

# 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

GAME REVIEW:  
SHARK

BY JAMES M. WARD

ROADHOUSE  
ROGUES

BY CASEY CHRISTOFFERSON

CREATING  
MAGIC ITEMS

BY CASEY CANFIELD

TALES OF  
THE RINGS OF  
BRASS

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

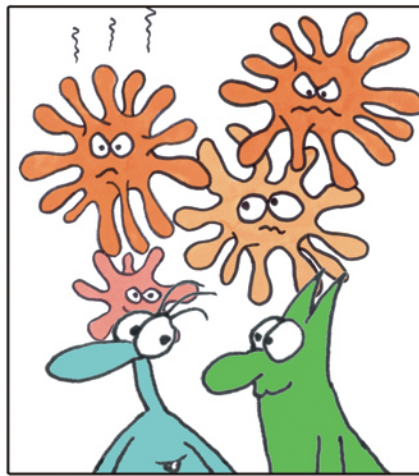
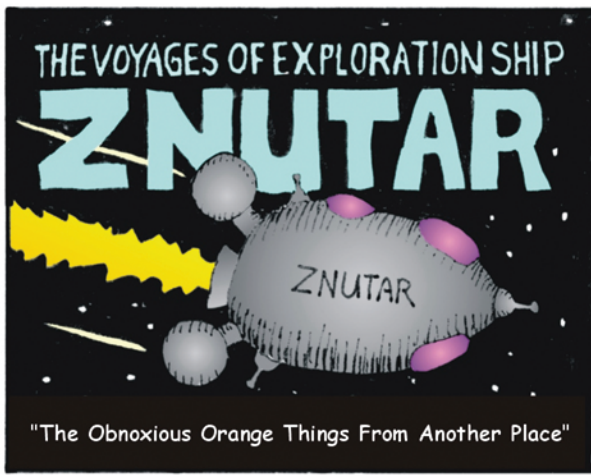
MONSTERS  
OF AIHRDE

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT



LOTS O'  
TROLLS  
INSIDE!

**NOW 36  
PAGES!!!**



It seems the crew of the Znutar are in for it yet again. This time, the "volunteers" they brought aboard have gone berserk! It seems that one of them consumed a can of Zgwortz in the Mess Deck and all hell has broken loose. You must, of course, have a copy of: "The Awful Green Things From Outer Space" to play this variant. The rest of you can go ahead and close this copy of the "Crusader" and see what's on the back. Thanks!

## "The Obnoxious Orange Things From Another Place"

### Game Variant -Preparation:

























**The Crew Player:** sets up his crew as specified in the rules, but you must evenly divide any crew that may be placed in "either bridge"(round up in your favor.) Now, find a "1 die fragments" counter from the weapon effects cup and place it next to the can of Zgwortz. This much the crew now knows.

**The Monster Player:** Place 6 Fragments in the Mess Deck. Then take 4 Adults and 5 Young Monsters. These monsters are now placed, *one per area*. Each one must go in an area adjacent (connected by a passageway or hatch) to one already occupied by a monster(s). No monster may start in an area with a crewman.

























**How to Play:** Once you have mounted and cut out the counters below, you're ready to play. All rules to the *Awful Green Things* apply with the following exception: The Obnoxious Orange Things **do not lay eggs**. When an adult **grows**, it breaks into 1 die of fragments (just like consuming Zgwortz.) If you choose to "grow" your adults, you do not need to do them all, just the ones you want to fragment (Zgwortz = Reproduction... go figure).

To play this variant, glue these counters to cardboard and then cut them out.









Fragments (24)

	1		1		1		1		1		1
1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7
	1		1		1		1		1		1
1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7
	1		1		1		1		1		1
1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7
	1		1		1		1		1		2
1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	1	7	2	11

Young (20)

	2		2		2		2		2		2
2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11
	2		2		2		2		2		3
2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11	5	15
	2		2		2		2		2		3
2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11	2	11	5	15
	2		2		3		3		3		3
2	11	2	11	5	15	5	15	5	15	5	15

Adults (16)

	3		3
5	15	5	15
	3		3
5	15	5	15
	3		3
5	15	5	15
	3		3
5	15	5	15

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# notes from the managing editor



## James M. Ward

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

## Your Ideas Stolen



et us say for the sake of this article that you have a great game you have just invented.

Your friends love it (don't tell anyone that because it is a turn-off to hear, trust me on this.)

You have a prototype that looks like a game just purchased from *Toys R Us* (a must-have to present it to another company for production.)

With all that going for you, you are terrified that any company you show the game to will steal your idea. I've spoken about this before, but I think I want to talk on this topic every year. It's an important concept that could use repeating.

A) If you are a game designer, you need to make your game as close to finished and "real" looking as you can do. That means the game is in full color, the rules are well written and edited. If you can, it would be good to create a color box the right size for your game.

B) When the game is ready it would be best if you can publish it yourself and make a thousand copies. I have a great friend, Rich Borg he had a game he called *Doubter's Dice*. He made copies and sold them at the convention he went to. Eventually the game was bought by Hasbro to become *Liars Dice*. It was also bought by a German company and became the best game of the year over in Germany. Many of your copyright issues go away if you can sell the game over state lines.

C) The "poor mans copyright" is you mailing a single copy of the game to yourself. The postmark on the unopened envelope established a date for when the game was finished. If you have to go to court to protect your ideas, you will have this mailing as proof of when you created your idea.

D) Getting your ideas stolen can happen. It's a slim chance however. You might think your idea is yours, but there are factors to consider.

If you have just seen a great movie like *Star Trek* and you make a great game based on that, it's a distinct likelihood that a large company like Hasbro had that thought when the movie was first scripted.

If you have an amazing NASCAR racing game, you should realize that NASCAR has been around for a long time and there are several racing games out there already.

I worked for TSR, 'the' role-playing company in the '70s and '80s and you would be amazed to see all the 'fresh' ideas on role-playing products that TSR was either working on or did ten years ago that people were trying to turn in as their own idea. TSR did a set of spell cards and the company had over a hundred people trying to turn in their version of spell cards. When they were told the company already had some, they maintained their version was much better.

Companies don't want to be accused of stealing a designer's ideas. They go to great lengths to make sure this doesn't happen. Always consider the possibility of parallel development however unlike it may seem.

I had a civil war game I was quite proud of and was showing around to companies in the hope that one of them would pick it up. A year later I saw unique concepts from my game in the games of two other companies; companies I had shown my game to. I wasn't pleased, but I wanted to establish a relationship with those people so I didn't say anything. Establishing a good relationship with another company is way more important than a single game idea.

Game ideas are truly a dime a dozen. If you have the ability to think of a good game, you can think of hundreds of good games.

The bottom line on this is the following:

Design a good game, play test the game, make a simple set of rules, graphically put it together so that it looks like a professionally done game, send yourself a copy of the game in the mail, plan on giving any company a copy of your game, and you will still have only a 10% chance of getting noticed.

Luck with that,

James M. Ward

Managing Editor



# ALEA IACTA EST



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

## Table Top Crusading

**F**or the better part of nine years I've been running Troll Lord Games. The company has grown from a very small enterprise into something a little larger. For most of those years, I engaged myself in the "industry" and managed to keep my finger on the pulse of what was going on, to participate in the bigger picture of table top publishing as it were. However, it is difficult for me to judge where the table top game publishing industry is today. I secluded myself in work on TLG, expanding the company, learning new trades, and building the game system that has become our flagship line. Everyone here at TLG has been hyper-focused on our own work, ignoring in many respects the work going on around us. This is not a bad thing, but it has left us a bit in the dark with trends in the general table top market; however it has simultaneously left us with a company that has become far more resilient in the face of a market in flux. Though I cannot comment on the market as a whole I can comment on TLG's place in it, the importance of working with that market, and in doing so give everyone a general idea of what we are doing and where we are trying to go. This information hopefully gives people the security to know that the Crusade is a vibrant and a growing movement; one for which we all have become a part.

When we started back in 1999 and released in 2000 we had little long term plans, and by little, what I really mean to say is we had none. We were planning a few releases, wanting to sell them at Gencon, and see what happened. Well, what happened was good. I quickly learned of the wider industry around us, and in working with Mac Golden we laid out a very loose plan of what we needed to do. One of the things we were doing was attending the Gama Trade Show in Vegas. This show, designed for publishers to showcase their products, gave us immediate access to hundreds of retailers and scores of contacts. We attended the show regularly from 2001 to 2006. Todd and I went at first and then later I went alone. Davis joined a few of the trips and a few other TLG folks came along for the ride. The early trips were great, as we outfitted the pick up truck with a camper shell and with a TV, a light and small icebox for one person to travel in the back. It was great fun!

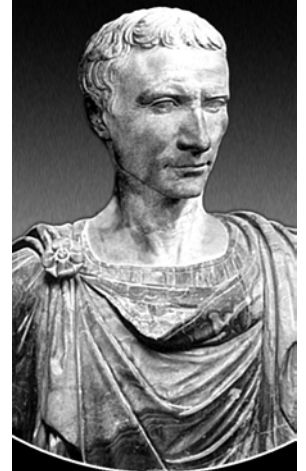
I chose not to attend GTS in 2007 as the costs to attend to the show continued to rise and did not seem to equal what TLG gained from it. Such decisions are difficult because you really never know what your return from such a show is. You might expose a bunch of people to your new release and sales jump out of the gate, but the new release may be the reason that sales jumped out the gate. It's difficult to quantify. We did not attend in 2008 either; though I managed to control the potential cost, the time down seemed to be onerous and I thought it would distract from the Fourth Crusade, which needed, as it does as of this writing, a great deal of work.

I now realize one of those things that I have missed, and TLG missed as well, by not attending. GTS, placed in March as it is, is far removed from Gencon, some 5–6 months depending on the actual dates. Attending the show allowed TLG to insert itself in a wider community of publishers and created a presence in that rather open community, showcasing the game's success and potential. We have probably missed out on some unique working relationships because of this. Though we are more than happy to see Goodman, Adventure Game Publishing, and now Brave Halfling putting out C&C material it would be interesting and probably beneficial to garner larger companies' support and interest. Some of the conversations I've had at GTS have certainly allowed me to think about problems from different angles, gaining an understanding that I did not perhaps have before.

Of course all of that was not really that necessary when Gary Gygax was still with us. I talked to him often and he was free and very willing with his advice. Even beyond that he was filled to the brim with ideas on how to market items, showcase them, and make them above all else more enjoyable to play for the end user. The year he passed on was the first year I did not attend, and probably in retrospect was the main reason I did not attend.

I've also dropped other trade shows and we have in many respects cut out huge swaths of our convention circuit. We canceled first Winter Dark, then later the Lake Geneva Gaming Convention. We also stopped attending a number of shows that were a bit too far for us and failed to yield a justifiable return in fan interaction. Much of this

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

has come down at my behest, as I have wanted to focus on the tasks at hand and spend less time selling and marketing. Of course this came at a hard time for TLG as other things were afoot.

I forcibly removed the d20 material from the lineup. I did not have to, but I made the decision in order to distance ourselves from the cacophony of 4<sup>th</sup> edition *D&D* that was coming down the pipe. I wanted no confusion with the 4<sup>th</sup> printing of our own game that I knew would not be far off. Trigeer removed the Gygax material for legal reasons as Gail Gygax set about the huge task of reorganizing her own company and pursued ventures outside the normal framework that was TLG. Suddenly TLG found itself with a product line that shrank by three major brands, *Gygaxian Fantasy Worlds*, *Legendary Adventures*, and d20, probably somewhere in the vicinity of 40% of the available titles and more in earning potential. Couple all the distance TLG has taken in our own pond with a disintegrating product line and you have a bumpy picture of a company that has removed itself from its own industry and lost much of its earning potential.

But this actually is far from the case. TLG has become a very vibrant entity, expanding in several directions at once. This has been difficult and the growing pains have been hard to swallow and made for some very stressful days and nights as we learn new trades and conduct ourselves through a whirligig of confusing items on very long to-do lists. We manufacture many of our own books now and have slowly learned how to increase the quality of our books as well. We are launching four major books this summer and two game boxes this fall. The *Crusader* is monthly (at least as far as I'm concerned, I'm sure our esteemed Managing Editor would disagree and many fans would as well ha) and continues to improve in quality and content. The website too is through the roof with few peers in our industry.

Things are looking good, and with more work and better focus we are only going to improve. We have big plans for the coming year (2010), as we expand the hole of the Fourth Crusade throughout our market and make *C&C* the game that many table toppers are playing at the conventions you attend.

First up are the conventions. Richard McBain has been working on the convention circuit for us, working with me to reconstruct a good series of shows that allows TLG to gain exposure throughout many regions. Initially our focus will be on regional shows. Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Illinois are all in our sights as we attend shows from the very small to the very big. We are also looking at attending at least one show on each coast, probably DundraCon in California, though we may look at show further north in Washington where our good friend from Necromancer Games lives, Bill Webb. We are presently looking for something on the east coast, probably in the vicinity of New Jersey as we have good contacts with Ed Evans at *All Things Fun*. If you've never been there his shop is SWEET!

The big convention news for 2010 is of course happening in Georgia, Dragon Con. This is perhaps one of the greatest conventions ever put together and loads of fun. We attended some few years ago, but the sales were very low, and we were not prepared for the market, even though I have attended the show for a decade as a consumer! Next year we will be well prepared for it and help make the show rival GenCon so far as Troll Lord Games and the Crusade is concerned. We are revisiting Origins as well, and I have had some

talks with Fat Dragon Games along those lines. We are hoping to become more active with such groups as the Kentucky Fried Gamers as well, and any other local groups you may be a part of.

As important as all this is we intend to attend the GTS show again and restart that avenue as well.

Tangled with this of course we have Troll Con VIII. These shows will build on the looming success of Troll Con VII. I say looming as VII has a nice stack of pre-registered attendees, our first dealers in the guise of *Castle Perilous*, and James M. Ward is coming down and refereeing a full register of games for the fans to play.

If you have a show in your neck of the woods don't hesitate to call or e-mail us, or even post on the boards about our possible attendance. At the very least we might perhaps get someone from the Society to come over and run games.

The C&C Society is also in our sights and support for it will come far sooner than the conventions of 2010. Starting this summer we'll revamp our TLG Society access, creating a password-protected area for members that offers people more material for being members and more access to other members. Within the Society website you will find portals to the Game Hermit, a site that will eventually carry all manner of TLG and *C&C* products for sale as pdfs, as well as dice and other material. Members will be given special codes that allow them a greater discount than they can get anywhere at any

other store on the web. We plan also to launch a program where you get "paid" in TLG coin to run events at shows or to generally promote *C&C* in your neighborhood. These coins can be redeemed at

## Things are looking good, and with more work and better focus we are only going to improve.

TLG, at conventions or even with other participating vendors. We are looking at regular open chat rooms, free downloads offered by Casey Christofferson for the *Haunted Highlands* and myself for the world of *Ahrde*, and most probably eventually Davis for the *Inzae* settings. The adventure finder service will be a part of it as well as we utilize outside sources to help you guys get together easier. Society discounts for attending Troll Con will be in the offing as well as t-shirts and more.

We are working on a new ranking structure as well, where service to the Crusade gains your title. These titles will be married with the old nobility of the society, those who have been around forever, creating what is truthfully a medieval world where there are old nobility whose titles are mired in history and the new nobility striving for rank through deeds. We intend to at last open the world of *Ahrde* to colonization, allowing society members to name regions and areas, populating it as it were with names derived directly from their own games (I must be the final arbiter of this of course, making sure the world does not lose its essence due to some strange names like Poo Taker Village.)

In all it will be great fun.

The conventions and the society won't be the only thing we offer. As the last of the summer hardbacks for the Crusade come out we will offer the whole set with the new screens and the new CRS for sale; in a very special retail package, allowing people to join the Crusade in force. This package will come in a far more advanced and long lasting case than the previous deluxe set. We are working with Patrick Nehan at Diamond State Specialty Box to offer a case that comes with a lid

and a nice textured wrap. This case will be mimicked by a dice case with a platform for your favorite gaming dice!

