


ISSUE
1

Fall 2021

Caers & Crannogs



a zine for use with **Cairn**
by: Matthew Morris



I am the singer at the dawn of the age, and I stand at the door to the West. Three fifties of warriors uphold me, those whose names are lauded in the halls of chieftains; great lords make haste and do their bidding. Royal blood flows through my veins, my kinship is not humble; yet my portion is despised. Truth is at the root of my tongue, wisdom is the breath of my speech; but my words find no honor among men. I am the singer at the dawn of the age,

and I stand at the door to the West.

-From the Song of Albion



This zine would not be possible without the amazing works of:

Yochai Gal, *Cairn*

Issac Williams, *Mausritter*

Chris McDowall, *Into the Odd*

Ben Milton, *Maze Rats*

Gavin Norman, *Dolmenwood*

Colin Le Sueur, *Runecairn*



as well as the literary works of Stephen R. Lawhead:

The Song of Albion Trilogy:

The Paradise War

The Silver Hand

The Endless Knot



Most important; thanks to my Wife, my kids, and my God.

GAERS & GRANNIOGS

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Caers & Crannogs

WHAT IS THIS ZINE?

Caers & Crannogs is a zine for the NSR adventure game *Cairn*. *Cairn* is produced by Yochai Gal and is based on the games, *Into the Odd* and *Knave*. This zine seeks to present **additional rules, alternative rules, new items and spells, new backgrounds and loadouts, settings, potential adventures**, and lots and lots of **random tables**. **Issue #1** and the next few to come will focus on **THE OTHERWORLD**, an Iron Age Celtic world of the fair-folk.

THE OTHERWORLD

The Otherworld is the mythical world that exists in tandem with our own, yet absent from it. **The Otherworld** is more usually described as a **paradisal fairyland** than a **scary place**. For this zine, the land of the fair-folk will take the shape of that presented in the works of *Stephen R. Lawhead*, most notably, the **Song of Albion** trilogy (*The Paradise War*, *The Silver Hand* and *The Endless Knot*). In these literary works, **the Otherworld** is presented not as a land of the Fae or Faeries but rather a never aging picture of **5th-8th century Celtic Briton, Wales, Ireland and Scotland**. This post-Roman and pre-Saxon setting is full of lore, religion, and customs. In addition to the historical setting and backdrop, Lawhead presents **the Otherworld** in an almost **Platonic Meta-physical** sense; the Otherworld is the “*world-ness*” of the physical world. Its sky is the blue of blue, the sky of skies; its forests are the green of greens and the forest of forest. It is, per-se, the ideal version of our own world.

PICTURING THE SETTING

“But, strange to tell, though I could remember those first glowing days of my arrival, I could not without intense effort recall much of my life before that—save in the most indefinite terms. Indeed, when compared to the intensely vivid life I knew in Albion, my life before coming to the Otherworld seemed almost unutterably remote and insignificant, little more than a vague pantomime acted out in a dim, colorless, half-light.” -from The Paradise War

With its rolling, green **hillsides** to its rugged and steep **highlands**, its deep and **dark forests** to its lush and **peaceful glens, meadows and marshes** to briny **coastlands** and wind-swept **hinterlands; the Otherworld** is beauty incarnate. **Deep pools** of the richest waters and the bluest blues. **Oak groves**, sacred stands of holly and hawthorn, more ancient than time itself. Mounds of earth and stone; hollow and full of the halls a past lords and chieftains. **Standing stones** of Neolithic proportions with ever-so-delicately etched **runes** and serpentine, **knot-like mazes** depressed into the rock. The countryside is littered with myth and legend, and it beckons all those who see it to stay. Those who dwell here are ruddy and fair, tough and warn yet smooth and tender.

CULTURE OF THE OTHERWORLD

Peoples dwell across the many, vast dells and glens. Clans have settled on coastlines and into the steps of the mountains. The men of the Otherworld are tall and thick, stalky and strong. They are proud and know their own world. Sporting long, yet well kept, hair and wearing mustaches and thick, massive beards. A chain of precious metal on their neck or arm, a tartan of bright color and tattoos of blue woad; these men are rarely seen without a sword, spear or staff. Mighty horsemen and charioteers, these folk are fierce on the battlefield yet stately at home in a caer. These men, despite their appearance, are only the shadow of their women. Fine, fair, and supple; these women’s brawn is only rived by their beauty, their might by their majesty, their sensual form only contested by their supreme wisdom. To fall into her favor is of upmost desire, to cross her is to flirt with death itself.

