



# CRUSADER



**GenCon Wrap Up  
The Pankratiast Class  
Drop In Dungeons  
Dungeon Hordes  
Adventures, Fiction  
& More**



*Pan  
2011*



# CRUSADER



## Featuring

3 *Industry News*

6 *Alea Iacta Est: Gencon Wrap*

*Stephen Chenault*

11 *Dropping Into Adventure: Unorthodox Beginning to Dungeon Crawls*

*Gerald L. Buldak*

18 *New Class for C&C: Pankratiast*

*Eric Piper*

23 *Stairway to the Gods ADVENTURE*

*John William Wright*

26 *Historical Footnotes: Life in the 24th Century...B.C.*

*Joseph Wolz*

28 *Rings of Brass: The Lothian Chronicles. Journey Ends.*

*Stephen Chenault*

31 *Monster Ecology: Chimera*

*Brian Kivari and Alicia Stanley*

33 *The Gods of Aihrde: The Cobbler*

35 *Comics: Dungeon Hordes by Jonathan Murdock! (NEW)*

35 *Foragers Fellowship by Marvin Breig!*



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## Notes from the Managing Editor

For the better part of five months things have been moving at a crazy speed around here. The final release of the CKG, coupled with the digest versions of the books, slammed right into the print shop expansion that exploded into a much greater endeavor than anticipated; these coupled with a host of other issues great and small, and altogether kept the whole crew running in circles; so much so that by early April, frayed tempers began to collide with sharp opinions and the Trolls growling like never before. Throw in a tornado or two, some flooding and other concerns and the Dens looked more like a real Troll's Den than a print and publishing shop. When the last batch of the CKGs shipped to distributors I called a halt to all production and gave everyone time off and away...not much time off, but a few days at least...so that we could get a clearer picture of what is going on. With that in mind, I'll take a few minutes to give everyone else a clearer idea of where the Crusade has landed.

The CKG scheduled for a Christmas release was complete and ready to go, but what missed was the print shop. The approach we had planned, and worked on for several months, failed in the end due to miscommunication with the printer charged with making the actual covers. This threw the whole process into chaos and created a sense of urgency in the Dens that fueled what eventually evolved into a mad-cap fire to produce and produce more. The loss of the outsourced printing forced us to buy new equipment and to train ourselves in the new equipment and this, as many followed on the twitter/facebook/boards threw the whole affair behind tremendously with warped boards and the like. The further we got behind the faster and harder we worked and as always with such approaches the mistakes and mishaps began to pile up. Missing were the languid days of lounging about in the sun and pontificating upon what was best in life (I'm pretty sure that never happened for ME around here, but its nice to pretend it did); now we waded into a fury of get it done and get it done yesterday!

Of course the only real problem here was that this approach never works. We used money and time to fuel the fires and the hotter these fires burned the more money and time they seemed to consume. But as March closed the CKG along with a small host of digest versions of the main books found themselves a place in circulation, the last batch of them leaving our shops in late March. Passing muster, we breathed a sigh of relief and Davis and I took a step back to reassess the state of all things Troll.

But it didn't last long. The digest books sold out. The CKG sold out. Even as we began to get ready for Troll Con the problems began to replicate themselves. We had already committed to Origins this year and that began tow all up with just keeping up with demand. One of my good friends and fellow publishers had a huge boon and needed a ton of reprints. Everything began getting piled up again. Before we had time to adjust our work horse of a binder gave way and broke down (in a really cool blue flash of flame and a mushroom cloud of smoke right up into my face). This made a hectic season, crazy.

Troll Con was canceled as we headed off to Origins and returned to fix the equipment (that continued to fail) and as we began gearing up for Gencon. Sales depleted our stocks of almost every title and we couldn't keep up. The weekend before Gencon we brought the binder back to life and worked day and night to play catch up, which we did amazingly.

Once that show passed Davis and I decided to take as step back and reassess. He and I spent the last few weeks of August going over the

company, the game, and the whole presentation of its ideology, the print shop, its function, etc. From those conversations we've begun launching a few changes around here.

One of the first changes is the print shop. Part of the chaos caused in the first few months came from the multiple outside jobs we were committed to doing for other manufacturers. These books kept constantly consuming printer time and company resources. These resources could be better spent on making more of our own books. We've begun pulling back on the outsourced material.

Approaching product presentation, Davis and I have taken a hard look at what we produced in the past 4 months and the actual presentation of some products lagged behind our normal high standards. This occurred over several months due to hurried production as we continued to fight print shop time for CKG and out-sourced print work. We dropped the ball on a number of books. But that too we are addressing. As we restock the shelves and return the shop to its normal level of production books will regain their once sterling look.

The CKG is up next. It is a large book and difficult to produce. Demand has remained high sense its release, direct sales outpacing all other markets by a long stretch. Because of this and the problems it causes in production we decided to outsource the CKG to our good friends at Walsworth. It is scheduled to ship to us on Oct. 15. These are the folks that did the PH and MT for us, so we know it is in good hands.

The next change is the content of our production line. We were quite stunned, though perhaps we shouldn't have been, by the number of CKGs we sold both print and electronic. This book drove the entire Crusade forward (kudos to Derrick "Omote" Landwehr for telling me this would happen back in 2008, 2009 and 2010). With this in mind its time to get back to work on C&C. First up is the Adventurer's Backpack. Writing has already begun and as this book is all on my desk, its completion will not be as in doubt as was that of the CKG... at least we hope not!

So as we look back, breathing a little easier, and relaxing now that the Castle Keepers Guide is out, we can begin again to look forward to the games continued growth. I hope you all will stay on board for the ride. Its been a hoot so far, but it can only get better!

Steve Chenault  
October, 2011  
From the Dens



**The Crusader welcomes Jonathan Murdock to its pages. Jonathan is all the blood, sweat and tears behind the Dungeon Hordes comic strip you'll see here on page 35! a comic exploring the life within a dungeon crawler and the madness that ensues. Be sure to check ou this site: <http://dungeonhordes.smackjeeves.com/comics/>**

# News & Culture

## Borders Down Under

Last issue the Journal reported on the financial woes of Barnes & Noble, this issue it's Borders Bookstores. The giant retail chain first filed for chapter 11 Bankruptcy in hopes of restructuring their considerable debt load; they used the play for time to shut down scores of stores and begin settling debt with creditors. They also looked for a buyer to help shore up the company. All these attempts failed and few interested parties surfaced willing to save the book store chain. This past month Borders official closed its doors, being the largest publishing casualty of the rapidly changing market.

Caught up in the legal proceedings are tens of millions of dollars in books which Borders bought on credit terms from publishers and distributors. Borders has not paid for the book and games and the publishers are demanding that borders return all the stock with open invoices.

Borders refused, claiming the book and games as assets for the court to liquidate and help manage their debt. This will affect many gaming companies as Borders had recently invested in expanding their game material in order to draw in new customers. Diamond Comics, father to Alliance Game Distributors, tops the list of "those owed money" with over 3.9 million dollars owed, but others that rank over \$100,000 are PSI, Flying Frog, and Hasbro.

Borders proved slow in reacting to the growth of online stores and venues such as Amazon, relying on the print model to sustain their vast network of stores.

## Castles in Arkansas

Arkansas is an unusual state. Its warm in the summer, cool and wet in the winter, the spring and autumn months are often rainy, but very nice. We get the occasional twister barreling through here...well, many occasional twisters...but all in all the heat and pace of life here are in sync; calm and methodic. So its not surprising medieval history should find a place in Arkansas.

Back in 2009, June, deep in the Ozark Mountains, south of Branson, Missouri and north of Harrison, a crew of dedicated professionals, historians, archeologists, and enthusiasts set about creating the Ozark Medieval Fortress. They set themselves the task of creating a castle. Though this may not be anything particularly unique in and of itself, their methodology certainly begs remarking. They intend to build the Castle in the same manner, with the same tools, designs, and approaches that medieval builders used.

This is the brain child of Michel Guyot, an archeologist by trade, who spent many years in France restoring old castles and chateaus. Mr. Guyot's passion for castles spilled over into a concept of building one from scratch. He "created the concept of Guédelon consisting of building a real medieval castle from scratch, recreating

at the same time the old skills required for such a construction: stone masons, stone cutters, carpenters, rope makers wood cutters, carters" etc.

The project is now two years on; the initial village to house the workers is complete and work on the castle's foundation begun. The site is amazing to see, and with the proliferation of hand tools, grit, muscle it seems a perfect fit to the rolling Ozark hills. And its far more than your thinking. It's not a façade of ply wood and painted boards; this castle is the real thing, made of stone and timber, cut from the earth; measured with the medieval 13-knot rope. No helmeted supervisors here. Visiting the castle is much like stepping back in time, the masons and carpenters are even dressed as they did in those long forgotten but much mused over days.

For more on the Ozark Medieval Fortress visit them on the web at: <http://www.ozarkmedievalfortress.com/en-us/>

## Amazon Ascending

In May Amazon announced that the number of e-books sold was greater than the number of print books sold, this included trade paper backs, but did not include free digital books. This lines up with the number of digital book sales tripling in recent years, continuing the trend that began with the release of the Kindle, Nook and other digital readers.

The increased volume does not mean that revenue generated from digital sales surpasses that of print. "E-book reading is a big deal, and it's going to continue to be even bigger," said a Forrester Research analyst. "But we are not to the point where e-books are a majority of unit sales and certainly not a majority of revenue."

The gradual expansion of the digital market is forcing publishers of traditional print products, books, newspapers, and magazines to reevaluate their publication models. It is also putting extraordinary pressure on the brick and mortar stores who increasing turn away from purely print products, such as role playing games, focusing on products that cannot be reproduced digitally as simply as print. Barnes & Noble leads the way in this, coupled with a great deal of cost cutting; they introduced and expanded toys and games into their stores. Many credit that initiative with revitalizing the sagging sales of that retail giant and keeping it from following Borders down the road of dissolution.

In a surprising move Amazon sweetened the deal for publishers, allowing them to publish on the Kindle for a very stout royalty fee if they kept prices beneath the \$9.99 price tag. The inducement seems to be paying dividinds, making Amazon one of the strongest competitors in the digital market.

Troll Lord Games has recently become one of the first major publishing companies to release their games on the Kindle.

## The Brothers Barbarian

Ken Whitman and crew just wrapped up filming on the first season of a new web series that launches this summer, Brothers Barbarian. The show chronicles the adventures of two young barbarians cursed by an evil witch (played by none other than Margaret Weis) and placed into the bodies of slightly portly and a bit middle aged barbarians. The brothers set out on a quest to remove the curse and visit their slightly less than competent vengeance on the witch. A kindly wizard (played by none other than the fantasy artist Larry Elmore) sets himself the task of aiding the two in their quest.

What follows is a hilarious journey of adventure and mayhem.

Our own Peter Bradley, tapped to work on promotional posters and storyboards with Mr. Elmore, joined the cast and crew last month and appears in several episodes.

Writing credits belong to Ken Whitman, long time industry veteran, who also plays Russ, one of the barbarian brothers. Tim Gooch who plays Art, the other brother, directs the series. Along with Weis and Elmore William C. Erikson joins the cast as the evil Red Wizard.

The Brothers Barbarian debuted at Gencon!



## Adamant Drops Ap-Pricing Model

In April Adamant Entertainment a leader in RPG digital publishing announced they were dropping their “Ap-based” pricing model. Under this plan all Adamant RPG products were priced below print MSRP. Adamant set the standard digital price at \$1.99, no matter the size of the book. The aim of the push was to make digital content more accessible to a wider range of consumers, the lower price points geared to entice almost anyone.

In April, citing falling revenue, Adamant announced they were dropping the pricing model. “Well, I’m not going to bury the lede here: The experiment was a failure. I don’t believe that the model is a sustainable one in this market,” remarked Gareth-Michael Skarka. All their prices returned to their usual level.

## Tarzan Back to the Big Screen

Warner Brothers has tapped Craig Brewer to write and direct a three part installment of the Tarzan saga. Brewer is best known for his work on Black Snake Moan, but his soon to be released of Footloose is gaining attention. Warner Bros has a separate screen writer, Adam Cozad working on another take of the famous Ape Man’s sage. Brewer seems to have the edge in the Warner Brothers stable and is hoping that the Tarzan story will be his next directing work.

Tarzan was a popular hero in the early part of the twentieth century spawning a host of movies, tv shows, comic books and more. He was created by Edgar Rice Burroughs who went on to pen 24 Tarzan novels as well as scores of other books including the John Carter Warlord of Mars books.

## Movies in Decline? Not so Fast

The movies have taken a pummeling this year. Ticket sales are down almost 20% over same time last year. Some moguls point out that the quality of the movies is not as good as in previous years. However in his article Moviefone, Gary Susman points out that 2011 has seen less movies released than in 2010 and more importantly there were no cross market blockbusters such as Avatar, that releases early last year. Coupled with Avatar was the hit release Alice in Wonderland.

2010 was a good year for movies, but 2009 was even better, as attendance surged, 16% by some accounts, and revenues were up across the board on ticket sales and volume of sales. Follow this with 2010’s multi-billion dollar release and one easily sees how 2011 looks more gloomy than it is. 3D films have helped boost sales across the board, charging more than the average ticket sale.

## Free RPGD Day

Schedule for July 18, this year’s event promises over 400 participating stores with 20 participating manufacturers and over 60,000 products given away!

## Terry Pratchett & End of Life

The beloved author, Terry Pratchett, had decided to end his life. He applied to the Swiss company, Dignatis, for the proper paper work to being his end of life journey. Mr. Pratchett was diagnosed Alzheimer's Disease several years ago. Dignatis has sent him the necessary paperwork but he has not signed it yet. "The only thing stopping me is that I have made this film and I have a bloody book to finish."

Terry Pratchett is the author of scores of books, averaging 2 a year for decades and is the author of the Discworld series

## Howard Days

The weekend of June 11 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> annual gathering of Robert E. Howard fans in Cross Plains Texas. The Robert E. Howard Days and the Barbarian Festival commemorate the works and times of the creator of Conan the Barbarian. The event sponsors barbecues, corn roasting and live music, as well as panel discussion on Mr. Howard, tours, and general gatherings. Fans and scholars mingle and are able to view the very world that Howard grew up and wrote it. The nearby Caddo Peak Range, a large source of inspiration for the writer, call to many at the gathering where they are able to walk the very trails that Howard did and partake of his inspiration.

Robert E. Howard wrote over 300 short stories, the most famous of which are he Conan tales.

## Studio Houses Avoid Comic-Con

For several years studios have taken the time and effort to attend Comic Con in San Diego. Comic Con is one of the largest conventions for comics in the world and hosts an ever growing amount of gaming enthusiasts. In recent years studios have begun publicity tours at the convention where their stars are hosted as guests and panels and promotional opportunities abound.

This year however, several of the larger studios are bowing out, including Warner Brothers, Dream Works, and Disney, who have all showcased in recent years. Studios have learned that publicity at such a fan driven event often turns into a double edged sword. Die hard fans of a franchise often turn on any adaptation of the original that does not meet their expectations. These fans serve to feed the beast or kill the beast depending on their responses. They often poison the well for a film before the movie going public even has a chance to view it and judge for themselves.

Fans of Lord of the Rings remember the extraordinary secrecy that surrounded the movies, allowing no pre-judged chatter to escape on the internet. The movies hit the big screens with monstrously good results, some little of which must surely lie in the garden of secrecy.



## Comic Sales Lag Again

Green Lantern topped comic sales in February, 2011. However, the news was mixed as the unit sales were the lowest for a number one title since 2001, ranging in at 71,587. Comics have suffered a long and slow decline in the past two decades, since the epic high points of the early 90s. In more recent years overall comic sales have declined as much as 3% annually as retailers grow ever more conservative with stocking. This decline occurs despite an increase in overall comic book prices.

As with many industries, print, music, etc. comics are suffering steep competition for their dollars with online entertainment and distribution continues to lag in its ability to market in the highly competitive digital age.

## A Gygax Movie in the Works?

Say what? The examiner (yes the plagiarising one) has an article with news about the project. George Strayton is to produce the project. Purportedly it has a 150 million dollar budget and a big time actor on line for the roll of Mr Gygax.

That Strayton would want such a project is not unlike him. He just released "The Secret Fire" roleplaying game. He is a gamer. He also wrote or worked on portions of and parts of Xena and Hercules series, some Dragonlance animated movie or something (I don't know anything about this) and other stuff.

Anyway, word floats around. I have my doubts that anything will happen in the near future. It seems that 150 million is quite a big budget for an extremely risky commercial project.

