and interviewing gamers. I personally love the Moldvay edition the best, but this series will look at all editorial versions as equally as possible. To most, there is little difference between the Basic books, at least in spirit and general game play. However, rule differences or mechanics may get spotlighted occasionally as a source for interesting material.

Additionally, we may journey into later extensions of the B/X system; we may touch upon rules or products in the “CMI” portion of the BECMI universe to break up the content once in a while. Heck, we may even write an adventure or two in the Masters or Immortals systems!

Our primary focus however, will be to produce a small fanzine dedicated to the early B/X work. We’ll always have at least one adventure, a product spotlight or review, a new monster and a few unique magical items in every issue. In upcoming issues, we’ll interview more legends of the industry, add a Wanted/For Sale section, and try to include more artwork for you to enjoy.

Thanks for picking up this premiere issue of *Back to BasiX*. I hope you enjoy it and find it useful!

— Thom Wilson

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## **Back to BasiX** — VI No 1

Issue #1 — June 2017

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Created by: Thom Wilson

Articles by: Thom Wilson

Cover Illustration: Matt Ray

Logo: Isa de Mendonca Silva

Comic: Travis Hanson

Upcoming Issues:

#2 — September, 2017

#3 — December, 2017

*Back to BasiX Issue #2 submission deadline for Ads, Wanted and For Sale posts is August 13th, 2017.*

## Publishing News

As you know, there aren't a lot of new products getting produced for the B/X system. That being said, each quarter we'll explore all the channels where new products may materialize. This includes crowd funding sites, indie publishers, and even convention publishing. We'll try to cover every angle of the industry, ferreting out new material for your B/X campaigns!

In this first issue, we'll highlight some of the known B/X products that are relatively new, at least released after the original B/X products of the 80's.

**Labyrinth Lord** by Goblinoid Games. Published in 2007 and 2009, Labyrinth Lord is a fairly consistent retro-clone of the Moldvay work, with expanded rules up to 20th level. Goblinoid Games has dozens of products to support the B/X system.

**B/X Companion** by Running Beagle Games. The B/X Companion expands on the Basic and Experts sets, providing rules for levels up to 36th, with new spells, monsters, magical items, and guidelines for mass warfare. Hard to find in print but for sale as a PDF on RPGNow.

## Product Spotlight

I've already "hinted" at my love for the Moldvay Basic Rulebook, so it seems fitting to review that product in the first issue of *Back to BasiX*. For me, it is the benchmark for all rulebooks; it is concise, has a clean layout style, and is full of inspiration.

The Moldvay Basic Rulebook wasn't the first guide; Holmes blue book, and Gygax and Arneson's earlier work were the foundations of beginning rule systems. But in the initial heyday of mass published RPG material, the Moldvay edited Basic Rulebook was the first simplified rulebook to reach the masses.

I can remember being given my copy of the red rulebook (along with the incomplete fragments of a tattered Otus box) back in 1981. The rules were laid out so simply that even my young brain could fully comprehend how the game was played. It was 64 pages of greatness.

The cover illustration by Erol Otus is one of the most inspirational early images of role-playing. That single illustration tells a story of adventure; treasure, heroes and a terrible dragon looming in the background made all my friends and I want to pick up dice and roll up a character.

Moldvay's editorial presence manifests in the layout of the book. Each section follows a carefully constructed path, allowing first time players and dungeon masters the ease of navigation from character creation through combat resolution. This book has set the benchmark for other guidelines and materials, providing a roadmap on how to publish an instructional RPG.

***Basic Rulebook**, Eighth (1981) through Eleventh (1982) printings, with Erol Otus cover illustration (ISBN 0-935696-48-2, #2014).*



I'll try to interview one author, illustrator, designer or editor who had a role and/or impact on the B/X systems each issue. In the first issue, I was able to get Merle Rasmussen to answer a few of my questions...

[Thom] *Everyone knows you were brought into TSR for your Top Secret RPG work, but why were you asked to write Basic and Expert D&D adventures?*

[Merle] I was not impressed by the fantasy genre, but I was inspired by role playing. Allen Hammack hired me over the telephone. I was 25 in June of 1982. The senior designers had staked out the more glamorous *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*® and TSR needed someone to write *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*® modules. *AD&D*® sold better than *D&D*®. *D&D*® sold better than *TOP SECRET*®.

[T] *You authored BSOLO (Ghost of Lion Castle), XSOLO (Lathan's Gold) and X6 Quagmire!), all released in 1984. Do you remember when you started each of them and how long it took to get them to print?*

[M] I started at TSR, Inc. in June 1982 and was downsized 22 months later in April 1984. My resume lists modules in this order: *Quagmire!* (X6), *Lathan's Gold* (XSOLO), and *Ghost of Lion Castle* (BSOLO). *Quagmire!* (X6) took over a year to produce and saw print after April 1984. I remember being told, "You finished writing that one

(module) in eight weeks. Now finish this one in seven." *The Savage Coast* (X9) was published in 1985.

[T] *Which of the Basic and Expert adventures you wrote is your favorite and why?*

[M] I was given the title *Ghost of Lion Castle* (BSOLO). TSR had promised a product with this title and it was listed in a book retailer's catalog before I wrote it. I enjoyed drawing a castle shaped like the King of Beasts surrounded by a wall. Glowing arrows shot out between its claws, molten lead dropped from its nostrils, and huge stones fell from the roof of its mouth. I enjoyed the challenge of writing the programmed text's decision matrix.

[T] *What are you working on these days?*

[M] If you look up <http://topsecretnwo.com> you will find a digital clock counting down until the launch of the *TOP SECRET: NEW WORLD ORDER*™ to occur on June 19, 2017. Together with my original editor Allen Hammack, and a design team including James Carpio, Jayson Elliot, Chad Parish, and A.J. Davenport, we have brought the classic game into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a completely new rule system for fast action, easy playability, and gritty realism. *TOP SECRET: NEW WORLD ORDER*™ is a trademark of TSR, Inc.

## Mythology

In the first issue of *Back to BasiX*, we feature a new monster straight from our Dungeon Crawl. Future issues will also feature one or more new monsters for your B/X adventures!

### Winged Snakeman

The winged snakeman is an abomination of merged species, often created from a failed wizard experiment or spell gone wrong. Part human, snake and bat, the poor creature rarely lives more than a few months, and is incapable of reproducing. Their leathery wings give them limited flight, but are better suited to gliding on strong winds. They attack with short spears or with a venomous bite (requires a save vs. Poison to avoid death).

Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	1*
Move:	120' (40')
Attacks:	See below
Damage:	1-4
No. Appearing:	1-4
Save As:	Fighter: 1
Morale:	8
Treasure Type:	Q (N or O)
Alignment:	Chaotic

Each creature has the head, torso and arms of a human and the lower half of a snake.

A group of escaped winged snake-men are often led by one alpha male who is capable of limited speech. The leader of the winged snake-men often has a few items stolen from their former wizard master (treasure type N and/or O).

## The Magic Shop

Each issue of this fanzine will have at least one magical item for your B/X campaign. Occasionally, we'll have a few unique artifacts for your homebrewed adventures. In this issue, we list three items that might be suitable for the issue's Dungeon Crawl, *Cavern of the Winged Snakemen*.

### Magic Sword, +1 vs. Snakes

A normal sword against any other creature, this blade gains a benefit against snakes or snake-like creatures (including the new monster, Winged Snakeman, listed above). Additionally, the blade adds +1 to any Poison saving throws when attacked by a snake or snake-like creature.

*Value: 1,000 gp.*

### Belt of Flying

This wide leather belt gives the wearer the benefit of flight, matching that of a large bird. Movement rates are 120' (40') when flying. No limb movement is required to fly or steer; only gravity increases velocity and speed. When the wearer wishes to cease flying, they may do so at anytime (even while in mid flight!).

*Value: 2,000 gp.*

### Ring of Poison Resistance

When worn, this thin emerald band provides a +1 to any saving throws vs. Poison. This ring cannot be used with another ring of the same type.

*Value: 1,500 gp.*



Each issue of *Back to BasiX* will include a new, low to mid level adventure for your B/X campaign. Expect most adventures in upcoming issues to focus on first through third level groups. Please enjoy the first adventure, Cavern of the Winged Snakemen!

**Cavern of the Winged Snakemen** by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 3-5 characters of 1st or 2nd level.

*Background:* Local townsfolk whisper of a strange cave system near town where some have claimed to see large, flying snakes. Of course, there are no villagers with actual proof, but the stories run rampant at the local tavern. Surely, this is a great adventure for brave and eager heroes?

*Detailed Background:* A group of winged snakemen have migrated to the nearby cavern, escaping the laboratory of a mad wizard. These creatures were to be destroyed; after all, they were failed experiments! The winged snakemen had other ideas however, and fled their imprisonment. After taking a few valuable items with them, they are currently being hunted by the wizard's minions who seek to return the stolen goods.

The creatures are half man and half snake, with usable wings for limited flight and gliding. See the Mythology section on page 4 for more details.

### **Cavern Entrance**

The dark entrance to the cavern system is littered with the bones of forest creatures and molted snake skin. Zigzagging tracks in the sand indicate that large snakes have entered and exited the caves frequently.

#### **A1: Large Cave**

A large, wet cave spans several dozen feet in width and length. Fallen boulders and old tree logs are found throughout the area. Behind a pile of rubble, 2 winged snakemen (AC 6, HD 1\*, hp 5 each, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML8) work to clear the space. They will attack the characters on sight.

#### **A2: Tunnels**

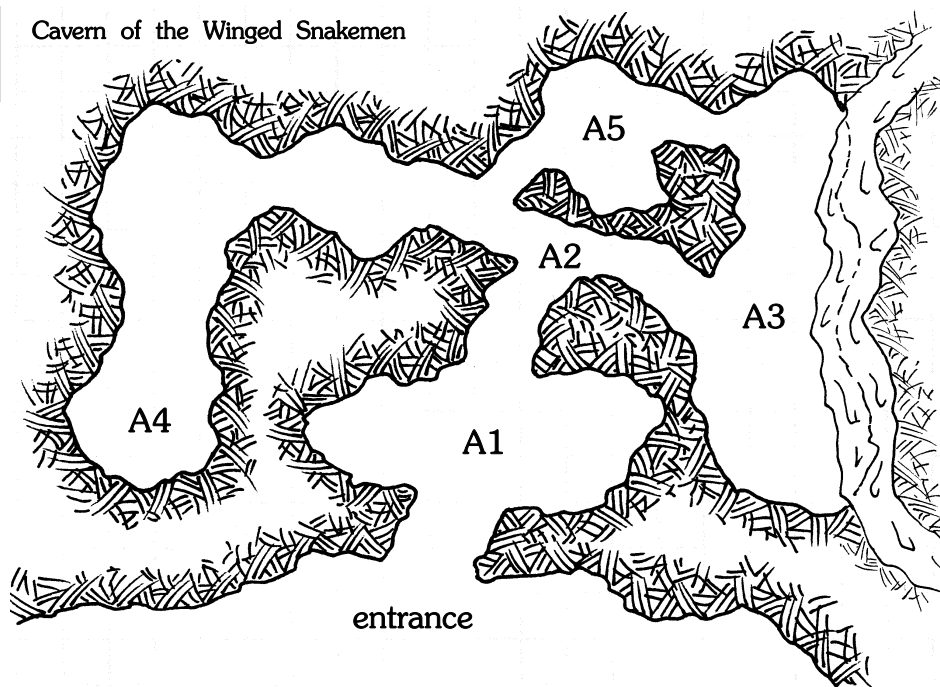
Several tunnels traverse the underground cavern system, leading to several different caves and chambers. There is a 25% chance that characters may encounter one winged snakeman or an acolyte from A4.

#### **A3: Main Chamber**

An underground stream fills the back corner of this large, open chamber. The ceiling is over 40' high, allowing the winged creatures a chance to glide downward in their attacks (adding +1 to their to-hit bonus).

3 winged snakemen are relaxing in the watery pool while 2 sit upon upper ledges, guarding the area (AC 6, HD 1\*, hp 4 each, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML8). The two guards will glide down to attack as the others exit the pool, grabbing spears.

## Cavern of the Winged Snakemen

**A4: New Temple**

A wayward priest, recently encountering the winged creatures, has convinced their leader to erect a temple to worship their kind. The priest is nearly done with the shrine and has recruited 2 acolytes to help finish it.

The priest is 2nd level and wears black **leather armor +1** and a **Ring of Fire Resistance**. He has but one spell (Protection from Good) that he will immediately cast when the characters arrive. (AC 5, C2, hp 8, #AT 1, D 1-6, Save F1, ML10). He carries a **Potion of Neutralize Poison** for emergencies. He uses a normal mace in combat.

The 2 acolytes are fanatical, doing what they are told to do by the priest (AC 7, C1, hp 3, 4, #AT 1, D 1-6, Save F1, ML10). They wear leather armor and carry black maces.

**A5: Chieftain Chambers**

Leading the escape, the newly elected winged snakeman leader uses this area as his personal quarters. A single female survived the experiments, and has partnered with the leader in hopes of successful reproduction.

The leader is quite tough (AC 5, HD 2\*\*, hp 9, #AT 2, D 1-6 or 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML12), attacking with two spears or a single, venomous bite. His mate will use a shortbow, firing arrows at the characters from afar (AC 6, HD 1\*, hp 6, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML10).

A small wooden crate near the pair's nest contains the goods stolen from the mad wizard; along with **250 sp** and **50 gp**, **2 Scrolls of Magic Missile** and **3 Potions of Healing** are found inside the small box.

Choosing spells for your low level cleric, magic-user or elf can be challenging, especially since few choices exist in the earlier B/X rulebooks. **Spellbound** will be a recurring article that highlights or compares existing spells, or details new spell ideas.

How many GMs running B/X campaigns allow their players to pick their spells? Do you let Magic-Users and Elves pick them but force Clerics to roll for their new spell? I've played with many GMs that do both. Here are my thoughts on picking and rolling for spells.

Aside from the characters discovering scrolls or spell books in their adventures, and assuming the group hasn't been shopping at the local Magic Shop, how do the characters find a new spell on level advancement? I've always believed that the character has been studying or praying throughout their adventures and upon gaining a level (as part of that study or prayer), have finally made the breakthrough needed to cast something new.

I personally prefer the method of allowing Magic-User and Elf characters to pick their spell, but to have Clerics roll for theirs (however, I may try to attune the spell choices to the character's god or pantheon). Furthermore, I usually have Magic-User and Elf players tell me what their characters are going to study for their next spell choices upon level advancement. What's your method?

### Floating Disc, But Why?

Our initial spell review is for the first level Magic-User and Elf spell, *Floating Disc*. I can honestly say that I can never remember ever picking this spell. Why? First of all, the spell lasts 6 turns, or 60 minutes. If you have but one spell per day, and you choose *Floating Disc*, you can basically carry 500 pounds of loot (or fallen comrades) for an hour before dropping everything. This makes the spell somewhat useless, especially if your first level character has but one spell. If you are deep within a dungeon, *Floating Disc* isn't going to help. A Bag of Holding, now that would help more.

When one of my players chooses *Floating Disc*, I tend to enhance the spell to make it more worthwhile. I also try to remember that we're playing B/X so I try not to complicate things. I extend the duration to 6 hours instead of 60 minutes (36 turns) or until concentration is broken. That means if the caster has to get involved in an encounter or perform a strenuous activity, the *Floating Disc* spell ends. But if the group is exiting the dungeon and meets with little to no resistance, they have more time to get all that hard fought treasure out safely.

In the next issue, we'll review the Cleric spell, *Purify Food and Water*.

Do you have a spell you'd like to discuss? Let me know!

On page 10 of this issue, you'll find the first installment of the *Dungeon Delver* comic series by Travis Hanson. This series will follow the adventures of three heroes as they search for a fabled artifact in a deserted abbey. Each issue, we'll parallel their adventure by providing a B/X representation of the comic; you'll get maps, encounter area, statistics, and more.

*Background:* Bindor Flameheart (dwarf), Whystal (thief), and Ensa Rassal (magic user) have embarked on their first quest, to retrieve a mysterious artifact from a long deserted abbey. It is rumored that the monks that once lived there watched over their most precious gift from their strange god. A magical hammer made from a meteorite was said to protect the abbey from disease and injury. One day, the lone bridge to the mountain abbey was found destroyed and the monks, vanished.

With the bridge gone, no one has been able to find a way into the abbey. That is, until Ensa Rassal found an old map which detailed a separate, secret entrance. Using the map as a guide, the three heroes have reached the cliff near the abbey where a secret door is supposed to be.

*Crimson Abbey Exterior:* The old monastery is falling into ruin, it's exterior no longer maintained by the monks of the Broken God. The chasm between the mountain cliff and the abbey is over 100' wide, and the remnants of a bridge are evident.

The abbey was built into the cliff face on a large ledge jutting out from a steep mountain. Its location was perfect for the secluded order; the lone bridge could be recoiled, easily defended or destroyed as a last resort.

### **Opposing Cliff:**

The cliff across from the Crimson Abbey is narrow, no more than 5' wide at its largest section. A moderately difficult climb along a winding ledge from the bottom of the mountain ends on the opposite side of the chasm, facing the Crimson Abbey.

A secret door can be found at the end of the winding ledge trail. The monks hid the entrance well, also protecting it with a lightning trap (deals 1d4 damage). The secret door opens inward, revealing a long unlit passage into the mountain behind the deserted abbey...

### *Story Characters*

#### **Bindor Flameheart, Dwarf**

Strength: 15  
Intelligence: 9  
Wisdom: 13  
Dexterity: 11  
Constitution: 14  
Charisma: 7  
Level: 1, AC: 4, HP: 7

Gear: Chainmail armor, shield, hammer, short sword, backpack (with supplies)

Bindor is a serious fellow, eagerly seeking his place in the world of legendary heroes. He is cautious, but a fierce combatant. He is loyal to his two friends, and will sacrifice himself for their safety.

*Story Characters (cont'd)***Whystal, Thief**

Strength: 12

Intelligence: 12

Wisdom: 11

Dexterity: 15

Constitution: 13

Charisma: 16

Level: 1, AC: 6, HP: 4 (3\*)

Gear: Leather armor, cloak, dagger, short bow, quiver w/ 12 arrows.

Whystal is rash young thief, preferring to think on his feet (often, not thinking at all). He tends to rush into situations unprepared, forcing his compatriots to "save" him time and again.

\* *After the lightning trap and Potion of Healing, Whystal is at 3 hp.*

**Ensa Rassal, Magic User**

Strength: 9

Intelligence: 16

Wisdom: 12

Dexterity: 11

Constitution: 9

Charisma: 15

Level: 1, AC: 9, HP: 2

Gear: Robe, dagger, Wand of Magic Detection, Potion of Healing\*, map of the Crimson Abbey. Spell: *Magic Missile*

Ensa is a smart, young wizard's apprentice who has recently acquired the map of the Crimson Abbey. She has taken leave of her studies to pursue the fabled treasures of the deserted abbey. Like Bindor, she is fiercely loyal to her friends.

\* *The Potion of Healing has been used, no longer available.*

**Want Ads / For Sale**

**Wanted:** Any condition copies of B2 Keep on the Borderlands, and Moldvay Basic and Expert Rulebooks. [throwi@gmail.com](mailto:throwi@gmail.com)

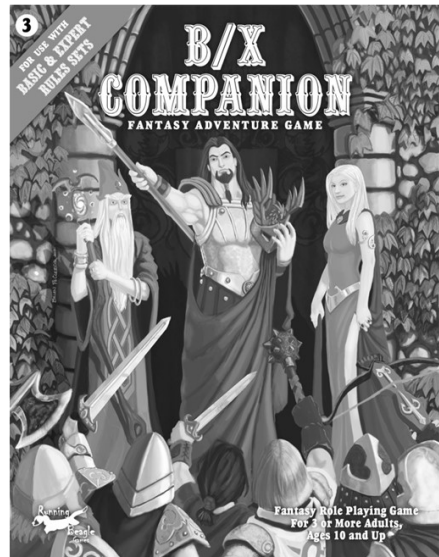
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If you have an idea for a short piece for *Back to BasiX*, contact [thom@throwigames.com](mailto:thom@throwigames.com) for submission guidelines.

Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for making sense of my 'Crimson Abbey of the Broken God' story and drawing it perfectly!

Additionally, a very special thanks to Merle Rasmussen for his candid responses to my goofy questions.

**For Sale:** B/X Companion by Running Beagle Games.



PRINT orders available at [bxblackrazor.blogspot.com](http://bxblackrazor.blogspot.com); PDF available at [DriveThruRPG.com](http://DriveThruRPG.com)

**DUNGEON DELIVERS** FOLLOWING THE ADVENTURES OF BINDOR THE STURDY DWARF, WHYSTAL THE CUNNING THIEF, AND ENSA THE MAGIC USER THE CRIMSON ABBEY



TO BE CONTINUED...



# Back to Basic X



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

## Amazing Support — A Letter from the Fanzine Creator

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I've been both surprised and humbled by the interest and support of this little, "thrown together" fanzine! I never expected *Back to BasiX* to be of huge interest or success, mostly due to the niche following of classic gaming systems. However, at the time of the second issue creation, over 150 copies of the first issue have been delivered to readers! [Note: *There were 50 first print copies, 50 second print copies, and over 50 PDFs delivered.*]

With such interest, I can assure readers that many more issues will be made. I've heard from gamers, potential contributors, and indie publishers who want to advertise. I've been asked about subscriptions and crate services. I think what's important for everyone to know is that this is still a trial period for *Back to BasiX*; over the next few issues, I'm going to try out different ideas and topics. Many things will

work and some may not. When we have a size and solid topic list that are both interesting and repeatable, we'll start to talk about things like subscriptions and such. Until then, just hang on and enjoy the ride!

My goal is to get a fun little fanzine into the hands of people who love Basic and Expert roleplaying. This is not about money or recognition, but about creating something that's fun for both you and me. Adding dozens of pages or changing it to a monthly release makes it a larger commitment than I want. If you want me to be excited to produce a fanzine, keeping this little book to 12-16ish pages, released quarterly, will do just that.

I hope you enjoy this, the second issue of *Back to BasiX*! Read on!  
- Thom Wilson

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## **Back to BasiX** — VI No 2

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Editor: Michael J. Gross III

Upcoming Issues:

#3 — December, 2017

#4 — March, 2018

*Submission ideas? Send them to [thom@throwigames.com](mailto:thom@throwigames.com)!*

## Publishing News

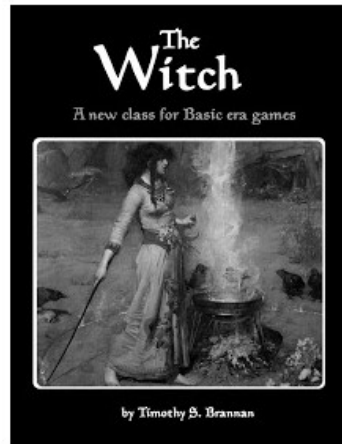
When you dig hard enough, whether it be through dozens of internet searches or through the beast that is RPGNow.com, you're bound to find new products for the B/X world. Sometimes, however, a reader points you in the direction of a new product that's interesting. **Timothy Brannan** (of Elf Lair Games) has an awesome new class addition for B/X—*The Witch*. If you like expanding your system but want to stay with the Basic and Expert feel, this supplement might be for you. You can find his work at RPGNow in PDF and soft cover.

(Picture and advertisement of *The Witch* provided by the author, Timothy Brannan)

Something Wicked this Way Comes...

### The Witch

A sourcebook for Basic Edition fantasy games



Print and PDF at  
<https://goo.gl/WP12Es>



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## Product Spotlight

In the first issue of *Back to Basic*, I highlighted the Moldvay edited Basic rules and provided my opinions of the content and how it was presented. While I love these rules, they were structured in a way that felt instructional for beginning players. At the time in which this book was sold, instruction is what many new players needed. However, when Frank Mentzer was tasked with creating a new version of the Basic ruleset, he took a slightly different approach to layout and structure that I feel many may have missed as they jumped over to AD&D. Some players may have felt that the Moldvay edition was “childish” and steered clear of the Basic set in favor of AD&D. Mentzer was able to use his recreated ruleset to pull brand new players

or existing gamers into a different version of D&D (maybe even getting players who were too intimidated by the Gyaxian tomes in the advanced version of the game).

While I will compare the two versions of the rulebooks, I'm not going to debate which is better. Each version has its benefits to both new and experienced players. Instead, I'll highlight the core differences of the sets, focusing on interesting differences or changes that I feel are worth checking out.

One of the main differences of both sets is that Mentzer's version comes in two books, one for the DM and one for the player. Some of the core rules are found in both books.

Splitting the rules between “roles” makes it easier for players and DMs to use their respective books at the same time. Previously, gamers using the Moldvay version would either have to have more than one rule book or share a lone copy.

Moldvay’s version starts immediately with character creation, spending little time on what the game entails. Mentzer instead chose to kick off the player’s guide with an example (solo) adventure, immersing the reader in the game and how it’s played. The revised red box rules detail character creation later in the book, around page 23.

Mentzer chose to put the spell descriptions within the class section of character creation. While Moldvay chose to have all spells together in its own section, Mentzer put Magic User spells in the MU class section, and Cleric spells in their section. The DM’s rule book in Mentzer’s version also lists higher level spells that aren’t in the Moldvay book (but instead, are within Zeb Cook’s Expert version). Mentzer gave the DM 3rd level MU and 2nd level Cleric spells to use.

A section of “additional rules” in the revised red box DM’s rulebook details new concepts on missile weapons, encumbrance and retainers, things that were hinted at in the Moldvay book but not covered to the extent of the revised rules. Additionally, portions of the additional rules are covered in the player’s book as well.

In the Mentzer edition, both the player and DM books provide an example of game play, each focused on the duty of the gamer’s role in the game; tips for running the game are provided in the DM adventure example, while the theme of collaboration and working together is the focus of the player’s adventure example.

Nearly every other aspect of the rules are the same between versions. Each set has a monster section (although a few are missing from Mentzer’s edition, specifically the Acolyte and Insect Swarm) and a treasure section. Mentzer’s set has many more tables for players, which I personally find to be more useful during game play.

The inside back cover of the player’s book in the Mentzer edition has advertisements for other TSR products: the Polyhedron, Dragon and Amazing magazines, and Star Frontiers are highlighted for players.

Both versions are extremely solid sets for new and experienced players. While Mentzer’s version tries to teach the new player the game with example adventures, Moldvay’s version walks through the steps of roleplaying in a methodical order. Each version works for players; it’s more of matter of what suits your needs and style.

*Twelfth through Fourteenth Release of the Basic Rules, 1983-1989, edited by Frank Mentzer. From boxed set “Set 1: Basic Rules”, ISBN: 0-88038-338-0; 1988 version used in review, set #1011, \$12.00 list price.*



After my product spotlight of the Revised Basic Rules, it's only fitting that I interview the editor himself, Frank Mentzer! Frank was kind enough to take time out of his busy schedule to answer a few of my questions.

*[Thom] What is the earliest roleplaying game you remember playing (not including wargaming and board games)? Was it a published or non-published RPG?*

[Frank] It was an unpublished homebrew finance game combined with some roleplaying, roughly 1964-65. Two fellow Boy Scouts named Jim Milman and Robert Fourer created this (self-titled) "M-F game". We each literally lived on our own cloud in the sky, were entrepreneurs (in keeping with the early 1960s), and created & sold things to each other.

*[T] What is your earliest or fondest memory of a B/X character that you played? Any relevant details, including GM, adventure name (if you remember), other players, etc. I'm mainly looking at what you chose to play and why.*

[F] I was introduced to the game by Don Paterson, with whom I played many card, board, and war games from 1975-1980. My first character was a wizard named Felonious, using the Holmes Blue Book (c. 1977) D&D rules. We played one-on-one, alternating as DM; there were very few players (Philadelphia PA suburbs). But I remember almost nothing of that first year's fumbling adventures, because in 1978 the

AD&D Players Handbook arrived. We converted to 1e immediately, taking this new book of classes & spells and the Monster Manual and mashing it all together with OD&D and Holmes. (The DM Guide wasn't out yet; we were on our own.) TSR wasn't producing many adventures, and although Judges' Guild had lots, their quality was spotty. We ended up creating our own by preference.

*[T] Which of the BECMI rulesets are you the proudest of, with respect to the versions that you had a hand in developing and/or editing?*

[F] That was a 4-year project, writing the five boxed sets, but the Companion set clearly stands out. Despite a decade of play, the D&D game had never really explained Campaigns. At Expert character levels (4-14) we focused on outdoor adventuring as a step up from dungeons, and kept Zeb's outstanding X1 module (Isle of Dread) from the previous Moldvay set. But in Companion I laid out the whole realm... dominions and resources, castle-building, mass battles, and more.

*[T] Do you have any memorable highlights of early B/X playtesting at TSR? Perhaps a TPK or player inspired action that introduced a new rule? Something that perhaps inspired you to get back to the design phase?*

[F] Tom Moldvay and I started work in the same office on January 20, 1980. He was immediately tasked to rewrite the Holmes version, but I

was a mere editor-in-training. I participated in some playtests (like A1 and Q1), but none for Tom's set. After a learning period, I won an award as best DM, and was almost immediately assigned to create the RPGA, which General Manager Mike Carr had proposed a year earlier. That was really my first creative job, and I quickly produced the "R" series of module adventures for our tournament use, plus several others.

[T] *Lastly, are there any rules in the BECMI rulesets that you would go back and revise or add today if you could?*

[F] Of course. A dozen small things, but it ties into one fundamental flaw. I worked on a 36-level basis,

spreading the game out over 4 boxed sets (plus the Immortals set to put it all in multiversal context). But we found that even core hobbyists generally play from levels 1-10, sometimes reaching 15, but very rarely beyond that. The Thief class suffers greatly thereby, and I've already produced an alternative (available free on the internet somewhere) that introduces a lot more campaign-oriented skills, while boosting the basic skill set to maximum within 10 levels or so.

The chance will never come, of course, but I'd revise the whole thing into levels 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, and 16-20. Level 20 maximum seems fitting, and far more appropriate for actual use.

## Mythology

Each issue of *Back to BasiX* will feature one or more new monsters for you to use in your B/X adventures. Enjoy!

### Mrunt

Shortened from their former name, "Mirrored Runt", the **Mrunt** is a small humanoid that is similar in size and shape of their distant cousin, the goblin. The biggest difference is in their skin and hair; their hide is glasslike, reflecting light and other elemental effects. Their exterior is their greatest defense—any spell cast at the creature may be reflected back at the caster. If the Mrunt passes a saving throw versus Spells, the spell automatically reflects back to the caster. The caster is entitled to a saving throw as well.

Armor Class:	4
Hit Dice:	1-1*
Move:	60' (20')
Attacks:	1 Claw
Damage:	1-4
No. Appearing:	2-8
Save As:	Fighter: 3
Morale:	6
Treasure Type:	Nil
Alignment:	Neutral

Their reflective skin and hair is as strong as thin steel, providing them with a bonus to their Armor Class.

Mrunts are found in small groups away from other humanoids. They are shunned by most creatures, including goblins. They prefer to run from conflict (instead of fighting) but can be extremely dangerous when cornered.



## Venezoan

This free-swimming sea creature resembles a jellyfish except for its glowing, green exoskeleton. The **Venezoan** is extremely venomous—even the slightest touch will cause intense pain and suffering. Characters who come in contact with this creature must save versus Death Ray or Poison (at a penalty of -1) to avoid succumbing to unconsciousness.

These creatures are often found in shallow spots along the sea coast or in underground coves.

Armor Class:	8
Hit Dice:	2*
Move:	60' (20')
Attacks:	1 Tentacle
Damage:	1-4
No. Appearing:	1-4
Save As:	Fighter: 2
Morale:	12
Treasure Type:	Nil
Alignment:	Neutral

Venezoans will often surround a single prey, attacking until the victim falls unconscious. Unless they are attacked, they will ignore other creatures while they consume their victim.

## The Magic Shop

Magical items come in various forms and with different rarities. Not every magic item will provide a benefit to combat—some will benefit the adventurers in simpler ways. In this issue, we highlight a couple of rare magical items that are extremely useful in different ways.

### Lantern of Living Daylight

Resembling a normal lantern, this magical item is filled with captured sunlight that never ceases. When opened, the lantern shines twice the distance of a non-magical lantern, up to 60' in diameter. A specially constructed hood can be used to focus the light as a single beam instead, increasing the distance another 30' (90' total).

Any creature affected by natural sunlight is equally as affected by the lantern's natural rays. The sunlight within the lantern never ceases or expires.

*Value: 5,000 gp.*

### The Never-hungry Bowl

What looks to be a simple wooden bowl and spoon is actually a powerful magical item. When one of the command words are spoken, the bowl magically fills with food enough to feed two people. Three command words are known to exist, each creating a different type of food; porridge, soup and a hearty stew can be requested with the respective command words.

The magical bowl can be used three times per day.

*Value: 2,500 gp.*

### Cursed Coin

Appearing as a gold coin with a medusa head on one side, this cursed item magically transfers any other gold coins within one foot of it to a random location (DM's choice). It has no effect on other types of coins, although it is rumored that copper, silver, electrum and platinum versions also exist.

*Value: 250 gp.*

Each issue of *Back to BasiX* will have at least one simple dungeon crawl for you to use in your ongoing B/X campaigns. In this issue, we give you “**The Lost Cove**”.

### The Lost Cove

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 3-5 characters of 1st or 2nd level.

*Background:* From their sea vessel, the characters spy a hidden cave along the shore of a deserted isle. It seems tidal waters enter and exit the narrow cave mouth under the massive cliffs. It appears that even a small boat will not fit in through the cave mouth; the characters will have to swim in.

*Detailed Background:* Mrunts, shunned by the other humanoids of the island, have made their home in the underground cave under the cliffs. Using the sea and cave fungus for food, the Mrunts are perfectly happy living out their lives away from their enemies.

Unfortunately, Venezoans have begun to use the lagoon as their home, preventing the Mrunts from fishing, and gathering crabs and oysters from the sea. Additionally, strange noises have begun beyond the strange iron gates to the rear of their caves. Unable to eat or flee, the Mrunts are getting desperate.

Note that Mrunts and Venezoans are described in the Mythicology section of this issue (pages 5-6).

### Cave Entrance

Even at high tide, the lagoon entrance is visible from the sea. The cave mouth is tall but narrow, preventing small vessels from entering the interior. During low tide, characters can wade into the lagoon beyond the entrance.

### A1: Lagoon

Warm tidal waters ebb and flow, filling the lagoon at high tide and nearly draining it during low tide. Three **Venezoans** have made the lagoon their new home, catching trapped fish and crabs in the salt water (AC 9, HD 2\*, hp 8 each, #AT 1, D 1-4 + poison, Save F1, ML12). Larger prey (like Mrunts or characters) are very appealing to the large jellyfish.

The creatures have consumed most of the plentiful resources in the lagoon. It will take several days for fish, crabs and other aquatic life in the pool to repopulate.

### A2: Mrunt Cave

Several Mrunts, hungry and scared, are huddled in the back of this cave. Although they would prefer not to engage characters, if they are attacked, they will defend themselves (AC 4, HD 1-1\*, hp 3 each, #AT 1, D 1-4, Save F3, ML6).

Interestingly, the Mrunts may offer information in exchange for clearing out the lagoon of Venezoans and ceasing the “scary” noises in the back of the cave system. They know of a secret cache of treasure

beyond the iron gate (area A5). If the characters initially act non-threatening, the Mrunts will ask them for help.

**A3: Fungus Chamber**

Mrunts normally supplement their diet with fungus from this cave but have recently turned to it as their only food source. Most of the cave mushrooms have been picked clean and haven't grown back. Only a handful of glowing fungus remains, mostly in hard to reach areas. Ingested fungus is toxic for those unused to them (save versus Death Ray or Poison or take 1d4 damage).

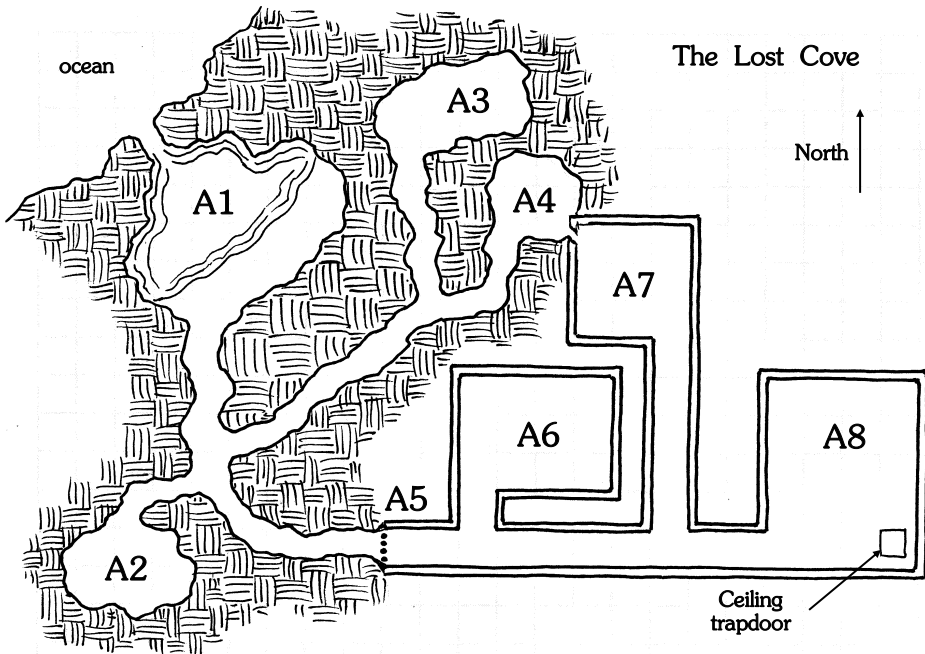
There is a 50% chance that one or two **Mrunts** may be here, searching for mushrooms. (AC 4, HD 1-1\*, hp 3 each, #AT 1, D 1-4, Save F3, ML6)

**A4: Mrunt Burial Mound**

Several Mrunts have been buried here recently as their clan slowly dies of hunger and disease from rat bites. Two **Mrunts** stand vigilant over the burial site, protecting it from scavenging rats from beyond the iron gate. (AC 4, HD 1-1\*, hp 3 each, #AT 1, D 1-4, Save F3, ML6)

There is a 1 in 6 chance that the characters may arrive to find the Mrunts battling six **Giant Rats**. (AC 7, HD 1-4 hp, hp 2 each, #AT 1, D 1-3 + disease, Save F1, ML8) The rats carry a special disease that saps Constitution by one point per day until a successful save.

Note that the giant rats can also use a small tunnel from area A7 to get to this burial chamber.



### A5: Rusted Iron Gate

An ancient iron gate stands at the rear of the Mrunt's cave system, padlocked from the other side. The gate is rusty from the breeze of sea air blowing through the caves, but is still firmly in place. The bars of the gate are wide enough for small characters to fit through (e.g. Halflings). The giant rats from area A7 easily fit between the bars as well.

The rusty bars may be bent to allow entry; three consecutive and successful Strength checks (at half the character's Strength score) will bend the bars enough to allow characters to fit through. Each character may only try this feat once.

Note that the tunnel beyond the iron gate is manmade, unlike the rest of the cavern tunnels to this point.

### A6: Tomb of the Cursed

Several dozen years ago, pirates sailing the waters near this island found a magical pearl once belonging to a powerful mermaid. When the captain of the pirate crew, "Rum-eye" discovered the pearl at the mermaid's underwater tomb, he dove down and stole it. With his act of theft, he unknowingly cursed himself and all whom he befriended. He and his crew came to this very isle where he had a secret lair to store his stolen loot. Within a few days, his entire crew succumbed to the "curse of the quick death", a magical affliction that disintegrates flesh if the character does not fully submerge themselves at least once per hour.

Rum-eye's crew died in this room, many of them in their hammocks. Any noise in this area will reawaken the dead pirates. Twelve pirate **skeletons** will arise and attack the characters (AC 7, HD 1, hp 4 each, #AT 1, D 1-6, Save F1, ML12). Each skeleton carries a rusty cutlass.

Several footlockers contain the pirate crew member's possessions. **145 sp** and **23 gp** can be found amidst the belongings.

### A7: Rum-eye's Quarters

The pirate captain used this area as his personal quarters while resting in the pirate lair. Rum-eye was the last to die, fighting the curse as hard as possible. His bony hand still grasps the cursed pearl to his chest. The captain arises from his bunk when characters enter the room. Rum-eye is a tough **skeleton** warrior (AC 6, HD 2, hp 8 each, #AT 1, D 1-6+1, Save F2, ML12). In one hand, he holds the pearl, but in the other, wields a **+1 cutlass** (short sword). If he drops the pearl, he will skip his attack to regain it.



Art by Jack Badashski, © Jack Badashski, 2016

Three small chests are found amidst the debris in the room. A key around the skeleton's neck will open all of them.

Chest 1 contains **500 sp** and **100 gp**. Chest 2 contains 100 rubies, sapphires and emeralds, each worth 10 gp. Chest 3 contains the captain's journal of the pearl, including his search, discovery and findings about the curse.

Note that if the characters did not encounter the rats in area A4, they may find them here moving through the debris and refuse piles.

### A8: Pirate Lair

Several wooden chairs and three tables are found in this large room once used by the pirates as they rested from their voyages. Empty wine bottles and discarded cards are scattered across the tables and floor. A wooden ladder leads up to a trap door in the ceiling. A sloping tunnel above the trap door leads to the surface of the island, exiting out between a narrow crack in a huge boulder.

From the surface, the crack in the boulder leading down to the pirate's lair is well hidden, much like a secret door.

## Spellbound

There are so few spells in B/X, but so much to talk about! In each issue of *Back to BasiX*, we'll review an existing spell or create a new one for your consideration... or both!

### Purify Food and... What?

Unless the DM made you roll for Clerical spells (not following the rulebook, of course), did you ever pick the *Purify Food and Water* spell? Okay, first let's talk about your options here. As a cleric, you don't even get a spell until second level. With your lone spell, do you take this one? I mean, really. You have eight spells to choose from and you pick this one? I bet most haven't, unless they needed it during a particular encounter, and even then, you had to pray in advance to get it! Who has that kind of foresight to know what they'll need in the upcoming day. Every player I've ever known has picked either *Cure Light Wounds* or *Protection*

*from Evil*. Oh, there's the occasional *Detect Magic* or *Detect Evil*, but most take the healing spell, man. Your fighters are getting beat up and healing potions are hard to come by. That healing spell can save the group.

That being said, there are times to take *Purify Food and Water*. Maybe when the group is starving or thirsty and there's nothing but rotting meat and sewer water around. But even then, a *Cure Light Wounds* spell might still be better.

### More on Cleric Spells...

While we're on the topic of Clerics and their spells, let's talk about optional (or standard) rules. On page B15 of the Moldvay edition, it states, "...the cleric has the choice of any spells of the same level...". How many DMs follow that rule? I know several that didn't.

This means that *all eight* of the first level spells were available to the second level cleric, praying to receive one of their choice. My first DM made me roll for my spell (I mean, there are numbers next to them for a reason, right? Roll that d8!). I don't think I "picked" *Purify Food and Water*, though. I believe I may have received *Resist Cold*. Super useful.

Another DM allowed me to gain an additional first level spell if I had a 15 or better Wisdom, usable at first level! An interesting variant to the B/X rule, for certain.

One creative DM made me pick spells that only aligned to my deity! How's that for roleplaying within a campaign?

In the next issue of *Back to BasicX*, we'll take a look at the more complicated spells *ESP* and *Phantasmal Force*. Both of these spells have less finite rules around their use, forcing players to get creative with their spell casting. Spells like these require an imaginative approach to magic, not something every starting player can quite do.

Do you have a spell you'd like to discuss? Let me know!

## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 2

In Part 1 of the Crimson Abbey of the Broken God, our characters found the secret door leading into the ruins. The group now enters the dungeon, seeking adventure... Check out page 14 to see how the comic characters fare in their delve. This section is for you, the DM or player, to play along with the comic. For background details on this adventure, see the first issue. Enjoy!

### Inside the Secret Door:

The interior of the tunnel inside the secret exit (this was used by monks to leave the abbey unnoticed) is dusty and filled with cobwebs. A quick search will reveal that no feet have touched the dusty floor for many years.

Sconces line the walls, alternating between left and right sides, each found at 20 foot intervals. Although fairly dry, there is enough oil in them to stay lit for a few hours.

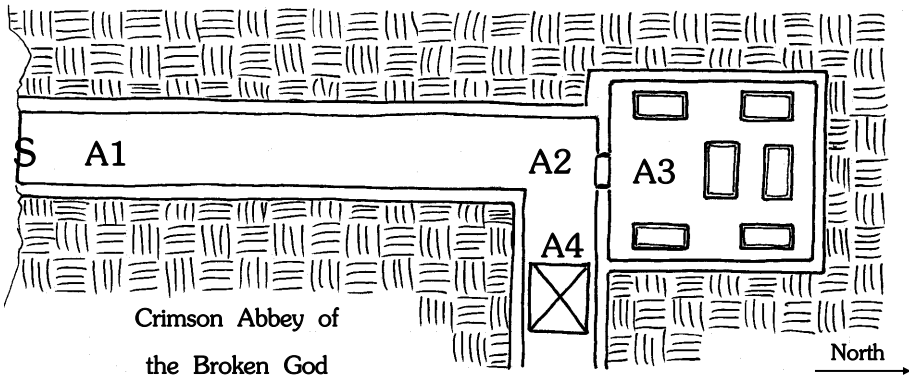
The hallway is one hundred feet long before it comes to a wide, thick wooden door at a 90 degree turn in the passage. The door is reinforced with bronze and steel fittings.

### Area 2: Wooden Door

A well-made, highly reinforced door stands at the corner of this hallway. Although it appears sturdy and beckons to strong characters desiring a chance to smash it down, the door is unlocked and easily opened. A Detect Magic spell will reveal a strong enchantment on the door. The door opens into the room beyond.

Once the door begins to open, it accelerates, slamming against the interior wall unless a combined strength of 18 (one or more characters) slows down its swing. If the door slams against the wall, the undead occupants in the room beyond will awaken...





### Area 3: Corrupted Crypt

Six marble slabs are the final resting spots for a group of corrupted monks. Stripped of flesh, the bony remains of the monks are covered in small bits of crimson cloth at their waist and wrists. On their skulls, each wears a golden headband with a single small ruby at its center. When the skeletal monks rise (either from the noise of the door or by a character touching the slab or skeleton), the ruby in the headband will slowly pulse.

**Six Skeletons:** (AC 7, HD 1, hp 4 each, #AT 1, D 1-4, Save F1, ML12). Each attacks with their bony fists.

Each uncut ruby is a shard from the large gemstone discovered within the old tunnels below the abbey. It is said that the monk's troubles began after finding the massive uncut gem. The ruby is worth 500 gp.

If the headband is somehow removed while the skeleton is animated, it will cease to attack, falling to the ground wherever it is currently. It takes only thirty seconds for the skeleton's bones to disintegrate, leaving behind a pile of dust.

If any of the characters place the headband on their own heads, they must immediately save versus Rods, Staves or Spells (and continue to do so each time the headband is put on or each consecutive day worn). If they fail their saving throw, they will immediately fall under the influence of the evil and sentient ruby found far below the abbey. Notes on gem and its evil effects will be covered in a future issue, but for game-play until then, character's alignments will slowly shift to Chaotic and their thoughts will be of evil deeds.

### Area 4: Floor Trap

After turning the corner in the hallway, characters may discover a pit trap in the floor. The trap is activated with less than 5 pounds of pressure, but due to its age is twice as easy to spot by Thieves (double % on Thief Abilities chart, page B8 [Moldvay] and Dwarves (1-4 on a d6). The ten foot wide trap drops characters into a 20' deep pit onto a pile of discarded straw and old clothing. Characters rolling under their Dexterity take no damage, otherwise take 1d4. A small door is found at the bottom... to be continued in the next issue!

**Wanted:** Any condition copies of B2 Keep on the Borderlands, and Moldvay Basic and Expert Rulebooks. throwi@gmail.com

**B/X Blog:** Check out Ancient Vaults & Eldritch Secrets at <https://ancientvaults.wordpress.com>

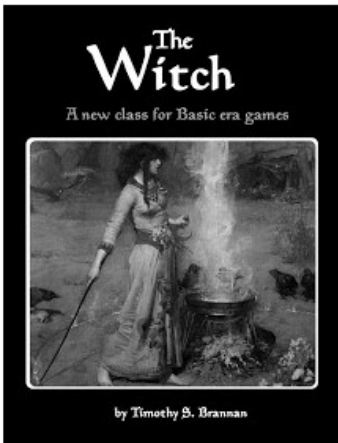
**Coming Soon:** DerbyMouse Games, for hand-crafted character and monster miniatures. Made from simple materials, either pre-painted or unpainted! Check out the back cover for sample minis!

**For Sale:** *The Witch* by Elf Lair Games.

Something Wicked this Way Comes...

### The Witch

A sourcebook for Basic Edition fantasy games

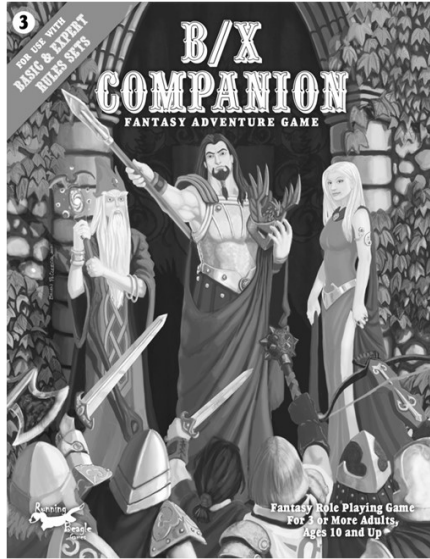


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**For Sale:** *B/X Companion* by Running Beagle Games.



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Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my *Dungeon Delvers* story!

Additionally, a very special thanks to Frank Mentzer for his interview question answers!



# Back to Basic

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

## Edition Overlap? — *A Letter from the Fanzine Creator*

I knew at some point that a simple fanzine, created to celebrate a 30 year-old roleplaying system, would get under someone's skin. Could this fanzine bother someone in some way? Well, I recently had a discussion with an admin of a BECMI group about the B/X inclusion or exclusion within the BECMI universe. So, the obvious is this: B/X, edited by Moldvay and Cook is not the same as Mentzer's BECMI, but can we agree that they both were Gygaxian, mainly differing in their presentation styles and scope? I mean, they both started in the Basic and Expert levels of a non-AD&D system. Sure, the BECMI version expanded the system to allow for higher-level characters, war-gaming, planar travel, and godly actions, but both are rooted in the same core principles and system designs. So what's the problem then? Who takes issue with the comparison?

