

#23



RUSADER



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by Stephen K. Chenault

Iron Guts - Mid-level

Adventures

by Stephen K. Chenault

Demons & Devils

M&T of Aihrde

Its A Trap!

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Throwing 20 Questions at Mark Allen

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AATUCK

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TROLL LORD GAMES

ODINE OCEAN



Notes from the Managing Editor

Welcome to another issue of Crusader magazine. As I'm sure many of you have noticed we have been woefully slow in getting this issue out. This decision was very deliberate on our part as we have really turned our focus on finishing up the Castle Keepers Guide. That book has dogged us for several years and we are determined to finish it this year, by the summer convention months if at all possible. But that means that we must set aside some other projects and as the Crusader is definitely the low man on the totem pole, it came up first on the hit list.

But this does not mean that we are shutting the publication down. I have worked a long time on Crusader and it is still one of my pet projects; to grow this magazine and create a platform where many diverse gaming styles can come together. What it does mean, in the short term, is that the magazine's production schedule slows immeasurably. We'll put out a few more issues while working on the CKG, but until that book is complete, we'll continue working on it and bringing articles together for the Crusader as we can.

For the staff of Crusader this comes at an interesting time. Jim Ward, our Managing Editor has been extremely busy expanding the Panzer General franchise into the hobby market and so for the time being I'm going to re-assume the role of Managing Editor. Jim Ward has done an astounding job working on the Crusader. He did exactly as I asked him to, putting it out monthly and bringing a host of quality projects to the pages of Crusader as well as streamlining its rather sometimes wandering focus. Jim is a good friend of mine and I do not like losing him on the Crusader staff. Panzer General may keep him busy for the next several months but when opportunity presents I hope to see him back in the pages working the magic as he did from issues 8-22.

Of course we have another project we are working on with Mr. Ward which we hope to highlight in a near future article in Crusader.

I temporarily offered Davis the Managing Editorship, but fired him a few weeks later as he wasn't doing anything but compiling political commentary from blogs and I felt it didn't belong in the pages of this gaming magazine.

So beyond the slowing release schedule and Mr. Ward assuming the reigns of his own mad chariot, what's going to happen in Crusader?

I am going to take this opportunity to try a few things new with the magazine. I want to get more cartoons in the issue. Mr. Tom Wham's are missing this issue, but don't think that it is because I don't want them in here. I just didn't get ahold of him in time. Look for more Mr.

Wham in issue 24. I also want to bring back Historical Footnotes and other more generalized articles that apply to your C&C game, but that you may find useful all the way around. But we'll see as the pages unfold. I'm also adding a little more artistic flare to the Crusader, the new logo and what have you.

In short the next few issues will bring a great deal of the C&C material you've come to expect, but also a few changes here and there. Enjoy the ride. As with all things Troll, its long in getting there, but worth it in the end . . . or so we keep telling ourselves.

Stephen Chenault



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Industry News

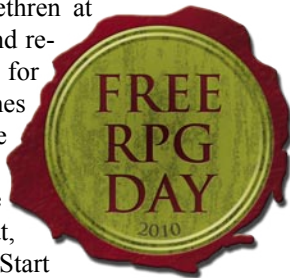
Are RPGs On The Way Out? No Way!

~Aldo Ghiozzi

It is always the same conversation when I tell people, “I work in the game industry...” And they say, “Oh, like Monopoly?” And I respond, “No, like Dungeons & Dragons.” Their response is always, “People still play that?” The days of RPGs are not what they used to be, but they are not over either.

Did you know that the original Shadowrun sold something like 80,000 copies of the core book? And the original Call of Cthulhu core book was some like 120,000 copies? Small and medium-sized publishers are lucky if they even sell 1,000 copies of their core book these days. So, what is it that is diminishing the interest in RPGs? Some blame videogames, some blame the amount of rules (my wife has always said to me, “Why would anyone want to read 100 pages of rules?”), some blame the economy. Personally, I don’t believe it is just one factor – it is a list longer than I can fit in this article. In the end though, people are still playing, and RPGs are still being published. And right now, publishing a RPG is easier than ever. Between print-on-demand technology and PDF downloads, anyone can put their epic out for the world to play. Unfortunately, the pool of people playing anything new has shrunk as well. Most hardcore gamers continue to play their old set of rules (whatever they may be) and make up adventures. And that is great. This is what keeps the spirit alive in the RPG market. Because of this though, most retailers are either a) not carrying RPGs at all, thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that RPGs are going away, or b) carrying so few that it is forcing you to buy direct from the manufacturer or download them as a PDF.

As much as the RPG market is truly shrinking in terms of players, there are still many of you out there...and the best way to find others like you is to find your local game store and let them know you still are part of this unique group. The best way to support the world of RPGs is to get out to your local retailer and let them know you want to have a game in-store (and www.FreeRPGDay.com is a great way to get that done!) Not only does this help keep your local store alive, but it could also build up the local market to convince them that RPGs are not on the way out...and you might just find some other RPG brethren at the same time. You will definitely find resistance from retailers since the trend for gaming right now is still board games and/or card games (and don’t get me started about how difficult the market is for CCGs/TCGs these days!) The store wants to go where the money is at, and you cannot blame them for that. Start with one game played at your local retailer and see if you can get a monthly group going with it. If you put it on their calendar of events and have the store make a flyer for it, you could eventually build up a group. From there, hopefully you get the people playing to buy from the local store and eventually they will



start bringing in product for the game you are playing and maybe try something similar to build off of it.

Yeah, I know, many of you think I’m a dreamer. That’s OK. As much as technology grows and makes it easier and easier to not struggle to yell at your weekly gaming group to get together, I still find the face-to-face interaction with friends to be fun and annoying at the same time. So, for me, I will fight like there is no tomorrow to get my friends together to sit together and play a RPG...whatever the game may be. My friends may stab me in the back, steal my gold or whine if they don’t get first pick at the magic items, but that is what RPGs are all about, and that is what will keep them alive and well.

Aldo is the owner of Impressions. Impressions handles the distributor sales and shipping for over 40 game companies to distributors worldwide. They also organize the yearly event, Free RPG Day, which is celebrated this year on Saturday, June 19th.

Frank Frazetta Passes Away

Frank Frazetta passed away in Fort Myers, FL on May 10, 2010. Famous the world over for his paintings; his vision of other worlds and worlds that might have been are some of the most ground breaking and memorable ever put to canvas.



Mr. Frazetta’s work appeared in comics, on movie posters, in movies such as *Fire and Ice*, and album covers; but most memorably on book covers. His vibrant, wholly unique, style allowed his vision to come to life upon the canvas.

Frank Frazetta, 1928-2010. He follows now where his spirit has always been, in a world between worlds, of canvas born fantasy.

Surfing the Surface

A team of designers at Entertainment Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University have developed a proof-of-concept project designed for use with the Microsoft Surface Table. This table allows for interactive role playing with your Dungeons and Dragons table top game. The interactive map allows creatures to detect where players have moved their characters. The concept remains in the design stage but promises a whole new lease on life for role playing games and the table top experience. To read more about it check out the Wired Website: <http://www.wired.com/geekdad/2009/10/d-and-d-microsoft-surface/>

ALEA IACTA EST

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

Iron Guts: High Adventure for Mid Level Characters

This issue we pick up a discussion where we left off last issue, by taking a closer look at the levels and ways and thoughts on how to Castle Keep from low level to high. Last issue we covered characters of levels 1-3, this issue we take a closer look at mid-level characters: those ranging from 4-8. Next issue we'll take a closer look at high level characters, 9+, "god will and the creek don't rise," to offer up one of Gary Gygax's favorite sayings.

Through reckless adventure and brazen heroics, and no doubt a fair share of luck, the low level characters push their way through to the mid-level range. It means that they have successfully cut their teeth on the horror and blood of the early trails. Green horns no longer; they now begin the second stage of the journey to immortality. Mid-level characters enjoy many benefits of their growing power, hit points, wealth in armor and gear, as well a range of nonplayer characters to access, and experiences to fall back upon. Against this stand increasingly powerful monsters, whose abilities range from the brute force to sorcerous weapons, new and strange. Castle Keeping mid-level characters offers the Castle Keeper and the player several difficult challenges; for the Castle Keeper, the use of powerful monsters offer the risk of overkill, setting the characters against monsters whose powers prove insurmountable, all the while maintaining an interesting, flavorful adventure; for the player, it's learning how to pit their growing skill sets against these new threats and balance their power in growing hit points, armor class, and magic without overextending themselves and getting killed.

In many respects, mid-level characters are the most enjoyable to play as they offer a host of new monsters and allow the Castle Keeper to pound the characters without instantly killing them, adding time to the equation of the running adventure, which in turn allows the enterprising story teller to really come to grips with the story and its threats and bring those down on the characters like a hammer. Whether carefully laid out and meticulously planned, or whether an adventure developed on the fly, the Castle Keeper's object lies in capturing the players interest and challenging them to overcome any series of obstacles. These challenges culminate in what is best styled the moment of adventure; that moment, or long series of moments, that bring the whole party to the table by

engaging their characters in some type of threat. This danger need not be one posed by a powerful monster, or a group of creatures; a complicated trap or series of traps. A mystery the players cannot easily comprehend pose equally engaging moments. Mid-level characters offer the Castle Keeper a whole new host of opportunities to develop their story arc and expand these moments of adventure.

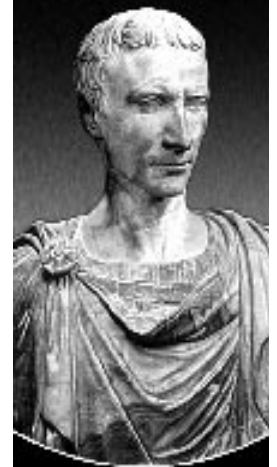
Foremost the characters possess more hit points. Where before one or two good blows threaten a character (especially from a wizard or illusionist) with a quick death, the higher hit points allow them take much more punishment. This expands the Castle Keepers story by telling in two directions.

The increased hit points allow the Castle Keeper to bring several more smaller monsters to bear in the battle; multiple monsters offer a greater threat that equates into more excitement. Capturing a battle where the character must fight off a horde of screaming kobolds- raking, clawing, biting, stabbing at them - brings personal combat to its highest form. The swirling hordes of their enemies circle them, cutting one off from the other, attempting to drag them out into their own ranks, there to consume them in their own weight of numbers. Here the hero carves through a host of his opponents, hacking to the left or right just to stay alive; no longer bound by one or two spells, the wizard, cleric, druid or illusionist taps multiple spells to keep the madness at bay. The added bonus here is that the piles of fallen foes embolden the players, encouraging them to play the fearless, almost reckless hero in their quest to conquer and overcome their foe.

Beyond the madding crowd of orcs, kobolds and goblins lay a host of monsters in both the *Monsters & Treasure* and the *Monsters & Treasure of Aihrde*. These monsters possess powers the low level characters cannot overcome, but challenge the mid-level characters. Here are new threats the players may not understand so that the challenge is far greater, as they do not immediately know the proper defenses or how to fight them. There is a danger here for the Castle Keeper, as pitting the characters against monsters whose powers on the surface do not seem very difficult, often prove very difficult and dangerous.

WHEN CAESAR
STOOD UPON THE
BANKS OF THE
RUBICON LOOKING
SOUTH TO ROME,
HE HESITATED.
BEFORE HIM STOOD
THE VAST, COMPLEX
MECHANISM OF THE
REPUBLIC, 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 CEBRIN
ENLLI, 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

The enterprising Castle Keeper must be able and willing to adjust and shift with these moments, curtailing affects of powers, devastating rolls and the like if the situation should call for it.

This is the true challenge for Castle Keeping mid-level characters. Multiple monsters, traps, and magic items exist here. Choosing them and balancing them is difficult. It is not the goal of the Castle Keeper to destroy characters. Any such ranking that counts character kills is counter-productive to the story and the fun of the game. Reading the monsters and understanding the affects of their powers is very important. Many Castle Keepers fall into the trap of looking at a monster's HD and setting that against the level of the players; four 6th level characters fighting an eight HD monsters sounds workable. But that monster's abilities are the true test of its power, for the characters must make their saving throws against that hit dice, and if those saves are on average against no primes, the chances of failure increase. If failure means death or incapacitation, then the Castle Keeper may find him/herself facing a dead party. Balance the encounter by looking at the outcome if characters fail multiple saves, as well as the damage that monsters might deal out.

Of course this is not to say that encounters should not pose the threat of character death, as that is the final motivator for fighting to survive. If the moment's danger becomes woven with chance or fate, and a characters poor actions fuels the flames and the character falls, then it is what it is.

The best way to achieve the balance in the encounter is to utilize the story itself. If the encounter shifts too violently toward destruction, or even falls prey to the characters insane luck, be prepared to change the encounter in mid stream. This is where playing behind screens proves most useful. Adjust the monsters hit points up or down as needed. The players need never know; adjust the AC through wastage; adjust the AC of the players through destroying shields; change the challenge level as needed. In short, the Castle Keeper must practice institutionalized cheating in order to salvage an encounter that proves too soft or too hard. Experience teaches Castle Keepers when this is necessary and when not; some encounters, starting dangerous that end precipitously through some bold action can be as moment inspiring as the long grueling fight that leaves scores dead and everyone wounded.

As always one of the best tools at the Castle Keepers hand for balancing these encounters lies upon the characters, literally. By shifting killing blows, breath weapons, or magical attacks toward the character's war gear or traveling equipment, it destroys the character's worldly wealth but allows them to fight on. Crushing helmets, shattering shields, breaking hafts, notching blades, ripping coats of mail, tearing open back packs, and cloven horns all bring all the reality of the battle to the

player's without ending it; furthermore the wake of devastation always echoes in the halls of memory.

