

THE CRUSADER™

The Journal of the Intrepid Adventurer

NOTES FROM
THE MANAGING
EDITOR
BY JAMES M. WARD

A NEW LOOK AT
AN OLD CLASS
BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

DRAGON
GRUMBLES
BY TIM KASK

HALLS OF
ADVENTURE
BY CASEY CANFIELD

THE ANGRY
GAMER
BY A TROLL

GAME REVIEW:
AGRICOLA
BY JAMES M. WARD

TALES OF
THE RINGS OF
BRASS
BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

MONSTERS
OF AIHRDE
BY STEPHEN CHENAULT



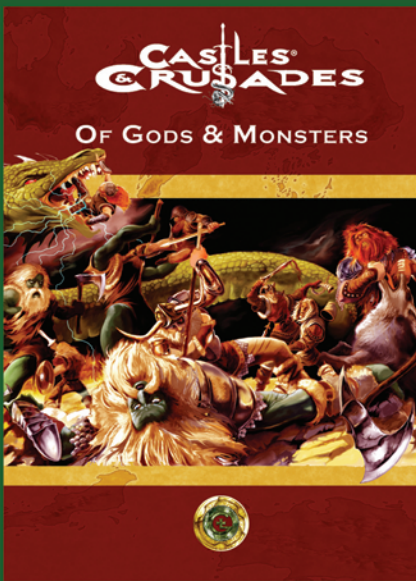
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notes from the managing editor



Favorite Books

In the course of my 57-some odd years of life, I've read a lot of novels. It all started when I was in seventh grade. One day I was in gym class playing volleyball. I went up to spike the ball and did so hitting the corner I was aiming at. Unfortunately for me Jack, a 300-pound goomer, tried to do the same thing, only he did it a lot slower than I did. As he was going up I was coming down and naturally, his inertia was greater than mine was and he ended up landing all his weight on my knee. As knees will do, mine splintered into many pieces. Two operations later, I have a quarter of my kneecap gone. In the process, I was in traction for two long months in the summer. To keep me from going crazy my wonderful mother brought me books to read. I read all the *Hardy Boys* and *Tom Swift* series while in bed and I became hooked on a lifetime passion. So here, I sit at my computer writing to all of you and I just want to give you the benefit of my reading experience. There are some authors over the years that I've greatly enjoyed that I want you to enjoy as well.

Robert Heinlein—*Time Enough For Love, Glory Road, Stranger In A Strange Land, The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress, Have Spacesuit Will Travel*

Time Enough For Love is the only book I've ever read that made me cry. There is a scene in this science fiction masterpiece where the main character is holding his dying wife on a far off alien planet. The wife has never been to Earth, but is so close to her husband that she imagines she can hear geese flying overhead. It's an amazingly moving scene in a book filled with action and adventure. I've read everything available from Robert Heinlein and he is a giant who has deeply impacted my life. My favorite saying is from his book, *Glory Road*. "The glory road is filled with rocks."

Roger Zelazny—*Jack Of Shadows, Lord of Light, Isle Of The Dead, Creatures Of Light & Darkness*

Jack of Shadows is an amazing book about a thief who is able to manipulate shadows to his advantage. Jack is such a cool character that I keep returning to the book repeatedly to discover even more interesting bits, as I grow older and mature. *Isle of the Dead* has one of my favorite scenes in any book. The main character of that book is able to build whole worlds for people to live on. When he lives on one of these worlds, the entire ecosystem loves and supports him. In one scene, he's leaving and the small animals of the planet gather in ones and twos to give him a pleasant send off. The fact that animals are able to present care and affection for anyone is written in such a way that the reader longs to have that type of empathy.

Bill Baldwin—*The Helmsman, The Defenders, Galactic Convoy, The Mercenaries, The Trophy*

Of all the hundreds of thousands of main characters, I've read in books I like Wilf Brim is by far and away the best. He begins as a simple navigator in a combat starship full of royal officers who don't like him. Many books later, he's a friend of the emperor and commanding fleets in huge combat actions. Every single one of these books is a homerun and I wait eagerly for every new one to come out.

Bernard Cornwell—*Sharpe's Rifles, Sharpe's Eagle, Sharpe's Gold, Sharpe's Company, Sharpe's Sword*

Richard Sharpe begins as a private in the King's Army during the early years of the Napoleonic wars. Fate allows him to begin climbing the ladder of rank as he is constantly thrust into the thick of battles and does amazingly heroic acts. Bernard Cornwell is able to wonderfully show the history of those times through the eyes of this common man thrust into high society because of his skill and bravery.

THE STORY... Jim Ward must have happy endings. I am extremely anal about this one point in all of my writings. I am just like James T. Kirk not believing in the "No Win" situation (I could try and spell Kobe-oshy Maru, but I'm not going to). I recognize this as one of my many character flaws, but am not willing to call it a major one. I know that tragedies gain far more attention and interest than do success stories, but I don't care. If I am only remembered in my own time, so be it. There is a driving need in me to say that no matter how hard life gets (and I haven't had a very hard life at all, but that's why I live in small town America) in the end, everyone will be smiling and happy. When I write novels and short stories, they will not end badly. It's one of the reasons I've stopped reading Stephen King (I also realize he doesn't care, but that's \$7.00 he's not getting from me). I know this Polly Anna attitude gets me in trouble. It has in the past and it will in the future. On the other hand, this same attitude helps me get up in the morning and keeps me working on Saturday and Sunday when I'd really like to take it easy. Therefore, I don't mind tragedies in the beginning and middle but I don't want to see them at the end. The only reason I bring it up is that this also colors the books and authors I read and re-read.

James M. Ward
Managing Editor
CRUSADER



ALEA IACTA EST



“The Die is Cast” – An Editorial by Stephen Chenault

A New Look at an Old Class



When we sat down to retool the barbarian we didn't take too much stock in the previous editions and incarnations of this class. Its not that those incarnations were weak, or bad or in any way unplayable, each have their strong points, each have their weak points. That wasn't the issue. The debate ranges beyond personal preference, as these weaknesses and strengths in class and races usually boil down. I myself had to set aside a natural prejudice against the class as I always picture a barbarian as an oversized man with a bear skin rug for a loin cloth, naked and a big old iron hat on his head. It's an image that has kept me from playing them for years. The class itself stands aloof from definition; his abilities seem best expressed through role-playing not mechanics. Or, as many suggest, including our own Peter Bradley, the barbarian's abilities are really social or racial in origin. Peter's concept makes sense. Rage as an ability? So when we sat down to retool this class we decided to take a step back and relook at the very class concept. We found a playable class, but we found that by projecting him in a Norse-centric, yet familiar, light that we shortchanged a class concept entirely. To retool the barbarian, we first had to retool the way we pictured him.

It's an odd thing to want to lose yourself in combat. The rage ability is interesting in the light of history, I suspect taken from the legendary Viking. The berserker attack is an idea that sees the barbarian almost purposely losing control of himself in battle in order to fight better and slay more enemies. He naturally takes a hit in his armor class as he is not defending himself as well as he should, but by going mad on the field he enhances his natural fighting abilities. This is an odd thing. I don't doubt that William Marshal, that most esteemed of Christian Knights, nor the greatest Samurai would but love for their opponents to lose control of themselves in battle. I find it very unlikely that Vikings would purposely lose themselves in battle. These were men who conquered vast swaths of the northern European land mass, building Kingdoms in Russia, Poland, Germany, England, Ireland, and France. Their warriors fought almost every type of warrior in their age, from American Indians to Persians. They were no strangers to battle and I suspect that going berserk was not on the common warrior's agenda.

This concept is ingrained in the game, from its root to the present. The barbarian is the personification of wild fury on the battle field and rages his way through the melee. "I go berserk!" Suddenly the character is a crazy whirlwind of maddened steel.

This is the first concept I wanted to jettison in the retooling process, because it doesn't make sense for this

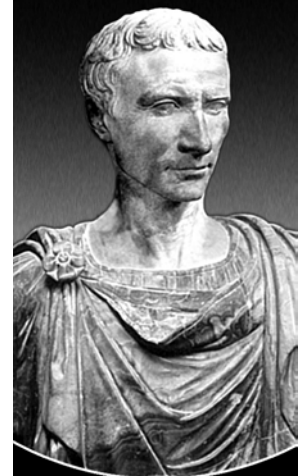
class or any other class. It's a nice concept but one that really should apply to any class, for any one who goes nutso on the battlefield. If my cleric is the last of seven characters standing in a sea of goblins and I see no hope for victory it's okay to ask the CK if I can go crazy with rage and drop my AC and gain a +2 to hit. Any CK would allow such a thing. The game is over and why not give him a little bump in hopes of gaining that sought after "from the jaws of death" victory. Why does the barbarian have an exclusive hold on this?

It happens that I've been reading a great deal of history on the American Indians. Generally I keep my focus on the 19th century plains Indians, but I've ranged out quite a bit, picking up pieces here and there. I can in no way pass myself off as an expert but some interesting traits have come to my attention. These peoples, these barbarians, were very deliberate warriors. They were not wild, whooping savages without the knowledge of certain death. They fought ferociously and bravely. They fought with the same foresight as any regular Knight. They definitely fought differently. Reading some of these accounts is truly amazing, it's eye opening. I strongly recommend two books. **Geronimo's Memoirs** are very short and to the point and very good. **War Path** by Stanley Vestal is about White Bull a Lakota Sioux, adopted son of Sitting Bull, and one of the most renowned warriors of his day. Reading these stories is like reading an adventure's log. These guys just got up and went on the war path in such a matter of fact way that you would think they are going to the grocery store. They fought the weather as readily as they did their enemy. They traveled great distances for loot and treasure, but more often than not, almost completely in the case of White Bull, for glory. They fought for the love of battle.

What sets them apart? Why is the Lakota warrior different from the French Knight? What is different between a barbarian and a fighter and a paladin and a knight? First we have to recognize that there is no real difference in the make up of the two cultures: barbarian and civilized. Indian/Viking/barbarian societies had warriors and merchants, hunters and shamans and every other social rank of people that civilized societies do. So first we had to establish that we were not talking about the average person in these uncivilized societies. When we look at the barbarian class, we have to look at those members of the barbarian societies who made up their warrior elite and how that warrior elite differed from the Knight, Paladin, and Fighter. If we can't do this then the class melts into the pot of the other three and becomes a conglomeration of racial abilities given to one of the above.

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

We tend to look at American Indians as these hippie-esque tree huggers who loved their environment. This may or may not be the case, but the American Indian, the warrior, was a fierce fighter who entered battle willingly and with a tremendous esprit. They fought all the time, often against crazy odds. They certainly did not stand and fight the 'noble' death, for this concept was as foreign to them as any other western concept. Dying was permanent and useless. They would fight to the death if need be, but more often than not they fought to live. Further, they didn't carry the same morality into battle that we do, fighting for wholly different purposes. As often as not the fight was that purpose. No where in these readings have I stumbled across a reference of a warrior going crazy berserk and leading a charge. Brave, certainly. Reckless, certainly, but not berserk. Not any more than any soldier on the Western Front whose friend just fell to an enemy bullet.

What is that one thing that set them apart, what was the quality that defined barbarians... assuming we define barbarians as people who live outside the normal bounds of civilization with its jumbled buildings, crowded living spaces, unhealthy eating habits, its filth, noise, the corruption that comes with it, etc etc... possessed that set them apart. We wrestled with this concept for awhile. They were tough. They could live off the land, being able hunters. Removed from the vestiges of town life they were exposed to all manner of mundane tasks such as making rope. Barbarian cultures seemed to abhor the culture of civilization as one that made its victims soft, fearful, and weak. These concepts seemed universal in the cultures, but seemed oddly missing from the class.

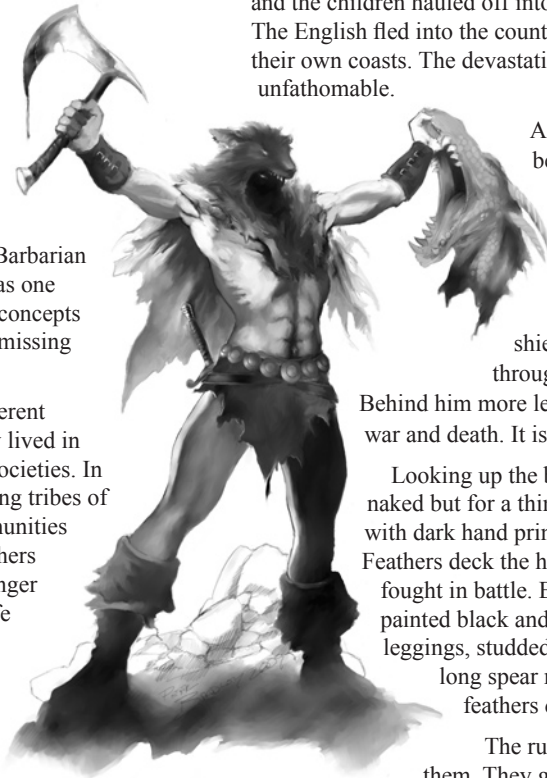
What establishes the barbarian as something different from the other 'fighting' classes? The societies they lived in established norms wholly different from civilized societies. In reading Caesar's *Gallic War* you find him mentioning tribes of Germans who forbid the sale of wine in their communities as they saw it as a poison that made them weak. Others refused to allow their people to live in one place longer than a few years for they saw the settled life as a life as one that further weakens you. Though we can question Caesar's account, the concept he poses is valid. The so called barbarians viewed the civilized people as pathetically weak and accounted their many defeats not to the martial powers of the civilized foe, but rather to their seeming limitless numbers. From the German warrior, to the Norse Viking, to the Comanche raider, they all viewed these house dwellers as weak and cowardly, fearful.

This seeming weakness is the one quality of which the barbarians were able to really take advantage. It's the quality that makes the racial traits a class playing ability.

The coming of the Goths had a profound affect on the Roman Empire. Tales of the sacking of Rome hundreds of years previous to their arrival in the 3rd century resonated with the citizens of the Empire and were only enhanced after they sacked Athens and other Balkan cities in the 270s. The Huns caused a similar response amongst the Romans in the next century. Word of their devastation spread before them and the peoples of the Empire fled at their arrival. When the Northman exploded onto western European scene in the 790s they terrified the inhabitants of the British Isles, Northern France, and Holland etc. They arrived on their ships, unheralded, and fell upon the unsuspecting locals, burning towns and monasteries. This sudden, brutal assault sent shock waves through the society and left the people reeling. These attacks continued for centuries to the point that the mere mention of the word

Viking struck terror in the hearts of men. The Zulu nation, unconquered, kept the British colonists in a state of panic, especially after the battle of Islandawhana. Further west, the Mexican, and Spanish colonists of the American South-West lived in constant terror of the Apache and Comanche peoples. This latter raided so often and so deep that they carved the Comanche Trace, a trail, through the mountains. Further north the Sioux and Cheyenne terrified countless thousands of settlers who wished to cross the Great Plains as quickly as they could.

The common, basic trait these barbarian peoples possessed was the ability to cause fear. By the ferocity of their own peoples and cultures, their dress, habits and society they struck a note of terror in those who faced them. They fought and died as any other warriors, the good, the bad, and the ugly. But they fought in such a way that those who stood in their way wanted nothing more than to get out of their way. The Spanish settlers fled all of northern Mexico as they feared falling into the hands of a Comanche or Apache warrior. The woman and men would be killed and the children hauled off into the wilderness and raised as warriors. The English fled into the country side for they could no longer defend their own coasts. The devastation left in the path of the Northman was unfathomable.



A dragon prow breaks the wall of fog before you. A creaking of ship's timbers and deep-throated shouts from the mist follows it. Northman leaps off his ships into the surf, girded in leather jerkin, with a chain shirt and iron helms. Large, round, iron studded shield and short thick spear in hand he plows through the water, unconcerned and uncaring.

Behind him more leap off into the water. They are here for war and death. It is the trade they practice.

Looking up the bluff a rider tops the hill. His mount is naked but for a thin blanket. The beast is painted yellow with dark hand prints all over his body, tattoos of sorts. Feathers deck the horse's mane, denoting a steed that has fought in battle. But the rider draws your eyes; his face is painted black and deep red. He is naked to the wind but for leggings, studded with beads and a thin pair moccasins. A long spear rests lightly in his hands and a mane of feathers deck his headdress.

The rumor of these savage barbarians precedes them. They give no mercy and ask none. They fight for the love of the fight. These are barbarians. They are not soft and tender. They do not define themselves by the comfort they achieve, but rather they define themselves by the glory that their arms bring them. They are coming, they are coming for you, and they will not show mercy.