It seems that certain extremists of BECMI don't want anything to do with B/X material. Facebook and other forum groups dedicated to the BECMI version desperately try to keep the two groups from crossing over, maintaining that the systems are different. There's a fine line between preservationist and extremist and I found out firsthand how the latter feel about B/X.

I'm not going to waste too much space in this fanzine about the discussion or its ridiculousness. I will say however, that this little quarterly 'zine will celebrate **both** B/X and BECMI. We'll probably keep much of the material in the lower levels of the systems, where most of us tend to play. As for differences, I see nothing that prevents using references from both versions. If this upsets you, I apologize. We're going to overlap the editions for simplicity.  
*Thom Wilson*

### — Issue #3 Details —

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## Publishing News

In late 2015, I backed a Kickstarter project for a tremendously useful product for B/X game play; the **B/X Monster Reference Index** by Peter Regan of Squarehex.

In addition to the flipbook, I also received several handy charts including to-hit tables, a damage-by-weapon list, and the experience-by-HD reference. Everything you need to run combat against countless foes!

You can purchase the PDF version of **B/X Monster Reference Index** on RPGNow.com (publisher: Gold Piece Publications) or a print copy directly from Squarehex's website (<https://squarehex.myshopify.com>).

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If you haven't seen this product and you regularly play Basic or Expert, you're missing out on a great item for the table. The spiral-bound flipbook has over 500 Basic and Expert monsters listed, in alphabetical order, each displayed with their critical statistics for easy reference. The number of creatures in this book for B/X came not only from the Basic and Expert rulebooks, but from other compatible rule sets (e.g. 1E). Ever wonder what the stats for an Ogrillon would be in B/X? Look no further! This index has them!



## Product Spotlight

Continuing in the spirit of TSR-produced B/X product spotlights — having already looked at the Moldvay and Mentzer versions of the Basic Rulebook — it makes sense to now look at the Expert rulebook, edited by David “Zeb” Cook with Steve Marsh.

First let me say, whoever decided to embed part of the Basic cover in

the Expert cover was an absolute genius. I have often wondered if it was Erol Otus himself, the illustrator of both covers. I will try to find out who made this call in one of the upcoming Artist spotlights (*note: a section to alternate with the Legendary Gamer Interview in upcoming issues*). This artwork may have been responsible for many spontaneous purchases of one or both boxed sets. Personally, the Basic cover art pulled me into the contents.

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Alright, so let's get into the contents of the Expert rulebook. First, the book is set up in a nearly identical fashion to the Moldvay Basic rulebook. The ordering of chapters matches its predecessor, giving the reader an immediate cohesive feel to the work. However, the book pays attention to where the reader may have come from; if they played the Holmes edition before moving on to Expert, there are several notes in the first few pages that detail rule conversions and changes. I feel like this was great idea, clearly covering both Basic entry points into the next set of levels. Additionally, the first couple of pages highlight slight changes to Basic rules, noting that the Expert rules should take precedence.

This book adds more depth to wilderness travel, detailing how and what to do when the characters get lost. It also adds a sample wilderness map and encounter, expanding the range of characters' exploration. With this, also comes a Special Adventures section, covering waterborne travel and combat. TSR added AC, hit point, and movement ratings to various ship structures, making ocean travel and combat a real thing.

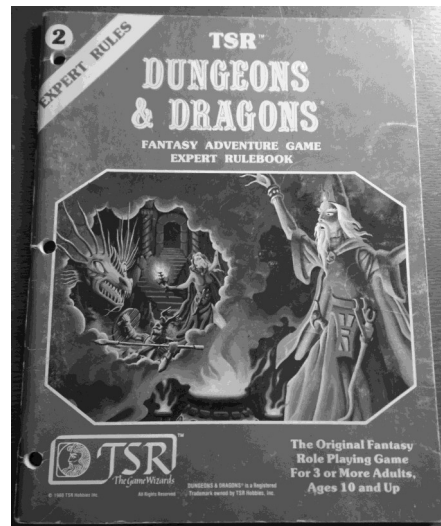
A section introduces specialists and mercenaries to the game, adding additional flavor and roles for the GM to use in their campaign design. Ever wonder what it costs to retain an Alchemist or Sage on staff? Well, the Expert rulebook has that information, including their skills and other considerations. Pages X21 to X22 list all eight NPC types.

One of the more useful hireable skills is the mercenary, found on page

X22. Costs are broken down by class, race and equipment. Additionally, morale ratings are provided for mass combat rules.

Of course, my favorite section of the book is found on page X51: the "Saving vs. Abilities" optional rule. I can't tell you how many times I struggled to resolve character actions before I found this! (Note: this is also found in the Basic rulebook, but I didn't discover it until I read it in the Expert rules.) It is a wonderful ruling that instantly helped my game-mastering. This book was as perfect a second piece to the Basic rules as anything could have ever been.

*First through Third printings of the Expert Set, 1981-1982, edited by David "Zeb" Cook with Steve Marsh. From the boxed set "Set 2: Expert Rules", ISBN: 0-935696-29-6; 1981 version used in review, set #1012, no list price on boxed set.*



My beat-up copy of the Expert Rulebook!

## Interview with a Legendary Gamer — David “Zeb” Cook

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If you're following along, you'll notice the theme of this issue—the Expert rules! Who other than David “Zeb” Cook could we interview for this issue?

*[Thom] What was the first tabletop role-playing game you remember playing? Do you remember the first character you had in that game?*

[Zeb] That's easy. Original D&D box set, no supplements. I started playing about 1974, so there weren't really any other options. I was in a game club in college, doing war games when I heard some of the members were playing this not-a-board-game thing. Wrangled a chance to play and was hooked. As for character, I went through a series of dwarves, all named Fred. Fred 9802 (or 3?) was the one I remember, named so because the 9,801 other Freds had all met quick and unpleasant deaths.

*[T] Can you tell us a little about how and why you were hired at TSR, i.e. where you were hired mainly as an editor or were you hired for a different role?*

[Z] I was hired at TSR in the spring of '79. I'm not sure why they hired me, but I applied because at the time I was a teacher in the middle of nowhere in Nebraska and Dragon magazine ran an ad looking for designers. I didn't know what that involved but I liked games, fantasy, and science fiction, so with the encouragement of my wife, I applied. I had to create a sample adventure and answer a bunch of “designer test” questions —

things like “Identify a Bohemian earspoon” or “how would you resolve this rules conflict” sort of thing. Apparently, I did well enough to get the interview and finally the job. I was the 2nd designer they hired because they were creating a Design Department, something that was a very new and untested idea.

While officially a designer, early on we were all expected to do a bit of everything. I developed and edited the first box version of Awful Green Things, developed (i.e. tested and polished) other people's modules and games, reviewed Judge's Guild material for approval, and anything else that needed to be done. We had official editors (such as Steve Winter) but even they got called on for other tasks.

*[T] How did you get asked to edit or get involved with the Expert Rulebook at TSR?*

[Z] Luck and a bit of lobbying, I think. The decision was to make D&D its own line that would hopefully appeal to a more mass market. That meant, of course, getting the Basic rules updated in look and feel and then it meant expanding the range of the game to include more levels and overland stuff. The plan was to make this two progressive products, hence Basic and Expert Sets. So there was a lot of discussion and planning amongst all of us about this -- and then passing everything through Gary for his approval. The design staff wasn't very big at the time (4 of us I think) and there were other projects to do, so

Tom Moldvay and I got the task in some part because we weren't scheduled for anything else. While we worked as a team to lay out the overall design changes we needed from the earlier editions, when it came time to write we broke it down with Tom writing the Basic set while I wrote the Expert.

*[T] Were you part of the early playtests of the B/X Expert rules and if so, do you remember who you worked/played with, in those days?*

[Z] Oh yes, we were part of play-testing. At the time we didn't have any formal out-of-house testing, so it was done by us running games of our own. We also did a lot of "thought" testing, where we would describe a rule or situation to others and then beat it up with all the what-ifs and what-abouts we could think of. And, as I noted, everything had to go through others for review and comment, including Lawrence Schick and Gary.

*[T] Any memorable changes, additions, or events during your work on the Expert rulebook, e.g. rules removed, last minute changes, deadline snafus, etc.?*

[Z] In my fuzzy memory of today, of course everything went smoothly back then! I'm sure that wasn't the case though. The biggest thing I remember was that we had to meet the deadline. Space was another issue too -- there were only so many pages in the rules, so a lot of extraneous systems went by the way. That helped to keep things simple and clear.

I do remember that we spent a lot of time working out character creation, particularly the question of whether there should be races and classes or just classes. Ultimately we went with the dwarf/elf/half-elf as class and not race because we thought it kept the flow simpler for new players and reduced complications for other rules. At the same time a lot of the basic decisions were already defined by the earlier Holmes blue box of the game.

*[T] Lastly, what are you working on these days?*

[Z] These days I'm a senior content lead at Zenimax Online working on the Elder Scrolls Online game. Basically I'm responsible for various chunks of the game world, leading a team to create content. I lay out the big story of an area, define the places, what the general tone will be, etc. and then lead a of team of content designers, writers, and encounter designers who take those ideas and create the quest content for the game. There's a lot of meetings with world builders, fixture artists, animators, concept artists, audio guys, and, of course, producers. My job is to manage the process, make sure the content is good (or ideally great), and also give everyone the opportunity to flex their creative talent. Most recently I was the lead for the Morrowind expansion we released and before that the Orsinium DLC. Now I'm working on yet more that I can't say anything about. Such is the life of a game designer!

## Mythology

This issue of *Back to BasicX* brings you two new monsters for your encounters; the first is for Expert, the second for Basic.

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### Mastodon of Calamity

This large automaton is filled with and operated by 5 men or 8 smaller creatures (kobolds/goblins). It appears as a large elephant and nearly indiscernible from the real thing. It can spit a glob of poison 50' in a 10' diameter 3 times before needing reloading (takes one combat round). Anyone struck with the poison must save versus Dragon Breath or die. The poison's effect dissipates after one round. There is a 50% chance that the spitting mechanism becomes clogged after use, requiring 1d4 rounds to clear before reuse.

The Mastodon of Calamity will attack four times per combat round, preferring to engage melee characters with its tusks and tail while targeting ranged foes and spell casters with its spitting attack. *Submitted by Ian McGarty*

### Weredog

A smaller race of lycanthropes, canine in origin, exist alongside the larger and more fearsome werewolves. Unbeknownst to many, the weredog is actually more common, and is often confused with their larger cousins. Weredogs take the form of any canine breed; a pack of weredogs can vary in size and shape.

Humans, elves, and dwarves gain a special resistance to the weredog lycanthropy strain and are rarely affected by the disease.

6

Armor Class:	3
Hit Dice:	9**
Move:	120' (40')
Attacks:	2 Tusks 1 Spike Tail 1 Spit
Damage:	Tusks 2-8/2-8 Tail 1-10 Spit Save or die
No. Appearing:	1
Save As:	Fighter: 9
Morale:	12
Treasure Type:	Nil
Alignment:	Neutral



Artwork by Je Shields © Used with permission

Halflings and gnomes are highly affected by this strain and often make up the majority of a pack of weredogs. Although often intermingled with werewolves, they are considered lesser breeds and treated as such.

Armor Class:	7
Hit Dice:	1+1*
Move:	60' (20')
Attacks:	1 Bite
Damage:	1-4 + spec
No. Appearing:	2-8
Save As:	Fighter: 1
Morale:	10
Treasure Type:	Nil
Alignment:	Neutral

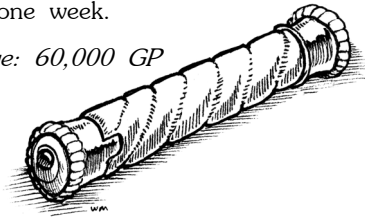
## The Magic Shop

Many treasures can be found in adventures beyond the lists within the Basic and Expert rulebooks. Here are two unique items for your players to find. *Submitted by Ian McGarty*

### Map of Moht Nai

This thick vellum map displays a 50-mile area where the holder is currently located. Once per week the player may activate the map to cast a spell with the effects of *commune* although this spell may only be used to ask questions regarding the location of a place, object, or person. The marked spots will appear on the map if the player is within 50 miles of them. They will remain for one week.

*Value: 60,000 GP*



Artwork by William McAusland © Used with permission

### Buckle of Barnabus Berdow

This plain-looking brass buckle has very little ornamentation to differentiate it from non-magical varieties. However, on the back side, a series of runes are scratched into the metal. This buckle was once the property of a thief who notoriously could not be contained when captured, and he was captured often. After his last and final incarceration, all that was found in his cell after his escape were his clothes. The guards stated seeing a naked man wearing a belt sprinting away from the prison.

This buckle can cast gaseous form on the character once per day. All his or her equipment, except the buckle and attached belt, fall to the ground leaving the character naked. The character cannot attack, has an AC of -2, and cannot be hit by non-magical weapons.

*Value: 15,000 GP*

## Spellbound

Most spells in B/X are straightforward, with short, easy descriptions and clear results. However, a few spells are tricky, especially those at higher levels. In this issue, we'll take a look at the 2nd level Magic User (and Elf) spells, *ESP* and *Phantasmal Force*.

First, let's review *Phantasmal Force*. What is this spell, and what does it do? The rulebook says that the caster "creates or changes appearances within the area of the spell effect." So, what exactly can be changed?

Since the spell is based on the illusion of something new or

changed, then anything within the area of effect can be altered in some way. The rulebook references creating a monster or using *Phantasmal Force* in an attack, but there's so much more that can be done with this spell. Casters can create imaginary pits or doorways in walls, or they could produce fake treasures or false henchmen to fool foes. The effects of the spell do not have to cause damage in combat, but could deter enemies from even engaging the group in the first place! This spell begins the caster's

foray into illusionary spell casting. We know that AD&D introduced the Illusionist subclass; its roots are in the simple illusion spells that began in B/X!

A sticking point between DM and player was often found in what the character had seen or not seen; the rulebook states that the opponent gains a bonus to saving throws with *Phantasmal Force* illusions created by the caster if the thing he or she creates is unknown to them. This makes sense... some of the time. Obviously, D&D is played in a fantasy world and no one person or creature can know every detail about every thing in it. So, maybe goblins are blue in color. Who can say that they don't exist that way? I say, let the saving throw battle be between caster and target Intelligence scores! Perhaps the caster can create one heck of an illusion, regardless of facts.

Instead of battling out the illusion successes through facts, let's reward players for ingenuity and creativity!

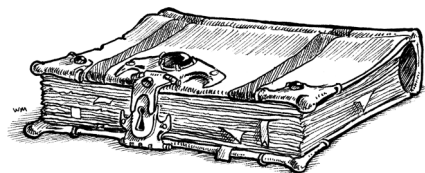
Where *Phantasmal Force* puts the challenge on the player to describe their character's spell, *ESP* makes the DM's job a bit more difficult. The spell "allows the caster to 'hear' thoughts" in a direction within range. Assuming there are only a few targets or even none, the DM's job isn't too challenging. What are those creature doing right now? Are they awake or sleeping? Is there a conversation or fight between creatures? This is different than resolving an encounter when characters burst in a room to face its inhabitants.

The DM has to come up with potential situations before they occur, with creatures in various locations. What if there are more than a few, like a dozen or more? Each creature, except the undead, has independent thoughts and trying to provide snippets of mental processes to the caster become nightmarish.

The rulebook says that the caster may take an extra turn to focus on one creature in a single direction, to gain a clearer understanding of the thoughts he or she was "hearing". Sometimes, I (as the DM) will only allow for a single creature's thoughts to make their way through the jumbled mess of words the caster may "hear". This simplifies my job and gives the character useful information. Often, I use this spell's effect to steer a group in the direction I want them to go in. I know, this is railroading, but you DMs out there know what I mean. Getting your group going in the right direction is helpful for everyone involved.

Both *ESP* and *Phantasmal Force* are challenging spells, but with a little bit of creativity on both sides of the table, they can be extremely useful.

Next time, we'll take a look at a few spells that can often seem too powerful for their level. Do you have a spell you'd like to discuss? Let me know!



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## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl

Each issue of *Back to BasiX* will have at least one simple dungeon crawl for you to add to your B/X campaigns. The first of two adventures this issue is “**Calamity Comes to Town**”.

### Calamity Comes to Town

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 3-5 characters of 4th to 5th level.

*Background:* After stealing a unique automaton from a group of sleeping gnomes, a band of pesky kobolds has used the device to threaten local villages into paying a tribute to avoid violence. Settlements that have ignored the threats have been reduced to ruin. With each village, the kobolds have become greedier and increasingly murderous. Their latest target happens to be the village where the characters are currently staying.

*Detailed Background:* Early one morning, the gatekeeper alerts the town officials to trouble at the entrance. A giant, mechanical mastodon has arrived, and with it, a demand of 1000 gp. If the town refuses to pay within 24 hours, the massive creature will destroy the entire village and slay its residents. The town will find it difficult to gather that much money in such a short period of time. They will likely turn to the characters for help. Knowing that the mastodon has been through the region, collecting dozens of ransom payments from wealthier hamlets, the characters should realize that there is treasure to be gained by destroying the mechanical device.

Five kobolds control the automaton, each with a specific set of controls; leg movement, head direction (sight and tusk attacks), tail, poison spitting attack and the creature’s “voice”. Each kobold coordinates their controls to move the creature in combat.

**Mastodon of Calamity:** (AC 3, HD 9\*\*, hp 50, #AT 4, D 2-8/2-8/1-10/Save vs. Poison, Save F9, ML12) See page 6.

If the automaton reaches single-digit hit points the magic animating the unit will fail, disabling the device. If their machine ceases to function, the kobolds will exit the device through a hatch in its underbelly, and flee on foot. Any kobold caught while attempting to flee will gladly trade information about their lair if freed. All ransom payments are held by the clan chieftain, residing in a small cave system nearby.

**Five Kobolds:** (AC 7, HD ½, HP: 3 each, #AT 1 - dagger, D 1-4, Save Normal Man, ML 6 or 10 within automaton)

If the automaton is reduced to zero or less hit points, it will explode dealing 4d6 damage to all within 50'. If the unit is captured or abandoned, the characters may be able to operate it after “recharging” the device by placing a magical item within its engine, a small compartment under the head of the device. Each magical item will recharge the automaton for 7 days; the magical item will be drained of its power, reducing it to a normal item.



## Kobold Caves

The kobold footpath can be easily spotted along a main trail between villages. Dozens of broken tree limbs and trampled shrubs clearly show where a large creature has moved between the trail and the wilderness beyond. Large footprints lead directly to the foothills of a mountain range, and to the kobold lair within.

### Lair Entrance

Behind a boulder and small shrubs, a lone kobold guard watches the approach to the cave. He will immediately rush inside to warn of attackers.

**Kobold:** (AC 7, HD ½, HP: 2, #AT 1 - dagger, D 1-4, Save Normal Man, ML 6)

### Main Chamber

A dozen kobolds use this large room as their temporary home while away from their clan. They are a part of a war party organized by the kobold chieftain to raid the area with the automaton.

**Twelve Kobolds:** (AC 7, HD ½, HP: 2 each, #AT 1 - dagger, D 1-4, Save Normal Man, ML 6)

### Chieftain's Lair

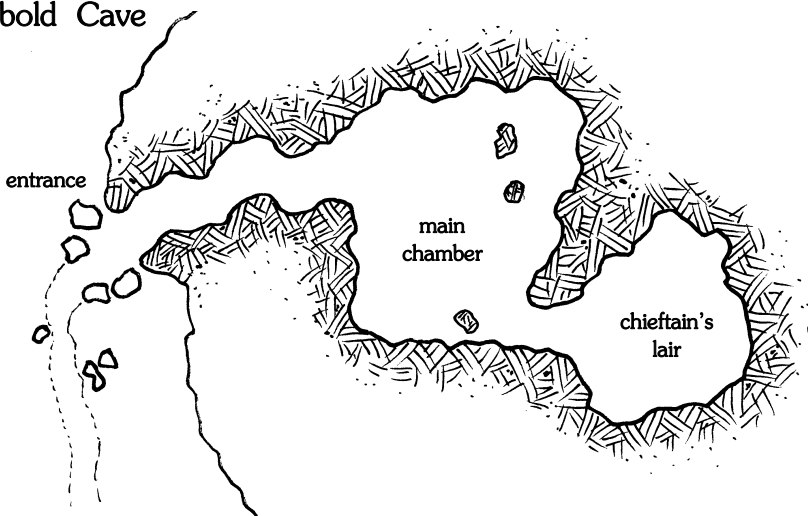
Chieftain Thrik-nik-bap has set up a small throne room in the temporary lair of the kobold war party. He has brought his two favorite ward-dogs with him, who never leave his side. When Thrik-nik-bap is not meeting with his kobold warriors, he's recounting the gold coins and other tributes from a dozen or more villages. He wears modified chain-mail armor and uses a **shortsword +1** with two hands.

**Thrik-nik-bap:** (AC 5, HD 1, HP: 6, #AT 1 - magical short sword, D 1-6+2, Save F1, ML 9 or 11 with war-dogs nearby)

**Two War-dogs, "Yip" and "Yap":** (AC 7, HD 1+1, HP: 5 each, #AT 1 - bite, D 1-6, Save F1, ML 10)

Six chests hold a total of **5500 gp** and six potions (**2 Healing, 2 Levitation, 1 ESP, 1 Gaseous Form**).

## Kobold Cave



## Night Dogs

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 3-5 characters of 2nd to 4th level.

*Background:* Dozens of livestock have been slaughtered in the recent weeks, and all clues lead to a pack of small, wild dogs... except these dogs seem to walk on hind legs! While the tracks leading to the farm's pens and barns indicate four-legged creatures, the tracks nearest the remains of slain cattle show larger pawprints in pairs. How are dogs walking about on their hind legs?

*Detailed Background:* Settlements in the region are seeing an increase in attacks, losing chickens, goats, pigs, and cows to what appears to be a roaming pack of vicious dogs. The farmers are half-right; the offending creatures are weredogs. Similar to werewolves, the weredog maintains a normal appearance by day but is unable to control their canine instincts at night. The rare strain of the lycanthropic disease affects smaller humanoids such as halflings and gnomes.

A group of traveling halfling gypsies are behind the attacks. Although they mean no intentional harm, the halfling jugglers and merchants are urged to transform into weredogs each night by their leader, Gorsef Jokal, a werewolf. Each attack on livestock only stokes their need to feed; it won't be long before the weredogs begin attacking human settlers.

Local officials and settlers will seek help for the recent attacks on live-

stock. Characters are offered a bounty of 500 gp to determine the cause of the attacks. There are many theories among the villagers, most of which are wildly untrue and border on hysterical nonsense.

Characters are encouraged to examine the latest attack at a farm on the outskirts of town. Intelligent adventurers will discover two important bits of information; the tracks around the slaughtered livestock are dog-like, and they look to come from a forest nearby. It should be obvious that the characters should check the wooded area for the culprits.

## Wooded Trail

The tracks soon turn into a simple trail that looks to be used for wagon and cart travel. Following the trail soon leads to a clearing where four gypsy wagons encircle a fire pit. Small humanoid figures are busy around the camp, preparing meals, playing instruments, singing and dancing.

## Gypsy Camp

Gorsef Jokal and his band of halfling jugglers are wrapping up their camp soon, preparing to move on to the next targeted village. The leader of the band fears getting caught and knows his weredogs aren't ready yet for a full fight with seasoned guards or hunters.

Gorsef's next reaction depends on how the characters approach; if they act threateningly, he will change into a werewolf and attack. If they look harmless, he

will stay in human form and try to dismiss the group as soon as possible.

**Gorsef, werewolf:** (AC 5, HD 4\*, HP: 17, #AT 1 bite, D 2-8, Save F4, ML 8)

In human form, Gorsef has an AC 9. He never fights in human form—he always changes into a werewolf when battling enemies.

If the halflings see Gorsef change into his were-form, they will be compelled to do the same. The ten small figures will turn into terriers, dachshunds, and poodles, and attack the characters. They will try to circle around a character, using pack tactics to take them down.

**Ten weredogs:** (AC 7, HD 1+1\*, HP: 4 each, #AT 1 bite, D 1-4, Save F1, ML 10)

If more than half the weredogs fall or Gorsef is captured or killed, the remaining weredogs will change back to halfling form, surrendering. They will plead that they were forced to serve Gorsef and would rather have their disease removed than to continue to live with it.

The traveling gypsies are rather poor, living off the meager tips for juggling and odd jobs. Gorsef has **17 sp** and **3 gp** hidden in his trailer under his cot. A small chest holding **4 Potions of Healing** can be found under the Gorsef's trailer.

### Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 3

In Part 2 of the Crimson Abbey of the Broken God, Bindor the dwarf, Whystal the thief and Ensa the Magic User entered the hallway beyond the secret door (*Issue #1—Ed.*). After lighting old sconces and entering the dusty hallway, they found a mysterious door at a corner in the tunnel. Bindor the dwarf opened the door to find six skeletal remains on stone slabs, and the group entered the room. Each skeleton wears a strange headpiece with an uncut ruby set at its center.

As you can see from the comic on the last page, the group gets into combat with the skeletons after Bindor removes one of the headpieces from a skeletal monk. This causes the other five to rise up and attack the group! In the last panel, our fearless trio flees the room, avoiding the wrath of the animated creatures.

Poor Ensa takes a painful strike from one of the skeletons, reducing her hit points by 1 (dropping her to a remaining one hit point). She's also used her only Magic Missile spell as she flees the room.

In the last issue, we referenced the mysterious headpiece and ruby; far below the abbey, a large ruby has an evil being trapped within it. From this place, the evil creature controls all who wear headpieces or handle any of the rubies found throughout the abbey. Eventually, the story will reach this area, revealing more about the sentient ruby and the evil being.

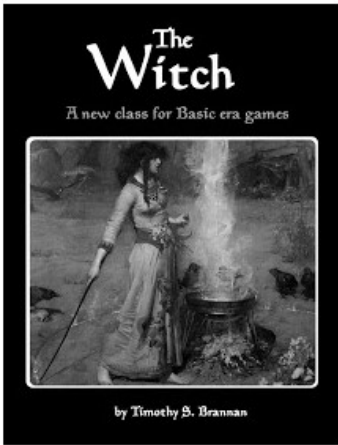
The RPG portion of this story continues next issue, allowing the comic to catch up with the adventure details from issue #2.

**Coming Soon:** DerbyMouse Games, for hand-crafted character and monster miniatures. Made from simple materials, either pre-painted or unpainted! Check out the back cover for sample minis!

Something Wicked this Way Comes...

### The Witch

A sourcebook for Basic Edition fantasy games



Print and PDF at <https://goo.gl/WPi2Es>



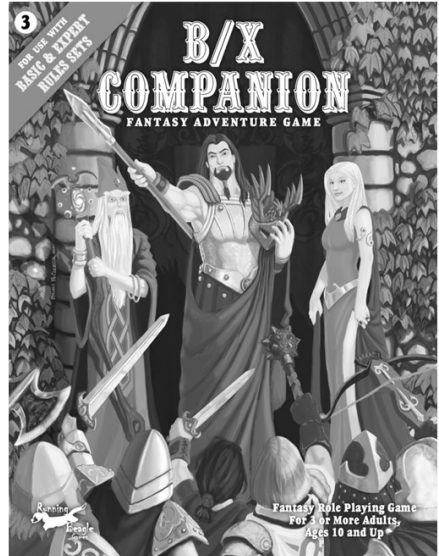
**Wanted:** Any condition copies of B2 Keep on the Borderlands, and Moldvay Basic and Expert Rulebooks. [throwi@gmail.com](mailto:throwi@gmail.com)

## B/X ESSENTIALS

Streamlined B/X rules reference optimized for use at the table.

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**Back Issues of *Back to BasiX*:** Contact Thom Wilson at ThrowiGames to request back issues: [thom@throwigames.com](mailto:thom@throwigames.com)

Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my Dungeon Delvers story!

Additionally, a very special thanks to our interviewee, David "Zeb" Cook for taking time to answer questions!

**Core Rules, Classes & Equipment**  
— Print and PDF at RPGNow

**Spells, Monsters & Treasures, Complete Rules Compendium**  
— Coming in 2018



**NECROTIC GNOME PRODUCTIONS**



# Back to Basic X



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



## What System? Who Cares? — *A Note from the Fanzine Creator*

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For all the social media banter about old and new systems, and which version ranks as the best or truest, our entire community supports the same thing: tabletop roleplaying games. Although the chatter can be both amusing and irritating at times, we all want the same thing—to sit down with friends and family and play a few good hours of a roleplaying game. I've seen even the most die-hard grognards relent to the pressure to play a different game just to get some long-sought-after time at the table. It gets harder and harder to find time to play these days, so why should we bicker about the system?

Although I love B/X the best and always return to it after short forays into other systems, I play the games my friends play because I want to spend time at the table with them. Memories are made not from the systems we play, but those people we play with. So what if the system has ascending armor class?

Let's sling the dice! Can you recall your favorite RPG memory? It probably wasn't about a gap in a rule or how you were able to maximize your character's abilities. I bet it probably included all your friends and how you all survived an encounter or worked together to outwit your foes. And did it matter what system you were playing? Hell, I can't even remember what system we were playing with some of my favorite memories of all time! But I can remember who was there and how I felt when we accomplished our goals.

We all love to play and we all have favorite systems. B/X is mine. That's why I write this fanzine - to put energy into something that has given me so much enjoyment over the years. It's the least I can do for something I love. But if your favorite system is something other than B/X, no worries. I can totally respect that. Just get out there, gather up your best friends, and have some fun! -*Thom Wilson*

### — Issue #4 Details —

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## Back to BasicX *V2 No 1*

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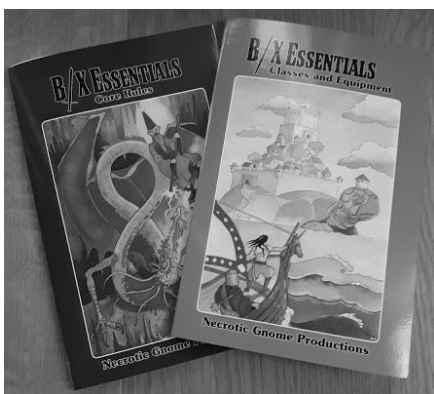
#5 — June, 2018 (also avail. NTX)

#6 — September, 2018



## Publishing News

Although we're a small group, there are a few of us out there putting together new material for an old game. Gavin Norman over at **Necrotic Gnome Productions** has created two B/X books for our enjoyment and plans on having the entire system in several volumes. I've purchased his first print on demand books, **B/X Essentials: Core Rules**, and **Classes and Equipment**.



First, let me say the dimensions of the books are great. They are US Trade paperback-sized, perfect-bound books with a bright, glossy cover. Each book has a manageable number of pages and is easily used at the gaming table. The separation of each book makes it simple for players to use them: core rules are in one volume, class and equipment information in another. I personally like this feature and can see how a several-book volume, split up by material, will make it easier for players and GMs during game play.

Players familiar with the Moldvay and Cook editions of Basic and Expert D&D will find these books very similar. The material is organ-

ized neatly and is true to the original rulebooks. A few sections have been reorganized and split between volumes. But this is what makes these books great — the rules are split between topics and not levels. For example, you get all the Cleric abilities for Basic and Expert, and won't need to thumb through two books to check leveling and abilities.

I wasn't able to find anything that differed from the original books besides the obvious - prose and artwork. Some of the important charts are found in both books (e.g. Ability Score Adjustments), which makes things easier when more than one player is looking for the same thing. Additionally, there is a lot of cross-referencing between books, i.e. book and page numbers are both listed when a topic is found in a different volume.

The material is presented with a retro font and in a very clean format. The pages are easy-to-read and the art is great. The Core Rules come in at 34 pages and the Classes and Equipment book is slightly larger at 44 pages. I've already started to use these in game prep and will have them at the table at the next gaming session.

Necrotic Gnome's website reveals that work on the third volume has concluded. **B/X Essentials: Cleric and Magic-user Spells** is also ready for purchase! PDF and print on demand copies of all three volumes of the B/X essentials are available at RPGNow. I'm looking forward to what comes next!

## Product Spotlight

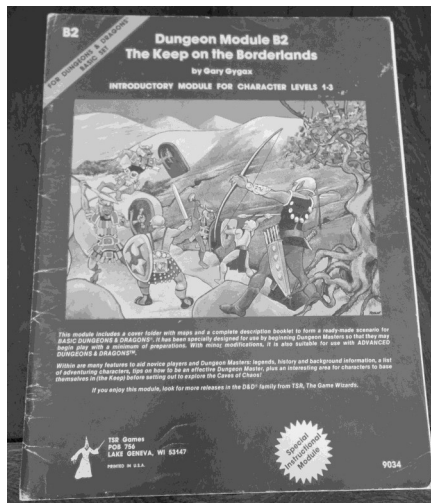
Having looked at the Basic and Expert rulebooks already, I felt like it was time to review an early B/X adventure. Where better than to start with the king of them all, the one we've all played... **The Keep on the Borderlands!**

4

This adventure was the first I ever played and the first I ever ran as a new GM. I've run countless new players through the keep, the caves, and the wilderness surrounding the small castle. I've added the Keep to new campaign worlds and adapted it to different game systems. I've just started a new campaign at a public library and guess where we started? That's right, using the Keep as a base of operations in a wild, lawless land. This short but packed book has been within arm's reach of the game table since I started slinging dice in the early 1980's. It's a wondrous beauty by Gary Gygax.

As most of us know, this is an introductory adventure, highlighting rules for new GMs. The father of roleplaying guides GMs and players through an avalanche of material, providing just enough back story and rumors to whet the appetite of first to third level characters and new players. There are dozens of well-designed encounters, but Gygax leaves plenty of room for new GMs to flex their imaginative powers; several of the wilderness scenarios are bare-bones, perfect for GMs itching to put their own stamp on the classic.

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A well-used first printing of the famous adventure!

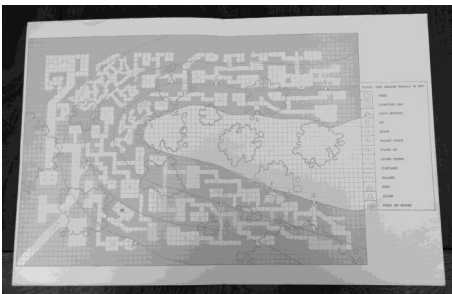
Keep on the Borderlands was designed with three sections in mind: the keep, the Caves of Chaos, and the wilderness. While many of us scoured the caves in search of treasure and experience, many players got most of their enjoyment by interacting with the detailed cast within the Keep. I've had groups try to rob the bank and others try to take the castle from the Castellan! I can't count how many times the gem merchant was robbed! Gygax gave us a great home base and so much more. The keep was a thriving, bustling place that players grew fond of and returned to it often.

Each encounter in the Caves of Chaos introduced new players to the varying races of the D&D fantasy setting. They met their first kobolds, orcs, stirges, bugbears, undead, owl-bears... the list goes on! Gygax did a wonderful job of exposing players to all the creatures of this game, in one massive labyrinth of interconnected caves and tribes. Gygax also loaded the tunnels with tons of

treasure for the characters to discover. Coins, magic devices, and non-traditional items are found in plenty. Every turn the group takes uncovers another new creature and more fabulous treasure!

Gygax shows the new GM how to challenge players with an assortment of difficult creatures. The adventure is listed as “Levels 1-3”, but several encounters are deadly for the lowest levels of characters. Namely, a minotaur, an undead army, and a medusa make any group’s life expectancy a little shorter. However, new GMs will learn how to tailor adventures and encounters for their groups by seeing what is deadly and what is not.

Finally, the wilderness has several encounters for characters looking to explore above ground. They’ll face bandits and spiders, a hermit and some lizardmen. Most of these encounters, especially the lizardman mound, are presented as a basic framework without story and depth. It’s apparent that Gygax left these this way to let GMs flesh them out further. I’ve used these areas many times to expand adventuring and for my own personal campaign story lines.



The detachable cover map, created by none other than Diesel LaForce (spotlighted in this issue on page 5). One of the most recognizable dungeon maps of all time.

Of course, the big empty slate feature of the book is the Cave of the Unknown, an intentionally missing adventure area. Gygax points to the location within the nearby forest and hints to what may be there (linkage to the Caves of Chaos, perhaps) but leaves it undeveloped to encourage GMs to fully create their own work. Much like the other wilderness areas, I’ve created several simple and large tunnel complexes for players in this hidden location.

This adventure was an instant classic the day it was printed. It showcased Gygax’s talent for developing massive adventure material books in a small number of pages. It also demonstrated his tendency to have a couple of deadly encounters just in case the characters pushed too far or went the wrong way. Absolute brilliance contained in less than 28 pages.

If I had to recommend a starting adventure for new players, I’d suggest the Keep on the Borderlands, regardless of edition or rule system. Obviously, I’m biased to B/X, especially for this gem of an adventure.

*First through Seventh Printings 1979-1983 with an Eighth Printing in 1999 (anniversary edition), written by Gary Gygax. ISBN: 0-935696-19-9; #9034, 1979 version (first printing) used in review, no price listed on the booklet. The Wizard logo was used on 1st and 2nd printings; the four line first paragraph on the cover identifies it as a first printing. DEX scores in the interior also identify the booklet as a first printing.*

## Interview with a Legendary Artist — Diesel LaForce

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When I think of Keep on the Borderlands, I immediately think about the inside cover map. Everything about it is wonderful: its color, simplicity, and detail. Our interview this issue is with Diesel LaForce, the creator of the map and a few other pieces inside that legendary module.

*[Thom] When did you get hired at TSR and was it solely as an artist or did you have other responsibilities?*

[Diesel] I was originally hired in shipping. Ernie Gyax had recommended me for the job, he knew me from high school and my best friend, Ken Reek, ran the department. In fact he was the ONLY shipping employee. TSR was small, just 35 or so people working there, but was growing rapidly. I was hired just when the operation had moved from a small 2-story house to a hotel/bar/bowling alley which TSR had purchased downtown. That was 1979 I think.

After my first year, the art director Dave Sutherland found out I liked to draw. He asked to see some samples and I did 3 pieces over the weekend at home. Dave bought 2 of them for publication in the DMG for \$35 each and offered me a position as a staff artist. How could I refuse?!

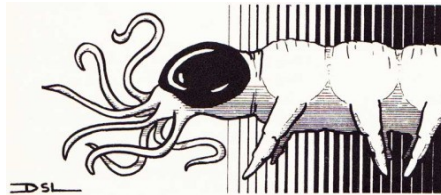
*[T] Can you recall your first piece that made it into a TSR publication?*

[D] Even though my first two illustrations had been purchased for the DMG, its initial printing was delayed

by quite a bit. So my first published pieces were not the first pieces I produced. The first printed art pieces were for the module C1 - HIDDEN SHRINE OF TOMOACHAN by Harold Johnson & Jeff Leason. The first piece I actually drew as a staff artist was the centaur with a spear.

*[T] Do you recall any of the pieces in the early Basic D&D rulebooks or adventures, and any that you are especially proud of?*

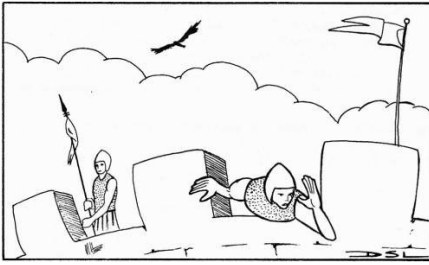
[D] The art I drew for those books were rather small, but I liked them for the most part. I was quite proud of all my work at the time, now most of it looks amateurish to me but still holds some kind of magic. I loved the Carrion Crawler monster so I took that opportunity to do one. It is a rather simple looking piece. The lined background was inspired by the art on the blank Maxell cassette tapes I used.



The Carrion Crawler from the Basic Rulebook (B32)

I did an illustration in the Basic Set of a guy (the DM) controlling the strings of a D&D character puppet (NPC). That was supposed to be me in the drawing.

There was a piece in B1 - KEEP ON THE BORDERLANDS that I was really kinda proud of the initial concept, but it bothered me in how it was handled in later reprints.



The illustration is of a fighter on horseback seen from behind in front of some castle gates. He is looking up. The drawing is supposed to be placed at the bottom right of the page and the character is looking up to the top left of the page. There, I placed a drawing of some castle guards on a turret shouting down to the rider. Kind of a story illo. They got it right for the first printing, but on newer copies the module had some text revisions which changed the location of the pictures. Now, they were just individual pictures that made no sense when out of placement. Even later printings removed the art of the castle turret guards altogether, which makes the illo of the rider looking up at nothing — and rather a head scratcher as to what he is doing.

Another of my Basic Set faves was a piece that depicted the different character classes. The halfling was my character. A couple of the others were player characters in our game as well. I since re-imagined this piece for Goodman Games a number of years ago.

*[T] What were the time lines like for you and other artists at TSR? Was the work a grind at times with difficult schedules or was it more creative with artists developing an "art library"?*

[D] When I first started I couldn't wait to get to work. I was 19 at the time. My desk was on the 2nd floor and the fire escape was just outside my window. I would leave it unlocked so I could get in (I had no keys). I had to jump on the trash bin to reach the ladder and up I would go. On a few occasions the police drove by but they never stopped to ask what I was doing up there. I always thought that was odd.

We were all pretty free to choose what we wanted to work on and what we wanted to put on a page. We received some direction from whomever was editing, but by and large it was up to the artist to do what he thought was appropriate on the page. We would be given a space to fill, we read the text, and created. Deadlines never seemed overly burdensome. As time went on, the product lines increased,



Recreating that B2 1st print scene!

deadlines shortened, workload was heavier. We started working more closely with an editor or writer as products got more specialized and the narratives got tighter on the adventures. After a time it became pretty common to pull late nights or sometimes all-nighters to make deadlines. Still, there was a lot of creative enthusiasm even then.

*[T] What sort of things did you do to "recharge the batteries" or to spark artistic inspiration after a lengthy project or heavy workload?*

[D] I always had to get up from my desk about once an hour and walk around, eye strain, stretch, relax the fingers. This also gave me the great opportunity to look at what the other artist were doing. Looking at other great art can be a fantastic way to jumpstart the desire to improve and maybe think outside the box sometimes.

*[T] Are there any personal projects that you'd love to work on and haven't yet had the time to do?*

[D] I have for a long time wanted to do my own rendition of Tolkien's maps. I am not sure what I could do with that because of copyrights. I would love to do some elaborate border art with it, like I did for some of the DragonLance maps.

*[T] Is there a client that you'd love to work for, if they called you tomorrow?*

[D] It really doesn't matter who I am doing the work for. As long as



Character Classes, from the Basic Rulebook, page B10

it is something I would be interested in working on. I recently completed a commission for a personal bookplate. It will probably never see print but was a piece that turned out to be extremely satisfying. So you never know...

*[T] What are you working on these days?*

[D] I am currently working on sculptures for NTRPG Con in Texas. I have been commissioned to do first, second, and third place trophies for their Circus Maximus chariot racing games they hold every year. I made a trophy for their gladiator games 2 years ago and they were quite pleased. This is a much more ambitious project.



One of Diesel's illustrations from the DM Guide



The two new monsters in this issue's Mythology section are also found in the Dungeon Crawl on page 11.

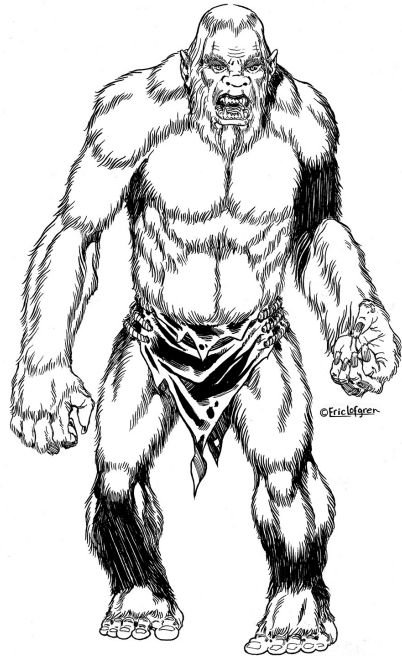
### Stone Gorilla

A magical union between a primate and a wingless gargoyle, the rare Stone Gorilla displays aspects of both creatures. They are often found in an unmoving, frozen state until they are activated, usually by touch or being in close proximity to the creature. Their skin is made of hardened stone, making them less susceptible to edged weapons (half damage) and fire or cold spells (immunity). Their nature makes them fearless foes, not to be taken lightly.

Armor Class:	4
Hit Dice:	4+1*
Move:	60' (20')
Attacks:	2 Fists 1 Bite
Damage: Fists	1-3/1-3
Bite	1-6
Special:	Immune to fire/ cold; edged weapons deal half damage
No. Appearing:	1-2
Save As:	Fighter: 4
Morale:	10
Treasure Type:	Nil
Alignment:	Chaotic

### Chimpanzee Trickster

Vastly more intelligent than its lesser cousin, the Chimpanzee Trickster is the most evolved primate known to exist. Most are able to speak broken Common and can learn new languages as quickly as an average human. A small percentage of their kind are also able to cast basic (1st



level) Magic-User spells. The more advanced Trickster can also learn to use magical devices such as wands, rods, staves or scrolls.

Chimpanzee Tricksters normally come from two parents that are both Tricksters; a Trickster mating with a common chimpanzee produces normal offspring. It is possible for a common chimpanzee to be transformed into a Trickster through magic.

Armor Class:	6
Hit Dice:	3*
Move:	60' (20')
Attacks:	1 Bite
Damage:	1-4
No. Appearing:	2-8
Save As:	Fighter: 1
Morale:	8
Treasure Type:	I
Alignment:	Chaotic

## The Magic Shop

Not every treasure can be found in a shop or store. Many are found in strange locales, created by hermit wizards and tinkers.

### Medallion of Tongues

Set on a heavy chain of silver, this large medallion is worn around the neck. It is imprinted with the word, “knowledge”, in hundreds of different languages on both sides. When worn, the Medallion of Tongues allows the character to expertly read, write and communicate in any existing language, both currently used or long forgotten.

*Value: 20,000 GP*

### Firedart Spell—1st level spell

Unlike other Magic-User spells, the *Firedart* incantation can be cast over several combat rounds, continuing the effects after the spell has been completed. Once cast, the *Firedart* spell automatically hits a chosen target for 1d4 damage. For two more combat rounds, the spell continues to create *Firedarts*, automatically striking a chosen target for the same 1d4 damage, even if the caster has moved on to another spell or activity. The caster may cancel the spell at any time after the first *Firedart*.

*Value: n/a*

## Spellbound

We all know that spellcasters in B/X are limited in the number of the spells they can cast per day. But are any of those spells just too powerful? Let's examine a few first and second level magic-user spells that seem to tip the scales quickly in the favor of the player characters.

Before we look at each spell in detail, remember that the “rule” with spells and saving throws in B/X is “The victim of a spell may only ‘save’ (make a saving throw) if the spell description permits a saving throw to be made.” (pg B15, Moldvay) This ruling helps categorize many of the spells that follow as powerful; victims are not permitted a saving throw in some cases.

A low-level spell that I've always felt was extremely powerful was *Charm Person*. A failed saving throw charms a creature for days, weeks

or even a month, depending on their Intelligence score. What? A first level spell makes a highly intelligent creature your servant for a whole day? Creatures that lack intelligence can serve the magic-user for days or weeks before getting another chance to break free from their charmed state. Considering a second or third level magic-user can cast this spell a few times a day and several times per week, they can amass an army of servants! Granted, they can't charm “larger” creatures, i.e. bigger than an Ogre, but they can charm an intelligent foe as long as the targeted creature fails their initial saving throw. *Charm Person* is extremely powerful, at least until several of the charmed creatures make their saving throw at the same time.

Another spell that takes care of business in B/X is *Sleep*. Oh yes, does it ever; 2-16 hit dice (2d8) of

creatures fall to sleep for 4-16 turns. They must have HD less than 4+1, but in the Basic D&D world, that's more than half the monsters in the book. Of course, at higher levels, *Sleep* is less powerful but early on the magic-user or elf has a powerful group spell. The fact that victims of the spell aren't allowed a saving throw makes *Sleep* a necessary and most often chosen spell at early levels. Additionally the B/X *Sleep* spell is target based, not area of effect based, so "friendlies" aren't subject to the effects of the spell.

Although it's not overly powerful in combat, the *Invisibility* spell has one very ridiculous effect; the caster can remain invisible permanently! Now, that's not entirely true. If the caster attacks or casts a spell, he or she becomes visible again and the spell ends. But if the target does not attack or cast a spell, they can sneak around invisibly for days! At the very least, they can sneak about unseen until they have to engage in combat, perhaps hours after the spell was cast. Depending on how you interpret the words of the spell description, *Invisibility* can make one object invisible forever. Do you want to hide that item so it will never be found? There you go.



You could argue that any spell that automatically works with no chance of failure is overly powerful, especially when compared to modern games where checks and saves are permitted often, and effect durations are much shorter. With many B/X spells, the "automatic" effect makes up for the limited number of spells the caster gets per day. There are other first or second level spells that could have been added to this list for their automatic effect; *Magic Missile*, *Locate Object* and *Knock* (especially if you interpret the description to mean "all" locked devices within the 60' range) all fit in this category. They are powerful because they cannot fail to work.

Next time, we'll look at spells that are often overlooked. As always, if you have a spell you want me to discuss or cover here, just let me know.

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl

*"It is hard for the ape to believe he descended from man."* – H.L. Mencken, early 20th century American satirical author and journalist.

### Ascent of the Apes

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 3rd to 4th level.

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*Background:* After years of cruel imprisonment, Grumnax, an intelligent ape, escaped his master and fled to a remote area of the region. Climbing the cliffs at the edge of civilization, the ape found a hidden sanctuary behind a rotted wooden door. Inside, he found dozens of lesser apes using the tunnels as their home. Their joyous reaction to his sudden appearance was at first bewildering, until the ape found statues within the sanctuary that bore a close resemblance to his own features. Was he a descendent of the ancient race of men idolized within the sanctuary or the other way around? Nevertheless, the man-eating ape took the mantle of leadership, organized the apes into a community and began teaching the most intelligent chimpanzees and baboons to speak and use sophisticated tools.

The apes have made several raids into nearby jungle villages to kidnap humans for their new leader. His appetite for human flesh is never-ending, and the apes have grown fearless in their battle prowess. Village leaders seek to stop the raids and end the apes' vicious attacks on settlers.

#### A1. Sanctuary Entrance

A narrow path winds dangerously upward along the cliff, until it reaches an old wooden door hidden in the shadows. Clumsy characters may fall from the ledge in several places during their climb if they aren't careful. The door angle makes it hard to see it from the ledge (found with a result of 1-3 on

11

a d6, or 1-4 on a d6 by an Elf or Dwarf). The apes have barred the door from the inside, requiring a forceful open door attempt (Moldvay, B21) to break through. There is a slight chance that an intelligent or dexterous character may be able to wiggle the handle and door latch to unbar the door from the outside.

Searching the area may reveal ape feces along the ledge and in the door alcove. Curiously, the word "ape" is roughly scrawled into the mountain wall near the door.