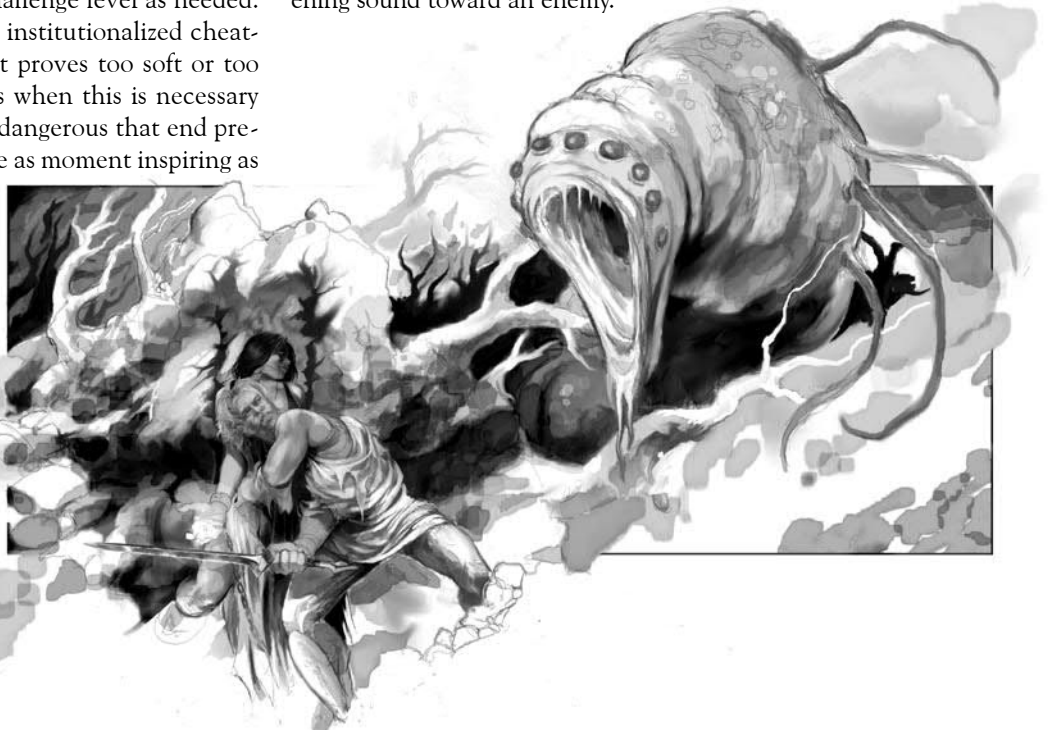
For the players, and the Castle Keeper as well, it is truly a time of picking up steam, as they now possess enough hit points to survive longer than two or three heavy blows and their skills increase to the point that they begin to affect the actual story arc and direction of the game. Here the fighter alone begins to settle into a pattern that last for many levels. But for the rest of the characters, more levels mean more skills. These new abilities add role playing depth to the mid-level characters and allow them to understand

. . . the wake of devastation always echoes in the halls of memory.

what is going on and in some cases to impact its events. From the bard's legend lore and the ranger's tracking to the barbarian's intimidate and beyond, the characters begin to push out from a low impact role to a higher one.

Learning multiple applications of their abilities is paramount for the character. The joy of C&C is that one's imagination alone restricts the character's ability use. "Try it" becomes the mantra of the game. Always think out of the box. Some abilities are linear and do not have many applications, but others might prove useful in multiple situations. An assassin might try to use his case target ability to learn something unique about a nonplayer character, with no intention to slay them. The Castle Keeper may or may not allow the check, but it is worth a try.

This becomes particularly true for spell casters. The limited number of spells they are able to cast in any given day, coupled with lower hit points, armor class, and their ability to hit forces them back up on their spells. Thinking out of the box is not easy and in of itself is challenging, but the character that expands the very usefulness of their spells tremendously increases their power and ability to impact the game. A *message* spell designed to send a message to a friend can serve as a weapon by sending a burst of threatening sound toward an enemy.



The player must carefully study their spells and abilities, casting about for multiple usages.

Understanding their increased powers is as important as expanding upon their own abilities. Where before a few blows or a trap destroyed half the party, now the increased hit points, level bonus to checks and saving throws, better equipment and spells brings the character forward in huge leaps and bounds. Now the character can take the punishment, and the player should not be shy in letting the character do so. Shying away from battle or challenges because of the threat of death does not serve the story arc or make for very fun play. Brave, brave Sir Robin* must fight and not fear the consequences to their character. Plunging into the fray often upsets Castle Keeper plans and forces them on the defensive which in turn fuels the storyline further bringing ever more excitement to the table.

With this increased bravado comes the oft mentioned equipment. Players must use their wealth to purchase ever greater equipment and weapons. This allows them to do more, inflict more damage and take more damage, as well as carry them through any number of dangerous scenarios. But just as importantly, it offers the Castle Keeper a sacrifice. By willingly discarding equipment, especially magical equipment, it sates the Castle Keeper's need to heighten the story danger, the narrative; that moment of adventure without actually destroying the character himself. Taking this a step further, smart players willingly lose, set aside, or break items to avoid the

damage to their selves. An adventure well played might be its own reward, but the treasure it yields easily replaces empty coffers to resupply and replenish.

Mid-level characters offer a whole new range of possibilities for both player and Castle Keeper. Taking advantage of them is as easy as reading through the monsters or studying the abilities. The adventure assumes a new depth in both its longevity and its possibilities; everyone at the table must take advantage of this in order to further the story. And here is the rub for mid-level characters, the true break through at the table. No longer content to sit and listen to the unfolding tale of the adventure from Castle Keepers prone to droning on, the players now directly impact the narrative, changing it as they use their increased abilities and powers to influence not only the outcome of the battle, but the adventure itself through those same abilities. Now nonplayer characters, monsters and encounter areas all become subject to the growth in power of the player characters.

But it's the high level characters, enabled with tremendous abilities, that begin to force the direction of the narrative, and dominate those moments of adventure. A subject we shall tackle in Issue 24.

* This is a reference to the movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail and the knight, Brave Sir Robin, who traveled with a band of minstrels exhorting his cowardly before "he almost fought the chicken of Bristol."



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Convention going is part of the game publishing trade and it takes publishers on journeys all over the United States and beyond. Long hours, long drives, late nights, hotels, airports are the bread and butter of the trade; and that doesn't touch the actual conventions. Join us now for . . .

ON THE ROAD WITH THE TROLL LORDS

By Stephen Chenault

We've been to many conventions over the years, individually or in packs. We've traveled from California to Maine, from Texas to Wisconsin, and many states in between. I can't name the majority of the shows we've attended over the years; there are just too many. Some periods are busier than others; releases would dictate hitting more shows to promote them, or conditions ripe, and the trolls able. Some periods proved slower, usually due to a mental exhaustion and a desire to stay put. It's the nature of old trolls to root to the ground and we are no exception. 2001-02 played host to a mountain of conventions that Davis and Todd or Davis and Mark attended. These were the hey-days of d20 and before C&C when we basked in the glory of spreading the gospel of our game, TLG style, with lots of hard roads, long trips, late nights, small shows, and big fans.

Stories from the road are plentiful; for a small company like TLG it is necessary to approach conventions in a more traditional traveling salesman type manner . . . more in the line of John Candy in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, rather than some more auspicious vacuum cleaner salesman from the 1950s. For the most part we traveled in Old Blue, a 1996 blue Chevrolet long bed, regular cab truck with a white camper shell and sliding glass windows. We crammed up to four people into this truck at times, or used it singly. The back we loaded with books, racks, banners, food and other supplies. We frequently forget one or two items, lost them on the road, broke them, or misplaced them in the various warehouse spaces we've used. Because of this we became masters of building things on the fly, like few other companies in the trade. From our hand-made 8 foot tall, 12 foot wide back-drop (quite an eye pleaser at the show, but heavy as the devil's left foot) to the monstrous racking we now use to a simple banner propped up with buckets of sand or placing Davis with a white TROLL LORD GAMES shirt in plain view, we've managed to show and advertise in unique ways.

But in any respect, our journeys on the road have almost always brought about some foolish incident or the other and it seems to me that the Crusader would be as good a place to recount some of these road tales. It is my intent to write a longer book about TLG's experiences, matched by few in the business, due to our overwhelming desire to not do things the way others do.



For now it seems most fitting to begin with Pentacon 2001 (or 2002) and the near disaster of one of our earliest shows.

Pentacon is an old show that has been running in Ft. Wayne, Indiana for many years. It's a good show and brings quite a crowd, sometimes up to 1200 people. After Gary Gygax's Canting Crew's release, we sought to really expand our presence and thought this show a perfect candidate. The Alliance crew, at the time a big distributor for us, bases out of Ft. Wayne, has a number of stores up there, and the drive seemed a fairly straight shot from here to there. Todd and I were waist deep in working the very complicated Gary Gygax's World Builder and Davis was freewheeling through the first installment in the Bergholt books for Inzae. It seemed a perfect opportunity to send him packing, cut down on the arguments between he and I in the office (mostly about cultural issues - not business ones), spread the word, and all with the added benefit of giving him some down time to write in the quiet.

So after loading the truck with a ton of books and racks, he climbed in and hit the road.

I would like to note before I continue that Davis and I both have this abhorrent hatred of spending money on silly things, and comfort is one those things (after you've slept on a city bench a few times, sleeping in a bed seems just a bit too much of a luxury). With that in mind we always leave late at night, around O dark 30 in order to skip a night in a hotel. If there are two drivers, one sleeps while the other one drives. If only one drives, he makes it the best he can and arrives when he arrives.

Davis hits the road sometime in the middle of the night and heads out east down interstate 40. This is our traditional road, taking us just about everywhere. He decided to head north on 55 to Missouri, then taking a right he can cross the Muddy River on 57 just west of Cairo. The normal route through Tennessee is a smidge shorter, but seems ever so long as that state



is just a long state. Davis is a seasoned traveler. Really seasoned, for he lived out of his truck in his anthropology days and camped all over the west, so I put him out of my mind entirely and got back to work.

I close down the shop on Thursday and head to the house, kicking back into normal mode. After some reading and TV I work for awhile on some projects, writing until late in the evening. I hit the hay and go to sleep somewhere around 1:00 in the a.m. This is my normal mode of operation, as I find working late at night is easier as the phone rings less.

Which is a bit ironic because somewhere around 1:30 or so the phone rings. Kathy, my wife, answers it and talks for a few minutes and then hands it on to me. It's Vera, Davis's wife.

"Ug, what's up V?"

"Davis has had a problem."

"Crap. Truck break down? Why didn't he call me?"

"He didn't want to wake the kids up. But no, the truck is fine, well not fine, it's in the impound yard in Cairo. Davis is in jail."

It seems that Davis was driving up through Illinois, hitting the 65 mile an hour zone doing about 90 and the state trooper there didn't think it was such a good idea. Pulling him over they found him with no drivers license in a truck that was not his, filled with mounds of books. It seems his story that he was going up to Ft. Wayne to sell them didn't go over very well either. In Davis' defense, he was extraordinarily tired and didn't bring his license as it was suspended.

The conversation ends as one might imagine; Vera and I are in her car heading east on I-40. We hang a left in Memphis and go north on 55 and when we hit Sikeston we turn right and cut over the Muddy River and arrive in Cairo about the time the sun is coming up. We went together because they took the truck

keys from him and one of us had to bring Davis home and the other go on to Pentacon. I can't really remember why we had to get Davis home but there was a reason for it.

We arrived in this rather strange little town and started looking for the jail; we drove to a gas station, got some bad directions from a sleepy eyed young lady, and tooled on into town. After a few minutes we pulled into downtown and stopped at a stop light to look around.

It was very quiet, the sun just peeking up and not a car in sight. No shops were open and the light we stopped at was blinking red. I had the windows open of course because V's Jetta didn't have a working air conditioner (Davis wouldn't fix it because he hates air conditioners). The light was blinking on and off: tick, tick, tick.

As Vera and I sit there looking around, this fellow walks in front of the car, never a look to the left or right, just moving on forward as if in a daze. Long hair, bearded, rumpled clothes, baggy pants, and dress shoes. He's hoisting his pants up. It takes me only a second to realize, so I open the door and stand up and out of the car, "Davis. What are you doing?"

He turns around, not a look of surprise in his eyes, and says "Thank god! I have to take a @&*#!"

"Well get in, there a gas station down the street."

He hops in and explains that the jail didn't have a working toilet so they let him go so he could find a place to relieve his discomfort. Once done and coffeed up I asked if he needed to go back and he said no, it was all taken care. It seems the cops were working a massive drug bust and had scores of people in there; the sheriff didn't even want to haul Davis in but had to once they ran him through the system. They sat on him all night, actually joking most of the time (which is reminiscent of my time in the big house...for a different kind of expired license), but eventually when he had to take care of his business they cut him loose.

Always be careful when Davis tells you this; in his own way he certainly means it and eventually he'll actually take care of it. Concerning the Illinois state police, well that is another story.

So several hours later, with barely an hour's worth of sleep under my belt, I found myself listening to some Johnny Cash cruising up 57 in Old Blue. I arrived in Ft. Wayne late on Friday afternoon. The con folks were very nice but on the verge of selling the booth. I piled everything on a big hand cart and wheeled it into the show. In no time I was sitting there in a chair, thinking to myself, that only a few hours ago I was in my living room looking forward to a quiet weekend.

But I can't help but wonder if things don't happen the way they do for a reason, because I found my booth set between two fellows that I became fast friends with: Joe Goodman from Goodman Games and Marcus King from Titan Games.

