

#24

CRUSADER

Fiction
Adventures
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Gaming



PETER / 2010

MERRY CHRISTMAS



FROM TROLL LORD GAMES

Revised 2010



CRUSADER



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Notes from the Managing Editor

A very Merry Christmas to all our readers! It's a wonderful time of year and we hope you are all enjoying a festive winter's break and not being to bogged down by the weather.

Well these past six months tumbled by far faster than we thought possible. It's been a crazy busy time here in the Dens. We've completed the Castle Keepers Guide, Fields of Battle, Monsters & Treasure of Aihrde as well as launched the new Store Front, revamped the message boards and ported them to the TLG official pages (removing them from the free abby boards they were on), launched a Castles & Crusades Facebook page, built a print shop and then expanded the print shop, to allow us to manufacture hard back books, we released a few modules and other nick knacks such as the revised Malady of Kings, as well as all the normal day to day mess that

The next six months promise to be as busy. Inside the Dens we'll continue focusing on pushing Castles & Crusades by releasing the book in digital format on the iTunes store as well as the Kindle. We are looking at wrapping up the A series (through A12), revising a few more modules such as Fantastic Adventure but also releasing the full complete maps of Aihrde (9 in all), as well as the basic set for C&C. We have a few other projects we are tinkering with, like the Adventurer's Backpack and Pulp Siege by Jason Vey, but those aren't officially placed in the schedule as of yet...well Pulp Siege is looking like a Summer release.

So where does all this activity leave the Crusader? We are not going to return it to a monthly release; that much is for sure, at least not in the short term. The market for magazines has changed dramatically and a we must adopt a new approach for this format to continue to

serve its purpose as a source for inspiration, humor and information for the gaming market as well keeping it a good read for the subscribers and those who pick it up on the fly. The digital age has brought amazing changes to the market and its presentation and we are looking at how best to take advantage of these.

In looking over the Crusaders of the past I feel that something is missing. They are good mags no doubt, but I feel that they are missing that little extra something that makes the magazine itself more interesting to the general reader, its missing a touch of the Troll. The Crusader is a magazine designed for the TLG community in general and the C&C community in particular. But to make the magazine more useful the content has to be useable itself. The addition of maps for use and adventures was a great idea that Jim had. We are going to expand on that. We'll bring back Historical Footnotes as history is replete with useful material for your game. Also we'll expand the news section to bring you bits and pieces you may not have picked up on the web. With that will come articles like the monster ecology you find in this issue and new character classes and game mechanic expansions for your C&C game. This issue will mark the return of the Alea Iacta Est column to an editorial column and not a headliner column. Originally the column was meant to be notes and thoughts from myself and Davis, a what's going on with the Crusade and the Journal... THIS column. So in Issue #25 we'll Alea Iacta Est moves to this column and we'll replace it with a headliner C&C article: up first the Arbalester, more commonly known as the Archer.

We fully intend to unite this new content with a digital platform. We are exploring new ways to present the material that go beyond the simple pdf or print. We want to make the Crusader a more interactive part of TLG publishing and the C&C game experience, allowing subscribers to log on to their accounts, access and download necessary material, use it or read it or what have you. All this is on the docket for 2011 and the future of the magazine.

For now, this issue sees the return of Historical Footnotes by Joseph Wolz as well as a new column on Monster Ecology by Brian Kivari and Alicia Stanley as well as bits and pieces of Popular Culture. We are bringing back the Fellowship of Foragers this issue. Some of you may remember that we ran the first 2 Fellowship of Foragers strips back in earlier copies of Crusader. We've been talking to Marvin Breig, the cartoonist, and are happy to welcome the strip back to the pages of Crusader. But in the spirit of "that was half a decade ago" we're going to start over from Fellowship #1!

We hope you enjoy this issue and as always look forward to comments and criticisms.

He Who Sits Upon the Elephant's Back
Stephen Chenault
December, 2010



Industry News

B&N ATTEMPTS TO STOP THE BLEED

Barnes & Noble has found itself in trouble these past 12 months, suffering staggering losses. Direct print sales have declined markedly for the retailer giant. Restructuring with a focus on toys and children's books and more importantly a renewed focus on the Nook offset some of their losses in 3rd-Quarter 2009, as did online sales. However the large overhead associated with running their brick and mortar stores, and the sales decline continued to eat away at their profits.

B&N offers a direct source of competition for many brick and mortar game shops, however, their ability to project themselves in many smaller communities that may not have a large market for games has allowed the retail giant to connect many RPG companies with their fans. Though it may not be the case, it is most likely that the companies' restructuring will include shutting down many of these stores, which may leave more gaps in the gaming community.

RPG MARKET UNDER CONTINUED PRESSURE

Distributor sales of RPG products continued to take a pummeling in the past 2 Quarters, continuing a decline that has been ongoing for several years. Several factors play into the decline: the growth of the digital market and the proliferation of print on demand services both play into the ongoing fragmentation of the market allowing many start ups to enter the business with little or no capital. This, coupled with online retailers putting tremendous pressure on brick and mortar stores, retailer giants such as B&N cutting back on items, and manufacturers expanded role in direct to consumer sales, all play into a market under extraordinary pressure. The decline in sales that Dungeons & Dragons has experienced further compounds this problem, forcing many brick and mortar stores to cut back on RPG investments.

Any one of these problems is serious enough for any industry; combined, it makes the pressure immense. It is anyone's guess and subjective opinion as to which is worse. But regardless, the brick and mortar retail shops and distributor channels are experiencing the worst of it.

Market fragmentation might be the most damaging. For several decades, Dungeons & Dragons held the RPG market together; giving retailers enough incentive to invest in second or even third tier role playing games, but the large decline in sales has removed this incentive. This decline has led distributors to drop off sales and marketing for RPGs in general. Several success stories, such as Pathfinder, keep consumers coming to the stores but rarely in numbers that the industry experienced years ago and not enough to give the retailer discretionary spending for other RPG games.

The rapid multiplication of game systems allowed by digital and POD press continues to diffuse consumer dollars as well. Consum-

ers buy into the game system that appeals to them the most. Few, if any, of these companies operate as traditional companies; rather they serve a niche market for hobbyists, many selling less than 50 copies.

Castles & Crusades continues to restock well in this tight market, particularly the Players Handbook, so much so that the book will go into a fifth printing sometime in 2011. However the game's industry impact is less as its player base is spread out.

ALLIANCE

In related news Alliance Distribution has moved their warehouse from the Chessex warehouse, purchasing their own building in Fort Wayne. This has allowed Impressions Marketing & Advertising as well as Z-Man Games to expand floor space at the Chessex Warehouse.

JAMES MISHLER & CHIMERA HOBBIES

Long time industry veteran **James Mishler** has been hired as the General Manager of Chimera Hobby Shops in Appleton and Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. He will be handling all marketing, advertising, merchandising, events, and general strategic oversight.

James, cut his teeth in the industry over two decades ago, working with ACD (where he was the first buyer to pick up the TLG line). He went on to work for Krause Publications, Wiz Kids, & F&W Media where he worked on Comics & Games Retailer. Of course he is best known for his work with Judges Guild creator Bob Bledsoe, whom he worked with until Bob passed away.

Chimera Hobby Shop has two locations:

Chimera Hobby Shop I, 820 South Main St., Fond du Lac, WI 54935.

Chimera Hobby Shop II, 808 West Wisconsin Ave., Appleton, WI 54914.

GAIL GYGAX AND GARY'S MEMORIAL

Gail Gygax continues working with the Lake Geneva Parks board to establish a lasting legacy for her late husband, Gary Gygax. In September of this year the Park's board tentatively approved a site in Donian Park in Lake Geneva. The December vote was postponed until January. Gail continues to try to get a place in Library park located in the center of Lake Geneva on the shores of the Lake and not far from Gary's home and the epicenter of all things Role Playing.

Gail sits on the board of Gygax Memorial Fund (www.gygaxmemorialfund.com), a non-profit memorial fund whose purpose is to raise money for the memorial and the proposed site. Gary was a long time friend of the Trolls and we whole heartedly support Gail in her efforts.

ON THE GO WITH PAIZO

We've got word that Paizo continues its upward climb, building on the success of their Pathfinder release. They have recently added 4 new employees, including our good friend Hyrum Savage, and are looking at adding a new Developer immediatly. (If your interested don't hesitate to give them a shout, all the information for applying is on their webpage at: www.paizo.com).

In this same vain, the Pathfinder Society is looking for aspiring scenario writers. If someone thinks they're up for the job have them email me adventure proposals at hyrum.savage@paizo.com.

They have a busy 2011 planned that includes the *World Guide: The Inner Sea*. In here you'll find, amongst other things, a teaser for the new Pathfinder gun rules. If you can't stab it! Shoot it! The full expansion of these rules will be out at Gencon in the Ulitmate Combat supplement.

Pathfinder has become the defacto game for many 3rd edition and 3.5 edition Dungeons & Dragons players since the release of 4th Edition.

Its Going to be Impressive

Talks with Aldo Ghiozzi, long time friend and business associate of the Trolls, reveal a very exciting 2011. Plans to expand new marketing venues that will rival FREE RPG Day, are in the works. He's working with long-time industry veterans for the retailer market!

Luke Gygax in Iraq

Luke continues his deployment overseas with the U.S. Fighting Forces in Operation New Dawn. Luke is the son of the late Gary Gygax, father of the Role Playing Game. He is the co-author, with his brother Ernie Gygax, of *Gaxmoor* published by Troll Lord Games in 2001. Luke and the family run Gary Con, a convention dedicated to the memory of their father. And rumor has it that Luke will return in time for the third annual event. See ad on page 7 for more information.

COOL MOVIE NEWS

The live action version of **GREEN LANTERN** is coming to theatres very soon. It stars Ryan Reynolds as green lantern, Hal Jordan. At first dubious, the trailer does look good and Reynolds might be able to pull off the role of the silver screen Hal Jordan. Hal of course was the most inclined to take the role of super hero lightly and Reynold's heavy comedic background might come in handy.

The CGI looks through the roof and the action seem fairly intense. A slight alteration of the costume has some fans riled, but in truth the costume looks pretty good to this GL fan's eyes. Hal Jordan was not the first GL of course, that honor belonged to Alan Scott; Hal was followed by John Stewart, Guy Gardner and Kyle Rayner.

Green Lantern is scheduled to release in June 2011

Another fan favorite, **STARBLAZERS**, debuts in live action this month in Japan. This sci-fi action adventure film takes its cue from the cartoon of the same name that ran in the late 1970s. It follows the trek of the refurbished Battleship Yamato as it travels interstellar space in order to save Planet Earth from the attack of the evil Gamallons. The trailer provides mountains of action and some wild battles scenes. Starblazers was an action packed TV show and the movie promises to be the same.

For those who love WWII battleships and have always wanted to see one in space shooting their big 16 inch guns (in this case 18 inch), and the screen lit up in constant battle this is the movie for you! No word on when English version might hit the street.

The **GOOD THE BAD & THE WEIRD**, a Korean film release last year is a modern day wild waste show the likes of which we've never seen. Filled to the brim with really cool turn of the century (19th/20th) it is some kind of fun to watch.



LISTEN...

... JUST
BEYOND
THIS DOOR.
A
CASTLE KEEPERS
GUIDE

ALEA IACTA EST



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

Epic Days: Keeping the Adventure Through High Levels

In this issue, we pick up a discussion that we left off last issue by taking a closer look at levels and ways and thoughts on how to CK from low level to high. In issue 22, we covered low-level characters, from 1st-3rd; last issue we covered characters of levels 4-8. This issue we take a closer look at high-level characters, those ranging from 9 and beyond.

Upon the windswept slopes of the western Rhodope Mountains, a huge beast lumbers. It drags its massive bulk across rocks, grinding them to dust. Its six tiny legs, with clawed feet, pull and scrape the earth, gripping it to pull its swollen abdomen a long the broken earth. It looks much like a tick, a look that defies its ancient visage; for this beast is a mother of the dop-pelgangers, that tribe of men who wander the roof of the world, waiting only to find others to mimic. The creature is possessed of immense strength and abilities. It defies imagination. So you find it, pulling itself through the dirt and rock. What do you do? "I cast time stop; I can take 9 actions before anyone else moves, right?" Sure. "I cast fire ball three times, lightning bolt once, two magic missiles, ice storm, and wall of iron over the creature so that it falls as the time stop ends." Much rolling later, before the wall, it takes 640 points of damage; even after the save, it suffers 320 points of damage. With its 295 hit points, the beast is dead in 1 melee round. Time to reassess the party's power.

It is the high level characters who, enabled with tremendous abilities, hit points, usually decked out in powerful magic, begin to force the direction of the narrative, and dominate the game like never before. These characters pose an interesting problem for the Castle Keeper who is attempting to maintain game balance. Generally, at this stage in the game players know their characters and their abilities well. Furthermore, they know the general tenor of the game and the methods of the CK. Combined, these pose a problem for the CK as challenges becomes more difficult than simply heightening the amount of the HD or hit points or increasing the challenge level. Enterprising players have long learned the stylistic approaches and generally know what fails and what does not. This sixth sense is difficult to overcome for CKs, unless they resort to brutal, massive, overwhelming force. The skilled CK takes a more subtle approach.

Preparation is paramount in high-level games. When attempting to achieve and keep the game balance, scripting out the adventure is very important, making certain

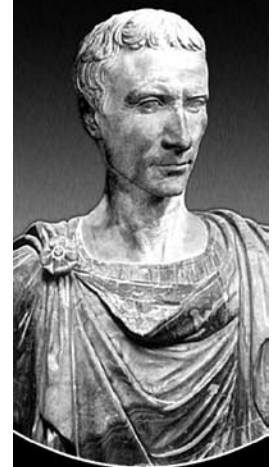
that the monsters and NPCs have all their abilities and or spells at least listed and for the CK to possess a rudimentary knowledge of how they work. Coupling this knowledge with how the monster or NPC uses those abilities and spells helps even more; if they have a concerted plan in encounter/adventure, the CK should know beforehand how tough or weak they are. If too weak, it allows plenty of time to toughen the encounter without slowing the pace of the game or weakening them as needed.

This same preparation carries over into the adventure. Using weather, terrain and other natural functions to ratchet the game up or down is a time honored approach to keeping control of the game. It is often overlooked, but these elements of the physical world act in many ways much as do monsters and NPCs.