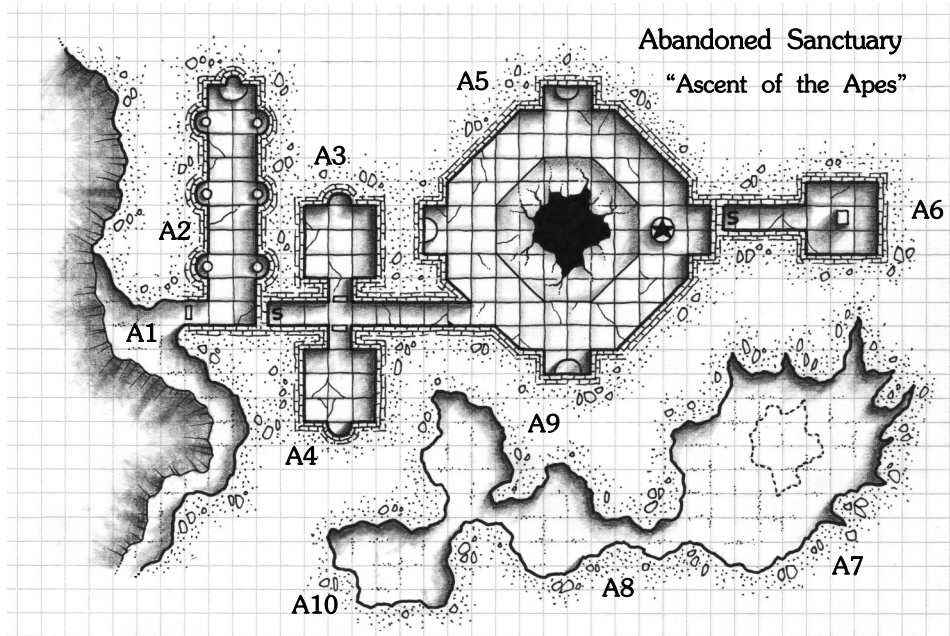
#### A2. Visitor's Hall

The long chamber beyond the sanctuary entrance was once used for visitors to pay their respects to the ancient men of the valley nearby. Six statues of once-great men line the two walls and an alcove with a mural epitaph at the northern end was used as an area to educate and collect donations from guests. The apes have broken the heads off the stone statues, replacing them with the skulls of dead primates. Fecal matter, rotted fruit and bamboo shoots are found in plenty throughout the hallway.

There is a 50% chance that 1d6+1 **Baboons** are found here, lounging amidst the statues and rubble. They will attack trespassers instantly, but will retreat to area 5 (through the secret door) if half or more of their number are killed.

**Baboons:** (AC 7, HD 1+1, HP: 5 ea, #AT 1 bite, D 1-4, Save F1, ML 7, XP 15 ea)

The stone platform at the northern end of the hallway is heavily damaged, with several cracks spreading across its entire length. A well-placed strike should break it apart, revealing the forgotten donation reservoir within. **26 gp** and **145 sp** will spill out of the broken platform. A crudely made secret door in the southeastern part of the hallway leads to the rest of the area.



### A3. Acolyte Chamber

Once a sleeping chamber for guardians of the sanctuary, this square room is now home to many of the stronger Baboons of the complex. The Baboons frequently chosen to raid the surrounding jungles are given the semi-private room away from the masses that crowd together in area 7. Most of the area is destroyed; any furniture that was once here has been broken and scattered about the room.

There are  $1d6+1$  **Baboons** in the room waiting for the next command by Grumnax, the new leader of their faction. If Area 2 was clear of Baboons, add another  $1d6+1$  Baboons to the total.

Additionally, there is a 1 in 10 chance that one of the Chimpanzee Tricksters from Area 4 may be here communicating new orders.

**Baboons:** (AC 7, HD 1+1, HP: 5 ea, #AT 1 bite, D 1-4, Save F1, ML 7, XP 15 ea)

A thorough search of the rubble should reveal a bag of gold coins (25 gp).

### A4. Guest Quarters

When visitors made the long trek to the sanctuary, the guardians would sometimes invite them to stay overnight. This room was used to house temporary guests when the complex was active. **Chimpanzee Tricksters** (more details in the *Mythology* section of this issue) now use the area as their private quarters. The room is currently empty while the Tricksters are in the main sanctuary (area 5) and serving their new leader (area 6).

Dozens of books, scrolls and empty potion bottles are strewn about the area. Four of the Tricksters are able to read, write, and speak, using the special medallions found by Grumnax in the glass case of area 6. The rest of the Chimpanzees mimic their smarter brethren and are able to use the magical devices they've accumulated with limited ability.

A large spellbook at the bottom of a book pile contains an ancient spell, *Firedart*. The spell is similar to *Magic Missile* except that it deals only  $1d4$  hp damage three times (more details within the

*Magic Shop* section of the issue). One of the scrolls found in the pile of paper is a **Scroll of Invisibility**. The rest of the books and scrolls have ancient writings detailing the great men that were once honored here. The language used in the writing is archaic and forgotten, but the medallions worn by the Tricksters can be used to magically decipher their content.

## A5. Main Sanctuary

A large, eight-sided room opens up after the narrow hallway from the main entrance ends. The floor has two tiers, with the inner portion sinking three feet below the upper tier. A great hole in the middle of the room drops to area 7 below. The domed ceiling once had several glass windows that revealed the sky, but are now broken and damaged after a terrific lightning storm struck the sanctuary. Three alcoves on the north, south, and west sides of the large room each contain a short pedestal with a shadowy figure. A great statue of a bent man with an ape's face stands before the empty eastern alcove.

The three shadowy figures in the alcoves are **Stone Gorillas**, a rare form of gargoyle-like apes that have come to assist the growing primate faction. The Stone Gorillas (more details in the *Mythicology* section of this issue) will remain unmoving and inanimate until a non-ape moves within 5 feet of the large statue. They are immune to cold and fire damage and take only half damage from edged weapons.

**Stone Gorillas:** (AC 4, HD 4+1\*, HP: 21 ea, #AT 3 - 2 fists/bite, D 1-3/1-3/1-6, Save F4, ML 10, immune to cold/fire, edged weapons deal half damage, XP 215 ea)

In addition to the Stone Gorillas, 1d4 **Chimpanzee Tricksters** are also here, practicing their limited magical abilities. They will try to hide from adventurers by climbing to the top

of the dome or into the hole in the floor until the Stone Gorillas awaken. Once the larger apes attack the group, the Tricksters will join the fray. The Tricksters have learned an old spell from the tome in area 4 called *Firedart*. Each Trickster can cast *Firedart* once each day.

**Chimpanzee Tricksters:** (AC 6, HD 3\*, HP: 12 ea, #AT 1 bite or 1 "spell", D 1-4 or *Firedart*, Save F1, ML 8, XP 65 ea)

Each Trickster wears a medallion around its neck that allows it to speak and read multiple languages. Four magical **Medallions of Tongues** were found in the secret treasure chamber to the east and were given to the chimpanzees to help bridge the communication gap between the broad range of intellect amongst the primates in the faction. The Chimpanzee Tricksters are the leader's translators and order-givers.

A close inspection of the large statue will reveal that each dirty tooth within the grinning man's mouth is made of platinum. The twenty grimy teeth are each worth **5 pp**. A secret door in the dark eastern alcove leads to Grumnax's chamber (area 6).

## A6. Treasure Room

Mystical treasures left behind by the ancient men honored in the sanctuary were once stored in this small room behind its western secret door. A single pedestal in the center of the room at one time held an ornate glass case that protected wondrous magic items. When the room was found by Grumnax, he quickly smashed the case and removed the valuable items.

The room is now used by "Grumnax", a **Man-eating Ape** and new leader of the primate faction within the sanctuary. He commands the growing group from a stone seat in his private lair, using the Chimpanzee Tricksters to communicate most of his orders. The man-



eating ape speaks broken Common but can communicate fluently with the rest of the apes, especially the Tricksters who are wearing the magical medallions (see area 5 for details). Grumnax prefers to communicate in Common.

Grumnax's arrogance shows through his physical attitude and how he grunts out orders to his minions. The large ape despises both humans and demi-humans and will immediately attack either on sight.

**Grumnax, Man-Eating Ape:** (AC 3, HD 5+1\*\*, HP: 30, #AT 2 - 1 slam/bite, D 2-8/1-4, Save F4, ML 11, XP 460)

Two especially fierce **Gorillas** stand near the secret door entrance, ready to protect Grumnax from unwanted guests. They attack any non-ape and prevent any ape other than the Chimpanzee Tricksters from entering the room.

**Gorillas:** (AC 6, HD 4+1, HP: 21 ea, #AT 3 - 2 fists/bite, D 1-3/1-3/1-6, Save F4, ML 9, XP 140 ea)

Up to four **Chimpanzee Tricksters** may be here assisting their leader with plans. The number of Chimpanzees will be four minus the number found in area 5. The Tricksters will hang back, attacking with their *Firedart* spells until they need to join the fray physically. To increase the challenge of the encounter, you may choose to have one or more of the Tricksters using the two magical wands found behind Grumnax's stone seat.

**Chimpanzee Tricksters:** (AC 6, HD 3\*, HP: 12 ea, #AT 1 bite or 1 "spell", D 1-4 or *Firedart*, Save F1, ML 8, XP 65 ea)

Grumnax keeps all the stored treasure captured from village raids and wayward merchants in a large chest behind his stone seat. The chest is filled with many non-valuable items but also holds **421 gp**, **1376 sp**, a **Wand of Webs**, a **Wand of Magic**

**Missiles**, and a **Potion of Healing**. Although intelligent, Grumnax is as equally fond of the non-valuable trinkets as he is of the magical items.

### A7. Large Cavern

The hole in the floor of area 5 drops down into a subterranean cavern where many Baboons rest, eat, and groom each other while waiting for new instructions. The floor of the cavern is littered with human bones from the remains of Grumnax's meals.

2d4+2 **Baboons** will be found as soon as characters enter the cavern. They prefer to swarm one or two characters, attempting to inflict the most damage in the shortest amount of time.

**Baboons:** (AC 7, HD 1+1, HP: 4 ea, #AT 1 bite, D 1-4, Save F1, ML 7, XP 15 ea)

Some of the Baboons have yet to learn that the fungus in the next chamber (area 8) is hallucinogenic, causing them to act erratically after eating the glowing mushrooms.

### A8. Fungus Chamber

A strange, glowing light pulses from hundreds of flat, wide mushrooms that grow along the base of the wall and floor in this area. Although the fungi generally pulses slowly, any warm bodied creature that gets within a foot of them causes the pulsing to speed up until they have a strobe-like effect.

Eating the mushrooms causes hallucinations, typically ranging from seeing things that aren't there to extreme fear. Failing to pass a Death Ray or Poison saving throw causes the consuming character to suffer the ill effects of the mushroom's hallucinations for 1d4 hours. During this time, they will be unable to speak clearly, fight, or cast spells. Passing the saving throw has a 50% chance of healing 1 hit point of damage.

## A9. Solitary Guard

A grizzled old **Gorilla** maintains watch over the prisoners in the area to the west. He only takes orders from a Chimpanzee Trickster or Grumnax himself. He often beats prisoners who make too much noise, being careful not to kill them; the ape leader prefers his meals alive.

**Old Gorilla:** (AC 6, HD 4+1, HP: 21, #AT 3 - 2 fists/bite, D 1-3/1-3/1-6, Save F4, ML 10, XP 140)

## A10. Prisoners

A dozen captured villagers, merchants, and defeated adventurers are found within this dead-end cavern. Each day, Grumnax sends for one prisoner at random to be selected for his midday meal. The kidnapped victims know that any that are drag-

ged away are never seen again. Only one prisoner is capable of fighting after their prolonged stay in captivity. A young guard who was accompanying a merchant when they were caught by the apes still has enough strength to fight if asked.

Borgal, the guard: (AC 8, F1, HP: 2, #AT 1 fists or weapon, D 1-2 or weapon, Save F1, ML 6)

## Adventure Conclusion

Unless the characters defeat Grumnax and all the Chimpanzee Tricksters, the ape faction will continue to grow. They will range out farther and farther, capturing more human victims and recruiting more jungle primates to their cause. If the man-eating ape and chimpanzees are killed, the remaining primates will return to the jungle and resume their previous way of life.

## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 4

In Part 3 of the *Crimson Abbey of the Broken God*, the intrepid heroes find themselves locked in a life and death battle with six undead monks. Luckily (as seen in this issue's comic by Travis Hanson), Whystal helps get the injured Magic-User out of trouble by taking down the skeletons with his bow and closing the door behind his exiting friends.

Ensa managed to grab one of the monk's headbands, a likely valuable and potentially magical item from the previous encounter area. Little does the group know how powerful the ruby fragment in the headpiece is and how valuable it will be to their survival later in the adventure.

Meanwhile, Whystal gets himself into trouble again, this time finding a pit trap in the hallway...

## Ensa Rassal, Magic User

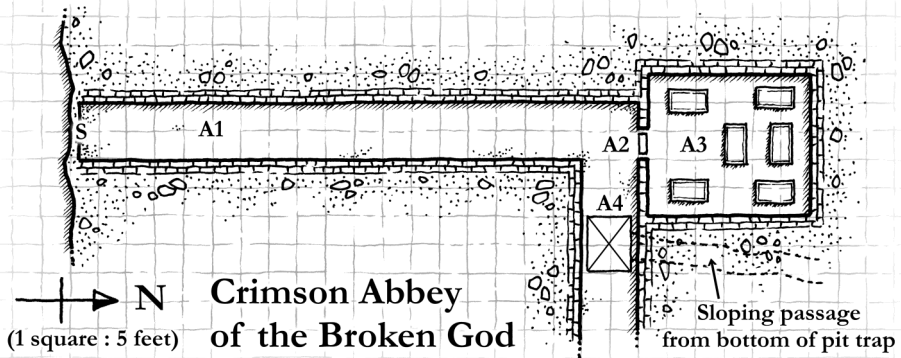
Strength: 9  
Intelligence: 16  
Wisdom: 12  
Dexterity: 11  
Constitution: 9  
Charisma: 15

Level: 1, AC: 9, HP: 2 (1\*)

Gear: Robe, dagger, Wand of Magic Detection, map of the Crimson Abbey. Spell: Magic Missile (used)

Ensa is a smart, young wizard's apprentice who has recently acquired the map of the Crimson Abbey. She has taken leave of her studies to pursue the fabled treasures of the deserted abbey. Like Bindor, she is fiercely loyal to her friends.

*\*after the battle with the undead monks, poor Ensa has but a single hit point left.*



**Area 4: Floor Trap**

After turning the corner in the hallway, characters may discover a pit trap in the floor. The trap is activated with less than 5 pounds of pressure, but due to its age is twice as easy to spot by Thieves (double % on Thief Abilities chart, page B8 [Moldvay] and Dwarves (1-4 on a d6). The ten-foot-wide trap drops characters into a 20' deep pit onto a pile of discarded straw and old clothing. Characters rolling under their Dexterity take no damage, otherwise take 1d4. A small, concealed door is found at the bottom of the pit on the northern wall.

The hidden door is not quite as hard to find as a secret door (in this case, 2 in 6 chance, 3 in 6 for an elf). It opens into a dark tunnel sloping downward in a northerly direction. It is possible that a character may roll into and through the hidden door after their fall.

**Sloping Tunnel**

A damp, dark tunnel winds downward for over one hundred feet before it levels off. The tunnel opens into a large room, nearly forty-foot square. Three other tunnels (on the other three walls) lead away into darkness.

The room is filled with hundreds of casks, crates, and wooden boxes, each covered with an inch of dust. A single set of footprints are found entering from the northern tunnel and exiting the room into the western tunnel. Otherwise, it looks like the room has not been used for a very long time. Only fossilized food, evaporated wine, and empty boxes are found in this area.

**Whystal, Thief**

- Strength: 12
- Intelligence: 12
- Wisdom: 11
- Dexterity: 15
- Constitution: 13
- Charisma: 16

Level: 1, AC: 6, HP: 4 (2\*)

Gear: Leather armor, cloak, dagger, short bow, quiver w/ 10 arrows (used two in area 3).

Whystal is a rash young thief, preferring to think on his feet (often not thinking at all). He tends to rush into situations unprepared, forcing his compatriots to "save" him time and again.

*\*After his fall into the trap (luckily only taking 1 point of damage), Whystal has but two hit points left.*



**Coming Soon:** DerbyMouse Games, for hand-crafted character and monster miniatures. Made from simple materials, either pre-painted or unpainted! Check out the back cover for sample minis!

**Wanted:** Any condition copies of B2 Keep on the Borderlands, and Moldvay Basic and Expert Rulebooks. [throwi@gmail.com](mailto:throwi@gmail.com)

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Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my *Dungeon Delvers* story!

Additionally, a very special thanks to our artist, Diesel LaForce, for taking time to answer questions and sharing his work!

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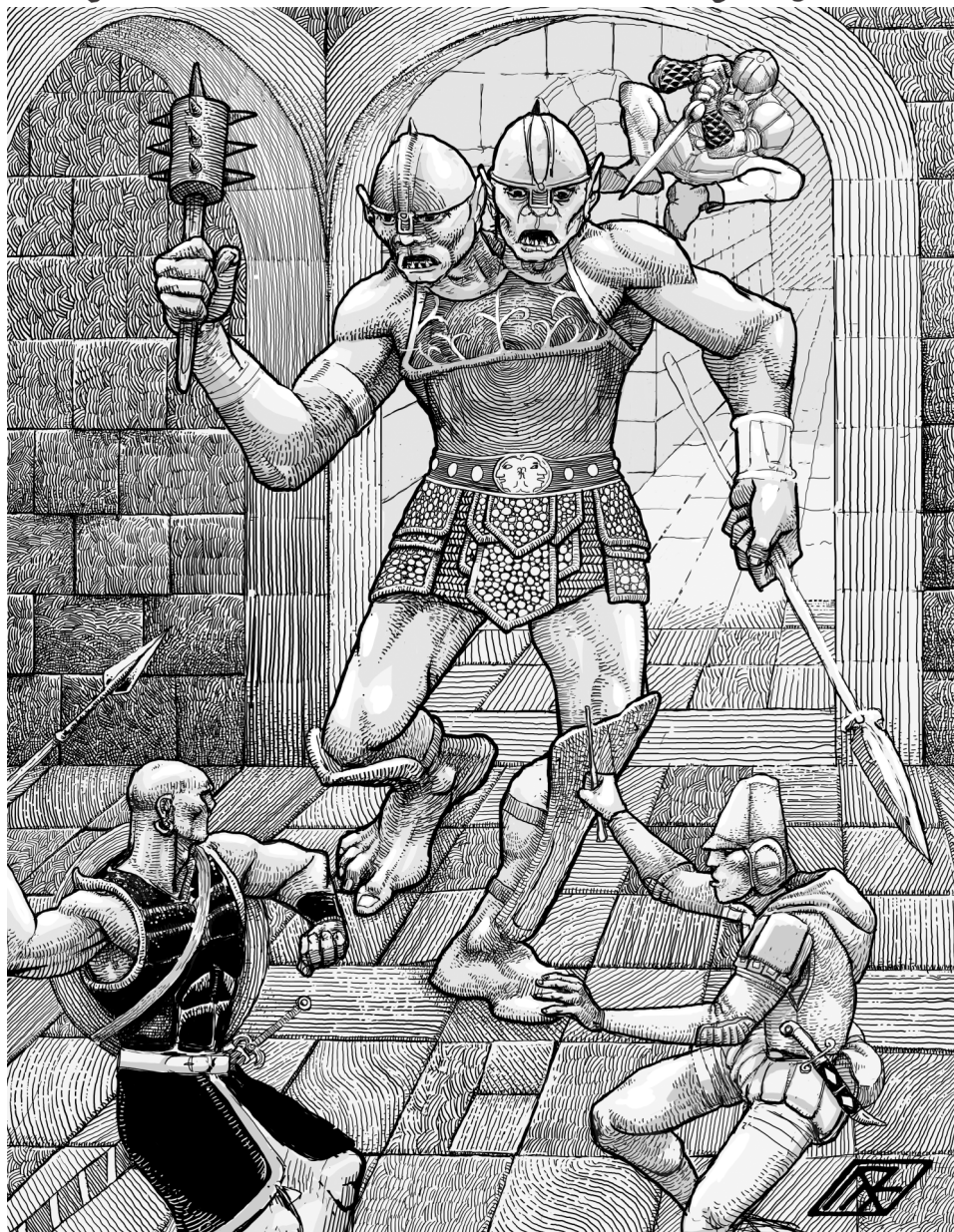


TO BE CONTINUED...



# Back to Basic

5



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

## Adding Homebrew Rules — *A Note from the Fanzine Creator*

Every game master—at one time or another—has likely had to modify an existing rule or create a rule for a unique situation. Perhaps the rules as written (RAW) were too strict for the encounter or the player's ideas were not covered in the rules. What did they do? Did they create or modify a rule to better handle this particular situation or did they just go with the best RAW option?

For most GMs, changing rules on the fly is a matter of preference, experience, and need. There are some that prefer to run RAW sessions to give the players a taste of how the original game creators wanted encounters to be handled or effects to be resolved. Others bend rules to better fit their campaign, style of play, or their player's experience. But if we look to the foreword of the basic rules (Moldvay Edition), we can read how the TSR staff viewed their own game. In the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph, Tom Moldvay states, "In a sense, the D&D game has no

rules, only rule suggestions." He continues, "No rule is inviolate, particularly if a new or altered rule will encourage creativity and imagination."(1) Well said, Mr. Moldvay!

Whether you are running RAW, a fully homebrewed system or something in between, you're still playing in the spirit of the game – to provide your players a setting and framework that allows them to have fun, exercise their ideas, and create wonderful memories!

In this and future issues, I'll include some of my own homebrew rules that I've used throughout the years. I don't claim that they are uniquely mine—someone, somewhere may have published the same idea—but I can say that I've used them in my games often enough.

*Thom Wilson*

(1) Tom Moldvay, December 3, 1980, D&D Basic Rules, TSR, page B2 (Foreword Section), 5th paragraph.

### — Issue #5 Details —

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## Back to Basix *V2 No 2*

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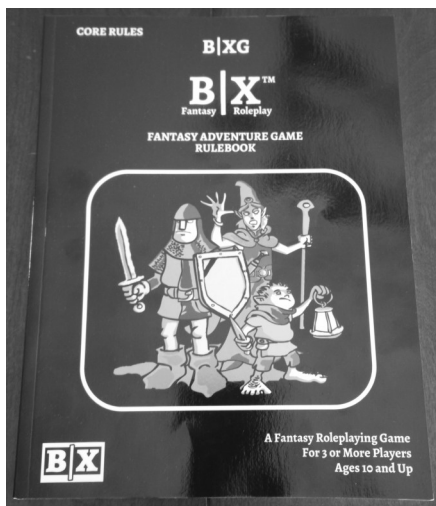
Upcoming Issues:  
#6 — September, 2018 - PDF, print  
#7 — December, 2018 - PDF, print



## Publishing News

As a lifelong fan of B/X, I'm always curious about products that inject new interest into our niche hobby. When I saw the **BX Fantasy Roleplay** (B|XFRP) book on the internet, I wanted to look it over. I'm a fan of print so I purchased a paper copy on Lulu for \$14.95.

If you're looking for a set of rules that combines Basic and Expert (Moldvay, Cook) into a single book, the B|XFRP book may be for you. It is laid out just like the original books with nearly identical section headings, similar section order, and a retro font that is reminiscent of the TSR fonts used in the original B/X products. Flipping through the book, I was eerily reminded of those early days...the B|XFRP book definitely sparked some nostalgia as I turned the pages.



However, its similarity to the originals may be its downfall too. It's *too* close to the first rulebooks. If you like using the B/X books you

have, this may not be the purchase for you.

But, if you've always wanted both the Basic and Expert rulebooks in one book, it's as good an option as any.

What are things I liked? I definitely liked the single-book feel with all the rules of B/X content blended together. Finding first- through sixth-level spells for clerics and magic-users (and elves) combined in their own sections was useful. Maybe putting both spell lists in a single section organized alphabetically would have been a better option. At least it may have differentiated itself from the originals that way. I did like that the B|XFRP book was less total pages than the two original books—84 pages instead of 128. There was no redundancy of experience point and class tables, attack and saving throw charts, or equipment and gear lists, either.

Although the B|XFRP book tries to faithfully capture the original rules without major modifications, it still has a few changes that purchasers may not like. The low d6 rules for finding secret doors and hearing noises were switched to high-roll preference. A few wording changes are also found throughout the book—speed is used instead of move and “Dragon Master” replaces Dungeon Master (for obvious reasons). The rule text is often reworded or rephrased to avoid being too close a resemblance to the original work.

The layout is clean and organized, making it easy to find what you're looking for. The art is mostly of

the stock or shadowed picture (silhouette) variety with a few originals thrown in. The trim of the book is a bit tight, with page numbers and the back cover close to losing some of their text.

Overall, the book is a good table reference for players and game masters alike.

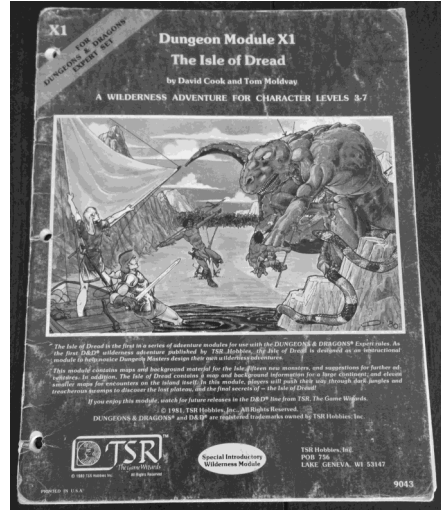
## Product Spotlight

Most of the early Basic adventures kept characters underground, exploring vast labyrinths and large cave systems. Wilderness travel was inserted into a session only as an afterthought, to get adventuring parties from dungeon to dungeon or from their adventure to town. The first real wilderness adventure book by TSR was released in the Expert rules boxed set, **The Isle of Dread**. This is what players had been looking for in D&D—a hex crawl!

I fell in love with that island map the moment I saw it—all those different locations set within jungles, mountains, swamps, and villages made it feel like the book had dozens of different adventures! My players' characters could spend months exploring hundreds of square miles of the island. Sure, there were some areas that needed additional fleshing out, but the framework for awesome adventures was there.

Labeled as a “special introduction wilderness module”, TSR gave us a book that starts our journey into outdoor travel and exploration. With islands to explore and a continent to use as a campaign world, B/X gamemasters finally had their first resource for broader-scale adventuring.

Many of the principalities and regions listed on page 3 were fleshed out in their own detailed Gazetteer books later produced by TSR (see the GAZ1-14 series).



I've run this adventure countless times—can you tell?

The adventure booklet is 32 pages in length, made up of 9 pages of maps, 3 pages of new monsters, a 2-page handout, a couple of pages of novice DM help, and about 13 pages of actual adventure material. Additionally, there are three wilderness encounter tables, several optional plot hooks, and a good mix of outdoor and dungeon adventures. Many of the encounter locations are only a few paragraphs with just enough detail to get the GM's imaginative juices flowing. Other areas, like the temple on Taboo Island, have detailed encounter areas that can be run as is.

Reading the art credits is like seeing the who's who of early TSR artists: Dee, Diesel, Otus, Sutherland and Willingham all draw art for this



[Stephen] Well, I just wrote the system, I didn't play it before I wrote it. Since then I've been more likely to play AD&D or various variant OD&D (brown box rules) though I am running a B/X game at the upcoming NTRPG Con. I tend to see the systems as somewhat interchangeable. I've also played a number of OSRIC-type systems since.

*[T] You say that you wrote the system before you played it... does that mean that the Gygax/Arneson "by line" in the credits really refers more to the OD&D work but you rewrote sections to fit the Expert system, as it relates to Moldvay's work?*

[S] "D&D" was "by" Gygax/Arneson. Arneson's intent is pretty clear from the mimeographed rules he released at the end of the 70s (at a time when quality mimeograph was still very accepted as a publication tool). Fixed hit points, magic-users rise in level by learning all the spells at one level... that sort of thing.

I pretty much sat down and wrote the Expert set. Moldvay had already done the Basic set. The idea was that we would do three books. Basic, Expert and another (to take the levels from where Expert left off to about level 20). For example, Giant Sea Serpents were originally going to be in Expert, but were reserved for the later book (20 hit dice, magic and melee, level 20 spell casters).

People tend to kind of over-think the differences between versions. AD&D was complex and aimed at



Artwork by William McAusland © Used with permission

having tournament rules that covered everything. It was really Gary/Tim Kask/Lawrence Schick's very specialized rules with lots and lots of detail.

*[T] Can you detail your editorial responsibilities with respect to the Expert Rulebook? What is it that you did, working with Zeb Cook?*

[S] I actually wrote most of the text, Zeb edited it all. To be honest, the editing was much harder as the rules had to be typeset to match up with the Basic Set (so that you could pull out pages and match them up one to one). Remember, this is with typewriters and I honestly did not think that it was possible to get done—what Zeb got done—in the time he had. The actual rule-writing was pretty easy.

If they had a different vision of the project, the writing would have been harder.

*[T] What do you mean, "a different vision of the project?" Can you elaborate on that last point?*

[S] That is, if the project was supposed to be more than an OD&D (Brown Box Set, before Monks and Psionic powers) rewrite—albeit in clearer terms and with rough edges

smoothed off, it would have been harder. However, a rewrite of the original rules but in the style of what Tom had done with the first few levels—to make them accessible and clear but without any of the additional “stuff” that was in AD&D – that was pretty easy to do.

That made for a nice, clean, and easy to write project, if that makes sense. That is why the editing was a superhuman task—which Zeb Cook did. People don’t appreciate just how hard the editing was with the tools available.

*[T] What are some of the things that you added to or changed in the Expert rules? E.g. did you modify any of Gary and Dave’s initial rules for simplification or clarification?*

[S] We were supposed to just express the rules without trying to fill in too many gaps and to do the least amount of changes possible. The idea was that AD&D would be technical and B/X would be for fun play, kind of a clearer version of the Brown Box materials. The only “modification” I did was to fill out some spell tables (e.g. the melee weapon enhancement spell for clerics I added), add and flesh out monsters (though I was overruled on doing intelligent woolly rhinos—I wanted them to be able to coordinate combat tactics and such), and race-as-class to flesh out some rules for Elves to make them a little more specific as fighter/magic-users. The math on tables and such was just tweaked to make things a little smoother.

*[T] What are you working on these days, specific to roleplaying games work?*

[S] I’m working on Shattered Norns, a setting I developed. At present I have pending a book on the Plane of Shadows that also includes some adventures (and lots of monsters and terrain rules) that New Big Dragon games is finishing up (the project is post initial distribution of editing copies). I’m probably going to do The City in Shadow next and some other materials if I find the desire to complete what I started on there. I admit that I’m somewhat depressed by delays in having Into the Shadows see final print; the delay’s effect on my interest in working has bled over into my interest in doing more updates of the materials I did before, such as City of the Revenant or to continue on newer projects.

I’m really sensitive to feedback, and to the lack of it. If Into the Shadows had come out last year and done ok, I’d be neck-deep in additional material. With the delays, I feel kind of weighted down until it either gets released or just goes under. Most of my history as a writer is with projects that have gone under and not seen print.

*Thank you Mr. Marsh!*



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## Mythology

The two new monsters in this issue's Mythology section are also found in the Dungeon Crawl (on page 10) and within the Crimson Abbey of the Broken God adventure on page 16.

### Rat, Undead

Undead rats are the product of malicious spells or unholy curses uttered by evil priests. Once created, the undead rat seeks to chase and kill any living thing, following the orders of its creator. They are the size of a giant rat but are found with exposed flesh and bone peeking through their ragged fur. Their eyes are often a bright red or blue.

The bite of an undead rat will send a chill through the victim, sapping their constitution in addition to dealing 1d3 damage. Each bite temporarily drains 1 point of Constitution for 24 hours. The victim dies when their Constitution reaches zero. They will become a zombie that will slowly begin to look like an undead Ratling over time.



Art by Gary Dupris

Armor Class: 7  
Hit Dice: 1+1\*  
Move: 120' (40')  
Attacks: 1 Bite  
Damage: Bite 1-3 + cold  
Special: Immune to cold; bite saps Constitution.

No. Appearing: 3-18  
Save As: Fighter: 1  
Morale: 12  
Treasure Type: Nil  
Alignment: Chaotic

### Minotaur, Crystal



Art by Brett Neufeld

Armor Class: 4  
Hit Dice: 6+1\*  
Move: 60' (20')  
Attacks: 1 Gore or Weapon  
Damage: Gore 2-8 or Weapon weapon type.  
Special: Regeneration.

No. Appearing: 1-2  
Save As: Fighter: 7  
Morale: 12  
Treasure Type: Nil  
Alignment: Chaotic

Crystal minotaurs are bound to serve their wizard masters, protecting castles, towers and lairs with fearless intensity. They are made from a single-colored crystal, forming into the shape of a man-bull after several weeks of incantations. A crystal minotaur is mindless, obeying a simple, simple command until death. It alternates between using a weapon and goring its victims.

When damaged, the crystal minotaur may rejoin separated pieces of crystal to itself, regenerating 1d4 hit points each combat round. Being mindless, it is immune to most control spells.

## The Magic Shop

In this issue of The Magic Shop, we take a look at rare gem and crystal treasure types.

### Crystal Dagger of Light

Crafted from crystal and imbued with a permanent *Light* spell, this dagger has razor-sharp edges that deal an extra point of damage on a successful strike (1d4+1). Additionally, the dagger illuminates a 10' radius area. *Value: 1,000 GP*

### Onyx Orb Necklace

This ornate necklace consists of a silver thread and 1d10 onyx beads. When an onyx bead is removed and thrown, the area around the bead's impact becomes an impenetrable, magical darkness. Only the owner of the necklace may see within the 20' cubed space of absolute darkness. The darkness lasts 10 minutes. Once all the orbs have been used, the silver thread disappears, never to return. *Value: 10,000 GP*

### Crystal, Animated Fragment

Damaged crystal fragments from magical creatures may sometimes try to rejoin to their host after separation. Small to mid-sized "pieces" will often move along the ground or through the air as they seek to reattach themselves, impaling or cutting living creatures that get in the way. Any living beings that get in the way of moving crystalline shards may be struck for 1-2 hit points of damage (roll to-hit as a normal attack). Most shards should be treated as AC 9 with 1 hit point if a character wishes to strike the crystal fragment.

### Diamond Eye

Made from a flawless diamond and shaped into an eyeball, this item can be used two ways. First, it may be inserted into an open eye socket, replacing a lost eye. When used in this manner, it provides infravision and double natural sight distance. Second, it may be used once per day like the spell *Wizard Eye* (X16). *Value: 5,000 GP*

### Emerald Snake Rod

This two-foot long, solid emerald rod would be extremely valuable just for its weight in gems. However, its magical properties give it its true value—the rod may be broken once per day to create two small, green snakes. The snakes are venomous and will follow the mental commands of the rod's owner as best as they can. The snakes return to rod form after 10 minutes or if one of them is killed. Use the *Spitting Cobra* (B42) statistics for each snake. *Value: 2,500 GP*

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl #1

### Fury at Fossilbone

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 3th to 5th level.

*Background:* The town of Fossilbone is known for its unique lighthouse made from the femur of a deceased Titan. The lighthouse is an important beacon for ships along the coast, clearly illuminating the edge of the land and dangerous reefs.

Recently, the evil wizard Gilgarax has captured the lighthouse, intent on stealing the light source at its peak. A timeless artifact of great power illuminates the crystal roof of the tower which never ceases to provide light to sailors at sea.

### Lighthouse Exterior

The lighthouse is made of fossilized bone, hardened to stone over hundreds of years. An entry at the lowest level provides access to the lowest level of the lighthouse interior. Characters will see a winding staircase around the exterior of the giant femur.

Gilgarax has stationed half of his loyal minions, a band of merciless **minotaurs**, outside the lighthouse. Characters will easily spot the fearless creatures as they patrol the area outside the towering structure.

**Minotaurs (6):** (AC 6, HD 6, HP: 30 ea, #AT 1 gore/1 bite or weapon, D 1-6/1-6 or 1-8 (battle axe), Save F6, ML 12, XP 275 ea)

If the party looks challenging, one of the minotaurs will flee to the ground floor to fetch the rest of his band of warriors.

### External Staircase

Two separate staircases wind around the exterior of the lighthouse—there is no way to access the upper floors of the structure from within. One staircase leads to the first floor, the other to the top floor.

### Ground Floor

A single statue in the middle of the hollowed out leg-bone stands triumphantly, seemingly unaffected by the **six minotaurs** as they use it for target practice. The statue is that of a beautiful woman, garbed in a long, elegant robe. Several light scratches upon the statue show the worst of the minotaur's strikes. The arms of the woman are folded across her chest and her face shows a look of disgust as she seemingly watches the beasts as they try to chip her exterior.

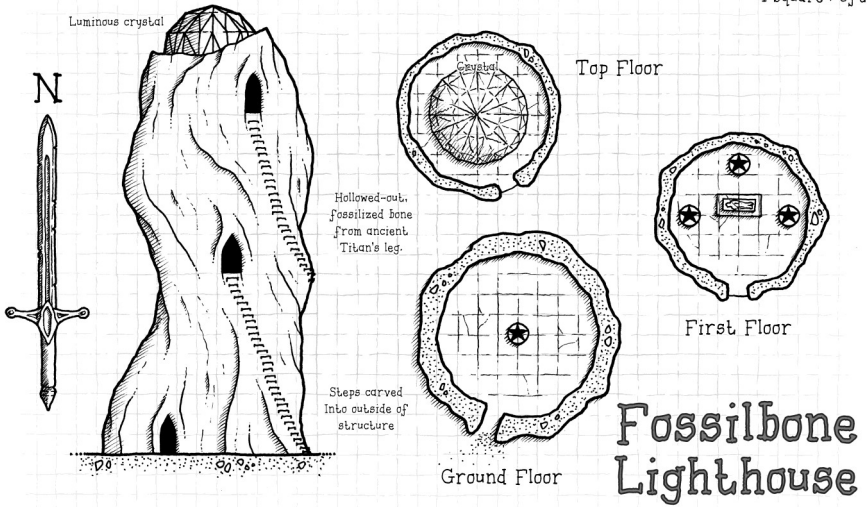
**Minotaurs (6):** (AC 6, HD 6, HP: 24 ea, #AT 1 gore/1 bite or weapon, D 1-6/1-6 or 1-8 (battle axe), Save F6, ML 12, XP 275 ea)

A chest in the back of the room holds **500 gp** and **1,000 sp** of donation money left for the goddess of the statue.

### First Floor

The burial chamber of the mysterious goddess of the statue below is guarded by **2 crystal minotaurs** (pg. 7). Their instructions are to kill any who enter the room without their master, Gilgarax. Three cherub statues gaze upon the burial coffin in sadness. A single crystal dagger (**Crystal Dagger of Light**, pg. 8) lies atop the coffin.





**Crystal Minotaurs (2):** (AC 4, HD 6+1\*, HP: 33 ea, #AT 1 gore or weapon, D 2-8 or 1-8 (battle axe), Save F7, ML 12, XP 650 ea)

If the burial coffin is opened, the lighthouse shakes in fury for 10 seconds, also dimming the artifact at its top temporarily.

### Top Floor

**Gilgarax** will be working diligently on the crystal device in the center of the room, attempting to remove it without destroying it. He is protected by **3 crystal minotaurs** who are intently watching the door for intruders. Irritated with the interruption, Gilgarax will immediately try to destroy characters with his *magic missile* and *lightning bolt* spells first.

**Crystal Minotaurs (3):** (AC 4, HD 6+1\*, HP: 33 ea, #AT 1 gore or weapon, D 2-8 or 1-8 (battle axe), Save F7, ML 12, XP 650 ea)

**Gilgarax, 7th level M-U:** (AC 7, Lv17, HP: 15, #AT 1 spell, D variable, Save MU7, ML 10, XP 1500); spells: *magic missile*, *charm person*, *shield*, *detect invisible*, *mirror image*, *web*, *hold person*, *lightning bolt*, *polymorph self*

Gilgarax is trying to remove the artifact that sits upon a marble pedestal. This artifact, the "**Heart of the Goddess**" is what provides continual light for the lighthouse. It cannot be removed by any known means and is only dimmed when the goddess's coffin is opened or if the crystal roof is destroyed.

A hidden niche in the pedestal holds a **Diamond Eye** (pg. 8), a **Horn of Blasting**, a **Potion of Treasure Finding**, and a bag of **100 pp**.

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl #2

### Sepulcher of the God-King

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 5th to 8th level.

*Background:* Travelers along the road near the Cliffs of the Dead hurry their pace to avoid passing the tombs and crypts during the night. The path between the lake's edge and hundreds of burial chambers along the cliff is a treacherous evening journey for all but the most stalwart and seasoned heroes. Rumors of haunting ghosts, shambling zombies and eerie spectres exiting their tombs under the moonlight are told throughout the land. If it is so well known, then it must be true...

Indeed, the dead do exit their final resting places each evening to gaze at the moon and lake-waters. Although the path along the cliffs is a foolhardy trek at night, it is relatively safe during the day. However, entering the tombs themselves is another matter entirely.

One such tomb is that of an ancient king and self-proclaimed god. **Hunkultak the Vile** was an evil king that ruled a lost empire several centuries prior. His greed, mercilessness and deceit were well known during his life, traits that followed him to the grave. He has become a *spectre* that haunts and hunts alongside other foul undead near the lake's edge. He is a dangerous foe that has retained many of his precious items and spells from his time as a living god and evil king.

### A1. Stairs to Tomb

Marble stairs lead up from the footpath to an ancient stone door. The door is secured but a lock cannot be found. Only magical spells or brute force will open the door.

**Brute Force:** roll under half Strength score.

### A2. Murdered Attendants

Hunkultak wanted his entire council of advisors and his personal servants buried with him when he died. Unfortunately for his attendants, they were very much alive when the god-king died. Hunkultak's own son made sure that his father's final wishes were kept. After they were murdered, the twelve attendants were placed here to guard and assist the king's needs in death.

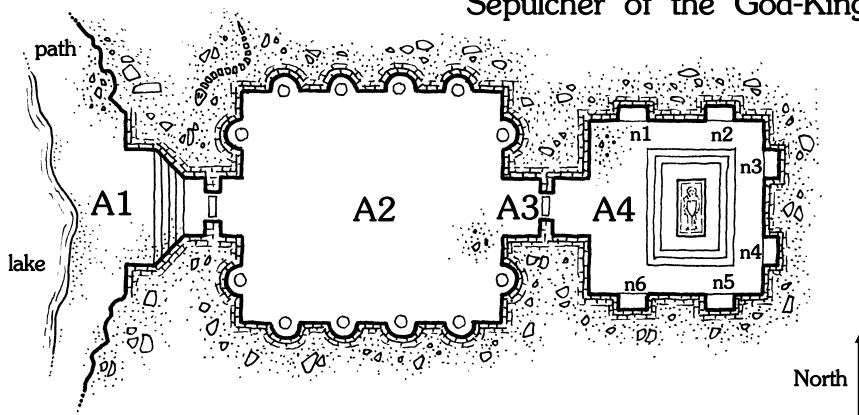
His four advisors were entombed in glass sarcophagi that stand upright in niches in the east and west walls of the antechamber. His eight personal servants were propped up in similar niches along the north and south walls. All twelve of the attendants emerge from their places to prevent intruders from disturbing their king.

The antechamber is empty of furniture, decorations and light.

**Advisors, Mummies (4):** (AC 3, HD 5+1\*, HP: 25 ea, #AT 1 touch + disease, D 1-12 + disease, Save F5, ML 12, XP 400 ea)

**Servants, Ghouls (8):** (AC 6, HD 2\*, HP: 10 ea, #AT 1 bite/2 claws, D 1-3/1-3 + special, Save F2, ML 9, XP 25 ea)

## Sepulcher of the God-King



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### A3. Passphrase Door

Unless magic is used to open this ornate, stone door, it must be opened by speaking the passphrase, “*Hunkultak the Vile*”. No amount of brute force may open this magically sealed door.

### A4. Sepulcher of Hunkultak

A glass sarcophagus on a raised dais is illuminated by a single orb of green light that floats above it near the ceiling. The ghostly form of a withered man rests within the sarcophagus, his bony hands folded upon his chest. Even the lightest sound will awaken the god-king, raising him from his crystal coffin.

He will mock intruders, treating them as lesser beings. He urges characters to leave while they still have their heads. Any defiant or insulting behavior causes Hunkultak to attack.

Six wall niches hold Hunkultak’s favorite magical items. He is able to use one each round, magically teleporting it to his hand (or body) at the start of his turn. Previous items return to their niches just before his next turn begins.

**Hunkultak the Vile, Spectre:** (AC 2, HD 6\*\*\*, HP: 40, #AT 1 touch + special or Spell, D 1-8 + 2 level drain or spell, Save F6, ML 11, XP 950); spells (used twice daily): *hold portal*, *mirror image*, *hold person*, *confusion*. Items: special (see notes).

#### Hunkultak’s Treasured Items

Roll (1d6)	Item
n1	+2 dagger, +3 vs. Lawful
n2	Wand of Magic Missiles
n3	Rod of Cancellation
n4	Ring of Invisibility
n5	Girdle of Giant Strength
n6	Staff of Power

Hunkultak may use any of the abilities of the item he has on that turn. Note that any damage inflicted with the dagger, wand or staff does not include the level drain bonus. GMs may elect to use the spectre’s touch attack and level drain ability instead of the item that round.

Additionally, a secret floor recess under the sarcophagus contains **1,500 pp** and 10d10 large gems, each worth 5d10 gp.

## Spellbound

Whether your characters pick, choose at random, or are given their spells, there are plenty that seemed to go unused or ignored. This issue's article will take a look at underused spells that may often be often overlooked. *Note that the comments that follow are my opinion only and come from my experience as a GM throughout the years. Your experience may say otherwise.*

We can easily group spells into two categories—those that players always take and those they infrequently take. This likely stems from players trying to maximize their character's chances for survival. Automatic spells like *magic missile* and *sleep* are always great choices for your low-level magic-user or elf—and what cleric doesn't want *cure light wounds* when they get their first gift from their god? [Note: if you run your games where the cleric can cast any spell from that level, then this is less of a factor—for this reason, we'll focus on magic-user and elf spells in this article.]

I've seen a tremendous amount of fun generated from the first-level *ventriloquism* spell. If you get a player who wants to utilize every tool in their toolbox and they only have that low-level spell left (or have reserved it for the right occasion), they can really create a lot of imaginative encounters and roleplaying from its effects. The fearful can be made to sound brave, the silent can be made to speak, and foes may think your group has turned down a different alley with phantom

footfalls. Almost any sound can be created to trick targets with this simple spell. I've seen it used to avoid sure death a couple of times.

In the last issue, we mentioned that the *locate object* spell could have made the “too powerful” list—this doesn't mean I've seen it picked or used that often. Many traditional adventure themes center around finding a location or finding a missing item or person. This spell really helps those objectives, especially if cast by a higher level magic-user or elf. This is a time when this spell would be nice to have in the spell book and memorized.

*Transmute rock to mud* is an underused but highly effective spell that can change an entire adventure in a single moment. Castle sieges, underground dungeons and impassable mountains are made simple with this spell. Yes, you could argue that there are other similar spells that might be more useful in the fifth-level list (e.g. *passwall* or *teleport*) but none are as destructive and frustrating to the GM as *transmute rock to mud*. Plus, you can reverse it!

There are many underused and overlooked spells in the Basic and Expert spell lists. When you're playing a system with a limited number of spells to memorize, you have to choose wisely. However, there are many that are great choices if players could look beyond the damage-dealing and protective spells that seem to always be picked.

## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 5

In the last issue of *Back to Basil*, we saw Whystal the thief fall into a floor trap while Ensa and Bindor recovered from their battle with the skeletal monks. Being the curious creature that he is, Whystal quietly crept down the sloping tunnel to the area beyond...

### A5. Secret Room

Just before the tunnel ends in the large storage chamber (A6.), a small room hidden by a well-designed secret door can be found on the east wall. The door opens by pulling down on it, sliding it into the floor. After one minute, the door slides back up into the ceiling. The door can be opened from both sides.

There are several of these small, five-foot square rooms throughout the abbey. They were designed as hiding spaces for monks if the abbey was invaded by marauders or bandits.

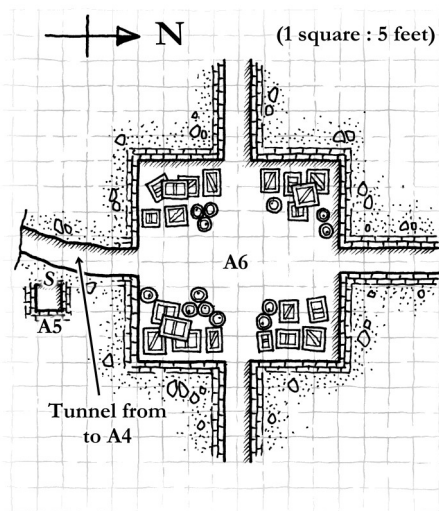
This particular secret niche holds more than the typical supplies left in most hiding spots—an unlocked chest in the back corner of the room seems out of place. Characters will find a crimson bag, a long, wooden box and a leather pouch within the chest. The pouch contains **100 gp**, and the box holds a two-foot long device, an **Emerald Snake Rod** (pg. 8). However, the greatest treasure is the mace found within the crimson bag. It is red-handled with a blackened steel head. This is the **Mace of the Broken God**, an artifact of great power, thought lost to thieves long ago.

*Mace of the Broken God:* A weapon blessed by the Broken God himself, this mace provides +1 to-hit and +2 to damage when used to combat Chaotic creatures. Once per day, the weapon grants its Lawful wielder the ability to cast *Cure Serious Wounds*.

A parchment in the bag states in a hastily scrawled hand, “*Hide the mace in the southern niche, the armor in the northern closet, the helm in the western hole and the shield in the eastern ceiling drawer.*”

### A6. Storage Chamber

This large room was used to store crates of food, barrels of beer, casks of wine, and boxes of vegetables for the monks of the abbey. They were loaded here from a secret access point to the east (found in a future issue). All of the perishable food and drink in their containers are spoiled and rotted. After a thorough search of the area, char-



## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God - Map 2

acters may find a small, steel box that contains a bag of 2d10 rubies (each worth 10gp) and two **Potions of Healing**.

A single set of footprints are found entering from the northern tunnel and exiting the room into the western tunnel.

There is a 50% chance for every 10 minutes spent in this chamber that a swarm of 3-18 **undead rats** will enter the room, attracted to the noise made by characters or the scent of living flesh.