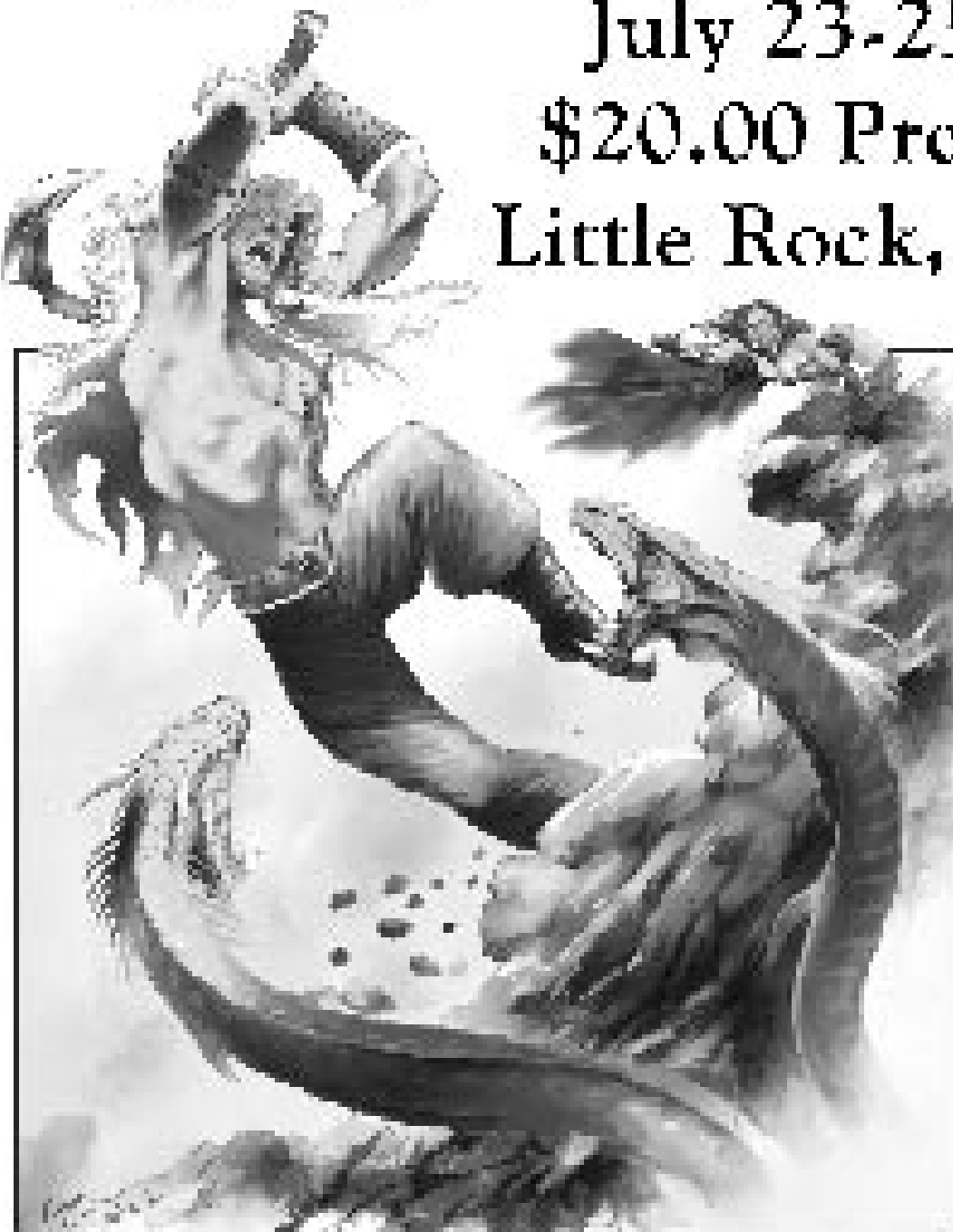


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“It’s a trap!”

- Admiral Ackbar¹

Traps are a classic and essential part of captivating adventures. Over the years, I’ve developed a personal philosophy for the design and use of traps in my games. It has not been a completely conscious effort, though I have learned some lessons from my haphazard trap methodologies of the past.

I now follow four steps during trap design:

1. Determine Intention
2. Determine Craftsmanship
3. Determine Placement
4. Determine Mitigation

I have come to prefer my campaign world to have verisimilitude. Verisimilitude is not realism, but plausibility. We know the fantasy setting isn’t our world, but we must be able to believe it is a working world. This allows players and Castle Keepers alike to have some ability to know what to expect during the game, and helps to ensure that “reality” in the game follows some consistent rules of its own. Many of these rules might be akin to the rules of our world and society; others follow the dictates of the influence of magic.

In this spirit, I started to redefine the logical use of traps in my campaigns. Eventually, I settled on four easy steps for ensuring that traps are sensible, thoughtful and useful devices for creating memorable adventures.

For the purposes of this column, I am not discussing the cost of installing these traps, only a method of evaluating the challenges they present to adventurers.



Step 1 – Determine Intention

The primary lesson that I’ve learned is that traps must have an intention. This seems elementary and obvious, but it’s something I find useful to keep in mind as I brainstorm ideas.

In my games, traps are designed to operate with one of four primary intentions: to kill, to maim, to restrain, or to warn. A player should be able to expect, in most circumstances, that traps will operate according to their design. A trap that is designed to kill the victim, if laid by a master rogue, will probably instantly kill the unfortunate soul who triggers it.

Note that “to protect” is not one of the intentions. While that may be the motivation of the one *placing* the trap, “protection” is merely a possible secondary function of a trap. Anyone desiring to “protect” something will create a trap that has one of the primary four intentions. The trap’s intention depends on the value of whatever is to be protected and the alignment and motivations of the trap placer.

All traps, whether physical or magical, will possess one of the four intentions, as planned by the trap placer. A *trick*, by contrast, does not have any of these intentions, and is designed simply to confuse or mislead anyone encountering it.

The intention of the trap helps to determine the rest of the characteristics, including craftsmanship, mitigation and placement.

Killing Traps

Traps that are designed to kill are ideally hidden, quick and merciless. The designer of a killing trap cares only that the trap is as lethal as possible when triggered. To this end, killing traps are generally constructed by the most skilled trap smiths, installed by master rogues, and use the best materials to avoid degradation of efficiency. Poisons are very often elements of a killing trap, to help ensure a fatal outcome. Examples of killing traps may include guillotine-bladed doorways and poisonous needle traps.

Killing traps are the most expensive to create and the most difficult to maintain. Killing traps often require remarkable feats of engineering to hide the trigger, conceal the killing device, and ensure the mechanism or magic operates quickly enough to be fatal.

Mechanical killing traps often require regular maintenance at some expense. Gears must be greased, counterweights must be tested and secured, and poisons must be replenished. Blades, if present, must be oiled and sharpened if necessary to ensure quick action and rust prevention. Magical traps or trap components may need renewal. The maintenance itself is often incredibly dangerous and is therefore expensive in its own right. (Enterprising rogues can occasionally make a significant living as trap technicians for the wealthy or powerful.)

Maiming Traps

Traps may be designed specifically to maim. A bear trap is one simple example. A maiming trap is not designed to kill outright, but to weaken, slow, and potentially disable a victim. Maiming traps also require clever concealment and a quick trigger. However, instead of targeting vital areas, maiming traps are designed to cripple extremities.

A trap placer may prefer a maiming trap for a number of reasons. The trap placer may desire to keep the victim alive in order to extract information. A maiming trap can prevent an interloper's escape while decreasing the risk of an accidental death in a populated area. Certain characters may prefer maiming traps to fatal alternatives for reasons of mercy.

In general, the best maiming traps are just as expensive to construct and maintain as the best killing traps. They require the same clever engineering, but are bent toward different goals. Maiming traps may use weaker sorts of poison that cause illness or paralysis, rather than fatal varieties.

Restraining Traps

Restraining traps are those that imprison or entangle victims, but do no physical or mental harm. A restraining trap will almost never injure or kill a victim, except in the most unusual of circumstances. Examples of restraining traps include shallow self-closing pits and falling nets.

The greatest variable with a restraining trap is the effective duration of the restraint. A net trap may not hold the victim very long, but may be effective in situations where a response can be directed within a few seconds. Other designs may be effective, but in general, restraining traps sacrifice overall effectiveness to ensure the relative safety of the victim. As such, restraining traps are often paired with warning traps to ensure a rapid response.

For many principled, good-aligned characters, restraining traps are the most effective, acceptable option.

A paralysis or sleep poison might be used in a restraining trap, but almost always in a gaseous form. Other applications would commonly require injury to the victim to apply the poison.

Warning Traps

Warning traps can be as elaborate as magically-triggered bells or as simple as gravel strewn across a floor, but the goal is always the same – to provide an alert in response to an intruder. Warning

traps almost never injure or incapacitate the victim, but may be paired with other traps that have those effects.

The relative cost and effectiveness of a warning trap largely depends on the area to be protected and the location where the alert is communicated. Mechanical warnings that encompass large areas and provide an audible alarm to a wide zone will be hideously expensive and difficult to design. Magical means can help make the protection of broad areas more efficient, but are generally prohibitively expensive for small areas, such as a private room in an inn.

Warning traps have a significant drawback in that they can allow the quick-thinking intruder to escape. However, the most resourceful trap placers invest in silent warning traps that give no indication to the victim that the traps have been triggered.

Step 2 – Determine Craftsmanship

Craftsmanship consists of two pieces – the nature of the trap, and the skill with which it was constructed. Is the trap magical, mechanical or some combination of the two? What are the resources of the individual commissioning or installing the trap?



For example, is a killing trap an elaborate, silent micro-thin blade system designed to decapitate at the blink of an eye, or is it a simple dead fall of a ton of granite? Traps set by individuals with fewer resources (such as lower levels of experience) tend to be simpler, less expensive and easier to detect, avoid and disarm (hence, they have a lower base CL). A trap may be well-designed but poorly implemented, also reducing its overall effectiveness and concealment.

Step 3 – Determine Placement

Where is the trap to be used? Factors in determining trap placement include frequency of traffic, structural limitations, and value of areas or items to be protected.

A common corridor in a palace is not likely to have a pressure tile that triggers a trap of fatal intent, though a silent warning trap may be very effective. Fatal traps tend to be reserved for those places where access to the area or item may be harmful to the trap placer. A secret corridor that can be used to bypass guard posts might be a good candidate for a fatal trap, as would a chest protecting the crown jewels of a kingdom.

In general, high-traffic areas are not trapped unless a circumstance dictates the area is restricted. For example, during a coronation, certain rooms and corridors of a castle may be forbidden to access, and may have magical restraining traps in place for a time.

Naturally, intruders are going to understand that traps are less likely to be of the killing or maiming variety in high-traffic areas. To counter this assumption, a hideously deadly trap may be installed in plain sight in a commonly traveled area, but the residents would probably know enough to avoid the trigger, and over time, would do so instinctively. An intruder unfamiliar with the area would not have that advantage, and woe to the rogue that assumes a well-traveled hall is safe.

Step 4 – Determine Mitigation

Mitigation involves considering all factors to determine the overall effectiveness of the trap. Mitigation enables the Castle Keeper to set reasonable Challenge Levels and trap effects.

Consider that, with no other mitigating factors, a rogue with a 16 Dexterity will have a 50% chance of success with Dexterity checks against Challenge Levels (CLs) of an equal level. For each level of difference between the rogue's level and the Challenge Level, this probability changes by 5%.

As such, a 6th level rogue with a 16 Dexterity has a 40% chance of detecting a trap set by an 8th level rogue. A 6th level rogue with a 13 Dexterity has a 35% chance of detecting the same trap.

Remember this before placing extremely difficult traps. Remember to consider mitigation to adjust these CLs. When in doubt, CLs near the rogue's level are usually a significant challenge.

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Mitigating CLs

Traps can have up to four different CLs: placing the trap, detecting the trap, disarming the trap and avoiding the effects of the trap. I recommend using different values for these CLs. A single CL of 6 for a given trap does not help to illustrate that a trap is well hidden but very easy to disarm, for example.

The base CL is always the level of the rogue that installed the trap. A complex trap may also include contributions from mages and engineers, but the rogue's skill determines how the entire package comes together.

If a rogue attempts to set a trap, the base CL is a little harder to determine. I suggest using a table, like the one below, to calculate a sum of all mitigating factors. You could simply set a value based arbitrarily on the resources and intent poured into the trap construction. A complex killing trap that is very well concealed probably has a high base CL (8 or 9) for the purposes of trap placement.

One possible mitigating factor is the state of repair of the trap. Physical (and possibly magical) traps are subject to the rigors of time. Wear, corrosion, rot, magical decay or other influences can reduce or negate the effectiveness of a trap. A trap designed to kill may simply do physical damage. A trap designed to alert the occupants of a stone tower may work, but less effectively, warning fewer foes over a smaller area. These factors can decrease the CL for detection, disarming or both.

A poorly designed trap may be easier to avoid when triggered, if it works at all. In this case, the Castle Keeper may wish to modify the CL for the Dexterity saving throw.

With some practice, you can get a "feel" for the CLs that are appropriate for the traps you place in your adventures, and this process will become much quicker.

The table below offers some suggestions for mitigating factors when determining the CLs of a trap. This is not an exhaustive table, but may help you to flesh out your own mitigation guidelines for your game. For example, only one entry is provided for magic components, but you may choose to have several depending on the nature of the component used. In addition, you may disagree with some of the values provided, for various reasons. Simply modify or add to them to suit your own tastes!

Mitigating Trap Effects

With no mitigating factors, a trap performs exactly as intended. A killing trap in good repair and well-maintained is fatal when triggered – unless it is avoided with a saving throw. However, consider the same trap after sitting in a state of tension for a dozen years in an abandoned keep. Should it still be fatal if triggered, or should it cause damage instead? Should it still operate, or just be a visible feature to make adventurers paranoid? (This is highly effective, on occasion, and I recommend it!)

This is a very subjective area, but there are a few approaches that can guide a CastleKeeper's decisions. Consider how the trap delivers upon its intent. Are there any factors in the current situation that hinder or improve on the trap's ability to achieve that intent? If so, list the factors and determine what impact, if any, those factors have on the operation and effect of the trap.

For example, a chest is trapped with a poisoned needle. The chest rests in a lord's castle, owned by the court wizard, and the trap is meticulously maintained and the poison renewed frequently to ensure its potency. However, after a war, the castle is abandoned, and looters were unable to discover the wizard's secret workroom. The chest has been idle for years now. The poison has not been renewed.

Factor	Set Trap CL	Detect Trap CL	Disarm Trap CL	Saving Throw CL
Level of the rogue installing the trap		Base CL = Rogue's level	Base CL = Rogue's level	Base CL = Rogue's level
Poor condition	-	-1	-2	-3
Fair condition	-	-1	-1	-1
Good condition	-	0	0	0
Excellent condition	-	+1	+1	+2
Excellent quality materials	+1	+1	+1	0
Professional design	+1 per 1000 GP spent on design	+1 per 1000 GP spent on design	+1 per 1000 GP spent on design	+1
Magic components	+1	*	*	0
Small trigger area (ex. needle)	+2	+1	+2	0
Large trigger area (ex. pit, large blade).	0	-1	0	+1
Silent operation	+2	+2	0	+2
Complex mechanism (many moving parts)	+2	+1	0	-1
Simple mechanism (few moving parts)	-2	-1	-1	+1
Identical trap encountered before	-2	-2	-1	-2

* May require magical means to detect or disarm some, or all, of the trap. Rogues can detect magical traps, but may have a significant penalty (I suggest +6 to the CL).

Does the poison wear out completely, or does it dry and retain a somewhat weaker potency? Consider the party's level, the level of the wizard who owned the chest, and the value of the contents of the chest.

