

THE CRUSADER™

The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer

HOW IT ALL
HAPPENED
BY GARY GYGAX

THE YEAR
IN REVIEW
BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

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& ANVIL:
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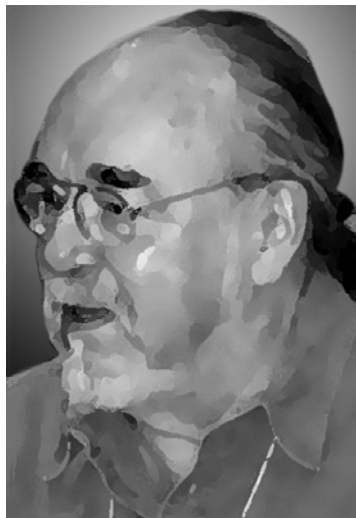
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How It All Happened by Gary Gygax

The Inspiration for the D&D Game, its Creation, GenCon's Founding, How TSR came into Being, and its Early Days...

Risky Things Part II



Gary Gygax

has written and had published over 70 games, game products, and books since he began creating in the 1960s, when he founded the world-renowned GENCON gaming convention. His first professional gaming work was published in 1971.

He co-founded the game publishing company Tactical Studies Rules (later TSR, Inc.) in 1973 with his longtime friend from Lake Geneva, Don Kaye.

His best known game and fiction credits include co-creating and authoring the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Role-Playing Game, creating the AD&D game, WORLD OF GREYHAWK Fantasy World Setting, and the Gord the Rogue novels. He is often referred to as the "Father of Role-Playing".

When Bill Fleming spilled acid on a 155 mm. howitzer round's proximity fuse he asked me to help him take it apart, and I agreed. We did it sitting on the main piers of the city's lakefront pavilion one night around 10 o'clock. At one point the timer spun and Bill barely managed to stop it. I confess that my heart was racing badly then, and I was glad to help disassemble the device and throw the component pieces into the lake.

More dangerous was the dynamiting I did with John Kohn when I was in my late 20s and supposedly had more common sense. He and I went through a case of 60% ammonium nitrate dynamite detonated by blasting caps and lengths of fuse out on the 40 acres of pasture land my grandfather had, left to my uncle Hugh Lewis Burdick. One day as a finale put 12 sticks under a boulder the size of a single bed, packed the hole tight with clay, and were only about 100 yards distant when the explosion came. That great stone flew out as splinters and shards, rained down as pieces as large as head-sized rocks that sunk out of sight in the ground when they hit. The two other witnesses to this folly were Joe Fabian and my then very young son Ernie, they being at greater distance than John and I, but subjected to danger from rock shrapnel nonetheless. Hearing it fly through the air, hit trees, was quite awesome!

Although I was on four automobile accidents as a passenger, I received only minor contusions and abrasions. Luckily for me the driver of a ford convertible with whom I often rode never lost control when he took curves on Snake Road on two wheels. Seeing how long it took to make it from one end of that road to the other was a popular pastime with many a foolish youth. I was also most fortunate to get my arm inside the car when John Rasch had to swerve off Snake Road when another car came around the curve we were racing through in the center of the way. The whole side of John's Dodge was raked to bare metal by the barbed wire-topped cyclone fence that the car hit. I had some

scratches on my forearm as I wasn't quite fast enough in withdrawing it.

Although I didn't drive, I was always ready for going along on a ride at 100 miles per hour, flying over some steep hills in Lake Como we called "The Knobbies," or going out on the frozen lake to spin and slide crazily. I didn't mind doing that sort of thing with a bunch who had enjoyed a few beers, but if we were serious about drinking, nobody drove after the keg was tapped.

I built a "secret room" in the basement by painting the door to the root cellar to look like the wall, padlocking it on the outside, and having the main entrance method via the crawl space down there, and access through a hole in the concrete block back wall. Tom Keogh assisted me, and being young we thought a torture chamber motif would add to its mystique. Using fencing staples, we managed a pair of rope manacles with sliding knots that were actually very difficult to escape from when tightened down. One night when all adults were away, I threw a party, and by instinct made sure to check the basement for trouble. What should I discover in the secret room but a pair of jerks tying up a young girl named Sandy R., their ultimate intent all too obvious. After seeing her properly released, I tossed the two offenders out, even as I wondered what had motivated their near victim to accompany them down there in the first place. That was the last underage party I ever hosted.

The mindset I had as a boy and as a young man is demonstrated by the risks I took, and it was very much a factor in my gaming activities. It is safe to say I was not overly fearful, if not downright foolhardy at times. One of the most dangerous things I did involved ruins and underground tunnels... Read all about it next issue.

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ALEA IACTA EST



"The Die is Cast" – An Editorial by Stephen Chenault

All Things Troll: The Year In Review

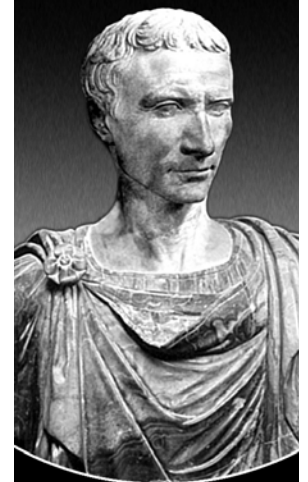
August is at last upon us and as you read this, **Crusader Journal** is officially a monthly publication. It's a good time to take a moment, catch our breath, and bring everyone up to speed on what the year 2008 has brought us and what it promises still. On one side of the coin, this has been an extremely hard year. It began with a great Winter Dark Convention and a solid steady spate of releases. The sudden death of Gary Gygax derailed the company's early showing as each of us came to grips with the loss. On the other side of the coin, James M. Ward and Mark Sandy joined the crew and our quality and productivity have all increased. This promises to be the busiest year for TLG, ever. Crusader has gone monthly; Castle Zagyg Upper Works is even now making the rounds. We've released more adventures, some of them long in the offing, and the first of our Siege Gear line is now available with Robert Doyel's Engineering Dungeons. We are pretty excited around here, both in looking at what we've accomplished and what we have in the queue.

Before I begin I would like to take a moment to honor the memory of our very dear friend, E. Gary Gygax. Gary passed away on March 4th, 2008. His death caught all of us off guard and left many of us, myself especially, grasping for a meaning in continuance. When I think upon his loss two things come to mind. Foremost is his impact on TLG in general and me personally. Gary took a great deal of risk in signing with us and he stuck with us through thick and thin. He was always a good sport about all things Troll, generous with his advice and assistance. He was a pillar in the TLG universe and for this we will never forget him. Secondly, he passed away on the cusp of the release of many projects he had nursed for many years, from Castle Zagyg to Lejendary Adventures. If he had survived another year the field would have been even greener with Gygaxia. Gary Gygax is missed. Not a day goes by that I do not think about him and wonder what he would do or say. We will never forget him.

Now, as he would be quite annoyed at my droning on about non game related matters I'll cut the rest of my rambling musings out and bring you up all up to speed with a world that is rapidly becoming Trollish.

The year began with the release of **Gary Gygax's Castle Zagyg Town Books**. These books offer up the town of Yggsburgh in tremendous detail, bringing to life the town, its many streets, and those that inhabit them. They are accompanied by some of the most detailed maps one is ever likely to see. Peter Bradley has spent hours laboring over the technical maps for the whole city and Jared Blando did a brilliant isometric rendition of the city. The amount of maps that come with the books is truly staggering, as is of course the information that each book presents. Within these books, which range from 48 to 56 pages, one finds the names of streets and alleys, shop listings, persons of note, adventure hooks, and price lists from inns and taverns to shops and services. The town books represent a truly massive undertaking. **TLG 8061 Town Halls**, (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-17-2, \$9.95) launched the line which will eventually total 24 books. **Town Halls** explores the government center of the Free Town, with a focus on the Town Halls, Courts, Jails, Workhouse and more. **TLG 8062 Moat Gate** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched or PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-18-9, \$9.95), followed **Town Halls**. Here the town's busiest gate gives entry to hosts of workers, travelers and adventurers. **TLG 8063 Store House District** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-01-1, \$11.95) is the third in the series. Filled with warehouses, residences, shops and more and is filled with plot, intrigue and interesting characters. **TLG 8064 East Corner** (Available Now in PDF ISBN 978-1-929474-03-5, \$9.95), is presently in production and before the year is out we'll see **TLG 8065 Riverside District**, **TLG 8066 Workman's Sector**, and **TLG 8067 Gaming District**. Each of these districts highlights parts of Yggsburgh and virtually invites hosts of adventures, intrigu-

WHEN CAESAR
STOOD UPON THE
BANKS OF THE
RUBICON LOOKING
SOUTH TO ROME,
HE HESITATED.
BEFORE HIM STOOD
THE VAST, COMPLEX
MECHANISM OF THE
PAST, GLOWING
WITH A HOST OF
INTRICATELY WOVEN
STRATAGEMS.
WITH HIM, HE HAD
BUT ONE LEGION,
WEARY FROM EIGHT
YEARS OF BRUTAL WAR
WITH THE GAULS.
BUT WHEN CALLED
TO SURRENDER
HIMSELF TO THE
SENATE AND CERTAIN
EXILE, HE DID NOT
HESITATE.
HE CALLED HIS
LEGIONARIES TO
CROSS INTO ITALY,
TO CROSS
THE RUBICON,
AND AS HE DID SO,
HE SAID ONLY THIS:
ALEA IACTA EST!



JULIUS CAESAR

ing characters, and more. These books offer some more material on a single city than any other project in RPG history. Each Castle Zagyg Town book is saddle stitched, ranges between 48 and 56 pages with a price of \$9.95 to \$11.95.

Adventures continue to be a favorite staple of ours. We saw the long awaited release of **TLG 8023 A4 Usurpers of the Fell Axe** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 1-931275-84-X, \$9.95) early in the year which revived Davis Chenault's long neglected adventure sequence. Usurpers of the Fell Axe continues the adventure on the Blacktooth Ridge as the characters are pitted against the might of the Baron Dietbold the Fell Axe. **TLG 8024 A5 The Shattered Horn** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 1-931275-85-8, \$9.95) is available now, debuting at the Gen Con this year. Both of these modules bring your worthy adventurers closer to the ultimate in adventuring experiences the hard-cover book **Aufstrag, The Tower of the Horned God**. This last of course is far from complete and makes its appearance only after A12 is out, sometime down the road. Davis also took time off from the CKG to pen the high level adventure **TLG 8311 Chimera's Roost** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-96-7, \$9.95), that plunges the bold and brave into stand alone adventures against ancient Troll dungeons. It passed with little fanfare until after its release when CKs everywhere began to notice this stand alone adventure module. Casey Christofferson's fourth book in the Haunted Highland series, **TLG 8223 Dro Mandras** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-91-2, \$9.95) made its debut as well. Dro Mandras brings to light the city that dominates the Haunted Highlands. This series of adventures, scaled for any level, has proven wildly popular with fans. **TLG 8076 Shades of Mist** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-88-2, \$9.95) finally made is showing this past July and expanded the playing material for the Darkenfold forest tremendously with a beautiful area map designed by Steve Chenault and rendered by Peter Bradley. Presented as an episodic adventure Shades of Mist is highly adaptable, fitting into almost any campaign.

We have also taken some effort to sit down and look over the existing C&C adventures and have made notes of the gaps that appear in the challenge levels and we are currently working on several adventures that can plug the gaps, allowing Castle Keepers to run continuous adventures from low to high levels.

Legendary Adventures also saw its fair share of attention. Gary Gygax's reprinted **TLG 3379 LA 5 The Hermit** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-11-1, \$9.95)

shipped in the early months, cleaned now of all non-LA material. This adventure was one of the early adventures of Gary's that we did and bringing it out in its proper form was exciting. Few writers are able to spin a yarn of the truly fantastic like Gygax did and if you've not played The Hermit, you should take some time and look it over. Inverted fish bowl, that's all I'm going to say. Barley Town is almost deserted and only the Inn Keep remains, but he propels the characters forward on a wild, hard road of adventure to unravel the mysteries of **TLG 3380 LA 6 The Rock** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-15-8, \$9.95). The Rock, written by Chris Clark, shipped in the early part of the year. This expanded the pool of adventures up so that the dedicated LA fans could have even more gaming goodies. In **TLG 3381 LA 7 Red Sands Rise** (Coming this fall in Saddle Stitched and PDF,



ISBN 978-1-929474-19-6, \$9.95) Avatars must unravel the mysteries of the Cult of Set in order to rescue the Pharaoh from a certain doom. Red Sands Rise makes its appearance at Gen Con this year and kicks off the next several adventures.

Gary Gygax's reprint of **Gord the Rogue Saga of Old City** (Available Now in Hardback, ISBN 781-931275-99-6, \$24.95) debuted shortly after he passed away in March of this year. We went to great expense to make certain the book was well bound with a nice dust jacket and it turned out marvelously. Anyone who enjoys reading books will find the shape and feel of Gord the Rogue pleasing to the say the least. Of course, that doesn't even touch the content. A marvelous read that propels one back to the early days of the hobby when our literature was fresh and less governed by the templates that seem to govern much of modern fantasy fiction. This is gritty fantasy at its best by the father of the role playing universe.

The most exciting release of the first part of the year was one of the smallest for the whole year.

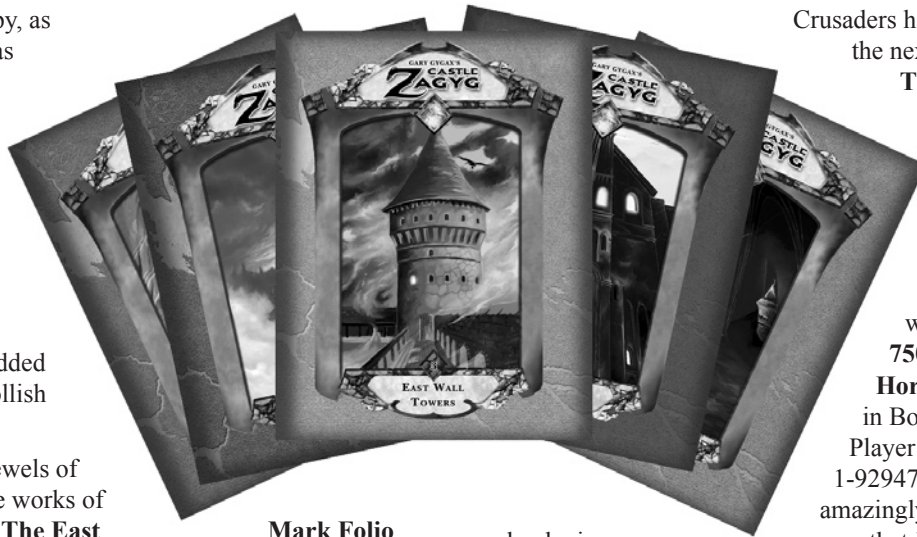
Sometime back in 2006 when we were wrapping up work on the **Monsters & Treasure**, Robert Doyel pitched a little book that he called Dungeon Making or some such. I didn't think about it much as we were busy with so many other projects. But in the waning months of 2007 I became painfully aware of a large gap in our publications, there was little practical support for the over worked and underappreciated CKs. This coupled with a call from my consolidator, Aldo Ghiozzi that he was in need of some non-adventure material made me think of Robert's book. We dusted it off and moved it up in the schedule. It released in March/April, with the new sporting title of **TLG 8501 Engineering Dungeons** (Available in Saddle Stitch and PDF, ISBN 978-1-929474-99-8, \$9.95). It caught us completely off guard with surprisingly strong

sales. We were very happy, as Robert was as well. It was obvious that the book, which ports into any system, and gives the beleaguered CK a wealth of dungeon creating information at his finger tips, was finding itself a home beyond the regular C&C player. Once again Robert has added to the strength of our Trollish Crusader!

