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THE CRUSADER™

The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer

EXPERIENCE
POINTS: WHEN
IS TOO LITTLE,
TOO MUCH?

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT.

NOTES FROM
THE MANAGING
EDITOR

BY JAMES M. WARD

HAMMER AND
ANVIL: CAST A
DEADLY SPELL

BY CASEY CANFIELD

GAME REVIEW:
RED DRAGON
INN

BY JAMES M. WARD

THE ANGRY
GAMER

BY A TROLL

TALES OF
THE RINGS OF
BRASS

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MONSTERS
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notes from the managing editor



James M. Ward

was born in 1951. Living a pleasantly long time, he has been happily married 38 years thanks to the patience of his wife, Janean. He has three equally charming sons, Breck, James, and Theon. They in turn have given him five startlingly charming grandchildren: Keely, Miriam, Sophia, Preston, and Teagan. Working here and there, he's managed to write the first science fiction RPG, METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA, several best selling CCGs including SPELLFIRE and DRAGON BALL Z, and a few novels including HALCYON BLITHE MIDSHIPWIZARD and HALCYON BLITHE DRAGONFRIGATE WIZARD. He likes to fence, the 'sword' type, not the 'put up' type. He spends a great deal of time looking for work. He reads science fiction and fantasy novels and occasionally something else when the cover looks interesting. Recently, he designed and tricked a company into producing his DRAGON LAIRDS board game and he's very happy with the results. If possible, he'd like to end up as the Captain of the starship Enterprise, but that job keeps getting taken before he can get his resume into the proper time stream.

Role-Playing is Dead (Not)

I hear the title of this rant all the time by people I like and respect. I try to take the time to tell them what a foolish statement it is. First, mankind has been role-playing since the cave man days as the shaman made images of the beasts on the walls and told tall tales in the firelight. As a teacher, I role-played with my students all the time and we all had fun. Second, when I ask them what is replacing role-playing they always say things like online games. I have a good laugh there, because what they are doing online is role-playing. What most of my friends are really saying is that paper and pencil role-playing isn't as popular as online role-playing. I would dispute that as well; surely we aren't selling role-playing products like TSR did in the eighties, but like all the rest of the games being played it's still there and still making money for several different companies, Troll Lords among them, thank goodness for that.

I've played several of the online games and of course the Blizzard giant WORLD OF WARCRAFT. I worked the system until I was 40th level with a couple of characters just so that I could have the cool mounts. Now, I'm told, you get the mount at 30th level, sigh. The vistas were incredible as my characters would stand on cliffs and look down into enchanted valleys. The visual of the monsters was way cool, as I would face undead, dinosaurs, and evil wizards. However, there were lots of things wrong with the system that really irritated an old gamer like myself. I couldn't play with other higher-level characters because the monsters keyed on the lowest level character in the group, me most of the time. I couldn't use the more powerful weapons and equipment, which really upset me as I could afford to buy that equipment, but couldn't use it. While the different dungeons are fun, there isn't near enough story lines for me and the quests didn't seem to have enough going to catch my interest. (I don't need hundreds of Blizzard fans writing in to disagree with me. Become your own managing editor and we will duel across magazines if we must.) Finally, when all is said and done, I'm sitting all alone in front of my computer, even if some of my friends are doing the same thing in

other parts of the country. I can tell you from vast experience it's much more fun sitting with a group of friends and playing the game with a good Castle Keeper in your own home with someone making snacks for you in the kitchen.

The fun of role-playing won't ever die. I'm proud to say that while I was doing my 20+ years at TSR we introduced many types of role-playing to millions and millions of people. Most of them are now over 40, but they are producing kids and showing them the fun of role-playing. Along the same lines, the smarter online players are going to look at paper role-playing and realize that they can have even more fun making their own campaigns. We aren't all computer programmers so online gamers don't get the thrill of making their own campaigns unless they pick up the paper and pencil products.

I would encourage all of you RPGers to drag in a new player as often as possible. All too often, the weekly campaigns just play with the same group of guys week after week. New players are perfect for laughing at when they make dumb mistakes.

Years ago, I was refereeing a METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA game with Gary Gygax and his son Ernie and a few others. I will never forget the look on Gary's face when he asked an artificial intelligence supply center for some chemicals to enhance strength and dexterity and the computer said that it had something like that, and how many metric tons did he want. That look on his face is one of my fondest memories and one that wouldn't happen across a computer terminal in an online game.

It's my belief that paper and pencil role-playing is alive and well. I'm happy to still see Gen Con happening every year and if you haven't gone to that excellent show, you really must. Steve sponsors Troll Lord conventions every year and you can see those dates in the pages of this magazine. At the very least, if you love the game as I do, take the time to inform your friends that our favorite gaming activity isn't dead.

James M. Ward

Managing Editor, CRUSADER



ALEA IACTA EST



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

Experience Points: When Is Too Little, Too Much?

It seems that every week it's the same thing. "How much experience do I have?" And every week I reply the same way: "I don't know, I haven't figured it up yet." They've already made 5th and 6th level and we've only been playing this game for a year or thereabouts. Sheesh, that's insanely fast compared to the olden times when they would play for a year and be lucky to pull out a level. I can remember giving experience only for a proper kill, or participating in that kill. If the character didn't do any damage or somehow impact the battle they got nothing. If they went unconscious they got nothing. If they did something stupid they got nothing and then lost some of it. Those were the days. Those are the days that your grandfather talks about when he tells you he had to walk uphill both ways to get to school. Though I may at times be like the grandfather with experience points, I do actually understand the importance of the experience points at the table. Without experience points there is no way to measure success in Castles & Crusades... I know one could be designed, and I can hear many of you pulling out your papers, pencils, abacuses, protractors and other gear in order to show me one... and receiving them is rather important to any game of C&C. Experience points may not be the driving thing making a game fun, but it certainly is the icing on the cake. Though the rules as set down in the Players Handbook are pretty broad and lay down a nice guideline for the game there are a few tricks to granting experience points that can help a game and a few pitfalls that can hinder. How often is too little, too much?

We are told that a character can gain experience points from Monsters, Money, Magic Items, Story, and Role Playing. Success in any one of these fields earns a certain amount of points, sometimes this amount is a hard and fast rule, such as with magic items, but other situations are left entirely up to the discretion of the CK, role-playing for instance. So if a paladin slays an ogre and gains a magic sword the CK knows what to give. Those points are listed in the rulebook. A great deal more experience could be handed out for that one encounter. Perhaps the player is a robust gamer and really gets into his game. During the 15 minute contest he's so bold as to say things like "I throw up my shield to block any downward swing, and slice at his thigh with my blade hoping to cut his leg out from under him." This encounter concludes the story arc and the now dead the ogre yields, along side the magic sword 1500gp

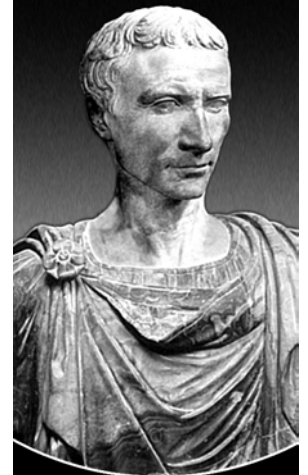
in coin and assorted treasure. This one encounter can yield a huge amount of experience, well over 2000, all this for slaying a simple ogre.

How much you should actually award depends on the pace of level progression you want the game to take. Level progression is a vitally important thing to any role-playing game, and I suspect any computer game as well. Gary Gygax aptly criticized the later incarnations of his game as having a level progression that was too fast for the playing table and the market. Characters gained experience too fast, leveled up quickly, and "finished" the game. Though this seems unrealistic to those of us who are veteran table top gamers, it is a real factor in that people buy the game, play for a while, and move on to other interests. Keeping them engaged is part of the marketing end of game progression. The level progression in C&C was tightened and deliberately set with breaks for this very reason, of course we opened the playing field by creating guidelines on how to award EXPs (experience points) if the players/CK desired a faster-paced game.

The fundamental discussion lies in the economic principle of investment versus return. If you put so many man-hours into setting up a game, prepping for it, making characters, and coming to grips with the background and you play a few sessions and find yourself rapidly rising to the top of the heap, i.e. gaining levels quickly, you run the risk of finishing the game. Before you know it, maybe after a year's time your characters are at the epic level. They've done so but have still only encountered half the actual monsters in the book and seen maybe one-tenth of the magic items. Now they are too high level and fighting those monsters or using those magic items is next to pointless and certainly not fun. The other extreme is just as bad (a problem I ran into from the olden times). Level advancement is so rare that you find yourself fighting the same monsters week after week because the characters have not gained any levels to actually take on the next HD level of monster. Magic items are so rare that you don't have the opportunity to play them and unless the story is crazy engaging you may find yourself in a retirement home before you reach a level high enough to actually slay the ancient red dragon.

Both of these extremes are rare, and though they can be fun and often memorable, they do tend to highlight the pitfalls of experience points. The foremost thing the Castle Keeper has to do is to decide how fast the level progression should be

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

before the game begins. Many factors play into this. How long your sessions are going to be, how often your group can meet, what level do you want to settle in at (i.e. do you want to play low level for a while or mid level longer, do you want to shy away from epic level). This should not be an arbitrary decision by the CK, but one reached at through consensus with the other players. The CK might be in the mood for a long winded 1st level dungeon masterpiece, but the players might want to be able to actually cast 3rd level spells at some point.

A good “for instance” occurred last year, or at some point in the distant past whenever it was we began our latest game. We had tried to revive our epic level, 20-year-long game that we like to call the Big Game. We started that fellow back in the early 80s and played it consistently until my army days and then picked it back up. Their level progression was crazy slow as I mentioned in the opening. After ten years of playing, sometimes two and three times a week they had averaged 8th to 10th level. Those games were fun, lots of fun. They were played when we were all single, in high school and college, and had nothing to worry about but a nuclear holocaust... something that Charlie and I longed for in order to prove our hypothesis that if we were nuked, we could cover ourselves in sheets of plastered mud to protect ourselves from mosquitoes. Hmm, strangely we were not so concerned about the nukes themselves, but rather the tremendous number of mosquitoes that blanket the state of Arkansas in the summer and spring... but I digress. Times are different now; we have jobs, wives, and families, along with truly gigantic time sumps such as houses, cell phones, and computers. For the most part we game every Wednesday night, but not for long. We manage to gather around 8-9 or such and play until about 12 to 12:30. So the games at best run about five hours, more realistically three or so. We certainly don't have the time to run another 20-year epic campaign. So we discussed altering the pace of the game a bit. We decided to increase the level progression quite a bit, making level in a few sessions and we would do this by making magic more readily available, but far more disposable. Once we settled on this, we quickly worked into a groove whereby they gained a level every three to five sessions.

Once the CK and players decide how fast the level progression is going to be, the CK can work out what he needs to do to award experience points. If it's slow, sticking with the monsters and treasure is easy enough to do. If it's fast, dropping on all the methods of gaining experience points is easy as well. But the middling progression is the hardest to settle upon. When is it too much and when is it too little? How to slow it down or pick it up when the game seems to be slipping from the progression level you've already chosen.

There is a plethora of options given to the CK for awarding experience points. Don't be shy to use them all or to use some of them or to change it from time to time. The experience point methods are a tool and should be used as such. It's a given that you are going to give EXPs for monsters and magic items, but treasure, storyline, and role-playing are entirely different things.

Using the option to award EXPs through the acquisition of treasure can get ridiculously out of control. In addition, because of this our players at the noble paladin's table have decided to not award treasure point EXPs. Our paladin who slew the ogre finds 300gp in coin and gems as well as a bone relic worth 1000gp. The decision to leave off EXPs for treasure seems a good one. The EXPs

for the treasure would have been almost three times that for actually killing the ogre. But in this instance the CK knows that the paladin is slipping behind the other party members in experience points. The player missed two sessions and lost a lot there, but paladins also need a little more than the average. Without consulting the players the CK makes a spot decision to award for the relic. To keep the whole event in line with the game he takes a moment to give the relic some meaning to the game. The relic is a bone from a cleric who served the paladin's deity. Pious and made a Saint by the church, the cleric's bones are holy items; though they do not confer any particular mechanical benefit, possessing one gains the paladin the full EXP value of the item, 1000 points. Here the CK has bent the rules to fit the game, aided the paladin in catching up with his fellows, and not lost any of the context of the game.

The storyline and role-playing experience point acquisition methods can be used in similar manners. Awarding a chunk of experience points for an adventure or some amazing role-playing is a quick and dirty way to progress games forward when the level

Most players are pretty smart and it's a safe bet that at least one player at the table can run decent numbers.

progression has slowed. They can be used as tools to slow it down as well, if the characters are gaining too much too fast, extend the period of time that the story arc covers. Having found the relic, the paladin now has to

return it to a church in the city of Fiume. When this is done the next chunk of EXPs for the story is awarded. Of course, there is no need to tell the players this; they don't particularly need to know when they are getting experience points as this can lead to other problems.

Tracking experience points after each session allows both you and the players to settle on a rhythm. This is not really a good thing. Most players are pretty smart and it's a safe bet that at least one player at the table can run decent numbers. They'll quickly figure out what they are earning EXPs for and how to earn more and worse, be able to catch you when you want to slip one player a little more or little less to keep the whole progression in line with the tone you set at the outset. Make it a standard to only award it when someone gains a level, after a certain number of sessions or upon the conclusion of the present adventure. You don't really have to track this to the exact numbers, as the CK you should have a pretty good idea of how much they are earning and if someone is creeping toward the next level. This allows you to run a few games at a lower level as you haven't awarded the EXPs yet. Or on the other hand to jump start some levels if you see they are falling behind or haven't made much progress. My players often have no idea where their experience points are coming from, but that's because I pointedly avoid a formulae... either that or I'm really lazy and it's worked out quite well. You can be the judge.

My lazy style of CKing has led to an amazing ability to embrace arbitrary numbers. Following a strict guideline of experience point acquisition can cause contention across the table when your players realize that you may be manipulating the level progression to fit the table's needs. Sometimes adventures go very poorly, players roll horribly and mayhem ensues. Although I'm not opposed to hard CKing and running games where the challenge is tremendous, we do have to remember that the game is one for fun and four sessions of playing the paladin in which no hits are scored, nothing heroic is done, and nothing is achieved can wear on the most thick skinned of players. It's important to make certain that the characters, if they survive get something out of their toil. Few people show up to the

table in order to wander through the squalor of life and relive the miserable conditions of lackluster homeless living in empty carts with no prospects and no hope. As JT says in Pulp Fiction, "They have a word for that Jules, it's called a Bum." No one really wants to play a bum. So when things are out of whack at the table don't hesitate to pull a few numbers out of the air and bring the planets back into orbit so the characters can get into the heroic adventure that they probably sat down at the table to play.

In truth, what does any CK gain by being stingy with EXPs? Being stingy with experience points should only be done when the game requires it, i.e. to slow down progression or when the players do something amazingly stupid. I ran a group years ago in which I gave them adequate warning that the coming encounter was going to be very, very tough and they should really stick together. When the wave of worg riding goblins and orc footman attacked the party from all sides the rogue climbed a tree, the magic user used his wand and teleported out of there, the ranger ran off into the woods attempting to conceal himself, the paladin charged and the cleric and fighter stood back to back to fight off the goblins. Though through some miracle many of these survived the encounter, I was not generous with EXPs, awarding next to none if any. Awarding EXPs isn't rocket science and these things aren't like gems found on the beach. They are points that track the progression and power of the characters. Award them when character's actions warrant it or when the events at the table demand it. Don't succumb to CK peer pressure and that nonsense about 'you're too soft of a CK.' I can't imagine a scenario in which I'm running a game in which any character could not be fairly beaten to a pulp by a CK. Monsters are plentiful and powerful.