In this case, I recommend that the poison be dangerous, but not guaranteed fatal. If the poison was originally fatal with a failed saving throw, consider changing the poison's onset time to offer more opportunity for a *neutralize poison* spell or antidote to be administered. You may also decide that the poison simply inflicts Constitution damage. If the poison originally inflicted Hit Point or Attribute damage, consider lessening the effects by some fair degree.

A note about mitigation of Killing traps...

I'm a firm believer that some traps should exist that cause instant death if the victim fails a saving throw. This is largely a philosophical matter, and Castle Keepers often differ on this point. From my point of view, traps very often do exactly as they intend, and many traps intend to kill. Mitigating circumstances may make the traps easier to detect and avoid, but not any less dangerous if triggered. If I alter my campaign so that all traps are dangerous but non-lethal, I'm stretching the limits of plausibility.

If you use killing traps that instantly slay in your campaign, ensure that your players know your philosophy and adjust their play. I tell my players that I will be fair, but to expect the worst, and work to avoid or neutralize traps whenever possible.

One folly often witnessed is that of a character triggering a trap that could not be disarmed, just because the player knew it likely wouldn't kill outright. In certain game systems or with certain Castle Keepers, that strategy is valid, but I find that approach distasteful. In my games, there are no certainties, and any trap has the potential to kill. The players, and their characters, had better act accordingly.

Sample Trap and Mitigation

Burning Breath

This magical trap is of a sort often seen in the lairs of powerful wizards. It is a semi-intelligent trap, relying on a *magic mouth* to speak a magical word. A false door is installed on one side of a corridor. The door is ensorcelled with *fire trap* by an 8th level wizard. It has also, at some expense, been enchanted to open with a magical word. One *magic mouth* is cast on the wall opposite the door, and another a short distance beyond.

When an individual, who is not the wizard or accompanied by the wizard, passes by the *magic mouth*, it will activate and speak the magical word, causing the trap to explode on the unwitting trespasser. When the door explodes, a second *magic mouth* activates to shout a short, repeating alert of "Intruder!" a total of 25 times.

This is a killing trap accompanied by a warning trap. It was designed and set by a 7th level rogue with the obvious assistance of the 8th level wizard. The base CL for detecting, disarming and avoiding the trap is 7. The magic has not deteriorated in any way and retains full potency as described in the *C&C Players Handbook*.

Now we can attempt to use mitigation to determine the real CLs in this case.

Detecting the trap is the most difficult part. The only moving part is the door. As such, detecting the trap is slightly more difficult (+1 CL). In addition, the rogue must search for traps in the specific area to even have a chance of detecting the false door or the *magic mouth*, and this very action would trigger the trap. The rogue cannot stand at a distance and have any chance of detecting the magical traps or the false door.

The rogue is in a precarious position and would require magical aid to enable approach to the *magic mouth* or the door. Further, a cleric or wizard would have to *detect magic* in the corridor to even realize that magical aid might be necessary.

The Castle Keeper has to realize that unless the players are very cautious and happen to have a *detect magic* spell enabled, they may not have a chance of detecting this trap before it is too late. That is why this trap is a killing trap. It is designed to be extremely hard to detect and avoid.

Even if the presence of the trap is known, the nature of the trap may not be obvious. However, players with a healthy sense of mortality may understand that an enchanted door with two enchanted locations on the opposite wall is an ominous sign for the party.

The first possible solution is to use *invisibility* or some other concealment to allow the rogue to approach the door and remove the hinges. If this is done, the rogue does not trigger the *magic mouth* and can investigate the door to discover it is false. Due to the difficulty of detecting a false door without opening it (+1 CL), the overall detection CL is 8.

If successful, the rogue can attempt to disarm the trap by removing the hinges from the door. This simple mechanism makes the trap easier to disarm, providing a -1 CL adjustment for a disarm CL of 6.

The second possible solution is to use *dispel magic* to negate the *magic mouth* and *fire trap* enchantments. An attempt to *dispel* need only affect the first *mouth* or the *fire trap* to prevent the second *mouth* from voicing the alarm.

Conclusion

Every Castle Keeper has a slightly different take on trap use in adventures, and each take is as "correct" as any other. It is my hope that I have provided some ideas and a springboard for developing your own trap-use philosophy in your games.

Until next time, happy designing!

Citations

1. *Star Wars – Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*, Lucasfilm, Ltd. (1983)

20 QUESTIONS THROWN AT MARK ALLEN

Today we sent down with Mark Allen whose been doing art for TLG for about a decade and has become our illustrator for horror in residence. Its always out desire to get at the root of what drives people; to understand their essence, what makes them tic, to understand the real “them.” With that in mind Davis mused over the 20 most important questions he could conjure up and we threw them at good old Mark Allen.

1. Most of the art you have produced for Troll Lord Games has a macabre or nightmarish aspect to it. So my question would be, do you enjoy zombie movies? If so, what is your best guess as to how fast a zombie could run?

Zombie movies are fun. Usually the dead guy is boring. But not in zombie movies. In zombie movies rotting animated corpses are fun. Limbs come off, they have funny walks, sometimes zombies have funny lines, and they just keep on coming.

George Romero’s original black & white film “Night of the Living Dead” is still one of my favorites. Yes it is old and it’s black & white, and the screaming blonde chick is annoying... but the atmosphere of the movie is fantastic.

“Thriller” has dancing zombies, which are the most un-boring zombies of all.

Zombies moved pretty slow back in the 60s and 70s. I mean a girl could run and fall down a few times and the zombies still wouldn’t catch up. They moved about as fast as granny in the card section at the supermarket. But nowadays some of the new-millennium zombies are souped up and can run very fast and can leap great distances, like Wizards of the Coast got hold of them.

2. Who do you think would win in a fight, Tigger from Winnie the Pooh or Hobbes in Calvin and Hobbes?

Hobbes – he seems a little scrapper.

3. If you had the option to relive your life as a deity from Nordic Mythology, which deity would you choose?

Thor - so I can shout “hammer time” and dance up and down the rainbow bridge sky-writing in lightning. Just be thankful I’m not your god.

4. Everyone has their ideal home. Can you describe what your ideal home might look like? Unless its boring, then describe some good eats

I’ve always loved log homes. Rustic looking with a stone fireplace and big log rafter beams. With lots of forest all around it and a little pond. Yeah - a log home with a steak and potato.

5. What is the least favorite book you were required to read in college? Did you read it? If so, why didn’t you stick it to the man?



I never went to college. I went straight to work in a factory after high school. That's not a joke. I come from a very blue-collar background.

6. If you had to go to a gunfight with a knife, what type of knife would you choose and why?

It probably wouldn't matter much in a gunfight, unless it can deflect a bullet, but I'll say a KA-BAR knife. I like its name.... KA-BAR! Sounds like super-hero sound effect, like KA-POW! or KA-BAM!. They are standard US military issue for a reason, so I'll go with that.

7. Lady Gaga is a fairly popular pop recording artist. Steve is listening to her constantly. Do you like her wardrobe?

It makes people talk, which is good if you are an entertainer for a living. I believe that half-naked girls with porn-hair know how to have fun.

8. Who do think is the most overrated artist of the 20th century?

Picasso. Sorry, I just don't get it.

9. Who is your favorite superhero and supervillain in the Marvel Universe? Who are you favorite in the DC universe?

My favorite Marvel superhero since I was a kid has always been Iron Man. I'm eager to see the new movie – they could not have picked a better actor to play Tony Stark, imho. My favorite supervillian would be Green Goblin –the comic book/cartoon version. He looked like a goblin and had pumpkin bombs and a cool ride.

I was never much into DC, I must admit. Marvel was my comic of choice. But I did own a handful of DC comics. A few Superman, Aquaman, and Batman comics. I did have a Mr. Miracle issue #2 at one time, from 1970. It's long gone – I did not understand the value of comics



when I was a kid. If I had to choose one DC superhero, I'd say Batman was pretty cool. My DC supervillain pick would have to be the Joker. He has the cool evil grin and the crazy hair. Plus, like the green goblin, purple and chartreuse always look great together.

10. If you could illustrate one book, which book would you choose?

Off the top of my head, maybe Tolkien's "The Hobbit". It's my favorite of all the Tolkien books and I love the visuals that come into my head when I read it.

11. Why don't you want to illustrate children's books?

I wouldn't say that I don't want to illustrate children's books. I would say that they might need to be the right kind of children's book. Something fantastical would keep my interest and excitement. Some types of children's books are not necessarily a good representation of my abilities or my best work. I would rather play on my strengths. I think I could do more with children's books suited to a fantastical style. Gerald Brom's storybooks would be a good example of the type of children's book I'd like to do. Tim Burton's work would be a good reference as well. They don't have to be dark

and scary, but more detailed and atmospheric than perhaps a cartoonish type children's book would be

12. If string theory is correct and our universe is but a bubble between the confluence of several universes it follows that our universe can be completely destroyed in less than a blink of an eye should more 'strings' collide and 'pop' the bubble. Does this thought concern you?

We cannot change this, so no. Just enjoy life and try to be a decent person to yourself and to others.

13. Speaking of calamitous events, when civilization comes to an end, what three items would you take with into the wilderness in order to maximize your survival?

A compound bow & arrow set-up, a big knife, and a headband.

14. How many pets do you have? Do you like them better than people?

We have 3 cats, 2 dogs, and an immortal rainbow shark. I might say I like my dogs better than some people. The cats and fish just sort of do their own thing, but they're cool.

15. If you could have one piece of original art from all of time and space, what would it be?

As much as I love Frank Frazetta's work, if I could choose only one single significant piece of original art, just for the pure enjoyment of staring at it and admiring



it, I might choose Michael Whelan's Stormbringer, from the series of Michael Moorcock's "Elric" books published by DAW in the 1980's. I was very much into those books, growing up, and I've always loved that painting – the colors, the green sky, his yellow jerkin and purple cape, the composition and angle, Elric's pose, the elements and details in it, like the blowing horn and the bricks in the skull tower. It's a cool painting.



There are hundreds upon hundreds of classic paintings or pieces of art from all time and space that I could pick, but I would choose something that I really enjoyed and meant something in my life personally. Whelan's Stormbringer would be a painting that comes to mind quickly.

It's hard to pick just one really, because there are many more strong contenders that are of equal value to me.

16. When you were growing up and just discovering your artistic talents, did you draw on walls? Did your parents teach you not to draw on walls? How did they do this?

I am told I did. In fact, I am told as an infant I painted the walls from my crib. Picture what you will.

By three years old I must have moved over to paper and crayon, as I have no recollection myself of any wall-drawing and my father has a stack of my drawings on paper, from three years of age on up.

17. My favorite medium is Rasputin because he had a great beard. Who is yours and why?

I would say Derek Acorah, because he has a cool Liverpool accent. I love how he says the words "area" and "spirit person". I don't believe he's a real medium though, but plays one on TV.

The Crusader Vol. 6, No. 23

18. How when and why did you meet the Troll Lords?

I have been working with the Troll Lords since 2002, after mailing them an envelope of black & white fantasy drawings (the drawings weren't very good, imo). I wanted to see if I could make a living using my art abilities, making money doing something that I enjoy. The first step would be to get something published. So I did something to make that happen.

I don't recall where I had heard of Troll Lord Games, but I had their address and sent them an envelope of drawings. Steve emailed me and said he had some stuff for me to do if I wanted it. And that was it. My first publishing gig ever was "Heart of Glass". The very first illustration I worked on was a Soul Thief.

I finally met Steve face-to-face for the first time at Gary Con 2 this past March. For 8 years we corresponded by email and spoke only once on the telephone. I have not met any of the other Trolls yet.



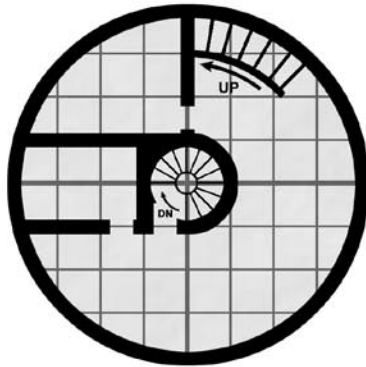
19. How many hats do you own and how many do you wear and why?

I have four or five hats around – I wear two of them regularly, although one of them is becoming a favorite and sees more use than the other lately.

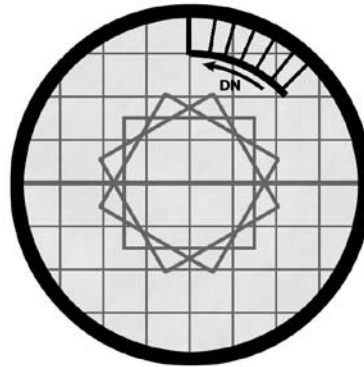
Hats are handy when you don't want to mess with your hair. They also keep your head warm and can keep your head from becoming sun burned. They can also help to keep the sun out of your eyes. Sometimes they are just a novelty and look cool, like my top hat.

Mark's work appears in: *Heart of Glass*, *Monsters & Treasure*, *Monsters & Treasure of Ahrde*, *Tainted Lands*, *Winter Runes*, *Mortality of Green*, *I Am an Archeologist*, numerous *Crusader* magazines, *Shades of Mist*, *Gods & Monsters* to name but a few.