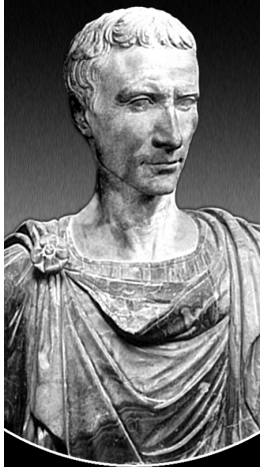
Yeah, but I hope that should it go forward, the movie portrays Mr. Gygax fairly and gives a nod to that which his mind spawned; the 20 billion dollar a year gaming industry (of which rpgs are but a pittance anymore).

## Neanderthal Genes!

Studies find that the Neanderthals gave Homo Sapiens, some very good pathogen fighting genes. Some of us are lucky. Others not so much

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

# ALEA IACTA EST



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

Gen Con, Origins, TrollCon? Wrapping up the Cons.

Gencon! Origins! Troll Con! Hallmarks of TLG's summer line up! We attended our first Gencon in 2000, our first Origins in 2001 and our first Troll Con was held here in Little Rock Arkansas in 2001. With over a decade of conventions under our belt we feel like old hands. We've had good conventions, we've had bad conventions, we've had exhausting conventions, and conventions that leave us reenergized to start whatever project we have set our eyes on, or more often than not, a project that we really want to tackle. Whatever the case, these conventions are an integral part of our marketing -- both the company, but more importantly the game, Castles & Crusades.

The conventions are always crazy times for us, very busy in preparation; from writing and manufacturing books to packing and loading the trucks . . . and after the fact, unpacking and sorting the remnants. They are much akin to putting on a giant feast wherein all one's friends and family gather around your oversized table to fill their gullets, make merry, catch up with one another, laugh, cry, break some dishes and crack some plates. The conventions this year offered the same board upon which we all gathered, fellow Crusaders, to eat and make merry . . . all but for Troll Con, as we canceled that.

Things have changed a wee bit from our earlier days. Back then we drove my Chevy pickup, a long bed affectionately earning the name "Blue," that with the years turned into "Old Blue." It is a standard cab that sits 2 comfortably, but can sit up to three not so comfortably. We'd load Blue with stock and racking and climb in the cab, packed in there. In those days, when Todd was full time, he, Davis and I would cram into the truck and take off. On long journey's such as

those to Vegas, we'd put a cot in the back, with a light and a small TV all hooked to the dashboard through the camper shell window and sliding glass window (yes we are from Arkansas). Whatever the convention or destination we'd lumber off, packed tight, for many hours on the open, but very dark, road. A few years back, in 2008 we had to retire Old Blue, the mileage got to her and the load grew increasingly heavy. I replaced it with a larger truck. A Chevy again, and a long bed, this time with a crew cab that comfortably sits four. It's a large 2500 series work truck and carries the load with ease. Davis took over the stewardship of Old Blue and it remains a permanent part of the Troll Dens.

But it was the new truck, simply called "Girl" that bore us to this year's conventions.

This is the first year we attended Origins in some time, since 2005 I believe. We thought it was past time that we revisited the show. We had stopped going when the response to the RPG market at that show declined. It seemed to have revived in recent years, so we gave it another go. It helped that Aldo Ghiozzi from Impressions was running a booth connected with our own and Tom Tullis of Fat Dragon was coming out to make the show. The problem with Origins this year is it found us short handed; the print shop overwhelmed and Mark and Davis buried knee deep in books and Peter Bradley with such a back log of work that I decided to go it alone.

The drive up was easy enough, about 12 hours. I cut through the night, leaving Little Rock around 8 or so on the evening of June 21<sup>st</sup>. Sleeping for a little in Kentucky, I got up and wandered north to Ohio. I stopped, had a hair cut and some lunch, visited some in-laws and at last arrived in Columbus late in the afternoon, just in time to meet Tom and set up the booth. We met with Aldo at some point and managed some dinner out of the whole evening. The convention started that Thursday and the feast began.

Origins is a different kind of show. It attracts well over 10,000 people, from a wide swath of gaming genres and there is always a mountain of games being played. The tone is slightly more subdued than Gencon, or even Troll Con for that matter. It seems to be more about the serious business of having fun and playing games than much else. It lies within that area we Trolls refer to as the Golden Crescent, a wide arc that extends from the beleaguered Joplin, Missouri, north to Wisconsin and then south into the rust belt of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio and beyond to become lost in the wilderness that is Kentucky and Tennessee. Origins' location in the Golden Crescent assures that many diehards attend and this Origins was no different.

We were lucky enough to meet up again with our friends Eric Piper, Derrick Landwehr and Dan Corwin and to meet many more acolytes to the Crusade. Though there were no organized events at Origins (and we should have been more diligent and put some together) there were many pick up games. I was lucky enough to run a game Friday night, that ran into the wee hours of the morning, about 3:30 in the a.m. It was a blast! Everyone got into the game with a gusto and it quickly developed a spirit that fed my CKing so that we all whipped up a great story arc and bloody campaign . . . well, bloody for Derrick as his elf barbarian was devoured by wyrms. A great time was had and I thank everyone who joined the fray!

Origins was interesting for me this year. When we first attended Origins back in '01, it was a happening show. There were scores of d20 start up companies and this grew more in '02 and '03. The field was crowded and we all ate at the same d20 table. We knew each other, the manufacturers that is, or at least knew of each other. Many of us gathered for dinner, eating together and having a blast talking about the market, this scheme or that, product lines, or what have you. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bar at the convention center was always humming and you could see John Nephew of Atlas Games talking to Monte Cook or any number of gaming dignitaries. It was crazy and filled with unbelievable energy.

Those days are passed of course. The d20 start ups are all but gone and only a few of us are left; that table is empty, left abandoned like some long board in a lost dungeon beneath the grinding stones of time. Gone are the energy filled days of market schemes and grandiose ideas of what would change the landscape; now there was no one except for the Troll Lord, Kenzer, and the fine folks at Paradigm Concepts. It was interesting visit I had to the bar and some of the restaurants.

But the nice thing was that I had the opportunity to gather with some of the Crusaders and we toasted until the wee hours of Saturday night; what vestiges of the old memories lingered around my consciousness faded into the night and I felt as if a new era was being born.

And so it is with Origins. We'll return again next year (assuming we can get all the ducks in a row) and we'll house a booth with Fat

Dragon Games and perhaps we'll bring back the tables of old, but better now, filled not with book makers, but rather, with gamers.

So Sunday night found me rolling back south, heading along the long winding road that is interstate 40, wandering through the dark, musing on what is or what was Origins.

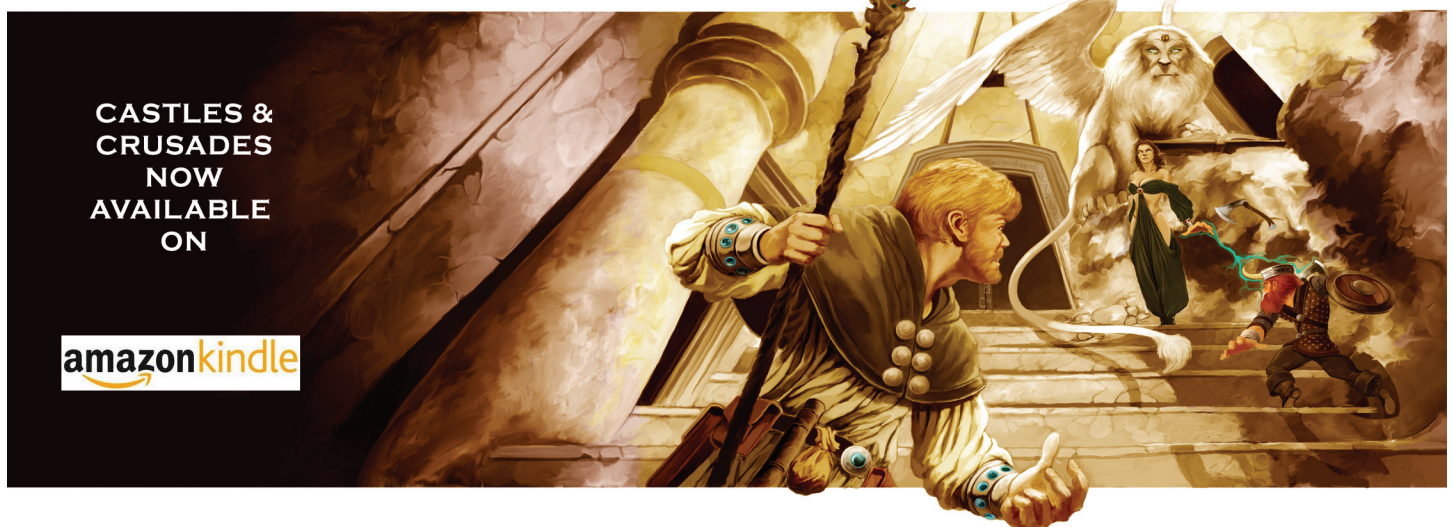
Normally, Troll Con would drop into the middle of the summer, sandwiched between Gencon and Origins, but not this year. The 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter of 2011 was consumed by the work expanding the print shop and bringing the CKG at last to the gaming world, to join the table's feast as it were, and planning for Troll Con 2011 fell by the way. Richard McBain, who put together the last three Troll Cons with such skill, has promised an even better convention this coming year, probably in the spring of 2012. Though we'll have to wait and see for that.

So Gencon loomed upon our horizon, set in the first week of August, it was closer to us than we had realized, as we were used to later Gencons in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or even 3<sup>rd</sup> weeks of that summer month.

Amazing Adventure by the indomitable Jason Vey was to be our Gencon release this year, but scheduling conflicts left that gem on the outside looking in. Instead, we put forward the Castle Keepers Guide as the cornerstone of our Gencon experience; coupled it with the Maps of Aihrde, the digest sets and the hardcovers for Of Gods and Monsters and Monsters & Treasure of Aihrde.

July, which normally should be devoted to preparing for the convention and getting stock brought up to speed was rather spent dealing with massive equipment failures; our main binder exploded, the TLG central computer, Alpha, froze, was brought back to life and then utterly crashed; printing malfunctions joined the fun and finally the cutter was discovered to have taken some kind of blow and was cutting paper and board at 1/32nds of an inch off. All this madness added to the chaos that is pre-Gencon, making the preparation for GC 2011 one of the most stressful in the company's history.

But as always we persevered, and with the uncommon sacrifices made by people like Jason "Breakdaddy" Alexander, my brother in law Tony (who fixed the very vexing problem that kept the binder working at about 30% capacity) and my wife who took the volt







So sayeth Luke! Mr. Aldo Ghiozzi was thinking, “I gotta get out of this booth!”

meter in hand to track down ruined wires and fuses. We are Trolls after all, a little clannish if you don’t know.

In the end it all worked for the better, as just a few days prior to the biggest convention of the year, we managed to get everything back online and in working order. Working through the weekend, all day and night we brought off all that was needed for Troll Lord and for the many other companies relying on our shop to get them goods for the show.

The loading took place on Tuesday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> and the crew gathered that night around 8:30 or 9. Peter Bradley made it down and rode in the main truck; Kim Harstfield, Richard McBain and Jason Alexander all joined the crew. This year marked the first year that Davis Chenault could not make the show. He hadn’t missed a Gencon since the company’s founding, and vowed to not miss next year’s. By 10 p.m. we were loaded and headed out. The long trek through the night found us in Kentucky by daybreak; hungry and tired. McBain took over driving and I slept a great deal, spent from the many late night hours laboring over the binders.

Mid-morning we sprawled in a Cracker Barrel, cracking jokes and eating some warm food. In the midst of all the revelry, Jason pointed out the window and noted the torrential downpour that was dumping mountains of water on the truck. Old Blue had a camper shell that always protected the stock and goods; but the new truck hasn’t fared as well. Early on in Girl’s existence a tree fell on the bed and crushed the guard rails so that a camper shell won’t attach; we’ve yet to have this fixed and normally use the racking boxes to protect the stock from any sudden rainstorm.

Note: Todd and I discovered years ago that if you have an open truck, and rain strikes, you can accelerate and deflect all the water but for the very back of the truck. The problem with this approach is that it doesn’t allow you to slow down or the rain falls into the bed of the truck. This is not a solution I recommend to anyone!

Regardless of the protection I hustled out to the truck to pull the tarp and drape it over the stock. It took a few drenching minutes

but with the goods covered, I headed back in. Checking the weather revealed a single thunder cell rolling over. It was the only sign of rain for hundreds and hundreds of miles. I thought to myself, ‘it is a Troll Lord world after all.’

Arriving in the hall late in the morning we promptly started unloading the truck. It went very smooth and considering the new loading docks and hall placement it could have been a nightmare. We quickly piled the booth high with materials and racks, visited with Tom Tullis and others and made as if to set the whole thing up. We made some progress before we decided it was too hot and we too tired so off to the hotel we trekked to get cleaned up and rested a bit. By late afternoon we were back in the hall, sweating away in the midst of toiling the booth to life. This was done in short order and by evening we were mostly satisfied with the turn out.

Hours later found us at Scotty’s Brewhouse, a bar and restaurant, where Dave Hornak, the General Manager, has turned over to the gaming community and allowed us all to settle in its halls and rooms to eat, drink, game, and make merry! Many a Crusader had gathered there and we feasted until late in the night. It was great to see everyone, many fresh from Origins, and to see folks we hadn’t seen in awhile and people we’d never met before. As the evening progressed the Trolls wandered off, knowing that Thursday’s at Gencon are always crazy (what with the Very Important Gamers and the hall opening early to them). Tullis and I were the last of the Trollish Lords (he’s lumped in with us, poor bastard) to wander off and we made our way back up to the hotels where we called it quits. Aldo Ghiozzi arrived late in the evening, disturbing our restless slumber. Gencon on Thursday is the craziest of the days. It begins early and when the doors open the explosion of energy is a sight to behold. People pour into the room seeking what treasures they’ve longed for the all year, or those new debuts at the show. To watch the flood is exhilarating and puts one in the mood to celebrate Gencon as much as working the floor. We had good placement, toward the front of the hall and near Fantasy Flight Games (where we have



Jason “Breakdaddy” Alexander and Mr. Peter “20 Dollar” Bradley!

always been, but for 2010 when we registered late). The crew took to the floor and we commenced to do what we do at such shows. We continued this for the next four days.

We had a great deal of fun at Gencon. There were many pick up games of C&C, though the plan of meeting at Scotty's proved untenable as the bar was just too noisy to run too many games and get much out of them. We had too precious few registered events; this was again my fault, as I had failed to register them. But Eric Piper and his brother came to the rescue and ran a number of events, pick up and official. He ran most of the Troll Crew through and adventure and did a stand up job as usual; if you ever get the chance to run under Eric or his brother, do so, it is well worth the wait. My own game, scheduled for Friday night fell through as the reserved room was occupied and those within needed it until 11 or so. Everyone who showed up was a great sport about it and we gathered outside on the patio and tipped a few beers, exchanging gaming war stories. It was a great deal of fun and in some ways cooler than running the game as we all get to know each other a little better. Cool stuff all the way around.

The most interesting thing I ran across at the show was really more of an absence that it was something at the show, at least so far as the table top RPGs are concerned, but really even in the larger companies. It was almost as if all the plans and game concepts, all the energy to drive forward with new ideas and explore new marketing concepts had succumbed to a dull shock. Perhaps it was or is that I have become too insular, hanging out with almost predominately with Fat Dragons, Trolls and my fellow Crusaders. Perhaps we've become somewhat removed as we grow C&C. But I don't think that was it. I usually hear of or get the inkling of something that is going on, something new, something innovative that is going to 'transform' the market and the hobby and the industry. But this year they seemed to be no such vibe, only a host of companies shouldering their packs and soldiering on, trying to hack their way through the rapidly changing landscape that is publishing.

Because the landscape is changing and we are all in something of a shock. Ways that we have practiced business for decades are proving obsolete and untenable. New methods are untried and as such very risky; plunging a quarter's profits into the latest fad is risky if not down-right dangerous; this is particularly true in a world where the latest fad might change in a few short weeks, leaving one's investment in tatters. Its best, or so the mind says, to hunker down and wait and see what is going to happen.

That was the feeling I seemed to get from Gencon 2011. We know something's coming, we've watched it hit the music industry, now TV, now publishing. Everyone is watching. Everyone is waiting. These new directions can devour a company or pick them up to new heights! Notice the Players Handbook on the Kindle . . .