Of course the crown jewels of the year's labor lay in the works of Gary Gygax. **TLG 8059 The East**

(Available Now in Folio, two Saddle Stitched books, five Maps, ISBN 978-1-929474-98-1, \$9.95) for Castle Zagyg debuted at Gen Con 2007, but made its official appearance in retail shops in January of 2008. This small folio offered fans of the setting a brief recap of the voluminous material presented in 2006's Yggsburgh book, a spate of maps of the city and area and a teaser module for the Ruins of Castle Zagyg in the guise of The Mouths of Madness. The East Mark Folio met with a very enthusiastic response from the fans and proved the mold established by last year's folio **After Winter's Dark Folio Campaign Setting** (Available Now in Saddle Stitched and PDF, Folio, two Books, four Maps, ISBN 1-931275-46-7, \$9.95). AWD is the default setting for Castles & Crusades and introduces gamers to the world of Aihrde. Specifically designed to be malleable it is the perfect setting for any gamer who enjoys rich background, lots of context and a platform that enables him to change the world to his own designs. These two products have set the tone for next year's folio which brings together the host of Casey Christofferson's **Haunted Highlands** (Coming Soon in a Folio Edition, two Saddle Stitched books, three Maps, ISBN N/A, \$19.95) material. With more information on the deities, the background, and setting of the Highlands and with hosts of maps it is a must have.

The East Mark Folio set the tone for the summer's big release: **TLG 8051 Gary Gygax's Castle Zagyg Upper Works** (Available Now, Boxed Set, six Books, Maps, ISBN 978-1-929474-93-6, \$44.95). Upper Works is the first of the long anticipated and marvelously deep dungeons created by Gary Gygax over a lifetime's worth of play. Beginning in the early 1970s he began scripting adventures that took place in his mystical castle. These dungeons and adventures were often separate from the whole and only loosely affiliated with each other, beneath the umbrella of Castle Zagyg. For the past several years, in conjunction with several writers and hosts of editors, who have worked hard at bringing them together into one coherent whole, and in the process creating a tapestry of adventure the likes of which no one has ever seen. When complete the whole will match the massive effort that has gone into the Town of Yggsburgh. But the **Upper Works** Box Set includes five books detailing the legendary Castle of the Arch Magi himself and the first of the many levels below, as well as over 30 maps, some few color and hosts of illustrations and player handouts. This work alone can't help but keep the host of



Mark Folio

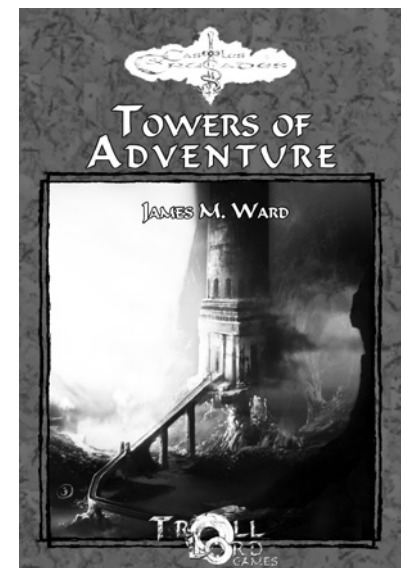
role playing gives the game master, the Engineer, the ability to craft games of operatic portions or ones more grounded in the day to day nuances of staying alive in hostile, futuristic worlds. The game truly stands out from its peers. By careful design Josh Chewning, the designer and author of StarSiege created a matrix of rules, whereby the Engineer is able to conduct combat between players and monsters and inter-planetary warfare with the same easy to grasp mechanic. Building upon the philosophy that simple mechanics are the best mechanics StarSiege brings it all home. StarSiege also is unique in that it is the first RPG, at least that I am aware of, whose box set includes four player's guides, to allow more hands the rules at a time. No more waiting around for Johnny come lately to finish musing over whether he should have a pistol saber or a pistol in his pocket.

The Summer also saw the release of James M. Ward's first C&C product, **TLG 8313 Towers of Adventure** (Available Now, Digest Sized Box Set, three books, ISBN 978-1-929474-19-6, \$29.95). Towers of Adventure is the ultimate adventure on the go box set. It offers the Castle Keeper a marvelous set of interchangeable tower levels, rooms, monsters, NPCs, traps and treasures. This box set allows you to make literally millions of exciting towers for your players to explore. Treasures, tower inhabitants, and tower maps are at your fingers and so easy to use you can put together a complex adventure in five minutes or less. When the concept was first pitched to me here I grasped immediately how valuable a tool can be in the hands of novice or experienced CKs. It comes with three separate books, with hosts of illustrations and maps.

StarSiege launches a new line for us here at TLG, one we've been musing over for a long time. The Siege Engine is a marvelously simple

Crusaders happy for many hours as the next box set in the series, **TLG 8052 Gary Gygax's Castle Zagyg The Dungeons** commences.

One of the most exciting releases of 2008 occurred in conjunction with Upper Works. **TLG 7501 StarSiege Event Horizon** (Available Now in Box Set, five books, dice, Player Sheets, ISBN 978-1-929474-20-2, \$29.95) is an amazingly simple science fiction game that in a few short booklets



mechanic and one which lends itself to all manner of play. By porting it, and of course tweaking it where necessary, we can bring to life other genres of role playing with relative ease. **The Siege Engine Games** are a series of unrelated, self contained, role playing games published in box set form scheduled for release in the next year. Built using the Siege Engine mechanic they are easy to understand and designed for any age of play... well, almost any age of play. Presently in this series of box set role playing games we have: **Victorious**, a Victorian Age super hero game; **Harvester**, an anthropomorphic that allows players to play a variety of animals; **Comrades**, a post apocalyptic game where characters are pitted against an Earth in the grips of collapse. Several more are in the works or have crossed my desk waiting for consideration. The eventual design of the Siege Engine Games is a series of games the play like RPGs but people use like board games.

Our most recent release is only now hitting shelves, or should be shortly. As with StarSiege it launches a new line of books, **The Castellan's Guide**, a series of books within the Siege Gear umbrella that give the beleaguered CK resources at the handy that they always seem to need. The first up is TLG 8502 the **Castellan's Guide to Arms and Armor** (Coming this Summer, Saddle Stitched, ISBN 978-1-929474-04-2, \$8.95) by Mike Stewart. With over 100 listings and illustrations this guide brings you everything you need to know about various and sundry weapons and armor, its background and use, armor class, damage, weight and encumbrance, and a little more besides. Next up for Mike is the **Castellan's Guide to Castles and Dominions**, a saddle stitched book which brings to life the world of the feudal castle. Why they were made, who occupied them, sizes, and more.

That really brings us to the end of what 2008 has already brought us, a host of adventures, source books and one solid game. The C&C line has proven itself possessed of legs and continues to grow and sink its roots deeper into the public's gaming conscience. The LA books are steady though in need of a good restart and the GFW line has been too long stagnant, with its last release being Nation Builder well over a year ago.

Beyond all this we have a host of material for Blacktooth Ridge and Haunted Highlands. **DB5 Dro Mandras II** (Coming this Fall, Saddle Stitched, \$9.95) is on my desk awaiting final approval before it goes to editing and layout... as if Casey's material needed final approval, he pretty much pitches ideas to me while I'm sleeping and I approve them. Dro Mandras II brings us into the other half of the Duke's city and opens a world of adventure as this tattered streets are controlled by evil. Casey's also put a wraps on three other books, all of which will be out before the close of 2008: **Tides of Battle** (Coming this Fall, Saddle Stitched), a rule set for large scale warfare using the Siege Engine; the **Black Libram** which includes a host of new spells, magic items and other useful player tools; as well as another small saddle stitched adventure, the **Mists of Mantua**, a ship born adventure of pirates and plunder. Davis of course continues with the A series, bringing the series forward to Aufstrag with another of our trademark soft cover adventures, **A6 Of Banishment and Blight** and the follow on pieces and **A7 Beneath the Despairing Stone**. Of Banishment and Blight is grim adventure that harkens back to one of the classics. The Lord

of Frost, a minion of Unklar's of old has twisted the world about him to keep the Winter Dark alive. It is up to the characters to overcome the giant front. Both of these will be available this Fall. Of course for those who have been following this slowly unraveling series the A books eventually lead to **Aufstrag**, the center piece of the world of Aihrde and where the horned god, Unklar, ruled for a thousand years. This monstrous tower is in the works, worked on in moments of quiet despair when we here at TLG are overwhelmed with other unfinished projects.

In this vein I continue to work on the Darkenfold series, **Powder River** follows **Shades of Mist** and expands the unfolding wood into the eastern eves where the Eschl dwell. Peter Bradley has rendered a beautiful full color map for the whole region, leaving plenty of room for scripted and unscripted adventures.

A host of smaller, though no less important projects are in the works, many on the docket for release this year include **TLG 8503 Dungeon Mapping Sheets** (Coming Soon, Loose Leaf paper, ISBN 978-1-929474-07-3, \$7.95), a bundle of graph paper designed with the needs of the game master in mind. It is our intention to develop TLG into a one stop game shop, from games, to adventures, from dice to aids, everything you need to run a fun filled, exciting role playing game. This is just the tip of the ice berg of course.

Work on the box set **TLG 8951 Castles & Crusades Basic Set** has met some interesting road blocks, all of which have inadvertently granted the designers of the project some amazing insight into what it should and should not be. Not long ago we began a pick up game for some neighborhood kids. Watching them play and seeing what they read and understood or did not understand from the Players Handbook brought revealed some amazing things to us. I personally began to grasp what the



project should be and how it should be written and constructed. So as frustrating as the delays are, and remain to be I believe that they will, in the end, lead to a better project and a stronger product, which combined make for a stronger weapon in the Crusader's arsenal.

This of course brings us to our Magnum Opus, the **Castle Keeper's Guide** (Coming Soon, Hardback, ISBN 978-1-929474-68-4, \$29.95 estimated). The CKG brings to together the great host of Davis', Mac's and my own notes into a workable whole. A team of writers continues to work with us to bring these rules and random concepts together. It promises to be the perfect companion book to the Players Handbook and Monsters & Treasure. Where those gave you the necessary tools, the CKG expands those tools into ever greater and broader applications.

This work has long been on our desks here at TLG and has suffered neglect for one reason or the other. It's long been a project of Davis' but never really one of mine (for those of you who don't know, Davis and I own TLG). Last year Davis revived it, put together a team of really good designers, and began putting it through the motions. The team made some headway and Davis even more, working as he does in the wee hours of the day. But I kept pulling resources off the book and allocating them to other projects. The distractions mounted and the CKG languished on the story boards. Things changed about a month or so ago. I was reading on the boards, another thread about "where is the CKG" and musing to myself about its relative place in the halls of the Troll Lords when I stumbled upon a post that read something like this: "I appreciate the approach the Trolls have taken, with the rules light and sculpt your own game RPG, but I have kids, a wife and a job and really don't have the time to add my own crunchy bits." He followed that up with a need for the CKG because of the vast time constraints on his game. I read the post over and over and slowly my brain began to develop a thought, and slowly that thought took hold on whatever precipice it could and stuck. Then I at last understood the value of the CKG.

As soon as that happened, really within minutes, I was on the phone with Davis, quite animated about getting this project resurrected from its present condition. Davis, enmeshed in a ton of other mess, turned over the host of his files to me to organize. I did so and came to an even greater realization about the value of this project and its place in the pantheon of TLG books. Clearing the board I began to work on it and only it. I've done so, in conjunction with Davis and Casey Christofferson and all

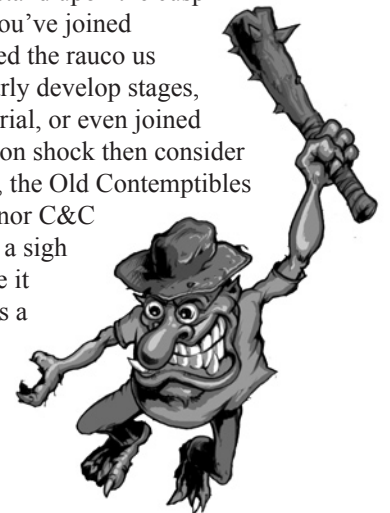
the other designers, trying to bring this puppy up to speed and out the door.

For those not in the know the CKG will contain a variety of rules, from developing NPCs, to managing estates, encounter charts, moral, battle rules, expansion rules for high level characters and so very much more. Some of these rules are optional, others more germane to the game. The CKG as written bustles with hosts of examples of play designed to help the novice or experienced gamer get more traction from his time. We are keeping in mind another poster's comments that keep ringing in my brain. The CKG has to have all that material that Castle Keeper's need in order to run a game. It has to be the ultimate tool box...the one stop game shop that is rapidly becoming the focus and philosophy of the game and the company.

As I stated at the beginning of this rather lengthy discourse, 2008 has been and will continue to be a defining year for Troll Lord Games. It is a year that Gary would have been proud to be a part of, indeed, one that he is still very much taking a part. It is also a defining moment for Castle & Crusades, proving to the nay-sayers that we do indeed have a game as every day new people swell our ranks. 2009 promises to bring even more Trollish wares and to grow the game and company even more. Legendary Adventure is an untested project, the Essentials box set did well, but as of this reading we are waiting to see how people take this very exciting and unique game.

I don't like to make predictions; it's really not in my makeup. But if I were to make a prediction I would say that TLG in general and C&C specifically stand upon the cusp of another expansion. And if you've joined us in the past few years, enjoyed the raucous debates on the boards in the early develop stages, or weathered our old d20 material, or even joined the Crusader ranks due to edition shock then consider yourself part of the Old Guard, the Old Contemptibles as it were, for no one takes us nor C&C seriously. Sit back and breathe a sigh of contentment for we've made it through the first hurdle and it is a Troll Lord world after all.

Steve





SOONERCON BY MARK SANDY

It was a dark and stormy night over Chicago's O'Hare. The lights were turned down low at the end of concourse K, the darkness filled with the sounds of aluminum tubing scraping on marble and the creaking of canvas stretched taut. It was the first night after SoonerCon, a small convention out in the wilds of Oklahoma, and I was lucky enough to spend it...the night, not the con...crashing on a cot at the airport.

This was our first official visit to SoonerCon, part of Steve's wild-eyed plan to expand the presence of the Trollish Crusade into Oklahoma and southern Missouri. We'd never been to SoonerCon and had spent much too much time thinking about whether we should go. We finally gave up and decided to trek out there as Peter Bradley and Casey Christofferson kept on nagging us! We left here about 6 am Friday, got there by 11:30. A little tussle and we're all set up, the hall opens at 2:00 and we don't do much of much all day. We relaxed, didn't want to be too discouraged, everyone says Saturday's the day. They were right. Saturday was better, we made some dough, and got to sit next to the girls from *Lollie Bombs* that were at the burlesque show Saturday night, so that was cool. Sunday went well too, so I expect we'll look at making the trip again.

It's Sunday and I had to get back in the hot seat and to work but I had no ride. McBain and I had driven to Oklahoma City together in his truck, but he had to go on to Dallas after the show. One-way car rental cost about as much as the plane, and that's not counting gas and the hassle of driving five hours. We could have taken two cars, but we only got the one gas card. Train would have been cheaper, but ran to something like a fourteen hour trip. Could have caught a ride halfway and Steve could come fetch me. But the final consensus was to fly me out. Steve, in his finite wisdom, gets me set up with the airline that just laid a bunch of people off and cancelled half their flights, so thanks for that, you bag of hammers! My route was a big circuitous, taking me north to Chicago before turning south to Little Rock.

I hadn't flown anywhere since I was 10 years old. So I was a little nervous (more about going through security than the actual flight) and I wasn't sure what to do. But all went well at first. The flight to Chicago was kind of cool. They asked if I wouldn't mind changing seats so a family could all sit together. I wound up front row at the window.

Once in the windy city news reached me that bad weather had passed through and flights were being delayed and cancelled left and right. Incoming flights were left sitting on the runway until outgoing flights could clear the gates. Naturally, the plane I was supposed to board had to leave to make room for the plane I was on to pull in. So there I was, stranded in Chicago.

So here I am, at O'Hare. I'm hungry, so I get over to the McD's and grab a bite. It's the only thing open and it closed about two minutes later. I keep looking at the line at re-booking, folks in

line saying it's a two and a half hour wait, but I figure, what choice do I got? Well, as it turns out, I did have a choice. Right about time I stepped into line a fellow that works there came up, handed me a pamphlet, and told to go over a couple of gates and use the red phone, they'd hook me up. He also told me about the cots. Wish I would have gotten his name. He was one of the very few who seemed to remember what customer service was.

