

Cepheus Journal

Issue #006

In this issue:

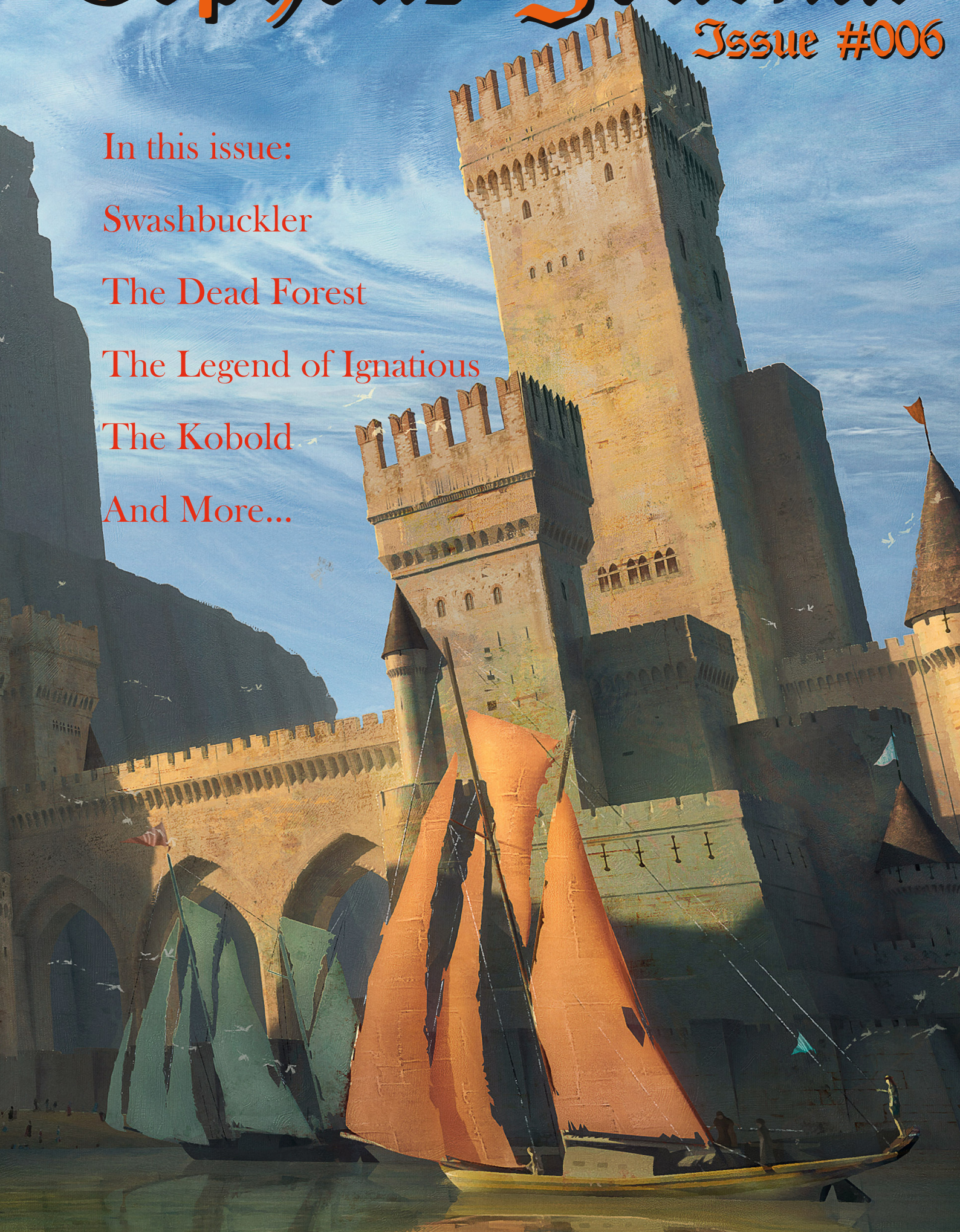
Swashbuckler

The Dead Forest

The Legend of Ignatious

The Kobold

And More...



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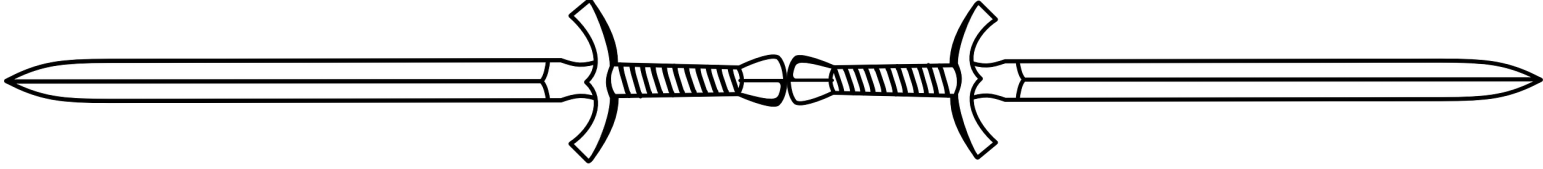


Table of Contents

From the Editors 2

Barbaric! Review 3

Swashbuckler 4

The Dead Forest 6

The Legend of Ignatious 19

The Kobold 23

Quantum Sorcery 26

The Vengeance of Dimion 29

Octorus 30

Open Gaming License 31

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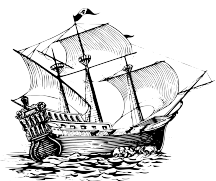
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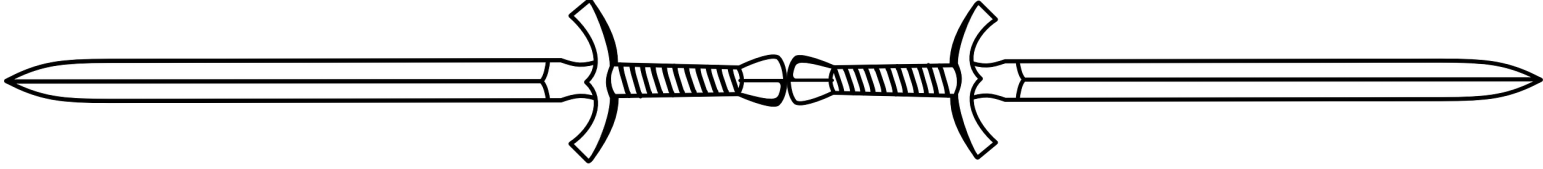
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From The Editors

Welcome to this, the sixth issue of Cepheus Journal, the free PDF based fanzine dedicated to all things Cepheus Engine related. This is a fantasy only issue and we have saved other submitted content for later issues, a big thank you to the authors who have submitted.

As always, the editorial team is happy to receive feedback, even critical ones, if it means our fanzine will get better and be of greater value with each issue. Wow! issue #001 has been downloaded almost 1500 times, with the other issues going strong as well. We hope you will enjoy this issue just as much.

This issue we have more great articles. This fantasy special issue kicks off with a review of Barbaric! by yours truly, followed by more articles on the fantasy theme. There's the Swashbuckler advanced combat rules from Peter Kreft, some expositions on dragons (Jo Jaquinta), kobolds (our own Paul Drye), and Quantum sorcery (Steve Attwood). The ever proficient Timothy Collinson gives a Barbaric! NPC to use in games, while our own P-O Bergstedt gives us the Octorus to use in his Störtebeker, or any, fantasy setting. And finally, something we've not had before, some fiction from Robert L S Weaver - The Dead Forest. While it's a good piece to read, the story should also inspire a nice little side quest in any campaign you're currently running.

A note now on new releases, Michael Brown released Underneath, Building Better Benefits, Species V, Evenfall, Burst Transmission vol 6, Lineage & Lambda-16. Cartridge Games has released the Exterminator RPG, World at Weird War II, Runes for Barbaric! and Scandinavian

Legendary Creatures for Barbaric! Monachus released Anubis Class Heavy Lifter & Lanzadera Shuttle. OSRP released Storm Warning, Islands in the Sky and The Thing in the Ice. Mood Toad Publishing released Mainstay Class Freighter. Horizons Games released six titles under their Cosmos: Age of Sail setting - Charted Space, Handout, Star Map of Charted Space, Companion, Vega & Classified. Stellagama Publishing released their Quantum Engine SRD and the spanish version of Barbaric! Zozer Games released Introduction to HOSTILE and Hostile Situation Report 001 - Ghost Ship. Independence Games release Subsector Sourcebook: Durga, Riders Referee Screen Panels & Earth Sector Quadrant 2 Bundle. Magic Pig Media released Death Stalkers of Antediluvia and Character Sheet & Pregens for Death Stalkers of Antediluvia. Game in the Brain released Mneme Variant Combat Rules. Cross Planes Game Studio released Foelio for the Quantum Engine, Cepheus Sorcery & Barbaric! Phew!

We're aiming to keep Cepheus Journal coming out regularly but understand that you may feel like checking in between issue. To that end, CJ has a group on Facebook as well as FB alternative MeWe where you are all welcome to hang out.

Please enjoy issue six and keep those dice rolling!

Brett Kruger.

Cepheus Journal Editorial Team

- Brett Kruger
- Ian Stead
- Michael James Cross
- P-O Bergstedt
- Paul Drye





Barbaric! Review

By Brett Kruger

Up until the last couple of years fantasy roleplaying was not a genre that I partook of, at least not since my high school days where I cut my roleplay teeth on the likes of MERP and Rolemaster – thanks entirely to my English teacher and a required reading of *The Hobbit*, which of course lead to *The Lord of the Rings* and many, many other quiet nights with good books.

Anyway, after the last two decades of having to play online via email and Roll20, I spent a few Saturday nights with our local roleplaying club playing the original fantasy game. Not my cup of tea, so to speak, but oh so much fun to get back into face-to-face games. Then the pandemic hit and even that dried up.

So, when *Barbaric!* was released, I thought I would purchase a download and give it a go.

At 57 pages it's not a huge read, I finished it over a weekend, but Omer Golan-Joel of Stellagama Publishing has done a wonderful job of packing a full game in. The layout is neat and tidy and easy to read, even on the PDF reader of my Android tablet.

Based on my current favourite ruleset, Cepheus Engine, *Barbaric!* does a credible job of moving that ruleset from science fiction to fantasy. The ruleset covers its basic rules, traits, combat, experience, equipment, sorcery, monsters and more, all the basics to get started in a fantasy setting.

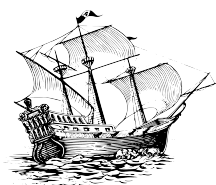
Artwork is minimal and black and white but still of good quality. Reminds me a lot of the original 2D6 sci-fi roleplaying game.

Character creation, skills and the like are minimal, and the whole game has a feel very suitable to one shot games and conference play. Want to quickly introduce your Cepheus players to a fantasy setting? Then *Barbaric!* is the game for you. Easy for the GM as well, not a lot of places to look up skills and rules, so quick to learn.

You can pick from human or non-human characters, a nice list of traits and skills and quickly jump in. Hero points and experience are a nice touch for those players that just have to level up and there's enough equipment to get any party started.

Combat is quick, I especially like the critical hit tables, takes me back to my Rolemaster days. While there isn't any setting information, the exploration section will at least help navigate your fantasy world. And then there is the monster section to help you fill out your world, followed by the treasure section to reward your players.

All in all good fun, and I recommend you give it a go at least once.





Swashbuckler

By Peter Kreft



01-06	AP=1
07-11	AP=2
12-16	AP=3
17-20	AP=4
21-25	AP=5
26+	AP=6

There is one exception, for the terminally stupid or slow: If a character has only 1 AP, he can make ONE action, regardless if it is a Significant or Standard, per turn.

Adding diversity to Melee Combat

Swashbuckler aims at adding more detail to melee combat, by introducing new concepts like Action Points (AP) and new skills like Parrying, Blocking and Dodging, while still staying in the confines of the normal rules.

Instead of Significant and Minor actions "Swashbuckler" uses action points (AP), where a Significant action costs 2 AP and a Standard Action 1 AP.