ENTERING THE OTHERWORLD

Entrance into the **Otherworld** is uncommon, but by no means does this mean that it is rare. To enter the Otherworld, an adventure must first find, in their physical world, an **ancient site** of either a **Cairn**, **Standing Stones**, a **Grange** or **Henge**, or a **Barrowmound**. These monolithic, scared sites of ages past work also as gates to the Otherworld. **Druids of the distant past** knew the secrets of the Otherworld and its mystical connection to ritual and festival, to death and passage. The runes and ornate maze-work carvings on these structures operate as the map into the land beyond.

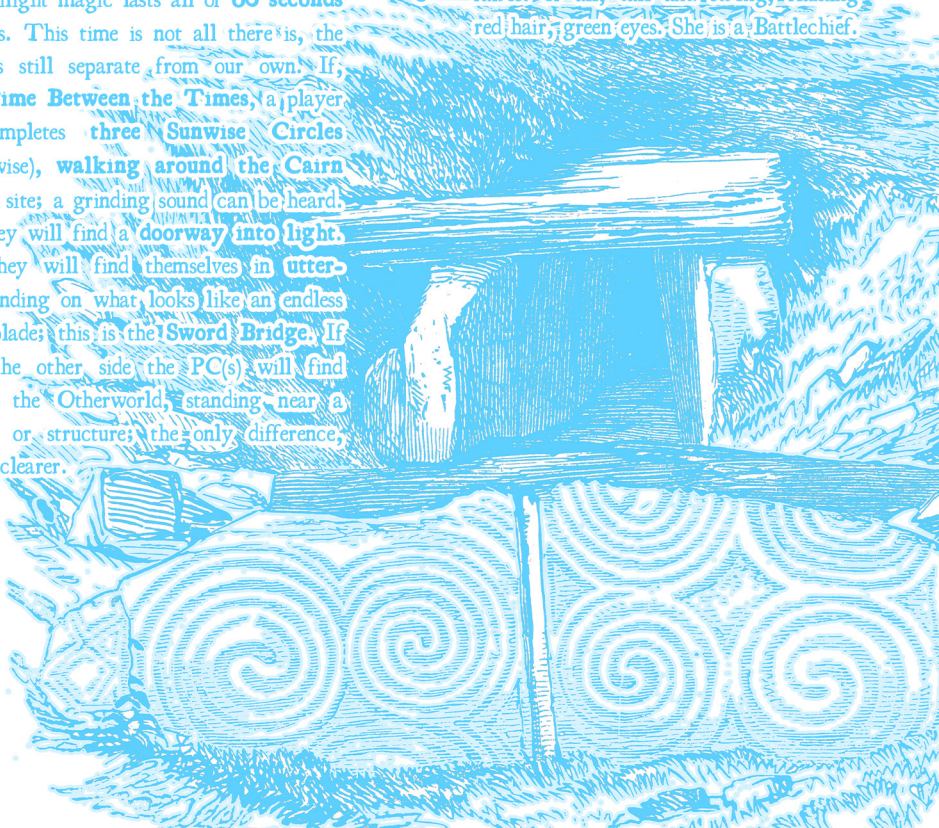
SUNWISE CIRCLES and THE TIME BETWEEN THE TIMES

Dusk and dawn, in the twinkle of sunlight, a strange thing occurs; a **bridge between the worlds** is accessible, our realities are closer than ever. This twilight magic lasts all of **60 seconds** and then fades. This time is not all there is, the Otherworld is still separate from our own. If, during the **Time Between the Times**, a player character completes **three Sunwise Circles** (counterclockwise), **walking around the Cairn** or other stone site; a grinding sound can be heard. If located, they will find a **doorway into light**. If entered, they will find themselves in **utter-darkness**, standing on what looks like an endless and massive blade; this is the **Sword Bridge**. If crossed, on the other side the PC(s) will find themselves in the Otherworld, standing near a similar Cairn or structure; the only difference, everything is clearer.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS "OTHERWORLD"?

d6 Adventure Hooks

- 1 An old druid, in an ancient oak grove, speaks of a land that exist beyond our own. He knows the way.
- 2 A wandering bard sings an old poem, the lyrics speak of a twilight a dawn and dusk, and a door to the West.
- 3 In a wizard's tower, an old scroll, written in a whimsical script, laced with knotwork drawings, tells the tale.
- 4 Whilst exploring a Barrowmound, runes begin to glow blue. When examined, the runes give instructions.
- 5 Your grandmother told tales to you as a child of faeries coming from a far of land, she went crazy near a Cairn.
- 6 — fairest of all, tall and strong, flaming red hair, green eyes. She is a Battlechief.



SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In the Otherworld, all peoples partake in any of the various **social classes** or **roles**. There are **traditionally six roles** one will find themselves filling.

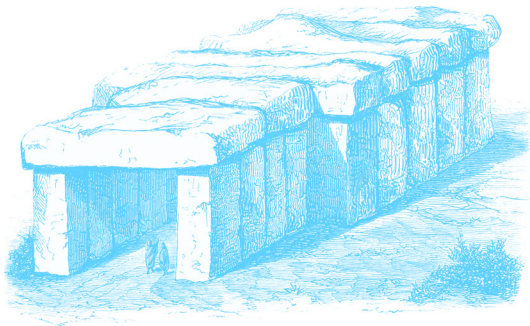
d6	Otherworld Classes
1	Druids
2	Bards
3	Craftsperson
4	Noble
5	Warrior
6	Chieftain or Battlechief

If a **player character** wishes to play as a denizen of the Otherworld, either, **roll d6** to determine their background or cross reference the **d6 HP** stat with the table above.

ALTERNATE LOADOUTS

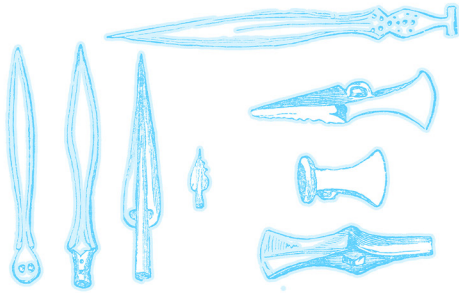
If a PC wishes to play as one of these six classes, they can follow character creation rule as lined out in **Cairn** or:

- Choose one of these **pre-made loadouts**
- **Roll d6** and randomly gain loadout
- **Cross-reference HP** with loadout tables
- Pick and choose what you like



1. Druid
Staff of Sacred Wood (one of the nine) (d6)
Golden sickle (d6)
White cloaks
Brass torc (10 gp)
Singing Stone (random)
Singing Stone (choose)
2. Bard
Staff of Sacred Wood (one of the nine) (d6)
Ceremonial dagger (d4)
Small Harp
Green or Brown cloak
Copper torc (5 gp)
Singing Stone (random)
3. Craftsperson
Short sword (d6/d8)
Knife (d3)
Tools
Modest trousers and shirt (bright colored)
Map of local trade routes
Small idol of nature deity
4. Noble
Bronze, leaf shaped, spear (d10, bulky)
Ornate sword (d6)
Silver torc (25 gp)
Signet ring
Cloak of colorful tartan
Money purse
5. Warrior
Greatsword (d10, bulky)
Shield (1 Armor)
Leather shirt (1 Armor)
Bright colored trousers
Blue woad tattoos
2-in-6 chance of owning a Horse
6. Battlechief
Horse 6 HP, 16 STR, Trample (d10)
Gilded Spear (d10, bulky)
Silver Sword (d6/d8, Advantage)
Battle axe (d8)
Golden torc (50 gp)
Tartan kilt





WEAPONS AND WARFARE

In the Otherworld, weapons and combat act almost the same as in our world. Weapons that enter the Otherworld do not change but weapons found in the Otherworld have been **ouched by that realm's magic**. A found weapon will be either **Worn**, **Ready** or **Silvered**. Each state has a mildly different damage mechanic.

Weapon condition	Damage roll
Worn	Roll at Disadvantage
Ready	Roll as normal
Silvered	Roll at Advantage

Example: worn sword, roll 2d6 and take lower. Ready sword roll d6. Silvered sword, roll 2d6 and take the higher.

When finding a random weapon in the other world, **roll 2d6** to determine its **condition**.

2d6	Weapon condition
2-4	Worn weapon
5-9	Ready weapon
10-12	Silvered weapon

A weapon found in a **Cairn**, **Barrowmound** or other ceremonial site has a chance of being **Cursed**.

