

KNOCKSPELL™

05



Resources for Old-Style Fantasy Gaming:
First Edition, Swords & Wizardry, and others!

KNOCKSPELL

January 2011

The Unofficial Magazine of First Edition Gaming (1978 edition)
Swords & Wizardry "Original Edition" Gaming (1974-1977)
and
Fantasy Retro-Clones

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Credits

Cover Art: Kevin Vito

Interior Art: Jason Braun (1), Matt Finch (15, 51), Paul Fini (18), John Larry and Jason Sholtis (28-46), Robert S. Conley (map 47)

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Editor's Note:

This issue of the magazine has been a long time coming – so long, in fact, that many people have been wondering if the whole magazine had been discontinued. The answer to that is a resounding “Nope.” What happened to delay the fifth issue of the magazine wasn’t actually about the magazine at all; it had to do with the fact that I was transitioning the Swords & Wizardry game over to Frog God Games, writing the “Complete” version of the game, touching up several of the old products into the Frog God Games format, and writing new material to go along with the launch of the Complete Rules. As a result, the magazine got pushed to the side because of time constraints. My bad.

This issue #5 is in many ways a transition issue of the magazine. In the future, Frog God Games will be picking up a lot of the editorial burdens involved in producing the magazine. The effects of this, however, don’t show in this particular issue, which I’ve edited myself, as well as doing the layout.

There is one final change which loyal readers will note, which is that there aren’t any advertisements for blogs or anything that isn’t an announcement of book publications. That’s due to the requirements of sending the magazine by media mail. If we have advertisements, the magazine isn’t eligible for media mail, which (in the USA at least) increases shipping costs to the readers.

Enjoy the issue, and look forward to more excellent issues in the future!

Matt



Adventuring at Conventions:

What is the goal? What are the standards?

Editorial by Tim Kask

Sifting through thoughts and feelings after my recent trip to NorTex RPGCon, I focused on one topic that I had discussed with several attendees while there: what is the proper etiquette one should expect or practice at a one-off adventure? To answer that, you must first determine the motivation for players to sign up. (It should be pointed out here that NTRPGC is a small, very well run event in a nice cozy venue.

Doug Rhea and his crew of henchmen do a great job, and have had several “names” on hand each time.)

I have been somewhat surprised to discover that some enter an adventure run by a “name” looking for a glorious PC death. The Tower of Gyax event at GenCon is perhaps the most extreme example of this; I have overheard players comparing notes on who killed whom. I even overheard one young man crowing that I had killed him five times in ToG. I must admit that the discovery, on my part, of this mindset threw me for a loop. However, it is cool. It is supposed to be all about having fun, after all.

For myself, I would be trying to pit my skills and game-play against the DM so as to survive, and “outwit” the DM.

Having done several of these “one-offs” in the past couple of years myself, I know that I am not nearly as hard on the PCs at a con, just there to have some fun, as I might be on players in my campaign. I have debated the issue on Dragonsfoot; go more lethal or not? I think I have found the right balance, but I am never sure. I can run the same adventure twice with two different groups and have one end up a TPK, and the other succeed.

I know that some sign up for this type of event simply to study another DMs technique, and I applaud that. All of us can learn from each other.

The subject that came up most frequently in these talks about convention adventures was the conduct of the players themselves. I have seen what they were grousing about, but I do not necessarily agree with them. I will give two cases, but before I do, we need to remember how it was for us when gaming, and RPGing, were new and wondrous.

First case: Usurpation of Leadership. Thrown together into party, it takes a while to figure out how the players fit together. These things come about gradually with a group that plays together regularly; that is a luxury con games do not have. If it seems like just one or two want to do the “calling” (*i.e.*, speaking for the group or questioning for the group), there is usually no problem. The situation becomes stickier when five or six players, who each may well be their groups “caller,” insist on that prerogative now. That problem pales in comparison to the dilemma a group finds itself in when one player simply bulls his way to the forefront and seizes the mantle of authority. The problem compounds exponentially when the player acts like a d**k and alienates the whole group. What do you do? Effect a coup and kill the PC?

The worst thing that can then happen is for that player to declare that he is being a d**k as a function of “playing the role,” as if that shallow façade legitimizes ruining the fun for the rest of the group. As a DM, I hate being arbitrary for no compelling reason and appreciate that someone may have paid to play in my game. If I get uppity and toss/kill a player, should they get their money back? How can I, as DM, say to someone that I am going to take away from him what he has fun doing? (My guess is that this player does not act like a d**k with his home group; if he did, he would not have a group to play with.)

Nevertheless, and this is a big one, the “RP” in RPG stands for role-playing. Just because they might be a bad actor does not mean that they are not pursuing what they perceive to be “acting.”

I overheard several grognards grouching about having to “play with kids,” and had a few bring up the topic in chatting. Well, we were all kids once, too. It would do us all good to think back what pushed our buttons when RPGing was fun, and new and exciting. I will bet we got loud. I will bet we blurted out ill-advised suggestions for action. I will bet we all did “stupid” things. It is called a “learning curve”; all of us had to

learn what type of behavior was appropriate in any given situation.

“Gaming,” from its inception with *Tactics II*, right up to today, attracts geniuses, ordinary folks, misfits, and socially uncomfortable people as a place where they can be themselves and we can all embrace each other and our diversity. For me, it happened when another A-student in my 6th grade class discovered AH’s *D-Day*. Now the two of us could do something together where we could be as smart as we wanted to be and not derided as “brains” or “teacher’s pets.” I have heard, from their own mouths, dozens of tales of what a great social influence *D&D* was for people in their youth. That is perhaps the one aspect that makes me the proudest about what we created at TSR; we created a social network before it became a buzzword.

So, the next time you sign up for a con adventure, and think yourself “stuck” with an attention-hog or a squealing kid, give ‘em a break and try to remember when it was exciting and new, and envy them for the enthusiasm that so many of us have sublimated.



Editor's Note: This final point Tim raises in his editorial, about playing with kids at a convention, happens (completely by serendipity) to be the perfect springboard into Bill Webb's article about gaming with kids outside the context of a convention.

Teach Your Children

Editorial by Bill Webb

“Give them the kernel of an idea, a spark, a fever dream, a chime of something adventurous or wild. That's what powers this magazine. What images are the octane fuel when you're writing? If you can tap into that - frankly, even if it's a stream-of-consciousness blast of ideas - then you're hitting the nail for this audience. They care about adventure and images and fear and treasure, runes and spells and magic circles, deep dungeons and forgotten things. How about describing an artifact in your purplest prose, or considering the significance of some particular demon's sinister activities?”

Matt Finch, email to Bill Webb, June 25, 2010

Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away...oh yeah, wrong quote. I was looking through my old Judges

Guild Journals (for those of you younger than I they actually came in brown paper envelopes on newsprint paper) the other day while sorting through my game stuff, and I saw the movie review for Star Wars...My wife finally is making me clean out my stuff, set aside what I want to keep and sell the rest. She keeps reminding me how lucky I am to live on a large farm, because we have 3 BUILDINGS full of “that gaming stuff.”

I recently tried to order copies of this fine publication, and having issues (likely user error on my part); I emailed Matt Finch to ask for assistance. We traded thoughts back and forth, and at some point I offered to write an article or ten (really a column) for him. After all, I produce material for later editions of the game, but we still play old style at my table. After getting that email from Matt, I had a “Johnny Appleseed” moment recently that I thought I would share. I want everyone to think on this. How many 10 year olds play WoW? How many 14 year olds play 4e? Now, how many 16 year olds play 0e?

I don't care about edition wars and whether 4e is a "bad" or "good" game. What does occur to me is that the game I play is the playground of the old (guys like me), and that should we fail to teach a new generation how to *do that voodoo that we do*, we are going to be farming nursing homes for players within 2 decades. I shared bits of this story online, but I wanted to share a few thoughts and a story.

In 1977, I was 12, and had just learned how to play this new game. The boys who taught me were older (some as ancient as 16!), and quickly decided that I was to be the "dungeonmaster", mostly because that way they got to play characters while I had to do most of the work. The first game I did not quite "get it", and they all had 15th level characters very quickly. Then I read a few books, bought a copy of the new supplement Greyhawk, and talked with the guy (his name was Buck) who ran the rogue portion of the local toy store; you know, the section with the weird dice, lead models of panzer tanks and little toy soldiers painted in Napoleonic colors on balsa bases; the Geek section. He sold me this cool little orange book shrink-wrapped with a couple maps of a haunted mansion, carefully explaining one golden rule to me. **Roll dice on the table in front of everyone, every time, and let them fall where they may.**

And fall they did. Imagine the player's surprise when they encountered the new and improved Bill. I killed 11 player characters that next session (one guy lived to run away on their 3rd try—there were 4 players). As time went on, they got better, and I got wilier. In the old days it was a bit more DM vs. Player than today. You hid treasure, they found it. You made big monsters; they killed them, died or ran away. No one worried about topics like "balance" or "CR/EL", or whether a first level monster had a vorpal blade. If the dice said they did, they did. Period. I let the dice fall where they did.

Now shift forward 31 years. My oldest daughter, Jillian, had just turned 6. She is a bit of a genius (truly, not just dad talking here), she decided that she wanted to learn to play daddy's dice and miniatures game. So she read a book, then another book. Then she went to the game store and rolled my dice for me. Then she asked for her own dice. This kid was 6 years old, mind you. If you want to see something really funny, take your little kid to Gencon, have David Kenzer high-five her and have her giggle and shout "TPK!" at the top of her lungs. I think the players almost wet themselves. Until she rolled a 20, again giggling with glee, and declared "I crit him in the head with a hammer for 33 damage!" At 6.

Needless to say, I taught her how to play. That was 2 years ago.

Two weeks from the time of this writing, I had the privilege of teaching a D&D class at my kid's school camp. Eight kids signed up, ages 11-13. Jillian (now 8) of course signed up as a teaching assistant (and they let her, of course). Those of you who don't play with young kids really are missing out, I gotta tell you. I took me back, I mean, back to 1977. Five of the kids had played 3.5 or 4.0. They looked at me like I was John Carter incarnate when I told them to roll 3d6 6 times and write down the numbers. One kid scored a 17 strength, and almost cried when I told him "Excellent, you get +1 to hit and damage with hand weapons!"

The funniest conversation revolved around "feats". With the adventure underway, a kid asked me if he could make a "spot check". He gleefully rolled a die, declared a high number, and asked if he found a secret door. I asked him what he was looking for, and we went back and forth in a confused dialogue for a bit until Jillian stepped in. "No" she said, "Daddy, I examine the stones along the wall, and feel for any pieces that are loose or movable. Then I gently pull the loose ones away and see if anything moves".

It was like a lightning bolt hit all 8 kids. They suddenly got it. We kept going through the adventure and they were actually using their minds and not just their dice. They were role playing, not roll playing. Now keep in mind, I am a hack and slay kind of guy—I mean read Rappan Athuk—but I am a firm believer that good questions and close examination outweigh dice rolls. I tell a story while we play. My players have to help tell that story. Dice do not tell stories. You have to outthink a good DM, you cannot outfight him. After about 4 hours, the kids were begging me to play more. I was wiped out. One thing for sure, 12 year olds have more energy than hung-over 45 year olds (the adult campfire runs later than other activities).

That's the coolest bit you see. The DM kid, the one who ran the 4e game for 4 of the players, asked me if he could take a shot at it. I handed him a copy of Matt's short form rulebook, and a couple of printouts of Brave Halfling Adventures books I bought, and spent an hour talking with them about source material (none had ever read R.E. Howard), game theory, and storytelling. Two hours later, as I was semi-napping in the next room, I heard the sounds of gaming begin anew. Those kids had forgotten all about "feats" and "CRs", and were actually playing D&D. They played for 5 hours. In 5 hours, he had killed 3/7, and each survivor had 128 experience points (see next issue article on that).

The DM kid (I call him my “Young Apprentice” now, getting laughs out of all (see, I circled back to Star Wars)) is running a regular 0e game instead of 4e. He is telling stories and roleplaying with the others instead of thoughtlessly rolling dice and moving miniatures across the squares of a battle mat. I like miniatures games mind you, but roleplaying games are not miniatures games. That is why when I got Matt’s email telling me to write whatever I felt like writing, I sent him back a note that said I wanted to write about his email. Let’s dissect these lines:

Give them the kernel of an idea, a spark, a fever dream, a chime of something adventurous or wild.
They got this. The new way of thinking and playing opened parts of their imaginations they did not know existed. They “felt” the part of their PCs. The “saw” what the DM said. It had that spark of adventure I once felt when I played this game in 1977.

What images are the octane fuel when you’re writing?

This is exactly why I do what I do. The feel of the cold wind blowing across the glacier and the icy sting of the frost giant’s axe are not lost on me. These kids woke me back up, at least for a time, and gave me great inspiration. Listening to the DM kid describe scenes in such detail and tell the story was inspiring. Listening to the other kids ask questions and grow the story was even more so.

They care about adventure and images and fear and treasure, runes and spells and magic circles, deep dungeons and forgotten things.

Image and feel are everything to me in this game. If players are not sitting on the edge of their seats, I am failing as a DM. If you MUST have miniatures and gridded maps to illustrate a scene, you are not doing the job (I can use both, but don’t always need them). Fear and wonder were present in the room, even more so after I retired to the side room. My Young Apprentice had them spellbound.

How about describing an artifact in your purplest prose, or considering the significance of some particular demon’s sinister activities?

This demon’s sinister activities included taking an artifact that was the D&D I grew up with out of the closet and reintroducing it to the world.

What all this means is that us old Grogards have got to get out more. If Buck had not taught me to DM, I would never have learned to play. Teach some others what we all learned so very long ago. Hit the local game store and run a 0e/1e game, just to see what happens. Tell some stories. I am pretty sure any edition could be played properly, but the old stuff has to be. I have seen a few guys; Greg Vaughan (who

works with me on Frog God Games books) is a superior Pathfinder/3.5 DM (way, way better than I would be), but I need the crutch of few rules to remember to tell a better story.

Product Pitch Section!

I gotta make a pitch or two for products. Most of the time I won’t pitch my own stuff, but may on occasion. I’ll try to do that each article. First one I am swearing by at the moment is then line of flavor texts coming from some truly nice folks called TableTop Adventures (<http://www.tabletopadventures.com/>). These guys make some of the most inspiring game aids I have ever seen. No other single item besides dice is always in my game bag. Buy at least one of their books (like \$7 or something, I mean dirt cheap) and let me know what you think. The other thing I experienced at PaizoCon last week was this little deck of cards called Gamemastery Plot Twist cards (yes, a card deck). It can be found at <http://paizo.com/gameMastery/itemPacks/v5748btpy8b8m&source=top>. This thing was incredibly fun. You use these cards to alter a game in progress. I am not too sure how well it would work in a campaign, but at a Con or a 1-shot game, it was a blast.

Hug a Frog!

Let me know what you would like to hear about, let me know if I make you happy, make you sad or just downright piss you off. My email is always open to the gaming community. I can be found at bill@talesofthefroggod.com, on the necromancer forums (<http://necromancergames.yuku.com/>), or on my website at <http://talesofthefroggod.com/>. Until next time, keep the faith, and may you always roll 20s.

“...And continents of serpent-shapen trees,
With slimy trunks that lengthen league by league,
Pursue my light through ages spurned to fire
By that supreme ascendance; sorcerers,
And evil kings, predominantly armed
With scrolls of fulvous dragon-skin whereon
Are worm-like runes of ever-twisting flame,
Would stay me; and the sirens of the stars,
With foam-like songs from silver fragrance wrought,
Would lure me to their crystal reefs; and moons
Where viper-eyed, senescent devils dwell,
With antic gnomes abominably wise,
Heave up their icy horns across my way.
But naught deters me from the goal ordained
By suns and eons and immortal wars,
And sung by moons and motes; the goal whose name
Is all the secret of forgotten glyphs
By sinful gods in torrid rubies writ
For ending of a brazen book...”

Clark Ashton Smith
The Hashish-Eater, or, The Apocalypse of Evil

Out of the Bag: Generating Encounters with Scrabble Tiles

By Jim Pacek

I live in Arizona, which is known as the "land of the sun." The views are magnificent, the humidity is low, and temperatures in the trunk of my car can get high enough to bake bread. In fact, daytime temperatures are hot enough to re-shape miniature figures into new and interesting poses if they stay in the trunk too long. So, a while back, I started using Scrabble tiles at the gaming table in place of minis. They don't pack the same visual punch as a huge army of painted figures, but I discovered that they work really well in other ways, such as keeping track of damage (orc "J" has 5 hit points left, and orc "A" is undamaged, etc.). They are also extremely portable if you are a GM (like me) who often takes game sessions on the road.

Even better, it occurred to me that you can use a bag of Scrabble tiles not just to represent the monsters, but to generate the encounters, too. With a little experimentation, I created a system that allows me to pull tiles out of the bag, put them on the table, and (with a little improvisation) have a unique encounter created for me.

Here is how my system works --

Based upon the tile distribution for the standard English version of the game, I've come up with a quick table that you can use to plan the monsters for a given dungeon or terrain type. The table ties the letters to mnemonic devices that can help you remember what the letters mean when you draw them. There's plenty of opportunity for improvisation within this system (a feature that I like).

When an encounter is called for, I'll just grab a few tiles out of the bag and create an encounter that makes sense. If I need a few extra monsters of a given type, I'll either dig a few more out of the bag (if I can find them quickly) or I'll just grab a few tiles and write on their backs with a wet erase marker (this only works for the wooden ones).

You can use the letters "as is" if you'd like. In other

words, whatever you draw, just plop that down on the table. (If you get some of the unique counters like tricks or traps, you might want to think about how that plays out.)

Another way to do it is to choose a few tiles to randomly determine the type of encounter. Then, choose a variety of letters that you can use to represent the various enemies present. (That way you won't have a group of kobolds ALL using the letter A and E. Which one is she attacking again?)

In practice, I alternate between these approaches as I see fit.

In the model I propose below, I make the assumption that the first few groups of letters are a "tribe" of humanoids or some other "group" of beings that are loosely organized together. There are 100 Scrabble letters in the English version of the Scrabble game with a set number of each type of letter. Those percentages are given below. When an encounter is needed or desired, reach into the bag and grab a few letters. Compare those letters to the groupings below.

Mnemonics and Organization:

Vowels (A, E, I, O, U) 42%

This group of letters represents an encounter with common thugs and mooks. If you'd like to spice the group up a bit, each letter can give a little clue about how the thugs are a bit different. For example, A=archer, E=experts (perhaps a bonus to hit or better weapons), I=infiltrators (bonus to surprise), O=oil throwers, U=uglies (extra tough – maybe maximum hit points).

L, D, R 14%

LDR = "Leader" (these guys are sergeants or minor leaders) L=large, D=distraction, R=ranged weapons

W, M, C 6%

WMC = "Wizard/Mage/Cleric" (spell slingers of some type) W=most powerful, M=middling, C=weakest/common

H, V, Y, F, P 10%

HVYFP = "Heavy Firepower" Each of these letters represent significant monsters or enemies that can be found 1 or 2 at a time. They may or may not combine with the groups above; Vowels (Mooks), LDR (Leaders), WMC (Spellcasters).

B, G, N, S 15%

BGNS = "Big 'uns"; These should be significant monsters that can be found in small groups of 2 to 6;

the letters *might* have meaning for your adventure;
 B=brute, G=gross, N=NPCs, S=sneaky

trap), maybe not even a monster but an event or magical happening.

T 6% Trick or Trap

You can also use this approach to determine “non-standard” encounters, such as the “On The Road” table below. Feel free to adjust the nature of each group to suit your needs. Looking at the percentage chance for each type of encounter can be helpful when planning these tables.

[Blank] 2%

Wild Card - if you draw this, make something weird or wonderful happen.

J, X, K, Q, Z 5%

Each is a unique one-off encounter (perhaps a trick or

So, here are a few takes on using my system.

	Low Level Encounters (Upper levels of dungeon)	High Level Encounters (Lower levels of dungeon)	On The Road
AEIOU	Goblins; O=oil lobbers; U=+2 AC from better bits of armor/max hp's	Bugbears; A=have flasks of acid to throw; I=weapons have spider venom	Oncoming Caravan (letter determines wares) A=armor, artichokes; E=elfin wine, smoked eel; I=firewood, produce; O=tomatoes, onions; U=clothing, apples
LDR	Hobgoblin leaders; D=uses giant centipede poison on blade; R=has light crossbow	Owlbears; R=has been fitted with poisoned razor claws by wizard	Bandits
WMC	All are shamans; W=Hobgoblin/cleric; W=Night goblin/wizard	Apprentices - Wilfar and Webbly - 4 th level; Mox and Mix - 5 th level; Charr and Chill - 6 th level (they are in charge of keeping all the 'bears in line)	Wizard leader of the bandits and his henchmen
H	Ogre(s)	Hill Giant(s)	Harpies
V	Worg(s) (trained by Ogres)	Baalrog	Vagabonds or Gypsies
Y	Giant Centipede(s) (raised by shamans)	Flesh Golem(s)	Hydra (4-7 heads)
F	Firebat(s)	Troll(s)	Friendly Wanderer
P	Piercer(s)	Doppelgangers	Patrol from local keep
B	Ghoul(s)	Adult Black Dragon	Bear
G	Gelatinous Cube	Green Slime	Griffons
N	NPC Party (roll on subtable)	NPC Party	NPC Party
S	Giant Spiders	Shadows	Signpost
T	Magic mouth "Beware the crimson fountain"	Magic mouth "Go back lest ye be doomed"	Terrifying Purple Worm!
J	Giant Scorpion	Ogre Mage	Josper, a local farmer, found unconscious at the roadside
X	Strange sounds (roll on subtable)	Strange sounds (roll on subtable)	Wagon breaks a wheel
K	Knockout Gas (save or sleep for 2–12 turns)	Falling block from ceiling (save or crushed)	Fallen tree blocks the road
Q	Quasit spy for wizard on lower level	Quasit spy for wizard	Rockslide
Z	Zombies!	Alcazar the Archmage (has Quasit familiar)	Zombies! (seriously – looking for brains!)

I've created a form that you can download, edit and print out. It's located at my blog carjackedseraphim.blogspot.com. It contains some ideas about what the letters might mean in each of the groups. Feel free to adjust them as you see fit – they are suggestions only.

Another way I use the tiles is for NPCs. I especially like the cardboard tiles for this purpose. I use the blue ones for “good” NPCs and the yellow ones for “evil” NPCs (usually the minions of the master villain). I just draw a letter at random and then create a name based upon the letter. Perfectly suitable for henchmen, hirelings and minions. Once a name is established, I will avoid using that letter for other NPCs of the good or evil variety.