Even as the players have learned how to react to the CK, the CK must surely have learned how the players generally react and how they use their character abilities. Like anyone, players slip into habits; they tend to do what has worked before and shy away from those things that generally fail. Changing the tune by dropping hit dice and challenge levels on monsters and traps helps to trip up the players.

A key element to the game is the CKs ability to alter or change the monsters that characters encounter. This tool comes in use when dealing with balance and high-level characters. There is every reason to believe that the high-level character has encountered many of the monsters available to the Castle Keeper. The players are familiar with these monster's set abilities and able to react to them quickly and through using their own abilities to maximum advantage. Everyone knows that a troll regenerates and is destroyed only by the use of fire. By changing the nature of the monster, from something as simple as its hit dice, to something as complex as its spell use or innate abilities, the CK can challenge the party while using familiar, though refurbished

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



JULIUS CAESAR

tools. Now the troll does not regenerate unless it is burned.

NPCs serve as another perfect balancing tool that can drive the game forward. NPCs are not characters. They are tools at the disposal of the CK and therefore should be treated as such. Allowing a fighter NPC to possess a tracking ability is perfectly okay in the context of the game. Some justification may be supplied but only if the CK is in a giving mood. The NPC is a tool to drive the game, not a bellwether for mechanical governance. Familiar classes with unknown powers help the CK keep the characters guessing, reluctant to use their full bank of abilities as this may give away to the NPC who or what they are capable of. This allows the CK to script the adventure better as it unfolds. Adjusting the NPCs up or down is also very helpful.

What was expected becomes unexpected. The giant shouldn't have been killed that quickly. That spell has never been that effective before. Changing the variants on certain things is easy and well within the prerogative of the CK and their need be no justification for this. If so desired, allow for more powerful, clever creatures where before, the beast was weak and stupid. This approach tends to put players on the guard, making them more ready to react to the game and what is going on. The familiar turned strange is the perfect tool in the CK's arsenal.

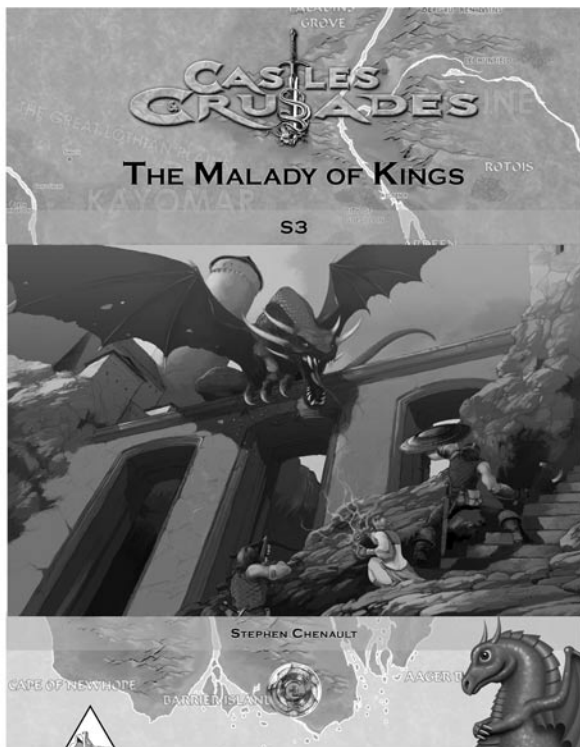
At high levels, magic offers a whole new area that the CK can utilize to script balanced adventures and keep them there. Magic is always an unknown in the game; as with monster variance, magic items can be changed or altered to fit the CKs needs, the player and

his character can never second guess what the item or items does or might actually be doing in the case of sentient items.

At this level, the sentient magic item begins to play a role like never before and one that, if used properly, outshines in usefulness almost any other tool in the CK's toolbox. The magic item, long desired or one just acquired, is very addictive for it gives the character powers that they did not have and perhaps have never had before or will ever have through normal level progression. The magic item can set the tone, for it had designs of its own, and may, at the desire of the CK, struggle with the player for power over the character, whether through actual or overt actions. The most obvious example of any such item is the ring in Tolkien's trilogy. The ring drives the adventure, serves to attract the enemy and influences everyone from the ancient elves to kings of men and the fellowship. In the Big Game that the Troll Lords play, many such items enter the fray: the sword Durendale, the Eye of Thorax, the Blade of Railth. All these items had powers that impacted the play, distracted the characters, forced them to battle unknown enemies, etc.

There is no limit on these items; as the game evolves, so can the magic item. What the characters didn't know one day they may find out the next, as the CK had an epiphany while reading the latest Green Lantern comic book.

In creating the adventure or encounter, the CK must learn to change their old habits, change things from what the characters have come to expect to something entirely new. Approach problems from a



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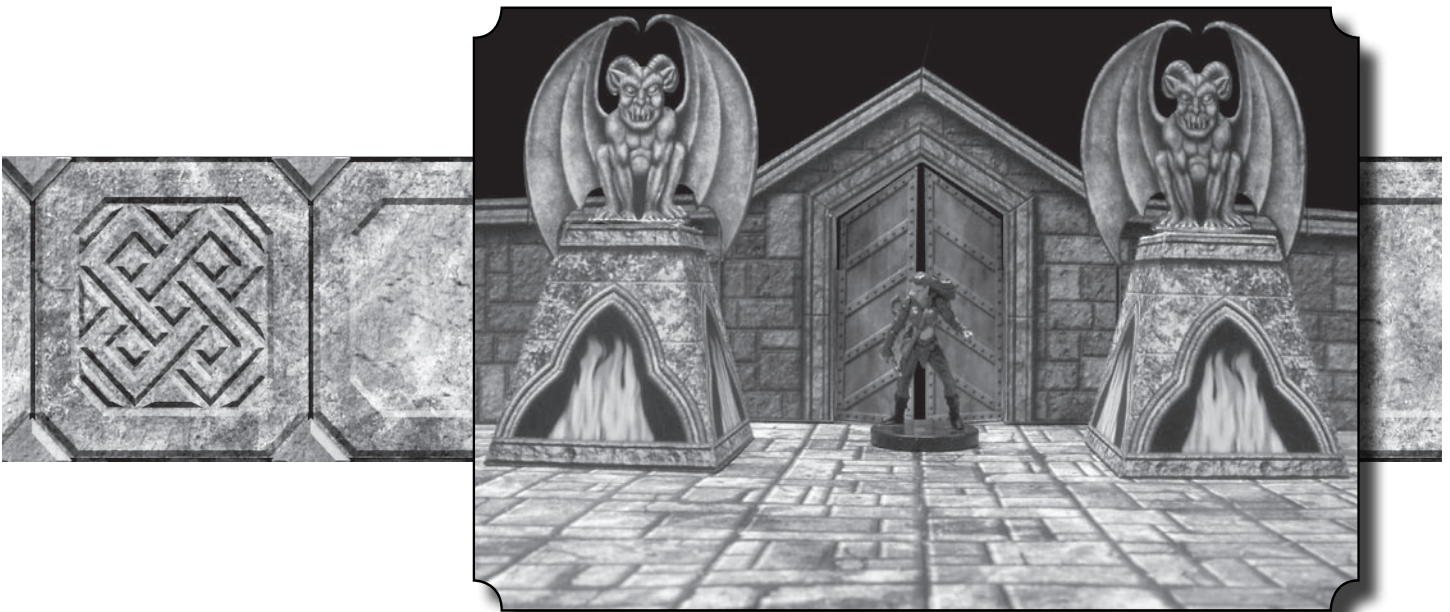


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different angle and establish different criteria for success. If the game is normally combat heavy, shift it to one where role playing dominates and the solutions are only attainable through role playing. This helps to challenge the player from different angles and to use their own abilities and skills in different manners. This approach to balance works well with the philosophy that nothing is written in stone and the CK is able to secretly change things to make them harder or easier depending on the momentary needs.

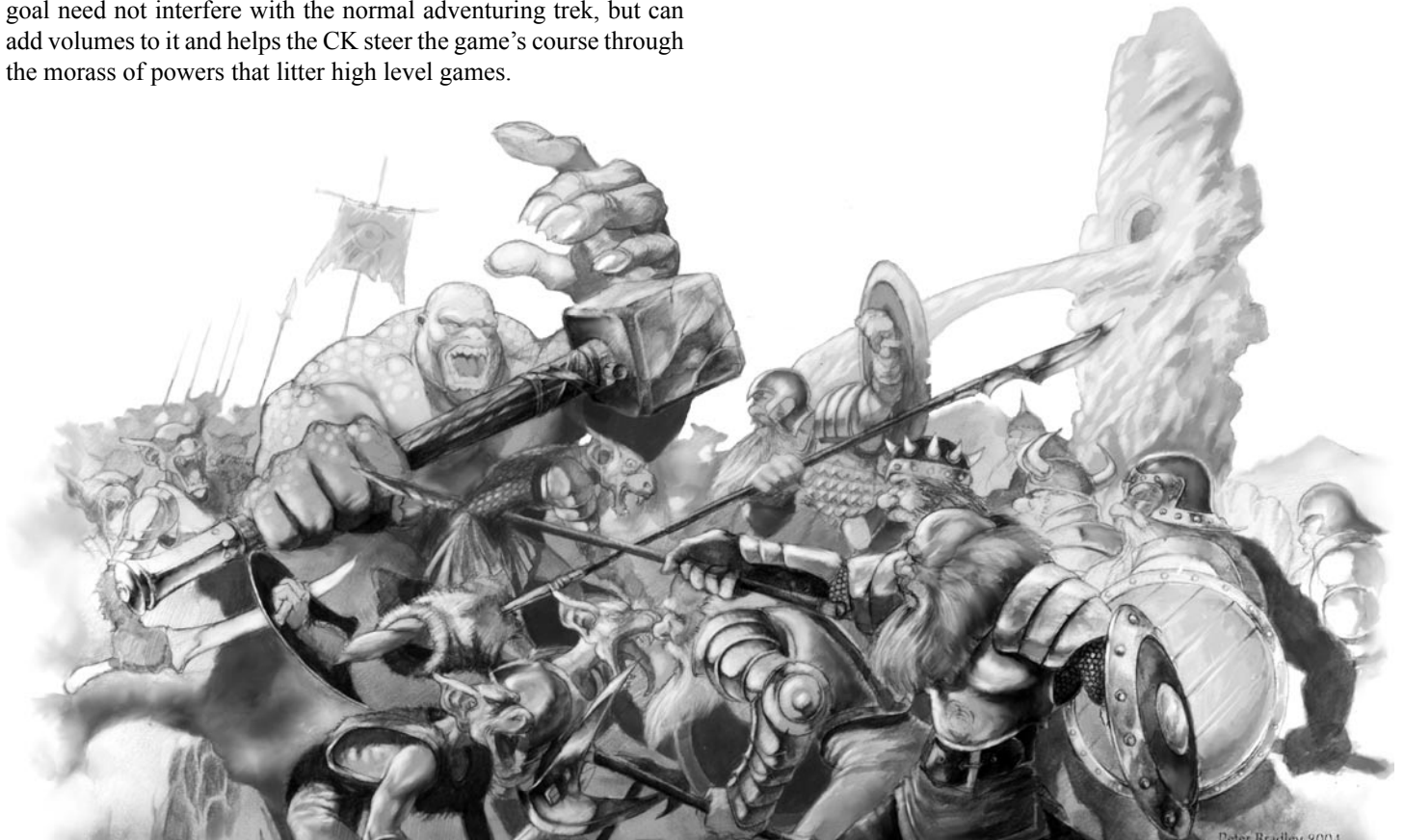
Achieving and maintaining game balance becomes easy with experience; not just experience gaming, but experience gaming with a particular group. Knowledge and habit come to dominate, and the CK able to take advantage of that assumed knowledge and those lazy habits is much better positioned to create initial balance and to maintain it when needed.

The players must adjust themselves into their new roles. They cannot be hung up on a life of simple adventure. Those days are generally past. Most monsters have long fallen beneath the blades and spells of the characters, and treasure has become heaped in mounds, spent and heaped again. The end game for simple adventuring is always the same. We've done this before! The monster might be different, but we've been here already.

Goals become a key element to the characters. If the players can supply their characters with even simple goals, such as building a castle or tower, finding an ancient tomb, dedicating a temple, starting a guild, etc. they immediately serve the CK with adventuring material and give the game some greater meaning. The meaning this time, however, is not one determined by what some prince in some ancient castle desires, but one driven by the characters themselves, fueled now by their desire for power and greater glory. This goal need not interfere with the normal adventuring trek, but can add volumes to it and helps the CK steer the game's course through the morass of powers that litter high level games.

Do not shy away from political intrigue either. Adventures in the halls of Kings can be very fun and challenging and offer whole new playing fields for the use of character powers as well as CK plots and tools. This does not mean that the game should evolve into a long drawn out discussion of the various merits of democracy and monarchy. Games based wholly on politics can be very dry and too heavy on the role playing, but as a backdrop to the epic quest for adventure, the baron's dusty hall can offer a truly lively scene.

Running any game for any level can challenge the CK as these three articles note (not nearly as challenging as remaining focused over the 12 months it took to finish these three articles). And the act of running a game is very much the act of a director. It is incumbent upon the CK to maintain awareness of a host of things, from the players they are running, to the monsters, the setting, time lines, back stories, and so forth. The whole cacophony is maintained in the imagination with supported scribbled notes. It's challenging, but not impossible, and can be extremely fun. The most important factor to remember is to always keep the players engaged in the game. By using NPCs, magic items, monsters, plot hooks and/or descriptions, the CK can capture and keep the players' interest, who in turn play their characters with added gusto and emphasis, bringing out role playing and developing traits in their characters that the CK can build upon and into the game. And this is the key to any game, its balance and move forward. Players who are captured and whose interest is held will achieve a suspension of disbelief that carries them through any small inconsistencies or mishaps the CK may experience. Balance is important, but it is only the end result of a game where all the participants are having fun.



HARVESTERS

WHEAT HOLLOW

Greetings, fellow adventurers! I hope you enjoy adventuring in the Lands of Wheat Hollow. I also hope that Harvoc is a distant memory. As you may have noticed when reading through the Harvesters adventure, there was a map of the areas surrounding the Village of Wheat Hollow, and that there wasn't any explanation or details as to who or what lived in these areas. Oops! Some pesky squirrel or sneaky mouse must have stolen that information when I wasn't looking. They can be that way, you know!