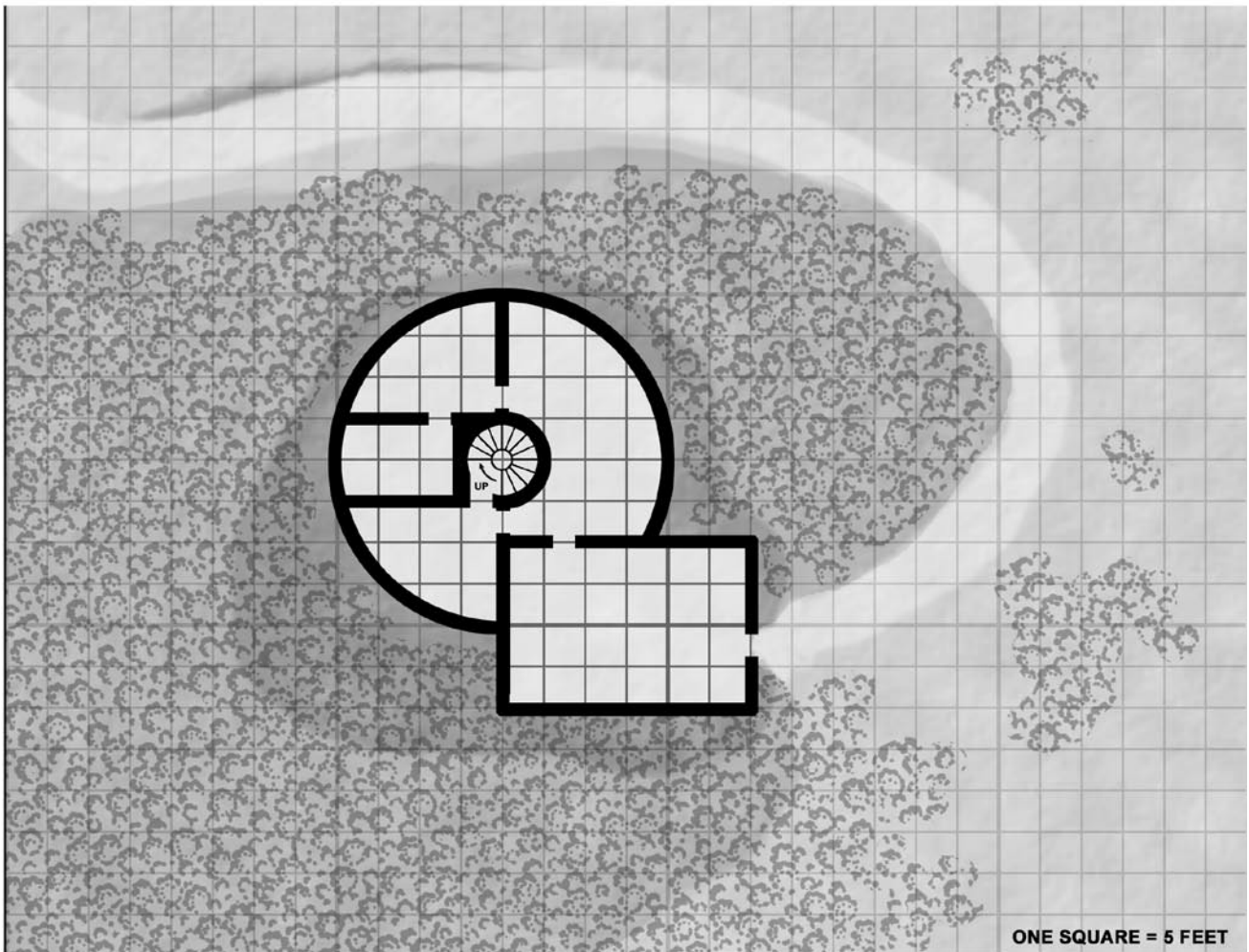
WIZARDS COTTAGE

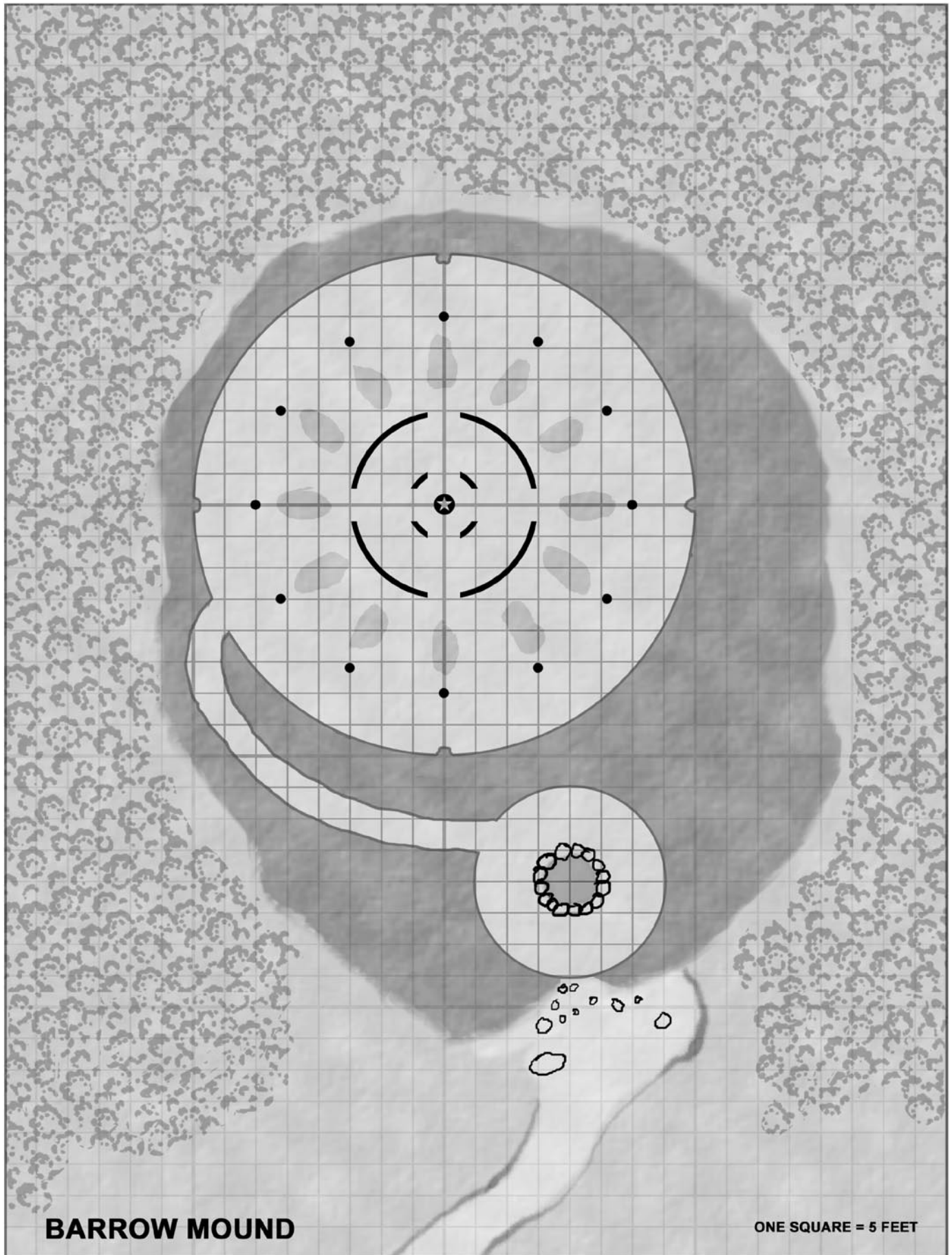


LEVEL TWO



LEVEL THREE
(ROOF)





BARROW MOUND

ONE SQUARE = 5 FEET

THE CRYSTAL CRYPT

Ultimate Crypt #1

By John William Wright

A C&C Encounter Crypt for Levels 7-9

Setup

“The Crystal Crypt” is an encounter for Castles & Crusades for a party of 4-6 adventurers of approximately level 7-9. The encounter is designed to be easily placed within any dungeon or campaign, with the “entrance” being an artifact known as the Gate-Shard that can be placed in an appropriate locale that, when activated, transports those who are touching it to the crypt.

A millennium ago, an Elven warrior named Scelibar of the Green Woods made his legacy in leading his kinsfolk against a terrible sorceress named Varana. Unfortunately, his great success also leads to his demise, as his arm was pierced with a cursed blade during the battle. Scelibar died, and magical efforts to restore him proved futile. The kinsfolk of the Green Woods feared Scelibar’s body had been tainted with evil, and might rise as an animus warrior of foulness. But his honor and great deeds demanded proper enshrinement. The magi of the Elves worked together to find a solution, and thus created the Crystal Crypt.

The Crypt’s actual location is unknown and impossible to locate by physical means – it might exist so deep within ancient stone that it is impenetrable, or it could exist on some plane separated from the material world. Where the Elven magi hid it is undiscoverable. The magi had successfully established a crypt filled with riches that would honor the heroism of Scelibar, but created a deadly prison to both ensure that he could not return as an agent of darkness or that unsuspecting grave-robbers might accidentally release him.

Accessing the Crystal Crypt

The magi made sure there is only one way to access the crypt – through a small crystal known as the “Gate-Shard.” Even powerful wizards who may visit the crypt will find that scrying spells go awry, and the distance to the crypt will always be the same – as if it is a room always moving away at infinitesimal speed, blurring and shrinking into nothingness. Only by holding or touching the Gate-Shard and speaking the proper command word will one be able to access the crypt. The Gate-Shard is approximately six inches long, seemingly an extended clear quartz crystal, which turns a bright, radiant blue when the incantation is uttered. The crystal can only reach the crypt, nowhere else. Precisely two hours from its use, it will return to whatever location it was at last outside the crypt. It will take the individual in its possession with it, but those not touching will be stranded in the crypt. The Gate-Shard may only be used in each direction once per day. The Shard can be moved or taken anywhere at all external to the crypt, and probably has been over the centuries.

How and why the artifact is in whatever dungeon or locale is the choice of the Castle Keeper. The command to activate it is “Scelibar is dead.” How the party learns this is also up to the Castle Keeper – perhaps a scroll that was kept with the Gate-Shard held

it in some ancient Elven tongue (which may or may not be in the same locale as the Shard itself); perhaps an Intelligence check by an arcane party member; or maybe an appropriate knowledge SIEGE check by an Elf in the party to know legends of Scelibar could also reveal some clue to the command (i.e. at his funeral his followers were heard in legend to weep in unison “Scelibar is dead! Scelibar is dead!). Whatever course of action the Castle Keeper chooses, he should make this an interesting challenge for the party to discover, and allow for the flexibility to mold it into the existing campaign or dungeon as is fitting. The command works in both directions, taking the individual or party to the crypt and thus returning (if before the two hours are up) to the location left from. If an individual says the command word alone, he or she will find their self in the crypt alone. They may return fast, but it will mean waiting another day before trying to access the crypt again.

The Crypt

The Crystal Crypt itself is just slightly larger than a 50’ x 50’ room, with 20’ high stone roofing. The walls, floor and ceiling are all a uniform black marble, tightly fitted together with no visible cracks, and seams so fine even the finest of blades or tools cannot get between them. Attempts to break or dig through the walls will be completely unsuccessful. Spells to meld stone will result in a patch of liquid surface which will re-harden and smooth back over within minutes. Anyone attempting to pass through stone will be in for a horrible surprise (left to Castle Keeper’s discretion as to whether they simply find endless stone or endless void).

E. Entrance space – Adventures using the Gate-Shard will always appear in this one area in the SW corner of the crypt.

A. Crystal Sarcophagus of Scelibar – The body of Scelibar lies in stasis in this large, clear sarcophagus, which looks like an enormous crystal resting on a rectangular pedestal of the same black marble as the walls. The sarcophagus is raised on a platform of the stone, two steps high, in the center of the room. Adventurers will be able to easily see that Scelibar looks to be absolutely preserved, and his treasure is quite visible: the body rests on a pile (within the crystal as well) of coins of all kinds (10,000gp in various coinage), glittering gems (20,000 in total) and exquisite jewelry (12 pieces worth 12,000gp). He wears beautifully crafted full plate armor (+4), with elaborate gauntlets (Ogre Power), belt (Charisma +2) and boots (Elvenkind). There is a ring on each hand (AC +1 and Regeneration), and a circlet about his head (Circlet of Underwater Action as helm), crowning the most striking and powerful facial features of this long-dead Elven hero. A cloak of green and brown hue (Protection against Evil +2) surrounds the body and a long-sword (+3 Sylvan blade) and a bow (+2 Oathbow) are rested alongside the body.

B. Body of Previous Adventurer – Next to one of the White crystals in the room lays the body of a very well equipped, but very dead human fighter. The crystal in front of him appears to have taken damage from the bastard sword (+2) in the dead warrior’s hands.

The fighter's head appears to be crushed inward, and the floor is stained with dry blood. The body is rotting somewhat, and because of that there is the odor of rot and death in the room (CON save CL -2 or nauseous and -1 to all rolls for 1d4 hours). The armor was very nice studded leather (+2), but will need to be cleaned and purified before wearing. The adventurer has a backpack with a grappling hook and 50' of rope, rations that are rotting, and a *Chime of Opening*. He wears a Ring of AC +2 on one hand and a Ring of Water Breathing on the other. The whole scene would lead a knowledgeable adventurer party to conclude that this fellow died perhaps 2 to 3 months previously. The boots may have been magical, but have been shredded around the dead human's mangled feet. Attached to a plain belt is a sack with: 38pp, 29gp, 17sp and 4 gems worth 2000gp total. Strewn about are broken, milky-quartz shards that seem to be broken off of the large crystal totem the body lies in front of.

The Crystals

The defenses of the crypt lie in the crystals surrounding the room. The white (W) crystals turn into the Crystal Guardians (magical constructs); the red (R) crystals deliver catastrophic fire-balls that explode through the room; the blue (B) crystals acts as a *Finger of Death* spell targeted at the closest adventurer to it; the yellow (Y) crystals crisscross the room with deadly *chain lightning* spells; and the green (G) crystals will cast *Trap the Soul* on the nearest adventure and deposit them in a little green crystal in front of the large totem. To successfully breach the crypt, all crystals must be destroyed individually. The Guardians will move and attack when the R, B, Y & G crystals are attacked. Trying to hit or break the sarcophagus randomly triggers the powers of the other crystals thusly:

Roll 1d4:

- 1 Sarcophagus glows red and red crystals activate, filling room with two level 6 fireballs (or one if one crystal is destroyed already), Dexterity save for half-damage
- 2 Sarcophagus glows blue and blue crystal activates, targeting nearest party member with *Finger of Death* spell
- 3 Sarcophagus glows yellow and yellow crystals activate, and two level 7 *chain-lightning* spells crisscross the room, with nearest party member as primary target for each (only one if either crystal is destroyed first)
- 4 Sarcophagus turns green and *Trap the Soul* emits as per spell at nearest party member. * There might be a green crystal with a "trapped soul" near this, if the Castle Keeper wishes to have one – perhaps the soul of some nonplayer character connected to the larger campaign

Even after some crystals are destroyed, continuing to attack the sarcophagus will result in a role. If the crystal or crystals attached to the outcome are destroyed, nothing happens, but a roll result for crystal(s) still existing continues as normal. The crystals have effective AC of 22 and 60 HPs each for purposes of attack and destruction, and must be hit with blunt damage and are impervious to magic excepting spells which create blunt damage.