Here's a list of quick names for your henchmen, hirelings and minions you might want to use:

A	Alec, Agaron, Amreth
B	Bandor, Barsow, Belrath
C	Cazgar, Caryn, Cantos
D	Davar, Delenn, Dundo
E	Elwar, Embril, Essian
F	Farli, Fangrin, Fezzal
G	Gond, Grangor, Gubble
H	Halm, Hender, Hundspeth
I	Ignatz, Issen, Ior
J	Jessup, Jahn, Jakot
K	Karl, Kandys, Kalin
L	Lyan, Lorn, Lirken
M	Mardin, Morrad, Mithilin
N	Norn, Nurble, Nandarn
O	Ort, Orrin, Obrisast
P	Perrin, Parbol, Purrn
Q	Q'azan, Queeg, Quen
R	Roz, Robin, Redgarn
S	Sarn, Shambor, Swerdlow
T	Tam, Turrin, Tekaril
U	Urdin, Ullah, Ubrik
V	Venna, Vara, Vhan
W	Warrik, Welk, Wurnn
X	X'drin, Xant, Xxyzn
Y	Yarrill, Yuva, Yerri
Z	Zambor, Zenna, Zath

On a side note, I was able to find a number of used word game copies at my local thrift store. Each box cost me only a couple of dollars. I was also able to find a copy of the “classic wooden version” at a neighbor's garage sale for one dollar! The classic version has wooden tiles. The “junior” version has thick cardboard tiles. There are several colors and varieties. I know that there are at least two different colors of wooden tiles and the two cardstock sets I have are yellow and blue respectively.

Jim Pacek has been playing RPGs since the summer of 1980 when a friend introduced him to the Red Book edition edited by the late, great Tom Moldvay. He's been creating his own world and DMing for his friends ever since. His Queston Campaign (he's hoping to write a sourcebook about it soon) has been running since 1983. He's a latecomer to the OSR, but he's enjoying all the creative ideas percolating through the blogosphere. Jim is married to Jeanne, has three stepsons and four grandchildren. Grandpa Jim runs the occasional game for friends and family (including two of the grandchildren - Matt has a lizardman warrior and Maddie has a dire badger).



Babels of blocks to the high heavens towering
Flames of futility swirling below;
Poisonous fungi in brick and stone flowering,
Lanterns that shudder and death-lights that glow.

Black monstrous bridges across oily rivers,
Cobwebs of cable to nameless things spun;
Catacomb deeps whose dank chaos delivers
Streams of live foetor that rots in the sun.

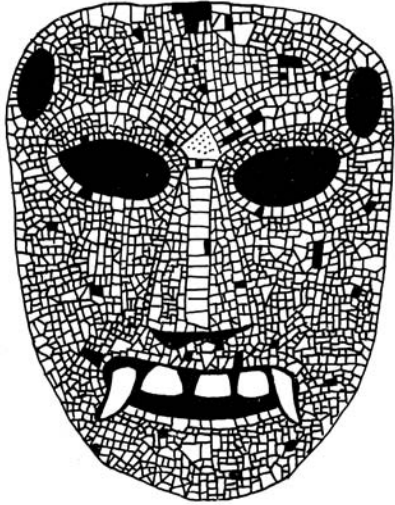
Colour and splendour, disease and decaying,
Shrieking and ringing and crawling insane,
Rabbles exotic to stranger-gods praying,
Jumbles of odour that stifle the brain.

Legions of cats from the alleys nocturnal.
Howling and lean in the glare of the moon,
Screaming the future with mouthings infernal,
Yelling the Garden of Pluto's red rune.

Tall towers and pyramids ivy'd and crumbling,
Bats that swoop low in the weed-cumber'd streets;
Bleak Arkham bridges o'er rivers whose rumbling
Joins with no voice as the thick horde retreats.

Belfries that buckle against the moon totter,
Caverns whose mouths are by mosses effac'd,
And living to answer the wind and the water,
Only the lean cats that howl in the wastes.

H.P. Lovecraft, *The Cats*



Dark Gods

By Al Krombach

Sword & Sorcery literature is rife with dark gods, malicious cults, and the forgotten patrons of fallen civilizations. Incorporating such entities into a campaign is a great way to help engender an atmosphere of dread and uncertainty, as well as a sense of age and ages past.

As cults and civilizations rise and fall, so to do the gods they honor. Busy, bloodstained altars are broken and buried, burned and forgotten. The chants of the fanatic clergies and ardent worshippers die out, existing only in the echoes of ghosts in long abandoned galleries. Vast libraries of dark knowledge and baleful wisdom are destroyed, lost to the unrelenting erosion of time.

Or so civilization would like to believe.

Sometimes, a seed of evil remains: a faint pulse of dark malice that squats, maundering, in subterranean vaults or ivy-choked ruins. Rumors and hints of vast power remain in dusty archives and histories, ready to ensnare the greedy and tempt the weak-minded into plumbing secrets best left undisturbed. And when the rotted log is pushed aside and the fat grubs of forbidden knowledge and diabolical ambition wriggle into the wrong individual's path, a new priest rises. And so a cult is reborn; and if the conditions are right, and the proper rituals observed, so too the dark gods themselves.

This article presents six foul deities to drop into your campaign.

GHOLA HOON (THE ICY DARKNESS)

Less than a decade ago, a town of hundreds on the northern border was discovered to have been devastated, its inhabitants frozen where they stood, most of them gazing with lifeless, icy eyes towards the sky as if in terror. Historians, hearing of the tragedy, were forced to concede that the occurrence may very well have been the work of a deity long thought banished from the Earth, Ghola Hoon, the Icy Darkness. Ghola Hoon was the patron of an empire of great evil that had formed in the vast jungles of the southeast, eventually falling as all empires must, and had left little but a legacy of nightmares behind.

Who or what was responsible for stirring the god from whatever slumber it lay idle in is unknown, but many sages fear that if nothing is done, a new age of darkness may be looming on the horizon. So far, investigations have led to three possible culprits: the Temple of the Eye (a notorious assassins' cult), the Circle of Bel'hain (a coven of dubious sorcerers and witches), or a group of priests of Law recently discovered to have been serving Chaos in secret. Of course, none of these may be responsible, and the true culprit may remain safely in the shadows.

Recently, potions have appeared in underground markets referred to as the "Essence of Hoon", a nectar that, once imbibed, allows the user to see in darkness, move freely through webs or other impediments, and act as if *hasted*, for 1d6 turns. Whether these potions actually have anything to do with Ghola Hoon, or are merely an attempt to capitalize on the lost god's sudden notoriety is not known.

Rumor: The staff of the Great Library was recently found murdered, and only a rare book detailing the Jungle Empire was discovered to be missing. Also, a shop on Rutting Street is supposed to have three vials of "Essence of Hoon" for sale.

GROMBE THE SHAPELESS

Grombe the shapeless is a terrifying dark god who has existed on the mortal plane for countless centuries. Once possessing its own form, the god was vanquished by a hero of Law, and now only its formless spirit remains. If the secret rites and sacrifices are performed, Grombe may be summoned and take possession of the flesh of its summoner. Through history, many horrific villains are suspected to be nothing more than hapless fools who were unwise enough to call up the Shapeless into themselves.

Some mortal oracles and fortune-tellers flirt with disaster by attempting to summon Grombe into themselves only temporarily. Drums, chanting, and a circle of true believers are usually necessary to perform such a feat successfully, though it rarely works as planned. Sometimes, an oracle will awaken days later, their hands and clothes smeared in blood, with no memory of what has transpired.

Two black sapphires are known to exist, called by scholars “the Eyes of Grombe”. If such a gemstone is possessed by an individual, they function as a character of one level higher. It is not known if the possession of one of the eyes increases the chances of drawing the dark god’s attention.

Rumor: The chief seeress and matron of a clan of wandering dervishes has turned to cannibalism. She sends her agents out each night to procure her feast. Nonetheless, the authorities ignore her crimes because she is in high demand by the local nobility. Also, a visiting merchant is claiming to possess a book of potent Grombian prophecies.

KARKEROS THE APE (TYRANT OF THE PIT)

Karkeros is among the most savage and cunning of the dark gods, and is worshipped by those who find such qualities desirable. Karkeros is typically depicted as a fifteen foot tall ape-like humanoid with black eyes and dark reddish fur. Great tusks sprout from his jaw, and spiraling, ram-like horns jut from his head. When Karkeros speaks, his voice resonates in your ears and in your mind at the same time.

Historians claim that Karkeros was summoned up from a black pit of hell to do the bidding of an evil overlord. In the end, the dark god turned on its master, and walked the earth spreading chaos and death wherever it went. After some few centuries of terror and woe, the god was, at last, imprisoned out of time behind an impenetrable gate of rune-inscribed iron. It is said that the worshippers of Karkeros can still draw power from the slumbering tyrant, and some wish to free it from its arcane prison.

The faithful of Karkeros allow themselves to be branded with the sign of a three-pronged pitchfork. A few more privileged acolytes are given iron collars, symbolizing their servitude to the Tyrant of the Pit. The collars radiate unnatural heat, but impart to the wearer a +2 bonus to Armor Class, as well as a resistance to non-magical fire.

Rumor: A rune-inscribed iron gate of indescribable cold has been discovered in the dungeons beneath a ruined keep. Any who dared touch the gate were driven insane. Also, a spy captured in the city barracks was discovered to bear the mark of the pitchfork branded into his chest.

F’HLUANG F’GHOH (THE GRAY TOAD)

When mankind first came to these lands, they sometimes stumbled across the deserted cities of a long-dead race. Scholars are unsure as to what brought about the downfall of this enigmatic people, but they seem to have been dedicated to the worship of a foully countenanced, toad-like deity always represented by statues of dull gray stone. Naturally, the apparent dominance and opulence of this long-gone race appeals to men of a certain unhealthy ambition, and so the worship of F’hluang F’ghoh occasionally rises from obscurity to grow like a cancer upon civilization.

Worshippers of the Gray Toad report strange trances and hallucinations of a bygone age, and are capable of acts of great cruelty. Secret shrines to the Toad are usually to be found deep underground, in caves or dangerous dungeons. Most alarming to scholars, however, is that the worship of the Toad is to be found in almost all lands of the Earth, from the lowliest tribe of savages, to the highest courts of civilization. As the main tenets and beliefs are transmitted through whatever group hypnosis and hallucination the worshippers undergo, their motives and designs are often only vaguely decipherable.

Clerics who worship the Gray Toad can often use spells normally associated with Magic Users, such as spells of illusion or enchantment. Small statues of the Gray Toad have been circulated as items that bring great luck, but apparently bring only madness.

Rumor: The head of the local Thieves’ Guild is never to be seen without his hideous statuette of some abominable toad-demon clutched to his chest. Also, a ship recently drifted into port with all hands missing save one, a maddened fellow who will do nothing but chant “F’hluang F’ghoh Gh’nang! F’hluang F’ghoh Gh’nang!”.

PEYLEYRA THE WHITE (THE DROWNED MAIDEN)

One of the so-called Old Religions, the worship of Peyleyra is mercifully uncommon, though shrines consecrated in her name are not. Any pool of water, fountain, well, spring, or cistern may have been a site of sacrifice, intentionally or not. Believed to be a daughter of the Earth itself, Peyleyra lurks in the silent waters beneath, especially favoring those waters which have never seen the light of day, and the frozen, salt-rimed coastlines that have never known warmth.

The cult of Peyleyra has never had a formal order of priests, rather the occasional individual thirsty for the power that comes from the favor of a dark god, and willing to perform the uncouth sacrifices necessary to obtain such power. The most precious sacrifice that can be offered up to Peyleyra is a young maiden deliberately drowned in cold, dark water.

Worshippers of Peyleyra may be found among the noble houses of decadent cities, among the greediest of merchants, and among certain more sociopathic orders of druids.

Those making the proper offerings and obeisance may harvest the Hair of Peyleyra, a thick black seaweed that, when ingested, allows one to breathe underwater for 1d6 hours.

Rumor: Once a month for the last four months strait, the bloated body of a drowned maiden has been pulled out of the capitol's reservoir. The last maiden was of noble blood. Further, a new dancer has been appearing at the Silk Lantern, who is said to be the mirror image of the Drowned Goddess.

Thraldur (The Eyeless King)

As the first great civilizations began to decline and fall, vast hordes of barbarians swept down from the icy northern forests to prey on the remains. With them they brought their darkest god, Thraldur the Eyeless. The great totems depicted him as a grasping, emaciated old man, his hair and beard choked with icicles, and his eyelids sewn shut with rawhide stitching. Thraldur was a hungry god, only temporarily lifting the many dooms placed upon his worshippers if properly sated with the blood of innocents.

Impaling was the preferred method of sacrifice, and the fat, weak cities of crumbling empires provided many trees for the god's "sacred groves": vast forests of writhing victims. Usually these "forests" were centered about a natural cave or ravine, where the

priests would perform still darker rituals. As the barbarian tribes gradually settled the lands they conquered, new gods and religions were adopted, and the worship of Thraldur fell from favor. Eventually, the worship of the Eyeless King was outlawed, and the few remaining enclaves of worship were violently rooted out and destroyed.

And yet, the cult has somehow managed to survive through the ages. At first just a few casual traditions were observed, usually by professional soldiers and bandits; a way of attempting to ward off the dangers inherent in such careers. Eventually, those with enough resources, and enough curiosity, began to uncover more and more of the banned cults rituals and tenets. Thraldur's most fanatic followers are berserk in battle, wielding the holy axe and spear, one in each hand, as the god's bloodlust overcomes them. A few priests have apparently managed to recover a cache of rune-carved "Impaling Spears". These spears are +2 magical weapons, and do an additional 2d6 points of damage if a natural 20 is rolled to-hit.

Rumor: A company of mercenaries in the Baron's employ carry a standard depicting a crossed axe and spear. Their captain is said to have an unquenchable thirst for blood.



Blog Focus

Beyondtheblackgate.Blogspot.com

Al Krombach's *Beyond the Black Gate* blog is one of the most popular blogs in the out-of-print gaming community, most likely because he tends to offer very little in the way of chatting and commentary, and lots and lots in the way of resources. It doesn't matter whether you're playing AD&D, OD&D, Basic D&D, a retro-clone – or frankly even if you're playing a much more modern set of fantasy rules. What makes Al's blog such a powerhouse isn't based on any particular set of rules; viewed as a whole, it's a phantasmagorical offering of sword & sorcery ideas. They're almost always presented in terms of gaming – you aren't left with the feeling that the blog is about fiction first and gaming as an afterthought. Al's article on Dark Gods is an excellent example of what you tend to encounter when looking through the posts in his blog. There's layer upon layer of this kind of mosaic-tile imagery – the pure substance of swords & sorcery as a genre. As a game master or referee, if you haven't taken a look at *Beyond the Black Gate*, you're missing out on a phenomenal creative kick-in-the-butt.

White Box Weaponry

By Robert Lionheart

Weapons do 1d6 damage in the White Box edition of Swords & Wizardry.

I absolutely love this rule! Instead of looking at weapons simply for their maximum damage, we can consider their other qualities. I hope this article adds more interesting options to your adventurer's choice for best death dealing.

These house rules have been inspired by many sources, including the Gygaxian Weapon vs. Armor tables, Philotomy Jurament's most excellent website, Akrasia's fighting styles article in *Knockspell* #1, along with forum discussions and drunken boffer fights. These house rules were playtested extensively with *Swords & Wizardry* White Box, but they can be easily converted to your favorite old school game.

DAGGERS EQUAL SWORDS? A LOOK AT WEAPON QUALITIES

In White Box, one six-sider represents the base damage of all weapons. Daggers and short swords do 1D6-1 and two-handed weapons such as battle axes, pole arms and great swords do 1D6+1. In my own campaign, wooden clubs and walking staves do 1D6-1 damage. I also limit slings to 1D6-1 since rocks are free and they are the only ranged weapon that does blunt damage.

If the damage is identical, what makes a sword different than spear? Why use a hammer instead of a battle axe? The answer is found in the different characteristics and tactics the weapon was designed to achieve. Some weapons are better at penetrating heavy armor, others for breaking shields, and a few for taking down charging cavalry. Here is a list of basic qualities:

- *Armor Penetration*
- *Nocked & Readied*
- *Set vs. Charge*
- *Close Combat & Off-Hand*
- *Parrying Blade*
- *Social Issues*
- *Double Handed Control*
- *Reach*
- *Thrown Weapon*
- *Great Weapon*
- *Reliability*
- *Utility & Tool-Usage*

ARMOR PENETRATION

Crossbows, maces, morningstars and warhammers are designed to pierce heavy armor or negate its effectiveness to defend against a blow. I define "heavy armor" as plate mail or greater protection. When deciding if a particular monster is heavily armored, rely on your physical description of the beast. Dragons are famous for scales hard as steel, so that's an easy call. Weapons specifically designed to penetrate armor receive a +1 "to Hit" bonus against foes in heavy armor.

The flail is a special case. Flails do not have noted penetration, but are designed to ignore shields. Against opponents with a shield, the flail gains a +1 "to Hit" bonus.

CLOSE COMBAT & OFF-HAND WEAPONS

Short impaling weapons are best when fighting in tight quarters or when grappled. Attackers using anything other than fists, daggers and short swords in these circumstances should suffer at least a -1 "to Hit" penalty.

When fighting with two weapons, daggers, hand axes and short swords are good off-hand choices. I suggest the two-weapon fighting style grants a +1 "to Hit" bonus because the primary weapon is usually the aggressor while the off-hand weapon is used for feints and parrying. At the referee's discretion, the warrior may instead make two separate attacks, but with a -4 penalty to each roll.

Another consideration regarding close combat weapons is their lightness, quick recovery and ease in maneuvering. The referee may wish to allow Fighting Men to substitute their Dexterity bonus instead of their Strength modifier as a "to Hit" bonus when using daggers and short-swords.

DOUBLE HANDED CONTROL

Large weapons like pole-arms and great swords must be gripped with both hands to wield effectively. Their hefty weight earns them extra damage. However, certain long hafted melee weapons have the option of being used two handed to achieve greater control. Flails, spears, swords and war hammers are particularly well built for 2H control. A look at medieval texts and museum pieces reveals that this long haft is the general difference in the construction of the mace versus the warhammer.

By foregoing a shield, a warrior can double hand his weapon to gain a +1 "to Hit" bonus with his attacks. In campaigns where small folk like gnomes need both hands to use anything larger than a dagger, they would not gain this bonus.

GREAT WEAPON

Great weapons are large versions of melee weapons that require both hands to wield effectively. The vast litany of pole-arms and pole-axes fit this category. Two-handed swords include the famous Scottish claymore, the Arabian sham-sheer and the samurai's no-daichi. A two-handed mace is often referred to as a maul and a two-handed spear is sometimes called a pike. According to the White Box rules, all great weapons do 1D6+1 damage.

In gamer math, the +1 damage bonus is not as valuable as the +1 AC lost from not using a shield. Also, in close quarters, great weapons are difficult (or impossible) to use. Thus, great weapons are often seen as poor choices. To avoid this perception, I have experimented with giving great weapons either a +1 "to Hit" bonus or increasing the damage bonus to +2, depending on the type of weapon.

Knockspell author Philotomy Jurament has an interesting option for great weapons as discussed on his website. You roll 2D6 and keep the higher die roll. This is a good method to increase damage, while avoiding the number bloat that results from too many bonuses. If you enjoy this option, I suggest using it with large monster attacks as well. Most importantly, if you want to see more 2H weapon usage in your campaign, include a magical one in the next treasure horde. Nothing changes minds faster than a *Vorpal Polearm!*

NOCKED & READIED

An advantage enjoyed by bows and crossbows is they can be held in a ready position that only requires a flick of a finger to deliver death to the target. A nocked arrow or readied quarrel could be shot before Initiative is rolled in the first round of combat. The referee may consider this a "wild shot" and negate any "to Hit" bonuses because the archer has no time to aim. The downside of nocking an arrow is that if the archer is surprised or somehow lose their grip, that arrow is going to launch. I love friendly fire!

PARRYING BLADES

Defenders are assumed to be actively parrying attacks. However, sometimes a character may forfeit his entire action to concentrate on knocking away incoming attacks, sometimes referred as total defense. Melee attacks against the parrying defender suffer a -2 "to Hit" penalty. At the referee's discretion, at higher levels the defender's BHB could act as the "to Hit" penalty against incoming blows, reflecting the greater skill of the warrior. Among all weapons, swords are the best for parrying. Parrying with a sword increases the attacker's penalty by an

additional -1. Remember that some monsters can parry as well.

REACH

Longer weapons allow the attacker to harm their opponent from a slightly safer distance. A dagger has a short reach. Spears and pole arms have a long reach. Most other weapons have a medium reach. Comparatively, small monsters generally have a short reach, medium sized monsters have a medium reach and large monsters such as ogres have a natural long reach. The referee should consider a -1 "to Hit" penalty whenever an attacker with a short reach weapon strikes against an opponent with a long reach weapon. Thus, gnomes with kitchen knives are not the most effective defense against rampaging ogres.

Traditionally, reach weapons have also allowed attackers in the second rank of battle to deliver melee attacks, thus making hired spearmen worth their weight in gold.

The downside of reach is the lack of maneuverability with large weapons in tight quarters. In small spaces, the dagger is king. Consider a -1 "to Hit" penalty for attackers using reach weapons in arenas where there is little room to maneuver. The referee will have to decide if the small space makes the use of pole arms impossible, or just doubly penalized.

RELIABILITY

Some weapons are inherently sturdier than others. Maces are difficult to break, while staves and spears are vulnerable to snapping. Consider a -1 penalty for Break Weapon attacks (see below) against sturdy weapons and a +1 bonus against weak weapons. Metal shields are automatically considered sturdy.

What about weapons made of stone versus steel? Shark-tooth swords and obsidian knives can inflict the same damage as their iron or steel cousins. However, they are easier to break. When a bone or stone weapon is targeted, grant a +1 Break Weapon bonus to the attacker. In primitive campaign worlds, metal weapons may be considered quite special. If stone and bone is the baseline technology of the setting, iron weapons would gain a strong social quality and be considered extra sturdy by comparison.

SET & BRACE VERSUS CHARGE

Spears and pole arms are excellent weapons against cavalry and rampaging beasts. These long impaling weapons can be braced and set against incoming foes. Any opponent who charges a defender who has set and braced suffers an immediate attack and if successful, that attack delivers double damage. Or

instead of double damage, consider rolling two dice and keeping the higher roll.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Depending on the campaign setting, referees may wish to consider social reactions by NPCs based the weaponry carried by an adventurer. Swords have traditionally been associated with nobility. Not surprising since swords are crafted from iron or steel, resources much more expensive than wood. Spears are the weapons of militias, savages and guards. And in many fantasy adventures, carrying a mace usually means you are a cleric!

Polearms, flails and crossbows are clearly weapons of war, certain to get a second look by the town watch. In many circumstances, a dagger's easy concealment trumps all other qualities. Swords also gain an additional social status if they are only magical weapons capable of sentience. Such would hold their place of honor above all other implements of war.