I would be remiss if I did not write about some of the products that startled the cool factor. Gencon is a big show and there are many things there. But two things stood out for me, above and beyond all the rest. The first was from Mongoose Publishing, Mathew Sprange was very kind enough to give me a copy of their History of Role Playing Game Companies. I took a bit of time and read huge sections of the book, including our own company history. Coming from historical studies background the book found a willing reader

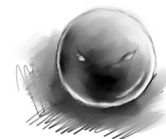


**Steve talke to the Most Abused Crusader in TLG history.  
The medium T-shirt guy!**

in the Troll Lord. And I must say, the book is a page-turner. Well written. Well researched and well put together. If you have the chance get a copy of this book, it must certainly make a nice counterweight to all those game books you've already gotten. Great job Mongoose!!

The second thing was the Brothers Barbarian. I was fortunate enough to get in on the premier of this comedic web series starring Ken Whitman, Larry Elmore and Margaret Weis. The first two episodes are out as of this writing and available to view on youtube. These are a lot of fun, be sure to check it out if you have a moment or two.

It's another year gone. Another Gencon having come and went. I find it hard to believe that I have attended 11 of these events. It boggles my mind. But when I look back the litany of funny stories I have to tell, the things we trolls have done and tried to do, the failures, successes, half successful failures and all that lies between makes me glad for it all. Don't miss next year. We'll be there again, enjoying Gencon 2012.

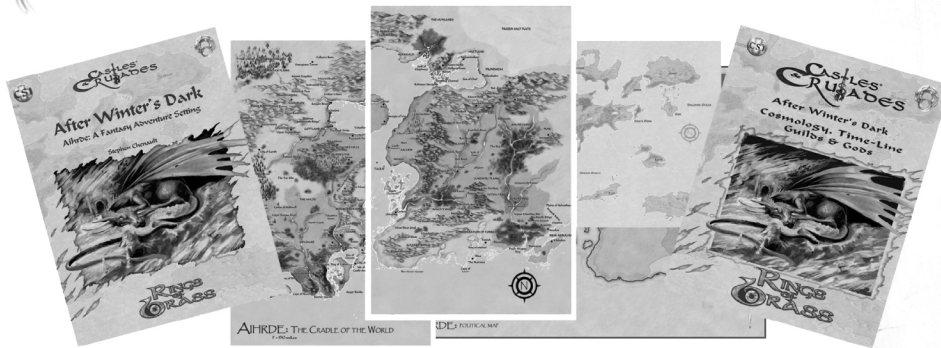


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# DROPPING INTO ADVENTURE: AN UNORTHODOX APPROACH TO BEGINNING A DUNGEON CRAWL

BY GERALD L. BULDAK

When we think of a dungeon crawl, we think of the foreboding castle on the hill, the gateway carved out of the face of a cliff, or maybe the hollowed out trunk of a giant tree in the forest. In other words, we think horizontally. We walk up to the front door, have the rogue check it for traps, open the door and walk in. What would happen when the adventuring party is relatively low level and the only entrance to the dungeon is from above? The dungeon has been buried for hundreds (if not thousands) of years, and Mother Nature has uncovered the only way in. Unfortunately, you don't have the benefit of a Fly spell or the like to get down. What to do? You have to think vertically to get in. Some general themes permeate this scenario, and I present it not as a whole adventure, but as something that can be plugged in to almost any dungeon with ease. If running a published dungeon, all you need to do is block off the "walk-in" entrance and substitute this somewhere on the map. If you are designing your own dungeon, this makes a good focal point around which the rest of the map can be drawn. Consider the following plot hooks:

- Erosion has uncovered a structure long forgotten by men. A more ancient individual, i.e. an elf or dragon, knows what it is, and needs the help of a stalwart group of adventurers to enter it and make sure that the original inhabitants no longer exist.
- You are searching for a powerful artifact and determine the approximate location of that artifact. The problem however, is that the chamber in which the artifact resides lies buried. After digging where you believe, "X marks the spot," you find a slab or something else covering an opening in the roof. If this sounds like a certain 1980's action movie, surprise, this is partly the source of my inspiration. I'd love to see somebody try using a bullwhip to get in.
- While lost in the foothills of a mountain range, you find yourself looking for shelter from an oncoming storm. You see the remnants of a worked stone battlement sticking up from the ground in a small valley. Upon further inspection, you think it will provide ample protection from the elements.

The entrance to the dungeon can be seen in Figure 1. What protrudes from the soil is between 5 and 10 feet of the uppermost part of the tower/dungeon. The highest parts should

simply be the battlements, and the center of the tower should be easily accessible, i.e. if a climb check is required at all to get onto the stonework, it is at CL 0. Aside from the timbers that likely once supported the roof of the structure, the top of the pit is open. Looking inside the chasm, the remnants of a staircase that once spiraled around the periphery of the room can be seen. Time and the elements have not been kind to the staircase, and inspection confirms it to be impassable.

This particular entrance gives the CK a great deal of latitude to challenge a party of adventurers. In such challenges, several things should be remembered. First and foremost, the PCs need to know that slipping up will mean almost certain death. The chasm into which they descend needs to be deep enough that a fall would most likely be lethal. There are plenty of places to tie off ropes, for example, that should be stable. The roof timbers are the likeliest option but the battlements are viable points as well. A brave enough character may also try climbing down the walls and placing pitons in the walls so that the others may more easily follow. Whatever the case, it will be difficult to get the whole party from the top to the inside in a single round. This presents other interesting possibilities.

Once the PCs have figured out how to enter, the next question for the CK to address is what lies within. A summary of the general dungeon layout follows in Figure 2. In a nutshell, there are four levels to the dungeon. The use of traps in the chasm is highly recommended to add to the excitement. Again, this isn't meant to be an easy dungeon.

The other important consideration in this design is that no direct connection exists between levels, short of traps that either transport characters to the bottom floor or the top entrance. To go from one level to the next, the players have to return to the central chasm and find their way from there.

Assuming that the numbering of the levels starts at the top of the figure, levels 1 and 3 have traps directly on the doors within the central chasm. Two different variants of this adventure have been used. In the following paragraphs, I'll describe these variants, just to give an idea of the different kinds of mayhem you can unleash on an unsuspecting party.

The traps for the door at level 1 are either a mimic or a mechanical spring trap. The mimic has 7d8 HD, 39 HP and an AC of 15. It has a slam attack for 3d4 HP damage, and is

an otherwise normal specimen of its kind, as per M&T. The mimic can be detected by means of a CL7 WIS check. The challenge here is that most likely, only one character will be positioned at the door and will be taking all the damage that the creature has to give. The rest of the party needs to find a way to free their imperiled comrade from the clutches of the mimic before he or she is killed and devoured. The mimic will negotiate with the character if it is detected, and offer an alternative to certain death (it has a taste for the creatures that lurk in the chambers on the other side of it).

The alternate trap at level one is a spring trap. The hinges of the door are actually tightly wound springs that, if not disabled prior to opening the door, will slam the door and any character on it into the side of the chasm. Think of a giant flyswatter when role playing this one out. The trap can be detected and inactivated by means of CL5 traps checks. Any character that triggers the trap is allowed a save vs. traps (DEX, CL5) to avoid getting slammed. If it fails this save, it takes 1d6 HP of damage and must then save vs. constriction (STR, CL5) to avoid losing its grip and falling. If the trap is tripped, it attracts the attention of monsters behind the door, thus drawing attacks. With either trap, one character winds up taking all the damage if the traps aren't detected. The flip side of this is that it presents a great opportunity for rogue/assassin characters to shine.



While no trap exists at the door to the second level, the exploring characters don't need to go far to find one. The first room encountered has an elaborate illusion that hides the exit from the room. A maiden lies shackled to a stone altar, begging to be released and insisting that her captors will return soon and kill them all. If the characters attempt to free the girl, i.e. if they attempt to touch either her or the shackles that bind her, they are teleported back to the ground at the top of the central chasm. The illusion was created by a 10th level illusionist, and thus carries a CL10 to disbelieve it. Once it has been tripped, the CL decreases to 5. If the characters attempt to interact with the girl, they quickly discover that something isn't right, thus lowering the detection CL to 5. Once they have detected the illusion, they see that they are actually in a larger room that exits into further chambers that may or may not be populated, at the CK's discretion.

The trap on the door to the third level is a more elaborate trap whose lock is actually a puzzle that the players must solve. The general layout of the trap is presented in Figure 3. It is a geometric puzzle consisting of 9 depressions in the door, arranged in 3 rows of 3. A narrow shelf protrudes from the door beneath the lock, and contains an elaborately carved wand. If the PCs attempt to detect magic, the wand and the lock will glow, however the wand has been treated with the spell, Magic Aura (Illusionist 0), and actually does nothing more than activate the lock. When the characters place the wand in one of the depressions, read the following:

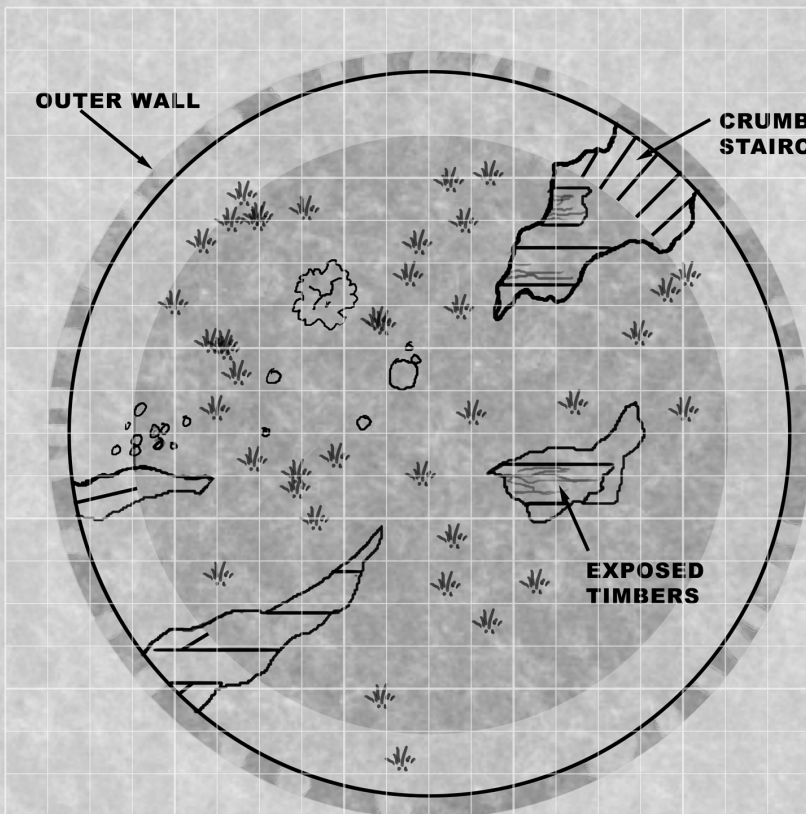
Placing the wand into one of the depressions, a pale yellow light begins to emanate from the area surrounding the depressions. Any feeling of resistance that initially existed between the wand and the depression seemingly disappears, giving you the impression that you can freely move the wand through the field. You hear a voice telling you: "Connect 9 with 4 unbroken, and for you the door shall open. Make your move."

The words that the opener of the lock can hear are actually a telepathic link established between the individual and the lock itself. The first sentence in the command is also scrawled around the lock, and can be detected on a successful INT check (CL 2).

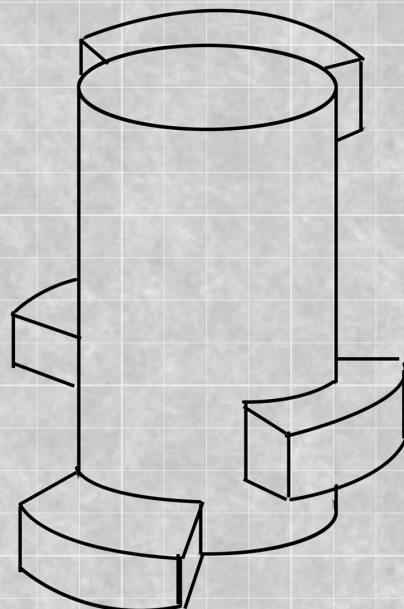
If the individual attempting to open the lock makes a correct move, read the following:

"As you move the wand, the field surrounding the points flashes green for a moment, then returns to the pale yellow glow. The track of the line remains visible in a shadowy black."

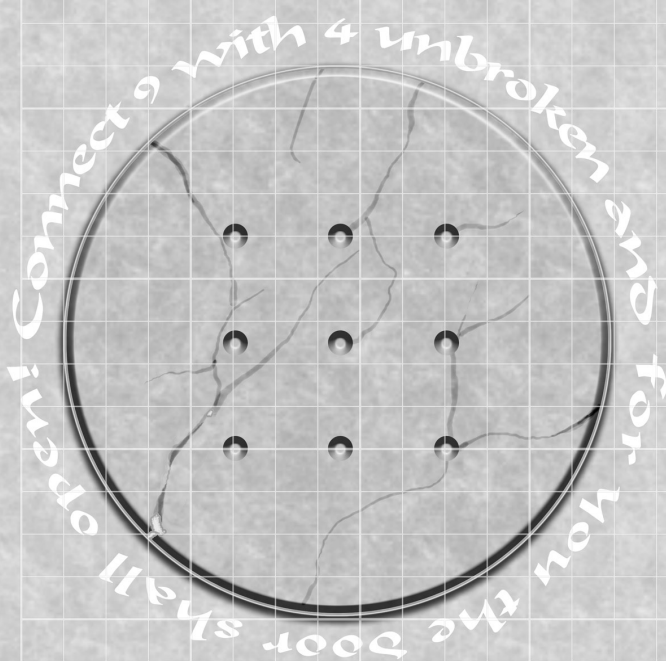
If an incorrect move is made, or the wand is pulled from the lock before all four lines have been drawn, read the following:



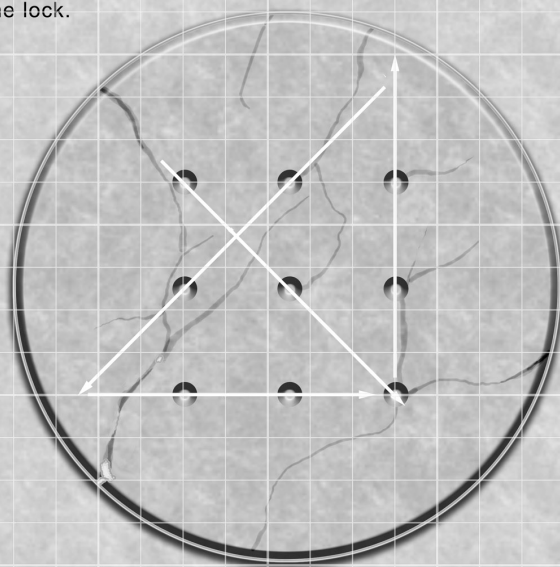
**Figure 1:** Top view of tower entrance.



**Figure 2:** 3-dimensional depiction of dungeon entrance and positioning of chambers coming off of the central chasm.



**Figure 3:** Lock on the door to Level 3 of the dungeon. While the text is shown in "Common," any language is usable, so long as the message presented is as above. The solution is shown below the lock.



“The field surrounding the depressions shifts from the pale yellow glow to a bright red glow. The voice fills your head with a blood-curdling scream, declaring, “Intruders! None shall enter the inner sanctum of Balouris!” With that, you feel something shift beneath you in the floor, and before you know it, the floor itself shoots upward just in front of the door, as though the door itself is attempting to dump you away from it.”

The depressions, or points, can all be connected to one another by means of four straight lines. The catch, however, is that the players’ pencil, representing the wand, must not be lifted off the paper as they are connecting the points. If the pencil lifts, the trap is triggered. This is another spring trap, only in this case, the springs are found under the floor on which the characters stand. Anyone standing near the door must make a traps save (DEX) at CL5 to avoid being dumped into the chasm. At least from here, the falling distance is only about 15 feet, but still, what awaits them at the bottom is worse than any of the traps they’ve faced.

The bottom of the chasm represents either the base of the fortress/tower that the characters are exploring, or it can be the actual published dungeon itself, if the CK opts to substitute this entry for the printed one. The most difficult challenges of the adventure will take place on this level. The risk of falling to one’s death has been replaced by the risk of being hacked to bits by monsters. I designed two different encounters that can happen here. One has the main room off the central chasm populated by orcs that appear to be no different than any other orcs. They are being driven, however, by a necromancer who was built using The Black Libram of Nartarus. One of his spells is the 5th level spell, Rise as the Dead. While it calls for the victims to be raised as ghouls, you might play the scenario out such that the necromancer couldn’t get his earliest castings of the spell quite right. Instead of coming back as ghouls, slain orcs come back as

skeletons and/or zombies. Progressing further into the level, the slain orcs return as ghouls, and in the final fight, the necromancer himself starts killing his orc guards, at which point they rise up as ghosts, all acting at their master’s whim. This makes for an interesting alternative to the standard monster encounters, adding to the sense of urgency and impending doom for the party. In the alternate form, all of the orcs are already in their undead forms with a couple of other surprises thrown in (a black pudding and a gelatinous cube) just to make things more interesting. The necromancer has long since died and returned as a wraith.