An average character has three AP, which would enable him to make one attack and one defense per turn. On the other hand there are characters with a very high dexterity or high intelligence which can act much faster than the average 777777 Joe Normal.

To find out how many AP a character has, add Dexterity and Intelligence and consult the following table.

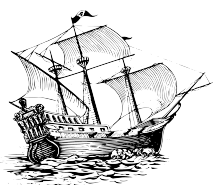
In the first round of combat, add the effect of the initiative roll to the action point pool of the character that has the initiative. Then the character with the highest AP# acts first (throw a die in case of ties), followed by next lowest, and so on. Important: No action also uses up one AP, e.g. so that you can't wait until the others are out and act then.

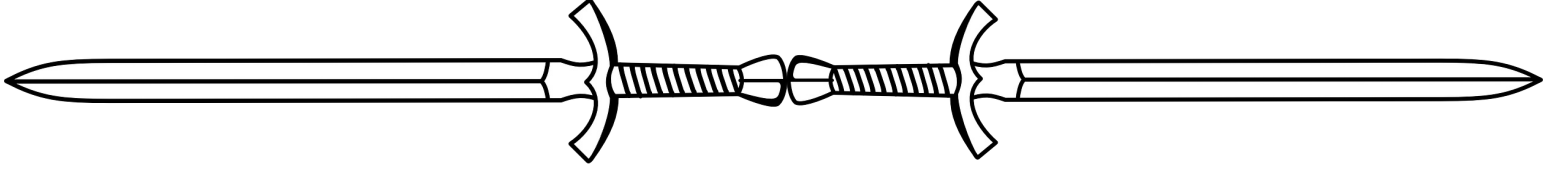
This continues until all combatants have acted once, and is then repeated until all combatants have run out of action points.

In the following rounds the character with the highest amount of APs acts first followed by the others, as above.

SKILLS

Some defensive actions that were used only as DM's in the original rules, like Dodging and Parrying, are now skills. Their value is identical to the highest Melee oriented skill the character possesses. E.g. Melee (blade)-3 gives the automatic skills of Parry-3, Block-3 and Dodge-3.





Examples of Use:

ATTACK

Unarmed or with a weapon: Average (8+) Melee (weapon or unarmed) check (STR or DEX).

Action Point Cost : 2AP

The classic melee attack as covered in the rules.

PARRY

Parrying an Attack (Difficult (10+) Melee (any) check (Instant, DEX).

Action Point Cost : 1AP

This is basically the classic fencing move, where the defendant counters the attack, by swordplay with his own weapon. Think Stuart Granger and James Mason in "Prisoner of Zenda".

Disarm the enemy (Very Difficult (12+) Melee (any) check (Instant, DEX).

If successful, the opponent drops his weapon. He can recover it in the next turn for a cost of 2AP.

BLOCK

Blocking an Attack (Very Difficult (12+) Melee (any) check (Instant, STR).

Action Point Cost : 1AP

This is the brute force approach to defence, the defender tries to counter the attack by placing an object into harm's way. Blocking can not be done with the weapon used to attack, but with an object in the off-hand, either a shield, or a weapon like the Main-Gauche, especially designed for blocking a weapon.

Using a Shield raises the chance of success drastically.

Buckler	DM+1
Small Shield	DM+2
Main Gauche	DM+3
Medium Shield	DM+3
Large Shield	DM+4

Action Point Cost : 1AP

Shield Bash (Very Difficult (12+) Melee (any) check (Instant, STR).

If successful, the opponent loses the rest of his AP for this turn and can neither defend himself, nor flee. This is a defensive (1 AP) action that, if successful, can be directly followed up by an attack.

Action Point Cost : 1AP

DODGE

Dodging an Attack (Difficult (10+) Melee (any) check (Instant, END).

This is basic legwork. Trying to be somewhere where the attackers weapon isn't. Endurance is the watchword, since only well trained legs can keep up running when the others are beating.

Action Point Cost : 1AP

Bullfight your opponent (Difficult (12+) Melee (any) check (Instant, END).

If successful, your opponent is surprised by your dodge and passes you while attacking. You have one free attack, without options to evade, parry or block it.

Action Point Cost : 1AP

The rules have been extensively playtested and while some rolls seem to be excessively high (10+ or even 12+), remember that it is easy to hit someone with a weapon, but difficult not to get hit at all. In addition a good fighter with good equipment will find that his chances are quite good.

A fighter with STR 9 and Melee 3, using a large shield, will find that his chances of a block, 12 minus 1 for Strength, minus 3 for skill and minus 4 for the large shield = 4+, aren't as bad as they look.





The Dead Forest

A Weird Tale by Robert L S Weaver

"The Dead Forest of Khana?" exclaimed the Keeper of the Bear and Blade tavern. "Why you must be mad to go there! Nothing live in it anymore, and who knows what haunts it instead? Ghosts and ghouls, they say. What business could you have with that cursed place?"

The man everyone called Rothech the Ranger smiled. "you've always thought me mad, friend. Always running off after adventures, instead of staying here in Bartacus like our friend Eolbert."

"Nay, he enjoyed adventures too, but sought them here in the city instead," The Keeper replied.

"Aye, and he's dead and I'm still living. What does that say for me?"

"It says you have good taste in your companions. Eolbert, myself, and all your mates here. Why go ranging across the world when everything you need is here? The Bear and Blade is the finest establishment in the city-state, and my customers are the finest as well."

"But without my adventures, how would I pay for your over-priced ale?" The Keeper reddened at Rothech's jibe, but in moments they were both laughing.

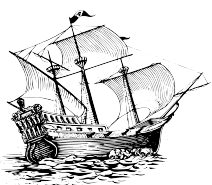
"Truly, Keeper, I am in no less danger by 'ranging' the world than if I stayed within the city's walls. Maybe less. Think of what happened to Eolbert." Rothech drained his latest stein, then took a deep breath, as though he had a hard saying to share.

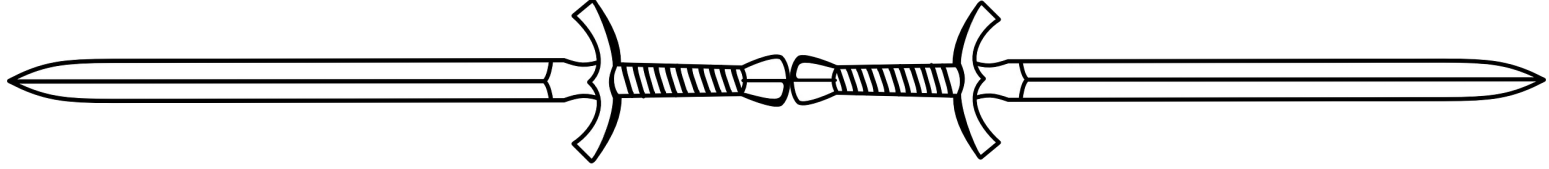
The Keeper missed the change in Rothech's demeanor. "Eolbert was killed by street thieves, that could happen to anyone."

"Aye, but what you don't know, my friend, and neither did I until recently, is that Eolbert was murdered. He had been working for Coenferth the Sorcerer. It was on his orders that Eolbert died."

"The one they call Soul-Shadow?"

"The same. Eolbert got greedy, as he often did, and pocketed more of the take than the wizard thought he should. He sent those street thugs after him. Of course, Soul-Shadow is rich and has rich friends, so he was able to cover his tracks and avoid the law. I only learned of it by chance from a drunken bravo who knew of the affair."





The Keeper spat on the floor. "The devil you say. Then why work for him yourself? And what does this have to do with the Dead Forest?"

"Soul-Shadow told me that in the forest, there is a magic book, buried in the tomb of its author, a magician of the old days. He wants me to retrieve it for him. It seems he does not know or care that Eolbert was my friend. It's the perfect opportunity for me to get justice for Eolbert. I'll find a way to vex this wizard. I'm not so mad as to attack a sorcerer directly, but now I have a reason to get near him, and into his house, so I'll find my chance somewhere." Rothec's eyes flashed with determination.

Shaking his head, the Keeper asked "You know little of the ways of magic. Do you think to use the magic of this book against him? If so, you really are mad."

Rothec waved a hand. "I don't have a plan yet. I expect that something will come to me once I find it. Perhaps this old wizard has other treasures buried with him, that I can keep or use. The Soul-Shadow only asked for the book."

"Well, I would hate to lose your custom in my tavern," the Keeper sighed. "You've spent much of your adventure-gained gold for my house brew. When you don't come back, how can I keep in business?"

They both chuckled. "Oh, I'll be back, have no fear. Eolbert is dead and the Soul-Shadow is alive. The world is out of balance, and Law demands that it be set right."

Chapter Two

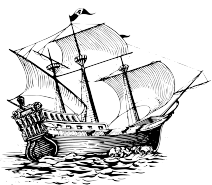
"You will find the tomb of the Sorcerer Flame-Singer in the nest of the Two-headed Eagle," the Soul-Shadow told him. "That is all that the ancient manuscript says to guide you. Surely there cannot be many eagles with two heads living in the world. So, you find the nest, and look in it for the wizard's tomb."

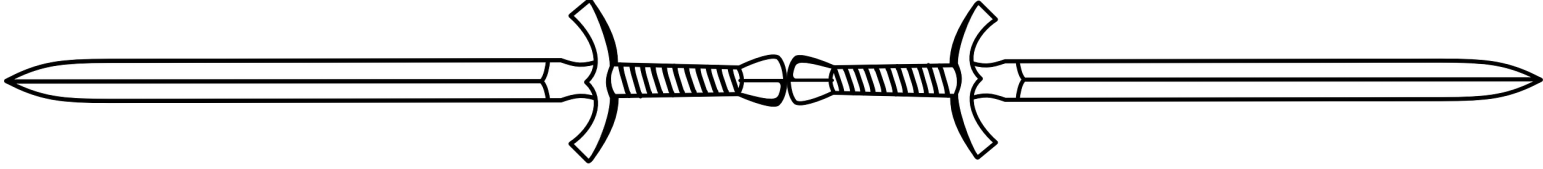
Rothec protested. "A Two-headed Eagle? I've never heard of such a creature."

Soul-Shadow showed Rothec the letters written to his mentor from the college of sorcerers in Isugrin, near a century before. He scanned them quickly, skimming over the archaic lettering and phrases. "No more description than that? Finding one bird's nest in a forest will be harder than finding an unguarded dragon's hoard." Rothec thrust the letters across the table to the gray-bearded sorcerer.

"I was informed by my sources that there is no more resourceful bravo than Rothec the Ranger. If any man could find the tomb, it is said that he could. Have I been misinformed? I would be most displeased to find that your reputation is exaggerated. It has wasted my time and treasure, in that case."

The Soul-Shadow's cold, hard stare had its desired effect. Rothec stared back defiance.





"If anything, the stories of me are guilty of omission, not elaboration. I said not that it could not be done. Sitting here in your comfortable apartments, you think it easy to find one ant in a haystack? When you hear my price, you'll not think it an easy task. What else is known about this Flame-Singer?"

Soul-Shadow went on as if Rothech had not spoken. "Flame-Singer was driven out of Isugrin by other wizards who opposed his consorting with Outsiders. Some tales claimed he was a Toshari, but other said he was a Man from Aruron, across the Calbani Ocean." He casually turned over a paper and continued.

"The Book of Flame-Singer contains all of his magic spells. It is described as large, leather bound with copper bands. They say that the covers are made from the hides of the ox-men of the plains, the Minoans, and the leaves of this book are vellum of men's skin!" Soul-Shadow's eyes grew wide and malevolent. He stroked his thin gray beard and gazed fixedly at Rothech.

Is he looking at me or through me? What kind of schemes is he up to? It sounds like this Flame-Singer dealt in Black magic, to summon the dark powers from Outside the world. He knew that was Soul-Shadow's reputation as well. Rothech averted his eyes to avoid meeting that menacing gaze, hoping that the Sorcerer was not reading his thoughts.