Of course the CK is powerful and the experience points are a tool designed to forward the adventure, the game and the fun everyone is having and able to have at the table. Abusing that power is really not a good idea. Players can quickly pick up on a CK who has no control over what he's doing behind the screens with experience points. Though some arbitrary numbers may be tossed over the screen, complete arbitrary actions are not advised. Give yourself guidelines and play around with the various methods. Push their limits and test their capabilities. Test what you are willing to do with them and don't be afraid to try to manipulate them to your own style and the needs of the players and game.

I really don't like doing experience points. Everyone at my table knows that. Its not that I don't like the system or don't want to see the characters gain levels, but it's more that I want to game and don't want to have to do a checkbook-like math table in order to continue. I know that if I take it from another angle, from the player's angle that every week it's the same thing: *"That lazy CK forgot to work up the experience points. How hard can that be?"*

Thanks for Playing,

Steve Chenault



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Castles & Crusades



When the publisher of this magazine first approached me about writing a column to replace Gary's column, I had misgivings. How could I, his first editor and employee, hope to take his place? Well, I can't really. What I can do is fill this space and try to explain how it was in the "good old days". Rest assured I don't feel qualified to replace Gary; all I can do is write a column instead of him.

Shortly after I went to work for TSR, sometime in the latter part of 1976 or very early in 1977, I was dealing with a lady writer from some publication or other (I think she wrote for a newspaper) who apparently had drawn the short straw in the Features Dept. and been assigned to look into "this D&D thing" by her editor.

She knew absolutely nothing about the game (which put her in the camp of the other 99% of people that had no knowledge of the growing phenomenon); and asked me to describe the play of this novel concept in as few words as possible. I thought a minute and then came up with an explanation that I subsequently used dozens of times later. I'm paraphrasing slightly here because the memory dims after so many years; I told her that it was as though the DM-as-author outlined the plot given the characters he had to work with relying upon them and subsequent events to flesh out the story and supply the dialogue. I categorized the result as "theater of the mind".

Lately, I have been thinking about that concept a lot. When I was very young, like third or fourth grade, I had the misfortune to get mumps, chickenpox and measles all in the span of about three months; my poor Mom had to deal with me stuck at home for about six weeks of that time. Luckily for me, she was an avid reader, visiting our bookmobile almost weekly and bringing me new books to read each trip. As much as I loved to read, it got tiring after a bit, and I discovered the world of radio soap operas. I'm too young to have listened to the classic radio serials like *The Shadow* or *Little Orphan Annie*; I got soaps. (How many of you knew that *The Guiding Light* started on radio long before TV was even feasible?) As you listened, it was up to you to follow along in your head, filling in the details with your imagination. Aside from books, where is anyone called upon to do that now, save paper and pencil RPGs?

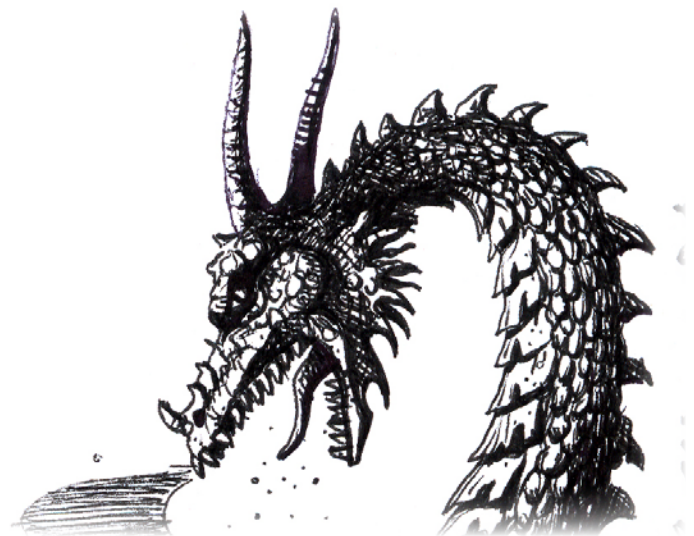
Video and computer games obviate the need for that skill; everything is right there for you to see with your eyes, not your mind. Small wonder then, that today's potential young gamers have such difficulty in embracing RPGs; they don't have the same skill set that we earliest gamers possessed. If you've never had to envision a whole story in your head before, it's pretty hard to jump into *Castles & Crusades* or any other RPG with both feet.

In my first adventure, played at GenCon in '74, I am sure that each of us in the group, as we were being encased in some sort of

transparent solid and lasered into little cubes, had a slightly different picture in our mind's eye. This didn't matter in the least as we were all convinced that our plucky characters were now thoroughly dead. But, we were all playing in our own "theatre of the mind", and collectively having a ball.

As an older gamer (I've been playing wargames since 1961) I wonder where that ability to play in the eyes of the mind is going to come from now. With the plethora of action figures and their respective arsenals of vehicles and weapons, the proliferation of passive-sedentary computer and video games, the wealth of good movies whether animated or live-action, and the appalling decline of reading skills, where are young people being called upon to exercise their imaginations?

As to future columns, what do you, the readers, want to hear about? Tales of the "good ole days" (they seldom were as good as we remember), background on development of RPGs, the joys and tribulations of game development and magazine editing, being the "answer-man" for a couple of years at TSR, BITD stories? Let our fine Editor, Jim Ward (of whom I am proud to say "friend and long acquaintance") know, and I will try to satisfy your wishes.



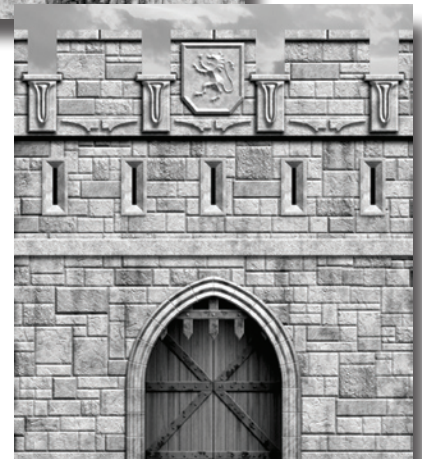
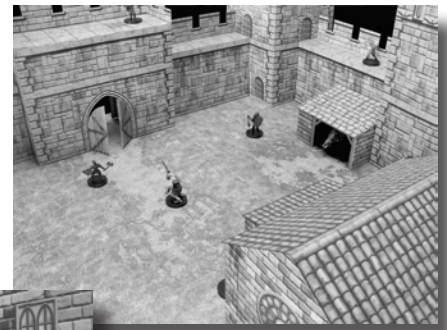
Probably the least known option for three dimensional terrain available to the RPG or miniature enthusiast is paper terrain. Year after year at the various gaming conventions we attend I am amazed at the number of people who have never seen card model terrain until they stumble across our booth. Today there are a staggering number of quality 3D and 2D model sets available on the market, from dungeons and castles to mountains and forest. Paper terrain offers the consumer an incredibly inexpensive, rugged and lightweight option for their gaming table. Most sets are available as PDF downloads from the various manufacturers, making this option even more desirable as the consumer can print as many walls, trees and parts as required with no further purchases required. All that is needed to start this addictive hobby is a small selection of tools including a good hobby knife, a straight edge, toothpicks (for applying glue), a cutting surface and a good paper glue. If you are downloading the models off the internet and printing at home a pack of cardstock from your local office supply store is also required.

Fat Dragon Games specializes in downloadable cardstock models, offering the widest selection of RPG and wargaming subjects available. Our Fall 2008 and Winter 2009 releases include some of our most ambitious offerings yet. All models are available for direct download from our website (www.fatdragongames.com) and many are also available on CDRom via your local hobby shop.

For those wanting to take their game out of the dungeon we have our new E-Z TERRAIN series. E-Z TERRAIN brings you the most detailed outdoor landscape card model sets available. The first set in this series, *Cliffs and Mountains* (FDG0044), allows you to build fully customizable 28mm cliff terrain quickly and easily (please note that this set could easily be used for 15mm scale as well.) Our exclusive E-Z KEY design keeps all individual cliff sections perfectly aligned and eliminates shifting during play, allowing you to build massive designs without worry. Our design also allows you to have figures 'climb' wall sections and we offer hot-swappable cave openings, climbing walls and cliff ledges so you can customize your design on the fly with ease.

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2009 will also see some exclusive C&C releases as well as new releases for our E-Z Dungeons model series. The C&C releases will include a set of siege engines, perfect for use with our *Borderland Keep* model set (FDG0046).



The Red Dragon Inn

Players: 2-4 (expansion available)

Ages: 13+

Play Time: four players took 1.75 hours

ISBN 0-9769144-1-7

Stock Number: SFG 004

Company: Slugfest Games

www.slugfestgames.com

BOTTOM LINE: Buy it, love it, play it



The Slugfest Games Company puts out an unusual number of fun games and **THE RED DRAGON INN** is no exception.

The theme of the game is simple. You play the part of an adventurer back from an exciting adventure. You have gold to spend and you want to relax in the Red Dragon Inn, your favorite hang out.

Each player is given two marking counters, a deck of cards, a supply of gold coins, and a game board to keep track of things. One marker keeps track of how healthy you are, and the other measures how drunk you are. If you run out of gold or your alcohol level equals or exceeds your Fortitude level you are out of the game.

Once everything is set up, you start doing the things any fantasy hero would do at their favorite inn. The cards have you gambling, drinking, and buying rounds for your friends through the play of the cards.

There are four characters in the basic game and each has a deck of cards that allows them to do things in the game and reflects their basic natures. Zot the Wizard is very good at

gambling and has magical spells that help him avoid

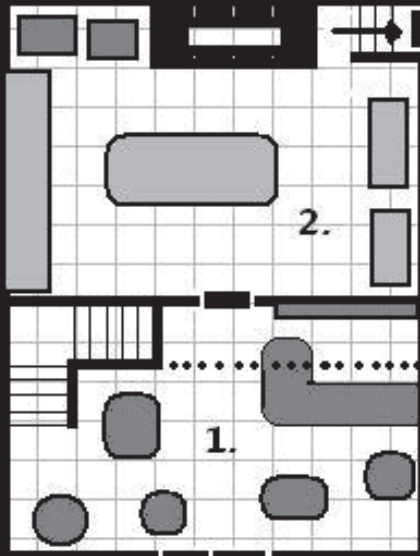
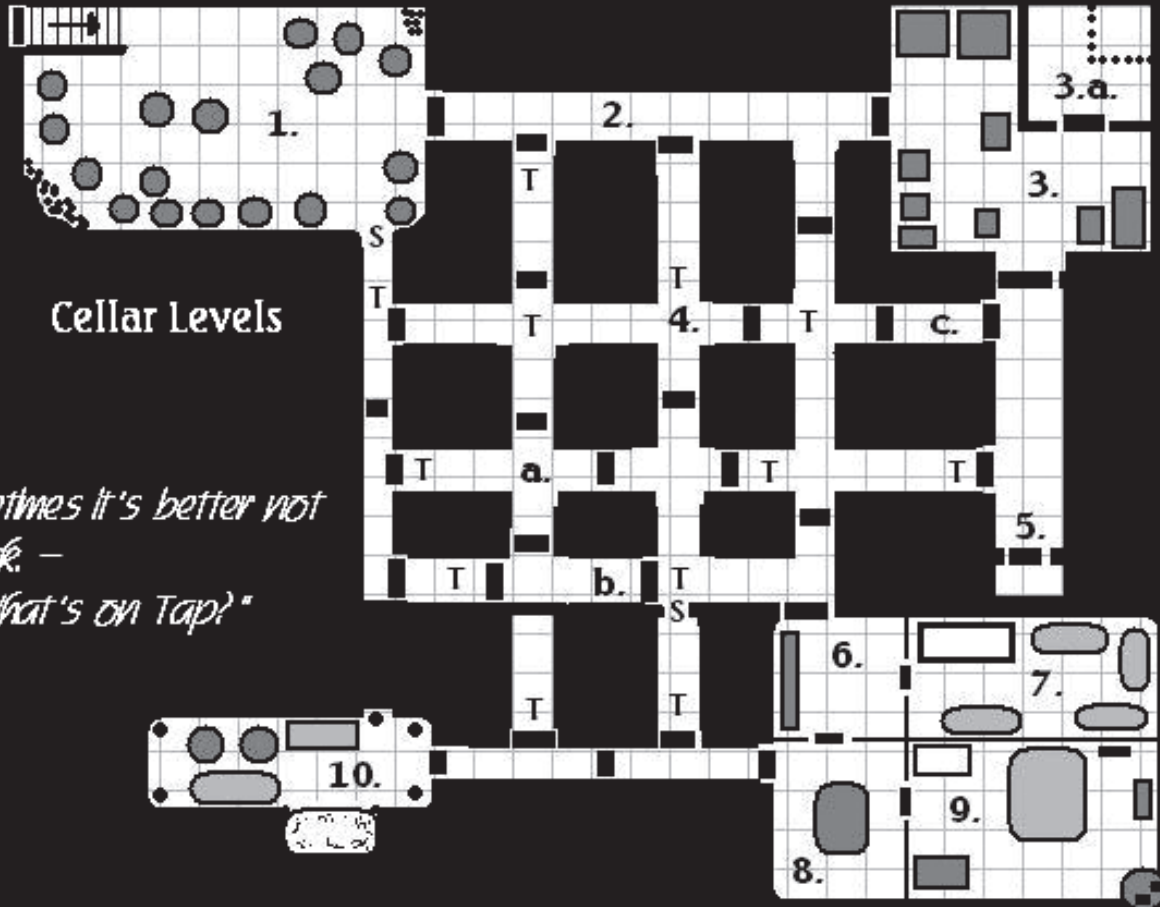
the dangers of the inn. Gerki is a thief type and is so good at gambling most try to get out of the game when he starts one. The bold warrior of the group is a pretty and huge thing calling herself Fiona the Volatile. She can drink a lot which is a huge advantage in this game. Both times I played, I was the Priestess Diedre (chosen randomly both times.) I didn't handle the many drinks very well, but every once in awhile I was allowed to pray to help myself out as the goddess likes to keep me from harm.

The cards are very clear and the only problem we had while playing was a liberal view of some of the text on the cards, as they didn't go our way. Some of the cards do need a bit more explaining than what is given in the rules or on the cards themselves.

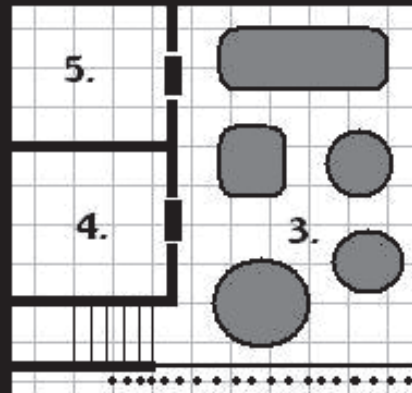
I played the first game, lost terribly, and enjoyed myself enough to want to play a second game right away. We played that game, I enjoyed myself even more knowing the rules, and I still lost terribly. My goddess must have been doing something else that day. Sigh.