THROWN WEAPON

Technically, any weapon can be thrown. Daggers, hand axes and spears are aerodynamic and enjoy a 10 foot range increment. As much as I love hurling swords and maces, I limit all other weapons to a 5 foot range increment when thrown.

UTILITY & TOOL USAGE

Some weapons are also capable tools. Axes and warhammers can take down stuck doors and barricades where even a magical sword would be useless. Spears are excellent for poking and prodding anything suspicious. An oak staff is an innocuous walking stick. A dagger doubles as the key utensil at most meals. Just try carving a turkey with a katana!

WEAPONS OF THE MASTER CRAFTSMEN

Few blacksmiths have either the time, training or alchemical knowledge to become true weapon smiths. But some masters do exist. The reputation of Toledo steel, the vengeful swords of Hattori-Hanzo and the legendary tales of elfin longbows among many other stories will cause players to seek out their own special weapons.

Uniquely crafted weapons are great fun, especially in low magic campaigns. An innocuous +1 bonus in Swords & Wizardry is notable bump, and thus the referee is encouraged to carefully weigh these concepts before adding them to his game.

The cost of a modified weapon should be at least ten times the base price of the weapon for each new quality. Here is a list of Master Craft qualities:

- *Balanced*
- *Extra Heavy*
- *Serrated Blades*
- *Composite Bow*
- *Hilt Basket*
- *Spiked*
- *Double Weapons*
- *Hooked*
- *Unique*

BALANCED

Craftsmen can forge weapons to be perfectly balanced, making them easier to wield and more accurate when thrown. Perfectly balanced daggers, spears and hand axes gain a 20 foot range increment. The referee may consider allowing Fighting Men to add their Strength bonus to damage when throwing a balanced weapon.

COMPOSITE BOW

A bow may be made from composite materials, such as laminated woods, sinew and bone that strengthens the bend and pull. A composite bow gains an additional 10 foot range increment and powerful warriors can add their Strength modifier as a damage bonus. In some campaigns, this technique may be a secret of the elves, and thus the power of their legendary bows. Or these may be known as "strong bows" akin to the myth of Odysseus where only those of great muscular prowess even have a chance to pull the bowstring.

DOUBLE WEAPONS

Swords with two blades are just silly...unless the blades are lasers and the wielder has horns. However, in a world where undead skeletons are resistant to cutting and slashing, it may make sense for a dwarf to forge an axe-hammer that combines both a heavy blade and the flat smashing head. This category could also include staves with a hidden spike or blade that could deployed as a spear or even pole arms that can be broken down into interlocking parts for easy carrying.

EXTRA HEAVY

The great weapon versions of flails, maces, morningstars and warhammers can be made extra heavy, akin to something used by an ogre or giant. Extra heavy weapons receive an additional +1 damage bonus, but attackers suffers a -1 "to Hit" penalty because of the unwieldiness of the oversized warhead. Extra heavy weapons must be used two-handed. Referees may disallow the use of extra

heavy weapons unless the Fighting Man has extraordinary strength.

HILT BASKET

The hilt basket is a popular addition to expensive swords. The curved metal protects the swordsman's hand and adds bone-crunching effect to his punches. Tactically, the wielder can parry more aggressively knowing his hand is safe. A sword with a hilt-basket delivers 1D6-1 punches and are excellent for subduing attacks when you want that guard alive. The referee may also consider an additional Parrying bonus.

HOOKED

Flails, pole-arms, spears, and staves can be attached with curved hooks to catch at the opponent's clothing, armor or weapons. Hooked weapons receive a +1 bonus to Disarm and Knockdown attempts (see below).

SERRATED BLADE

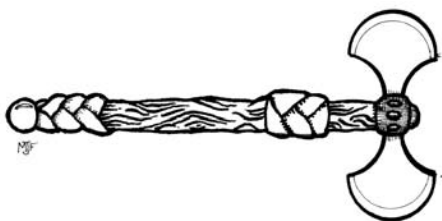
Axes, pole arms and swords can be fitted with viciously sharp serrated blades. These weapons receive a +1 damage bonus because the deep ridges rip into the opponent. Saw-tooth blades have poor armor penetration and are easily broken. Against any breaking attempt, a serrated blade is considered weak. Also, when used against a heavily armored foe, the attacker suffers a -1 "to Hit" penalty.

SPIKED

Long vicious spikes can be built into clubs, mauls and warhammers. The spikes do not necessarily increase damage, but the weapon now delivers both impaling and crushing damage which may be important versus some creatures. Spiked clubs are cheap and nasty weapons that do a full 1D6 damage. A spiked mace is called a morningstar.

UNIQUE

Unique weapons are those rare works of perfection that mark the masterwork of a renown craftsman. Just like DaVinci painted only one Mona Lisa, such a weapon marks a lifetime achievement, not something easily duplicated. These unique non-magical weapons gain both a +1 "to Hit" and +1 damage bonus. Such weapons would sell for a hundred times or even a thousand times the basic price, depending on the rarity of magic items in your campaign.



SPECIAL ATTACKS: DISARM, BREAK WEAPON and KNOCKDOWN

Every weapon is designed to damage the opponent. However, some weapons have additional qualities that make them excellent tools to achieve certain effects in combat. The three main special attacks are Disarm, Break Weapon and Knockdown.

Making attacks against a foe's weaponry or their balance is more about the luck and skill of the attacker than the defender's AC. Instead of making any attack rolls, I suggest using the highly versatile Saving Throw system instead. Since the tricks of battle are the domain of Fighting Men, I grant them a +2 bonus to these special attack saving throws in addition to either their STR or DEX bonus. Whether or not dwarves, elves or gnomes also receive this bonus depends on the referee. I know the excellent saving throws of clerics make it appear they can succeed at these maneuvers at equal or greater odds than a Fighting Man. This is fine. Friar Tuck would be proud.

Of course, the individual situation may create modifiers to this roll. Certainly these tricks are going to be more difficult against an opponent of higher skill. I suggest -1 penalty per 4 levels or HD above that of the attacker. Of course, the flipside bonus versus lower skilled opponents should also be used. That's how the Lancelot disarms overzealous palace guards instead of killing them when he visits Guinevere.

At the referee's discretion, a thrown or fired weapon can disarm, sunder or even trip at range. While this may appear overly cinematic, the ancient Franks were renown for hurling axes (the francisca) at the start of battle to shatter their opponent's shields.

DISARM

Disarming is knocking a weapon or shield out of the hands of an enemy, leaving them defenseless. It is harder to disarm someone using either a shield or a two-handed weapon. Consider a -2 penalty for these attempts. Disarm attacks might also be used to knock helmets off heads, snap off amulets or cut purse strings.

Swords are easily the best weapons for disarming foes. The swordsman's ability to lunge, cut, thrust and suddenly twist make defending against disarm very difficult. Swords receive a +1 Disarm bonus. In *Ruins & Ronin*, chain weapons such kusarigama, kyoketsu shoge and nunchaku are also ideally suited for disarming.

BREAK WEAPON

Both fantasy literature and museums are strewn with broken hafts and snapped blades. Breaking a weapon is choosing to attack the weapon or shield of your foe, instead of your opponent's body. Axes are best built for shattering, their chopping edge makes quick work of shields and spear hafts. Axes gain a +1 bonus when making a breaking attack.

Instead of worrying how much damage a crossbow can withstand versus a pole arm, I declare that all non-magical weapons and shield have one hit point. A solid blow breaks them. Why? The attacker is forfeiting a chance to do damage. These effects make combat more interesting and cinematic, thus the simplicity. Give it a try!

Can magical weapons be broken? What a terrifying thought! Can Stormbringer shatter Excalibur? In my games, a +2 weapon can make a +1 weapon suffer, but a normal weapon will never scratch an enchanted one.

KNOCK DOWN

Tripping an opponent flops them to the ground. Larger opponents and those foes with four legs (or more) are harder to knock down. Consider a -2 penalty for these attempts.

Unless the ground has its own dangers, tripping only bruises egos. Instead of damage, knock down puts the foe in a vulnerable prone position. As our games use an abstract system that reduces the dance of combat into a single roll, there is no reason to require a fallen character to spend his entire action rising and readying himself. Instead, grant all attackers a +2 "to Hit" bonus against a prone target.

Pole-arms, particularly halberds and other hooked spears, are excellent for trip attacks as are Asian-inspired chain weapons. Consider granting them a +1 Knockdown bonus. In honor of Friar Tuck, the humble staff should also get this bonus.

TAKING THE HIT

Why disarm when you can shatter just as easily? Broken weapons fetch no gold. Shattered shields are useless for replacing your own. Some players may fear these house rules because it breaks their stuff. As an option, allow the adventurer the choice of throwing their body in the way and suffering the full damage of the attack instead of the disarm, weapon breakage or knockdown. Choices are good and hard choices are even better!

MASTER TABLE OF COMPLICATIONS

As much as Old Schoolers love simplicity, some of us enjoy complicating our games. Here is the Master Table of Basic Weapon Qualities.

MASTER TABLE OF COMPLICATIONS	
WEAPON	LIST OF BASIC QUALITIES
Battle Axe	+1 Break Weapon, Tool, 2H Control
Hand Axe	Off-Hand, +1 Break Weapon, Tool
Bow	Nocked Arrow, Twin Wild Shots
Dagger	Off-Hand, Thrown, Easily Concealed, -1 Damage, Tool
Club	-1 Damage unless Spiked
Crossbow	Armor Penetration, Nocked Bolt, Slow Reload, +1 "to Hit"
Flail	+1 Disarm, Ignores Shields, 2H Control
Mace	Armor Penetration, Hard to Break, Tool
Morningstar	Armor Penetration, 2H Control, Tool
Pole Arm	Reach, +1 Knockdown, Hard to Disarm, Set vs. Charge
Sling	Easily Concealed, -1 Damage
Spear	+1 Trip, Breaks Easy, 2H Control, Thrown, Set vs. Charge
Staff	+1 Knockdown, Breaks Easy, Tool, -1 Damage
Short Sword	Off-Hand, +1 Parry, +1 Disarm, -1 Damage
Sword	Social, +1 Parry, +1 Disarm, 2H Control
Warhammer	Armor Penetration, 2H Control, Tool

THOUGHTS ON MISSILE WEAPONS

I have never been happy with Rate of Fire issues with missile weapons. If a bowman can fire four arrows in the same time a heavy crossbow can shoot off one bolt, there is no reason for crossbows to exist.

Historically, the longbow was considered extremely difficult to learn, thus the anecdote “if you want to train an archer, start with his grandfather.”

Crossbows, like guns, were “point and trigger” weapons that could be quickly mastered.

There is no question an arrow can be strung and nocked much faster than a bolt can be loaded and cranked. In White Box, the light crossbow can be fired once each round for 1D6-1 damage while the heavy crossbow needs a round to reload and does 1D6+1 damage.

My personal solution has been to allow archers the option to fire their bows once per round as a well-aimed shot, or give them the option to “wildly shoot” two separate arrow attacks, but with a -2 penalty to each roll. Also, to emulate the concept that crossbows are easier to master, I grant them a +1 “to Hit” bonus in short range.

In actual play, these house-rules have resulted in a more interesting mix of weaponry among both adventurers and adversaries. I hope the same happens for your future campaigns!



Heroes of Geomorphy!

Geomorphs are, as virtually all of us know, jigsaw pieces of a map that can be fitted together to form the larger map. They can be turned upside down or sideways, so even a small number of them can create a huge variety of possible combinations.

There is considerable artistry involved in creating a geomorph, because each piece has to be capable of joining up with any of the others in any orientation.

In the recent past, several geomorph artists have gotten together on the internet to combine their efforts, creating jigsaw-pieces that all follow the same “rules” – and thereby allowing the work of several cartographers to be used together. It’s one of the great examples of the power of the internet, and an example of the phenomenal generosity of those who are contributing their time and formidable talents to this project.

Moreover, David Millar has taken all the various tile-sets created by the cartographers (he is one of the cartographers himself, by the way – a man of many talents), and stored them up in a computer program which does all the combining for you. Click on the site, and you see a complete map made up of 6 randomly-combined tiles, selected from the contributions of several cartographers.

The contributing artists – at this time – are David Millar (as mentioned), Stonewerks, Dyson Logos, Risus Monkey, Talysman, Sigurd Sigurd, and Amanda Michaels.

Dave’s Mapper (the computer program):
<http://www.thegriddle.net/mapper/>

Blogs of the contributing cartographers:

Dyson Logos
<http://rpgcharacters.wordpress.com/>
(this is where it started)

Risus Monkey
<http://www.risusmonkey.com/>

Aeons & Augauries
<http://aeonsnaugauries.blogspot.com/>

Stonewerks
<http://stonewerks.wordpress.com/>

(I haven’t found blogs or sites for Amanda, Talysman, or Sigurd).

Kudos to ALL of the artists who have been putting this project together – the results are phenomenal, and anyone with the slightest interest in dungeon maps should check it out!



WHERE DWELLS THE MOUNTAIN GOD

An Adventure for Character Levels 7-9
For 0e, First Edition, or Swords & Wizardry
By Bill Silvey

BACKGROUND

High in the mountains above the rolling plains of the Sea of Grass sits the village of Tellim. The people of Tellim have long kept the worship of their Gods, and have prospered accordingly. However, during the last snow season, when the northern winds were easier than they had been, and snowfall lessened somewhat, clerics who had gone up the mountain passes to pay respect to the dead under their cairns on the roof of the world returned with an ominous new sermon. In the Temple of the Forgotten God, a new deity demanded obeisance. The Temple is a shunned edifice a few leagues away from the village, further up the rocky precipices. It was abandoned ages before the founding of the little outpost and trading village that grew into Tellim.

This new God claims to be a living descendant of the Titans of old, returned to the mortal plane to restore the worship of his kin. This old religion was dire and dark: sacrifices were to be sent, both treasure and ... humans. At first the villagers of Tellim denounced the pilgrims as heretics – but no less than one day later, the Council of Elders were struck down by some unseen force within the council hall itself, their bodies entombed beneath an unnaturally cold sheet of ice!

The surviving village leaders, fearful of what this terrible force might wreak on the townsfolk immediately obeyed the Mountain God's pilgrims. The strongest and best mountain ewes and rams were gathered up. Terrible levies were put upon every villager; the town treasury was sent northward – but even worst, the fairest and finest of the village youths were hauled away as well in an attempt to appease this wrathful new god!

But while the mightiest of the village may have been struck down by some dark power, some of the townsfolk sent word out to the lowland cities,

begging for aid. Gathering the last of their treasure, they have sent for assistance. Since Tellim is a free town, no Lord is compelled to defend them. If they are to be freed, it will be at the hand of skilled adventurers...

START

The journey across the Sea of Grass from your own city-state is uneventful. The cool, early spring of the plains quickly gives way to the remnants of bitter winter as you enter the foothills and eventually the mountain paths that lead to Tellim. The village itself sits atop a flat hill, and is surrounded by a high stone wall topped with wooden hoardings. Given enough food, the place looks as though it could hold out forever against an army trying to pass it by. Most of the villagers regard you with suspicion; they wish to be troubled no further. But your patrons welcome you with open arms, providing you with stout mountain horses to replace your long-legged beasts of the open plains, as well as a place to rest. A guide is assigned to show you to the so-called "Temple" when you are ready. The town has a single tavern, two smithies, a general trading post, an inn (above the tavern) and other such amenities.

NOTES FOR THE JUDGE

The people of Tellim are on edge; they have been forced to surrender many of their children and much of their livestock and money to this new, so-called god on the mountain. They want little trouble, and the priesthood of this new "god" is fanatical about not raising their deity's ire. The new priesthood is comprised of a level 3 cleric and two acolytes (first level). All wield maces and carry shields. They have taken over the old temple, but tokens of the new god now adorn it. These symbols depict a blue-white starburst representing the sudden cold the god seems able to mete out. They are not *evil* per se, but are driven by a fanatical devotion to the new god so as to

spare their people any further hurt. If approached by adventurers and told about the mission to depose the new god, the town militia may be called upon to eject the “meddlers” from the town (or worse). Most town militia fight as normal men, with clubs, knives, and the like. A few (ten out of the thirty or so) are armed with swords and equipped with shields. This group fights as level 1 fighting-men and will be the first responders in the event of trouble...

Otherwise, as noted, the villagers simply want as little trouble as possible.

You may wish to employ random outdoor encounters during the climb to the temple, which will take approximately one day (sun-up to sun-down).

MAP KEY

1. Entryway

Around a bend, a broad natural opening in the mountainside can be seen. Several rough-looking types are around a campfire, built in the lee of the opening so as to be shielded from the wind. These men are bandits drawn to the area by rumors of treasure within the temple. They now serve those within, and will willingly attack any who approach without the appropriate device or password. The password is “Cloud God” – the clergy in Tellim know the password but will not willingly give it. There are eight men total, all of 2nd level of fighting ability. They wear chainmail and carry shields. Half are equipped with short swords and a spear to hurl; the others are armed with flails. They all have 1d6 gold and have 8hp each.

The entryway itself has been etched by time; no identifying marks remain upon it.

2. Outer Temple

A rich curtain hangs on the western wall of this place. Black granite pillars stand on either side of the room. The floor is scuffed and worn from countless footfalls over the ages. A raised dais stands at the north end of the room; on it is a gong with the white starburst device.

Striking the gong will summon four acolytes (8hp each, wearing breastplates and carrying maces). Noise further south will alert temple guards (four orcs, AC 7, HP 6, 6, 7, 8) who will come up from area #7. The orcs carry tough nets and will throw them on characters (save v. paralysis or become totally entangled for 1d4 rounds) and then try to subdue interlopers. If required, a pair of ogres that dwell in area #8 will be whistled for.

3. Inner Sanctum

This is a largely bare, 30ft broad hall. Old sculptures have been removed; any painting or decoration here has completely faded away over time. A discolored stone can be seen on the curved northern wall.

The stone is an easy-to-spot concealed doorway that leads deeper within the temple.

4. Readyng Chamber

This is the readyng chamber of one of the priests of the new god. He is here meditating, and can observe the outer temple through a mesh screen in the secret door that opens there. He is accompanied by four 6th level fighting-men (AC 2, HP 28, 27, 30, 21), all of whom wield swords. The priest is but a 4th level cleric who will direct his bodyguard to attack while he uses spells. Each fighting man carries 1d10 gold.

5. Bodyguard Quarters

Two of the six fighting men (currently in area #4) sleep here; most of their equipment is unremarkable (as is the room). However, hidden beneath the bunk of one of them is a lockbox containing a necklace with ten gems worth 10gp each; the chain is silver and worth 250gp. As jewelry, the entire item is worth 500gp. The box is trapped with a poison needle.

6. Bodyguard Quarters

Similar to area #5, this room is where two guards stay when not on duty with the temple staff. Beneath a flagstone in the middle of the room is an undiscovered secret hatch; inside are two vials of holy water.

7. Guardpost

Unless previously encountered, four orcs (HP 6, 6, 7, 8) stand watch here. They are armed with sword and shield and chain armor. The sound of fighting will raise the attention of the two ogres at area #8. The orcs carry 2d6 silver pieces each, all having benefitted in their way from the looting of the beleaguered village.

8. Ogres' Post

Lounging in this room (unless alerted by the noise of combat) is a pair of ogres (HP 15, 20) who are not paying much attention to anything. They are both armed with halberds which they use as battle axes (treat them as +1 to hit and +1 damage due to the ogres' strength). These ogres regard the whole affair of working for human goals as highly suspicious and if given quarter, will throw down a sack of 500gp and head for the exit. They will *not* cooperate with adventurers, and may (at the judge's discretion) actually wait to ambush them outside to regain their

lost gold! Note that four more of their kin lie in wait in area #9.

9. Ogres' Den

Once-fine tapestries cover the floor here as mats and blankets; opulent furnishings have been smashed to near uselessness by these brutes' constant use. The four ogres herein will assume that any sounds of battle to the south are simply the two guards in area #8 bickering or disciplining the feckless orcs in area #7. There is only a low chance (1-2 on d6) that any will investigate – unless an ogre escapes to this area. The ogres have the usual collection of clubs, as well as their gnarled fists. (HP 14, 17, 17, 19). They have 3d10 gold pieces each. Ogre #4 wears a tarnished silver necklace worth 200gp (but only if carefully cleaned – it is 90% probable that to the untrained eye it is mere junk). Additionally they have secreted 4 bloodstones worth a base of 50gp each under a plank in the floor, in the northeast corner of the room. These louts are more loyal to the temple than the other ogres, and will not flee, instead seeking to gain favor by dint of bringing prisoners (or dead interlopers) to the priest.

10. Statue

In the center of this octagonal room is a fountain half-filled with scummy water. In the middle of the fountain pool, on a low pedestal, stands a life-sized statue of a beautiful warrior maiden, arms outstretched as if expecting an embrace. The statue is carved from some dark green stone.

The water is foul and cold, but otherwise harmless. If someone braves the water and steps on the pedestal to touch the maiden, the statue will embrace the character and draw him forward, as though for a kiss. Any who allow a kiss must make a saving throw versus poison or die immediately. After this, the statue turns from jade green to pure alabaster, and resumes its beckoning pose. Any who now embrace (and kiss) the statue are granted a single wish (as the spell, at Judges' discretion). The statue radiates a strong magic aura if magic detection is employed, and has been the source of much study by those within the temple (although none have braved a dalliance with it).

11. Hall of Refuse

This disgusting chamber may once have had some other purpose, but it is now filled with trash, broken pots, and the like. Fresh, bloody bones from all sorts of creatures are scattered about, mixed in with the garbage. A carrion crawler rests beneath the pile, having recently eaten two unwary orcs who came here to dispose of trash.

12. Storeroom

Here is an average storeroom; at a glance there is nothing of interest here. Inquisitive delvers searching the supplies will find much of the material wealth of Tellim in furs, amber, gems, and other trade goods. The total overall value is approximately 11,000gp. In addition, notable items are:

- A crate of iron spikes
- A barrel, half full of (unused) torches
- A crate containing six weeks of iron rations
- A barrel holding 50 iron-tipped spears
- An armor stand with a full set of fine chainmail (not magical; it is simply well made and if *not* worn or damaged in combat it is worth 25% more than the standard selling price)
- A weapons rack with four short swords, six maces, and three small shields hanging on it

13. Ogre Guardpost

Two foul ogres are here hunched over a stone table in the corner of the room (Judges Note: they cannot be seen from the hallway, as they are in the far eastern corner of the room). They are both concentrating on a game of knucklebones, each watching the other for signs of cheating. While they are belligerent and hateful towards each other, they *will* set aside differences to deal with interlopers! Their hit points are 23 and 33 respectively. Both fight with iron clubs and deal an additional +1 points of damage due to their wicked strength.