**Rats, Undead (3d6):** (AC 7, HD 1+1\*, HP: 5 ea, #AT 1 bite, D 1-3 + cold, Save F1, ML 12, XP 19 ea) - see page 7.

The sounds of combat are likely to draw the immortal knight, Sir Cralnat to the area. He most often patrols the northern and western areas of the lower levels, where an increasing number of undead are stirring. He will assist characters in peril, but will quickly be on his way to resume his duties.

Other foul creatures wander the lower levels of the abbey—use the wandering monsters table to check for the chance that characters run into other foes.

**Sir Cralnat, Fighter [NPC]**

Strength: 17  
 Intelligence: 9  
 Wisdom: 13  
 Dexterity: 13  
 Constitution: 7  
 Charisma: 5  
 Level: 3, AC: 4, HP: 12

Gear: Rusted chainmail, **sword+1**, silver dagger.

Neither dead nor alive, the withered old warrior is the last defender of the abbey, tasked for all eternity to guard the lower levels from evil. He will offer aid to those who need it, provided they are not Chaotic in alignment. He cannot be healed and his condition cannot be reversed. He can assist characters with simple directions or fighting off evil, but will not join their group.

**Homebrew Rule #2:**

Thieves may use their Dexterity bonus (missile to-hit) to increase the “level” of their thieves’ abilities. For example, a 1st level thief with a Dexterity of 13 has thieves’ abilities (TA) of second level: 1st level +1 level for the Dexterity bonus.

Actual Level	TA Lvl 13-15	TA Lvl DX 16-17	TA Lvl DX 18
1	2	3	4
2	3	4	5
3	4	5	6

Wandering Monsters—Abbey, Lower levels (roll 1d20)									
Roll	Creat.	No.	AC	HD	HP	AT	Dam	Align	XP
1	Wight	1	5	3*	15	1	ED	C	50
2	Ghoul	1-2	6	2*	12 ea	3	1-3 +	C	25 ea
3	Zombie	1-6	8	2	10 ea	1	1-8	C	20 ea
4-5	Skeleton	2-8	7	1	5 ea	1	1-6	C	10 ea
6-7	Rat, Undead	3-18	7	1+1*	5 ea	1	1-3 +	C	19 ea
8-20	Nothing encountered. (+) special ability; (ED) Energy Drain								

Roll on this table every 30 minutes of game time...

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Visit [RPGNow.com](http://RPGNow.com) for my latest products for sale, including B/X and S&W adventures! Note that back issues of Back to BasiX (in print) are no longer available. Stay tuned for print-on-demand.

Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my Dungeon Delvers story!

Additionally, a very special thanks to author Stephen Marsh, for taking time to answer my questions!

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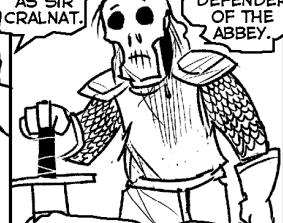


THANK YOU STRANGER, YOUR TIMING IS PERFECT.

INDEED, OUR THANKS. MIGHT WE ASK YOUR NAME?

I WAS KNOWN AS SIR CRALNAT.

THE LAST DEFENDER OF THE ABBEY.



I HAVE BEEN GUARDING THE LOWER LEVELS OF THE ABBEY SINCE ITS FALL.

CAN I ASK WHY ARE YOU HERE?

WE'RE INVESTIGATING THE ABBEY AND TRYING TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED.

WELL, I'M SURE THERE'S MORE TO YOUR STORY, YOUNG ELF.



BEWARE THAT BEING HERE TOO LONG AGES YOU.

THANK YOU FOR THE WARNING. WE SHALL BE GOING SOON.

WHAT?? NOT YET, ENSA.

YOU MUST GO NOW. ANY WAY BUT THIS WAY.

IT IS TOO DANGEROUS FOR YOU.



**HOOOOOWWWWIIIIII!**

TO BE CONTINUED...

# Back to BasiX



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

## Future Issues — *A Note from the Fanzine Creator*

It's hard to believe that I'm working on the sixth issue of this fanzine, encompassing a year and a half of quarterly releases. The reviews and feedback from nearly all of you has been overwhelmingly positive, driving me to create each new issue to be better than the last. Throughout the 15-month run, particularly in the last two issues, a few repeated questions have popped up that I can answer here.

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Why are you moving print to a third party? Well, I've always intended to release the fanzine in two formats – PDF and print. I've hand printed, bound, and mailed the previous four issues (five, including the first issue that was handed out at NTRPGCon in 2017) and would rather let someone else handle the time-consuming task of printing and mailing going forward. Additionally, I sell more PDFs than print so moving the digital version to the primary release method makes more sense for my business. As a lover

of print myself, I understand the need for physical copies – continuing to print physical copies satisfies that need for those that wish to have the fanzine in their hands.

Why don't I offer subscriptions? This question was asked very early on and I understand why. It's easier for consumers to pay for several issues in advance and have them arrive when they are released. I can appreciate the question and need for such a service. However, knowing that my release model was going to shift to print by a third party, this made it difficult to find a service that offered print via subscription, especially in a niche market. The big players in the PDF market offer a subscription service but only for digital product. Finding a company who would handle a print mailing without taking a large chunk out of the returns of each issue is and continues to be difficult. I don't make a profit on most issues until I sell more than a few dozen PDFs.

### — Issue #6 Details —

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## Back to Basix V. 2 No 3

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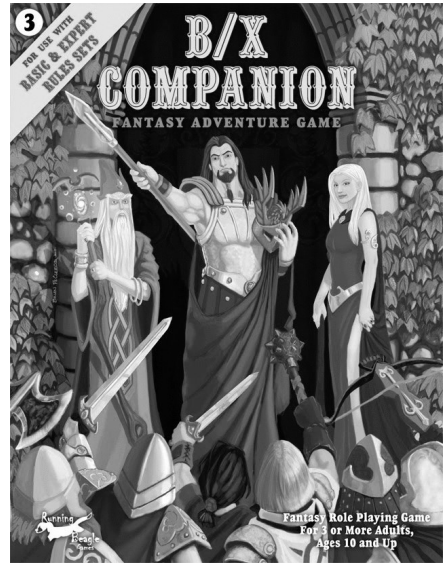
Having a subscription company or crate service added to the mix negates any profit I'll make.

I apologize to those who have come to love the handcrafted issues I've made. I hope that you'll continue to buy it in print from the third party company or PDF as I switch release methods with this and future issues. I also hope you understand that these changes only help future issues—I will have more time to create and release RPG materials for you without being burdened with printing, binding, and mailing.

*Thom Wilson*

## Publishing News

Although I mentioned the Running Beagle Games book, **B/X Companion**, in the very first issue of this fanzine, I felt like it was time to do a proper review of it. Jonathan Becker has given us a wonderful book that perfectly follows the Basic and Expert rulebooks. Imagine if TSR had decided to produce a third book in the spirit of the Moldvay, Cook, and Marsh design – my guess is that it would look much like this. Similar to TSR's first two rulebooks, it fills 64 pages with two-column, justified text, laid out in an instructional, simple-to-use format. Topics are in the same order of the original books – my fingers naturally found the section I needed as if I was thumbing through the early TSR rulebooks. Unlike most modern-day books however, Running Beagle Games stays true to the originals by using the interior covers for additional space. I just wish they had used a blue color font to match exactly.



B/X Companion—cover

B/X Companion covers levels 15 to 36 for the four main classes and provides a few options for demi-human races after they reach their maximum level in the Expert book. I like that the book encourages players to keep their demi-human characters active after they reach maximum level, by using experience points to advance their attack and saving throw ratings and number of attacks per round.

Dozens of high-level and powerful monsters are listed, challenging most experienced characters with their special abilities, massive hit dice, and low armor classes. A few low-level foes are thrown in to add some depth to B/X adventures but the real focus is on the many formidable threats that would frighten a seasoned player. Nearly every monster has one or more asterisks marked after their hit dice, indicating special abilities that warrant additional experience points for their defeat.

The magic item tables are completely filled with new and wondrous treasures for experienced characters to acquire. Seeing a Sword +5 in any D&D® product is thrilling unto itself, but the sheer number and breadth of choices in the tables offer many new possibilities to characters. The Book table is worth a read all by itself.

Variable combat damage, grappling, and special mass combat rules add considerable depth to the book, providing high-level characters and campaigns with additional advanced options.

Artwork is somewhat sparse (averaging 1 piece per 2-3 pages) but is solid, good work. The cover art is spectacular, reminding us that cover pieces need not show action and combat to tell the story of the interior. It clearly speaks to the leadership that higher-level characters bring to new campaigns.

The font choice is clean and—besides a few strange oddities (e.g. the rear index) -- is consistent throughout the book. The interior front cover Table of Contents replicates the original work but the Charisma table and hiring price charts also found there seem strangely out of place, as if used to fill space. No matter, both tables are useful and make it easier to find that information when needed. I think the only issue I have with the book is with the table design. They are flat, plain, and even a little ugly in a few places.

Occasionally, a table will have a gray-highlighted row or column, but most are simplistic, white grids. If

there was an area to improve, it would be in the table design and layout. However, this is about all I can find that I'd change. The rest of the book is quite good and—besides a few typos and a couple places with missing punctuation—this is stellar work.

If you haven't picked up this book for your B/X campaign, you should. When you use it at the table, it almost feels like you're using one of the original TSR books.

***B/X Companion***, Running Beagle Games, \$28.99 print available at [bxblackrazor.blogspot.com](http://bxblackrazor.blogspot.com), \$12.99 PDF at [RPGNow.com](http://RPGNow.com).

### Interview with a Legendary Author—Mike Carr

One of the first adventure books packaged with early boxed sets (Holmes 4th and 5th printings) and later in a different color cover for Basic D&D®, *In Search of the Unknown* is one of the most played and remembered modules from early TSR. I got a chance to interview the author, Mike Carr, to ask him about his days at TSR and his work on this legendary book.

*[Thom] How did you find yourself moving to Lake Geneva to work for TSR in March, 1976?*

*[Mike] I graduated from Macalester College in Saint Paul in 1973 with a degree in History, hoping to become a high school social studies teacher – but there were virtually no openings at the time in Minnesota, so my options in the field of education were limited.*



For some months I continued working at my college job, which was as the night cook at The Ground Round restaurant in Roseville, Minnesota. That store was one of the busiest in the entire chain, so it was a training ground for aspiring managers – and with few other options, I asked the regional manager if I might be considered as a management trainee. My expectation was that, if accepted, I would be training there in Roseville, but when the offer was made to me, it was for a position in Cedar Rapids, Iowa – take it or leave it. I had no desire to leave the Twin Cities, but this was a genuine opportunity and the only one I had, so I took it.

I enjoyed the restaurant business, but working six days a week and having only Tuesdays off took most of the fun out of it. I really disliked living in Cedar Rapids, so after spending 1974 and 1975 there as a trainee and assistant manager, I was more than delighted when Gary Gygax offered me a position with TSR in early 1976. He felt that with my gaming background and now my management experience, I would be of value to the growing enterprise as an editor and potential manager.

At The Ground Round I had worked my way up from \$150 a week to \$205 a week, but Gary's offer was for just \$110 a week, with the promise of some corporate stock in lieu of salary and the opportunity to buy more shares at a discount. Since I had developed an interest in the stock market as a teen, I was well aware of what that

could mean for the founders and early investors if the business became a solid success – and that's exactly what transpired over the next seven years. Besides, I was single and loved gaming, so taking a pay cut of that magnitude – although significant – was something I was more than willing to do. So in mid-March of 1976, I happily pulled up stakes in Iowa and moved to Lake Geneva. I've been a Wisconsinite ever since. Today I live outside of Oconomowoc, which is about 40 miles north and 45 minutes away from Lake Geneva. So I'm able to visit there any time I like.

*[T] So initially at least, your job duties at TSR were informal and more managerial, before becoming the games and rules editor?*

[M] Yes. As with any small company, we all performed a variety of tasks, creative and otherwise, including unloading boxes of newly printed products being delivered. Among other duties, I did some editing and proofreading on several projects along with Brian Blume—which led to more editorial work and a change in my title from general manager to games and rules editor.

*[T] How did you get tapped to write an introductory adventure for the Basic Set? Were you given the direction to write a module that intentionally taught fledgling dungeon masters how to populate a dungeon (i.e. had fill-in-the-blank monster entries for rooms, along with monster population lists)—or was that primarily your invention?*

[M] When the decision was made to include an introductory module with the Basic Set, I raised my hand and said I'd like to write it, which I ended up doing largely on my own time. After outlining my plan and getting the approval of Gary Gygax and Brian Blume, I set to work with very little input from anyone – I was really given *carte blanche* to bring my own vision to life, which I did. I was well aware that this was going to be an important product that would serve as a model for countless players to use and enjoy, so I really gave it a lot of thought and tried to make it not only illustrative of good design, but also interesting and challenging.

In creating this module, I had several goals. First and foremost was to present it as a true introductory work suitable for first-time dungeon masters and players. That meant explaining to the dungeon master what was being presented, as well as the rationale behind it. For the players, it was giving them a background sheet that outlined the reason and motivation for their adventure, to get them thinking like role players.

Second, I wanted to show what a good dungeon design looks like, starting with architectural aspects (like including all the necessary rooms for housing dozens of people in a functional way, considering aspects such as basic drainage, the location of cooking, eating, and sleeping areas, etc.). I also included aspects that might confuse the adventurers or make the place difficult to map, including some angled or irregular walls.

Third, I wanted to give an example of a solid “backstory” that would provide a reason for the adventure and inspire the players’ imaginations. To give the dungeon master an example of how to tailor certain details to individual players, I included a random roll for rumors or legends that each player’s character might have heard, which could be true or false.

Fourth, I wracked my brain to come up with as many interesting and mysterious features as I could think of for what could be discovered within the place, particularly the garden of giant fungi and the room of pools. That had to be done considering that the adventurers were going to be low-level characters. So nothing could be too deadly or too challenging to overcome – and that meant that there were limited options on the design side.

Fifth, I wanted each dungeon master to be able to provide some of their own input through the placement of various monsters and treasures in different locations – with the suggestion that some rooms have one, or the other, or none. That was my idea, but it reflected what is done in Dave Megarry’s *Dungeon!* Board game, where level-appropriate monsters and treasures are placed in each room, albeit randomly.

Lastly, I included advice for both the dungeon master and the players, hopefully to keep them on track while emphasizing that flexibility and the ability to adapt on the fly are key elements to achieve success in any role playing endeavor.

[T] Is there any particular reason that B1 was added to the Basic Set, and similarly, why was it replaced in relatively short order with B2? Apart from the fact that it'd be nice to have a module in the Basic Set to help people figure out how to play, was there any business reason?

[M] The Basic Set was created specifically for the mainstream audience in hopes that D&D would become much more than a niche product. Prior to the release of the Basic Set, D&D was becoming increasingly popular, but mostly within the gaming community. The Basic Set was aimed at the mass market so that it could be sold far more widely – and it really did take off. However, it soon was obvious that most buyers – who had grown up on traditional board games and to whom role playing and dungeon creation were alien concepts – wanted and needed something to allow them to more easily get started. TSR management was aware of that and I believe that they wanted to enhance the product for solid business reasons – to make it easier to grasp and play, thus increasing sales and removing an obstacle to getting started.



Both the monochrome and brown covered versions of **In Search of the Unknown** by Mike Carr. The artist Darlene updated the cover artwork in the revised edition (although the monochrome cover art was kept on the title page of the newer book). Additionally, the art on the back cover (not pictured) was also updated by Darlene, depicting a combat scene between a few adventurers and lizardmen.

## Product Spotlight

It only makes sense to take a deeper look at the adventure module, *In Search of the Unknown*, after our interview with Mike Carr.

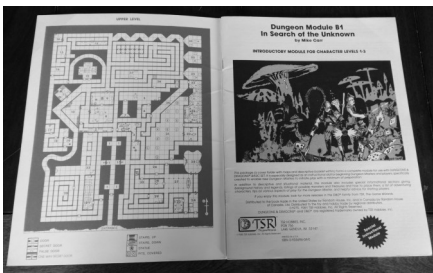
The classic adventure, *In Search of the Unknown*, was one of the truly unique and interesting modules produced for TSR's Basic product line. Written as an instructional book for both dungeon masters and players, this title was available in boxed sets and sold alone. Dungeon module B1 (as it's best known as for most enthusiasts) was found in two formats – the monochrome edition from 1979 and the updated copy with the brown cover in 1981. Although Goodman Games has recently reprinted the adventure in their large hardcover book, *Into the Borderlands* (including a few versions of *Keep on the Borderlands* as well), our review will focus solely on the two original printings of yesteryear.

The first thing that I found interesting when I read this adventure in the early 80s was that there were references in the monochrome (earlier version) book that didn't make sense to me, specifically to different classes and a different version of the game called *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*—I had only played B/X up to that point so when I found “Fighting Men” in the back of the book and “Krago of the Mountains”, a dwarf with 18/54 Strength, I was a bit confused. I hopelessly searched the *Moldvay* rulebook for days, hoping to find answers to the strange differences.



It was only some years later that I found out about the Holmes version of Basic D&D and exceptional Strength scores in AD&D. Although it made sense after I found these things out, I thought it was still strange to find them in a Basic D&D adventure book. Oddly, the later printing of the book that stripped much of the AD&D references still included Krago's exceptional Strength score.

Although several sections and encounter numbering changed in the later printing, the book retained most of its original design and encounter information. A new illustration filled the spot that referenced using this adventure with AD&D, but otherwise, most of the interior illustrations and content remained unchanged. The newer version was updated to better reflect Moldvay rules, using the classes of B/X more accurately and precisely. With the exception of a few edits and changes, the 1981 book remains pretty much the same as the earlier, monochrome version.



In this picture (of the left, inside cover and the detached adventure booklet), we see the iconic upper level map of *In Search of the Unknown*, with its non-standard layout and rooms of varying sizes. Notice the large room with all the pools on the right side of the map.

This picture was taken of the book with the brown cover (1981 version)—the interior maps were a much brighter blue color than the those found in the monochrome book and were better suited for photography.

With the differences of the printings aside, the adventure itself is one-of-a-kind in design. To my knowledge, this book is the only TSR book designed to help fledgling dungeon masters populate a dungeon with monsters and treasure of their own choosing (or randomly, if desired). Several encounter areas have seeded treasures, traps, and magical effects listed but each room still has open space at the end of each description to handwrite monsters and treasures. This unique design allowed dungeon masters to populate each encounter any way they wished, making the adventure their own. This design undoubtedly inspired many dungeon masters to create their very own adventures once getting the general idea from this exercise — obviously, one of the intentions of TSR staff.

So, what about the adventure itself? Designed for three to eight adventurers of first to third level, this 32-page, 56-room dungeon crawler can be added to any campaign. The former secret stronghold of a pair of heroes, the lair and caverns of Quasqueton is generic enough to fit into any main storyline or as a side quest in an existing adventure series. There is a good balance of traps, secret doors, illusions, and trickery to test seasoned players, but is simple enough to be enjoyed by those new to the game. There is a lot of material in this book, one of the early trademarks of the TSR line. Smaller fonts, less illustrations, and lots of content!

One of the biggest standouts in the adventure is the Room of Pools (area 31 in the upper level). The encounter material

spans nearly two pages, and provides adventurers with fourteen mysterious pools to investigate. Each unique pool has an interesting feature that may be beneficial or deadly to curious characters. A quick scan of the pools immediately hints to the fun a dungeon master can have in this large room.

The lower level of adventure locale is not as interesting as the upper portion, but a single area of the unfinished caverns is worth the trip. Area 45, the Cavern of the Mystical Stone, plays like a Deck of Many Things – consuming chips of the magical stone randomly bestows either a positive or negative affect on a character, some of which are permanent! Whereas the aforementioned Room of Pools may be avoided by savvy players, many of the same players will tempt fate hoping for a powerful boon. The effects the author has provided in the d20 roll chart are both interesting and unique, and sometimes quite comical.

This is a sure-fire winner if you are running B/X. It can be plugged in anywhere at anytime and can be customized in advance or played with random monster and treasure seeding. This is one of those adventure books you keep in the bag every time you gather – it could be pulled out and used with ease!

*9023—In Search of the Unknown, B1 – monochrome 1979 edition, 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> printings, brown cover 1981 edition, 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> printings. ISBN on 1981 edition: 0-935696-04-0, list price \$5.50*



## The Magic Shop

A few items of interest found in our double-sized adventure are further detailed here.

### Robes of the Alchemist

When these magical robes are worn, they halve the time to create potions and magic items. The robes provide an AC of 5. *Value: 2,500 GP.*

### Staff of Transmutation

Each charge of the staff allows the user to attempt to transmute a substance to another, different material of equal size. The weight of the transformed material may drastically change when the substance is altered. If the target material makes a saving throw, it fails to change.

Unfortunately, the staff cannot be recharged. *Value: 10,000 GP.*

### Wand of Spell-storing

This ten-charge wand may be used to store magic-user spells, where charges equal their spell level. For example, a 2nd level spell “uses” 2 charges. Once the spell is cast from the wand, the charge(s) and spell are used. *Value: 2,500 GP.*

### Scroll of Rock-to-Slime

The instructions and steps to convert rock to slime have been magically transcribed on this one-time use scroll. When used, a five-foot portion of rock slowly transforms into a mindless green slime creature of full size. The slime has no allegiance to the caster, possibly considering him or her its next victim. *Value: 5,000 GP.*

## Mythology

The double-sized adventure found in the following pages have several new creatures, each described in this issue's Mythology section.

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

### Mud Slime

This creature is created from a failed transmute rock to mud spell where a small portion of a slime was intentionally or accidentally introduced. The flesh of the slime forces the spell to integrate the mud with the creature turning it into a large muddy slime. It acts and behaves as a regular Green Slime however, it takes only half damage from fire due to the earthy elements in its transformed make up.



Art by Je Shields

Armor Class:	Always hit
Hit Dice:	2*
Move:	3' (1")
Attacks:	1
Damage:	As slime (B36).
Special:	Immune to all attacks except fire and cold.

### Gemstone Slime (rare)

Much like the Mud Slime, this creature has been formed through a failed magic spell, where a slime was somehow introduced into the fabled Rock to Gem incantation. The creature appears more sandy than mud and is covered and filled with hundreds of gemstones. Only when the creature dies can the gems be freed from its form. Gems of all sizes and types can be found within the creature. There are a total of 5d20+25 unrefined gems of different varieties, shapes and sizes.

The Gemstone slime is similar to the mud slime in all statistics except its hit dice.

Hit Dice: 4\*\* (max hp)



Art by Mustafa Bekir

### Gebbellurd's Mistake

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 2nd to 3rd level.

*Background:* A nobleman frets over a missing friend, the old alchemist, Gebbellurd. A note from the aging wizard indicated that he had finally discovered the secret to turning stone into gems! However, after indicating he'd travel to the nobleman's keep to demonstrate his secretive work, he's fallen strangely quiet. Gebbellurd is a shy fellow, often holed up in his underground laboratory for months at a time, but with a discovery of this proportion, the nobleman would have expected his friend to have arrived already.

The characters are hired to investigate the home of Gebbellurd, checking on his well-being, and to safeguard his travel back to the keep. The nobleman, Ornatal the Just, worries about his old friend but also eagerly awaits the proof of the alchemist's claims. A spell that turns rock into gems is incredible!

However, the characters will find that when they arrive, the laboratory has been destroyed by misfortune and accidents. After successfully creating the spell to turn common rock into gems, Gebbellurd accidentally set fire to his research, losing a lifetime of work. In a panic to recreate the spell, he inadvertently incorporated an extra element in his revised spell that instead turns rock into slime! Several failed attempts led to a destroyed home filled with lurking slimes.

Gebbellurd has been locked inside his bedchambers without food and water for days, and will likely be near death or dead by the time the characters arrive. Little to none of his research has survived the mishap.

The old alchemist inherited the underground labyrinth from family decades ago and has adapted it into a home and laboratory. Being a wizard, he has created many magical effects to protect his home and to simplify his daily life.

Ornatal can provide directions to the alchemist's home. The journey from his keep is over 8 hours by horse.

#### 1. Entrance to the Home

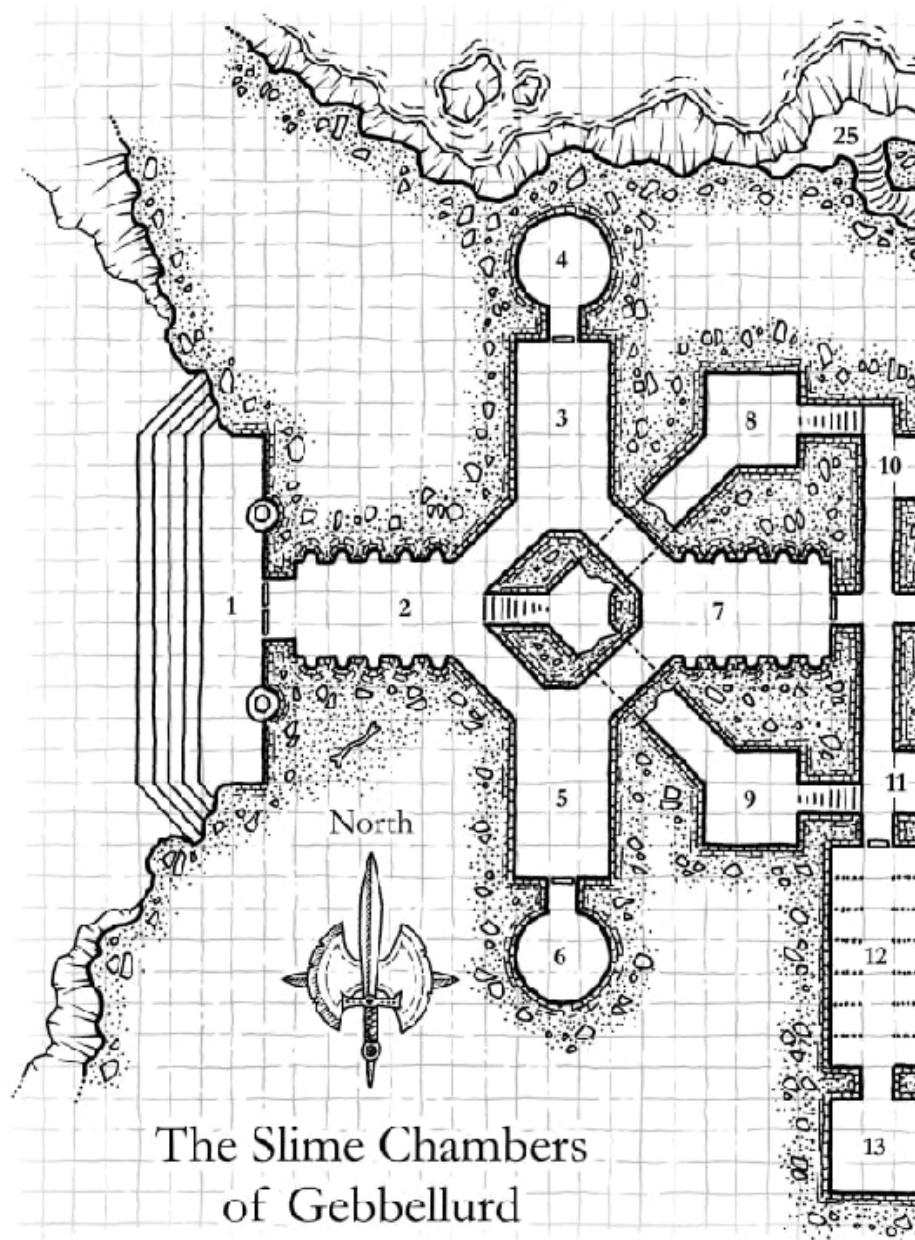
Double doors at the top of a wide staircase built into the side of a mountain provide access to Gebbellurd's home. Most often locked, they are currently found in the opposite state. Glittering pillars on either side of the doors provide light after the sun sets.

A pair of strange (magical) mouths on the doors loudly announce any visitors and bid guests farewell when they depart.

#### 2. Alcove Hall

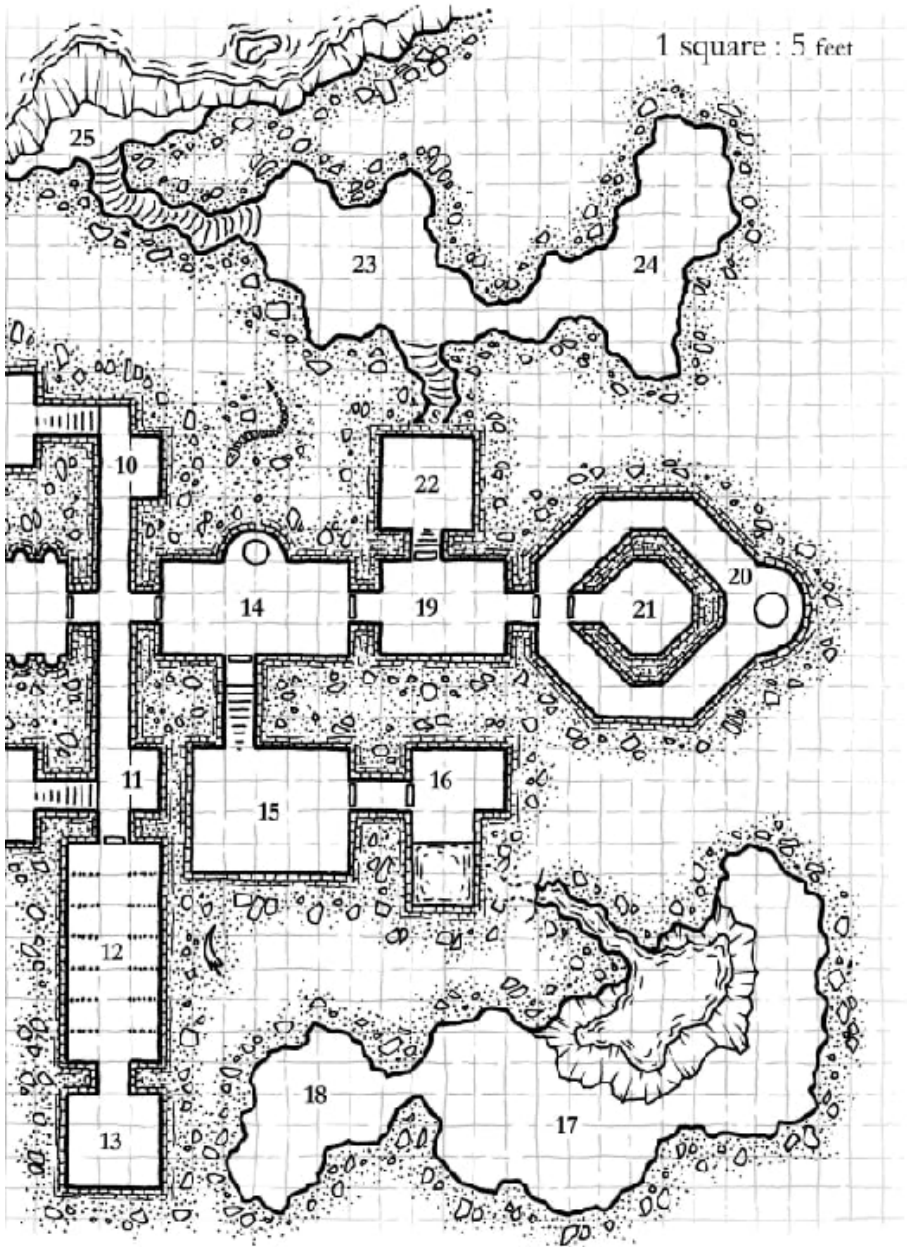
Busts of famous wizards fill the alcoves along the hall. Oddly, one alcove at the eastern end is empty (saved for himself, to be created after his death).

A backpack filled with common travel gear lies spilled on the floor midway down the hall. A walking staff is found under the loose items.



The Slime Chambers  
of Gebbellurd

Note that a full adventure map can be found in PDF at [DriveThruRPG.com](http://DriveThruRPG.com) or in print through [ThrowiGames.com](http://ThrowiGames.com).



### 3. Sitting Room

Six chairs and a large couch are positioned around this long room to maximize conversation. A small fireplace in the west wall appears to have not been used for many weeks. A small **green slime** has hidden itself under the couch but will slide out when movement or noise in the room is detected.

**Green Slime:** (AC automatic, HD 2\*, HP: 8, #AT 1 touch, D turn flesh to slime in 1d4 rounds, Save F1, ML 12, Special: harmed only by fire or cold, XP 25)

### 4. North Guest Room

Gebbellurd infrequently entertained guests but had a place reserved for visitors as needed. The room is furnished with all the needs of an overnight guest.

### 5. Library

A battle between tiny **imps** and a **green slime** may be heard from this room long before it is entered.

**Imps (6):** (AC 7, HD 1/2, HP: 3 ea, #AT 1 flame dart, D 1-2, Save F1, ML 8, XP 5 ea)

**Green Slime:** as area 3.

Regardless of which side the adventurers assist, the helped side turns on the group as soon as they are able.

The room is filled with hundreds of non-magical books on nature, geography, and other mundane topics. Gebbellurd's alchemy and magic tomes can be found in area 19. However, there is a 25% chance that a magical scroll may be found tucked into one of the books.

### 6. South Guest Room

Similar in design and contents as the northern room (area 4).

### 7. Dining Area

A well-dressed goblin stands upon a long table in the center of this room, staring at the door to the east. He startles easily but is well-spoken and fairly intelligent. Gebbellurd's assistant has barely escaped a pursuing slime that was slithering in the hallway beyond the east door. He hopes arriving characters may help him find his missing master.

**Gibby, Goblin assistant:** (AC 6, HD 1-1, HP: 3, #AT 1 Wand of Cold, 2 charges left, D 6-36, Save NM, ML 6, XP 6)

Gibby has taken his master's **Wand of Cold** from the laboratory to try to help free his master who is pinned down somewhere in the eastern part of the underground facility. He is not very brave and likely to flee at the first sign of danger.

The poor goblin has a small bit of slime on his pant leg. If unnoticed, it will climb under his clothing and attach to his skin in 1d6 turns.

### 8. Kitchen

Evidence of a hasty retreat is quite apparent—cabinets are open, boxes are overturned and emptied, and chairs are scattered about. The corpse of an old dwarven woman leans against a nearby cabinet, her eyes wide with fright.

A container in a well-hidden niche behind a dry sink holds a ruby necklace (500 gp value).



## 9. Store Room

Boxes, crates, barrels, and bags are neatly stacked along the walls of the room. Most are marked with familiar village names and are filled with various local produce, salted meats, and beer.

Six dog harnesses hang from a rack on the south wall. They look to fit rather large beasts.

A small slime lurks behind one of the crates on the west wall, oozing out to meet inquisitive characters.

**Green Slime:** (AC automatic, HD 1\*, HP: 4, #AT 1 touch, D turn flesh to slime in 1d4 rounds, Save F1, ML 12, Special: harmed only by fire or cold, XP 15)

Sitting on the top shelf (out of sight unless checked), a wooden box holds **100 gp**—the money used for the next supply shipment from traveling merchants.

## 10 & 11. Hallway Guardians

Guests that wander in halls beyond their quarters are stopped by one of **two iron living statues** (one in each small alcove) who obstruct the uninvited from venturing further in the alchemist's home. Although they merely prevent access to the hallway beyond their station, they will not attack unless provoked or ignored. They will verbally warn guests before attacking. They do not pursue any who flee back to the western portion of the alchemist's home.

**Living Statues, Iron (2):** (AC 2, HD 4, HP: 16 ea, #AT 2, D 1-8/1-8 + special, Save F4, ML 11, Special: non-magical weapons may stick to the statue, XP 75 ea)

## 12. Kennels (Dungeon)

Before Gebbellurd inherited his home, this part of the underground facility was used as a dungeon to hold prisoners. Now, the alchemist prefers to use this area for his hunting dogs. Unfortunately, most of the dogs have escaped with the kennelmaster. Two older dogs remain in their cells, scared and hungry.

**Hunting Dogs, Oka and Brog:** (AC 7, HD 2, HP: 9, 7, #AT 1 bite, D 1-6, Save F1, ML 8, Special: will not attack Gebbellurd or Kennelmaster, XP 20 ea)

Each dog may have a different reaction to the characters if freed from their kennels.

Hunting Dog Reactions	
1d6 Roll	Reaction
1-2	Dog attack!
3-5	Dog flees the area.
6+	Dog becomes friendly.
<i>Charisma bonus added to roll.</i>	

## 13. Kennelmaster Quarters

Fleeing the alchemist's home at the first sign of trouble, the Kennelmaster left most of his common belongings behind in his room. Aside from the typical trappings of a modest bedroom, the area has only one interesting trinket. A necklace hanging from a full length mirror is actually a **Medallion of Control Animal**. This magical item acts like the potion of the same name except that it may be used once per day.



## 14. Laboratory

Hundreds of strange tubes, beakers and pots cover six long tables in this area. Intelligent characters will immediately recognize this room to be a laboratory. Several pieces of parchment and a dozen books are scattered about the lab, each inscribed with various alchemy recipes and tests. Pieces of burnt paper look to have been put together as if trying to reassemble a puzzle. Each of the alchemy scrolls and books are valuable but not a single one is extraordinary. A search should reveal a newly started recipe that has many ingredients and steps added and crossed out. Additionally, the characters will find dried, burnt slime in several places in the room.

## 15. Storeroom

Gebbellurd kept spare laboratory equipment and ingredients in this area south of laboratory. The remnants of broken glass bottles and tubes are found on the floor as if someone or something rushed through the area quickly, heading east.

## 16. Well Room

Buckets and barrels filled with clean water are found here, stacked along the walls near the opening to a 15' deep well. The well's water is nearly at the level of the floor.

## 17. Underground Cavern

A 30-second swim from area 16 ends in a pool in this cavern. The pool is cold and clear, fed from an underground spring. Muddy footprints are seen along the edge, leading west.

The area is quite dark but once there is illumination, the form of a humanoid can be seen in the northernmost part of the cavern. This is the corpse of Nabby, one of two goblin assistants to Gebbellurd. His form is covered in muddy slime, killed by the foul creature that now lurks in area 18. A silver key in his pocket opens the large chest in area 21.

## 18. Small Cavern

After killing the poor goblin in area 17, the newly created **Mud Slime** now lurks in the drier cave away from the pool.

**Mud Slime:** (AC automatic, HD 2\*, HP: 8, #AT 1 touch, D turn flesh to muddy-slime in 1d4 rounds, Save F1, ML 12, Special: harmed only by fire (1/2 damage) or cold, XP 25) - *details found on page 9.*

## 19. Gebbellurd's Library

The old alchemist keeps his most treasured works in his private library. There are at least 2d6+3 valuable tomes on alchemy on the shelves in this room. Additionally, a spellbook lying open on a table holds 1d4 1st-level and 1d4 2nd-level magic-user spells.

## 20. Ancient Temple

When Gebbellurd inherited the underground facility, he was told about the mysterious temple at its far end. Since then, the old alchemist has avoided the area. A shrine to an ancient evil god is here, unleashing its wrath on any lawful beings that enter its sphere of influence. When any lawful creature moves within 20' of the shrine, a **small demon** is summoned to slay offending trespassers. The hearts of those who

are slain are sacrificed to the evil god, putting a mysterious curse on any of the friends and family of the dead.

**Small Demon:** (AC 3, HD 5\*\*, HP: 20, #AT 3 bite, claws, D 1-6/1-4/1-4, Save F5, ML 12, Special: immune to fire, non-magic items deal half damage, XP 425)

Although risky to take, the idol in the shrine is made solid gold and has two large ruby eyes (total worth, 5,000 gp).

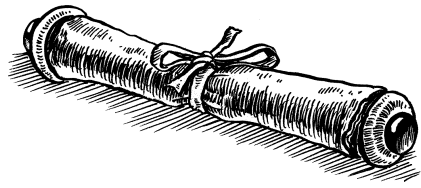
## 21. Locked Treasure Room

A locked door keeps guests and servants from accessing Gebbellurd's treasure room. A large chest and two glass cases hold the alchemist's most prized possessions. Only Gebbellurd has the keys to the door and chest. However, one of his goblin assistants (Nabby, area 17) has a spare key to the chest.

The chest holds **Robes of the Alchemist**. A **Staff of Transmutation** and a **Wand of Spell-Storing** are secured behind the glass cases. Descriptions for all three magical items can be found on page 8.

## 22. Gebbellurd's Bedroom

The poor alchemist has been unable to escape his home, infected by one of the many slimes loose in the facility. He is near death (or dead, GM choice), slumped against the north wall so close to the secret exit out. A nearby poorly scrawled note, addressed to Ornatal, apologizes for his failures. A **Scroll of Rock-to-Slime** can be found on his desk and a bag of **100 sp**, **50 gp** and **10 pp** can be found within a drawer.



## 23. Gem-filled Cavern

A large cavern glitters when a light source is brought into the wide-open space. Dozens of large gems are seen embedded in the rock walls of the cavern. One rock wall moves when characters enter—it's a **Gemstone Slime!**

**Gemstone Slime:** (AC automatic, HD 4\*\*, HP: 32, #AT 1 touch, D turn flesh to muddy-slime in 1d4 rounds, Save F1, ML 12, Special: harmed only by fire (1/2 damage) or cold, XP 175) - *details found on page 9.*

Once slain, the gemstone slime leaves behind 5d20+25 unrefined gems of various types.

Another 3d6+3 raw gems may be pried from the walls of the cavern.

## 24. Gem Mine

A newly-started mine has recently begun to provide Gebbellurd with dozens of large, raw gems. At least 1d6 unrefined gems of various types (each) may be found with a few hours of careful digging. However, the number of gems found slowly diminishes within another thirty to forty feet of excavation.

## 25. Lake Exit

The underground tunnel exits to a ledge above a small lake. A rope ladder descends down into the water where a two-man sailboat is moored.

## Spellbound

Up to this issue, the Spellbound section has focused on existing spells in the B/X rulebooks, highlighting those that are powerful or underappreciated. In this issue, we contemplate other options to support spellcasters, especially at the lower levels.

Later editions of D&D brought about the idea of *cantrips*, lesser incantations of little power that could be used limitlessly. Cantrips could be considered zero-level spells, so easy to learn that even thieves or Halflings could learn one or two. This is a considerable departure from the rules as written in the Moldvay books, so—for the purpose of exploration of possible options, let's consider two possibilities.

What if Elves, Dwarves, and Halflings had access to simple cantrips—to be used in their daily lives? What about higher intelligence magic-users and thieves? Could they benefit from their great intellect and learn additional incantations? Consider the following example cantrips.

### Breeze

The caster causes a slight wind to affect a 10' area for a brief moment. The wind is strong enough to snuff out a candle or turn a page in a book.

### Fetch

An item within 10' of the caster of one pound or less is magically pulled along a surface to the caster. Note that the item does not move in the air (gravity applies).

### Mend

A normal needle and thread are magically instructed to sew materials for 10 minutes. The caster may leave the area while the instruments continue to work.

### Scribe

The caster may verbally instruct a quill or other writing instrument to write. The caster must be able to speak aloud for the cantrip to work.

### Spark

Snapping his or her fingers, the caster creates a brief spark or small flame for a brief second.

There are a multitude of options for simple cantrips that won't upset the balance of the game but instead provide in-game usefulness. For example, grabbing the sleeping guards keys? The cantrip 'fetch' works great for that!

The number of cantrips available to the character would equal their Intelligence bonus.

Another option for adding a little extra help to low-level spellcasters is allow them to cast first level spells more often—this makes first level spells behave like cantrips in a slight way. This option allows the caster to pick one spell to cast more than once per day as the table below details.

One Spell	INT 13-15	INT 16-17	INT 18
Bonus:	+1	+2	+3

For example, a magic-user with an Intelligence of 17 could pick one spell per day to be cast a total of 3 times.

After their encounter with the undead rats and the old knight, Sir Cralnat, the group decided to leave the storage chamber (area A6) and continued north.

A network of tunnels under the abbey can lead to adventurers becoming lost.

### Hallway from Area A6

The hallway extends over 100 feet before splitting into two separate tunnels. Each tunnel continues north but slants west (the upper tunnel) or east (the lower tunnel). Both tunnels appear equally unused. A hidden room between the tunnels is accessible by a secret door on either side of its southern point (see map on page 20).

**Secret Door Check:** add +1 to the chance due to older doors.

### A7. Secret Room

Triangular in shape, this secret room has been sealed for many years. Dust covers everything within the dark area, suggesting decades of forgotten existence. Either secret entrance reveals the contents of the room: two skeletal figures lie on the floor, limbs entwined and bony fingers clutching missing throats as if the two had died locked in battle. Although one figure appears human in structure, the other is much larger with large horns protruding from its misshapen skull. Near the northern wall, a crate sits upon a large wooden chest. Nearby, a pair of rotting stools is tucked under a simple, wooden table.

Closer inspection reveals that the larger skeleton is that of a minotaur. How it came to this place and

how the two died remains a mystery. Note that the remains of more minotaurs will be found in future issues of this fanzine.

The crate lid has been partially pried off, revealing a dozen glass bottles within. Removing the bottles from their compartments within the crate will expose their faded labels and the remnants of liquid that once filled them. Hints of pink, red and yellow liquids are each found within four bottles respectively. If tasted, all three liquid types taste pleasant yet old and stale. The old potions were once full potions of **healing** (pink), **herosim** (red) and **control human** (yellow). Although old and diminished, if all four potion bottles are consumed of the same color, it will effect the imbiber as one complete potion of that type. Thus, there are three usable potions in the crate. Note that the **heroism** and **control human** potion descriptions are found in the Expert Rules.

The heavy, wooden chest is locked and no key for it will be found in this area. Once unlocked, a hidden mechanism will fire a poison dart at anyone found in front of the chest (south side, unless moved). If the poison dart strikes its target, the affected character must make a saving throw versus Death Ray or Poison to avoid falling into a deep sleep for twelve hours. A suit of well-crafted and shiny plate mail armor is found within the chest, its chest piece engraved with the Broken God's emblem, a wide-shouldered, faceless man split into two halves from shoulder to opposite waist.

*Armor of the Broken God*: **plate mail +1**, adds +1 to all saving throws except Death Ray or Poison which is instead made at +2. The armor can never become dirty and will magically shrink or enlarge to fit most humanoid creatures (humans, elves, dwarves, and halflings).

### A8. Study Chamber

The unlocked door allows entry into the lower level study chamber. Hundreds of deteriorating scrolls and rotting tomes, exposed to excessive moisture and years of decay, lie in crumbling piles on tables, shelves, and chairs. Monks new to the abbey were once tasked with studying the lessons and doctrines carefully written upon the old parchments. Unfortunately, nearly every scroll and book is completely useless. An hour or two of searching will reveal one well-preserved scroll that has survived the ruinous environment. Characters will discover this to be a specially constructed **scroll of protection from minotaurs**. This scroll acts as other, similar protection scrolls do.

### A9. Supply Closet

Although area A6 was a much larger storage room, it was primarily used to store food and wine. This smaller area once stored general supplies for the abbey, including rope, wooden cups and plates, empty barrels, extra monk attire, sandals, brooms, buckets and linens. Most of these items are now gone, however, remnants of broken pieces of the former supplies should help unravel the mystery of the room's

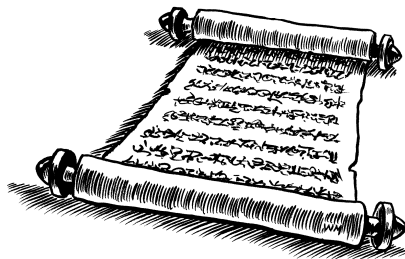
former purpose. Left behind under an old shelf is a small bag of silver coins, stashed here for some unknown desire. There are **66 sp** in the bag.

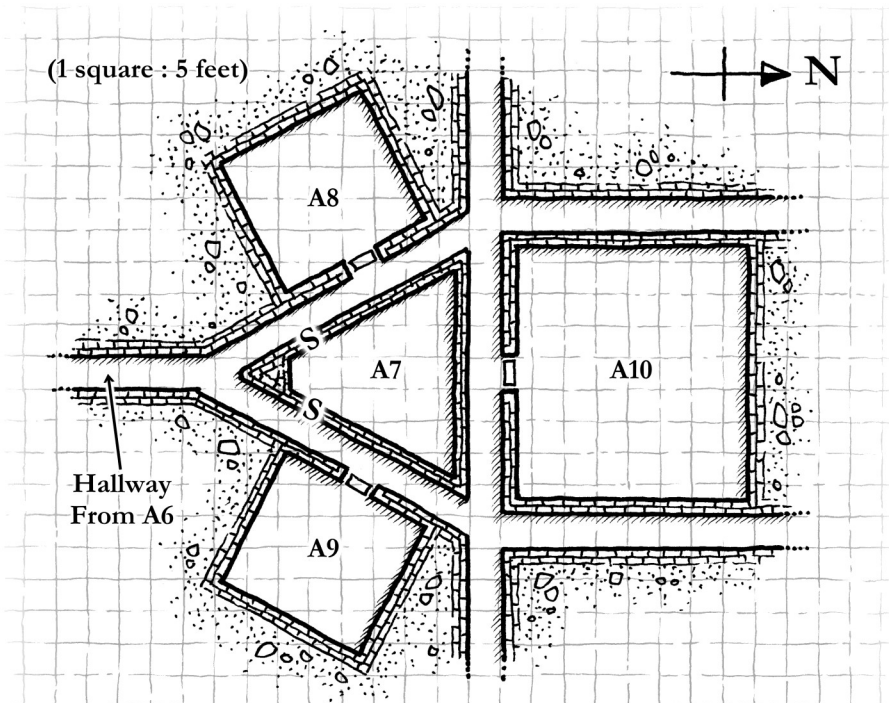
### A10. Initiate Training Area

Newly arrived initiates were to receive daily training and combat instructions from senior-level monks in this large room. The floor was once well-padded, covered in cotton-filled burlap mats. Blunt weapons and training dummies once lined the long walls. Most of the floor mats and dummies have rotted, becoming a mushy mess of disintegrated materials. Characters walking upon the old floor mats will disturb the family of **centipedes** now living in this unused room.

**Centipedes (1d4+1)**: (AC 9, HD ½, HP 2 ea, #AT 1 bite, D Poison, Save Normal Man, ML 7, XP 6 ea)

Characters bit by the centipedes must make a saving throw versus Death Ray or Poison or die. Over the years, the family of centipedes have accumulated dozens of silver and gold trinkets that can be discovered in their nest within the rotting mats. Characters should find 3d6 simple items, each worth 1d4 gp, after a few hours of careful searching.





## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God - Map 3

### What Comes Next?

In the next few issues, Bindor, Whystal, and Ensa will avoid the northern part of the underground maze, instead taking the western hallway past area A8. This northern passage will lead them back up to the ground floor of the abbey where they will begin to unravel further parts of the mystery. There are many areas that can be explored in the rest of the underground labyrinth that will not be covered in this fanzine (except a few parts that may be explored many issues from now). The majority of the story will take the characters to the upper portions of the mysterious Crimson Abbey where they may finally encounter the Broken God. Keep an eye out for future issues!