Well, I'm here to remedy that! The following is a quick short run-down of what you can find or run into in the areas surrounding the Village of Wheat Hollow. Feel free to add or subtract anything you like. Remember, it's your world to mold and to change as you see fit.

SURROUNDING AREAS

LINDEN FOREST

The Linden Forest is a large deciduous forest that lies just west and south of the White Caps Inn and the east and south of the Black Midge Swamp. It is filled with trees of all kinds – oak, hickory, elm, maple, poplar, ash. Many different animal communities make their home here - such as mice, squirrels, moles, shrews, chipmunks, rabbits, and hares. There is a main road that runs through the entire forest and exits out the south end. There are other smaller roads that shoot off to the east and west that lead to separate animal communities. Be careful though, some of the roads are very old and may lead to dead ends or trouble.

It is rumored that a tower of an ancient and powerful squirrel wizard lies somewhere in the northern part of the forest. These wild tales of gold, jewels, and many magical items have been flying about for decades. One could rest easy for the rest of their lives if only they could just find it! Could you be the lucky one? Located in the southern part of the forest is the hideout of a band of nasty rats. They've been using this area to hide from the authorities while preying on those that traverse up and down the main forest road. They've been at it for many seasons and probably have accumulated a vast sum of wealth. Rousting them out and recovering that wealth would be quite nice, eh?!

THE WHITE CAPS INN

This inn is on the shores of Lake Lotor to the south of Wheat Hollow and is run by a rowdy, but good natured, otter by the name of Seamus "Stikkle Back" Waterglide. He's been running the inn for the last 12 seasons with nary an altercation. He and some of his old

shipmates from his sailing days decided call it a day and run the inn instead of fighting the storms and waves of Lake Lotor. He and his six otter mates do all the cooking, cleaning, bartending, and anything else that needs to be done around the place. It is because of these burly fellows that even the most cantankerous bar patron stays behaves themselves.

The inn has a common room for eating and sleeping, the kitchen, and the bar. There are twelve rooms for rent on the second floor. The rooms are 10'x10', contain two single beds, and a trunk and dresser for storing personal items. The cost to rent a room is 10sp/night or 1gp (w/meal). Any stay over a week will have to be worked out with Seamus. He serves fish or vegetable stew, bread, and any type of drink the patron would prefer (i.e. beer, ale, wine, cordial, water) for the low price of 1gp. The bar closing time is 11 pm and they reopen the bar for breakfast at 7am. A typical breakfast is eggs, potatoes, pancakes, and bread and sells for 10sp.

There is a dock on the lake that is able to handle four small boats at a time. Being a former sailor, Seamus is more than happy to talk of sailing and has plenty of stories to share about sailing the waters of Lake Lotor. If anyone mentions the name of Black Tim, Seamus' face will darken, for he has nothing but bad words to say about that scoundrel. Black Tim is a pirate that has been sailing the waters of Lake Lotor and preying on just about any ship that sails the waters. He will say that keel-hauling is the only good thing for that low-life creature. In fact, if anyone is able to bring back the pirate's hat and eye-patch, he will pay them 50gps for their prize. He would gladly display it over his bar if he could.

Seamus keeps his 30' longboat named *The Roving Blade* moored out at the dock as well. It has one main mast in the middle and six oar stations (12 in all) on both sides of the boat. There is a raised platform on the front of the boat that supports a light ballista. They use the weapon to deter pirates and to hunt the giant pike and musky that roam the deeper waters of Lake Lotor. He and his crew take the longboat every once and awhile just to keep sharp and on the hopes of running into Black Tim and his crew.

He also has the dream of bringing the dreaded Taniwhasa, the Terror of the Deep, to heel. Taniwhasa is a large behemoth that time has forgotten. It is a mosasaur has been terrorizing ships and their crew for centuries. It has not been seen in this area of the lake for the last few years, but could make an appearance at any time.

Seamus "Stikkle Back" Waterglide (Sailor/4th lvl fighter, HP 23, AC 15 (+2 ring of protection, +3 dexterity bonus), weapon: +1 cutlass (behind bar), 1d6+1, PA – physical).

6 Otter shipmates (Sailor/1st lvl fighter, HP 5, AC 11 (leather coat), weapon: short sword (1d6), spear (1d6), or dagger (1d4).

The Roving Blade (length 30 ft, hull points 30, move 120'/rd; light ballista, 3d6). It also has a rack towards the aft end of the ship that holds 15 spears (damage 1d6). There is a barrel next to the ballista and holds 10 large bolts.

BLACK MIDGE SWAMP

This large track of fetid swamp is the home of many bands of evil frogs and toads, slithering snakes, and many biting insects (i.e., midges, mosquitoes, and gnats). Any sensible creature has long been driven out of this place. It is said that the Mad Headless Hare roams the lost trails in the northern areas of the swamp above the Lake of the Lampreys. Rumors say that the hare found a magical necklace while searching for treasure in the Unforgiving Mountains - it had a life of its own and it slowly twisted his mind and drove him mad. Because of this the hare did unspeakable horrors and was put to death for it - hence, headless. Some say that the spirit of the hare is searching the swamp for the necklace that he "lost". The necklace is indeed still in the swamp. It lies with the remains of muskrat who found the necklace many years ago following the demise of the Mad Hare, which had been had originally been stolen by a desirous raccoon thief many years before that and who had fled into the swamp.

The first inkling that the adventure group will have that something is amiss is that they will hear a very soft low groan, almost like the sighing of the wind. It will pick up in intensity over the next couple of rounds. The shadowy image of the Headless Hare will slowly appear from about 25-30 yards away. Once the Headless Hare is fully formed (20 seconds), he will start shouting at the adventure group, saying that they are responsible for stealing his head and necklace and will start attacking the group. Seeing as the shadow is insane, there is nothing that the group can say to appease it. He wants revenge and he's going to get it!!

Cursed Necklace: The necklace's curse is still very much alive and well. If a player character should wear the necklace, he/she will have to make a save vs. intelligence (CR 4) or fall under the spell of the necklace. The PC will do everything in his/her power to control the others in the group and kill those who do not obey. He/she will have delusions of grandeur - thinking that he/she is the mightiest animal in the world. He/she will fight to the death to prevent the necklace from being removed. A remove curse spell will only work for the number of combat rounds equal to the spell caster (i.e. 5 rounds (50 seconds) for a 5th level cleric). If the necklace is not removed in that time frame, another remove curse spell will have to be cast in order to try and remove it again.

The necklace consists of a silver rat-shaped skull surrounded by onyx beads. The beads give off a sickly purplish glow that radiates a protection from good, 10 ft in diameter (+2 bonus to AC and savings throws against creatures of good).

Mad Headless Hare Shadow (HD 3 (d12), HP 25, AC13, # attacks - 1, incorporeal touch (1d4) + strength drain, PA - M). See the Monsters & Treasure book for more details on shadows.

LAKE OF THE LAMPREYS

The lake is shallow and full of weeds, cattails, and lily pads. It is the home of many large lamprey, leeches, and northern pike. There are many different smaller harmless fish that live in fear of these creatures dwelling there (i.e. blue gills, bass, perch). The depth of the lake varies from 5 to 30 ft. The center of the lake is the deepest area of the lake at 30 ft. It is also the location of the remains of small pirate ship. Inside the hull of the ship is a chest that holds the pirate's spoils that they never had a chance to enjoy. The ship was sunk by the lampreys. They were able to latch onto the ship and slowly chew holes in the hull, causing the ship to sink. The lamprey also enjoyed feasting on the poor pirates as well.

Treasure Chest: 550 gp, 300 sp, a +2 dagger, and a ring of water breathing. The remains of the ship are the home of a group of lamprey that could care less about the treasure, but will attack anyone that comes near their home.

5 Large Lamprey (HD 2d8+2, HP 14, 10, 9, 8, 6, AC 13, # of attacks - 1, damage - blood drain, 1d6 hp/rd after successful hit, PA - physical).

Also living on a small wooded island located towards the north end of the lake is a swamp sloth. He has made his lair in the middle of the island and patiently waits for small boats to come by so that he can capsize them and devour the hapless victims that are on board. His lair is a mound of mud, cattails, and brush that he has been gathered from the surrounding area. Buried in the backside



DO YOU HEAR THAT? GIRD YOURSELF. FOR IT IS UPON US!



A CASTLE KEEPERS GUIDE

of the mound wall are various pieces of treasure he's gathered over the years. It contains the following: 25 gp gold ring, a small sack containing 35gp, 60 sp, 13 cp, +1 dagger, a bone scroll case that contains a scroll with the following spells – 1st: magic missile, squirrel claws, identify.

Swamp Sloth (HD 4d8, HP 21, AC 16, # of attacks – 3, damage – 2 claws (1d6+1), 1 bite 1d4+1), PA – Physical).

ZADOOKS' WOODS

This small woods is made up of mostly birch, cottonwood, and jack pine trees with the odd elm, oak, or hickory located here and there. Travelling through the woods is rather easy due to very little undergrowth. The woods are home to Zadooks the Bear and his little companion Cubby. Zadooks and Cubby are both black bears – Zadooks is black in color and Cubby is brown. They will first come across as being scary and possibly dangerous, but that is just to get a feel for what type of critters the adventuring group are before revealing their true selves. The two bears are hospitable and will help out the adventurers if they should need it. They live in a simple small cabin located on the southern end of the woods. It is a 20' x 20' one room cabin that contains a fire place for cooking and heat, a table and two chairs for eating, and two beds (one large, one small). They have no wealth to speak of in terms of coins, weapons, etc. Zadooks does use a large wooden club to keep other animals in line or to defend himself and Cubby. Cubby is just a youngster and will run to Zadooks for help and protection. They also keep a group of honey bee hives just to the north of their cabin. It would be wise of the adventuring group not to disturb these hives. It would not make Zadooks very happy to say the least!

Zadooks the Black Bear (HD 5d12, HP 40, AC 15, # of attacks – 3 (2 claws, 1d4/1d4, & a bite, 1d6) or 1 (by weapon type – club, 2d6+2), PA – physical).

Cubby (HD 1d12, HP 7, AC 16, # of attacks – 3 (2 claws, 1d2/1d2, 1 bite, 1d4) or 1 (by weapon type, dagger, 1d4), PA – physical).

GOLDEN LAKE

This lake lies just north of the Village of Thimble Berry. It gets its name from the golden sand at the bottom of the lake. The waters of the lake are clear, cool, and refreshing. Many different types of fish can be found here – pan fish, perch, and minnows to name a few. Unfortunately, it is also the home of northern pike as well. Although the pike will spend most of their time chasing these smaller fish, they are not above going after an unwary smaller creature (i.e. mouse, mole, etc). Bull frogs are also found among the lily pads and cattails that surround the lake and will attack if the opportunity arises.

THE QUAKING WOODS

This small woods is made up primarily of cottonwood and aspen trees that give the woods its name. The woods are under the control of Red Rufus the Bobcat and his group of malcontents (rats and weasels). The woods also has a small group of red squirrels that Red Rufus just can't seem to control in it as well. If the adventuring group happens to run into Red Rufus, he will tell them that the squirrels are most savage and dangerous. That they should not believe anything that the squirrels say, for they are lying and devious killers.

These red squirrels are a major headache for Red Rufus. He's been trying for months to get rid of them without success. He will try and dupe the adventuring party into getting rid of them for him. He will offer them a handsome sum of 500gp to do this. Of course, he has no intention of paying them, for he's a scoundrel. He will pay them a 100gp up front, which he will try and get back from them by attacking and subduing the group to make them slaves if the adventuring group is successful in getting rid of the red squirrels.

His compound is approximately 150' x 300'. It is surrounded by 15 foot high wall of timber. There are six buildings located inside – his long house and five huts. His long house (15' wide by 30ft long) contains a table and four chairs on the left side, a fireplace in the middle that also has two large chairs in front of it, and his sleeping quarters on the right side. His sleeping quarters contains a bed and a chest. The sleeping quarters is separated from the other areas by a larger curtain that hangs from the ceiling.

Red Rufus the Bobcat (HD 4 (d8), HP 22, AC 16 (mail shirt + dex (+2), # of attacks – 1, damage – 1d6+2 (+2 rapier) or dagger (1d4+1 (+1 dagger), PA – physical). Red Rufus has the abilities of a 4th level rogue. This is due to his natural cunning and deviousness. He is very light and quick on his feet, hence, his dexterity bonus. Red Rufus is not like other bobcats. His tail is much longer than what is typically found – most bobcat tails are short, or bobbed (hence, their name). It is his pride and joy. He uses his tail as a badge of honor and will flaunt in front other bobcats – to cause any harm or damage to it would greatly affect him and his ego. He will seek revenge on anybeast that should cause it harm. He has the following items in the chest in his sleeping quarters: 200 gp, 54 pp, a gold necklace (150gp), and 3 gems (2 - 100gp, 1 – 50gp). The chest is locked (CR 3). It has a poison trap as well (CR 2). Anyone setting off the trap will take 1d8 points of damage from the poison that is on the needle. He has the key to the chest on a chain around his neck. Using the key will bypass the poison needle trap.

12 Rats (HD 1 (d8), HP 4, AC 11 (leather odds & ends), # of attacks – 1, damage by weapon type – short sword (1d6), dagger (1d4), or by short bow (1d6). Each rat carries 1d8 arrows in its quiver. Each rat carries 1d6 sp and 1d10 cp in a pouch. Their loyalty lasts only as long as Red Rufus is alive. If Red Rufus should be killed, they will either beg for mercy or run in any direction they can to get away.

5 Weasels (HD 1+1 (d8), HP 6, AC 12 (leather + quickness/dexterity), # of attacks – 1, damage by weapon type (same as rats above)). Weasels get an added +1 to their armor class due to their quickness.