Barbarians are more than wild miscreants at the table. They are men of action, born of warrior cults, who use their own ferocity, not to unbalance themselves in battle, but to unbalance the enemy, their targets. Anyone who faces a barbarian knows that death is on the line, that the civilized norms of quarter will not be offered, expected, or given. This is the barbarian that we bring to the table in the 4th Printing of the *Players Handbook*. This is the retooled class. It brings to the table that feeling of awe and dread that only the barbarian warriors could inspire. The fighter may fight better than anyone else, the knight may exalt his friends to heroic deeds, and the paladin may create holy ground against the evil of the abyss, but only the barbarian can strike true fear in the hearts of his victims, for he is the personification of the indifference of the natural world.



Tim Kask

Even though they tried for eight years, the nuns were not able to break his spirit, although they did give him a good education. During the sixth grade, he discovered AH's D-Day and was hooked on wargaming.

Growing up in the Corn Belt, Tim longed to see what else there was out there and mistakenly bought into the Navy recruiter's promise to "Join the Navy and see the world" upon graduating from high school. He saw a lot of SE Asia, but not much else except the flight deck of a carrier.

Upon his return from RVN, he married a girl that he had known since ninth grade, went to college on the GI Bill and rediscovered gaming and miniatures. This led him to Chainmail.

Chainmail led him to calling up one of the authors, named Gary, which led him to D&D in 1974, which in turn led to a job with a new company in 1975 called TSR editing D&D supplements and starting a magazine called The Dragon.

He left the gaming field until just a couple of years ago, resurfacing as one of the celebrity auctioneers at GenCon. He is now busy writing a couple of game columns, answering questions on his thread at dragonsfoot.org, and writing a series of modular adventures for RP games. He is still happily married (39 years in July), has two children and four grandchildren, one of whom obviously got his gaming gene, and two cats in the yard.

Managing Editor's Aside:

Recently, a person or two has said they don't understand all of the abbreviations in Tim's work, but they love the work. I'm here to help.

CK = Castle Keeper

D&D = Of course this is *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* and if you didn't know that you shouldn't be role-playing.

DM = Dungeon Master

GM = Game Master

IoD = Increments of Damage (I haven't seen this one used very often)

LBB = Little Brown Books (I swear this one Tim made up himself, but he gets around more than I do. The term refers to the very first *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* box set that was in a brown box. The booklets inside were digest sized and brown.)

Lvl = Level

M-U = Magic User

NPC = Nonplayer Character

PC = Player Character

RPGers = Role-Playing Gamers

RPGing = playing a role-playing game

TSR = The company name of the people who brought you D&D. It derives from a gaming club in Lake Geneva, and means Tactical Studies Rules.



Like many RPG'ers, I got my first taste as a PC. Unlike most RPG'ers, I played those first two adventures in 1974 in Lake Geneva. I must have had fun...

Seriously, though, I bought the set and took them back to college and then spread the RPG virus to about 25 more gamers as the GM (CK, DM or whatever your game calls the individual that concocts the whole thing and gets to play Supreme Deity). I didn't get to role-play as a character again until I joined TSR and play-tested modules and the like.

I missed that.

But, I had something almost as good, or even better, depending upon your viewpoint: I had scads of NPC's. Old school RPG'ing was big on NPC's for several reasons and saw them used in several different fashions.

NPC's were a double-edged sword back then for GM's to consider. We could use them in two different fashions: help or hindrance. I want to talk about how they helped.

Gary saw the difficulty new PC's had surviving even simple encounters. When you only have six increments of damage (IoD) that can be suffered, however your system might characterize them, just three or four sorry orcs can do you in, quickly. We talked about this on several different occasions in '74 and '75 before I went to work for him.

The 3LBB (the three little brown books of original D&D) had lots of information on hiring flunkies, men-at-arms and specialist "gunslingers." The original goal of the game was to get so powerful and wealthy that you could build your own keep, hire oodles of men-at-arms to defend it, and be able to afford to subsidize one or more magic-user's research. It was still very miniatures oriented, as miniatures were played back then at the Dawn of Role-Playing.

Those "pioneer role-players," of which I was one, took a while to get into the mindset that the "rules" were not "rules" at all, but "guidelines" and "suggestions". Many, many miniatures players back then were kind of anal-retentive about "The Rules," and considered them sacrosanct and inviolable. Until we had that epiphany, we all slavishly followed the charts and tables in the 3LBB when making levels, building frameworks for campaigns and concocting encounters. That meant that if they (the players) were rather unlucky, a "wandering monster" could be anything from a goblin, 12 goblins, up to a dragon in lethality. Pity the party of puny low-levels that ran into that dragon...

(Incidentally, it was that horrible disparity that led many of us to start modifying "The Rules," and fudging die-rolls to conform to our individual

vision of what the campaign should be. My original group might never have gotten past third or fourth level if not for that fudging. I will address fudging in the next *Grumbles*.)

That circumstance of high potential lethality posed a serious quandary for the early DM's. Nobody wanted to spend the time and effort to create the beginnings of a campaign, only to kill everyone off by the fourth session. (I would guesstimate that I spent close to 100 hours before I sat down at the table with 12 or 15 of them and explained what we were gonna play, and how it went.) The way to address that puzzle that I quickly adopted was providing "arrow catchers" hanging around the local inns, or town, or whatever.

No, these were not nimble sprites snatching arrows out of the air before they could pierce a PC; these were "slightly less than 1st Lvl" NPC's that were that guy in the red tunic in all of the old Star Treks. You know the one, he usually had something horrid happen to him before the opening credits, like being impaled with the poisonous spores that otherwise would have hit Kirk. Like the Mongols so thoroughly proved, there is hardly any better way to preserve your best troops than screening them with conquered peasants. (In an enormous, many-year miniature campaign I played in, they were referred to as saps-serfs and peasants.)

If they had a really hard task ahead of them, I often let them find a "special" NPC, like maybe a 4th or 5th Lvl M-U. The thing about these NPC's was that they were very expensive. The PC's choices were like "more likely live to split 60% of the haul with the rest of the PC's," or "hazard a very likely lethal endeavor on their own, fueled by greed, to keep all of the loot." Also, the entire agreed upon percentage went to however many surviving NPC's were still standing. If hiring an M-U, you ran the risk of him appropriating a choice magic goody, a gunslinger Fighter a nifty weapon, etc. But you were alive to be able to feel bummed about it; dead is just dead.



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GUYS & DOLLS

By KEITH HACKWOOD

Keith Hackwood (Heruka) is an avid fan of projective identification



Dolls. We all know and remember them, maybe we owned some, or had a particular favourite—an external unifying centre all of our own. Maybe we lavished it with love, treasured it, named it—told it every secret, every feeling we had. Then one day we put it away, never to take it up again. Neglected and forgotten, yet always connected to our deepest emotions and memories, perhaps that lost doll sits there to this day. Perhaps not. Question here is what would happen if that were true for your PC, or for that grizzled necromancer over there, or for the little beggar child you passed on the street? What if the doll had a will of its own? Welcome to the twisted world of animate toys, their owners, and their unstoppable quest for attention.

THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

Penelope Nizzen is a twelve-year-old girl from Cheaplore, the poor quarter of Leng City. Orphaned at birth, she has lived her short life from hand to mouth, surviving on her wits and by her canny knack for appearing just how others wish to see her. A successful beggar, Penny now operates alone across town, begging for alms from temples and guildhouses, evoking pity from even the stoniest of passersby. As you meet her, she is sitting by the steps of the mercantile hall, cradling a bundle of rags. As you pass, she asks for a copper or two, perhaps you pay her, perhaps not.

Penny is a twelve year old human female, AC 11, HP 3, primes in Charisma (isn't she sweet, poor thing?), Wisdom (no flies on our Penny) and Dexterity (watch your pockets). Although frail looking, she is more robust than she appears (and is very capable of surviving alone in an urban setting). Penny is by nature deeply neutral, understandably preoccupied with meeting her own needs. However, the doll she cradles under those rags, and whom she calls 'Virula', is quite another proposition. Virula is a foot or so long, with an old-fashioned body of stuffed gauze and hessian and a painted wooden head. She appears inert, but is in fact an animated doll (AL: LE, AC 6, HD 2(d6), HP 8, Save P, Move: 18 ft., Move Silently capability, Att: her arm is basically a needle (1d4 dam) with a cork hand which she removes and replaces at will, she can emit an inaudible scream (causes 1d4 dam + fear effect each round), and she can use her gaze to distract or control (as per hypnotism).

Virula comes to life upon Penny speaking a command word known only to her, though in her history (Virula is at least a hundred years old) there have been many moments when Virula has animated through her own innate magical capacity. Being evil, Virula attempts over time to bend Penny to her own path, leading her often into situations of ill-intent or seducing her to go further than she intended (recently at Virula's impulsive instigation, Penny pushed another beggar child in front of a cart, where she broke her arm; wracked with guilt Penny swore not to use Virula again, until hunger got the better of her and she sent her out to steal bread). Virula feeds off being needed, she creates dependency and will use any means to inculcate her current owner with fear, to control them and their actions, and to use anything she learns against them.

Often preying upon children, Virula is the culmination of generations of distorted desires and needs. Her hallmarks are spite, subterfuge, resentment, rage and revenge. Anyone encountering Penny has a base 25% chance of triggering the interest of Virula, modified by context (so

50% if Virula is animate at the time, or if Penny becomes particularly interested). Once animated, Virula is active for 1d12 rounds before her energies fade and she becomes still again, unless she is able to lap at fresh blood. In this latter case, the taste of blood acts as a reanimation and she can function for another 1d12 rounds.

Virula is believed to be one of the so-called 'Argvain dolls' crafted generations ago by an enslaved sorcerer and puppeteer. A dozen were made, according to legend, and most are thought lost over the years, to domestic tragedy or wear and tear. The dolls were enchanted and designed to be playmates and companions for the offspring of wealthy Argvain slave merchants (originally all were lawful good by alignment). However, Virula has slid, through her many owners and experiences, into an altogether different place—and is by now a total corruption of her original purpose. She seeks to spill blood, create suspicion, jealousy and hatred, and everywhere to sow the seeds of discontent. She may, through Penny, follow a PC or party and attempt to steal from them or cause disputes in any way possible; or she may attack, stealthily, as a doll-assassin might do. Her abilities are limited, and her physical form now quite frail (split seams, a lost hand, loose head) hence her immediate need is to have someone with the means to pay (i.e. not Penny), get her repaired and re-stitched. She is capable of great guile, deceit and brutality in the pursuit of this end. She may detect as magical to the right spell-user, but her alignment (should it ever be checked) will produce no result—instead, she will appear as a hazy succession of memories based on the alignments of her previous owners (most of whom, of course, she has ruined or even dispatched entirely).

Hilbertix Bonemeal (AC 11, AL: CN, L 3, HP 8, Primes in intelligence 17, charisma 16, and dexterity 15) is a failed sorcerer from the east, the third son of a wealthy landowner, highly disenchanting with his lot in life. Leaving his studies at the College of Arcane Medicines in Poule, the twenty-six year old Bonemeal eloped with his lover, the aspiring bard Paradine Mudel. However, Paradine contracted the ague and died last winter in agony. Unable to contain his grief at her loss (and his own narcissistic rage at having failed utterly to save her) Hilbertix threw himself into the necromantic arts—studying furiously, reapplying his previous years of arcane research to this new end. So far, in his shack at the edge of town, Hilbertix is no nearer raising his dead love (whom he keeps beneath the floorboards in a trough of ice-melt)—though he has, unintentionally, managed to animate her favourite bear, Cordy. By turns despairing and depressed to the point of inaction, or else seized by urgency and apt to work for days without sleep, Hilbertix has lost all contact with reality beyond his immediate surroundings. Meanwhile Cordy, discarded in a recent depressive episode, has developed a rudimentary will of his own.

Cordy is a two-foot tall stuffed bear, made with real bear fur, and though his muzzle turns up in a glib childish smile, his teeth are real enough to be dangerous, and his paws have recently taken on a new sharpness (AC11, AL: NE, HD 2(d6), HP 9, Save P, Move: 30 ft., Move Silently). He can attack with a claw/claw/bite (1d2/1d2/1d2+1) and is surprisingly strong, especially when in motion. He has already bitten and mauled Hilbertix, hence being thrown out. Cordy is animate by night, but is light sensitive, and hence tends to withdraw in daytime. Hilbertix, when in a more active phase, may seek the lost bear – since it reminds him of his mission to raise Paradine. However, Cordy has had a taste of life and freedom and is bent on maximising this experience—

the toy bear has truly gone feral. Local dogs and foxes have been showing up dead, with heads bitten off and claw marks aplenty; last week a toddler was mauled and almost died, whilst her mother gathered in the washing at dusk. People are becoming nervous and suspicious, and Hilbertix is already being pointed at as a suspect.

Poitrenau of Klip (AC 15, HD 6(d8), HP 31, Move: 20 ft., Save P, AL: N, Att: by weapon, limited two-handed capability, or two-weapon use with no penalty) is a nickname given by squires at the court of Jerome to the mannequin used in jousting practice. This man-sized figure, with outstretched arms, is built out of hardwood and iron plate, and designed to take fulsome blows by charging knights at practice with lance, cavalry axe or sword. For years, Klip has stood in the tilt-yard surrounded by sawdust and sweat. Recently, following the summer's tourney, Sir Jerome Flaxen, gentleman knight of the manor at Klip, had the mannequin refurbished. As well as new welds and a general tightening, and the freshest livery of red and green paint, the artisan hired to do the work replaced Poitrenau's head. However, the helm,

which he placed upon the carved woodenhead, which he had taken from a store of old kit in the tourney stable, was in fact a helm of animation. The result was that during the next practice joust, having been hit with the lance, old Poitrenau the blade-bag dummy, reared up, struck with flail and sword, and brought down a charger at full tilt. The stunned squire, Tepran, fell with great alarm, and before he could raise himself, Poitrenau had cut him to pieces, delivering the coup de grace through Tepran's visor.

The newly animated mannequin then stomped through the tiltyard gates and disappeared into the countryside, and has not been seen since. Sir Jerome is known to be offering a reward for the return of the dummy and the helm, and news of these events has attracted a good many others to the area, with intentions of their own.

Enjoy using/adapting these unfortunates and their awkwardly animated toys however you may choose.

Tainted Lands

A Nightmare's Dread

JAMES M. WARD
SUMMER, 2009

A SIEGE ENGINE GAME

WWW.TROLLORD.COM/SIEGE/7651.HTML

Agricola

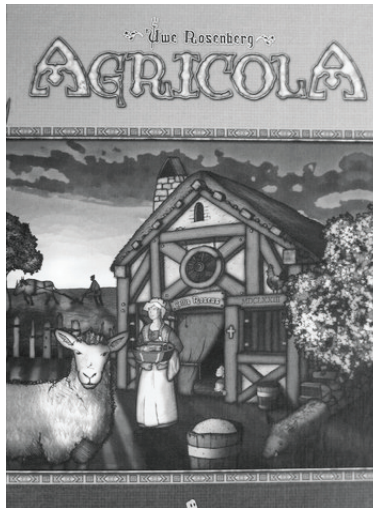
Players: 1-5

Play Time: Nearly Forever

Game Design: Uwe Rosenberg

Company: Z-Man Games

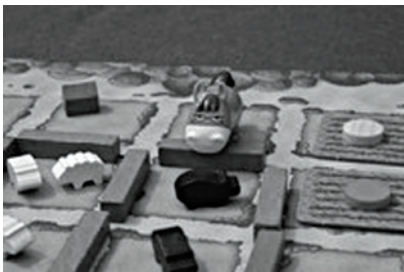
Review by James M. Ward



Agricola is extremely popular. It's an agricultural development game and at this writing, it was #1 on *boardgamegeek.com*. Those of you who like to play boardgames should definitely look up that web site. The *boardgamegeek* ranks games, gives good overviews of how each game plays, and there are plenty of images on each game. I was amazed at how many images there were for Agricola. It's a farming game where each player develops a farm and there are images of many different types of home made sheep, cows, boar, and other farmy bits. Check it out and you will be impressed.

There is even a solo version of the game in the original rules, and I know several people who take it on business trips and play the game in their hotel rooms at night.

The designer presents this bit of info. *Central Europe around 1670 A.D. The plague, which has raged since 1348, has finally been overcome. The civilized world is revitalized. People are upgrading and renovating their huts. Fields must be plowed, tilled, and harvested. The famine of the previous years has encouraged people to eat more meat.*



resources to advance their own farm.

At the end of the game, you are granted points for how widely defused you are. You lose points if you don't have each type of farm animal. Those with wooden houses don't get as many points as those with stone houses. You lose points for every patch of unworked land you have on your game board.