Anyhow, the cots are set up down at concourse K. Must have been about 200 people there before me snoozing away. I grabbed a cot right next to the twenty foot tall window. Just across the way were the bathrooms, a couple of one-holers with real doors (opening and closing about once every 30 seconds) and a steady flow of folks in need. Thought there would be an international incident as an employee kept trying to call security on a customer for trying to put his cot down in the exact same way as every other cot (both the employee and customer were clearly speaking english as a second language). I managed to catch a couple of hours sleep, only to hear what has to be the single un-coolest thing I have ever heard, "ladies and gentlemen, it's 4 o'clock, it's time to wake up". By that time, there must have been 500 people sleeping on the cots.

So it's 4 am. I'm confirmed for a seat at 9:30 that night (a mere 17 hour wait), with stand-bys at 8:30 and 1:30. I wander back down to the food court to wait for Ronald to open his doors for breakfast. Once my belly was full, I found my way to the gate that they were pretending the next flight would leave from (they would change the gate two or three times) and chatted a bit with some of the other folks on stand-by. There were two ladies, traveling together, in line in front of me, but when the call came for the 8:30 flight there was only one seat. I could have taken it, but there was an army sergeant behind me so I let him have the seat. Support our troops, however you can.

So I settle down to wait for 1:30. My phone's been dying the whole time, but I had my charger in my pocket, and there were outlets here and there, so I managed to keep a little bit of a charge in it. 1:30 finally rolls around, but the flight can't board because the crew haven't arrived yet. They show up around 2. After all the scheduled passengers get on, the call for stand-by comes around, and once again there's only one seat. The two ladies, traveling together, decline, and I'm finally on my way home. I give Steve a quick call to let him know the flight number so he can pick me up, and we're on our way. About two minutes off the ground, the pilot comes on the loudspeaker and says we were the last flight out before the weather hit. Lucky me.

We touch down a little after 4 in the afternoon, not quite a full day from when I left Oklahoma. It was Monday and Steve mentioned that there were a few job orders that needed addressing...needless to say, I took the rest of the day off.

HAMMER & ANVIL

THOUGHTS FROM A
GAMER MASTER'S FORGE



BY
CASEY CANFIELD

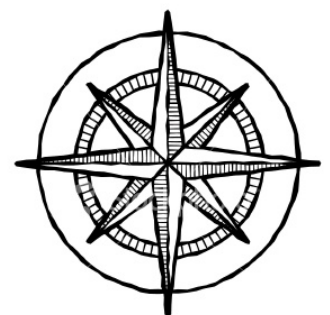
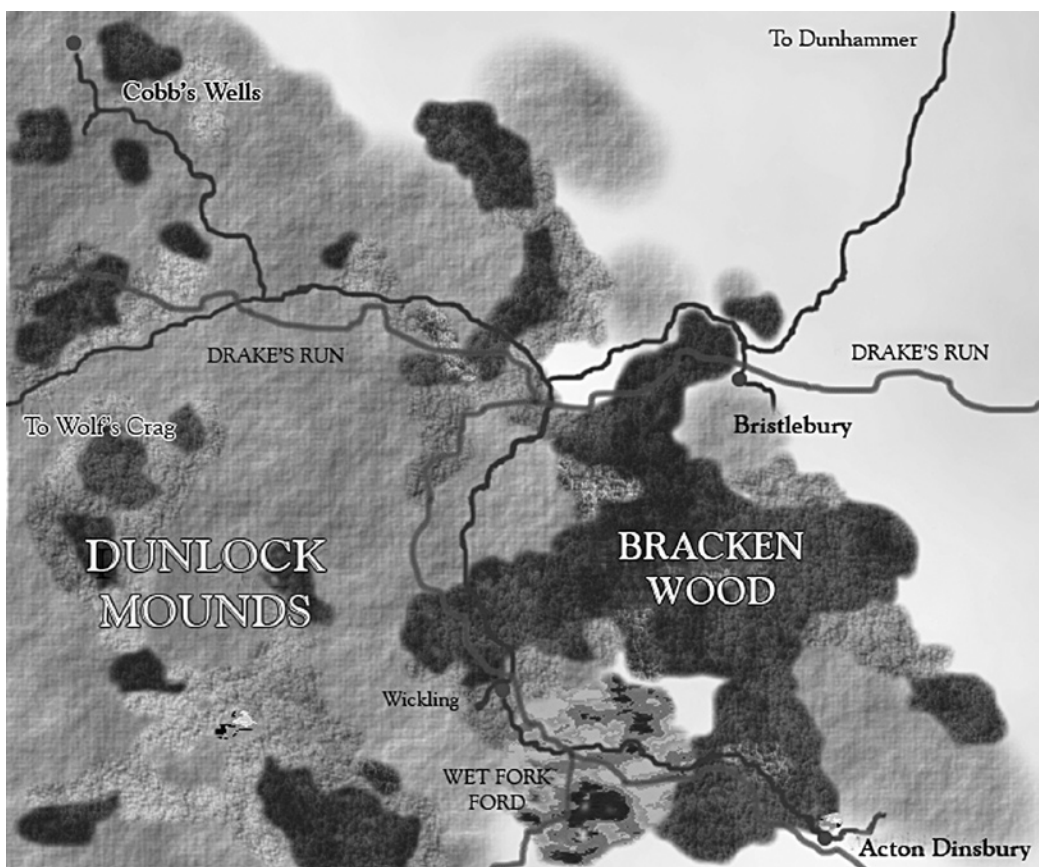
The Campaign Setting: Environs, Part III

In the last issue, I developed more detail about my setting's towns and villages, the areas that PCs will use to launch their adventures. Towns provide a portrait of the setting's culture, from broad background colors to individual brushstrokes. To understand the portrait, however, one must often understand the artist and the environment in which the work was done. In this case, we seek to understand the surroundings of the towns in order to better understand the circumstances that led to the development of the culture within them and challenges that the PCs will face.

I've already established the overall terrain scheme of the campaign area and I have created a map from my ideas. This map is just detailed enough to provide essential information, while leaving a great deal for the CK and players to explore. While this map was included in a prior issue, it is included again as a reference aid.



Casey Canfield has been playing and game-mastering RPGs since 1983. Casey currently plots the deeds of nefarious characters and creatures from his lair just outside of Endicott, New York.



The map displays several main areas of interest that envelop the towns of the setting. The most prominent are the Dunlock Mounds to the west. As previously described, the Dunlock Mounds are a badlands—a desolate area of scrubland and rocky terrain, rich in mineral wealth but largely inhospitable to settlement. The Mounds are reportedly overrun with competing humanoid tribes that occasionally molest the settled towns to the east.

The second major area of note is the Bracken Wood, along with the adjoining swampland. The three inhabited towns – Bristlebury, Wickling, and Acton Dinsbury, all border the Bracken Wood in close proximity. The Wood is large, however, and its deepest recesses hold a mixture of old-growth deciduous and coniferous trees. While roads and trails have been established along its fringes, most of the Bracken Wood remains mysterious. The swampland to the south of the Wood is actually a flooded extension of the forest's expanse. Several raised trails and roads exist through the swamp, but it is a vast and dangerous place that likely holds secrets well off the established routes.

On the eastern portion of the map, rolling plains stretch outward away from the more rugged eastern terrain. Much of this land is unsettled, though the occasional farm will make use of the more fertile ground near Drake's Run. It is clear, however, that the majority of the interesting adventures are to be had in the Dunlock Mounds and the Bracken Wood. For this article, I will focus on bringing more detail to those regions, and noting their impact on the local settlements.

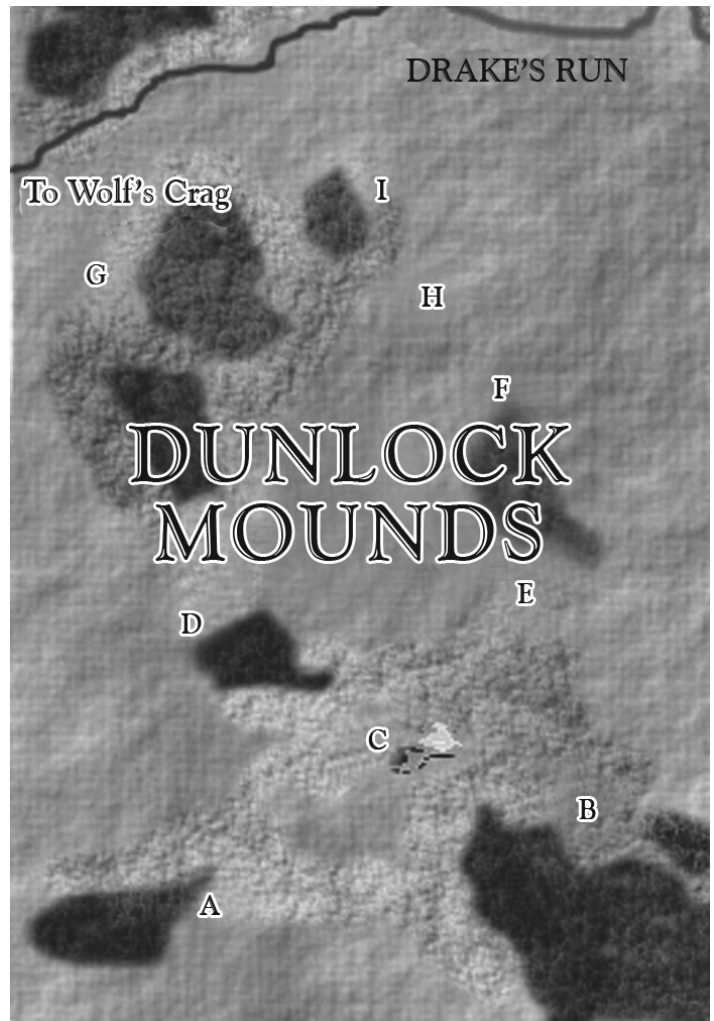
Dunlock Mounds

There are three main areas of the Dunlock Mounds. While each can rightly be considered part of the badlands, each has unique characteristics.

The South (Areas A, B, C)

Humans entering the Dunlock Mounds have a fair chance of escaping notice if they enter in the north or central regions. This is not the case in the south. The most ruthless, intelligent, and organized tribes of orcs and gnolls inhabit the deadliest terrain in the Mounds. From the farms of Wickling, the grassy hills quickly become pulverized shadows of themselves as one travels west into the Mounds. Canyons, deep pockmarks, rocky shelves, gulches, and narrow defiles make this land one of the most dangerous and disorienting areas in the world. Those characteristics, coupled with the aggressive territorial nature of the humanoids in the area, truly create a no-man's-land.

Verak, a half-orc of unknown origin, has chosen this as his stronghold. He has risen to power on promises of glory and plunder for the tribes of orcs and gnolls he has unified under his command. Possessing cunning martial skill, he has developed a soldier's culture, and is building his strength for a massive invasion of the central lands. It is his goal to conquer the other tribes of the Mounds, and unify them against the humans. Once he is ready, he intends to attack Wolf's Crag and fortify it, effectively cutting the towns in the valley away from any support from Dunlock. From there, he would conquer and enslave the three populated villages in the valley itself, and would establish a nation to rival any of the regional city-states.



It is Verak who is responsible for the thefts of livestock from the Wickling farms. He is particularly interested in the large horses raised there. He sees the wisdom in mounted soldiers, particularly in the most open areas of the Mounds, and eventually against the humans he wishes to bring under his heel.

Orcs in Verak's command kidnapped Aragee Berdun of Acton Dinsbury about ten years ago, and held her in captivity for almost an entire year. Her children, born shortly after her escape, are half-orcs, hinting at the horrific nature of her captivity.

I've tied the surroundings to Acton Dinsbury through the Aragee Berdun story. This allows me to provide plot hooks to players that might wish to investigate the orc activity in the area, and provides further clues to any players investigating horse thefts in Wickling. This is clearly a pressing issue for the residents of the area, even if they don't realize it yet – and that makes for a compelling story.

Verak is the embodiment of my original idea to make the humanoid races more compelling. I think having a leader bring these changes to the humanoid cultures makes the rise of the orcs more threatening.

A – Remote Canyon

A remote and winding canyon of modest size is an open wound in the earth. Caves within this canyon house two of

the most powerful orc tribes under Verak's command: the Iron Boot and the Bloodspear tribes. These tribes represent a large portion of Verak's heavy infantry, but more importantly form the backbone of Verak's entire scheme. The tribes are tremendous crafters, producing somewhat crude but highly effective arms and armor. They rely upon ore mined from the rich veins found throughout the canyon, and outfit all allied tribes with excellent equipment. Without these materials, weapons, and armor, Verak's effort would be much more unlikely to succeed.

In order to explain Verak's rise, one has to give some thought to his resources. This canyon is one of them, and is a clear target for adventurers seeking to disrupt his efforts.

B – Ancient Barrow

Even the skill of Verak has been unable to drive the superstition about this area from the hearts of his humanoid minions. Resting at the base of a huge spear of rock, an ancient domed structure looms here, seemingly immune to the ravages of the elements. It is constructed of the hard stone of the mounds. Etched into its portal are sigils of a long-forgotten language. There are signs of attempted forced entry around the main portal, but it is unknown whether any of these efforts succeeded.

Infiltrators entering these lands will find the barrow to be an ironic site of safety in a forbidden land. The challenge is in getting to it, and leaving once there.

The CK can decide who put the barrow there. My goal was to establish that there was some group of people there "before" who left things behind. The area has a history far beyond that which is known. Placing these structures allows me to hint at that history without having to detail it and memorize it, and any concept I have of the history can still be easily changed.

C – Ziggurat

The southern lands have one major source of fresh water—a lake resting atop an unbroken mesa, not far from the central region of the Mounds. It is here that Verak has established his stronghold. His fortress is established in the upper two floors of an eldritch ziggurat, constructed in an unknown age on the shore of this lake. Verak is attempting to access the lower floors, but has not yet discovered access to the bottom levels that would preserve the structural integrity of the edifice.

Surrounding the ziggurat and lake are barracks and other buildings created by detachments from tribes under Verak's command. Several large stables have been constructed to hold the livestock stolen from the Wickling area. Sentries and pickets are on constant guard around the area. The few approaches to the top of the mesa are fortified and constantly manned.

The ziggurat has the same shape as the terraced hills in Acton Dinsbury. This is a massive clue about the ancient history of the area that cannot be learned until adventurers move against Verak.

The Center (Areas D, E, F)

The central area of the mounds has the most favorable terrain. While still broken and rough, the terrain is much more gradual in slope, and contains more robust woodlands. It has served as home to tribes of goblins, hobgoblins, and hill giants, who generally keep to themselves and try to scrape an existence out of the harsh land. The orcs and gnolls led by Verak are attempting to seize the land for themselves. The goblins and hobgoblins are organized, though not as militaristic as the orcs, and they have made agreements with the giants for mutual defense. So far, the two sides have fought to an impasse, though the participation of the orcs and gnolls to the north would certainly tip the balance.

While human settlement in the Mounds has always been rare, the central areas contain the most frequent signs of their presence. No current human settlement exists in the Mounds, but several mining and hunting camps dot the area. Most are in ruins, if they can be found at all, but the occasional structure still stands. The most solidly built structures, such as barrows, are practically whole, and serve as ominous landmarks.

More ancient buildings develop the mood further. The central area is supposed to be the easiest to access, while still being dangerous. Hence, the mixture of goblins (to interact with or fight) and giants (to avoid at all costs).

D – Abandoned Mine Community

Long ago, a group of enterprising humans decided to attempt mining the area for iron and silver ore. While the effort failed for an unknown reason, the mine and the supporting structures still stand, all but forgotten. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this area is the fact that the goblins and hobgoblins haven't commandeered it for their own use.

Again, the CK can decide what happened to the miners and why the goblins and hobgoblins refuse to use the site. The goal is to spark ideas that can carry on into entire adventures.

E – Creekside Barrow

Against the branches of two colliding creeks, this smaller domed barrow has suffered a recent roof collapse. There are no distinguishing features either outside or inside, except for the fact that all of the corpses within have been removed.

I know why these corpses have been removed, and now that the idea is out there, any CK can figure out what best fits his or her vision too. I've hinted at strange happenings in the big cities...my intent is that this is related.

F – Giant's Escarpment

A large cave serves as home to a family of hill giants, part of a local clan. These giants live a relatively peaceful life, but are facing pressure to join in the defense against Verak and his orcs. This lair is representative of most hill giant homes in the area. Though the cave opening is large, it is a deep recess, and is difficult to approach by anything smaller than a giant. It

commands a view of the surrounding area, and passing adventurers or invading humanoids would need to exercise astounding care to avoid notice.