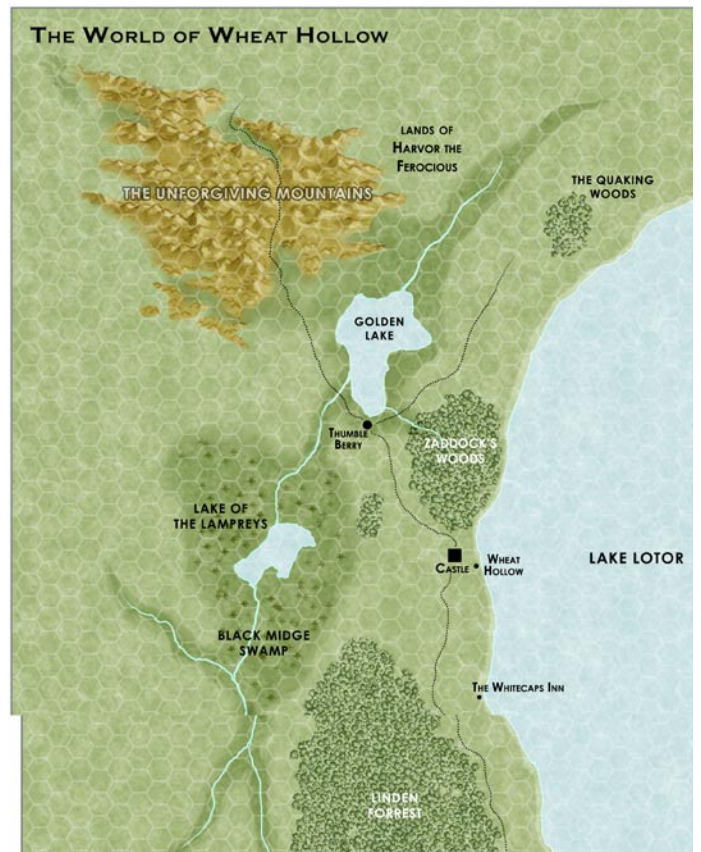
18 Red squirrels (HD 1-1 (d6), HP 2, AC 13 (quickness, no armor), # of attacks – 1, damage by weapon type – dagger (1d4) or sling stone (1d4), PA – physical). These smaller cousins to the grey and fox squirrels are just doing what any squirrel would do if an unwanted visitor showed up – try to drive them out. The squirrels would like nothing better than to send Red Rufus and his gang on the way down the road.

The red squirrels are not evil, far from it. The squirrels are good natured and friendly. However, they are very shy and will watch the adventuring group from the tree branches above to see if they are good or bad. If they are convinced that the adventurers are good, they will make themselves known and try to warn the player characters that Red Rufus is in the woods and is very dangerous. If the adventuring group has run into Red Rufus before this, they will easily see that the red squirrels are not a danger to anyone and that Red Rufus is the biggest scoundrel in the area.

THE UNFORGIVING MOUNTAINS

The Unforgiving Mountains is the homeland of Harvoc the Ferocious. For many months out of the year it is snowy, windy, and bitterly cold. Why any animal would want to live there is a very puzzling question, but they do. It is also the home of lemmings, voles, and the frost owls that chase them. Polar bears, arctic foxes, musk ox, and caribou can also be found roaming the open flatland tundra beyond the mountains.

Small villages comprised of lemmings and voles can be found dotted throughout the tundra. A few arctic hares can be found amongst them as well. The number of villagers will average 25-100. They mostly subsist on foraging the tundra for food. Because of the great distances between villages and the mountains to the south there is very little in the way of trade. It is just too hard for them to make it through the mountains to visit the villages of Thimbleberry and Wheat Hollow. To communicate the other villages, they will either use the arctic hares as runners or an arctic tern to fly down/over with messages.



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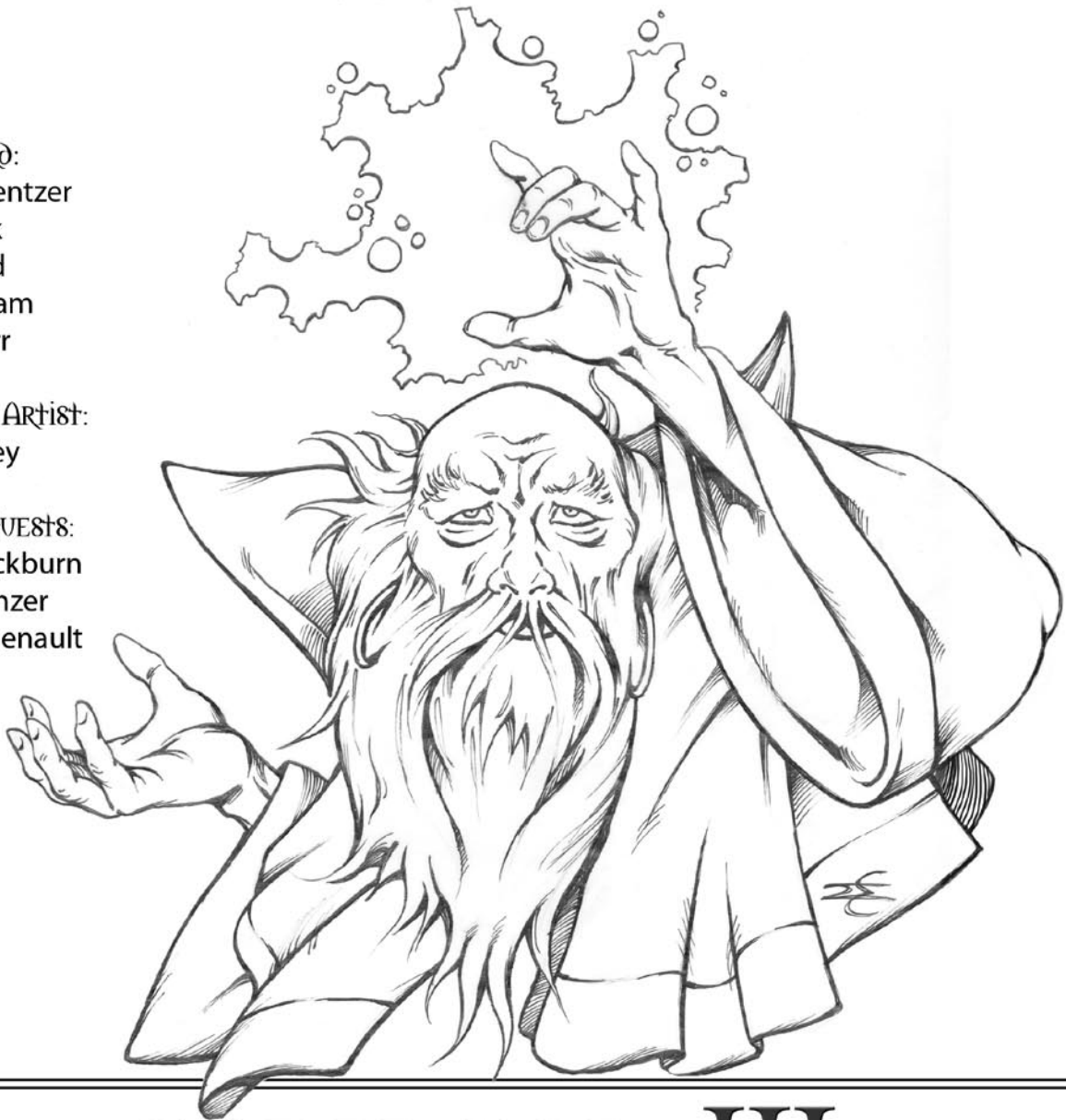
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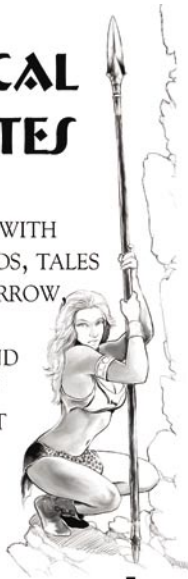
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LIFE IN THE 24TH CENTURY ... BC

BY JOSEPH WOLZ

A staple of gaming is the ancient ruin. Our heroes always explore the tombs and catacombs built by a forgotten people, probably for a purpose long since turned to dust. History is a lot like this as well, there are always older civilizations to explore. Records accumulate in ancient to modern times, and it is these records that help historians understand the past. But what happens when there is no “before,” no ancient civilizations, no ruins, no accumulated records? Prehistory can be fun in gaming, of course, but where we’re going now is to the beginning: Mesopotamia.

The region currently known as Iraq is completely different what it was in the 24th century BCE. The climate of Iraq today is not the same climate the Mesopotamians enjoyed. In the 24th century BCE the land itself is dry but fertile. It is considered semi-arid, meaning that it’s a land of dusty plains and small stands of trees. It rains infrequently, “there are a few showers at the changes of the season, and, in winter, a few days of heavy rain. During the summer, for long months together, the sky remains inexorably blue while the temperature is hot and parching. In winter, clouds are almost as rare; but winds often play violently over the great tracts of unbroken country.” (Chipiez, 1884, pg 9)

Before there were pyramids in Egypt, even before there was writing, there were cities in Mesopotamia. The land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was a little wetter, but still dry. There was not a lot of stone to be had in the central part of Mesopotamia, and so the civilizations turned to clay for building material. The semi-arid area between the rivers was “a land of bricks” according to historian A.H. Sayce (1900, pg 91). The sun in the area was sufficient to “bake” the clay into brick, and the early people of the area experimented with mixtures until their bricks were just right.

Daily life was surrounded by bricks, but the people were fond of decorations. Their homes generally had small gardens at-

tached to the side. These gardens served both a decorative and a source of food and herbs. The gardens were generally small, and even the smallest gardens had date palms. The richer the inhabitant of a house (and thereby the larger the house), the larger and more elaborate the garden. The largest palace gardens were paradises on Earth. The garden was an essential part of daily life, as well.

Houses in the Mesopotamian city-states were built of brick, of course, and usually ringed a courtyard. The size of the house was dependant on the income of the inhabitant, but even poor houses had a small central courtyard for various industrial pursuits. Most houses had more than one storey, accessible from an outside staircase. The house was furnished, but not overly much, it would have looked a little Spartan to modern eyes. Floors were covered in rugs, which looked like Persian rugs, but were of much simpler design and less luxurious material. There were low tables and couches, as well as chairs. It was fashionable to recline on couches as opposed to sitting up in chairs.

Clothing of the time was simple in cut, but became decorated more and more as ones wealth increased. Men wore tunics over loincloths and a robe that went down to the ankles. They always wore a hat or headdress of some kind. Women wore simple dresses, also consisting of a tunic. A cloak could be put over the robe when the weather was cold. Most people went barefoot, although if it was necessary people wore sandals.

Many people associate Mesopotamia with huge curly beards, but having a beard was pretty rare in the city-states of the 24th century BC. People from the southern cities tended to have beards, or at least be able to grow them, while people in the north tended to lack facial hair. There is evidence to suggest that men in the north regularly shaved their heads

as well. Of course, Gods were always depicted with curly beards...but no moustaches.

Everyone wore makeup. Men and women wore eyeliners and blushes, as well as scented oils. In the south, the men would shine their hair with oil. Women wore more in the way of cosmetics than men, but not by much. Jewelry was likewise co-ed, and everyone loved wearing jewelry. Even poor people had semi-precious stones set in bronze as jewelry. Necklaces, bracelets, rings, anklets, and torcs were all common items worn by the masses.

Most men and many women carried signature cylinders. Stone was rather rare in the floodplain of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and so "every pebble was of value, and [the Mesopotamians] accordingly became expert gem-cutters at a very early period." (Sayce, 1900, pg 103) These cylinders, when rolled on wet clay, made a small picture, scene, or string of illuminated words which served as the unique signature of the bearer. These cylinders were carried by people everywhere they went and losing one was unthinkable. It took a long time to make one, and even people who had been elevated from peasant to upper class would tend to keep their plainer cylinder, although they'd occasionally have extra marks added to represent their new station. Stealing one would be a great affront, and copying one would be abhorrent.

Contracts and documents were of vital importance to the people of the city-states of Mesopotamia. Most documents were impressed in wet clay and baked or sun-hardened into permanence. The equivalent of a scratch pad was a wax tablet where one could erase what they had written. The people of the region had a sophisticated writing system, which could represent every sound in their language.

The cities were governed similarly to one another, because they were all culturally very similar. Although they warred with one another, they also traded, and travel between city-states didn't seem to be overly difficult...especially if the cities were allied. A good analogy would be the United States: if you travel from one state to another, the broad details are the same, but the accent is different as are the local delicacies, and maybe some of the décor. You're still in the same place, essentially.

City states covered about 60 square miles. This was enough farmland to feed the city, and not too large to defend. Around 24 BCE (a little later, in fact), a land called Assyria, just south of the Mesopotamian city states was beginning to form the first Empire the world had seen. But the city-states themselves were not imperial in any way. They were theocratic, and the king was an essential religious figure. In some cities, the King and High Priest were one and the same; in others, the offices were separate but relatively equal. Any ratio of power between the two men (or women!) was possible.



Religiously, Mesopotamia was different from what you'd expect. Every city worshipped basically the same pantheon, but each city had a different primary God and divine hierarchy. The creation stories differed sometimes, but generally the mythology was the same from place to place. The relative importance of divine characters changed, sometimes changing the story completely and at other times keeping the story almost exactly the same. This situation is awesome for gaming in this period, or one substantially like it. Clerics from different city states would worship their own patron deity (probably of their city) who may be considered an evil god in the city down the road. Or even weirder, the cleric of a minor deity in one city could go a few cities over and find herself treated as a high priestess since her "minor" god is the patron of that city!

Warfare was rather sophisticated amongst the cities in Mesopotamia. The region was in constant war over water and land. Many of the great irrigation systems were fought over so many times that their city of origin is either lost to history or had their distinctive markings deliberately obliterated by a succession of armies. Generally, cities did not attempt to destroy one another or conquer one another; they would go to war over border or trade disputes.

Warfare was conducted primarily infantry with some ranged capability via short bow and javelins, commanded and supported by chariots. The chariot was a very important part of Mesopotamian armies, acting as a platform for command, archery, and javelin throwing. It was also used to guide the armies toward an objective on the battlefield. The men on the chariots and in the ranks all wore simple armor, generally of hardened leather reinforced with small bronze plates. The wealthier warriors (nobility) wore chain shirts of bronze

and bronze helmets. Swords of the time were either straight slashing swords with a blunt tip or Khopesh-style "sickle-swords." Both could be beautifully decorated, and generally were of good quality, since only the wealthiest warriors could afford them. The most ubiquitous weapon on the battlefield was the mace, which was generally made of bronze and patterned after what were obviously stone headed war clubs.