I've played the game six times now and the number of players varied from 3-5. I never played it in less than 2 hours+ and one game took three and a half hours (sigh.) I rarely enjoy long games. It's my feeling that there are several cards in the various decks that are so good that they weight the game toward those who are able to use those cards. I am a success driven individual and it's almost impossible to argue with the extreme success of this game. A large number of people love it for hundreds of different reasons. I present it here as a game you should look at. I don't own one, and will never buy it, but thousands of others happily play it often.



I'm positive that it's the number of choices that's making this game so popular. There are literally hundreds of different choices each player makes, in the game. Agricola never plays the same way twice. In the play of the game, you are trying to fill up your game board with homes, fenced in pens for the farm animals, and plowed fields for the grain and vegetables. At the beginning of every game, you get a set of cards, with some of the cards far more useful than others. How you insert these cards into your game turn determines how well you do in the game.

Feeding all of your people is the central task in the game. Although you are encouraged to produce more homes and people, feeding them is often a huge problem. There are limited resources appearing every turn and your player interaction is every one scrambling for those



CHAPTER XI: LAND AS TREASURE

A PEEK INSIDE THE UPCOMING CASTLE KEEPER'S GUIDE



CHAPTER XI: LANDS AS TREASURE



s discussed in the Monsters & Treasure, Land and Title are perfect rewards for hard fought campaigns and serve to shake up the normal gold and magical treasure that veteran players are sometimes accustomed to earning.

The enterprising Castle Keeper offers Land and Title in order to both reward the character or characters and propel the game in new directions. Understanding when to offer land as treasure and how to integrate it into the ongoing game are critical elements to making land as treasure an enjoyable and workable aspect of the game. When used correctly it can heighten the experiences of any game and bring the players to the table with enthusiasm.

Castles & Crusades is not particularly limited to any one type or genre of game. But for the purposes of this chapter we are using Medieval Europe as our baseline. Please note that the term Land as treasure is used throughout this chapter but covers any type of land, title, entitlement, endowment treasure that the CK might devise; from the guild hall orders to the landed estate.

NEW HORIZONS

The Castle Keeper's main task is to engage the character in a fun and exciting game of chance and adventure. The setting is the arena within which this fun takes place. Settings range from the very detailed to the simple (see Chapter 10 Worlds of Adventure). Ahrde is complete with history, racial groups and sub-groups, political institutions, cosmology, and more; all of which afford the CK and players a virtual tapestry within which to weave their own stories. Though such detail is by no means necessary, the game's setting need have no further depth than "the forest path looms."

No matter the depth of the setting this is where the action takes place and the players conduct the activities of their characters. The setting is traditionally the CK's realm. They design it, creating its structure, the rules that guide it, and the monsters that people it. Rarely are player opinions sought and even less rare are they acted upon and integrated

into the game. In many respects the setting is akin to the video game console. As any table top gamer recognizes the video console is very limited. It creates boundaries that the gamer cannot pass over or through. The CK's setting is often too much akin to this, there are established boundaries that restrict the actual play and in some cases the imagination of the player.

Lands as treasure offer the CK the perfect tool to set aside this gaming paradigm and allow the characters themselves to integrate directly with the setting and the game. Not only that, but they are able to change the course of its history and become actual participants in the world's creation. In many regards this makes them part of the setting itself.

Too often the veteran CK shies away from this concept. At first mention of letting players possess a greater role in the setting, visions of madness and destruction emanating from every wild, hair-brained idea that a player may put forward come to their minds. They see an endless debate over strange questions pertaining to bizarre cultural, ecological, and social questions that have no grounding in the rich flavor and or history of the setting. "No the Kopesh sword is a near eastern weapon; this is a medieval European environment. They have no knowledge of such a blade!"

This attitude is slightly misplaced. The setting should be a vibrant and evolving environment. The CK must make adjustments to it from time to time, refining aspects, or reacting to the very exploits that their players achieve. There is no reason that allowing characters a freer hand, or any hand at all, in the local setting should have any more impact than do the actions they routinely take. If the characters slay the local giant that is terrorizing the lands of Krackenmore, they have in effect impacted the entire region of the world, realistically changing the local political environment and if one wanted to be extremely technical the ecological, social, and economic environment as well. Even plundering a dungeon liberates a region of the terror of the undead that rose from its depths with vast ramifications on the surrounding region. The argument states that these are actions within

the CK's control and as such remain acceptable because they are controllable.

In fact the opposite is true; by allowing the players a greater role in the setting it adds to their own involvement, giving them a vested interest beyond the acquisition of gold and silver, to work within the setting. To put it frankly, allowing players to assume greater roles in the setting is something akin to the political concept "keep your friends close and your enemies closer." The player whose knight earns the title of Duke and stands as one of the King's men is far less likely to do things detrimental to the Court and country, such as mouthing off to their rightful lord, if he is a part of that Court. The setting itself must be a vibrant arena in order to keep the players captivated and interested in playing in said setting. Creating a setting in which all the controls are there must by its very nature wear on the players and bore them into wanting to do something else or play some other game.

The Setting should be the arena for the adventure, not the restricted access old boys club. Bringing the characters into the setting allows the CK to bring the players more into the game. This does not mean that the CK must yield to the player's opinions or his desire. This in no way impairs the CK's ability to run his own game and maintain clearly defined setting rules. Maintaining control of the integrated setting is as important as maintaining control over any interactive aspects of the CC game.

LAND AS TREASURE PER CLASS

The below list (*note: this references the complete Chapter 11 in the CKG*) expands concepts on how to award land as treasure for each class. The list assumes that nobility, the title and rank of Lord and Vassal, is not restricted to the soldier's profession, but one whereby deeds beyond the sword serve earn an adventurer rank and title. In this case use of Table 11: X Land & Title as Treasure is the baseline for any class that earns a fief, however; for those Castle Keepers that wish to preserve the warrior culture of feudalism refer to the below for guidelines on how to award land as treasure for each class. Each class is different, possessed

of a different set of skills, goals, and designs and the setting that you are playing in or have designed may not have room for a druid who has become a fief-holding Lord and Vassal.

RANGER

Awarding a ranger a fief would only serve to tie them down and perhaps not play to their skills as a Lord would desire. However, there is a constant need for a warden, someone able to watch the roads, keep an eye on strangers who pass through a land. The warden keeps track of the amount of game in an area, when best to hunt and how best to hunt. Further they keep a watch out for any monsters that live in the area or may travel through it. Rangers are generally awarded wards to watch over and keep safe for the Lord of the land. As such they are not required to raise troops, or render obligations. Their oaths of fealty or homage earn them a different reward. Refer to **Table 11.4 Land & Title as Treasure: Ranger** below.

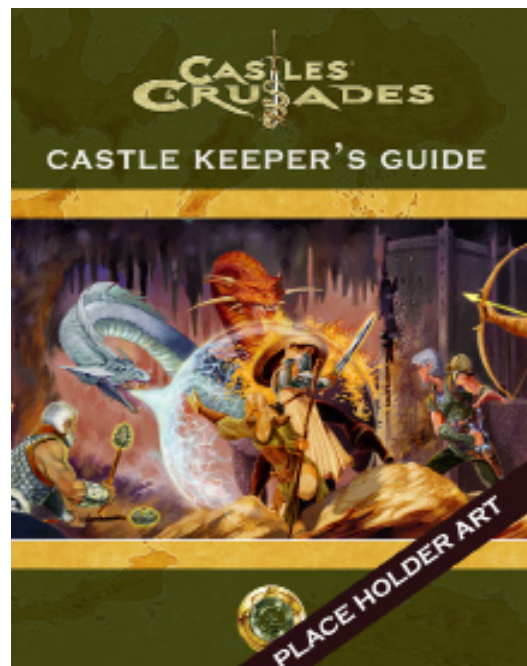


Table 11.4 Land & Title as Treasure: Ranger

Level	Title	Ward*	Huntsmen**	Habitation/Pay†
1	Deerstalker	2	0	n/a; 10gp
2	Huntsman	4	0	n/a; 25gp
3	Scout	8	1	Draw Rations; 40gp
4	Pathfinder	50	2	Free Room at Inn; 50gp
5	Sheriff	150	4	Free Room and Board at Inn; 65gp
6	Master of the Hunt	500	8	Quartering Anywhere in Realm; 75gp
7	Master of Game	1200	12	Living Quarters in Lord's Castle; 110gp
8	Warden	5000	16	Cottage; 120gp
9	Marshal of the Realm	15000	24	Manor House, 10,000 acre fief; 150gp
10-12	Ranger	30000	36	F. Mn. House, 20,000 acre fief; 200gp
13-15	Ranger Lord	55000	48	Keep, 45,000 acre fief; 300gp

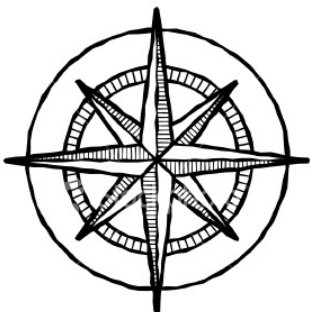
HAMMER & ANVIL

THOUGHTS FROM A
GAMER MASTER'S FORGE

BY
CASEY CANFIELD



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.



Halls of Adventure



Our stalwart Managing Editor has asked for “crunch” in this issue, and CRUNCH he shall have!

Mike Stewart (of *Auld Wyrnish*) and I have been working on a project for Troll Lord Games called *Halls of Adventure*. Halls of Adventure, when complete, will be a tome of locations that a CK can use, in a pinch, to bring additional depth to his or her game. Every CK has encountered a situation when the players decide to go somewhere that hasn't been developed, or seek adventure in an unexpected locale. *Halls of Adventure* will provide exciting material that can be used immediately and seamlessly in any game.

As of this writing, Mike and I are planning to include several types of locations. First, we will be including common locations, both urban and rural, that might be found in any campaign. Examples include a mage's guild, a blacksmith's shop, and an apothecary's store. From there, we branch out into slightly less common or mundane locations. I'm developing an oasis locale for the book that fits this category. Finally, we will be including a number of locations that represent “typical” lairs for our favorite creatures. Essentially, these will be small adventures in themselves that can be used by any CK, as needed.

Well-developed locations are the bread-and-butter of any campaign. I thought including a teaser of some of my content for Halls of Adventure might provide some guidance for developing interesting locations. While I won't provide any locations in their entirety, I will provide several representative examples. I'm aware that experienced CKs will find this rather elementary, but for new recruits into the CK business, I hope it is helpful.

When creating a new location of your own, it is best to understand, in a broad sense, the role that location plays in a campaign. While it is not necessary to do this in your own campaign notes, *Halls of Adventure* provides a detailed explanation of potential roles that each location can play in a campaign. Here's some text from the *Apothecary/Herbalist* location:

Role in the Campaign

Apothecaries are essentially a combination of doctors and pharmacists. They have chemical

and herbal knowledge that allows them to create medicinal remedies for a broad spectrum of maladies. They also have rudimentary knowledge of anatomy, and can apply medical procedures to relieve common injuries and afflictions. Apothecaries may also practice alchemy, and combine it with their medical abilities to better concoct magical potions and tinctures.

Herbalists, by contrast, specialize in applying natural remedies derived from various forms of plant life. While they also seek to treat those in need of medical assistance, their expertise is limited to applied knowledge of plants, extracts, or combinations of herbal treatments. This is not to say that treatment by an herbalist is necessarily inferior to that of an apothecary, however. An herbalist's specialized knowledge can often attain equal or superior results.

Adventuring is a profession fraught with risks, and the most successful of that breed are those that seek methods to mitigate those risks. Enterprising adventurers will eventually seek to do business with an apothecary or herbalist, for several reasons.

Bruised and wounded adventurers certainly find apothecaries and herbalists to be of aid, but more often, individuals seek out their shops to prepare for the unknown. The shop of an apothecary or herbalist will offer many items for purchase, often for a premium. These items might include salves, ointments, and draughts of varying effect, bandages and poultices, raw herbs, herbal extractions, or mixtures, and perhaps even componentry required for the casting of certain spells or the crafting of specific potions.

Apothecaries are often found in larger towns and cities, usually in middle- to upper class areas. A master apothecary would likely have between one and three apprentices, and would work closely with local temples devoted to healing practices, town and city guard garrisons, and most houses of nobility or affluence. A particularly gifted apothecary may find demand high enough to produce goods for distribution through merchants. An apothecary's shop can range from a small, unassuming storefront to a larger, busier workshop, depending on the skill of the apothecary, the location of the business, and the relative affluence of likely clientele.

Herbalists are more likely to be located in rural villages and hamlets, or perhaps isolated in the countryside. A master herbalist may have an apprentice or work alone. Herbalists produce most of the herbs that they use from their own gardens. Specimens that are more difficult to grow themselves are obtained from across the countryside, often through employment of local youth to perform the gathering chores.

Rural herbalists and urban apothecaries may have commercial arrangements. Apothecaries obtain herbal components, common and rare alike, from rural herbalists. Herbalists, in return, receive coin or finished medical supplies for use in their localities. Apothecaries in large cities often rely on rural herbalists for most of their herbal component needs, as gardening space may be limited in large urban areas.

Again, the detail provided here is not essential material for every CK and for every campaign. For those unfamiliar with exactly what an apothecary does, it is a valuable resource for understanding how they can be used in a game.

Each location will also contain a section called “Variations on a Theme.” This section presents other possible uses for the location, including potential adventure hooks, variants, and modifications that can be implemented. It is an attempt to show how one location can potentially become many with a little bit of effort. When creating locations of your own, understanding the broad array of potential uses may help in the future. After all, plenty of games occur where the characters never visit a keyed location, and it would be nice to use those locations elsewhere with a little modification.

For an example, I present the “Variations” section for the *Bandit Encampment* location.

Variations on the Theme

A nearby wilderness road serves as a remote leg of a religious pilgrimage. Hundreds make the journey every year, but the usual stream of pilgrims has suddenly ended. Adventurers must locate and investigate known waystations and encampments on the route to determine the cause.

A group of nomads has settled into seasonal residence in a known encampment. One of the nomad youths is accused of a crime against a prominent local resident.

A band of wilderness protectors has established various encampments as waypoints for use in planning and organizing strikes against humanoid raiders. The adventurers stumble across one such encampment while retreating from a battle gone awry.

Next, we delve into the innards of every location, the general description and the detailed encounter areas. When applicable, each location will have a general description that provides a basic overview of the place, along with a detailed map and encounter key that notes precise locations of all NPCs, monsters, or items of interest. In addition, all goods available for sale (or pilfering!) will be listed, with general pricing guidelines. Locations of your own will need far less detail, unless you intend to make them useful in a variety of campaigns, as we intend for *Halls of Adventure*.

First, an example of the overview of a *Mage’s Guild*:

Overview

The Guild of the Arcane Amalgam is a formal society of wizards. A relatively new guild, it was formed to cater to those unable to access the more exclusive organizations. While organized, its membership criteria are considerably more lax than those of its counterparts.

The Guildmaster, Mabic Vioned, was a renowned adventurer, now in retirement. He was inflicted with a horrific disease that

disfigured his legs, leaving him unable to continue the pursuit of adventure. He became increasingly unhappy and restless, missing the life he’d grown to love. During a bout of melancholy, he brooded over the incident that crippled him. He realized that had he been able to research the nature of the disease, he might have been able to affect a cure before it became too late.

He thought further, and discovered a pattern: the lack of readily available magic advice, hirelings, and research materials made his travails much more dangerous and difficult. The GOAA was a way for Mabic to contribute to the community, to help prevent tragedies like his own from happening, and to live vicariously through the ongoing exploits of his patrons.

Not only is this an explanation of the origins of the guild, but also it provides a little insight into the culture of the organization, and a bit about the fairly unique NPC founder of the guild. This is a location with a story, with depth.

Next, a representative of one of the keyed encounter areas, from the *Charlatan’s Wagon*:

Wagon Interior

1. Door

This carved wooden door serves as a thick barrier between the living area of the wagon and the outside elements. Painted and repainted, the weathering and chipping surface belies the age of the door. A large iron latch secures the door from the outside. A ring allows Tabarin to padlock the door from the outside. When inside, Tabarin bars the door with a thick length of oak to prevent it from being pulled open.

The padlock placed on the outside of the door is CL 4, and it is trapped with an incapacitating contact poison (CL 2). The poison does no damage, but makes the victim violently ill 2 rounds after contact. The illness lasts for ten minutes thereafter. The victim should be treated as if stunned until the duration expires.