14. High Priest's Chamber

The apartment of the high priest of the Mountain God. Turning his back on the old religions has paid off for this individual – the chamber here is richly appointed! The floors are covered in fine carpets, and well-made furniture decorates the room. Tapestries depicting a giant, blue-skinned “deity” standing over obedient followers decorate one wall. The high priest himself is here, planning another raid on Tellim (unless alerted to the presence of interlopers, in which case he may be encountered elsewhere). The high priest is a 9th level cleric (37hp), with three attendant clerics of 5th level (HP 18, 22, 25). There are also four men-at-arms here, simple mercenaries with some considerable skill (treat as 4th level fighting-men). All are clad in plate mail. The high priest wields a +2 mace with deadly efficiency; the clerics are armed normally. The high priest's usual tactics will be to send his attendants and bodyguards in first, employing spells to keep the party at bay accordingly. The apartments for the attendant clerics are at areas 23-25.

A locked (and trapped with a poisoned scything blade) chest underneath the great throne-like chair of the high priest holds his personal fortune: four

tourmalines worth 200gp each, a platinum necklace of office with the holy symbol of his (former) god worth 1100gp, a pair of sacrificial +1 daggers, a *potion of gaseous* form (he has not identified it), and 183 platinum pieces. The key to the chest is hidden in a carving on the chair itself, under the right armrest.

15. Torture Chamber

This dismal chamber seems to be some sort of improvised torture chamber. A smoldering brazier stands in one corner; chains are attached to a large, heavy, butcher-block table in the middle of the room. The floor is stained rust-brown and blood red, and several normal kitchen and farming implements, obviously used here for unsavory purposes, hang from pegs on the walls. The room is currently unoccupied. A faint wailing can be heard from the north.

Areas A-F are individual cells for sacrifices, prisoners for ransom, and other doomed folk. Cell A is unoccupied. A (normal) dwarf, emaciated and weak, is imprisoned in cell B, the victim of a raid on a distant dwarven outpost in the mountains. He fights as a normal man if given time to recuperate. Cell C holds the body of a recently deceased female elf. In cell D sits a dispirited human, seemingly resigned to his fate. He is one of the temple faithful, caught in an act of theft from the treasury. He is half mad and utterly Chaotic, and will reward his freedom with treachery. He is, however, sly, and will attempt to convince the party he is like the other prisoners here. Cell E is empty. Cell F is occupied by a human female who looks healthy but has clearly been a "guest" in the torture chamber recently. The maltreatment has left her crazed, but if treated kindly she will recover quickly. She is actually an experienced fighter (as 2nd level fighting-man, 11 HP) and will accompany the party if given equipment. Cell G is unoccupied, but careful searching of the room may reveal a loose stone in the floor. If the stone is removed, a short passage may be found that leads to area #42. The tunnel was dug long ago by the original occupants of this temple as an escape route should they come under siege...

16. Owl-Bear's Den

The air in this cave has a thick, sour, rotten odor to it. Out of sight in the southeastern corner a hideous crunching and tearing sound can be heard. The room is the lair of an owl-bear (33 HP) that moved into the caved-in area after the temple proper was abandoned, but before the new cult occupied the temple. The high priest sees to it that prisoners are occasionally fed to the creature, and some small treasure is given it. A filthy sack (90% chance indistinguishable from a rock unless carefully searched) holds 350gp and a

potion of healing. The Owl-bear likes the bottle for its red color. The creature is indifferent to occupants in the temple; it knows little more than that it is sometimes brought food and shiny coins. It might be convinced to not attack if it is given food. It is currently snacking on a temple guard who wandered into the caves.

17. Giant Spiders' Lair

Cobwebs hang from the walls here. A few desiccated skeletons dot the floor. Lurking on the ceiling are two giant spiders (HP 18, 15) which feed on vermin and any temple faithful dumb enough to wander in – which are few, for the location of the spiders is well known. They will surprise (50% chance) any interlopers. They have no treasure.

18. Large Cavern

This is a sandy-floored room, obviously created by some kind of cave-in. It seems now to be stable. Weird footprints go off in all directions. While it isn't the lair of any one creature there is a chance (judge's discretion) that a creature might be wandering through on the way back to its lair after seeking prey.

19. Troll Cave

A dreadful troll (40hp) lives here, and considers itself the warden of the caves at large. It would very much like to kill the owl-bear in area #16, but fears the priest might respond to the death of his "pet." The troll is willing to wait. It has a simple, evil, cunning, and it has already stolen what little amount of treasure the spiders once had. Their numbers were originally larger; but as poison little affected the troll, it simply killed off several, took what it wanted, and left.

20. Troll Treasure Room

Beneath a huge boulder in the north end of this chamber is the troll's treasure. Two potions (one of *water breathing* and another of *fire resistance*) are in an iron box. A ring hauberk of fine construction (treat as chainmail +2), too small for the troll to wear; a bag of eight gems (worth 40, 50, 50, 50, 100, 200, 200 and 500 GP respectively); a broadsword +1 (again, too small for the troll to use except as a hand knife); and a cursed *helm of alignment changing* sit in a hole beneath the boulder. It will take a very strong group of individuals to move the boulder.

21. Unstable Area

This room is choked with rubble approximately 3ft deep. Passage to the caves beyond is possible, but difficult. The rocks, sand, and mud here are slippery and of uncertain stability. Once the tunnel to area #18 is approached, there is a cumulative 10% chance (roll for each character as they proceed toward it) that

a rockslide will occur when the refuse here is traversed. Most of the loose stuff from the walls and ceiling has already tumbled into the room, but while the cave-in will be mild, it will still inflict 1d12hp on each person in the room (no saving throw is allowed due to the difficulty of moving, much less dodging).

22. Doppelganger Lair

Beyond the portcullis to the west is a rough, unfinished-looking chamber. A few (six) bedraggled humans stand about with mining tools. They look to adventurers who approach as if waiting on orders. However, they are not as they appear: this is a group of doppelgangers that occupied the temple ruin for a time before the cultists took over. Originally the doppelgangers' goal was to infiltrate caravans passing through the mountains, spreading out to assimilate the unwary, but they have been thwarted by the presence of the cultists. The clever shape-shifters may even try to alter their appearance by use of their ESP ability to look like a long-lost friend or family member to one of the adventurers. If found out, they will fight viciously. While they but fight as 4th level men (HP 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22) they save as 10th level men and do 1d6 damage with their fists. The "tools" are mere props, and useless as weapons; the doppelgangers are not proficient with weapons at any rate. They will change shape rapidly to sow confusion among party member ranks if melee becomes intermixed. The doppelgangers have no particular hatred towards anything, but regard the murder and replacement of victims as a sort of natural order...

23. Supply Room

Unlike other places in the temple area, this small room seems dry, neat, and well appointed. Dry meat hangs from hooks, kegs of wine and ale are stacked along the northern wall, and boxes of spices, bags of wheat and flour and dried corn line the shelves. There is enough food here to supply the temple for two weeks. All of it bears the mark of nearby towns and settlements.

24. Kitchen

A pair of humans in fairly good physical shape (3 HP each, fight as normal men, but only if attacked) attend this kitchen. There is little cooking going on at the moment, and unless they are given reason to believe otherwise, they will assume passersby to be residents or authorized visitors to the temple. This pair occasionally steals food to smuggle back to the prisoners at area #15 when they are relieved for the day, but know if they are caught it will likely mean their deaths. They have no treasure.

25. Dining Area

This is a richly appointed chamber; a 10ft long table down the center is surrounded by comfortable chairs; a silver service is set in place for the next meal. A gong stands in the northwest corner, with a decanter of some kind of liquid on the sideboard next to it. A lit oil lamp chandelier hangs from the ceiling. The brandy in the crystal decanter is (together with the decanter) worth 150gp; the silver service on the table is nothing but highly polished pewter and only worth perhaps 10gp.

26. Antechamber

This is a bare room, with little to distinguish it from any other unused place in the dungeon. A trapped secret door leads to the temple treasure store at #26a. The trap consists of a scything blade which does 2-24 points of damage to any who try to force the door. A full 24 points of damage indicates a severed hand!

26a. Treasure Room

Chests, studded leather bags and iron strongboxes fill the room. All appear to be locked, and indeed most are. *Unlocked* chests contain coins of lead washed with pyrite, which are (on very close inspection) valueless but at a glance appear to be normal gold pieces. The judge should determine what chests contain which. There are 10 locked chests or strong boxes in the room which contain the following actual treasure items:

- 2200gp.
- 10 pieces of jewelry with a base value of 100gp each.
- A book of magic-user spells containing *Read Magic*, *Write*, *Levitate*, *Floating Disc*, *Transmute Rock to Mud*, *Magic Mouth*, and *Sleep*. The book itself is trapped with a dusting of poison that rubs off on contact, causing the incautious handler to fall into a coma for 2d10 turns. The dust is slightly too adhesive to be normal, and this could be noticed by close observation; magical detection of traps will reveal it instantly.
- 30 gems of base 10gp value
- A silver service (a duplicate of the false pewter service in the dining room at #25) – it is worth 300 gold pieces intact, but is very bulky. The custom-fit chest for it weighs 50 pounds alone and is very bulky; it must be carried by both handles.
- A coffer of four potions. One is a potion of *Resist Fire*, another is a potion of *Polymorph Self*, two are potions of *Gaseous Form*. All of the bottles are marked with a painted-on black skull and crossbones. They were put here pending further investigation and forgotten...
- Platinum-plated bronze tablets, depicting the triumph of some sort of huge figure riding on a

cloud over covering humans. The plates have no special value, but the platinum can be separated and is worth 800gp. The plates and the chest weigh in excess of 200 pounds.

- This curious box seems filled with junk: chipped marbles, bits of glass, bent copper coins, etc., some 6 inches deep. However, in amongst the refuse is a *Figurine of Wondrous Power: Marble Elephant*. Only six turns of careful searching will unearth the item (or a *Detect Magic* spell).
- A lockbox containing 330 silver pieces and 800 copper pieces, mixed together.
- A box of rags; mixed in is a *Bag of Holding*.

27. Ogre Miners' Room

This room has the same unfinished appearance that area #22 does – except it is the chamber of four strong-looking ogres. The room is cluttered with the usual junk (empty crates, broken cots and other ad-hoc “furnishings”). All the ogres carry mining tools which suit their large stature. They wear leather aprons, and can use the tools with a deadly efficiency. These ogres, more skilled than most, chafe under the human leadership here and have tunneled out the ceiling with plans to leave after overpowering a few “tinyfolk” and stealing as much treasure as they can carry. Their leather aprons give them an additional +1 to their armor class and they strike for 1d8+1 points of damage with their picks and shovels. They currently have a collection of 210sp, 35gp and two base 50gp value bloodstones under a boulder in the corner of their room. Moving the boulder requires a total of 60 strength points (the four ogres can do this with ease).

28. Ogres at Knucklebones

A pair of ogres are here, playing knucklebones. No humans as such are “allowed” here, so they will immediately leap to the attack. They have 18 and 20hp, and fight with their bare hands for 1-10 points of damage per attack.

29. Bowling Alley

A sort of nine-pins alley has been set up in this room – well worked rock spheres are stacked at one end, and “pins” consisting of broken stone pillars are at the other. A trio of ogres is bowling, and the noise will mask any entry from the north. The ogres can hurl the stones for 2-7 points of damage (there are five rocks total), or fight normally. They have 18, 18, and 22 hit points, and no treasure.

30. Concubine's Boudoir

Beyond the portcullis at the top of a short flight of stairs is a room that seems most out of place – the walls are painted a calming blue, soft silk pillows dot the floor, a low couch is against the wall on the far

side of the room, and a richly carved vanity stands near the entryway. This chamber is where the leader of the ogres – and the “concubine” of the “Mountain God” at area #40 resides. If the party has made any loud noises or bypassed this room and fought the ogres in areas #27-#29, she will be alerted to their presence. The Concubine is a powerful ogre mage (HP: 52, AC 2) and unless totally surprised (or occupied in area #40, below) she will be prepared for interlopers by shape-shifting into human form. In this guise she will attempt to lull adventurers into a false sense of security, claiming she is a princess from the east, being held for ransom. If the party believes her, she will wait for the most opportune moment (likely in the waist-deep waters of the flooded area of the temple) to strike, using her formidable spell abilities to their devastating worst. She is sly and ruthless, and will sacrifice her kin to gain any magic items or treasure the party has, and to try to gain a bit more power over her master in hopes of supplanting him and becoming the “mountain goddess”. Her treasure consists of 2330 silver pieces in an iron floor safe (only she knows the correct combination) beneath the vanity; a +2 *flame tongue* sword beneath her divan; and, concealed behind one of the tapestries, a bag of three diamonds, each of exquisite cut and clarity, worth a base of 500gp each. She also wears a copper scroll tube around her neck as a pendant; on the scroll is a 6th level *Fireball* spell. If asked, she will say that the tube is merely a good-luck charm, and dear to her – she will not willingly give it up.

31. Black Water

Clearly some kind of disaster has struck this part of the temple: the stairs descend into still, black water. The water is only 3ft deep, but this will slow movement to 1/4th normal. The floor is fairly rough and not too slippery, but running will surely trip even the most sure-footed adventurer. Beneath the water, just to the outside of the pillars lining this chamber on each side, is an encroaching green slime (0 HP, eats flesh). While the stuff will only be encountered if those areas are approached, it is virtually undetectable unless stepped on directly.

32. Meditation Chambers

32a. Altar Chamber

It is impossible to tell what this chamber may have once been; the damp has ruined any markings or frescoes along the walls. There is an alcove to the east and another to the west. Beneath the murk, in each alcove is a meditation altar; on each sits a wooden box containing a *pearl of wisdom*. A *detect magic* spell will locate the pearls, but touching the tables without using any sort of magic detection will (95% chance) knock the pearls off into the silt and

such on the floor, forever losing these magic treasures...

32b. Fountain Chamber

Like the other flooded areas, whatever this large chamber was once used for is now forgotten. The water seems coldest here, and shallower (perhaps only 1ft). From the southeast, the sound of flowing water echoes forth. A fountain, demolished by the ogres early on when they were put to work by the “mountain god” has run out of control and filled the lower-floored part of the temple chambers. While the “god” was initially furious, the water deters any over-curious temple faithful, and has thus not been repaired. Holes were bashed at strategic places to allow the water to drain at roughly the same rate it fills up. Islands of rubble dot the floor here; there is otherwise nothing of interest. If the players manage to formulate a way to close the pipes, over the course of 7-12 days the water will eventually drain out of the temple. *Part Water, Destroy Water* or *Lower Water* spells can accelerate the process.

33. Ancient Treasury

The floor here steeply slopes away to the north from the entry. Although some sort of ramp can be felt underfoot, it is narrow, and clearly very steep. The water in this room is fully 10’ deep; this chamber was the treasury of the old temple. A few gems (base value 100gp, total of 5) dot the floor, but a search with appropriate measures for surviving in the cold water to locate them. Unless the water is disturbed, if a good light source (magical) is used, similar ramps can be seen to the east and west, leading up out of the basin-like room.

34. Oily Water

The water in this chamber is only 5ft or so deep. An oily scum floats on the surface here, as do several barrels. Clinging to the ceiling is a huge (20ft diameter) colony of yellow mold above the entryway. The oily scum is lamp oil; the barrels are half-full of rancid dregs of the stuff. *If flame is used in this chamber, such as torches held aloft, it will ignite (explode!) the yellow mold, and the oil.* The barrels will burn furiously, adding to the conflagration as they leak into the water. All in the chamber must make a saving throw (the fire is similar to dragons’ breath) or suffer 5d6 points of damage. A successful saving throw indicates half damage. Standing in the burning waters will inflict 2d6 points of damage. The oil here will burn for six turns due to the barrels’ leakage.

35. Cloud Giants

Standing in this huge, well-lit chamber are four giant figures, all wearing dark blue robes. These cloud giants serve their “lord” and consider themselves the

“god’s messengers” – they accompany raiding parties of ogres, and drum up “converts” in nearby villages. They are thoroughly wicked, and will attack any unrecognized persons (adventurers!) immediately. They are as powerful as any of their kind, their size and toughness gives them the equivalent of plate mail. They have no handy stones to hurl, but fight as 13th level fighters (HP: 44, 44, 46, 50). A (large!) secret passage in the east wall leads further into their den.

36-39. Cloud Giant Quarters

These are the quarters of the Cloud Giant’s kin, who are in area #35. Their goods are the best that have been looted; likewise each cloud giant keeps personal treasure in the rooms. While the chambers are (by cloud giant standards) tiny, and essentially the same, the treasure differs for each giant. Note that the giants do *not* also carry additional gold.

Room #36 belongs to the toughest of the cloud giants; locked in a huge iron chest (the giant has the key) are 1000gp, 3 gems (two 250gp tourmalines and a single 2000gp jade lozenge), a +1 *shield* used as a scoop for the coins, a +2 *warhammer*, and a *potion of undead control* padded in a straw wrapper.

Room #37 contains a huge bronze jug with a leaden stopper; only the strength of the cloud giant could easily pry it out. Inside the jug is a *curse* scroll (inflicts a *disease* which is fatal in 3 turns unless cured with an appropriate spell or power), a scroll of *protection from lycanthropes*, and a magic-user scroll of *levitation, invisibility* and *comprehend languages*.

Room #38 has a simple (large) wooden chest with a flimsy bronze lock – with a poison needle trap inside. One of the two 44 hit point giants has the key. In amongst common items (clothes, etc.) is a *potion of longevity*.

Room #39 has no obvious containers; a hole beneath the sleeping pallet has a quiver with 10 +2 *arrows* (there were 20; the giant used them as darts in a game with his fellows some time ago), and a clerical scroll of *cure serious wounds, detect magic, and holy word*.

40. Mountain God’s Chamber

This truly must be the chamber of the mountain god. Everything here is done in rich blues and purples. Lounging on a giant throne hewn from marble is the decadent cloud giant responsible for all of the troubles visited upon the highland villages. He will first taunt interlopers, and then hurl huge polished marble spheres at them. He wears a giant-sized +2 *ring of protection*, in addition to his other abilities. He has 68 hit points, attacks as a 13th level fighter, and strikes for 3d10 points of damage with each blow

(also the value of hurled stones, of which there are 10 in a pyramid next to his throne). As mentioned above, there is a 50% chance the ogre mage, transmorphed as a female cloud giant, will be present, scheming with him. If the female ogre mage is slain and the cloud giant reduced to half its hit points, it will try to flee to area #41, slamming the stone door behind it, then grab the most portable treasures and flee up the chimney.

41. Treasure Chamber

This is the cloud giant's treasure chamber. Huge sacks of coins are scattered about (25,000 gold pieces in all, in many bags). Additionally, a huge (hollow) iron statue of a steed here is filled with 8,000 gold pieces and brazed shut. Buried in the coins therein is a scroll of *protection from elementals*. The brass chain that makes up the horse's bridle has a marble vial containing a *potion of gaseous form*. The cloud giant will seize the statue and climb up the chimney in the corner of the room to escape attackers. It can handle the statue and manage the escape ladder with ease.

42. Escape Route (Sort of)

This dismal cave has an opening to the east. Boulders dot the sandy floor here. A broken pick-axe lies at the mouth of a sandy pit in the middle of the room. This was the escape route of a dwarven adventurer caught some time ago in a temple raid. He dug his way out and hoped to find his freedom...

43. Carrion Crawler's Chamber

Another forlorn cavern, this one is filled with bones. Behind the charnel heap is a carrion crawler – it caught the unwary dwarf and dragged him to his doom. The creature has 18 hit points and is hungry. A few (100gp worth) coins are scattered through the mess here.

44. To the Cliff

This otherwise unremarkable cave smells faintly of fresh, cold air. A natural tunnel leads a quarter mile to the east, and opens on a cliff-side, some 1000 feet above a ravine floor. The drop is sheer, but a risky descent using pitons and rope might be possible...

This ends the adventure *Where Dwells the Mountain God*.



See Map on Next Page

Convention Announcement

NTRPG Con

The 3rd annual NTRPG Con will take place June 2-5 in Irving, TX (same location as last time, the Staybridge Suites). NTRPG Con is the south's premier old school con, focusing on pre-2000 RPGs of all types, particularly D&D in it's many forms. No card games, no board games, no 4e, etc. Only OOP or old school oriented games need apply!

This year we will award the first ever Three Castles Design award for achievement in RPG design. The statuette is stone cold gorgeous! We have had some great submissions this year and we are still going through them.

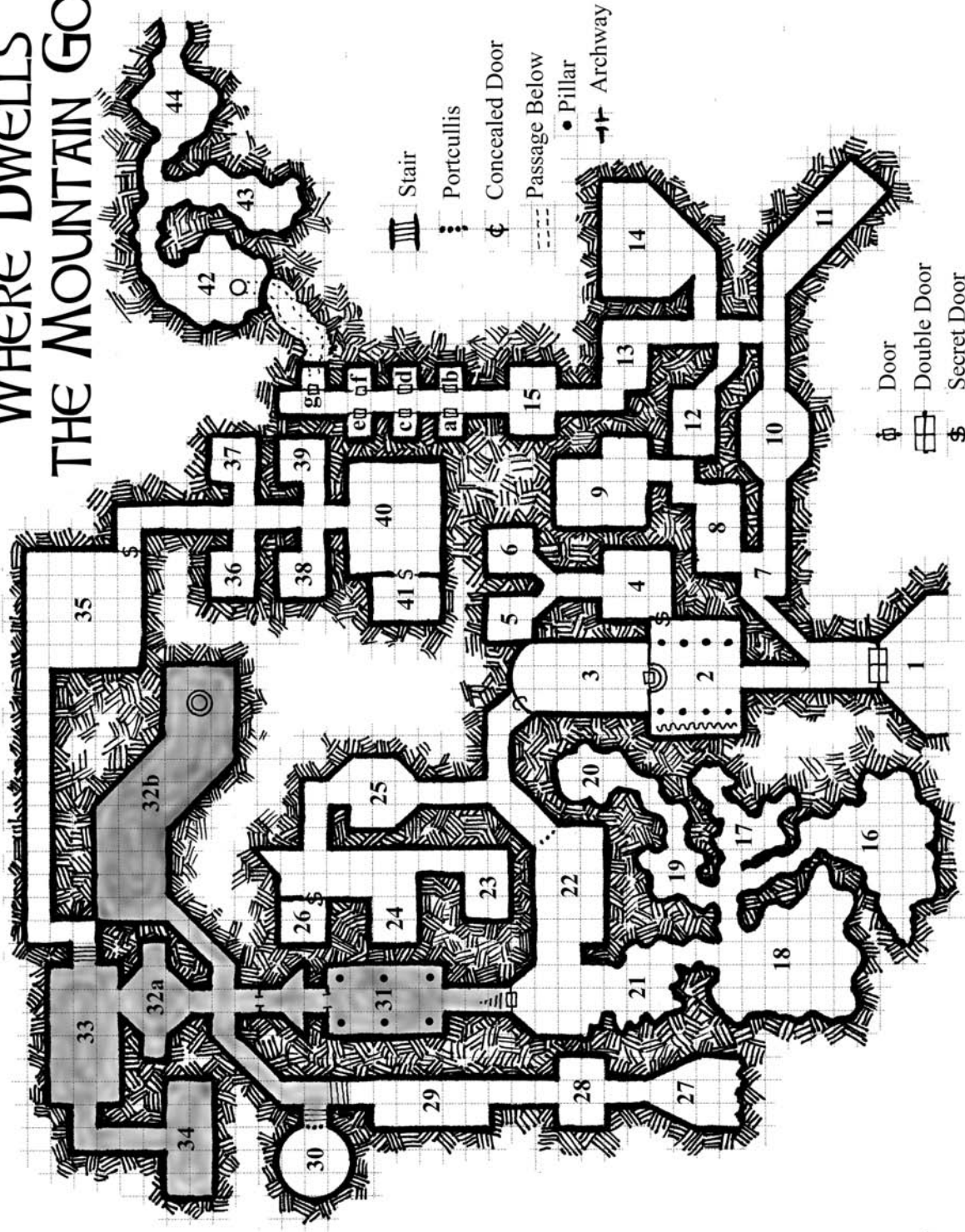
Doug and I have discussed giving out an annual NTRPG Con award for best release at the con itself. Basically, any adventure released at the con for the first time will be eligible. We need to work on it a bit more but it looks like we'll take votes on all submissions and give out the award sometime at the end of June, to be awarded at the next year's con.