A Darker Shade of Ale



"The Door House"
First Floor



"The Door House"
Upper Floor

■ = 3 Feet

A Darker Shade of Ale

An Adventure for Castles & Crusades

By John William Wright

Introduction

The adventure you hold in your hands is intended either as a stand-alone one-shot or as material that could be incorporated into a larger game or campaign. "A Darker Shade of Ale" is meant to be played with the Castles & Crusades® RPG as published by Troll Lord Games. It is intended for player characters of 3rd–4th levels, and is meant as an adventure encounter for a party of 3–6 characters.

Background

In every city or town there are taverns like "The Door House." Karl Rockheimer, a human assassin who seemingly "settled" into his life here, runs the Door House, so-named for the exquisitely carved bas-relief wooden double doors leading into the establishment; the relief carvings depict all manners of heroic feats from the world at large. The clientele of the bar is rowdy, often catering to the transient adventurer type, as well as two or three "regulars" from the town. Some months ago, however, the Door House saw an upsurge in popularity with the introduction of two new ales: the Red and the Green, the flavor of which was said to be intoxicatingly exquisite. In addition, the Red ale seemed to give drinkers a burst of heartiness (+1 to CON for a day after a mug), while the Green ale seemed to enhance the senses (+1 to all spot, listen checks for a day). These Ales are expensive (5 g.p. per pint), but many have flocked to the tavern to purchase the Red and Green ales.

Of course, good libations are needed in times like these – for the town or city that the Door House resides in has seen some recent criminal activity, most notably the mysterious disappearances of elves, half-elves and dwarves. There is fear of some form of racial strife about the town.

For the Castle Keeper

Karl has a secret ingredient to his new draughts. He and his small group of thugs are behind the demi-human disappearances. He is draining elf blood and dwarf blood as additives to his ale. Elf blood goes to the Green ale, dwarf blood to the Red. Karl discovered the benefits of using blood like this some time ago, but spent several years quietly building his cellars to accommodate his plans. There is also a drawback to the draughts – after drinking the 5th pint, each additional pint will increase (3% chance with each additional drink) that the imbiber will become anemic and will start bleeding out with wounds from battle (2–3 × damage at CK discretion unless disease cured). Karl designed the hall-maze and traps as a way not just to keep his secret safe, but also to provide potential additional "donors" for his ingredient. Lastly, his sadistic nature just enjoys seeing people suffer under his "ingenuity." Stats for NPCs of note will be provided at the end of the adventure.

"The Door House"

1. Main Room – Roughly 65' × 36' room, dominated by the old oak staircase on the left side of the room and the bar to the right. Several small tables fill the lower portion, and several wooden stools line the bar. Looking up, patrons can see the open rail along the upper area, with the roof sloping forward over this portion. A heavy iron candelabrum hangs in the center from the sloping roof, held by a sturdy chain to the ceiling.

At any given time there are 1d4+1 ruffians of various classes here, as well as two "regulars," Donk the Frosty (Male Gnome) and Hory Jhones (Male human), both usually at the bar. Donk and Hory are pretty devoted to Karl and their taste in the ale here, and are likely to jump in to his aid if the occasion should ever occur.

The bartender is a rather homely human woman named Durva, whose appearance reveals her past as a fighter who adventured with Karl. She is still his "muscle" in the tavern itself, and is quite capable of ejecting troublesome guests. She knows well Karl's secret, and keeps an eye out for anyone who seems to be too interested in the subject (beyond just drinking, that is).

In addition to the Red and Green ales, the tavern still has other selection of regular ales, wines and alcohols at fairly standard prices. The tavern also serves basic courses of food, good if not spectacular, including: salted beef mash; roast duck in pickle puree; stack 'o wings 'n legs (heavily fried poultry wings & legs);

2. The Kitchen – Dominated by the fireplace on the N wall. The cook is a half-orc named Gloth Ganuk. He is a decent cook, and also acts as primary guard for the entrance into the cellars (he has a key). There is very little of value here, other than the meats that Gloth is preparing. Gloth tends to cook with a flourish, admonishing the short human assistant he has working for him, Brayan. If battle occurs, Brayan flees (he knows nothing of Karl's real dealings). The stair leads down, and the door is locked (opens either with key or against CL 2 to pick lock).

3. Upper Room – The upper floor common room looks out over the lower room, and then curves around to the back where the 2nd floor fireplace provides warmth and comfort. The clientele here usually consists of 1d4+1 table usually occupied by 2-3 individuals of various class and demeanor.

4. Private Room – This room for private dinners or meetings can be rented from Durva (in not already occupied) for 5 s.p./hour plus the costs of food and drink. It may or may not currently be hosting a meeting of several rogues from the town.

The Cellars

1. The Wine Cellar – The first room of the cellar complex is primarily a standard wine and ale cellar, with numerous barrels containing a wide variety of wines, ales and alcohols. The secret door opens to the S (CL 1 to find, unlocked if found). The primary door to



the E is locked, and the cook's key is not the one that opens this door. CL 2 to pick, AC 18 (stone door), as if 40 HPs to bash through.

2. The Pantry Hall – This long hall is the primary connection between the dry/cold storage at 3. and the wine cellar. Two of Karl's thugs are lounging here, pausing between carrying large sides of beef from the storage to the kitchen. Stats: Fighters LV 3; HPs 20, 21; AC 16 (Studded Leather Armor); Long swords as weapons. Each has a pouch with 2d10+2 g.p.

3. The Dry/Cold Storage Pantry – The doors into this room are not locked, just shut. The primary room here holds numerous boxes and crates, filled with dry goods and foodstuffs. The 2nd area, 3a. Cold Locker, features a floor of metal grid plates under which ice is kept and replenished regularly. Sides of beef, pork, venison and other meats are stored here. There is a trap door in the ceiling leading up to a hidden entrance that is in an out of the way alley way a block or two away from the Door House. Karl also keeps this as a potential escape route as well.

4. The Door & Trap Cellar Halls – Karl built his cellar complex around a series of interconnected hallways, filled with locked doors and traps, designed to not only keep the curious from discovering the Door House's secret, but also to expedite additional "material" for his ales. Karl and his men use what they refer to as "the direct route," meaning the third hallway S away from 2 (the hall with the offset rather than flush door) that leads all the way to Karl's quarters at 6. The trap at the first intersection of the hall (just West beyond the door from 4c.) is a pressure plate gas trap (sleep unless dexterity save) that can be deactivated easily with a key carried by Karl, his chief lieutenant Alton, or Durva. Otherwise, it is a CL 2 to find, CL 3 to disarm (it is also possible to jump with a successful dex check CL 2, but missing negates the chance of a save for the individuals involved).

All the doors are locked – CL 2 to pick lock; treat each door as AC 16 with 40 HPs (the sound of basing door after door certain to raise an alarm of all involved in the Door House, including Durva, Gloth, Donk and Hory). The traps listed are (randomly) one of three types (use 2d6 to determine):

1-2: Trip wire activating poison darts – three darts released, dex save to avoid for EACH (CL 3); constitution check (CL 2) for resist

(half) damage from the poison – 1d4+2 HPs damage initial plus 1d4+1 additional damage each minute after.

3-4: Pressure plate activating gas (as sleep spell) in confined hallway – saves as above.

5-6: Spike pit trap – CL 3 to find, CL 2 to disarm/jam. If sprung, character or characters standing on 5x5 area are dropped into 10' deep pit lined on the bottom with numerous sharp metal stakes – dexterity save to take half-damage, 2d6+2 HP's.

Karl has also set some special surprises in three of the corridors:

4a. The Chained Gnoll – Karl has a captured and chained (15' chain) Gnoll, AC 15, 14 HPs, Slam attack, here – it is kept hungry and will attack at once the first person to enter through any of the doors leading to this area.

4b. J'Thok – J'Thok is an Ogre (AC 16, 25 HPs, Slam attack) that Karl and Alton have captured and set in this part of the dungeon – they keep him remotely happy with copious amounts of red bloody meat, and the promise he can keep any gold on victims he disposes of here. He has a pile of large furs in the hall to sleep on. J'Thok is becoming bored with this job, however, and has recently thought about simply smashing his way out of the cellars.

4c. Gray Ooze – In this hallway is a Gray Ooze, the one creature kept by Karl in these hallways that doesn't leave much in way of "material," though it has proven useful in simply stopping the prying eyes of adventurers. AC 5, HPs 19, Acid attacks and special (see M&T pg. 64).

5. Karl's Pet Mimic – The "door" at the South end of this hallway is a faux door that gives the impression it leads to Karl's



quarters. It is, instead, a mimic kept as another pet and defensive trick for unsuspecting “visitors.” Karl keeps the mimic constantly fed, and encourages it to enjoy its kills... indeed, Karl doesn’t mind using the mimic to test new would-be thugs... if they survive, they’re good enough to hire... if not, well, human blood doesn’t do much so he just lets the mimic feed. AC 15, HPs 37, Slam attack and special (see M&T pg. 59).

6. Armory and Closet – The 1st room in the four-room quarters area is a dressing and armory. A low bench allows for sitting, and racks and wooden lockers dot the room. Currently there are 3 long swords, a hammer, a mace, 2 sets of studded leather armor, several knives, and a cat ‘o nine tails here. In this area, only the door into area 9 is kept locked. The walls between the four chambers are relatively thin wood partitions, rather than rock, and a strong character could conceivably bash through them during combat.

7. Karl’s Thugs’ Dorm – Four sets of bunk beds serve as quarters for 7 thugs, including Alton (Durva sleeps with Karl, Gloth has a mat he rolls out in the kitchen or the wine cellar). There is currently one thug sleeping here (stats as #2 above, but AC 11 as undressed and sleeping). There is a table in the NW part of the room, on which are scattered dirty bowls and spoons, and the table is grimy with sticky spilled food. An open, half-drunk bottle of good wine sits there as well. Under each of the mattresses is a small alcove slot containing the possessions of the thugs – each has a sack containing (randomly) 20-45 g.p. and 2d6 p.p. One of the thugs also has a trashy, pulpish story scroll called “*The Blood and Love of Leget the Half-Elf.*” One bunk is currently unoccupied.

8. Common Room – Two of the thugs are sitting here playing a card and dice game. Depending on how careful the party is at listening and remaining quiet before entering, there is a chance they can wait till the two hit a particularly heated moment and thus catch them by surprise. Thugs: same stats as area 2 above.

9. Karl and Durva’s Room – Nicely furnished, Karl and Durva have silk bedspreads (worth 7 g.p.), a running water basin in the corner (courtesy the generosity of a druid friend of Karl’s who managed to instill a once-a-day create water spell into the stone basin), a silver-lined mirror standing next to the bed (17 g.p.), and a locked chest. The chest has a trap, CL 2 to find, CL 4 to disarm, which shoots a poisoned dart into the person who trips it (same as darts in area 4). CL 3 to unlock the chest, the contents of which include: an *Efficient Quiver*, a *Ring of Water Walking*; 175 g.p., 28 p.p., and 108 s.p., as well as 1 diamond (100 g.p.), and 2 other gems (25 and 15 g.p. value). Finally, there is an exquisite silver-handled knife (+1).

10. The “Mixing” Room – This secluded alcove room is the reason for all the defense of the cellar – it is here that Karl and Alton drain the demi-human blood from their victims and mix it with their base ale (a fairly cheap base bought by the barrel from a wholesaler in another town). The room has a metallic table flanked by two large cisterns, one of which elf-blood goes into, the other dwarf. There is a table under which the barrels of base ale are put, and through holes above on the table exact quantities are measured and poured into these barrels, which are then taken to 1. above to await service. Currently, Karl and Alton are here with one other thug, draining the blood of a youthful and comely female elf, unfortunately quite dead. There are pipes leading from the ceiling in four corners of the room, as well as one in the north wall, which feed away from the chamber to the sewers, as well as feeding rainwater for cleaning into the chamber from a cistern above. In the south wall is an alcove with

a stone basin, filled with acid. Karl uses the acid bath to dispose of used bodies, although sometimes he uses what’s left as food for the mimic at 5.

RPC Stats:

Karl Rockheimer – NE Human Assassin LV 5, AC 17 (Dex +2, Studded Leather Armor, Bracers +1); Short Sword +1. STR 13, *DEX 17, CON 12, *INT 14, *WIS 12, CHA 9. Also has: pouch with 23 g.p. and 10 p.p.; *Ring of Protection from Good +1*; Repeating hand-held crossbow on belt.

Alton – CN Human Fighter LV 4, AC 16 (Studded Leather + Bracers), Long sword; Belt pouch with 2 gems (10 g.p. and 25 g.p.). *STR 18, *DEX 14, *CON 14, INT 8, WIS 10, CHA 11.

Durva – NE Human Fighter LV 5, AC 17 (Leather Armor +1 plus Dex +2), Crossbow and Bastard sword; *STR 16, *DEX 15, CON 12, INT 10, *WIS 12, CHA 9). Also has: belt pouch with 17 g.p., protects change at bar which varies from 12 g.p. to 200+ on any given night.

Gloth Ganuk – NE Half-Orc Cook/Fighter (treat as 1st level), AC 12, HPs 14, attacks with various kitchen implements, especially meat cleaver.



Castles & Crusades
MONSTERS & TREASURE
 8.5 x 11 hardback, 128 pages; \$19.99
 Ordering Info: TLG 80113

The latest incarnation of the C&C Monsters & Treasure debuts a new look, with more interior art, expanded index and some rules clarifications.

March, 2009





Journeyman Printer, Shipping and Receiving, Convention Hound, Lord of the Bread:

Mark Sandy cut his teeth in the wilds of Iowa. As a young man, his family limbered up their wagons and headed south to the cotton belt where they immersed themselves in the rice fields of eastern Arkansas. After discovering the only VW Bug that has both a manual and automatic transmission, Mark became entranced with all things bizarre and that partially worked. Thus, his joining Troll Lord Games was a natural next step. Mark has long been associated with Troll Lord Games, attending and helping with the Troll Lords at various conventions across the country. He participated in the great Troll Trans-migration of 2002 when he Davis and Todd wandered from coast to coast trying to earn gas money to return to the dens, all the while Steve gloated and grew fat on the proceeds of their wanderings...but we digress.

On March 31, 2008 Mark Sandy joined the Troll team full time. He's been buried in the warehouse working the machines and running the mailroom and inventory. Mark remains somewhat isolated as the warehouse has no phone lines. He remains buried in paper, boxes and half repaired gear!

Designing a game mechanic can be difficult. Creating a mathematical system to resolve the actions of the characters which is both easy to learn and play, reasonably realistic, and versatile enough to encompass all the actions a character may take can be an epic struggle. There is certainly a whole lot more involved than just throwing some charts together.

For me, I would put playability near the top of the list of important elements. Highly playable systems generally have everything laid out ahead of time, and allow little room for variation.