Armies were made up of a core of professional soldiers. Constant warfare meant that there was always a standing army for each city. This small core of professional soldiers would be supplemented in times of major war with levies from the city-dwelling classes and peasant farmers from outside. Espionage would have been a problem however, since the region in the 24th century BCE all spoke the same language.

Espionage between culturally similar cities, gods in control of those same cities, and a background of constant warfare make for an excellent environment for fantasy gaming. To add another wrinkle, the Mesopotamians were a superstitious people who saw magic everywhere. They earnestly believed in it, and although their subtle, indirect magic may not intersect exactly with the typical magical tropes of fantasy gaming, minor details like that can be ignored in order to make an awesome campaign. It is certain that with a little tweaking a wonderful, fantastical setting at the dawn of the world could give your gaming group an immensely satisfying gaming experience!

To prove it, Crusader will be running two additional articles on this topic which will treat you to a few rules tweaks to bring C&C in line with a Mesopotamian game, as well as introduce the Gods & Monsters of this fantastic world at the dawn of time.



MONSTERS & TREASURE OF AIHRDE

BY STEPHEN CHENAULT

IN MONSTERS & TREASURE OF AIHRDE ARE HOSTS OF LEGENDARY MONSTERS FOR YOUR CASTLES & CRUSADES GAME. EACH ENTRY COMES FULLY DETAILED WITH DESCRIPTIONS, HABITS, CULTURE WHERE NEEDED, TREASURE, COMBAT, ALL ABILITIES AS WELL AS A SPECIAL SECTION ON EACH MONSTER'S PLACE IN AIHRDE.

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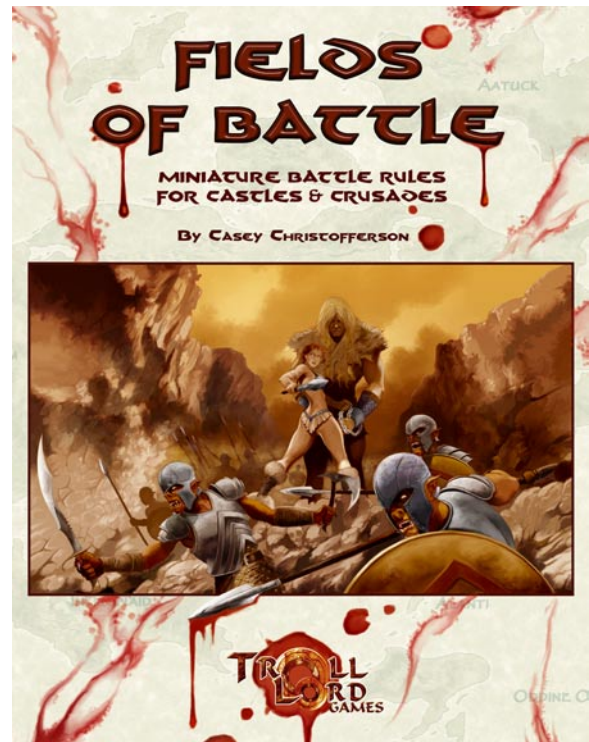
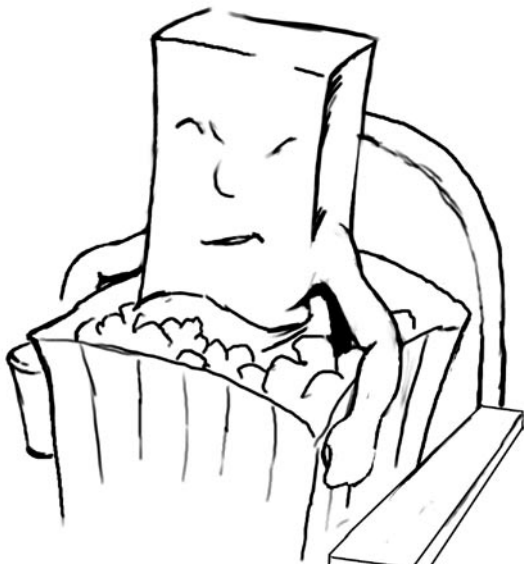
It's too easy to find flaws in movies, but it really takes the enjoyment out of them, so its best to just sit back and relax with a cool Dr. Pepper in hand and some slathered over buttery popcorn and watch away. A pretty darn cool movie to watch is Ridley Scott's Gladiator. This movie stars Russell Crowe and some other people and takes place in ancient Rome during the height of the Empire. Arguably the best part of the movie is the opening battle sequence.

Here we have several Roman Legions in full battle array, standing upon the burnt up slopes of some German forest. Before them a host of German warriors have gathered. A battle is more than inevitable; the ferocious Germans seek it. As the Romans, commanded by General Maximus, played by Crow, brace for the battle a German warlord comes forth carrying the head of a dead Roman messenger. He shouts something that I don't have the translation for but sounds really cool and hurls the head a the Romans.

The battle is inevitable. As the Romans further brace for the coming attack, Maximus leads his cavalry around to the German's flank and rear. He he gathers them on a darkened slope, riding a massive horse and flanked by his ferocious look dog. The scene is caste in grays and subtle tones so the armor and swords stand out starkly. Blood and iron all the way. Then Maximus says one of the most memorable lines in movie history:

"If you find yourself alone, riding in green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled. For you are in Elysium, and are already dead!

To which the men shout and follow him on the charge. That's the way to play a role playing game character!



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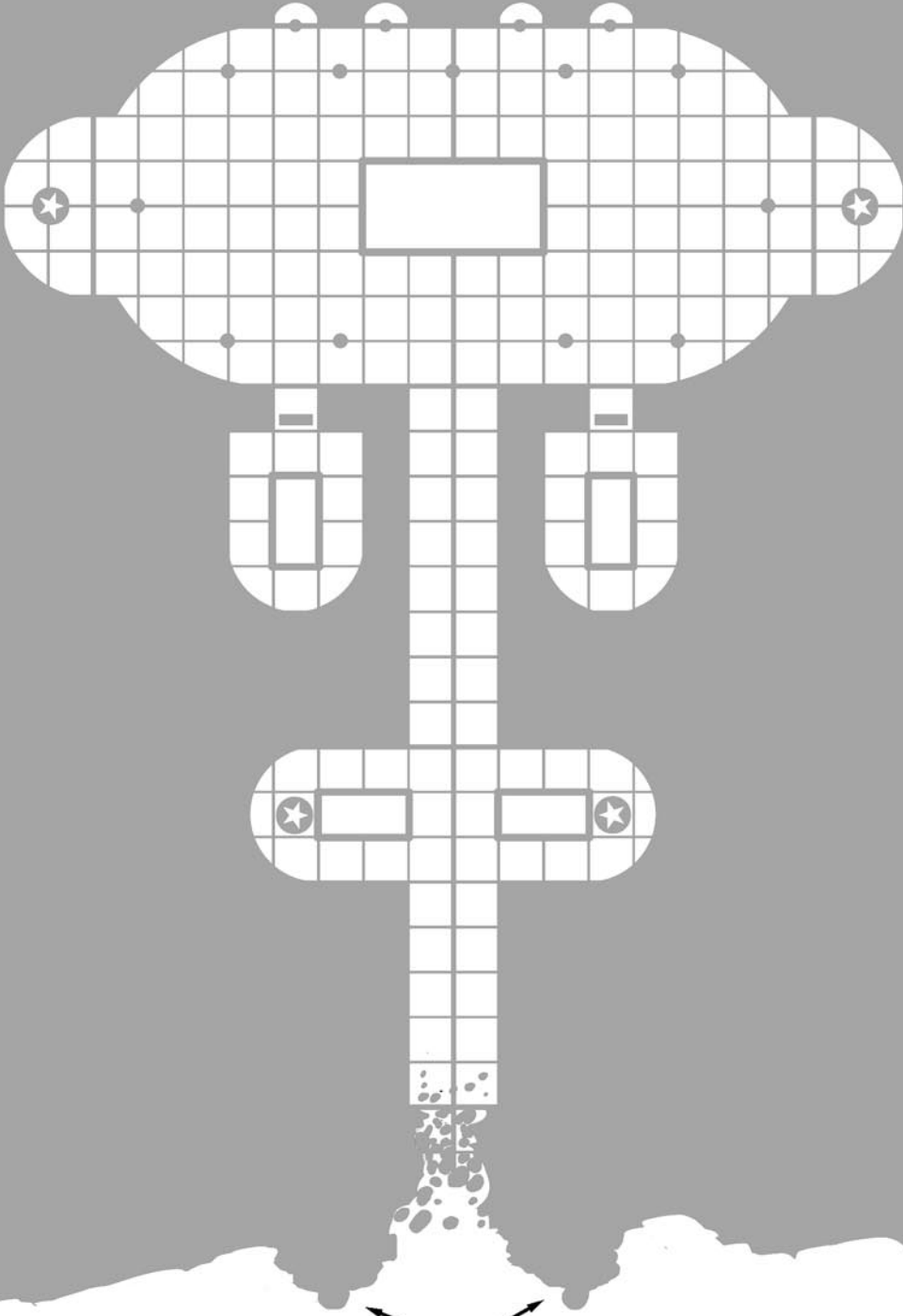
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TOMB OF THE FORGOTTEN KING



WEATHERED STATUES

ONE SQUARE = 5 FEET

UNUSUAL ROADSIDE ENCOUNTERS

By Davis Chenault

THE HUNT LEVEL 5-6

The Setting: Along a section of road in a sparsely forested area intermixed with deep grasslands and just as the sun has dipped below the horizon, the characters barely see a man moving through the high grasses at a phenomenal rate of speed. He is constantly looking behind him. In the distance the characters can hear the eerie bailing of wolves. The person running is not paying much attention to what is in front of him and is approaching the characters when it tops a mound of shallow grasses. It is no human which is moving through the grasslands rather, a centaur. It stops for a moment only to begin its breakneck gallop through the grasslands and towards the road. The bailing and howling of the wolves grows louder and louder.

The characters have several options at this point. They can move forward and try to intersect the centaur as it crosses the road, ignore the whole scene or try to intersect the wolves chasing the centaur. Only, it is not wolves chasing the centaur, but Shadow Mastiffs.

Should the characters attempt to intersect the centaur at the road or in the grasses, they are successful. The resplendently attired centaur only pays scant attention to the characters, stopping for one second, yells something and charges forward, dashing away into the grasslands yet again. In this case, the shadow mastiff's are very close behind the centaur and moments later the fastest of the lot leaps onto the road.

As the mastiffs are not here to randomly kill beings, but centaurs. It stops for but one round, growling at the characters before making off into the grasslands after the centaur. The others follow suit.

Should the characters attack any of the mastiffs or interfere in any manner with the chase, the whole lot turns on the characters and begins attacking them. They first bay and try to get the party to split up, taking down one character at a time by pulling them to the ground and voraciously attacking that one character. They move from character to character in this manner.

Should the characters have started a fight with the shadow mastiffs and interfered with the chase, the centaur quickly becomes aware of this. It then stops its flight and charges back to the area of the fight. The centaur engages the mastiffs with all its might in an effort to kill them.

If the characters ignore the whole and track the paths the chasers and chased leave through the grasses, they eventually come upon a dead centaur.

Should the characters stop the chase, kill the mastiffs, save the centaur and the centaur survive, it will be very grateful. The centaur, suspicious by nature asks why the characters saved him or helped him, where the characters are going and why. The centaur is suspicious of the characters as it is of all humans and demi-humans but not so dumb as to not realize a great favor has just been bestowed upon him.

The centaur can offer the characters healing berries to all members of the party as a thanks for their help. He has 32 of them and each heals 1d4 hit points. The centaur would be very familiar with the area he is in and offers to guide the characters wherever they are going as well. When asked about the shadow mastiffs and why they are chasing him, he claims not to know, only that they showed up some days ago, killing several of his family. He, the head of the family has been leading these astray for several days. The mastiffs only come out at night making flight difficult.

Centaur (This chaotic neutral creature's vital stats are: HD 4d8, AC 14 and HP 26. Its prime attributes are: physical. It attacks with a hoof for 1-6 damage and by weapon type. Special ability: use spear as lance. The centaur carries a long spear, short bow, 20 arrows and long sword.)

Shadow Mastiff x7 (This neutral evil creature's vital stats are: HD 4d8, AC 14 and HP 12, 14, 17, 17, 19, 24, and 29. Its prime attributes are: physical. It attacks with a bite for 2-8 damage and by weapon type. Special ability: bay, trip, blend, sunlight vulnerability.)

Further Adventures: It seems someone is after the centaurs. The centaurs now reside in a grove of old trees in the savannah. This grove also contains a sacred well from which creature from the netherworld can be summoned. An evil wizard or cleric is trying to chase the centaurs away from the grove in order to have absolute mastery over it. The grove contains an old tower nearby the well where the wizard or cleric has taken up residence with his minions.

Other unusual encounters to confuse and bother players

A one 3-legged dog hops down the road past the characters. It does not come when called or even if offered food.

A short time after the dog wanders past the characters, a gnome comes wandering down the lane swinging a collar in one hand, whistling and yelling, "Here three leg, come back three leg." The gnome asks the characters if they have seen a three legged dog. He follows their directions if any are given.

A short while after this a giant comes clambering down the lane carrying a large sack and singing a song, Right behind him two gnomes carrying smaller sacks whistle in tune with the giants song.

"Three little gnomes
In one big sack
Slung across
my very big back
Oh where have they gone
My three little gnomes"

The giant pulls up short when he notices the characters and asks if they have seen a gnome looking for a three legged dog. If given directions, the giant and the gnomes travel on, singing and whistling.

SEE more at www.trolllord.com!



Nursery Rhymes from the Winter Dark

The Winter Dark lasted for over a thousand years. The shroud of darkness blanketed the warmth of the sun, locking the world in a permanent season of cold and ice, snow and hardship. The Horned God ruled from his throne in distant Aufstrag. Kings raged battle, and cryptic wizards fought battles upon planes far away. But beneath the struggles of the wise and powerful their lived the common multitudes who toiled on, eking a living out of a world frozen in ice. As always the children dealt with hardship as children do, they know nothing else, so there is nothing else.

These are a small collection of rhymes sung by children in the long cold of the long dark.

Blanket

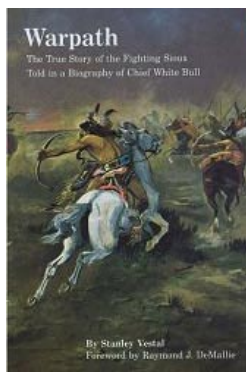
Father's blanket on the fire,
To cool us children's ire,
Take the blanket far away,
And we'll be warm by the way.