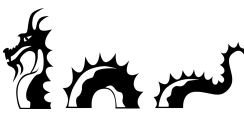
The sorcerer's chambers were hidden away in a merchant's square, far from the main gates of the city. The servant who guided Rothech to Soul-Shadow's door never once spoke to him, and moved quickly, so Rothech had little time to mark the way there. After agreeing on 500 gold ducats for the delivery of the Book, he was led out a different way by another servant and deposited on a main road.

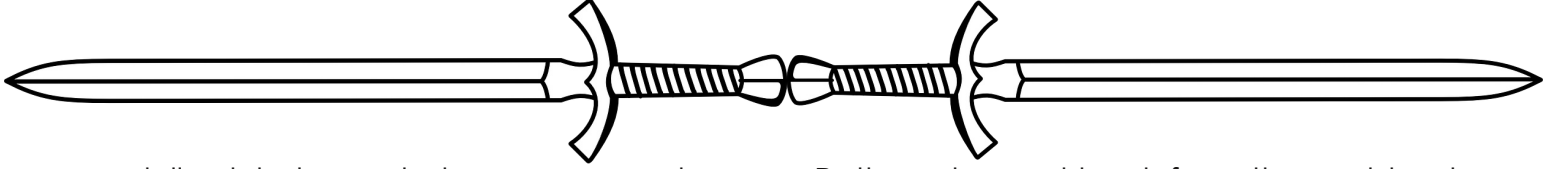
For the twentieth time, Rothech played over that conversation in his mind. Two days out of Bartacus and the last outlying village miles behind him, there was little else to occupy his thoughts.

Schemes of revenge jostled with each other in mind, some brutally direct and others hopefully more crafty and subtle. Yet none put him at ease as sure to meet his two objectives: to make the Soul-Shadow pay and to get away with his own life. The sorcerer would not scruple to have him killed too, if he thought Rothech had wronged him. Still he had plenty of time to decide which scheme was the most likely or least mad.

Mid-morning on the third day of walking, Rothech spotted something moving north of him, as it came over a rise on the plains. Soon it was plain what he saw was a wagon, drawn by two horses. It was covered with canvas and driven by a lone man on a high bench. Rothech pondered whether to hide and let him pass.

It may be that he has some bit of news, and I've not spoken to a soul in days. Unless he's





a dullard, he's sure to have seen me by now. Rothec stepped back from the cart track and waited as the wagon approached. The driver must have spotted him, but he kept on at a steady pace. He won't think I'm a bandit now that I've made myself so obvious. There's no cover here so he'll guess I'm not hiding confederates.

The wagon rolled right up to where Rothec stood. The driver pulled on the reins and the two brown dappled horses came to a stop and immediately began grazing.

The driver and the walker consider each other for a few moments, their hands casually but plainly moving towards their weapons. Then the wagon driver spoke. "Peace be with you," he said in the tongue of Isugrin. There was no warmth in the greeting, only formality.

"And with your house," Rothec responded, in the same tongue and with the same judicious, neutral tone. Judging from his manner and speech, a merchant or artisan from Isugrin. Probably safe enough. Rothec bowed.

"How fares Isugrin?" he said. "Well enough, if the weather remains mild. It will be storm season soon. Where are you from?"

"From the city-state of Bartacus." "I am glad to know it, for I am bound for Bartacus." The driver relaxed a little. "Do you know the Guild of Crockers?"

"Only that they are kept busy by the patrons at The Bear and Blade. They are a rough bunch and none too careful with the crockery."

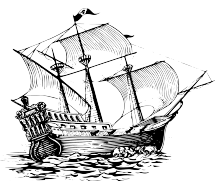
"Perhaps I'll visit then. Where is it located?" "On the Sheep market, by the east gate. Do you speak Radilim? That is the common speech of the city."

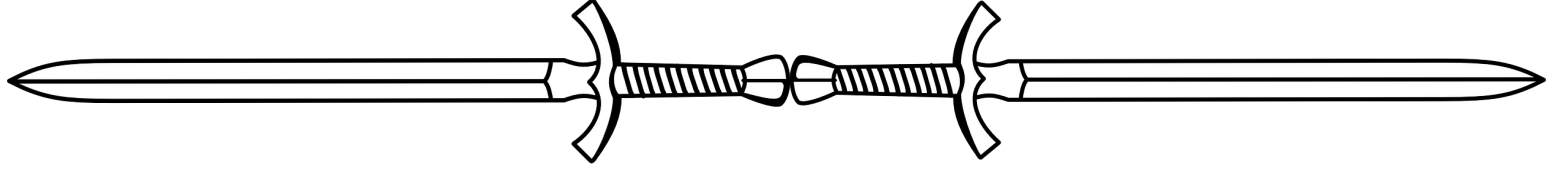
"Aye, and Morean besides. I've travelled to many of the city-states. As you've no doubt guessed, I trade in crockery and its tools. My name is Tirwald. I heard that there was a new Master Crocker working in Bartacus and thought to judge his wares. If he knows the method of crystal glazing, then I may buy up a crate or two to sell in Isugrin. It's the new fashion there. Could I interest you in some hollow-ware, or maybe a potter's gauge?"

Rothec dismissed the offer with a wave. "I travel light when I'm on the road, and I have not the patience to learn a new craft. My name is Rothec. I do – odd jobs for people."

Tirwald raised an eyebrow. A wandering adventurer? He'd known too many of them – and most were thieves when other adventure was absent. He shifted in his seat. "Where are you bound for, then? Isugrin?"

"Nay, not Isugrin." Rothec hesitated. "I seek the Gorteos Woods, to collect some rare types of wood. For a furniture maker." He displayed his ax to lend veracity to his claim of being a woodcutter.





Tirwald appraised him doubtfully. That's a lie. Still, best not to press the matter. "Well, my counsel is that you will do well to avoid the Forest of Khana. In my city, they call it the Dead Forest. I traveled many miles just across the Khana river from that dreadful waste. I would have kept away, but the road follows the river for a time, and the river borders the Forest. I thank all the gods my back's to it now."

"I will be wary. What can you tell me of it, so that I know what to look for?" Do not sound too interested. But I need to know what he knows.

"Bare tree trunks, no bushes and no grass for miles and miles. The ground is gray, and rocks abound." Tirwald spread his arms wide. "I would say that a great fire had consumed the forest, but there's no sign of ash or smoke. All the trees just died, standing. Some folk in Isugrin say it is the habitation of ghouls, now. I secured a charm to ward them off, to be safe. All the same I felt that I was watched as I rode past. I am certain I saw movement behind a tree, more than once." He shuddered at the memory. "I urged my beasts as fast as I dared to get away from there without risking my flatware. Mark my words, you'll find no good if you go near it. Cross the river west of the Forest and head northwest. You'll see the goodly trees of Gorteos before long."

"Thank you for the warning. If you visit The Bear and Blade tavern, tell the Keeper that Rothech sends his greetings. Peace be with you."

"And upon your house." Without another word, Tirwald snapped the reins and the wagon moved off. Rothech watched him until the next rise obscured the wagon, then he turned and continued his lonely walk. Ghouls, eh? There's at least one grave in the Dead Forest, it is not hard to imagine more. What have I gotten myself into this time?

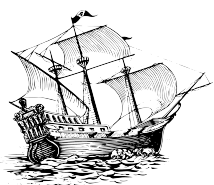
Chapter 3

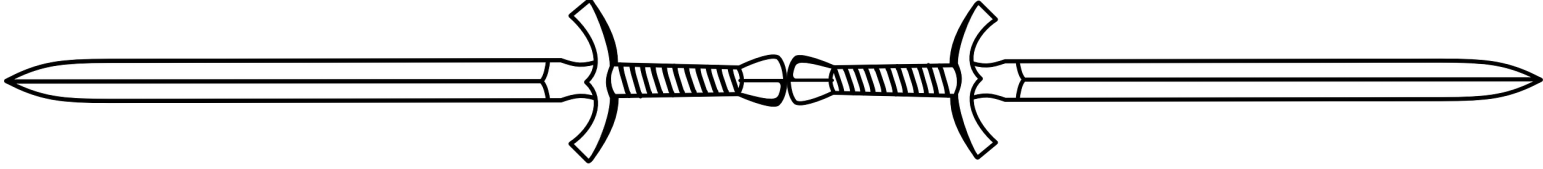
Rothech the Ranger saw the Dead Forest in the distance. It could be nothing else, a dull gray expanse stretching out in both directions along the horizon. By all the gods! He had not considered that it would be this large. How could he hope to find one nest in an area so vast? Perhaps that was why the old wizard had chosen this place to be buried. Bare as it was, the Dead Forest would hide him well.

After his meeting with the trader, Rothech had seen no living souls on his way to the forest. This was a desolate place, even without the menace of the Forest. Why then did the trader say he felt that he was watched? Was it nervous superstition or did something yet live there?

"May the Eye of the Presence watch over me," he murmured. The prayer was only a vague memory of his religious training as a child, but still it rose in his mind when he knew he walked into danger.

"Where to begin?" he wondered aloud. "Start by fording the river, I think. If there are





trails through the Forest, they should begin at a ford. Perhaps the Flame-Singer lived near a trail. I'll set up my camp on this side of the river, though, to be safe."

After hours of walking along the riverbank, he decided on a crossing, and made his camp. He had guessed correctly, the shallow point in the river was marked on the far side by a rough track, no more than one cart wide, where no trees were. Ruts ran from the riverbank into the treeline where the path wended its way out of sight beyond.

All through the evening, Rothec found that his gaze strayed again and again across the river at the forbidding expanse of the Forest. Did he see movement? No, surely not. Just the shadows in the twilight.

At break of day, Rothec set his face towards the Forest, and crossed the river. The standing trunks of the dead trees came right up to the river's bank in many places, and the grass stopped within feet of the water's edge.

He thought that the trail would have vanished without men and wagons to trample it, covered over by grass and bushes. What he found was that the trail was as distinct as if it was in daily use. Two stripes of bare ground where cart wheels rolled over root and rock. No grass grew in sight.

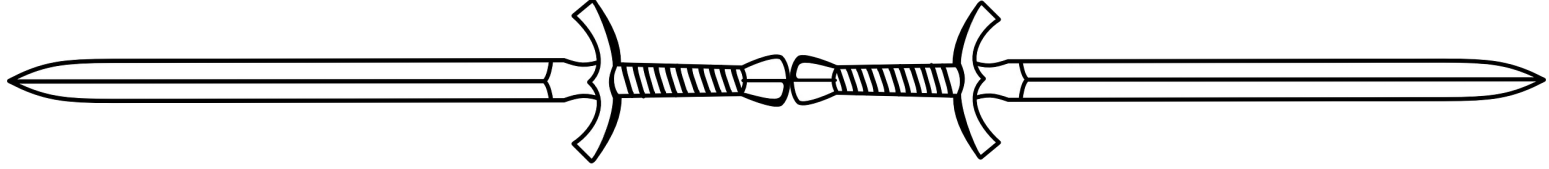
What made the trail hard to follow was the condition of the forest floor around it. Rothec had never seen its like before. There were no bushes, scarcely any lichen or moss, and no carpet of leaves. No leaves had fallen on that floor in many winters. The forest floor was bare dirt and rocks. Here and there he saw a few blades of sickly-looking grass, but in patches smaller than his hands. Every tree's roots were exposed for feet in all directions. Yet there was something wrong beyond the absence of anything green and growing. Beyond the deathly stillness and silence, for there were no leaves to rustle in the weak breeze. Despite the bright sunshine, the air was unnaturally chill for the time of year. Something more tugged at his mind, some feeling of things not being right.

As he walked, Rothec stumbled over a tree root and pitched forward. He reached out for something to balance himself, but he was too far from any of the gaunt bare tree trunks. Steadying himself, he glanced back at the root that had tripped him.

It struck him in that moment what was odd about this place, even more odd than the bare limbs and branches. There were far more roots visible than could be the product of the trees. The trees stood apart, more than the length of a man's body. But everywhere there were roots.