Of course, the more playable a system, the less "realistic" it is. Not only are important factors down-played or left out altogether, but so is the ability of the player to customize his character. That's fine if you are playing a one shot or a board game, but if you are looking at a lengthy campaign, you probably want the characters to be more distinctive than that. This can run into the trap of trying to include too many factors, and a ton of math. Although those of us with a math background might find a certain appeal to a math heavy system, such systems try to include as many factors as can logically influence a situation, for the sake of realism. They quickly become bogged down in the math, and can disrupt the flow of play. While a skill point system may allow for a truly customized character, character generation is an ordeal, advancement is a chore, and play

is slow. When the characters are in the middle of a life and death struggle, who really wants to wait for someone to add all their bonuses up? It's painful enough watching Davis add 13 and 6 on his fingers in a simple system like C&C. Can't even imagine what it would be like in a percentile/ skill point system. Flow should be quick and smooth, and the mechanic should require so little thought that it should be practically invisible.

What it boils down to is this: class-based or skill-based? The answer is both. Use the classes to determine the availability of skills and then allow the player to emphasize the skills he favors.

Having decided that, we have now almost started. Now we must come up with a mechanic that players can understand and which will hopefully, cover all the bases. Of all the mechanics out there, the one that is likely the most versatile is the percentile system. It is as easy to learn as any other, and it has a sort of mathematical purity to it. What it lacks is all the cool dice. Let's face it: we like the d20 and the d8 and the d4. They are familiar, traditional, and have a sort of character to them. Besides, we all have buckets of them around so we should use them.

There any number of elements to consider at this point. Will attributes be defined separately from skills? Will skill checks solely be success/fail or will the degree of success/fail be taken into consideration? What sort of factors will be allowed to modify skill checks? Will combat (not only the most used skill, but the one with the most possible influential factors) be resolved the same as other skills? Just coming up with a decent combat system which makes sense and is fun to play is a headache. I got notebooks full of systems that just don't quite make it.

Spend a few months playing with different ideas, and you will find that every system with any validity to it works well in one aspect and not so much in others. More months of use and you will realize that there is no perfect system. Combat might work great but spell casting is broken, skills make sense but advancement is unbalanced. There will always be something. You could proceed with the mechanic that works most of the time, or you can choose to abandon the one-rule game and use two or three or four different mechanisms together, each designed for a different purpose.

Now that you got the foundation of a game, spend about six months tweaking it, work out the kinks. Fit it to a setting (don't tell me you don't have a setting). Once you have the dice system just how you like it, get together with a bunch of friends who have also spent the last year making their own perfect game system, and try to convince them why you are right and they are wrong.

TALES OF THE
RINGS
 of
LOTHIAN

THE AIHRDIAN
 CHRONICLES
 BEING THE 13TH NARRATIVE
 OF THE
 LAY OF THE LOTHIAN PRINCES

The Elfin Warlord, Meltowg-Aet-Ohd, Prince of Lothian, has wandered the world in the Shadow of the Long Centuries. Bitter and filled with rage his life is one of unceasing war against the tower of Aufstrag and its great horned god. In his travels he learned of the Castle of Spires, its guardian Melius the Wise and its location in the Twilight Wood. He learned too that it held the gates to other worlds, where his kin had fled to and now dwelt. Returning from his travels, he gathered with his small band on the Avishean Ridge that is the Blacktooth in the Vulgate, where stood the Ineng Tree, from whose roots flowed a small creek of healing water. In drinking the waters, roads were opened for him, containing paths that led to the world's past. The Prince walked the long memories of the Troll Lord and learned from him the riddle that the Fair Lady of Gilgum said laid before him. Secure in the knowledge that his chosen path is his and his alone he returns to the path of war. Leaving the Blacktooth Ridge he rides west to over take his companions, led now by his cousin Sedgwick.

The company rode west for many days and nights. They crossed the Blighted Screed west of the Ridge. They rode with little rest, soon passing beneath the eaves of the Kellerwald Forest and even to the banks of the Udunilay River. There they slew a great beast that lurked in the waters and carved from its shell a boat that could ferry their company across the river, horses and gear included. Two of their men fell to the ravages of the creature, and they were buried in shallow graves with Meltowg's blessing upon them. Turning north they traced the banks of the river until they came to the rolling hills of the Aeut country. Once fertile grasslands, the soul of the empire, they were now desolate plains, covered in snow and drifts so that the grass remained only a memory. The Prince did not hesitate but led the company into the open and across the blasted heath. He had little fear, but in those days the lands were held in the tight grip of Winter's Dark and all seemed to be cast in shades of gray.

For several days they crossed the prairies. Their number was not great, counting both the mercenaries and the Vale Knights, they amounted to only 119 swords, hardly a company in the Legions of the Dark Empire. But these men were more than a company of mercenaries. They were hard men, cast in the fires of countless battles, bitter from years of loss, filled with determination and indifferent to the outcome of a struggle they all believed to be hopeless and long since lost. For the horned god ruled from his dark throne in the Tower of the Tree, Aufstrag. There he sat amidst the squalor of a thousand years of other men's labors. The Krummelvole, the Crown of Sorrow, rode upon his brow and Utriel, the Mace of Judgment, rested in his hand. From his throne, he watched the world unfold beneath the terrible winters of his wrath. None stood against him and there was not even the rumor of war that might unseat him. Only a scattered few remained to fight and these were desperate

creatures that hadn't the sense to know when defeat had overtaken the possibilities of hope.

At their head rode Meltowg, the elfin Prince. He rode girded for war once more. Strapped upon his back his great two-handed sword, Noxmorus, jutted out far above his helm and head, its black pommel and green blade stood out even in the dim grays of the wintry landscape. Meltowg's armor was once a deep forest green, but now looked more black; battered and stained from countless battles. Beneath the wrinkled, mended iron were the markings of the Great Tree that he himself had etched there long years ago. Though he rode with the tall conical helm of his people, it did not contain the long unkempt hair of his head, which shone golden in the faded cool light. Streaks of silver shone in the gold, marking his age and the stresses that wore him, body and soul. Hanging from the horse's saddle was a battle axe, etched and marked with many runes, a testament to its power.

At his side and armed in a similar fashion rode his cousin and long time companion Sedgwick. No great sword rode at his backside, but a long sword of wondrous workmanship was belted at his hip as was a shorter blade, thick with no guard and a richly decorated pommel. His armor bore as many scars but stood the test of time better for Sedgwick carefully mended it and often cleaned it. He carried a shield too, this lay hanging over his shoulder in a loose guard position. His grim vision bore the brunt of long campaigns, but whereas his cousin's face was lined with a grim knowledge of eventual victory... a conviction born more from hopelessness than reality... Sedgwick's was one of resolution and resignation.

Upon the evening of the ninth day they pitched a camp on the far side of the Aeut, just to the east of the Red Hills. The men sprawled about in small groups, building wind shelters from canvases or

the
west-
ern
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laying bed rolls out beneath the horses. They drank and gambled long into the evening. Only then, in the night's deep quiet did they cast their minds back to times that were more pleasant, and reminisce on what had been lost or cast aside.

Meltowg took his leave of the troop and walked up upon a small hillock. He stood there, still as a shoot in a windless night, watching.

“What is it you are looking at my Lord?” Sedgwick hadn’t the sight his cousin did but he knew him well enough.

“There, to the west and north, there is a light that casts its reflection upon the clouds. It isn’t snowing, that much I can see. Beyond, I see the mountains, perhaps an off shoot of the Red Hills, or those other bergs whose name escapes me.”

“The Antiquian Range I believe Lord. We have not come far enough for even your eyes to see that I would think. Those must be the Red Hills. This is open country. Nothing lives here any more. One of our men, Martin, he comes from these lands. It is barren he says.”

“There is fire Sedgwick, count on it.” Turning then to his Captain, “Tell the men to rest and eat while they may for tomorrow we’ll be crossing the paths of that which burns.”

Early in the morning of the following day they took the road again. Passing quietly beneath the faded stars of the gray skies they entered a range of low lying, rolling hills. These were the Red Hills, a pleasant country in years past. By the mid-morning hour everyone in the company could see the fire that burned in the distance. They had seen similar scenes before. A township or village burned, its flames licking the skies and reflecting upon the clouds above. Within a short while the line of a large chasm came into view and soon they struck it, several hundred feet deep. Though not impossible to scale on horse back, Meltowg wished to avoid exhausting the mounts, so he followed it to the north, seeking a bridge or some other crossing point.

At last they came to a bridge, and by design or coincidence, much closer to the flames. The large stone bridge spanned the chasm in one gigantic arc. Built long ago its stone laced with magic so that it could bare the weight of many men and stand the test of time and weather. The company slowed as they approached the bridge, a cautious note entered their gait. They could see four figures upon the bridge, all heavily armored in plate, with shields and pole arms.

“How now Lord, what is this?” Sedgwick leaned forward, straining his eyes to see markings or devices. “Men at arms? The horned dog doesn’t use men at arms.”

“Well let me see what we have here.”

“My Prince! You are a lord of the Elfin peoples and should not treat with these men. Let me go, or let me send Martin, perhaps he knows them or of them at least.”

“No. I am thirsty.”

Meltowg rode forward slowly, bringing his huge armored warhorse to the fore of the bridge. There he stopped. The beast snorted, blowing blasts of heat into the frozen air. Meltowg leaned forward and caught the hint of a stench that made his brow twitch. Dismounting, he dropped the reigns to the ground and walked onto the bridge. The horse settled into a relaxed pose, disappointed that its own blood lust would not be sated this day.

The armored figures gathered together, lifting their bill hooks and gisarnes. As Meltowg approached one leaned forward and shouted in a deep guttural tone. “Now to it Lord! You may not pass this bridge for you are in the lands of the Hlobane, given to that people by our Dark Lord this past campaign season. So take yourself, your mount and your company and keep riding north. Do yourself a favor and pass around us for we are not trifles.”

Meltowg did not stop or slow his passage. “You are an orc. I cannot help but think your companions are orcs.”

“Not orcs Master. Hlobane. We are the greatest of the orc peoples. We come even from the Marl where we hunted your people for meat. Yes I know you now. Your voice is like the breaking of ice in winter, a horrid sound. But mistake me not for my soft hearted kindred. I am Hlobane and my people are Hlobane and we are not trifles.”

Meltowg closed much of the gap now so that only a few dozen feet lay between them. “I have heard of you, whispers on the lips of dying women and children. They talk of a fearful breed of pig that marches in step and sings while they work.”

The orc growled its rage, as did the others. They started forward as Meltowg continued the taunting, but this time he switched to elfin. “But you should know me. I am Meltowg-Aet-Ohd, Prince of Lothian, son of Ithrund-Aet-Tu and servant of Londea. I am the Mouth of the Ineng Tree and Orc Bane.”

The foremost Hlobane leapt forward, his companions in step; he swung his huge gisarme at the armored knight. Meltowg ducked under it and caught it in his hand. Twisting it violently around he broke the orc’s grip, tearing ligaments in the creature’s arm. Even as he howled in pain Meltowg tore off his own helm, leaping past the falling orc he bashed another in the face. The force of the blow knocked the orc senseless. Even as he fell, a third orc drove the hook of his billhook into Meltowg’s legs, attempting to catch his leg and pull him to the ground. The Prince spun and stomped on the haft of the weapon breaking it in two. Ducking the blow of the fourth orc, he scooped up the broken billhook and leapt upon the orc who owned it. That beastly creature caught in the act of pulling his short sword from its scabbard died with the bill driven up and beneath the gorget of his armor.

Meltowg turned then again, quick as lightning, ducking low to avoid the gisarme of the only remaining orc, the one who spoke before. Leaping past the orc’s guard he drove his helm up and into the creature’s chin. The orc flew back crashing to the bridge upon his back. Meltowg turned then and gathered up the first orc he had struck down, walking him to the edge of the bridge he cast him into the chasm. The second orc, now recovered, rushed him, but the Prince, with a wicked grimace hurled his helm into the creature with such force that it knocked him dead to the ground.

He turned then to the final orc, the captain of the bridge, who still lay stunned upon the bridge. Meltowg tore off his helm and half the creature’s face as he did so. He lifted him up by the throat, his iron fingers tearing into the creature’s muscle bound neck. The orc coughed a weak cough but within a few minutes the Prince choked the life out of him.

By now, Sedgwick and the rest of the company rode up. They reigned up, just shy of the carnage. “That is a first Master. You killed the creature with your helm. What do we have here?”

Meltowg gathered himself and picked up his helm. Looking west to the burning he said, “It said it was a Hlobane, a tribe of orcs from the Marl. I have heard of them. Fierce beasts, organized like no other. They fight together, as a unit, and do not quit a battle field. Notice these are not poorly armed or armored. I think that what lies beyond that far ridge may be more than a burning village.”

The company now rode with greater purpose. They spread out into a narrow V as soon as they passed the bridge with the Prince at the fore and Sedgwick and the other Captain at the ends. They came to the foot of a long, gentle slope. Their gait did not change as they rode up the hill to the top of the ridge where the valley beyond opened up before them. There they drew up their mounts.

Immediately before them, capping the ridge, was a large stake. A man, wounded from many tortures, was bound to it. His head sagged upon his chest. At his feet were two creatures. The smaller of the two was heavily armored and bore in his hands a pole axe. At

his feet was a huge iron ball. This ball was attached by chains to the other creature, an orc much larger than the first and naked but for a few scraps of armor. The beast's flesh was rent from many wounds and its skin tattooed with runes of unknown meaning. It slavered upon itself, and looked up at the riders with a maddening lust for rage in its mind.

It leapt forward, but the chains bound to the iron ball restrained it and it howled its rage. To this the lesser orc relented and spoke a simple word and before the Prince or his men knew what had come about the iron ball cracked open and the chains fell loose to the ground. The creature rushed the Prince with a maddened purpose; its long chains snaked behind it, smaller spiked balls on their ends. Meltowg hardly had time to leap from his horse, axe in hand before the beast was upon him.

He did not know it then, but he fought now a Hlobane orc, but more than that. It was a species of orc all to itself. Called a Neurog

Let, or Bone Crusher, these were creatures forced to suffer the pains of the whip their whole lives, and those who lived were driven mad with rage and hate.

Beyond the orc and elf, the stake and man, and the smaller orc lay a valley. It was long, shallow, and wide. A small river ran through its center, tracing a path from the north to the south. In the valley's center a small concourse of creatures gathered. There were several hundred wagons, drawn up in a tight circle. In the center a large encampment was built with tents set up throughout. Upon every fourth wagon temporary towers of posts and flat boards were built and guards patrolled the walks. Heard animals, oxen mostly were gathered in the compound, kept in check with ties. It seemed to all like a mobile fortress, not unlike the Halfling's laagers. But these were not Halflings, these were orcs. And there were hundreds of them. By the glare of the burning forest west of the camp, it was clear to see these were not unlike the four Meltowg slew on the bridge.