Obviously, that particular keyed area is rather brief. I don’t want to give away one of the good parts of the location by printing it too early! It does serve as an example of the sort of detail each important area should have. Each keyed area should have descriptive text that helps the players (and CK!) imagine the scene, important details such as locks and challenge levels, if needed. The amount of information you’ll need from your own location will depend on your own improvisation ability. As a rule, everything you will need to smoothly run an encounter in that location—preferably without resorting to the rulebooks—should be detailed.

I hope this gives you a taste of what to expect inside the cover of *Halls of Adventure*. The book is expected to contain 28 locations in total, encompassing all manner of common and exotic venues. Personally, I am excited about the inclusion of lairs, as I am able to bring some of my favorite creatures into an official C&C product, at long last! For my part, expect to see some unusual lairs. Goblin dens have been covered. I wanted to give the reader something new.

I’m exceptionally happy to be working with Mike on this project. We’ve had a bit of a hiatus, but I’m looking forward to completing the project so the Trolls can get to printing it.

In the next column, I plan to jump back into discussing the building blocks of a successful game. In my experience, most games have a need to deal with a very common issue: the creation of magic items. I’ll share my method for allowing characters to create them.

Until then, happy designing!

AFTER THE WHISTLE: OF BATTLEFIELDS

BY KEITH HACKWOOD

Keith Hackwood (Heruka) lives in South Wales, in the UK and enjoys all things fantastical. This is another installment of ‘Archetypal Scenes’, exploring role-playing from the point of view of specific and timeless places.

“Some left their horses and putting off their armour looked round for ancient worn-out garments, and took to the road as beggars. But their caution was of no avail, for not a single well-known man among them all escaped. O calamity! To see men lately dressed in armour or purple and fine linen now attired in rags and imprisoned in chains!” [From “The Aftermath of the Battle of Borough bridge” in the reign of King Edward II]



It could be a mountain pass (as with the Greeks and Persians at Thermopylae), a desert (like Ramses’ Egyptians and the Hittites at Qadesh, or the European Crusader knights against the Saracens at Acre), a forest (as with the Germanic tribes’ destruction of three Roman legions at Totenberg), open ground (like Agincourt, Crecy, Hastings, or the campaigns of El Cid), a full frontal assault (such as the Viking victory at Maldon, or the Roman storming of druidic Anglesey) or a siege (as with successive Crusades, or the sack of Aleppo by the Mongols). Battles have taken place in all times and upon all terrains, but here we will explore what is left when the fighting ceases, the archetypal aftermath of massed combat, and what it might offer to role playing.

TO WHAT END?

There are many reasons why such an after-battle scene may add to a session or ongoing campaign. Here are a few possibilities:

The shock value (for PCs and players) of the encounter both emotionally/psychologically (does it arouse pathos, horror, despair, or a revelling in the carnage?).

To gather information in extremis (by observation, or from an expiring casualty, perhaps through a spell such as *Speak With Dead*).

To witness tragedy or victory, confirm hopelessness or inspire action. How might such an experience affect a PC’s spiritual beliefs? Are there ‘costs’ to participating in such horror? How can they find a sense of meaning in the heart of this brutal destruction?

To test the morals of PCs—e.g. do they loot or try to help, or fall and weep in existential despair? Is there any healing they could usefully offer? Or does their sadism emerge amid such chaos and destruction? How might they feel about mercy killings or extra-judicial execution?

To encounter dying/dead friends, kinfolk, allies, enemies, lords, peers. What happens when they do come upon those they know, the mighty now fallen, or the innocent caught up and destroyed in fate’s mad dance?

SETTING A SCENE

Rather than being participants in the battle itself (which is beyond the scope of this piece), here we are exploring how it is for a lone PC or a party to stumble upon the aftermath of a recent (within a day or two of its end, at most) battle. It may be a battle of which the viewer was unaware (as though it has intruded from another reality), or one of which all in the area would know about. Either way, coming upon the initial sight should be an overwhelming experience, shaking any adventurer in a variety of ways.

The battlefield scene, archetypally, is always encountered near dusk, after the cessation of battle. The viewer is abruptly confronted by a vast sea of death and dying, destruction, abandoned weapons, dead horses and other mounts, the tattered, blood-soaked banners and standards of the protagonists flapping in a fell breeze. Everywhere arise the moans of the wounded, the stench of death, broken machines of war, the evil sight of pickers and strippers (often poor women and children from nearby settlements, or rat-like professional scavengers following the armies for just such an opportunity) seeking a profit or a trophy, competing with the carrion eaters, birds, wolves, rodents, humanoids etc. A scene of utter devastation.

ELEMENTS

After the opposing armies or forces involved have gone (by slaughter, retreat or the advance of victory), what remains is characterised thus:

Decide upon the weather and other elements, is there burning and smoke drifting, mists, bleak rainfall, snow or frost forming, is there a sunset or do huge lowering clouds obscure any hint of light? Use the elements just as you would an NPC, bringing depth and mood, tone and portent to the scene.

Next, decide who, apart from the abandoned dead and dying, is present from the following suggestions:

Roll 1d20

1–2	Mourners & those seeking relatives, friends (mainly locals)
3–4	Prisoners herded together, for slavery or for ransom;
5–6	Executions—and perhaps the collection of heads, hands or ears as trophies;
7–8	The gruesome exhibition of broken bodies in gibbets, or hung in irons (particularly for those considered criminals or traitors);
9–10	Looting of bodies for coin, jewellery, weaponry, armour, clothing, boots etc;
11–12	Camp followers—wives, whores, cooks, children, the wagon/baggage train etc;
13–14	If the battle has been a siege, the aftermath of the sacking of a breached or undefended city may be all around—broken defences, shattered and dazed civilians, refugees among the ruins of their homes, now turned to smoking ash and ruin;
15–16	Sutlers, victuallers, ostlers, suppliers of alcohol and luxuries to victorious forces, together with their wares;
17	Ghosts, allips, tortured souls, banshees, and other forms of haunting spirits, roused by the disturbance of such recent slaughter;
18	Ghouls & other undead, necromancers and/or evil clerics and cultists, seeking personal gain or revelling in the victory of death (perhaps recruiting from the ranks of the fallen). Or religious orders of a neutral or good bent, trying to provide alms & succour to those who have lost everything, to restore balance to such misery;
19	A presence (as totemic animal or avatar) from the liminal deities of battle & war—perhaps the Morrigan, Indra, Bellona, Mars, Freyja;
20	The absolute presence of personified death—Thanatos, Yama, Azriel, Santa Muerte, Arawn, Hades, a grim reaper figure;

The size and scale of the slaughter will be a telling factor—whilst inexperienced or low-level PCs may be horrified by a relatively small encounter, worldlier and more experienced adventurers may need a vaster scene to provoke them from their complacency. Here is a suggested calibration:

Roll 1d12

1–2	The aftermath of a skirmish of 50–100 combatants, perhaps the result of a local tribal or territorial dispute;
3–4	The result of company-sized battle—up to 250 dead and wounded;
5–6	A battalion sized conflict, perhaps a thousand casualties at most;
7–8	Brigade-sized combat, up to 3–4,000 casualties on the battlefield;
9–10	Divisional encounter—over ten thousand casualties
11	Entire armies have clashed here, upwards of 20,000 dead on any one battlefield, & battlefields can be seen stretching into the distance;
12	Epochal catastrophic clash of civilizations—unnumbered casualties, unprecedented scale of devastation & death. Total destruction of entire regions & lands—a world-changing scale of event and aftermath.

INITIAL REACTIONS TABLE

Faced with their first sight of the field (or with a specific encounter from the table above) the following reactions may occur for a PC (some are immediate; others may take time to appear):

Roll 1d12

1	immediate nausea and vomiting;
2	a sense of existential dread and 'vertigo' or dizziness;
3	full-blown panic attack (as per fear spell) for 1d8 rounds
4	PC is overwhelmed by grief and horror—weeping and shaking inconsolably for 1d6 rounds;
5	PC is traumatised but repressing emotion by an act of will (50% chance of suffering flashbacks and nightmares in future, requiring something similar to a remove curse spell to cure);
6	PC starts talking and cannot be quiet (using speech and sound to block out feeling) – talking to themselves or anyone around, if left unchecked they may start speaking gibberish (25% risk of becoming dissociated as a result, sullen and morose, requiring remove curse or similar);
7	PC begins to bemoan the fates and/or gods for allowing such slaughter. Full crisis of faith may well ensue;
8	PC experiences symptoms of profound post-traumatic shock a week after encountering the scene and is disabled by fear, horror and meaninglessness (requires remove curse or similar);
9	Apathy, listlessness, ennui and a feeling of extreme futility overtake the PC;
10	PC experiences a massive thrill reaction—pulse quickens, a euphoric sense of joy at being alive, may result in risk taking or inappropriate behaviour (such as making cruel jokes or using the battlefield as a collection of props for a 'performance');
11	PC appears normal (but later becomes dependent upon alcohol or some other drug, possibly to dependency or even addiction levels);
12	PC feels properly 'at home' for the first time in their life—a sense of 'yes, I was born for this place—I know it'. (this may be authentic, or part of a delusional defence with consequences later—CK's choice)

DRESSING THE SCENE

(Roll d%)

1–5	at the fringe of the battlefield, as wild dogs chew at corpses, two combatants still barely live—recent enemies, now united in their wounds (one has a deep stab wound to his belly, the other is missing a leg);
6–10	beneath a fluttering banner you discover a trumpet, still clutched by its butchered owner (it is a <i>Horn of Blasting</i>);
11–15	a body in the war-gear of a chief or general seems to move as you approach—investigating, you find a child (or a gnome or halfling) hiding beneath him—the child looks at you, terrified and says 'A...a...are they gone?'
16–20	scavengers are picking over a rank of bodies—when you approach they hiss at you and mutter curses; the bodies they were working on are clearly those of elite troops (excellent armour, masterwork weaponry, one or two magical items);
21–25	two elderly men (Bernardo and Kufu) are stoically carrying bodies, by the arms and legs, and stacking them ready for a mass pyre—they have tears in their eyes, and handkerchiefs over their mouths;
26–30	a war-horse, peppered with arrows and crossbow bolts, lies across the smashed legs of a knight. He seems to be alive, but delirious with thirst and pain;
31–35	a man-at-arms in livery stands and surveys the scene—you approach him from the back, but he doesn't answer you—if you touch him he collapses. A lance penetrates his torso diagonally and had been supporting his weight (he wears a +1 longsword and a pot-helm +1);
36–40	two low and ugly figures are visible, crouching among the dead—up close you can see that they are armed with daggers and appear to be slitting the throats of the wounded, and sawing off fingers to get at rings;

41–45	a woman (Eemah) lies over the mutilated body of a warrior—she appears to be asleep (this man (Porto) was her fiancé, and they were to have been married—she is mad with grief);
46–50	strange incantations rise from behind a pile of bodies—there is a priest of some sort intoning prayers; two acolytes, who support the body of a dead officer; accompany him;
51–55	three armed men stand guard over a dozen walking wounded who appear to be digging a mass grave—as you approach, one of the guards casually cleaves a prisoner with his battle-axe, then laughs in your direction;
56–60	two filthy soldiers (Narnu and Ghent) are sat on the charred remains of a wagon, swigging whisky from a jug—they are both completely drunk and highly unpredictable;
61–65	a pack of dogs runs, barking, across your path, as though fleeing in panic from some unseen presence—the mist has a weird greenish hue just here;
66–70	a team of four clerics is passing among the dead and dying, apparently giving last rites, and identifying those who may yet be saved;
71–75	a group of women with two handcarts or barrows seem to be undressing the dead, piling the clothing into their carts and making for a mule-drawn wagon—they repeat the trip again and again;
76–80	there is a great pile of heads stacked into a rough pyramid, next to which stands a man with a scroll, he appears to be counting;
81–85	a wolf sidles past you, unafraid and brazen, holding in his teeth a severed arm, which is still clutching something (if it is recovered, the arm's fist is wrapped around a brooch depicting the head of a god—it is an <i>Amulet of Protection</i> , +2);
86–90	you find an officer's trunk upon the battlefield (locked, perhaps trapped, CK's discretion)—within it are coins, a number of gems and a folio of correspondence and obviously diplomatic papers. There is also a flask of healing (<i>Cure Serious Wounds</i> , 5 draughts);
91–92	as you approach the field you see a line of shapes approaching, slowly but methodically (they are zombies, 2d12 of them, raised 'fresh' by some nefarious power);
93–94	you encounter a murder of crows picking at carrion, one obviously larger and more intense than the others (a deity in crow form?);
95–97	as you pass by, a man you took for dead begins to whisper, he calls you close to him (he pleads for water, is quite incoherent, but manages to tell you that he is Camran, a farmer from Hemmaler, also to pass you an engraved ceramic token—'give this to my wife, I beseech you'—then he begs that you put him out of his misery);
98–99	children throw stones at you as you walk the field, women ululate and point and make gestures—you feel decidedly uneasy and exposed;
00	as you kneel to check a corpse, it suddenly inhales and seizes your arm—you feel a freezing chill run through you, and cannot move or speak a voice in your head says 'I am the Lord of Death. Why do you disturb my work?'

FINAL THOUGHTS

With Skeel's allied forces destroyed, Nashtaman elected to end the siege and withdrew back down the valley. While casualties for the Battle of Koumas are unknown, records show that around 14,000 humans and elves were captured by Nashtaman's forces. In a fit of rage Nashtaman ordered that they be divided into groups of a hundred, and ninety-nine in each be blinded. One man in each group was left with one eye so that he could guide his comrade's home. The sight of these prisoners returning overwhelmed Skeel, and he died later that year. His death marked the beginning of the end, and Nashtaman completed his conquest of Pendoria in 4089.

(Loosely based on accounts of the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria—AD1018)

Leaving the battlefield may be a decision the PCs make quickly, or perhaps they are chased off in some way—then again, a night spent camping amidst this scene would be highly charged, and perhaps by morning, in some mysterious way, the scene has changed or cleared—as is the way with archetypes!

CONVENTION BLOG

by Richard McCain

With June already upon us, we are in full panic for Troll Con next month. By the time you read this, the Event Schedule will have been finished and published for all to see. Last month's article focused on all the things going on with Troll Con itself. This month, I thought it might be good to highlight some of the local attractions for Little Rock for those who might be bringing their spouse and/or families.

- **Dickinson IMAX Theater**, located in West Little Rock, offers Hollywood films on the big IMAX screen. It's located about 10 minutes away from the Hampton Inn at the Promade Center of Chenal Parkway. <http://www.dtmovies.com/showtimes.aspx?tid=161>
- **The River Market District** of downtown Little Rock offers the perfect place to go for a morning breakfast. May through October the Farmers' Market is open at 7 am with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. There are also a few specialty shops and restaurants open for breakfast. Get your breakfast to-go and take a short hike to the banks of the Arkansas River. Nothing is nicer than sitting outside and having breakfast the Arkansas way. <http://www.rivermarket.info/>
- **The William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum** located just down from the River Market area is a monument to the 42nd president of the United States, William Jefferson Clinton. This \$200 million library offers visitors a view of the controversial former President that is as complicated and as multi-dimensional as the man himself. <http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/>
- **The Museum of Discovery** also located in the River Market District, has a "hands on" rule. Children and adults are encouraged to participate in the exhibits and displays, and have fun learning about science, technology, nature and history along the way. Some of the interactive exhibits include the Health Hall, where you can learn about parts of the body; Worlds of the Forest, which includes an insect zoo; and the Tech Lab, which lets you build your own robot. <http://www.amod.org/>
- **Midtowne shopping center** is a different kind of shopping experience; you may be wondering exactly who we are. Quite simply, we are a unique collective that refuses to conform to any one label. We specialize in upscale, modern, classic, life-changing retail; the likes of which Arkansas has never before experienced. <http://www.midtownelittlerock.com/>
- **Arkansas Arts Center** is the cultural focus of Little Rock. Rotating exhibits of paintings, photographs and sculptures feature both local artists and renowned masters like Monet. The center boasts an eclectic gift shop, the upscale Best Impressions Restaurant and the Children's Little Theatre,

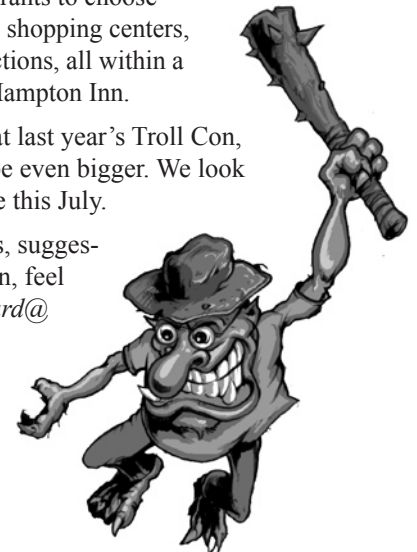
which stages several theatrical productions a year. <http://www.arkarts.com>

- **Little Rock Zoo** is the wildest place in town. With over 500 different species on display, the zoo is home to exotic tigers, lemurs, tortoises and elephants. Children will want to visit Kiddieland and take a small train to ride around the park. The Zoo Cafe, located within the park, serves hot dogs, nachos and cold drinks. <http://www.littlerockzoo.com/>
- **Dickey Stephens Park** is home to the Arkansas Travelers, the St. Louis Cardinals AA farm team located in North Little Rock. This newly built facility was built in 2007 and has a beautiful view across the Arkansas River of the Little Rock downtown skyline. <http://www.travs.com>
- **Big Dam Bridge** is the longest bridge in the United States that was built for pedestrian traffic. It's also the only bridge built into a dam (as opposed to on top of a dam). It's a popular spot for walkers and cyclists in the state, and a popular spot to host 5k walks and bicycle events. <http://littlerock.about.com/od/thingstodo/p/bigdambridge.htm>
- **Imagine Hobbies & Games/Kapow Comics** are the two geek stores of choice for the Trolls in the Little Rock area. Both will be at Troll Con so you can visit with Jay and Matt and if you have time to break away from TC, can swing by their stores and help support those that support Troll Lord Games. <http://www.imaginehobbies.com/> <http://www.kapow-comics.com/>

Troll Con VII will be held at the Hampton Inn in West Little Rock on 1301 Shackleford Road. To reserve your room at the special Con rate of \$89 a night, make sure to tell the reservationist that you are with "Troll Con". The Hampton Inn is located within 5 minutes of over 20 restaurants to choose from. As well as 2 theaters, shopping centers, and other Little Rock attractions, all within a 20-minute drive from the Hampton Inn.