This scenario is a simple device to catch the veteran adventuring party off their guard. It illustrates the importance of party composition, wise selection of non-combat equipment, and creativity in their approach to the challenge. The goal is to force the players to think outside the box, so to speak. The players must use all of their resources available, from class abilities to equipment to magic, to survive the dungeon. If the party acts wisely, the adventure can be completed by a balanced party of 3rd level characters. If the players simply opt to bull their way forward, this dungeon will be a death-trap. The monsters and other challenges that inhabit the other rooms of the dungeon will push PCs in the normal ways monsters do, but as shown above, the CK can “dress up” these encounters with ease so that they’re not what they seem superficially. They should ensure that sufficient treasure can be found to keep the PCs from fleeing the dungeon until they’ve completed their quest. The lack of magical flying, however, makes the geography a challenge that must be overcome. The CK’s individual tastes and preferences must, of course, dictate what lies beyond the framework provided here.

Thanks to John “Sir Seskis” Wright for editorial assistance.



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# MOVIE REVIEW

## Sucker Punch

Awesome! Don't miss this movie. That is my review in a nutshell. However, Steve wants an article so, an article you shall have.

I occasionally check my email. On one such an occasion, I decided to actually read some emails rather than do a wholesale delete. This in itself was unusual as there were close to 3,000 unread emails in my account. One of a dozen or so I read was from Mac Golden and it simply had a link to the promo poster for Sucker Punch. My immediate thought. "Chicks with guns in cyberpunk gear - what could be better?" Sold.

I put the movie out of my mind until it was released. After it was released, I read a few reviews, then a few more and then a few more. As the reviews were almost universally negative, I decided to wait to watch the movie until the movie was released on pay-per-view or some such. One evening I went to the theater to watch *Battle LA* or whatever it was called. I arrived about ten minutes early and, as I usually do when early, I went theater hopping to watch previews or the starts of other movies. As luck would have it, I caught the opening scene of *Sucker Punch*. From the outset I liked it. I jumped up left, having decided to watch it in its entirety the following day. I was glad I did.

The opening sequence sets the stage for the movie; in quite a literal sense. The opening credits appear on a curtain/stage and when the curtains open, you notice that Baby Doll is upon a stage. The viewer is told that from the beginning that at no moment are we outside the inside of Baby Doll's head - or so we are initially lead to believe. Actually, later we learn that the entire movie is a re-imagining of Baby Doll's imagining/dreaming as told through by another character, Sweet Pea. I like movies like this. I liked *The Matrix*. I like *Inception*. I like *Memento*. I just like movies like this. I enjoy movies that do not try to anchor me somewhere.

Now, one might ask, what is the movie about? The movie is about escape. At least that is my opinion. It's about escape from an asylum. It's about escape from one's past. It's about escape from regret. It's about escape from memories. It's about escape from a wretched life or situation. It is also about inviting the audience to escape, for a moment, into a world of fantastic dreams and unlimited possibilities.

The latter is managed through the most obvious aspect of the movie; the visuals. Visually, *Sucker Punch* is a masterpiece. The entire movie is hyper-realized dream-space with beautiful and ugly characters, giant mechanical samurai, Nazi-zombies, glistening robots, a dragon, a dismal asylum, a seedy brothel, guns, swords and bombs. Holy cow, it's like having an entire issue of the old Heavy Metal jammed together and put on a screen. How cool is that? "Escape audience, and watch for a moment our dreamworld unfold." The 'our' here being those of us who have such imagina-

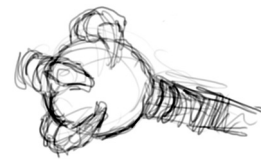
tion or such references to them. On the visuals alone, the movie stands alone. "Hot chicks with guns and swords fighting dragons and Nazi-zombies? I'm going tonight!" So said Steve.

Then we actually have a story tied into the whole sequence of dream events. On the surface the story is about a girl trying to escape an asylum. Really though, the story is about a girl escaping her regrets and memories. This is Baby Doll's story. It is sufficiently realized tragedy to be a good story. I will not divulge the details of how Baby Doll's story culminates as it might spoil the movie but it is one of the most fascinating aspects of the film and helps to tie in various rather clichéd and cryptic remarks made throughout. The other story, that of the narrator (Sweet Pea), is only revealed toward the end of the movie and then one comes to realize the whole film is layered.

It would be remiss of me to avoid pointing to various problems with movie. In this way you can be forewarned.

Haha, tricked you. There is nothing wrong with the movie. Just go and sit down and enjoy the movie. Did I mention it has hot chicks with guns in it?

Davis Chenault



## Books to Read

For a very interesting take on space exploration, check out *The Case for Mars* by Robert Zubrin; published in 1996 by Free Press. The book takes a fresh look at space travel and what it would take for humans to colonize the planet Mars. Its not a science fiction piece by any stretch as Mr. Zubrin was a senior engineer for Lockheed Martin and studied the challenge from many different directions. In *The Case for Mars*, a whole new look is given to what it would be like and how it should be; forgoing the giant interstellar space cruisers planned by our own NASA program (so recently producing that stellar study where they determined, no doubt through vigorous use of the scientific method, that if there were aliens these aliens would look at us as trash and want to put us in the can with the cookie monster), but rather small craft propelled by little more than their own momentum.

The creation of human habitation on Mars comes in a series of small 'house' like structures hurled to the planet before we set foot on it; the cultivation of water becomes a major task and more. Mr. Zubrin even discusses the concept of terra-forming, a concept well know to all of us as it was terra-forming that brought us into contact with Aliens and that bad-ass mother that Sigourney Weaver had to fight . . . wait I'm talking about that NASA study again . . . er, no, it was a movie.

At any rate, check out this book. It is a very interesting read and will give you all kinds of ideas for your next StarSiege Game.

# Game Review

## 7 Wonders

By James M. Ward

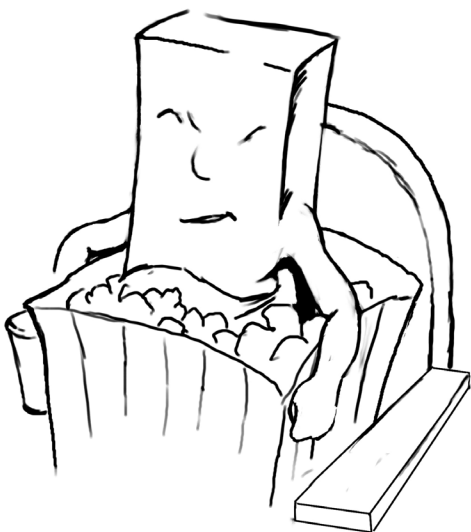
It's too easy to find flaws in movies, but it really takes the enjoyment out of them, so its best to just sit back and relax with a cool Dr. Pepper in hand and some slathered over buttery popcorn and watch away. A pretty darn cool movie to watch is Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*. This movie stars Russell Crow 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!



**Designer:** Antoine Bauza

**Company:** Repos Productions

**Number of Players:** 3-7

**Ages:** 12 and up

**Play Time:** 30 minutes

7 Wonders is a must have game for anyone who loves to play games. It's a resource management game done in three rounds. Each player has a card representing one of the seven ancient wonders.

### Play of the Game

Each player has a hand of cards. In the first turn these cards are resources like bricks, stone, and lumber. Players take one of the cards from their hand and pass on the rest of the cards to the right. Play continues until all the cards are played down on the table. During the course of the turn you are trying to collect useful resources to help you build your wonder. If you don't have the resources in the cards you have selected you can buy resources from the players on your left or right.

Besides the resource cards there are military cards that give you victory points at the end of each epoch. Science cards allow you to collect multiple points at the end of the game. Trader cards give you gold to allow you to buy other resources. For each three gold you have at the end of the game you get a victory point.

The game is fun for lots of different reasons. Because of the way the epoch cards are passed round, the game plays differently every time. Each of the wonder cards calls for a different strategy to do well. For example, the Colossus of Rhodes gives the player military units which promotes that player growing his armies to collect points from the players on his right and left. The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus allows a player to build a card from the discard pile, which in effect gives that player an extra turn.

An unusual feature of the game is that it plays quickly and is fun playing with three or six players. I've played the game now with every number of players from three to seven and enjoyed each experience.

# NEW CLASS FOR C&C: THE PANKRATIAST

BY ERIC PIPER

This class is being offered as the western alternative to the Monk character class, and is, at its core, simply a restating of that class in the guise of a different martial context, that being the ancient Greek combat sport of Pankration.

## PANKRATION

Pankration is translated as “All Powers”, meaning it combines all the punching elements of boxing, the various throws, joint locks, and holds from wrestling, and additional elements, such as kicking, elbow and knee strikes, and head-butting. Pankration is a savage yet technically advanced martial art practiced for over 1,000 years as a battlefield discipline in ancient Greece before it was eventually introduced in the Olympic Games in 648 BC to satisfy the growing thirst for a more violent spectator sport. Aside from the professional athletes who competed in Greece and later Roman arenas, cultures like the Spartans made it a part of every child’s upbringing, so that by adulthood, they were considered dangerous weapons, even when they were unarmed. Many historians now claim that the roots of Asian martial arts were influenced by pankration, brought to the east by the armies of Alexander the Great. Greek mythology credits the famous hero Theseus with the development of Pankration; he used his incredible hand-to-hand skills to defeat the legendary Minotaur in an epic battle. Other Greek sources attribute Hercules with its creation as he is depicted on various potteries grappling with the Nemean Lion using Pankration.

The monk class, while it still holds a place in my heart as a gamer and a martial arts instructor, simply doesn’t blend well with the pseudo Western European feel of most campaign settings, including Troll Lord Games World of Airdhe, which is the current setting I utilize as a CK.

As to the original monk special abilities, you will find that some have been converted or largely rewritten, while other abilities have been dropped altogether and replaced with those that are unique.

Also, while the pankratiast is based largely on historical references, it is based also on Greek and Roman mythology, where a hero could achieve such skill that he could tap into the power of the

Gods and defeat horrific monsters with his bare hands.

## THE PANKRATIAST

A disciple of Pankration is a dangerous adversary. The training of a pankratiast begins most often as a youth, beginning with arduous physical and mental conditioning so savage that outsiders believe it to be sadistic and cruel. The philosophy of Pankration, however, is that each athlete must develop immunity to the pain of exertion, of damage to the body, and to the psychological rigors of combat. Every pankratiast must become a paragon of fitness, and many among them have become legendary in feats of strength, speed, and athleticism. So arduous is the training that the vast majority do not graduate the basic training to see their first arena competi-

tion. Indeed, it is only when the pankratiast proves his mental and physical discipline that the true secrets of Pankration is revealed. The athlete is then trained in an arsenal of complex defensive and offensive techniques, ranging from devastating kicks and strikes to a multitude of grappling maneuvers, allowing the Pankratiast several tactical options for defeating their opponent.

On the defensive side, the pankratiast has developed a variety of dodging and blocking techniques to avoid or deflect attacks, as well as conditioning the body and mind to ignore pain and crippling injuries that would render a normal combatant unconscious or immobilized. In the offensive category, the athlete is taught how to strike in lightning fast combinations, utilizing fists, feet, elbows, knees, shins, forearms, and even their head. Even more prominent is the pankratiast’s mastery over the science of grappling. The ability to throw, trip, or takedown a much larger opponent through leverage, skill, and strength allows the pankratiast a tactical option against a foe that has the striking advantage. The pankratiast then follows up with a variety of grappling maneuvers, from breaking their opponent’s limbs to rendering them unconscious or dead through the application of lethal chokeholds. At its highest levels, pankratiasts practice methods for dealing with armed adversaries and multiple opponents.

In most contests, a pankratiast can only win by forcing his opponent to submit, often through choking techniques, excruciating joint locks, or simply through knocking the opponent unconscious through a brutal barrage of blows. In some cases, the fight is to the death.

Where and how often a pankratiast competes is left to the devices of the CK. He may compete in front of thousands in a gladiatorial arena where the sport has a great following, or he may find himself fighting to survive in the gory pits of decadent slave lords in some desolate land. The pankrationist may be dedicated to a temple of a God or Goddess that value strength and competition, and here their savage bouts are in religious tribute to the divine. In this case, the CK could institute a Pankration Hall as part of the Temple structure, where athletes are devout worshippers or perhaps considered a part of the religious order. In this way, the pankratiast most closely resembles the original monk class, and yet retains its western flavor.

## ABILITIES

**ATHLETICISM:** The pankratiast is a paragon of strength, agility, and speed, and as such, gains the following benefits:

+2 to all physical attribute checks and saving throws that involve feats of athleticism. This can include a wide variety of actions. Examples: Running at top movement rate for several hours to deliver a message. Toppling a heavy statue over onto a group of attacking orcs. Catching the ledge when a trapped floor gives way beneath. Dodging a web spell.

Additional +2 to Armor Class when using the combat maneuver Dodge or Evade. (see PHB, page 132)

**Enhanced Movement-** The Pankratiast has trained extensively in athletics and moves faster than normal. (See the Pankratiast Special Abilities Chart for movement rates.) Carrying a medium or heavy load will negate enhanced movement, and reduce it to 30.

**STONE SKIN:** By subjecting himself to excruciating and repetitious blows, the pankratiast has tempered his body and mind and to shrug off pain and injury.

To this end, a pankratiast gains a +1 to all saving throws against the effects of stun, paralysis, and death attacks. This increases to +2 at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, +3 at 6<sup>th</sup> level, +4 at 10<sup>th</sup> level, and +5 at 15<sup>th</sup> level.

Further, the pankratiast can shrug off 1 point of damage per die at 6<sup>th</sup> level from any bludgeoning, blunt, or otherwise impact related weapons (club, fists, martial throws, etc). This increases to 2 points at 12<sup>th</sup> level.

Additionally, the Pankratiast adds his Constitution bonus (if positive) to the special Pankratiast Armor Class as presented in the special abilities chart. This stacks with any dexterity bonuses. *Unlike the improved armor class listed in the special abilities chart, this bonus is retained even while wearing armor.*

**HAND TO HAND COMBAT:** The pankratiast is highly trained in the science and art of hand to hand combat, and as such, has the following abilities.

Enhanced Empty Hand Damage (see chart)

Secondary Attack (see chart)

Base to Hit increased by +1 for all unarmed attacks (including fist weapons)

Enhanced Armor Class- While going unarmored, the pankratiast gains the armor class listed on the chart.

**STUNNING STRIKE:** The pankratiast can opt to focus all of his power into a painful, disorienting strike that stuns his opponent. The pankratiast must declare that he is attempting to stun at the beginning of the turn. If the attack hits, the target must make a constitution saving throw or be knocked from their feet, disoriented or otherwise writhing in pain for 1d4 rounds, and is considered prone. If the attack misses, then this is considered a use of the ability and is wasted. The ability can only be used once per day per level of the pankratiast. A pankratiast who has multiple attacks and Stunning Strike uses available can attempt a Stunning Strike twice in one round, against one opponent or more. Multiple Stunning Strikes against one opponent make it possible to attempt an Incapacitating Blow.

It should be noted that while the effects of stun rounds are not cumulative (they do not stack), each new stun delivered replaces the previous. Example: The pankratiast strikes an opponent and causes stun for two rounds, but the next round he stuns the oppo-

nent again for four. The previous stun effects are now replaced by the four rounds, which go into effect immediately.

This ability is limited to medium sized creatures from 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>, and can affect even large sized creatures upon reaching 6<sup>th</sup> level. Creatures must have a discernable anatomy, and cannot be undead creatures.

**INCAPACITATING BLOW:** The pankratiast, at 2<sup>nd</sup> level and above, can attempt to strike an opponent that is already under the effects of a previous stun and deliver an Incapacitating Blow. This must be declared before the player rolls for the attack. On a successful hit, the target must make an additional save or be rendered unconscious for 1d6 minutes x the level of the pankratiast. If the save is made, the target sustains only normal damage.

This may be used once per day for every two levels of the Pankratiast. Once per day at 2<sup>nd</sup> level, twice per day at 4<sup>th</sup> level, three times per day at 6<sup>th</sup> level, and so on.

**WRESTLING MASTERY:** For game purposes, any *overbearing attack* executed by the pankratiast is described as devastating tackle or wrestling style throw that can be lethal to an unskilled opponent. *Grappling attacks* are described as a variety of joint locking techniques or holds that either cause damage or immobilize the target. Tactically speaking, grappling and overbearing attacks are dangerous to attempt when confronted with multiple opponents, but against only one, especially an armed or larger opponent, can be incredibly effective.