A found weapon has a **1-in-6 chance** of being **Cursed**. If **Cursed**, this weapon will still **deal damage as normal but will also deal that much damage to its wielder** until returned to its resting place. **Curses** can be removed by a Druid, but this comes at a **high price**. If removed, the weapon deals **damage +1**.

Near lakes or other **bodies of water**, Otherworlders often toss fine weapons into the depths of the water as a **ceremonial act of thanksgiving**. Many ornate weapons can be found here. If taken, they will be **Cursed**.

WHAT IS THE WEAPON?

d6	Weapon
1	Celtic-knot hilted Sword (d6/d8)
2	Rune etched Greatsword (d10, bulky)
3	Gilded, leaf blade Spear (d10, bulky)
4	Battle axe , can wield two (d8)
5	Ceremonial dagger (d4)
6	Ornate druid's staff , may be magic (d6)

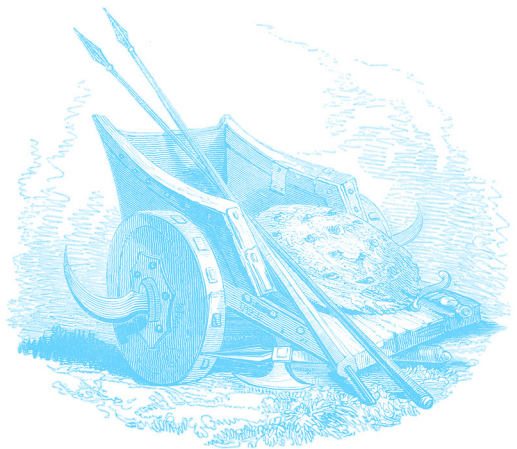
HORSELORDS

Those in the Otherworld are masters on horseback and gods-of-war whilst in chariots. Use these combat mechanics for dealing damage while on horseback or in a chariot.

On an attack **roll 2d6** (*for whatever the damage dice may be*) and deal the total result. If doubles are rolled, damage is halved, the weapon is lost and there is a **3-in-6 chance** of falling from mount.

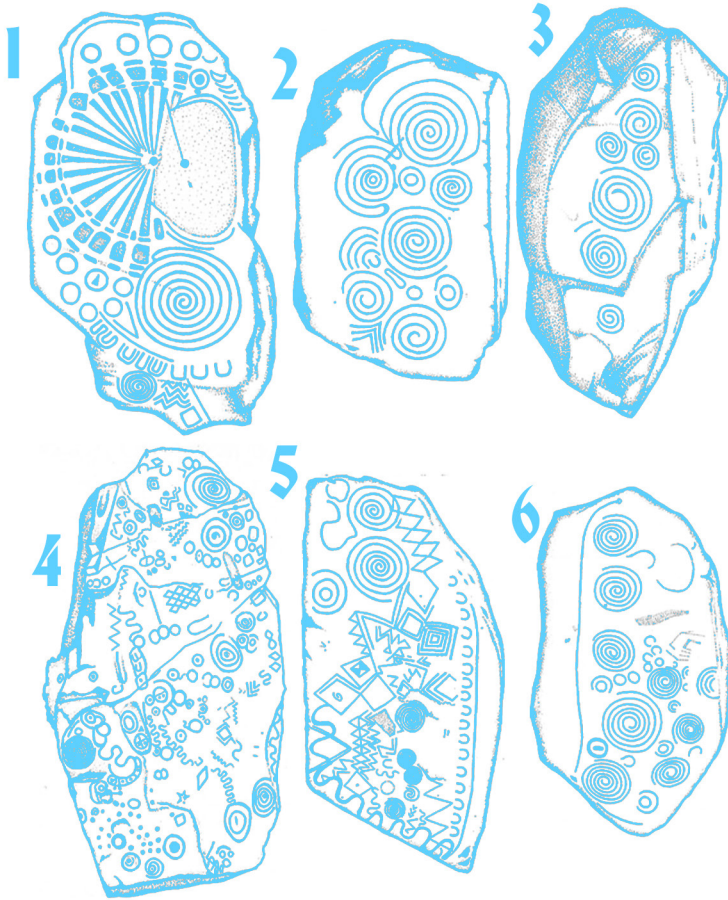
Chariots | 8 HP, 10 STR, 12 DEX

Horse | 6 HP, 16 STR, 16 DEX



SINGING STONES

In the **Otherworld**, some magic is found in the form of elemental spirits being bound to spell rocks known as **Singing Stones**. While holding these **Singing Stone** in both hands and speaking the ritual words, the Spell is cast. This system is heavily influenced by the Magic system of *Mausritter*.