As the four books and the Crusade unfolds this summer we are laying the ground work for what *C&C* material will be coming out in 2010. There are two themes we are working on. The first is basic, very basic. It's the basic set. We'll focus our attention on that long neglected product. The second dwells in the dungeons, forests, rivers, mountains and all throughout your gaming world. Monsters, monsters, and more monsters have been called for, and we will be delivering them. We have *Monsters of Ahrde* to kick start the new year with its December release (2009) and we'll follow this up with work on and the release of *M&T 2* and the untitled *Beasts of the Nether Planes* (aka *Demons and Devils*).

All these projects, the conventions, the Society and the whole Crusade will begin focusing attention on the retailer as well. We have long neglected our contacts in that world and fully intend to make *C&C* a part of every retailer shelf. This benefits everyone, but most especially those of us who thoroughly enjoy the table top games, because by bringing more retailers into the fold and giving them the ability to order more often and carry lines deeper, it brings the gamer ever closer to the game, making it more convenient through being more accessible. This in turn allows us to refine what we do, weeding out products that aren't popular or have little value to the gamer in all of us.

In short, though the industry as a whole seems to be in some state of flux as 4<sup>th</sup> Edition struggles to find its footing and other companies struggle to find what new direction to take if any, TLG remains focused on the task at hand. The company and game grow together and with both being wholly dependent on the gamer in the end, it brings us all into a rather nice inter-working relationship. As our good friend, Our Lady of Gaming, Darlene would probably say: there is a wonderful symbiosis within our community. It is our intention and hope that we can continue to build this and grow it all together.

The Fourth Crusade continues!

*Steve Chenault*



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# 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.*



**I**wrote about using PC's to help the players by hiring low-level types as arrow catchers. There is another aspect of NPC's that should not be neglected or thought less of: as avatar of the GM (or CK, or DM, etc.).

We gave up active role-playing when we moved around to "the other side of the screen" and became Impresario of the Impossible. Isn't that what we really did, take on the responsibility for the fun of our group? It is completely up to us now to provide the rest of the group the opportunity to have fun in an engaging mutual interest. If you aren't up to the task, you'll soon find yourself the only one showing up for game nights.

I do not think that there has ever lived a GM that at least briefly has not wanted to mess with the party: bring them down a notch, or remind them that they are mortal, or figure out a way to take back an artifact that they figured out how to use in a way you never foresaw, or turned out to be just too powerful. But we can't. As GM, we have to present the Face of Impartiality and not just seem to be arbitrary, capricious or "unfair". (And let's be honest, shall we? We do what we do because we like doing it, and we need enthusiastic players to feed our sense of self-worth and populate a campaign or adventure.)

Enter the NPC. PC's beware; there is a reason he or she is there. Let me list some possibilities:

- *Vamp/seductress*; let's see just how chaste that paladin is;
- *Turncoat/double agent*; ostensibly available with some "inside" info, they are there to rat you out or give you away at the worst possible moment;
- *Sneaky thief*; cozens up to the group, gives a little useful info, steals that pesky artifact when their backs are turned;
- *Genuine helper*; is there to give good info that will prompt group in the general direction you would like them go, and my favorite,
- *"Voice from the back"*; the NPC that "sees" what the PC's overlooks, or has a sudden flash of "insight" to steer them in the right direction, or "find" the hidden something that the rest of the group overlooked. Then there is:

- *The Gluteal Pain*; a really annoying NPC that is there to screw things up, give bad advice and in any way possible hinder the group.

And do you know the absolutely, positively best aspect they all share? You get to be all of them! This is your opportunity to role-play again.

What I do is "create" a mixed group of PC-types; I tailor them to the level of the adventure or campaign, or whatever to maintain the verisimilitude. It's like creating pre-generated PC's for strangers or infrequent members of the group that come along to play. In my case, I whip up about a dozen or so. Then, I make up back-stories to give them names and a history of sorts. I assign alignments as I am creating these histories as the mood hits me. I craft the story around weapons they may be carrying, artifacts they might possess, or deeds they may have performed in getting those things.

Once I have a back-story (or I guess you could call it a biographical thumbnail, background or history), I play them just the way I think a persona with that background, those traumas, the values they pick up and their particular skew on the world. It may help that I've taken a bunch of Psych courses over the years, but I really don't think it makes any significant difference. You create characters to act the way you want them to—it is your game, after all.

A good friend of mine that has been doing this almost as long as I have has a really neat gimmick along these lines that I may well adopt myself. Whenever he runs a game at a con, or any place he is using pre-generated characters, the players always have an NPC that accompanies them; my friend's alter-ego, "voice from the back" and usually genuine helper all in one.

When the game is moving like December molasses, he uses this NPC to get them going again, or provide a "clue" that might put them on the right path, or voice of warning; "Do we really want to try that, guys?"

Another use I can think of would be to take a balky or recalcitrant PC aside (all in character, of course) and point out their obnoxious and/or annoying behaviors. Then with a cheerful grin, tell them you are the "cleaner" that Tony Soprano sent to make them an offer they can't refuse, or show them where they can sleep with the fishes.



# The Eight Great Cemeteries

By Keith Hackwood

*Keith Hackwood is gravely serious about C&C*

## What?

Legend has it that there are eight great cemeteries, located at the edges of the known world, marking the most sacred and auspicious of sites for interment of bodies after death. Over the aeons, knowledge of these places has been lost and today they stand surrounded by myth and ancient rumour. Some maintain that the cemeteries relate to the major races (one human, one eleven, one dwarven, one giant and so on), others claim that no such places ever existed physically, and that the legends refer to an inner process of transformation once embraced by initiates of long lost deities. However, reports from recently returned adventurers to the far eastern reaches of the last continent, have once again stoked discussion among the learned, the curious and the devout. Possible reasons to visit such a place, or to seek the other cemeteries, if they exist, are:

### Roll d8

1. to locate a legendary artefact believed buried there
2. to fulfil a vow to a specific patron deity
3. to seek contact with the ancient ways and discover lost knowledge
4. to be buried in an auspicious place for entering the afterlife
5. for the kudos and reputation – to prove utter fearlessness
6. to eliminate any evil sects or demonic activities associated with the place
7. to seek the last resting place of a legendary hero or lost prophet
8. for the thrill of adventure and discovery

## Know way!

News reaching civilization notes the following impressions reported by adventurers:

1. That the human cemetery is huge and circular and certainly exists – it can be found beyond the Pale Mountain, where ‘the black sound’ echoes
2. That a great red statue dominates the central part of the cemetery—and the cemetery is called, in the ancient tongue, Grahula (the Frightful)
3. That the trees flanking the place are skeletal and from them hang many bodies

4. That there are living communities who dwell in around the cemetery and maintain its integrity, serving as sextons, flesh-cutters and crematory attendants
5. There are many crypts and ancient buildings, ossaries, barrows, charnel houses and deity mounds
6. A great whirl of blades and cutting edges circles the cemetery and confronts all who approach

The rumours are largely true and reflect genuine experience. The cemetery does indeed exist and function, and there are many who dwell there to serve, to maintain their traditions, and to further their practice of divine arts long forgotten elsewhere. Among them are the following:

## Chod

Chod is a ragged man, apparently in his forties, often to be found at dusk or dawn near the cemetery gate. He carries a circular stemmed-drum in his right hand, played by twisting the handle and swinging two leather thongs to create a rattling rhythmic sound (the effect of which is as a *Fear* spell cast at fifth level). Those who approach Chod will find him entranced and swaying in some transcendent dance, black eyes focused in the far distance, maroon robes whirling; if he is spoken to there is a chance (a roll of 1 on a d4) that he will come out of his trance and focus on the questioner. In this case, Chod will be able to answer one question with full knowledge and accuracy, and one question with an utterly convincing lie before he returns to his trance. If a 4 is rolled, Chod produces a large curved flaying knife in his left hand and proceeds to decapitate himself before the group, remaining upright and drumming/dancing—he will stoop to collect his severed head and offer it to the group, rather like a begging bowl.

**Chod:** Chaotic Neutral, geased 10<sup>th</sup> level human Monk: HP 71, AC 17, MV 30 ft, primary attributes: intelligence 18, wisdom 16, dexterity 14. He uses a +3 *robe of protection*, a +3 *Drigu flaying knife* (1d6 +3). He speaks in an ancient tongue but understands questions asked in Common when focused upon the questioner—otherwise communication is telepathic and uses simple symbolic form. Chod will not leave the cemetery under any circumstances and functions as a kind of guardian. He can sever his head once per day and it reattaches, leaving no wound, each sunset. Once he has conducted this operation one hundred thousand times, Chod is free to ascend to his deity.

**Itzakh The Toe:** Chaotic Evil, 8<sup>th</sup> level insane human mendicant-mystic: HP48, AC15, MV25ft, primary attributes: dexterity 15, wisdom 14, charisma 16. He uses a thighbone trumpet, which functions as a *horn of blasting*, and carries a *scimitar*

+2 (1d8+2). Itzakh wears a necklace made of toes, some fresh, others skeletal or in various states of decay. Occasionally he will eat a toe (gaining +3 to all attribute checks for 24 hours), as a great delicacy—and will exchange information for an offering of a toe or two. He is also able to ‘milk’ the toes to create a sort of juice, which will function as a *potion of healing* (CLW). Itzakh sleeps rough on the edges of the cemetery and belongs to none of the communities found there—a loner, he is elusive, but magnetically charismatic and unnaturally youthful looking, even attractive (successful Wisdom save required by anyone engaging with him, CL8, to avoid becoming entranced). Itzakh aims to collect toes and one day, to establish his own shrine within the cemetery. Sometimes he raids parts of the cemetery (the flesh-cutter’s camp or the ossary) to steal toes or to kill (usually at the dark of the moon, to appease his evil deity). Itzakh often croons to himself and will happily bestow his ‘toe milk’ in exchange for more toes.

**Venn The Reddleman:** Neutral Good, 6<sup>th</sup> level human merchant/tinker, HP:29, AC16, MV20ft, primary attributes: strength 17, intelligence 14, dexterity 12. He carries a *hand-axe* +1 and a *dagger of burning* +2, both of which he is adept at using to defend himself. Venn is a middle-aged man covered in ochre dye, and pushes a handcart upon which are his bindle, tinkering kit, and various trinkets for sale or barter (bone wear jewellery, copperware, a few parchments). Venn is a traveller, a purveyor of dyes and one of the few regular visitors to the cemetery. An outsider, he is often viewed with suspicion back in the civilized world, though here he is respected as a force of neutrality and the dissemination of information.

**The Wheel Of Sharp Weapons:** This Lawful Neutral semi-sentient automaton consists of a double ring of adamantite metal, the outer ring about eight feet across, the inner, about five feet, upon which are mounted eight supernaturally sharp swords, blades radiating outwards. Moves 30ft, HD:12, HP:96, AC:20 The Wheel will attack one target each round (either the strongest opponent, or any chaotic character—CK’s choice). Each sword can deal 1d8+3 damage and on a successful hit, roll 1d4 to check how many blades inflict damage that round. The Wheel can be deterred by PCs prostrating before it and pledging to abide by the law of the cemetery (Chod, Itzakh or Venn could potentially impart this knowledge, in whole or in part).

**The Red Statue:** This vast (90 ft tall) statue of a naked red woman stands in a warrior posture, holding aloft a great skull and wielding a mighty flaying knife. Her face bears three eyes, and her open mouth shows four fangs. Around the base of the statue various ‘altars’ stand, some clearly disused, others stained with blood or adorned with flowers and gracefully arranged bright foliage. The statue is of Dakini Varahi, an ancient goddess of nature, Neutral in aspect, shown here in her protector form. Over time her cult has splintered and degenerated so that now, some view her as a vampiric devourer, a blood-drinker rooted in evil – such followers now offer blood sacrifice, and seek to animate the statue itself (should they ever succeed, the statue would function as a Fire Giant). Others still relate to Dakini Varahi as a nature goddess, a sublime being promising continuity beyond physical death, and for them the statue is a symbolic ideal.

As the centre of the cemetery, this area is overwhelming to the senses and dominated by the statue. Around and about are humans engaged in the disposal of bodies through cremation on pyres, interment in graves or charnel houses, and sky burials (where bodies are sliced apart by the flesh-cutters and offered to the carrion eaters and birds). There are skeletal trees, actual animated skeletons walking near the southern edge of the place, and zombies abroad during the hours of darkness. There are also sundry fortunetellers, seers, beggars, feral children and ecstatic mystics of all alignments, together with shabby stalls selling food, alcohol and religious accoutrements. There are also, for those with eyes to see, accomplished teachers and masters of a variety of mystical techniques, disciplines and traditions—a monk or cleric, even a paladin, could well discover a new mentor in such a place.

Around the cemetery, are fields of graves marked with stone symbols and carved markers. The various mounds and buildings contain (as well as crypts and bone houses) temples, places of rest for grieving relatives and pilgrims, and areas for stabling animals. Observant PCs will notice that things are highly organised within the cemetery itself, and specific areas are cared for and regulated by certain sects (e.g. the flesh cutters, the cremators, the operators of burials, and also by broad alignment)—though closer to the cemetery’s circumference, things are more chaotic and wild (even the vegetation is tangled and enmeshing, and wild animals can be heard and glimpsed). The mood of the place varies between terrifying and strange to peaceful and contemplative by time of day and location within the place. There is also a lake, around the shores of which visitors set up their camp (many come from the surrounding tribal areas to conduct funerals for their relatives and peers), and also piles of bodies (some fresh, some mutilated, some skeletal), fires (kept burning at all times) and the surrounding distant mountains.



# Shark

Author: Jean Vanaise

Players: 2-6

Company: Ravensburger

For Ages: 10 and up

Play time: 60-90 minutes

Buy it, Play it, Love it!



I have three of the Flying Turtle versions of the game and I bet I've played the game over a thousand times. It's gone through several companies now, but the game play hasn't changed much. The box top I show above is a Ravensburger edition and it has changed several times over the years as well.

Shark is a wonderful abstract stock-trading game. Game play is simple as each player rolls for a position on the board and a color of stock. They place colored pawns on the board to form chains of stock. The larger the chains the more your stock is worth.



Players buy and sell stock as they wish under certain rules. The best players will have a range of all the colors of stock and as the game develops, some of the colors just naturally become more valuable than others. Luck is a factor in that some colors can come up more often than others.

The game ends when one color set of pawns is all used up or if one companies share prices reach 15. In all of my games, the price reaching 15 only happened twice. At the end, player's cash out their stocks and the one with the most money wins the game.

All of you board gamers who have a great collection of games really must have this one on their shelves.

The shark part is fun in that some of these chains can be eliminated when the pawn of a larger company comes next to the pawn of a littler chain of pawns. The littler chain goes away and its stock is lowered in value. So if you have a value six green stock and a green stock pawn comes next to a value four red stock company all of the four red pawns are taken off the board and out of play.

During the game, the grids on the board slowly fill up with the colored pawns. A player rolls a green one and they place a green pawn on any part of the 1 grid. There are some rules that don't allow pawns to be placed next to each other. As the game continues people, try to increase the growth of that green pawn by connecting other green pawns horizontally and vertically next to other green pawns. Placing a pawn diagonally to another pawn does not increase the size of that color. When two or more of the same color are connected, the stock of that color goes up by the size of the number of pawns.



# Castles and Crusades Society

by Sir John "seskis281" Wright and Robert "serleran" Doyel



What exactly is the Society, you ask? First off, the C&C Society is *not* exclusively dedicated to the game known as *Castles & Crusades*®, rather that game was created and produced out of respect and honor for the traditions and name of the original Castles & Crusades Society as it existed several decades ago.