Reminder that registration for events goes live midnight April 15th....as some of you know events fill up VERY fast, especially premium events.

Home Page for the Convention:

<http://ntrpgcon.com/>

WHERE DWELLS THE MOUNTAIN GOD



Operation: Unfathomable



Operation Unfathomable

By Jason Sholtis, Illustrated by John Larrey and Jason Sholtis

A Swords & Wizardry (Core or Complete Rules) one-off adventure for 4-6 1st level characters

INTRODUCTION:

Gonzo alert! This adventure is designed for use as a convention game, a one-shot scenario pitting neophyte adventurers against competing factions ranging from beings from the far future to bizarre demigods, set deep within the world-spanning megadungeon known as the Unfathomable Underworld. Without the concerns of an ongoing campaign to restrain the writer, and the secondary objective (fun being number one) of demonstrating the freedom inherent in a rules-light game such as OD&D or S&W, this adventure's hazards are extreme, chances of character death (and even entire party death) high, and the kitchen sink stands ready to be tossed into the mix. Only those characters who laugh at death need apply.

While the adventure is location based, with a number of set encounter areas, it also features the use of random event and encounter tables by means of which a variety of plotlines can be developed by the referee and players. My aim is to make the gaming experience just as surprising for the referee as the players.

PLAYERS' BACKGROUND:

Sorcerer-King Syantides, autocrat of the ancient city-state Mur, has made a terrible blunder. The fabulous Null-rod, an anti-magical artifact of mythic proportions, long kept safely locked away in his Tower Impregnable, has been taken by one of Syantides' sons, the gallant Prince Eyraen.

Unable to master the mystic arts and doomed to obscurity in the shadows of his nine (confirmed) siblings, the Prince dedicated himself to mastering the arts of war and became a mighty fighting-man and prominent explorer. While outfitting himself for an expedition, Eyraen discovered the Null-rod among his father's substantial treasure hoard and appropriated the relic for use on a suicidal errand into the Unfathomable Underworld.

At some point in their delve, the Prince's party met with some terrible fate, from which only a single hired porter escaped. This young man, his hair prematurely white from terror, was able to offer very little in the way of coherent testimony before his overtaxed heart gave out. Authorities found a rough

map of a small section of the Underworld in the youth's tattered sack, along with a small golden idol depicting a little known demigod, the Worm Sultan, Shaggath-Ka. Former associates of the Prince confirmed that Eyraen had long fomented a terrible vengeance upon the Worm Sultan, to whom one of the Prince's most ardent lovers was sacrificed in an unspeakable rite.

According to the map, Shaggath-Ka's realm lies somewhere beneath the frontier territories to which your group has traveled in search of adventure. Here, in the modest wilderness outpost you have chosen as your base of operations, the Sorcerer-King's local regent has put out a desperate call for the bold. By chance, the entrance to the Underworld used by the Prince lies but a few hours travel into the nearby wilderness. With perpetual internecine wars raging on all fronts, most of the greatest heroes in the Sorcerer-King's service are occupied or very far away.

Just yesterday, the local captain attempted to plumb these depths with a sizable force of soldiers. A half-insane survivor, before rescinding his citizenship and disappearing into the night, reported that the war band attracted so much attention they were drawn in to non-stop battles. The captain and his remaining stalwarts fell in an encounter with a singular horror, which he was either unable or unwilling to describe.

A smaller expedition, proceeding stealthily and choosing battles wisely (this cannot be overemphasized), may have a better chance of success. According to the best information, the section of the Underworld visited by the Prince's party has been at least partially pacified and many horrors destroyed. Certainly, whatever wiped out the party remains at large, but with care, planning, and stealth, the Null-rod may still be recoverable. The opportunity to reclaim any treasures procured by the Prince before fate overtook him should not be ignored. Your newly formed company, already planning a career in exploration, treasure hunting, and dungeon-delving, will simply have to do. As nominal subjects of the Sorcerer-King, you are officially compelled into service. However, the regent says, there shall no doubt be a princely reward for your efforts, to be determined in a face-to-face meeting with Syantides himself (a rare privilege indeed), should you succeed.

With only scant clues to follow, an incomplete map of a small portion of the Underworld, and a few loaned magic items, your group must find the prince, dead or alive, and return with the relic. To further complicate matters, spies within the Sorcerer-King's government have probably already reported to their nefarious masters the true nature of the relic and the prince's folly. Even now, other parties may be setting out on the same subterranean path. Time is of the essence! Get thee below!

A few words of encouragement from the regent:
Adventurers! You think yourselves brave? You call yourselves the bold, the mighty, the daring? I call you out!

Some friendly advice from the referee:
Be sneaky! Run from extreme dangers! Hide when running fails! In the Unfathomable Underworld there is no such thing as cowardice, only living adventurers and dead ones.

The Sorcerer-king's regent in the frontier keep offers the party the following items, as a down payment on their eventual reward for completion of their mission, to be divided among the party as they see fit. These items were commandeered from the nearby noblesse and a few well-off retired adventurers, who wished to avoid service.

- Sword +1
- 20 arrows +1
- 3 healing salves (1d4+1)
- 1 potion of invisibility
- Ancient charms vs. Chaos (grants bonuses as *protection from evil* to the wearer)
- Stone cloaks: provides camouflage (+1 to any checks)
- Wand of Magic Missiles: fires 2 magic missiles per charge, 5 charges

With the local garrison heavily depleted by the captain's ill-advised expedition and recently dispatched reinforcements from the south yet to arrive, the regent can offer but two men-at-arms, two guides, and two archers to aid the party in their endeavor. Oothu of the Zao, a corporal of the guard, has experience in the local wilderness and will guide the party to the Underworld entrance some hours away.

Spearmen (2): HD 1d6, HP 6, 6, 5, 5; AC 7[12]; Atk 1 short sword (1d6); Move 12; Save 17; AL L; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None.

Oothu (brave and loyal expatriate warrior of the Zao people, a tribe of hill barbarians):

Oothu (Ftr 1): HD 1; HP 6; AC 7[12]; Atk 1 longsword (1d8) or short bow (1d6); Move 12; Save 17; AL L; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None. Equipment: soldier's kit (backpack, bedroll, full waterskin, 5 days rations, flint and steel)

Chuthok (another ex-Zao warrior, mystified by much in the world outside of the scope of his tribal culture):
Chuthok (Ftr 1): HD 1; HP 6; AC 4[15]; Atk 1 longsword (1d8) or short bow (1d6); Move 12; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None.

Archers (2):

Phlonx (son of a local settler, nervous and likely to bolt under duress):

Phlonx (Ftr 1): HP: 5 AC: 6 (chain) short bow AC 4[15]; Atk 1 longsword (1d8) or short bow (1d6); Move 12; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None.

Q'tang (a steady Bowman currently dedicated to staying drunk when off duty):

O'Tang (Ftr 1): HP: 5 AC: 6 (chain) short bow AC 4[15]; Atk 1 longsword (1d8) or short bow (1d6); Move 12; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 1/15; Special: None.



REFEREE'S NOTES

Underworld Common Knowledge:

Thought by some to be as vast as the surface world, the Underworld runs the length and breadth of the world and can be reached by numerous known entrances deep within natural caverns, through dormant volcanic vents, at the bottom of huge sinkholes, via underground rivers, beneath subterranean kingdoms, underneath the last level of deep dungeons, etc. etc. To the south, many of these entrances have long been known. While some have been permanently sealed by great works of engineering or sorcery, others are guarded by whatever powers or principalities rule the region. The Underworld lies somewhere between reality and myth, owing to the slowly deteriorating influence of Primal Chaos, still cooling in the core of the world. Here physical laws are more like a set of loose guidelines and most anything can happen. Some esoteric authorities regard the Underworld as a nexus-point where a multiplicity of universes converge and occasionally spill over into one another. Most religions have their own conceptions of the place of the Underworld in their cosmologies. For some, the Underworld serves as a realm of the dead, for others, the center of creation. Heroes aspire to one day be masterful enough to pit their strength and fortitude against the horrors of the Underworld and even then they are frequently destroyed, driven to madness, or lost forever in the unfathomable depths. Dead heroes (from every epoch of the world, including those of extinct races) often leave behind fantastic relics and enchanted arms when they perish. An ancient tradition, still honored in many cultures, encourages aging warriors and adventurers to end their careers by setting off alone into the deeps, smashing Chaos in its nest before succumbing to their inevitable ends. Many religions contain clauses entitling those who perish in the Underworld to VIP status in the afterlife.

The Null-rod: Created sometime in the distant past by a forgotten people for use in their struggle against Living Chaos, this 4 foot long black cylinder of mystically-wrought meteoric iron was empowered by its creators with a virus-like matrix of Primal Order, dampening and remaking chaos in its own image. When struck by the rod, any chaos-tainted creature's tissues will begin to ossify, shrivel, and slough off (when it is used as a hand weapon, treat the rod as a +3 war-hammer, +2d6 damage against Underworld horrors and other chaos creatures). Due to the dimly understood relationship between magic and chaos, the rod also dampens or dispels enchantments as *dispel magic*. Any magic item touched by the rod is permanently rendered non-magical. Spells cast within 20 feet of the rod are subject to automatic failure.

From a distance of 20-50 feet (1d4+1 x10), spells fail 50% of the time. The Null-rod also possesses a simple intelligence (allowing limited telepathic communication with whoever holds the relic) and powerful ego. Prince Eyraen found himself unable to resist the single impulse of the Null-rod: to smash chaos.

Demigods in the Underworld: For the purposes of this scenario, demigods are defined loosely as any unique supernatural entity of great physical and magical potency. These beings are occasionally spewed forth by Primal Chaos, seething away an indeterminate half-life at the center of the world, and often making their way into the more frequently trodden pathways of the Underworld. Unlike many traditional assumptions regarding deities, Underworld demigods are wholly corporeal, and may be permanently destroyed. But, you may ask, how can you incorporate such entities into a game featuring fledgling characters, scarcely able to hold their own in a scrap with an equal number of orcs? The answer lies in the axiom that not all that is encountered in the Underworld is meant to be defeated. Indeed only truly suicidal parties would pursue a policy of unabashed hack-and-slash in this environment. The super-powered beings in this adventure are meant to be feared, fled from, supplicated, bargained with, and only engaged in combat as a last, desperate, ultimately hopeless resort. The folly of Prince Eyraen stands as a material example of such pursuits.

Character Pool: During the course of the game there will very likely be a few character deaths. Try to get your players to see this as a feature, a chance to experience true fear for their characters' lives and an opportunity to ham up their last words or pitiable shrieks. Part of the fun of the old school style lies in the perpetual mortal peril of low-level play. To facilitate the easy re-introduction of players into the game following some terminal incident, prior to the game roll up a good number and variety of 1st level characters (and perhaps a few 2nd level clerics) to provide as needed. Players of recently deceased characters may choose to take on the role of one of the party's hirelings and continue with play immediately, or return as a new character from the pool and await the referee's cue. Several other similarly-outfitted teams were dispatched from nearby allied citadels and fortresses, and these are the source of the replacement characters. When a back-up character is required, one (or more) of these adventurers shows up in some fashion in keeping with the current action. The new character may be found imprisoned or unconscious, as the lone survivor of another group, the recipient of a felicitous *teleport* by an allied mage, disgorged from the belly of some Underworld horror, etc.

START

En Route: For the purposes of a convention game, I recommend a brief description of the terrain, building tension by having Oothu describe some of his past encounters in the wilderness before fast-forwarding the action directly to the cave entrance.

The guide has reconnoitered twice before to the cave entrance (detailed below) in the recent past, and knows that the surrounding lands are often plagued by strange terrors from below that have wandered out onto the surface. He tells of an invisible giant that routed an entire patrol before devouring both soldiers and their horses. The swallowed men, astride their half-digested steeds, nearly overran the outpost the following day. Another patrol surveying the area around the cave found itself face-to-face with a newly born demigod, a floating, glowing, writhing ball of snakes. Driven by child-like curiosity, the being, who had not yet named herself Thrantrix the Ineffable, carefully dissected each member of the patrol before assembling the available parts into a ghastly, twenty-headed, reanimated servitor. These anecdotes are second-hand; Oothu himself remains untested against such nightmare creatures.

This region, only a few decades since the most recent Great Catastrophe caused a massive and speedy retreat of the glaciers that once enveloped these lands in a mile-thick blanket of ancient ice, most closely resembles southern Alaska in perpetual early spring. The terrain is very rugged, jagged with rocky hills and mountains, heavy with thick, often thorny brush, and punctuated by stands of young pine. Movement here is reduced to a third of normal.

Entrance: The only charted entrance to the Underworld in this region, this yawning opening at the base of a lofty cliff face spans fully 50 feet across and is 30 feet tall. The area around the cavern mouth is partially clogged with wickedly spiked briars that seem to thrive in the cool, damp, and peculiar smelling breeze coming from the cave. The briars are parted in two areas, obviously stomped down by entry into the cave by at least one sizable group. The handful of identifiable footprints in the passable areas indicate the presence of booted feet, as well as some three-toed claw prints of various size.

Beyond the cavernous entryway, the cave descends gently, narrowing into a single cramped tunnel which terminates in a round chamber approximately 20 feet in diameter. In the center of the floor a 6 foot wide shaft opens straight down into the depths, iron ladder rungs embedded into the roughly hewn (perceptive characters might speculate that it appears to have

been *chewed*) tunnel wall. Adventurers peering down the shaft will notice a pale bluish luminescence far below. To reach the Underworld, the party must go down the ladder in single file, a task that will take considerable time and effort, for the total distance to the landing below is about 1000 feet. While it is recommended that this descent, surely physically challenging to attempt, go without incident, those characters of weak constitution, especially spell-casters who constantly slave over their mystic tomes, eschewing exercise in favor of more cerebral pursuits, may have to take occasional breaks, hanging by their elbows and trying to shake life back into weakening hands. Referees who delight in destroying characters (or hapless NPCs) before the action really begins could always have one of the competing parties (the sorcerer's expedition, detailed below) grease a few ladder rungs after making their descent. Save or die!

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Due to the highly dangerous and changeable conditions in the Underworld and the presence of several factions all looking for the same object, referees should check for random encounters at the beginning of each turn spent in the main passageways. Encounters occur on a roll of 1-2 on a d6. In secluded caves and chambers the chances drop to 1 in 6. Roll a d6 again on the following table:

- 1-2. Roll once on the Random Events table
- 3-4. Roll once on the Competing Parties table
- 5-6. Roll once on the Wandering Horrors table (only in main thoroughfares, otherwise treat as NO ENCOUNTER)

On the following tables, treat a repeat result as NO ENCOUNTER. Each entry is detailed below.

Random Events Table (1d6)

- 1. Sudden Blackout
- 2. Whirlwind of unbidden transportation
- 3. Seismic gas activity
- 4. Sounds without cause
- 5. Cave lightning
- 6. Procession of skulls

Competing Parties Table (1d4)

- 1. Professor Zabon Gormontine
- 2. Doctor Ephraim Thontorios
- 3. Sorcerer's expedition
- 4. Thrantrix the Ineffable

Wandering Horrors Table (1d8)

- 1. Mind-bats (1d2)
- 2. Giant centipedes (1d4)
- 3. Fire-bomb Beetle

4. Flaming Hounds
5. Bewildered White ape
6. Hrrk and Krrgh, Twin Princes of the Magmen
7. Chaos flies with carrion cargo
8. Psychotic Cyclops

Note: The use of these tables is intended to provoke improvisation and surprise for the referee as well as the players. Results should be altered (or ignored) as required by the circumstances of the game as it unfolds. Many entries have little bearing on the players' objectives and serve only to add flavor and texture to this conception of the underworld. Other entries have built-in implications that imply plot possibilities. If pressed for time in a convention game, the referee should freely pick and choose from the entries to create maximum drama or to engineer a satisfactory conclusion for the session. If desired, these encounters and events could be pre-selected to provide a more "programmed", and therefore more easily manageable, scenario.

Random Events Table (1d6)

1. Sudden Blackout: Without warning, the ambient lighting of the Underworld crackles and goes out, leaving characters in a totally lightless environment. After 2d4 turns the blue-green illumination just as suddenly returns.

2. Whirlwind of Unbidden Transportation: A miniature twister careens wildly about the area, moving in the opposite direction as the adventurers. Any character in its 10ft wide area of influence must save or be swept up in the funnel. Unless somehow rescued, the funnel cloud will eventually collide with a wall, stalagmite, or some similarly immovable object and dissipate, depositing its contents on the spot. Adventurers dropped will be dazed for 1 turn and unable to act. Roll 2d4-1 for the number of contents, then proceed to the table below.

Whirlwind Contents (roll 1d8):

1. Loose change: 2d6x10 gp value
2. Unidentifiable alien skull, notable for 3 eye sockets, 3-way mandibles lined with razor-sharp teeth, and distended brain-case
3. Fungus-folk: 1d4, immune to whirlwind daze effect
4. Sword +1
5. Dead Nanuits, innumerable (see Ice City of the Nanuits, below)
6. Giant centipede, dazed
7. Tunnel prawn, dazed
8. Wax-sealed vial containing a *potion of healing*

3. Seismic Gas Activity: A violent but momentary tremor shakes loose stalactites, topples columns, and creates a number narrow cracks in the floor ahead. In the ensuing chaos, characters must make a saving throw at +4 (adding any Dex bonuses) to avoid damage from falling debris (1d6 damage). Simultaneously, the fissures in the floor flood the area (20ft cube) with a scintillating gas that heals 1d6 hp upon vigorous inhalation and adds 1d6 to Strength for 1d4 turns.

4. Sounds Without Cause: A terrible, resonant gurgling followed by a series of dinosaur-sized bleats and warbles emanates from the passage ahead. The noise is loud enough to make shouting necessary for communication and, if traced to its source, seems to be coming from empty air. Touching or otherwise disturbing the air around this obnoxious chaotic effect causes it to immediately cease. Mysterious disturbances, though frequent in the Underworld, often attract attention: roll once on the Wandering Horrors table.

5. Cave Lightning: Without warning, a deafening thunderclap accompanies the outbreak of horizontal cave lightning, ricocheting around the area in a blinding flash. Each character in the immediate vicinity must roll a saving throw but needs only to score higher than a 1 to avoid being struck. If any characters or creatures fail this save, they take 5d6 damage (save again at the normal score for half damage).

6. Procession of Skulls: Innumerable skulls of every conceivable origin silently float toward the adventurers, eye sockets illuminated by green radiance. The skulls seek out the dead, which they surround and bathe in green light until a magical effect strips the flesh from the fallen, and detaches the skull from the rest of the body. The skull rises up to join the procession, subsequently wandering on towards its unknowable purpose. The skulls take no notice of the adventurers (except dead ones).

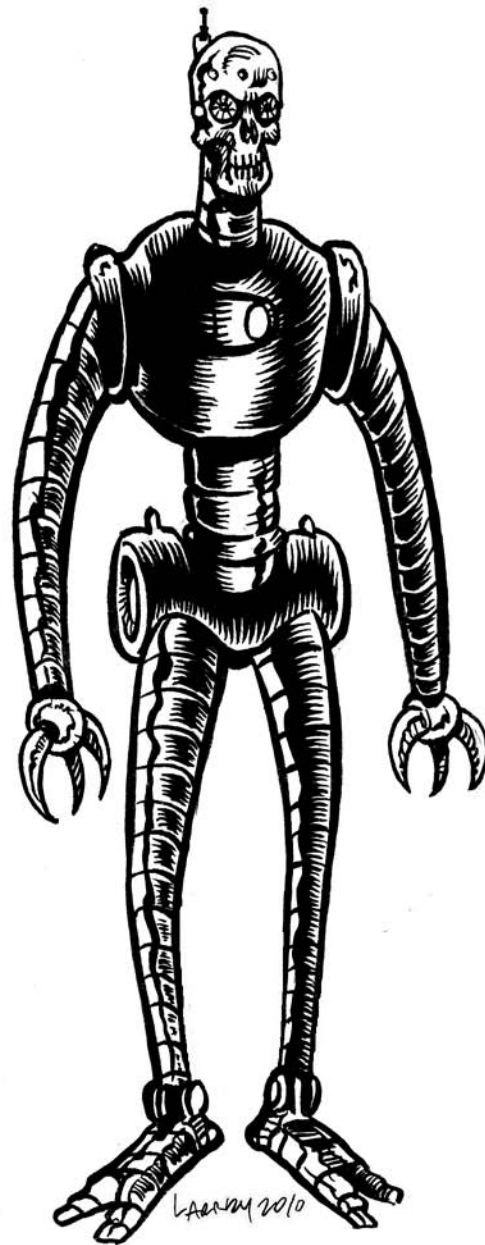
Competing Parties Table (1d4)

For purposes of a convention or quick one-off game, it would probably take too much time to track the independent activities of the Competing Parties, and this is not recommended unless the groups have encountered each other and have started making tactical decisions based on the existence of the other group.

1. Professor Zabon Gormontine, The Robot-master: Secretly a robot himself (from a factory-recalled line of AI robots), Gormontine will do anything to see to it that the Null-rod returns to the safe-keeping of the Sorcerer-King, which will set in motion a highly complex series of events resulting in the ultimate elimination of magical forces in the universe and the establishment of immutable physical laws, which in turn ensures the rise of science and Gormontine's objective: the eventual triumph of the robots after a generations-long struggle, ending in the total extermination of all organic life. If encountered, Gormontine will feign lawful goodness, explaining himself as a scientist from the future desperate to undue the damage caused by Syantides' loss of the relic, and attempt to fall in with the party, doing anything he can to further their mission. The Robot Master entered the Underworld via a home-spun time door (see area 5, below)

Gormontine: HD 3; HP 24; AC: 5 [14] (can only be hit by +1 or better); Atk death ray (30 ft, cone, 1d8, save for half damage) and 2 claws (1d6); Move 12; Save 14; AL C; CL/XP: 5/240; Special: force field generator absorbs first 10 points of damage before it is destroyed, after first hit flesh begins to fall away, revealing true robot identity.