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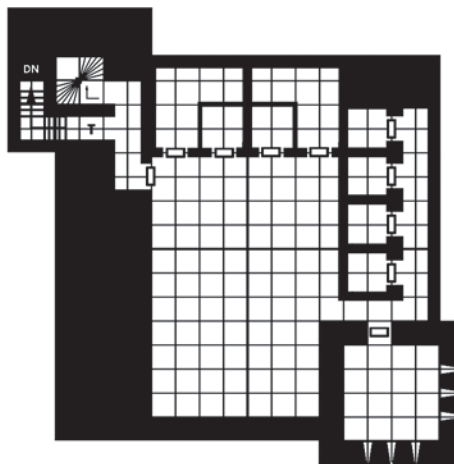
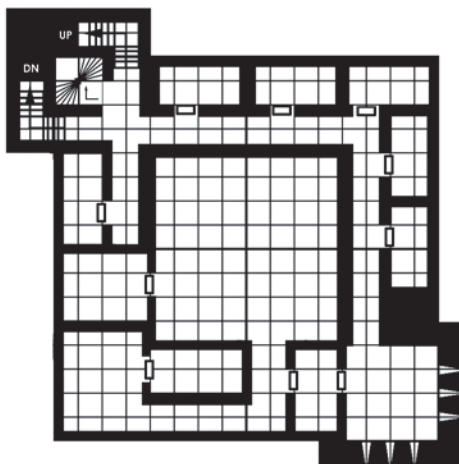
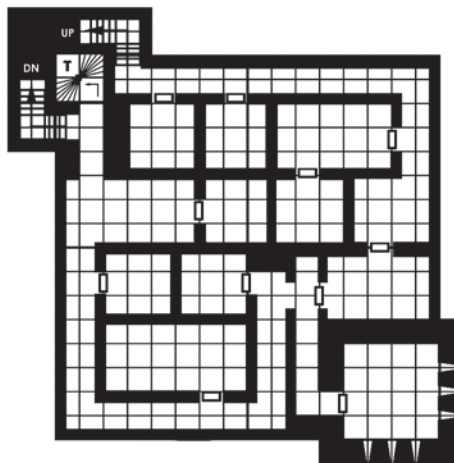
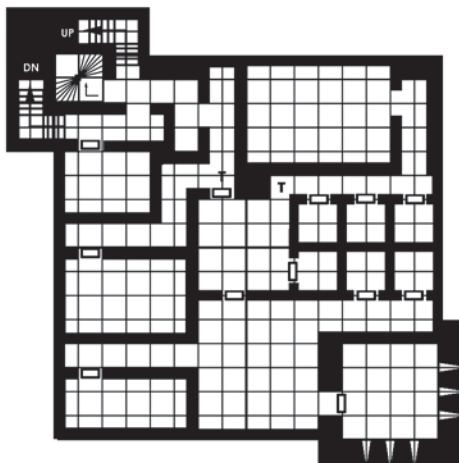
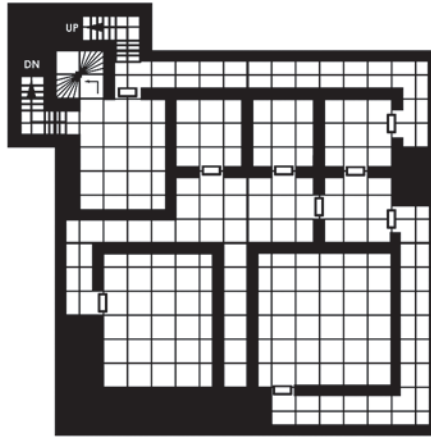
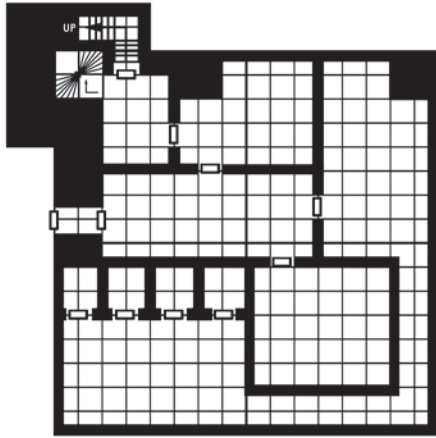
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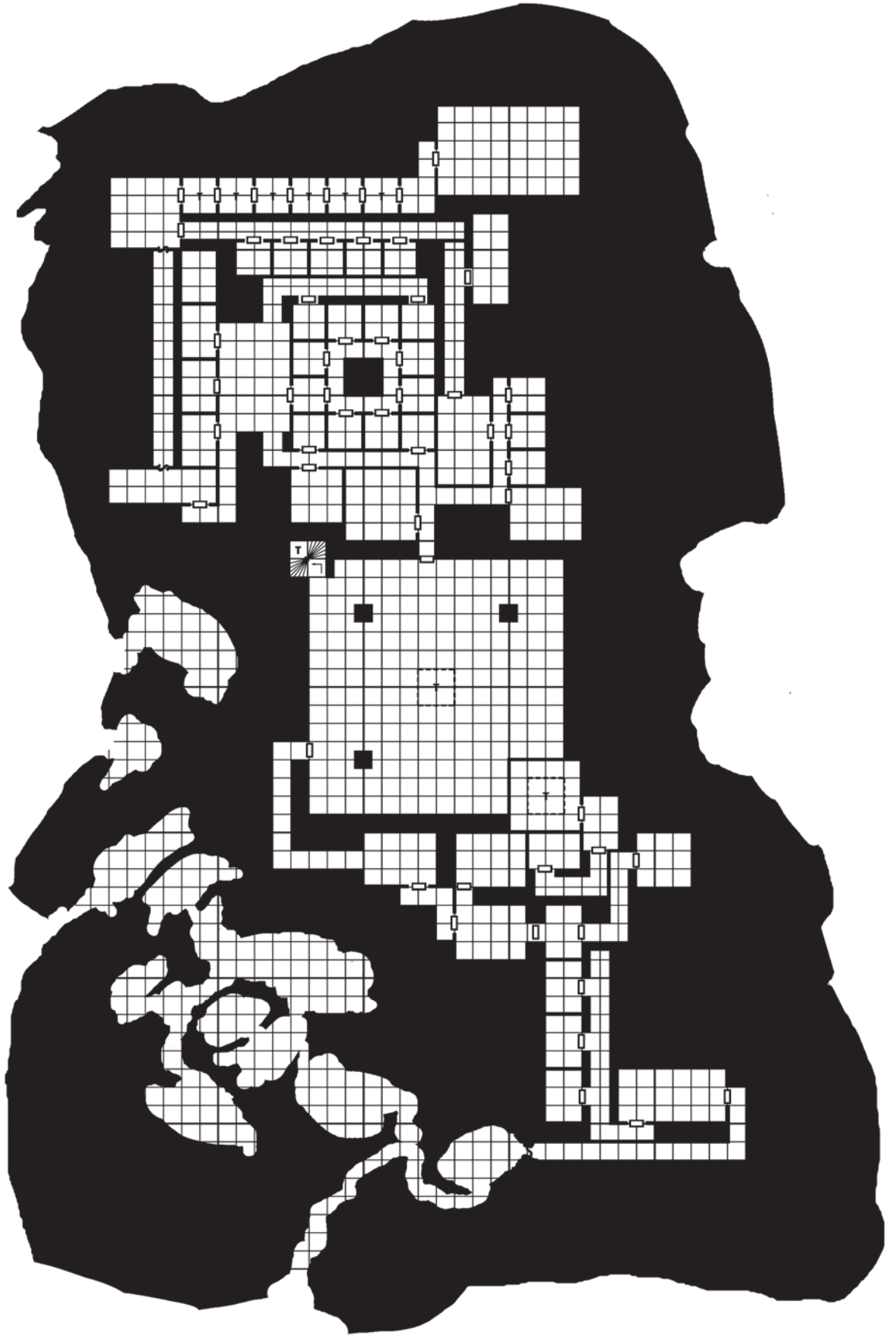
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Ready to Serve NPC's

by Joe Damiani

About Joe Damiani: Playing RPG's since the 80's and recently begun writing after meeting the late, great Gary Gygax at a convention in Canada. While necessity keeps him in the corporate grind, when Joe isn't spending time with his family and wonderful new baby, he enjoys delving into a world of imagination.

The goal for this series of articles is to provide some non-player characters that are fully fleshed out to add some adventure hooks and storyline spice for your game world. These NPC's are tools for the Castle Keeper to add some bang to a random encounter or mystery to the solitary figure drinking at the tavern.

Name: Erlick Kobrak

Background: Erlick is a neutral Rogue in a constant state of internal conflict. He is engaged in a constant battle of wills with the sentient Elven dagger Lowithen gathered as part of an ill fated expedition. As the sole survivor of a trek to an old Elvish outpost, he has remained a solitary figure due to his circumstance. Normally an affable albeit self-interested rogue, Erlick exhibits multiple personality symptoms due to his constant battles with Lowithen; created to champion Law. His erratic behavior leads people to give him a wide berth but his fat wallet keeps him from being ejected from town.

Appearance: Since Lowithen is little concerned with Erlick's normal sanitary regime he is able to keep his appearance. He is well groomed with trimmed beard and long curly black hair neatly tied back. He wears a sage green coat over well tended leather armor with a short sword, dagger and belt pouch at his sides. His eyes have a haunted look and his face is wrinkled beyond his 25 years.



Demeanor: Erlick tends to keep to himself, dealing with his internal conflict. Anyone eavesdropping hears him muttering to himself, "No! I can't do that," "You are crazy!" "Look, you can do that if you want **BUT I** won't." If approached, his reactions will be governed by who is in control at the time (roll a d6).

(1-3) Erlick's character is in control, he will be polite but guarded with any extreme Lawful or Evil parties. He is very concerned about his situation, but realizes the blade is valuable and feels he should benefit from his suffering. He offers to sign on with a Lawful party to evaluate their wealth and ultimately offer a trade to any character that is approved by Lowithen. With a neutral party, he seems to visibly relax and be more at ease. He is looking for a good troop to join, but realizes his current situation will get in the way. He will not share his lot in life unless someone has gained his trust over time. He uses the cover that he was cursed by a witch to flip personalities and that he is on a personal quest to overcome it, asking patience with his do-good personality.

(4-6) Lowithen is in control. Erlick stands erect almost at attention with his hands on his hips. He appears confident and in charge, with a lawful paladin's zeal. He will act with outright contempt towards any Evil parties, but not foolishly challenge any situation that he feels he could not better (Lowithen is not a fool). With any Lawful groups, he will be keenly interested in hearing stories of goodly deeds to understand who is most overt in their pursuit of what is Just and Right. His preference would be a paladin or other fighter type as a compatriot for championing Law. Lastly with Neutral parties, he will be indifferent and less communicative believing that such folks would have little in common.

Erlick Kobrak is a neutral 12th level Rogue with the following statistics: strength 13, intelligence 12, wisdom 9, dexterity 18, constitution 14, charisma 9 HP: 49 AC: 18 BtH: +4. He carries the following: Lowithen, +2 Short Sword, +3 Leather armor, (2) Oil of Invisibility, Potion of Blur and a Ring of the RAM (30)

Lowithen is a +4 dagger of Elven design. Sentient, lawful good, Will 23, Speech/ Telepathy with wielder only, Sight, Hearing, Mirror Image (1/day), Deflect Missiles 3/day as monk, Major Image 1/day, Wall of Fire centered on wielder 1/day, light 3/day, Fear 3/day, Read Magic, Special Purpose: Champion of Lawful Good

Name: Olivia Frances D'Ken

Background: Olivia is a Halfling Druid who is still reeling from the total destruction of her community. She was born and raised in the isolated Halfling village of Humber Mound where she apprenticed with and eventually replaced the retiring head druid. As the main naturalist healer for the clan, she would frequently travel into the wilds for a few days to replenish her herbal supplies. On returning from one of her sojourns, Olivia found her community



razed and kinfolk killed to the last woman and child. After overcoming her shock, Olivia searched and found the remains of different demi-human races from multiple tribes. The mystery being that these tribes and races did not typically cooperate and operated in an area many miles away. After burying the dead and gathering whatever gear was available to her, Olivia set off to uncover and avenge her kinfolk.

Olivia began trailing the obvious path left from the passage of many humanoids. Eventually the large group split into multiple smaller units and head off in different directions. For many days, Olivia tracked the different groups from the shadows using her spells, abilities and animal friends to help her on the way. The first group led to a tribe of goblins living around a cave system in a forested area. After watching the tribe for several days, she found that some of the males were being questioned by their elders. She was surprised to find that from the elder's perspective, these males had abandoned their posts and gone missing for a few weeks. They had no memories of where they were or what happened to any missing goblins. The mystery continued as Olivia followed some of the other tracks leading to other tribes of goblins, orcs and even a few giants. Where she could do more reconnaissance, she found similar situations where the missing tribesfolk had wandered away for a period of time and how had no memories of where they went and what they did. Something was behind this...but what, or who?

Olivia's current motivation is to find a group of good adventurers that she can join who would assist her to better investigate the downfall of Humber Mound. She has spent most of her life in the company of Halflings and recently alone with her animal friends tracking the different marauding tribes. She has recently set up camp in a forest near a road on the outskirts of a major city. She has

been spying out and following different groups of adventurers trying to find a group that seems upright, trustworthy and honorable. She is wary of entering any non-Halfling town and has had only limited dealings with the farmers in the area to trade fairly for supplies.

Appearance: From a human perspective, Olivia is very cute with the appearance of a perpetual child which has lead to a few surprises for both Olivia and the unsuspecting human. To Halflings, she is a striking young woman. She is dark haired with wide, brown eyes and shoulder length brown hair with a slight curl. She wears a green cloak, tunic covering brown cuirbouille armor and carries a short staff.

Demeanor: Olivia is cautious and wary with any group of adventurers even after spending some time following and assaying their character. Once she has made her determination that the adventurers are those that may help her with her quest, she will approach them offering her services. She will keep to herself until she has direct experience of the party's good nature and only then request their aid.

NOTE: The Castle Keeper is free to expand on this adventure hook or can easily tie it into an existing story line. The destruction of Humber Mound was merely an experiment, the product of an evil priest's desire to understand the function of a recently uncovered malign artifact. Discovered in an old, forgotten crypt; the artifact has the ability to sway goblin-kin and some larger humanoids to the wielder's bidding. Humber Mound was seen as a low risk area to test the mind control abilities without fear of discovery.

Olivia D'Ken is a neutral good 13th level Druid with the following statistics: strength 10, intelligence 12, wisdom 18, dexterity 14, constitution 10, charisma 15 HP: 54 AC: 15 BtH: +6). She carries the following: +2 Staff of the Woodlands, +3 Short Sword, +4 Cuirbouille armor, Scroll of Control Weather, Creeping Doom, Animal Growth and Neutralize Poison and a Bag of Tricks (Rust Colored: D100 to pull out 01-30 Wolverine, 31-60 Wolf, 61-85 Boar and 86+ Black Bear).

Typical Spells: Level 0 - (6) - Create Water, Detect Neutrality, Endure Elements, First Aide, Know Direction, Light Detect Evil, Detect Chaos, Detect Magic (x2), First Aid. Level 1 - (7) - Alarm, Detect Pits and Snares, Entangle (x2) Faerie Fire (x2), Obscuring Mist Level 2 - (6) - Barkskin, Charm Person or Animal, Cure Light Wounds (x3), Warp Wood Level 3 - (6) Call Lightning, Meld into Stone, Neutralize Poison, Protection from Elements, Snare, Speak with Plants Level 4 - (4) - Control Plants, Cure Serious Wounds, Scrying, Summon Animals Level 5 - (3) - Commune with Nature, Cure Critical Wounds, Summon Beasts or Plants Level 6 - (2) - Summon Elemental, Wall of Stone Level 7 - (1) - Control Weather

Special Defenses: Totem Shape (Brown Bear, Bird of Prey, Wild Boar each 1/day) 1/day a large form of one of the three shapes plus all Halfling racial abilities.