The original C&C Society was founded as a chapter of the International Federation of Wargamers in 1968 by E. Gary Gygax, and it was the society which began publishing a newsletter known as *The Domesday Book*, with a very small circulation but with enormous impact. It was this society that first published the miniatures rules that would become "Chainmail," and the first map of the legendary Blackmoor. From these, the medium of role-playing games and "Dungeons & Dragons" in particular would emerge.

The Castles & Crusades Society today was given rebirth as Gary Gygax began to work with Troll Lord Games, and the Society was reestablished, first being used to help support the development of the game system that also honors the name "Castles & Crusades." The intentions of the Society are much greater!

We exist to bring together gamers from all corners, who are dedicated to RPG and non-RPG gaming. We welcome all who view this hobby with the love that Gary brought to the table so many thousands of times over the course of his life, and we humbly dedicate this endeavor to his memory!

So what will you find here and as a member of the C&C Society? A community of gamers who wish to share their passions both as fans and as creators themselves of art, adventures and all manner of gaming exploits. You will find those who are already published, those who seek to contribute, and those who merely play and wish to share their experiences. All are called to this Crusade, in the poetry of Medieval fashion!

While principally focused on Fantasy and classic Medieval RPGs and wargaming, the Society is open to all who enjoy every genre, every system. Our forums do not forbid discussion of any differing views on games and gaming philosophy, only that people be respectful of difference.

The Society is also dedicated to presenting, once again, *The Domesday Book*, a fan-produced newsletter with reviews, articles, art and material to supplement our gaming community. We are also gaining more and more permissions to publish fan work from a variety of companies, and invite fans of a wide variety of systems and rules to submit. *The Domesday Book* is a Quarterly production of the Society, in pdf form from the Society website.

The Society will also offer members benefits, a few of which are already in place, with more to come. The Society will sponsor contests, and, with hope and a little work, some regional events and gatherings in the future. We are also working

alongside Steve Chenault of Troll Lord Games to re-establish direct ties with them and offer more benefits to Society members who also play the game that shares our love—at first, it will be a discount offer (10% to all members) but also a Valor system where members who contribute by running game demos and the like will earn additional rewards. Further, we are seeking a special art commission from a well-known and respected RPG insider, Jim Holloway, to depict the Society in its glory, each member, we hope, to receive a print of this to say "thanks."

More than anything, the Society is dedicated to gaming as fun and as a stimulating forum for the support of our gaming industry!

The Society currently boasts 190 Titled members on its Rolls, plus two dozen or so other members who are Knights under the Heraldry of the full members. Individuals who join and provide their own information can register members of their groups for the rolls.

Notable members include James Mishler, RPG author and publisher, Jeffrey Talanian, co-author of *Castle Zagyg: Upper Works*, and *Crusader's* own editor James M. Ward. We have members from all corners of the world, from Europe to Canada to Australia.

In March of 2009, the Society was represented at Gary Con in Lake Geneva Wisconsin, where it presented a commemorative selection of Society art to Luke, Heidi and Elise Gygax. At GenCon Indianapolis this year, the Society will run a special C&C Tournament, in honor of the TSR tournaments of yesteryear, featuring a tournament module written by Steve Chenault. Details of this tournament will be forthcoming soon at the Society website.

## How does one join the Society?

There will be some exciting changes to the way we structure our membership and heraldry in the coming months, including more elaborate member profiles. New members will eventually begin as Knights and work through a new Valor system to increase their titles and benefits. Those who are currently members and who join us before these changes are implemented are awarded rank and title based on the number of members in their group, and these ranks will remain as we implement our future enrollment system.

Joining is free. There are no conditions or requirements for it, other than to provide the very basic info asked for in our online registration form. To do this, simply go to [www.ncsociety.org](http://www.ncsociety.org) and look for the navigation tab that says, "Join the C&C Society Now!" Read the instructions, fill in the form and press "send." At some point thereafter your chosen society name will appear on the Rolls and you will be added to the Society's email distribution list. The information you should provide is as follows:

1. Fill out your real Name

2. Register your e-mail
3. Choose a "Society Name," one which reflects yourself and should fit into a Medieval Fantasy genre of naming to honor the traditions of the society (could be a character name you played or a favorite from literature). Watch out for specific ™ registrations as names, however.
4. List your most common Board Name (very important!)
5. Your Location (where you are regionally, etc.)
6. The numbers of "knights" under your command (how many people do you game with or lead as player or GM in a group).

## Submitting to The Domesday Book

The Domesday Book is the periodical e-zine of the Society, produced and delivered free in pdf form for all to use. We have produced three issues so far, and will be releasing the fourth this summer. This e-zine is open to submissions from all those who wish to share their creativity in gaming.

Please adhere to the following guidelines for any submission to Domesday:

1. Do not plagiarize anything
2. Send complete manuscripts—not nearly-complete or serial projects: if we like it, we will serialize as space and desire warrants
3. Make your material as "neutral" as possible, please—if you are submitting something for another game, make sure it is on the Official List of Supported Games and include the system in the submission in some obvious way, like Vancian Magic for XXXX or whatever
4. try to use correct spelling and grammar—the fewer errors; the easier it is to produce quality.
5. MAKE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR NAME AND INFO ON THE MATERIAL YOU SEND (i.e. IN the text)! It's amazing how many people forget to do this, and our editors have to spend time tracking down who the author is as the files get moved to different stages of production.

## Standard Sections for The Domesday Book:

**The Horn Blasts—News from the Front** (exciting developments both for the Society itself and for role-players; may include preview materials unseen elsewhere—this is where Society Proclamations will be found as well).

**Bard Murmurs—Tales of the Crusade** (campaign journals, event reviews and discussions, and reviews of gaming products).

**The Muse's Market—Collaborative Creation** (your rules, ideas, and implementations for all gamers or a specific, supported, game system).

**Dealing with Dragons—The Art of Running a Game** (advice articles for handling common issues, ranging from not having an adventure prepared before the start of a session to who pays for the pizza...this is also where, if it possible, "nearly" official answers to *Castles and Crusades* questions will be answered, but we have to have them first).

**Miscellaneous**—fiction stories, letters to the editors, art, and whatever else you can think of, including Classified ads (we definitely need to see more of these).

So what sort of things have we presented in our issues thus far? Josh Sherrer has brought us several articles on "The Black Trade," dealing with integrating tobacco and its associated merchants into the medieval campaign setting, and Les Rouell has provided excellent articles on using weather in your RPG games. These articles, and others, are designed to be used cross-system, while others have presented C&C specific crunch, such as new monsters and character classes, by authors such as Pat Bellavance and Todd Pote—Issue #3 introduced us to Todd's take on The Shaman as a C&C class. We have provided excellent art by Kevin Morton, Eric Piper and Ian Baggley. The very talented Matthew Stanham has provided our readers with rules for alternative weapons use, and we have had reviews of products from both TLG and other companies.

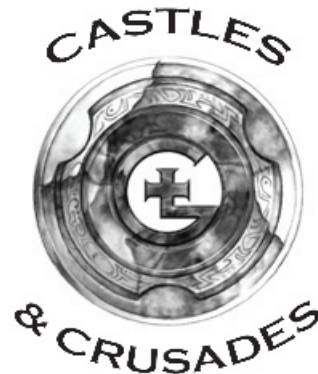
Our current issue will feature a new science fiction game called Argosy Command by Todd Pote, a new take on the Warlock class for C&C, an article on "Romance in an RPG" by Kevin Morton, and much, much more.

The intention of the *Domesday Book* is to allow for Society members and the gaming community at large to have the chance to show their own creativity, and as the guidelines above show we accept a variety of different work. As we are the C&C Society, and will indeed be strengthening our ties with the Trolls, we support C&C and SIEGE systems very strongly, but also encourage system-neutral and cross-over work as well! Work that writers and artists submit will not only be available via the Society site with these issues, but *The Domesday Book* is being offered through *Dragonsfoot.org* as well, so we have the opportunity to reach a fairly wide audience with our creativity.

*The Domesday Book* is a periodical pdf e-zine, so our intention is to produce several per year. The first three were produced in 2008, our current issue will be in release early this summer, and plans are for #5 to be produced this fall. We especially would appreciate contributions of gaming related articles that focus on how GMs run games, deal with issues at the table, etc.

## Important Email Addresses and Websites

- Society Website: <http://cncsociety.org/contacts.html>
- Society Forums: <http://domesday.proboards.com/index.cgi?>
- Submissions: [submissions@cncsociety.org](mailto:submissions@cncsociety.org)



# THE PLAYER AS AUXILIARY CK

BY RON HEINTZ



any role-playing groups adopt a format in which the CK position rotates between competent storytellers, so that the CKs can get to play as well. This article discusses the benefits of involving the players with running each and every session: in a way, they become “auxiliary CKs.”

Different gaming groups and CKs will have different levels of comfort with player involvement “behind the CK screen.” It may worry some people that there would be “spoilers” regarding the story plot, or that the dramatic flow might be lessened. In fact, it is possible for players to become involved in many aspects of the game play, from the simple, mechanical ones, to “this episode’s guest villain” or another primary “acting” role.

## PART I: STREAMLINING GAME MECHANICS

To begin, let us look at the method of player involvement that has the least impact: streamlining game mechanics. While the “virtual weapon swing” of die rolling can be one of the most exciting parts of a session, it can also bog play down, especially if there are multiple opponents. One of the classic ways in which a party of characters can look “heroic” is by mowing down a dozen minions and a couple of lieutenants, before they actually encounter the session or scenario’s main villain. However, squaring off each hero with 3 to 4 “mooks” can mean dozens of die rolls, and can make a thirty-second slice of game time take two hours to run, even with *Castles and Crusades*’ efficient combat system. Here is an example of player assistance for large battles.

The CK, Linda, has five players and they are about to be attacked by twenty opponents. She decides to have the bad guys split up four per hero, simply due to space constraints in the encounter area. The players are seated around the table in this order: Bob, Levon, Sanjay, Sue and Tom. “The cloaked assassins come rushing at you!” exclaims Linda, moving miniatures on the table. “The situation looks grim.” She then switches to her mechanics voice and continues. “Bob, I’d like you to roll for Levon’s group. Levon, roll for Sanjay’s, Sanjay for Sue’s, Sue for Tom’s and Tom for Bob’s. The attackers will be using simple tactics, trying to surround the heroes and beat them down. Give me two rounds worth of combat and then we’ll assess the situation.” The players, used to this, or introduced to it by a quick training session pre-game; follow through by rolling attacks in the appropriate order for their NPCs and for their own characters. Players in charge of NPCs also make rolls regarding saving throws and damage. After two rounds, the assassins have been thinned out considerably and Linda repositions a few miniatures, describes the carnage (or invites the players to describe it for their small groups) and carries on, either by having the players go through another round or by taking over, if it seems appropriate.

Variations: if there is an even number of players, it can make things easier and more exciting to have them pair off and run each other’s NPCs. Of course, since an atmosphere of competition (or cooperation) can evolve in these cases, it only works if the players are impartial and know how the CK wants combat run. If there is an odd number, the CK can pair off with one player. Split group: if some characters are not involved in the current combat rounds, it makes good sense to have them roll for some of the NPCs: this will speed things up even more.

Initially, a player group may find rolling for the bad guys a bit traumatic, but as long as they understand the separation of “in-game” and “out-of-game,” and the randomness of die rolls, aiding game mechanics is something most people become used to. Certainly, a group that is likely to develop internal friction or rivalries, as a result, should not use this method: it presumes players with a degree of maturity.

*A cautionary note:* this type of player aid is primarily intended for combats where the players outclass the opponents. In these situations, while the occasional lucky hit may hurt a hero, the situation is unlikely to deteriorate in a round or two, leaving the CK with a corpse by the time she checks in. Players should definitely flag the CK if she is watching a different part of the battle while a hero is about to be seriously hurt (half health or less), or die. Once players become experienced with this sort of combat flow and can report exciting descriptions of events, it can actually simulate the cacophonous chaos of mass combat very well.

It is also possible for the CK to retain more rigid control, but to still leave the mass die-rolling to the players. For example, she may call off the initiative count and have the rolls made as appropriate, but describe the results and action herself.

## PART II: STORYTELLING AND ACTING

Another very useful and empowering role for a player is to be one of the CK’s actors, in other words, to play an NPC. This works especially well if the player is unable to use his or her character for the evening, for some reason such as recovering from injury. It is also liberating for the CK, who might otherwise feel that she *cannot* incapacitate PCs for a session or two, because there would be nothing for the player to do. There are several different degrees of player responsibility for NPC role-play that may be introduced, depending on comfort level and the ability of the people involved to portray the Keeper’s creatures. Playing a stereotypical orc is not a huge stretch for most people, but “In tonight’s performance, the role of the sinister, cloaked man will be played by Derek” may require an entirely different caliber of actor.

The CK will need to prime the player with the encounter specifics, which may include the goals, motivation and standard operating procedures of the creature.

For the orc and its warband, it could be as simple as, “Try to extort at least fifty gold pieces from the party. If they won’t give it, back off, but then trail them and have your gang snipe at them with bows. If they give you the gold, you’ll be content and take off. But: if they let slip any indication that they are carrying the ‘Serpent’s Eye’ gem, go for the gold and then back off, but you’ll trail them and try to get the gem, in any event.”

For the sinister, cloaked man, there may be several different types and degrees of interaction with the characters, or with different members of the group. These will require specific preparations and, perhaps, “cue cards” to remind the player of critical plot points. If the actor is very competent and also has a good sense of story, the CK may feel confident enough to just watch the scene unfold, ready to step in if needed, and may even let unforeseen plot directions emerge. Some of the best storytelling can come from situations that the group itself creates, rather than from the CK’s “script.”

Of course, it is also possible to have more than one player portray a creature, or to rotate the responsibility, if your group simply likes the idea and it would be appropriate for one of their characters to be absent or passive from a specific scene or split group situation.

Here's a variant that you and your group may find amusing. Last session, the group routed a fairly large group of intelligent monsters, killing many but not all. When they get together for tonight's session, assign *all* of them acting roles as creatures that survived, and have them plot how to take their revenge, upon either the heroes or the surrounding territory. At an appropriate time, use some or all of what they came up with as an encounter. If you are worried that they will know the creature's plans by having played them, you can change one or two specifics—or have the monster's use the plan against some *other* group of (non-player) heroes, and this becomes the lead-in for a subsequent, side adventure, where the regular party is investigating why that group disappeared, or failed in a quest.

A word about gender-benders, or, "The role of the seductive temptress will be played by Bob." Now, depending on Bob and on your group, this could turn out to be either one of the most memorable and amusing evenings of the last few months or, "The Reason Why The Group Broke Up". Make sure that you have a good idea of the various comfort levels in your group—the *real* ones, not just what people say is "OK with me."

An excellent entry point for player participation as "auxiliary CK" could be thought of as a "trainee position". Back to "CK Linda's" group. Sanjay has come up with what Linda thinks is a very neat idea for an encounter, but does not have the confidence and/or experience to simply GM it for the evening. Also, he does not have a whole scenario worth of ideas, just this one great encounter. So CK Linda makes this offer: "I'll build the encounter in and run it, Sanjay. Since you obviously know the plot as well or better than I do, and since you know the creatures' motivations, you'll play them and I'll take care of the bookkeeping and game mechanics stuff. After the session, we'll meet sometime and go into how I ran it—you may want to take a turn at being the CK sometime, if you like how it goes." In this way, the idea is used; Sanjay is appreciated and gains confidence. Sanjay's character will either be played by CK Linda for the encounter, or will be left out in some appropriate manner—she might choose to award Sanjay's character the same experience points as the rest get, regardless.

Incidentally, as a superior CK Linda is quite aware that should anything go wrong with the encounter, she will take full responsibility and not let Sanjay take any "heat." After all, she approved the encounter and she is still the CK of her campaign and story.

The benefits of the above, of course, are that the group gets to play in an encounter that they otherwise might have missed, CK Linda gets to watch someone else do the description and the work for a bit, and the group may have another, "rotating CK" before long, if that suits their style. Regardless, Sanjay knows that his ideas and opinions have value to the CK, and that's a definite win.