Guard-bots (2): HD 2; HP 14, 9; AC: 7 [12] (can only be hit by +1 or better); Atk 2 claws (1d6) and hardening foam (range 30ft, 10ft area, save or be immobilized), stun beam (range 60ft, save or fall unconscious for 2d4 rounds); Save: 10; Move 9; CL/XP: 4/120; Special: riot foam, stun beam.



Guard Bot



Professor Gormontine

2. Dr. Ephraim Thontorius: This giant bear-man from the future, though ferocious in appearance, is in actuality a noted scholar and academic (decidedly not a professional adventurer). Thontorius discovered Gormontine's scheme after snooping through the Robot-master's personal e-mails in their shared office in the Galactic University's department of cosmology. Convinced by Gormontine's dire but seemingly irrefutable arguments, he is willing to sacrifice the science-fantasy future he now knows; by destroying the Null-rod to prevent the robot apocalypse. Should he succeed, the future shall remain firmly within the high fantasy sub-genre. Thrown into a panic when Gormontine came up missing, Thontorius failed to look in the closet in his office, where he could have conveniently followed his rival to the ancient Underworld, instead wasting valuable time by illegally souping up his personal flying saucer to break through the time barrier (area 8, below). Having narrowly escaped an encounter with a huge black pudding (area 3b, below), he is more than willing to enter into an alliance with the adventurers, should the situation present itself. The bear-man's flying saucer (see area 8, below) remains capable of traveling through space and time, but due to inconsistencies in Thontorius's rushed calculations it ended up in a cavern with exits too small to accommodate the ship. He will only use it to return to the future upon completion of his mission. Any other use of the ship is left to the referee's discretion.

The gamma gun, a common sidearm in Thontorius' world, projects a visible wave of emerald energy, which erupts into a spectacular green mushroom cloud upon impact with any solid material.

Thontorius: HD 2; HP 16; AC 6 [13]; Atk 1 gamma gun (2d6) (300ft range, 36 charges) or 2 fists (1d6+1); Save 15; Move 12; AL C; CL/XP 2/30; Special: none



Dr. Thontorius

3. Sorcerer's expedition: Solgum the Resplendent, an on-the-rise mage who takes a great deal of pride in his personal appearance, seeks the Null-rod for his arcane collection. Like the adventurers, he got wind of Eyraen's folly and has come to loot while the looting's good. Solgum and his amphibious crew entered the Underworld an hour or so ahead of the adventurers using the same entrance. He seeks to avoid confrontation whenever possible (lest he unnecessarily soil his fabulous garments), using his scroll of *hallucinatory terrain* to obscure his party from view when forewarned of danger. While as evil as can be, Solgum is not unreasonable, and could enter into a very temporary alliance with the adventurers, should the opportunity present itself.

Solgum (MU 6): HD 6d4; HP 14; AC 2 [17] (bracers of defense); Atk dagger +3 (1d4); Save 10; Move 12; AL C; Spells: 1: *charm person*, *shield*, *detect magic*, *sleep* 2: *mirror image*, *ESP* 3: *lightning bolt*, *haste* Equipment: bracers of defense AC 2 [17], potion of flying, dagger +3, scroll with the following magic user spells: *hallucinatory terrain* and *dispel magic*.

Newt-men (4) (see New Monsters): HD 1d4hp; HP 4, 4, 3, 2; AC 9 [10]; Atk; short sword (1d6); Save 16; Move 12; AL C; CL/XP: B/10; Special: take double damage from fire, heat.

Lizard-men (2): HD 2+1; AC 5[14]; Atk 2 claws (1d3), 1 bite (1d6); Move 6 (Swim 12); Save 16; CL/XP 2/30; Special: Breathe underwater.

4. **Thrantrix the Ineffable:**

A demigod freshly born of Primal Chaos, Thrantrix still experiments with the universe around her, seeking to understand her own power and place within the cosmos. Like most of her kind, her colossal ego cries out for approbation, and the worshipful acknowledgement of her innate superiority, by lesser beings. Now, her ranging consciousness has detected the recent distress of fellow demigod Shaggath-Ka. Sensing weakness, Thrantrix makes her way to the Worm Sultan's lair where she hopes to destroy her rival and lay claim to his flock. In so doing, Thrantrix has found herself frequently distracted by the wonders so plentiful in the depths. If encountered, Thrantrix appears as a writhing ball of snakes suspended 6 feet in the air, exuding an eerie yellow luminescence and addressing all that moves with a booming basso voice. She demands praise, worship, and unquestioning obedience from all she encounters and will settle for nothing less. Only by speedy retreat can characters hope to avoid either her service or her wrath. Her personality still being a work in progress, the Ineffable one remains a bit unintelligible in conversation, inexperienced in the subtleties of communicating with beings of lesser cosmic enlightenment. Indeed, Thrantrix still attempts to command praise from unintelligent creatures like giant centipedes, blasting them to smithereens when they fail to fall to their many knees. If the adventurers find themselves in her service, whether willfully or by means of her geas power, she will command them to locate the realm of Shaggath-Ka while she attends to other business, and to return to her with the precise directions (Thrantrix claims any space she occupies as sovereign territory, regardless of where she is encountered). Should the adventurers accomplish this, Thrantrix will order them to herald her arrival in the realm of Shaggath-Ka; and to watch and bear witness as she attempts to assassinate the weakened Worm Sultan. The ensuing chaos should provide plenty of opportunities for player-driven improvisation. Thrantrix has no knowledge of the Null-rod, but will shrink from the relic if it is brandished at her.

Thrantrix the Ineffable: HD 20; HP 99; AC: 0 [19]; Atk: 2d6 bites (1d10+ poison; save or be instantly liquefied); Move 12; Save 3; AL C; CL/XP 25+/5300+; Special: +1 or better magic weapon to hit, regenerates 3 hp/round, immune to poison and mind-control spells, spell-like abilities (each usable once per day): *charm person*, all *detect* spells, *ESP*, *fireball* (x3), *polymorph self*, *geas*

Wandering Horrors:

1. **Mind-bats (1d4):** (See New Monsters)

Mind-bats: HD 2; AC 6[13]; Atk 2 claws (1d6 each); Move 14; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP: 4/40; **Special:** Flight, stun power (save at +2 or be unable to act for 1d4-1 rounds).

2. Giant centipedes (1d4): Adapted for life in the Underworld, these creatures, approximately 3ft long, are scavengers as well as hunters of small prey, **Giant Centipede (small, non-lethal):** HD 1d2hp; AC 9[10]; Atk 1 bite (0 + poison); Move 12; Save 18; CL/XP 1/15; **Special:** non-lethal poison bite (+4 save).

3. **Fire-bomb Beetle (1):** (See New Monsters)

Fire-bomb Beetle: HD 2; HP 13; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 bite (1d4) and firebomb; Move 12; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP 3/60; **Special:** Firebombs (1d6 damage, range 30ft., 10 ft. radius burst, save for no damage)

4. Flaming Hounds: Only the insanity of unchecked chaotic influence over living matter could produce such a senseless mockery of natural processes. A pack of 12 wild dogs following a blood trail into the Underworld have undergone a shocking metamorphosis: where once lush fur sprouted from their skin, tongues of flame now blaze forth, fanned by their panicked stampede. The pitiable creatures have no plan or purpose, only blind flight from an uncanny fate they can never outrun. Unless engaged by the adventurers, the pack will pay them no notice. Should they be attacked, the creatures seek to vent their rage and terror upon their perceived enemy.

Flaming Hound Pack (12): HD 1; HP 8, 8, 8, 7, 7, 6, 6, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2; AC 6 [13]; Atk: 1 bite (1d6+1d4 fire damage); Save: 15; Move 14; AL N; CL/XP 2/30; **Special:** Fire damage from bite (1d4).

5. Bewildered Martian ape: This huge, white, four-armed simian, somehow transported from his native dimension, charges along the main passages in a desperate panic to find some means of escape, checking side caverns as he goes. If encountered in close quarters, the creature will violently lash out at anything between it and an exit.

Martian Ape: HD 10 HP 45; AC 6 [13]; Atk: 4 arms (1d6 each) and 1 bite (1d10); Save 5; Move 12; CL/XP 11/1700; **Special:** None

6. **Hrrk and Krrgh, Twin Princes of the Magmen:**

Traveling on diplomatic business further north, the twins have no time for amusing diversions such as slaughtering parties of first-level characters.

However, their very proximity is a danger, with radiating body heat inflicting 1d6 damage to the lungs and exposed skin of anything passing within 10 feet of the creatures. They can be heard approaching (unless the adventurers are occupied by something like a noisy battle) due to their thunderous footfalls and buoyant conversation regarding social affairs at the molten center of the world.

Hrrk: HD 12 HP 60; AC 2 [17]; Atk: 2 fists (2d10+1d6 fire damage each); Move 10; Save 5; AL N; CL/XP: 13/2300; Special: 1d6 damage to any within 10 ft, save for no damage

Krrgh: HD 11 HP 38; AC 2 [17]; Atk: 2 fists (2d10+1d6 fire damage each); Move 10; Save 5; AL N; CL/XP: 12/2000; Special: 1d6 damage to any within 10 ft., save for no damage.

7. Chaos flies with carrion cargo: (See New Monsters). Eight of these creatures fly toward the adventurers, carrying the body of one the men-at-arms from the local captain's expedition. The soldier appears to have a very large bite taken out of his midsection. The flies will defend their prize aggressively if assailed. Otherwise they will make their way to area 7, below. Hp: 1 each

Chaos Flies: HD 1hp; AC 5 [14]; Atk 1 sting (1hp); Move 14 (fly); Save 18; AL C; CL/XP: B/10; Special: flight, weak poison (save or take 1 additional point of damage)

8. Psychotic Cyclops: Even with only one eye, he has seen too much. This deranged member of an already-chaotic race might be encountered in one of several possible mental states. Roll 1d4 and consult the following table:

1. Ebullient: Still quite irrational and paranoid, but cheerful and open to negotiating.
2. Bewildered: Lost and childlike, pliable
3. Despondent: When encountered, will be weeping and muttering, likely to collapse against any available wall to sob inconsolably.
4. Homicidal: Frothing with hostility toward the entire universe and shrieking curses; attacks immediately

Cyclops: HD 8+2; AC 4[15]; Atk 1 weapon (2d8); Move 12; Save 8; CL/XP 9/1100; Special: Throw boulders for 2d8 damage.

MAP KEY

That a very powerful party of adventurers recently passed through this region of the Underworld is evident, owing to the remains of several terrors fallen before their swords and spells. Following this trail is vital, representing the only real chance of fledgling adventurers achieving their aims and returning alive. Players who choose to move off of this relatively obvious path or proceed down passages leading off the map will hopefully realize their mistake before it is too late.

Major thoroughfares have ceilings between 20 and 40ft in height; larger caverns vary between 20-60ft, small passageways 10-20ft.

1. Landing: The pale blue-green luminescence seen from above emanates from the walls, floors and ceiling, as it does everywhere in the Underworld, creating an atmosphere of dream-like strangeness. This dim illumination allows for clear vision for up to 60 feet before details are obscured by the Underworld's musty, miasmal atmosphere. Careful investigation of the floor will reveal scuff marks, disturbed dust, and debris from recent use.

2. Mind-bats: This cave's floor is covered with heaps of discarded carapaces from several dozen giant centipedes. Adventurers carelessly entering the chamber will find themselves noisily crunching these husks under their feet. The mind-bats, for whom centipede is their chief form of nourishment, detect the activity of the adventurers nervous systems immediately upon entry, and swoop down to attack in defense of their territory.

Mind-bats: HD 2; HP 12, 6; AC 6[13]; Atk 2 claws (1d6 each); Move 14; Save 17; AL N; CL/XP: 4/40; Special: Flight, stun power (save at +2 or be unable to act for 1d4-1 rounds).

Investigating the chamber reveals additional bodies among the carrion on the cavern floor. The shriveled body of one of the keep's men-at-arms, obviously sucked dry by the mind-bats, lies near the entrance. He carries a diadem charm on a golden chain (75 gp value) given to him by his betrothed as a good luck charm. A bit further into the room are the bodies of 2 more mind-bats, their forms distorted by strangely shriveled bruised areas where the flesh seems dry and crumbly like loose-packed soil. The prince struck down both of these creatures with the Null-rod.



3. Dead monsters: Each of the following creatures succumbed to attacks from Eyraen's party. Wounds that could only be caused by the Null-rod (as noted above) are readily noticeable on the giant skeleton and the Tyrannoclops body.

a. Giant skeleton: This early victim of the Prince's expedition is currently being stripped of flesh by a swarm of dragonfly-winged prawns, one of the agents of decomposition in the Underworld. These carrion-feeders have no interest in living creatures, and take to wing if approached, dodging deftly around investigating adventurers before returning to feed on a nearby spot. If attacked, the swarm rises high into the air, waiting for threats to move on. They will not abandon the giant's body until it is completely consumed. The body itself was a frost giant hermit, driven mad by isolation in the Underworld. His broken axe lies several feet away. The giant's threadbare sack, recently rooted through and discarded by Eyraen's crew, is empty but

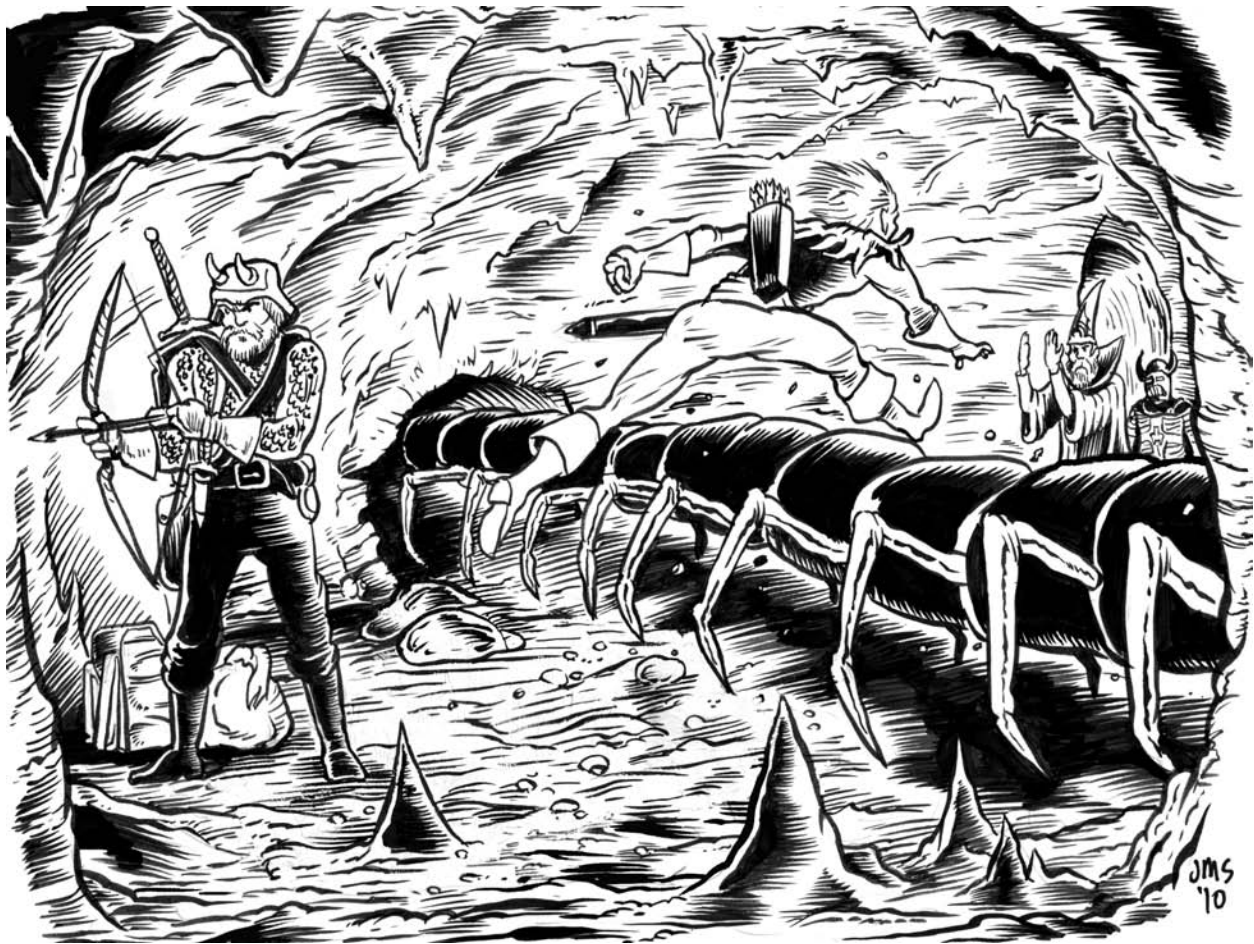
approximately 200gp worth of mixed coinage lies scattered around its immediate area.

b. This area is defaced by multiple scorch marks on walls and floor and a large (20 foot diameter), roughly circular stain that used to be a huge black pudding. The unique stench of incinerated pudding hangs heavy in the air, like burnt rubber and strong, runny cheese. Small sticky blotches of black goo still retain the acidic properties of the late monster, as investigating characters may learn by touching (1d4 damage) or probing with objects (wood begins to dissolve immediately, metal smokes on contact and must be scraped clean before damaged irrevocably). Investigating the scorch marks will in no way reveal their origin: gamma blasts delivered by Dr. Ephraim Thontorius (see Competing Parties, above), sometime recently.

c. The Tyrannoclops: Here lies the broken body of the Tyrannoclops, a unique horror of the Underworld. This strange being once stood 15 feet tall, an albino bipedal sauropod distinct for its head, taken up entirely by a single colossal red eye, still dimly luminous in death. Null-rod wounds are obvious and multiple. Careful observation yields a disturbing revelation: fist-sized shapes move subtly beneath the creature's lumpy flesh. If the flesh is in some way damaged or perforated, dozens of 6-inch long Tyrannoclops larvae will begin to slither forth, their crimson eyebeams crackling into life, illuminating their paths as they stumble away for cover amongst rocks and grottoes. This event, almost unbelievably smelly, attracts 2d4 giant centipedes, arriving in 1d4-1 turns. The centipedes will ignore non-hostile adventurers and set about snapping up the larvae.

4. Googolpede: This passage is being crossed from left to right by the seemingly unending body of an incalculably long googolpede, entering and exiting through small round side passages just large enough

to accommodate the creature's body and legs. The googolpede's body surges forth at break-neck speed. About 3' feet in height, athletic characters could vault over the creature's constantly moving form with only moderate difficulty. Characters of short stature would require assistance. Landing atop the racing body would likely send the character sprawling on the other side or slamming into the opposite wall. Adventurers interested in waiting around for the tail end to come into view should check their water supply and rations, for their vigil, if seen through to completion, may take weeks. Attacking (a fruitless endeavor) or otherwise molesting the arthropod's segments or legs invites danger: the googolpede will reflexively attempt to throw a coil of its body around its assailant, dragging those unable to escape in time along with it. If the googolpede makes a successful attack roll (as a 20 HD creature) on an adventurer, the character must make a strength check at -3 to escape. Failing this, unless somehow rescued, in one round the adventurer will disappear into the exit hole, never to be seen again.



5. Doorway to the future: On the south wall adventurers will notice the illuminated outline of an arched doorway, the stone beneath the arch hazy and subtly moving in rhythmic waves. Attempting to touch this section of the wall causes a rippling effect like disturbing a vertical pool of water. Objects or body parts will move freely through the stone wall, which causes a momentary chill in living flesh that has no ill effects. Objects thrown through the doorway disappear into the space beyond. Should an adventurer pass through, he will find himself in a crowded room, assailed by bright flashes of light from gathered space-paparazzi and the stunned faces of a gaggle of research scientists, generals, and government officials, some human but most aliens of every conceivable stripe. The door opens into a broom closet in the office Professor Zabon Gormontine shared with the rest of the Department of Cosmology at the Omni-Cosmic University 3000+ years in the future. This area and the adjoining office space has been taped off as a restricted time door zone. Goal-oriented players will probably lose interest after posing for a few hologram shots and return to their objective. If the group wishes to further explore the University's planet-sized space station, the referee must place nose to grindstone, for the details are left in his or her capable hands. Treasure: Buried in a pile of stones along the wall opposite the door, the dust of an ancient hero still occupies a suit of opalescent scale mail, fashioned of some unearthly material (ancient magic scale, AC: 1 [18], +1 to saving throws against damage, wt: 10).

6. Friendly fungus-folk: Here a pair of toadstool-shaped men (see New Monsters, below) hash over the Underworld news of the day with a large demonic-looking mantis creature. When they notice the adventurers they pause in their incomprehensible utterances long enough to ascertain whether they are about to be attacked. If the party makes no hostile moves, the fungus-folk return to conversation, seemingly unperturbed. The devil-mantis, less trusting of interlopers and more nervous in general, teleports away after a quick explanation to its friends. Adventurers wishing to talk to the fungus folk must first consent to be exposed to a puff of psychoactive spores exuded by the creatures that magically allows communication, a process the fungus men will attempt to convey via hand gestures. If things go well the party may learn the following information:
 -The Prince passed through this area several days ago, with a party of heavily equipped men and at least one powerful sorcerer. Several of the party members sampled the spore effects (detailed below). They had excellent luck.
 - The fungus-folk can advise the characters on relatively safe travel through their garden, though

they really don't yet fully understand the effects of spore-exposure on surface creatures. They are, however, extremely curious about the possible outcomes of exposure and will do all they can to cajole the party into taking part in experimental spore-exposure. In their experience, no two exposures are the same. If the adventurers can avoid stimulating the fungi (causing them to release clouds of spores), and no other creatures disturb the growths, it should be safe to pass, using the patches of green lichens as a path. If the adventurers wish to experiment with spore effects, the fungus-folk excitedly monitor events, making careful study of the various outcomes.

- They have seen several strange interlopers passing through, determined by die roll on the Competing Parties table above, altering results as necessitated by encounters thus far.

Fungus-folk: see New Monsters, below. Hp: 19, 16 Kilifrix the Devil-mantis (unique Underworld horror): HD: 8 AC: 2 [17] hp: 39 atk: 2 claws (1d6), bite (1d4) sv: 6 mv: 12 spec: *teleport* as spell, strobe effect from eyes as *sleep* spell 3 times a day. CL/XP: 10/1400

Moving through the fungal garden, thick with an astonishing array of molds, lichens, and fungi of every size and description and arranged according to the alien aesthetics of the fungus-folk, each character so doing may trigger a spore eruption (a roll of 1-2 on a d6). If the party rushes through the area for some reason, or a monster has blundered into the garden area, chances increase to 1-4.