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HAMMER & ANVIL

THOUGHTS FROM A
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BY
CASEY CANFIELD

Cast A Deadly Spell

“I was asked to memorise what I did not understand; and, my memory being so good, it refused to be insulted in that manner.”

- Aleister Crowley

The C&C Players Handbook provides a broad list of spells for use, but this collection is far from comprehensive. On occasion, CKs and players feel the need to sew their magical oats, and strike out in the pursuit of new spells to bring excitement into their games. A crucial part of maintaining the thrill of any game is the continuous discovery of new and wondrous things.

In this installment of Hammer & Anvil, I will discuss the process I use for the creation of new spells. This article will discuss the wise creation of spells from a rules perspective, as well as methods for introducing those spells via role-playing. From there, it's up to you.

The Rationale

As you set about creating new spells, it's important to determine the rationale for creating them. The rationale adds depth and meaning to the campaign in a very simple way.

For example, it can be assumed that wizardry is a difficult art, or else everyone would be a wizard, to some degree. With that in mind, a wizard seeking to discover new magical practices would naturally find that process difficult, and would need a good reason for devoting time and expense to the effort.

From an out-of-game (or metagame) perspective, there are several good reasons for adding spells to your game. First, new spells bring variety, particularly for games with experienced players. A sense of the unknown makes games far more enjoyable for those gaming veterans. Second, spells might be created to fulfill a specific campaign purpose. The research or discovery of a new spell that helps solve a problem is a nice storytelling device. Finally, players may discover a need that the CK did not

anticipate, and they may choose to have their characters research a spell.

Spending a few moments to determine the reason for bringing the spell into your game will pay dividends. The spell will seem like a natural fit into your gaming style and into the ongoing fabric of your campaign.

Creating the Spell

Before we can determine how the spell gets into the game, we need to determine its effects and characteristics.

The easiest method of spell creation is to modify an existing spell. The CK finds an existing spell that closely matches the intended effect, and then tweaks the description and statistics accordingly. Let's use an obvious example. Let's say that I want to create a spell that forms an exploding burst of ice and cold. I can use the fireball spell in the Players Handbook as my basis and tweak it accordingly.

Frostpulse (Level 3 Wizard)

Range: 450'

Duration: instant

Area of effect: 40' diameter sphere

Casting Time: 1

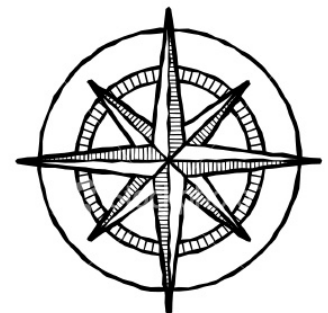
Saving Throw: Dexterity half

Components: V, S, M (small piece of quartz)

Frostpulse causes the detonation of a blast of the most extreme supernatural cold. When cast, a small fragment of ice forms, then streaks away from the caster toward the target area. Upon reaching the target area, the ice crystal detonates, filling the area of effect with shards of ice and the most bitter supernatural cold. This blast causes 1d6 HP of cold damage per caster level. The cold is so intense that even magical liquids are flash



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.



frozen, exposed flesh will stick to metal, food items will be frozen solid, and paper will become brittle.

The frostpulse can be detonated prematurely if it impacts a solid barrier, such as a wall or rock outcropping, before reaching its designated target. The caster may attempt to send the ice crystal into a narrow opening, such as a small window or arrow slit, but the caster must succeed at a ranged attack roll. Failure indicates that the frostpulse has impacted the barrier surrounding the opening.

This method has the advantage of being quick and easy, but it also produces a spell that is already “balanced.” For example, it is less likely to disrupt a game by being overpowered or too costly. Since fireball was play tested, frostpulse is essentially play tested. Therefore, this is a safer way to quickly add spell variety to a game. On the other hand, this method is not very original. The closer the new spell is to the source, the more likely that experienced players will recognize that the new spell is just a derivative, and then all of the charm goes out of it.

The more difficult method of spell creation is to develop the spell entirely from scratch. The CK determines all of the spell’s attributes and effects, including spell level, duration, damage (if any), saving throw (if any), and range. With this approach, the CK has more ability to precisely tailor effects. In return, the CK has far more to consider.

Perhaps the most challenging decision is assigning a level to the new spell. If the characters in my campaign are of a certain level, and my intent is that the new spell be useable by the characters as soon as it is introduced, then I need to ensure that the spell is assigned to a level that the characters are able to learn and cast. On the other hand, if I wish the spell to have a specific effect, and I don’t necessarily want the characters to be able to use it right away, then I can start with creating attributes and effects that model precisely what I imagine for the spell. I can compare those attributes and effects to other spells to determine the spell level. My recommendation is to create the spell according to your vision, and then tweak the attributes if you must fit it to a certain level.

Assigning the spell level and ensuring that attributes and effects are appropriate is more of an art than a science. It takes a great deal of practice and understanding of how spells can be used in game play.

As an example, I’m going to create a frostcreep spell from scratch. I’m envisioning a spell where frost creeps across the ground, freezing everything it touches, doing some damage and possibly restricting movement.

I always assign attributes according to my imagination. These are arbitrary values based on my concept of the spell. I try not to let bias from other spells impact my decisions, as I want my custom spells to be as true to my vision as possible.



The more difficult method of spell creation is to develop the spell entirely from scratch.

Frostcreep

Range: 350'

Duration: 4 rounds

Area of effect: 10' diameter circle in round 1, increasing each round by 10', max of 30' diameter in rounds 3 and 4.

Casting Time: 1 round

Damage: 2d6 HP of cold damage per round

Saving Throw: Strength negates loss of movement

Components: V, S, M (drop of mercury)

Frostcreep causes a field of supernaturally cold frost to spread across the ground, chilling the bodies and restricting the movement of anything caught in the area of effect. From the point of origin, this frost will begin as a 10' diameter circle, and will continue to expand by 10' in diameter each round, to a maximum diameter of 30'. Any creature caught within the area of effect suffers 2d6 HP of cold damage per round as the frost seeps into their bodies.

Additionally, the frost can cause the feet or bodies of victims to adhere to the ground. Every round, any creature caught within the area of effect must succeed at a Strength save or be rendered immobile for that round. Creatures standing may not move, though they can use their arms and speak normally. Prone creatures may not stand up or move, though they can still speak.

Range: I wanted the caster to be able to direct the origin of the area of effect in order to avoid affecting allies. 350' is a significant range, allowing the caster to use this spell to “soften up” opposing forces from a distance, slowing them in preparation for close combat. As such, this is a fairly powerful spell.

Duration: At first, I considered the duration of 3 rounds, plus 1 round per caster level. This duration is long enough to make

a difference during a fight, but not outside of combat. A high level caster, on the other hand, could maintain this spell for many rounds. This is an incredibly powerful feature, and

it concerned me immediately. If the caster is just 8th level, this spell will last for 11 rounds. Just for pure damage potential, 11 rounds at 2d6 per round is 22d6 damage. That is a massive amount of damage potential. It’s limited somewhat by the fact that the damage is not instantly inflicted, and that victims have a chance to move outside of the area. It’s still a very significant number. Coupled with the movement restriction potential, I think this duration is unreasonable. I settled on 4 rounds as a better choice.

Area of effect: The slowly increasing area of effect provides the “creeping” effect that I wished to have, and it also helps to limit the damage potential of the spell. If the spell had a 30' diameter circle of effect for the entire duration, the potential for damage would be greatly increased.

Casting Time: This is a combat spell, so I wanted it to be cast quickly. If I wanted it to be more difficult to use, I could increase this time. However, be conservative when changing casting times. Players will make casting time comparisons to other spells with comparable effects, so be prepared to justify your decision.

Damage: I chose 2d6 because it provides a reasonable bell curve of damage. Most of the time, the damage is going to be between 5 and 7 HP per round. If I wished to make the damage more random



and linear, I could have chosen 1d10 per round. This increases the potential for greater damage due to linear probability, but also increases the chance that the damage could be very low. I also chose d6 instead of d8 because I wanted to keep the mean damage value lower. Using 2d8 would usually cause 8–10 HP of damage per round. I'm thinking that's a little high for frost.

Saving Throw: Most spells that have area effect damage or restrict movement in some way allow a saving throw. Those that do not, with few exceptions, are extremely powerful and very high level spells. In this case, the damage cannot be avoided if in the area, but the movement restriction can be negated. This makes the spell moderately powerful. The reason that I do not allow the damage to be avoided is because of the creeping nature of the spell. The spell has a more profound psychological impact on players about to be caught within it when it automatically does damage. The damage is not so high that it will kill many creatures in a single round, unless they are very weak.

Components: Most spells have verbal and somatic (movement) components. Material component use depends on the CK. Spells that do not require verbal or somatic components are quite powerful. Spells without verbal components can be cast even when the caster is muted or silenced, and spells without somatic components can be cast without movement, such as when bound or magically held. Spells with no components can be cast with the power of thought only. Because of this, most spells have a verbal and somatic component. Material components can impact the balance of a spell, as well. A rare or costly component can make the spell more difficult to cast frequently, and can act as a check against the spell's power.

Based on what I have so far, I think that frostcreep is a 3rd level wizard spell. I did not reach that conclusion scientifically, but it is a somewhat educated guess based on the characteristics of other spells. For example, this spell has characteristics that are similar to fireball (extended range, area of effect, 6d6 damage potential) and entangle (area of effect, restricted movement). Fireball is a 3rd level wizard spell, and entangle is a 1st level druid spell. Frostcreep has a fairly small area of effect, and it does not start out at the full diameter. It also has incremental damage. This feature is weaker than fireball. Frostcreep has a smaller area than entangle, as well. However, the utility of the combined effect makes it more likely that victims will be damaged by successive rounds of cold. Because of this combined effect, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and therefore I consider this spell to be roughly the same, in practice, as a fireball. It seems most appropriate as a 3rd level wizard spell.

Let's say that I needed to tailor this spell so it was a 2nd level spell, instead. What would I do to make it fit? From the 3rd level spell base, I can tweak the characteristics to weaken it slightly. The two most appropriate changes, in my mind, are to reduce the range to 150' and to reduce the damage to 2d4 per round. With everything else staying the same, the overall impact on combat is weaker than a fireball, which slots this spell in at 2nd level.

If I wanted to increase the level of the spell, I could increase the damage die (2d8), the area of effect (up to 40' or 50' diameter) or the range (450'). I could also consider adding a third spell effect to accompany the damage and restricted movement. All of these would help push the spell into a higher level slot.



Introducing the Spell

Now that the spell is complete, you'll need a way to bring it into the game so the PCs can use it. How this is done depends on what you're trying to accomplish, and the role the PCs had in the development of the spell.

If you're bringing in a new spell with no PC involvement, then the simplest method is to include the new spell in treasure, either in a scroll or in a spell book. This method isn't glorious, but it's clean and easy. To spice things up, it can be taken further. Consider including the new spell as a key part of an opposing wizard's repertoire. If the wizard (or shaman, etc.) uses the spell against the PCs, the spell is introduced in a far more exciting way. Imagine the sense of accomplishment and the potential for role-playing when the PCs learn the nasty spell that was just used against them! Alternately, consider giving the spell to the PCs in pieces. They find part of it in a treasure trove, with a reference to a place the other parts might be found. This creates incentive for an adventure to find the other pieces.

If the PCs are involved in the spell creation process, they are either researching or helping to research a new spell. If you have the time, I find that the most entertaining way of handling spell research involves a phased approach.

Let's say that the PCs describe a spell they'd like to create, and from that description, you develop the frostcreep spell detailed above. Ideally, you would like to make the in-game development of the spell into a process. This process requires experimentation

—trial and error that requires the creation of incremental spells that somehow fall short of the desired effect.

From the baseline frostcreep spell, you can develop three or four “stepping-stone” versions of lesser effectiveness that help illustrate the experimental process. Then, as the PCs spend more time researching, they gain the use of the more effective versions. Likewise, if the players put forth a lackluster effort and are stingy with expenses, you might consider failed trials that have negative effects.

As CK, the time and money spent researching a spell is completely in your discretion. I recommend requiring PCs to devote a significant amount of time and treasure, including travel, component gathering, and research. The power of the spell determines the sacrifice required to gain it. As a rule of thumb, I usually say that the entire process requires 1000 gold pieces and one week of time per spell level. Naturally, I don’t tell the players the real cost. I let them figure it out. They choose how much money and time to spend on research, and when they have spent enough time and money, they finally succeed.

If you also take the time to use material components, the gathering of these items can become adventure hooks themselves. Be careful to keep the required components proportionate to the effect of the spell. A dragon’s eye might sound exotic, but it’s a little overblown as a component for a 2nd level spell. It may also help to consider the effect of the spell, and choose a component or two that have some relation to it. Frostcreep requires a drop of mercury, which is a pun related to the drop in temperature.

Of course, spell research can be a simple matter. Just tell the players that a week of game-time passes, instruct them to deduct some gold from their character sheets, and give them the use of a new spell. I find that to be quick and easy, but not terribly entertaining as the part of a grand tale of adventure.



Playtesting

With any new spell, it is best to arrange a trial period in your game. During the trial period, perhaps four game sessions, you will reserve the right to make changes to the spell if the rigors of game play reveal some sort of flaw. Of course, as CK, you will always have the ability to change any rule at any time. It is just nicer for the players if the ground does not shift underneath them all of the time. Four games ought to be enough to flush out any problems, and if you need more time, you can just add it.

Encourage your players to offer feedback on the spell’s particulars, as well. Perhaps they can imagine a cool effect that you never considered. Working with them helps increase their enjoyment of the game, since you’re helping them earn something they really want.

I don’t recommend dwelling too much on playtesting. I have never run a special side game meant to test any new rules, and somehow, new rules always seemed to work out. The key is careful consideration of the new rules prior to introducing them into a game. The law of unintended consequences has bitten me more than once. To handle new rules, an understanding between CK and players is all that is needed. Keep open lines of communication and don’t take things more seriously than a game warrants.

Adding new spells to a game need not be a daunting task full of uncertainty. If you take the time to reason through the process, and make clear decisions about how you will handle the procedure in your games, than your imagination will not be limited by fears of imbalance or campaign disruption.

Until next issue, happy designing!



WELCOME TO THE CONQUERED EAST

BY CASEY W. CHRISTOFFERSON

BIRTH OF THE HAUNTED HIGHLANDS

I am frequently asked by writing colleagues and fans, “where do all your ideas come from?” Like most other writers in the Role Playing Games and Swords and Sorcery genre I point to the usual pool of influences. I offer up Michael Moorcock, Robert Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, some extremely obscure Clark Ashton Smith, less obscure H.P. Lovecraft and so on. However, the truth of this is that to merely quote and note these influences probably does a disservice to the person asking the question and to my fellow writers and creative folk for what often boils down to a lot of research and really hard work.

The fact is, I sometimes get a kernel of an idea, and then brainstorm the various different ways I can turn the idea into a story or an adventure. I may have a strange dream brought on by a late night snack that gives me an idea for a monster or villain. Someone may say something funny or do something that gives me an idea for an interesting character that PCs may run into.

Take for example the germination of the Haunted Highlands series of adventures that I have been writing for Troll Lord Games over the past few years.