### PART III: RECURRING ROLES. OR, "OH, NO, NOT SNIDELY WHIPLASH, AGAIN!"

A somewhat different form of "players as extra actors" and the single encounter guest CK ideas, above, is to let a player design a series of ongoing encounters involving a potential campaign nemesis. This is a far higher degree of involvement, bordering on the "second CK" level, and you may not feel comfortable with that degree of participation in your campaign story. It also requires a high degree

of collaboration between you and the person scripting the nemesis encounters, and you both have to decide what will be the fallback point, should the players take things in a completely unforeseen direction. Note that this is not the same thing as turning the session over to another player and getting out your own character, if you are usually the CK. That would be simply "rotating CKs." In this cooperative situation, there must be a high degree of trust between the primary CK and the "guest CK" of the nemesis story arc, and also between the guest CK and the player group. In my home campaigns, this technique has worked well and has led to some very enjoyable and memorable group-villain interactions that might otherwise never have occurred. Still, it is not everyone's cup of tea.

### PART IV: THERE'S NEVER A PROBLEM WITH MORE GOOD GUYS

A lower-impact opportunity for player involvement would be to occasionally have players take on the roles of Keeper characters who are *helpful* to the party: patrons, temple authorities, town or city headmen or councillors, and so forth. Since there is no conflict implied, all the CK has to do is make sure that the player knows the parameters of what help can be offered and what the helpful character might want or need in return. There is no real reason why the player heroes should be anything but pleased at this kind of "guest shot", unless the group is terribly greedy and hopes to pressure a hopefully sympathetic "actor" into exceeding his or her instructions. However, if your group is that poor at cooperative gaming, then you likely won't be giving them too many guest shots as it is.

### PART V: WHY BOTHER

I have already suggested some of the rewards for involving your players as "auxiliary CKs". Most fall under the "many heads" and "many hands" categories, for bringing fresh ideas into your story, for distributing the workload and for making large encounters move smoothly. There is, however, another very important benefit here, one to which reference has been made in other articles.

When you involve your players in "your" story, you are giving them at least partial ownership of the campaign. While this can be a risky gift, it can also increase the level of involvement and player care for your story, because it then becomes *everyone's* story. When you show your players that you trust them with plot and with enhancing the whole atmosphere of the game's encounters, and when they understand that you listen very carefully to their ideas, dreams and desires, their sense of personal investment increases greatly. This can add a huge degree of depth and commitment to making your story sessions more enjoyable for everyone. When that happens, when all the people around the table see the rewards of caring for other peoples' enjoyment as much as their own, you'll be well on your way to having the sort of classic role-playing campaign that many can only dream about.



# Calling All Crusaders: Let's Fire up the Crusade One Shot at a Time

By Christina Stiles

*Christina Stiles is a freelance game writer/editor from South Carolina. She has written for such companies as Eden Studios, Firefly Games, Goodman Games, Green Ronin, White Wolf Studios...and now Troll Lord Games. She is also a member of Misfit Studios ([www.misfit-studios.com](http://www.misfit-studios.com)), publisher of SpirosBlaak, Odyssey Prime, and many Superlink supplements. She maintains a web site at: [www.christinastiles.com](http://www.christinastiles.com).*



I spent the last weekend in May running two *Castles & Crusades* one-shot adventures at ConCarolinas, an enormously fun sci-fi/gaming convention in Charlotte, NC. My one-shots exposed nine new players to *C&C*, and while nine may not be a tremendous amount, those gamers who played may indeed become fans. Those who do join us in our love of *C&C* help make a difference to our gaming community by sustaining the game's viability and longevity, whereby the Trolls continue to feed our gaming appetites with cool new products. It's a win-win situation, you see. Thus, it is certainly my hope that at least one or two players were swayed enough by their experience to purchase a copy of the *C&C PHB* and gather other new gamers to join them.

So, what does my weekend gaming experience and my hope for new *C&C* players have to do with *Crusader*? Well, with the advent of Troll Lords' new slogan, the Fourth Crusade, I couldn't help think how we gamers could, in essence, become *crusaders* for *Castles & Crusades* and our beloved Trolls by going out and running one-shots. Game-play exposure is very important in this industry. Actual play experience can convey much more about a game's ease of play and fun factor than any back-cover blurb or a word-of-mouth reference on a Web site. Heck, in the former case, the book might not even have made it to the FLGS' shelves, what with that "other" fantasy game hogging up space, so customer contact with the cover's blurb may not even be likely—depending on the depth of the store's stock. In the latter case, there is so much verbal traffic on the Web that it is often still difficult for customers to wade through it all to make a purchasing decision. So, actual play trumps these other marketing efforts in that it shows the game's immediate value to potential customers.

Essentially, one-shots give prospective new *C&C* players a three- or four-hour glimpse into the game's rules (and possibly setting) via an actual gaming experience, providing them with a hands-on, in-depth look at the game with no required monetary investment. Basically, it's much easier to get gamers to expend several hours of their time in trying out a game than it is to get them to expend hard-earned cash for something, which could be hit-or-miss for them in terms of entertainment value. Overall, time is a much safer investment for them.

To make the most of these one-shot sessions, Castle Keepers, I recommend running these games with pre-generated characters. Here, you might be saying that learning how to create a character

is an essential part in learning any game, and I would agree. However, your goal is to hook the possible new players as quickly as possible, and pre-gens allow the player to skip the paperwork and jump right in. Not only do pre-gens provide the quickest access point to the gaming experience, they also alleviate any intimidation factor that character creation might have on newbies. Additionally, creating pre-gens with interesting backgrounds and good hooks help jump-start the role-playing aspect of the game, aiding in its overall enjoyment.

On a final note, you need to get to the action very quickly in your one-shots. Don't have the characters standing around town gathering up supplies. Unlike real-world shopping, this type of stuff is BORING. Shopping trips are never a good way to introduce new players to a game. You need to maintain their attention right out of the gate, so give them the equipment they need and set them down where the action is. You'll find this tactic in most novels, and the reason you do is because it works. It keeps the players entertained and their heads in the gaming experience. In a three- or four-hour session, you have little time or room to dawdle. Get right to it!

So, if you can't tell my purpose in this article by now, I'll be clear: I'm calling on you passionate Castle Keepers to fire up this crusade. Get those adventure wheels turning and those CK hats on and get out there and spread the game to others wherever and whenever you can. Run some one-shots at your local gaming store, your local con, or at a special gaming event. Heck, if your current group isn't playing *C&C*, what are you waiting for? Now is the perfect time to convert them. Doing these things will help our hobby alive and well and our game of choice thriving.

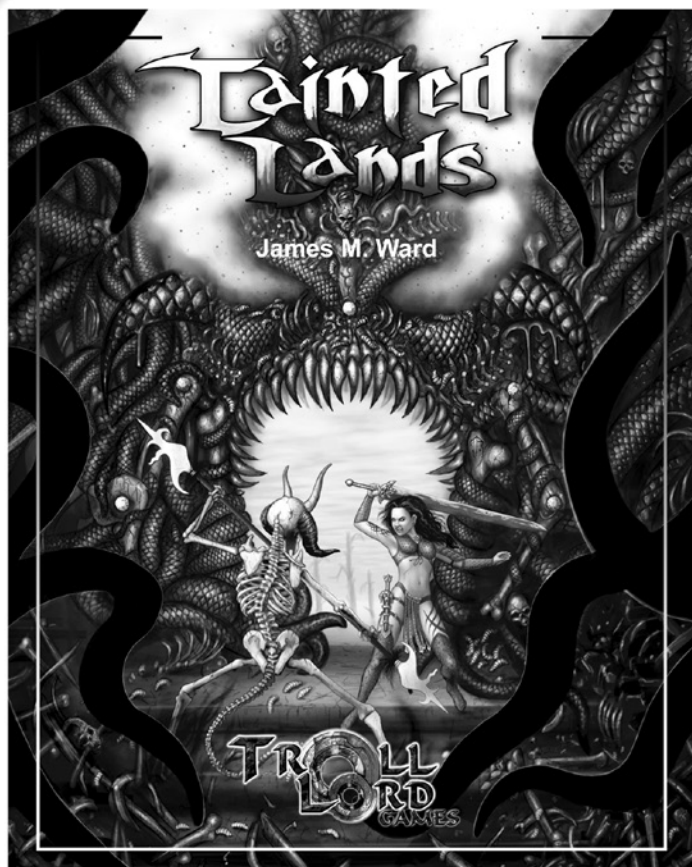
Join me in the crusade!





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by Elizabeth Stewart

**T**his past June, my husband Mike and I were lucky enough to be able to attend the first North Texas RPG Con down in Bedford TX (that's near Arlington, if you're inclined to find it on a map). Initially, Richard McBain was tentatively set up to be the Troll Lord presence for the con, but swamped as he became dealing with this year's Troll Con and other closer to home con attendances (such as Sooner Con) he had to back out and Mike and I became the last-minute official unofficial envoys of the Trolls.

For those of you who may not know since this was their first year, North Texas RPG Con is a convention dedicated to old-school gaming. The two masterminds behind this nefarious weekend of grognardy fun are Mike Badolato and Doug Rhea, who you may be familiar with from the *Acaem* forums online. And while "RPG" may be in their name, they don't limit themselves to just role-playing; anything from 1<sup>st</sup> Edition AD&D to a rousing game of Divine Right was featured, especially if it was pre-1985, and I gotta say that we had a great time. The convention was free. That's right, free. All you had to do was RSVP on their website, and you didn't pay a dime to get in. How cool is that?

Because we're lazy old sods and because cash was tight, Mike and I didn't attend the Friday afternoon/evening festivities. It's about an hour's drive for us to reach the Bedford area from Denton and another hour to go home, so that burns up a lot of gas. And did I mention that we're lazy? Anyway, the two of us along with our roommate Rita drove down Saturday afternoon in order to attend the barbecue offered at Doug Rhea's home.

We were afraid we were late, as we pulled up to the house about twenty minutes after things were supposed to start, but it turned out that we were the first ones there! Apparently the chartered bus which was to take the attendees who were at the hotel to Doug's was running late as well. This was great, as it meant we got first dibs on seating and food.

The barbecue was beyond fabulous—Doug was doing all the cooking himself (both he and Mike B. worked like dogs for the entire weekend to make this convention fun for everyone, and they succeeded), and there was grilled chicken breast, bratwurst, ribs, hamburgers... Just thinking about it now several weeks later makes me salivate! Plenty of shade trees to sit under, a swimming pool which we were free to make use of—it was great. And because of the casual party atmosphere, it was easy to circulate and meet the special guests; for instance, Mike, Rita and I found ourselves sharing a table with Frank Mentzer as we ate. Frank remembered us from the LGGC we attended a couple of years ago, and he was his usual gracious and charming self. Tim Kask, Robert Kuntz and Dennis Sustare were all seated at a table just behind us, mixing with the attendees as well.

After we had all gorged ourselves on mountains of grilled meat (which was free—I can't stress this enough—free con, free food, free!), we staggered our way back to the car and managed to get

to the hotel. The three of us were signed up to play in Tim Kask's game that evening, and we certainly didn't want to miss out on that!

Tim is obviously an old hand at shepherding groups of players in convention play—he never let things get bogged down, and did not put up with half-hour long debates over whether the east or the west corridor should be taken. If the party seemed undecided for too long, he decided for us and kept things moving. The adventure was one of his own making, called *Disciples of Arianhrod*. It had many inspired tricks and traps to keep you on your toes, and all I can say about it without giving anything important away is that we regretted not having poultry with us.

Tim's game was great fun, and ran till about midnight on Saturday. Unfortunately, being the decrepit middle-aged pair that we are and anticipating that hour-long drive back home, we had to skip out around 11-ish as things were wrapping up. Mike was virtually asleep on his feet, and my reserves were fading fast. So we went back home and promptly fell into a coma-like sleep.

Sunday morning bright and early had a tour of the Reaper Miniatures studios (which are here in Denton, by the way) for the con guests and attendees, with another chartered bus provided to ferry everyone from the hotel and back. Mike, Rita and I slept through the Reaper tour, woke at ten and managed to make it back to Bedford after noon. Mike was scheduled to run a Judges' Guild adventure using the Holmes basic D&D rules around two that afternoon, so we grabbed our reserved table and began setting up.

Paul Jaquays of Judges' Guild fame had signed up to play in Mike's JG adventure, but unfortunately had to bow out so he could get to the airport to make his flight. I was disappointed not to be able to play with him, but I know Mike was having kittens at the thought of having to run a game for Paul Jaquays! He was almost certainly relieved to have the pressure taken off him. We had pre-gen characters, 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> level, and had a pretty nifty time up until we ran into the hellhound. That's right, hellhound. Unfortunately, we didn't realize it was anything other than an ordinary black dog until it toasted three-fourths of the party (including me) with one breath. Mike didn't quite manage a TPK, but he came awfully close. Kudos for that. We spent the next hour or so just visiting with people, and having a relaxing time.

All in all, this was a fantastic convention. There were raffles held throughout the weekend for some great swag to defray Doug's and Mike B's costs, which had to be astronomical. Free dice bags were given to every attendee with the North Texas RPG logo on them, the Saturday barbecue was gratis, and pizzas were provided Sunday afternoon, also free. Quite frankly, more was provided for the attendee here than at many cons I've paid to attend. I don't know how they did it without resorting to grand larceny or bankrupting themselves, but I tip my hat to these guys. And if you can make down to the Dallas/Ft. Worth area next year around this time, I cannot recommend this convention enough. Go. You won't be sorry.

[www.ntrpgcon.com](http://www.ntrpgcon.com)

# The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



WHERE HAS HOW GONE

AND WHEN DID WHY BECOME WHO?



What the hell has happened to our genre?! Every time I go up to the book store or to a comic store I look around for something earth-shattering cool, exciting, different! What I find is neverending tales of woe and characters who constantly struggle with their own inner selves, text that is labor filled with too much detail, thought provoking life philosophy or fantasy whines! What happened to Conan? To Tarzan? What happened to Superman? What happened to all those heroes of yesterday who didn't worry about their place in the world, but accepted it and went about #\*&@ing something up?

I love the image of Tarzan lying in a tree, rope in hand. Numa the lion passes beneath him. Without thought, no malice, no desires other than to alleviate his boredom, he drops his rope around the lion's neck and tries to hang it. Then he drops from the tree in rage at the lion's attempt to defend himself and he slays the lion in a titanic struggle!

This isn't politically correct. He can't do that. That's mean to the environment. He'll cause global warming, or worse his insensitive nature will make children act in an insensitive manner. As if children don't already act in insensitive manners. They are the only members of our species who are even vaguely in tune with what we actually are, biological organisms that the previous three million years of inbreeding has taught to react to danger with a fight or flight instinct.

Those are the two instincts that entertainers, from writers to directors to artists should be appealing to; our desire to kill it or run the heck away from it. I saw the Transformers movie the other day and loved it! Simple, straight to the point and filled with men and women willing to put it on the line!

When is our genre going to return to that, our roots? For the love of the toothless hillbilly in all of us, enough of the inner struggle. Yes it hurts! Mommy doesn't love you, people don't respect you, get the heck over it and drive on! Let's get back to some classic fantasy, where the heroes pull out their swords and slay the foul beasts! Where the heroes aren't just flabby gum flapping beer-bellied swine, but are something different, something bigger than us... where they are heroes!

All this is gone of course. Now the heroes who people our fiction and comics have to wring their hands while they save the environment from the destructive nature of humanity...by the way, has anyone EVER seen how destructive nature is? I'm pretty sure it wasn't humans who caused a chunk of the Canary Islands to fall

off, create a tsunami, and engulf the whole eastern sea board in water, killing every thing living there in seconds...

But I digress; our stories are long and tiresome, filled with the detail of life that presently peoples my pantry. What the heck has happened to good and evil? This whole notion is so watered down with sociological psychobabble that we don't know who is what and what is who anymore. It's even infected my tired little brain.