Rothec turned his experienced eye to examine the ground. I thought these were tree roots, exposed because of the lack of leaf cover. But this one comes to the surface here, away from that tree, and goes back underground there, also not near a tree. Rothec knelt to examine the root. It was an unhealthy greenish-brown, tough and covered in short fibrous tendrils, and thick as Rothec's bicep.





It looked different from the roots of the nearby tree. This length of root even lay atop of a root from another tree, before burrowing back into the ground further on. If this were a proper tree root, then the tree from which it came would have to be of greater girth than any of these here. Or taller by half again as much.

Rothech swung his ax and shaved off a sliver of the root to examine it. His other hand, resting on the root, felt the blow from his ax, and then an answering tremor from within the root. Rothech recoiled in surprise. It shuddered when my blow fell. It reacted and moved! What kind of root is this? The sliver fell to the ground forgotten. The wound in the root oozed with a sickly greenish ichor. New tendrils were already stretching out to cover over the exposed spot. Rothech slung his ax at his belt and hastened away.

Now Rothech could tell that the roots were everywhere. Some thicker than his leg, some thin like fingers, the roots spread in every direction, and everywhere. Over dirt and stone, over dry creek beds, over the roots of trees and even around their bases. It seemed to him as though thousands of arms were reaching up out of a graveyard to grasp at the surface world or feel the sun.

His stride was uneven and his pace slow as he tried to avoid stepping on the roots. He was wary of them now. The shuddering of the root under his ax still tingled in his palm.

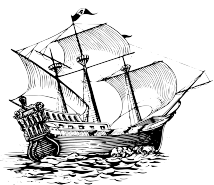
Later, Rothech came upon a creek cutting across the trail. Once there had been a plank bridge crossing the span, but no longer. The piers still stood at the creek banks, but the planking had long since rotted and fallen away.

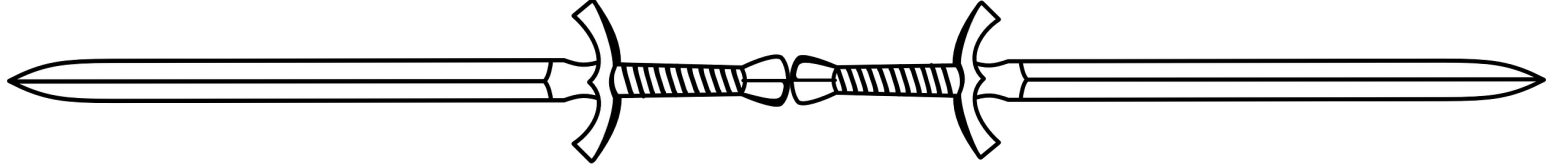
As at the river, at the edges of the stream small patches of grass grew. Rothech looked carefully on both sides of the bank for signs of animal tracks. He was hardly surprised to find that there were none.

Looking down into the creek, Rothech saw that it was not deep, and moved only sluggishly past the weathered piers. The bottom was smooth with sediment, but the water looked unclean somehow.

Not wanting to risk deep mud at the bottom, Rothech backed up and made ready to leap the distance. Charging the pier with a growl, he launched himself into the air. His foot struck on the edge of opposite pier, and Rothech tumbled forward. He fell to his knees and skidded to a halt. He got up groaning, his knees aching. "That was further than it looked from that side," he exclaimed as he brushed the dirt from his leggings. "Still, I made it. I wouldn't have cared to clean such foul looking creek-mud out of my boots." He realized that he was standing on one of the strange roots which infested the Forest. He hastily stepped off and moved on, down the path.

Had he investigated the creek bank on the side where he now stood, he would have spotted at last, a sign of other inhabitants in the Forest. A foot had left its imprint in the soft earth near the water's edge. A print with five long toes, an arch and a round heel.





Too small for a grown man, but with nail-prints much too big for a child.

As the day wore away, Rothech grew tired and thought more and more about laying down to rest. "No, that I must not do. Perhaps though I should turn south again, so I will be sure to make the river by dark. Yes," he announced to the tree-trunks and stones around him. "That is what I will do." There was none that answered or made reply.

The second day came and brought more of the same. When he judged it to be noontime, Rothech found a tree that had few of the mysterious roots close to it, and sat down with his back to the trunk. His satchel produced a hunk of bread, much diminished from when he had purchased it in Bartacus days ago. Muttering a perfunctory thanks for his daily bread, he relaxed and closed his eyes while he chewed.

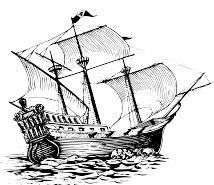
When his eyes opened, he saw the chunk of bread in his lap, and the shadows further to the left than when he had sat down. Cursing his inattention, he shoved the bread into the satchel and climbed up. Half-way to standing Rothech froze. By his foot there was an arc of the mysterious root, a foot long and bigger than his wrist. That was not there when I sat down. I'm certain of that. More slowly, he gathered himself up and backed away from the tree before turning to go. He glanced nervously over his shoulder more than once the rest of the day.

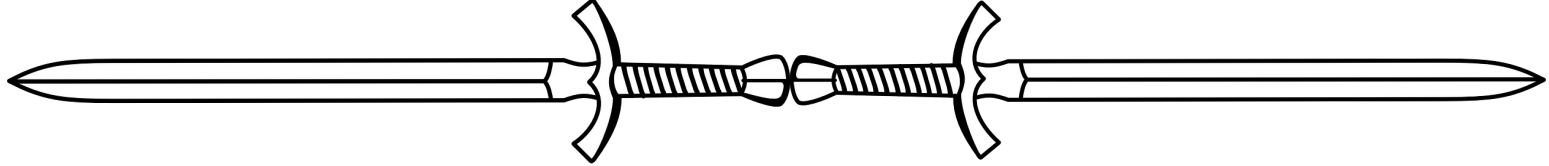
Returning to his campsite at the river's edge, Rothech smiled grimly to see that his camp had not been disturbed. That also means that no one's come by here in a whole day. If I get into serious trouble, it may be a long time before anyone discovers my bones. The following morning, despite his conviction of being quite alone, he once again concealed his few belongings in the grass by the bank.

The third day of treading the Dead Forest was much like the days before. The sun was not yet to its zenith when Rothech decided to stop for a drink. A good-sized rock became his seat, while he stretched his legs out and took a long pull from his waterskin. He had gotten only a few swallows when a cloud of weariness descended on him. His limbs felt leaden, and his head was too heavy to keep up. What is this? It is too early in the day for sleep. Magic? Must get up, must get up . . . Down he slumped, rolling off the stone and collapsing in a heap.

A small stone, pressed into his cheek, woke him. Still stupid with drowsiness, Rothech tried to remember where he was. He was lying on his side with one arm beneath him, and it felt like a thick woolen blanket had been cast over him. His arm had gone to sleep beneath him. He reached with his other hand for his face to move the irritating pebble. Something had a hold of his arm. He raised his head to look and could only move it a little. His hair was caught and held fast. He gritted his teeth and pulled. His hand was caught in a manacle! Now shocked awake, Rothech pulled and pushed to sit up. It was as though tiny hands grabbed at his hair and clothing, fighting to pull him earth-ward.

His hair began to tear free, and he was able to glance over himself. He had toppled off





of the rock where he was sitting. Those vile green roots had sprung up where he fell! One held his wrist in check, and another had looped over both his legs, holding them fast. His first thought was What kind of plant is this? and the second was Can I reach my knife or my ax? Tiny tendrils grew up out of the ground, grasping at his clothing and gear. He twisted and tugged his manacled arm, and slowly and painfully rasped it through the tight whorl of root. Is it squeezing my wrist, trying to hold on? A few tendrils still clung to his wrist as he wrenched his hand free.

Ignoring the pain and blood, Rothech pulled his knife from its sheath and began cutting away the strands of root that held him down. Arm free, he turned enough to get his other arm from under him. Then with both hands he set to work on the root which encompassed him like a belt.

Once he regained his feet, he swept out his ax and from pure spite attacked the roots that had held his arm and body. Only when they were dripping green splinters did he lower the weapon. Rothech pronounced a curse on the evil-looking shards before turning away and marching on.

Behind him, beady eyes which had watched his struggle with the roots followed him towards the next ridge.

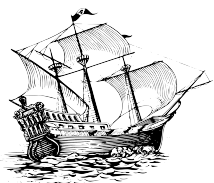
Noon had passed on the fourth day. Rothech notched another tree trunk. He was working his way east, marking where he had already searched. While he had water aplenty from the river, his food supply was running short. Even if I meet someone on the road, it is not likely they will have food to sell. Perhaps I'll have to take a few days and roam the plains south for some game. A curse on this sorcerer and his dead colleague. I told the Soul-Shadow this would take a long time. Perhaps I can convince him to raise his payment when I find the blasted Book. Worse, I still have no idea how I'm going to gain the advantage on the wizard. May be the Book itself will give me an idea.

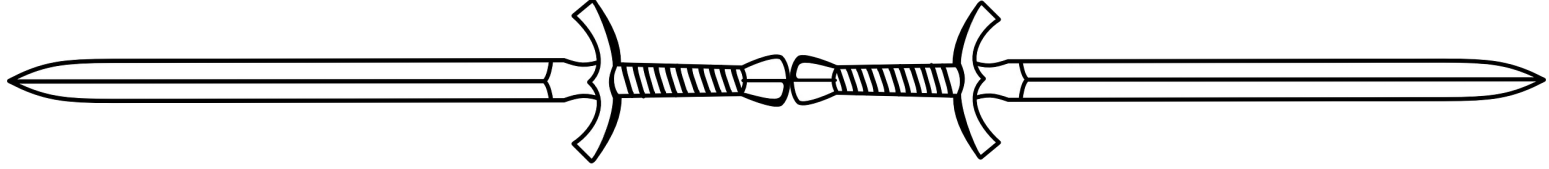
Looking up, Rothech gazed at the next slope he had to climb. He sighed. Maybe this one will show me a new sight. At the top of the slope, the view was familiar. More rocks, more roots and more dead trees. Or one tree, rather. Rothech stood on the rim of a dell, nearly circular to his eye. At its nadir stood one lone tree-trunk. It was dead and bare of leaves as all the rest were, but Rothech could imagine it in full bloom. Larger than most of the trees in the forest, its top reached above the rim of the dell. Better to go around than to climb the slope on the far side, he thought. Slowly and without much interest, Rothech worked his way around the edge until the lone tree was behind him.

Something compelled Rothech to turn back. He looked back across the dell and saw it. The two-headed eagle rose before him, frozen in a pose of launching itself into the sky.

Chapter Four

Rothech made his way down the slope into the dell, towards the solitary tree at its center. He marvelled that it was so obvious once he understood what he had been looking for.





The two-headed eagle was a tree. A tall, stately tree at one time, with wide-flung branches that at one time must have been a wonder to behold. The tree had clearly been struck by lightning at some point. The treetop was sundered perhaps twenty feet from its apex, and the two blasted sides peeled away opposite each other. Had the tree still been covered with leaves, the rest of the branches lower down would have made a perfect replica of two wide-flung wings, and the lowest branches formed the eagles' claws. Now denuded of leaves the image was more skeletal than majestic, but Rothech was certain that this was the place that Soul-Shadow had wanted him to find. The moss-covered mound sheltering under the eagles' right-hand claw would therefore be its nest. There the old wizard was buried.

He approached the mound and inspected it from a careful distance. The nest was no nest at all, but a cairn. Rothech thought that made sense. The rocky ground, pervaded with these strange roots, would have been difficult to excavate. Stones were plentiful in this dell as everywhere in the Dead Forest. The cairn was wide, greater than the length of a man, and half again as long. Larger rocks made up the base, now covered in moss and the dust of many seasons. He estimated that the wizard's coffin was off the ground by perhaps two feet.

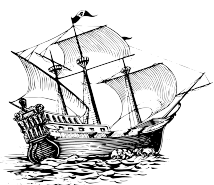
He set to work. Despite having no mortar, Time had worked the stones into a tight stack. Rothech's fingers ache from pulling and getting caught.