Several years ago I got a call from Davis Chenault who asked me to meet him at Gorilla Con in Pittsburg, Kansas, sometime in early March. I had done several small projects and some editing for TLG prior to this, and had worked extensively with Necromancer Games on a variety of projects. About this time I had developed the first incarnation of the “Fields of Battle” project. I figured I would haul my two pages of rules and a case of miniatures along with me to see how it played out.

As it turns out, the rules played out pretty well and Davis was hooked. This was around the time when TLG was first developing the Castles & Crusades rules and Davis had lots of very clever marketing schemes to be somewhat unique and original as far as campaign materials, adventures and so on were concerned. The gist of his idea was to release small areas that would unlock into larger areas as adventures progressed, with each new project giving a slightly bigger portion of the world to the fans.

I liked the idea because it reminded me a lot of the old TSR style adventures where the “setting” was implied rather than concrete. The setting of the adventure as it was happened to fit into the GH gazetteer but didn’t necessarily have to have a set in stone fact/sourcebook of information to go along with it. An adventure was an adventure after all and the really great adventures left lots of room for the referee to expand it and take it into directions that were most appealing to their players.



For example we all knew that the ruined temple in Highport was the lair of the first gang of Slave-lords and generally where that fell on the map of Greyhawk. After the battle we knew that it was quite a trek from the Pomarj to the slavers stockade and the journey was sure to be fraught with peril! By and large the majority of these adventures were places to explore and monsters to kill for loot and boon prizes. I also very much liked the idea of developing my own thing. For many years I’ve worked on other people’s settings or had to incorporate other folk’s ideas into an overarching product like Bard’s Gate for Necromancer Games.

Mind you, there is nothing wrong with being a “great redactor” as my friend and colleague Clark Peterson, owner of Necromancer Games often enjoys being. Rather, I just wanted to be the guy in control and Davis assured me that this would be the case. Of course it was a lot of talk and a good time over that weekend and I put the idea in the back burner while continuing work on several other projects for Necromancer.

Most of the actual “rules” for C&C had yet to be completed at the time that Davis had made his suggestion. A year later the rules were out and I played in my first game of C&C at a second Gorilla Con. Oddly enough the game didn’t impress me in the beginning. This was likely a culmination of the off the cuff scenario and the late start time of play but it was still a solid six months before I finally ran my own game and suddenly understood what all the hub-bub was about! I was able to run “my” kind of game and if it was “my” kind of game to run, it was definitely “my” kind of game to write for. After an extended and harrowing (though largely successful and satisfying) 3.X edition campaign came to a close I was ready for C&C to be my full time game.

Thus I dusted off all the old notebooks and sketchbooks I had kept work in since my conversations with Davis and got to work. I should add that when I write a new adventure I can’t help but sketch my ideas out visually. I use these visual references when I write to

remind myself what its all about. These visual cues then get sent to Peter when I turn in the manuscript. To his credit, Peter has done an amazing job of translating my artwork into the look and style of a high quality TLG product.

Within a few weeks of starting the first installment of the Karbosk RPG saga was born as “**DB1: The Haunted Highlands.**” In it I wanted to introduce a grimmer, darker world of fantasy that didn’t necessarily have to cleave to more traditional “Tolkienism” as it were. Something a little more Elric or Conan was needed for this grim war torn world that I had envisioned. In it I have sought to develop a small piece of a world rather than the world in the whole. Karbosk and the Haunted Highlands are of course designed to be someplace where you could expect a group of adventurers to get its start.



DRO MANDRAS I AND II: A GOOD PLACE FOR A GRIM CAMPAIGN

Not that there is anything wrong with a little “Tolkienism”. The preface of an orc invasion works well for a starter campaign, even if it is a well worn cliché. Prior to the Karbosk setting I’d never written one, nor read one that had really captured my imagination. Besides, the thing about a good cliché is that it helps give everyone a bit of familiarity and a way to ease into character when the dice start clacking.

The trick in making Karbosk different has been to make it a departure from the standard cliché of “humanoid monster invasion” by adding layers of foes and sub-plots for the characters to literally lose themselves in. These sub-plots and red-herrings are by full intention. They are laid into the script in order to give the Castle Keeper plenty of fuel to keep each and every player occupied with some special task at the gaming table. Why else would there be an evil circus master despised by the druids if not to give the player of a druid some mission or goal in a city adventure?

As for the Roadhouse itself, again I chose the cliché of the “adventurers are sitting in a bar and...” with my own twist. I populated that particular bar with characters who have a story, and a hook for adventure. I wanted to give Castle Keepers a place to get adventures started and a safe haven where the characters can rest between sojourns to such locales as the Crater of Umeshti, or Dro Mandras. As I said, sure it’s cliché but not all cliché’s are bad.

For me, that’s what good campaigns are about. More importantly that’s why a project like the DB series needs to happen. For example, Dro Mandras and the forthcoming Dro Mandras: The Conquered East were designed specifically to give the characters a REAL opportunity to be the hero, and not just sit on the sidelines and watch the action unfold. We aren’t talking a “little” hero either, but bona-fide saviors of a besieged city filled with really nasty villains. I know that I get pretty tired of sitting in adventures where at the last minute some great and powerful wizard pops in and steals my thunder. Seriously I want to take a hammer to authors who do that to their players. The DB series isn’t like that.

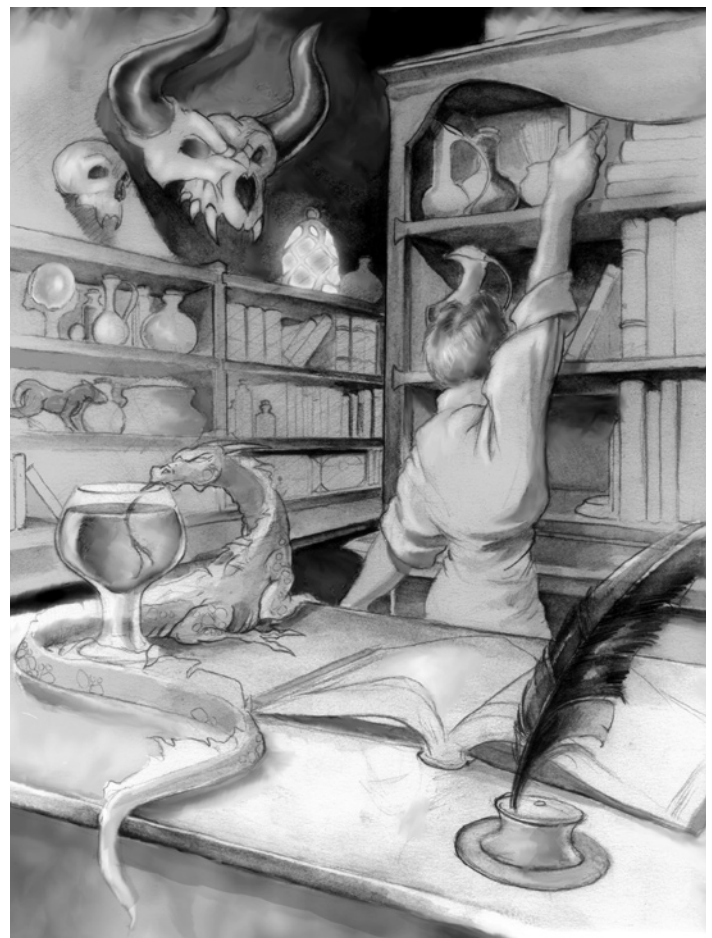
In **Dro Mandras II: The Conquered East**, the characters actually get to precipitate a change in the landscape of their world! They have a timeline, they have targets to take down, and they have secrets to explore. Most importantly, they have no chains upon them. They can complete the adventure any way they see fit

by using any tactic which they may imagine. Their successes offer the opportunity to free the conquered half of Dro Mandras from the clutches of the invading horde.

Success may offer more than gold and magic to the characters, as they gain some measure of ownership in their world. Campaign ownership is something that has been missing in fantasy RPGs for some time. Steve and my fellow trolls touched on it in the Castle’s and Crusades Player’s Handbook. Good treasure need not be gold and magic items. Certainly these things don’t hurt, but really, the measure of a successful character was not merely in the Christmas tree of magical items that hung upon his frame, but also upon the quantity of his holdings and number of his retainers and minions.

The Haunted Highlands offers a viable opportunity for PCs to carve out their own fiefdom under the authority of a strong Duke who needs their assistance. Likewise Dro Mandras is a place where the PCs may cross the grain. In Dro Mandras, they can follow the evil path and join sides with the invaders. Since Dro Mandras has the statistics for most of the defenders, and Dro Mandras II: The Conquered East has the stats and motivations of the invaders, it is a simple matter to switch it up and play for the bad-guys for a change.

Most importantly in Dro Mandras II we get a deeper look at the factions and organizations of the foes that face the “finer” races of Karbosk. For example there are several competing factions of Orc tribes. Each tribe has its own motivation, and leader, though the most powerful of the tribes currently has the “juice” as far as their overlord Yorgach is concerned. The heroes also get a glimpse at Yorgach’s genius and realize in their encounters with these factions that the enemy of Karbosk is no ordinary “stupid orc.”



In the Conquered East, each faction has its own desires and motivations. Many have their own secrets and treasures that they keep hidden from their rivals, making the entire location a violent and exciting area of adventure. As the PCs explore the ruin of the once great city they realize that the enemy himself has no trust for his lieutenants and uses their own mistrust of one another to keep his army organized. For example, to keep the peace amongst his competing tribes, Yorgach has placed Asluba Ape Face, a wicked hobgoblin champion and her Black Sword shock troopers who offer yet another challenge for the PCs. No doubt this is an insult to the ruhks' in Yorgach's service, yet none of their chieftains alone is powerful enough to depose Asluba and take over her command. One of the many dangers for the PCs is to avoid rousing the whole hornets nest and finding an army of hundreds and thousands faced against them!

Readers familiar with my other works have probably noticed the extensive chains of options I like to leave open for Castle Keepers when running a "D" series adventure. I want Castle Keepers to be able to have the feel that they are running "on the fly" without having to do any legwork if they don't want to. I like to give role play notes for the motivations and needs of the various characters because I feel that interesting villains make for interesting adventurers!

I also like to leave hints to a broader world outside the comfortable published borders. Fans who have collected these adventures thus far have probably caught hints of not so distant Rhodensia, or the hidden Undercity of Ulgakur. Perhaps they wonder about Jiron and the East. Possibly they are curious about what wonders lie beyond the Eskadian Sea. Again, these references are purposeful. They exist to enrich the campaign and to get the players immersed in their character and the setting. They are also part of my own ever growing lexicon of the world, which started with a little area called the Haunted Highlands, and has like all things, grown and matured over time.

Readers may have also noticed that I like to throw in an occasional "Roadhouse Rule" somewhere in the text of an adventure. These are simply some of my own house-rules that I like to share with fellow Castle Keepers to give them a little bit of Dirty Bowbe's campaign spice! Since I strive to create a more visceral experience, I tend to find ways to tinker with the rules to offer more intense encounters without doing things that break the game or interfere with everyone else's good time.

The upcoming year promises a lot of new flavor and excitement for the Haunted Highlands. With luck fans should be getting several more products, including deeper exploration of the Crater of Umeshti, and exploration of other parts of Karbosk, and the world at large. If you have not yet explored the Haunted Highlands, The Crater of Umeshti, or Dro Mandras, I encourage you to jump in with both feet and take a look at something a little different! For those who have helped keep this going for the last few years let me just say...

Thanks for playing!

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The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



A T T A C K O F T H E M A N A G I N G E D I T O R

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

Troll Lords are at my front door. It happens every month now that the magazine is monthly. I can hear them bickering now.

"I'm going to do it."

"We all agreed, the ANGRY GAMER column would be written by me, this month."

"I never agreed to that."

"We'll let the managing editor decide."

"That's not going to happen, he doesn't like me."

"That's not going to happen, I still owe him two articles, he would never pick me."

"Hee, Hee, I turned all mine in an hour ago. Guess who's writing the ANGRY GAMER, boys?"

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

I hurled open the door and looked at three of the ugliest monsters you could imagine. They were nine feet and a little bit more tall. Their flesh was green, wart covered, and exposed way too much of themselves. It was hard to believe they were all married with children. They were the ones that gave me the gold to help produce the CRUSADER magazine.

"All your guesses would be wrong. I'm writing the ANGRY GAMER this month!"

Three stunned Troll Lords looked down at me as if I was a major nasty bit.

WHAT!" they all roared when they finally realized what I said.

"YOU CAN'T DO THAT!" they all shouted in unison.

I pointed my fingers at each of them. Even at full extension, my finger didn't come up to their impossibly long noses.

"Did you turn in all of your articles?" I asked to the littlest one.

"Well no," the Troll Lord said clearly embarrassed. He scuffed his taloned claw on my porch and left a ten-inch groove in the cement. His head was downcast, not looking in my eyes any more.

"Did you do the rewrite I needed yesterday? The one you told me I would have by eight last night." I said poking my finger into the rubbery chest of the middle one.

"Ah no, but. . ." it stopped, not being able to think of anything and began scratching the largest wart on its head. Green goo started pulsing out of its head. In a few nasty heartbeats, its eyes, noting my beat red face, and the glare from my eyes, were downcast and I had several more grooves in my porch.

"And you," I said to the last one as smoke started to pour out of my ears.

He had a huge fangy smile on his troll-face. "I've turned in all of my articles and even had my wife look them over. I sent you a check you can even cash, this time. I even have an outline for the ANGRY GAMER article I know you're going to let me. . ."

"WHERE IS MY ISSUE 14 CRUSADER MAGAZINE?" I screamed with the fires of heck burning in my voice and fire blazing from my throat.

The three Troll Lords backed off the porch. The littlest one, at nine foot eight inches tall, started crying in fear.

"Sorry, sorry. I am so sorry," the boldest Troll Lord said in the face of my all-consuming anger.

The littlest one and the middle one were now well back behind their leader. The middle one had his talons up to his ear in a strange gang symbol. He mouthed the words, 'call me,' and left running. The little one was close behind him looking back every once in awhile in abject terror.

The last Troll Lord stood there with his knees aqiver.

"WHERE IS MY ISSUE 14 CRUSADER MAGAZINE?"

Fire singed his flesh. He was now standing at the edge of my driveway, making grooves with his talons in the road.

"Well, I took you off the subscription list. And ah. . ." he said looking around for support from his Troll Lord friends who were miles away and probably in caves screaming with joy at being alive.

"ARRRRRGH!" I expressed my extreme displeasure. I'm sure one of my stupid neighbors, probably the vampire, called the fire department again as fire filled the night sky.

"I'll take care of it," the Troll Lord said. "I'll put you back on the subscription list." He must have seen my eyes gow brighter. "I know, I know that doesn't take care of issue 14. I'll send it priority mail the second I get back to the lair. Won't you just let me in now to write my ANGRY GAMER article?"

I calmed myself. I stopped breathing fire. He was after all my Troll boss. "You trolls won't be writing the ANGRY GAMER in issue 15. I will write it and I'll be writing lots more of them if you don't get me my magazine to me on time or AT ALL. ARE WE CLEAR?"

He ran into the night, waving that he understood perfectly.

I slammed the door shut, feeling really good about myself. I had wanted to try one of these ANGRY GAMER pieces anyway. I sat down at my computer, took a big sip of diet Coke, and started typing.