The Crusader Vol. 6, No. 23

New Monster

Crystal Guardians

NO. ENCOUNTERED: 4

SIZE: Large

HD: 10 (d10)

MOVE: 20 ft.

AC: 26

ATTACKS: Slam (4d8+4)

SAVES: P

INT: None

ALIGNMENT: Neutral

TYPE: Magical construct

TREASURE: 8 (beyond this particular Crypt)

XP: 1550+10

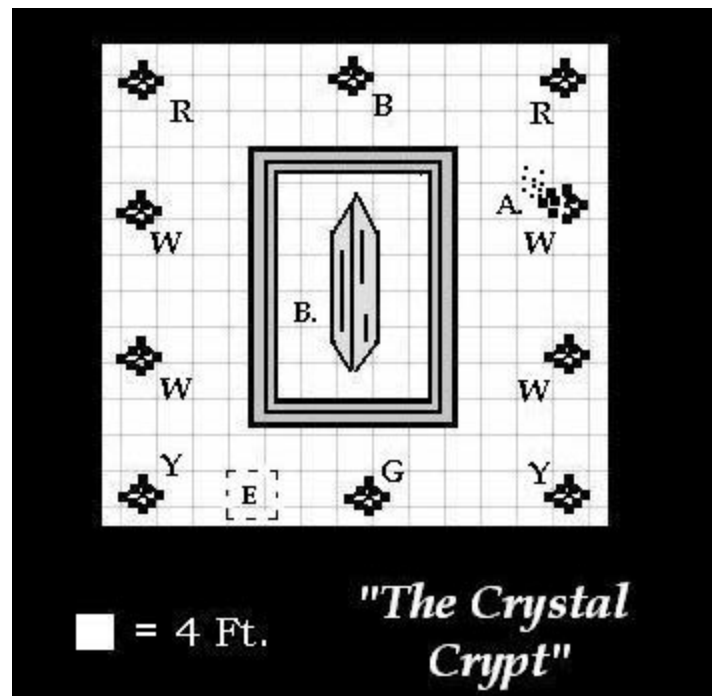
SPECIAL: Breath Weapon, Immunity to Magic

Breath Weapon: Once every 7 rounds a Crystal Guardian can breath forth an *Ice Storm* as a level 5 Wizard spell.

Immunity to Magic: The Crystal Guardians are immune to most magic spells. Spells dealing with cold or ice restore HPs to full for any Guardian affected.

The HPs of the four Guardians in the Crypt are: 80, 77, 57 and 36 (the last being the partially damaged one in front of the dead adventurer at B.)

Only after all Crystals and Guardians have been destroyed can the party work to smash through the sarcophagus crystal. Scelibar is really dead – the fears of his kinsfolk were unfounded, and he will not rise as an animus. However, there is a preservative gas trapped within the crystal which will release when the sarcophagus (AC 24, 100 HP) is finally breach; a gas which will disperse quickly through the room and saves must be made or affected party members will take 6d6+6 damage as portions of their skin, limbs, digits become crystalline and break off . . . Restoration will be needed!



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In all of towering Aufstrag there is but one physical gate, the *Ahargon Den*, the Great Maw to those who pay homage to Unklar; but to others, it is called the *Art et Unklar*, the Mouth of Darkness, for those who entered those dreadful gates were devoured by the malice of Aufstrag.

The dwarves fashioned Ahargon Den for Unklar, for in those distant days he bound them to him by chains of servitude that they could not break. And they put all of their skill into the project and made for Aufstrag an unbreakable set of doors. They cast the doors of bronze, laced with iergild, that magical ore from beyond the world's of men. They scripted runes into the doors, words of making from their forges that the bronze absorbed that gave the doors a magical property that protected them against sorcery. They set riddles into the bronze as well. These riddles captured sound and absorbed it so that none could speak words of opening to it. Thus protected they ordered it set into the frame of stone. Trolls, huge and monstrous came at the bidding of Unklar and set the doors in place. There it stood, overshadowing the Wasting Way.

To open the door the dwarves crafted a horn of exquisite beauty. Shaped from the horns of a dragon, bound with bands of platinum and inlaid with thin strips of gold. The instrument's final shape resembled a ram's horn. Upon the mouthpiece they carved runes which opened the gates to the Rings of Brass. Upon the inner coils of the horn, where the air of the use blew, were more runes

and these they set with a chime of opening and it alone could force the gates wide. Only the very strong or clever ever mastered the horn and those who tried and failed activated the runes of the Rings of Brass; these tore them from the world and hurled them into the Void where they were forgotten. The horn the dwarves set upon a stand before the Gate and there it stood for many long centuries.

Upon its facade are set the words of Unklar's Rule:

**Suffer Not the Tyranny of Fear
Embrace The Dominion of Law**

The Yoke Shall Set You Free

At the foot of the door, beneath the stone arch, upon the very threshold of Aufstrag, are stones, stained a rust-colored brown. These stains come from the binding of Jaren the Falknjager, one of the last to hold out against him; unrepentant in his defiance, Unklar took him alive and bore him back to Aufstrag where he nailed him to the overriding arch, a place the holy man stayed in agonized torment for over 9 centuries. His blood spilling upon the ground, staining the flagstones.

The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



DRINK OF CHOICE

So who in the name of Sam Colt appointed Mountain Dew as the anointed drink of gamers? I've been gaming for many a year, from table-top war games, to table-top role playing games, across the hall to the arcades where I dominated at Tornado (the precursor to Defender) and all the way down the mountain to the Wii and Playstation and back again to the inside of the industry belt way of conventions, trade shows, book fairs and expos. No where have I seen a preponderance of Mountain Dew. In fact I might go so far as to say that I rarely, if ever, saw any Mountain Dew at any table anywhere. The few people who I saw drinking it seemed more like lost souls in search of some greater meaning and, failing all success, they have turned to that yellow elixir brewed by the somber folks at Pepsi who forever mourn their failure to overtake Coca-Cola products.

Now if I were to anoint a drink as the official drink of the gaming world, it would not be easy. I must by force devote many long hours of quiet contemplation to conjure what drink it might be; what drink would be able to cross generations of gamers, from very old to very young. It would have to be something of exquisite taste, that even if not endowed with love after the first drink, it would grow upon the drinker over time, like the black lotus. It would have to be an addiction, not of spite or rage, hate or longing, but one of love; an addiction to a moment in time where the wielder could savor the goodness that comes from the last horde of dragon's gold. For as we all know, the good things in this world may seem different and odd, but they, like Arthur's Excalibur, or even Arthur himself, overcome all obstacles to last for all forever.

Indeed, if I bent my mind in such a direction, as I most assuredly have since sitting here at this small child's table at Carver Elementary School where I'm attending a chest tournament . . . a gamers tourney mind you . . . and have made particular note for some time the complete and utter absence of any kind of mountain or any kind of dew; but a plethora of cans of my favorite drink, it turns my mind toward the only drink worthy of such

contemplation. Indeed! There can be only one drink that is worth considering. Only one. There can be only one!

Dr. Pepper!

Madness you say! Dr. Pepper? It must be Mountain Dew!! To wit I reply, bend your ear and hear wisdom as it sounds in opening a can of crystal cool DP. You have been spoon fed the madness of Hollywood as that horrid place casts the drinking habits of our whole industry in the light of the foolish writing of a few wandering miscreant gamers. If I gave a hair's breadth of thought to its origins we would probably find some movie reference, or cartoon, or youtube video or some such tangled mess, written no doubt by someone who, leaving their gaming roots behind, retained only his taste for that horrid swill that is Mountain Dew. But the drink itself is to blame, for it holds the promise of things that cannot be; in its fevered state the drink promises you to be EXTREME! But in fact it leaves you naught but thirst for a cold glass of water and some salt in your eye.

But Dr. Pepper promises nothing extreme; it does not pitch itself as a brew that makes you more than can be. No, it promises only one thing: cool, refreshing taste. An aromatic battery of sensory glory that drinking only one is utterly impossible. You do not drink Dr. Pepper because you want to be something in the game you are playing. You drink Dr. Pepper because it is good. It tastes like glory feels and promises nothing more than the cool waters of a desert spring in the summer hot sun of August.



Before video games there were role playing games, before Mountain Dew there was . . . heck, before Pepsi, Coke and Root Beer, there was Dr. Pepper! Don't let the fevered dreams of some pasty white, pock marked gamer-turned writer cast you into a mold you do not belong! Bring to your table the glory of the can! Bring to your table the only drink worthy of your imagination's mind's eye! Dr. Pepper.

We deny this is a paid advertisement for the oldest and most venerated soda company in the world, the Dr. Pepper Corporation.

They fled down the south face of the hill, slipping in the long tangled, dew-covered grass. Their equipment burdened them so they tossed much of it aside, gripping weapons and armor all the tighter. With less weight their speed increased and they stumbled and staggered. The early morning sun spilled across their brows, promising a long day of heat, but an early morning of thick humid air. They continued their flight, loping more than running, for the long night saw nothing but battle's pain of loss. Still they fled, stumbling and staggering on. But all was for not for the ground beneath them shook, and a sickly sweet scent rose in the air. They knew then that escape was impossible and only battle could save them now. Taking cover in a small cleft they turned at bay only in time to see the fierce Jolmuen leap over the hill side. A roar split his tusk filled face and the cleavers he bore in hand gleamed in the morning sun. Like wolves at bay the warrior, priest, and mage turned to win their glory or face eternity!

MONSTERS & TREASURE OF AIHRDE ON SALE NOW!



TALES OF THE RINGS of CORASS

THE AIHRDIAN CHRONICLES BEING THE 21ST NARRATIVE OF THE LAY OF THE LOTHIAN PRINCES

The Elven Warlord, Meltowg-Aet-Ohd, Prince of Lothiam, 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. At last they set out from the Isle of Onwaltig upon the storm racked seas of Shenal. Their boat is one of water fashioned by the puala beast and born through the surf by that magical creature, whose life's trail has led him from the deeps of the Void in the time before time, to the deeps of the seas of Aihrde. Now upon his back the boat thunders to the distant shores of Ethrum and the last legs of their journey to the Castle of Spires.



The sky hung over the crew of the water-ship in heavy, dark clouds, pregnant with rage. The land fell away from them as the boat skirted out to sea; the water coursing around the magical craft. But the waters began to break in huge waves, surging across the wildly flying boat; the wind picked up, thundering from the south, pummeling the ocean with massive fists, chopping off the tops of waves, hurling blocks of ice into the churning maelstrom. All about the boat the sea rocked, lifting on high to crash down again in a great spray of water. But the boat cared not for the sea's turmoil. Held together by the puala beast, it raced forward, settling the seas as it did so. Whether the beast carried the boat, or guided it, or used some other magic to steer it forward none could say for it did not speak, and only glimpses of it came to the men as it swam under the water or before the boat.

But a rage of storm followed its wake as if the mind of the Horned God in his grim tower willed the seas to battle the ship. And indeed this was so, for nothing in Aihrde escaped his thought and long had he pondered the power of the puala beast under the sea. And though now he slumbered, ever was his mind cast about in its restlessness; and the seas were a dark place in his mind for they were not utterly bound to him as was the world at large. Their power was deep and changing and he never achieved their conquest. His minions swam its deeps and watched its channels and he pondered the white capped waves. He instructed his folk to impede all who crossed; killing them or capturing them.

As the beast moved across its surface Unklar groaned in his sleep and his sufferings were as pain to his minions and they howled across and beneath the surface of the water, speeding to the boat and its master. The skies opened up and a pelting rain of ice lashed the wind-torn waves, pounding the mariners in their boat of water. The waves lifted ever higher, their caps reaching for the clouds, gaining enough power to fall upon their foe and crush them into ruin, pulling them beneath the waters to drown and suffer death upon those who rode the boat.

All about them the world exploded and the men never knew before or after feelings of such helplessness. Each turned upon themselves in their own manner. Some stared forward with gloomy eyes; others looked to death, uttering prayers to the gods of their past; some swore and cursed, damning Unklar and his many fingered horns; but none wept, nor feared death, nor begged the gods to show them mercy for they were a grim company of knights and soldiers. But over them all stood the Prince Meltowg and his gaze stared forward as he leaned upon the main mast. His mind did not dwell on the here and now, trusting to the wizard, his cousin, for control of the craft; rather his mind lay in the eves of the Twilight Wood which now lay upon the far shore. He wandered its dark paths in search of an isle where he might find passage to a world beyond and to his kindred.

Beneath the ship of water the puala beast paid no heed to any and all, the men in the boat, the steeds who stood next to them, the elements that pounded him and his craft, raging their anger. The puala beast swam as if this were any other day and the raging storm but a moment in a lifetime of time. He loved the sea and the taste of it so he swam forward, pulling the magical boat behind him with such speed that no other creature on Aihrde could surpass it.

The storm raged on into the night and into the next day and the ship hurled through the waters all the while.

When the sun stood only a few hours in the day the shore loomed before them; a long beach beyond which were small hills rising in gentle slopes and beyond a dark line of trees, the Twilight Wood.

The ship hurled through the water, cutting the low surf in noiseless waves until at last it crashed onto the beaches of Ethrum where the boat disintegrated in a wash of noisy water. The men of Meltowg's company, having braced themselves for the impact, some mounted, others afoot, leapt ashore with groaning curses. Men and steeds, gear of war, and the camp scattered to and fro about the beach.

Meltowg hit the beach mounted, leaping the gunwale as the boat collapsed into the surf; his steed cleared it with ease and he landed

in the sand at a gallop. Turned he saw his cousin right behind him, both avoiding the chaos of the rank and file.

Vianarth-Aet-Brule, known to the men as Sedgwick, turned his steed about, and trotted down to the water's edge. The storm raged beyond in thundering chasms and walls of water and in the midst of it all the puala beast rose upon its massive trunk, rising from the water to tower over the wizard. The beast's broad head, crowned in tentacles hid its eyes in iron clad bone. A smell of deep memory hung about him, calling to mind the wild ocean unspoiled by death.

"Vianarth-Aet-Brule, Elf Lord of the House of Lothian, I have done your bidding and carried all your folk and steeds across the waters to these shores."

"You have Lord of Waves," the Elf shouted over the tumult of the sea. "You have my gratitude."

"Think not that my memory strains with age or is wasted on the sands of the deeps. I shall come for you when I have call or need."