As unarmed combat specialists, the pankratiast receives a +2 on all grappling and overbearing attacks.

Further, the pankratiast ignores the normal -2 armor class penalty when choosing to use an overbearing attack.

The pankratiast is trained to fight from every conceivable posture, and never suffers a penalty to attacks or armor class when prone

**Rolling Fall-** Pankratiasts have mastered the art of falling without taking damage, and upon a successful dexterity save, can negate all damage on falls of ten feet or less, or half damage from falls greater than ten feet. A successful dexterity save also will halve all damage from martial takedowns and throws.

**OVERBEARING ATTACKS:** When the pankratiast commits to an overbearing attack, it is always an amazing display of technical savvy. Whether the maneuver is described as a pile driver, a back breaker, or a fancy over the body throw, the overbearing attack causes a base damage of 1d6 plus a bonus equal to the pankratiast's level. Direction of the throw is up to the player, and is assumed that the pankratiast is keeping his opponent within striking range, utilizing the takedown to place his foe prone before him, and following up with strikes to finish the opponent off. However, if the player wants to use the technique to throw his opponent a distance from him, he can throw them 1d6 feet plus one per level, double if the opponent was charging him. It is up to the player to decide whether the damage is lethal or subdual damage. Tactically, the pankratiast uses this method to hurl opponents off of precarious heights, into other opponents, or into dangerous obstacles.

It should be noted that on any round that a pankratiast wins initiative against a charging opponent, all damage is doubled on a successful throw.

**GRAPPLING ATTACKS:** When the pankratiast successfully grapples his opponent, he can then opt to cause damage on the following round equal to his empty hand damage, if the opponent doesn't break free beforehand. If a secondary attack is available, the pankratiast can cause damage in the same round by expending one additional attack. The pankratiast is limited to causing damage to his opponent only once per round, no matter how many unused unarmed attacks he has available, as it represents the focus on twisting, hyper extending, or rending a limb or body part with a particular hold or technique.

On any successful overbearing or grappling attack, the player may state the ending position of the opponent if it's pertinent to the encounter. (i.e. prone on their back or face-down, etc.)

**IMPROVED GRAPPLING ARMOR CLASS:** The pankratiast is an expert at defending against grappling and overbearing attacks as well, and uses a base armor class of 17 instead of the normal base of 15, and are allowed to use constitution bonuses in addition to the other modifiers listed in the grappling section of the PH (page 131).

**PNEUMA DYNAMI:** The pankratiast has honed his mind and body and spirit until he can tap into the power of the gods themselves, summoning the Pneuma Dynami, or "Spirit Strength". Scholars and theologians alike debate the true source of this power, as some believe it is a blessing bestowed by the gods of strength and competition upon those they find favor while others believe that it is the natural evolution of the pankratiast to reach into the realms of the supernatural and forcibly take the power for his own. Regardless of its true origins, the following are abilities gained when summoning Pneuma Dynami:

**Strength of the Titans:** Upon reaching 5th level, the Pankratiast can summon this power and channel it into a burst of superhuman strength for very short intervals. This effectively raises his strength by +1 at 5th level, with an additional +1 for every odd level attained thereafter; the strength then lasts for one round per point of the bonus, which can be used at the total bonus for one round, or spread out over many rounds. Example, Ruleus the Undaunted is a 9th level pankratiast, which grants him the ability to summon +3 to his strength score for one round or, if he chooses, could instead opt to use the bonus for three rounds at +1. To activate the ability, the player must announce his intention and make a successful Siege Check versus strength, with a CL equal to the amount of the bonus to be gained. The pankratiast is then capable of bending steel bars, lifting a portcullis, or breaking chains with his bare hands. At high levels, he will be capable of epic feats of strength, such as toppling colossal marble pillars or hurl man-sized boulders. The exact parameters of the ability and the CL related to the feat of strength are left to the adjudication of the Castle Keeper. Immediately after the ability is expended, the pankratiast must make a constitution check or be utterly exhausted for 1d4 turns. If the check fails, any endeavor will be at a -6 for the duration. If the check is made however, the penalty is halved, and is for only 1d4 rounds.

**Focus of the Titans-** At third level, the zeal of the pankratiast has enabled him to permanently tap into the power of Pneuma Dynami to strike or grapple an opponent that can only be harmed by magical weapons. Any unarmed attack made by the pankratiast is considered the equivalent of a +1 magical weapon for these purposes, and increases to +2 at 6th level, +3 at 9th, +4 at 12th, and +5 at 15th.

**Epic Fatality-** At 11th level, the pankratiast can execute an instantly fatal hold or blow to an opponent, either through a grappling maneuver or a strike. The opponent must have fewer HD than the pankratiast, and be no more than one size larger, as well as possess a physical anatomy. This is so taxing on the spirit and focus of the pankratiast, it can only be attempted once per week. Upon receiving a successful attack, the opponent must make a constitution saving throw (using the pankratiast's level as CL) or die instantly in an incredible display of skill and power. Any opponents who witness this feat who are of lesser HD than the pankratiast must make a Charisma check or suffer effects identical to the Fear spell.

The ability increases to an additional usage per week per every four additional levels (15th, 19th, 23rd, etc). When multiple uses of Epic Fatality are available, all uses can be used in one combat encounter if desired, allowing for legendary battles against numerous foes.

**PRIME ATTRIBUTE:** Strength

**ALIGNMENT:** Any

**HIT DICE:** D12

**WEAPONS:** Cudgels, clubs, rods, staves, cestus, spiked gauntlets, brass knuckles, and punching daggers.

**ARMOR:** None

**ABILITIES:** Athleticism, stone skin, hand to hand, incapacitating blow, wrestling mastery, overbearing attacks, grappling attacks, improved grappling armor class, pneuma dymame.

| LEVEL | HD  | BtH | EPP       |
|-------|-----|-----|-----------|
| 1     | d12 | +0  | 0         |
| 2     | d12 | +1  | 1,751     |
| 3     | d12 | +2  | 4,001     |
| 4     | d12 | +3  | 8,501     |
| 5     | d12 | +4  | 20,001    |
| 6     | d12 | +5  | 40,001    |
| 7     | d12 | +6  | 80,001    |
| 8     | d12 | +7  | 160,001   |
| 9     | d12 | +8  | 325,001   |
| 10    | d12 | +9  | 550,001   |
| 11    | +5  | +10 | 750,001   |
| 12    | +5  | +11 | 1,250,001 |
| 13    | +5  | +12 | 1,500,001 |
| 14    | +5  | +13 | 1,750,001 |
| 15    | +3  | +14 | 2,000,001 |
| 16    | +3  | +15 | 2,250,001 |
| 17    | +3  | +16 | 2,500,001 |

## PANKRATIAST SPECIAL ABILITIES

| LEVEL | ARMOR CLASS | GRAPPLING AC | PRIMARY ATTACK | SECONDARY ATTACK | FAST MOVEMENT |
|-------|-------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| 1     | 11          | 17           | 1d4            | -                | -             |
| 2     | 12          | 18           | 1d4            | -                | -             |
| 3     | 12          | 18           | 1d6            | -                | 40            |
| 4     | 13          | 19           | 1d6            | 1d2              | 40            |
| 5     | 13          | 19           | 1d8            | 1d2              | 40            |
| 6     | 13          | 19           | 1d8            | 1d4              | 50            |
| 7     | 14          | 20           | 1d8            | 1d4              | 50            |
| 8     | 14          | 20           | 1d8            | 1d6              | 50            |
| 9     | 14          | 20           | 1d10           | 1d6              | 50            |
| 10    | 15          | 20           | 1d10           | 1d8              | 60            |
| 11    | 15          | 21           | 1d10           | 1d8              | 60            |
| 12    | 15          | 21           | 1d10           | 1d8              | 60            |
| 13    | 16          | 21           | 1d12           | 1d8              | 60            |
| 14    | 16          | 21           | 1d12           | 1d10             | 60            |
| 15    | 16          | 22           | 1d12           | 1d10             | 65            |
| 16    | 17          | 22           | 1d12           | 1d10             | 65            |
| 17    | 17          | 22           | 1d12           | 1d10             | 65            |

### WEAPON RESTRICTIONS

Pankratiasts are specialists in unarmed combat, and as a result, are proficient with only a very few weapons. Weapon proficiency is limited to simple blunt instruments, including cudgels, clubs, rods, and staves, as well as all specialized fist weapons, such as the cestus, spiked gauntlets, brass knuckles, and punching daggers. When utilizing specialized fist weapons, the pankratiast retains his multiple attacks and in most cases, retains the pankratiast empty hand damage base; it should be noted that many fist weapons, such as punching daggers, hamper or negate the ability to grapple or wrestle an opponent. Simple cestus, spiked gauntlets, and brass knuckles will still allow grappling, but cumbersome or elaborate versions of these weapons may incur a penalty (CK's discretion).

### MULTI-CLASSING

Through multi-classing, or the use of the optional Class and Half option from the Player's Handbook, a player can recreate several character arch-types. By combining the fighter and the pankratiast, the character becomes the ultimate gladiator, bred for the pits or arena; this combination serves to recreate warrior cultures, such as the Spartans, who were as at home unarmed as they were armed. Paladins or clerics of the Gods of Strength, for example, may come from cultures where Pankration is a part of their religious and martial regimen, and are expected to champion their gods cause with bare fists and epic feats of monster slaying.

### CAMPAIGNING IN AIRHDE

Tagea and Brindisium make great places to start a pankratiast character in the world of Airhde, as the Solarium Empire produced the first structured system of pankration, which was in turn a hybrid of techniques practiced by the ancient Ethrum and Aenochian tribes. However, Tagea makes the bold claim that it is the true birthplace of what they now call Tagean Pankration, with the first demonstration of it's effectiveness attributed to Captain Tagea, when he

slew a werebear using his unarmed skills. In tribute to the nations founder, several temples and military training gymnasiums were established early on, and over the centuries have produced some of the toughest hand-to-hand combatants in the world of Airhde. Mastery is rivaled, however, by the nation of Brindisium, where pankratiasts battle in colossal arenas before thousands of cheering spectators; nobility and athletes alike spend recreational time learning at least the rudiments of the art.

In Tagea, worship of the Twins, Adrius and Zernius, has a huge following among the warrior classes. As the Gods of Strength and Protection, they have been interpreted by the pankratiast to be Gods of Offense and Defense, as it pertains to battle, and have named techniques in their honor. Colossal statues of the twins often overlook the xysti (training halls) and military courtyards, often in combative poses.

Humans are not the only ones to practice Pankration, however. It is said that the orcs of Onwaltig

have mastered their own version of Pankration; pit fighting to the death is a favorite sport among the orcs, especially with captured prisoners from abroad. Imagine a grim adventure of survival where a captured pankratiast pc must do battle against vile and horrific opponents in the arenas of Carteris, all the while trying to devise a plan of escape from the orc island nation.

### PANKRATIAST STYLES

The pankratiast class, as presented here in the article, assumes the most common style of combat taught, whereas strength is valued above all other attributes in combat. It should be noted that other styles of pankration exist, with other attributes being considered the key to victory; these class variations and their different skills and abilities will be explored in upcoming issues of the Crusader.



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# A STAIRWAY TO THE GODS

## ULTIMATE CRYPT #3

By John William Wright

### INTRODUCTION

Centuries upon centuries ago, the nobility of a once-great kingdom suffered the same simple curse that often plagues those with too much power: the arrogance and belief that their royalty had come to equal a level of “godhood.” For this particular land, arrogance reached its pinnacle with Regis Ulthira IV, who elevated himself in his 40<sup>th</sup> year to equal rank in the nation’s pantheon with the other major gods of the land. Indeed, he squandered his kingdom’s wealth and resources over the next two decades to prepare for his own ultimate “ascension,” building elaborate temples to himself and preparing his own, final resting place... a high mountain crypt he called his people’s “Stairway to the Gods”, designed to ensure his own immortality as central deity to his people.

Even before his death, the lesser nobles began to chafe at their regent’s growing demand for worship – the cozy benefits they had enjoyed began to dissipate with his flagrant wastefulness and unending spending of the treasury. Several of his kinsmen decided it would be best to accelerate his ascension, through poisoning. Thus, Regis Ulthira died well before he planned, though his High Theurgist and the realm’s Archmage carried out his wishes and enshrined him in the protected crypt in the mountains before they, too, fell to the treason of the now squabbling nobles. Ulthira’s “godhood” did not last long, as the ensuing civil discord ultimately stripped all records of his existence. The nation itself eventually disappeared in the sands of time, and the only remnant of Ulthira is the whispered legend of the Stairway itself, with varying differences in the telling, of a lost or hidden temple or crypt in which it is said the gods actually step to the material earth to endow great rewards on the worthy, or great destruction on those that displease them. The specifics of this are left to the Castle Keeper.

### AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

The entrance to the stairway is a dark, unadorned cave that looks like any other, nestled atop a series of rolling hills (shelves) that carry upward toward the base of several jagged peaks. The area is heavily forested and not well explored. The forested area in front is also home to several Treants (four) who have long claimed the area as their native land. At least two Treants like to rest most of the time in the soft, mossy ground just outside the cave entrance (a small moist creek runs down next to it), and use the cave to store the little treasure they care to keep. The Treants will react positively to Elves and Druids, but will become very defensive at the sight of axes, blades, and Humans and Dwarves. They will also react badly if adventurers attempt to enter the cave without permission. Use Treants as in *Monsters & Treasure* © pg. 79. The two Treants near the cave have 39 and 37 hit points; the other two (who are not far) have 38 and 32. Inside the cave, the party will find mainly moss and mushrooms (all non-monstrous and benign other than a minor chance of nausea if eaten), and the Treants’ stash of treasure, which is a wet and dirty pile of various coinage collected over many centuries (worth 3,890 g.p.), a silver dagger (+2, +5 against

lycanthropes), and several cups and (non-magical) amulets, worth approx. 2,000 g.p. The actual stone door is hidden in the back wall, and is difficult to find (CL 10) as it is almost seamlessly a part of the natural stonewall.

**THE STAIRWAY:** Behind the hidden door in the cave, the stairway begins immediately, climbing nearly 1,000 feet in straight, angled flights of stairs. There are no levels or respites along the way, and no light until the landing at the top. The stairs themselves are not trapped, nor difficult, but heavily armored or encumbered members will need to begin constitution checks every hundred feet, with increasing challenge (CL 1 at 100, +1 every hundred thereafter), with failed saves granting fatigue that equals -1 to all rolls for 1 hour, cumulative. Resting one hour at any point in the stairway rejuvenates this and resets the base for the constitution check.

**L. THE LANDING:** As the party reaches the topmost stairs, they will enter an area around the two peaks in which a powerful, permanent incantation has been placed, blocking *scry* and *teleport* in any area amidst this cloud-topped crypt. The incantation has been placed within the rocks of the two peaks themselves, and cannot be removed save by literally breaking apart the mountains themselves. The landing at the top is marked by two straight candles that burn with flame continuously, flickering but amazingly never blowing out. There is a high wind, whipping around clockwise the south peak (including the stairway), and then curving at even higher speeds counter-clockwise around the main peak and the crypt itself. PCs will find it impossible to use *fly* or *floating disk* or other such spells, because the winds were also attached magically and increase when any creature enters the “sky walk” space.

The “sky walk” is comprised of a series of translucent permanent magical platforms stretching across the space. Initially, it will look as if there is nothing there, but a successful spot (CL 9) will show them up to 20 feet distance. The party must make their way across these landings, for on each of them there is a protective field against the high winds. Jumping or using short spells or levitations will be subject to the winds as the individuals move from one to another, with the wind speeds increasing as the party moves closer to the far end (which is 80 feet away, area 1. below). The biggest trick is that the closest platform to the final in the sequence is actually impossible to traverse to the last. It is to the S just a few feet from the final one, but the magical wind is so strong that ANY attempt to cross to the final sky walk platform will result in the individual being blown from the mountain top, and falling (deadly, of course unless the player employs means once below the magical field to save their fall). The correct path is to the left as one approaches, with the seemingly greater distance (almost 20 feet) mitigated by the fact that here the wind will actually help carry a jump or movement to the final platform. Difficulty levels for successfully traversing the platforms are left for the CK to determine, but should range between 9 and 12 depending on what approach the party takes.