We were gaming the other night and encountered some trolls. In a massive battle we slew one and tried to burn it. Its mate seized the body and fled into the woods (this is Davis' world, his monsters HATE to die, that fact alone drives us all insane). But anyway, the troll comes back and attacks us at some point and some at the table felt sorry for it because it was just getting revenge for its mate. Even I slipped into some moronic trance of hippy love. I sat there thinking, it's just a poor troll whose wife is dead. I mused to myself that maybe we should spare it...

Now remember Conan the Barbarian? The movie? At the end, when Thulsa Doom is trying to hypnotize Conan and he slips into this half trance, and you think, dang, Doom has him, and then suddenly Conan wakes up, his eyes fill with the light of awareness and hefting his broken broad sword, he chops Doom's head off? That was what it was like for me. I suddenly woke up from my trance, hefted my battle-axe, and shouted, "NO THIS GUY IS EVIL!" I attacked him with gusto.

Later the infection continued, someone muttered at the table, how do we know he's evil?

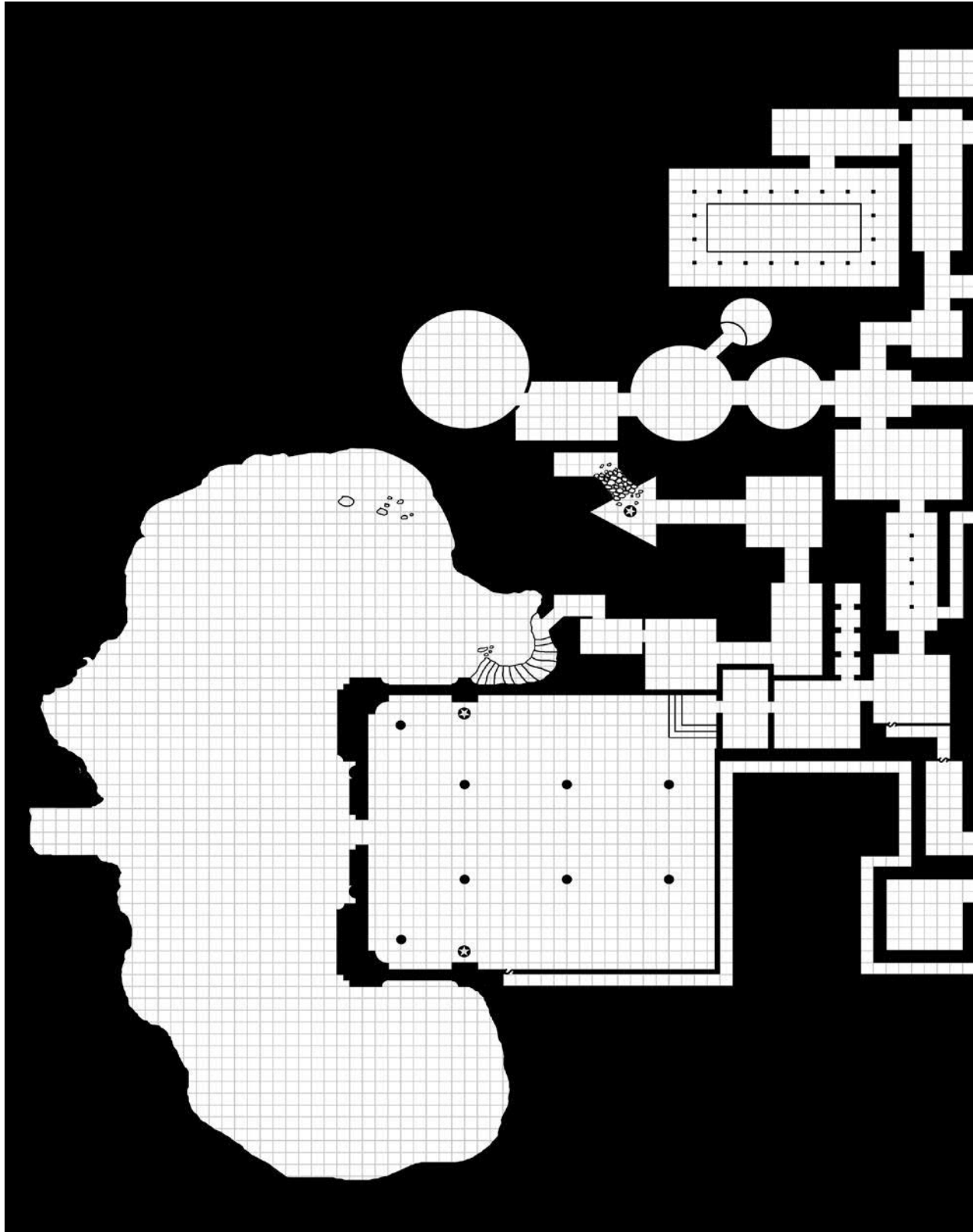
That's easy; IT SAYS IT IN THE BOOK. RIGHT THERE. TROLLS ARE CHAOTIC EVIL!

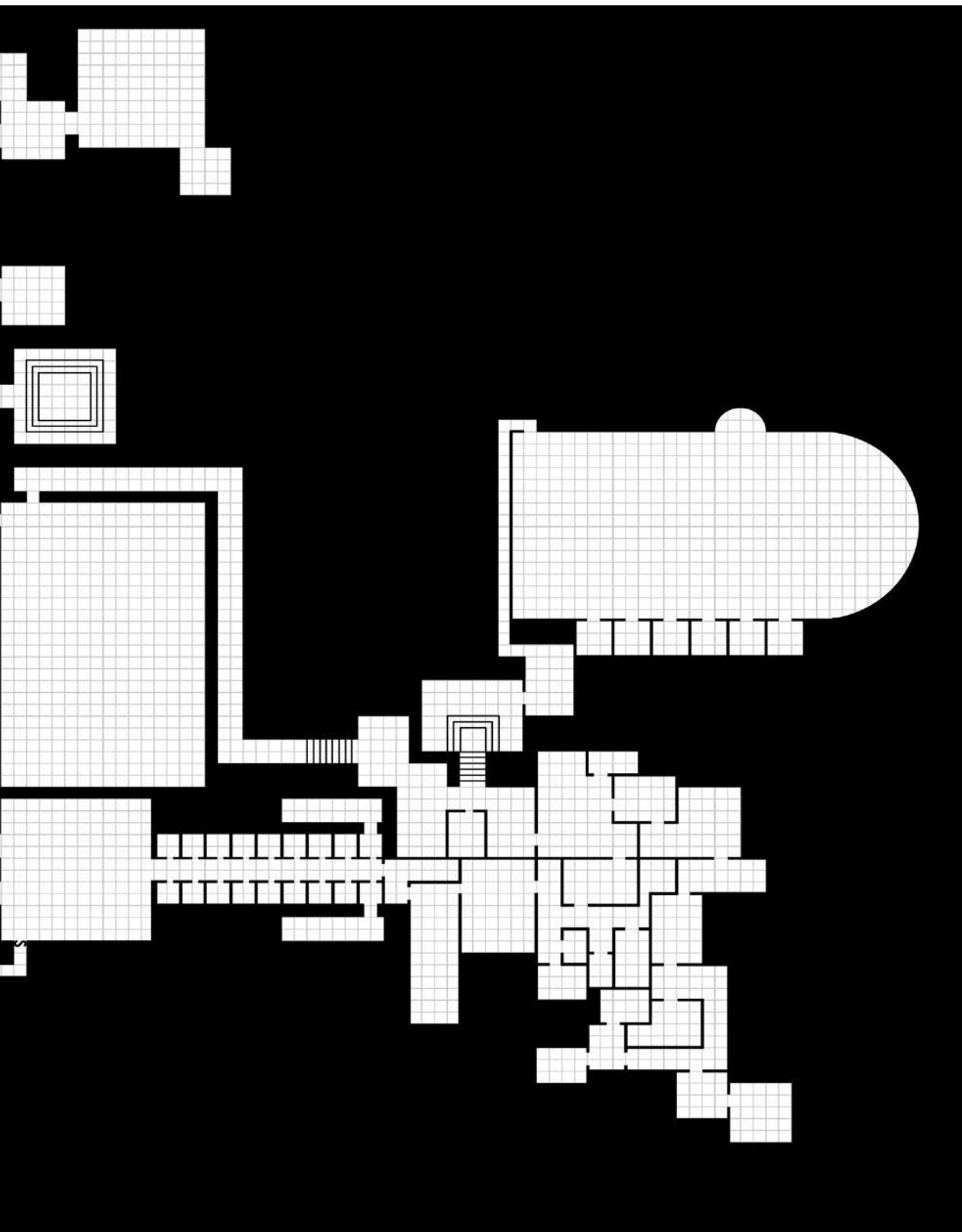
But evil is gone from our society, from our literature. We've lost moral clarity and hence most of our fiction sucks! It's boring, trite, and painful to read. JUST KILL THE BAD GUY! Can't figure out who the bad guy is? Make it the dude next to that dude and have your hero kill him!

Your subject doesn't have to be stupid. He doesn't have to be brawny or any other stereotype we have developed about those people who actually try to do things. He just has to be decisive. He has to know what he's doing or she's doing or its doing and then does it. We really won't be bothered by the why so long as the how is really cool!

Drop the why and bring back the how!

# Troll Lord Freebies (just for you!)





# IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY..

## C&C FOREST ENCOUNTERS BY MICHAEL DAVIS

*For mid-level characters (levels 3-5).*

### WASPS AND SPIDERS

As the party are making their way through a forest or wood, they catch sight of a curious structure. It looks like some kind of small dwelling with five chimneys sticking out of the top—or an oddly constructed pipe-organ made of mud. On closer examination, the structure appears to be a mud dome, about 6' in diameter and 3' high, with five chimneys or pipes sticking out the top. The pipes are about 1' in diameter and about 3' tall. If the party cast *detect magic*, they will detect a faint dweomer coming from inside the dome.

Giant wasps (see below) constructed the structure. This species of wasp kills its prey, then builds a mud nest around it and lays its eggs in the tubes. When the wasp larvae hatch, the dead prey is used as food—in this case, an unlucky ogre. The dome encloses the decomposing body of the ogre. The ogre was carrying 52 gp in a small sack and the magical aura comes from his *two-handed sword* +2.

The mud of the dome is quite brittle and can be broken with a solid blow. If a character steps up onto the dome to examine the chimneys, it is likely that the mud will break (75% chance for a human, dwarf or half-orc; 50% for an elf or half-elf; 30% for a halfling or gnome; add +20% if carrying heavy gear or metal armour; chances are cumulative if more than one character steps up). Characters standing on the dome will fall through, squelching into the remains of the ogre. Falling characters must make a Dexterity save (CL1) or be off-balance, losing their action for the next round. They will also lose their Dexterity bonus to AC until they regain their footing. When the mud is broken, the stench from the corpse of the ogre will escape. All characters within 10' must make a Constitution save (CL1) or be nauseated, suffering a -2 penalty to attack rolls and ability checks for 1d4 rounds.

If the dome or tubes are violated, the newly-hatched wasp larvae will writhe forward in search of food. If any character has fallen into the dome, they will be attacked by a squirming mass of larvae. If the character is more than 3' tall, they will probably have to spend one round climbing out of the dome before they can retaliate. If the dome is not broken but the tubes are, the larvae will be exposed to attack. If a character peers into a tube from above, a single larva will attack them.

**Wasp Larvae (5):** *HD 1d8, hp 6 each, AC 12. They attack with a bite (1d4).*

The larvae are not very dangerous, but the CK should play them for maximum horror value. One round after the larvae attack, there will be a faint buzzing sound from afar. Characters must make a successful listen check (Wisdom CL1) to notice. On the second round, the buzzing is closer and everyone will

hear it. On the third round, three angry giant wasps will burst through the forest canopy overhead and swoop to attack:

**Giant Wasps (3):** *HD 4d8, hp 16 each, AC 16. They attack with a bite (2d4) and a sting (1d4 + poison). Poison damage is 1d8 in round 1 and 1d6 + paralysis in round 2. Save for ½ damage and to negate paralysis.*

The wasps can be driven away with large amounts of smoke or flame, for example by casting *pyrotechnics*.

When the party continue on their way, after a suitable interval, they will once again hear a buzzing sound from above. Glancing up, they will see another giant wasp (hp 13) in the branches above them. The wasp actually poses no threat to the party, as it is trapped in a spider web, weakly buzzing and struggling to break free. As the party investigates further or attacks, they will feel some small furry balls dropping on them from the trees above. These are small giant spiders.

Party members must make a Wisdom check (CL5; forest dwellers—druids, rangers, elves, gnomes—gain a +2 bonus to the check) or be surprised by the spiders. 1d10 spiders will drop each round until all 20 spiders have fallen. The spiders make a touch attack (against AC 10, modified by Dexterity bonus for characters who are not surprised) to land on party members. This initial attack does no damage, but the spider will cling to the character. This gives the spider +2 to hit for subsequent attacks and the character's Dexterity bonus to AC does not apply. Attacks against these spiders may also injure the character: for each attack on a spider, make a second to hit roll against the character's AC to determine if this is the case. Spiders, which miss in the initial dropping, attack land on the ground and attack normally next round.

**Small Giant Spiders (20):** *HD 1d4, hp 1 each, AC 14. They attack with a bite (1d2 + poison). Poison damage is 1d2 in round 1 and 1d2 + strength loss (1d2) in round 2. Save for no damage and to negate strength loss.*

There is a further hazard in this area. The trees to the side of the path are interlaced with almost invisible fine silken strands. Once combat begins, characters may stumble into this sticky mess. Characters who notice the webs (Wisdom CL3; elves and half-elves gain a +2 bonus due to superior vision) can avoid this. Otherwise, make Dexterity check (CL1) or be entangled: -2 to hit and AC; spell casting with somatic components is impossible. Break free with a Strength check (CL1). The webs can be destroyed with fire (mundane or magical)—this will also kill or drive off any surviving spiders. Characters trapped in the webs will suffer 1d6 burning damage.

Having killed or driven off the spiders, the party will discover that the way forward is covered with webs. If anything, they

seem to be getting thicker. The party will have to cut or burn their way through. The mummified remains of giant wasps and other woodland animals, which have fallen victim to the spiders, can be seen hanging from branches here and there.

Suddenly, the path drops away down the side of a steep gully. Lead characters must make a Dexterity save (CL2) or tumble 20' to the bottom: take 1d4 damage; prone for 1 round (-2 to hit and AC). At the bottom of the gully is a pile of bones at the base of a huge oak tree. Mummy spider is in the branches of the tree and will drop on any character foolish or unfortunate enough to enter her lair. (If no one fell down the gully, the CK may allow the party to begin to search the bones, providing a dramatic pause before the spider attacks). Some of the surviving baby spiders may accompany her.

**Giant Spider (1):** HD 5d8, hp 34, AC 16. She attacks with a bite (1d8 + poison). Poison damage is 1d10 in round 1 and 1d8 + paralysis in round 2. Save for ½ damage and to negate paralysis.

If the spider succeeds in killing or paralyzing a character, she will pull herself back into the tree on a strand of web, taking the hapless victim with her. The character will be hastily wrapped and stored in the tree—this takes 1d4 rounds. If she is reduced to less than 20 hit points, the spider will pull herself up into her tree and try to escape from there across the forest.

The pile of bones is mostly from small and large animals, but also contains human, elf and goblin remains. A few scraps of rusty armour and weapons can be seen poking out here and there. A search will turn up some scattered assorted coins (1 pp, 29 gp, 245 sp and 376 cp) and the remains of a small pouch containing four opals (100 gp each).