"And I shall honor my debt if I still have life to do so."

"Fear not Elf Lord, for if you tarry in the world or nay, if your soul wanders in the Shadow Realms, or the Stone Fields or even in the deeps of my ancient dwellings of the Void, I shall call you and bring you to me."

A spray of water washed the Elf Lord's face; a wizard of no mean power, he looked upon the puala beast in greater fear. "I know not the source of your power if you can walk through the halls of the dead as easily as the halls of the living."

"You know not my power." Turning, the beast fell back into the sea with no splash or sound that the waves made; the waters enveloped it, covering it as any rock on a calm day. And as suddenly, it was gone.

"Those words carry a price I would not have you bare alone cousin." Meltowg stood now next to the wizard, still mounted. The wind and water tore his long hair about him, whipping his face with it.

"It is a price I will bare alone My Prince, for none here summoned the creature but me. And though I have cast us far and wide across the sea and landed us on this shore of our destination, I do not now know that the price is worth it. Perhaps we could have found a less perilous road."

"No, my cousin, I do not think so. For in this world our enemies hem us in and there are few who would aid us even if there were many who could. Do not discount the tumult of the seas, nor the source of its anger. Those are Unklar's doings and if we had taken a mortal ship our course would now be at the bottom of the Sea of Shenal and our quest left for those not yet born to achieve, if ever at all."

"You bring no comfort to me, My Lord."

"I bring no comfort to any. Nor do I house the poor or fettered. I do not offer succor or hope for a future beyond one of misery and struggle and no doubt, in the end, death."

"You speak too ill of yourself My Lord. For your unyielding battle is one of choice and you offer all free men that if nothing else; we may lay upon our backs and suffer the indignities of another's discretion or we may stand and die as free men." He looked away from the water to the men and then to the Prince. "I do not ride with you lightly My Lord, nor make choices I regret. Do not think my musings meant that my choices are not well thought or my own."

"I did not, my cousin." Meltowg turned his horse around, looking at his men. "Get up you dogs! Now we must go from this beach in haste and to the eves of the Twilight Wood where beyond lies the Castle of Spires and the end of our quest." As he spoke he rode through them and up the beach to the top of a dune where he stopped.

The men took heart at his words and gathered their arms.

Meltowg smiled, for beyond the dune he spied a great band of orcs, hundreds strong, armed, and girded for war. They moved in haste, crossing the broken plains toward the beach. Before them were a dozen outriders, riding fleet wolves and these sounded horns calling their companions to the chase. Those behind shouted in deep intonations and a drum picked up the beat of their stamping feet. Above them swayed the banners of their Dark Lord in Aufstrag, the crescent moon, silver on black, the Horns of Darkness. These orcs came from the south Meltowg could plainly see, for they ran more like loping dogs than men. These gangrel orcs fought poorly in units, wielding their numbers in a cumbersome fashion, but individually they were tougher than the average eastern orc.

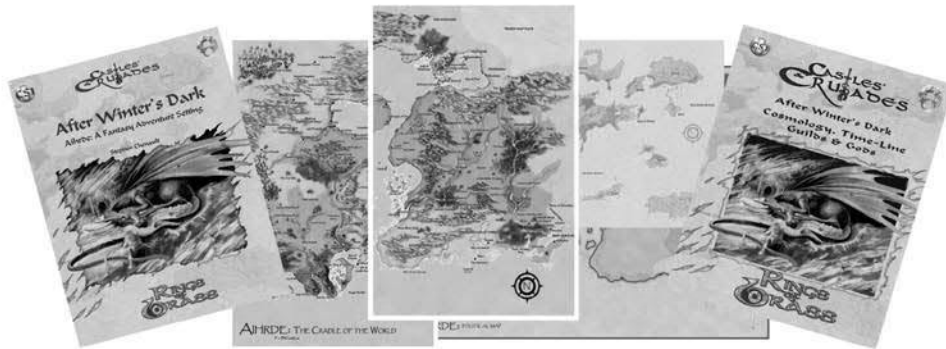
Looking back the Prince saw Sedgwick lift up his arms, signifying his sorcery was spent for the time being, but his men, already mounting on their steeds, pulled weapons and prepared themselves for battle. The horses snorted and stamped, tired from the long voyage but relieved for the earth under hoof.

Drawing black Noxmurus the Prince held it on high. It flickered with a sickly green light, casting a pall of fear about Meltowg and his horse. "Hells on the hoof! Let's meet it with blood and iron!"



RINGS OF ORASS

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MONSTERS & TREASURE OF AIHRDE

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE FORTHCOMING MONSTERS & TREASURES OF AIHRDE.

DEMONS AND DEVILS

These creatures are unadulterated evil. Evil defines them. They are not capable of good, or acts of kindness or mercy. Human emotions do not motivate them. They do not feel humiliation or understand it. If made to crawl in the mud and play the part of a cowed beast they do so, seeing their actions as one step toward whatever their goals may be. If an action such a creature takes benefits someone, it is a byproduct of their own desires and nothing more. Such actions would never intentionally benefit others. They have no ability to feel for others, no empathy of the plight of sorrow. They are wretched creatures, pathetic in their self-absorbing madness of being. They are evil, pure and simple.

But evil carries many faces and demons and devils are as different as night and day. Evil defines them both, but the nature of that evil sets them apart.

Demons are agents of chaos; they dwell in the madness of their own filth. They are the wretched refuse of disconnected streams of consciousness; a twisted madness of incoherent emotions. They do not possess the ability to act in a coherent manner, work in the company of others that are not their slaves, or even to stand with their own kind. Theirs is a madness of constant movement. Their minds are an infinite abyss of unfettered chaos. They are Lords of this Chaos.

Devils on the other hand are slaves to law; they dwell in a state of mental entropy. Crippled and weak, hubris defines and governs them, granting them the narcissistic belief that they can bring an order to the world around them. For their minds are small and the entropy that governs them governs the order of things. Abject creatures defined by their own slavery, they are servants of a degenerate covenant that fails them. Their minds are structured to serve others; it is a fettered control. They are the Lords of this Law.

Powers Common to All Devils

There are three tiers of tvungen in the Wretched Plains, the Lutz are the lesser devils, the Qaul of those of the middle ranks and the Eahrük are those greater devils who rule the palaces of the damned. They all share certain powers.

Immune to Elements: Devils are extra-planar creatures that are possessed of natural immunities to the elements. As such, all fire and cold-based attacks do an automatic half damage. A successful save reduces the damage further.

Immune to Weapons: Non-enchanted weapons cannot strike a devil. It requires at least a +1 weapon to strike a devil. Some devils require a greater than +1 as noted in their Special Abilities. Masterwork weapons are not enchanted and as such cannot strike devils.

Shape Change: All devils can shape change as per the spell *shape change* with the following exceptions. There is no duration on the ability; a devil may remain in the deceptive state as long as it desires. They cannot however constantly change form. A Lutz devil of the Lutz can only *shape change* twice a day, to and from. A devil of the Qaul can *shape change* 4 times per day; to and from. An Eahrük Devil, the greater kindred, can *shape change* up to 8 times a day. They cannot, however, assume any form they wish. The form must be the same size as their original form or smaller; they can take on the shape of animals or even other beasts. This is a natural ability for devils and they do not need any components to shape change.

Speak with the Dead: As inhabitants of the Wretched Plains they are able to speak with those consigned to those realms.

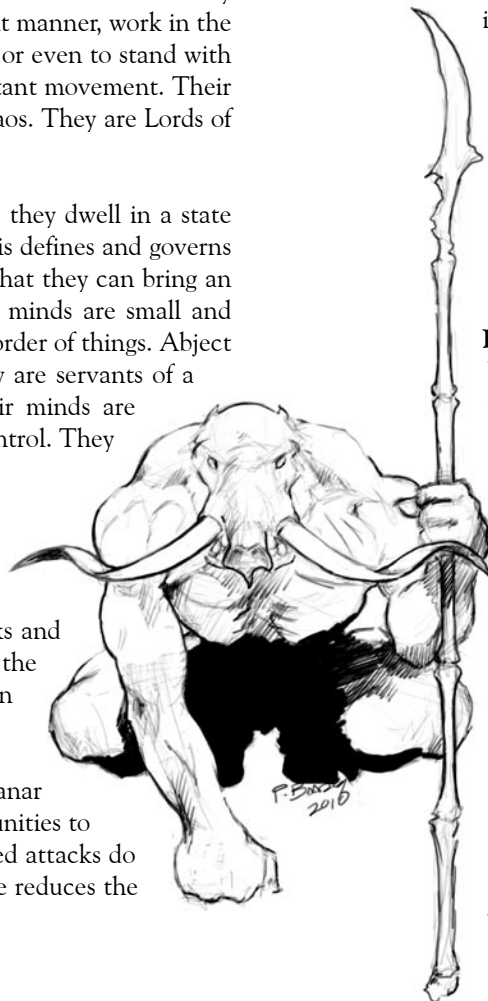
Vanity: A devil's greatest weakness is its vanity. They love themselves more than power, more than wealth, more than anything in the world living or dead. Clever characters can attempt to take advantage of this vanity. Through a successful charisma check the character can charm a devil, convincing it to not attack. The charisma check is made against a CL equal to the devil's hit dice. It lasts for 1 hour per level of the character. The charm is not so powerful as to convince the devil to help the characters or aid them in any way. But it can prevent an attack.

Powers common to All Demons

Immunity, to Weapons: Non-enchanted weapons, except as listed below, cannot strike a demon. It requires at least a +1 weapon to strike a demon. Some demons require a greater than +1 as noted in their Special Abilities. Masterwork weapons are not enchanted and as such cannot strike demons.

Iron Weakness: All demons have a weakness where iron is concerned. They cannot cross it and when struck with weapons of pure iron the weapon gains an additional +2 to-hit and 1d6 points of damage.

Magic Jar: The demon is able to cast a type of "magic jar." The spell acts in all respects as the *magic jar* spell with the following exceptions:



the spell can only be cast upon one item. If that item is destroyed, the demon is consigned to the nether planes for eternity; the duration of the magic jar is permanent or until the demon returns to its own body; the "jar" can be any type of item, a mirror, cup, weapon etc. There is no range on the magic jar, but if the demon is to cast it into another plane there has to be some type of connection such as a contact other plane spell, or summoning spell, that allows the demon to see into the other plane and cast its magic jar. This is the primary method that demons use to travel from one plane to another, by placing themselves in an item upon another plane or bound for another plane.

When the demons cast magic jar, it enters the item, waiting for something living, and desirable, to approach. At that point, they attempt to possess the creature and enter the victim. When the demon has occupied a new host for a number of days equal to the host's HD or level, the demon "arrives," taking control of the host. The host must make a successful charisma save or it morphs into the demon. The host dies and its soul perishes and the demon has "arrived" upon the plane.

In all respects the demon is a denizen of the plane it now occupies. It is not considered a summoned creature and magical protection against summoned creatures have no affect.

Speak with the Dead: As inhabitants of the Wretched Plains they are able to speak with those consigned to those realms.

IN AIHRDE

Demonkind and devilkin are clearly defined by their service to the Horned God. When Unklar came to the plane of Aihrde and slew the Court of Aenoch, he launched a series of long and bitter wars, the first of which he waged against the gods. He hounded them from the world, slew them in their fastnesses, or bound them in chains. To do this proved a monumental task for even him, and he called to the Shadow Realms and to the Void and all the dark places of creation; he called for allies. From the depths of the Wretched Plains there arose a tumult of many voices, great hosts of creatures crawled from the filth of their wasted existence to heed his call.

He gathered them in several hosts and he bound them to him, making them slaves to his will and design. They were called "the tvungen" by their enemies, the "fettered;" what later men simply referred to as devils of Unklar. These lawful, evil creatures saw the design of his purpose and sought to be a part of it or at least to mimic it; or those who sought to resist could not leave the horned god's call unheeded.

Many of the voices in the Wretched Plains, that is, the Shadow Realms, did not heed Unklar's call, but rather heaped curses upon him and swore to slay him and the tvungen. These men called the "tvungenos", the "unfettered," those free from Unklar's control. These demons were marked not by their independence but by their utter madness.

But Unklar gathered together the tvungen, fleshing out his cohorts with their ranks. Unklar armored himself and taking up Utriel, the Mace of Judgment, he marched to war at the head of his host. They marched then on Aalun-Hart-Ra, the City that lies at the Center, where the gods congregated. He tore down their gate and assailed them in their bastion, laying waste to it all. During this War of the Gods, the ranks of the tvungen were greatly depleted, for the gods did not yield their power needlessly. Unklar proved careless of the ranks of the tvungen as well, for he loved nothing, not even the loyalty of powerful minions. The war wages for years in the high halls of that place. The deeds of man and god fell into the abyss and few remained to remember them, but the struggle was hard and took more from the Horned God than ever he believed it would. In the end, he cast the city into ruins and left its inhabitants shadows of their former selves. But the greater part of the casualties Unklar himself suffered, his hosts were devastated and where thousands had gathered, hundreds now remained.

They have no ability to feel for others, no empathy of the plight of sorrow. They are wretched creatures, pathetic in their self-absorbing madness of being. They are evil, pure and simple.

The tvungen of course are of the ranks of the Val-Eahrakun and slaying them is not an easy task; many returned to the halls of the Wretched Plains, the Shadowed Realms, to lick their wounds. But their return was fraught with danger for in their absence the tvungenos assumed command of the gates and portals, the towers and dungeons, many of the great cities too fell to the demons and they ruled in their raving madness. These realms are home to pitiless dead, those who in life lived an evil or mean existence, and those lost spirits found no order in the rule of tvungenos.

When the tvungen returned, they sought their seats and towers, but the tvungenos laughed them off and cast them the beggar's coin. War erupted soon after. It spread throughout the Wretched Plains as the two sides fought bitter battles, one to regain their strongholds and power, the other for the love of hatred and tumult; and the dead they left untended. Utter chaos ensued. In some areas the tvungen ruled, in others the tvungenos, but in others the dead rose to prominence, ruling their own kingdoms of wild nightmares. So the Wretched Plains, unforgiving in their conception, descended into deranged horror and dreadful nightmare.

The lines that divide the two entities, the tvungen and the trungenos are not so easy to discern. They do not war as nations of men war, though they hate each other. In all the evil of the Wretched Plains, the tvungen live in islands of calm where their evil is perpetrated in cold calculation. But all around them surges the sea of chaos, warring with and upon itself even as it does upon the islands of dread in its midst.