Books to Read

History is replete with all manner of amazing stories, often greater than the fiction we read today. For the gamer in you there is one book that stands above them all: *Warpath: The True Story of the Fighting Sioux Told in a Biography of Chief White Bull*. Chief White Bull was a nephew of Sitting Bull and though he did not earn the battle honors of his famous Uncle he came very close. His reputation carried far and wide across the plains for his fighting spirit and courage. He was in the front ranks of the Sioux who destroyed Custer at the Little Big Horn. This biography is more of an autobiography. Stanley Vestal wrote it from extensive interviews with White Bull as that Chief chronicled his life as a warrior, his coups, kills, and struggles.

There are several reasons *Warpath* is a great book. Not only does it bring to light the amazing life of a true nomadic warrior (forget the peace loving, herb smoking modern conception of the Native American), his astounding courage and tenacity in individual combat

but its impossible to miss that this warrior, when a young man, was nothing less than an adventurer. He was your character in real life. More often than not he would gather his war gear together and leave on campaign, seeking plunder and glory. Its connection to our hobby, ground in the real life tale of a truly amazing man, is unmistakable. Get it on Amazon!



Bones

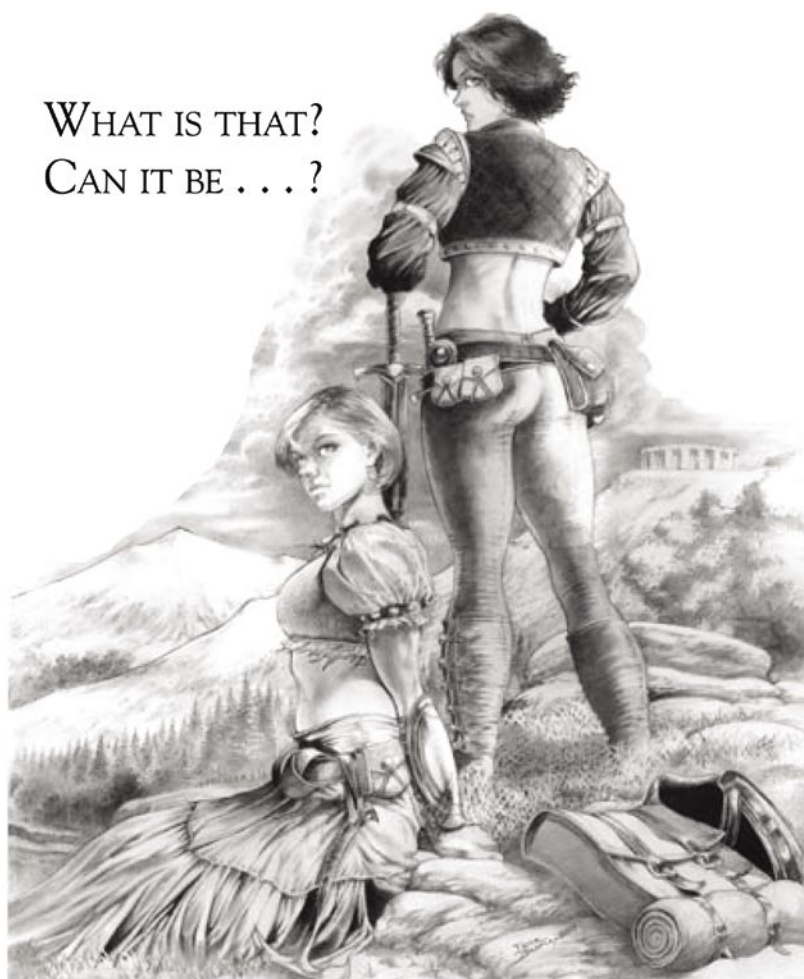
Bones are the earth,
Ashes are the sky,
Blood in the river, lakes by and by.
Bones in ice
Ashes in snow
Water all frozen, down we go.

Walking in the Snow

Not so far to go when you walk in the snow,
Keep your head down as the wind will blow,
Huddle your hands, arms don't throw
Feet and legs, not so fast, move real slow.
Leave your coat open for old man crow,
The walk is short, this you must know,
No so far to go when you walk in the snow.

Seasons

Spring sun cold,
Summer sun old,
Autumn sun in the tomb,
Winter sun doom!



A CASTLE KEEPERS GUIDE

The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



The Continual Flame

So I'm running a game the other night and I have a full table. The whole crew showed up, which is really exhausting because that means there are like 6 people doing stuff all at the same time and I have to pretend that I hear them when I'm actually only reacting to their annoyed facial reactions of when I respond to their actions with much verbosity and wild gesticulations designed to distract them from my failure to actually hear them. This, in itself, can be exhausting as we've played together for so long, over so many countless tables, and weathered so many countless gaming sessions that they know I'm not listening and are merely reacting to my reactions to their reactions. Often they do this with no actual basis, just making up reactions to confuse me and force me to listen to them, which of course sets off the whole horrible train wreck all over again.

CK to Player 1: "What? Yeah I heard you. So you turn around quickly..." Spinning, hands thrown wild in a gesture of defense, I make it seem dramatic. "

Player 1: "I turn around cautiously with no wild gesticulations."

CK to Player 1: "Right, like I said, you throw your hands up in amazement at what you see . . . that was the gesture I was doing." Then to Player 2: "So you turned, upon noticing the figure, you gesture for your comrades..." "Throwing your hand backward in a gesture of retreat."

Player 2: "Or crouch down, weapon at the ready, depending on what part of my description you were listening to."

CK to Player 2: "As you crouch down, slingstaff in hand..." Squatting now in the space between the table and icebox, mimicking someone holding a staff.

Player 2: "It's a crossbow, I'm not sure I would actually squat with a slingstaff."

CK to Player 2: "Yeah, that's what I meant!"

And so on. It never ends, they are always doing something. Of course, the wild gesticulations are met by the passive posture of the player, sitting in the chair watching the greatest show on earth (though they don't know it) unfold before their very eyes.

Of course, I'm under no illusions that they are listening to anything I say. The above attitude only comes from the moment the players are prescient enough to catch me in a mistake. Most of the times their minds are far but not so very far away.

There they sit with arms across their chest or one hand extended disdainfully to the pile of dice in front of them, rolling the 20-sider back and forth, mentally attempting to force the small cut form to

not roll a natural 20 because its not their turn and rolling one now would be a complete waste, but might be really cool as it would be a forbearer of things to come, which of course is a massive glut of natural 20s that will allow them to finally triumph over the monster at the table and be the hero they so vainly hope their character will be. This long-winded internal monologue is only occasionally jolted to reality by my continued wild gesticulations.

Everyone at the table repeats this from time and again with varying degrees of success or aplomb, only interrupting it by sudden violent shifts in ability usage as someone realizes they have just the right ability to counteract just the right challenge, if only that ability check results in a natural 20 then they must surely shine, lording it over their fellow players like the master they are, rolling in the flush of victory. Too often after the wild exclamations of "I can handle that", the roll turns into little more than a failed success . . . "at least it wasn't a one." Now the player must sink into the background, acutely aware that it must surely be several more games before a skill like theirs is used again.

In the midst of all this back and forth of listening and not listening comes the hubbub garnered from so many players as legitimate inter-player questions turn into esoteric discussion of the relative value of the relative strengths of one argument over the other. Other players join in, even those involved in failing their ability checks to the doom of the party. Within minutes, a second conversation is going on. Should I be a crazed dictator and crash down on them or should I join in the inane discussion of whether the paladin would be able to free himself from beneath the log in rushing water? Better to go the middle ground and throw out some wild gesticulations and talk louder.

This inevitably leads the volume of the conversation inadvertently rising until everyone in the room is babbly at unbelievably high tones. A shouted "quiet" brings it all back to the fore with only a few mutterings of "Nazi" thrown at me, under the breath of course, as this would start a whole new discussion about German 88 millimeter guns being used against tanks and planes which inevitably leads into some quantum discussion about time and space.

The end game of any game comes somewhere in the middle with a question.

"Hey CK man. The illusionist casts *continual flame*. Does the illusion light the corridor? And do I need to make a check to see if I can see or not?"

Lucky for me, however, that I don't really listen to their insane questions and shrug it off with a laugh and some reference to adventure we had long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away.



TREASURE OF AIRHDE

GAUL-LET

The dwarves of Norgorad-Kam settled in a land of giants. In those mountains that flanked the western edges of the Great Massiff, the Bergrucken, stone giants, dwelt in great numbers. These tall beastly men ravaged the lands of men in the great plains that later became the Lands of Kayomar. When the dwarves built their halls of stone in those mountains, the giants molested their every work. It was the first of the long standing wars between these sundered peoples. But the giants had the better of the dwarves; for their skin was as stone and their stature so great they towered over the dwarves. To make it worse the Bergrucken Mountains consist of loose shell rock; the active volcanoes, brought on by the breathing of the dragon beneath the land, make gaining purchase upon its manifold paths difficult and dangerous.

The dwarves found themselves out fought and out maneuvered in this land made for giants.

But that changed soon after the smiths moored the great gates of their kingdom. A party of kinsmen set off upon a scouting party in hopes of keeping the giants at bay. Upon their trek they found a great troop of the giants, 14 in all, and a battle ensued. The dwarves found themselves outmatched and one by one they fell to stone and club. Of them all, Pleither was the youngest and he watched as his father and then his grandfather fell. His uncle on his mother's side called to him to flee and bear word of their defeat to the gates.

But Pleither would not quit the field. In a madness of grief, he leapt upon a fallen giant and carved out a long bone from its leg; he wielded the bone as a weapon. To his amazement, the bone's shape bore some similarities to an axe and it was light the touch, but heavy in the blow. He cut through the enemy like madness, wounding them to the left and right until at last 2 lay dead at his feet and the rest fled from the country.

Pleither and his uncle survived and they bore with them the secret of this weapon back to the fledging kingdom. There, in the dark places of their own smithy, they shaped the bone, and wrought from it the look of a great axe, sharpened like finely tempered steel. The weapon proved light to the touch and long, so that it dealt grievous damage to the giants in their face and chests. They called them the Gaul-let.

Pleither and his uncle used their own magics in runecraft and skills to forge the axes. They never shared this wealth of knowledge with their people, nor with any beyond their own family. In time, they grew wealthy as they fashioned the Gaul-let for war and many battle lords of the dwarves bore them to battle.

In normal combat, the Gaul-let is a +2 axe, dealing +2 in damage to to-hit and striking for 1d8 points of damage. When used against true giants, the axe gains a +4 to to-hit and to damage rolls and strikes for 2d6 points of damage. The axe is almost weightless, but

is as strong as any magic item and delivers a heavy blow when striking a foe. Those who carry it gain sure footing in mountain and hill terrain, gaining a +10 against any falling checks. They are also able to speak stone giant. Furthermore, it possesses the ability of the stone giant to shape rock; any blow struck against any type of rock is done so as if the rock were a soft wood. It can carve through up to 5 feet of solid stone in an hour.



THE WENAFAR CUP

During a great battle of gods and heroes, Unklar, born of the ever dark was brought low. Shrivens of all his power, was cast into the Void where he drifted alone and without thought or deed to his name. Fearing his rise again, gods and heroes of great power devised what they thought was a means that his remains would forever lay dormant.

Wenafar, the faerie Queen and others of her order, came to him then, even in the Great Empty. She bid Dolgan of the Mighty Hammer to forge a vessel to hold the Horned God and he cast about in his memory, bringing to the fore the skull of a creature long defiant to the dark god in his day of power. The beast died centuries ago, his skull adorned the forges where Dolgan slaved to the Horned God; but the memory of its courage held true in Dogan's mind. So he cast the vessel in the shape of its skull, including in the casting the shape of its crown and the jewel of its long dead and lost kingdom; he delivered this to the faerie queen and she with the terrible power of the elements at her command breathed upon it and made its strength stronger and its power unbreakable.

And they took up the form of Unklar, his soul and body as it floated on the Void, and bound him in the skull, so that only the skull remained. So the Horned God lay in a binding of wild power. But Wenafar riddled that she did not know what the Gonfod, the End of Days, might bring so made in the skull a flaw, known only to her and a few others. Only one of the purest heart, and of her own free will, could reach into the void and pull forth this fell relic from whence it was sealed away.

But the skull had another weakness; the horn of Unklar, shorn in the final battle remained on Aihrde and through this Unklar might one day return.



BRACE YOURSELF!



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TALES OF THE RINGS of CORASS

THE AIHRDIAN CHRONICLES BEING THE 22ND 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. Ruled by Melius the Wise, the Castle 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. Carried across the Sea of Shenal upon magical boat fashioned by the puala beast they have at last arrived upon the shores of the Ethrum. There, they are confronted by a small host of orcs, bent upon their destruction.

Plunging through the thick sand, the horse-born mercenaries crested the dune in time to see the first of the orc warg riders leaping upon their master. Meltowg, plunging forward, his red cloak billowing behind him drew the great beasts to him; his sword flashed down, cutting flesh and bone, cleaving the orc rider and beast in one bone crushing blow. The others pursued him like dogs against a raging storm, but the Elf-Lord thundered on toward the rolling tide of iron.

Even as the warg riders turned to pursue him, Meltowg's men fell upon them, Vale Knights and common mercenaries downed orc and beast alike without slowing the pursuit of their grim faced lord.

Some few archers rode out on the flanks, shooting arrows into the orcs, some of which fell, but the armor they wore proved thick and the orcs were handy when it came to layering their iron. Even as the horse tide crested the dune, the orc chief began bellowing commands. His voice sounded like a horn and the earth groaned at its deep tones. "DRAW UP YOU HALFLING DOGS! FORM A LINE!" He beat and whipped them and his lieutenants followed suit. Within a few seconds the ragged line halted, retracted and compressed until Meltowg saw only a wall of iron, from which protruded glaives, guisarnes, fouchards, and other such fell devices designed for the ruin of men.