## WASP, GIANT

	Adult	Larva
<b>NO. ENCOUNTERED:</b>	1–6 (11-20 in nest)	2–8
<b>SIZE:</b>	Medium	Small
<b>HD:</b>	4 (d8)	1 (d8)
<b>MOVE:</b>	20', 60' (fly)	10'
<b>AC:</b>	16	12
<b>ATTACKS:</b>	bite (2d4), sting (1d4)	bite (1d4)
<b>SPECIAL:</b>	Poison sting, Darkvision 60'	None
<b>SAVES:</b>	P	P
<b>INT:</b>	Animal	Animal
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Neutral	Neutral
<b>TYPE:</b>	Vermin	Vermin
<b>TREASURE:</b>	Nil	1
<b>XP:</b>	90+4 (Queen 270+6 / 405+7 / 575+8)	5+1

Giant wasps are terrifying predatory insects. Their prey is most often other giant insects or medium-sized animals, but they make no distinction between these and humanoids. Giant wasps are feared for not only their deadly sting, but also the parasitic way in which they feed their young.

Giant wasps attack with a powerful bite from their mandibles and will also attempt to sting their prey to paralyse it. Any creature stung takes 1d8 poison damage (Con save for half damage). The following round, they take a further 1d6 poison damage, and are paralysed for 1d4 days. A successful Con save means half damage and negates the paralyzing effect.

Giant wasps are highly manoeuvrable in the air. They are capable of hovering as well as swooping to attack. If the wasp is on the ground, it suffers a -2 penalty to its AC. A wasp's wings make a loud buzzing sound, which can alert its victims to an imminent attack.

Wasps are vulnerable to smoke and flame. Smoke from a large fire gives the wasp a -2 penalty to hit and AC. If the creature is hit by a magical fire attack, such as *burning hands* or *fireball*, it must make a Dexterity save to avoid having its delicate wings burned off. This does no additional damage, but renders the wasp flightless.

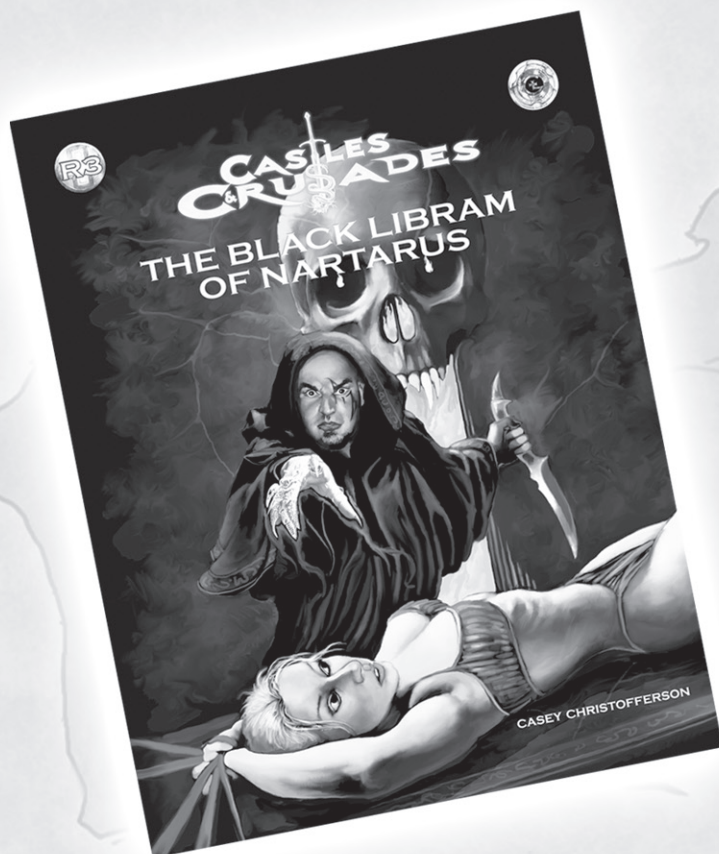
Giant wasps kill or paralyse their prey, then move it back to their nest. In some cases, the eggs are laid on or in the prey. When the wasp larvae hatch, they feed on these dead or incapacitated creatures. The treasure indicated usually belonged to the wasps' humanoid victims.

Wasp nests may be constructed from paper (i.e. wood pulp), with hexagonal combs for rearing their brood; constructed from mud; or a burrow in the ground. The nests of some wasp species contain a monstrous Queen wasp of 6–8 HD.

Note that only female wasps possess a sting. Male wasps are rarely encountered, and usually only as solitary insects. Male drones are produced only towards the end of the summer and their main function is to reproduce with a different wasp colony, creating a new queen.



From the Pages of the Haunted Highlands,  
Casey Christofferson Brings You  
**The Black Libram of Nartarus**



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# HAMMER & ANVIL

THOUGHTS FROM A  
GAMER MASTER'S FORGE

BY  
CASEY CANFIELD

## Creating Magic Items

When I started playing D&D long ago, magic items weren't normal. They were straight out of the rulebooks, maybe with a +1 or +2 next to them. We were thrilled to see "flame on command!" Regardless, in the early days of my exposure to the game, they didn't need much more than a modifier to seem fantastic and unusual to me. Everything about the game was new and wonderful.

Unfortunately, time and age can change our views of the mystical, and our tastes can become more refined. This was the case for me. Gradually, saying "+1 Longsword" or "+2 Dagger" wasn't enough. I want to know who owned it. I want to know who made it, and how it was made, and what styling the item possesses. Did the maker give the item a name?

There's nothing wrong with a desire for detail. It's simply a more mature need for substance and depth in a role-playing setting. But, just as the ordinary "+1" modifier grew to become commonplace to me, so can these supplementary details, if not crafted with care. It's so important to keep magic items interesting, so they can retain the imaginative spark that drove us deeper into the game when we were just infants in its arms.

*Monsters & Treasure* is a fantastic book, and I have heard that the latest incarnation, the fourth printing, is no exception. As I discuss magic items here, I have not yet had the opportunity to review the treasure section of the fourth printing for possible changes, either to fix errata or to correct some imbalance. What I write here is based upon the third printing of M&T, when necessary.

Rules for the in-game creation of magic items are provided in M&T. They are quite thorough, and I think are applicable to most games with very little, if any, tweaking required. I am going to concentrate on the areas not covered in M&T. M&T handles the mechanics, and I'm going to discuss the style. First, I am going to discuss methods of spicing up the narrative of the item creation process. Then, I'll spend some time describing how I bring flavor to ordinary magic items *after* their creation, and I'll throw in a

pair of my favorite custom items from my own games.

There are many different methods that can be used to bring flavor to the process of creating magic items. If the M&T method is followed, the process is intended to be quite difficult, and costly either in life force or in treasure. When a process is difficult, it can be assumed there are a lot of details wrapped within it. Because of this, there's absolutely no reason why a CK should skimp on adding detail to the process. If a player is willing to make the investment in time and treasure for their character, then I believe they deserve a narrative.

### Make a Recipe

The easiest way to style the creation process is to create a recipe for the item they wish to fabricate. This is much easier than it sounds. Even if the player wishes to create an item not currently found described in M&T, it involves several easy steps.

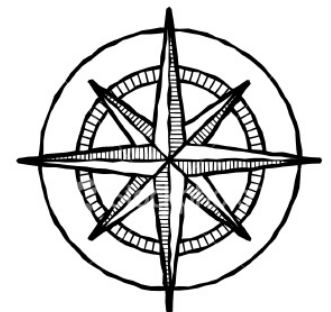
First, take an inventory of all of the desired effects of the item to be created. You'll need to do this anyway in order to determine the cost of the item according to M&T. This inventory also helps with your recipe, because the easiest way to create the recipe is to decide on one or two components for each effect of the item.

Next, list the components needed to imbue the item with each effect desired. The components should, ideally, have some sort of narrative connection to the effect. If the effect mimics a spell, and that spell has a material component, it stands to reason that the material component may be needed for the magic item as well.

Gaming reference materials exist that provide lists of the purported mystical effects of various items. There are many scholarly works available to aid in this task, as well. A quick search on Google or Amazon.com will reveal many sources that provide alleged properties of gemstones, herbs and plants, animal components, and precious metals. These can all help you develop component lists for magic item creation.



*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.*



Remember to be consistent. The many available sources often contradict each other. The properties of jasper, for example, may be described very differently by different sources. Settle on sources that are pleasing to your game aesthetic and use those consistently.

As you create the list of required components, carefully consider the effort required to obtain those components. If the effect is particularly powerful, it stands to reason that the component may be dangerous or expensive to require. After all, in many cases, the effect will be permanently inlaid into the item. Likewise, a relatively mild effect should not require a horrendously difficult component to obtain. Gauge the overall scarcity and cost of the component against the desired effect and the impact on the game.

Once the component list is complete, consider creating a process for the recipe. This process should match the time required according to M&T, but will aid in providing flavor to the endeavor, rather than a stale “three weeks pass and the item is complete” narrative. The process can be as simple as a recitation of a ritual, or the burning of the components in a certain order. More complicated and powerful items may require special spells and possibly even attribute checks as the ritual progresses. Use attribute checks sparingly! If you require one, ensure that the player is aware well in advance. No player is going to be happy if he or she devotes the time to gather components and perform the ritual, only to have it all ruined with a surprise roll of the dice.

Consider requiring complex actions during the creation process that demand the hiring of skilled help. Apprentices and novice clerics can aid in the ritual of creation, requiring the player to coordinate the activities and preside over the entire process. The player then assumes responsibility for knowing what he or she is doing, as well as for the safety of the hired help.

Remember to be proportional. This cannot be overstated. It would be silly to require a red dragon scale for a *potion of burning hands*. No one would ever create it, because no one would consider the risk worthwhile. Also, the fair market value of every component required should add up to the cost determined from M&T. This includes the cost of renting or obtaining a laboratory or forge. If you decide to change the figures and calculations in M&T, be sure to apply this uniformly to all creation processes.



## Create Some Adventures

Once the recipe is created, the character is going to need to gather materials and assistance. Most items require a forge or laboratory, well-appointed with traditional equipment. The components must be gathered, usually in such quantities as to allow for spoilage or accidental destruction of a few pieces. Finally, the creator must be sheltered, fed, and protected for the duration of the creation process.

All of this can require adventures, whether they are short excursions across town or expeditions to find rare monsters to harvest components. Making the gathering of each component a task adds an incredible amount of flavor to the process. What is more enjoyable, a wand that is created after a player erases a few thousand

gold off a character sheet, or a wand that had seven components, all painstakingly obtained by the character at risk to life and limb?

Remember, make the adventures proportional to the component and the effect that component will create in the item.

## Allow Input!

The player is a crucial part of bringing flavor to the item. Most players, when given the opportunity, will bring great amounts of creativity to the process. Give the player plenty of chances to construct a personalized item. When possible, dictate only components required for effects, not components required to create the item itself. Let the look and feel of the item rest entirely on the creativity of the player. This should be within reason. Creating a powerful wand the size of a toothpick, and easily concealed, should not be allowed for obvious balance reasons.

Players may even wish to try their hand at creating their own recipe or with substituting components. If they run with it, let them! They may even think of more appropriate components than you. Just take their suggestions and compare the items they have selected with the recipe you have created. If the general cost, rarity, and relation to the effect are satisfactory, consider the player’s idea to be a fine substitute. If the comparison is not apt, give the player an Intelligence check to determine what the effect will be of that component. I recommend a CL equal to the approximate level of the effect, using M&T as a guide. A weaker component of the same general type will produce a weaker effect. A component of a completely different type will change the outcome even more drastically. Allow the player a chance to discover these types of potential outcomes, and if they proceed heedlessly, let the full consequences be discovered as well.

## What about items that are found, not created?

When running a game, I would apply all of the M&T rules in synergy with the guidelines described above. If a player creates an item, they will be following a recipe, gathering the components, designing their item, and performing a ritual. At the end of the process, they will have a personalized item that they have invested time, energy, and treasure into creating. They will also have a huge sense of accomplishment and satisfaction every time they use that item in a future adventure.

Now, imagine this: for every single magic item out there in the campaign world that can be discovered, someone, at some time, went through the same process. They put in the same amount of time, treasure, and trouble. They fashioned these items from their will, and then they were put to use.

This is something we don’t always remember when we populate our treasure troves with generic +1 weapons and garden-variety *rings of protection*. They weren’t always just sitting there waiting to be found. They have history. This history gives them power and weight far and above any abilities the items have.

Give these items a name that can be discovered through an *identify* spell. Give them a history that can be determined through research or magic. Describe the exploits of the prior owners, for good or ill. Give these items a unique appearance, something that distinguishes the taste of the creator, or the era in which it was created.

This is doubly applicable for sentient items that can communicate! It is incredibly important to be able to recount the memories of the item from the time it became conscious. This may not be required all at once, but over time, a broader picture of the depth of this item's existence should become clearer.

As I promised, here are two of my favorite magic weapons from campaigns past. Hopefully through their detail, you can see how I, or my CK, applied the general principles described above when they were created.



## Bloodletter

### Magical Dagger

Abilities: +2 to attack and damage rolls, masked against *identify*

When this finely-bladed dagger was created, its intended name was Bloodletter. Commissioned by an assassin of notoriety, this dagger was meant to be nondescript in the sheath and menacing when drawn. The assassin had a penchant for allowing his victims to witness their final moments, specifically the weapon that would bring their demise.

The wizard commissioned for its creation was subtle, and used special components designed to mask the history of the weapon's creation and ownership from *identify* spells. More powerful magical methods are required to divine the abilities of the dagger, or the names of the creator or the commissioning assassin.

One component used was a crushed gemstone with the ability to enhance magical detection and divination. It was blended with another crushed gemstone with reversal properties. Rather than enhance magical detections cast upon it, this had the effect of dampening the ability of spells to trace the item to the creator or owner.

A third component, the fang of a lion, was used to imbue the blade with combat prowess. The wizard was careful not to introduce the lion's fang too early, lest it also be reversed by the second gemstone.

Note that the names of the gemstones aren't important—any gemstone will do for either purpose, as long as the purported effect you assign is used consistently in your campaign and the costs and rarities are appropriate.

## The Sword of the Conqueror

### Magical Bastard Sword

Abilities: +3 to attack and damage rolls, *cone of cold* once per day, *telekinesis* of no more than 10 pounds once per day. It is lawful neutral in alignment, but is not sentient.

I have my brother to thank for this one, as it is an item one of my characters obtained in a game he ran long ago.

The Sword is an incredibly powerful weapon, lost for ages when a benevolent lord fell to vampirism in the infancy of his rule. The corrupted vampire lord was unable to use the Sword, so it was stored in his manor, awaiting a group of adventurers that centuries later would slay the vampire and recover his former weapon.

The Sword is an ancient sword of kings, brought from distant lands during an invasion long ago. It has an archaic look about it, as if fashioned in an entirely different culture. A long double-edged bastard sword, the blade glows a soft green when the weapon is drawn. The golden alloy hilt is masterfully crafted and inlaid with precious gems, the grip wrapped in electrum wire.

The history of the Sword is quite detailed, but I haven't the space to discuss it at length. Suffice it to say that the Sword now belongs to one of my favorite characters, Baroness Windstormer, who led the party that recovered it from the Vampire Lord.

My brother didn't provide details of the creation of the Sword. We were a little young to care about such details. But, I've taken it upon myself to imagine how it might have been done.

First, a component for battle prowess was required. While this could involve several more common components combined into one, I believe one single rare component was used. I prefer to use components, as with *Bloodletter*, that reflect the great martial prowess of the animal "donor." Since *Bloodletter* used a lion's fang, consistency demands that I choose a more formidable creature for a more powerful weapon. The most formidable predator in our world is Man. Thus, the first component used to craft the Sword was the breastbone of the king's former master-at-arms, freely donated upon his death. There are alignment restrictions to consider, after all!

Next, the components for the *cone of cold* power needed to be determined. It was determined that the Sword was created in an arid, hot land. Therefore, the component for such a powerful effect was one of the rarest substances of that area—ice. Two hundred pounds of ice was required to stay frozen throughout the process. If the process took several weeks, one of two things was necessary: an elaborate cooling system via magical means, or enough ice that several weeks of melting left two hundred pounds behind. Either way, the requirement was fantastic and extremely difficult to accomplish!