Spell	Effects	Recharge
Llew's Hand	When cast, a target of choice's weapon is now considered Silvered for the next d3 turns.	Singing Stone must be thrown into a lake for up to d6 weeks and be left undisturbed.
Gorfannan's Blessing	The forest lord grants your next Save or d3 attacks Advantage. Effect fades in d6 hours.	Find a stand of birch trees, deep in a dark wood. Create a massive bonfire and place the stone at its center.
Storm's Surge Purify Water	Cause a heavy rain for d6 days. Cause liquids to be fresh water.	Singing Stone must be hit by lightning. Stone must spend d6 months at sea.
Speak with Wind	Communicate via the wind for up to d3 Hexes in any direction to d4 targets.	Drop the Singing Stone from the highest cliff you know of, there is a 1-in-6 chance the stone shatters.
Fire of Skye	Create a fire that burns for d3 days.	Place the stone in the darkest cavern that can be found for d6 weeks.

BEASTIARY



WARRIOR

d8 HP, 10 STR, 10 DEX, Roll for Weapon

WARBAND

d10 HP, 1 Armor, 10 STR, 10 DEX, Greatswords (d8)

WARCHIEF

8 HP, 12 STR, 11 DEX, Silver Spear (d10)

WOLF

4 HP, 8 STR, 13 DEX, Bite (d6)

DIRE WOLF

6 HP, 12 STR, 12 DEX, Bite (d8)

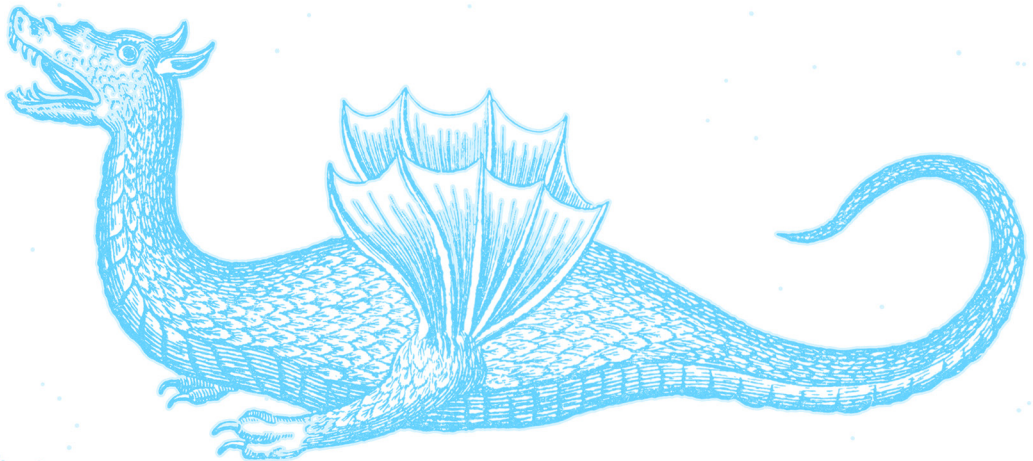
•Found in deep woods, normally have a pack of **d6 WOLF(s)**.

AUROCHS

16 HP, 16 STR, 8 DEX, Gore (d12), Trample (d10)

CYTHRAWL, Chaos Dragon

21 HP, 3 Armor, 18 STR, 12 DEX, Bite (d10-d10)





THANK YOU FOR READING!



In the next issues of *Caers & Crannogs*

- Hex Crawling•
- Overland Travel mechanics•
- Creating Settlements•
- Building Forts•
- Create-a-Clan tables•
- Build a Tartan•
- the Nine Sacred Woods•
- a hex map Adventure•
- a dungeon crawl in Newgrange•
- and more•

view my other works at: manarampmatt.itcb.io

CAERS & CRANNOGS is an every-other-month zine that is produced for the **CAIRN** *adventure game* system.

CAIRN is written and published by *Yochai Gal*.

CAERS & CRANNOGS is written by *Matthew Morris* and is published by *ManaRampMatt*.

This, and the first couple, zine(s) will focus on the setting of **THE OTHERWORLD**, a Iron Age Celtic land, accessed only via strange magic, ritual, festival and most importantly; **SUNWISE CIRCLES** and **THE TIME BETWEEN THE TIMES**.



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