"Loo-Lu Bell the faerie and her band of bold sprites had just finished defeating the nasty and smelly trolls. The faerie and her people could barely lift all the treasure they found in that smelly lair. . ."

CONVENTION BLOG

by Richard McBain

Welcome to our new monthly column covering Troll Lord Games convention news and notes. Every month I'll be updating you on our comings and goings and hopefully have an interesting story to tell along the way.

Conventions are a lot of fun. For TLG, they serve several purposes. Cons help us reach gamers on a personal level. It also gives us a chance to promote Troll Lord Games locally to help spread the gospel of Castles & Crusades. And we can't forget all the late night drinking sessions where I find a new and inventive way to steal Davis' beer without him realizing it. But I digress...

Last June, Mark and I made our way to Sooner Con in Oklahoma City. For several years, Casey had been trying to get the Trolls to make an appearance there as he continually told of the many virtues of Sooner Con. Now, Casey is a great writer, but we wondered if his adoration of Sooner Con was based more on his level of alcohol consumption instead of its economical viability for TLG as a business. With our concerns abound, I convinced Steve to take a chance and let Mark and I take a road trip. We were looking to get an increased presence at Conventions, and this one was close enough to Little Rock, that it worth giving it a shot.

We left early Friday morning. Mark is admittedly not a morning person. I by default, am a night owl, but have become more of a morning person through necessity due to kids and a job that requires my timely arrival every work day. The drive was a straight shot on I-40 to Oklahoma City. On the drive, Mark and I engaged in a myriad of topics, even dipping into the realm of politics for a short time. It was good company and good conversation, something I enjoy quite a bit.

We arrived at the Convention shortly after lunch, which was being held at the Historic Biltmore Hotel. We locate the exhibitor check-in and began to setup the booth. After about 2 hours we finish setup and wait for the exhibitor hall to open. 5 pm rolls around and Mark and I braced for the onslaught of potential customers to hit the Hall.

The onslaught never comes.

Now don't get me wrong. Everything about Sooner Con from was first rate. Kelly Keyser and company ran a very good, very well put together convention. But Friday night was slow, very slow

for the TLG booth. We ended the night with Casey, Mark, myself and Peter Bradley on the "Troll Lord Games" Q&A panel. We had all of 3 people show up. We wouldn't have it any other way.

Saturday found a complete reversal of fortunes for the Trolls.

The Convention was in full swing and the TLG booth was rockin'. Of course it didn't hurt that the featured entertainment for that nights festivities booth was just opposite of us. A burlesque troop from Dallas, The Lollibombs, provided Mark and I with all the eye candy that we would require for the rest of the Convention. Casey ran several games that day and they went very well.

After the Exhibit Hall closed that day, we had dinner and headed back to the Biltmore to catch some of the Burlesque show.

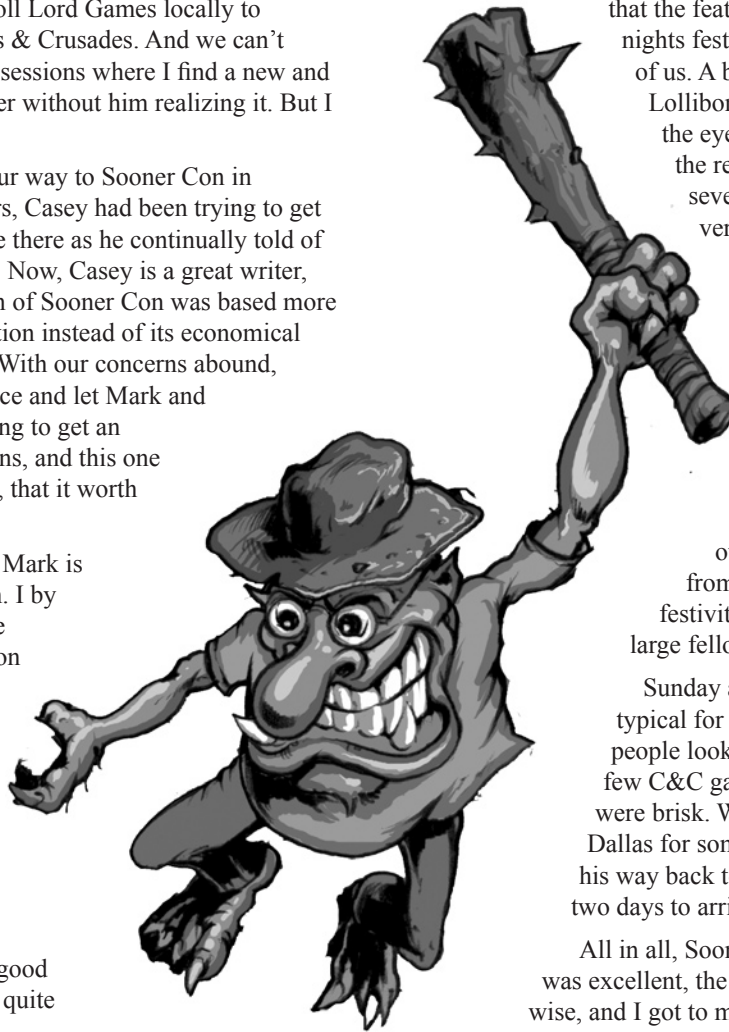
Luckily they had a full bar, so the drinks continued to flow without missing any of the entertainment. After the show finished Casey, myself, and some others headed back to the same bar from the night before to continue the festivities. While there, we ran into a very large fellow who was obviously intoxicated.

Sunday at Sooner Con found it to be fairly typical for most Conventions, slow, with people looking to get back home. Casey ran a few C&C games in the gaming hall, and sales were brisk. We broke down and I headed to Dallas for some family business and Mark made his way back to Little Rock on a flight that took two days to arrive (it's a story for another day).

All in all, Sooner Con was great fun. The staff was excellent, the weekend was terrific weather wise, and I got to meet a lot of good gamers and fans alike. And thanks to Shadoes and his group for all their support at Sooner Con.

Look for us this June at Sooner Con. We'll be there again this year, looking for people to share a drink with, and dodging drunks who think I have a pretty mouth.

Next Month, my write up on Troll Con 2007. In the meantime, if you have any comments, suggestions, or just want to tell me I suck; shoot me a line at richard@trolllord.com



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BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

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HLOBANE ORC: NEUROG LET, BONE CRUSHERS

NO. APPEARING: 1

SIZE: Large

HD:8(d8)

MOVE: 30 ft

AC: 19

ATTACKS: Ball and Chain (2d6), 2 Claw (1d4)

SPECIAL: Dark Vision, Light Sensitivity, Spell Immunity

SAVES: P

INT: Low

ALIGNMENT: Lawful Evil

TYPE: Humanoid

TREASURE: Nil

XP: 500 +8

The neurog let, called the bone crushers in the vulgate, are beastly orcs, bred for their sheer brutality. They are tall, powerfully built, though surprisingly lean creatures. With narrow eyes set beneath and thick browline. They appear to always glare at what they look upon. Their mouths are wide and their teeth filed and sharp. Like all orcs, they have tusks that jut from the lower jaw, but the neurog tusks grow back into their upper jaw where they cut the flesh, wounds constantly seeping puss and blood. Hairless but for a token lock they keep on their scalps, the neurog let ritually tattoo themselves, usually blending their horrific scars with a decorative nature of tattooing. The tattoos always reflect the dark crescent, or the horned god.

Neurog let are bred from other neurog let and usually kept apart from the tribe, bound to the females of their particular

breed. These Den Mothers routinely beat them and torture them, teaching them the tools of their trade. By the time they reach maturity they are filled with the rage of a long life of pain and suffering, they are then bound with chains. These chains are specifically designed for the bone crushers. Two chains, each independent of the other, are set on the creature's wrists. The chains are attached to one or two spiked mace heads. These heads are placed inside a huge iron ball that weighs several hundred pounds. The neurog let must drag this ball wherever he goes. The ball is looked after by another orc, the ukjanu Let, the Keeper of the Bone Crusher. The ukjanu is the only orc allowed near the bone crusher. He feeds him, waters him, and mends his wounds. For these reasons they exercise some control of the neurog let. In combat the ukjanu breaks open the large iron ball and releases the spiked mace heads, unleashing the neurog

let onto the world. Generally the bone crusher only responds to the ukjanu. If the ukjanu is killed the neurog let rampages on all things living until he himself is killed.

By the time they reach maturity they are given to one of the Battle Groups and used for a variety of purposes. For the most part they are used to torture prisoners and strike fear into those who do not yield to the questions put to them. They are also used in combat, unleashed to battle some champion or the other.

COMBAT: Neurog let, once unleashed attack with a brutal disregard to any suffering they may incur. They single out the largest or best-armored opponent and attack until they have killed it or they themselves are killed. They do not feel pain or suffer any wound to stop them, fighting even after limbs have been severed. They attack with the ball and chain, swinging it in wide circles to smash their victims or using them to strangle opponents. If freed from their chains for some reason they take any weapon that is near.

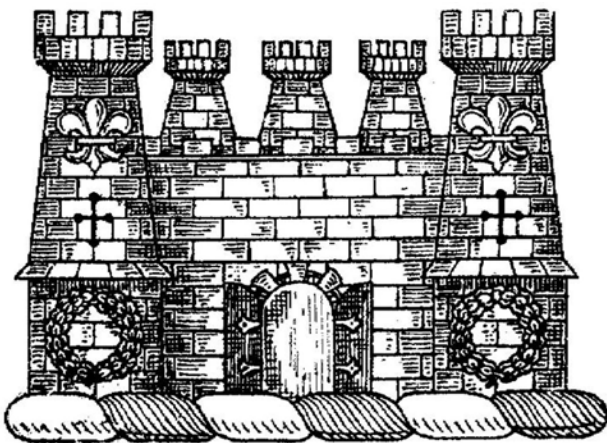
Spell Immunity: Neurog let are immune to all mind altering spells, such as fear, charm person etc. This does not include illusions.

The Neurog Let In Aihrde

The neurog let are Hlobane orcs, coming as all the whole of that orc tribe does from the Red Hills. They are said to be the descendants of the first orcs of the Marl and are held in high regard by the rest of the Hlobane peoples. To become an ukjanu is highly sought after, if dangerous, post in the tribal hierarchy.

During the Winter Dark each Hlobane Legion was given one of these creatures to serve in the noted purpose. In later years they were favored by Unklar in his dealings with all peoples and used frequently by him to bring great suffering and humiliation on his victims. Their nature made them unreliable and they often turned on Unklar or his servants and were in their own turn destroyed. In latter years the neurog let have become even rarer, but any large group of Hlobane, numbering over 100 has a good chance of possessing one of these fierce creatures.

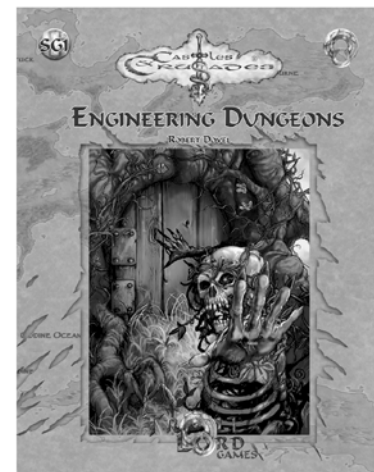
They are most often encountered in the east; however, an increased demand for these creatures in certain courts and by those who seek such protection has led to their spreading to the west. They are sometimes sold on the slave markets of the Confederation of Torrich, Eloria, the Gelderlands or other similar places, always with the ukjanu let in tow.



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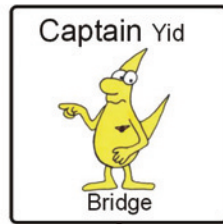
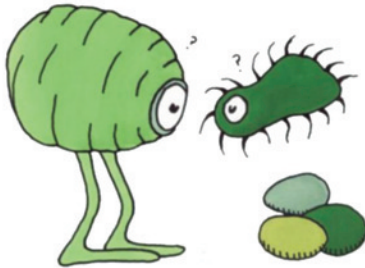
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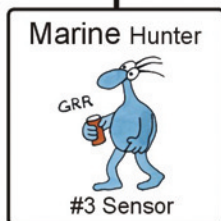
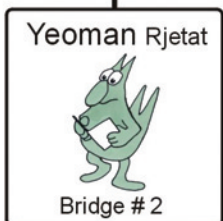
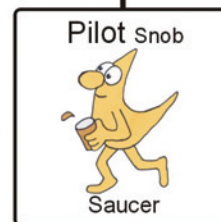
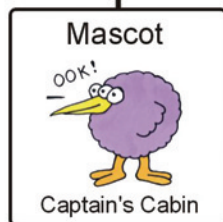
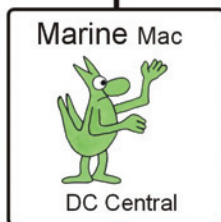
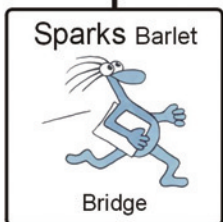
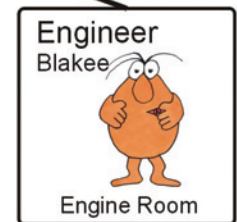
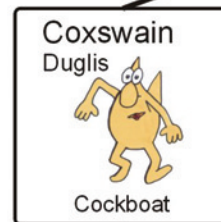
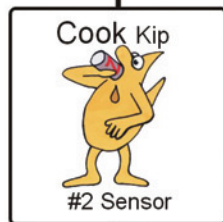
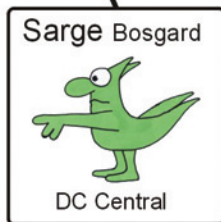
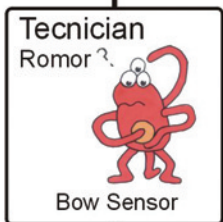
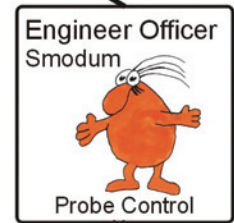


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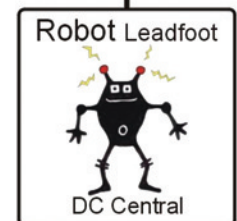
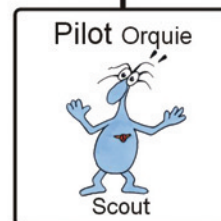
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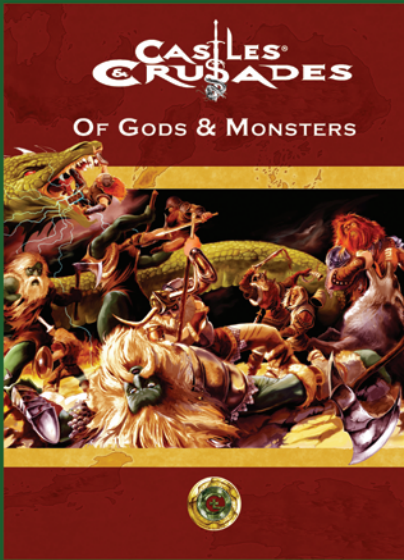
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I sketched this out a long time ago, for the Dragon Magazine, right after **Awful Green Things** first appeared, but never finished it. Now, 30 years later, it finally sees the light of day.
Tom





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