For the *telekinesis* power, there are several possibilities. One is a gemstone rumored to aid in magical projection of thought. Another is some component from a creature possessing the ability to move objects with its mind. Finally, one can rely on the abstract. To move an object normally, one exerts force upon it. Usually, a humanoid uses a hand. To move the object intentionally, the humanoid uses a sense, usually sight. And to coordinate both, the creature uses its brain. I prefer the abstract approach in this case. Therefore, the *telekinesis* component is the eye, hand, and brain of a primate. These uncommon components reflect the relatively weak nature of the power imbued in the Sword. A stronger *telekinesis* power would require a far more difficult set of components!

The alignment of the Sword is not a power, per se, but rather a quality developed both from the creator and from the Sword's wielders throughout the ages. The rulers of the land, for the most part, were more interested in order than in concepts of good and evil. Therefore, over time, the Sword absorbed some of these qualities, and does not lend itself to possession by those that do not share those qualities. As such, the Sword was probably a useful tool for determining appropriate succession rites in the event a king failed to leave an heir.

With these simple ruminations, I am able to bring much more depth to what could be "ordinary" magical items. Remember, with the exception of items mass-produced in a magic heavy society, magical items are difficult to make and all have a story. Find that story, and you'll find adventures that your players will never forget.

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# Roadhouse Rogues

by Casey Christofferson

*“Know your secret races of the highlands well students,” Gilean explained to the young disciples gathered at his feet. “Of course we are all familiar with the brave Ugashtan hill folk of the north. And indeed some of you have met a half elf in your day.” He said with a grin tucking his graying hair back behind his lightly pointed ear for emphasis. This always drew a gasp of awe and wonder from his impromptu college.*

*“I do not tell you of these things like your mother does, to terrify you into doing your chores children,” he continued. “Instead I tell you of them because they are real. I speak first of the Meshkuri, those deadly men who dwell in the lands below the earth. I know of them children because I have faced them!” His tale continued as the youths stared at him wide eyed. Some of the older literate children scribed notes with pen and quill upon yellow parchment. Others simply sat and hugged themselves as the Abthian bard continued his tale.*

## Meshkuri

The Meshkuri are a race of near albino humanoids dwelling in the darkness. Like the Ugashtan on the surface world above, the Meshkuri are among the last of the Umeshti race that retain a semblance of their original human origin. Upon the devastation of the Umeshti Empire, an enclave of survivors was entombed alive in the hidden caverns where they were protected from destruction by the aid of their hellish allies. Here they led a humble existence, at times as slaves, and other times as conquerors of the various races of the darkness.

**Appearance:** Their skin is almost translucent and their coal black eyes have sunken well into their skulls. Their ears are slightly pointed from an admixture of other underworld races that pumps within their thin veins. Meshkuri typically have white hair that is often dyed coal black, or in many cases no hair at all. Generations of life in the darkness and occasional intermixing with dark elf and goblin races have caused the Meshkuri to developed darkvision, but a lack of sunshine has brought about other deficiencies, such as an aversion to bright light.

## Personality

Meshkuri have long since turned their back on Gods and deities, relying on a strange admixture of drugs, super-science, sorcery, and devil worship to heal their wounds. This reliance on science has resulted in a wide variety of medical treatments for healing that often leave the Meshkuri scarred and twisted.

Meshkuri have no real loyalty to any particular code or creed save one another. They tend to band together for strength and

mutual protection, recalling their history of slavery, sorrow, and forgotten legends of their former glory as their common bond. As a relic of this ancient heritage, a form of knighthood permeates the Meshkuri subculture, though its trappings would seem alien and far removed from the style and substance of knighthood practiced by humans in the surface realms.

**Racial Affinities:** Meshkuri are distrustful of most races, being the product of calamity and dissolution. Despite this distrust, they have shown great resilience in their twilight sojourn and have earned the respect of the other races of the darkness who give them a wide berth.

**Environment:** Like other races of the darkness, the Meshkuri are at home in the deep caverns, dungeons and hidden places of the under earth. Meshkuri construct Spartan fortifications and often keep a coal mine, forge, and martial training grounds in their castle-like settlements. These settlements feature increasing rings of danger starting from a wide perimeter and terminating in some form of keep or central stronghold that affords defenses in all directions.

**Healing:** Meshkuri cannot or will not be healed by divine clerical healing, and see clerics as false prophets of failed philosophies. Druidic magic or their own potions may heal them.

**Meshkuri Surgery:** All Meshkuri are trained in self-surgery. They are capable of healing 1d6 points of damage for every four-experience levels per day, regardless of character class. The Meshkuri further add an additional point of healing per Intelligence point bonus. Thus, a first level Meshkuri with a 15

## Meshkuri Pain Killer

*Meshkuri are adept at finding pain-killing drugs and distilling them from natural and supernatural materials. These drugs do not actually heal the imbiber, but instead kill all pain, so that the user has no idea how hurt they actually are. Imbibers gain 1d8 false hit points. These false hit points increase the depth of which a user can take damage, so that in essence the character may be “dead” but still upon their feet. Multiple doses may be taken though these have no effect until the “false” hit points from the first dose have been used. Taking multiple doses is not without its side effects. The user must make a Constitution save (CL 4) for the second dose, (CL 8) for the third dose and so on. Failure results in instant coma lasting 1 day per dose taken. A dose of Meshkuri painkiller lasts four hours.*

*Any Meshkuri of at least 7<sup>th</sup> level regardless of character class may manufacture the painkiller. These doses require 200 gp worth of rare material components to manufacture and take one day to create a single dose. A laboratory with alembics, flasks beakers, graduated cylinders, and the like of at least 1200 gp value is required as these pain killers cannot simply be “whipped up” on the battlefield.*

intelligence could heal 1d6+2 points of damage per day. The surgery takes 10 minutes per point of damage healed.

**Deepvision:** Meshkuri have deepvision of 100 ft. They are however susceptible to bright magical light and daylight suffering a -2 to hit and attribute checks for the first 1d4 rounds they encounter such conditions.

**Resistant to Divine Magic:** As the Meshkuri have turned their back on the dealings of gods, they receive a +2 to Saves vs. Divine Magic.

**Languages:** Common, Dwarven, Zvarguth, Dark Elf, Goblin, Orc, Giant, Troll.

**Size:** Medium

**Movement:** 30 ft.

**Attribute Modifiers:** +1 Constitution, -1 Wisdom

**Typical Classes:** Fighter, Knight, Cleric (Fiend Only), Wizard, Assassin.

*Gilean looked around at the pale faces and wide eyes of his students as he lit a pipe and took a deep drag of the freshly packed Tokalladin Root. Its soothing burn reminded him desperately that he needed to give up smoking at some point lest he sound like a kiln the next time he sang.*

*He noted their shivers, and smiled, knowing that he had all of their attention. He took a glance around his “classroom” which was nothing more than a section of run down tavern next to the pane-less window facing out directly into the streets of Dro Mandras. During the day, the barkeep let him hold “class” here where he would discourse and educate the local orphans and any other children who would listen to him. Not for any coin, but because Gilean truly believed that everyone deserved an opportunity to learn.*

*“Very well class,” Gilean continued. “Let us take some time to learn about Changelings,” he said with emphasis. He smiled behind his long fingered hands at the shiver that crept across his students forms, though truly, after his last encounter with a Ghodeleth, he too shivered a little bit. His students caught this and warmly leaned forward. If the maestro was afraid of such creatures then they had common ground. Mouths closed and ears perked they listened intently as Gilean continued.*

## Changeling (the Ghodeleth)

Changelings are the half-fey children born to prisoners in the Rathe Cuirtha of Jokashka and her twisted fey progeny. The changelings, called Ghodeleth in the Rathe Cuirtha, are switched with mortal children who are stolen away to Jokashka’s realm. A note or other message insures the understanding that the changeling will be raised in the natural child’s place lest the natural child be murdered as punishment to the adoptive parents. These mortal children serve the Rathe Cuirtha as slaves until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday where they are given the opportunity to escape in an elaborate game of cat and mouse played by the dark fey for Jokashka’s amusement.

The half-fey changelings have been twisted by their proximity of the Rathe Cuirtha to the Rings of Hell and the Abyssal Nether so that they exist as shadowy versions of their mortal kin. Although not implicitly evil, they are wracked with wild and uncontrollable emotions and touched with chaos. Most mortals consider the changelings to be bad luck.

**Description:** The Ghodeleth vary in appearance but average in height between three and a half and six feet tall, typically with long thin limbs and long delicate fingers. Their hair is uncombed and wildly tangled and believed to grow to full length overnight even if cut. Their flesh is pale and mottled with color ranging from pink, to blue, to purple. Their mouths are small. Their most alien and distinguishing feature are their eyes, which tend to be large and range in color from blue to green, or violet to red. Their vertical pupils, slitted and cat like have an un-natural eye-shine in darkness. Their ears have a slight point to them so that changelings

are often mistaken for half-elves or halflings by those familiar with either race. Ghodeleth refuse to wear shoes, though their feet seem unaffected by natural heat or cold (though not lava or magical cold!).

**Personality:** Changelings are often mischievous, moody, conflicted, and prone to fits of mania and unpredictability. Some seek appreciation and acceptance amongst mortals while others seek to dominate them with their darker gifts. The Ghodeleth are often isolated loners who seek a balance between the more violent aspects of the natural world and the darkly magical world of their birth. This is not always the changeling's fault, as their very makeup is neither fully of this world, nor of the shadowy realm of Rathe Cuirtha

Although it is true that their adoptive parents feared them due to their unpredictability and the fact that so many of the Ghodeleth have brought about the death of their mortal parents through treachery, murder, or unexplained accident. It is sometimes the case that the Ghodeleth's natural abilities became a crutch by which their mortal parents gained access to riches and power. Thus the presence of the changeling ultimately corrupted the mortal parents as the Ghodeleth themselves were corrupted by their own dark heritage.

**Racial Affinities:** Racially and perceptually changelings share most in common with half orcs, half elves, Halflings, humans, and dark elves. They do not specifically mix "freely" with any of these groups but are capable enough of passing themselves off as humans or half elves, or Halflings if the need arises. Typically adult changelings prefer to hide their nature, as they are often scorned, hunted, outcast, or otherwise shunned by most societies. As they typically are not found in large groups they have not developed an actual "culture" of their own so mimic the culture of the mortal race who raised them. Changelings may breed with other changelings or with humans, half-elves, and Halflings. The result is always a changeling, though not necessarily a Ghodeleth.

**Environment:** Changelings may be found in any environment where humans, halflings, half-elves, or elves may be found. Most often they are encountered in out of the way communities and rural locales that are cut off from large population groups and close to enchanted glens, or haunted woodlands. That said there are always exceptions to this rule, and urban centers that are affixed upon vortices tying the mortal realm with the Rathe Cuirtha may hold a population of changelings. When possible changelings may gather in secret communities or gather in fiefdoms where they rule over and enslave true mortals.

## Racial Traits and Abilities

**Animosity:** Changelings suffer a -2 to Charisma based Siege checks when dealing with humans, who are naturally uncomfortable around them.

**Racial Affinity:** Changelings have a rare relationship with trolls, gaining a +4 to reactions and Charisma based checks in any and all dealings with trolls and neutral or evil fey.

**Twilight Vision:** Changelings can distinguish color and detail up to 1 mile under torchlight, moonlight, and starlight. They

see at normal distance underground so long as a minimum of available light is present.

**Fey Wrath:** Once per day, a changeling may enter a rage, gaining +2 HP per HD and +2 to damage, lasting for 1d4 rounds +1 per point of Constitution bonus. During the Wrath, the changeling is also suffers a -2 to armor class and -2 to intelligence based SIEGE checks. Upon the end of a Fey Wrath, the changeling is sapped; losing all bonus hit points and suffering -2 to Strength, and Constitution until the changeling feasts. This feast must be three times the size of a normal meal, or the changeling must rest eight hours.

**Spell Like Ability:** *Prestidigitation*, 1/day as the spell of the same name. *Change Self*, 1/day as the spell of the same name. Changelings who achieve at least 2 HD in any character class may use *Cause Fear* 1/day. Changelings with at least 3 HD in any character class may use *Charm Person* 1/day. Changelings who achieve at least 5 HD in any class may also assume *Gaseous Form* 1/day as a spell of the same name. A changeling's caster level is equal to Hit Dice.

**Iron Vulnerability:** Changelings are poisoned by pure iron, and take an additional +2 points of damage from weapons of pure iron. Furthermore, iron shackles cause changelings to suffer -2 temporary penalty to Dexterity and Strength. Changeling rogues attempting to pick an iron lock or squeeze through iron bars do so at an additional +2 to the standard Challenge Level.

**Languages:** Common, Fey, Troll, Goblin, Halfling, Elven.

**Size:** Small or Medium

**Movement:** 30 ft.

**Typical Classes:** Assassin, Bard, Illusionist, Druid, Rogue

**Attribute Modifiers:** -1 Charisma, +1 Intelligence



*In a continuing effort to present progress on the CKG we offer up this small piece of Chapter X, Worlds of Adventure. This chapter is, I believe, the longest chapter in the book. It is monstrous, and when finally laid out will cover some 30 pages, or thereabouts. The chapter itself covers the outdoors, dungeons, and city environments. It touches on many things and references some previously published work as well. But without further ado, here is an excerpt from the CKG's Chapter X.*

## CHAPTER X

### THE WORLDS OF URBANA

**T**he urban world is as varied in its structure as is the natural world. In the panoply of human history the vast array of social structures is staggering. Humans are inventive and part of the imaginative processes goes into ordering the world in which they live. Understanding these cultures and social structures can take a lifetime and even then, one can only partially come to understand them. If one adds to that mixture fantastical races, magic, and the supernatural in the creation of the world, the possibilities beggar the imagination.

However, considering that, there are constants that seem to fit every society and culture and general understanding which, once applied, can be manipulated and bent to fit one's needs, and if used as a baseline for development one can add magical and supernatural elements and effects to a believable effect. Further, our suggestion is to rest the setting in a well-known milieu (one the players are familiar with) and cultural categories, which the players readily understand and can play in without sundering the suspension of disbelief.

As such, a preponderance of attention is given over to varieties of west European Roman, Greek, and medieval social structures. Within this contained area and time, there are vast arrays of cultures and structures. However, do not let this limit your imagination. Read about other cultures and their ordering and draw upon them for inspiration as is your want.

#### THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

By urban landscape, we refer to that arena of activity encompassing all of mankind's (and demi-human) social environment. This includes the lifestyles and makeup of single dwellings and thorps to large cities, the economy, culture and religion, government and taxes, laws and ethics. All this makes up what we refer to as the urban landscape.

#### BASIC ELEMENTS

There are several basic elements that one must understand before beginning developing and detailing ones world. These





range from population density to occupation and settlement. After these are given an overview, we will examine the details on further development.

**POPULATION DENSITY:** There are no reliable statistics on population density for most pre-industrial societies. It goes without saying that density varied greatly from region to region depending on social and agricultural development, government, natural settlement patterns, arable land and other limiting factors. Cities would have the highest density of population while rural areas would have the lowest population densities. Within any given area population densities could and did vary greatly as people tended to cluster the developments close to one another with nodal densities being very far apart.

**OCCUPATION:** In pre-industrial societies, the vast majority of time was given over to agricultural pursuits. Only a small percentage of the people, from 1-10% were involved in non agricultural pursuits. Further, in many very early societies everyone was involved in agricultural pursuits of one type or another (fishing, hunting and gathering). Only when population densities increased and agricultural surplus was regularly available did other occupations even become possible. However, even in societies in which agriculture takes up the vast majority of time and effort, there are those people with specialized skills to produce and make objects of need or value (baskets, pots, weapons, rope etc).