This reinforces the latent threat of the giants. While the giants probably aren't aggressive, they might feel threatened by blatant, arrogant interlopers. Smart players will understand that giants aren't to be trifled with. It doesn't add a real threat as much as it adds atmosphere—a sense of danger—to the adventure.

The North (Areas G, H, I)

The northern area of the Mounds consists mainly of rocky bluffs and hillsides, adorned with the occasional thick forest. The altitude climbs as one travels northwards within the Mounds towards Wolf's Crag, to the west. Networks of caves are cut through the area, serving as lairs for marauding orc, gnoll, and kobold tribes. These humanoids have a volatile peace. The kobolds prefer to prey upon travelers on the road between Bristlebury and Wolf's Crag. While they do their own marauding of the road, the orcs and gnolls have a fixation upon attacking Wolf's Crag itself. It is rumored that the site of Wolf's Crag has some religious significance to those tribes, explaining their enthusiastic sacrifices to attempt to capture the ground.

These tribes have very little to do with the goblin, hobgoblin, and giant tribes neighboring them in the central expanse of the Mounds. While conflicts do happen, they are rare enough that tribal leaders ignore them as insignificant. Despite this, the orc tribes far to the south have been pressuring these tribes to join with them against the goblins, hobgoblins, and giants. So far, the chieftains have resisted, not wishing to anger their southern neighbors while combating the humans of Wolf's Crag.

This provides openings for adventure. Adventurers might decide to help Wolf's Crag and find themselves pulled into a struggle to save the people of the valley. A clever party may try to gain the trust of the northern orcs and pit them against Verak.

G – Orc Palisades

While not as industrial as their cousins to the south, the orcs in the north have shown a clever tendency to equip and fortify. They use tactics and seek advantages in cunning ways that occasionally surprise their human foes in Wolf's Crag. The area noted contains several orc palisades, usually spaced about a mile apart. They are circular, and have two raised platforms. The orcs manning these palisades have developed a sophisticated signaling system. Any palisade finding itself under attack would rapidly gain reinforcements. To prevent this, any attacking force would have to be large enough to engage all of the palisades at the same time. Within the palisades are crude shelters, mantlets for protection from arrows, and supplies to withstand a siege of up to one week.

This reinforces my idea of more developed humanoids, and shows that the idea can be used in different ways to differentiate between orcs that would otherwise be cut from the same mold. This is an excellent method for making ordinary monster groups into something special.

H – Kobold Warrens

The major kobold tribes live in small caves not far from the east-west road between Bristlebury and Wolf's Crag. Most of these caves are so small that humans cannot easily explore them, though a few have larger passages. They are truly warrens in the sense that they are disorienting and easy to become lost within. The kobold tribes in the area do not pose a consolidated threat to any other group in the area, though they are a significant nuisance to merchants wishing to enter the valley to the east.

This is an easy opportunity for beginner adventurers, and the ecology of the kobolds is easy to justify next to the more powerful humanoids.

I – Triple Barrows

Three domed structures create a symmetrical triple barrow in this location. Buried in underbrush, the domes are typical of barrows found in the Dunlock Mounds. However, this is the only location in the Mounds where more than one barrow is found on a single site. No apparent reason exists to explain why this location is different.

I have no idea why there are three. One for each Sibling god, perhaps? The barrows are there to make people ask questions. Great campaigns come from those questions, and their answers.

Bracken Wood

Valley residents are proud of Bracken Wood. It's an intangible sort of pride, as if the people of the area are happy to have a very strange place they can claim as their own. It is a dense forest with large conifer stands and huge groves of oak. It is the sort of forest that isn't easy to explore, filled with ravines and steep embankments, all covered with old growth and heavy underbrush. The locals seem content to live along its fringes, taking from the periphery while avoiding the esoteric interior.

From the stories people tell, however, one might think that everyone had some experience traveling through the Wood. Tales of mysterious forms, lights, sounds, and even buildings that appear and disappear abound. Parents tell stories of Bracken Wood to their children; stories that they heard from their parents and grandparents. They tell stories of the lost race of gnomes living within, the ancient roads that led to lost cities, and the glories of an ancient civilization.

Almost no one reaches adulthood believing the tales. It's a shame, really. Most are true.

Bracken Wood exists as the magical counterpoint to the mundane Dunlock Mounds. The Mounds are mysterious because they are extremely dangerous. The Bracken Wood is mysterious for this reason, but also because I find it interesting to have a place of the unknown resting in the midst of several towns.

A – Zunken Grove

In this eastern corner of the forest is a bowl shaped depression, surrounded at almost even intervals by huge trees. Nothing grows

within the depression except lush grass and wildflowers. No human has been here in many years, if ever. Thus, it's difficult to explain the child's footprints always visible within.

Gnome prints, or something more sinister? Either way, it's a great inspiration for plot.

B – Waystation

On a gentle hill in the forest stood a small stone house. It was not a fancy house, but it was comfortable. It had a fireplace with an inviting flame within it, and rustic but comfortable furniture. One might be tempted to stay the night. Anyone who does finds themselves awakening the next morning among the ruins of a small stone building, the fireplace toppled, and the furniture rotting.

It's weird but harmless. The fear comes from a perfectly attractive and comfortable place to rest in the middle of the wilderness. Nothing makes a player more paranoid than the feeling of being baited. For the record, the intent is that the building is a ghostly imprint that is extremely realistic, for some reason.

C – Ancient Road

Under a thick carpet of moss and brambles are the paving stones of an old road. If one looks closely enough, it is easy to see where the road once cut through the trees. The road was flanked by the now huge trees on either side, and smaller trees populate the middle of the road. The road leads north and south. To the north it fades into untraceability. To the south, it can be followed carefully in a winding pattern until it disappears at the foot of a small hill covered in berry bushes. No outward sign exists that tells who may have built the road.

This is another hint at an ancient predecessor, and from the looks of the road, the builders were a large presence here.

D – Wet Fork Ford

The Ford here, at the confluence of two streams in the Wet Fork Swamp, represents the best place available to cross the confines of the swampy southern portion of Bracken Wood. The ford is shallow enough to handle wagon passage easily, with a flat slate bottom and slow rivulets of water passing across it.

The residents of Wickling and Acton Dinsbury aren't the only ones that appreciate the ford's usefulness. Verak's orcs have their sights trained on it as a strategic goal.

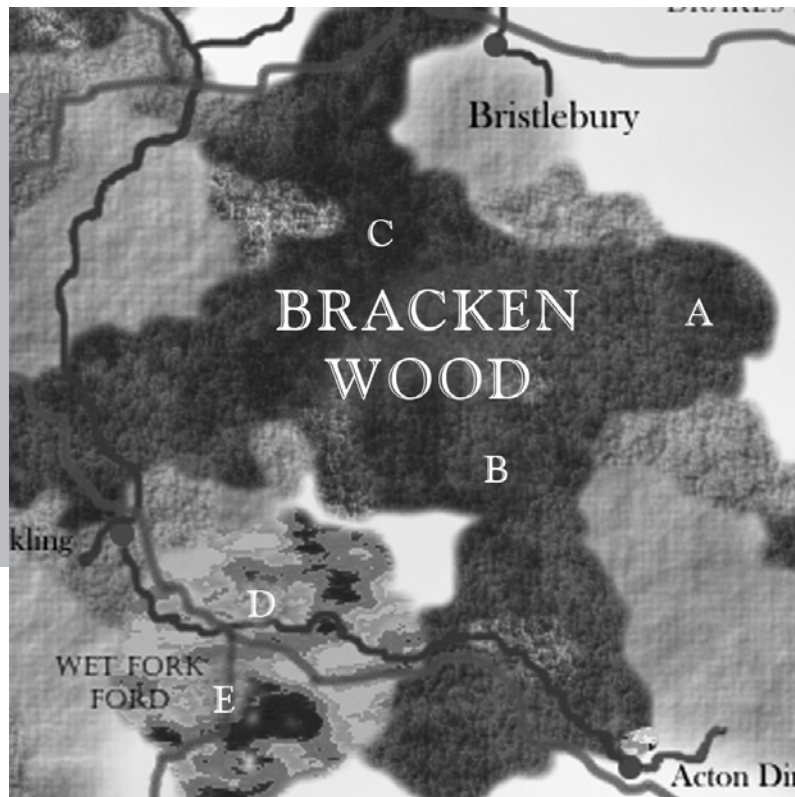
This entry points out the obvious strategic importance of the ford, but the next entry hints at what might be done if the ford falls to the orcs...

E – Ruins of a Dam

If one of the streams at the Wet Fork Ford were to be followed southward, one would eventually arrive at a huge ruined structure of an antiquated dam. This dam is the cause of the flooding that gradually created most of the wetlands in the area. Still effective, the dam slows the passing water to a shallow stream, allowing

easy passage at the ford to the north. However, this water overflows the area and washes throughout the basin, and has created a swampy mire over many years. It is unclear who constructed the dam, or why. No other ruins are visible in the area.

I get a cool reference to an ancient culture wrapped up in an explanation for the swamp tied up with a plot device I can use when the players go up against Verak's orcs. This is the ideal location.



These wilderness areas surrounding the towns of Bristlebury, Wickling, and Acton Dinsbury provide a very robust and organic feel to the campaign. The entire area feels steeped in history and in the unknown, making it perfect for enterprising

adventurers seeking their fortunes. When combined with the cultural groundwork that has been done, as well as the detailing of the settled towns, the details of the wilderness provide a very strong basis of an entertaining campaign setting. The setting is now ready for a CK to develop scenarios based on the information already presented. Then the adventure begins!

The campaign setting doesn't end here, however. I set several goals when I began developing ideas for the campaign, and I have not achieved all of them. I still need to attain my goal of creating a novel magic system that provides a challenge for experienced players, and I also need to create my assassin class of good alignment.

In the next issue, I will begin to discuss rules modifications like the two listed above that support the theme of the campaign.

Until next issue, happy designing!



Dragon Lairds Exposition

By James M. Ward

Dragon Lairds Board Game

Ages: 10 to adult

Players: 2-5

Play Time: 1 hour

Designers: James M. Ward & Tom Wham

Company: Margaret Weis Productions, Ltd.

Web Site: www.margaret-weis.com

Retail: \$39.99

It's rare when the author of a game gets the chance to present his work in another publication. I had the extreme pleasure of designing **Dragon Lairds** with the design and artistic help of Tom Wham. I know if you give the game a chance you will have lots of fun playing.

In **Dragon Lairds**, you become the king or queen of a faction of dragons. As the game proceeds, you become more powerful by purchasing cards to help you gain Royals (victory points) and geld (paper money).

Each turn is set up in a number of rounds. During a round, you can purchase cards from the board, purchase cards you have placed in a face down hand of four or less cards, or pass. At the end of the turn, you collect your geld and figure out how many victory points you earned in that turn.

There are five different types of cards to purchase. Each of these cards presents a fantastic piece of Tom Wham art and the color scheme of the card helps point out which dragon faction the card represents.

Commoner Cards generally give the dragon player geld and sometimes victory points. Special commoner cards can steal geld or victory points from other factions of dragon players.

Laird Cards give the dragon player victory points and geld every turn. There are special lairds that protect the dragon player's cards or even attack other player's cards if they don't pay geld.

Resource Cards provide more geld and often finale royal victory points (only counted at the end of the game.) These cards are some of the most expensive cards in the game to purchase.

Havoc Cards provide player interaction and often the cards lessen the power of other dragon players by doing some hindering act like taking away one of their cards or subtracting victory points.

When the first player gains sixty or more victory points, the game ends. Everyone

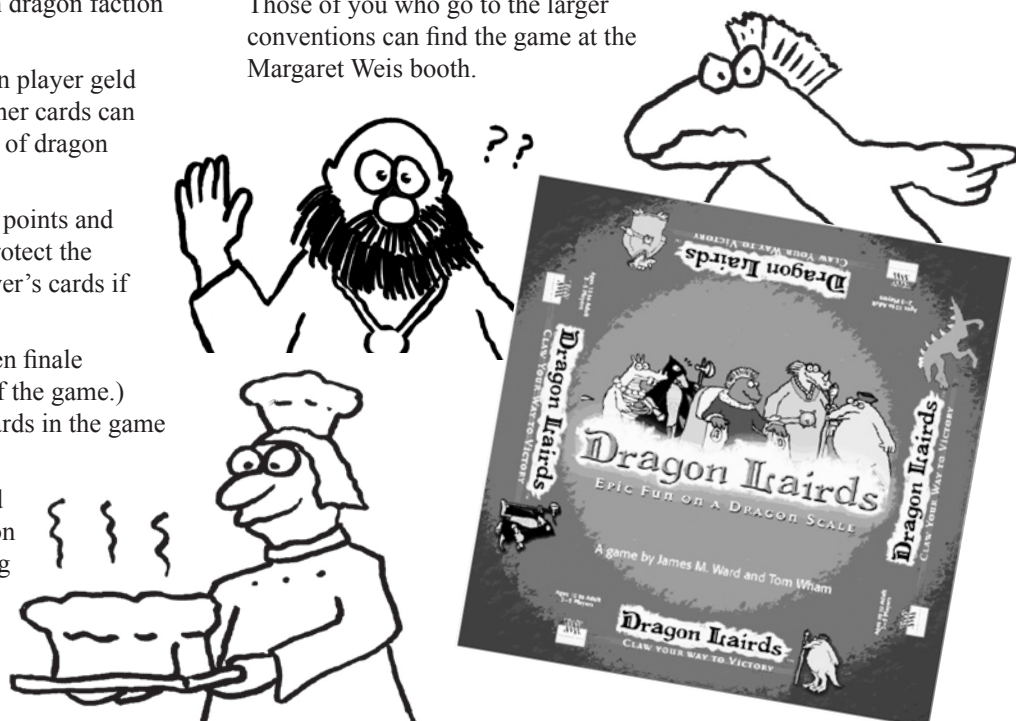
gets to finish his accounting and then there is a final accounting session. The player gaining the most victory points wins.

Another reviewer called **Dragon Lairds** a combination of the best features of European games and American games and I really liked that comment.

Why You Should Buy This Game:

1. **Dragon Lairds** plays differently every time you play the game. All of the 155 cards are shuffled before the play of the game. What cards are available for purchase is different with every game.
2. There is a lot of player interaction in the game. When a player is getting further and further ahead on the victory point track, all the other players can start playing havocs on that player to allow others to catch up.
3. Tom Wham art is fun to look at.
4. The game plays quickly. It's rare when any game with five players can be finished in an hour, but it's very possible with **Dragon Lairds**.
5. There are many different ways to play the game and each method has a chance to win. A player could specialize in buying Lairds and gain a lot of Royals (victory points) a turn. A player could specialize in buying Resources and gain a lot of finale Royals in the final accounting of the game. A player could purchase a lot of Havoc cards and spend time attacking other players. Whatever method you pick, its fun to watch what unfolds during the course of the game for your dragon faction.

The game can be ordered at hobby stores or bought online. Those of you who go to the larger conventions can find the game at the Margaret Weis booth.



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Jeffrey Talanian hails from the woods of New Hampshire. A gamer since 1981, he is presently working as Gary Gygax's co-author of the Castle Zagyg™ Campaign Module Series, including the recently published *Castle Zagyg: The East Mark Gazetteer folio*, by Troll Lord Games. He is also the author of four of the Yggsburgh Town Expansion Series modules, including the recently published *Yggsburgh: The Town Halls District*. When not developing adventuring material with Gary, Jeff is changing diapers, bussing his 3 children about, reading old books, watching movies and TV with his lovely wife, Erica, or gaming with his stellar group of companions, *The Knights of Next Tuesday*.

by Jeffrey Talanian

Author's Note: Players participating in a Castle Zagyg campaign should check with their Castle Keeper before reading the following article. While it is player-friendly, it also contains some hints and information that some Castle Keepers might be reluctant to reveal.

At the Green Dragon Inn:

Seekers of the mysterious Castle Zagyg, pay heed!