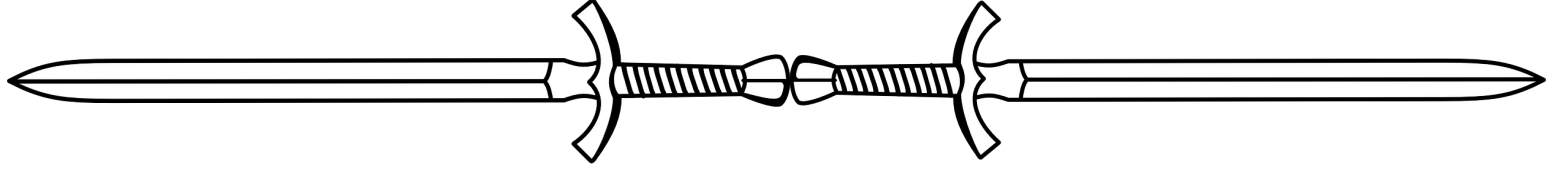
Past the top layer, the stones resisted being dislodged, except in one place. Rothech found as he worked that one corner of the coffin was exposed to the air. Several stones had slid away, but the hole was not much wider than his ax-head. The wood of the coffin had suffered from rain. The corner had rotted away in the time since being exposed. That may have even occurred recently. Not sure though.

The sun wore away as he struggled and heaved stone after stone off of the cairn. The damaged corner of the coffin was visible now, and more of the wooden lid appeared with each stone. Excitement rising, Rothech focused all his energy on moving stones. He lost awareness of the forest around him.

Some time later, Rothech froze, and realized that he had left his ax leaning against the base of the double-headed tree. It's too far away, he thought. His body was already turning into the attack but Rothech knew it was too late. A twig had snapped behind him. Between his own breath and the clatter of the stones he could have been wrong. As he twisted about, a mass of brown fur landed on his shoulder. Over backwards he went, tumbling down the side of the cairn.

His head struck a rock and dazed him. Blood flowed into his eye, cutting off sight. Teeth dug into his shoulder. A hand grabbed at his hair. Get it off! His hand grasped a rock, swung it crazily. The impact flung the mouth away with a guttural wail. Get up. Get the ax! Blood streamed down his face as he crawled into a standing position. He lurched towards his ax. Small strong arms grabbed his leg and something bit.





Rothec bellowed and limped to the tree, dragging the weight. He jabbed the ax haft at the creature biting his leg. Knocked it loose, swung the ax. The blade crunched into bone. There was an inhuman squeal, and he was free. Another stroke, and the head flew off, spraying blood. He sagged back against the tree. Wiping blood from his face, he saw three more shapes coalesce out of the shadows. Rothec staggered forward swinging, shouting he knew not what. The ax rang on a rock, and hands grabbed at his ax haft.

He swung and heaved. Teeth and hair flew towards the tree, smashed into it and crumpled into a pitiful heap. Rothec continued the turn and swept the ax down on another mass of hair and teeth, splitting it from nose to shoulders. The last shape melted away into the deepening shadows of the setting sun.

Rothec swayed, took a few steps and fell to his knees. The ax fell from his nerveless hand, but he forced himself upright again. Panting, his head throbbing, he crumpled onto the half-unmade cairn. There next to it lay the broken body of what appeared to be an oversize rodent. Fully three feet long it was, plus the length of tail. The body stirred feebly, as if it made to get up. Rothec's ax descended and parted the hideous body from its head. The carcass lay still at last.

"That's a damn big rat," he panted. "Now wait a moment." Even without part of its head caved in, it looked wrong for a rat. The neck was more defined, the nose much shorter, the jawline extended too far forward. Its fore paws had the usual five fingers, but they were almost arranged like his own.

Puzzled, Rothec crouched down to examine the body. The hind legs were too straight for a rat, and the feet were more like an ape's feet. Disgust rising, he backed away from the corpse and sat again on the cairn.

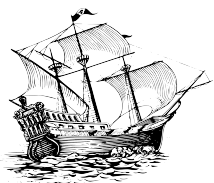
The light was fading fast. He lit a torch and propped it up with stones. His aching muscles fought against his will, but he made himself begin again clearing away the stones that entrapped the prize he sought.

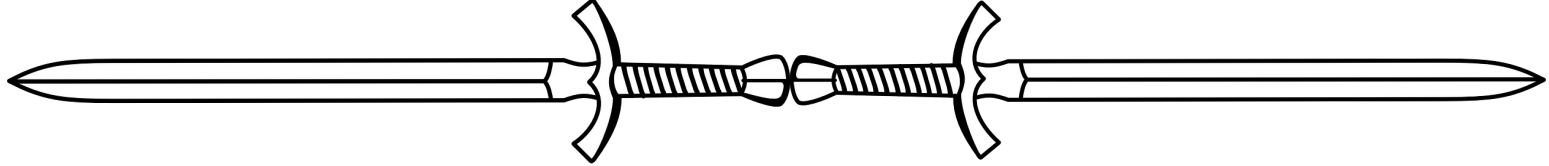
When the last of the stones were forced aside, Rothec used a small knife to pry up the coffin lid. No time for reverence or ceremonies respecting the dead, his only thought was to retrieve his prize and put his back to this dread forest.

Even the massive pile of stone was not enough to keep the sinister roots from reaching the coffin. One larger than his forearm arched over the lid. With a grim smile, Rothec chopped at the tendril, ignoring its shudders as the ax bit into it. The lid was scarred by his blows, but the thick planks held together.

With a heave Rothec forced the lid to the side, and let it slide down the heap of stones. He took up the torch and played it across the contents of the coffin.

The body of the old wizard Flame-Singer had been wrapped in a shroud. No doubt at





the time it had been of rich work and fine design, but Rothec beheld only shreds and gossamer strings covering the body. The rest had gone to dust with time. Nothing remained of the wizard except the bones. The Soul-Shadow had been right. The bones were clearly that of a Toshari. The teeth alone made unmistakable the feline characteristics of that race. Strange that his fur had also gone to dust.

Rare it was for a Toshari to practice Black magic. Small wonder then, that he had been buried so far away from any Toshari territories. He would have been a pariah for his dark ways. The Toshari he knew in Bartacus would have nothing to do with such a one, seeing him as a traitor. What matter to him though? The old wizard was past caring about others' opinions.

Rothec spied the goal of his quest, there beneath the wizard's arm bones, laid upon his chest. He moved the torch as close as he dared and understood how he would accomplish his revenge on the Soul-Shadow. He barked a short laugh, then winced at the stab of pain in his head.

Quickly but carefully he gathered up his prize. Without another glance at the dead wizard, he made all the speed his slashed and tired legs could manage towards the river, towards safety and home.

Chapter Five

Rothec sees the towers of Bartacus in the distance. He hurries to make the gate before they close for the day. He has a delivery to make. Making it quickly, he turned his path towards his favorite tavern.

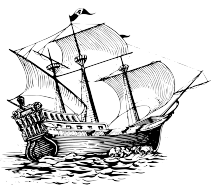
As he enters, several regulars greet him with cheers. Someone calls the Keeper to come and see him.

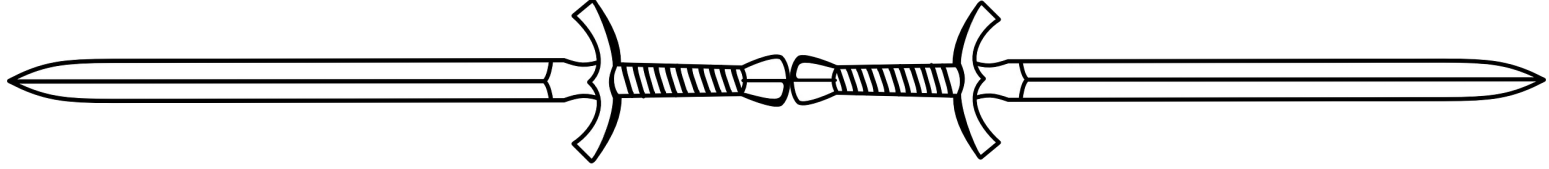
The Keeper greets him with "Did you find it?"

"Oh yes, I found it. I delivered it to the Soul-Shadow for all the good it will do him. But I got paid, so I am content." A pouch clinked on the bar. "I'll buy one round for anyone who will lift a glass to my mate Eolbert. Pass the word around."

Keeper refers to the trader who came by and sold him some plates. Mentions his surprise when the Keeper told him where Rothec was really going.

Across town the Soul-Shadow sat in his study alternating between rage and laughter. On the table before him were the boards which once had been the Book's cover. Between them was a pitiful pile of string, scraps and fragments which had once been the pages of a book. Every useless strand was marked and frayed with dozens of tiny teeth marks. Not one spell, not one magical word was discernible from the chewed remnants. The strange creatures must have once been the rats that ate the Book. The dark magic contained therein had mutated them, giving them features more like the men whose flesh they had consumed.

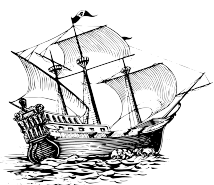




Later, the Keeper found Rothech at a side table. He worked his way past the crowded bar area, where a knot of regulars were singing an old war song, with Eolbert's name as the hero. He sat down. "Now I'm curious. What about your great plan for revenge? How did you manage it? How did you escape his wrath?"

Rothech told him the state of the Book when he found it. "The Soul-Shadow had to hand over five hundred gold ducats, and I made him count it twice, for a worthless pile of rubbish. So died my revenge."

The keeper sat down and began to laugh. When they both stopped for a breath, Rothech said, "I'll buy one more round for you and me to toast old Eolbert. Beware, though, this is Sorcerer's gold."





The Legend of Ignatious

By Joseph Jaquinta

"Ignatious?" said the dragon, its voice filling the cavern, raising its head in surprise. It looked down on the small band of cowering humans with a different light in its eyes. "You ask of Ignatious?" It took a few steps around them, contemplatively. "And here I thought you were just a snack."

The dragon's gaze turned from the cringing people to the shiny cup at their feet. It leaned closer and sniffed. "Hmm. Only gilt, not solid. Mostly crystal accents, but a few gems. Hmmm. Not worthy of my hoard, but worthy of the story of Ignatious. It is a common enough tale amongst dragons. I'm surprised you do not already know it.

It circled them once more. "Very well. I may eat you yet. But you shall have your tale first."

The dragon belched in its throat and exhaled the billowing smoke through its nostrils. "Ignatious, Ignatious. The Legend of Ignatious. It's an obscure dragon creation myth. I've always thought of it as the most interesting and compelling idea that can't possibly be true." It chuckled to itself.

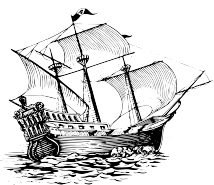
Then it settled back on its haunches for a bit. "So, Ignatious is a very rough translation for something like 'creative fire'." It puffed its cheeks and blew a small, blue-hot flame at a spear one of them had dropped. The haft charred and the point melted. "Normal fire destroys. Something becomes... nothing. But creative fire! That is fire that creates something from nothing. Fire that burns backwards, if you will." It

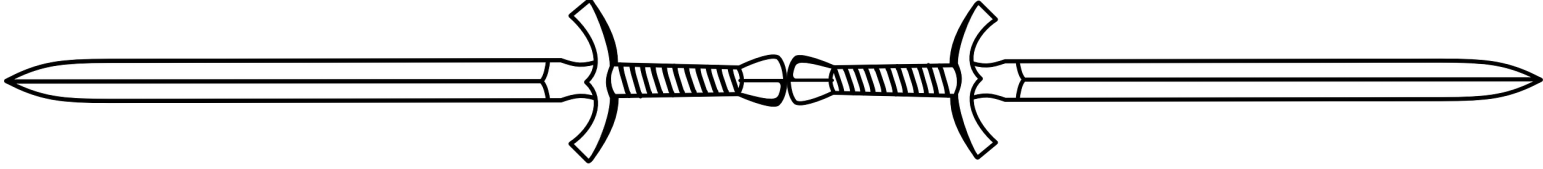
blew on the puddle, but nothing happened.