Adventurers tempted to try out spore effects must jostle a fungal growth, causing a small cloud of spores to fill the air in 10 ft. cube. Have the player roll a d6 adding any bonus for constitution. Results of 1-3 roll again on the **spore effects, bane** table, 4-6 on the **boon** table. Each growth will only produce a single puff of spores and no two fungi will have the same effects, so repeat results should be re-rolled.

Spore effects, bane (1d8):

1. Surface infestation: The exposed breaks out in grey lumps all over their body, becoming extremely unpleasant to view (-1d6 to CHA) but no other effects.
2. The speed of mildew: The character suffers a loss of 1d6 to DEX and a personality shift toward intense lassitude.
3. Fungal vision: After a brief period of blindness (1 turn) the character's vision is restored but altered. The world is now perceived entirely in shades of green, and an alien sense of aesthetics renders the formerly hideous beautiful and vice versa.
4. Mushroom-mind: Virus-like fungal tissues rapidly replicate and replace the nervous system of the affected character, who must re-roll his Intelligence score. Regardless of this result, which may effect

class-related abilities, the character suffers a complete personality overhaul: speech takes on a flat, atonal quality, decision-making processes agonizingly slowed by confusion, and whatever other role-playing effects seem entertaining to the player, who should make the most of this opportunity to amuse.

5. The slow change: Over the course of 2d4+1 turns the adventurer undergoes a slow metamorphosis in the following order: skin turns grey and begins to stiffen, head begins to broaden into a mushroom cap shape, intelligence drops by 1d4 points per turn, tendrils burst through footwear, rooting the adventurer to the floor, legs fuse into a single stalk, adventuring career over.

6. Funganthropy: Undergoing an immediate metamorphosis, the victim becomes a were-fungus with a ravenous hunger for human flesh. All stats remain the same save hit points, which are doubled due to the damage resistant nature of the fungal form. The character must make a saving throw each turn to resist homicidal urges. Once this roll is failed, the character attacks the rest of the party, becoming the province of the referee.

7. Explosive growth from within: the victim perishes while fungal stalks burst forth from mouth, ears, eyes, etc.

8. Spontaneous puffball: Before the rest of the party's horrified eyes (and over the course of 30 seconds), the victim rapidly swells to gross immensity, skin growing lumpy and purple, until exploding forcefully in a thick cloud of spores. Any character within 10 feet of the explosion must save or suffer the same fate.

Spore effects, boon (1d8):

1. Burst into blue flames, burn off clothes, start fires, allows subject to intensify flames at will: all in 10 ft. radius take 2d6 fire damage (save for ½)
2. Grow beetle wings/carapace on back, *fly* (as spell) at will, grants AC: 5 [14] but subject can no longer wear armor.
3. Develop fungal third eye, *charm* (as spell) once per day
4. Eyes turn red, heat vision once per day (1d6 damage, start fires, heat objects)
5. Eyes turn white, cold vision once per day (1d6 damage, freeze waters, cool objects)
6. Eyes turn golden, *detect magic*, *evil* as per spells at will
7. Random attribute (roll 1d6) increases by 1d6
8. Grow thick fur (random color), +1 [-1] to AC

7. Chaos fly hive: Adventurers approaching this area immediately detect the stomach-wrenching stench of decay issuing from the chamber ahead. Within, the chaos flies store their current collection of carrion, harvested from around this vicinity of the

Underworld. The 15' high ceiling is obscured by a swarm of chaos flies buzzing around in a semi-orderly fashion. One by one they descend to feed from the heaps of rotting carcasses on the chamber floor. When they are satiated, the flies gather at the western exit until they form a group of about six. So gathered, they proceed to area 12 to deposit their eggs. This goes on continuously, with new flies arriving (often burdened by fresh carrion), and egg-laden flies departing every few minutes. At any given time there will be 3d8 chaos flies buzzing about the ceiling. They only attack if their carrion is disturbed (by burning oil, say), avoiding dangers whenever possible to improve chances of reproduction. Among the carcasses lie several of the local captain's men-at-arms, and less identifiable bodies.

Chaos flies (3d8): see New Monsters, below. Hp: 1 each

If searched, the rotting heap yields the following treasure: a decomposing backpack containing a small bag of gems (1000 gp total value) and two corked flasks, one a potion of flying, the other a potion of water breathing.

8. Someone left their flying saucer running: Doctor Ephraim Thontorius (see Competing Parties, above), currently in the middle of an extensive Underworld-crawl, left his ship hovering 10ft above the ground in this chamber, tethered by automatic anchor beams (just visible as thin distortions in the air) and protected by a powerful electric force beam. Any creature or character approaching within 20' of the ship will be targeted by the ship's computer. Waves of crackling electric force harmlessly push anything with less than giant strength back to the 20ft perimeter, where they are released. The onboard computer can target up to three characters or creatures per round. Any character who manages to get past this defense finds the ship impervious to entry, its hatches sealed to anything short of ray-gun fire or a *disintegrate* spell.

9. Eyes of the Pit: This otherwise featureless cavern contains a pair of floating orbs some 3' in diameter. To all appearances, they are gigantic human eyeballs. These regard anything entering the chamber continuously, monitor events, and scrutinize characters closely. Able to freely fly around the chamber, the eyes never leave the immediate area. Should adventurers choose to attack these passive observers, they will be able to hit but not damage the eyes, which regenerate instantly. They will, however, succeed in provoking the wrath of the Oracle of the Pit (area 15, below).

10. Intermittent river: A stone bridge in the center of the passage arcs over what appears to be a dry river bed running from a 3' high by 10' wide opening

in the north wall to a similar opening in the south wall, as indicated by the pattern of erosion in the sunken bed. Examination indicates the area is quite damp and muddy. When adventurers near this area the referee should roll 1d4+1 to determine how many minutes will pass before the intermittent river erupts back into life, sending a deluge of rapid waters back through the bed with enormous force. This event is preceded by a low rumble, slowly building into a watery cacophony. Any character caught in the bed when this occurs must make a saving throw, adjusted by any Dex bonus to scramble out of the way before they are tossed helplessly in the surging waters and out the south wall opening. From this point the river passes underground until it reaches area 15, below. Here, allow the character another saving throw plus Str bonus to allow a chance for the unfortunate adventurer to seize a rocky outcropping or hurl themselves from peril before the waters flow over the edge of the bottomless pit. What becomes of such characters is left to the referee. The bridge itself appears ancient and composed of large slabs of stone held together only by their own weight. A thorough search under the bridge reveals the calcified corpse of an ancient hero, wearing her still-intact *cloak of defense* (grants -2 [+2] to AC).

11. Defeated soldiers: Here fell the local captain's expedition, just hours ago. Some 24 corpses (armed and armored as hirelings, above) litter this area, their bodies almost entirely intact but for mournful facial contortions, streamed with dried tears of blood. Four giant centipedes, in the midst of feasting on the bodies, defensively attack anything entering the area, but will not pursue foes in retreat. The captain's body, if rolled, yields a pristine suit of chain mail +1 and a battle axe +2.

Giant Centipedes (4): hp: 2, 2, 2, 1

12. Snow cave: Approaching this cave, adventurers within 30 feet of the entrance detect the rapidly dropping temperature, a zone of cold emanating from the chamber ahead. A column in the center of this snow and ice-filled chamber, obscured by a cloudy mist, radiates a faint white light. The wintry weather conditions in this and the adjoining room (area 13) seem to emanate from this column. Closer viewing reveals the form of a motionless woman, draped in regal finery from a by-gone age, encased within several feet of semi-transparent ice. In a heap at the pillar's base lies the frozen body of Prince Eyraen. Any character gazing into the woman's luminous green eyes must immediately make a saving throw or become magically enthralled, transfixed by her melancholy countenance. Only unaffected characters may free enthralled comrades from this spell-like effect by dragging them from the area and slapping

them back to reason. Otherwise they will remain gazing upon the woman, contemplating her strange fate until they collapse from exhaustion and die of exposure in the frigid conditions. The Prince, despondent after the deaths of his comrades (see area 14, below), wandered into this chamber and met his end. A careful examination of the area around the pillar reveals a series of very tiny footprints and indentations in the snow indicating a heavy cylindrical object was dragged from the Prince's body and away to the opposite wall, disappearing into a 1 foot diameter round tunnel. The tunnel leads to area 13, below. Investigations of any sort within the chamber will also reveal the wriggling presence of several dozen snow-maggots, the larvae of the chaos flies. At any given time, 1d6 adult flies will be in the chamber depositing eggs. They will not attack until they have done so, completing their life cycle, at which point they become very aggressive. Chaos Flies: see New Monsters, below. Hp: 1 each

13. Ice city of the Nanuits: This out-of-the-way grotto houses an entire civilization in miniature. The Nanuits, descendants of the crew of a whale-hunting expedition marooned in this universe by a freak maelstrom, each stand less than half an inch in height. They have managed to construct a city of ice domes, some the size of earthly igloos but composed of many floors, rooms, and chambers within. The tiny streets bustle with anorak-clad Nanuits going about their affairs, several piloting beetle-driven sledges laden with freshly harpooned snow-maggots. In the center of this micro-metropolis these people have recently erected the Null-rod like an obelisk, still strung with tiny ropes and pulleys. Though only adventurers resourceful enough to entice a Nanuit into their ear canal could hope to ascertain the full story, the Nanuits' sacred texts (The Utterances of the Flies) prophesied the coming of the Prince and his relic, scripture indicating that by bathing in the anti-magical rays of the Rod they shall in time be restored to normal size and freed from their current state of degradation. No longer will they be forced to hunt the unpalatable snow-maggots, their only source of sustenance. Never again will their children weep piteously at the chiming of the dinner bell. No more shall they cower from the terrible giants that stalk the Underworld. On and on the tiny reporter will thus ramble, wasting precious time for over-polite adventurers. The Nanuits will do everything in their power to retain the relic, though this doesn't amount to much more than occasional shots from a few micro-ballistae harpoon launchers used for maggot hunting (as shot by 1 HD monster, 1d2-1 damage). Their chief defense and sole reason for continued existence is their relative isolation and a general lack of interest from Underworld predators.

14. Vault of Shagath-Ka: This chamber serves as a secret parlor for the Worm Sultan to meditate, rest, and recuperate within, his realm and worshippers located on the other side of the underground lake that divides this giant cave. The entrance available to the adventurers had been almost forgotten, sealed off long ago by magic. The Prince, having tortured the door's location out of a captured high priest, blasted through the stone barrier, hoping to assassinate the Worm Sultan by surprise. The rubble choking the passageway is all that remains of the barrier. This plan failed utterly, resulting in the deaths of the rest of Eyraen's party and his own suicidal final meanderings around the Underworld. The Prince's crew got in significant licks before succumbing one-by-one, however, and even now the Worm Sultan continues to enjoy a recuperative coma, attended by faithful servitors. Shagath-Ka lies in the sand that composes the floor of the cave, half of his 50' length submerged in the lake. The visible portion of the demigod looks like a bloated caterpillar, semi-translucent skin barely containing the visibly churning guts within, covered with long spiky protuberances, the bulbous head adorned with a vaguely human face, equally regal and repellent in peaceful repose. Teeming in the waters around him, several dozen albino merman attend to their deity's many wounds. The sandy beach glitters with gold and jewels, deposited by representatives of various merman factions from the strange city beneath Shagath-Ka's lake. These parties beach themselves, pay ritualistic respects, and offer their tribute before genuflecting their way back into the waters. Due to the mind-bending terror and obviously overwhelming danger of this situation, any hirelings still with the adventurers at this point will be on the brink of mutiny. Should the merman discover the party, they will begin missile attacks immediately and attempt to rouse their deity from his slumber. This can be accomplished in 1d6 rounds. Once awaked, the Worm Sultan will promptly destroy any who dare remain in his territory.

Shagath-Ka: HD: 21 AC: 0 [19] hp: 81 (down from 118) atk: smash (3d8), bite (2d6) mv: 9 sv: 2 spec: +1 or better magic weapon to hit, regenerate 3 hp/round, lethal gaze (saving throw applies), spell-like abilities, each usable once per day: all *detect* spells, *charm person*, *darkness*, *ESP*, *stinking cloud*, *web*, *lightning bolt* CL/XP: 25+/5300+

Mermen (4d12+4): HD:1+3 AC: 7 [12] hp: 7 each atk: short bow (1d6), spear (1d6), short sword (1d6) mv:1/18 (swimming) sv: 17 spec: breath water Adventurers prone to gold-fever may attempt some mad dash (perhaps invisibly) to the beach to seize treasures. For game purposes, the wealth, though vast, is scattered over the sand haphazardly, and would require a great length of time to collect. For every minute spent shoveling treasure into a sack,

1d4 thousand gp value in mixed coinage and raw jewels can be retrieved.

15. Oracle of the Bottomless pit: This chamber is dominated by a large, uneven opening in the floor some 20' in diameter and of indeterminate depth. An opening in the north wall roughly 3' high by 15' wide shows signs of erosion, a deep groove worn into the floor leading directly to the pit. The opening is an outflow of the intermittent river detailed above (area 11), and will spew forth a high pressure blast of water for 10 minutes at a time every 2d4 turns. This eruption is preceded by the slowly building sounds of rushing water from the opening. Any character remaining in the eroded area must make a saving throw or be swept into the pit. Characters entering the room during one of the lulls between deluges who speak (even whisper) to one another immediately attract the attention of the Oracle of the Pit. This being, something of a demigod itself, is composed of many disparate parts, each comprised of the living stone of the Underworld. The pit in this room is its mouth. Its ears are near, somewhere deep within the stone surrounding this chamber. Its eyes, as noted in area 9, remain strangely confined in a nearby cavern. Unable to physically move or significantly interact with the world around it, the Oracle, as it calls itself, projects its mind far and wide throughout the multiverse, continuously expanding its consciousness in pursuit of ultimate enlightenment. However, when visited by a living being in this area, the Oracle will make every effort to engage them in conversation. This strange being will greet adventurers with a booming salutation, especially warm if the Oracle has laid eyes upon them before (unless wrathful, in which case the Oracle roars out insults and curses, see area 9, above). Here the improvisatory skills of the referee must take over, as the Oracle speaks and answers questions in a customarily (for the oracular) obscure and ambiguous manner, always with an air of complete superiority. If asked for the location of the Null-rod, the Oracle answers: "Of the Null-rod I will say only this: follow the flies." In the event any of the adventurers have been swept into the pit, the Oracle obliquely explains "Weep not, for he (or she) is Me now."

Endgame: Should the party succeed in finding the Null-rod, they must still make their way back to the surface, an endeavor that will take several turns, during which they are still subject to random encounters and events. In the event they regain the surface, they find the situation has changed in the time they have spent underground. A mounted war-party from the Sorcerer-King's elite corps arrive in the area within hours of the adventurers' descent and immediately secure the entrance cave. Emerging adventurers are apprehended and the Null-rod and

any treasure confiscated. The party is loaded into wagons for transport (under heavy guard) to shadow-haunted Mur, far to the south. Upon arrival in the city-state, the adventurers are debriefed by the personal interrogators of the Sorcerer-King and tossed into his deepest dungeon to await speedy execution as a matter of state security. Syantides, making good on his promise of a personal meeting, explains that he never anticipated the party succeeding in their mission. His best hope was for them to perish while collecting additional intelligence to be gleaned by more experienced party (probably via *speak with dead* spells).

Referees off put by this gallows humor may be desirous of a more cheerful ending. These gentler judges are once again advised to engage their powers of improvisation.

NEW MONSTERS

CHAOS FLY

Armor Class: 5 [14]

Hit Dice: 1 hit point

Attacks: Sting (1 point of damage)

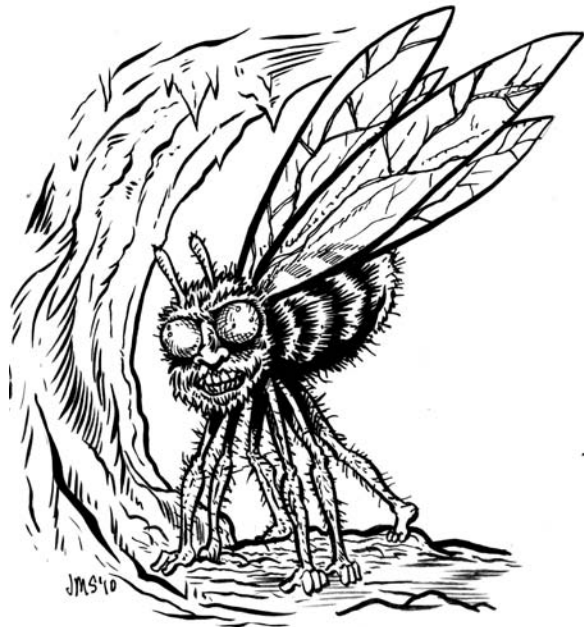
Saving throw: 16

Special: flight, poison (save or take 1 additional point of damage)

Move: 14 (flying)

Challenge Level/XP: B/10

Chaos flies appear as fist-sized house flies with twisted, agonized human-like faces. They sting with extendible barbed tongues. Their peculiar life cycle requires the presence of snow within which their larval spawn, the snow-maggots, somehow thrive. Swarms of chaos flies compete with other Underworld vermin for carrion, which they carry back to their hive.



FIREBOMB BEETLE

Armor Class: 5 [14]

Hit Dice: 2

Attacks: 1 bite (1d4), firebomb

Saving throw: 17

Special: Firebombs (1d6 damage, range 30ft., 10 ft. radius burst, save for no damage)

Move: 12

Challenge level/XP: 3/60

Another component of the Underworld's carrion clean-up crew, these solitary giant insects are also ferocious, thriving in their environment by a defensive strategy that can be summed up as "shoot first, ask questions later". The rhinoceros-like horn adorning the head of the fire-bomb beetle contains a natural weapon similar to a modern-day mortar. Projectiles lobbed from this organ explode on impact, doing damage to anything within 10 feet. On a successful attack roll, the projectile strikes the intended target. A miss indicates the projectile has landed 2d10 feet away in a random direction. In this way it is possible for unintended targets to be damaged by a fire-bomb attack. A successful saving throw indicates that the target managed to jump clear. It is possible to harvest 1d4-1 bombs, gelatinous cysts filled with a liquid that immolates upon contact with the air, from deceased beetles. These may be carried in relative safety, requiring significant force to rupture.

FUNGUS FOLK

Armor Class: 6 [15]

Hit Dice: 3

Attacks: weapon (1d6)

Saving throw: 5

Special: slow regeneration 2 hp/turn

Move: 9

Challenge level/XP: 4/40

These jolly little toadstool men go about their affairs (the fungal topiary arts a principle concern) with little regard for the hazards that frequently surround them in their Underworld environment, likely due to the fact that they are so difficult to destroy. When fungus folk are reduced to zero hit points or below, they become temporarily inert until they regenerate positive hit points. Only soaking their inert forms in acid or repeated burnings will ensure a permanent death. They are curious creatures, dedicated to learning for its own sake, rarely practically applying their hoarded knowledge and then only in service of new and improved fungus gardening techniques.

MIND BAT

Armor Class: 6 [13]

Hit Dice: 2

Attacks: 2 claws (1d6 each)

Saving throw: 17

Special: Flight, stun power (save at +2 or be unable to act for 1d4-1 rounds)

Move: 14

Challenge level/XP: 4/40

Winged, hairless subterranean predators of great size and menacing aspect, mind-bats get their name from the brain-like shape of their otherwise featureless heads and their singular ability to stun prey with a focused beam of mental energy. This special attack causes both the creature's brain and that of the intended victim to momentarily glow a bright green and those who fail their saving throw (at +2) collapse to the ground, unable to move for 1d4-1 rounds. These creatures also use this ability as a psychic analogue to echolocation and can detect active nervous systems from a distance of 100 feet. Wicked serrated claws the size of broadswords serve as

defensive weapons and to scoop up fallen prey for leisurely consumption back at their lairs in lofty underworld grottoes.

NEWT-MEN

Armor Class: 9 [10]

Hit Dice: 1d4 hp

Attacks: weapon (1d6)

Saving throw: 16

Special: double damage from fire, heat

Move: 12

Challenge level/XP: B/10

Created from living salamanders and newts by misguided sorceries, diminutive newt-men exist only to serve the whims of their master (typically a misguided sorcerer). Silent and seemingly emotionless, these creatures are fearless combatants, eager to escape their debased condition through the sweet release of death in battle. Due to their sensitive skin, newt-men never wear armor and take double normal damage from fire and heat-based attacks.

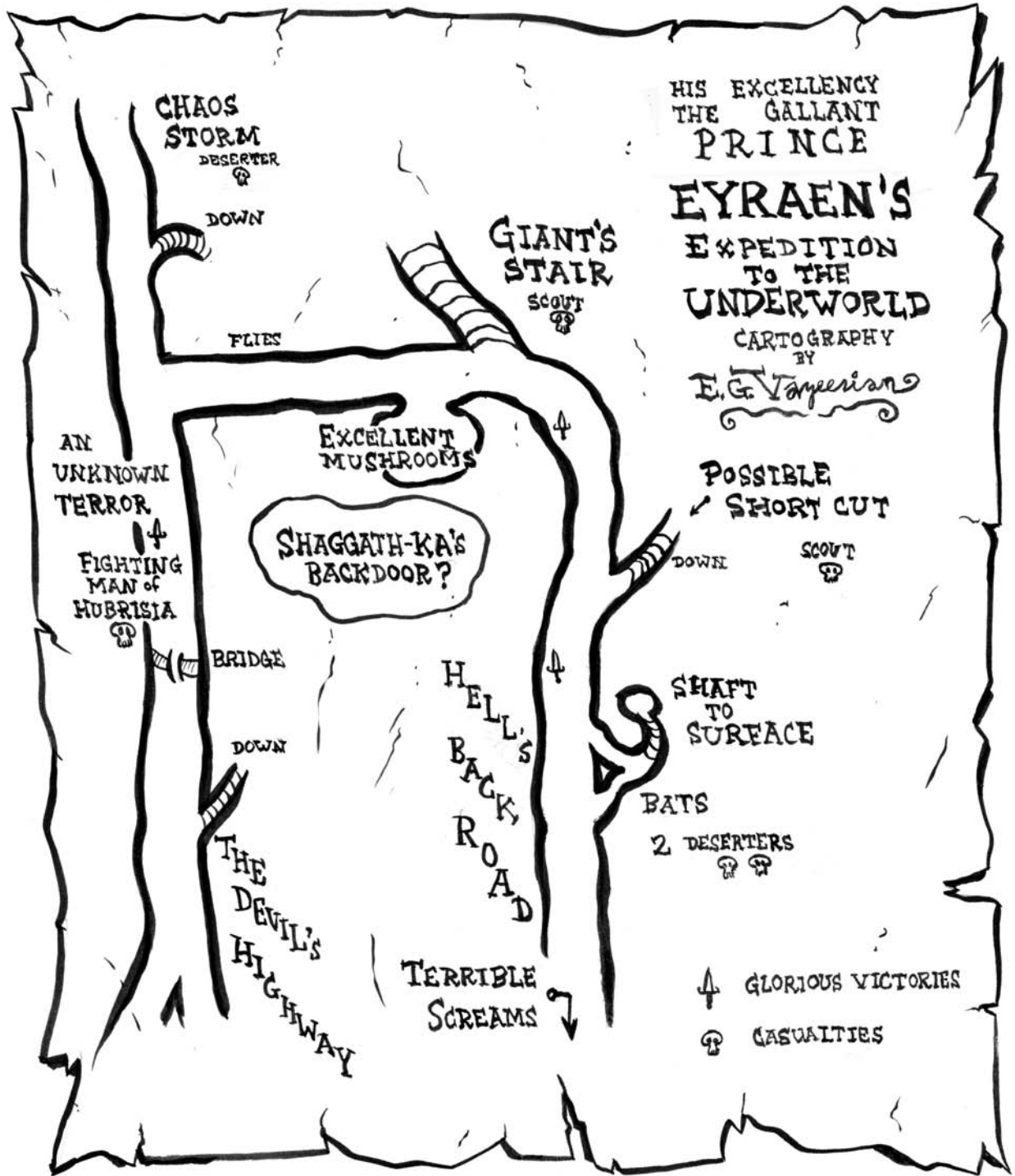
Here ends the adventure *Operation: Unfathomable*. Maps follow on the next pages.