If you aspire to equip yourself with intelligence as pertains to the Mad Arch-Mage's ancient dwelling, you would be wise to invest in a most remarkable report that was acquired by an agent of our fine association. Without doubt, this invaluable document was mishandled and misplaced by some absent-minded scholar, perhaps the author himself or some careless subordinate. Hence, is it not obvious that our recovery of this report signifies the noble preservation of the invaluable knowledge it contains? Naturally, however, the standards and practice of our occupation (that being commodities relocation and redistribution) dictate that we manage this property as we would any other second hand merchandise acquired thus: we must profit by it. Please visit your local "Value Second Hand Market" to purchase a copy of this most informative intelligence report. For castle seekers, it might define the difference between life and death.

Sincerely,

Master Rum-Fixer, Yggsburgh

If the PCs purchase a copy of the report as sold by the Yggsburgh Thieves' Guild, it is penned thus:

Report on Castle Zagyg

by Herbert Franklin, Savant-Sage of Yggsburgh

Deep within the hoary confines of the Little Hillwood Forest there dwells a peculiar hermit of both human and orcish ancestry. His enormous back is hunched, his legs are thin, and his forearms are heavily sinewed. His sheepish countenance suggests simplemindedness, but his knack for survival in this hostile wilderness proves otherwise. Goblins fear him, losels avoid him, and the beasts associate with him on the brute level, as though he were their ilk. Who is this mad hermit? Woodsmen and forest elves call him "Igyg the Mad".

It was with great difficulty that we located the mad hermit's rude abode, a small cave over a mile north of the ancient castle. He welcomed us in, my assistants and I, and at once he began roasting a catfish and boiling partridge egg, watercress, and potato soup. The beer was stale, but the fare was surprisingly fine. I proffered him a bag of rare mixed herbs and a pewter flask of fine whiskey, the latter of which may have been instrumental in loosening his tongue. But what seemed to win his affection was a curious trinket that I gifted him with: a rabbit's foot dyed green. The brute smiled his simpleton's smile and stroked the knick-knack as he proceeded to answer my many questions to the best of his capacity. I will not subject the reader to the hermit's inane diction; rather I will present what I perceive to be some truths regarding Castle Zagyg.

The Cursed Fog. What sages have termed Zagyg's Curse of Fog and Frogs is an unequivocal truth. Before my crew and I sought out the half-orc hermit, we directly approached Castle Zagyg, and there we spied the complex engulfed by an eldritch fog that swirled and shifted with mock intelligence. We sent forth one of our crew to enter the fog, and around this one's waist we affixed a stout rope, but upon penetrating that dread mist the rope fell slack and the man was gone. The morale of my contingency was thenceforth diminished, though I convinced them to assist

me in a circuitous inspection of the potent phenomenon. Only a dweomercrafter the likes of Zagyg could engender such a curse. North of the fog-enshrouded complex we spied that most curious hermit emerge from the weird fog, and so I resolved to engage him. From my subtle interview I gleaned that some men and beasts pass freely through the fog, seemingly inured to its cursed effects.

Plateau and Caves. From my newfound confidant I learned that the Castle complex, as history tells us, is built upon a rising plateau largely composed of granite and gneiss. From west to east it rises. The west end is separated from the mainland by a narrow ravine, while the east end is noted as the highest point, its bluff perhaps four score feet in height and overlooking the sluggish False Urt River below. I was informed by our host that the bluff is of four faces—north, south, east, and west. Each bluff is pocked with caves within which lie humanoids and monsters. The brutish man spoke of goblins, kobolds, orcs, gnolls, and hobgoblins. By his understanding, the gnolls and hobgoblins are presently at war with one another, and the kobolds train dogs of war. Furthermore, beasts mundane and magical occupy some of the caves, such as giant bats, wolves, bears, stirges, and a ravenous owlbear. Rumors of a werewolf, he says, are numerous amongst the humanoid populace but never has the hermit seen hide or hair of such abomination.

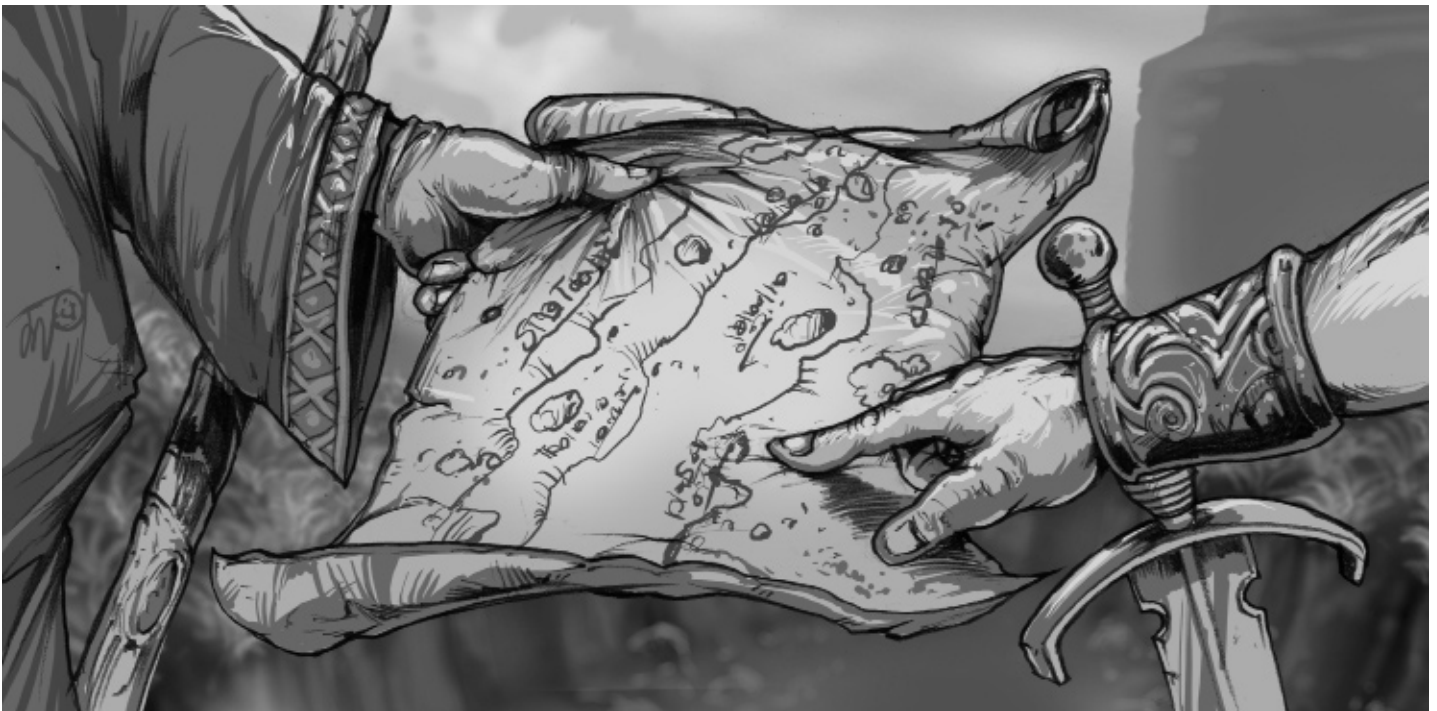
The Ruins. My dim-witted informant told tale of the castle ruins atop the plateau. Curtain walls follow the contour of the bluff, these joined by towers square, round, and pentagonal. The lower courtyard is where the hermit makes his daily pilgrimage. This courtyard is located atop the west end of the plateau. The hermit said there is a wall breach that he climbs through to access the place, for the outer and inner gatehouses that flank the ravine are filled with “nasty goblins”, so he warns. Likewise goblin-infested is the lower courtyard, but the hunchbacked

hermit revealed that these evil little humanoids presently avoid him, this after some recent event, the details of which he did not reveal to me, but his face was painted with a curious smirk as he alluded to it. There is a shrine the hermit visits among the ruins of Castle Zagyg, and I have reason to believe it might be dedicated to Zagyg himself, or possibly the deity of magic Zagyg is reputed to serve.

He also made mention of a grassy middle courtyard where a bear-like monster hunts wild boars, and, high atop the east end of the plateau, an inner courtyard where the castle fortress is surrounded by a black-watered moat.

The Fortress and the Great Towers. The hermit says that he has never been within the fortress, that it is the “Big Wizard’s House” and not meant to be bothered. Despite this, he has reason to believe that men occupy the place, as well as the two enormous towers that flank the fortress, one of which is round, the other hexagonal. He has seen strange beasts flying about the top of the fortress—demonic men and a blood-thirsty griffin. These, coupled with some of the horrific sounds emitted from the dread fortress have convinced him that the men dwelling within might only control the front gate of the fortress and not much else.

The Dungeons. Legendary dungeons lie below the fabled Castle Zagyg, and these are purportedly filled with gold and magical treasure, humanoids and monsters, tricks and traps. Of these dungeons many tales of adventure and intrigue have been spun. The hermit’s knowledge is limited in this regard, as he has never delved within the subterranean depths, but he has met some of its occupants. From a cave at the northeast end of the bluff, the brute has encountered gnomes that work for a group of dwarves. The dwarves scarcely leave their abode, sending their diminutive cousins out to gather supplies. At the southeast end of the bluff he claims there is another cave that is accessed by



warrior elves that, according to the hermit, are unlike the wood elves across the river. These elves, like the dwarves, scarcely venture without, and the hermit believes they are dangerous. One of the more frightening dungeon dwellers, my informant revealed, is a massive hill giant that prowls the woodlands about the castle. This one has been seen dragging bears and aurochs back to his cave at the south side of the bluff. The hermit advises not to enter the hill giant's cave.

Other Notes: The mad hermit also mentioned a damp cave at south face of the bluff within which a pool has collected. He claims to have harvested snails in a cavern pool, the bottom of which he often swam to. There he claims to have once discovered a water-filled chute that curls up to a secret cave. Here he spied an iron door, but he was too timid to approach it. He also spoke of a strange creature, a magical goblin that is not "bad" like all the other goblins. The creature is a cobbler by trade, who calls himself "Egg".

My interview with the brutish hermit was soon to end. He was twirling his trident in his hands and becoming quite twitchy, my many questions having taxed his simple mind, I suppose. Without further ado, he confirmed it was time for my contingent and me to depart his rude abode, because it was time for him to forage the river banks and check his traps—but he said we should return some other day for "conies". Notwithstanding, it is not my intention to ever return to Castle Zagyg or its precincts, for I am a man of learning, not some foolhardy adventurer. When at length the Mad Arch-Mage resolves to part the veil and thus admit a new generation of brave and bold seekers to his many and sundry dungeons, it is my estimation that more fantastic and impossible tales of derring-do will thenceforth unfold.

The preceding piece functions as a gaming tool for the Castle Keeper to utilize when running a Castle Zagyg campaign. It also demonstrates some of the features of the first boxed set, *Gary Gygax's Castle Zagyg, Vol. II: The Upper Works*, though presented from the perspective of an Yggsburgh sage.

- **Castle Zagyg:** The Upper Works is designed for 4 to 6 (or more) player characters of 1st through 4th levels of experience. The adventure is comprised of five components:
- **The Mouths of Madness:** Wilderness surrounding the castle and the humanoid-infested caves that pock the bluff on which the castle is built.
- **Ruins of the Castle Precincts:** The walls, towers, gatehouses, and other outbuildings sprawled before the massive fortress. Here dwell goblins, monsters, and magical beasts.

- **The East Wall Towers:** The two massive towers that shoulder the fortress north and south. One is inhabited by an enigmatic figure who surrounds himself with despicable vermin, while the other is inhabited by a clandestine group of men with a singular agenda.
- **Castle Fortress:** The ancient domicile of the Mad Arch-Mage himself. Formerly in ruin, the fortress now stands a massive, four-storey structure with corner towers and a central section carved from black gneiss and rising above its wing sections north and south. From the top of the central section rises a pair of spires, also carved of black gneiss. Scarcely explored by seekers past, this restored building offers new opportunities for adventure. Tricks and traps are plenty in Zagyg's fortress.
- **The Storerooms:** The first level of the dungeons below Castle Zagyg. The infamous initial level that's been explored by countless adventurers past, now restocked with more threats than ever. Here dwell many old favorites, such as the militant Old Guard Kobolds, cruel goblin slavers, opportunistic bandits, peculiar dwarves and elves, voracious fire beetles, and more!

The appendices of *Gary Gygax's Castle Zagyg, Vol. II: The Upper Works* contain 25 new magic items and 18 new monsters. Also included are NPC parties, one of which can be used as pregenerated characters. *The Upper Works Map & Illustration Booklet* is another valuable component of this adventure. It contains maps, floor plans and player handouts to facilitate greater enjoyment at the gaming table.

As we discussed in the first installment of **The Dweomercraefter's Den**, the first level of the dungeons, *The Storerooms*, is based on the original dungeon created by Gary Gygax in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin during late autumn, 1972. Revised and expanded for modern game play, it also includes encounters directly imported from the original source material.

Castle Zagyg: The Upper Works provides gamers with a first glimpse of this unparalleled mega-dungeon adventure, with many and sundry levels to follow, each one more deadly than the next. The Upper Works includes hundreds of encounter areas and could very well provide a year of gaming enjoyment. Despite its size, this adventure is easy to run, and preparation time is minimal for the Castle Keeper. Here there are no convoluted histories to study, world-saving plots within plots to keep up with, scripted paths to follow from A to Z. This is fantasy role-playing taken back to its roots: adventure for adventure's sake! So go kill some monsters and take their stuff.

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MAGICAL ITEMS, MAGICAL CAMPAIGNS

BY JAMES MISHLER

Magic items are part and parcel of every great adventure and often at the heart of a memorable campaign. Sometimes, however, the magic items can be the very reason for a campaign, and the acquisition thereof the heart of the adventure! This article presents the players with a legendary hero of old and information on his greatest magical treasures; it also presents the Castle Keeper with information on the powers of these items and their current disposition, as well as several suggestions on how to insert them into an existing campaign or even run a campaign based entirely on the acquisition of and use of these items.

Castle Keepers should feel free to change any names and adjust any history to fit their own campaign setting.

Efstrofos the Nimble

Almost two centuries ago the Old Thieves Guild of the Free City of Granmaestar faced its greatest challenge in the singular person of Efstrofos the Nimble, the Thief King of his day. Raised by the streets of the city as an orphan, Efstrofos grew up to hate the powerful Guild and all it stood for, from the lowest ranks of thugs to the



Grand Guildmaster himself and all those in-between. So though he left the city in his late youth (two steps ahead of Guild assassins), after many adventures and long years of experience, he returned to wreak his revenge upon those who slaughtered his friends and first love.

During those long years he made the acquaintance of and took service with no few powerful wizards, and from the five greatest he asked as his reward the most powerful enchanted items that each could devise according to his wishes.

F'dan Szek Haultin, the Master of Shadow, cut for him a cloak of his own ill-gotten shadowstuff, stolen from the lee of the dead god Dumghannon in the Desert of Lost Dreams;

From the wizard Otuloum of Minesh he received a set of picks and tools, of ancient black dragon horn carved with obsidian from the isles of the Sea of Fire;

From the sorceress Idesmae of the Gibbering Tower he got a pair of ink-black boots, woven of silk harvested from giant spider webs that had never fallen under the light of the sun;

Casmael the Illusionist gave him a mask, of gossamer stolen from the boudoir of the Faerie Queen;

And finally his small blade of old, heavy with his own soul and deeds, he traded to the Forgemeister Kaghan Sikkhur for the Last Blade of Ti'Gan, Neverslake, The Hunger, and to it he gave his left smallfinger.

With these items and his own well-honed skills he brought down the greatest thieves guild the world had ever known in less than a year. It was said that even Neverslake paused in the midst of the final bloodbath, though whether to gloat or to enjoy its long repast was never to be known.

Today the New Thieves Guilds of Granmaestar are, together, not even a shadow of the power than the singular Old Guild once was. No longer the overweening power that grips the other guilds in a single hand, the Many Guilds of the free city bicker and fight over the scraps that remain to them. Of the fate of Efstrofos the Nimble, little is known and much is conjectured.

Some say he retired to the West and lived to his dying days as a great sheik among the Elden Emirates; others claim that he faded away into shadowstuff himself when his deed was done. And still others whisper that Never-slake turned on him in the end, as all such blades are wont to do. Of the magic items he used during his quest for vengeance, more is known, or at least rumored.