**SETTLEMENT:** As people moved from nomadic lifeways they tended to settle in small communities (both for safety and to take advantage of common skills). These communities developed around certain places. Fertile areas along major watercourses or in places where water was readily available is the most important factors in determining settlement placement. Settlements also tend to cluster close to one another such that populations aggregated in localized regions with large swaths of unoccupied land between villages or towns. Settlements also tended to develop around trade routes or major transportation arteries.

**ECONOMY:** Barter or trade in kind or service was the primary method of exchange in most pre-industrial societies. Even in those with a well developed monetary system used barter and exchange of service as the primary method of economic exchange. However, money was developed and used once economies of scale came into being and trade over large areas. Accepted mediums of exchange developed. This was usually in precious metals but not always. Other items of accepted value could be used such as shells, beans, ceramic plates, or even paper money.

**GOVERNMENT:** With only a few exceptions, governments prior to the industrial revolution were autocratic to some degree. This does not refer to those societies which were still primarily tribal or band oriented in which were more egalitarian. Rigid structures of leadership far outnumbered those with more fluid and egalitarian governments. Leaders had varying degrees of power as well. Sometimes power was nearly complete and rule by fiat occurred. In other cases, power was spread out amongst or between several classes or institutions but still rested in the upper tiers of the social ladder. Revolution, conquest, and war were the typical methods through which power changed hands.



Peter Bradley 2004

**LAW:** As a general rule, laws to which a community is bound are unwritten. They are social and cultural rules and regulations and norms of behavior expected of everyone. Only with highly concentrated populations, diverse populations, and the need for regular or routine punishments did written laws come into play. Even so, these were not quite as extensive as those used in most societies today. They were sparse and general in nature. The application of law and punishment was also quite varied even when written down. Whatever local authorities and judicial systems were used differed from community to community and person to person. The lawgivers and judges almost always had ultimate fiat in how legal actions were carried out.

## THE RULE OF TEN

As a basic guideline to development, it is safe to use what I refer to as the rule of 10. You will see a constant reference to 1 in 10 for this or that and 1 in 100 for other things, 10% for this or that etc. For example, 1 in 10 people in a normal population are involved in non-agricultural occupations. Although the numbers do not reflect any reality, they manage a reasonable facsimile thereof. The castle keeper is encouraged to amend these numbers as they desire or do more detailed research to garner more accurate numbers. When faced with any unique situation or one not dealt within these pages, for consistency and ease it would be best to maintain the 1 in 10 ratio for development.

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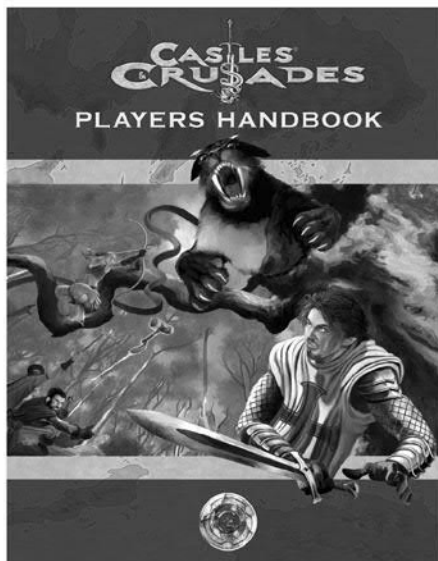
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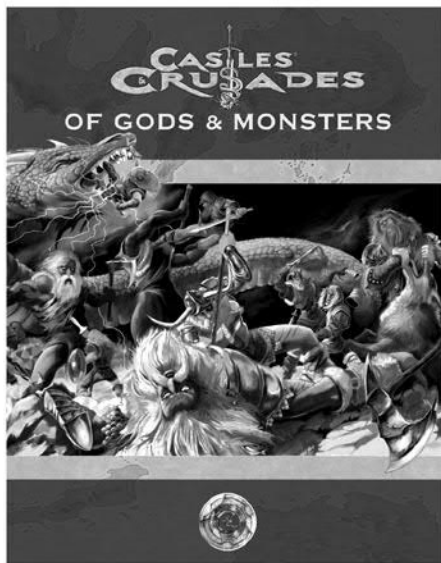
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TALES OF THE  
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THE AIHRDIAN  
CHRONICLES  
BEING THE 18<sup>TH</sup> NARRATIVE  
OF THE  
LAY OF THE LOTHIAN PRINCES

*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. The troop had only recently scattered a band of goblins and befriended a snow steed.*



edgewick's abilities stood in marked contrast to those of his master. Where his master was reckless, he was calm and not prone to rash behavior. Meltowg fought with a blind courage, uncaring of his own fate, where Sedgewick studied events and chose his path to further the Prince's goal. Meltowg's renown as a warlord stood unequalled, but Sedgewick harbored a deep understanding of ethereal worlds of the arcane. He studied lore in his youth, retaining all that he learned. Though he was an accomplished warrior, with countless battles beneath his belt, his true gift lay in his sorcery and his ability to see through the things around him.

The Rinckval, or snow steed, stood before him and he knew within a few minutes that the creature possessed a keen intelligence, almost equal to that of a man. The creature communicated telepathically, though not with common language, but rather through images and emotions. Beyond this, the creature was a traveler. It possessed a natural ability to leap through the Wall of Worlds and into the Void. There it could live, breathe, and move upon or through that emptiness with the ease of a fish in water. Sedgewick could see in its mind that its past was one of freedom, but residual memories, passed down from one generation to the next placed the creature's not distant forbearers within the confines of Aufstrag.

"So, the horned one bred your people in the past and made of you what you are. How now I wonder, did you come to your freedom? How did your parents, or their parents, come to be free?" The elf mused for a moment, staring at the horse. He set down his weaponry, shield, and helm, and relaxed.

The steed watched the elf for a moment. Relaxing, it pawed the snow for old grass that might lie beneath. Finding none it trotted over to the tree line to chew the bark from a cottonwood tree.

Sedgewick followed slowly. Eventually he approached the steed, but waited until it had eaten for awhile, patient not to disturb it. He could hear the Prince and his men come into the area, stop, and wait. He knew them well enough to know that they would leave him undisturbed until his curiosity was satisfied.

When at last the horse seemed content Sedgewick sent an image of himself rubbing the creature's neck and the beast relented. The wizard walked over slowly, extending his hand, palm out until at last he rested it on the creature's neck. He stroked the long white fur, but said nothing.

This wasn't a gentle beast. He probed Sedgewick's thoughts, skimming through the surface of them, trying to learn who and what he was. There were no experiences in his past that taught him what elves were, none that is but one.

Suddenly, the wizard's mind was alive with imagery. Unbidden, unsought for the snow steed stumbled upon a common theme and unleashed the totality of it. Though untrained in the psionic arts the creature mastered, the elf possessed a nimble mind and was able to absorb the sudden torrent.

He found himself cast upon the All Father's ocean, the Deep Empty as humans called it, the Void in common parlance. A wall of darkness consumed him and the firmament that was the world, the Maelstrom, slipped away from him with astounding speed until the vast sprawl of matter and worldliness was little more than a spinning disk of light in the darkness. The deeper he plunged into the madness of the Empty the more he could see. Upon a horizon that spread in all directions, placed at distances unfathomable, were other things, lights, deeper darkness, flashing moments, here and then gone. Alone he would be lost forever, a husk on bark upon an ocean. But the steed guided him and brought him with speed to a deep flowing darkness, live a

river on the black empty. He could see its current, though he could not see where it began or where it ended.

He watched in awe, trying to see what the horse had seen. Before long he heard voices, distant, but clear as a bell. Their language was not unknown to him for it was elvish, but spoken in a dark tone and with hidden words the meaning of which he could not understand. He knew then that he looked upon the river of Uul, a dark water that flowed from the elven lands of Shindolay to the world of Aihrde. Here, before Unklar cast up the Shroud of Darkness blocking the Void from Aihrde, the elves of Shindolay could cross over to Aihrde upon boats built by one of the seven tribes, the Teth-Aet-Uul. These elves were like no other. They lived in darkness and shunned the light of day or the beauty of the world above. Their skin was dark and their hair light or silvery in color. They were steeped in magic and perhaps, above all others, were the most powerful of the elvin magi. This river was the course of dreams they say and those who would know their heart's desires fulfilled need only sleep upon its banks and listen to its subtle charms.

Sedgewick followed it. Or rather the steed did, hurling its length where it meandered through the Empty, coiling upon itself until at last it rose upon high, or low, for their was direction, up or down and tumbled into nothingness. Its darkness vanished as surely as if it were exposed to the light of day. This did not hold the wizard's mind compared to what else he saw, for there upon a great masted galleys that floated in the inky darkness were elves, hundreds of elves, thousands of elves. The ships, 14 by his count, were large, and carried a massive compliment of his kindred. They were girded for war, in armor, with shields and high helms. Their spears were bright, their swords shone in the darkness, the pennons and flags floated in a breeze they could not feel. They looked upon the river's end and their eyes were filled with horror and sadness and many were distraught, others filled with a rage they could unleash. Impotent fury hung upon the elven host like nothing Sedgewick had ever seen. He followed their gaze until at last he could see beyond the curtain of darkness where the water fell into nothing a scene as normal to him but strange to the realm within which he stood.

A forest opened up to him. Ancient trees, hung heavy with deep vines and dark foliage, towered over forest paths lost in darkness. However, the trees and paths were covered in snow and ice and he knew that he looked upon his own world held in the grasp of Winter's Dark. The forest was not unknown to him for only one wood was so black that even the darkness seemed to beckon, the Twilight Wood, where the dreaming gods dwelt and where his kinsmen first came to Aihrde so many years ago. The more the wizard watched the more he saw until at last he

could discern the shape of a castle of many spires upon a hill top island and upon its battlements stood a wizard. He was old, his face drawn like no elf's face should be, and he stared into the air about him as if he could see into the dark Void. In his hand he held a staff of fine wood. His flowing green robes covered him well, keeping him warm against the winter's chill. Sedgewick knew he looked upon Melius the Wise, one of the greatest of the elven magi.

He stared for a great while, until he remembered that he rode the memories of the steed. He felt he knew, Melius' expression was that of the elf seeing the host upon the river and he knew that he held them from crossing over and that upon him the full fury of the elves in the ships fell.

This was the army the witch spoke to Meltowg about, an elven host thirsty to revenge themselves upon the heart of the horned god's empire.

Sedgewick broke the trance with the steed and returned to the world of Winter Dark. He looked upon the horse and the horse on him. Turning slowly he looked back upon his master and saw him sitting, grim faced upon his own massive warhorse. Looking up he caught a glimpse of the elven host upon their mighty ships, foundered, abandoned, upon the course of the River Uul. he could still see Melius standing upon his battlements, grimly watching.

"You must know wizard, that some day, time will turn and those elves will come to roost in your castle." This he said to no one in particular, but the horse snorted and nuzzled him.

With ease he leapt upon the creature's back and guiding it, he trotted over to his Lord.

"My Prince, I have seen the host of elves whom your witch spoke of and I have noted their armaments, and a lust for battle unmatched by any but yourself."

"How has this vision come to you?"

"This creature I ride is more than a horse. Within it lies the ability to travel to the Void, to break the bands of the Shroud and ride the Great Empty. He took me to the courses of the River Uul that is of our homeland in Shindolay. We followed it to see fourteen great vessels carrying thousands of elves in battle array. A wizard holds them at bay."

"So the witch's words have truth in them. Then we must slay this wizard and free our kindred so that they might join us in our war against the darkness."

"So it would seem. So it would seem."

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# MONSTERS OF AIHRDE

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

## JARDHEL

**NO. APPEARING:** 1–6

**SIZE:** Medium

**HD:** 4(d8)

**MOVE:** 30 ft

**AC:** 21 (head, neck) 17 (body) 13 (stomach)

**ATTACKS:** head butt (1d6), bite (1d4)

**SPECIAL:** Dark Vision 60 ft., Powerful Charge

**SAVES:** P

**INT:** Animal

**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral

**TYPE:** Beast

**TREASURE:** Nil

**XP:** 40 + 4

The jarhdhel are beastly creatures able to dwell in a wide range of environments. They stand about three feet at the shoulder and are about six feet long from head to tail. They have four long, jointed legs with thin clawed toes allowing them to gain purchase on steep rises, icy ledges, or even on slippery rocks. Their heads are broad and covered in an angled plate of bone that allows them to ram their victims but also protects them from the thrashing of their prey. Their jaws are long and filled with cutting saber-like incisors at the fore and rending teeth at the back. They are wide and bulky and do not run quickly, but their bodies have several bright blue colorations, often confusing less intelligent prey. A thick hide of short horns protects the flanks and back, though their bellies have no protection. Their most peculiar feature is undoubtedly the large ‘sails’ they are able to unfold from their backside. They are able to unfold two, long spiny, sails from their back. These sails consist of a thin membrane of skin connected to boney spikes. They have a short tail, used mainly for balance.

The jarhdhel prefer to dwell in cool environments, but are able to dwell almost anywhere. Their sails, filled with blood vessels, allow them to regulate their body temperatures from one extreme to the next. This allows them to hunt in most environments and for much of the year. When the sails are flush with blood they turn a bright orange color; this color often serves to distract their prey.

The jarhdhel are wide ranging, traveling in packs of 1–8. There is always one adult male, the rest being female with 1–2 young. Solitary encounters are almost always with young males, hunting the tundra for an older male they can unseat. They are very capable hunters and will eat almost anything they can take down. They are not particularly fast and as such usually wait for their prey to pass near, charge, ramming them, and pouncing on

them. They are scavengers as well, eating almost anything they find dead on the plains.

**Combat:** The jarhdhel lay in wait for prey to pass near. When the intended victim passes within a few hundred feet they charge, slamming the creature with their large head, knocking it to the ground or even senseless. Once prone and helpless, they fall upon it, and devour it.

**Powerful Charge:** A jarhdhel typically begins a battle by charging at an opponent, lowering its head to bring its mighty head to bear. In addition to the normal benefits and hazards of a charge, this allows the beast to stun the victim. If the jarhdhel scores a successful hit then the victim must make a constitution save. If they fail, they are knocked prone and stunned for 1d4 rounds.

## The Jarhdhel in Aihrde

The jarhdhel were largely restricted to the northern regions of the world and rarely seen in the southern climes before the age of the Winter Dark. When the horned god filtered the sun’s light the snows began falling and the jarhdhel’s population exploded as a whole new range of hunting grounds opened up to them. They adapted to a wide range of terrain and humanoids, humans, and demi-humans became a major part of their prey. They ranged into the Lands of Ursal (the Cradle of the World) where they became a terror throughout. A favorite target for hunters for both their meat and their heads, the jarhdhel were hunted most by the nobility of Unklar’s court.

When the Winter Dar receded the jarhdhel remained behind, their sails proving a highly efficient adaptation, allowing them to live in almost any environment. They are now encountered almost anywhere in the world.



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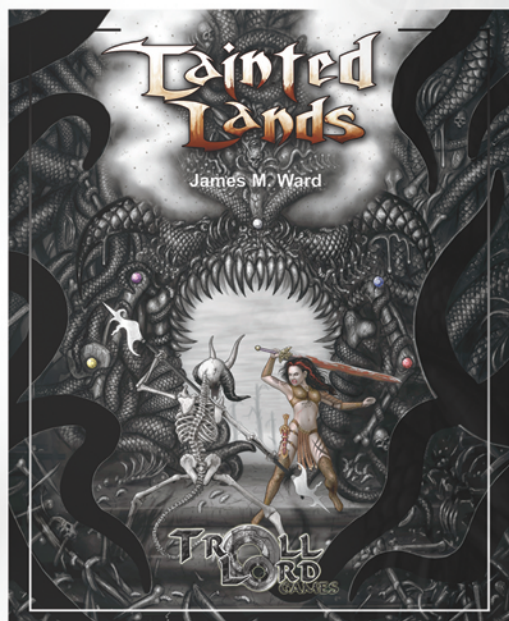
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