With over 40 attendees at last year's Troll Con, this year's event looks to be even bigger. We look forward to seeing everyone this July.

If you have any thoughts, suggestions, or ideas for Troll Con, feel free to contact me at Richard@trolllord.com



The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



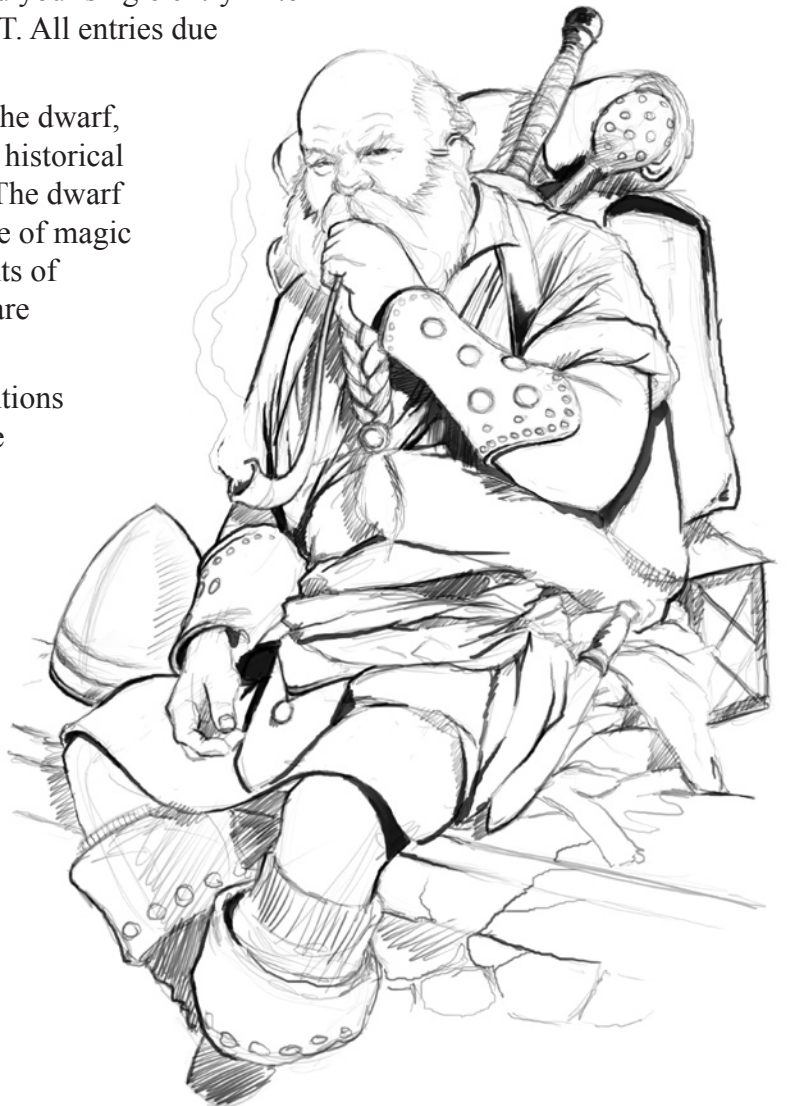
BOXING THE BOXERS



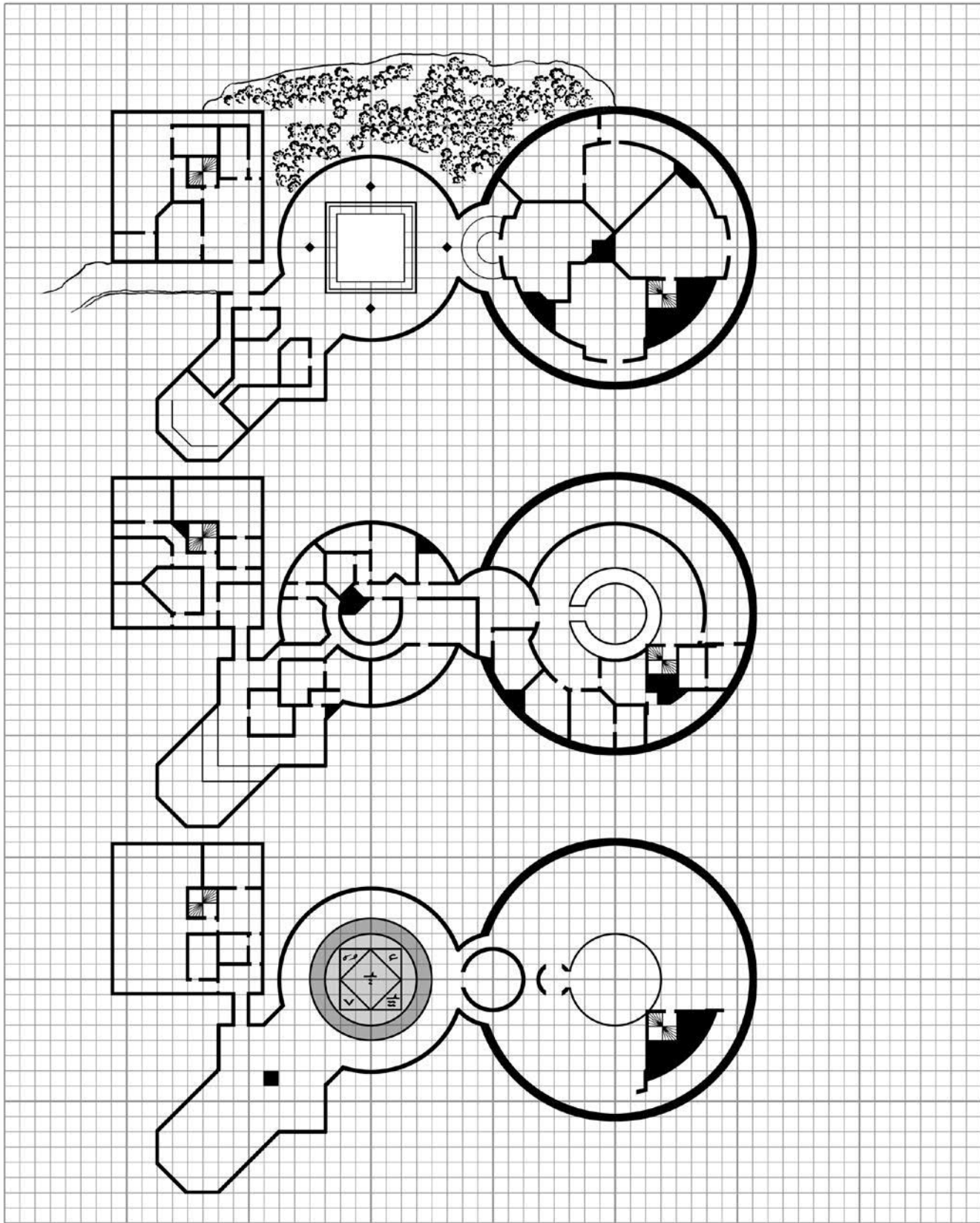
We are tired of armchair gamers saying they can do it better. Its way past time that you put your type-written words where your flapping mouth is. The Troll Lords will be the judges of the contest. The top three finishers will win subscriptions to the magazine—1st place wins a year of CRUSADER, 2nd & 3rd place wins 6-month subscriptions. Anyone can send in one entry. List your name and address at the top of the entry. Send your single entry in to sirjmw@aol.com listed as CRUSADER CONTEST. All entries due by the 26th of July.

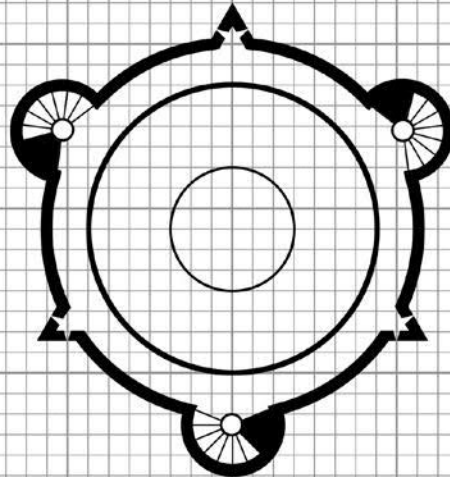
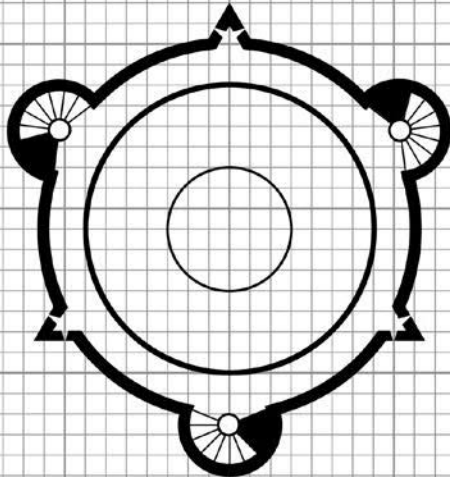
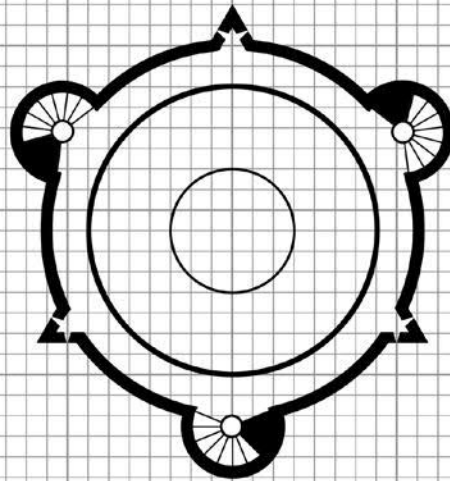
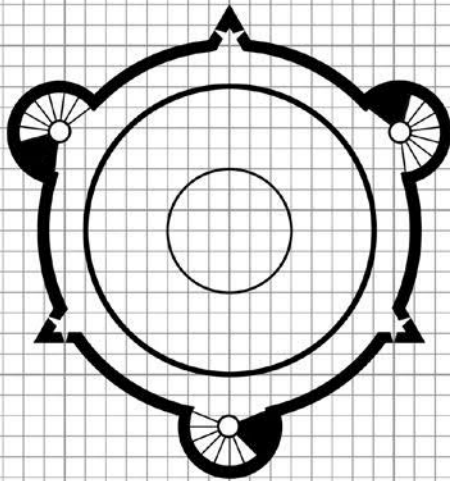
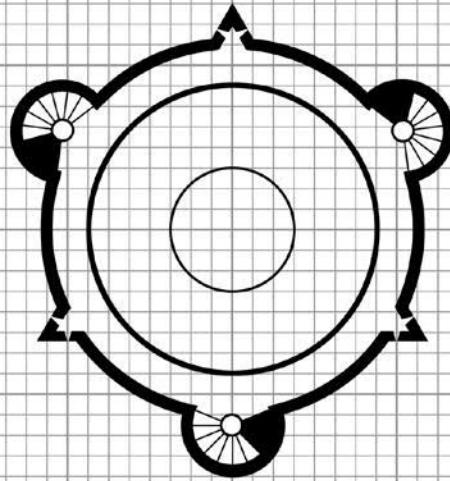
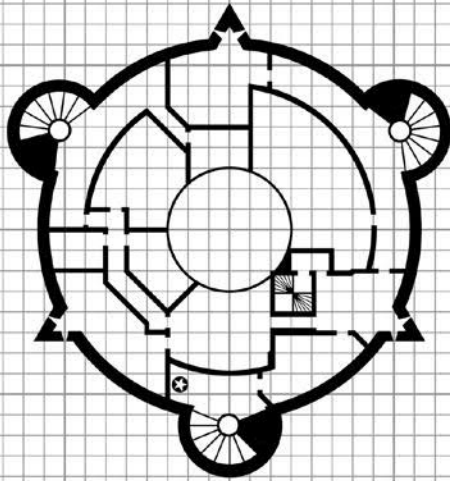
Using the illustration of a Fighter Dwarf, name the dwarf, list out his statics, and describe his equipment and historical background. All of this text must use C&C rules. The dwarf can be of any level up to 18, and can have any type of magic items or none of those. Historical written treatments of equipment and the historical actions of the dwarf are encouraged.

Winners and a limited number of honorable mentions will get printed in the magazine. All entries are the property of *Troll Lord Games* and cannot be less than 800 words or more than 4,000 words. The dwarf doesn't have to be a true PC or NPC in your games and can entirely be made up from scratch including his attributes.



Troll Lord Freebies (just for you!)





AMBUSHED TIMES THREE

BY JOE DAMIANI



This is a sideline encounter for use in an existing campaign. The setting is in a wooded area where the characters happen upon an ambushed wayfarer and have the opportunity to surprise their attackers...

only to be surprised themselves. This encounter is designed for a group of 3–5 characters of 4–6th level. As CK, your job is to create the setting and wait for the characters to take the bait! The CK should introduce this encounter when the party is traveling between adventures. They should be heading through a wooded area and the tree cover should be so dense that they will have to dismount and lead their horses if they are riding.

Overland travel is the downside of adventuring. The slow trek can be tedious facing the elements and locals with varied dispositions. Luckily this trek has been fairly pleasant. You are currently following a trail through a fragrant wooded area that after a few days will give way to plains and the road to your final destination.

FRAMING THE ENCOUNTER

The CK should make a show of rolling dice behind the screen as if an attribute check and tell the party that they hear something ahead. The party will likely advance or send a scout for whom you should read the following.

After pushing through some brush cover, you spy an open clearing within the dense cover. You see a group of goblins, some with short bows at their side, arguing amongst themselves. They cluster around a fallen horse and what looks to be an arrow riddled body. They seem totally oblivious to your approach”

(8) Goblins: (Lawful Evil, HD 1d6, HP 3, AC 15, MV 20 ft. Attacks Short Sword; Short Bow with 20 arrows. Darkvision 60'. Their saves are physical. Each carries 2 GP, XP: 91)

Anyone understanding the goblin language will make out that they are indeed arguing amongst themselves about how to divide the booty and the fresh meat from the horse. In case the party needs some additional goading to attack, suggest that the body seems recently fallen and that they still might have time to take action. The goblins are positioned as shown on Map A.

The characters obvious course of action will be to charge in and individually engage the Goblins. Once several of the party has engaged with the Goblins, you are ready for the third ambush.

As you begin to make short work of the goblins, you hear a frightful roar! The snapping and cracking of branches are followed by a rush of air and a huge beast flies down through the air landing on and crushing one of the goblins! A lion headed creature with a golden scaled body with leathery wings has crushed the goblin and surveys the area while uttering a low growl.

Have the party make a saving throw for the roar effect. The goblins will drop their weapons and begin falling over themselves to rush away from the area. The Dragonne will advance on anyone remaining in the area.