CASTLE KEEPER INFORMATION

After destroying the Old Guild, Efstrofos decided to retire, and so faked his own death, spreading the rumor that the blade Neverlake turned on him and destroyed him body and soul (a power that it never had, but that had grown with his legend). He sold his magic items to various allies, save for the Cloak of Shadowstuff and Neverlake, and together with that treasure and the hoard from the Old Guild, retired to an island in the Southern Seas. There he lived out his remaining days in peace and quiet, until he died of old age and was buried in a simple grave.

Today there are many groups who could wish to see The Nimble's items brought back together. Perhaps the New Thieves Guilds are growing in power, or even merging, and the merchants of Granmaestar wish to use the weapons against their hated foes. Maybe one or more of the Thieves Guilds seek the items, in order to cement their power over the other guilds and the merchants. Perhaps a wealthy patron seeks the items in order to wreak his own vengeance for wrongs dealt to him. Mayhap one of the creators of the items seeks its return (many of these wizards live still). Or maybe the adventurers simply hear of the items themselves and wish to gather them for their own purposes.

The Cloak of Shadowstuff

This long black cloak swallows all light, and seems to move of its own accord, rippling to winds that blow upon some distant plane. The space within its hood is clouded by shadows even upon the brightest day. When you don the cloak the world around you seems to fade from colors to fuzzy blacks and whites and shades of grey. When you wear the hood all around you sharpens into stark contrasts and the shadows disappear.

Upon Efstrofos' death his youngest grandson took up the Cloak of Shadowstuff, moved to the northern lands, and there in his own right became infamous as Darkspawn, the Thief of Shadows. Active in the Southern Cities rather than the great northern port of Granmaestar, few ever connected the Thief of Shadows and his cloak with Efstrofos the Nimble and the legendary Cloak of Shadowstuff. In time the Thief of Shadows also retired and sold his cloak to his last apprentice. Unfortunately his apprentice did not live

up to his master's expectations, and was captured (drunk, asleep in his bed) and executed by the constabulary of one of the Southern Cities. His black cloak was taken as a trophy, and still hangs to this day in the Hall of Constables in the city of Metrex.

Powers: The Cloak of Shadowstuff provides a +4 magical bonus to any conceal, hide, or move silently checks; when both the Cloak and the Boots of the Spider are worn the combined bonus to move silently is +6. When the hood is worn the wearer possesses twilight vision but loses the ability to distinguish colors (this condition is ameliorated if the Gossamer Mask is also worn). The wearer may use the 7th level illusionist spell shadow walk once per day for 10 minutes (travel up to seven miles).

In addition, if all four of Efstrofos' other items are also possessed and worn, the wearer may use shadow walk at will. The drawback to using this power is that there is a chance to encounter shadow beings upon the path, one in 10 per 10 minutes/seven miles of travel, and if the wearer uses the Cloak to fully enter the Plane of Shadow chances of encounters there are double normal!

Legend (Granmaestar sage) or Rumor (Southern Cities dive tavern): They say that some 20 years ago the Thief of Shadows was taken in Metrex, and that he, too, bore a cloak of shadowstuff; mayhap it is the same cloak as was once worn by Efstrofos the Nimble?

Black Horn Picks a.k.a. The Skeleton Keys

These picks and tools of black dragon horn are as strong and sharp as steel. When you touch them they are warm and slick, and as you heft them they feel light as horn yet somehow also heavy as iron. The picks hang upon a ring of ivory dragon bone, like keys, and though the ring is unbroken and seemingly unbreakable, you can pull the picks off and place them back on the ring at will...

These were sold to Efstrofos' best apprentice and good friend, Philos the Black, who helped him during his quest for vengeance against the Old Guild. Philos went on to fame himself as a solo thief during the chaos that followed the fall of the Old Guild; many of the thieves guilds of Granmaestar today claim the Lord of the Skeleton Keys as their founder. The truth, however, is that Philos took the Black Horn Picks with him to his grave, a hidden sepulcher deep in the bowels of the tunnels and sewers of Granmaestar. There he, his treasures, and the Black Horn Picks are guarded by dozens of fiendish traps and no few undead (though mostly of the weaker, unintelligent kind). The many "Skeleton Keys" kept by the various thieves guilds of Granmaestar are either poor forgeries of the original or lesser creations of less talented wizards

designed to fool the guilds into thinking they had the originals...

Powers: The Black Horn Picks provide the user a +4 magical bonus to any open lock or traps checks; when the user also wears the Gossamer Mask the bonus to find traps increases to +6. The user may use the 2nd level knock spell three times per day as though it were cast by a 17th level wizard.

In addition, if all four of Efstrofos' other items are also possessed and worn, the user may use the 2nd level wizard spell knock at will, as though it were cast by a 17th level wizard. The drawback to using this greater power is that the locks or bolts opened thereby are melted by dragon acid and permanently ruined.

Rumor (Guild thief of Granmaestar): Aye, the Guild-master claims that the picks he bears be those of the Lord of the Skeleton Keys himself, but I've heard that the true Keys lay with the Lord's moldering body in a hidden tomb. Ali Kaneef of Golden Phoinix is said to bear a map to the tomb far below the city...

Boots of the Spider

These boots possess themselves of a tulgey shimmer in which shadows of silver can be seen to glitter in the right light. When you pick them up they seem sticky, as though covered in some tacky substance, but it takes no effort to let go of them. When you put them on they mold themselves to your feet and ankles, yet with but the will and a tug they slide off easily enough.

The Boots Efstrofos sold off to the highest bidder, a thief from the Emirates of the Sweet Seas. Said rogue, Aswad Alzaki, went on to great fame in the east as a hero in the rebellion against the Eternal King. In gratitude the people made him an emir of one of the major states of the Sunrise Empire. His grandson escaped the fall of the empire to the Theocrats using these very boots, and today he lives in exile, a king among rogues, in Suramanya, the First City of the Eastern League of Cities.

Powers: The Boots of the Spider provides a +4 magical bonus to any climb, scale, or move silently checks, and the wearer suffers no penalties for climbing or scaling slick or slippery surfaces; when both the Boots and the Cloak of Shadowstuff are worn the combined bonus to move silently is +6. The wearer may use the 1st level wizard spell spider climb five times per day as though he were a 17th level wizard.

In addition, if all four of Efstrofos' other items are also possessed and worn, the wearer may use the 1st level wizard spell spider climb at will, as though he were a 17th level wizard (the boots must be worn to use this ability,

and do not interfere with the spider climb). The drawback to using this greater power is that any giant spiders or ettercaps within three miles become aware of the user's presence and will be able to track him unerringly thereafter, seeking to slay the wearer of the boots.

Rumor (Beggar of the East) or **Legend** (Sage): In the time of my grandfather a heroic warrior of the East fought against the Eternal King; it is said that there was no wall he could not conquer in his quest to recover his beloved betrothed and steal the Ruby Heart of the dreaded lich lord. When made a noble lord in the Sunrise Empire, he took as his device a pair of black boots...

Gossamer Mask a.k.a. the Fey Masque

Thinner than a silken kerchief, nigh as insubstantial as a wisp of smoke, the mask you behold appears as little more than a gossamer oval with almond-shaped eyeholes. When you touch it, it feels warm and pliant, though there is no room for it to give. When you life it, it is as holding a cloud. When you place it on your face it disappears and seems to melt into your flesh. The world becomes a whirlwind of color and motion, and your eyesight extends far beyond the norm, able to perceive the tiniest features up close in detail and yet also able to discern details at great distances.

The Gossamer Mask was sold to the courtesan Michaela Di'Gourdaine (for some gold and services tendered), who used its powers to great effect and retired in great wealth as the former mistress and spymaster of the King of Aquilon Magna. The Mask then passed to her youngest daughter (the bastard of the king), Alienor the White, who used its powers to get into the good graces of the King of Yslandia, and thereby became his consort. Her granddaughter, the Princess Ysabeau, in turn stole it when she fled from the palace to become an adventurer, and she lost it and her freedom to the Unseelie Scarlet King of the Isle of the West, when she tried to use its powers to charm that fey potentate three years ago. An enemy of the Faerie Queen and her Seelie Court, the Red King allows the goblin jester of his court to wear the mask of times when he wishes to mock the Faerie Queen (or the human Ysabeau, remains trapped in a cage of branches in the Old Oak at the center of the Scarlet Court).

Powers: The wearer of the Gossamer Mask is able to use the disguise ability of the assassin and illusionist as though it were a class ability, with a +4 magical bonus to the check; an assassin or illusionist gains a total +6 bonus to their check. The wearer of the Mask gains the enhanced vision of an elf; if the wearer is an elf, her vision range doubles. The wearer of the mask may also use the 1st level illusionist spell change self five times per day as though he were a 17th level illusionist In addition, if the wearer

is also using the Black Horn Picks the Mask increases the bonus to find traps to a total of +6; if the Cloak is worn with the hood up, the Mask enables the wearer to see in full color rather than black, white, and gray.

Finally, if all four of Efstrofos' other items are also possessed and worn, the wearer may use the 2nd level illusionist spell alter self at will, as though he were a 17th level illusionist. The drawback to using this greater power is that any creature of Faerie will see right through the disguise and know that the wearer possesses the Mask made from gossamer stolen from the Faerie Queen's own boudoir! How said fey creature reacts is up to the CK...

Rumor (Tavern in Westria, especially Ys): Another prince of blue blood was lost to the Scarlet King last moon; they say that the Unseelie lord's goblin jester gyred and gimbled about him, taking the form of figures from myth, as the Unseelie power sapped the young knight of his vitality. Though merely 18 summers old, the poor prince died of old age under a three-foot-long white beard, or so they say. I doubt me any will ever claim the Queen Mother's reward for the return of her daughter and the Fey Masque...

Neverslake, the Hunger

This short sword is about as long as a man's forearm. *Near the hilt it is a hand in width, tapering to a sharp point at the end. Upon the blade on both sides are a line of inch-tall sigils that cause the mind to ache if stared at for too long. When looked at edge-wise, one can barely discern a blade at all, so thin it is, yet it weighs no less than any other short sword. The blade is of some black metal with whorls of dark silver; the whole sucks in light and spits out shadows. The pommel is plain, wrapped in an unidentifiable black leather, with a large obsidian round stone at the end. The stone, like the blade, seems to draw in light and reflect darkness. When you hold the pommel the blade almost quivers in anticipation, and you feel a thrumming sensation travel up your arm. You run your thumb along the blade's nigh-invisible edge and draw a dollop of blood; the blade drinks it in, and the thrumming gains in intensity...*

Note: The sigils are Abyssal; the translation is the blade's name, Neverslake.

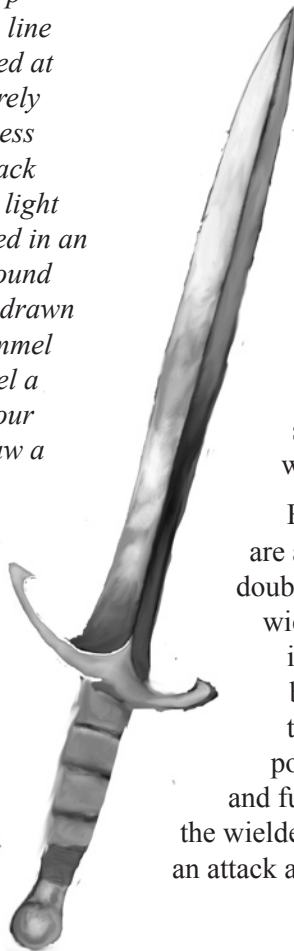
Neverslake was not sold; even Efstrofos did not wish to see its evil continue after having been visited by several victims of the blade's draining powers. Thus, whilst en route to the Southern Isles, he placed the blade in an iron box and cast it into the Southern Seas.

Of course, the foul powers that created the blade had other ideas for its fate. The box was swallowed whole by a whale, which beached itself upon a shore near the Southern Cities. Villagers who sought to harvest the whale's corpse found the iron box in its guts, and the local blacksmith claimed the blade as his fee for opening the lock with his hammer. A youth of the village coveted the blade, broke into the smith's home, and used it to slay the blacksmith in his sleep. The blade has changed hands many times in the long years since, in manners similar, until today it is in the hands of Neverslake, an assassin known to the player characters (see below). Naturally, Neverslake is opposed to the player characters...

Powers: Neverslake is a +3 featheredged short sword (as per Monsters & Treasure pg. 103). It operates as such until the user purposefully sacrifices a digit or limb to the blade (losing a hit point permanently), upon which the blade's greater powers awaken. Note that after a week of normal use, the blade will implant within its wielder's mind the knowledge of the power it can grant to the wielder for the simple sacrifice...

After said sacrifice, it operates for its owner as a +5 featheredged draining sword. It has +5 to hit, deals +3 damage, has the featheredged severing feature, and also drains a hit die from the opponent (along with the average number of constitution-adjusted hit points for that die) with every hit. The wielder of the sword gains the lost hit points as temporary hit points (these are the first lost to damage and last for one hour). 24 hours after losing a hit die the victim must make a constitution save for each lost hit die, or the loss is permanent. If the blade slays a victim through draining all of its hit dice, the body rises again three days later as a wight. All such creatures seek the utter destruction of he who wields Neverslake...

Finally, if all four of Efstrofos' other items are also possessed and worn, Neverslake deals double normal damage to all opponents and the wielder gains a +1 bonus to all saving throws; if he has sacrificed a digit and hit point to the blade, the damage is triple and the saving throw bonus total is +3. The drawback to this power is that whenever Neverslake is wielded and fumbled (the wielder rolls a natural 1 to hit), if the wielder has an ally adjacent to him, he must make an attack against his ally at full normal bonuses; if the



sacrifice has been made, the blade attacks the wielder himself with additional +3 to hit!

Note that in any case, if the wielder gains three or more levels while wielding Neverslake, he can never get rid of it normally. If he tries to throw it away, it will return... wielded by a dominated NPC who will seek to slay the former wielder with the blade! Even if it is cast into a cement block and dumped into the sea, in time, the blade will return to slay the one who would try to rid himself of it. If, on the other hand, the wielder comes to accept the blade as his master, he will gain several benefits. First, he gains command of the wights created by the draining power of the blade. Second, he gains a hit point for every hit die permanently drained, though his hit points can never go higher than his maximum due to level and constitution modifier. Finally, a slave of the blade can transfer some or all of the blade's bonus to hit to his armor class instead, as per a sword of defending. At this point, the slave generally takes on the name "Neverslake" and exists only to slay that the blade may drink the lifeblood of the living...

Rumor (Anywhere): Sad it 'twas that the lord died so young. Cursed assassins that strike in the night! Lopped off the poor lord's head in one blow he did, and the black blade even drank in the lord's blood, or so the guards say... Neverslake, so the assassin called himself as he screamed at the guards, "Neverslake, I am, and I shall drink of your blood in due time" he cried...



Castellan's Guide to Arms & Armor



June, 2008

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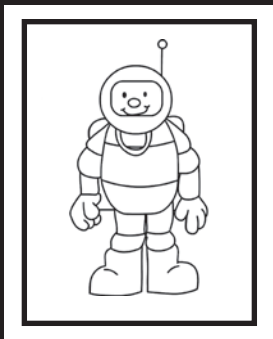
Auld & Wurmish

Wisdom from an Old Master

by Mike Stewart



In 1978, Mike Stewart became interested in roleplaying games and has never looked back. He is currently a post graduate student at the University of North Texas. When he grows up, he wants to be a spaceman.



The Infernal Powers in Castles & Crusades

Perhaps one of the earliest icons of the Sword & Sorcery genre was of evil forces from the depths of Hell. After all, what foes could be so implacable, so terrifying, and so difficult for Our Hero™ to defeat than a demon or devil summoned from the lower realms to slay them? What beings make the best servants for foul sorcerers? Which beings are summoned only to frequently turn against their summoner (usually the aforementioned foul sorcerer)?

As with the fiction that inspired them, the above is certainly true of Fantasy Role Playing Games (FRPGs). From the first and best known in 1974 to today, the names may change but their power and evil remain for heroes and heroines to battle for the good of all! **Castles & Crusades**, following in such grand company as the FRPGs of yesteryear, also introduces a few demonic forces in the *Monsters & Treasures* tome such as the Imp, Quasit, and Bodak. There has been very little published regarding the Nether Planes themselves, those who rule these stygian places as well as their fell inhabitants.