### Homebrew Rule #3:

Magic-users and Clerics gain spell bonuses corresponding to their respective primary ability bonus. E.g. A magic-user with a 13 Intelligence gains 1 first level bonus spell to cast each day (giving them a total of 2). If your system allows for first level clerics to have spells, it works in the same way for them too (or when they reach 2nd level, they get their first spell and the bonus spell). Note that they cannot gain bonus spells for levels they haven't reached yet. A 1st level magic-user with an 18 Intelligence cannot yet gain the bonus 2nd and 3rd level spells.

Int /Wis Score	1st level Spell	2nd level Spell	3rd level Spell
13-15	+1	n/a	n/a
16-17	+1	+1	n/a
18	+1	+1	+1

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Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my *Dungeon Delvers* story!

Additionally, very special thanks go to author Mike Carr for taking time to answer my questions!

### Convention Calendar

Convention	Date, Location
ShireCon I	September 22nd, Falls Village, CT
GameHole Con VI	Nov. 8th—11th, Madison, WI
TotalCon 33	Feb. 21st—24th, Marlborough, MA
GaryCon XI	Mar. 7th—10th, Lake Geneva, WI
North Texas RPGCon XI	Jun. 6th—9th, Dallas-FW, TX
Gen Con 2019 (52)	Aug. 1st—4th, Indianapolis, IN

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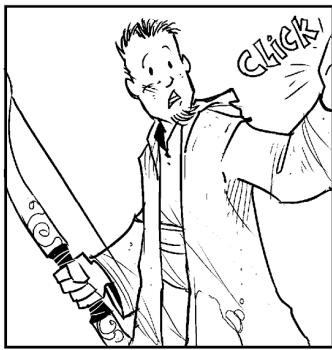
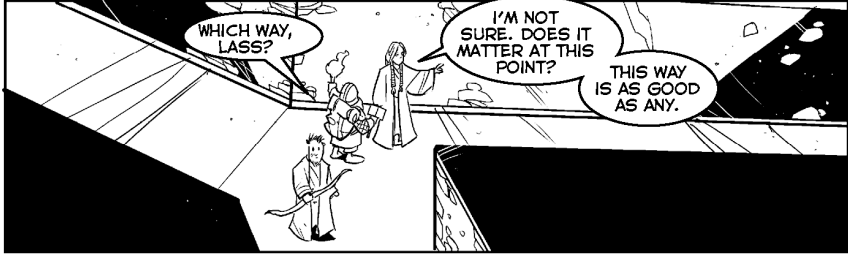
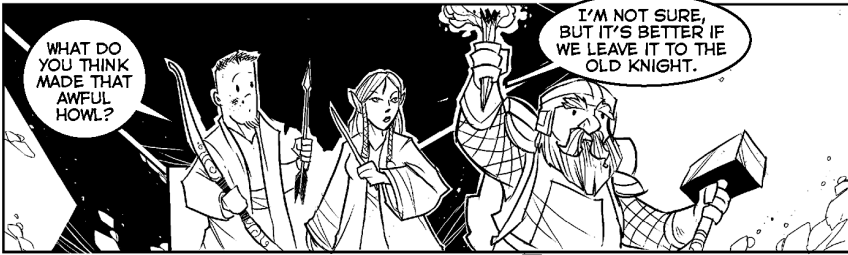
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# Back to Basic X

7



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

## eSports D&D League — A Note from the Fanzine Creator

With the recent announcement of a D&D ESports concept by Hasbro's CEO, Brian Goldner, RPG gamers of all experience levels quickly voiced their opinions on the matter. Some expressed interest in the idea while others immediately proclaimed that such an option was not for them or their style of play.

Regardless of where one stands on the topic, it does resurface an old point once debated at tables years ago. "Is gaming, specifically D&D, a competitive game or one of cooperative storytelling?" We can probably assume that a competitive ESports league takes something like the Adventurer's league to the masses in a digital format, via Twitch, YouTube, or similar channels. Perhaps a real-time setting, much like a convention tournament adventure, broadcasted to viewers will be worth watching. My issue with ESports or competitive events is that it forces players to seek points and achievements in-

stead of the bene-fits of the storyline and/or characters. We know that point-seeking, power-leveling character play changes the way D&D and other classic role-playing games are designed and played. Many classic versions of our hobby, especially B/X D&D, are ill-suited to such a style of gaming.

Time will tell if this new concept will catch on with players. I suspect that many grognards will continue playing their games the same way as always, unaffected by a competitive league or new style of gameplay. Newer players to the game, used to watching professional actors playing D&D for hours online, or enjoying other ESports leagues such as Overwatch and League of Legends, will likely enjoy the new twist on competitive gaming.

I might add that this concept may be where role-playing moves squarely into roll-playing.

*Thom Wilson*

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## Back to Basix V. 2 No 4

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Not every product this fanzine reviews has to be an officially published, for-sale production. Sometimes, an interesting project comes along that isn't out there for sale and is a personal work of love and desire. The **Companion Supplement** by James Bobb is one such work. I watched his progress over a year or so more as he slowly worked through the development and digital publication of this 129-page supplement and was overjoyed when it was finished. You could feel his devotion to its completion in his many updates to B/X fans on the internet, and when it was done, the clamor of fans to obtain copies.

There are several other "Companion" supplements out there, both for free download and sale. James Bobb has clearly stated, for obvious reasons, why this particular version would never be for sale, at least in its current design. I won't dig into those particulars; those of you who have it, know what I mean. However, as a free supplement for GMs and players to use at the table, this is a great resource by an old-school B/X enthusiast. It—much like other "book 3" attempts—gives us the extensions we need for higher level characters and campaign options not covered in the first two rulebooks.

So, first the light stuff—James uses a retro font reminiscent of the originals found in the original TSR publications. It's not exact but it's pretty darn close. You can definitely feel it. Additionally, the tables are designed quite well, with alternating

color rows and good spacing. Readability is spot-on here. As is typical with works of this nature, the chapters are organized and ordered as the original books, making it easy to find what you need quickly.

Purists will immediately see some additions to these rules that will test their interest levels. Additional classes have been added to give players the option to try something new. Giantkin, Gnomes, Druids, Paladins, and Rangers have been included in the new book. Level "skills" have also been included, giving existing and new classes more crunch. For example, Clerics have the Theurgy skill at 2nd level, allowing them to craft magical items. This added skill ability progression is new to B/X and offers an interesting look into added depth in the class. At first, I wrinkled my nose at several of these skill options but as I read further, I found most of them to be well thought out and not overly powerful. Later in the book, Bobb offers additional "adventuring" skills to add even more flavor to the game.

Monsters and armor in the book are represented in both ascending and descending armor class—this is definitely a stretch from B/X but those that like a little variety in the system (or are just fans of OSR games) will find the double-stat helpful.

Conditions have been added to challenge the characters during long battles or at times when resting is impossible. The added conditions really make for more challenging situations.

As with other, higher level supplements, this book also touches upon mass combat, fortification building, and extra-planar travel. They are lightly covered but this seems acceptable—the book still keeps focus on character development and standard adventuring styles. A section near the end of the book offered even more fighting style options for fighters and some demi-humans.

I really couldn't find anything I disliked in this supplement. The information was neatly presented, important areas were covered fully, and added options were available throughout the book. I only wished that I had the physical book to read it more often.

**Companion Supplement**, James Bobb, free PDF by email—jamesbobb.rrg@hotmail.com.

## Interview with a Legendary Artist—Erol Otus

As most of us B/X fans know, the covers of the Moldvay Basic and Marsh/Cook Expert boxed sets were illustrated by Erol Otus. Those covers may have single-handedly pulled me into the game, long before I knew what D&D was. I'd guess that many fans of the early game were inspired by those wonderful covers. I was fortunate enough to be able to interview Mr. Otus recently. Additionally, he has agreed to publish some early art of his for the first time in this issue of *Back to Basic!*

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

[Erol] Our group started playing D&D in '74 and I had been reading the "Strategic Review". Somewhere in there it was announced that a new magazine, "The Dragon" was coming. I started sending in unsolicited artwork to them in early '76. I had a subscription and when the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue arrived I was stunned to see my first published color illustration inside, "The Remorhaz". Over the next couple of years they published several more of

my pieces including "The Ankheg" which I designed and illustrated.

Dave Trampier had left the TSR art dept. and they were looking for a new staff artist. Out of the blue I got a call from Dave Sutherland, who asked me if I would be interested in joining them. He seemed surprised I was all the way in Berkeley, CA. I had a theory that because at the time the Berkeley area code was 415, and his was 414 he thought I was close by. They flew me out for an interview. It was quite magical seeing the Dungeon Hobby shop and the rest of the offices. I moved to Lake Geneva and joined the TSR art department in the summer of '79.

*[T] After you were hired, do you recall which of your pieces was first published in a TSR product?*

[E] Whenever I try to think of the first pieces, my memory always goes back to my first months. At that time there was just Dave & I in the art dept. and he was teaching me how to make these monochrome color cover illustrations. Some of them were for playing

aids, like “Non-Player Character Records”. These were painstaking to create, as a separate black and white illustration was needed for each tone of color. These had to be carefully aligned with registration marks. You didn’t really know what it would look like until it was printed. It’s interesting, these days something like that is trivial to create using layers in a digital paint program. Similar to digital illustrations, there was no physical original that matched the final printed version.

[T] *Are there any particular pieces you created for the Basic and/or Expert D&D lines that you are particularly proud of?*

[E] The cover of the Basic Box is one of my favorite color paintings and the Mad Hermit holds a special place. But the Three Wizards Dividing Treasure makes me happy whenever I look at it. It captures the sometimes not so glorious aftermath of the adventure with, I think, Vancian humor. I am still pleased by the three very different expressions on three very different faces. Anyone who plays a lot of D&D will see some truths there.

[T] *Do you remember whose idea it was to put a portion of the Basic boxed set illustration into the Expert box set illustration?*

[E] I actually don’t remember, other than it wasn’t my idea. We ended up photographing the first painting, I glued the photo to the illustration board, then painted around it.



The Mad Hermit in B2—Keep on the Borderlands

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

[E] There was an idea for the cover of “They’ve Invaded Pleasantville” to reproduce Grant Wood’s “American Gothic” but change some elements: give the wife antennae and put a flying saucer in the background sky. When I finished the painting, TSR management decided not to use it because they thought I copied the original painting too closely and there could be legal issues. This was nonsense, of course, but the heads of the company were still smarting from their blunders with “Deities & Demigods” and so were overreacting. It was frustrating because the concept wasn’t my idea but I really applied myself to the task.

Fantasy Arts Enterprises produced “The Necromican,” a book of magic-user spells before “Booty & the Beasts”. Other products included “Magic and Technological Item Cards” and “Geomorphic Dungeon Modules”. I did the illustrations and



graphics for all of them. The business was formed from members of our D&D gaming group—including Paul Reiche III, who went on to create some of the greatest computer games of all time.

*[T] What sort of things do you do to "recharge the batteries" or to spark artistic inspiration after a lengthy project or heavy workload?*

[E] If I'm having trouble coming up with inspiration/concepts sometimes you just have to drop it for a while, don't actively think about it and let the part of your mind that keeps your heart beating help you out. Before making art it's often good to get some exercise, really helps the brain. I like tennis because it combines fun gaming competition with exercise.

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

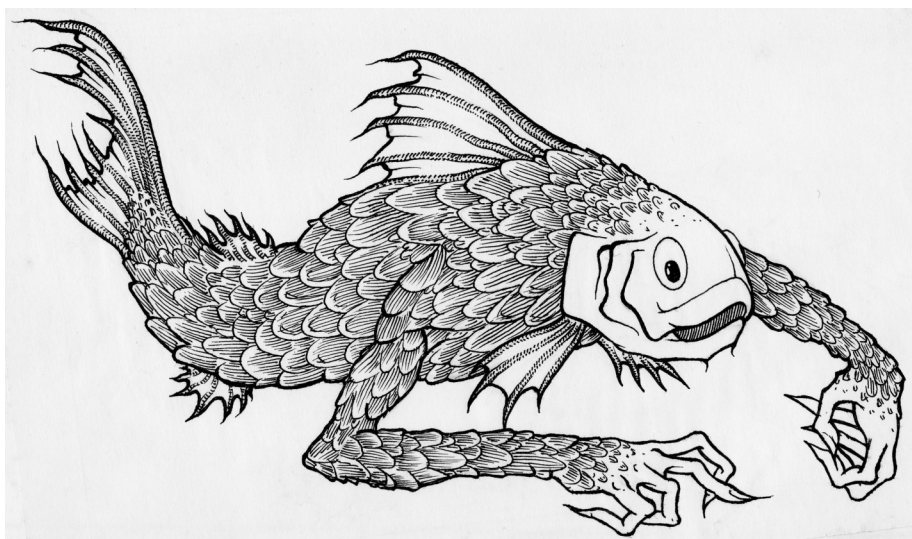
[E] Given unlimited resources, I'd like to create an online computer role playing game. Maybe not massively, but 'somethingely'. It would be fun to bring my aesthetics to that genre.

*[T] Did you always want to publish your own adventures, or did that come later in your career (e.g. North Texas RPG Con)?*

[E] Before joining TSR, as part of F.A.E. (Fantasy Art Enterprises), we did publish books of spells, monsters, and treasure but not complete adventures. I still haven't really, I did create modules for the North Texas RPG Con, but I only printed a handful of playtest copies and the Con produced a limited run "digest" edition. I'm not sure that qualifies as being published.

*[T] What are you working on these days?*

[E] Right now, I'm in the early stages of working on a cover for Greg Gillespie's latest project going over



The **Kuklapi**, by Erol Otus, found in both the New Monster section and Dungeon Crawl of this issue.



The **Indulger**, by Erol Otus, found in both the New Monster section and Dungeon Crawl of this issue.

possible concepts. Also thinking about the next adventure for my AD&D 1<sup>st</sup> edition campaign.

*[T] Are you very selective when taking on work from firms or is it a matter of timing?*

[E] I think I'm fairly selective about projects. One of the main things is having creative freedom. I want to respect and follow the needs of the product, stay true to the content, but at the same time come up with the concepts myself.

Note that the illustrations found on these pages were to end up in the sequel of "Booty and the Beasts", a book that unfortunately never materialized. The illustration on the back cover was work that was submitted to TSR but was never used.

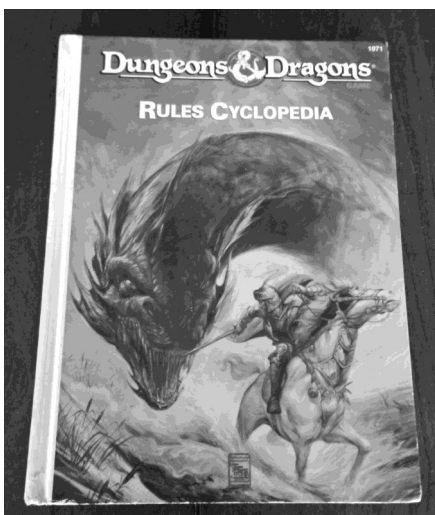
Erol has allowed us to print these three "new" illustrations for the first time! Thank you, Mr. Otus!

## Product Spotlight

Although this fanzine focuses primarily on B/X material, there's no reason not to review BECMI rulebooks—in fact, I've been trying to get a review of the mighty **Rules Cyclopeda** into *Back to BasiX* for some time.

First published in 1991, the **Rules Cyclopeda** was compiled and developed by Aaron Allston. The 304-page tome was printed in a triple-column format using a tiny font to likely maximize word count per page. Some of the text bleeds into the bottom border and the print coloring is unusual but this hardcover book is overflowing with information. With an original cover price of \$24.95, this book had great value for its cost. Although compiled into a single tome from previous BECMI books authored by Mentzer and others, owning the **Rules Cyclopeda** was a necessity for GMs.





The original printing of the Rules Cyclopedia

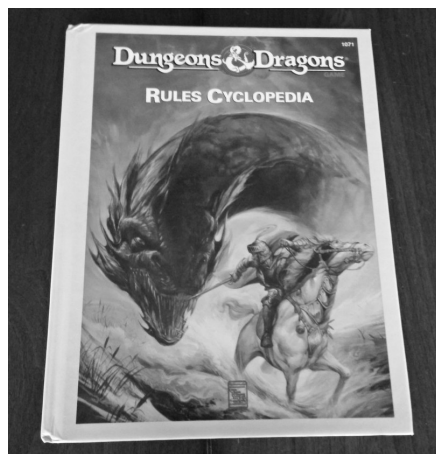
First, it was a great resource to find details about the two optional classes, the Druid and Mystic. Spells just for the Druid class are included as well. To further enhance fighters, the Weapon Mastery rules found on page 75 and their special effects on pages 78 and 79 are extremely interesting. Those wanting to add a little crunch to their fighting mechanics will enjoy this section. General skills start on page 81, giving characters many extra abilities—these feel very much like the early 2nd edition AD&D skills do.

Combat information begins on page 102 and highlights a lot of information and expansions to the early game. Armor classes from 19 to –20 are shown and THACO, touched upon in an earlier section, reappears. Special combat (e.g. striking, unarmed), mass combat, and rules for aerial and naval battles appear in this section. These twenty-five pages cover a lot of fighting rules.

A section for special GM procedures—including character conditions and resolution to complex situations—is found in Chapter 13. Topics like character aging, spell effects, and damage to magical items are found here and are extremely useful.

Chapters on the Planes of Existence and intelligent foes (e.g. spellcasting monsters) are worth the read. Appendices for Mystara, AD&D game conversions, and character and adventure sheets are great add-ons. The Mystara maps are in full color! The great part about this book is that it's a central resource to use when playing Basic through Immortals D&D. The compilation brings all the information into a single book and uses the space to fully detail both simple and complex topics. For example, the Wish spell detail nearly takes up one full page! The **Rules Cyclopedia** is an essential book for any D&D player or collector.

*1071—Rules Cyclopedia, 1991 edition, ISBN: 1-56076-085-0, list price \$24.95. RPGNow.com reprint (print on demand) available, \$29.99, identifier: 2370009026539.*



The print-on-demand version of the Rules Cyclopedia, a slightly larger book in size.

## The Magic Shop

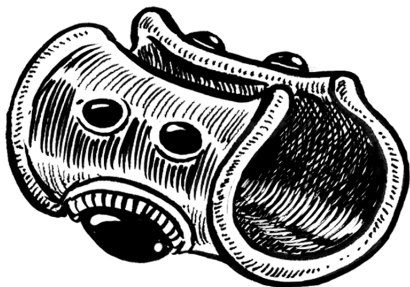
Finding new and exciting magical items is often what drives characters to explore and take risks in dangerous locales.

### Bracers of Distortion

As soon as these brass and ruby-studded bracers are placed on the wrists, the wearer's image appears to distort and move as if there were several versions of them all slightly out of phase with one another. Those close to the wearer are less impacted by the strange distortion but attackers from afar will find it hard to pinpoint their foe's actual location. The wearer's armor class (AC) is four points lower (vs. missiles only) when wearing the bracers.

Note that the Bracers of Distortion cannot be worn over heavier armors (e.g. plate and chainmail).

*Value: 7,500 GP.*



### Necklace of Spell Negation

Six black stones hang from a silver chain designed to be worn around the neck. These magical stones are artifacts of the Negative Plane and will absorb most any hostile spell cast at the wearer. Each stone can absorb one spell—once it has been

used, it no longer works to absorb spells cast at the wearer.

The wearer cannot select which hostile spell to negate—each spell that targets the wearer has a 25% chance of being absorbed. Note that area of effect spells cannot be absorbed.

The necklace is found with 1d6 usable stones. *Value: 10,000 GP.*



### Staff of the High Priest

One of the most powerful staves known to clerics is the Staff of the High Priest. This highly coveted staff is difficult to identify due to its simple and unadorned design.

The staff has three main abilities: it can store one spell per spell level each day, can fully heal one injured or sick individual once per day, and can boost the morale of friends while demoralizing enemies.

When the cleric prays for spells, one "extra" spell per spell level also gets stored within the staff (may replace an existing spell, chosen by the cleric).

The staff heals an injured individual fully and cures them of any diseases or sickness. The staff cannot remove curses or other unnatural afflictions.

All friends of the cleric are Blessed within sight of the staff, and all foes suffer Bane in the same manner (as the reverse of the Bless spell).

*Value: 40,000 to 50,000 GP.*

## Mythology

Erol Otus's two new creatures are this issue's Mythology section (and appearing the two Quarterly Dungeon Crawls too).

### Kuklapi

The Kuklapi (pron. "kook-lah-pee") is often the horrific result of a failed reincarnation. When the deceased target has either drowned or died near water, a failed reincarnation spell may instead produce this semi-aquatic creature. Small populations of Kuklapi have been found in shallow fresh water. Sages believe that these creatures can produce Kuklapi offspring, sometimes mating with other aquatic species.

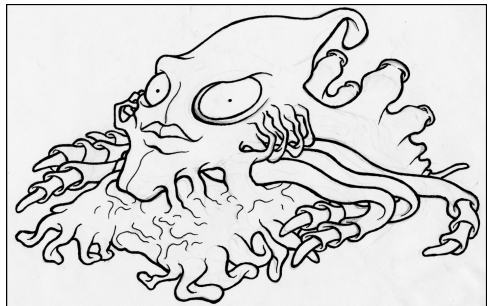
They are strong swimmers and use their ability to hold their breath underwater for long periods of time to drag victims to the bottoms of lakes and ponds. Two consecutive successful attacks indicates that the Kuklapi will attempt to drown their victim. They enjoy eating cold flesh, preferring that of humans and elves most of all.

Armor Class:	7
Hit Dice:	3*
Move:	40' (40' swim)
Attacks:	1 Bite/2 Claws
Damage: Bite	1-6
Claws	1-4/1-4
Special:	Drown (see above)
No. Appearing:	1-2
Save As:	Fighter: 2
Morale:	10
Treasure Type:	C
Alignment:	Neutral

### Indulger

No one is quite sure where the Indulger originates, but to cross paths with one is to face certain death. The horrific creature has a large head that sits upon a mass of tentacles, air tubes, and nodules. It uses the tentacles to move about slowly, or projects itself forward quickly with short yet powerful bursts of air from its rear air tubes. Foes making eye contact with the Indulger's mesmerizing gaze will be held like the Hold Person spell. During the time the victim is held, the Indulger will probe its mind to steal memories and knowledge, often leaving them only with their basic functions and nightmares of the mental invasion. For each round the Indulger probes a victim's mind, the victim must make a saving throw versus Spells or permanently lose one point of Wisdom or Intelligence. While charmed, victims will often sing in loud, high-pitched voices.

Foes of the Indulger subtract 4 from their attack rolls to avoid looking at the creature. Additionally, the Indulger gains a +4 on all saving throws. The Indulger often has one or more charmed minions to protect their lairs.



The air tube propulsion can be used as a ram attack doing 2-12 points of damage to a single man sized or two smaller than man sized adjacent targets and can be used 3 times per day. This attack is unerring with no saving throw.

Spells, each cast twice per day: Charm Person, Sleep, Phantasmal Force, Invisibility, Dispel Magic.

Armor Class: 0  
Hit Dice: 10\*\*  
Move: 30' (60' Ram)  
Attacks: 1 Gaze or Ram (3x/day)  
Damage: Gaze \*charm\*  
Ram 2-12  
Special: Spells  
No. Appearing: 1  
Save As: Cleric: 8  
Morale: 10  
Treasure Type: G  
Alignment: Chaotic

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl #1

### Giant Oak Retreat

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 2-4 characters of 2nd to 3rd level.

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*Background:* Two druids (Elilly and Ronndal) once lived within a secluded forest, choosing a great oak for their home. A small pond of cold, clear water nearby made the choice obvious for the pair. Later, they found that the water had slight healing properties.

The married couple was content with their habitat until one day when a group of hunters mistook the husband—who often wore a hat with large antlers—for a deer and accidentally killed him with an arrow to the neck. Elilly buried him in his favorite place, by a large rock near the edge of the pond.

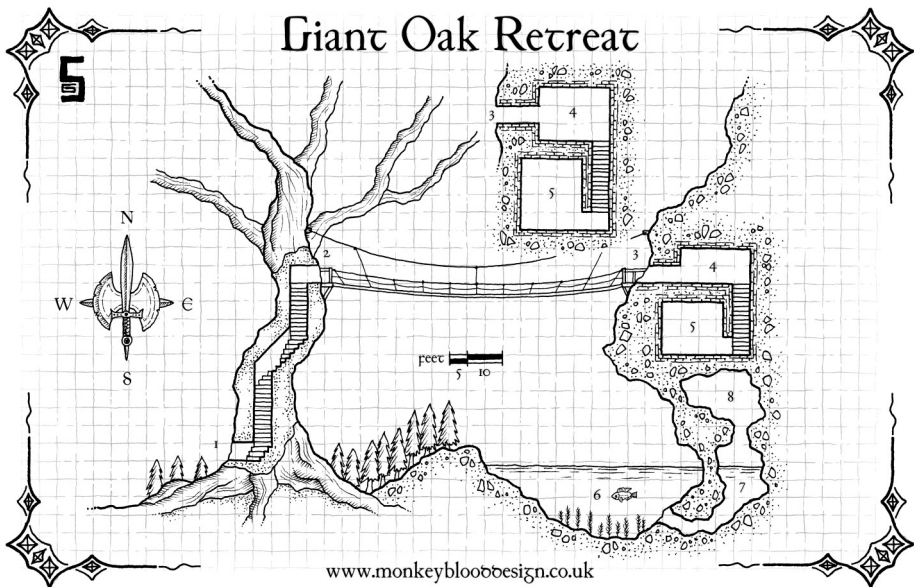
The distraught wife was lost without her partner until she found that he had a scroll of reincarnation stashed away in his nature books. Using the scroll improperly, the wife brought her husband back from the dead as a twisted, semi-aquatic creature that retained only a fragment of his

memory of her and their life together. Her husband slipped into the pool and now lives within its icy depths and the water cave beyond.

After many years, the druid's wife has become angry with her situation. Instead of helping visitors and travelers, she preys on them. She lures adventurers who hope to find the secret to the healing waters of the pond of the great oak retreat—so her mutated husband can capture them and feed upon their corpses.

#### 1. Great Oak Retreat Entry

Once unlocked, welcoming visitors to the druidic retreat, the large wooden door at the base of the great tree now stands closed and locked. A large rusty bell hangs from the ancient tree near its entry. Ringing the bell summons the old druid who initially looks displeased to be bothered before giving visitors a large smile. She will offer to let adventurers stay in the retreat for 10 gp per night per person. A large room in the middle of the tree (between areas 1 and 2) is clean and comfortable and sleeps up to ten.



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## 2. Old Bedroom

After Ronndal's death and transformation, Elilly stopped using their bedroom at the top of the tree. Instead, she sleeps in area 4, a converted storage area in the side of a hill. She now prefers the dark, cold place instead of the warmth of the outside. The room still has all the usual trappings of a bedroom, but covered in inches of dust and dirt. A search of the room will reveal several nature tomes (each worth 10-25 gp) and a magical cudgel once used by Ronndal (treat as a **club +1**).

## 3. Rustic Bridge

A simple bridge stretches between the great tree and the rock formation beyond. At the far end of the bridge, an opening in the rocky hill leads to a roughly hewn chamber, once used by the druids to store fruits and vegetables of the forest.

## 4. Converted Storage Room

Elilly has a small cot for a bed and crude box to store her meager belongings. A journal and two vials can be found at the bottom of the box—the poorly written handwriting of the old druid will reveal her husband's demise and her plans to feed adventurers to her flesh-craving spouse. The two vials contain a potent, black liquid that, when imbibed, paralyzes the victim for 1 hour per ounce used.

**Elilly (druid):** (AC 7, HD 4\*\*, HP: 16, #AT 1 or spell, D 1-4+1 (club) or spell, Save C4, ML 9, Spells: Bless, Cure Light Wounds, Hold Person, XP 175)

Elilly carries a matching, **magical cudgel** (as found in area 2). It provides her a +1 bonus to attacks and damage. She wears a special ring that summons and controls forest animals (see box on next page).

*Ring of the Forest.* Use as a Ring of Animal Control with the added benefit of summoning 1d6 1HD forest creatures three times per day. Cannot be worn with armor, but provides a +2 armor class bonus.

## 5. Second Storage Area

After leading visitors and travelers to their deaths at the pool below, Elilly takes their gear and stores it here for later sorting. Clothing, armor, weapons, and other gear are found in this room in separate piles.

### Items Found in Area 5 (roll 1d8)

Result	Reaction
1	Leather pants, gloves, dagger
2	<b>Chainmail +1</b> , helm
3	Shortsword, dagger, 50' rope
4	Backpack, wineskin (full)
5	<b>Dagger +1</b> , new boots
6	Leather armor, small sack
7	Pint of mead, silver ring (20sp)
8	<b>Longsword +1</b> , 1d10 rubies

*One result per party member (unique)*

## 6. Ronndal's Pond

In happier days, the two druids spent much of their time in and around the pool. They cataloged creatures, cultivated roots, planted medicinal herbs, and frolicked in the cool, healing waters of the pond. Elilly now only ventures here to lead visitors to her husband who is always hungry for more victims.

Elilly will tell visitors that when tossing a silver or gold coin into the pond, it summons water spirits to work their magic, enriching the waters with healing and purity.

Hundreds of silver and gold coins line the bottom of the pond, reflecting off the sunlight as it streaks through the clear water.

The pond is only 20' at its deepest point and is perfectly clear and clean. If the sun sneaks between the great oak boles of the forest and shines upon the pond, its entire contents are visible. Ronndal typically prefers to hide in his lair (area 7) and only ventures out when he can "sense" approaching victims.

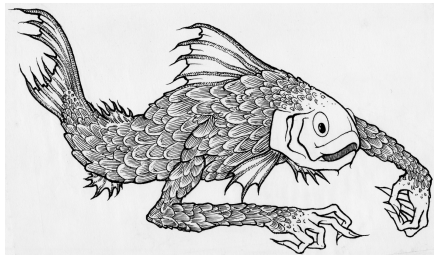
Adventurers will notice that little water life can be seen in the pond. Tiny fish and bugs are present but larger aquatic creatures are strangely missing. Ronndal feeds on fish once they grow big enough.

**Ronndal (Kuklapi):** (AC 7, HD 3\*, HP: 15, #AT 1 bite or 2 claws, D 1-6 or 1-4/1-4, Save F2, ML 10, Special: Drown, XP 50)

*(see more information about the Kuklapi on page 9)*

## 7. Ronndal's Lair

Remnants of dozens of skeletal remains of humans and forest animals lie upon ledges and in cracks along the sides of the cave. Gear is stripped from victims and given to Elilly for sorting and identification, then stored in area 5.



## 8. Hidden Room

Not even Elilly knows of this secret room beyond Ronndal's lair. Although Ronndal has some memories of his previous life with his wife, his current nature and desires have made him more of a beast with the treasure cravings of a monster. Before giving Elilly gear from slain visitors, Ronndal searches their bodies for shiny trinkets and valuables. He stores these items in this secret room above his lair.

Use the Kuklapi's treasure type

("C") to determine the hidden valuables here.

## Adventure Conclusion

Elilly will do anything she can to feed her transformed husband, feeling guilt for his current state. Ronndal barely hangs on to the memory of his wife, understanding only their current arrangement (she brings him food, he gives her items in return). However, at any time, Ronndal could kill and eat his former wife.

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl #2

### The High Crypt

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 3-5 characters of 5th to 7th level.

*Background:* The reward of immortality is rarely achieved by great wizards of necromancy and never attainable before mortal death. Powerful mages and priests have occasionally sacrificed their lives to cruel gods or succumbed to their evil studies to return in undeath. But to be gifted with immortality before death -- this is the ultimate prize of any hopeful man or woman.

Eoclises, the high priest of a long-forgotten god, was a man that once searched for a way to extend his life indefinitely. Unhappy with just simply being mortal, he searched ancient texts and lost scrolls to piece together a ritual that would bring him immortality. After decades of travel, searching, and study, Eoclises found a way to pause the aging process. Unfortunately, the final spell completely transformed his body and bound his soul to the location of the ritual. He is unable

to leave the High Crypt, instantly reversing the anti-aging process if he passes beyond the entry hall to his lair. Bound to the few rooms of the crypt, Eoclises continues to search through his library of books for a way to escape his fate.

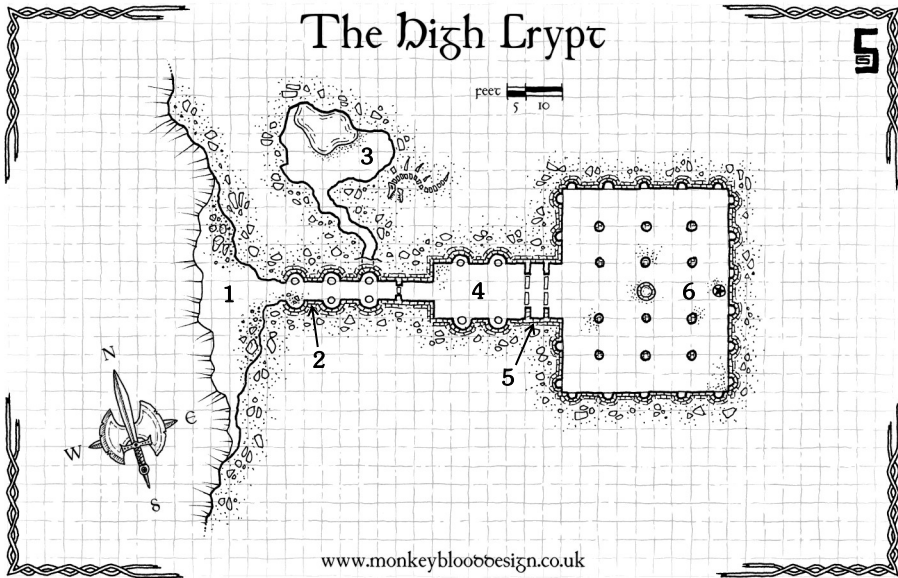
Enlisting the services of a troll named Grolgolbar, the high priest has managed to stay fed and supplied. He often sends Grolgolbar out to retrieve spell components and other items. In return, he provides the troll with small trinkets of moderate power and treasure from his vast wealth.

### High Crypt Location

The open entry to the ancient crypt is found within a small ravine. Grolgolbar uses his clawed hands and feet to climb the ravine walls to enter and exit. There are no ladders, ropes, or stairs down to the wide ledge just outside the high crypt entry. Any who look down into the ravine will see light spilling out onto the ledge from the opening to the crypt.

# The High Crypt

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## 1. High Crypt Entry

Light streams out of the open archway, illuminating the ledge outside the crypt. Dried blood stains and bone fragments are visible in several areas of the ledge. A **magical spell** (trap) has been cast upon the open archway that—when triggered (by passing through the opening)—rings a bell deep within the crypt. The bell ring can be heard by anyone within the ravine and crypt, including Eoclises and Grolgolbar.

**Find Magical Trap:** Roll under Intelligence (add +4 to roll result).

## 2. Hallway

A thirty-five foot hallway terminates in a wooden door at the southeastern end. Six alcoves in the hallway are filled with inanimate statues of nameless and faceless gods of ages past. One statue has been reduced to rubble, leaving an alcove open. A search of the rubble will reveal two rubies worth 250 gp

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each. A secret door behind the statue at the far end of the hallway leads to Grolgolbar's lair (Area 3) beyond.

If the entry spell-trap was triggered, there is a 50% chance that Grolgolbar will emerge from the secret door to attack the adventurers. Otherwise, he may instead let the group pass and attack from behind.

## 3. Grolgolbar's Lair

A narrow tunnel descends to a troll-hole that Grolgolbar uses for his home. A small pool of brackish water is fed by a small, trickling overhead stream (the water from the stream is clean, but the pool is used by the filthy troll for bathing). Bearskin rugs and leather mats cover most of the floor near the pool. A large chest sits against the eastern wall. An iron rod, embedded at both ends in the cave wall and floor, covers the chest. A massive padlock keeps the rod locked over the chest lid, preventing it from being opened.



If Grolgolbar is surprised here, he will be enraged that intruders entered his lair—add +1 to his attack rolls while he is within his lair. He wears two of the magical items given to him by Eoclises—**Bracers of Distortion** and a **Necklace of Spell Negation** (see the *Magical Shop* section of this issue).

**Grolgolbar (Troll):** (AC 4, 0 versus missiles, HD 6+3\*\*, HP: 39, #AT 2 claws/1 bite, D 1-6/1-6/1-10, Save F8, ML 10 (8), Special: regeneration, see page X41, XP 950)

The troll wears an iron key around his neck that opens the chest in this room. The chest contains payment from Eoclises for the troll's services. Once the chest is opened, adventurers will find **1,300 sp, 987 gp**, a bag of mixed gems (fifty in total, each worth 2d20 gp), a gold-inlaid, ivory horn (worth 250 gp); a necklace of emeralds (worth 1,000 gp), a set of silver plates and cups (4 of each, worth 25 gp each piece), a **Dagger +1, +2 vs. Undead**; and **Gauntlets of Ogre Power**.

A search of the room may reveal a bag of diamonds hidden in a bear-skin rug (twenty small gems, each worth 50 gp) and a submerged steel box in the small pool. The steel box holds **100 pp** and a **Ring of Protection +1, 5' Radius**. However, prolonged exposure in the foul waters of the pool increases the chance of catching a water borne disease (e.g. Giardia, leading to diarrhea and a penalty to actions until cured).

#### 4. Workshop

Eoclises occasionally tinkers here, working on projects to keep his

mind active. His latest work is dabbling in golem creation and control. After mastering wood golems, the high priest has moved to bone golems (as evidenced by the many human body parts on several work tables). He has yet to create a successful bone golem but will likely master the spells and creation process within weeks.

Four wood golems stand quietly in their alcoves in the walls in this area. They will move to attack after one minute if any intruders enter this area.

**(4) Wood Golems:** (AC 7, HD 4+4, HP: 20 each, #AT 2 fists, D 1-8/1-8, Save F2, ML 12, Special: see page X33, XP 125 each)

Dozens of valuable tools and devices are found in this area, each worth 5 to 10 gp in value.

#### 5. Trapped Hallway

An area between two sets of double doors is activated when the doors adjacent to area 4 are opened and other doors are touched. A trap releasing poisonous gas fills the small area after the doors on the western side lock, closing one or two adventurers in the small space. Failed saving throws versus Poison result in a 24-hour, deep sleep followed by death (second saving throw is applicable).

#### 6. The Library of Eoclises

The large room at the end of the high crypt is now the eternal home and lair of Eoclises, the transformed high priest. A once gaunt and tall priest now appears as a mass of

tentacles and a giant head that slides about the room. (Note: the high priest is an Indulger, found in the new monster section of this issue.) Eoclises has adapted well to his form, mastering his transformation and new abilities. When not tinkering with the current fixation in his workshop (area 4), he spends his time here in his library, studying old texts and ancient scrolls filled with forgotten knowledge.

Thousands of oversized books, vellum parchments, and cloth maps fill shelves, cabinets, and tables throughout the room. However, the room's previous purpose can be determined after a long look around. Pillars carved in the shape of serving acolytes and a statue of a warrior-god hint to an old temple or crypt. A well in the middle of the room provides clean water but looks to have once been a donation well where visitors dropped coins in prayer.

Eoclises will toy with smaller groups, sure that his power easily overmatches the few intruders. He wastes no time with larger groups, instead using his greatest powers to weaken them quickly.

**Eoclises (Indulger):** (AC 0, HD 10\*\*, HP: 60, #AT Gaze, Ram, or spell, D special, Save C8, ML 10, Special: see pages 9-10 of this issue for abilities, XP 2300)

In his human-form days, the high priest Eoclises amassed a hoard of useful magical items. In his current form, he is unable to use many of the items. A secret niche in the back of the statue holds his greatest items -- a **Staff of the High Priest**

(see *Magical Shop* section of this issue), **Staff of Commanding**, **Rod of Cancellation**, and **Wand of Fear** lie atop three boxes. The first box contains a **Ring of Telekinesis** and a **Ring of Teleportation** (as the spell, once per day). Two potions (each of **Healing**, **Gaseous Form** and **Invisibility**) fill the second box. The third box contains the Serpent's Eye, a fabled green emerald the size of man's fist (worth 25,000 gp or more).

An immobile skeleton is at the bottom of the prayer-well, bound to the bottom by Eoclises long ago. If Eoclises dies, the skeleton is freed from his paralysis and begins to climb up the well.

**Large Skeleton:** (AC 7, HD 8, HP: 32, #AT 2 claws, D 1-8/1-8, Save F4, ML 12, Special: none, XP 650)

A vast treasure of coins lies at the bottom of the well -- **25,691 cp**, **9,745 sp**, **4,602 gp** and **299 pp** are found at the bottom of the 50' well. Getting to the coins will be a challenge for most adventurers.

### Adventure Conclusion

If Eoclises dies in his lair, his entire library engulfs in flames. A magical fire ward on each pillar of the room ensures that no one can take his work after he is gone. Characters may be able to grab an armful of books and scrolls before safely exiting the burning library. Note that the fire does not spread beyond this room and that the contents of the secret niche in the statue remain unharmed after the fire consumes the room.

## Spellbound

Some players have discussed the merits of subclasses in B/X, extending the four main archetypes to include variants as AD&D once did. Fans of AD&D played illusionists, druids, paladins, rangers, monks, assassins and other niche classes. However, B/X remained loyal to the seven classes, four human and three demi-human. Other systems like Labyrinth Lord and BECMI added additional classes to extend the main system for players looking to change up their game somewhat. We're not going to argue RAW versus homebrews or alternative rules here, but adding a roleplaying element to the game to alter your main class is slightly interesting. In this issue of Spellbound, we'll take a look at altering the low-level cleric into a druid, mainly through spell choices.

It's important to note that we're not making a druid class for B/X -- that's been done elsewhere. But if your player wants their cleric to be more druidic in style, this article may be for you.

Druidic types have always served nature and nature-revering deities. Some would say that they don't serve a god at all but only Mother Nature herself. Regardless of how your pantheon or polytheistic system is set up, you can easily allow clerics who serve nature.

The B/X system already has included many spells that are druidic in nature -- I'm guessing Gygax and his editors of the system intended to keep that flavor within the cleric class in this manner. Spells like Speak with Animal and Speak with

Plants are clear indicators of this nod to druids.

Since this article focuses on spells and spell behaviors, we'll only look at new spells for the cleric that wishes to have a few more druidic abilities.

Additional 1st Level Spells (cleric)	
No.	Spell
9	Animal Whisper
10	Find Plant
11	Restore Plants
12	Move Plants

*In addition to the eight spells in B/X*

### Animal Whisper

The cleric whispers a simple, short message to nearby animals. All animals within range (50' times caster level) may hear and understand the message. The animals may save versus Spells to ignore the message.

### Find Plant

At a range of 50' per caster level, the cleric may automatically detect the location(s) of the desired plant.

### Restore Plants

When the cleric casts this spell on damaged or dead plants, they may restore 1d6 per caster level plants to healthy, thriving growth.

### Move Plants

The cleric may move 1d6 plants (or 1d6 feet of plants, e.g. vines) per caster level out of the way to clear a path or doorway. The plants are not destroyed or damaged, only moved aside.

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### Additional 2nd Level Spells (cleric)

No.	Spell
9	Find Water
10	Plant Growth
11	Plant Resistance
12	Summon Woodland Creatures

*In addition to the eight spells in B/X*

#### Find Water

At a range of 50' per caster level, the cleric may automatically detect the location(s) of water. Note that this spell does not determine the quality or cleanliness of the water found.

#### Plant Growth

This spell increases the overall size of plants by 1d6 feet per caster level. Note that the cleric can affect several plants at once, splitting the sizes amongst all of them (in total).

#### Plant Resistance

When cast upon one or more plants, the cleric gives the target plants resistance to all elements for 1 month per caster level. The number of plants affected are 1d6 per caster level.

#### Summon Woodland Creatures

For each caster level, the cleric may call 1d6 woodland creatures to assist him or her. The woodland creatures are typically non-combatant and found in glades, forests and plains, e.g. rabbits, deer and squirrels. Their level of assistance is limited to their physical makeup and is never combative.

Note that any of these spells could be known and used by the druid in this issue's adventure, *Giant Oak Retreat* (pg 10).

## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 7

Completing their search of the secret room at the hallway split (area A7), the group of brave adventurers continues to search for the ruined temple in the Crimson Abbey.

#### Hallway from Eastern Areas

At the split in the hallway near the secret room (A7), an unused passage leads back up to the ground level of the abbey.

Highly revered monks, deceased centuries earlier, have been buried in secret tombs in this ancient hallway. Finding the first secret door is challenging but each one thereafter becomes easier to discover.

**Secret Doors Check:** subtract -1 to the chance for the first door. Add +1 to each check after finding each additional secret door in this hallway.

#### A11. Burial Crypt #1

The skeletal remains of an old monk lie on a white marble slab in the center of this small room. A ruby headband (like those from area A3 from issue #2) rests upon the head of the deteriorating skeleton. Removing the headband has the same effect to the skeleton, awakening it from its eternal slumber.

**Venerable Skeleton:** AC 7, HD 2+2\*, HP: 10, #AT 2 claws, D 2-5/2-5, Save F2, ML 12, Special: immune to charm, sleep and fire, XP 35)

Besides the magical, ruby headband, the only treasure in the room can be found in the base of the marble slab. A **scroll of Protection from Magic** and a purse of **15 pp** are found in a secret niche.

### A12. Burial Crypt #2

Most of the skeletal remains of the dead monk have turned to dust, leaving only bits and fragments of bones behind. A search of the room will uncover a rusty, iron club and a box full of ivory game pieces for a long, forgotten game (20 pieces, each worth between 5-10 gp).

### A13. Burial Crypt #3

A blackened marble slab at the opposite end of the room appears to have once been engulfed in fire. A skeleton lies strapped to the slab with iron chains and restraints, its bones also blackened by hot fire. Although the skeleton is inanimate, stepping within 5' of the remains has a 5% chance per point of Wisdom to project a brief image of a restrained, elderly monk being burned alive.

### A14. Burial Crypt #4

Empty of bones, this burial chamber is the home of a distraught **Wraith**. Unlike most undead creatures who seek to destroy the living, this creature desires to be free of its confines. It only attacks those that first attack it. If the door to its prison is left open, the wraith will try to exit the area.

The creature's loathsome wail is enough to frighten even the toughest adventurers.

**Lonesome Wraith:** AC 3, HD 4\*\*, HP: 19, #AT 1 touch + special, D 1-6 + energy drain, Save F4, ML 12, Special: level drain, fear-causing wail (as Blight spell), XP 175, see page X42)

If the characters prevent the wraith from exiting without attacking it, they can get it to answer a single question in exchange for freedom. It

can only answer questions that relate to the abbey when it was operational centuries earlier. Note that questions regarding the Broken God and the demise of the abbey will be met with hostility and ambiguous responses.

A search of the chamber will reveal a tome under a hidden, removable piece of the slab (at the top). The tome is written in ancient language only used by the monks of the abbey, decipherable only with the translation text found in the abbey library (found in a later issue). A **scroll of Cure Serious Wounds** is found tucked into the back of the tome.

### A15. Stairs to Ground Level

Wide stairs lead up to a locked door at the end of the hallway. The locking mechanism is complex and rusted, the door unused for many years.

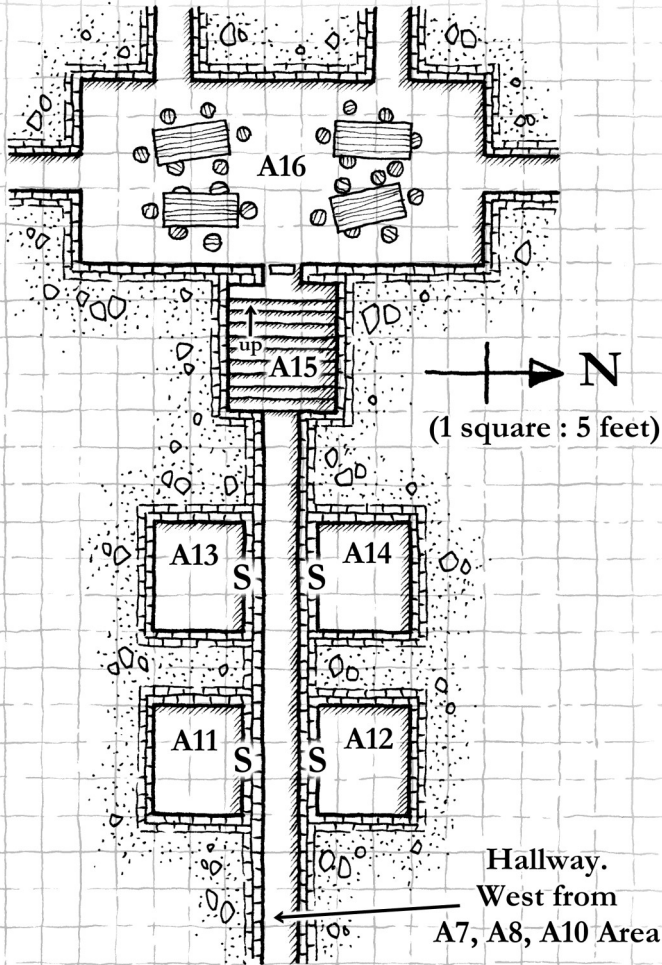
**Open Lock:** Thieves work at one or two levels below their current skill level (50% chance).

### A16. Dining Hall

Four large tables and dozens of stools fill this large chamber. Four hallways lead out of the room (see map). Half a dozen human skeletal remains lie in various parts of the room and remain inanimate. However, a large creature resembling a skeletal minotaur rises from the floor at the first noise made here.

**Skeletal Minotaur (undead):** AC 7, HD 3+3, HP: 18, #AT 1 gore/1 bite, D 1-6/1-6, Save F3, ML 12, Special: ignores sleep and charm, XP 50)

The room is otherwise empty of anything valuable.



## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God Map 4

The hallway to the south leads to the kitchen, the two halls to the west lead to monk bedrooms, and the hall to the north will take adventurers to the library, prayer rooms, and temple.

**Special Note:** After *Whystal* consumes the potions of Healing in area A7, he is healed to full HP.

### What Comes Next?

After their battle with the undead minotaur, the stalwart adventurers will again, luckily choose the right direction to go—they will head north and find the more interesting parts of the abbey...and maybe its forgotten secrets.