The Prince did not slow his charge but went on; even had he desired to, he could not, for his steed lusted for the blood of the orcs and thundered heedless of his master's desires. So the two rode together, the elf's wild exultations echoing the steed's primal rage. His men, not far behind raced to catch up with the pair. Their horses were powerful, with burdens in some cases many times lighter than the Prince. The distance was closed but not before Meltowg's beast leapt over the wall of iron and into the thicket of orcs beyond. A guisarme drove into its breast and he absorbed the blow, snapping the haft; a grounded fouchard fork caught the horse flank, but the iron plate of his barding mail, forged in the Shelves of the Mist years ago, withstood the blow, driving the haft back into the orc's face and chest, making him a ruin of bone and flesh. Hurling spears, and axes bounced off his mail or stuck in the armor. He surged into their midst, cleaving to left and right, his horse crushing orcs beneath its iron shod shoes.

The orcs, initially surprised, rallied quickly as their chief hurled commands like whips. They turned on the Prince, attempting to bring him down from the mighty steed. But the line wavered only a little as some turned to face the demon in their midst and others held the fore; into this subtle doubt the Prince's host, over a hundred strong, smashed like a tidal wave of fury. They bowled the orcs over, snapping pole arms and crushing the monstrous beasts beneath the hooves of their horses. Their swords and axes, spears and maces made a ruin of the orcs, cutting them down to the right and the left.

The line dissolved and the whole field became a general melee where mounted men and elves fought foot pad orcs. The shouts of the dying, screams of the horses, the ringing metal of steel on iron and iron on steel, echoed across the plain; the sound of it carrying to the eves of the Twilight Wood just beyond. Soon blood washed the snow as more fell and wounds spilled life's ichors. Steam rose from the blood soaked snow; eerie ghost-like apparitions rose about the field, as if the fallen lifted up from their corpses, to linger in the rage, to aid or curse the living, none could tell.

The orc Chief watched his wall fall apart and saw the melee. He could not at first tell who would have the upper hand, but it soon became apparent that the mounted riders were experienced soldiers, used to pitched battles. And though his Ulgars were known from the cities of the north to the sea for being solid in battle; they were no match for the fury of these wave riders. The Prince, too, bore the symbol of those cursed elves they had fought so many years ago in the Shelves of the Mist, where so many of his mates had died in the mass of his master's squandered armies.

"BONES" He cursed. "You there. Give me your iron and get gone from this place. Leave off to the tell bosses that we have the Prince of the Red Cloak upon our shores and we'll need more than cold iron." The orc tossed his master his heavy crossbow and without another word, raced like the wind back across the snow.

The orc chief took up the cross bow, already cranked and set with a bolt in it. He took aim at the Prince, careful, laying it so that the bolt would strike him in the face. But before pulling, a mounted warrior crashed into him and the crossbow flew wild and the bolt hurled

into the sky. The orc, smashing into the ground cursed a stream of blood curdling oaths, as his helm twisted around his head.

“How now dog! Not today!” The warrior pivoted the horse, turning to strike a blow upon the fallen orc. But the chief, ripping the helm from his head, tearing flesh and pulling hair as he did, deflected the sword blow. Leaping to his feet, he smashed the horse across the snout, crushing its nose and breaking its boney brow. The horse crashed to the earth, falling through its blood soaked vision and the orc smashed it with another horrific blow; with that the skull cracked and the brains of it splattered across the sodden earth. As the horse fell the warrior leapt free, landing with some skill on the ground, sword in one hand earth in the other. But as he rose, the orc moved too, whipping around with his gore-caked helm to smash the man across the face, breaking bone and his neck. “Die now and enjoy the lauds of the Wretched Plains!”

Even so a spear exploded out of the orcs chest so that the point rose in his line of sight. He screamed a raging pain and turning, hurled his helmet at his new attacker. A score of feet from him, the warrior had hurled his spear and now came on drawing his blade as he did. The orc’s sword freed its scabbard in time to deflect a death blow, turning it into his face where a great gash was cut from chin to scalp lock. The chief fell backward, driving the spear the rest of the way through his ragged body, his opponent caught up and vained in the fray.

“Bones! Bones! Bones!” the orc shouted as he lumbered back to his feet, sword in hand. A third rider, passing behind, landed a bone jarring blow on his back, but he took the blow and spinning, chopped into the horses unarmored rear so that it screamed and fell, its legs grinding to the earth. The elf rider attempted to leap free but the orc proved too fast and leaping upon the falling horse, driving it further to the ground, cut off the elf’s head in one swoop. Carried by the momentum of the battle, both tumbled over the whining horse and into the blood soaked, snowy ground.

“Bones!” The orc shouted as he clambered to his feet upon the ruin of his enemy. He saw for a brief instant the wildly clattering melee as orc and rider ground together in the wreck and ruin of war. He breathed deeply, for his evil lusted after such carnage.

But his breath was short lived, for another rider, a fourth, came at him from the flank. Another human now, lightly armored with a short sword in hand. Bracing himself, sensing some difference in this new foe, the chief had only enough vision to see but not react to the lightning reflexes of the man as he leapt from the horse’s back, rolling through the snow, to come up beneath the orc to open a third wound beneath his arm, so deep it cut the bone. Swinging down wildly at the cavorting rogue he sought to open the man’s skull, but the man proved too fast and leapt out of the way.

But Unklar smiled upon his servant and the snow of his making, turned ice in blood-ruin, caught the rogue’s dodge and he slipped, falling into the ruin of the braying horse. Leaping into the wreckage, the orc hacked down upon the rogue with his sword, severing his arm with the cleaver-like blade. The rogue, howling in pain, drove his own blade into the orcs arm, up through the plated mail.

The orc’s howling rage of pain shook the snow from the distant trees. Dropping his sword, for his arm obeyed him no longer, he grasped for whatever weapon he could find and came up with the rogue’s severed limb; this he drove into the man’s throat. Jagged bone cut deep and the man’s blood gushed and a look of horror passed over him as his life leapt from the wound.

The chief stood up in time to take an arrow in the side and a second one soon after. Turning, he could not see his attacker and doubted not that some mounted archer rode by and feathered him only in haste.

Bleeding from his many wounds and pulling a wicked tulwar from his belt, he looked out over his pack. Mostly dead, only a few stood now, fighting on. Some fled but fell in the snow, trampled to death or cut down in their flight. They had made a wondrous mess of things. In the midst of it he spied the Prince wheeling his horse around, having slain an orc with a single blow. “At me, Princeling! Come for me if you dare!”

But the Prince did not heed him and the rage of the battle carried him further away. But others came at his call, seeing the orc Chief standing in his own ruin and bellowing. A human, decked in chain, with coif and helm, whose horse had fallen, charged forward, a huge axe in hand. He charged the chief who in turn leapt at him.

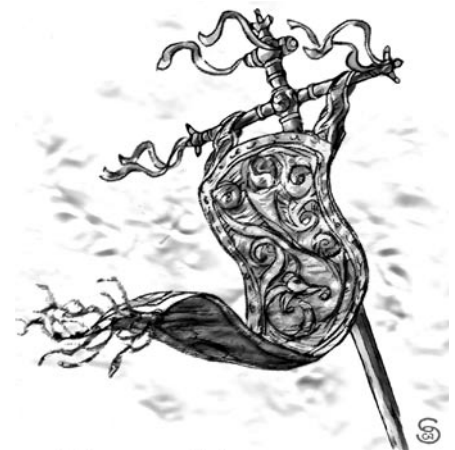
The tulwar slashed down, its deadly arc set to cut the throat beneath the chin. But long years of campaign had taught that nameless warrior his armor’s vulnerabilities and using the haft of the axe to first deflect the blow, he spun it around and hewed the orc’s legs from under him. The blade cut through iron and flesh, chopping muscle to the bone so that the orc fell to the earth, tulwar still in hand. Before curse, word, or deed passed from the orc’s lips or limbs, the axe clove him in twine, splitting him from bloody crown to his navel.

The mailed warrior looked down upon him. “There dog. The evil of your days is no longer written in the blood of the innocents you have slain. It now stains the snow of your dark master. Rot.”

Turning, he reentered the melee that raged for a few minutes more before the last of the orcs fell.

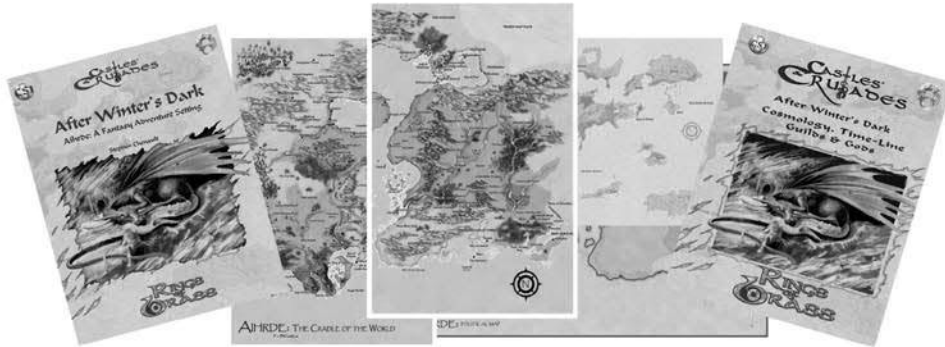
A horn sounded the recall and the Vale Knights regrouped around their Prince. “Gather the wounded and dead, kill the horses that will not carry us. Get under the cover of the forest. We’ll bury the dead and heal the wounded there.”

Meltowg sheathed his sword and riding toward the forest, passed the orc chief where he lay. He looked down upon him and knew the story of his fall, but his gaze did not carry a hint of recognition, nor a thought to the orc’s power or demise. He looked on dispassionately and rode on to the forest.



RINGS of ORASS

After Winter's Dark A Fantasy Campaign Setting



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

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ALICIA STANLEY



Deep in the heart of the Aihrde Soup Marsh dwells an interesting creature called the Manticore. Though Manticores can be found lurking near rivers and along coastlines, their concentration can be found mostly in the Soup where it is wet and humid and they enjoy the moist, rainy environment. Preferring a hot environment, the Manticore is rarely seen above The Wilds of Aihrde. With in this environment the Manticore can find an abundance of food and mates.

The Manticore presents a duality in appearance that gives most men pause and sometimes confusion. Sexually amorphic, both males and females attain roughly the same size and muscle mass as well as a spiked tail. With bat-like wings, the strong body of a lion and a face that most would recognize as a humanoid, the face confuses those who presume it is a reasonable, logical creature. Though the strength and design of a Manticore's body incite primal fear in most creatures, humanoids often mistakenly assume that the beast is rational. The exact opposite is true. It is a primal being, driven by instinct, and rarely thinks beyond mating, food and protecting its hunting grounds. A Manticore is an animal by nature and possesses no more sentience than what can be found in most other animals of Airdhe.

Because the beasts are fiercely protective of their claimed hunting grounds and maintain a desire to protect their young, it takes very little to provoke a Manticore into a fight to the death against another predator. When not threatened, however, Manticores will live peacefully alongside one another and will even share hunting grounds as long as the prey is in abundance.

A Manticore is not just a killer but an opportunist. Given the opportunity, a Manticore will scavenge for the scraps of another predator's meal, or any carcass left unattended. Easy meals present a sure way for the Manticore to keep its strength and energy high. Having a disproportionate body weight to flight ability makes flight a challenge and drains its reserve much more quickly than what is seen in other flying animals such as birds. This extra weight encourages a Manticore to prowl, on land, looking for that next elusive meal. When times are tough, though, it will take flight, where it can soar at great heights to increase its chances of finding its prey. Flying above its hunting grounds creates a better opportunity at spotting a meal, where the Manticore will swoop out of the sky, and send a barrage of spikes from its tail, much like a hedgehog's quills. It can grow new spikes at an alarming rate, making it capable of having a ready supply at all times. They can choose how many

spikes to throw depending on the size of its opponent. After it has launched its spikes, crippling its target; it will engage the prey in a life-or-death battle. Unfortunately, these combats often injure the leathery wings of the beast, which can completely ground the Manticore if a hole is too large to allow flight. Instinctually aware of this, Manticores are careful to protect their wings in a fight, by folding the wings carefully and pressing them close along the body until the immediate danger has passed.

During the lean winter months and other times of scarcity, the Manticore can and will try to expand its hunting grounds. Disputes over territory are common during these times, but rarely result in death. Typically, a show of ferocity and a few clashes will decide dominance between two rivals. The weaker animal will then retreat and move on to find new grounds.

Though the Manticore is primarily a solitary animal, there are two exceptions.

INTER-SPECIES CONFLICT

When a Manticore is threatened by another predator, he will call out to other Manticores, so they can join forces and help exterminate the potential threat. Their roar can carry many miles, and both males and females will answer the call. Because of the wide range of hunting grounds, it is unusual for more than four Manticores joining in these battles. Once begun, the fights are fierce and often the battle will end with either the intruder or intruders being butchered to death, or the gang of Manticores lying in a heap of death and destruction. Once a battle has been won, the Manticores will then depart and the status quo is maintained by these magnificent beasts.

If by chance a Manticore is killed in one of these territorial defenses, other Manticores will adopt the beaten Manticore's territory, and surrounding Manticores may fight for this new opportunity at an extended hunting ground. Most often, however, the hunting ground is peacefully divided amongst the territory-dwellers and life resumes its natural course.

MATING

The single male Manticore spends the majority of his post-pubescent years building a nest in attempts to attract a mate. The nest is built from the skins of the beast's prey animals, which are carefully stripped of meat and then hung in tree branches until

dried. These can be spaced out within a few hundred yards from the nest, creating a macabre forest of drying skins. A wise traveler in the Soup knows that when animal hides line the tree branches, a nest is nearby. Once dried, the male then carefully lines the skins inside the nest, often arranging and rearranging the pattern as new hides are collected, to make a more pleasing display for the female. Disturbingly, those who have seen Manticore nests firsthand often recount seeing the skins of elves, dwarves, and other humanoids littered in amongst the animal hides.

Where the male chooses to make his nest is of great importance. Preferring wet and humid areas, the prime spot would be swamps or near rivers that wind its way through forests. These spots have their disadvantages, in that it is much harder to create a nest that will remain dry above the wetlands. It may take more time for the male to finish his nest, but the pay-off is the female would choose, between identical nests, one in the swamp over one sitting in a forest far from a water source. In some cases a male could work on his nest for well over a year, depending on how fruitful his hunting ground is.