"Theologically speaking, it is a personification of the creative force that brought the world into existence. The transition from nothingness to somethingness requires... a creative spark. That is Ignatious. It created the ground, the sky, and, well." It made a gesture with its wings. "All those other things that all creation myths talk about."

The dragon got up again and continued circling. "The only thing it could not create was itself. Or, metaphorically speaking, other things in its image. Other things like creatures capable of independent thought. There are about two hundred years of philosophical argument wrapped up in why, which I never really understood. Suffice to say that Ignatious got bored and decided to alleviate that boredom by talking to itself. But this being the supreme creative force, it wasn't just mumbling at a mirror. It was more like conversing with a full-fledged separate entity.

"That was fine for a while, but since they still both thought the same way, it proved less than fulfilling in the end. So, it thought about it for a while, and then started again. But this time it put some arbitrary restrictions on what each side could say and think. By separating its knowledge and personality in asymmetric ways, it hoped to produce more enlightening dialog. Some say this was the origin of male and female, but I'm getting ahead of myself.





“That was much better. Since there were genuinely different points of views, it led to more interesting conversation. But things being things, it also led to arguments, and then to fighting. To lend weight to their arguments, each side created more reflections to make its point in a more focused way. Each with variations of its train of thought to create a more tailored viewpoint to argue specific points. Most thought similarly, but not exactly the same. Sometimes, those of different lines of thought would find similarities in their thinking and split off new voices amplifying what they had in common.

“The original creative spark of Ignatious became diluted over this multiplicity of voices. Each iteration became less powerful and the process of creating new voices became more tied to the creation that was made. In other words, it came to rely more on the physical reality of the created world, and less on the divine spark of spontaneous creation.

“I’m sure you can see where all of this is going. The end result being the current state of affairs. Each voice is instantiated as an individual dragon, and each dragon passes on a unique combination of the voice to its children.”

The dragon performed a little bow. “It’s a fascinating philosophy, and one that we still debate endlessly.” It drummed its claws on the rock floor of the cave. “Hmm. I guess I had better decide if I’m going to eat you or not.”

Dragon Society

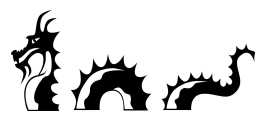
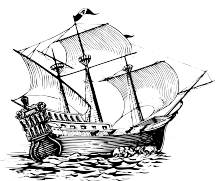
Dragons, as presented in *Sword of Cepheus*, are loner monsters, living on the fringes of civilization, preying on errant damosels, and separating adventurers

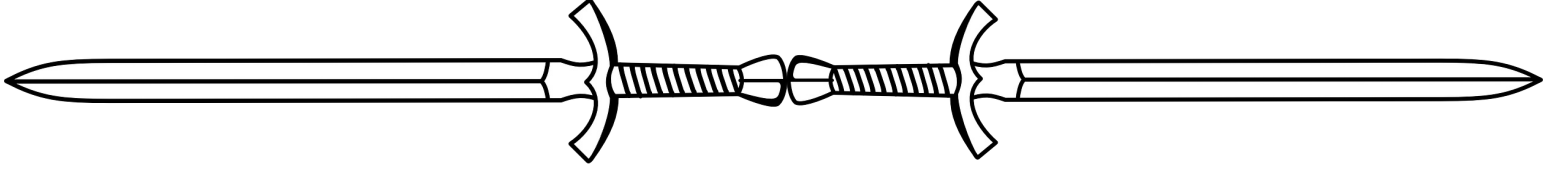
from their treasure. If your campaign only requires a beefy level boss, then that is fine. There is an opportunity to make dragons more than this. To give them a culture and society that can interact with your campaign on various dimensions.

The Legend of Ignatious gives a draconic point of view about not just how the world came to be, but also how they came to be, and their relationship with each other. Dragons are territorial hoarders, as kind of a baseline definition. But the Legend extends this concept beyond the simple desire to possess material goods to knowledge and philosophy itself. It tells dragons that each one of them carries in them a spark of the fire of creation. What this means, and what they do with it, is a subject of character or philosophy.

Some dragons treasure this spark and seek to see it grow. In some interpretations, that means by having as many children as possible, spreading them as widely as they can, and making them, in return, as prosperous as possible. This amplifies their portion of the spark and helps them “win the argument” for the faction they are members of. These dragons are very clannish, and will look to their own, and have an incentive to help out others in their clan. Human legends of swarms of dragons seeking revenge probably relate to dragons of this philosophy. Dragons outside of the clan, though, are seen as enemies, and they won’t pause to see to their detriment. These clans, however, can also fragment, usually starting with an argument about parentage and if some outside dragon fertilized certain eggs. (Although they are also prone to inbreeding, which may also explain a certain amount of instability.)

Other dragons treasure it, but on a



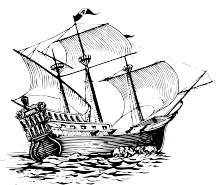


personal level. They have a zero-sum view of the creative energy and may actively avoid having children to prevent diluting that spark. More often, though, they don't consider simple parentage to be how the spark is passed but rather vanquishing an opponent and forcing it out of them. Some take this literally, and will ritually challenge other dragons to duels, the loser of which forfeits their spark (and life) to the winner. Others see this more figuratively and will engage in deeply fought intellectual battles with other dragons. They will engage in deeply written correspondence arguing nuanced points of draconic philosophy seeking to deride other arguments and gain acceptance for their own.

Another school of thought ties the spark to sorcery. Those dragons (or dragon lineages) whose origin is closer to Ignatious will have a greater fire within them and will have greater command over sorcery. Their hoarding evidences itself in the acquisition of sorcerous knowledge, spell compendiums, talismans, foci, and anything else that, arguably, might represent some of the dispersed hoard of Ignatious's knowledge.

Referees may choose to use the Pack (PAC) characteristic to represent 'how high up' a dragon is considered in their society. From a draconic point of view this is how much 'spark' they are considered to have. Those seen as closer to Ignatious will have greater sway in dragon society, they will be listened to more and challenged less frequently. This may, or may not, affect their Sorcery skill rating if, as a referee, you choose for there to be literal implications to this philosophy.

Adventure Hooks



Although largely esoteric these elements of dragon philosophy could make for interesting plot hooks or tangents to add interest and color to your campaign.

Derailing Dragons

As in the narrative intro to this article, asking a dragon the right question, can send them down a tangent and buy a little time before being eaten. Much as a cat toys with a mouse for practice and training, dragons who engage in philosophical battles with other dragons may be persuaded to debate players who have some understanding of dragon philosophy. In this case winning, and embarrassing the dragon, may almost be as bad as losing!

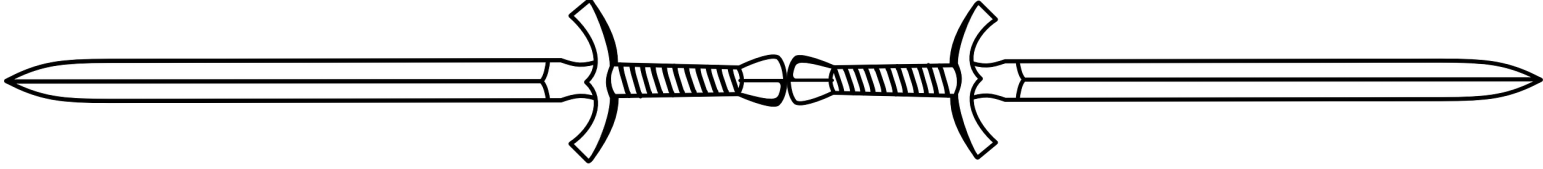
Particularly knowledgeable players might even know the proper ritualistic challenges in order to initiate a debate. Although technically not applicable if the challenger isn't a dragon, it may pique the dragon's interest enough to engage. It's a nice trick for an NPC to pull in order to provide cover for the players to make a hasty exit.

Understanding Draconic Behavior

Why are dragons invading our kingdom? The more we kill, the more come! This is a simple adventure seed that might lead the players down the path of seeking out and finding their answers in the Legend of Ignatious.

Once the motivation behind the dragons is understood, they will know where they stand. Either it will justify their eradication, or the humans might offer to join them in devastating another dragon clan so they can expand in that direction, and not in their direction.





Dragons as a Source of Knowledge

Dragons who hoard knowledge are the sort to contain repositories of ancient wisdom and lore long thought lost. Especially given their long life span. A sorcerer may join or hire the adventurers to take on a dragon with the agreement that they get all the treasure, and the sorcerer gets all the books.

Another approach would be to beseech a dragon for its knowledge. If it is a zero-sum dragon, it is unlikely to part with anything, unless they can bring troves of new knowledge that exceeds what it would be giving up. Compilations of current events, new religions, or breakthroughs in philosophical thinking might be things of interest. Anything that will give the dragon an edge on appearing more informed and wiser at their next challenge.

Dragon Messenger

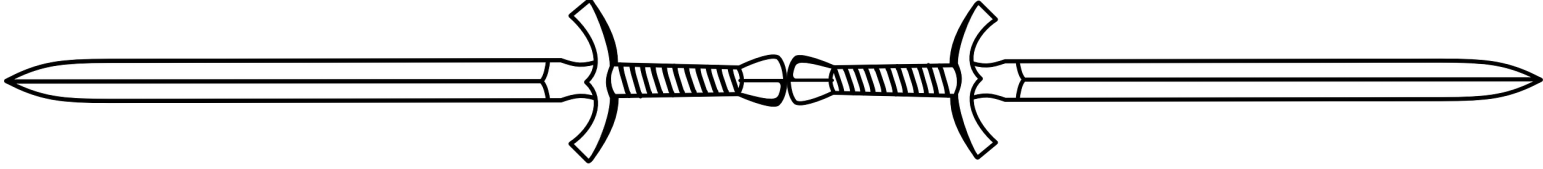
For dragons who engage in philosophical battles, much initial posturing is done via

correspondence. Taking it personally could set off a premature territorial battle, so they need 3rd parties to conduct their messages. Summoned creatures are preferred, although adventurers might do at a pinch.

An interesting twist would be for a party to be hired as escort by a scholar who has been engaging in a decades long discussion with a dragon and decides to finally meet them. Only the scholar has no idea that their correspondent is a dragon, and the dragon has no idea they have been talking to a human!

Whether used as a drop-in backstop for a night's adventuring, a red herring, or the pivotal point of a campaign, adding more background and motivation to what is otherwise a two-dimensional killer will benefit your game. May the Legend of Ignatious fan the flames of your own creative spark!





The Kobold

Old School Rethink by Paul Drye

Author Jon Peterson treats the compendia of monsters from the early days of fantasy RPGs as the latest examples of bestiaries, the medieval books that detailed animals both real and fantastic. He makes the point, though, that RPG writers innovated by particularizing their subjects out of a wide range of possibilities. This is most noticeable with “fairy folk”, who in legend are often several kinds of extremely variable beings tucked under a single name. Take, for example, “pixie”. Their Wikipedia entry says they are “often described as ill-clothed or naked...said to steal children or to lead travellers astray...said to reward consideration and punish neglect on the part of larger humans...drawn to horses, riding them for pleasure and making tangled ringlets in the manes of those horses they ride...great explorers familiar with the caves of the ocean, the hidden sources of the streams and the recesses of the land” and so on and so on. Readers encountering two creatures with the same name in two different stories will often find them to be not much like each other at all.

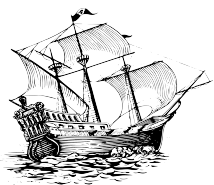
Cutting away some of that forest is a necessity for a game as the abilities of an antagonist need to be tightly defined before they interact with player characters. This means that a lot is left on the table and that a referee has the option of cutting a different way to make their version of a monster novel when compared to the ones their players have encountered in other games.