\* The magic controlling the winds and the platforms reside in all



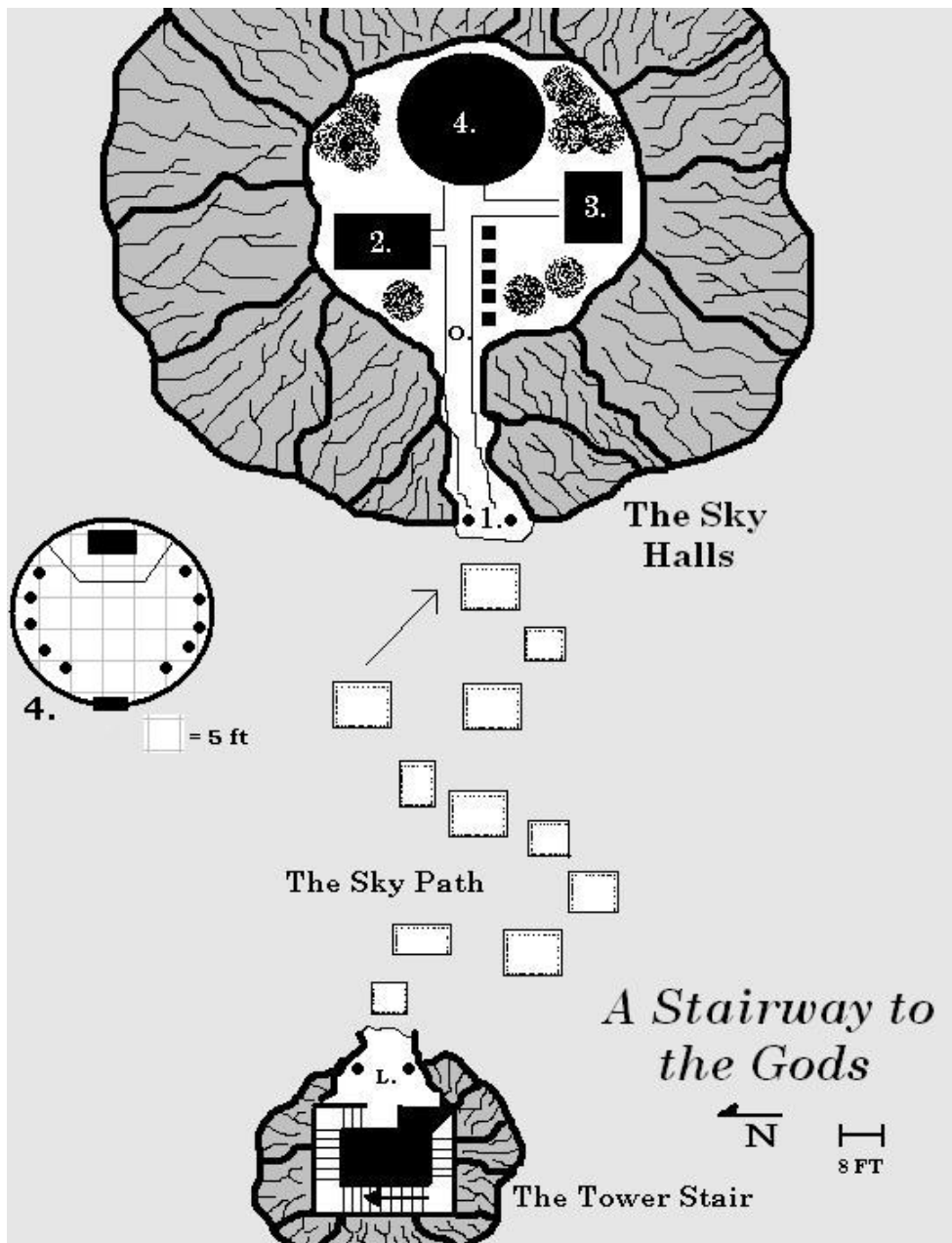
four of the ever-burning candles. All four, on both sides, must be put out or destroyed. *Dispel magic* will achieve this of course, or attack with magical weapons. If not, return through the winds will be nearly impossible for all the party to accomplish together.

**1. ENTRANCE LANDING TO THE SKY HALLS:** Regis Ulthira's crypt actually comprises several marble buildings atop this carved-out plateau, collectively called the Sky Halls. The landing has matching, ever-burning candles as the other side, bracketing a marble & gold lined path leading into the Halls. The gold is mixed with the marble in an elaborate stonework, and a talented Dwarf could use his stonework ability (with proper tools) to begin separating some of the gold (CL 10), but this would be tedious and time consuming, and the noise will almost certainly alert the Watcher at area 2.

The players will see the three marble buildings, including the circular domed crypt. Scattered about the plateau are dark-leaved trees that seem frozen in time as if this were the day of Ulthari's death and entombment.

**O. THE OBELISKS:** On the right side of the path as it enters, there are 5 obelisks, magically designed to test the "piety" of any who come to the Sky Halls. On each is a symbol of a major god (the Castle Keeper can choose appropriate pantheons in accordance with their particular campaigns), except for the fifth, which is of course the symbol of Regis Ulthari. The magic of the Obelisks require that passing PCs pay homage by bowing and speaking the name of the "god" on each as they pass. Failure by any triggers a *Message* to the "Watcher" in area 2. allowing it to prepare for an ambush.

**2. CHAMBER OF THE WATCHER OF THE GODS:** None of the entrances to the Halls have doors; rather they are merely open arches with the marble face of Ulthari cresting above the center of the arch. If the party attempts to rest on the plateau, the Watcher will encounter them on its patrol within 1d4+1 hours. If the party attempts to rest after defeating a Watcher, there is a 25% chance each hour (cumulative) the Will-O'-Wisps at 3. will realize the Watcher is gone and hunt on the plateau.



The "Watcher of the Gods" is a Prysmal Eye (see M&T © p. 67) set here to protect the Sky Halls from trespassers and "infidels." It resides in an empty marble single-roomed rectangular structure, wherein it keeps its own treasure and from which it patrols the Halls on the mountaintop. It was trained long ago to "serve" the "god" Ulthari, and can be convinced that a party is here to pay homage with enough tithing to the watcher and a highly successful charisma check (CL 10 – useless if the party failed the "test" at the Obelisks above). The Prysmal Eye has 98 hit points, and it will be quick to assault any party that does not prove its "piety," which is actually the better possibility, for if the Watcher is not defeated before the party enters the crypt at 4. then, if the Ghost of Ulthari and its "servants" are roused, the Watcher will be summoned and join in that battle.

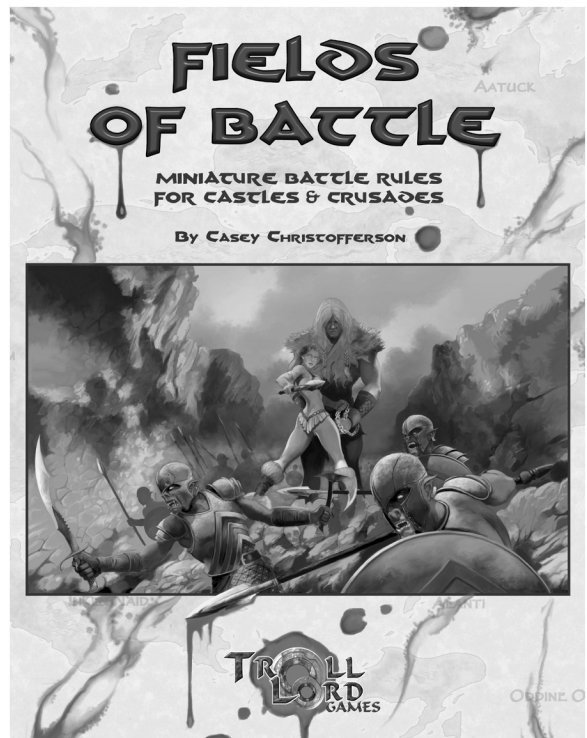
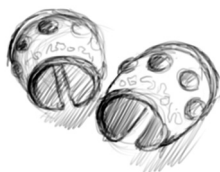
The "Watcher's" treasure includes: 3 expensive rugs (5000 g.p. total), piles of various coinage (59,870 g.p. total), statuary and jewelry (28,425 g.p.), a bag of holding, a +2 Lion's Shield, a set of +4 Dwarven Plate, a Hat of Disguise, a Horn of Blasting, 2 potions of *Heal*, 1 Potion of *Greater Restoration*, a scroll of *Power Word Kill*, a scroll of *Clone*, a Sword of Life Stealing, and a Ring of Spell Turning.

**3. Ulthari's Repository of Knowledge:** This small marble building is lined with shelves of stone, upon which sat a collection of tomes, scrolls and documents that were valuable to the long-dead king. Due to the circumstances of his death and en-

tombment, however, protections against time and weather were not put in place, and most of the room is a bulging, petrified ruin of ancient paper, or merely works so brittle they crumble at a touch. A search (CL 5) will reveal three items that have managed to survive: a Tome of Leadership +2, a Tome of Understanding +1, and a scroll of *Limited Wish*. Unfortunately for the party searching, two Will-O'-Wisps (M&T © p. 82) have made their home here, independent of the Crypt and left alone by the Watcher as they use this as a base to travel down and hunt on travelers lost in the mountain paths and forest below. The Will-O'-Wisps will defend their "lair" immediately, but will not engage or attack anything else on the plateau (thus they will not join in defense of the Crypt area at 4.) unless they realize the Watcher no longer patrols (see above). The Will-O'-Wisps have 48 and 39 hit points respectively.

**4. ULTHARI'S CRYPT:** Upon entering this circular crypt, the party will see immediately 10 pedestals lining both walls, each with a marble bust of the image of a major or minor god (CK's discretion), including a bust of Ulthari. The sarcophagus is on a raised dais at the far end from the entrance. There are no traps in the room, but as any player enters more than five feet, the Ghost of Ulthari will appear (M&T © p. 38), demanding in his ancient tongue the worship of the "pilgrims." The Ghost will be happy only if the party gives him complete worship, "tithes" a massive amount of their own riches and belongings, and leaves. As soon as any member of the party makes any other action, the Ghost of Ulthari becomes enraged and attacks, as do the "servants" Ulthari. One is another Ghost, that of his major-domo who was also killed when Ulthari was, the others his retainers who he had doomed to be his protectors by making them into 8 Shadows (M&T © p. 72). The Ghosts have 70 and 52 hit points; the Shadows have 19, 17, 15, 20, 15, 17, 14 and 12 respectively. If the Prismatic Eye at 2. has not been defeated it will arrive in 1d4-1 rounds and join the attack from the entrance, making the battle exponentially more deadly.

Once (or rather if) Ulthari and his minions are defeated, the sarcophagus must either be unlocked (CL 11) or smashed open (AC 24, 60 HPs). It has traps, with near-invisible filament wires interlaced through the box and stretching through the stone floor into the mountain sides surrounding the plateau (CL 9 to spot, CL 12 to disarm) – triggering the trap will result in the upper part of the mountain crumbling, with a landslide of deadly rocks crushing the entire plateau in 30 seconds. Inside will be found the skeletal remains of Ulthari's physical body (smashing has nothing to do with his incorporeal form in case any party member tries), surrounded by his personal treasure: a bed of coinage, mostly platinum (worth 73,278 g.p.), a diamond necklace (framed with 10 diamonds worth 100,000 g.p. total), a +4 Vorpal Blade, a Ring of AC +3, and an Orb of Storms.

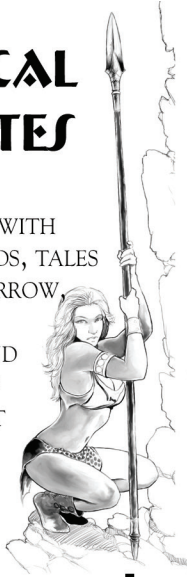


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# HISTORICAL FOOTNOTES

HISTORY IS REPLETE WITH STORIES OF EPIC DEEDS, TALES OF WONDER AND SORROW, LEGENDS THAT DEFY THE IMAGINATION AND THE ADVENTURES OF HEROES! IN THE PAST LIE GEMS FOR ANY GAME'S FUTURE.



# LIFE IN THE 24TH CENTURY ... BC

BY JOSEPH WOLZ

This is the second installment of Historical Footnotes dealing with ancient Mesopotamia. The city states of Fertile Crescent were always at war. In history, they fought over land, water rights, and honor. Those same reasons could hold true for your adventurers, but intrepid heroes can also fight antediluvian evils, or new evils associated with society's rapid changes. But no matter what they are fighting for, they need something to fight with, and so the following is a list of much of the arms and armor available to adventurers in a time and place much like ancient Mesopotamia.

The following entries share their style with Castellans' Guide to the Arms and Armor of the Early Medieval Period. Costs are given in equivalent trade goods, since coinage did not exist at the time. Armor and swords were expensive, and so a warrior needed quite a few resources to equip himself properly.

A note on Bronze: These weapons are all made of bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, or more commonly, copper and arsenic. For game purposes, they are equal to iron weapons, but inferior to steel weapons. If you play a game wherein a Bronze Age culture is being attacked by a medieval culture, steel has a 10% chance of breaking a bronze weapon that parries it.

## Armor

Helm: Simple Helmet

Weight: 4 lbs. (1)

Cost: 6 large clay pots of beer

Availability: 80%

Armor Class: +4

Optional: Any blow aimed at the head which gets a natural 20 will do triple damage to the target



and require a saving throw against constitution to not fall unconscious.

The standard bronze helmet of the period covers the top of the head, the back of the head and the sides of the head down to the jawline, but leaves the face open. Not every warrior had one of these, as they were seen as a mark of wealth.

## Helm: Noble (Fancy) Helmet

Weight: 4 lbs. (1)

Cost: 1 goat

Availability: 40%

Armor Class: +5

Optional: Any blow aimed at the head which gets a natural 20 will do triple damage to the target and require a saving throw against constitution to not fall unconscious.



This is a much fancier and better made version of the regular helmet worn at the time. Usually it was lined with leather (for comfort) and was engraved to look like the head of the wearer, including hair! It was generally made of thicker bronze, however, which offered slightly better protection. If suffered from the same lack of face protection that the simpler helmet did.

## Armor: Sumerian Body Armor

%Coverage: 75%

Weight: 25 lbs. (2)

Cost: 50 lbs. of copper ore

Availability: 50%

Armor Class: +3

Optional: An extra +1 to AC against slashing weapons

This was a leather cloak which fastened across the shoulders. It was similar to ring mail in that there were bronze disks affixed at random to the outside. It was long, reaching to the ankles, but light enough to keep a sword arm free.



## Weapons

### Sickle Sword

Length: 2-3 feet

Weight: 4 lbs. (2)

Wield: One-Handed

Cost: A year's labor

Availability: 20%

Damage: 1D6

Inflict: Slashing, Mass



Intent: Only the outside edge of the curve was sharpened, so this was a slashing weapon. The sickle-sword is the first sword style to appear in Mesopotamia, and the design stayed through the Iron Age. It was developed out of the more common axe designs, and was really more of an all metal axe than a sword. It was meant for chopping.

### Spear

Length: 6 feet

Weight: 3 lbs. (2)

Wield: One or Two-Handed

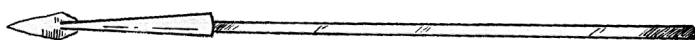
Cost: Materials for two spears (5 lbs. copper, ½ lb. Tin, and some wood)

Availability: 80%

Damage: 1D6

Inflict: Thrusting

Intent: The Spear was the most common weapon on the earliest battlefields. Every soldier would have started with a spear. They were rarely thrown, and not designed to be, but can be hurled 20 feet. Because of its reach, the wielder of a spear gains initiative against a Small or Medium opponent armed with a weapon of 3 or less feet of length.



### War Axe

Length: 2 feet

Weight: 6 lbs. (2)

Wield: One-Handed

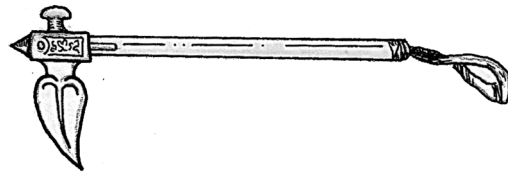
Cost: A set of bronze eating utensils

Availability: 60%

Damage: 1D8

Inflict: Mass

Intent: As warfare continued, axes went from repurposed farm tools to narrow-bladed, armor piercing implements. They were designed to punch through the helmets of the time, and as a result are +1 against opponents wearing bronze helmets when striking for the head.



### Epsilon Axe

Length: 3 feet

Weight: 7 lbs. (3)

Wield: One or Two-Handed

Cost: A bolt of fine cloth

Availability: 80%

Damage: 1D6

Inflict: Mass

Intent: This is a general use axe that was used in warfare in addition to its more utilitarian roles. It had a long blade to improve the chances of hitting a target, but the thin blade was easily damaged in battle. If the player rolls a natural (unmodified) 1 on an attack, the blade breaks off the haft and the weapon is useless as an axe. The haft may be used as a club, however.