Only one constant defines the Wretched Plains, the creatures who rule there are evil, unashamed and unrepentant; evil in their thoughts, actions, and deeds. There is no nobility of spirit, no justice that drives them; they are broken creatures, shed by the All Father as flawed because of their evil.

CULL, DEVIL (CULL STODT'NE, FLAWLESS CIRCLES)

NO. APPEARING: 1

SIZE: L

HD: 15(d8)

MOVE: 40 ft., 80 ft. (fly), 40 ft. (climb)

AC: 28

ATTACKS: By Weapon

SPECIAL: Deep Vision, Dusk Vision, Ice Storm, Immunity to Elements, Mirror Image, Phantasmal Mirror, Regeneration 2, SR 14, Telekinesis, Trap the Soul, Twilight Vision, +2 or better weapon to hit

SAVES: M, P

INT: High

ALIGNMENT: Lawful Evil

TYPE: Fey

TREASURE: Nil

XP: 13,600+15

Long ago, the cull shaped and molded their forms to mimic those of the dryads and other sylphs of the forest. To all appearances they look like a human woman. They are tall and thin, their skin is pale and in the light, translucent. Their hair hangs down in long curls upon their shoulders. The hair itself is of a pinkish hue, though beneath that color it is white. Long lashes shroud their wide, unblinking eyes. Their form is flawless, their hair never moves, they do not bruise or show wounds until death takes them. Wings hang over them, riding upon their backs, barely discernible to the naked eye; but when viewed appear with feathers, long and graceful. Their arms are overly long, with fingers to match and nails like claws. Their spines are clearly visible, pushing at the taut skin upon their backs. They are beautiful to behold, though terrible to see. A slight haze circles the cull at all times, it appears as a thin mist, only a few inches wide. It moves extremely quickly, circling her, between her legs and up

around the back of her head. It consists of millions of tiny shards of diamonds.

The "devil in the circle," as the magi call the cull, is wickedly intelligent but filled with a tremendous envy of all things beautiful. With orderly thoughts they organize everything around them. Their lairs, almost always built of white stone, evenly cut, lie in circular rooms. Corridors are in circles as well, there are no corners in the world of the cull. Few furnishings adorn their abodes, for the cull cannot lie down, nor sit. They almost always have mirrors in their halls however; mirrors that hang upon the walls, rest upon the floor, or cling to the ceiling. The mirrors serve the cull as doorways, leading to other portions of their lair, or often to other palaces in the Wretched Plains or beyond them into the outer planes.

The cull look at themselves constantly. They cherish jewels, but favor diamonds, pearls, and white opals.

When the cull ride to war, they gather their cohorts around them in great circles; they carry huge mirrors at the fore, and these are their banners. The mirrors are magical and cast doubt and consternation before them. The cull favor whips of chain and adorn their bodies in white armor emblazoned with circles of varying size.

COMBAT: The cull carry nine-ring broadswords in battle but favor their whips of chains and mirrors of soullessness. The whips are +3 weapons and cut flesh with the many barbs that line their length. They extend up to 20 feet from the devil and she is able to slash her prey from that distance. Their nine-ring broadswords are +2 swords of sharpness. They always project themselves in battle through their mirrors, casting mirror images first and trying to draw their victims' attention to the mirrors they carry.



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Whip: The cull use a tremendously long whip in battle. It strikes opponents for 1d8 points of damage. But any creature struck by the whip must save versus strength or suffer 2d8 points of extra damage from the thunder of its snap. Furthermore, she is able to crack the whip and cause an *ice storm* as if cast by a 15th level wizard. The “ice” particles are actually tiny shards of glass and stones drawn from the ring that continually circles her.

Mirror Image: Cull are able to project images of themselves as the spell mirror image. There are always 4 other images and, to a limited degree, they can act independently; the cull images are able to use any non-physical ability until they are struck. She can take this action once per day, and casts as a 15th level spell caster.

Phantasmal Mirror: Cull use this ability when they are surrounded. By drawing upon the ring of diamonds, they raise magical mirrors all about them so that anyone looking upon the cull is subject to the sorcery. Looking into the mirror, the victim sees some creature from their nightmares, leaping upon them. Victims must make a successful intelligence save or are stunned, locked in a singular battle with this creature. They cannot see beyond the mirror, believing they are cast into the mirror, forced to battle the creature alone. If they die while locked in battle with their nightmares, they die and their souls pass into the Wretched Plains. If they slay the creature, they are free of the phantasmal mirror. In order to use this ability they must use their telekinetic ability for one round; after that time they are able to use their other abilities.

Telekinesis: Telekinetic creatures, the cull can lift up to 500 lbs of material, multiple objects, and direct them at targets. In all other respects, it acts as the spell of the same name. They cast as a 15th level caster.

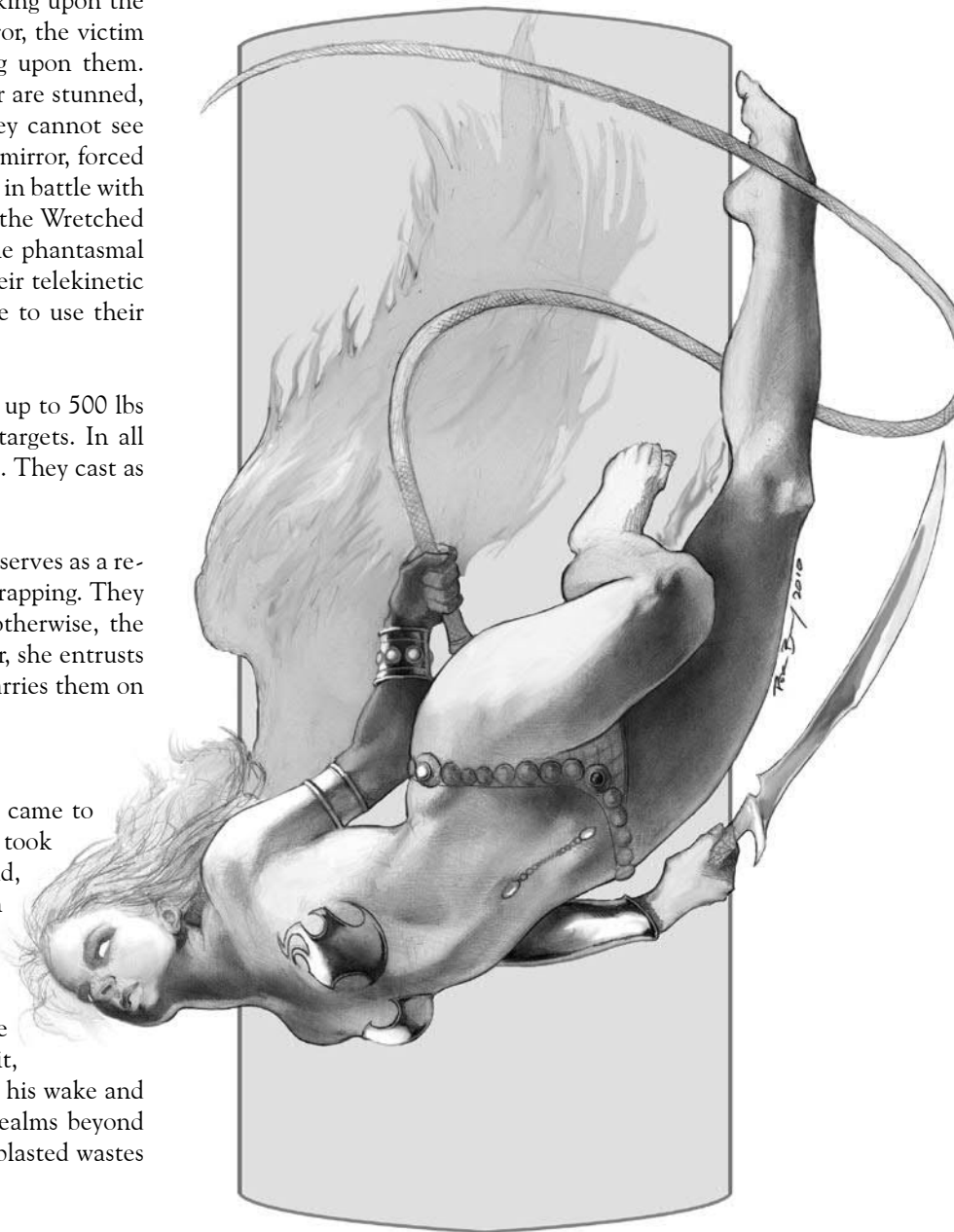
Trap the Soul: Every cull possesses one mirror that serves as a repository for her victories. It acts as a mirror of life trapping. They never carry these openly unless they go to war; otherwise, the mirror resides in the cull’s lair. When carried to war, she entrusts the mirror to a cohort of Kain’s Henchman, who carries them on large iron rods, secured with adamantite metals.

IN AIHRDE

One of the All Father’s earliest creations, the cull came to the Void when even the All Father was young. He took moments of time and cast them in a hard shell and, whirling them in multiple circles, he hurled them into the Great Empty. They were aware and lusted immediately for more; he looked upon them and saw the flaw of their mind and cast them off to continue his creation. They lingered in his wake like dust for untold eons. But when the maelstrom split, torn by the thrashing of the dragon Inzae, they left his wake and entered her chaos, traveling through it into the realms beyond the All Father’s knowing. Here they settled in the blasted wastes of what later became the Shadow Realms.

They built palaces throughout the planes, always on tall hills, and always circular; they made them of stone or silks and blanketed all in a thin covering of ice like jewels. The palaces of the cull stood as beacons of vanity in that blighted landscape, drawing the dead to the fields of diamonds that always surrounded them. There they fell into dust, cut a thousand times over in their suffering until they ceased to exist. But these palaces stood as fast fortresses against the tyranny of tvungenos and bastions of evil vanity.

During the Winter Dark, many of the cull rose to the world and served the Dark Lord and he loved them, using them sparingly. When he fell, many returned to the Shadow Realms to find their homes besieged or spoiled by the madness of the demons. Some remained in Aihrde however, hidden from the foolish but obvious to the wise for their houses of circles.





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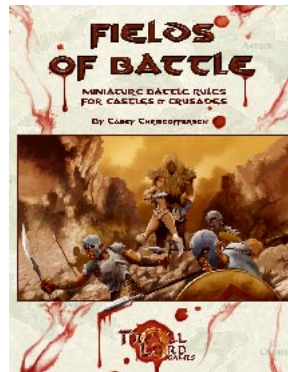
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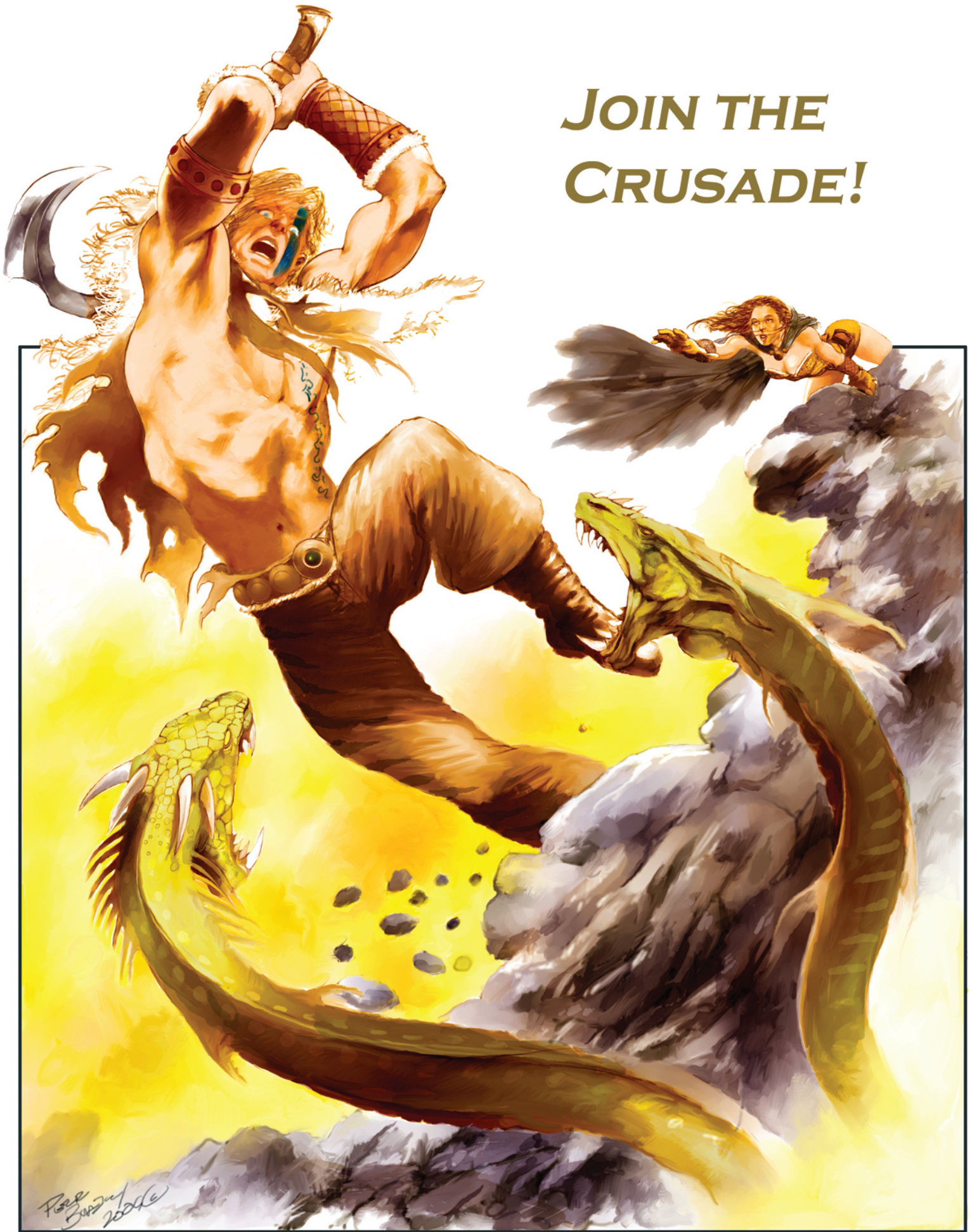
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