This article will attempt will attempt to recreate the foundation from which many of our RPGs draw their infernal mythos. In homage to the prior tales and myths, a major source for this article was Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* as well as William

Shakespeare's various plays, all of which abound in malefic entities and their deeds.

To begin with, one must define devils and demons. Both are residents of the Infernal nether planes of reality and both adhere to evil and corruption as other races do to goodness and tranquility. Are there differences between the two types of creatures, or are the names synonymous?

The answer is "yes and no." In the realms of the *Inferno*, both do reside, but they are less of a statement of race as of status. A demon is the usual resident of the nether pits, if anything about the abyssal realms can be called "usual". A devil is a demon who has, through fortune, fate or diligent evil gained a personal name and with it status in the hierarchy of the *Inferno*. Names are a source of power in the arcane, and never more so than names of devils. These beings have a public name and a secret name; with the former, more of a reflection of their vile deeds and spheres while the secret name is the one held close to their black hearts. Any being gaining the secret name of a devil can, with the right rituals, command that devil to their service regardless of their power or rank.

Demons desire names so that they can advance to the greater hierarchies of Hell and thus are willing to serve evil wizards and clerics as familiars or servants in order to be given the secret name. This name is given upon the casting of the Find Famil-

iar spell (as detailed in the **Castles & Crusades Players Handbook**), but this name only becomes truly theirs when their master or mistress dies and the demon familiar takes their soul to the Hells. A demon may not kill their master except under very certain circumstances (usually if their mortal master breaks the details of the contract) without invalidating the name. This seems an easy way to obtain a name, but the evil and chaotic nature of the demonkind makes such self-control and patience very rare. If they kill their master or break the contract with the mortal caster (or the mortal rejects them) then they must return to the Infernal planes to wait again to be summoned.

Status among demons is determined solely through power and evil, with power going to those who consume mortal's life forces or those of other demons; though the latter gives only a fraction of power compared to the beings of the mortal realm. Upon gaining a name and being advanced to the ranks of the devil castes, the new devil begins its new existence on the lowest rung of the hierarchy. This is not a discouragement however; as a devil can gain ranks in the legions of Hell not only through evil, but may challenge those above them to single combat to advance to a higher caste. These duels for honorifics are formal affairs and while usually fatal, the defeated devil is not cast back into demonkind, but is reconstituted as a devil of a lower rank than the challenger. Violation of these formal rules (or of commands of a senior devil) can result in being cast back into demonkind or even worse, rebirth as a Dretch—the lowest of the low.

Mortal souls taken to hell become Dretches or Lemures, depending on their sins in life. Those of Lawful Evil bent become Dretches while those of Chaotic Evil disposition become Lemures; either way they are nothing but twisted souls that roam the Inferno as playthings and torture victims to entertain the demons and devils around them. Since these spirits are eternal, reforming after being killed this heinous existence is for eternity.

Geography:

The Inferno is a wild conglomeration of small realms called Circles. The Circles are each vast, and can comprise a whole range of environments similar to mortal realms from deserts, icebergs, oceans, swamps, jungles, to every type of region known and unknown. One thing that will remain constant is that each will be a twisted version of the earthly location, made to insure suffering and despair regardless of wish or will. Each Circle has a devil Duke who acts more as a warden than a ruler, and these six circles are within each other as concentric rings; with the higher the number the smaller the realm (though "small" is relative with these vast wastelands). The outer six are

the abodes of demons of various kinds and are detailed below. The three circles are the very heart of the Inferno and are the demesnes of the devils, both lesser and greater. They are the center of the malefic power of the Inferno and are ruled by the three Kings of Hell. The fourth King, Asmodeus Amaimon, is the High King of Hell and the Master of the infernal hosts of blackest evil. To reflect this grand status, his floating palace travels the skies of the three circles of Devilkind and jealously guards the gateway to Purgatory, the only means of escape from the Inferno.

The exterior circles (#1–6) are a chaotic region where temperatures and geography can change from hour to hour and day to day, though always remaining unpleasant. The descriptions of the six circles below represent the average environment within the circle, though in such a chaotic domain variances are inevitable. Demons roam free here, and though the more powerful demons tend to reside in the circles closer to the heart of the Inferno, it is possible to encounter most any type throughout the six circles. Demons are, in essence, random creatures of unknowable madness and as such it is impossible to give complete information on them, but Table I provides for the typical denizens of the 1st through 6th circles and the devils of the central three circles.

The First Circle: Acheron

This region is a place of dourness and fear, with ashen plains and twilight illumination. This gray barrenness is considered the gateway into Hell. Though easy enough to enter, it is impossible to leave the hells through any means except from the 9th Circle. If adventurers are trapped here by guile or evil sorcery, they must travel deeper into the diabolic plane to find escape!

The river Styx marks the border between the world of mortals and the gates of Hell. It also flows through the other circles and divides each circular realm apart from the others. This wide and treacherous river can only be crossed by Charon's barge. He is an immortal spirit who will demand a coin for payment to ferry beings across into each of the Circles. The coin pays the fare for one trip; charges are usually a copper piece for each commoner or poor person, a silver coin for artisans and soldiers, a gold piece for officers and minor nobles and a platinum piece for great nobles and kings. Those not paying will be left on the bank for eternity, unable to cross the river and unable to return to the upper world.

The dread ruler of this circle is the abomination known as the Leviathan; a colossally massive devil of scales, teeth, claws and malice. She is shaped out of the nightmares of an antediluvian past; part fish, part dragon, part snake, part whale and part hydra with an insatiable hunger for

souls and weaker demonkind that scurry across the face of this circle. The Leviathan may be beastly in form but she is highly intelligent and cunning, with the ability to breathe noxious fumes that kill and dissolve flesh, bone, and metals. She hates her rulership (re: banishment) to this place and despairs of ever rising in the castes of devilkind and thus takes her fury out on those who call this circle home.

The type of demons generally found here are of the weaker sort (for demons), finding only the damned souls to bully and torment. Lemures, Quasits, and other weaker demonkind roam here. An example of such a 1st circle type of demon is the Vrock (see **Table I**).

The Second Circle: Typhon

This land is even darker than Acheron, becoming only darker as one travels deeper into this land. About an hour's walk will have the atmosphere become so dark as to be impenetrable beyond 3–5 feet. This field acts as a magical darkness (as the spell in the **C&C PHB**), though residents of the circle can see as normal.

The Archduke of this Circle is the Devil Mammon, a grossly fat being with horns, red skin, and hooves. Despite his bulk, he is very powerful (hits as a Fire Giant) and loves to torture mortals that fall into his grip. Unlike the Leviathan in Acheron, he enjoys his realm and the suffering he inflicts upon his subjects.

The typical demons of this realm are those who use vision less often than other sense (despite immunity to the darkness). Bodaks frequent this place, as do Nightmares and Hezrou.

Third Circle: Perdition

After walking from the banks of the river Styx for about half an hour, the sky will clear from impenetrable blackness to a sodden grey uniformity. The land is bare as well, with the ground covered here and there with falling hailstones (from occasional storms) and snow drifts. This snow is full of pollutants (thus the grey color) and anyone ingesting it will have to make a successful CON check (Challenge Level 12) or die of a slow withering disease, lingering for 3–5 days. Upon death, the mortal will become a Dretch or Lemure, and be tortured here for eternity.

The land will quickly become a frozen swamp, with a single bridge of connected bones allowing egress across the foul murk. Damned souls are frozen in the muck and howl their anguish unceasingly. Undead of all sorts roam this plane, torturing souls or swarming the living. Any undead encountered here will have maximum hit points and always do maximum damage upon a successful attack.

This realm hosts some truly abominable demonkind, most with various aspects of death and undeath. A typical demon

of the Third Circle is the Glabrezu, whose canine-corpse form reflects their master's own.

Ruling over this blasted heath is Moloch, Archduke of the Dead. He is goat hoofed, as are all devils, but has the head of a wolf with ram's horns adorning the skull. His humanoid arms and chest are covered in short grey fur, and his fists can claw or strike with the strength of a Frost Giant. He hates Mammon with a passion, and desires Dis (and its Archduchess) for his own.

Fourth Circle: Abyss

After leaving the frigid banks of the Styx again to traverse this new circle, travelers will notice that the temperature will slowly rise to something more normal and though the sky will clear, it remains in perpetual dusk. The ground is dark brown, with many pools of stagnant black water filling them. The circle seems to travel at a declining angle the further one goes, because in truth it is one massive pit. The pit becomes progressively steeper as it descends, with travelers finding themselves suddenly at the bottom without warning. From the bottom, the realm is enchanted so that despite having a gradual descent to enter this place, leaving the pit (in any direction) requires a steep climb up a sheer cliff for hundreds of feet. If travelers manage to survive the steep cliff face (and the creatures that hunt there) they can eventually pass to the banks of the river Styx and the ferry ride to the Fifth Circle.



The Lord of this pit is the Archduke Beelzebub, the Lord of Lies. He appears as a grotesque hybrid of man and fly, with buzzing wings and an insatiable lust for blood and killing.

The usual demonic creatures of this malodorous pit are those who are odd mélanges of human and animal. The Cubi (Succubi and Incubi) live in caves here, as do demonic harpies and winged Nightmares. The cliffs also abound with ugly crossbreeds of creatures that revel in filth and carnage. These aberrations of man and monster are terrifying to look upon, and most are able to fly across the sheer cliffs to gather prey. A typical member of this breed is the “Nalfeshnee,” who love to attack creatures attempting to rappel down the sides of the pit, rending some limb from limb while leaving others to fall to their doom.

Fifth Circle: Stygius

This area seems to merge with the river Styx into a horrific everglade swamp, with little ground above water and deformed plants and trees creating dangers and terrible fates for all. Unlike the Third Circle, the air is warm and humid with the smells of decomposition filling nostrils and evil vapors stinging eyes. Travel is slow, with monstrous creatures waiting to feed upon the unwary!

Most demonkind here are those who either love swampland (like the Hezrou) or who are powerful enough to clear some of the ground above the swamp to build small fortifications. The latter demons tend to be more snakelike than amphibian, and a typical example of this type of Fifth Circle demon are those called Marilith. These female demons prefer towers to any other type of structure, and prefer isolation to other pursuits; but will be merciless to intruders of their homes.

Sixth Circle: Dis

Unlike the other circles, when the barge deposits visitors on this far shore it is not on dirt but on a rusting iron pier, one of many that stretch across the banks on this side of the Styx; as far as the eye can see. Before these are the iron and rust colored towers, spires, walls and streets of the Iron City of Dis. Not only demons, but maddened Iron Golems rampage from street to street, eternally smashing souls, and victims. Rust monsters, evil Xorn, and others who enjoy such terrible places lurk in Dis's shadowy streets. There are many varieties of buildings and monuments here, but all are haunts of chaos and depravity. The river Lethe flows underneath the city and provides water for the rusty fountains found in Dis. Of course, the residents are immune to its effects but any non-demon/devil drinking it will (upon a failed WIS save at CL 15) become amnesiac and will refuse to leave Dis. Only a Remove Curse spell, cast by a 12th

level cleric can rescind this effect; the spell must be cast on the victim outside the circles of the Hells.

In such an aberrant realm, only the strongest of demonkind survive and thrive. One class of demon typical of the streets and spires of Dis are the “Balor.” They are the enforcers of Glasya’s edicts in Dis, and none of the circle’s inhabitants dares to offend them.

The Mayor of this hellish metropolis is the Archduchess Glasya Labolas. She is a devil of seductive beauty, appearing as a Succubus and dressed in exquisite finery. She is served by a court of 20 Cubi, all of which will have maximum hit points and powers. Her court also contains six Balor, who follow her commands and act as her generals and enforcers on this most ordered of the chaos pits.

From Chaos to Law: The Gates of the Diabolic Inferno

Crossing the Styx from the Sixth to the Seventh Circle passes from the domains of demonkind to the demesnes of the devils. Unlike demons, the ordered nature of the castes makes seizing circles and holding them unnecessary. As such, the various kinds of devil noted in **Table I** earlier can be found throughout any of the three circles and the clouds of purgatory. Naturally, only those with flying ability will be found in Purgatory but any can be encountered throughout Phlegethon, Eridanos, and Cocytus. Charon will grant transport from the sixth to the seventh circle as he has done before, but once within the diabolic realm bridges span the rivers and thus there is no further need for Charon’s services.

Seventh Circle: Phlegethon

Only a few dozen yards from the riverbank of Styx is the massive stone gate that allows entrance into this circle. Guarding this gateway is the mighty devil beast Cerebus, the three headed Hell Hound and defender of the passage to the Lawful Hells. No demon can pass Cerebus, and other intruders attempt such at their peril. Cerebus is immortal, but can be killed for a short time; a necessary act to pass him into the Seventh Circle and closer to the escape from the Inferno.

This Circle is swelteringly hot, with pools of boiling blood spattered across the region like wounds on a flayed hide. The land itself is rocky brimstone, with the dull reddish glow of heated coals providing some small illumination below the eternally night sky. Evil creatures of fire can be found here along with their own domains. Evil fire elementals, the Efreeti’s City of Brass and the lava pits of the salamandermen are all located here and revel in its fermenting corruption. Hellhounds and Hellcats also stalk this realm, attacking lost souls and each other with furious abandon.

Being one of the true realms of devilkind, this circle is ruled by the King of the south and of fiery evil, King Belial, also called Gorzon. He appears as a handsome older man of sophistication, though his horns, tail and goat legs reveal his devilish origin.

Eighth Circle: Eridanos

This circle appears, upon first glance, as a peaceful pastoral farmland, with castles and towers on the horizons and copses of trees scattered throughout. Farther in to the realm the river from which the circle gains its name has a wide stone bridge spanning its quiet eddies and flows. Upon closer inspection however, this pictorial scene changes. The vegetables in the fields have human faces, and scream as they are harvested and consumed. Demonic figures till the fields, and chop down the trees, which have shades of the damned hanging from them like fruit from the limbs of mundane orchard trees.

This circle has various devils serving their Dukes and other nobility in a caricature of the mortal world above, but with an underlying corruption and the truth of their evil and depravity always surfaces.

Barbed and Horned Devils perform many of the tasks here, and evil earth elementals follow the commands of the lordly devilkind at need. Seductively beautiful Eriynes and horribly visaged Annis Hags (see the **C&C Monsters & Treasures** tome) reside here in numbers, ruling as princesses or living as peasant wise women as the mood takes them.

This Circle is the domain of the monolithic power of the King of the North, King Zimmar. This monarch appears as a stone giant with the ubiquitous horns, tail and goat legs of his kind. Unemotional, he is nonetheless implacable when angered and will pursue enemies to eternity and beyond.

Ninth Circle: Cocytus (Ice)

After passing over the stone bridge into the lowest circle of the hells, the temperature begins to fall rapidly. After only an hour of travel it becomes quite cold, and the fertile fields of Eridanos give way to barren plain. Patches of brownish-yellow grass are covered in frost, and before long, a massive lake spreads across the horizon, its frozen surface shining like a dull mirror in the dusky light.

While many types of devil reside here, the lake is the favorite lair of the Ice Devils, who move with frightful speed and dexterity upon the frozen surface or lurk beneath the icy sheen, waiting to burst forth and devour their victims. Bearded Devils ply the shoreline, sometimes moving to the lake surface and cutting holes in the ice to fish for monstrous fish and other aberrations that lurk within the cold depths of this place.

This realm of icy damnation is the realm of the Queen of the frozen South, Lady Astoreth, also called Gomery. Her horns are ivory and polished to mirror sheen. Though appearing reasonable, she is merciless and enjoys freezing victims in the great lake of her realm.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, no one can escape the nine circles of the Hells without travelling to this demesne. Somewhere in this frigid place is the escape from the Hells. Some say it is a magical mirror that one simply enters to return to the upper world. Others say it is a golden ladder rising into the sky that must be climbed. Whatever it is, only Queen Gomery and her retinue (as well as the other Kings of the Hells) know its true location. Others will have to search, or attempt to force these mephistolic beings to reveal this secret.

Devils and Demons cannot use this escape unless summoned by magic from the mortal world. They are also prevented from destroying it or locking it away due to strange magics and divine admonishments. Barring those impedimenta, they nonetheless do their utmost to keep mortal interlopers and evil souls from using it to return to the world of their origin.