Size: Large
Hit Dice: 9d10
Hit Points: 67
Move: 40', 30' Fly
AC: 18
Attacks: 2 Claw (1d8), 1 Bite (4d6)
Special: Roar, Darkvision 60', Twilight Vision, Scent
Saves: P, M
Intelligence: Low
Alignment: Neutral
Type: Magical Beast
Treasure: See below
XP: 880+9/hp

ROAR EFFECT: Any victim within 120' must make a charisma save. Those failing will lose 1d4+5 points of strength which will last for 10 rounds. The Dragonne can use the roar effect every four rounds.

Once the party has defeated the creature, upon searching the immediate area read the following.

Unfortunately by the time the combat has ended, the poor traveler and his mount have already shuffled off this mortal coil. Examining the body shows that this was a messenger who was obviously surprised and killed by the goblins.

The messenger wore leather armor that is currently in need of repair after being riddled with goblin arrows. He also carries a +1 rapier, Potion of Levitation in addition to 200 gp and a necklace of wood inlaid ivory worth 100 gp. There are the normal traveling supplies that one would prepare for a few days journey. The messenger also carries a letter sealed with a local noble's signet. Should the characters return the unopened letter to the noble, they will be paid an additional 400 gp for their troubles. This will also serve as an adventure hook where the CK may have the noble hire the party to deliver the letter. If the party did not honor the seal, the noble will be extremely displeased and not offer a reward and think the party a disreputable lot. The contents of the letter have to do with boring political and trade affairs in the local region.

Should the party think to search for the Dragonne's lair and look for his path through the trees to seek a direction, it will become obvious that he came from the west. Heading in that direction, they will find his launch point some 50 yards away. From here, the Dragonne has walked from his home and successful tracking rolls will bring the party to a cave 500 yards distant.

THE DRAGONNE'S LAIR

Located in a heavily treed area, the lair is a cave opening into the side of an overgrown hill. The wide cave mouth and beyond are pitch black. The cave is musky, humid and unpleasant permeated by an awful stench. The entrance branches into a Y intersection with both sections showing tracks of a large creature. The first branch leads to a large cave which was used as a latrine. The second leads to a cave with a small pool and nest. The room is littered with bones, bits of trash and debris.

Scattered amongst the debris are 61 pp, 524 gp, 400 sp and 65 cp. Some of these will be in be in backpacks and belt pouches that were ripped from the bodies of creatures that became a meal.

The water pool is 20' deep. Hidden at the lowest point of the water pool are a series of gems. These were originally in a sack fallen from a victim which has eroded over time. The gems will require time searching and sifting through the silt at the bottom of the pool likely through the use of a water breathing spell. There are small malachite (10 gp), 2 pearls (25 gp each), a white agate (50 gp), 2 opals (100 gp each), an emerald (1000 gp) and a large piece of jade (2500 gp).

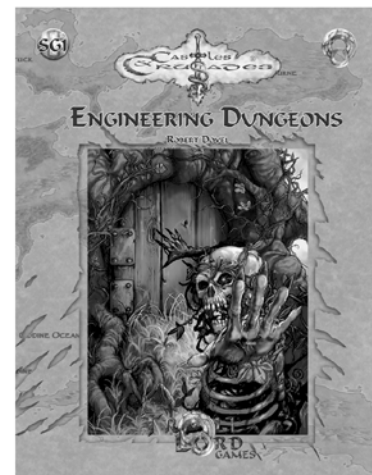
Finally buried beneath the ground over the years is a *Rod of Withering*. The rod is buried beneath the nest and covered with enough earth that a Detect Magic spell will not find it. If the party specifically mentions that they will dig out the nest area, the item will be detectable through spell or search roll.

Thus ends **Ambushed Times Three**.

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BAKED ASKALAN

By CHRISTINA STILES

A side adventure for characters level 4–6.

Setting: Any sea-side city or town.

Summary: Didjer Blackstock, owner of Didjer’s Crab House, is in need of some strong muscle to help his crabbers, who are being harassed by sea devils (*sahuagin*), bring in their catch. What he doesn’t reveal is that the sea devils are attacking his men because his men are poaching on a food source in their territory, the askalan (crabmen) (and, unbeknownst to them, Didjer and Malachai’s men are occupying the caves where the sea devils intend to start a small colony). Didjer is using these intelligent crabmen as the main ingredient in his tavern specialties: crab stew, crab cakes, and crab soup.

This adventure may cause some moral dilemmas, especially if the characters have been partaking of the crab meat at Didjer’s.

BACKGROUND

Four months ago, Malachai, Didjer’s right-hand man, discovered a cave large enough to sail his fishing boat, the *Zhew Vas*, through. He believed the cave to hold the famed treasure of Titan Maul, an infamous ogre pirate. Instead of finding coin and magic items within, Malachai encountered the peaceful, intelligent race of crabmen foraging in the caves. Malachai, irritated from his failed treasure search, decided not to go home empty-handed. Thus, he captured one of the crabmen creatures (called askalan by the locals) to take back to Didjer’s Crab House. Malachai thought the half-orc cook Kellun would have no moral problem with cooking up the intelligent creature and adding it to the tavern’s standard fare, and he was right. Since adding the crabmen to his food, Didjer’s customers have been clamoring for more, and now he requires two crabmen a week to keep up with his customer’s demands. To aid their acquisition, he has left five men at the caves to “farm” the creatures.

Unfortunately, the askalan that Malachai and his pirates have been harvesting are part of the sea devil food chain, a preferred delicacy, in fact. The pirates’ actions have angered them, and they have begun attacking the pirates and any ships they come across. So far, they have killed several innocent fishermen and have wounded Didjer’s men. If allowed to escalate, the sea devils will eventually threaten much of the city or town’s trade, with fishermen and merchants refusing to travel the unsafe waters.

Malachai’s men are also continuing to hunt for Titan Maul’s treasure, as they do believe they have found one of his former hideouts. With many of his men guarding the crabmen and some looking for the treasure, he is short handed in protecting his boat.

A JOB OFFER

The player characters should be able to spend several days at the tavern and enjoy the much-talked-about crab pies and other

offerings. Assure them that it is the best they’ve ever had, but don’t overdo it in your description; else the players may become wary. Have them overhear the common tavern gossip and boasting and bragging. A few fights break out during their stay, but nothing out of the usual. If the characters are sailors themselves, they may have heard rumors of recent attacks on fishing vessels by sea devils. If not, they also hear about that within the tavern.

After a few days at the tavern, a bloodied sailor, arm in tourniquet comes stumbling into the bar. A hush falls over the room. The man, Malachai, ambles to the bar and tells Didjer of their plight: more sea devil attacks, but much deadlier this time. He tells Didjer he lost two men and needs more muscle to ensure his future shipments. The player characters may overhear this conversation (CL 3). However, as a rogue, Didjer may notice them listening in. Either way, he sends Malachai to them to ask them to hire on (he doesn’t know them, but they look strong and they are expendable to him, after all). Allow the players to haggle with them; Malachai will promise to pay 25 gp each, but can be haggled up to 50 gp each; and he will even pony up if they survive and prove useful to him.

ATTACKED ON THE WAY!

Malachai lost his shipment, so he wants to make a fresh start first thing in the morning. His fishing boat, the *Zhew Vas*, is 30 feet long, with a single 10-foot-tall mast, and can travel 2 mph. The boat can travel in shallow water. The boat has no weapons. It currently has one eight-foot-long skiff attached to its starboard side. The eight-mile trip to the coastal cliffs takes four hours unimpeded.

The sea is a bit choppy when they leave out, so characters who don’t have their sea legs must make Constitution checks (CL 3) or become seasick (-2 to attack for 1d6 hours).

At an appropriate time on the trip, have the sea devils attack. Normally, they prefer to attack in darkness, but Malachai’s transgressions have led them to be more aggressive.

The boat travels for several hours along the coastline, which rises to mountainous heights. The cliffs will eventually give way to a cave, where Malachai will take the boat.

Sahuagin (×6) (lawful evil), 2d8 HD, AC 16, MV 30 ft. and swim 60 ft., primary attribute: physical. They attack with a trident (1d8) or by talon (1d4) or bite (1d4). Their special abilities include blood frenzy upon being wounded.

Malachai (chaotic evil), 5th level fighter, HP 52, AC 17, MV 30 ft., primary attributes: strength 18, constitution 17. He uses a +2 longsword (1d8 +2), wears a +1 chain shirt, and carries a potion of haste, potion of cure light wounds, and a pouch with ten 10gp gems at all times.

Pirate Crewmen (×7) (chaotic neutral), 1st level fighter, HP 8, AC 14, MV 30ft., primary attributes: strength 14, constitution 13, and dexterity 13. They use a short sword (1d6) or dagger (1d4) or light crossbow with 20 bolts (1d6), wear leather armor with a buckler, and carry 1d6 gold each.

CAVE SYSTEM

Area 1: The Cave Entrance

It should be mid-morning when the characters arrive at the cave. Malachai's men maneuver the boat (dexterity check CL 2) into the cave entrance, and the characters find themselves in a 120-foot cavern with a 30-foot-wide strip of beach to the north with another visible cave up ahead. (Player characters may think it is odd they have entered a cave, when they were expecting to go crabbing in the open ocean). The men drop anchor, and the characters are left with 5 crewmen to protect the boat, while Malachai and two others row to shore. The player characters are told to keep vigilant, as Malachai and his crewmen have also been attacked within the caves before. Malachai tells them he needs about two hours to take care of some business in the adjoining caves. He doesn't specify what that business might be.

Area 2; Plant Creature Cave

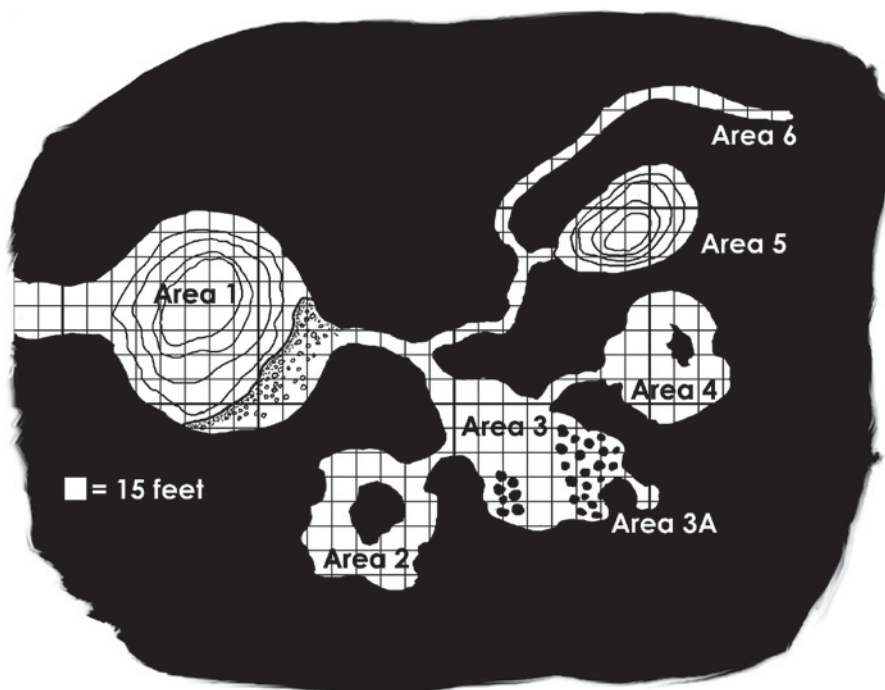
A thin coat of water lies on the floor of this cave, and the inner ground grows up into a small, flat-top hill in the center of the cave. Algae and lichens grow from floor to ceiling here; and six-foot-tall plants with black, protruding stalks and large blue-violet flowers grow in patches all throughout the cave, but especially on the flat-topped hill. The odd plants have wide leaves that glow slightly.

The plants fire their stalks when anyone comes within ten feet of them.

Midnight Stalks (×8–16) (neutral) 2d8 HD, AC 13, MV 5 ft., primary attribute: none. They attack by firing their stalks (1d4 each plus poison.). Some treasure rests in the muck around the plants 2–20 gp (CL 3 search or wisdom check).

Area 3: Rock Cave

This dry cave is filled with rocks on the eastern side (north and south) and the pirates' bedding and equipment (pick axes, lanterns, oil, food stuffs, and dwindling medical supplies). Two of the 5 men stationed in the caves are likely to be here,



EVENTS IN THE CAVE SYSTEM

Sahuagin Attack. There is a 1 in 6 chance every 20 minutes that the sea devils attack, either in the main cavern where the characters should be watching the boat, or further in **Area 3** of the cave system, where Malachai and his 7 men are. If Malachai and his men are attacked, the player characters may hear the sounds of screaming and combat (CL 6); they will have to decide whether or not to attempt to join in. The boat's one remaining skiff will be on the beach where Malachai beached it (the other is being used to barricade **Area 4**), meaning characters will have to fly or swim to come to the sailors' aid.

Swimming characters may possibly be attacked by sea devils hiding under the water (2 in 6 chance that 3 sea devils are within the cavern's depths; 3 sharks already lie in wait below).

The water in the cave is essentially ocean water, so the sea devils do not suffer any ill effects from being in it.

Sahuagin (×6) (lawful evil), 2d8 HD, AC 16, MV 30 ft. (60 ft. swim), primary attribute: physical. They attack with a trident (1d8) or by talon (1d4) or bite (1d4). Their special abilities include blood frenzy upon being wounded.

Sharks (×3) (neutral), 3d8 HD, AC 15, MV 60 ft. (swim), primary attribute: physical. They have a bite attack (1d6).

BABY CRAB!

If all things remain quiet on the dice rolls for sea devil attacks, have a crabman child of about 10 years of age sneak haphazardly into the cavern from the entrance on the northern beach. He escaped the area where Malachai's men are farming them (marked **Area 4** on the cave system map) when the crabmen tried to revolt a few days ago. He has not done well in captivity, and he is weak, exhausted, and slightly disoriented. If he spots the characters, he is 50% likely to flee into the water (where he may come into contact with the sahuagin or the sharks); otherwise, he drops and cowers on the beach, unable to muster the strength to run. Either way, a stark look of terror will be visible on his face to any characters who notice him (wisdom check, CL 1).

while the other two will be watching **Area 4**. Malachai and his men will be here rendezvousing with the pirate guards. If the sahuagin do not attack, they will pick out their next victim for shipment, and they'll return again tomorrow for another.

Successfully searching the ceiling in this cave (wisdom or search check CL 5) reveals scorch marks, where Titan Maul's wizard blasted a part of the ceiling to hide the entrance to one of his treasure caches (**Area 3A**). Malachai saw these marks, and assumed the treasure might be hidden there, so he has had his men start moving the rocks from the north to the south. The men have not made a tremendous amount of progress, due to keeping an eye on the crabmen and the sahuagin.

Moving the rocks here would take a good 16–20 hours of labor, but this is time the pirates have not had.

Pirate Crewmen (×4) (chaotic neutral), 2nd level fighter, HP 13 (currently wounded, avg 7 HP), AC 14, MV 30ft., primary attributes: strength 14, constitution 13, and dexterity 13. They use a short sword (1d6) or dagger (1d4) or light crossbow with 20 bolts (1d6), wear leather armor with a buckler, and carry 1d6 gold each.

Gremmel, (neutral), 4th level wizard, HP 9, AC 11, MV 30 ft., primary attributes: intelligence 15, dexterity 14, and wisdom 13. He carries a spellbook, staff (1d6), dagger (1d4), and a pouch of 10 sp and 50 gp in gems. His prepared spells are: 0- detect poison, message, light (×3); 1- burning hands (×2), comprehend languages, magic missile (×2); 2- acid arrow, web; 3- fireball)

Area 3A: Titan Maul's Cache

Moving the rocks reveals a small tunnel, three-feet in circumference and extending six feet inwards. The tunnel opens up into a roughly 15 × 15 cave, where a pile of copper (4000 pieces) and silver (2355 pieces) rests. Underneath the pile lie a +2 longsword and a +1 halberd.

Titan Maul originally kept the treasure here as an emergency cache. When he started having problems with the sea devils, he abandoned it, having his wizard hide its whereabouts behind an explosion of rock. He always intended to retrieve it, but never got the chance. He has since wandered into an extra-dimensional water world.

Area 4: Crabman Farm Area

This cave entrance is blocked by a skiff. Two of Malachai's men guard this cavern, which serves as the holding pen for 30 crabmen, with crossbows and/or spells. Malachai's men herded the foraging crabmen here, and have managed to keep them mostly contained, even with the creatures' revolt attempt (one did escape and has eluded them so far).