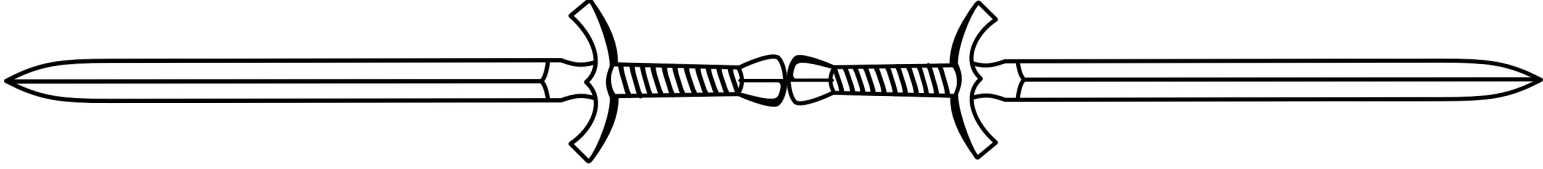
One place where we can do this is the

kobold, which in gaming has traditionally been a diminutive, entirely material being. Two types have been built up from that base, the first being pure cannon-fodder for novice characters to fight and the second being popularized by writer Roger E. Moore a few years after they first appeared. He embellished them into deadly little bastards who build their underground warrens in a way that channels bigger intruders (i.e., the adventurers) into traps and ambushes. But neither of these characterizations bear much resemblance to the kobold of German mythology, and that opens up an opportunity.

The first thing to note about the mythological creatures of that name is, again, their extreme variability. While some kobolds in folk tales are miners and dwellers of stone, they’re more broadly elemental than that. Some are made of fire and others live in water. Some are house-bound in a way reminiscent of the shoe-making elves of fable—performing small domestic chores if treated well. While generally of human appearance, if small and wizened—another difference from the game type—they are also shape-shifters and can appear as animals or pure manifestations of their element.

This variability is indeed a problem and needs to be restricted for any “kobold” to be useful in a game, but we needn’t go so far as to turn them into a mere variation on the FRPG orc either. Let’s stick to their association with mines while keeping more of their magical qualities



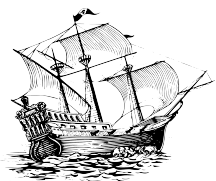


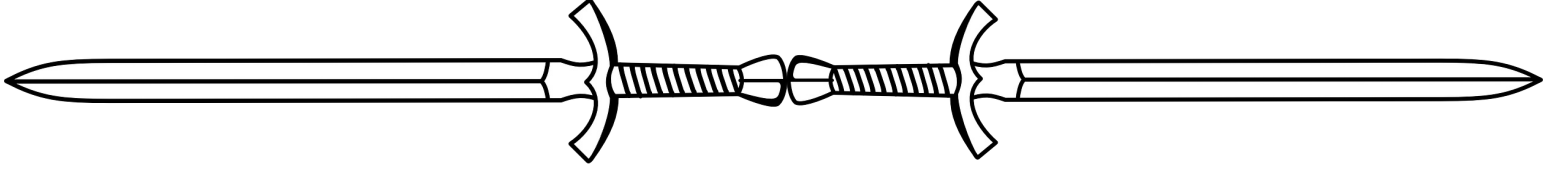
from legend. I imagine many of you are at least a little familiar with the origin of the chemical element name cobalt, as in some regions the kobolds were blamed for replacing useful ores of copper and zinc with poisonous, arsenical cobalt ores (the two categories being chemically similar and commonly found together in mines). These “miner kobolds” were liminal spirits, generally unseen and living inside the stone walls of the mine as if they were air, perhaps mining in the fairyland Otherworld that interpenetrated our own and only coming through to our world on occasion.

Kobolds are not evil per se but live by the apparently capricious laws of the fae, which is infamous for its dangers. Etiquette is paramount to co-existing with them, and they expect small sacrifices of food and polite requests made to the (apparently) empty mineshafts. This can be a problem if one doesn't even know they're there, which kobolds don't consider a reasonable excuse for rudeness. If offended they will, as mentioned, make the products of the mine poisonous as well as collapse areas of the diggings, and in rare circumstances they will even kidnap isolated miners (especially ones lost in the dark) to labour in the Otherworld. These mines account for the kobolds' apparent ability to walk out of and into solid rock—they step from the material world into a shaft they have driven through the Otherworld's matching space. These routes let them make seemingly impossible journeys through the human workings and in one legend even let human miners escape being trapped when kindly-inclined kobolds led them out and through to the surface.

In appearance kobolds are like wizened and rather ugly men just three feet (1 meter) in height. They dress in imitation of human miners: simple, somewhat shapeless and ragged outfits in drab colours. Despite looking worn, these are impervious to tearing even against jagged rocks. A kobold's face and hands are always grimy with the dust of the mines they work in and their grey hair and beards turn out to be black and wiry on the rare occasion they are clean. Individuals are both immortal and soulless, like so many fae-folk being animated only by a spirit, so they have little understanding of human frailties or beliefs, or how humans perceive time. A day and a year are little different to them.

Kobold societies are simply organized, with a rarely seen king above them all and some who act as foremen for the others. They don't go in for any kind of recreation or even sleep, instead preferring to work endlessly on their mining projects. Exactly what they do with all they extract from the Otherworld's earth is unknown, though there have been rare instances of them trading with people or even offering up riches in return for a favour. Other times they reward correct behavior in the humans they encounter by warning them of impending mine collapse—hearing the cracks and ringing tones of their tools working within walls are a sure sign that one needs to evacuate. They rarely talk to anyone except each other, preferring to use gestures (if not ignoring humans altogether) and if they need to speak will use monosyllables if they can.





Kobolds for Sword of Cepheus

30kg Outsider, extraplanar walker 679654

Appearing: 1D/2

Treasure: Incidental

Deception-1, Melee Combat-1

Damage by weapon (usually repurposed mining tools); Armor: none; Walks 6m/action

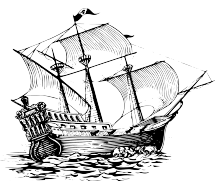
Neutral; Morale DM-1

Kobolds can become invisible or visible at will (by stepping into the Otherworld) though can only attack when visible; in any given round, the referee decides which of the two states they choose to be in. While invisible they can walk through stone as if it were air. They can also cause others to move into or out of the Otherworld by touch. Unwilling targets must be successfully attacked for this touch to land, but once moved to the "other side" the effect is permanent until the kobold (or some other being with the same power or using a similar spell) reverses it.

Kobolds also have the power to transmute metal. This has a few restrictions, notably:

- In the mortal plane they can only transmute ores. Smelted metal is immune to their influence. In the Otherworld they are free to transmute both ores and metals. One usual use of this power is to turn all the iron weapons and armor of persons brought into the Otherworld into bronze, which they will often do in order to avoid the weakness outlined below.
- When using this power, they can only turn their target into another substance of similar preciousness. For example, they could not turn iron ore into gold ore, or silver into lead. However, gold into silver and the opposite, as well as lead to iron to nickel to copper (or any variation thereof) is possible.

As mentioned previously, kobolds dislike iron as much as any other fae creature. This stems from both a weakness and an aversion to the substance. If struck with an iron weapon, a kobold takes double the usual damage. Iron doors, cages, and the like present in the material world prevent them from passing through even if they step into the Otherworld, and they will whine and complain even if just in the presence of one—one of the few times a kobold will wax loquacious.





Quantum Sorcery

An Alternative Magic and Spell Tables
by Steve Attwood / Alegis Downport

When planning to write Quantum Sorcery, one of the challenges of writing a minimal set of role-playing rules was the magic system. The Sword of Cepheus book provides a very comprehensive magic system with a huge variety of spells that sorcerers can utilise for a variety of situations. The problem was choosing the right spells that would prove useful for those playing the Quantum Sorcery rules set.

There is a balance to be achieved in making sure that sorcerers will have a reasonable range of spells and they don't feel frustrated in not having a spell that is flexible enough, which can be used in a variety of ways. Therefore, the published set of Quantum Sorcery rules have a range which include what is hopefully considered a broad range of spells including attack (Kindle Flame, Choking Grip, Call Lightning), defence (Protection from Chaos, Resist Element, Dispel Magic), investigatory (Mind Probe), control (Unseen Servant) and healing (Purify Food and Water, Cure Wounds and Cure Disease).

However, what if your game world had magic that was predominantly of a particular type? For example, magic may only have healing effects or may be linked to nature and elementalism. Some books that have magical healing as a central part of the story can be found in this article at Tor.com 'Five Books Featuring Medicine and Magic':

<https://www.tor.com/2020/02/03/five-books-featuring-medicine-and-magic/>

Presented here therefore are two alternative tables of magic which you may wish to use in your Quantum Sorcery games. The first set are spells that are related to the control of health; it is called that as just in the Sword of Cepheus rules there are spells to heal but the reverse is also true, in that you can cause harm.

If you want to randomly select a spell from the list, use 2D6.

Control of Health Alternative Spells List

2D / Spell

2 Purify Food and Water

Makes enough spoiled or diseased food or water safe for consumption for up to 10 people.

3 Respite

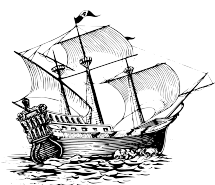
When touched, the subject is healed as though they have rested for a full day.

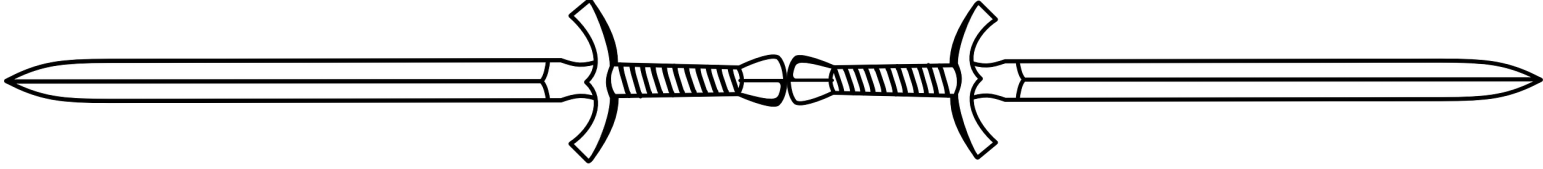
4 Remove Fear

The spell removes magical or non-magical fear and calms any touched creature.

5 Sleep

A sorcerer may at 20m range attempt to put two visible creatures to sleep. Target rolls END 8+ or fall asleep helpless. Ranged attacks are DM +2 or if not already in combat, the attacker may slay the sleeping creature automatically.





6 Remove Curse

Instantaneously removes all magical curses from a single creature at 10m range. If cast on a cursed item, the curse is not removed but allows bearer to rid themselves of it.

7 Neutralise Poison

Neutralises any magical or non-magical poison in the touched creature or object.

8 Cause Moderate Wounds

The sorcerer causes 4D wounds by touching the target.

9 Drain Life

The sorcerer drains the life of a living target by touching their skin. Requires attack throw 8+, if successful target suffers 4D damage, half of which is transferred to the sorcerer to maximum of their statistics.

10 Poison

In casting the spell, the target must be attacked in mal melee. If successful, target is poisoned and must roll 10+ or receive 4D damage.

11 Convalescence

When touched, the subject is healed as though they have rested for 5D days.

12 Cure Disease

The spell cures all diseases of one touched subject, including magical ones. It does not prevent infection.

The second table describes spells that involve the control of plants or are elemental in nature. This may be useful where your world magic is shamanic in nature and the elements are imbued with spirits which can be spoken to and if necessary, controlled. Some useful discussion points are raised about 'The

Four Elements in Magic' over at the 'Thoughts on Fantasy' website:

<https://thoughtsonfantasy.com/2019/02/18/the-four-elements-in-magic/>

Control of Plants and the Elements Alternative Spells List

2D / Spell

2 Resist Element

Grants temporary immunity to the effects of cold, fire or electricity (choose before casting), lasts one hour. Also gives DM+2 against effects of magic such as Call Lightning spells.