The Clouds of Purgatory:

The skies of the lower, three circles of the hells are the domain of the High King of Hell, Asmodeus Amaimon. His floating palace is built of volcanic rock and is the aerie for all sorts of winged devils who serve their dark lord and act as his messengers. Any attempting to escape the pits of evil that are the Hells must overcome the eagle eyes of the High King and his minions, by either cunning or force!

There are certainly other demons and devils not described here, but so many legends have sprung up about these infernal beings and their powers. Only those brave souls willing to face their evil may learn the truth.

Are you brave enough,
worthy Adventurers?



The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



*Editorial Note: Davis Chenault, perhaps the angriest of gamers, has been absent from these Troll Dens for a short while, and though his person is much missed, his wit is missed even more. Did I say wit? What I meant to say was his biting sarcasm, anger and utter disgust at all things. But in poking around some of the archival material, especially in the Seeker I found these little germs . . . you **might** think I meant gem . . . taken from The Seeker, the precursor to this esteemed Journal, that were written way back in the early days before May of 04 while we were working on C&C. Its his Notes from his Scrolls from the Troll Dens. Enjoy . . .*

Sometime in 03??

As Steve sits over at his desk singing the “Cotton Eyed Joe” and Todd lingers about his computer like a dusty dirt road around the General Store, I am busy devising schemes and schematas, perilous plots and coniving conspiracies to overtake the world with my little magazine. To help with this dastardly deed, I need your help.

Supporting this webzine has proven a difficult and onerous task. To wit, I need the following things to help make it easier:

Saturday Nights - Please order me a pizza with all the trimmings. I especially like sardines mixed with pineapples and some mustard on top. Delicious.



Every Morning - I need one pack of smokes. Now, for those of you who do not smoke, don't worry. I don't smoke 'em, I just look at them.

Friday Night – Please supply me with some cash, preferably \$1 bills but any small denomination will do.

Wendsday Afternoon – Please give me a nap. Make it along one.

May of 04

So Steve and I were sitting around at lunch eating \$2.00 steaks with some helpings of Mac and Cheese thrown onto the plate as aside. Mmmmm, scrumpdelileitious!!!! (Note: DO NOT COOK MAC AND CHEESE WITHOUT MILK - IT SUCKS).

So we had our weekly (now daily) rules meet, our daily meat as we like to think now, and up comes the range weapon discussion. If you know the two of us, you might know the direction this is going. So anyway, Steve wanted two shots a round with a bow and I wanted one. One is easier than two I was thinking. I mean, would you rather have one bill from your credit card or two. I think we can all agree on one.

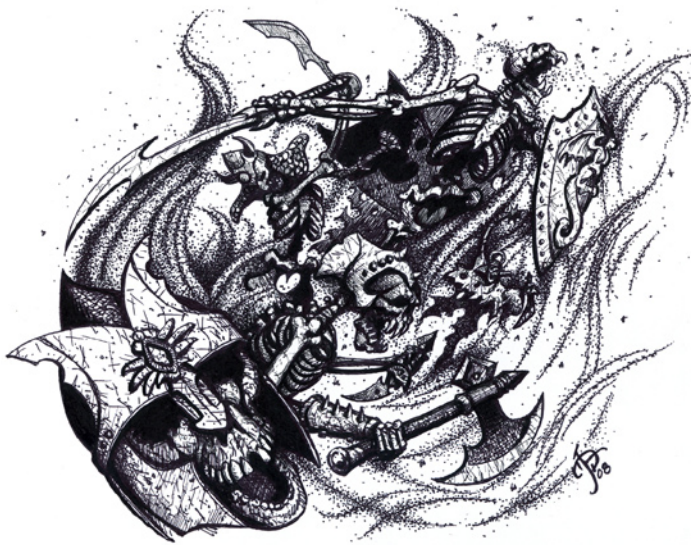
So it stood at a dead heat. Now, I get to make all the final rules decisions but am more than willing to listen to arguments contrary to my ruling. So I suggested to Steve that he prove he could throw two ‘weapons’ in a round with any amount of accuracy. Quicker than lickity split he picked up a fork and threw it really hard. I don't really know where he was aiming but it thunked right in my shoulder and stuck there!

So I looked down at it shaking my head and thinking, this really hurts - I am going to kill my brother. Steve fell off his chair laughing as I plucked the thing out of my shoulder. It was not deep though. Now I really started to think and counted to 10. ‘You lose nimwit, its been a round and you could not make your second attack.’

MONSTERS OF AIHRDE

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

The world of Aihrde spins upon an earth-like axis of ancient civilizations where good and evil have struggled for countless years. It is a world bearing the markings of its past; where ancient evils slumber, stained with the power of eldritch wizardry; where gods dwell in bejeweled halls of wonderment, worshiped by men and women of all creeds; where dragons live in great dens of heaped treasure; where the new stands upon the ruins of the old in beds of ancient glory. Here, kingdoms have risen and fallen, ground to dust by war, famine, plague or time. Aihrde is a world reborn, and in the After Winter Dark heroes tread in iron, shod boots and wizards lean on crooked staffs to plunder the buried wealth and power of the ages. Here, the eternal struggle goes on, age after age, for Aihrde is a world of adventure, of undaunted heroes, untainted by the decadent philosophies of those meek who suffer in the shadows of lesser men. For here, the stone columns of history are wiped clean, awaiting the bold to carve their mark and gain entry to the halls of immortality.



Naerlulthut

NO. APPEARING: Special (see below)

SIZE: Special (see below)

HD: Special (see below)

MOVE: 30 ft.

AC: Special (see below)

ATTACKS: Slam (see below)

SPECIAL: Darkvision 60 ft., Devouring Assimilation, Dust, SR 5

SAVES: Special

INT: Average

ALIGNMENT: Evil

TYPE: Undead

TREASURE: N/A

XP: 1 HD13+1 / 4 HD 150+4/8 HD 950+8

The naerlulthut are incorporeal creatures that dwell in the fields of ash left behind by the naerlulth. At times they

appear as whirling balls of ash, rolling or twisting through the devastation without purpose. When roused they begin to transform, assuming something of the shape they possessed in life, but it is little more than a hollow echo of it. Gaunt, skeletal creatures, their bodies elongated beyond imagining, their visages twisted with rage and madness, their clothes in tatters holding what weapons, if any, they held in life. But these are ghostly images of what was once real for the naerlulth, their mistress, devours all.

The naerlulthut are the spawn of the naerlulth, that dread creature of the darkness whose sole intent is to destroy the world about it (see Crusader No. 10). These, its children, are undead spirits whose bodies were devoured by the beast and whose souls were bound to it. These tormented spirits wander the ashen fields of the naerlulth's destruction, bound to the creature that made them. They have only faint memories of their former lives and these are usually haunting nightmares that do nothing but cause them the anguish of anticipation. Fear and hate consume these creatures.

The naerlulthut's natural form is one of dust, the spirit of the devoured creature lingering in the refuse left behind by the naerlulth. If in life it used a weapon such as a sword, it will do so in death, but the weapon is actually a part of it and not considered separate. When the creature becomes corporeal it takes the shape of what it was in life, an orc will appear as a gaunt or skeletal orc, a manticore as a gaunt and skeletal manticore and so on. No matter the shape it is restricted to one slam attack per round. However, its size does determine its HD and AC.

Small Creatures: HD 1(d12), AC 13

Medium Creatures: HD 4 (d12), AC 15

Large Creatures: HD 8 (d12), AC 17

Combat: Naerlulth appear as swirling clouds of dust drifting across the ashy fields. When living creatures (aside from insects or plants) pass near the creature they begin to change shape, turning into a vaguely corporeal form. They appear to be made of dust but with the shape of whatever they were

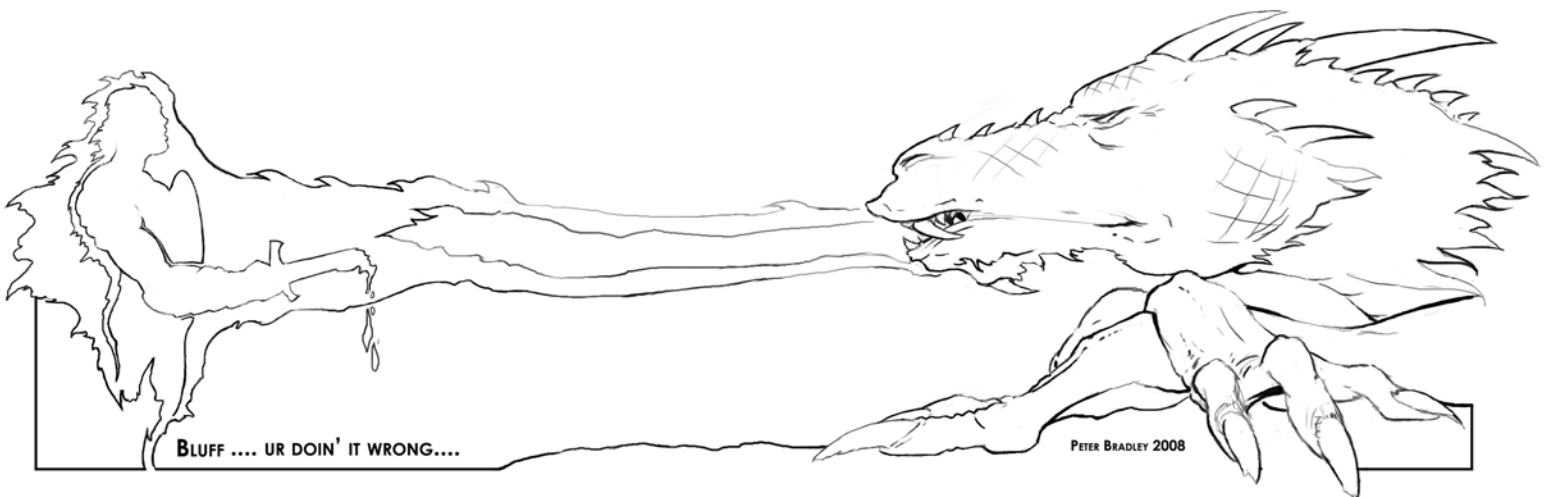
in life. Once they have changed shape they focus on the nearest living creature and attack it ferociously, even going so far as to pursue it if it should flee. It attacks until killed or turned. They do not leave the fields of dust and as soon as the creature they are pursuing leaves the naerlulth dissolves, vanishing into the dust once again. If the naerlulth is killed it dissolves back into the dust from whence it came, it is not destroyed however, after several days it regains its shape and terrorizes the wasteland once more. Turning the creature is the only way to permanently destroy them.

Devouring Assimilation: Whenever the naerlulth touches living flesh, the flesh becomes dry and cracked, turning black almost immediately. The flesh is destroyed only a little at a time. The initial contact causes 1d8 points of damage. After the initial contact and damage and for each round that the naerlulth continues to touch the victim it causes 1-2 points of constitution damage. Alert victims can quickly break away to avoid this damage, no check being necessary. Those unable to break away continue to suffer constitution damage until they eventually die, as the affect spreads from the initial point of contact throughout and across their whole body, turning them into dust. The victim dies when they reach 0 constitution points. The damage is not permanent unless the victim dies and can be cured with a restoration spell. Also victims regain 1 constitution point for every day of solid rest.

Dust: Naerlulths change shape, morphing from the dust that is their natural form into a more corporeal being. This change triggers when a living creature (excluding insects and plants) passes near the naerlulth and stays in the vicinity for any length of time. They begin taking shape from the dust of the desolation about them, slowly forming face, hands, arms and a torso until they have some portion of a body. Once they have taken form resurgent memories drive them to attack any creatures that they see. They keep the form until destroyed. It takes 1-4 rounds to change from dust to corporeal. Passing by a naerlulth causes the creature to begin taking shape but if the creature continues to pass the naerlulth loses its form, dissolving back into dust.

The Naerlulth in Aihrde

These creatures are very uncommon, only found where the naerlulth have dwelt for some time. They have no real connection to the Winter Dark or the Horned god, being entirely creations of the naerlulth. They hold no particular importance to the people's of Aihrde as few have encountered them and even fewer have unraveled their origins. Those that have, such as the White Order, have noted them as yet one more horror that survived the Winter Dark. Some elves have taken to bringing their dead and feeding them to the naerlulth so that their souls or spirits linger on the plane, this in hopes of defying the curse of old.





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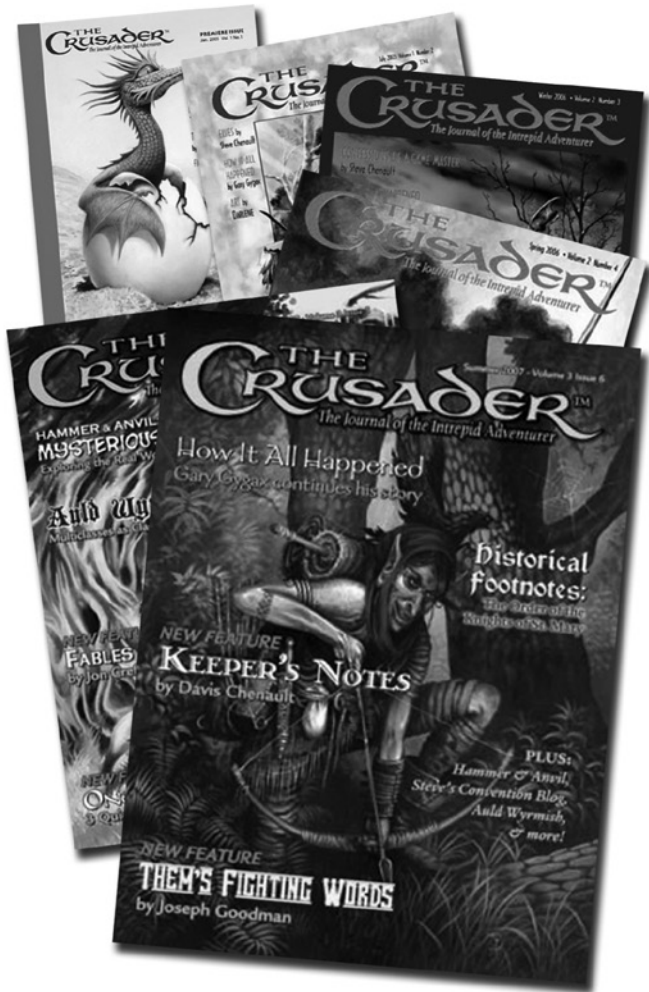
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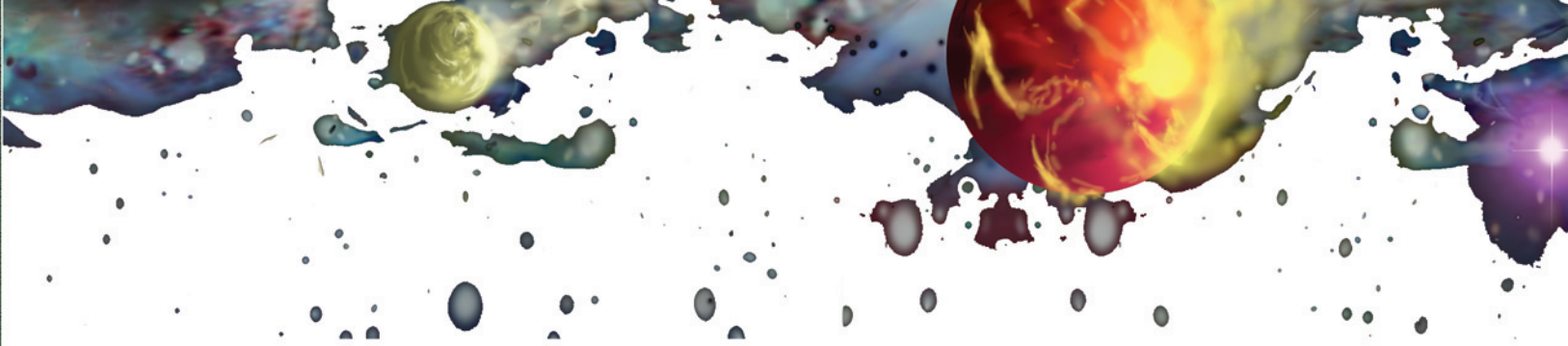
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