The cave is filled with algae and lichens, and a mountain-fed stream feeds water into a small pool here. The crabmen have been surviving mostly on the plants, as the pool offers very little protein. Some of the creatures are wounded (scorched by fire), and most are weak and exhausted. They just want to go home, and they know that it is just a matter of time before the sahuagin, one of their greatest enemies, manages to overcome the humans. They find themselves between the humans' cooking pot or the sea devils' teeth. Life is very bleak.

Area 5: Water Cave

This cave is mostly submerged in murky water. The water's bottom rests some thirty feet down, where an ocean tunnel feeds water here. The sahuagin have just recently started using this cave as an egg bed. Small sharks float in and out of the cave, checking on the eggs. The crabmen previously scavenged here for fish and other protein.

There is a 1 in 4 chance that 1d4 sharks are swimming in the water.

Sharks (×1–4) (neutral), 3d8 HD, AC 15, MV 60 ft. (swim), primary attribute: physical. They have a bite attack (1d6).

Area 6: Tunnels to the Crabmen Home Caverns

This tunnel leads down, and continues for over a half mile to the crabmen homelands. If the player characters insist on traveling the tunnel, the CK will need to flesh out the area beyond here. They may encounter sahuagin within.

If set free, the crabmen will flee down this tunnel to their home caves.

AFTERMATH

The following set of events are in motion, however the player characters decide to deal with their knowledge of the true nature of Didjer and Malachai's business:

- Several more boats have been attacked out at sea since the characters left out. Sailors are more scared than ever to go out to sea. While some small-time operations will likely cease their trade in the face of this danger, the wealthier merchants will hire on mercenaries to assist in defending their hauls. This will drive up seafood prices and the price of imported goods. Still, the mercenary business will be booming.
- The sea devils are planning a concerted attack on several coastal communities, including the town or city in which you set this adventure. Their population has exploded, and it is time to go to war to find more food sources. This has actually been brewing for some time, so the attack was inevitable. Didjer's business dealings just moved up the creatures' timeline.
- The famed ogre pirate Titan Maul actually did use the crabmen cave system as a base of operations at one time, and he did hide some of his treasure here. The CK may have them find clues to the whereabouts of the treasure while they are in the cave system. They could attempt to come back to retrieve that, but will be subject to sea devil attacks.



NEW CREATURES

Askalan (crabman)**NO. ENCOUNTERED:** 3–60**SIZE:** Medium**HD:** 2 (d8)**MOVE:** 30 ft., swim 20 feet, burrow 5 ft**AC:** 16**ATTACKS:** 2 claw (1d4)**SPECIAL:** Amphibious, darkvision 60 ft, improved grab**SAVES:** P**INT:** Average**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral**TYPE:** Monstrous humanoid**TREASURE:** 2 (in lair)**XP:** 15 +5

The bipedal askalan stand five feet tall and are roughly three feet wide. They have crab-like heads and four arms, two of which end in pincers. A hard exoskeleton covers their bodies, and a large shell protects their backs. Their exoskeleton is generally a reddish brown color, but their coloring can vary by tribe.

The askalan's pincers, while serving as their main means of protection, also function as communication devices, their language being an intricate pattern of clicking or banging noises performed with one or more hands. Because of their clawed appendages, the crabmen cannot use weapons or tools. Their other two, much smaller, arms aid them in food gathering and burrowing. The askalan use their burrowing ability to hide themselves in sandy areas. They cannot burrow through hard earth.

Overall, the askalan are passive, peaceful creatures who only engage in combat when threatened. They live in sea caves and other areas along the coast. Some tribes have even been known to create mud-home mounds on small islands.

The askalan are omnivorous, eating mostly algae, worms, mollusks, and any decaying animals. Their search for food generally has them scavenging along beaches and throughout underwater cave systems.

COMBAT: The askalan do not seek combat. If cornered, however, they stand their ground, attacking with their pincers.

AMPHIBIOUS: Askalan can survive indefinitely on land and underwater.

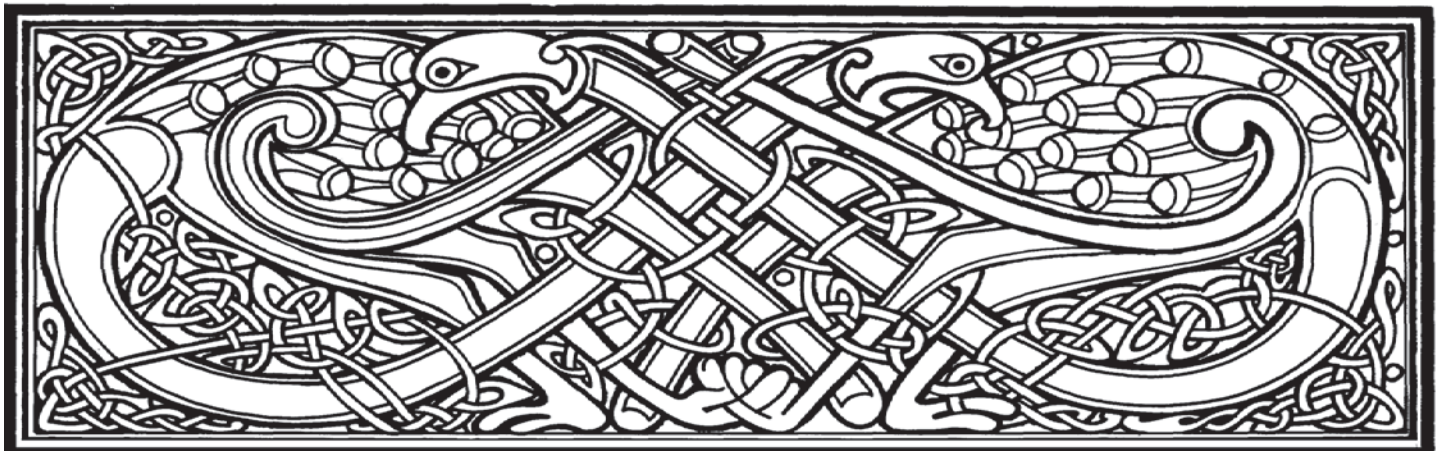
IMPROVED GRAB: On a successful hit with its claw attack, the askalan's opponent must make a successful strength save or be held in the creature's claw. A held opponent automatically suffers 1d6 squeezing damage each subsequent round. The victim may attempt another strength save to break free only after the damage is applied for a given round.

Midnight Stalks**NO. ENCOUNTERED:** 1–20**SIZE:** Medium**HD:** 2 (d8)**MOVE:** 5 ft.**AC:** 13**ATTACKS:** 1–4 stalks (1d4)**SPECIAL:** Poison, Twilight Vision, Plant Traits**SAVES:** N**INT:** Not ratable**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral**TYPE:** Plant**TREASURE:** n/a**XP:** 20 + 2

Midnight stalks grow in subterranean areas. Their flowers resemble massive blue-violet morning glories, and their stalks splinter into several (1–8) black spear-like protrusions on each plant. The plants emit a sweet, pleasant odor within a 15-foot radius.

COMBAT: When creatures come within ten feet of the plant, the plants fire their sharp spear-like stalks. A successful stalk attack deals 1d4 damage, and requires victims to make a Constitution saving throw against its poison.

POISON: The plants' poison can paralyze a victim for 1–4 hours. During that time, 1–8 seeds from the plants' stalks make their way into the victim's bloodstream. A second constitution save (CL 3) is required, or the seeds begin to take root inside the victim and begin draining the victim's constitution by 1 point per hour. *Delay poison* will limit the paralysis, allowing slow movement (5 ft), and *neutralize poison* or *remove paralysis* will rid the poison from the victim. The seeds are not part of the poison, however, and must require a *remove disease* or more powerful curative spell to kill. They may also be cauterized from the victim's wounds. Unless removed, the plants (one per seed) will burst forth from the victim's chest in 4–8 days.



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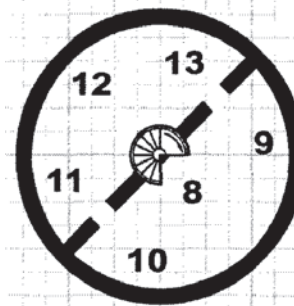


Wizard's Tower

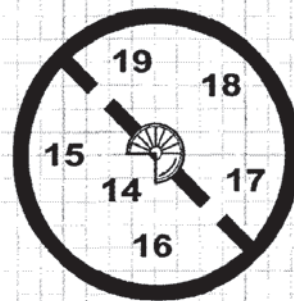
by James M. Ward



LEVEL 1



LEVEL 2



LEVEL 3



LEVEL 4



n using the *Towers of Adventure* box set, you decide what encounters you want and you place their numbers from the booklet onto the map diagram.

I've given you all of the full encounters because you haven't purchased your towers set yet. Hopefully, after reading this you will.

Another TOWERS OF ADVENTURE Tower

The box set came out in January of this year. Sales have been good, but I would like to encourage you all to take a second look at the product. It's three books and a set of maps for miniatures. The first book is a set of tower illustrations with maps to go along. The second book is a set of characters using the C&C rules. The third book has traps and treasures. All of these things are numbered for easy reference in the tower. I've made several towers up in less than five minutes and you can as well, if you own the product.

ADVENTURE HOOK: A Relative Problem

In thirty days, your brother will be hung in the middle of town for a crime he didn't commit. He and his long-time partner went into the wilds a few months ago and your brother came back with a huge chest filled with treasure. The relatives of your brother's partner claimed foul play and had important enough connections in the town to bring your brother before the magistrate. Your brother was sentenced to death. He contacted you to help him out. He gives you a map to a hidden tower in the nearby mountains. He says you will find evidence of how the partner died there on the second level of the tower, but you'll find lots of traps and trouble there. He maintains he's killed the worst of the creatures in the tower and explains it takes at least five days to get there on fast horses. He's to be hung in exactly thirty days.

Wizard Tower Level One

Front Half of the Level

1: 125) Shadow-Undead × 3 (chaotic evil), HD 3d12, HP 29, AC 13, MV 30, primary attribute: physical. Special: only magical weapons strike their forms, a shadow touch drains 1 point of strength. Those lost points return in 1d4 turns if characters survive the attack. Blend allows the shadow to attack invisibly unless several bright lights are used to search for the creature.

2: 126) Skeleton-Undead × 5 (neutral), HD 1d12, HP 10 × 5, AC 13, MV 30, primary attribute: physical. The skeletons attack with a two-handed sword (2d6). Slashing and piercing weapons only do half their normal damage.

The skeletons will follow the company until they are destroyed.

3: 135) Spider Swarm × 24 (neutral), HD 1d1, HP 2 × 24, AC 12, MV 10, primary attribute: physical. Each spider flows down from the ceiling. Any spider bite shows no immediate damage, but in 60 seconds, a save vs. poison is rolled for. Those who fail take 1d6 poison damage. Those who make the save take 1d3 points of damage.

4: 178) Mummy Shaman (chaotic evil), HD 6d12, HP 60, AC 26, MV 30 ft., primary attribute: physical, wears bronze

plate mail, bronze helm, an amulet of fire protection, and a large +3 mace (1d10 +3), Mummies inspire fear causing a save vs. fear or fight the mummy at a -2 to hit. The mummy can cast the following spells: *bane* ×1, *paralysis* ×2, *change self* ×1, *jump* ×2, *spider climb* ×2, and *needle barrage* ×3. Needle barrage sends out a cloud of projectiles in a 10×10 area for 30 feet doing 6d3 with a save at -10 to half damage.

These mummies always guard important treasures.

Stairs Up

291) Deadly Staircase

Stepping on a special step activates a timer and five seconds later a set of six spears thrust up from the stairs doing 1d6 points of damage to anyone on the next six steps above the pressure step. The spears go back in their holes and the trap is reset.

Back Half of the Level

5: Bodies

There is a pile of ten fighter characters of the second level. Fire and being smashed in the chest have killed them. They have good equipment, but it's barely worth stripping off.

6: 222) Generous Wizard Treasure: There are several statues in this chamber and each of them has a bit of adventuring equipment hanging from an arm or head. One statue of a fighter has a finely made wizard hat. One statue of a woman playing a harp has several well-made wizard robes draped over the harp. A statue of a dog has several quarterstaves leaning on it. One statue of an orc has a Handy Haversack holding the following goodies: 2,000 gp, 10 blue turquoise gems set in a silver bracelet 3000 gp, and five solid silver throwing daggers.

7: Ten Statues

These are medusa-changed characters of many types. They have all been turned to stone over the centuries and their faces reflect their terror.

Wizard Tower Level Two

Front Half of the Level

8: 347) Large Mushrooms

Sleeping dragons especially like placing these huge mushrooms in the opening tunnels of their lairs. All a character has to do is pass by such a shroom and the fungus begins screaming a warning for all creatures in the cavern complex. If their shout wasn't bad enough they begin their warbling if a bright light comes into their area or bodies come within ten feet.

9: 352) Floor as a Gong

The characters discover a metal floor and every step on it forces a loud noise that echoes all over the chamber. Naturally, all guards in a hundred yard area around the metal hear the noise. In this case, the undead are motivated to come and check things out.

10: 124) Zombie-Undead × 10 (neutral evil), HD 2d8, HP 14 × 10, AC 12, MV 20, primary attribute: physical. The zombie attacks with a slam (1d8.) The zombie acts last in the round.

These zombies have acquired a taste for fighters and will attack them first.

Stairs Going Up and Down

293) Steam Blast

There is a heat source somewhere in the area and this should be making the chamber or the corridor unusually warm. It should then come as no surprise when the character steps on a pressure stone and a blast of terrible heat bursts out and burns the character for 25 hit points of damage. Naturally, no one in full armor is bothered at all by this terrible trap. Often the nozzle is positioned to blast down a thirty feet wide column to get several characters at one time.

Back Half of the Level

11: 340) Incense of Death

A flame of some type is near the center of this chamber. When the characters walk within fifteen feet of the fire a number of incense sticks fall into the flame and begin belching dark smoke that is poison to breathe. A save vs. constitution is force and failure causes half a character's hit points to be lost per round.

12: This treasure is guarded — 294) Spring Arrows

In this chamber, life-size clay warriors line a wall and face toward the chests and bags of treasure. Someone walks in front of them and nothing happens. When someone touches one of the treasures, a blast of arrows shoot out of the chests of the statues, with three arrows hitting each character. Nothing stops the characters from destroying the statues, but they have to know to do that.

298) Cooking the Intruders

The intruders are in an area, and have defeated the living guards. Unknown to them, the heat has been turned up and the room quickly becomes very hot. If they don't leave then, the room does five points of heat damage to each character and ten points to those in metal armor. Each round they will take the same heat damage until they leave. When they return to this chamber, the heat increases and damages them again.

223) Sizeable Wizard Treasure: There is a large water fountain in this chamber. Water constantly runs from the many stone flowers of the fountain into a deep pond at the front of the fountain. The water is clear and pure, tasting very fresh. Each of the flowers of the fountain has some type of treasure hidden in the petals of the stone flowers:

Five chrome tourmaline 100 gp, five yellow-orange sunstones 500 gp, 5 extraordinary throwing darts, 5 extraordinary throwing

daggers, 5 tubes of gold each worth 1,000 gp, and 5 potions of healing.

13: 337) Poison Thorns

Vines are growing on the walls in the chamber and these plants grow thicker and thicker until the walls are entirely hid by the action of the thorns. If the player characters mess with the plants tentacles of thorny vines smash out and whip the characters for 1d4 points of damage plus a save vs. constitution or be slept.

Wizard Tower Level Three

Front Half of the Level

14: 333) Bursting Bladder

Anything that can be opened can have this type of trap. As the think is opened, a bladder is burst wide open and a poison dust fills the area, much faster than a character could run out of the sphere of dust. The dust is deadly to breathe, but there is more. Eventually the dust settles in the area and then it coats the boots of the characters as they pass through the area. Saves against a milder effect of the poison will have to be made every day until they figure out what is wrong with their boots as they take them off at night.

15: 325) Magic Happens

The magic fills the chamber and every time the characters try to walk into a chamber, they find themselves walking out of the chamber. There is no way for them to enter this area using the portal they are using as the magic keeps sending them back. There is nothing stopping them from pounding through the walls.

16: 322) Curse of Transformation

This spell goes off and in a 10-foot area every time someone comes in the area, all characters are forced to save vs. intelligence or be turned into an ant until the magic is dispelled.

Stairs Going Up and Down

Back Half of the Level

17: 310) Gelatinous Cube

The cube fills the treasure chamber as an almost invisible presence. Touching the cube does 1d4 of acid damage. Damage from a cube forces a paralysis save vs. strength or be paralyzed and then engulfed by the cube. Before the character touches, the cube they are allowed a wisdom save to spot the creature. If they fail the save, they walk right into the cube.