### Name: Stone Headed Mace

Length: 2 feet

Weight: 6 lbs. (3)

Wield: One-Handed

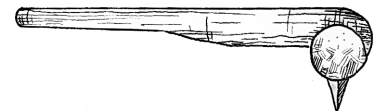
Cost: A copper bracelet

Availability: 90%

Damage: 1D6

Inflict: Mass

Intent: These were common weapons available to just about anyone. The only more common weapon was the knife. The head was made of stone, sometimes coated in bitumen, to prevent cracking. These were very rarely made from bronze, since the metal was more useful as an axe. However, many of the maces were made more elaborately than a stone sphere, with carved protrusions and ridges. This has no effect on game mechanics, but does add to the cost.



# TALES OF THE RINGS of CORASS

## THE AIHRDIAN CHRONICLES BEING THE 23RD 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 a magical boat fashioned by the puala beast they have at last arrived upon the shores of the Ethrum. Battling their way through a host of orcs they at last come beneath the eves of the Twilight Wood, that forest where only that Lord of Dreams, the Horse Lord of Nightmares, Utumno rules.*

“How do we stand Sagamore? Those orcs pressed us hard.”

“We lost several killed and more wounded. Our strength stands at 92 men able to ride. We lost several of our own and more mercenaries. Of the Vale Knights, including the two of us, there are 31 remaining. Sixty one mercenaries ride still. A further few are too wounded to go on, one of our Knights has suffered a mangled leg and cannot sit horse for many days.”

“His name?”

“Her name is Aereon. I will take you to her.”

The trees of the wood stood tall about them, long, thick bows, capped by broad leafy canopies; unlike much of the frozen world of the Winter Dark the trees here continued to shed leaves and grow them anew, all in tune with the seasons of yesteryear. The bramble grew thick about the stems of the trees, cluttering the forest floor with so much detritus. Travel proved difficult as few trails existed and those that did changed constantly as the beasts that dwelt here defied the Darkness of Unklar’s Winter.

The troop sprawled throughout the forest, gathered in small groups binding wounds, eating, making light of the journey past and future. As their Prince and Captain moved through their midst they said little for he was a Captain of lost souls and they his crew. At last Sagamore came to three Knights, two sitting by a fire, a third, pale and drawn leaned against a tree. Her helm lay at her side, with a long, thin sword and a mace, both clotted with blood and the ichors of the recent struggle. Her armor lay in a heap beside her, chain shirt, hauberk and boots. She wore only a tunic, soiled with her sweat and the blood of her recent wounds. Her matted auburn hair hung about her head and shoulders, the ties that held it flat pulled and loose.

“My Lord . . .” She started to her feet but Meltowg waved her back down. With a grimace and sigh she leaned back against the tree.

“You are wounded and cannot ride, is this so?”

“I can ride My Lord.”

The Elf Lord looked upon her. He took in her form and deep eyes. For a great while he stood there in silence. Only the crackling of the fire broke the stillness.

“It is said that my cousin, Melius, bared the gates to the lands of Shindolay, keeping the scourge of the Dark God from that Kingdom of Elves. It is said that he keeps those gates are bound within a ring of brass and this ring he has placed in a stone in the Castle of Spires. For these acts he is called ‘the Wise’ by the elves. Upon the walls of his castle are troop of knights to guard it from the plunders of the world and all about this castle stand the Twilight Wood and its dark hearted god. It is our fate to assail this Castle and throw down the wisdom of its keeper. With this we may open the gates of Fey to the world and bring a host of Elves onto the fields of battle and with this mayhap we can drive Unklar from his throne and give back the world to the Spring.”

“It is said.”

“But that is not your fate Lady Aereon. I have a different task for you, one that has only come to my mind now and one that I cannot help but think that,” and these next words he shouted so that all could hear, and the sound of his voice crashed through the forest, “Gegelmesh Mair Maukling placed there!”

The forest seemed to grown at the shouted name and somewhere deep in the woods some beast bayed out its hunting call.

“So the dwarves have named the Lord of Nightmares, who you call Utumno.” Sagamore’s voice was still but carried through the woods.

“You must go south in the Gelderland. There is no border between this wood and that, you know it only when you come to the trees whose leaves are frozen or dead. If you continue on your southerly path you will come to a wide stream, called the Peatmoss by men. Follow that stream to its mouth where stands a small lake at the foot of a broad cliff. From this cliff come the headwaters of the Peatmoss and upon its top stands a tower. This tower served once as a watch tower and is called the Sheppard’s Tower, or was in days of old. Go there and find what you will, but remember you are Vale Knight, sword to my service and from your oath you’ll find no relief

from me.”

“Yes My Lord.”

“I will see you in the Stonefields Aereon or not at all!” He turned then and called for his company to make ready. “You are rested and now we must be on our way.”

The clanking of metal echoed in the forest as men gathered themselves up, buckling on weapons belts, picking up armor, shields, helmets. Throwing saddles back on weary horses, they mounted and in short order followed their master as he led them in the darkening wood.

Sagamore turned his horse back to Aereon and looking upon her he said, “You’ve a hard road ahead of you. That I can see. Watch all those around you and trust your sword only. He looked about him and began to chant quietly under his breath, with one palm stretched out he seemed to summon some eldritch force. All about the woman and her wounded companions a sheen appeared and a dark shadow loomed just beyond it.

“I have set a guard upon you, a curtain to confuse those looking for you and any that become too curious must encounter my shadow, your ward. It will last a day or two, three if you are lucky. So do not linger here. When you are able to even walk take your horses west into the wood, find the great masiff walls and follow those south. It will keep you from the hounds of Darkness.”

“I will find this Sheppard’s Tower that our Lord speaks of and make of it what I can. We will fortify the place for your return.”

“Make haste Lady.” With that Sagamore turned his steed to follow the trail of his companions. Aereon watched him vanish into the brush and though she knew it not, her journey to the Tower and those beyond would become the stuff of legend, of which the bards would sing for centuries.

\*\*\*\*\*

Meltowg’s heavy destrier trampled the undergrowth beneath its iron shod hooves, forcing a trail through the wood. In short order the others in the troop followed suit, in short order the whole company was traveling in a long sinuous line through the forest. The ground rose and fell in gentle ridges. The company crossed stone brooks that babbled their lazy language as they meandered through the wood. Clinging mosses hung from trees old and bent with the passage of years. Deadfall littered the forest floor everywhere, cluttering the way with yet more undergrowth. The ground was moist, filled with roots and covered in colorful fungus, all defying the sunless skies of the Winter Dark. For the elves in the company, and even some of the men the deep greens of the forest brought comfort to their minds; but this comfort the forest itself tempered with a nagging doubt. For the wooded wasteland tumbled on as far as the eye could see; hundreds of shades of green, dark and inviting, assailed the troop and in time numbed their minds to the world around them.

The Twilight beckoned the travelers, opening before them, allowing them egress to the deep woodlands. They passed glades of wondrous beauty, where water pooled in deep shades and wild, thin

stretched birds, gray and white, walked on stilted legs. They passed beneath trees that were old when the world was young; whose branches brushed the earth to coil back up, clutching the air, held back by their great weight. Meandering brooks, filled with smooth shaped stones, cover in moss quenched their thirst, allowing them entry in comfort.

But behind the trail closed and they could not find the path again. Some few of the company wandered off the trail and were lost.

Sounds battered their senses too, strange guttural calls, clacking from creatures in the trees, growls and rumblings as if from the earth itself. The sounds built to a crescendo during the evening hours when creatures came out in safety, to hunt the day walkers. They called to each other, fought on occasion but always hounded the Company in their camp. The men gained little rest from their vain attempts to sleep; for if the sounds did not wake them, their dreams did. Something stalked them, creeping up in their nightmares. It was dark and filled with rage and sought to unroot the very soul of the dreamer. Those who saw him wrestled with it... him...themselves, until they matched it or died. Two of the company went mad in their sleep, calling to dark Utumno to take them away. They too were lost.

The Company had many adventures, encountering eldritch creatures on their journey; dark magics and fey filled with exuberant love or intractable hate. They fought a giant and slew a snake from the dawn of time. A crypt wherein dwelt some ancient King of Ethrum blocked their path. And so their journey went.

After many such reckless adventures that do not fall into this tale the Company topped a small rise that stood upon the end of a long, broad treeless slope. Exhausted, drained of their desires to move on the at last came to the end of their road.

Beyond the rise the land dipped into a wide, deep, bowl shaped valley. The valley stood in the shadows of the western mountains and beneath the ridge, shrouded in darkness. Trees, thick and tall, commanded the whole valley; blanketing it all in a roof of deep and unwholesome green. At the valley’s center, climbing through the roof of trees stood a tower. Narrow and tall it reached up, its flat roof and battlements unfolding like the palm of some might hand. Vines clung to it and it seemed more a mirage of the forest than an actual structure.

“There lies the end of our road. Lets us take a rest before we assail its walls.” Meltowg dropped from the horse, and began to loosen his armor. The noontide had come and he thought it wise to attack before the sun set.

His men followed suit, dismounting and taking what rest they could. They ate, and drank, smoked pipes and slept there on the slopes of that ridge. They lived now as if they had no care or concerns; a Company of men long dead who waited only for the coming of the dark.



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# MONSTER ECOLOGY

EXPLAINING THE STRANGE BEASTS THAT PEOPLE THE HALLS OF OUR IMAGINATION.

BRIAN KIVARI &  
ALICIA STANLEY



Of all the animals that inhabit the world of Airdhe, one remains an enigma. Created using three distinct animal body parts, the Chimera is yet another unique and fascinating creature of Airdhe.

The beast's imposing physique is a triumvirate of powerful animals. It has the massive paws, strong legs, and large head of a lion. From the center of its back, the horned head of a goat grows above leathery, reptilian wings. The tail is comprised of a dragon's long neck, which sprouts a fire-breathing dragon's head.

The question of its origin can only be explained through educated guesses and tribal lore. The earliest of these stories involves the Goblin Warlock Ondluche, the first sorcerer. His tale was passed down by oral history through the Goblin tribes, eventually spreading out to other races which have added or changed the lore to include the importance of their own race. Even so the skeleton of the story remains the same, and has been told countless times around fires and over good ale. The oral history is a testament to Ondluche and his paranoia, or as the Goblin tribes like to say, "his concern for all living beings."

The first sorcerer created power spells from the Language of Creation, which most races know as the Ondluch-Eroan. In the beginning, some of his magic was shared with the humanoids, who in turn perverted and distorted the power for their own evil gains. Instead of ushering a new epoch of peace and wonder, the races each manipulated Ondluche's great discoveries to gain power and wealth, smiting enemies in brutal wars and mad genocidal rampages. Saddened by this turns of events, Ondluche did the only thing he could imagine, hiding the runes where no one but he could recover them. He imparted fragments of his magic into the rune stones, which he then hid throughout Airdhe in hopes that other humanoid species would never be able to discover and use them.

Not satisfied with just hiding the rune stones in caves and dungeons, and not satisfied with the web of illusions, traps and wards erected around his powerful treasures, Ondluche created another level of protection by building mighty beasts, imbued with the knowledge of the rune stones, to stand as vanguards at the mouths of the caves and dungeons where the rune stones were hidden. These beasts are known as the Chimera.

After a long period of thought and deliberation, Ondluche decided to infuse some of the best attributes of existing animals and create a new, superior species. Wanting a fierce creature infused with

equal parts cunning and defense, he amalgamated three animals into one: the lion, the red dragon and the goat. The lion provided the fierce nature; the red dragon provided the cunning and the goat as the conscience of defense. The goat was important because although Ondluche wanted a beast that would fight to the death he also saw the need for the Chimera to have an instinct of self preservation that would prevent it from reckless acts of aggression, though in later generations this self preservation slowly eroded away to becoming a minor aspect in the makeup of the Chimera.

Ondluche recognized that having the claws and rending teeth of the lion would serve to strike fear into even the hardest adventurer. The goat head would be primed to see from all sides and gore a foe coming at the beast's core. Anyone attempting to attack from the beast's rear would face the snapping, fiery maw of the dragon, whose long neck reaches beyond the strike zone of the lion in battle. Its part-dragon makeup also provides flight ability, with its great leathery wings and long tail/neck acting as a rudder in the air.

Ondluche also recognized that the Chimera would need more than just instinct to protect the entrances; he paired his creatures as mates, hoping that this bond would motivate them to protect their mate as well as his magic. Then, satisfied with his creations, Ondluche set about placing a bonded male/female pair of Chimera at the entrance to each of his rune stone hiding spots. He observed the Chimera from afar, using a sight stone, and discovered that though created for the single purpose of protecting their domain, his progeny were often leaving the site to secure food and shelter, and were driven by the instinct to breed. Though pleased that his animals were following the natural order of life, Ondluche couldn't afford to leave his treasures unguarded. He spent hours in research and practice to weave the spells which made guarding the rune stones paramount for each beast. Against his beliefs about further meddling with nature, he forged binding collars for each of his Chimera to inhibit their desire to leave, effectively enslaving his noble beasts.

The legend says he then lived out the remainder of his years, haunted by guilt over his choices. On Ondluche's deathbed, he could not face the afterworld knowing what he had done to the Chimera. He pushed his paranoia aside, and in a last attempt for redemption, Ondluche released the Chimera from their bonds thus allowing them to join the plethora of Airdhe species.



The great beasts have prospered in Airdhe for many centuries. Whether the story of Ondluiche is true or not, it is clear the Chimera now follows its base needs to eat, find shelter, and multiply. Today's Chimeras follow a breeding season in the late summer, when pairs of the creatures mate freely with a single partner each season. The female then flies to the mountain ranges to find a suitable nesting spot on a rocky outcropping. After birthing a single cub around the size of a small lion, she will abandon her young to fend for itself. On the rare occasion where two cubs are born, the siblings will fight until one eventually discovers its power of flight, or is pushed off the ledge to fall to its death. This nest fighting is one of the very few times a Chimera will exhibit any kind of territorial dominance.

Juvenile Chimera are fully formed at birth, and within a few hours they are ready to take flight and begin their life. They have full energy reserves which will quickly be used up during the first flight from the birthing nest, so it must stop to feed within hours after birth. This is a crucial time for the young Chimera as it is in the most vulnerable state it will ever experience. The cubs make an easy meal for some of the predators who will not be able to overcome a fully grown Chimera. Beginning life in such stressful conditions has no doubt contributed to the animals being known for their ferocious, hostile adult nature.

Over the course of the next two years, the cub rapidly grows into a fully fledged adult, which are normally the size of a small elephant. During this time, the juvenile must consume large amounts of food to keep up with its growth, forcing it to take more chances hunting than the average adult. Unfortunately, a sizable number of juvenile Chimera are killed from risky battles in their attempt to sate their constant hunger. During this time, it is not unusual for more than one juvenile to team up and take on larger opponents, sharing the spoils of victory equally. However, as they grow closer to adulthood, they drift apart and become more solitary hunters, only intermingling during the mating season.

In battle, the Chimera uses its three heads in concert to better its odds at becoming the victor. The most successful battle opponents will orchestrate multi-based attacks against the beast, coordinated to distract each of the beast's heads at the same time, thereby rendering it unable to use all of the weapons at its disposal concurrently.

Chimera seem programmed to fight to the death, but do not appear to instigate aggression against another except when matched face to face, or to feed. It can be seen in the skies above Airdhe peacefully flying by, completely indifferent to the creatures below. Occasionally it will descend with almost unmatched ferocity and attack a target

on the ground. These attacks confuse scholars because they are not always for the purpose of feeding - sometimes the Chimera will simply kill for the sake of killing and then fly away after defeating the foe.

In non-battle times, researchers have noted that the three heads of the Chimera often engage in minor fighting amongst themselves, further confirming suspicion that each head is capable of independent thought even though the three heads frequently work together to accomplish tasks.

Chimera are not territorial and migrate widely with seemingly no rhyme or reason. They can be found in almost every region of Airdhe but mostly congregate on the plains, as prey is bountiful and the open space is more to their advantage when engaging in battle.

The beast is near the top of the food chain and therefore has no known natural predator. The study of the remains of the Chimera documents a wide variety of opponents that have killed a Chimera but none consistently enough to rule it a natural, regular predatory occurrence. Feeding patterns appear to be unique to each animal, as opportunistic carnivores with individual preferences. It favors fresh kills and has not been witnessed to engage in carrion feeding.