3 Speak with Plants

Range 10m, duration 15 minutes, a sorcerer may converse with plants and plant creatures.

4 Thunderclap

Range 20m, deafening thunder sounds at the point of choosing. Any creature within 2m of the source takes 1D damage and be deafened for 1D x 5 minutes. Deafened creatures suffer DM -2 to all rolls.

5 Command Plants

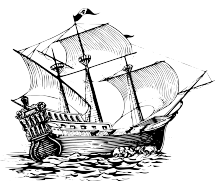
Range 20m, duration concentration, 3x3m area of controlled plants follow command of the caster even if they are normally immobile.

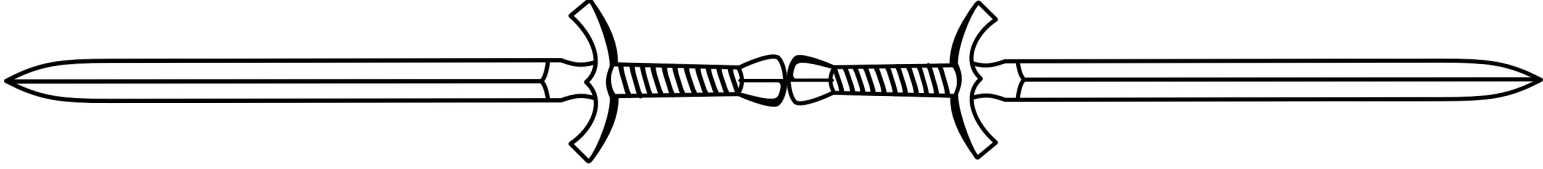
6 Pillar of Fire

Sorcerer can call a 15m high, 5m diameter pillar of fire on the target location. Creatures in the affected area suffer 4D damage.

7 Control Weather

Caster can create their own weather conditions in a 100m radius of themselves. Lasts as long as the sorcerer concentrates.





8 Tremor

The sorcerer causes the ground around them in a 30m to tremble. Creatures in affected area suffer 1D damage and lose their footing if they fail a roll of DEX 8+ roll.

9 Ice Storm

Caster calls a storm of razor-sharp ice on a 6m diameter area to a maximum range of 75m. Any creatures caught in the area roll DEX 8+ or suffer 3D damage. Movement of slowed to half.

10 Move Earth

Within a 75m range the caster can move up to 10 cubic metres of soil and undergrowth at a rate of 20m every minute.

11 Conjure Elemental

The sorcerer calls an elemental creature

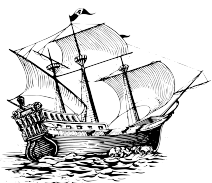
from one of the four elements: earth, air, fire or water once per day. The elemental remains under control whilst the caster concentrates.

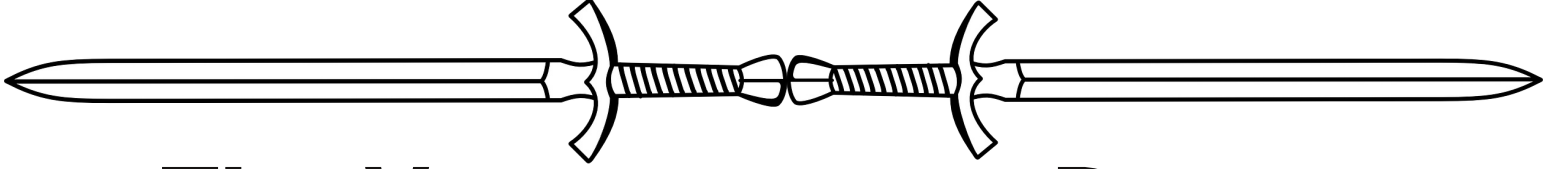
12 Flesh to Stone

When cast on a target creature within 40m range, they are instantly turned to stone. Target rolls END 10+ to avoid its effects. If the statute is broken and the spell is reversed, the creature suffers damage and permanent injury.

If you are looking for a rules-lite set of fantasy gaming rules, Quantum Sorcery can be picked up for free from DriveThru RPG at:

<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/351911/Quantum-Sorcery>





The Vengeance of Dimion

By Timothy Collinson

A Barbaric! NPC to meet or character to play. In the latter event, a group of PCs could be Dimion's crew and more or less invested in the vengeance of their captain as suits the game. As an NPC, Dimion could be met at any stage in the following and perhaps be calling on the help of the PCs for some reason.

Dimion is a fisherman of the Limnal Lands, a narrow region of fertile land between the mountains and the sea. He's skilled at sailing smacks with his crew of four or five along the coast and providing pelagic meals for family and village. Indeed, he is much revered for his ability to catch cutterfish from the slightly deeper offshore waters; he can also dive up to 10m for much sought after glosspears.

Dimion has been hunting the killer of his brother, Freeven, who died at sea three years previously and whose body was never found. A trusted crewmate, Eswine, was on a fishing expedition with Freeven and often tells the tale of the battle with a Giant Octopus (Barbaric!, p.45) which overwhelmed their smack. Eswine vividly recounts, to anyone who'll buy him a drink, how the monster caused the death of everyone else on the boat. Eswine was picked up several days later clinging to wreckage and barely alive.

Dimion has heard reports of a giant octopus in the vicinity of North Cape and is setting out with his crew to find and destroy the beast. He may be able to locate the octopus in the dangerous rocks of the craggy cape and if he and crew can defeat it, along with the electric eels

the octopus has trained to defend its lair, he will find – amongst other debris in the octopus nest – a Stone of Luck (Barbaric!, p.53).

Soon after finding this stone, Dimion's sister and Eswine's current mate, Ondia, will report to her brother that Eswine has been talking in his sleep. It would appear that he killed Freeven in a fight about how to manage their fishing boat in the midst of a great storm that blew up unexpectedly. Whether or not Eswine killed the rest of the crew to cover this up or they were overwhelmed by the tempest or perhaps taken by the giant octopus may never been known.

In any event, Dimion must now decide how, when and where to exact vengeance on his former friend. Those questions may be answered by signs of a terrible storm brewing and the possibility that not everything of value was recovered from the octopus' lair. Perhaps an unfortunate accident, at depth, is in the offing. Whether the Stone of Luck had anything to do with the fortuitous revelation that Eswine was the murderer or whether it has any of its other reputed benefits, is left for the players to discover. It's not impossible that Ondia was tired of Eswine and saw an opportunity to be rid of him.

Dimion

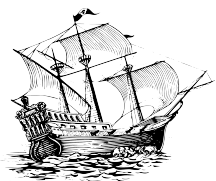
END: 8

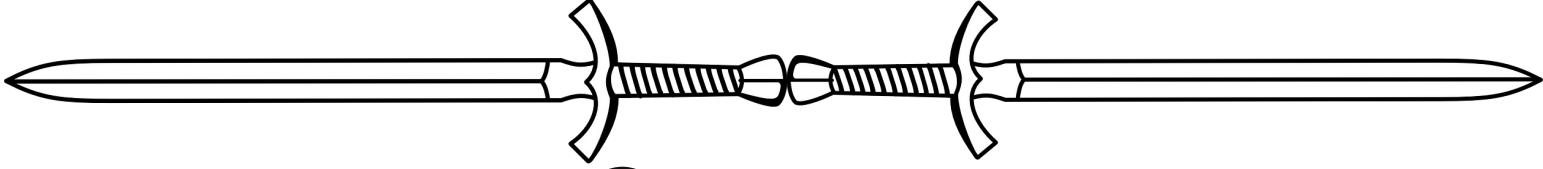
Lifeblood: 14

Combat 2, Craft 2, Physical 1, Lore 0, Social 0, Sorcery 0, Stealth 0

Trait: Awareness

Equipment: 110gp, water for 3 days, backpack, waterskin, knife, spear (2D)





Octorus

By P-O Bergstedt

An animal for a fantasy sea encounter in cold waters.
For The Sword of Cepheus and Cepheus Störtebeker.

50000 kg Beast (Hijacker), ocean swimmer, Z4Z6A1
#App: 1 Treasure: Ivory tusks

Athletics-2, Melee Combat-2, Recon-2, Survival-2, Tactics-1

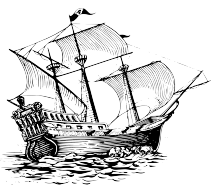
Attacks ships on 8+; flees on 3-
(If there are fish in the cargo, the Octorus will attack.)

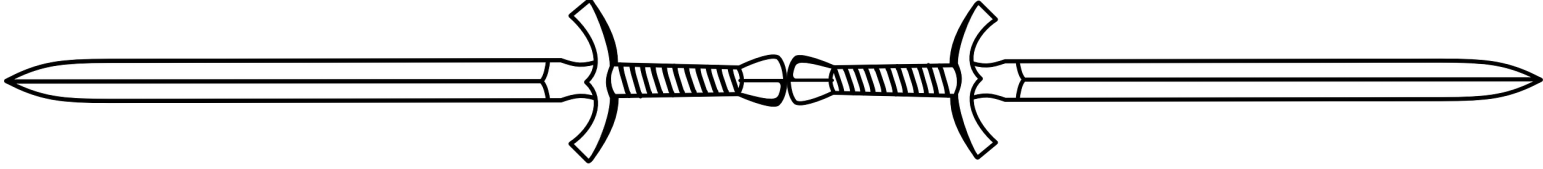
Teeth (3d); armor 3; swim 10m/action

Neutral; Morale DM+0

The Octorus is a chimera between a Giant Walrus and Giant Octopus. The creature is mostly Giant Walrus but has some tentacles around its head.

The Octorus will attack ships and can smell if there are fish in the cargo. It will hold on to the ship with its tentacles and use its tusks to destroy the ship. It has an AV rating of 4D against cogs and other wooden ships.





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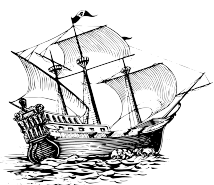
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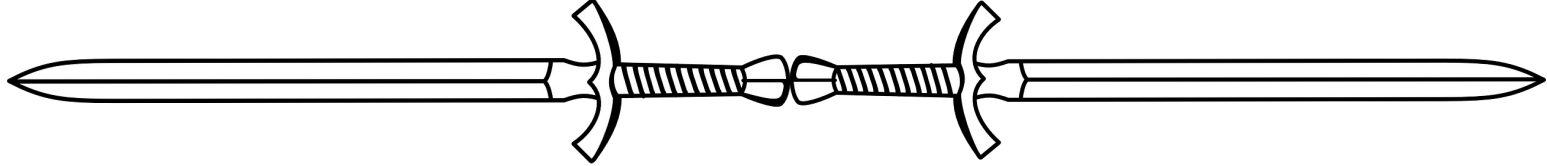
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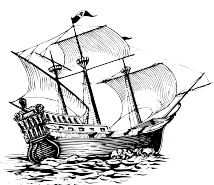


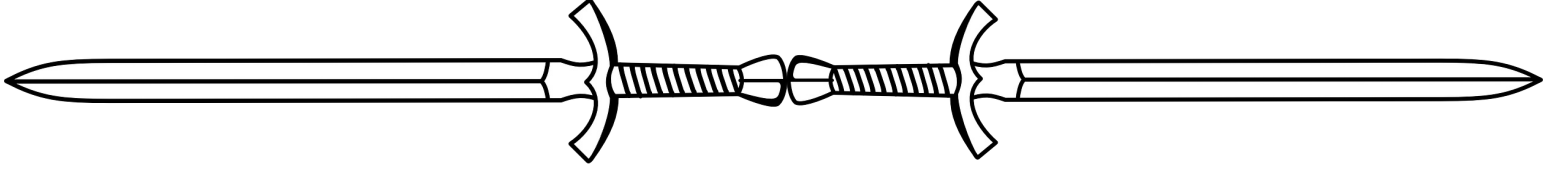
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