The partner's dead body appears to float in the mass of jelly. There are rings and bits of armor to identify him as the dead relative.

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18: 320) Floating Shillelagh

The big club floats above the area. When a character comes within five feet of it, the weapon attacks as a 10th level fighter doing 1d8 +2. Although the weapon could be grabbed, it can't be stopped from fighting in its area. It won't leave its circle of supervision.

311) Watching Spirit

A glowing spirit is closely tied to parts of the treasure. As the characters steal the treasure, the spirit begins walking with them. The problem is that it glows in the dark and its presence points out there are intruders in the area. The spirit doesn't leave as long as the characters have certain parts of the treasure.

224) Substantial Wizard Treasure: In this chamber is a very large writing desk. Above this desk are many bins filled with scroll tubes. Each of the tubes is well worn and the leather of the tube is cracking from dryness and neglect. All of the tubes have little rune signs on them and the ones with a large X have treasures in the tubes instead of parchment.

- Tube One: This one has a solid cylinder of gold worth 2,000 gp.
- Tube Two: This one has 8 large green-white emeralds 500 gp.
- Tube Three: This has a magical scroll of wizard spells: L-3 *summon lesser monster*, L-5 *teleport*, L-7 *phase door*, L-3 *nondetection*, and L-8 *maze*.
- Tube Four: This has a fully charged *wand of lightning bolts*.
- Tube Five: This one has two pink rhomboid *ioun stones*, two scarlet and blue sphere *ioun stones*, and two clear spindle *ioun stones*.

19: 318) Exploding Fireball

On a chest or better on a door, the fireball explodes if the proper password or knocking isn't used on the trap, doing 6d6 in fire damage.

Wizard Tower Level Four**Front Half of the Level****20: Wizard Bedroom**

There was a wizard here, but he has been killed and others have stripped the room of valuables. All that is left is a ransacked desk with broken drawers, a large canopy bed, and a ripped open chest with an undiscovered secret compartment containing: two blue diamonds each worth 5,000 gp.

Stairs Going Down**Back Half of the Level**

21: Guarding this treasure is the following:

351) Help! I've been Stolen Alarm

The player characters have come into a treasure vaults and find all sorts of valuables from extraordinary weapons to coffers of gems. They inspect these things and are well pleased. Putting the items in backpacks and portable holes, they leave the tower

complex and go to sell the items. As soon as they take them out of their containers the items begin screaming, "*Help! I've been stolen from the wizard Ajax!*" The items don't stop screaming until they are dispelled or return to where they belong.

Also there in the treasure is the following:

346) Horn of Poison Gas

A magnificent battle horn lies on top of a treasure chest. The ivory horn is inlaid in gold and has 20,000 in red rubies embedded in both ends of the horn. When the heavy horn is blown, it covers the wielder in a poison dust that does 20 hit points of damage if they don't make a constitution save vs. poison.

225) Huge Wizard Treasure: This wizard planned so that his treasures didn't leave the building.

- Treasure One: This is a 2,000-pound four-foot cube of solid gold (worth 20,000 gp) that sits on a pedestal.
- Treasure Two: This is a five foot in diameter column of unbreakable glass and at the center of the column at the height of the wizard's eyes is a crystal ball with telepathy. Anyone can use the item but it isn't leaving the chamber easily.
- Treasure Three: On the wall is another unbreakable glass case is a mirror of life trapping. This mirror has five extremely evil giants trapped inside.
- Treasure Four: This is a 4,000-pound eight-foot cube of solid silver (worth 30,000 gp) that rests on the floor.
- Treasure Five: This is a stuffed twelve feet tall raptor dinosaur. Its jaws are wide open and inside the mouth and fully exposed is a mass of 15 large black pearls each worth 1,000 gp. Anything physically placed in the jaws will be snapped off as the raptor bites down for fifteen points of damage.





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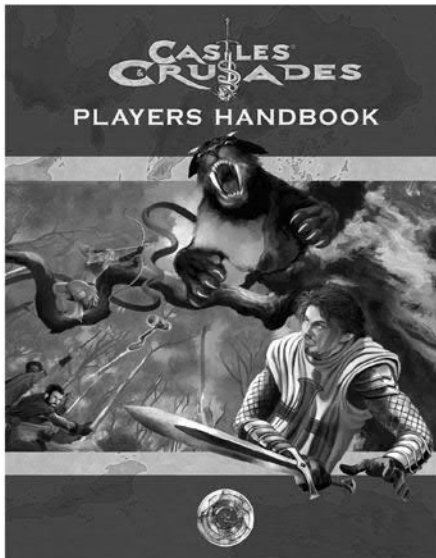
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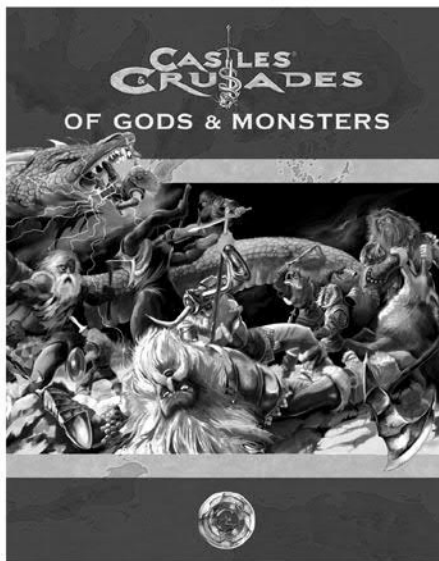
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THE FOURTH CRUSADE



TALES OF THE
RINGS
of
ORASS

THE AIHRDIAN
CHRONICLES
BEING THE 17TH NARRATIVE
OF THE
LAY OF THE LOTHIAN PRINCES

The Elven Warlord, Meltowg-Aet-Ohd, Prince of Lothian, travels west with his Vale Knights and a company of mercenaries on a journey to find the fabled Castle of Spires. The Castle of Spires, ruled by Melius the Wise, is rumored to hold gates to other worlds, wherein the Elven hosts of old have taken refuge. The Prince is possessed of a grim determination to open those gates. After many adventures he has led his men through the pass of the Antiquan Mountains and into the once fertile valleys of the Fromia River. Here the great Aenochian Forest sprawls from the foothills to the distant waters of the Sea of Shenal where lies the orc kingdom of Onwaltig. The snows of Winter Dark blanket the land, the river is partially frozen over, and the trees locked in its icy embrace.

“I would kill for some good rain.”

“Aye. Some rain would be a fair piece of luck, but more than that the sun, My Lord.” Sedgwick shifted himself on the horse, his back sore from too long on the trail. He looked at his Master.

Meltowg sat astride his horse, back as straight as any board. His bearing was haughty and made him seem taller than he actually was. He wore a heavy suit of plate armor, his shield slung at his horse’s side. The armor bore the makings of his elven people, magical it bore the brunt of its many attacks, mending itself, reshaping to its original form. Despite this, some blows proved too heavy and hard and broke the magic of the plate so that the dents remained and the luster would not return. Perhaps this was a due to the sun’s glare never touching the armor, but that it was filtered through the Shroud of Darkness that covered the world, locking it in its wintry embrace. Noxmorus, his great two handed sword, possessed of some impish demon, the Prince wore at his back, locked with simple clasps. The hilt of it protruded high over the elf’s armored head, and the point tapped the armored saddle of this war steed. Constantly tapping as the horse moved slowly down the path. Meltowg’s helm bore the marks of many battles as well, dented and scrapped here and there. From beneath its ornate workings the Prince’s face peered into the darkness, his skin a pale color in the light, his hair almost white. His eyes bore the edge of hatred that gave the Prince meaning in his life.

The fuel of his vengeance he called it. He hated the Winter Dark and its black horned master Unklar who ruled from his high towers in distant Aufstrag. Meltowg hated him and his people. He sought only his ruin and destruction. For Unklar ruled the entire world and put much of it to the torch in the conquest. What he did not burn and destroy he remade, and what he did not remake he blanketed in ice and snow, locking it in a

timeless state of death. Much of what Meltowg had ever known was dead or bound in the Winter Snows. What remained had fled the material plane, leaving this one for another one, where Unklar did not rule. There, in Shindolay, the land of Fey, his people gathered and awaited some distant outcome. Their exile they took on willingly and for this the Prince hated them a little as well.

His hate filled vengeance fueled his never ending quest to fight against the dark one, slay whatever minions he could, and cause what havoc he might, until the end of time or until the end of his time.

“Do you believe this Castle of Spires is real my Lord?”

The Prince shifted in his saddle, cast a glance at Sedgwick. “Cousin, it does not matter to me. In truth whether it is real or not I do not care. For between me and the Twilight Wood where the Castle lies there are great hosts of the enemy and I shall slay them where I may, whether that is here or there, it concerns me little.”

The lieutenant shifted too, moving his horse forward a little as he spied something down the road. He peered at it as he spoke. “Ah. You do not fool me Prince. You would not go this direction if you did not have some hope of finding this Castle. If the riddles are true and Melius the Wise dwells there still, holding the keys to many gates to the outer realms then this is an opportunity to fetch our kin back for the war that it seems we alone wage. Some of those must hunger for vengeance. When they hear of what the orcs did to our Princess, they must hunger even more.”

The Prince grimaced at the memory of the Princess’ fall. Slain these many years ago in the battles of the Blue River, what men call the Mistbane. “Aye. That I do hope.”

“Yonder in the wood is some beast.” Sedgewick held up his hand and the ragged column came to a halt. Some voice in the back of the troop muttered “Breakfast?” Some others laughed.

“Still you fools.” Sedgwick gestured to two men to follow him and rode forward. The path opened up into a broader clearing. The Aenochian Forest consisted of many ancient trees. Of old the Kings of Aenoch reserved this place as a private hunting preserve, so that it teemed with wildlife, monsters, and ancient trees. Nothing had changed now but that the forest stood locked in winter’s grasp.

The wizard-knight moved forward, cantering his heavily armored horse to shield his Prince should something occur. For his part the Prince stood still and watched the scene unfold. Lowering his visor Sedgwick picked up a little speed, and drew his sword. The steel of it scrapped along the scabbard metal with a grating, ominous sound.

The path showed signs of fresh use. Tracks broke the snow ahead, coming from the forest deeps and onto the path. There were many of them, mingled with some hooves. The knight moved forward, his mind ablaze with a spell that called lightning from the air, his sword in his hand. His men followed, arming themselves for battle as well.

As the path gave way, the knight caught site of a small troop of goblins surrounding a horse of amazing beauty. They held the beast with many guide ropes, pulling on it to and fore, trying to exhaust it and pin it back. For its part the horse pulled mightily at the ropes and the goblins holding her. Great plumes of air blasted from her wide nostrils as she heaved and struggled. Her coat was white, with a little mottled gray mixed in. But her mane was golden and long, as was her tail. She stood some 16 hands tall, and was thick, almost barrel-chested. Her legs were stout as well and she stood on the icy snow with hardly little effort. She seemed to shimmer, to move from one place to the next, all the while standing still.

The goblins numbered a score or more and their light arms and armor bore the markings of some legion or the other. These were not just wandering creatures, but soldiers in the horned god’s empire. One had just staked the horse to the ground when his gaze caught the elf.

“Argghhh!” The goblin screamed in terror. Not for many years had elves been seen and certainly not one so armored and armed. They brought a huge ransom from the Lords of Aufstrag, for they were highly sought after as flavor to meals. “Elf Meat!”

The goblins all turned and began scrambling for their weapons. Some pulled swords and daggers, others loaded crossbows and still others uncased long spears. While all this began Sedgwick spurred his horse forward and bent low over her neck, sword at the ready. Before they knew what had hit them the armored men were in their midst and slaying them right and left. Four were down before they others were armed and two more fell as they scrambled to regroup. The three knights had passed through and turned to see the remaining goblins scattered to the forest eves.

“Give a short chase, kill what you can.” The two knights took heed to their lieutenant’s command and gave chase. For his part Sedgwick turned then to the horse.

“Well fair beast. You have another day’s life at least as these goblins may molest you no more.”

The horse stared at him for awhile, her eyes a dim red, glowing in the pale light. Sedgwick plainly saw intelligence in the horse’s eyes. He untied the stake and tossed it aside. Approaching the creature slowly he held his hand up and reached for the rope. An image came to him. He saw himself removing the ropes and dropping them. “What’s this now? Have you cast that image to me?”

Another image came to him then, where the horse ran free under the snows. Sedgwick nodded as he freed the horse. “Indeed fair creature. I shall free you of your bondage and you may choose to go free.” Unbidden to his mind came another image, this from his own inner thoughts, of him riding the horse. The steed picked up on it and rolled its eyes and flared its nostrils, more guarded than fearful.

“Hold now. It was only a thought. I mean nothing by it. You are too beautiful to ride little mare. I’ll bid you take your freedom and god’s speed.”

The steed stood then, free of ropes and halters. Her stout legs were locked, ready to launch but she looked over the wizard-knight. Images of her travels came to him and he saw that she was more than a steed, that through her own magics she could travel the planes, projecting herself into the astral at least, and probably the ethereal plane as well. But more, Sedgwick saw that this steed had been to the Void, the Great Empty, where all things began and all must in time return.

“You are more than meets the eye, fair steed.”



MONSTERS OF AIHRDE

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

SNOW STEED (RINCKVAL)

NO. APPEARING: 1–20

SIZE: Large

HD: 8(d8)

MOVE: 40 ft, 90 ft (fly)

AC: 22

ATTACKS: 2 hooves (1d6), 1 bite (1d4)

SPECIAL: Cold Resistant, Shadow Projection, Telepathy, Twilight Vision

SAVES: M

INT: Average

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

TYPE: Large Outsider

TREASURE: Nil

XP: 950 + 8



They are generally white, or bluish white with manes and tails of gold or silver. Their coat tends to shimmer in the light, especially in snowy or icy conditions. They heads are broad and their eyes a hollow red, when they exert themselves the eyes glow a dull orange. They are tall and long legged steeds, strong by the standards of any warhorse. They are extremely swift and are able to move over snow and ice without mishap.

These beasts are extremely wild, intelligent enough to understand simple language and the nature of bondage. They have a very simple telepathy. On occasion they serve a single rider, but they abhor a bit and bridle, wearing armor, or even a saddle. Generally they allow a blanket for their own comfort. They communicate with their rider through mental images, knee pressure or hand jesters. They generally travel alone, but on occasion travel in small herds of up to 20 beasts, usually a number of foals and colts, several mares with one or two stallions. Generally handlers take the young mares, training them as mounts, but even these tend to be skittish and untrustworthy.

Because they move as freely on the astral and ethereal planes as they do the material they are often moving, almost blinking in and out of the light. This gives their coat the shimmering look it possesses but also serves as a natural armor class.

The Snow Steed can carry 300 pounds, medium load up to 650 an heavy up to 1000 pounds.

COMBAT: Snow steeds are extremely spirited and independent. When threatened they become aggressive, attacking by rearing up and striking a foe with their hooves. If endangered they take flight, circle an opponent waiting to strike them again.

COLD RESISTANT: Snow steeds are highly resistant to cold based attacks. Any such attack automatically does half damage. They may make a saving throw to further reduce the damage.

SHADOW PROJECTION: Snow Steeds are able to enter and exit the astral and ethereal planes at will. Any rider mounted on the beast travels with them. They are limited to their one rider, and can take no other passengers. The ability acts as the spell astral projection, and the actual steed and rider remain behind on the material plane.

TELEPATHY: These creatures are able to speak with any creatures that have some type of mental aptitude, but only in limited form. They are to project simple images, say of 5 orcs, to the recipient. They can see similar images. Though they are not able to communicate via language they can understand very simple and basic words.

The Snow Steed in Aihrde

At the height of the horned god's rule his lieutenants gathered a great host of horses and selectively bred them. They predominately chose white horses, to blend in with the Winter's snow. They also were particular in breeding them with paladin's warhorse. The magical nature of these creatures passed into the snow steeds and imbued them with an extraordinary intelligence and toughness. When at last they strengthened the line of horse they infused them with the magic of the Paths of Umbra.

The intent was to use them to cross over into the planes, particularly the Void. The steeds proved unruly and were rarely willing to carry their masters through the Wall of Worlds, or even the Shroud of Darkness in later years. After some time Unklar's folk abandoned them and drove them into the wild places of the earth. The beasts thrived in the cold and dark of the Winter World. Eventually, as the Winter Dark ended they migrated to the northern climes and the high mountains. Only on a rare occasion do people encounter them in the warm regions of the world.

They are able to project themselves in the Void as well as the astral and ethereal planes.

Generally such a horse brings 10,000gp in the market.



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