The natural life cycle is still unknown. All Chimera corpses have been killed in a battle or met an accidental end, and to date a Chimera dying of natural causes has not been discovered. Rumours say that the original Chimera of Ondluiche still exist today, and the superstitious report seeing them flying about with their magic collars still hanging about the lion's neck with the chain trailing behind.

The Chimera remains a mystery in many ways, but it remains one of the most dangerous beasts of Airdhe's lands and skies. Its mystical origins and solitary lifestyle only reinforce the classic image of the Chimera as a majestic and fearsome beast.



DS<sup>o+</sup>

# GODS OF AIRHDE

## MORIDAIN, FIRTHNACH, THE COBBLER

**ORDER:** Val-Eahrakun

**PROVINCE:** Beginnings, Foundations, Adventure, Travel, Dangerous Journeys, Risky Endeavors, Chance

**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral

**HOLY DAYS:** The First Day of Spring

**SUPERSTITIONS:** The Fearful

**PREFERRED WEAPONS:** Any Magic

**MISSIONARY:** "Guide my boots Oh Cobbler, to a life of glory and adventure!"

**SYMBOL:** Two intersecting planes, shaped like an X, the ends flare out. All in a circle.

### OF MORIDAIN, THE COBBLER

When the All Father fashioned the world of Airhde he had no place it for living creatures. It burned of the raw elements for the Maelstrom and he moved through it alone. But into world crept creatures great and small, for they peopled the Void and the warmth of Airhde called to them. But many would not walk upon the tumultuous ground and they feared its chaos.

Moridain came to them then and he spoke words of council, even to Corthain, Thorax and their sister Mordius the greatest of the gods. "It is with simple steps that your journey must begin but it is fair to protect oneself against the dangers of the road, so allow me to fashion for you boots to wear. These will give you courage to travel over the land and safety for your bodies."

To this all the beings welcomed his words and his offer so that in the early darkness of the world Moridain fashioned for the gods and all the Val-Eahrakun courage for the unknown. He wakened in them a lust for adventure and a desire to understand the world at large. He it was that unlocked those qualities inherited from the All Father and for this he was named Firthnach by his peers, that is Courage; who in After Ages the Dwarves called Moridain, the Cobbler, for from his courage all journeys begin.

### MORIDAIN

*"All those who brave the wilds of the world for adventure must begin their journey with a stout pair of boots!"* So the Cobbler is want to say.

The Cobbler is a portly god who appears as an elderly man with defined features. Standing over six feet high, with a well trimmed beard and long gray hair, always pulled back in a tight tail. His hair is thin, though all of one length; it is light on the top, where the hair line recedes. His eyes are wide, though heavy with age and laughter. His hands are broad, with thick fingers, sporting the grip of man used to labor. He wears a simple heavy shirt and pants, with broad boots and a workman's smock. He smokes constantly, usually large cigars.

The Cobbler is worshiped by travelers, adventurers, explorers, and all those seeking a life less ordinary. He is kind to those who call upon him, less so to those who make sacrifice to him. When in his good graces he is free with advice, and even at times, with worldly goods. For those who do not call upon him he is indifferent, allowing them to suffer or succeed on their own. For those who curse him he is unforgiving in his rage and may attempt to hinder their journey.

It is said by those who call upon the Cobbler that he is beneficent. The most common prayer is said over a newly purchased pair of boots, or boots that have been resoled or at the beginning of a journey: "Guide my boots Oh Cobbler, to a life of glory and adventure!"

But there is a greater, deeper meaning to the Cobbler for though he is called upon at the beginning of a journey or adventure; it is in the adventure itself that the true power of the Cobbler is told. Starting the journey is a hard and difficult task; but continuing the journey through the long hard toils of its unwinding lies the true test. And from the Cobbler comes the beginning and the journey. He does not foresee an ending, nor do those who follow the true mark of the Cobbler. He and they see only the path.

It is not uncommon for the Cobbler to join Adventurers before long journeys; usually as an old work shop clerk.

As with many of his order he is forbidden to battle mortals. But when forced into battle he dons +5 heavy plate and takes up the Shield of Geneva and his +8 bastard sword. He is terrible in his wrath but forgiving in his victory. When roused he is possessed of a towering rage, transforming into a dragon of immense size; any who suffer his breath are turned to stone.

### THE WORSHIPER

In order for a cleric to gain the granted abilities of the chosen deity, the cleric must adhere to the following guidelines. First, the cleric must train with the chosen weapon(s) for 3 months time. During this time, the preferred armor of the deity must be worn (if necessary). Second, the cleric must follow the ceremony for the chosen deity. Failure to do this results in the cleric losing use of the granted abilities for 1d6 months. Finally, the cleric must pay close attention to the taboo of the chosen deity. Failure to do so results in losing use of the granted abilities for 1d6 months. Should the cleric fail to honor the ceremony as well as the taboo of the chosen deity, then the cleric loses the use of the granted abilities for one year.

Once the granted abilities have been lost, the cleric must work to regain them. The cleric must train for another 3 months with the weapon(s) and armor of the deity. Also, atonement (as the spell) must be sought out by another, higher level cleric of the same deity. If the superior cleric deems it necessary (CK's discretion), the atoning cleric must perform some quest or task to return to favor with the deity.

### Religious Observances

The Cobbler has no set holy days or any temples, churches, or the like. Any day that begins a journey is a day worth calling upon the Cobbler and making prayers to him. He abhors general sacrifices so that nothing but prayers are required, though it has become common practice for one to fill a mug in his honor and to leave it untouched while feasting and adventure preparations are under way. A similar happenstance has replaced the Cobbler's lack of temples; those who wish to commune do so in taverns but as frequently they commune with him at the local Cobbler's shop. Here they call upon the Cobbler, pray to him and fill a mug in his honor.

**Preferred Weapon(s):** Sword or Axe

**Armor:** Plate Mail

**Province:** Dangerous Journeys

**Alignment:** Neutral

**Sanctum:** Any Cobblers Shop

**Ceremony:** Drink and feat with each new pair of boots or resoled boots

**Taboo:** To be timid, hesitate

**Granted Abilities:** At 7<sup>th</sup> level clerics can contact other plane as the wizard spell. At 13<sup>th</sup> level clerics can teleport without error as the wizard spell.

## DRIED INK: MAGIC ITEMS

### BY NEAL CHENAULT AND LEE NEILSON

**DRAKENTHUL'S NEVERENDING MUG:** Drakenthul was a heralded champion, said to be sent from the god themselves. He was of the most devout and virtuous demeanor one could be. That being said, he also loved his ale. Drakenthul would drink to the point of no return, then drink some more. The gods, loving Drakenthul so much, enchanted for him a beautiful white gold mug with diamonds lining the bottom that will forever be filled with the richest, darkest dwarven ale. Drakenthul's mug is said to be buried with him in his crypt.

**GAUNTLETS OF CRIPPLING STRENGTH:** The Gauntlets of Crippling Strength were originally created by a pair of gnome tricksters who decided that they would make an item that would make one the strongest they've ever felt. The gauntlets are made of dark steel and have many emeralds and rubies upon the knuckles of each finger. Many have fallen to the tricks of the gnome brothers, and many have lost their lives in the course of what this is. The gauntlets are enchanted, you see, to grant inhumane strength, but they drain upon the physical body so much that one is reduced to a sickly little lamb. The gnomes find it hilarious that the strongest men in the world can't get off the floor because they are so sickly. One should avoid these Gauntlets at all costs.

**THE ROD OF MIGHTY MUCKING** (also called the Muck Stick by the Unlearned): As taken from *Return of the Red Beard's Malachite Codex; a Catalogue of Items Wondrous and Arcane*.

The tale is told how the evil sorcerer Koneveal gained the Rod as loot taken from the tunnels and pits of the "Hill", known as the richest and most extensive underground delvings in the world. Koneveal used the Rod several times over the years and it is assumed lost with the mage during his disastrous expedition into the Gorge of the Serpent.

The rod is described as a miniature square-point shovel about 2 and one half feet long with an arrowhead shaped glyph appearing on the shovel head.

The rod of mighty mucking is known to effect earth and water elementals and shambling mounds in the following manner: a successful to hit roll against the creature's natural armor class while uttering the command word "stop" causes the rod to plunge into the creature and unleash its magic. Clay, stone, sand, black soil or even silt suspended in a water column is prevented from bonding together. The affected monsters can no longer regenerate until the rod is recalled by the user.

Each successful hit uses one charge out of six. It is said the rod may be recharged using a pail of beer & the end of a rainbow.





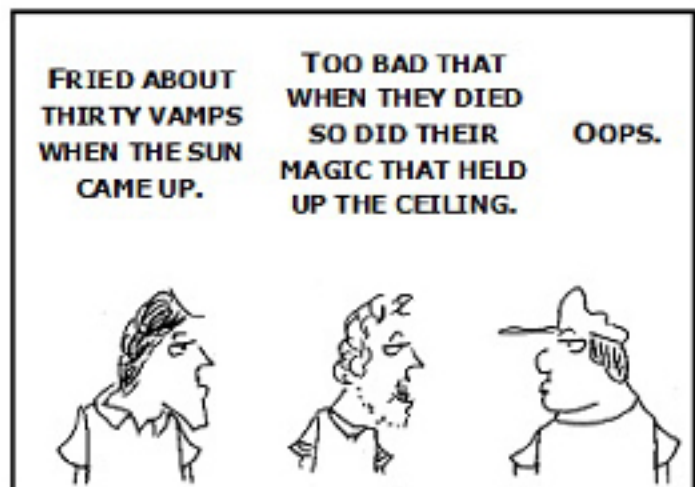
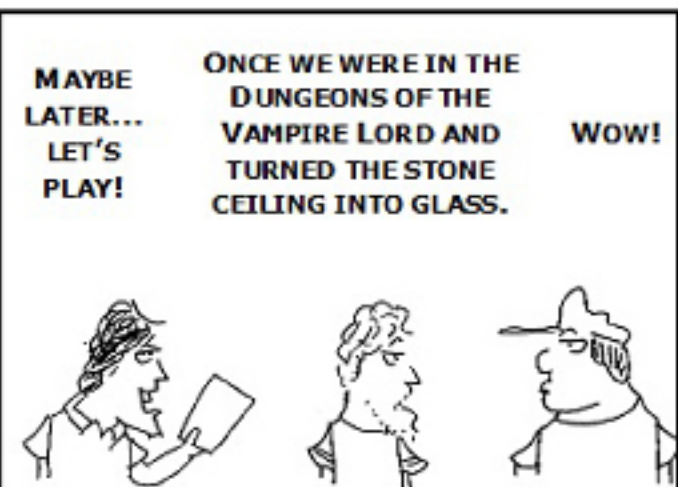
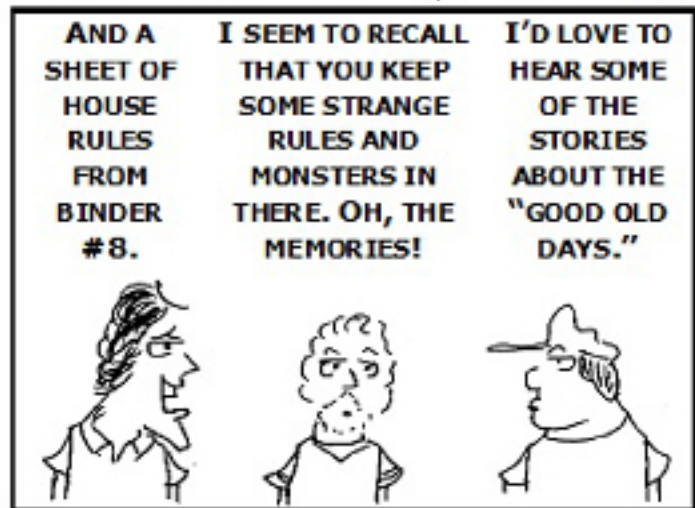
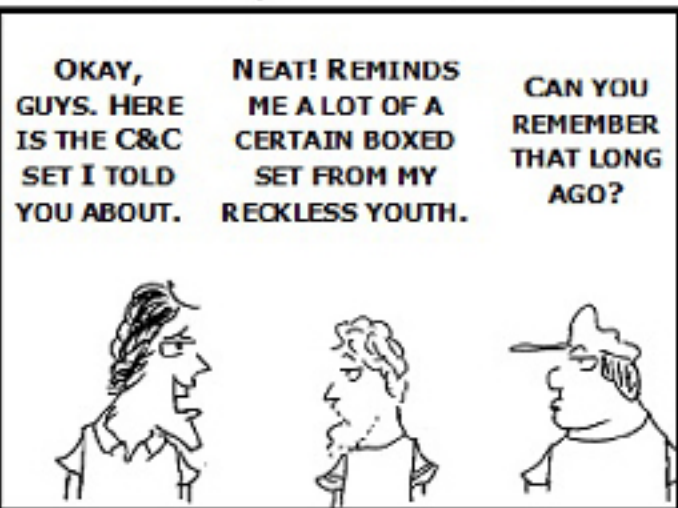
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# Finarvyn's Fellowship of Foragers #2

#2



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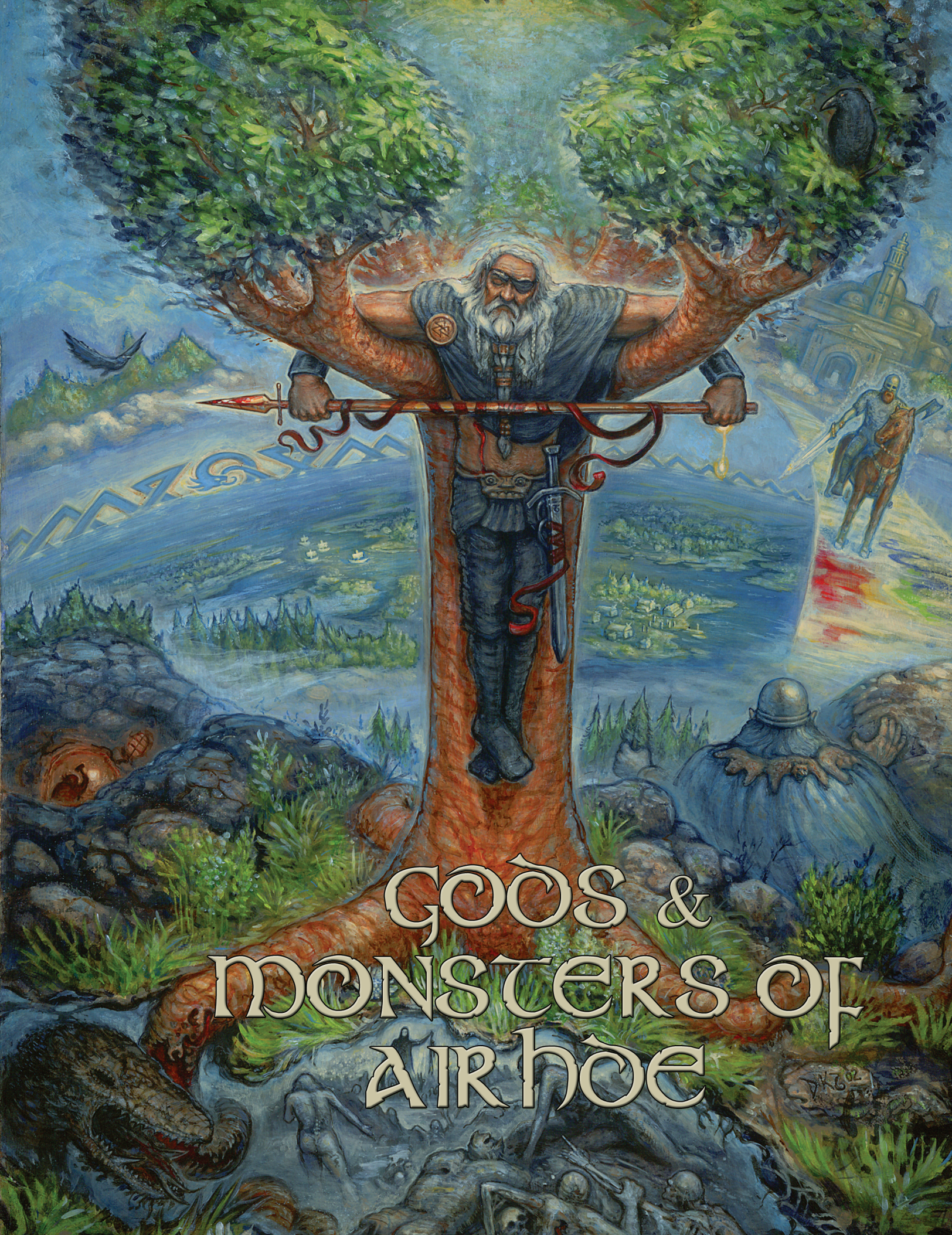
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