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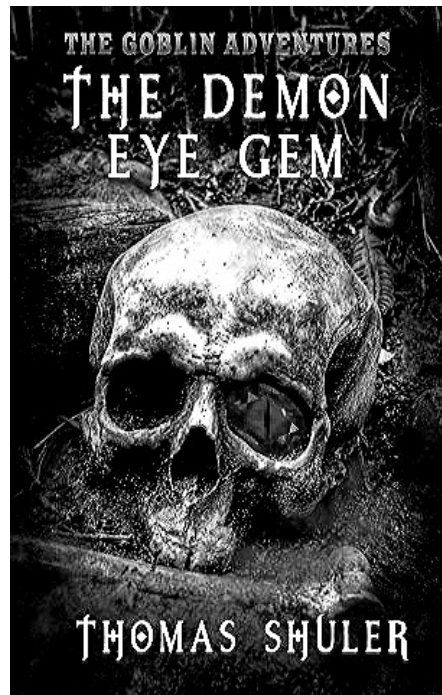
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## Convention Calendar

Convention	Date, Location
SnowCon 11	Jan. 19th—20th, Bangor, ME
TotalCon 33	Feb. 21st—24th, Marlborough, MA
GaryCon XI	Mar. 7th—10th, Lake Geneva, WI
North Texas RPGCon XI	Jun. 6th—9th, Dallas-FW, TX
Origins Game Fair '19	Jun. 12th—16th, Columbus, OH
Gen Con 2019 (52)	Aug. 1st—4th, Indianapolis, IN

Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my *Dungeon Delvers* story!

Additionally, very special thanks go to author Erol Otus for taking time to answer my questions!



"Goblins. Easy XP, annoying nuisances, rats with swords... But what are they like when not being slaughtered by heroes?" *The Demon Eye Gem*, now available at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).



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# 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, willing to spend absurd

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# 9 — June, 2019 — print, PDF  
#10 — September, 2019 — print, PDF

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

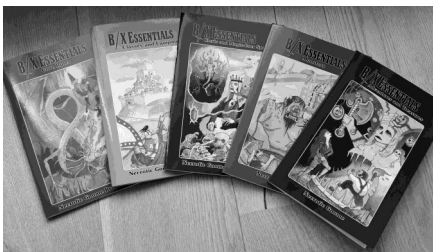
listed, rounding out the most complete stat block of any monster guide I have seen.

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 find 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 was the overview they

gave 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 Goblins (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?*

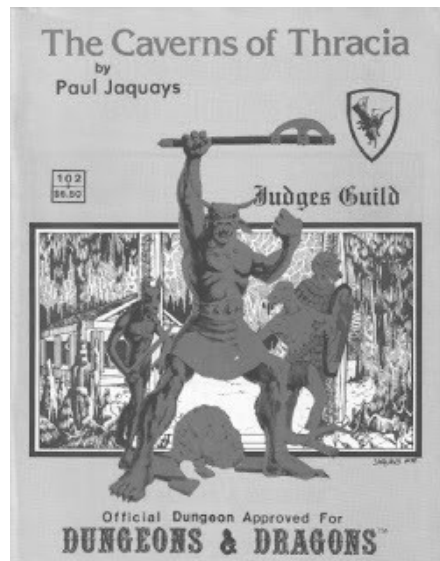
[J] I'd like to paint more miniatures and do more game-related crafting. I'd like to get deeply into 3D sculpting for miniatures, and maybe work on some video games again.

*[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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Skool, Inc.

Thank you, Jennell!

*Question responses © 2019 Jennell Jaquays*



Another well-known book by Jennell!

## Product Spotlight

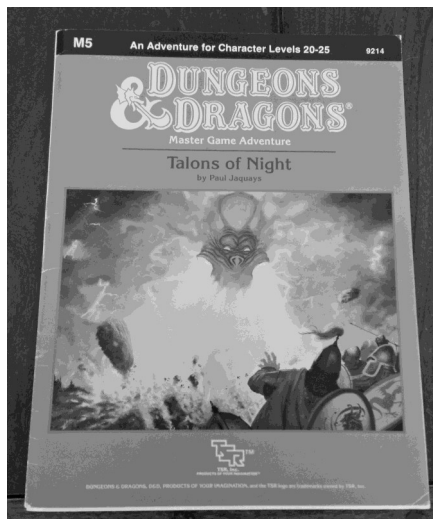
We've yet to spotlight adventures for higher level characters in *Back to Back X*—mainly due to the primary focus of B/X (levels 1-14). However, with Jennell Jaquay's interview this issue, I've decided to review **Talons of Night**, a master's level adventure.

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 presented in



Outside cover of *Talons of Night*.

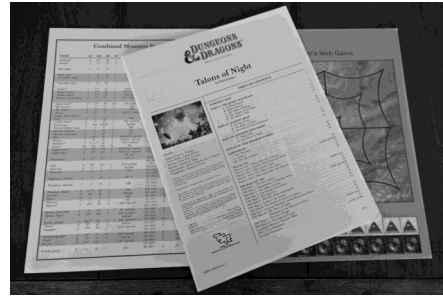


the Companions set) for obvious reasons—Expert and Mastery weapons skills offer characters better to-hit and damage bonuses, speeding up combat with foes with loads of hit points. Without weapon masteries, combat in several encounters may turn into a long, drawn-out affair.

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

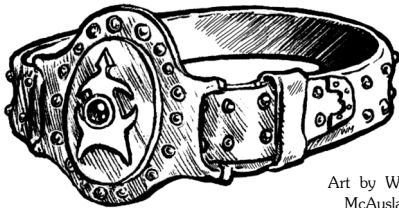
Not every useful magical item found in your adventures has to be a sentient sword or armor. Sometimes, that strange or unique item can be just as useful in the right situation.

### 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.*

9

### 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 undercity 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.

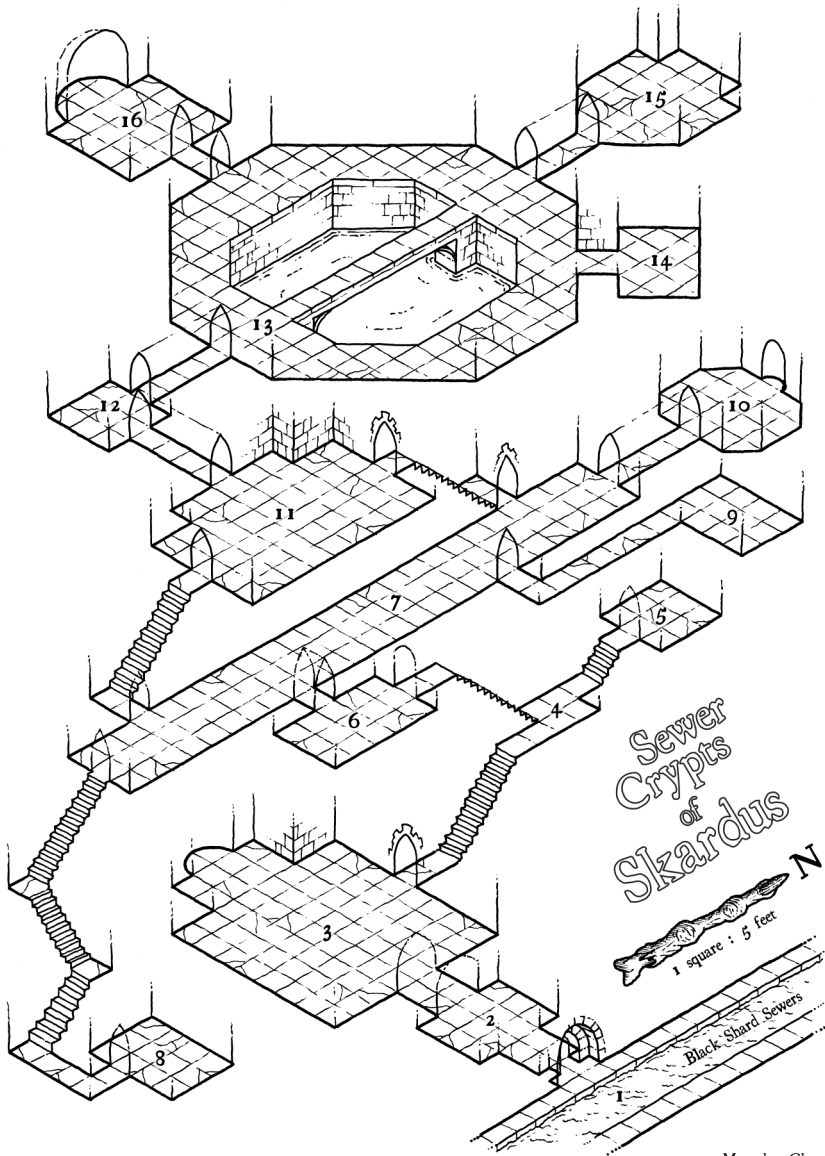
#### 2. Antechamber of the Dead

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 awakening their master, Skardus, found in area 16.



Map by Glynn Seal

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 afore-mentioned 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 Ghoul**s 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 Ghoul:** (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 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

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)

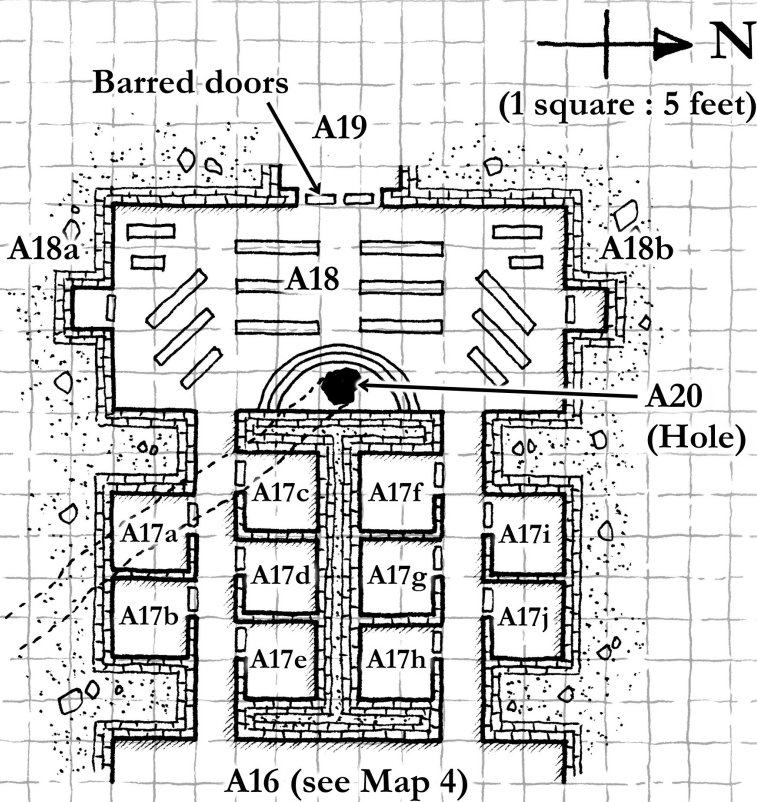
A hole at the bottom of the refuse pile leads to the tunnel below (see Area A20). A search of the pile will reveal **27 sp**, **12 gp**, and a **Ring of Protection +1**.

### 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 that his*



## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God Map 5

Map by Glynn Seal

*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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### Convention Calendar

Convention	Date, Location
GaryCon XI	Mar. 7th—10th, Lake Geneva, WI
North Texas RPGCon XI	Jun. 6th—9th, Dallas-FW, TX
Origins Game Fair '19	Jun. 12th—16th, Columbus, OH
Gen Con 2019 (52)	Aug. 1st—4th, Indianapolis, IN
ShireCon II	Sept. 21st, Falls Village, CT
AppleCon 1	Sept. 20th—22nd, Cornish, ME
GameHoleCon VII	Oct. 31st—Nov. 3rd, Madison, WI

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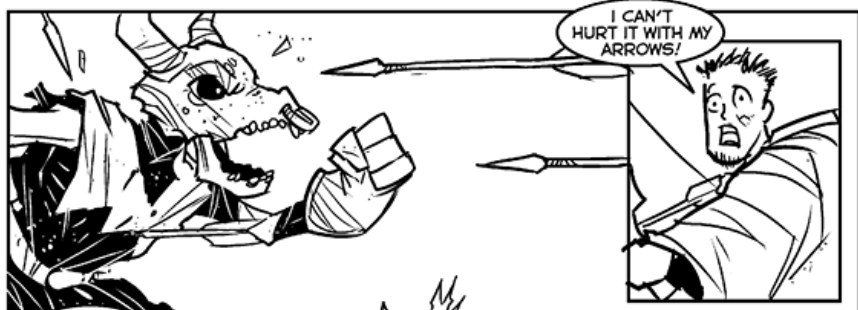


[www.podcastatgroundzero.com](http://www.podcastatgroundzero.com)

Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for continuing to draw my *Dungeon Delvers* story!

Additionally, very special thanks go to artist and author Jennell Jaquays for taking time to answer my questions!





NEXT TIME: HOW WILL OUR YOUNG THIEF PROTECT HIS ELVEN FRIEND ALL ALONE?



# Back to Basic X

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



## In Memoriam — A Note from the Fanzine Creator

Those of us most familiar with the B/X system are arguably and likely older gamers, players and GMs from the pre-Wizards of the Coast era of tabletop roleplaying. Of course, this is not entirely accurate; newer and younger players, first introduced to RPGs with the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of D&D, are trying older systems to experience the origins of the early games.

With time, though, comes the vicious side effect of mortality — aging. Many of us that started in those early days of gaming are reaching and passing semicentennial milestones. D&D and GenCon—the earliest gaming convention—have both surpassed fifty years! I am the same age myself and have logged thirty-seven years of roleplaying! Although I play with gamers of all ages, I still see many players of my generation (and older) at game conventions throughout the USA.

Unfortunately, our kind (on average) is an unhealthy bunch. We've spent

far too much time on our backsides indoors, shirking exercise and healthy diet choices. This “gamer lifestyle” has led to some great people departing our world far too early. In just the last year I've seen several gamers who I've either regularly communicated with or followed online pass away at far too young an age. These early deaths have left devastating holes in the gaming industry — gamers, customers, and creators alike, lost to poor health.

The best way to celebrate this hobby and to honor those that have fallen too early is to live a healthier and full life, sharing these early games and experiences with new players. We are the ambassadors of the old-school gaming style and it is our duty to live long enough to positively affect as many gamers as possible.—Thom Wilson

*This issue is dedicated to: Timothy Wagoner II, Donald A. Turner, and Mike Cary.*

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## Back to Basix V. 3 No 2

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Upcoming Issues:  
#10 — September, 2019 —  
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## Publishing News

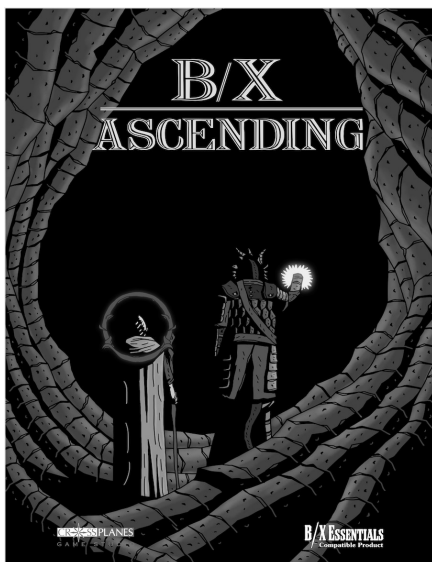
**B/X Ascending** by Crossplanes Game Studio focuses on the “roll-high” mechanic, and introduces players to the blend of old-school B/X with a modern twist. After d20-style games removed the need to calculate THACO\* and look up to-hit values on large matrices, many players became used to high armor classes and roll over values for actions and feats. Although B/X and other original game formats were developed with descending AC and rolling under statistics, many players have tried to blend the two styles together to try to satisfy both desires. *Swords & Wizardry* by Frog God Games injects offers both ascending and descending armor class rules into in their system. However, S&W is more akin to AD&D than B/X D&D. Crossplanes Game Studio tries to introduce ascending AC with a focus on Moldvay Basic.

The PDF is 63 pages and is filled with mostly player-related B/X rules. Classes, spells, and a few optional rules make up the book. Classes include non-standard B/X classes like Druid, Paladin, Assassin, and others. While this is fine, it does deviate from the early caveat in the book that references Moldvay's Basic. That said, this product also is B/X Essentials (Necrotic Gnome) compatible—they have an advanced class book with add-on classes. This book has full Illusionist and Druid spell lists, leaving the Cleric and Magic-User spells as referenced in the Necrotic Gnome books.

The author adds a few twists of his own that make for interesting game

play. Each class has an attack bonus value added by level, to reflect the character's increasing skill in combat. He does a decent job of leveling the bonuses for classes with maximum levels while letting the fighter class have the highest bonus. I'm not sure I'm a fan of 12<sup>th</sup> level Druids and 12<sup>th</sup> level Dwarves having the same attack bonus but I can see the simplicity in the author's design. There's no mention of increasing bonuses of the demi-human classes that have a maximum level with added experience (as referenced by in the BECMI rules, for example).

Many of the classes have specialized abilities or feats that make their class a little more interesting. I'm always a fan of adding a little something special to characters. I prefer this as a background option—less class-based perhaps—and a little more specific or unique to the character. What's presented in this book



works and adds some things for GMs and players to talk about. A few of the options seem a little confusing or overpowered. For example, the Assassin has a base assassination attempt percentage as 50% for a target of equal level. That's pretty darn good. Targets of lesser level or even easier and targets of higher level are harder. However, the wording of the assassination attempt for level difference is odd and confusing—it makes it sound like higher level targets are easier (based on the roll-high mechanic). I think a little more editing and cleanup of wording is needed in this section.

One of the things I really like is tailoring Thieves abilities to the “roll-high” mechanic. Each thief ability is now a target on d20. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the book that discussed added difficulty (e.g. challenge ratings or added difficulty for harder feats). So, a 14<sup>th</sup> level thief can pretty much do anything, failing only when a “1” is rolled (5% chance) on a d20, except Hear Noise. This aligns to the B/X thief of course, so no points lost here. There may have been an opportunity to discuss change in difficulty (the +4/-4 rule in B/X) or Dexterity bonuses for the roll.

There's nothing in the book that breaks any major rules. This adaptation of an ascending B/X system is useful – players and game masters will find nuggets of good information to use as desired. My biggest issue with the book is not in the content per se, but in the format of the PDF. The company gives us a two-page spread file—

unprintable unless you're familiar with large format printing and have a printer that can handle the large

page size. If you're a pure digital player/GM, this won't be much of an issue, but for those of use that like to print PDFs for use at the table or to have stored with our other materials, it's problematic.

All in all, it's a good little book that many can find useful. It could use an update, more editing, and some additional playtesting to stress-test some of the overpowered rule options.

**B/X Ascending**, a B/X Essentials Compatible product by Crossplanes Game Studio (Mark Craddock). Found at DriveThruRPG – PDF \$3.99.

\*THACO is a TSR-reserved mechanic, used here only as a reference with no other intention.



Artwork by Darlene

## Interview with a Legendary Artist—Darlene

When I think back to the iconic illustrations of the early eighties, the work of Darlene instantly comes to mind. I remember those wonderful Greyhawk maps, the unicorn on the title page of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the cover art of *In Search of the Unknown*. In this issue, we check in with her and talk about the artwork in those early days of roleplaying.

[*Thom*] What year did you get hired (or started freelancing) at TSR? Do you remember your first assignments) there?

[*Darlene*] It was a year after I was graduated from Beloit College that I settled myself in Lake Geneva, WI. That would be 1977. I was a local gal, having grown up a farm girl less than five miles east of Elkhorn, Wisconsin. Jim Ward was in the same high school class as my older sister, the Class of 1969. They were seniors when I was a freshman at Elkhorn High School (Go Elks).

When I met Mike Carr (the 6th employee hired at TSR; *Fight In The Skies* creator), I was working at Graphics Printing doing paste-ups and graphics. Mike was a client who wanted to update a flier from the previous year. I was assigned to assist him with an event called Gen Con. It meant swapping out some dates and adding new information to the schedule. After he approved the final proof, in our final consultation, Mike Carr asked me on a date.

It wasn't long before Mike took me to his place of work, which was



Darlene's Unicorn from the DMG

only a few blocks away on Main Street next to the Pizza Hut. He wanted me to show my portfolio of artwork to the person in charge of art, Dave Sutherland. Dave happened to be Mike's room-mate at the time—was it on Cedar Street?

At any rate, at that meeting, Dave chose several art pieces on the spot. Of the two I remember, there's the (now iconic) unicorn on the title page of the DMG and the "Paladin on his War Horse," which I think (but am not sure) became the title page for the Rogues' Gallery.

I believe I met Tim Kask on the same day. He was hard to miss as his office took up the whole reception area of the house on Williams Street. Tim Kask was the first person you see when coming in and the last person going out. Good thing he was sociable, (but still well on his way toward "curmudgeonhood", even then). We hit it off immediately.

Tim had a good appreciation and grasp of calligraphy, having been

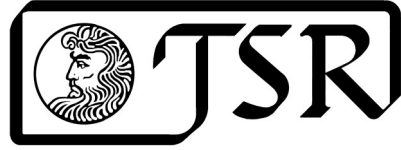
taught by Prof. Bill Hannon who was an expert in it. Tim immediately saw the possibilities of having someone around who could illustrate and letter. So from the get-go, I began doing header-type things for *The Dragon* magazine. I was glad for the work, and the conversation.

I did a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff. I painted a double-sided sign for TSR in the shape of a shield, and two others for Gary personally: one for Dragonlands Stables and the other his own coat of arms. I created stationary for Dragonlands Arabians, TSR Periodicals, and *The Dragon* magazine. I created the Wizard head logo. Much of my work was doing logos and titles, like those in Deities and Demi-Gods and for articles in *The Dragon* magazine. It was not often I would get pure illustration assignments.

*[T] Do you recall which of your works was first published in a TSR product?*

[D] It's really strange to ask an artist when something was published. Once a piece of artwork's completed, it's always on to the next illustration. The one you just did is forgotten. So, essentially, out of sight, out of mind. Often, we didn't know anything until later after the fact when something was published. When we finally saw a printed version, we'd say, "Oh yeah, I remember doing that."

But the lapse of time between final delivery and publication can be considerable. We artists have since memorized the dates so we can accurately answer fan's questions.



Darlene's Wizard Head logo for TSR

But it's not like we actually remembered it. Ok. I'm speaking for myself. However unlikely it may be, maybe some TSR artists do remember.

Having said that, I credit my first official TSR art commission as a poem I "calligraphied" in spiky letters for Lawrence Schick's "White Plume Mountain" adventure.

*[T] How did you get the project for Gary Gygax's Map of the Flanaess?*

[D] I've always known them as The Greyhawk Maps.

The last time I spoke with Allen Hammack, (*Top Secret* author), at GaryCon XI, he set me straight on the Greyhawk maps. Allen said he advocated for me in a meeting with Dave Sutherland regarding the map and told Dave he'd "be a fool not to have me do it." Actually, I did not know that and I'm glad to have the mystery solved. So there you have it—there'd be no Greyhawk Maps as we know them without Allen Hammack speaking up on my account. (Thanks, Allen!)

Now, I wish to briefly address everyone who's been a fan of my Greyhawk maps. You have all been close to my heart because I poured my heart into creating the

Greyhawk map and I believe you can somehow still feel my creative energy. What I'm saying is that there's a shared resonance between the map and me—and the users of the map (who know each detail more intimately than I). I didn't set out to do that, but that's what happened. For some, it's just a map, and that's perfectly OK. They are simply not on the same wavelength and don't need to be.

Incidentally, when I became aware of the possibility that projections of energy can be channeled into artwork, I decided to purposefully place positive vibes in the artwork I'm creating for girls. The idea is to use positive energy to effect positive change. Well, it can't hurt... I'll mention more of this at the end.

[T] Can you recall your inspiration for the cover of *B1 In Search of the Unknown*?

[D] I think all Mike told me was something vague like "an adventure party underground with giant mushrooms." Everything else was pretty much up to me. The back cover had the same characters, but I don't recall much if anything about it.

However, what is truly interesting is I just finished some more B1 drawings for Demos Sachlas. He is interested in having me illustrate the old B-1 module from years ago. And so I decided to show you one of the newest illustrations (hot off the press, so to speak) to have emerged from my imagination. Hope you like it!

[T] Do you have a favorite piece or project from the days at TSR?

[D] Yes, the Unicorn on the title page of the DMG and my "The Story of Jasmine" illustrated fantasy-adventure series, which ran for a year in *The Dragon* magazine, (beginning May 1980). At the beginning of January last year, I found an old box I've been lugging around for 40 years. In it, I found pages of writing continuing *The Story of Jasmine*. I wanted to make the fact I kept them into something meaningful, so I decided to share them. I published them, one at a time, on a daily basis for 100 days. By the end of that time, fans had emerged to help fund me in continuing with "The Story of Jasmine" for eventual publication on Kindle.

To join my intrepid *Story of Jasmine* fans, become my patron: <http://www.patreon.com/darlene-artist>

9

9  
 ¶ catch ye far or search ye near  
 You'll find no trace of the three  
 Unless you follow instructions clear  
 For the weapons abide with me

North past forest, farm, and furrrow  
 You must go to the feathered mound  
 Then down, away from the sun you'll burrow  
 Forget life, forget light, forget sound.

To rescue Wade, you must do battle  
 With the beast in the Boiling Bubble  
 Cross cavern vast where chain-links rattle  
 Lies Whelm, past water sprouts double.

Black razor yet remains to be won  
 Underneath inverted ziggurat.  
 That garnered, think not that you're done  
 For now you'll find you are caught

I care not, former owners brave  
 What heroes you seek to hire.  
 Though mighty, I'll make each one my slave  
 Or send him to the fire.

Darlene's scroll from White Plume Mountain!

[T] *Were there any works that you created during the TSR days that was never published?*

[D] The second year for *The Story of Jasmine* series to run in the Dragon. I only found out a couple years ago that Kevin Blume was dead set against having any depictions of violence. Well, no one told me there were any rules about this because I kinda showed an eensie weensie decapitation in my December 1980 Jasmine installment. If I did not have a contract, my adventure story would have been pulled on the spot. But try as I may, I could not get the rest of my story published for a second year in *The Dragon* magazine ever again. It may have been Kevin's edict. The editor's hands might have been tied. Who knows or remembers?

That's why I created "*Jasmine: the Battle for the Mid-Realm*" collector card game, which I based on the characters of the story. I got together a group of people who helped fund me with printing and published my card game in 1982. I was so happy when it received the Strategist's Club Award in 1983 for the "Best Game in 1982 in an Open Category" (see <https://boardgamegeek.com/image/590905/jasmine-battle-mid-realm> and [https://cf.geekdo-images.com/imagepage/itm\\_g/rTVrRd3fr4d8koE\\_UGGtfZQqBPI=/fit-in/900x600/filters:no\\_upscale\(\)/pic590905.jpg](https://cf.geekdo-images.com/imagepage/itm_g/rTVrRd3fr4d8koE_UGGtfZQqBPI=/fit-in/900x600/filters:no_upscale()/pic590905.jpg) for a pic) announced at their Ninth Annual Awards at Gen Con. There are still a few games left from the original 1982 print run (my sister found some in

her basement)—signed and numbered—still available and now it really is a collector's item. I have them available. See my website: <http://darlenetheartist.com/jasmine-games> for a copy.

[T] *What sort of things do you do to "recharge the batteries" or to spark artistic inspiration after a lengthy project or heavy workload?*

[D] Cleaning the house somehow recharges my batteries. I do it right after I complete an art project. It's like I'm clearing out the old so the new can come in. I'm more of a "Walks in nature" kind of gal than a nightclub person. Good thing I live in a remote area of North Carolina where there is no nightlife. I'm also into my kitties: I love watching and interacting with them.

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

[D] I presently live in a 1909 Queen Anne Victorian house located in a part of North Carolina seldom traveled. It was perfect for a curmudgeon writer and introverted artist. We knew choosing The Arts would be lean and challenging to navigate. My husband died several years ago. Our nest egg disappeared with his health. I look around me and this old house has really suffered from my lack of resources and desperately needs tending. My ultimate wish is to restore my 110-year old house to her former dignity and glory. I think it would rejuvenate me as well.

[T] What are you working on these days?

[D] I wish to give back to the community and to my fans who have believed in me all these years.

The best way I'm giving back is to depict positive images of powerful women/maidens for the next generation of gamers. In my last three coloring books, the art is clearly in the fantasy realm. My latest 2019 Coloring book, "Color Me Free" is about powerful ladies moving freely and independently, such as on a polar bear, a moose, a skateboard, and a stingray. I also include fairies and pixies. These coloring books are for "girls of all ages." And I'm so pleased at how well they are being received. If you want one, here is the link: <http://firesidecreations.com/darlene>

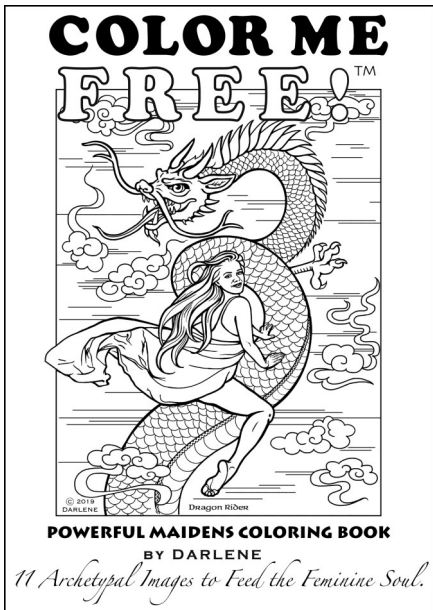


Harmony by Darlene

I just finished designing and illustrating a 50-page spiral-bound "PlayBook" called *"Dancing the Enneagram With Kate."* My friend Kate's innovation is to add movement to the intellectual construct of The Enneagram, adding a tactile sense to learning each of the 9 Types. My contribution is to illustrate the 9 personality types in the form of coloring book pages. In my introduction, I explain how the process of coloring, like dancing, gets other parts of yourself (besides the mind) involved in the learning process. I also go through the symbology of color as a means to integrate different parts of yourself.

*Very special thanks to Darlene for a wonderful and insightful interview!*

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Darlene's coloring book



## Product Spotlight

The early authors at TSR really knew how to cram months of campaign material into a 32-page book.

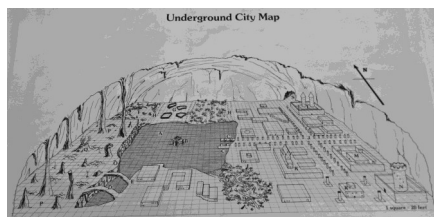
**The Lost City** by Tom Moldvay is a perfect example of how the original modules were made—over one-hundred detailed encounters, several maps, and new monsters spill out of the short book, providing a DM with more material than they could probably ever use. There are several interesting design elements that are worth examining.

Tom Moldvay, known most notably for editing the Basic D&D rulebook, follows the same pattern of an earlier adventure—the *Isle of Dread* (X1)—when writing this gem. In both books, we see how well he blends detailed backgrounds with a crawler. As in the island adventure, *The Lost City* has plenty of encounter areas, a dozen maps, a framework section for game masters to expand, four new monsters, and a glossary of terms. This pattern is great for new and experienced game masters alike. Moldvay sets up the start of the adventures with an introduction page that prototypical of early D&D modules.

Background information on the setting, including the rival factions of the pyramid and city deep below the surface, is a single page and gives the game master everything they need to know about the motivations and conflict of the denizens within. It's the right amount of detail to help set the stage for gameplay without miring the GM with unneeded minutiae.

Characters were never safe in these early D&D adventures. *The Lost City* is filled with many traps and foes that can wipe out a party in no time. In just the first two tiers of the pyramid, there are enough traps to set the characters on edge for the rest of the trek through the pyramid – there are three traps in the first room alone! If that wasn't bad enough, the monsters of the first dozen rooms are pretty hard for even third level characters. Ten killer bees, stirges, green slime, and sprites can quickly reduce a large party to a few hardy souls before the group even gets going. What party of low-level characters can survive Save or Die mechanics and a flesh eating slime?

The tiers get bigger as the party descends down into the center of the pyramid. Adventurers will face the dilemmas of revolving passages, warring factions, undead, and—of course!—more traps. Moldvay throws everything at characters, testing their mettle and luck. As a GM, I've never had a group exit this adventure unscathed and unless they aligned with one of the factions, even leave at all.

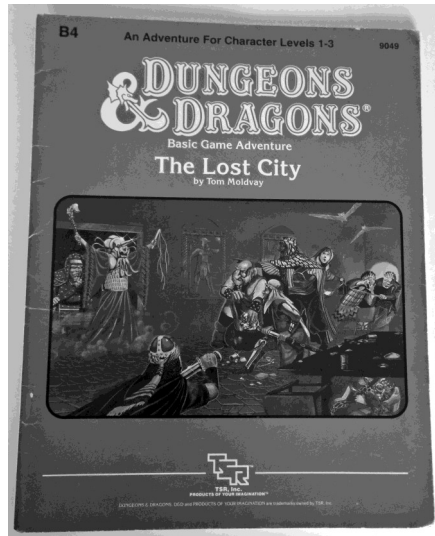


Famous Underground City map in *The Lost City*

After 20 pages, the bulk of the detailed encounters are wrapped up. Tiers 6-10 are filled with the other half of the planned encounter areas but are far less detailed, providing the GM with a section of the adventure to further detail on their own. Although names, foes, and treasure are listed, most of the areas lack the detail of the previous tiers. A secret passage found in tier 5 bypasses the five lower tiers and leads directly to the underground city far below. Characters delving into the lower five tiers of the structure may eventually encounter the primary villain-creature of the complex, a terrible 12 HD creature with a daunting armor class, loads of hit points, and seven attacks per round! An impossible foe for a low-level party, best avoided by savvy players.

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The underground city is given a cursory overview but begs to be further detailed by a willing GM. Nineteen areas across a one thousand foot-wide cavern can be expanded to provide many more hours of exploration and adventure. An island in the middle of the underground lake and cliff-caves filled with a wide variety of denizens can add more adventure material to an otherwise full book. To top it off, Moldvay provides eight additional adventure hooks to keep the characters underground for weeks or months! I especially like the new Banshee and Polymar monsters in this book. The wail of the banshee and the early Mimic-like creature (Polymar) are enough to send most parties running back to the entrance.



Purple cover, red banner of *The Lost City*.

I'd be remiss in not mentioning the great artwork of Jim Hallaway throughout the entire book. His style is iconic in these early books and **The Lost City** is no exception. Unlike some of the later books by TSR, this module has an adequate amount of artwork for the page count. The three-panel cover, a common style of TSR modules, displays maps and a standard equipment pack player handout.

This is a fantastic adventure for low-level characters. It's filled with great risk but the rewards in experience and treasure are immense! If you've never played **The Lost City**, put it on your list. It's worth your time.

**B4, *The Lost City***, written by Tom Moldvay. 1982. ISBN: 0-935696-55-5; #9049, no price on the cover; 32 pages; trifold cover; for 6-10 characters of 1st to 3rd level.

## The Magic Shop

In this issue of the fanzine, we take a look at four new magical items that GMs can add to their adventures.

### Wand of Dragon Fire

When the command word is spoken, the wielder of this magical device can send forth a cone of fire similar to that of a red dragon (90'x30'). A single charge deals damage equal to that of the hit points of the wand's user to any creature within the fiery blast. The fire from the wand has all the properties of dragon's breath.

If used more than once per day, each subsequent charge deals one half the damage to the wand's user. For example, if the magic-user or elf has 40 hit points, the charge deals 40 points of damage to those within the cone of fire (saving throw versus Magic Wands for half damage) and 20 points of damage to the caster (no saving throw allowed).

Maximum charges 10. Used only Magic-Users and Elves. *Value: 25,000 GP.*

### Casks of Teleportation

These four-foot tall clay casks are nearly three feet wide at their middle and weigh over 150 pounds each. When a character steps into one cask, they will instantly appear in the other, regardless of its planar location. If one of the casks is destroyed, the other cask ceases to work. *Value: 10,000 GP.*

### Rainbow Potion

This powerful potion changes consistency and magical properties every hour, with each property aligning to

a color of the rainbow. The colors always rotate through the seven rainbow colors in order, adding an eighth color (brown) before returning to the starting color of red again. Consuming the potion when the potion is brown in color provides a random property of one of the other colors (except Poison). The potion can only be consumed once. *Value: 5,000 GP.*

Rainbow Potion	
Color	Effects
Red	Cure Serious Wounds
Orange	Fire Resistance
Yellow	Gaseous Form
Green	Poison (save or die)
Blue	Invisibility
Indigo	Heroism
Violet	Invulnerability
Brown	Random (choose one of the above, not including poison)

### Leather Mask of Disguise

When this flexible, leather mask is placed over a face, it instantly becomes the face of any known humanoid. The wearer of the mask must have seen the target face at least once and must be conscious for the magical mask to work. The mask does not change the voice, height, weight or mannerisms of the wearer to match the target. However, scars, eye and skin color, and other facial features will conform to the desired look. The wearer must make a saving throw versus Wisdom to remove the mask. *Value: 2,500 GP.*

## Mythology

This issue of *Back to BasiX* presents two new monsters for use in your adventure campaigns!

### Ettoar

A horrible cross between an ettin and a boar, the **Ettoar** strikes fear into the hearts of any who face their kind. Like ettins, they are hard to surprise—one head is always awake while the other sleeps. They are most often found alone but occasionally may be found with another of the opposite gender.

Armor Class: 5  
Hit Dice: 5+1  
Move: 90' (30')  
Attacks: 2-4 weapons  
Damage: 1-10 each  
Special: Cannot be surprised

No. Appearing: 1-2  
Save As: Fighter: 4  
Morale: 10  
Treasure Type: E x2  
Alignment: Chaotic



Illustration by Je Shields (KS)



Illustration by Je Shields (KS)

### Yurktogg

The planes of hell are filled with countless demons, many of which have yet to be discovered by mortals. The Yurktogg is one such demon—rarely encountered. This flying demon prefers to float above hapless adventurers, dousing them with fiery missiles before swooping down to finish injured victims with cruel knives.

Armor Class: 2  
Hit Dice: 4  
Move: 120' (40') - fly  
Attacks: 1 by weapon  
Damage: 2-12 fire missile or by weapon  
Special: Cannot be charmed; cannot be injured by non-magical weapons

No. Appearing: 2-4  
Save As: Fighter: 3  
Morale: 11  
Treasure Type: Nil  
Alignment: Chaotic

### Dragon Chambers of t'Zeel

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 7th to 10th level.

*Background:* An ancient race of dragon-men once dwelt in these lands, living their lives as scaly humanoid wizards and priests. Although they have not been seen for centuries, their ruinous temples, towers, and fortifications are still found throughout the mountains, abandoned yet avoided by most. Rumors of great power and immeasurable wealth within these empty places are often whispered in shadowed taverns and quiet inns by locals—brave adventurers overhearing such talk may become interested in the perilous and likely exaggerated tales uttered by farmers and merchants.

One such place is within a day's ride of the small farming village of Yellen Hill. The local tavern overflows with gossip each night and adventurers stopping in for a quick meal may discover a wondrous tale of wizards, dragons, and treasure.

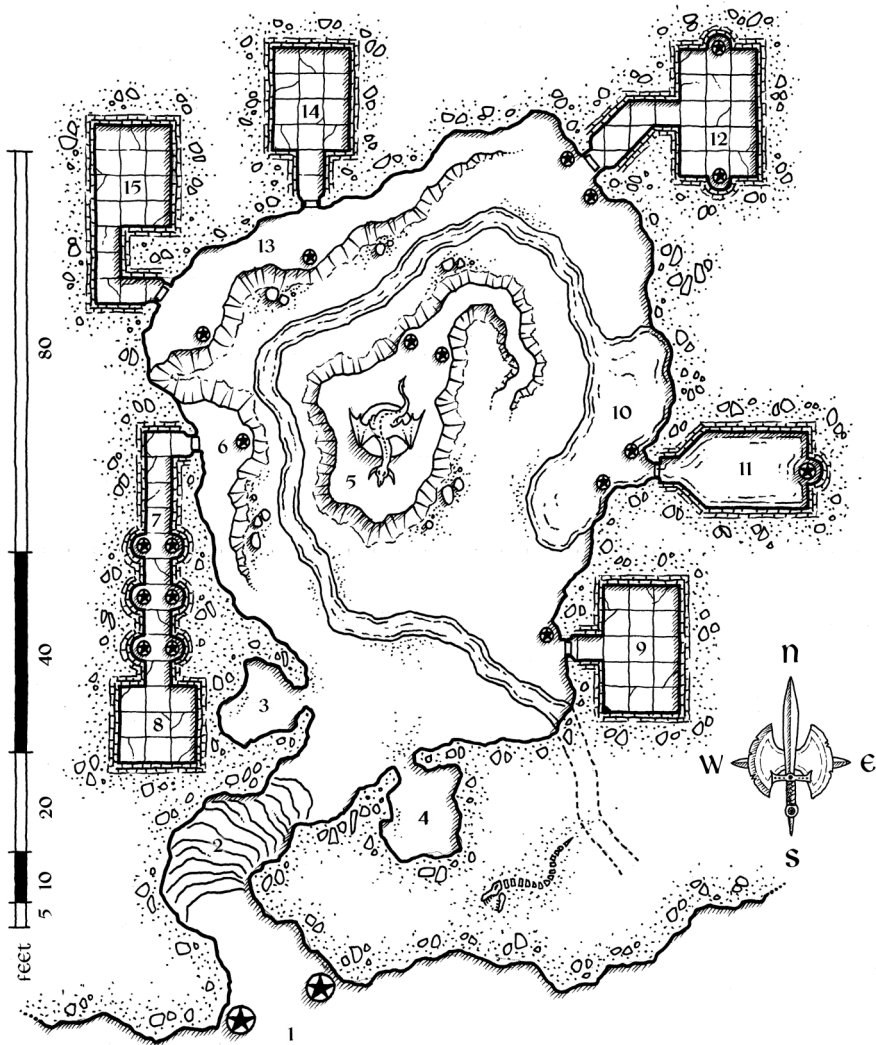
*Detailed Background:* In the tradition of his mentors before him, the dragon-priest t'Zeel maintained a small temple in the mountains where his brethren could assemble and pray to their planar god, Kragkothamon. Like some of the great priests who preceded him, t'Zeel had the option to perform a final ritual after his 100<sup>th</sup> year on this plane, that would transform him back into dragon form. Many dragon-priests elected to remain in humanoid form, living out several

centuries in this world, before lying down one final time in a prepared crypt within the temple.

Although initially undecided, t'Zeel made the choice to transform back into dragon form just before his centennial anniversary. With a young disciple ready to take his place as the temple priest, he began the painful ritual only days before the last day of choosing. During the process, a group of armed soldiers attacked the temple, killing the young priest and preventing the ritual from completion. A violent battle between the soldiers and temple guards left everyone dead—not a soul left the temple alive.

The great dragon-priest t'Zeel remains in a partially transformed state, appearing as a small dragon statue in the middle of the temple (area 5). Most of the remains of the dead have all but withered away with only trace bone fragments and rusted weapons found lying in various places throughout the abandoned shrine. Former priests and wizards are still lying in their crypts within the temple but a couple have become restless and are roaming their chambers as undead.

Disturbing the temple by touching the dragon statue or unsealing the crypts of former dragon-priests will restart the transformation ritual. Within six rounds, t'Zeel will break free of his stony exterior and emerge as a famished Red Dragon.



## DRAGON CHAMBERS OF t'ZEEL

### *Notes About the Crypts*

Much of the history and deeds of the temple priests are inscribed on the walls of the burial chambers. Characters may learn who they were and what they did by reading the lengthy chapters of their life on the walls.

14

### 1. Temple Entrance

Two towering dragon-men statues, each with long, folded wings, stand guard over the entrance to the temple. Neither of the 20-foot statues animate but their presence instills fear (as the *Cause Fear* spell, saving throws allowed) in all but the bravest of mortals.

## 2. Temple Stairs

Naturally made stone stairs lead down to the temple floor. Still present on the stairs are the remains of a fallen human soldier who stopped his crawl up, likely expiring from wounds suffered from his fight with the temple guards.

A small leather pouch under his rusted breastplate and rotting leather armor contains **20 gp** and **10 pp**.

## 3 and 4. Guard Stations

These two chambers were temple guard stations, occupied by two to four dragon-men sworn to protect their priests and shrine. All that remain in the area are rusted weapons and broken furniture. The remains of the guards, slain by the human soldiers long ago, are found throughout the temple in several areas.

## 5. Dragon Statue

Appearing as a single, marbleized statue, the partially transformed priest t'Zeel remains frozen, a short step away from ritual completion. The statue is but a tenth of the size of a normal red dragon. At ritual completion, it will fill out to full size. The eyes of the statue appear as large garnets and its nails look like elongated opals.

Touching the statue will restart the transformation process, ending it within a few minutes. There is no way to stop the process once it begins.

**t'Zeel, Red Dragon:** AC -1, HD 10\*\*, HP: 60, #AT 2 claws/1 bite or breath, D 1-8/1-8/4-32 or breath, MV 90' (30') or flying 240' (80'), Save F10, ML 10, Special: breath 3x day, spells, AL C, XP 2,300

The dragon-priest will emerge from the transformation enraged, knowing that his ritual was halted centuries earlier. He will attack any and all living creatures for several days before returning to the temple and departing to his home plane.

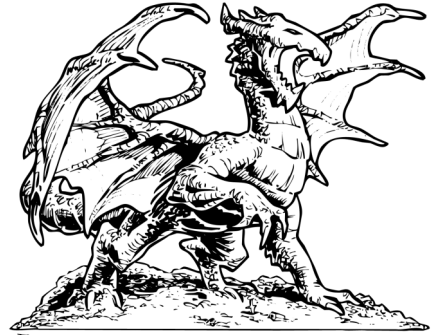


Illustration by Je Shields (KS)

## 6. Cursed Statue

A statue of a dragon-man, his arms crossed and holding two sickles, stands facing the door to the oldest crypt in the temple. Any who approach within 5' will be engulfed in a fiery blast that issues from the statue's maw. Characters may make a saving throw versus Dragon Breath to take only half of the 5d6 fire damage.

## 7. Trapped Hallway

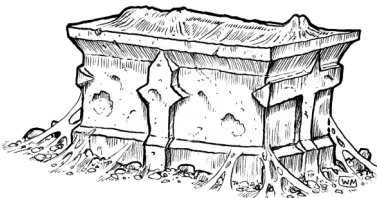
A pressure plate in the floor fills the hallway with barely detectable gas in four rounds. Any character that makes a save under half their Wisdom will detect an odd smell after the trap is triggered. For every ten rounds characters stay in the hallway, they will suffer 1 hit point of damage.

Six dragon-priest statues stand facing inward, their hands in an open, receiving gesture. If anything is placed in a statue's hands, its eyes will flicker with a small flame. There is a 20% accumulating chance per round (per statue) that the flame will ignite the gas in the hall. Characters caught in the explosion will suffer 6d6 explosion damage (or half if a save versus Death Ray or Poison is made). Note that the gas and subsequent damage reaches into area 8 as well.

### 8. Crypt of the First

A niche in the southern wall contains the wrapped form of the dead dragon-priest, t'Kral the First. Being the first to refuse the transformation ritual, his body was buried with great reverence and respect. Several jars of platinum coins and gems surround the body in the niche and his bony hands hold a small wand. Along with one hundred garnets (each worth 100 gp), there are **500 pp** in the jars. A **Wand of Dragon Fire** with six charges can be pried from the firm grasp of the deceased priest. (The Wand's abilities are found in the Magic Shop section of this fanzine)

Note that an explosion in the hallway has a 10% chance of destroying the wand.



### 9. Crypt of the Fifth

The last dragon-priest to remain in humanoid form was buried in this simple tomb. A slab adjacent to the east wall holds the decaying form of t'Durg, the fifth and last priest to refuse the transformation ritual. His form has been partially consumed by long-dead creatures, leaving broken bones and bits of linen wrappings atop the slab. Several broken clay pots, pushed from the slab, lie on the floor. Their contents are spilled and scattered. Silver and gold coins are found on the floor (**500 sp** and **250 gp**). A pair of silver bracers on bony forearms remain unblemished by time. These are **Bracers of Cold Protection** (adds +1 to saving throws versus cold-based attacks, both magical and natural).

### 10. Pool of Remembrance

Although the water from the winding stream is normal and clean, it changes once it enters the pool. A magical aura at the bottom of the pool gives the water both healing and mental restoration abilities. Drinking from the pool heals 1d8 damage (maximum once per week) and cures any mental affliction (once per character). For every half minute a character submerges themselves within the pool, there is a 10% cumulative chance that they can recall any lost memory from their past.

Thousands of donated coins line the bottom of the pool, reflecting light from torches and lanterns throughout the temple. There are **1,790 sp** and **865 gp** at the bottom of the clear pool.



## 11. Crypt of the Sixth

When t'Zeel felt that he may elect to remain in humanoid form, he had the construction of his burial chamber started. However, the work was stopped when he changed his mind. A water-filled crypt appears empty at first until the room is entered and the room's guardians, three **Electric Eels**, attack.

**Electric Eels (3):** AC 9 HD 2\* HP 12 each, ATT 1 bite, Dam 1-4, MV swim 120' (40'), Special; shock once per turn (5' range, 3d8 dam; 10' range 2d8 dam; 15' range 1d8 dam), ML 7, Save F2, AL Neutral, XP 25 each

## 12. Crypt of the Fourth

A pair of dragon-men statues watch over the narrow door to this crypt. After turning into the chamber, characters will find a bent-over, shambling creature partially wrapped in rotting linens and carrying a glowing spear. The dead priest t'Gath has risen as a vile **Wight** and wanders about his burial chamber seeking some forgotten vengeance.

**t'Gath (Wight):** AC 5 HD 3\* HP 18, ATT 1 claw or 1 weapon, Dam energy drain or 1d6+2 (spear), MV 90' (30'), Special; energy drain reduces character's level by one, ML 12, Save F3, Align Chaotic, XP 50

The **spear +2** that t'Gath carries also protects the wielder from Fire (+1 vs. all fire attacks and saving throws, magical or natural). Additionally, several rotted leather bags have split open revealing several piles of gems. There are 1d100 gems of each of the following types: diamond, sapphire, emerald, ruby, and topaz. Each gem is worth 10 gp.

An ornate tapestry hangs from the east wall, depicting a scene of Kragkothamon engulfing an entire world with a single, fiery breath. It is worth 1,000 gp to tapestry collectors.

## 13. Statue Trap

When characters reach the midway point between the two dragon-men statues on the slope, each will animate and converge on the group. Each wields a sickle and spear, attacking once per round with each weapon. Each weapon is treated as +1 to-hit and damage. The weapons will disappear when the statues explode upon death.

**Dragon-men Statues (2):** AC 4 HD 5\*\* HP 30 each, ATT 2 weapons, Dam 1-8+1, 1-6+1, MV 60' (20'), special: upon death, explodes in a ball of fire for 3d6 damage to any within 20', ML 11, Save F3, Align: Chaotic, XP 425 each

## 14. Crypt of the Thirds

Twin priests once shared the duty of administering service to members of their race. Wrapped and buried side by side on two stone slabs, t'Reth and t'Relk were identical and were never apart in life. When t'Reth died before his brother, t'Relk took his own life moments later to remain by his side in death.