After the male is satisfied with his nest, he stands within it and starts to howl. This howl is a combination of low frequency and an audible range that most humanoids can hear. Though the howl sounds almost mournful, it is only a part of the cacophony of sounds it produces. The low frequency can reverberate for miles and the audible howl helps the female hone in on the location of the male. Any unpaired female, within range, will go to the source of the courting male. She is not subject to the territorial fights displayed during hunting behavior, presumably as a result of pheromone release in response to the male's mating howl. Once she has located him, the male turns his call into a huffing sound. He continues to do this while the female inspects his nest. With luck she will be pleased by his efforts and join him in the nest, where bonding and breeding will begin.

If more than one female answers his call and both are satisfied with the male's display, a posturing of dominance occurs. The two females will scream and posture at one another without actually

engaging in combat until one concedes and returns to her own hunting grounds. With the courtship over, the bonding can begin. Simply, the pair rub their noses onto each other's face and lick and clean most of each other's bodies. The female acclimates herself to her new surroundings and the bond is set for life. Once the bonding process begins, a Manticore pair remains monogamous, even if other more dominant beasts attempt to interlope.

The territory abandoned by the now-mated female is then divided up amongst her former neighbors. The new couple then goes about expanding his hunting grounds to prepare for not only themselves, but their future offspring. This territory take-over is not one designed to encompass an entire Manticore's territory, but fluctuates according to the needs of the family. This means they may very well only claim parts of other Manticore hunting grounds. If there is an abundance of game, the territories can overlap for a greater distance and fewer battles will occur. Again, when the hunting is sparse, conflict may occur. A mated pair battling for territory will fight as a single unit against opponents, as with single hunter territorial battles, the conflicts are fierce but rarely fatal. Usually, an unpaired Manticore will relent and look to make-up his or her lost territory elsewhere. In rare circumstances, a pair will dispute with a more mature single who is seasoned in battle and strong both mentally and physically. Unlike younger, less experienced Manticores, the older mature adult could put up a formidable resistance that the pair cannot overcome, and splitting the territory causes a domino effect, as Manticores realign their grounds for miles outward from the original dispute.

After securing adequate feeding grounds, the couple can then switch their efforts to making their new home comfortable and secure for future offspring.

Mating usually begins in the first month together and the gestation period lasts about nine months. She will birth normally one but up to three cubs at a time. Newborn cubs do not nurse and are capable of digesting solid meat almost immediately after birth, because the female Manticore has no teats and cannot nurse her young.

The first few days of the cub's new life consist of it gaining nourishment from the mother's afterbirth. From there it becomes totally dependent on its mother and father to bring it fresh meat from their daily hunting. Both parents take turns hunting while the other remains at the nest to protect the offspring. Once there is a kill, the hunting parent will feed first, then return the carcass to the nest where the other parent then feeds and leaves just enough for the growing cub. This family hierarchy is presumed to be the reason adult Manticores are able to settle dominance disputes so quickly and without much bloodshed.

The cub is reared by its parents for about 11 months, during which it grows rapidly until it learns to fend for itself. Once mature, it is chased from the nest and sent off to begin its solitary life. A new cub can search for weeks and cover many miles before finally finding a territory for itself. Those who are unable to secure feeding grounds will starve to death or be devoured by one of the numerous other predators in the marsh. For those successful, however, the process begins anew, as the cubs mature and seeks mates of their own.





I know I know, Davis usually handles food for the Trollish Gamer, but man, have you ever actually tried to EAT any of the crap he suggests? Horrible doesn't even begin to describe the Troll's palate for delicious gamer delicacies. This tasty recipe works perfectly for that adventuring band who just fire-balled the Sahuagin King and is looking for some tasty vittles afterwards. Why waste a good sea devil carcass if you don't have to? Besides it's only cannibalism if it is 'same species'. Other sentient being beware: Dirty Bowbe likes him some rare and delicious eats, not the craven droppings of a lunk headed trollkin!

SAHUAGIN TACOS WITH CHILE LIME SAUCE

Ingredients

1 lb Sahuagin (or Mahi Mahi, or Flounder, or Eye of the Deep, or Locatha per guest, arguably any other tasty fish will do.)

Seasonings (See Below)

1 head of red cabbage

Limes

Mint Leaf

Hot Sauce

Tortillas (Corn, whole wheat, or white, depending on where you're from and if you're a gringo or a true adventurer).

The Sahuagin Seasoning

½ tsp per lb of flesh of each of the following.

Kosher Salt

California Chile Powder

New Mexico Chile Powder

Coriander

¼ tsp per lb of flesh of each of the following

Onion powder

Minced garlic or garlic powder

Fresh Ground Pepper

Mint leaf

½ lime per lb of 'Fish'.

First. Slaughter yourself some sahuagin, preferably via fireball, axe and sword. Other options work too, though be careful in using poisons as they have an unsafe effect on the meat. Likewise first coating a critter with say... enchanted grease or lamp oil tends to leave a mungy after taste. You will need about 1 lb of sahuagin per adventurer. The fresher the kill the tastier the dish. Place all thawed, rinsed filleted and de-boned fish in a bowl. Coat with dry seasonings and lime juice. Leave in bowl to marinade while you prepare the Chile Lime Sauce.

The Chile Lime Sauce

1 tsp of mayonnaise per adventurer

1 tsp of sour cream per adventurer

1 tsp of white vinegar per adventurer

¼th tsp fresh dill, per adventurer

¼th teaspoon minced garlic per adventurer.

1/4th teaspoon coriander

5-6 chopped mint leaves.

1 tsp of fresh squeezed lime juice per adventurer.

Dirty's Roadhouse sits atop a small bluff some ten leagues (or 35 miles) from Dro Mandras. The square stone structure is surrounded by a wooden palisade which overlooks one of the major land roads between Dro Mandras and other settlements of the region.

Dirty's serves as a hub for merchants, soldiers, mercenaries and adventurers seeking wealth and fame within the area. The roadhouse has a somewhat rough edged reputation, especially in the more civilized areas of the region. In Dro Mandras, the roadhouse is frequently spoken of in scornful terms by members of the city's law enforcement as a place where bounty hunters, bandits and other undesirables go to hide from the long arm of the law.



1 Chile Pepper per 2 guest, chopped. (Note: Proper chiles may include seranno peppers, cherry bomb peppers, jalapeno peppers or 'sport peppers'. If your adventuring party are weenies than avoid habanero peppers and make sure to seed and de-vein (Not to be confused with Rhuvein) the peppers prior to chopping. Otherwise go all in like a real barbarian hero and show them how hard you are with the zesty hot hot stuff!)

Mix this stuff together in a glass bowl (because it will eat plastic), cover, and refrigerate.

To COOK

Place the Sahuagin filets on foil and place them on the preheated 300 degree grill for 10 minutes. When the sahuagin meat is white and flakes easily with a fork its time to grab it off the fire with your tongs and bring it on it. Keep an eye on it so it don't over-cook or even burn. Grillin fish is trixy, but if you get it right, your belly and your fellow adventurers will always remember how awesome you are.

To EAT

Serve sahuagin on tortillas with a spoonful of the chile lime sauce, shredded red cabbage. You can also add cheese and southwestern style hot sauce if so desired. Have some of these next time you game and no matter how exotic it sounds, the chile peppers make this meal all that is mighty! Truly Blooblaplop the Sahuagin king never had so much taste as after he's been skewered, properly roasted, and served on a tortilla with chile and lime! Mix up some margaritas or some south of the border brew to quench the fire and enjoy something you killed, rather than letting your meal kill you!

DINERS REWARD

Sahuagin served this way is imbues the eater with the ability to magically breath underwater for 1d4 hours after consumption. Warning, however, the eater must wait at least 40 minutes before getting in the pool, so If the eater rolled poorly their water breathing benefit may be limited! Likewise eaters who consume the flesh of a four armed sahuagin or a sahuagin king gain the additional benefit of being able to continue to do battle beyond zero hit points up to their maximum negative hit point factor for 1d4 hours after eating the flesh of this delectable undersea adversary.

Yours Truly
Dirty Bowbe

SEE YOU AT THE ROADHOUSE!!!

Notes from The World of Inzae

Inzae entered the void. Here, she brought into conjunction the plains of earth, fire, water, and air. Through many eons she experimented, trying to create a place to reside. Her many mistakes litter the void, balls of fire, chunks of earth, celestial winds and droplets of water.

In time she brought forth the best combination and created her place of residence.

A mass of earth, in the shape of a bowl, still growing at the edges, becoming ever larger. Along its rim converges the plane of water and into the bowl flows a constant stream of water, beneath its mass the plane of fire erupts and from above the air whisks in from places unknown.

To keep the plane of fire open, Inzae found a celestial being, hereafter named Maugen, to hurtle through the skies around Inzae pulling a giant orb of fire. By moving in concentric circles, coming ever closer to Inzae and then further away and chanting the correct spell, Maugen keeps the plane of fire open.

The years number 400 days – as befitting a single chant by Maugen. The seasons are based on the proximity of Maugen to Inzae.

The plane of air is kept open in a similar fashion. But two celestial beings pulling two giant orbs follow Maugen in the same pattern.

The dwarves were brought first into the Realm. They were brought to create a palace of grand design in which Inzae would reside. Humans were brought in as slaves to the dwarves. Elves were brought in much later to create beautiful things for Inzae. Dwarves divide the years into 10 months of 40 days each. Elves do not divide the year but measure time in the passing of a year. Each day for the elves has an individual name. For humans it varies.

There are several Kingdoms.

Todayia: A vast empire located south and east of the Interzae.

The Troke: The original home of the dwarves located on the south east banks of the Interzae.

Chazrimia: A huge expanse of land settled by the chazrim (ores) located on the northeast of the Interzae.

Imphal: A kingdom of dinosaur like creature located in a southern branching of the Kambrian Mountains.





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I have had a bad day. The words 'We are out of Ale' better not be uttered right now.

Weevil thought he was going to get 100 berzerkers



What he got was a party gag!

Finarvyn's Fellowship of Foragers #1

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME GAMING?

SURE WE ARE! DICE ARE WARM AND BEVERAGES ARE CHILLED!

PIZZA HAS BEEN ORDERED.

OKAY, STANDARD C&C RULES AND WE'RE GOING INTO A MODULE I'VE BEEN WORKING ON FOR YEARS.

COOL.

THAT'S EXACTLY THE KIND OF "OLD SCHOOL" GAMING THAT I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR!

WELL ... I DID "HOUSE RULE" A FEW THINGS...

AGAIN? WHEN WILL YOU EVER LEARN?

AH. THE INFAMOUS BLACK BINDER, EH? EVERYONE HAS THOSE.

UH... WELL, ACTUALLY IT'S ONE OF ABOUT TWENTY BLACK BINDERS...



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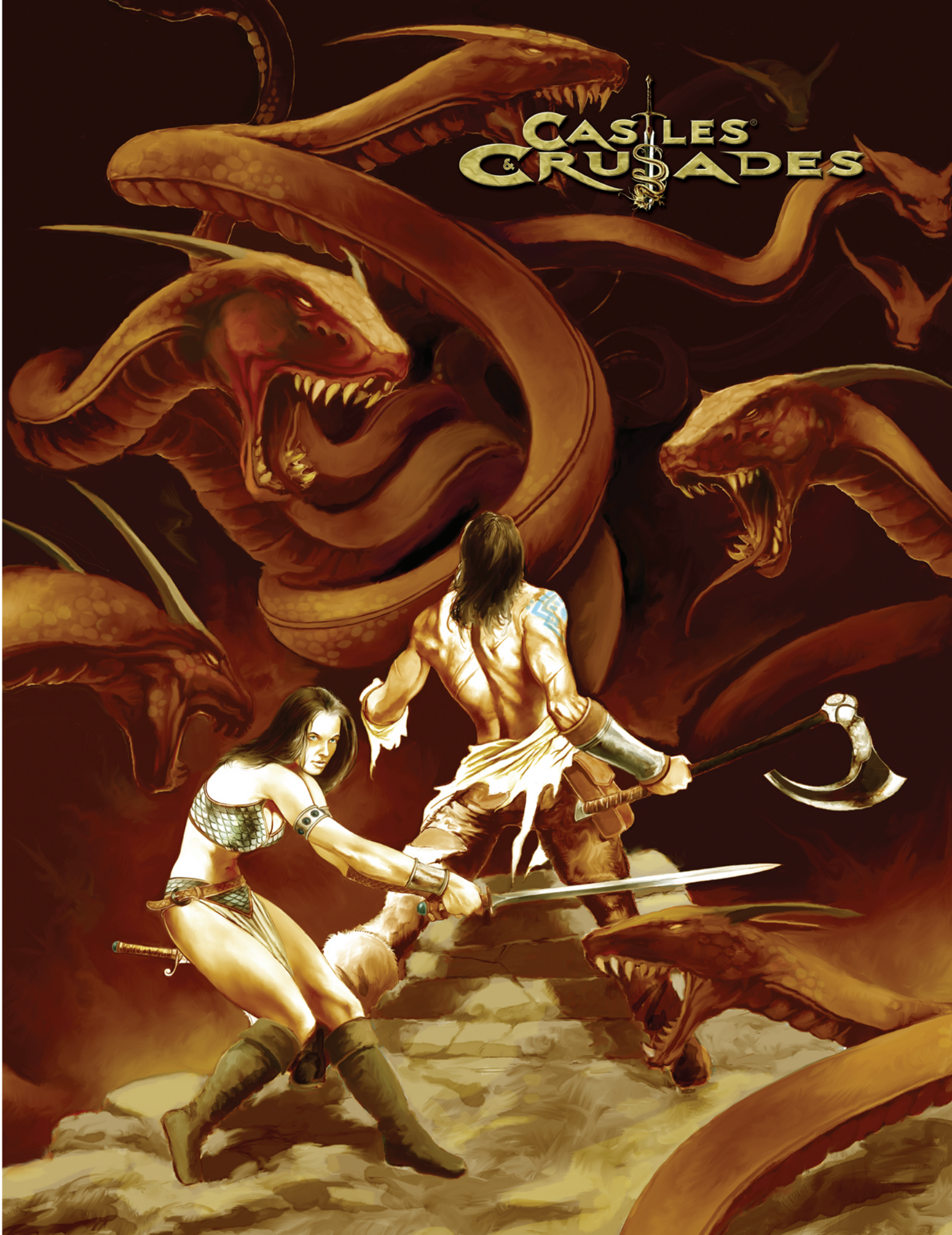
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