Dean Spencer

Each brother holds a half shield and a short sword upon their wrapped form. Both swords are **short swords +1** and illuminate on command (10' radius). Although non-magical, the shields are adorned with language and images that—when seen—may prevent any dragon-man (statue or undead) from attacking (1 in 6 chance they will attack someone else).

A single clay pot between the burial slabs is filled with platinum coins (350 pp).

### 15. Crypt of the Second

Upon entry to the area, characters will hear the scraping of nails on stone in the dark beyond. A **Mummy** digs at the wall seeking a way out. Awakened from his eternal sleep when the ritual was halted, t'Shrin has ever since tried to escape his burial chamber.

**t'Shrin (Mummy):** AC 3 HD 5+1\* HP 31, ATT 1 touch, Dam 1-12 + disease, MV 60' (20'), Special; disease, unaffected by sleep, charm and hold spells, ML 12, Save F5, Align Chaotic, XP 400

A small chest and three clay jars are set near the east wall. The chest contains 3 scrolls (*Bless*, *Hold Person*, and *Snake Charm*), **chain-mail +1**, and a **war hammer +1**. The clay jars contain **668 gp**, **981 sp**, and two dozen pieces of gem-encrusted jewelry (each piece is worth 1d1000gp).

### Conclusion

If characters inadvertently restart the ritual, they will have to contend with an irate red dragon looking for revenge and a meal. If t'Zeel is slain in dragon form before he returns to his home plane, his body will return to its humanoid state after several rounds.

## Spellbound

In a previous issue of *Back to BasiX*, we briefly discussed Druidic spells. I was recently asked about necromancy and spells of this type for B/X. I've come up with a few spells that I think I would use if a player wanted their character to have more of a necromancer feel.

Note that I haven't specified whether the base character class would be Cleric or Magic-user—I believe I would allow either but I'd lean more toward the Cleric class for this build. However, GMs can choose either base class or create a new class entirely.

### Necromancer Spells

Level	Name
1	Destroy Life
1	Dispel Undead
2	Rot Flesh
2	Summon Undead
3	Gravesight
3	Hold Undead
4	Animate Bone Golem
4	Speak with Dead
5	Resist Death
5	Vampiric Touch

Spell descriptions are found on the following page.

## First Level Spells

### *Destroy Life*

Targets unintelligent life, destroying 1 HD or ten square feet (depth of 1') per level of the caster. Useful for destroying vegetation or swarms of insects. Targets must have less than 1 HD each to be affected.

### *Dispel Undead*

Caster affects 1 HD undead per level, turning them as the cleric's Turn Undead ability. This spell can be used on undead that have previously been turned or unaffected by a turn attempt. This spell can also be used to cancel the effects of an *Animate Dead* spell.

## Second Level Spells

### *Rot Flesh*

For the number of rounds equal to the caster's level, any successful touch by the caster has a chance to pass on a rotting disease (like that of a Mummy). Affected victims may make a saving throw versus Spells to avoid the disease effects.

### *Summon Undead*

The caster may summon 1 HD of undead to their location. Each undead creature may be controlled by the caster using verbal commands. Undead of 4 HD or higher may make a saving throw every turn to avoid being controlled. Undead must be within 100 feet per level of the caster. The undead follow the commands of the caster for 1 turn per caster level.

## Third Level Spells

### *Gravesight*

The caster may look into one grave or burial location, gazing through solid rock, wood, or dirt to examine the contents within. For each level of the caster, the distance is increased by ten feet and the length of time increased by one minute.

### *Hold Undead*

This spell works on undead like the *Hold Person* spell except that the undead targets do not get a saving throw.

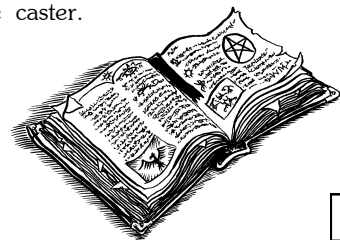
## Fourth Level Spells

### *Animate Bone Golem*

Using a pile of bones, the caster may create a Bone Golem that will follow his or her simple instructions. A full-sized Bone Golem requires over two hundred pounds of bone. One hundred pounds of bones will create a half-sized Bone Golem.

### *Speak with Dead*

The caster may be able to speak with the dead, asking simple yes or no questions or queries that may produce a one-word response. Each level of the caster increases the number of days the target may be dead to allow the spell to work. For example, a 10<sup>th</sup> level caster can speak to the dead who have died within ten days. The caster may only target one dead being. The spell lasts for 1 turn per level of the caster.



## Fifth Level Spells

### *Resist Death*

Any creature or person who has been killed can be held in a state of “near-death” for a number of days equal to the level of the caster. During this time, the affected target's form will not naturally deteriorate or heal. Magical healing may be applied at anytime, but cancels the spell's effects immediately.

### *Vampiric Touch*

For 1 round per character level, the caster has the same deadly, energy draining touch as a vampire. Each successful strike heals the caster 1d4 hit points while draining the victim two levels or HD. Any creature killed with Vampiric Touch will not turn into a vampire but has a 50% chance of returning as a Zombie within 24 hours of death.

## Quarterly Dungeon Crawl #2

### Pyramid of Reversal

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 10th to 14th level.

*Background:* Village elders of Ghantala have had a loose agreement with demons living below the desert dunes for centuries – a child from a single village family each generation must be sacrificed to the demonic denizens to prevent a catastrophic disease from decimating the remote village. However, only the elders are aware of the arrangement. Villagers believe that some of their children have been born “possessed” and had to be left in the nearby pyramids to be judged, taken away, and healed by the gods. Children are actually drugged by elders making them behave erratically. Parents are led to believe that to save them, they must give them over to the gods.

Unfortunately for the elders, the centuries-old secret was somehow discovered by villagers after a recent sacrifice. After enraged families dispatched their elders in a night of bloodshed and retribution, they have

tried to recover lost children at the pyramids but their attempts to discover an entrance has failed. They are offering a substantial reward to characters to enter the pyramid and retrieve any children they can find.

*Detailed Background:* Elders have been trading children for bricks of gold for centuries. Demons have been paying the mortals in gold in exchange for young children, used to work as slaves in their mines below the surface (among other nefarious purposes). The elders have been stockpiling the gold, spending it only when necessary. A secret vault under the village council chambers is well hidden and unknown to any who remain in the area. It is filled with hundreds of gold bars.

Many of the abducted children are still below the village, serving their demon masters in the upside down city of Xak'tor. Children are forced to mine for gold and silver, serve lazy demon masters, and defend the upside down city from subterranean threats.

## Pyramids of the Dead

### 1. Funeral Area

Most of the villagers have gathered in this area, awaiting heroes who are willing to enter the Pyramid of Death to retrieve their lost loved ones. Daring to go no closer than the gathering area between the pyramids, they have assembled in prayer and lamentation, heart-broken from the deceit of their trusted elders. None of the villagers will go any closer than this area.

### 2. Pyramid of the Sun

A smaller pyramid nearby is used to offer sacrifices of vegetables and fruit to the Sun god, Zharr. The small cubicle at the top of the pyramid lacks a roof, allowing the sun to reduce sacrificed food to a watery pulp. In exchange for the bounty, Zharr is said to bless his people with long life and healthy bodies. The door to the pyramid interior has been sealed for centuries—no one knows what is within the structure, if anything.

### 3. Pyramid of Reversal

Called the “Pyramid of Death” by the people of Ghantala, this structure is nothing more than an overbuilt entryway to an upside-down city below the surface. Elders of the village have convinced villagers that the pyramid was constructed as a sacrificial temple to their god of Judgment, Lorfandu. Since no child has ever escaped the judgment of the gods, the people have also called Lorfandu the god of Death.

### 4. Sacrificial Pole

A single pillar emerges from the stone floor of the uppermost tier of the blackened pyramid. Leather ropes, used to lash children down, hang from the stone pole. No door or entry can be found anywhere on the pyramid unless a lengthy and meticulous search is made. A concealed trap door around the pillar opens to reveal a circular stairwell leading to areas 7 and 8 below.

**Find Concealed Door:** 2 in 6 chance, or 3 in 6 chance for elves and dwarves.

### 5. Sulfuric River

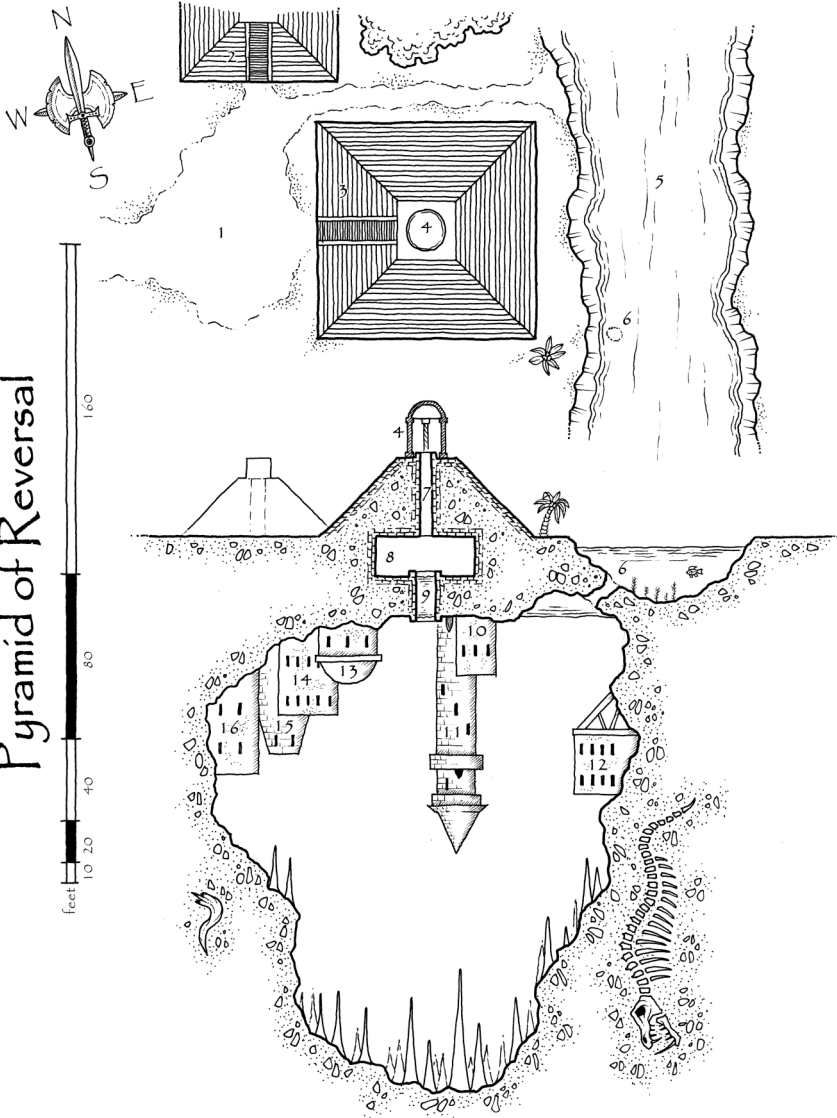
A river of sulfur-rich water flows past the pyramids, depositing the yellow-tinged fluids to a shallow sea in the south. The slow-moving water is undrinkable, giving anyone who consumes more than a mouthful of it serious stomach pains, cramps, and *diarrhea* for 24 hours. However, the water is safe to bathe in and provides a cleansing feel to the skin and a calming effect to the nerves.

**Avoid Sulfuric Sickness:** Roll under one-half Constitution score (rounding up).

### 6. Secret Tunnel

Villagers bathe and relax in one especially warm spot in the sulfuric river near the shore. Heat from the underground city emanates through a secret tunnel that connects a lake below to the river above. The secret tunnel at the bottom of the river is challenging to discover. Some characters may detect a change in water flow or direction near the spot, hinting at an opening at the river bottom.

## Pyramid of Reversal



**Find Secret Tunnel:** 1 in 6 chance, or 2 in 6 chance for characters with aquatic backgrounds.

### 7. Weightless Drop

Circular stairs wind downward forty feet before ending in a trap door. An overwhelming feeling of weight-

lessness increases as characters descend the stairs. By the time they reach the bottom, they will feel like they have to fight to stay grounded. Any who jump from the top of the stairs down into the center opening between the steps will find their descent slowing almost to a halt as they reach the floor.

The trap door in the floor is locked from the other side, requiring considerable strength to break the bar and chains holding the door in place.

**Open Reinforced Door:** 1 in 12 chance (Strength bonus applies).

## 8. Sorting Chamber

Weightless children floating in mid air were evaluated for service suitability in this large room. Demon masters choose new workers for their mines, towers, and tunnels after a lengthy review of their minds and bodies. Those found to be unlikely suited to the harsh environment of the reversed city are disposed of.

## 9. Testing Tunnel

A final test is performed by those that pass the initial sorting evaluation in the previous chamber. Mortals must move through a current of swirling darkness to access the opposite side and door to exit the tunnel. Resisting the urge to fight the pull of the chamber makes it more likely to pass the test and survive the final area before entering the upside down city.

**Access Opposite Side:** Roll OVER Strength (stronger characters are less likely to succeed).

The door exits into the fully upside down world of the demons within Xak'tor. By this time, characters will fully feel that up is down and down is up. As they emerge from the testing tunnel, they will be able to plant their feet on the floors of the structures and cave without much difficulty. However, for each failed check made in the tunnel before

exiting, they will be penalized -1 to all actions for 24 hours (cumulative) as they fight the urge to right themselves.

Most denizens of Xak'tor are indoors, lounging while their slaves perform all necessary duties. There is a 10% chance that **1d4 Cambion Demons** may see the characters as they emerge from the tunnel.

**Cambion Demons (1d4):** AC 4, HD 6, HP 36 each, #AT 1 weapon, D weapon+3, Save F6, ML 9, Special: 18 Strength, Thief abilities, XP 820 each



## 10. Guardhouse

This two-story structure houses demon guards while off duty. Luckily for characters, the demons are rarely idle, preferring to spend their time making mortal lives miserable. Many torment the slaves within the city or are off to different planes or worlds to war and pillage. Characters will find only a handful of demons here at any time.

**1d4 Shadow demons** are often here, awaiting orders.

**Shadow Demons (1d4):** AC 1, HD 7+3, HP 45 each, #AT 2 claws/1 bite, D 1-6/1-6/1-8, Save F7, ML 9, Special: Spell-like abilities, XP 1,320 each

## 11. Tower of the Demoness Ixnatak, Great Guardian of the Plane of Reversal

The slender tower contains six levels of empty living quarters for the demoness Ixnatak, a Marilith Demon of great importance. She resides in the uppermost level of the tower, served by slaves and many Succubi. Dozens of valuable items are found throughout the tower, including 1d6 magical items. Pairs of Succubus guards are rarely far from the demoness' great possessions.

**Succubus Demons (GM decides):** AC 0, HD 6, HP 36 each, #AT 2 claws, D 1-3/1-3, Save F6, ML 7, Special: Magic weapons to hit, level drain, XP 1,320 each

**Demoness Ixnatak (Marilith Demon):** AC -6, HD 7+6, HP 36, #AT 7 swords/1 tail, D 1-8+3/1-8 (other 6 weapons)/2-8, Save F7, ML 10, Special: +1 weapons to hit, Spells as MU7, XP 1,700

The demoness carries the magical gemstone, *Soulblood*, a red ruby that contains all the souls of the countless mortals she has defeated. It is worth 75,000 to 100,00 gp. She also wields *Willbreaker*, a magical sword that reduces the target's morale to half on a successful hit and steals souls on natural 20s. Otherwise, it is treated as a **sword +3** for to-hit rolls and damage.

Ixnatak often has chests of gems, platinum, gold, and magic items



scattered about her private quarters. Characters should find in plain sight 1d100 gems (value 1,000 gp each), 5d100pp, 10d100gp, and 1d6 magical items.

## 12. Slave Quarters

Broken or injured slaves are left here to recover or die. The door is locked from the outside and is always guarded by a single Balor Demon.

**Grizzled Balor Demon:** AC -2, HD 8+7, HP 55, #AT 1 sword or 1 whip, D 2-9 or 1-6, Save F8, ML 10, Special: +1 weapons to hit, whip adds 3d6 fire damage, spell-like abilities, XP 1,820

There are 3d6 sick, injured, and near-death slaves within the building (50% are children).

## 13. Temple of Demogorgon

A high-domed, single story structure, the Temple of Demogorgon the King of Demons, contains a gargantuan statue of the two-headed leader. Although the temple is filled with hundreds of kneeling and prayer mats, it is rarely attended by demon patrons. Demogorgon mandated that the temple be built in Xak'tor, but none of his minions



regularly visit its interior. A single, fanatical **priest** and his **three acolytes** provide worship services and advice to visitors as needed. Non-demon visitors (other than slaves) are treated with hostility unless given specific instructions otherwise. In battle, the acolytes will protect their priest, preferring to die to save him or give him time to cast spells against foes.

**Human Priest of Demogorgon, Xak'tor temple:** AC 3, Cleric 7, HP 24, #AT 1 mace or spell, D 1-6+2, Save C7, ML 11, Spells: 1L) *Protection from Good, Detect Good*, 2L) *Bless, Hold Person*, 3L) *Cause Disease, Curse*, 4L) *Cure Serious Wounds*, 5L) *Commune*, **mace +2**, plate mail, XP 1,250

**Acolytes (3):** AC 3, Cleric 1, HP 5 each, #AT 1 mace, D 1-6, Save C1, ML 12, XP 13 each

Four massive opals are set into the statue's four eye sockets. Removing them marks the characters for life, creating an open-ended plot hook for many demon encounters to come (DM to create and use as needed). However, if the characters can sell the opals, each will fetch 15,000 gp each. Note that gem dealers and craftsmen will consider the unnaturally large opals to either be fake or cursed making them hard to sell.

## 14. Storehouse

Grains, vegetables, and fruit are stored in this warehouse in large quantities, used primarily to feed the slaves in the small city. Most of the supplies are either nearly or fully spoiled, yet still given to starving slaves nonetheless. There is a 50%

chance that one or two Cambion Demons will be patrolling the storehouse.

## 15. Storehouse

The entrance to a vast mine of countless tunnels is found at the ground floor of this structure. Thousands of slaves mine the tunnels for gold, silver, and gems while watched over by dozens of demons. Entering this area is considerably dangerous and should only be encouraged if the characters are capable. It is easy to get lost in the darkness beyond as hundreds of wretched and foul things lurk in the shadows and dead-end tunnels. Somewhere at the end of the mining operation lies a hidden exit to Avernus, the first level of Hell. It is guarded by a dozen Balor demons.

## 16. Visitor Quarters

Although rare, visitors occasionally visit Xak'tor to meet with Ixnatak or attend a special service at the Temple of Demogorgon. Demons, devils, leaders of underdark factions and—very rarely—an elder from Ghantala may use the special quarters at the edge of the city by invitation only. When multiple visitors stay in the elegant quarters, violence often ensues.

## Adventure Conclusion

Characters should easily find a few children slaves in several areas, attending demons, working the mines, or cleaning up after visitors. Attempting to gather as many slaves as possible may create issues when trying to sneak them out. Demons will be sure to miss multiple slaves and will search the city for intruders.

Finding the tunnel below the dais of the old temple, the brave heroes navigate the darkness and dozens of corpses littering their path to emerge in the new shrine of the Broken God (Area 28).

*The map for this part of the adventure can be found on the next page.*

### A21-23. Monk Quarters

A private wing of single rooms was added here for monks both excelling at their studies and showing great promise in the order. Each of the three rooms is outfitted with a single bed, writing desk, stool, and side table. The rooms are filled with years of undisturbed dust and smoke residue. If searched, adventurers will find old scrolls, books, and dried writing utensils. There is a 25% chance that a character may find a scroll or book that details the Crimson God in further detail.

### A24. Monk Quarters

A single monk was charged with watching over several monks, providing assistance and advice as needed. This monk was called an “Observer” and often had his quarters near his charges. This room was the quarters for this wing’s Observer. It is furnished similarly to that of his initiates with the exception of having more books and scrolls on his bookshelf than the younger monks.

When searching the bookshelf, adventurers will find a magical tome that will add one point to Wisdom permanently after a full, uninterrupted read. Only one character may

read the book and only if they have at least an Intelligence score of at least 12.

### A25. Empty Library

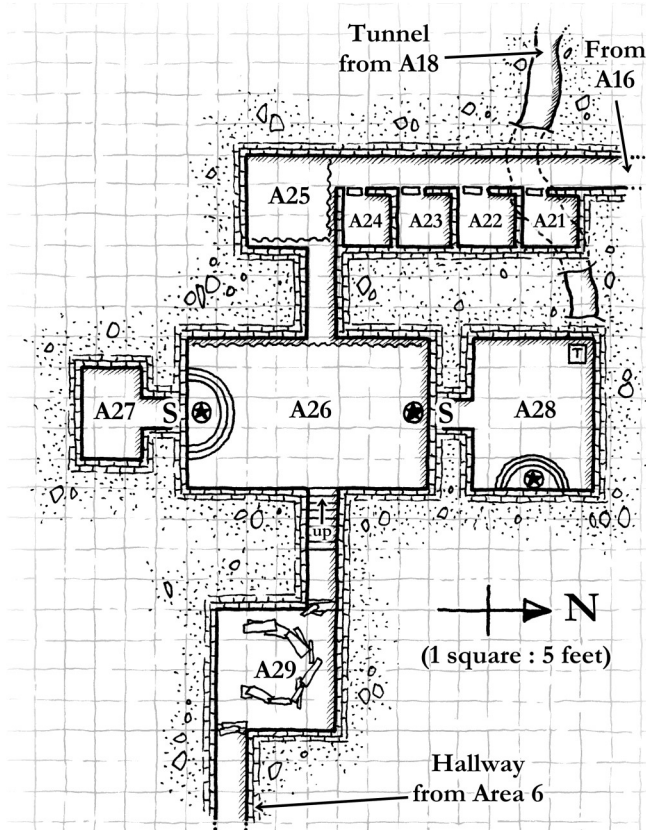
Two massive tapestries slide on rails to reveal two openings into this room. Several empty bookcases are found in the room, apparently cleared out in a hurry. Books and scrolls are lying about the room as if dropped or thrown to the side in a rush. In fact, monks fleeing the area in the abbey’s last days grabbed whatever they could and left.

A note on a shelf reads, “Take three others and grab whatever you can from the western library. Make sure to get *The Crimson Veil* and the unfinished *Breaking of a God*. Hurry back!”

### A26. Private Shrine

Monks often attended worship multiple times per day privately. Although they spent time with villagers and visitors in the main temple (area 18), they preferred the private shrine in this location when furthering their prayers and devotions. Unlike the main temple, this shrine lacks benches or chairs. Monks were expected to kneel upon the hard floor to show their faith.

A statue of a broad-shouldered man on the dais at the western side of the room has been defaced, marked with splashes of black and red paint. The hallway to the north is covered by a great tapestry of monks helping men, women, and children in several different locales.



**Crimson Abbey of the Broken God**  
**Map 6**

An archway on the southern wall leads to stairs and a hallway beyond.

**Find Well-made Secret Doors:** Two secret doors in the room are hard to find (Elves and dwarves may find them on 1-2 on 1d8, and others on a 1 on 1d8).

### A27. Secret Chamber

This area was known to the lawful monks of the order before the Broken God's influence spread throughout the abbey.

The secret room contains one of the many artifacts of their god: the

*Shield of the Broken God.* Additionally, the monks stored much of their donation money here. Ten small chests hold a total of **967 gp, 1,896 sp, 2,751 cp.**

*Shield of the Broken God:* **shield +1, +2 versus Chaos.** Provides 1-2 hp regeneration per eight hours to one Lawful character (must possess the shield for a majority of the time during that period). Once per day wielder may automatically knock one adjacent target back 1d4x5 feet.

## A28. New Temple

When the Broken God became tainted by the crimson entity below the abbey, the order broke into two factions. Those that served the newly transformed evil god created a smaller, secret temple in the upper level of the abbey. This temple was used for secret prayer and worship until the main temple was finished in the crypts of the monastery far below.

The statue that once stood in the main temple (area 18) was dragged through the tunnel to this secret room and erected on a makeshift dais. The arms and head were broken off the statue and the entire sculpture was splashed with crimson paint. A glass container filled with blood was set in place of the head (since dried, now just lined with a dried, red substance). The remains of several dead monks, an equal number of both orders, are found here and in the tunnel below. Note that none of the dead have headbands—all were presumably removed after the battle.

A trap door in the floor leads to a hidden tunnel that emerges in area A18.

## A29. Barricaded Room

When the battle for the abbey erupted and monks were decimated in the main temple, the remaining monks of the original order made their last stand in this common room. Piling up furniture and crates, they stood their ground to the last. A pile of skeletal remains in the center of the room hints to the gruesome and bitter end of the

monks of the untainted Broken God. Several dead monks outside the barricaded area wear ruby headbands. If any headpieces are removed, 2d4 skeletons will rise to attack characters.

**Skeletons (2d4):** AC 7, HD 1, HP 5 each, #AT 1 claw, D 1-4, Save F1, ML 12, XP 10 each

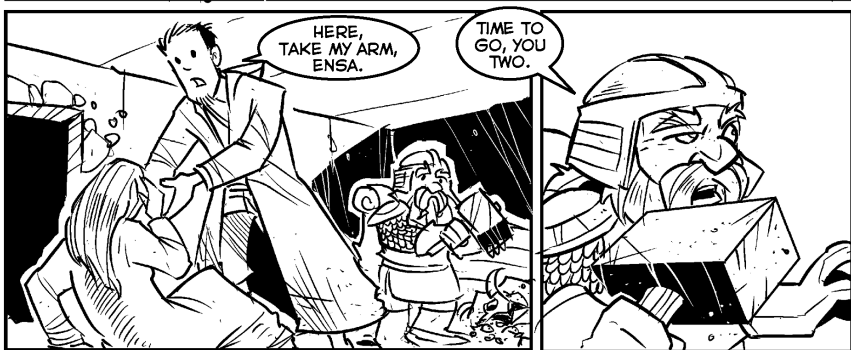
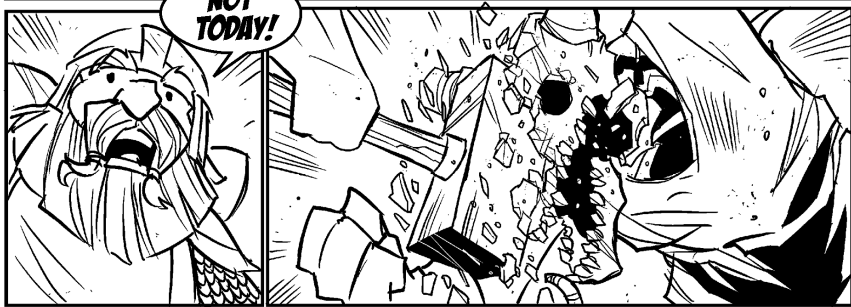
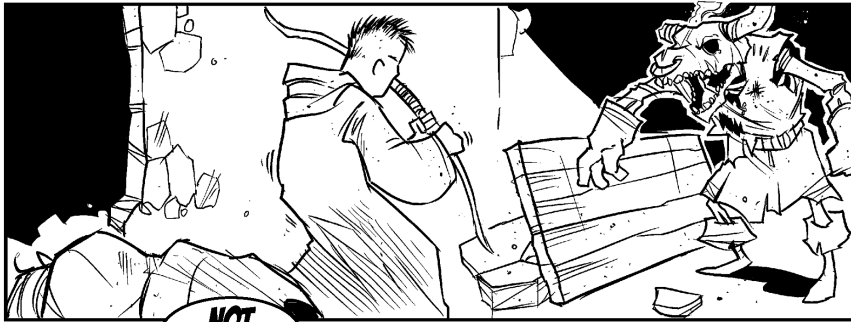
A search through the dead skeletons in the center of the room will reveal two important tomes: *The Crimson Veil* and *Breaking of a God*. These were to be secured and kept from the evil monks. The monks hid the books in their robes and died protecting them.

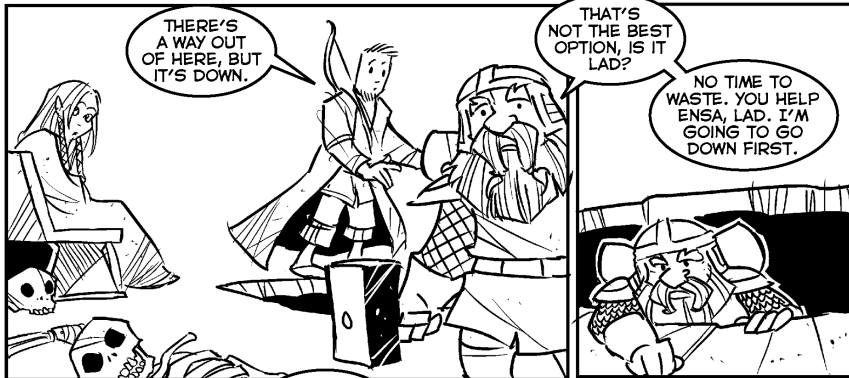
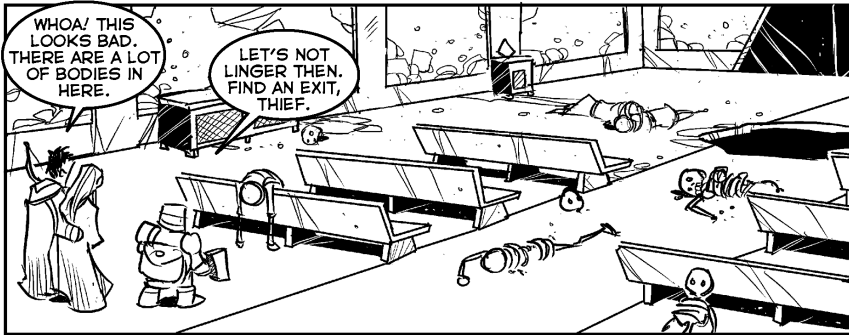
*The Crimson Veil* chronologically details the slow change in the order after a few monks stumbled upon the evil ruby below the abbey. It specifically details the location of the gem where it was found and several events that should have forewarned the evil to come.

*Breaking of a God* discusses the rise and fall of an immortal angel who finally rises to deity status after self-sacrifice. The story hints to the origins of the original order of the monks and their faith in their god's teachings and deeds.

### Convention Calendar

Convention	Date, Location
Origins Game Fair '19	Jun. 12th—16th, Columbus, OH
Gen Con 2019 (52)	Aug. 1st—4th, Indianapolis, IN
ShireCon II	Sept. 21st, Falls Village, CT
GameHoleCon VII	Oct. 31st—Nov. 3rd, Madison, WI





NEXT TIME: THE GROUP LEARNS MORE ABOUT THE FALLEN ABBEY.



# Back to Basic X



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

## The End? — A Note from the Fanzine Creator

For those that haven't followed the course of this fanzine over the last several months, know that this issue is the "final" issue—or the final issue for now. I know that's a bit vague but that's the best I can say at this time.

Why is it ending? Well, there are several reasons. Primarily, I'm ending the run of quarterly 'zines so that I can begin on work on other, more demanding projects. I'm a single creator already working on several projects, all in my free time. My bandwidth has shrunk over the last few months and instead of missing deadlines, I'd rather put a long hold on developing further issues.

I've had many emails and messages from fans of the fanzine asking to continue it and to seek assistance from other contributors. I appreciate the offers and ideas but in my experience, it's easier to herd a few cats than a dozen. Reminding contributors to get their submissions in

on time and having to edit their work several times doesn't fit my schedule constraints. I'd rather be the sole contributor, working toward my own deadlines without having to worry about others getting their parts done.

Although issue #10 is the final issue, I'm leaving the door open for a return to the series once I've completed several large projects over the next several months. I'm not guaranteeing a return but hinting to the possibility of restarting the series once my plate clears.

I've enjoyed the run over the last three years and am proud to have kept fairly close to meeting the quarterly deadlines I've set for myself. I've had the chance to interview industry legends and work with talented artists throughout the series. It has been one of my favorite things to create for you and I appreciate all the positive feedback you've had for the series. Thank you! - Thom Wilson

### — Issue #10 Details —

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## Back to Basix V. 3 No 3

Issue #10 — September 2019  
Printed November 1st, 2020  
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Editor: Michael J. Gross, III

Upcoming Issues:

None—See **Note** above for details.

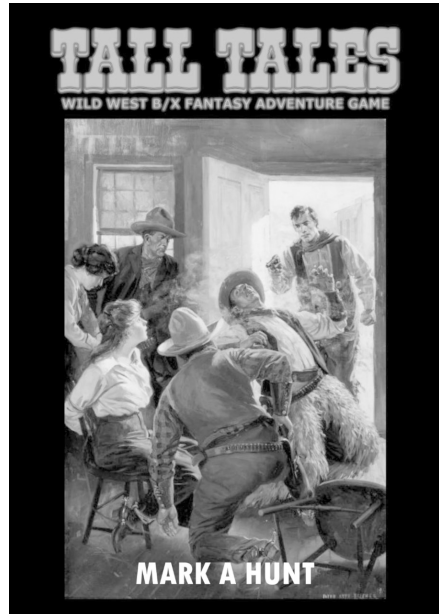


In the first nine issues of this fanzine, I've highlighted third-party and independent publisher's work that fell squarely in the B/X fantasy domain. In this final issue, I'll switch it up a little and take a look at a B/X system set in the old west: **Tall Tales BX Wild West RPG.**

Mark Hunt's western roleplaying game is an interesting and enjoyable take on the genre, using the simplistic rules of a tried and true system with classic professions common to fans. Six base classes are available for players, from Gunslinger to Snake-Oil Salesman. Each class has one or more special abilities that more than make up for the lack of arcane and divine spells.

Trying to bend B/X rules into a western game does present several challenges. First, armor class without real armor is interesting. The creator does use clothing variants to decrease AC, extending heavier clothing to a plate mail equivalent. However, adding a hat or a badge to decrease armor class seems a bit quirky. It works but just seems like a stretch. If the creator stretched the rules a little, using Dexterity or even Charisma (for law-abiding or dishonest characters) bonuses for armor class, it may have worked the same as hat and badge additions to the "armor" lists.

Additionally, money in *Tall Tales* matches that of the fantasy genre—copper through platinum pieces. This is definitely something I'd change if I ran this version of the game with my players.



Tall Tales cover

My last quibble with the system is with weapon damage. Pistol damage deals 1d6, the same as a spear. While this seems okay, I wonder if distance and body location for pistols, rifles, and shotguns could have been factored into damage a little better. Keeping with B/X (which doesn't care as much about distance and body location), it works but I can see Gunslingers at higher levels getting riddled with bullets without missing a step.

Otherwise, the book is quite good. Loads of interesting tables with name and background generation, plot ideas, and town-building make this a really good game and resource. Even the included character sheet matches up with the traditional B/X sheet. This book is definitely worth getting. Downloaded in PDF from DriveThruRPG for \$7.99 (on sale for \$1.99).

## Interview with a Legendary Author—Douglas Niles

One of the great RPG authors of the 1980s was **Douglas Niles** who produced adventures for different systems and levels for TSR. He is likely best known for producing the AD&D gem, “Against the Cult of the Reptile God,” and the Basic D&D novice-friendly, “Horror on the Hill”. I recently had the opportunity to ask him a few questions about his work at TSR and writing in general.

*[Thom] When did you begin working at TSR and what was your first published work there?*

*[Doug]* I started working at TSR in January of 1982. I began my post-college career in fall 1977, as a high school speech/English teacher in Clinton WI. That was where Gary Gyax moved with his family, and his daughter Heidi introduced me to D&D when I told her I had heard about it but never seen it. She gave me a copy of the Basic Set on a Wednesday, I think it was, and that Friday night I had some friends over and started my first campaign. Over the next couple of years (80/81) I progressed through the Expert rules and moved on to AD&D. I also was inspired enough by the game to rediscover my love of writing adventure fiction and began writing a fantasy novel set in a Celtic/Britannic type world.

My first published work was an AD&D introductory level module called “Against the Cult of the Reptile God.” I’m still rather proud of it and it got a lot of nice feedback.

*[T] How did you find writing for three different levels of D&D to be? Was it challenging? [note: Douglas wrote adventures for Basic, Expert, and Companions.]*

[D] I didn’t find the different level game rules to be very challenging, except for having to flip back and forth between the rulebooks when I couldn’t remember where a certain spell, monster, magic item, etc. were described. (There was no rules compendium in existence during the 80s!)

The most complicated part of my involvement with D&D was creating the “War Machine” rules for mass combat. Frank Mentzer, who was writing the Companion rulebook, asked for me specifically to do that, which was flattering. I had done some fun and fast-moving war-games by that time, and also the AD&D BATTLESYSTEM rules, which allowed for tactical miniatures play of large scale battles. But War Machine was supposed to be a streamlined version for battle resolution—instead of lining up miniatures and playing out the battle, you factor in a whole ton of factors, such as troop numbers, various armor classes, movement, cavalry, and artillery (like catapults, not gunpowder) as well as heroic leaders. Then you make one dice roll to determine the outcome of the whole battle! I actually can’t remember many details about it, but I still hear from people who use it in not just D&D but other RPGs as well.

*[T] Were there any other adventures (or supplements) you wrote or pitched for Basic/Expert D&D that either moved to AD&D or never made it into the product catalog at all?*

[D] When TSR acquired SPI in the early 80s I hoped to have a chance to design a game for a Civil War battle in the “Great Battles of the Civil War” rules system, but I never had a chance to do that. As I gained experience, I spent more time designing rules for RPGs and board games and less time working on adventures, which was fine with me—I really liked game system design. I began writing novels for TSR in about 1985 and tried for a long time to get the book department to approve a series of epic historical novels about World War 2. I pitched the idea that they could come out on the 50th anniversary of many important dates (Pearl Harbor, Dec 1991; D-Day June 1994) but could never get the go-ahead. The head of the department decided, logically enough, that the TSR brand was about fantasy, and so I made my way through the Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance book lines, which were a lot of fun to write. After I began my free-lance career in 1990, I did write some WW2 alternate history novels with a friend and former TSR colleague, Michael Dobson.

*[T] Any memories of playtesting, writing, or your time in general at TSR that you'd like to share? E.g. your first D&D character, or an event at a playtesting session of one of your books that was surprising or unexpected?*

[D] My most vivid memory of a playtesting incident actually occurred during the design of a board game, World War 2—European Theater of Operations. The game had a fairly detailed (for a strategic game) naval combat system, including ship-to-ship combat based on 2d6 rolls. Ships had gunnery and armor ratings. A roll high enough to “hit” usually had to be something like 7-11. If the hit was rolled as doubles, the target was immediately sunk instead of damaged. During a playtest, a naval engagement occurred as the German BISMARCK encountered several British battleships. The German player immediately rolled a “12” for the BISMARCK, which would sink any target in the game. The hapless British victim? (You already guessed it if you know your WW2 history.) The HOOD, of course—historically, she was quickly hit by the German ship and torn apart by a massive explosion. There were only 3 Royal Navy survivors if I recall correctly.

My memories of working at TSR are more social than actually work-related. I made great friends there. When I started, it had a very college-like atmosphere—we were more concerned with creating games that were fun. Those of us on the creative staff did not really concern ourselves with marketing and economics. In the first two years I worked there, the design staff grew from 5 (I was the fifth hired) to 12. Then, abruptly and shockingly to us, hard times hit and 8 of the game designers were laid off. After that, it became clear it was more like a job than a college course. In time,

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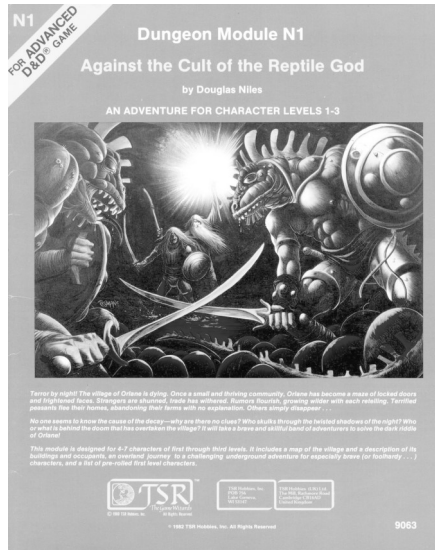
the company began to grow and we hired more people, several of whom became great friends. But it wasn't quite the same as during my first two years with the company.

By 1990, I had established enough of a name and reputation as both a novelist and game designer that, with my wife's blessing, I decided to take a chance on a freelance career. I resigned from TSR in January 1990. My last project was to fly to California and help the TSR West staff (about 4 people in a small office) design a game, in a hurry based on Saddam Hussein's conquest of Kuwait, and the upcoming campaign to drive the Iraqis back. That game, called *A LINE IN THE SAND*, used a game system I had designed for a game about a hypothetical modern war in Germany, based on Tom Clancy's book: *RED STORM RISING*.

During the 90s and 00s, I did a lot of work for TSR—both game design and fiction—as a free-lancer. The company was bought, first by Wizards of the Coast, and then WotC was bought by Hasbro. In about 2008, Hasbro decided they wanted to get out of the novel business and that ended my association with TSR—not by my choice, this time.

[T] *What are you working on these days?*

[D] I have just signed a contract with the American branch of a German roleplaying game company, Ulisses. They have been publishing, since the 80s, a very successful RPG called the *Dark Eye*. They have decided they wanted a series of novels to bring that game



N1—*Against the Cult of the Reptile God*, Doug Niles

world to life, and (based in part because of my work on the shared world of *DRAGONLANCE*) they have hired me to write 7 novels for them! So after a stretch of slow years, I am going to be busy, again, for a while.

*Thanks to Douglas Niles for taking a moment to answer my questions and shedding a little light on his work in those early TSR days.*

*A review of Horror on the Hill can be found on the next page!*



Classic TSR art within N1!

## Product Spotlight

**Horror on the Hill** by Douglas Niles may be one of the most overlooked gems of the original B Series. It may even be one of the top few of the series. Why do I think so? Read on to find out!

It's rare for Basic adventures to have wilderness exploration and scenarios, but we find plenty in this adventure. An entire hill is filled with outdoor and small cave encounters, ranging from killer bees and ants to ogres, Neanderthals, and even ghouls. A nearby fort gives the adventurers a base to work from, making it easy for the group to return for supplies and healing as needed. A mysterious cottage on the hill is home to helpful sisters who are willing to assist characters for a fee. Beware, they are expert negotiators!

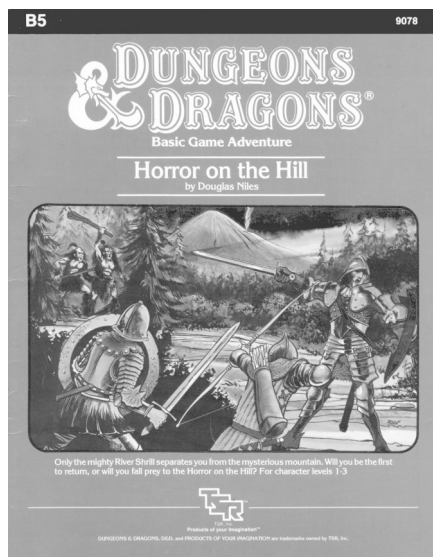
After exploring the hill, characters should find a ruined monastery that is home to all manner of deadly foes. Although surface and building encounters seem simple enough, the dungeons below the monastery are filled with merciless and challenging creatures: a gelatinous cube, giant centipedes, venomous snakes, piranha birds and lava lizards (new monsters), and finally a young red dragon! The sheer number of foes is daunting, making its design akin to many of these early TSR adventures.

Treasure abounds throughout the hill and dungeons of the ruined monastery. Characters should easily find enough gold and silver to fund their lifestyle for many months afterward.

The entire adventure is very much an open sandbox. Characters can explore the whole hill or parts of it, in any order they wish. A section in the beginning of the book suggests that characters use the Fort as a base, frequently returning to it to resupply, find work, and to gain new information if needed.

James Holloway provided most of the interior art for the book, using his iconic style to illustrate key NPCs and foul creatures. Jim Roslof created the color cover in a way that hints at some of the interior content—a wilderness adventure and a mountain with some volcanic activity. Like many of the early Basic books, there is loads of great art and cartography within.

***B5, Horror on the Hill**, written by Douglas Niles. 1983. ISBN: 0-88038-046-2; #9078, \$6.00; 32 pages; trifold cover; for characters of 1st to 3rd level.*



B5—Horror on the Hill

## The Magic Shop

In this issue, we have a couple of magical items submitted by Evan Dembskey added in with a few of mine.

### Coin of Transmutation

Resembling a coin of a particular type, the Coin of Transmutation transmutes all of the coins carried with it into a lesser metal. For example, a gold Coin of Transmutation will transform all gold coins into silver coins. These coins were made by students of a great alchemist Galdorleoth from long ago. Some of them actually work as intended; they transmute lesser coins into coins of greater value. These are exceedingly rare.

*Value: 500 GP.*

*Submitted by Evan Dembskey*



Dean Spencer

### Sword of Nihtfaren

The Sword of Nihtfaren was created a long time ago to protect travelers against the undead. It is not as powerful as it once was, having been buried for a long time. But even now, it is a +1 sword, +2 versus vampires.

When the sword is struck, it glows brightly. The harder the sword hits, the longer and brighter it glows. If a vampire is struck, the light has the same effect as sunlight. Conversely, any creatures that draw strength from light will be rejuvenated.

The Sword of Nihtfaren is both a boon and a curse; it brings light to the dark and terror to a foe's heart, but it betrays those who would hide.

In combat situations, the sword glows for a number of rounds equal to the wielders strength + 1D10. The wielder can of course tap or hit the sword softly for the purposes of making it glow; the DM can choose a reasonable base figure that is less than the wielder's strength, +1D10.

*Value: 15,000 GP.*

*Submitted by Evan Dembskey*

### Harp of the Deep

A magical instrument forged by merfolk, the Harp of the Deep enables a musician to charm and control water-breathing creatures. When played by a skilled musician for at least one turn, 1d6 HD of underwater creatures may be charmed or controlled for one full day (no saving throw allowed). The harp can only be used to charm once per day.

However, when played by merfolk, this instrument can charm land-dwelling creatures in the same manner.

Usable by Bards or characters with musical skill. *Value: 7,500 GP.*



Dean Spencer

### All-Seeing Eye Necklace

This strange artifact provides no benefit for the wearer but allows its true owner sight from great distances. Once the command words are spoken, the necklace can be placed upon the neck of any humanoid or forest creature by its owner. The necklace provides sight to the owner from the wearer's point of view from any distance.

The true owner must concentrate for at least one round to see through the necklace's lone eye. Any effects relying on vision (spells, etc.) work through the eye as if the owner was present. If the necklace's eye is covered, the owner cannot see through it.

*Value: 10,000 GP.*



Dean Spencer

### Boots of the Forest

These magical boots were made by elven craftsmen from a forgotten time. When worn, they allow the wearer to pass through forests without leaving tracks or markings of any kind. Alternatively, the boots can leave animal tracks instead. Once per day, the Boots of the Forest can be used to walk over running water for short distances (one foot per point of Dexterity).

*Value: 7,500 GP.*



Dean Spencer

### Water Bubble Flask

When opened in deep water, the Water Bubble Flask draws in 1,000 cubic feet (10'x10'x10') of water, creating an air pocket in its place. The air bubble lasts for 5d6 minutes before returning the water back into the open space.

If the flask is opened outside of water, 1,000 cubic feet of water pour into the 10'x10'x10' space, creating a bubble of water for the same length of time.

The flask may be used three times per day.

*Value: 5,000 GP.*

## Mythology

In this issue, we offer three new monsters for you to use in your adventures. All three of them are found in this issue's adventures.

### Blisterpixy

These small (1½' tall) pudgy blue humanoids live in moderate forests. They exist in relative peace amongst the low-lying shrubs on the forest floor, burrowing much as moles do. They love to collect the flowers of the shrubbery that grow above their homes and feed on these as a delicacy. While they are small and look fairly harmless, their initial appearance belies their ability to defend themselves well.

Whenever a blisterpixy is harmed or becomes angry, it will erupt into a rage and undergo a physical metamorphosis. The blue skin of the blisterpixy changes to a deep red and its body more than doubles in size to about 6'. This transformation takes a mere round to complete. Any weapons (usually daggers) are discarded and the creature begins to attack with its fists, causing 1d8 points of damage per fist. They may attack with both fists each round. The blistering rage lasts for 5 rounds after combat has finished and generally any surviving blisterpixies will pat each other gently in order to calm themselves down. It is believed that these creatures are responsible for the euphemism "seeing red" in anger as scores of them transform at one as a tribe. *Monster Submission by Michael J. Gross, III*

Armor Class: 5 or 0  
Hit Dice: 1/2 (1-4 hp)  
Move: 30' (10')  
Attacks: 1 or 2  
Damage: By weapon or 1-8/1-8  
Special: Hard to spot  
No. Appearing: 2-12  
Save As: Halfling: 1  
Morale: 7  
Treasure Type: Q (C)  
Alignment: Lawful



Illustration by Jeff Madding

*Optional Ruling:* When a Blisterpixy enlarges while enraged, its hit dice and hit points quadruple—they become an HD 2+2 creature with the appropriate hit point value (averaging 12 hp).

Damage taken while enlarged is discarded when the Blisterpixy returns to normal size unless the damage received would kill the creature in its larger state.



Dean Spencer



### Wereshark

Pirates who are bitten by sharks during a full moon occasionally develop a rare form of lycanthropy that transforms them into a wereshark. Driven to hunt the seas in shark form, weresharks are called to deep water each full moon.

Weresharks may use traditional pirate weapons or may rely on their fierce bite when attacking. They can swim at incredible speeds (sometimes faster than actual sharks) and are also affected by blood frenzy (adds +1 to-hit when blood is detected in the water).

Armor Class: 4  
 Hit Dice: 2+2\*  
 Move: 30' (10'); swim 45' (15')  
 Attacks: 1  
 Damage: By weapon or 2d6 bite  
 Special: Breathe water, blood frenzy  
 No. Appearing: 1  
 Save As: Fighter: 2  
 Morale: 11  
 Treasure Type: None  
 Alignment: Neutral

### Gargoblin

A cross between a gargoyle and a goblin, the Gargoblin hunts for prey in old graveyards, abandoned churches, and fallen castles. The four-armed and four-winged creature is quite agile and deadly. Luckily for adventurers, they are a bit fragile.

Gargoblins swoop down on unsuspecting prey, attacking twice when airborne or four times from the ground. From the air, they can perform a fast dive attack, gaining a +1 to-hit.

Armor Class: 2  
 Hit Dice: 1\*\*  
 Move: 30' (10'); fly 45' (15')  
 Attacks: 2 or 4  
 Damage: 1-4 each  
 Special: Flight; dive attack (+1 to-hit)  
 No. Appearing: 2-8  
 Save As: Fighter: 1  
 Morale: 10  
 Treasure Type: I (group)  
 Alignment: Chaotic



Dean Spencer

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### Craghorn Hills

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 2nd to 3rd level.

*Background:* Historians have said that long ago, an evil king was cursed by a reptilian god for his mistreatment of a local tribe of lizardmen. The king first saw signs of scaly skin and a forked tongue. Within a fortnight, his eyes changed and his lower limbs began to shrivel and weaken. His people cast him out of his own citadel, forcing him underground and away from the painful light of the sun. Now, only stories remain of the outcast king of Craghorn Hills.

*Detailed Background:* Not only was King Fjorndal turned reptilian by the curse but has suffered a painful and lengthy life in this form. He took refuge in an ancient crypt close to his former citadel, presiding over dark-dwelling creatures and foul beasts of the underground.

Recently, the king has learned of an old tree growing under the earth that may have bark with magical properties. He hopes that the bark can reverse his condition. Unfortunately, his minions are unable to reach the tree which is guarded by spirits and the dead.

King Fjorndal's belief that the magical tree's bark can help him is partially correct. The bark will reverse the curse but will also undo the slow-aging effects of his condition. Death will come to him quickly once he consumes the magical skin.

Characters can choose to assist the reptilian king in finding the magical tree or they can do what most characters do best—rampage through the cavern system, acquiring loot and experience.

#### 1. Ledge Path

A narrow ledge along a deep ravine winds toward the open entrance of the Craghorn Hills crypts. Careful characters will have little problem moving along the edge.

#### 2. Crypt Opening

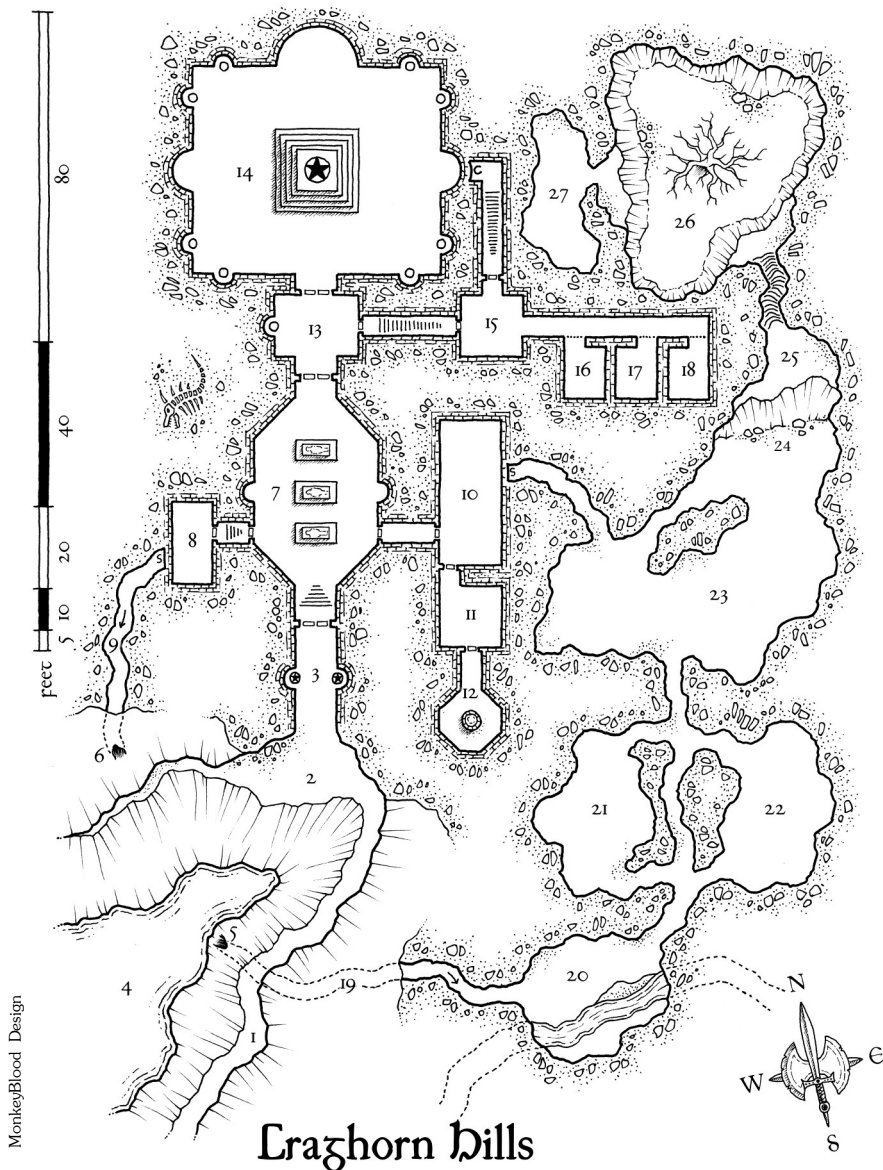
A wide ledge terminates the path and provides access to the crypt complex entrance. There is a 50% chance that kobolds or goblins will be here in the evening hours.

#### 3. Crypt Entrance Hall

A long hall leads to double doors at the north end of the entrance. Two black pillars are found midway in the hall. Each is engraved with ancient runes that indicate that the dead beyond never rest.

Each pillar is covered in a black, oily substance that when applied to skin, suppresses the heat signature of living beings. This suppression makes it possible for characters to pass through Area 7 without waking the dead.

If the characters secretly observe kobolds or goblins entering this area, they may see the small creatures applying the oily substance to their skin.



#### 4. Watery Ravine

Deep water at the bottom of the ravine hides the remains of many victims who have fallen from the ledge above. There is a 25% chance to find **1d100 sp** or a 10% chance to find a simple magic item after two hours of searching the watery grave.

#### 5. Minion Entrance

Kobolds and goblin serving King Fjorndal use this concealed entrance to gain access to their living quarters (Areas 21 and 22). Rocks and bushes cover up the entrance but searching characters will spot the small hole with a roll of 1-3 on a d6.

## 6. Forgotten Entrance

Unknown to those residing in the crypts, this entrance provides a secret way into the crypts. The hole is behind a crack in the ravine wall and is difficult to spot (a roll of 1 on a d10, or a roll of 1-2 on a d10 for dwarves).

## 7. Three Dead Princes

The Craghorn Hills crypt has been mostly forgotten by locals and is avoided by those with a faint memory of its existence. Used by royalty in a time before King Fjorn-dal's reign, those buried here were corrupted by the dark magic of the evil tree (in Area 26). The dead perpetually await the arrival of the living, to continue their hateful and destructive ways.

The sarcophagi hold three brother princes, slumbering until the next time they awaken to combat intruders. The skeletal warriors will rise when the living enter unless they are protected by the oily substance from Area 3 or are accompanying King Fjorn-dal.

**Skeletal Princes (3):** AC 5, HD 4, HP: 20 each, #AT 1 claw/1 weapon, D 1-4/1-8, MV 30' (10'), Save F3, ML 12, Special: edged weapons deal half damage, AL C, XP 75 each

Each skeletal warrior wears rusty chainmail and wields chipped yet effective long swords.

A thorough search of the room will reveal a hidden drawer in the base of the center sarcophagus filled with gold and silver coins (144 gp, 369 sp).



## 8. Empty Tomb?

If the room is viewed from either door, it will appear that the room is empty. However, walking through the area's center will cause characters to bump into an invisible sarcophagus. Once revealed, the illusionary walls will dissipate—an ornate, engraved stone tomb on a gilded dais will be in full view of all within the area.

Bone dust and small pieces of linen are all that remain of the king once buried here. If characters choose to search for any further illusions, they will be pleased to reveal a chest firmly attached to the ceiling above the sarcophagus, hidden by another illusion. Removing the chest requires one character with a 15 or higher Strength or two characters, each with a 13 or higher Strength.

A trap in the chest lid fires three sharp darts at any who attempt to open its lid (hit AC, dealing 1d2 damage each). Inside, characters will find a **Scroll of Healing**, a bag of 20 emeralds each worth 10 gp, and a **Shortsword +1**.

## 9. Slippery Tunnel

A wet, narrow tunnel descends to an opening in the ravine (Area 6). Less dexterous characters may have trouble keeping their footing in the tunnel and may slide out and down into the water at the bottom of the ravine fifty feet below.

## 10. Tomb of the Protectors

A dozen faithful guards gave their lives for their wizard patron the day he died so that they would be buried with him. Hoping to accompany the wizard into the afterlife, these guards never got their chance, their bodies corrupted by the evil tree's influence. Now, they stand guard in undeath, prepared to slaughter any who dare to disturb their slumbering patron.

**Skeletal Guards (12):** AC 5, HD 1+1, HP: 6 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-6, MV 30' (10'), Save F1, ML 12, Special: edged weapons deal half damage, AL C, XP 15 each

Each guard carries a rusty shortsword and wears dirty chainmail. A gold medallion hangs from each guards' bony neck (valued at 50 gp each).

## 11. Wizard's Burial Chamber

A shriveled wizard, clearly dead, floats in mid-air, his body suspended by an unseen magical force. If any living being moves within five feet of the wizard's body, his eyes open and his skeletal head detaches from his bony neck. The head will speak in an unknown language (asking why he has been awakened) and will have little patience for intruders. Within one round, the head reattaches and he attacks.

**Dead Wizard:** AC 7, HD 4\*, HP: 20, #AT 1 claw or spell, D 1-4, MV 30' (10'), Save MU4, ML 12, Special: spells, AL C, XP 125

Although dead, the wizard can still cast spells as a 3rd level magic-user:

First level: *Charm Person*, *Magic Missile*.

Second level: *Mirror Image*

A spellbook and a wand are found in his rotting robes. The spellbook contains the above-listed spells plus *Light*, *Shield*, and *ESP*. The **Wand of Paralyzation** has but 2 charges left and cannot be recharged due to its age.

## 12. Chamber of the Eye

A pedestal in the center of this octagonal-shaped room holds a magic item once owned and used by the wizard in area 11. Under protective glass, the **All-Seeing Eye Necklace** resting upon the pedestal is protected by a lightning rune. If the glass case is touched without removing the rune (for example, with a *Dispel Magic* spell or a Rod of Cancellation), four streaks of lightning from the rune find their way toward four random, living targets in the room. Each lightning bolt deals 1d4 damage. The rune resets after 10 minutes (unless dispelled, of course).

A bag of topaz gems have been hidden in the base of the pedestal. The 20 gems are worth 50 gp each.

The statistics for the **All-Seeing Eye Necklace** are found in the Magic Shop section of this issue on page 8.

### 13. King's Antechamber

Goblins and kobolds take turns guarding the king's chamber (Area 14) against intruders. Either eight goblins or ten kobolds will be found here, each group serving as sentries for twelve-hour shifts.

**Goblins (8):** AC 6, HD 1-1, HP: 4 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-6 (arrows or shortsword), MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 9, Special: n/a, AL C, XP 5 each

**Kobolds (10):** AC 7, HD 1/2, HP: 2 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-4 (darts or dagger), MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 8, Special: n/a, AL C, XP 5 each

GMs may reduce the number of goblins or kobolds in areas 21 or 22 accordingly. Each sentry carries 1d6 cp and 1d4 sp.

A statue in an alcove on the west wall depicts a male human in intense agony and pain. This is a representation of King Fjorndal's reptilian transformation.

### 14. Prison of the King

King Fjorndal is unable to leave this room for more than an hour, his essence bound to the reptilian god statue on a raised dais at the center of the area. Leaving the room will kill the king after aging him hundreds of years in mere hours.

The king presides over the minions of the cavern system, providing leadership and protection from the outside world. The goblins and kobolds that serve him are devoted and will not abandon their faithful leader.

Characters arriving in the chamber have the chance to speak to the king who is most often found lounging at the base of the statue in the center. The king will first see the characters as an opportunity—they may be able to assist him where his minions have failed previously. He will ask them to acquire bark from a magical tree in area 26. In exchange for the bark, he will provide the characters with a chest of gold and two magical items. If the characters refuse, the king will summon goblin guards who are hiding in the alcoves around the room.

**Goblin Warriors (8):** AC 6, HD 1+1, HP: 6 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-6 (shortsword), MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 11, Special: n/a, AL C, XP 15 each

**King Fjorndal:** AC 3, HD 5\*, HP: 25, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-8+1 (**Sword of Nihtfaren**), MV 60' (20'), Save F5, ML 12, Special: use **Potion of Healing**, AL N, XP 300



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Note that the king has a serpentine lower half and moves as a snake would. His arms and hands, besides scaled, work like a normal man's.

The king wields the **Sword of Niht-faren**, a +1 weapon. He will give this sword and the **Boots of the Forest** (found in a hidden niche in the dais) in exchange for the bark of the evil tree. A chest of **500 gold coins** is also found in the hidden niche.

Both the sword and boots are detailed in the Magic Shop section of this issue on page 8.

## 15. Cells of the Captured

A lone hobgoblin watches over the prisoner in the cells to the east. Two prisoners are awaiting their fate—an elf and a thieving kobold.

The hobgoblin has been ordered to remain here at all times. He is especially cruel, enjoying violence and misery more than most.

**Hobgoblin Warden:** AC 6, HD 1+1, HP: 6 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-4 (whip), MV 90' (30'), Save F1, ML 10, Special: knock down opponents with whip, AL C, XP 15

The hobgoblin warden carries the keys to the three locked cells nearby.

## 16. A Desperate Elf

A trespassing elf was captured by goblins and brought here. He is eager to be free from his cell, knowing that his fate is likely death. He will join a group that frees him and may be persuaded to stay with them after they leave the caves.

**Elf, "Nimborni":** AC 7, E2, HP: 6, #AT 1 weapon or spell, D by weapon, MV 90' (30'), Save E2, ML 9, Special: can cast *Detect Magic* and *Light*, AL N

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## 17. Empty Cell

Bloodstained straw and dried viscera only hint to the tale of what previously transpired in this cell. A careful search of the filthy area will reveal a single uncut emerald (worth 100 gp).

## 18. Disloyal Kobold

After being caught stealing from his tribe, Gix the Stunted was brought here to await judgment by his king. The kobold is a masterful liar and a slightly above-average thief. He will promise to help any who free him, only to attempt to rob or murder one of the characters before escaping the caves.

**Kobold, Gix the Stunted:** AC 7, HD 1/2\*, HP: 2, #AT 1 weapon, D by weapon, MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 6, Special: Thieves abilities (1st level), speaks Common, AL C, XP 6

Gix can assist characters with the location of hidden doors, the cave system layout, and the evil tree area (and foes there).

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## 19. Minion Tunnel

Goblins and kobolds use this tunnel to return to their lairs when not on duty serving their king. There is a 50% chance of encountering 1d4 goblins or kobolds in this tunnel. Note that characters accompanied by minions will be allowed passage.

## 20. Common Area

Both races of minions use this area to get water, exchange information, and occasionally (infrequently) allow their offspring to interact. There is almost always 1d4 each of goblins and kobolds here.

## 21. Goblin Lair

Dozens of goblins use this area as their lair. Females and children intermix with a handful of sturdy goblin warriors, each serving the king of the caves as needed. 2d4+4 fighting goblins will be found here, taking care of their families (4d6+4 females and children).

**Goblins (2d4+4):** AC 6, HD 1-1, HP: 4 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-6 (arrows or shortsword), MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 9, Special: n/a, AL C, XP 5 each

## 22. Kobold Lair

This area mirrors the goblin lair with respect to numbers. However, the lair entrances are both trapped with spring-loaded spiked bars that inflict 1d4 damage to surprised victims.

**Kobolds (2d4+4):** AC 7, HD 1/2, HP: 2 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-4 (darts or dagger), MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 8, Special: n/a, AL C, XP 5 each

*Special Note:* Neither the goblins or kobolds will travel beyond area 23 in the direction of the evil tree and the warped creatures beyond.

## 23. Training Grounds

The king's minions use this area to train their combat skills and to protect their lairs from the creatures beyond. There is a 50% chance that characters will encounter one or both races of minions practicing combat and stealth maneuvers here.

## 24. Northern Sentries

There is always one guard of each race watching the northern passage for Gargoblins who stray from the evil tree (in area 26).

## 25. Deadly Lichen

A faint glow from the walls and ceiling here provides just enough light to see the area and the tunnel beyond. However, touching the lichen can be quite deadly. Any character who comes in contact with the phosphorescent vegetation will have to make a successful saving throw versus *Death Ray or Poison* to avoid falling into a deep sleep for twenty-four hours. During this period, the organs of the characters will begin to shut down, resulting in death. If any healing is applied during this time, the character survives.



## 26. Evil Tree

A petrified tree stands in the middle of this tall chamber, its bare branches reach up toward the ceiling. A dozen Gargoblins roost on its branches, feeding off its evil essence. Any noise or movement in the area will disturb the foul creatures, stirring them into flying attacks.

**Gargoblins (12):** AC 2, HD 1\*\*, HP: 5 each, #AT 2 or 4, D 1-4 each attack, MV 30' (10') ground, 45' (15') flying, Save F1, ML 10, Special: dive attack +1 to-hit, AL C, XP 16 each—see page 10.

The Gargoblins will protect their tree at any cost.

The skeletal remains of goblins and kobolds are found throughout the area, hinting to their failed attempts to acquire the bark from the tree.

Moving within 5' of the tree requires a successful saving throw versus *Paralysis or Turn to Stone* to avoid its evil influence. Those that fail their saving throw react in different ways (see the table below).

Evil Influence	
Failed By	Effect
10+	Alignment change*
6-9	Fall unconscious
4-5	Attack nearest creature
2-3	Run away 1 round
1	Confused 1 round

\*Lawful to Neutral, Neutral to Chaotic

Gargoblins will target their attacks on confused and unconscious characters first. Chaotic characters may choose to abandon their fellow party members.

Characters must deal at least 10 points of damage to the petrified tree to obtain one piece of bark. If 100 points of damage are dealt to the tree, its evil essence dissipates, also freeing the gargoblins from serving it.

Eating the bark from the tree will remove evil curses or magical afflictions. This can only be used once per individual. Bark cultivated from the tree after its destruction loses its magical properties.

Amidst the remains of fallen goblins and kobolds are the remnants of two human explorers that also succumbed to the area's deadly inhabitants. Their rotting backpacks contain spoiled food and wine, but also a few valuable items. A set of thieves tools, a holy symbol, a **Scroll of Healing**, and two bags of silver coins (a total of **188 sp**) can be found after searching the backpacks.

## 27. Lost Shrine

A forgotten goddess was once worshipped here. The head priestess's spirit was trapped in the evil tree in area 26 long ago—freeing her by destroying the tree will reactivate the shrine. Water will begin to flow magically in the basin in the shrine, healing any who drink from it as a *Cure Lights Wounds* spell (once per day use only).

A mace rests on the shrine, left here when the high priestess was "killed" by the tree. It is a **mace +1** and adds an extra 1d4 damage to evil creatures.

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## Spellbound

In this last issue of *Back to BasiX*, we will suggest several spells useful for sages, alchemists, and artificers. These spells can be used by magic-users and elves to reveal an artifact's secrets or to create magical items.

### First Level Spells

#### *Know Properties*

When cast upon a magical item, this spell reveals the item's properties, including charges, command words, and origin.

#### *Bind Item*

When cast upon a singular item, this spell binds the object to the caster for 24 hours. This binding effect prevents accidental drop or loss and includes protection from thievery. Additionally, if the item is separated from the caster during the time of effect, the caster automatically knows its location as long as it is within the same plane as the caster.

#### *Instant Knowledge*

Casting this spell upon a book or scroll instantly reveals all information as if the writing had been studied numerous times and memorized. The effects of the spell last one day per level of the caster. The writing must be in a language known by the caster for the spell to work.

#### *Convert to Food (reversible)*

Any non-magical item that can fit in the hand of the caster may be turned into an edible food item with this spell. The type of food can be chosen before the spell is cast. Note that the effects are permanent.

### Second Level Spells

#### *Detect Ingredient*

Any desired material or ingredient (for spells or alchemy) can be instantly detected when this spell is cast. The range of detection is equal to 100' per level of the caster. This spell cannot be used to find specific items or people. It can detect non-magical stone, paper, etc.

#### *Fools Gold*

When cast upon a singular item, this spell "turns" the item into solid gold. However, the effect is a mere illusion and only appears to others as gold. For each level of the caster, saving throws made to disbelieve the illusion are penalized by one (e.g. a third level caster would make the saving throw of a first level fighter 19 instead of 16).

Note that the maximum size of the item must be no larger than the caster.

### Third Level Spell

#### *Imbue Item*

For every five levels of the caster, a weapon or armor can be given a semipermanent magical bonus when this spell is cast. Only a singular item can be affected. The bonus lasts one day per level of the caster. Only non-magical items can be affected by this spell.

#### Imbue Item Effects

Bonus	Caster Level
+1	5th level
+2	10th level
+3	15th level

*Bonus continues until maximum allowed*

### The Sea God's Halls

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 4-6 characters of 3rd to 5th level.

*Background:* The sea is not known for kindness, nor does it show favoritism to travelers. The Sea God judges those who travel upon his waters to see if they are worthy of his favor. A lone temple, forgotten by all but the most devout, stands on a small island not found on any known map. Visiting the temple to pay respect to the old god can either be fruitful...or deadly.

*Detailed Background:* The Sea God's temple is now overrun with water beasts, from giant crabs and eels to weresharks. These creatures help eliminate unworthy visitors to the temple, ensuring that only the truest of champions and heroes reach the temple of the god's halls.

If the characters are trying to reach the lost temple, this may be a short adventure—just a few rooms separate the sea from the temple itself. However, if the characters are exploring the Halls as a recently discovered area, they are bound to find several challenging and rewarding encounters.

### The Sea God

In this adventure, the Sea God only manifests his aspect in two places—area 24 as a giant snake or area 26 as a demon.

The GM should substitute the “Sea God” with whichever god name they wish for their campaign.

### 1. Northern Hall Entrance

The northern entrance was used by merchants, arriving to pay their respects to the Sea God while their crew unloaded supplies in area 4.

### 2. Eastern Hall Entrance

Worshippers from the surrounding islands attended weekly services at the temple, using this main entrance to enter the Sea God's halls.

### 3. Southern Hall Entrance

The little-used southern entrance was reserved primarily for priests and special guest arrivals. A secret tunnel from the temple to the hall just inside this entrance provided priests with a secret way in and out of the Halls.

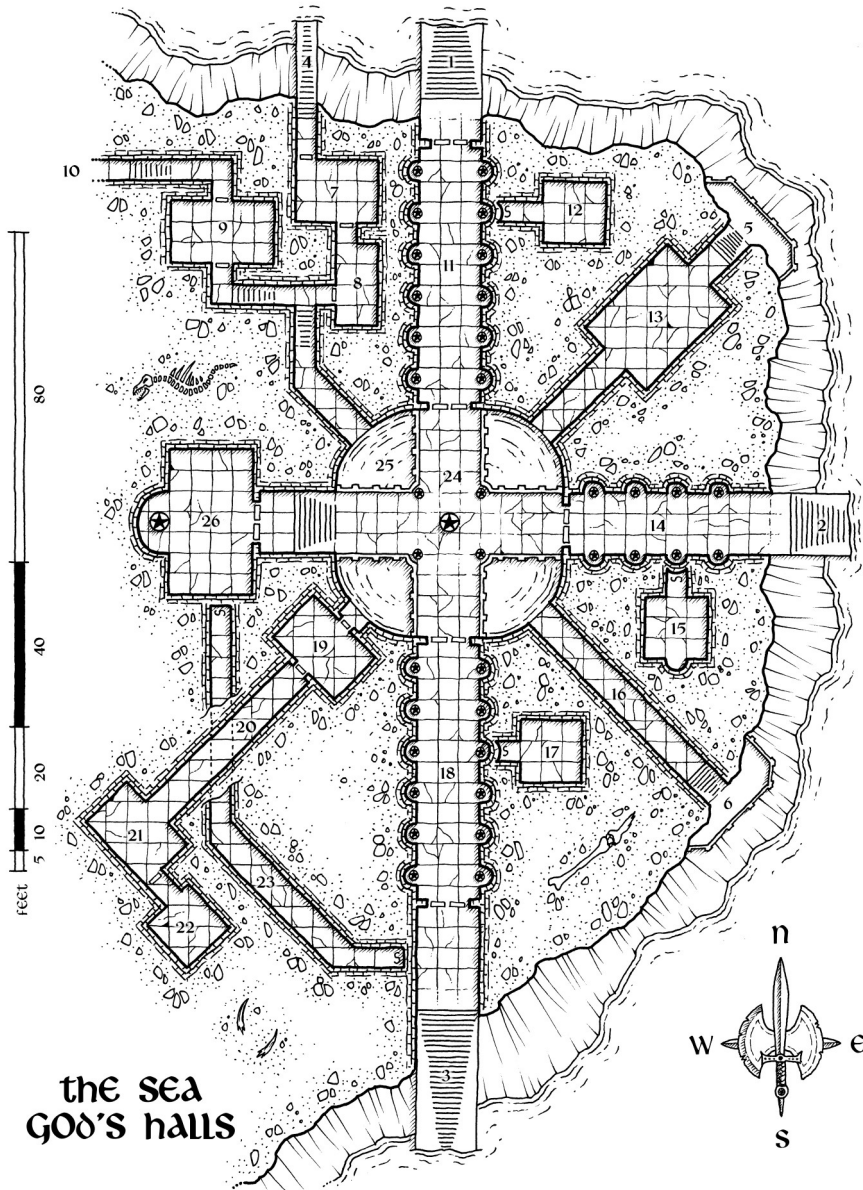
### 4. Supply Entrance

Supplies were loaded into the kitchen and supply closets through this smaller entrance on the north side of the temple. The door to area 7 is locked.

### 5. and 6. Watch Platforms

In the days of regular temple activity, these platforms were used by temple guards to watch arriving worshippers and to signal that a special service was planned when large urns were lit with magical fire.

These days, the watch platforms remain unused except when the occasional temple inhabitant wanders out to the area to look at the sea. There is a 25% chance that a wereshark from areas 9, 13 or 25 will be here.



## the sea GOD'S HALLS

### 7. Unused Kitchen

Kitchen workers once prepared meals for temple acolytes and priests, pulling food and wine from the supply closet (area 8) as needed. The kitchen has been abandoned, unused after workers and priests abandoned the temple

21

the temple centuries ago. Currently, the area is home to Giant Rats, who feed on rotting supplies and lost explorers searching the temple.

**Giant Rats (6):** AC 7, HD 1/2, HP: 3 each, #AT 1 bite, D 1-3 + disease, MV 120' (40'), Save F1, ML 8, Special: disease, AL N, XP 5 each



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## 8. Empty Supply Closet

Besides a few hardened or rotting scraps of old food, the supply closet is empty of anything useful. However, a careful inspection behind the wooden shelves will reveal a Yellow Mold fungus on the south wall.

**Yellow Mold:** AC automatic, HD 2\*, HP: 12, #AT spores, D 1-6 + special, MV 0', Save F2, ML n/a, Special: spores, AL N, XP 25

## 9. Servant's Quarters

Temple servants once used this area to rest when off duty.

This area is now home to two Weresharks who watch the western tunnel for intruders.

**Weresharks (2):** AC 4, HD 2+2\*, HP: 12 each, #AT 1 bite or weapon, D 2d6 or weapon, MV 30' (10') or 45' (15') swim, Save F2, ML 11, Special: blood frenzy, AL N, XP 35 each—see page 10.

During their travels around the temple complex, the weresharks have found numerous stashes of treasure and valuables. A locked chest in the room holds a gem-encrusted silver pitcher (500 gp), six silver goblets (25 gp each), a gold ring (75 gp), three silver necklaces (10 gp each), **286 sp**, and **111 gp**.

## 10. Lost Passage

An old tunnel used by servants to travel to villages on the western portion of the island has not been used for centuries. A thick layer of dust covers the floor of the tunnel. The tunnel ends several hundred feet in the west, opening into a deserted island village.

## 11. North Hall

Statues of sea elementals and nymphs alternate along the hall, each with an expression that can be interpreted as laughter or cruelty, depending on the onlooker. The statue of an erotic nymph hides a secret door to area 12.

## 12. Northern Treasure Room

A small, magical treasure can be found within the midst of hundreds of empty boxes. A leather bag holding a single coin can be found after a half-hour of searching. This is the **Coin of Transmutation**, a cursed magical item. Details on the item can be found on page 7.

## 13. Guard Room

Temple guards once used this area when they were off-duty. Now, four Weresharks use this area to rest when not hunting in the temple or surrounding sea. [*Use the same stat block from Room 9*]

Note that the southwestern part of the tunnel ends 20' above the water line of the pool at the center of the complex (as do all the smaller tunnels shown on the map).

## 14. East Hall

Worn marble tiles hint to the numerous feet that traversed this hall over many centuries. Statues of the Sea God, found in alcoves along the hall in various poses, are awe-inspiring. A secret door behind one statue of the Sea God winking hides yet another of the god's treasures.

## 15. Eastern Treasure Room

A single golden harp with silver strings and the body of an octopus floats in mid-air. This mighty magical item is the **Harp of the Deep**. Details on the item can be found on pages 7-8.

## 16. Narrow Hall

The floor of this tunnel is unusually slick with moisture. Less dexterous characters may slide into the pool at the center of the temple, falling 20' into the water.

## 17. Southern Treasure Room

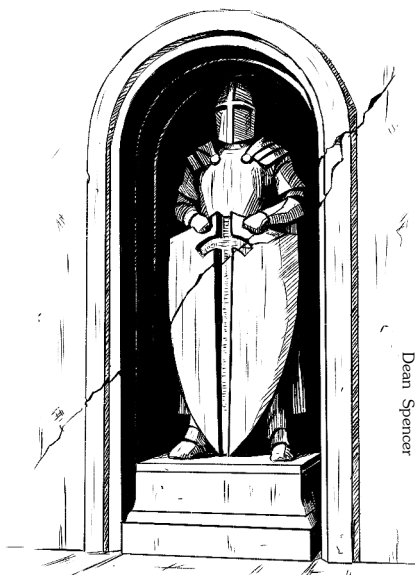
This room is filled with glass containers of all sizes on shelves, tables, and racks. All but one glass container are empty. This small flask is the **Water Bubble Flask**, a powerful magic item. Details on the item can be found on pages 8.

## 18. South Hall

Once a hallway reserved for priests and acolytes, this area is filled with the skeletal remains of explorers that failed to reach the exit. The twelve statues in the alcoves of this hall are aware of any unbelievers who traverse it. They animate if the area is disturbed by any unfaithful

Each statue falls after a single point of damage, only to reform and attack again after five rounds.

**Animated Statues (12):** AC 2, HD 1\*, HP: 1 each, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-8, MV 30' (10'), Save F1, ML 12, Special: reform, AL N, XP 13 each (one time only)



## 19. Acolyte Quarters

A disintegrated platform outside the room once provided acolytes and priests access to the worship pool (area 24) and temple (area 26) beyond. Access to this room is now a challenging climb down from area 24 to the platform over twenty feet below.

Acolytes studied and rested in this area when the temple was active. Giant Crabs have made this abandoned area their nest.

**Giant Crabs (5):** AC 4, HD 2+2, HP: 12 each, #AT 1 bite, D 1-6, MV 120' (40'), Save F1, ML 8, Special: swim, AL N, XP 25 each

Their centrally-located nest is filled with dozens of small trinkets and coins collected from various areas. A thorough search will uncover **66 sp**, **29 gp**, a silver ring (25 gp), a gold and ruby necklace (125 gp), and a dozen silver earrings (5 gp each).

Je Shields



## 20. Hall of Silence

No priest or acolyte was permitted to speak when traveling through this hall, following the commandments of their order. The hall's water runes are still active, burning noisy travelers with scalding hot water each time anyone speaks within. Each affected character suffers 1d4 boiling hot damage if they are unable to avoid the spurting water from the twelve runes.

## 21. Study Chamber

A vacant library and study chamber remains long after the temple complex was cleared. An illusion was cast upon the top shelf of one of the bookcases, still preventing weak-minded observers from seeing the scrolls many years after being left

behind. Five magical scrolls and one tome are present: scrolls of *Light*, *Detect Magic*, *Cure Light Wounds*, *Resist Cold*, and *Purify Food and Water* are stacked under a voluminous tome entitled, "The Sea God and his Flawed Water-Children". Thirty hours of continuous study of the magical tome will both reveal the history of the Sea God as well as increase a reader's Wisdom by one point (18 maximum). Note that only characters with a minimum of 9 in both Intelligence and Wisdom can read the tome. The tome loses its magic after one read.

## 22. High Priest Quarters

High priests of the Sea God served a single year in the island temple before returning to the mainland. The last high priest was killed by pirates before being replaced, causing the exodus of servants and acolytes.

The last high priest's chamber is still filled with many of his personal effects. A search of the area will uncover a chest filled with temple donations and a wardrobe with a few interesting items. The chest holds **1,452 sp** and **444 gp**. The unlocked wardrobe holds a **Robe of Armor** (acts like a Ring of Protection +1), a **Snake Staff**, and a **Rod of Cancellation**. Both the staff and rod have three charges left.

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## 23. Secret Escape Tunnel

When threats emerged from the ocean around the small island, acolytes and priests could use this escape tunnel to flee to the southern part of the temple complex where small boats were often moored. Unfortunately, the last pirate raid overwhelmed the temple too quickly, resulting in much of the temple population perishing. Several acolytes and servants fled this tunnel but were unable to exit to safety. Eight skeletal remains are found at the southern end of the tunnel, clutching one another in their last breaths.

A rotting leather bag under a skeleton holds the temple's greatest treasure, a golden octopus idol worth 10,000 gp.

## 24. Test of the Devout

Worshippers and flawed acolytes could use this area to test their faith in the Sea God. Standing in the area's center for one minute summons an ageless Sea Snake who attacks only unbelievers. At its age, it may have forgotten its purpose and attacks any unfamiliar faces who enter here.



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**Giant Sea Snake:** AC 5, HD 6\*, HP: 30, #AT 1 bite, D 2-12, MV 90' (30'), Save F5, ML 11, Special: constrict, AL N, XP 500

There is a 50% chance that 1d6 weresharks may be here, tending to the snake or guarding the area.

## 25. Watery Grave

The bottom of the pool (over 100' below) is littered with the remains of unfaithful and trespassers. **1d1000 sp**, **1d100 gp**, and **1d4 magic items** are found in the murky depths.

## 26. Sea God's Temple

Although abandoned for centuries, the Sea God's essence still lingers in the dusty temple. Those brave enough to utter the summoning words or to ask the Sea God to show himself have a small chance to have the angry god answer, manifesting himself as a trident-wielding demon before mortals. Additionally, removing any gems from the wave mural at the back of the temple may summon the furious god.

**Aspect of the Sea God:** AC 0, HD 6+6\*\*, HP: 36, #AT 1 trident, D 1-10+2, MV 120' (40'), Save F7, ML 12, Special: spells, AL N, XP 750

The Sea God can cast the following spells: *Magic Missile*, *Sleep*, *Phantasmal Force*, *Web*, *Detect Evil*, and *Protection from Evil*. If the Sea God's aspect is defeated, he will be unable to reappear for 24 hours.

The temple has been cleared of valuables except for 5,000 gems in the wave mural behind the altar (each worth 1 gp).



## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God — Part 10

The following part of the Crimson Abbey can only be reached from area A28, found in the previous issue. It is the author's intention to release the entire Crimson Abbey adventure, including its unfinished areas, as a separate adventure in the future. In order to wrap up the adventure with the final issue of *Back to BasiX*, we've moved the characters to the final area of the adventure where they face the Broken God once and for all.

Note that the ruby chamber (area A30) can be reached by touching the bloody, headless statue in area A28 from the previous issue.

### A30. Ruby Chamber

Characters touching the headless statue from area 28 are instantly transported to this room, the chamber of the Broken God. Even if only one character touches the statue, all living beings within area 28 are teleported here.

Each wall of the square room is covered in ancient tapestries depicting various murderous and tragic scenes of crazed priests slaughtering unbelievers in the name of their god. All non-believers present in this chamber that witness the horrifying sights of the tapestries must successfully save against Fear (save versus Spells) or fight at a -1 penalty to-hit until they leave.

A giant uncut ruby floats above a short dais in the center of the room. A slow, rhythmic pulse, like a heartbeat, can be seen within the uncut gem.

As soon as any living being is transported into this chamber, the Broken God's mortal aspect begins to emerge from the ruby in the center of the room. He appears as a cross between a jinni and demon—small horns rip through his creased forehead, his wide shoulders and large arms are outstretched, and his lower half is completely hidden in a red mist.

At first, the Broken God will toy with characters before becoming bored with the banter. He attacks unless the characters kneel and submit to his greatness.

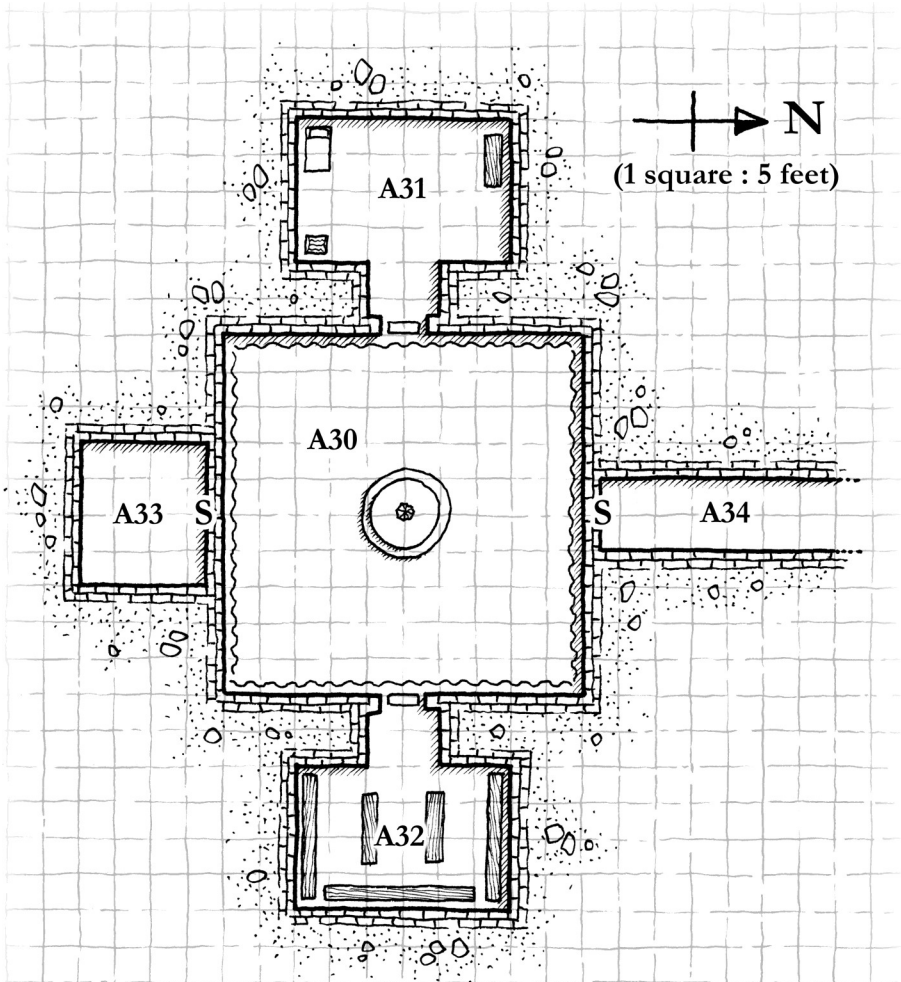
**The Broken God:** AC -1, HD 8\*\*, HP: 36, #AT 2 fists and spell, D 1-6+3, MV 30' (10'), Save F8, ML 12, Special: spells, AL C, XP 1,250

The Broken God may cast any spell from the Magic-User list, up to and including third level, once per day.

The ruby is impervious to all physical and magical attacks unless the attacker holds or uses a ruby headband. The ruby can withstand 50 points of damage before being utterly destroyed, trapping the Broken God in his home plane for all eternity. Broken bits of the uncut ruby are worth hundreds of gold pieces each. If the Broken God's aspect is slain (without the ruby being damaged), he returns to hibernation for one year.

The unbroken ruby cannot be moved from this chamber in any way—it is magically bound here. Of course, 1d100 pieces may be broken off.

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## Crimson Abbey of the Broken God Map 7

### A31. High Priest's Chamber

Countless years of dust cover the furniture and floor of this room, hinting to its lengthy disuse. A writing desk and small chest are items of particular interest in an otherwise plain area.

Two gold candlesticks sit on the writing desk (each worth 750

gp). Remnants of deteriorated books and scrolls are found as flakes of parchment upon the desk. A locked drawer holds a book and a scroll, each preserved within ivory cases. The scroll lists the instructions to summon the Broken God in the chamber beyond (area A30). Following these carefully has a 25% chance of returning the god on any ruby fragment in the area.

Additionally, a magical quill writes spoken words upon command in any language known to the item's user.

Two leather sacks and a small wooden box fill the chest. The box holds six **Potions of Healing**. One leather sack is filled with a dozen ruby headbands. The second sack holds **481 sp** and **223 gp**.

### A32. Private Study

Only the most privileged priests were allowed access to the high priest's private study and library. Hundreds of valuable tomes and scrolls fill the shelves of sagging bookcases. Most of the books and scrolls are illegible due to improper storage throughout the years. However, a thin **spellbook** still maintains its magical and preserved state. Six magic-user spells are found within its pages. Three pages are currently blank. The spells are: *Floating Disc*, *Ventriloquism*, *Continual Light*, *Locate Object*, *Clairvoyance*, *Dispel Magic*, *Confusion*, and *Remove Curse*.

There is a 10% chance that a thorough search may uncover 1d4-1 additional useful and/or magical books or scrolls.



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### A33. Treasure Chamber

A lone pillar of skulls and bones can be found at this secret room's center. Each grisly artifact is firmly affixed to the five-foot-tall stone pillar underneath. If a successful roll under Strength is made (by a character trying pull one of the bones or skulls off), there is a 10% chance that a random magical item appears at the feet of the character. Only 2d20 bones and skulls can be removed in this manner.

### A34. Exit Hallway

A secret exit from the Ruby Chamber leads characters back to the main part of the abbey. There is presently no map that indicates where this hallway enters the main complex—GMs should connect the abbey to this area on their own.

The author intends to create a standalone adventure, filling in the missing areas and map to create a full-length book with additional encounters and background. Stay tuned to ThrowiGames on social media for the complete *Crimson Abbey of the Broken God* release!

## BONUS Dungeon Crawl #3

### Lair of the Bloody Fists

by Thom Wilson. An adventure for 2-4 characters of 1st to 2nd level.

*Background:* A group of Blisterpixies is fighting to retake their home from a band of ruthless goblins. Characters can assist either side, depending on their alignment.

*Detailed Background:* Blisterpixies and goblins have been battling over a valley and cave system for days, each side calling for reinforcements. This adventure is designed to work with either party alignment.

If the characters have come to help the Blisterpixies (Lawful alignment), they will find the remaining creatures trapped in the cave system. If the party is assisting the goblins, Blisterpixy reinforcements are heading into the valley from the east.

Use the following stat blocks for each side as needed.

**Blisterpixy:** AC 5 or 0, HD 1/2 or HD 2+2 (enraged), HP: 1d4 or 2d8+2, #AT 1 or 2 weapon or fists, D 1-8/1-8, MV 30' (10'), Save H1, ML 7 or 12, Special: enrage, AL L, XP 5 or 35 each—see page 9 for more details

**Goblin:** AC 6, HD 1-1, HP: 3, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-6, MV 60' (20'), Save NM, ML 7, Special: n/a, AL C, XP 5 each

#### 1. Valley Entrance

Good parties will find 1d4+1 goblins camped here. Otherwise, 2d4 Blisterpixy reinforcements are preparing

to attack the goblins in the cave to rescue the trapped Blisterpixy villagers.

#### 2. Defiled Woodland Altar

A stone and wood altar has been badly burned, and the surrounding area shows signs of a fierce battle that had occurred in the last 24 hours. Bodies of both goblins and blisterpixies are found around the altar.

One of the fallen blisterpixies clutches a **shortsword +1**.

#### 3. Secret Entrance

A hidden entrance, known only by a few blisterpixies, leads to the village's sacred burial chamber (area 9).

#### 4. Open Cave—Village

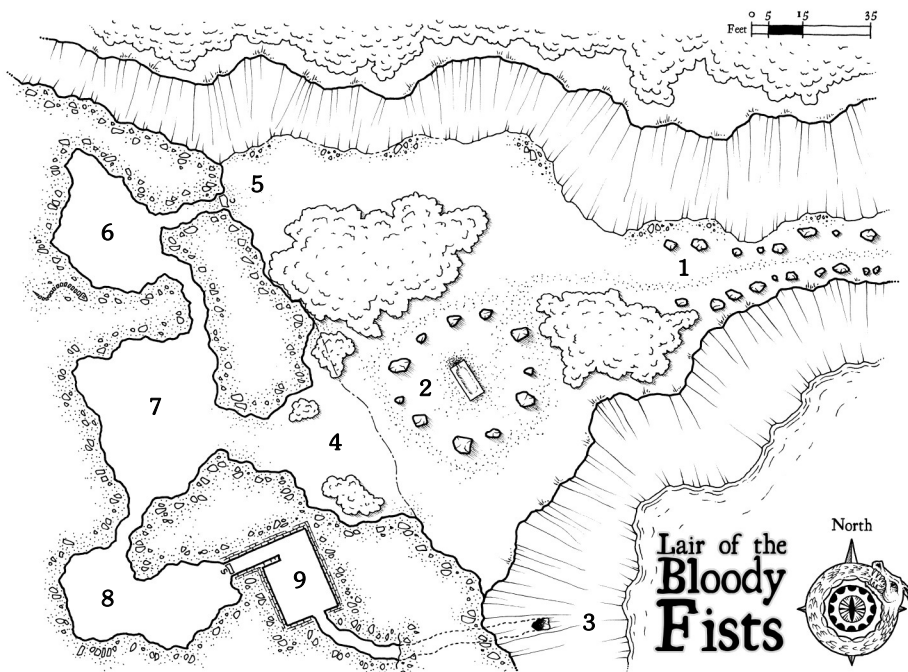
The Blisterpixies have created their village under an overhang of the hill above. Several small huts, many partially or fully burned, are found in this wide, open cave. Several blisterpixy bodies lie around the burned structures. 1d4 goblins linger in the area, waiting for reinforcements.

#### 5. Blocked Exit

A normal stone door has been blocked from the outside, trapping the blisterpixies inside (area 6). At least four hours of time is needed to remove the debris from the door.

#### 6. Trapped Villagers

3d6 blisterpixy men, women, and children have been trapped here. 1d4+1 males are guarding the southern exit, keeping goblins from advancing any further.



## 7. New Goblin Camp

This area was previously used by the blisterpixies to store harvests and supplies but is now the new goblin camp. The goblins have more supplies than they ever have had and are content to wait here for reinforcements or to let the blisterpixies starve to death. 2d6+2 goblins have made camp under their leader, Ggrulggub, an especially mean goblinoid. The scarred leader carries a magical **spear +1**.

**Ggrulggub, goblin chieftain:** AC 5, HD 2\*, HP: 10, #AT 1 weapon, D 1-6+1, MV 60' (20'), Save F1, ML 9, Special: **spear +1**, AL C, XP 25

The goblins have brought their full tribe treasure with them—an old, broken chest holds **232 sp** and **88 gp**.

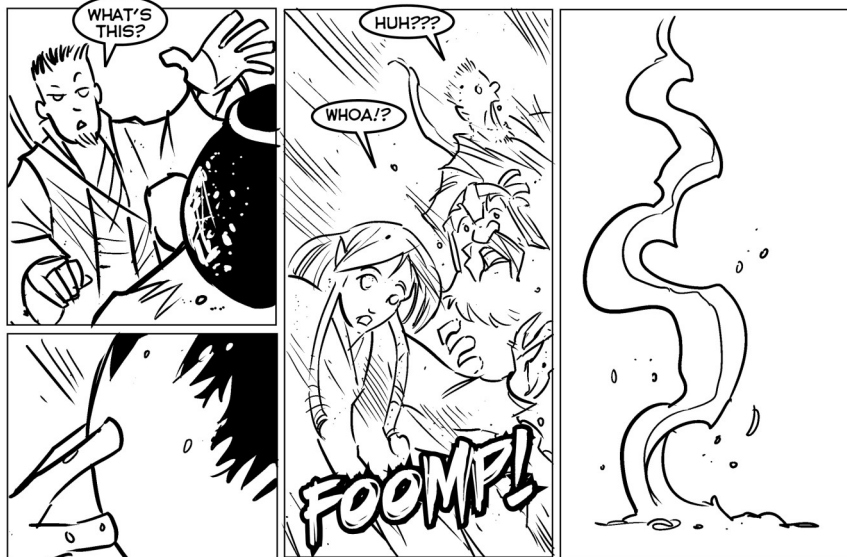
## 8. Remaining Blisterpixies

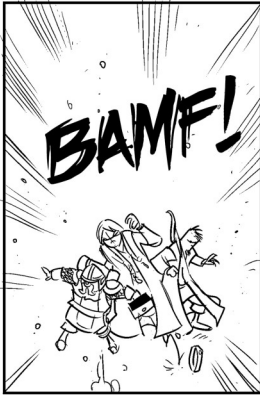
Separated from his village, the Blisterpixy village elder, Brindoo, waits in this area in secret. The blisterpixy leader is seriously injured and cannot move more than a slow crawl. Without aid, he perishes in 36 hours. He carries a **sling +1** and a **dagger +1**.

## 9. Secret Burial Chamber

Deceased blisterpixies are buried in this concealed chamber. The goblins are unaware of the area but will likely find it in the coming weeks if they prevail against the villagers.

Two dozen small wrapped bodies are found within wall niches. Each body has a treasure type of U (roll for each separately). Note that no blisterpixy will reveal the area's location.





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Special thanks to Matt Ray for the use of his wonderful cover illustration, Isa de Mendonca Silva for her logo work, and Travis Hanson for drawing every panel of my *Dungeon Delvers* story!

Additionally, very special thanks go to author Douglas Niles for taking time to answer my questions!

And thanks to YOU, the reader! Your dedication to this series has made this fanzine one of my most favorite creations!

### Convention Calendar

Convention	Date(s), Location
GameHoleCon VII	Oct. 31st—Nov. 3rd Madison, WI
Gary Con XII	March 26th—29th Lake Geneva, WI
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Created and printed between June, 2017 and September, 2019, Back to BasiX is a quarterly fanzine celebrating the B/X version of the world's most popular tabletop role-playing game.

Presented in a US Trade hardcover format for the first time ever, this compilation brings together all 10 issues into one volume, complete with every piece of original gaming content, product review, and industry legend interview from the original print run! Best of all, these 216 pages are housed within a brand new color cover, created by the fanzine's original cover artist, Matthew Ray.