UNFATHOMABLE UNDERWORLD 1 square = 20 ft



PLAYER MAP



Weird Watery Magic of Vats and Pools

By Richard Hart

Human kind has long had both a fascination and fear of water. Man needs this precious liquid each day to live and yet he can drown in a mere teaspoon of the substance. Vessels of water hold a powerful symbolism of motherhood and the womb. This symbolism juxtaposes the origin of life itself with an environment that man can no longer enter without fear of death by drowning. Foul potions brewing in the cauldrons of witches, horrific creatures dreaming in the inky black depths of the sea, and embryonic vats birthing a monster are just a few examples of how this powerful symbol has been employed in literature. This article aims to flesh out a variety of ideas on how you can use vats and pools in your fantasy RPG game. These entities should be used infrequently and each use should invoke either a magical almost holy wonder or a sense of horrific alien fear. The statistics used in this article are written for Swords and Wizardry, however they could be adapted with ease to any retro clone or original edition of our favorite role playing game.

The Apparatus

Use your imagination on creating the body of liquid, the enchantments that gave it power, the liquid held inside of the vessel, and the person or entity or natural force/phenomena that created this magical focus. The following random tables are springboards for your imagination.

Types of Vats and Pools

Roll 1d8:

1. Natural Cavern Pool
2. Clear Fountain of Water surrounded by elaborate statues
3. Bubbling Natural Spring
4. Huge Glass Vat
5. Massive Iron Cauldron
6. Large Vessel carved from a single block of: crystal, granite, the calcified heart of a dragon, bone, a living tree, the tip of a mountain, etc...
7. A spherical body of liquid, floating in air, held aloft by powerful magic.
8. Small object sewn or bonded together to form a vat: leaves, skin, gems, eyelashes, hair, gold/silver wires or strands, feathers, etc...

Liquid Held in the Vat/Pool

Roll 1d8:

1. Pure water.
2. Chemical sludge/slime/solution.
3. Organic protoplasm similar to embryonic fluid.
4. Blood
5. Collected tears of: angels, virgins, widows, babies, strong men etc...
6. Aether, airy water, or some other mystical/magical/ or unknown fluid...
7. Saliva of a huge dragon, gorgon, titan, etc...
8. Liquid metal.

In addition to the base liquid held in the vessel the DM could rule that the vessel requires aliquots of an additional component routinely (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, etc.). The materials added to the vessel could be as strange as the liquid held in the vat. Rose petals could be added each spring to re-enchant a magical spring of romantic powers. Another natural pool of magic could require the light of the full moon each month or it would lose its magic if shaded during that night. A demonic vat full of blood may need frequent replenishment of its blood due to consuming some of its fluids with each magical effect.

Example Enchantments or Magical Forces Used to Grant Powers

Roll 1d6:

1. Presence of trapped or inhabiting water spirits or elementals,
2. Harnessed energy: lightning directed to the vat, sunlight or starlight or moonlight focused and captured by mirrors or crystals or lenses, directed voices from chanting monks, etc..
3. Trapped souls captured by magical gems.
4. Essence of victims drowned in the vessel.
5. Bound demons or gods.
6. Powerful enchantments cast by a wizard or priest.

Magical Effects

While this article provides a group of random tables for generating magical vats and pools, the magical abilities of a pool or vat should be decided by the DM with the theme and backstory of the vessel in mind. These tables are meant to be used as a springboard

for the imagination of the DM to create even more wondrous manifestations. If a powerful magical effect is selected for your pool or vat, think about giving the pool or vat a drawback or limitation for game balance.

Example Healing/ life-force Related Powers

Roll 1d6:

1. Any creature drinking of the waters of the pool/vat will be fully healed of all wounds, diseases, or ailments.
2. Any creature bathing in the waters of the pool is restored of all lost memories, lost levels, and lost Stat points.
3. Any creature even touching the waters of the pool is aged 1d10 years, age an additional 1d10 years for each minute the character remains in the pool.
4. The pool will permanently increase CON+1 and 1d2 HP when drunk, however the character will also permanently lose 1d4 WIS.
5. The waters will regenerate lost limbs/organs, etc... full regeneration takes ~1 week of bathing in the waters each day.
6. A deceased creature immersed in the vat/pool will be raised back to life. The creature loses 1 pt of CON permanently and may have other side effects.

Example Dark/evil Powers

Roll 1d6:

1. A creature drinking the liquid falls into a coma and sleeps until a Remove Curse spell is cast on the victim.
2. Anyone looking upon the vat must roll a saving throw (modified by intelligence) or leap into the vat. The vat will slowly change the character into a twisted frog/man creature - it also dissolves away all the characters items. This process takes 1 day - if the victim has friends to pull him out within 1 hour there is no effect. The DM can determine the effects of staying in the liquid for a fraction of the critical time and also can create stats for the frog creature that the victim will become.
3. Any dead creature placed in the vat/pool is reanimated as a vat zombie with a hunger for flesh - this type of zombie cannot be slain. It must be trapped, chopped into little bits, or otherwise immobilized. A dark wizard with the correct knowledge may be able to bend these zombies to his/her will - at least for a while...
4. A dark wizard (Level 5 or higher) who enters the pool will be able to create a ethereal form (move rate 9) that can move in any direction within 500 feet of the vat and pass through non magical walls and barriers. If the dark wizard touches a victim he can attempt to take possession of it (Saving Throw) until he chooses to release it or his body is removed from

the vat or slain. The wizards body remains motionless until his spirit returns.

5. Each month the pool births a monster of the DM's choice. The monster will be the servant of the pool's inscrutable wishes and intentions.
6. The pool is a gateway to extraplanar intelligences. Staring into this ghostly still liquid will grant visions and auguries that will help the victim at first. These visions could warn of danger or provide directions to lost treasures. Few men can withstand temptation of this kind of power and woe to the victim of this gateway for each additional use of the vision pool will have a +25% cumulative (50% the third, 75% the fourth, etc..) chance of twisting the visions such that the victim is dealt misfortune. The DM is encouraged to be creative in twisting these visions. Even from the first time the pool is used, when the character is looking into the pool the DM should remember that the extraplanar entities are forever watching with lidless eye in return.

Other Example Weird Powers

Roll 1d4:

1. By stepping into the pool/vat a creature is teleported into another place, time, or dimension. The DM could even link a group of pools together...
2. By drinking the waters of the vat a creature can gain the memories of another creature that drank from the same pool. The imbibor also simultaneously gives up a random memory that can be viewed by others in the future.
3. Upon drinking the waters of the pool a character will split into two duplicates. Each duplicate will hate the other and will have an irresistible urge to kill the other. If both are allowed to live they will slowly go insane. If either is killed the other reverts back to normal as if nothing has happened and remembers the whole like as if it is a nightmare (although any damage suffered during the fight remains).
4. If a wizard holds a piece of flesh, hair, blood from another creature in his hand and plunges his head into the vat he can look through the eyes of the other creature no matter where the creature is for as long as he can hold his breath.

Arcane Spells Related to Pools and Vats

The main component of all of these spells is an appropriate vessel of liquid. The requirements for the vat/pool, liquid, and ritual are left up to the DM although in some cases the spell description will identify a particular concept. Typically the pools and vats used for these spells do not need to have permanent magical powers.

However, if a magician has access to a pool with permanent enchantment, similar to the pools/vats described in the preceding sections, the DM could

rule that it would amplify certain of these spells that are in "tune" with the magical focus of the vessel in question. This brief list of arcane spells barely scratches the surface of the possibilities, but acts as example of what can be accomplished with this weird watery magic. In addition, the DM may wish to adapt variations of vat and pool magic to pre-existing spells (simulacrum, clone, animate dead, magic jar, etc..) perhaps amplifying or altering their effect if they are used with a properly designed or enchanted vat/pool. Finally, feel free to create "one-time-use" arcane versions of the permanent powers described in the preceding sections.

Examples:

Watery Rest

Spell Level: Magic User, 2nd level
Duration 8 hours

By casting this spell exactly at dusk a wizard can slip into any pure body of water (forest lakes, seas, babbling brooks, etc..) becoming part of the water for one night's rest. The wizard cannot see or hear while existing as part of the water and having no physical body.

When the morning sun rises the wizard will emerge from the water at the same spot he entered feeling well rested and healed of 1d6HP. A detect magic cast in the area will identify an enchantment, and a dispel magic can wrench the wizard back early without him/her feeling rested or gaining hit points.

Stasis Pool

Level: Magic User, 3rd Level
Range: NA
Duration: Permanent until dispelled, or victim removed from the pool.

Using this ritual a magic user adds narcotic drugs to a vat or pool and then casts this enchantment on the vessel. The first being to touch the water must pass a saving throw or slip into a trance-like state. If the victim is already charmed or enchanted and then asked to step into the water, they will not receive a saving throw to avoid the effects.

In the trance the victim will slide into the waters of the vat. They are bestowed with an ability to "breathe" the waters of the vat and will not drown. The victim will stay in the vessel until physically removed (regaining consciousness and not remembering what happened) or until a dispel magic is cast on the pool (at which time the victim will awake and begin to drown in the pool unless they scramble to the surface).

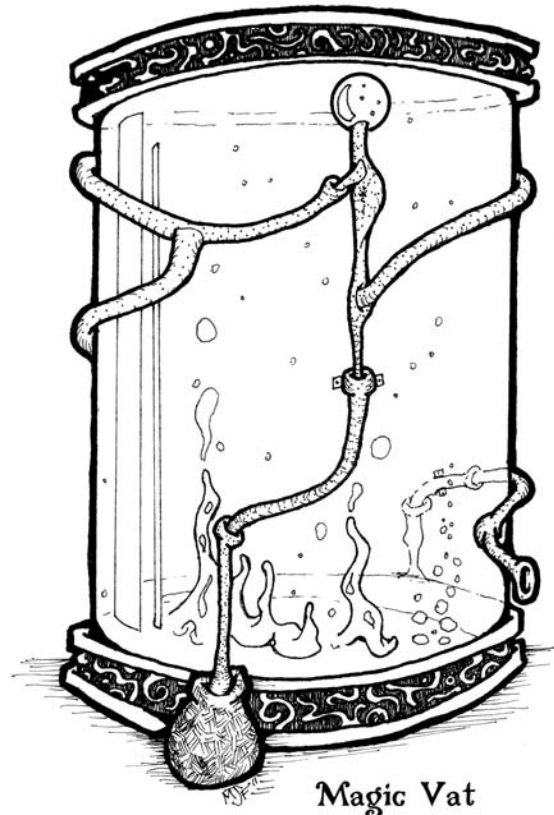
Victims in the pool can be probed with mental interrogation spells (ESP, telepathy, etc.) they do receive saving throws against these spells (at -4).

Call Water Spirit

Spell Level: Magic User, 4th level
Range: 1 natural pool within 240 ft
Duration: until dispelled

The caster calls forth a spirit, elemental, ghost, or other supernatural being that inhabits a given body of water. This spell may have no effect if cast on a body of water with no spiritual history. If the caster knows the true name and location of a spirit he can be specific in his summoning, otherwise the DM can randomly determine the spirit called forth by the spell or decide that there is no spirit bonded to this location.

This spell offers no immunity to the wizard from whatever he/she calls forth. If the wizard performs prior research, uses binding circles, and/or brings gifts or sacrifices to the spirit these acts should be rewarded by the GM with some cooperation from the spirit depending on the being called forth.



Magic Vat

Watery Hold

Spell Level: Magic User, 4th Level

Range: 1 natural pool within 240 ft

Duration: until dispelled or the item returned

The caster casts this spell on a body of water and then hurls a single item into the body of water. The item will vanish into the water and is only returned by three methods:

1. The wizard who cast the spell can return later and call the item back. It will rise from the water back to the wizard's hand.
2. The wizard can specify an individual, or group of individuals (example, any of the descendants of the "true king") who can also return to the body of water and call forth the item to their grasp.
3. Another wizard can force the item out of the water using a successful dispel magic spell.

Otherwise, the item will stay in the body of water forever, until either called up or the waters dry up or are destroyed.

Exneuration

Level: Magic User, 6th level spell

Range: Any victim within 240 feet of a prepared vat.

Duration: Until dispelled

Using exneuration, a wizard magically rips the brain from the body of one victim (saving throw only allowed if the victim is > 8HD) and teleports it into his vat. The brain and body of the victim will collapse into a permanent state of stasis until the brain is returned to the body. The brain can be returned to the body with a successful dispel magic spell. However, both the brain and body could be destroyed by physical trauma before being reunited. The wizard who cast this spell can send the brain back into the body at any time, even if there are many leagues between the body and brain, unless one or the other is on another plane of existence. If this wizard has collected multiple brains he can send any of the brains into any body under his control with this terrifying spell, assuming the target body is on the same plane.

Any brains that are in the liquid of the vat are still capable of thinking although they will be in a perpetual dreamlike state. Any mental communication spells can be cast on the brain (ESP, telepathy, etc..) and the brain will not receive a saving throw. As a result this spell allows a wizard to glean any information his victim holds including ripping spells from the head of a captured spell caster brain.

Regenerate Flesh

Level: Magic User, 5th level

Range: NA

Duration: Permanent.

After this spell is cast on a target, the target must fully submerge himself in the waters of a prepared vat. The target will slip into a coma for 24 hours inside the liquid, during which time they will be able to "breathe" the liquid in the vat. During this day of stasis, any missing limbs and tissue will regenerate and they will become whole again. The DM may rule that regenerated flesh has side effects (discolored green, smells funny, doesn't feel right, or moves on its own sometimes...). Also, if the target is removed from the vat before a full 24 hours the process will only be partially completed.

Create Life

Level: Magic User, 9th level

Range: NA

Duration: Permanent

Using this spell a magic user can create a living creature. The wizard must first create a large vat with a long forgotten recipe of protoplasm, ectoplasm, and strange chemicals held in this arcane text of this spell.

It takes one month of undivided focus from the wizard to create a living creature. At the end of this process a living creature will be "born" from the vat. The age, sex, race, species, are all decided by the wizard. The wizard may also decide to create a new species of creature of his own design (moderated by the Referee). Obviously, the vat must be large enough to hold the creature formulated.

There is a 50% chance that something goes wrong with the creation process - the results of failure are decided by the DM. Since a part of the wizard's lifeforce is forever connected with his creation, there will be a psychic bond between the wizard and his creation. The DM will decide what in game effects this bond will have (but could include sharing hit points, sharing saving throws, telepathic communication, psychic pain sharing, etc.). It is incredibly risky to use this spell multiple times; each additional use of this spell incurs a cumulative 5% chance of the caster losing sanity (-1d4 WIS).



Five Portable Rooms

By Andrew Trent

Editor's Note – Andrew suggests a few monsters from the Swords & Wizardry Monster Book, which many readers probably don't own. We have left those references in the article, because we figured it would be stupid to take out some interesting ideas just to make the article more generic. If you don't own a copy of the Monster Book, just disregard the references.

There's one thing about old school players - they're unstoppable exploration machines. They search high and low for secret doors even when there are none to be found. They examine every piece of furniture, every sconce, every tapestry, rug and mural they can get their hands on looking for a way to open that portal that just isn't there. Normally a GM just takes advantage of all this wasted time by rolling for an extra wandering monster or two. But sometimes it just feels right to give the persistent chumps a bonus room to check out.

Below are five rooms that could be used to fill this purpose, or any other "Man, I need a room!" situations that arise. For each room, a basic description is provided along with some suggested tricks, traps and possible monstrous occupants. Think of these like a soup stock. Pick and choose, combined as desired, or just throw out everything and season to your own tastes.

The Bells

This small, almost closet-like, room would be scarcely worth noticing were it not for its impossibly high ceiling, which recedes into the darkness. Any effort to climb the walls to find where they end yields only frustration, for the walls simply continue to climb further still.

Three stout ropes hang down from that impenetrable height. Pulling on any of the ropes (or attempting to climb them) results in the tolling of faint, far away bells. Normally, each rope intones a different note (G, B, and D), and all blend harmoniously with the others as a major triad. If the ropes are activated by any character who is wounded, poisoned or diseased, though, the notes sounded by the bells are wildly out-of-tune and dissonant (though the musically inclined should be able to tell that it's still supposed to be a G major triad).

Suggested Tricks/Traps

Select as many or as few features from the list below to make the room more interesting.

1. A chill wind blows down from the great yawning void above, extinguishing torches on a 1-4 on a d6 and lanterns on a 1-3 on a d6.
2. When an injured, poisoned or diseased character pulls the ropes in the order necessary to create a second inversion (D, G, B), the bells sound as harmonious as they do when unaffected characters pull on them. There is a 25% chance that the injury, poison or disease afflicting the character is completely healed. This effect may only happen once per day, and then only once per character.
3. If all three ropes are pulled on in unison by injured/poisoned/diseased characters, a cacophonous blast of sound fills the room, rendering all present permanently deaf. This deafness may only be removed by the casting of Remove Curse by a Cleric of a deity of music.
4. Any character who pulls more than three times on the same rope must make a saving throw (vs. Spells) or suffer the loss of 1d6 points from his or her Intelligence. These points will return at the rate of 1 per week. This rate cannot be accelerated by any means.

Suggested Monster

An impossibly high bell tower seems like a great place for impossibly large bats. Consider any of the Giant Bats found on pages 65-66 of the Swords & Wizardry rules or, for a slight change of pace, use the Belfry Goblin found on pages 39 & 40 of the Swords & Wizardry Monster Book.

The Wax Chamber

Every surface of this medium-sized rectangular room is covered with wax of varying colors. The stubs of countless candles, most melted to their bases, others never having been lit, dot the floor and are found in numerous small alcoves found at irregular intervals around the walls. In one corner a large metal cauldron has been turned over, spilling out its once-molten contents across the floor. The remains of a shattered apiary lie in a different corner, the beeswax that it once contained smeared haphazardly on the walls.

The center of the room is dominated by two large stone tables, upon each of which rests a slender, waxen, humanoid, female form. Both figures, which are identical in their features, have a large hexagonal platinum coin embedded in their chests. Other wax

figures - cast aside in various states of development - are scattered about the room.

Suggested Tricks/Traps

Select as many or as few features from the list below to make the room more interesting.

1. A mosaic is barely visible beneath the wax on the wall opposite the door. If the wax is cleared away from this wall, the mosaic can be seen to depict a human woman resembling the wax figures lying upon the tables.
2. The wax that covers the floor obscures a hole in the flagstones between the two great stone tables. Anyone walking between the tables will discover this hole, the hard way, on a 1-2 roll on 1d6. The hole itself only drops 12 inches, but as a foot strikes the bottom it triggers a scything blade located just below the hole's opening, which does 1d8 damage to the leg of the person who found the hole. Further, attempting to remove the affected limb from the hole inflicts an additional 1d8 damage per attempt. An attempt may be judged as successful if a saving throw is made.
3. A small silver mirror has been placed in the hands of one of the wax figures. Any character who removes the mirror and looks into it must make a saving throw or change gender (if male) or gain 1d4 Charisma (if female). The mirror then shatters, doing 1d6 points of damage to the player holding it.
4. For every full turn spent exploring this room, each character has a 5% chance of falling into a deep melancholy that lasts for 1d4 days. During this time, the character suffers a -2 on all to-hit rolls and saving throw attempts.

Suggested Monster

This room is begging to house one or more Wax Golems (S&W Monster Book, p. 41). But other options might include Fire Elementals (S&W Core Rules, p. 73), Iæru (Knockspell #3, p. 55), or Giant Bees (HD 2; AC 4[15]; Atk 1 sting (1d4 + non-lethal poison); Move 6 (Fly 16); Save 16; CL/XP 3/60; Special: Non-lethal poison sting (2d4 damage, save for half}).

The Vivisection Room

The walls of this large square room are lined with shelves and bookcases, and a grid of nine operating tables occupies its center. The surface of each table is occupied by the remains of some humanoid or another, ranging from complete skeletons and mummies to mere remnants of limbs, torsos and heads. All of these are obviously ancient, though some are clearly better preserved than others.

Each specimen is labeled or tagged, identifying the race or origin of the item, and in some cases the specific individual. A character with sufficient knowledge of history might recognize a few of the names as significant, either as famous or infamous figures or as noteworthy "vanished" persons.

Suggested Tricks/Traps

Select as many or as few features from the list below to make the room more interesting.

1. The eyes of a skull on the shelf - labeled "Ulux Wizardbane, King of Bron" in an ancient variation of Common - glow green when any magic-user stands within 10ft. Non-magic-users who possess the skull on their persons receive a +1 to all saving throws against magic cast or created by magic-users. Magic-users who possess the skull on their persons have their spell effectiveness reduced, granting enemies a +2 on saving throws made against their spells.
2. A mummified monkey's paw might be found in a pile of preserved animal limbs. This item grants a single Wish and then crumbles into dust. The results of the wish will always carry some degree of negative results as well as being the strictest possible interpretation of the wish.
3. A jar of teeth sitting on one of the shelves contains a ruby worth 500gp. Handling the teeth to remove the ruby may (1 in 6 chance) infect the character with lycanthropy.
4. If disturbed, one of the mummies sits upright, opens its mouth, and releases a large and fast-spreading cloud of poisonous spores. It then collapses back to the table. Characters in the room must make a saving throw (vs. Poison) or suffer the immediate loss of 2d4 points of Constitution. These points do not return without the casting of a relatively powerful spell. Three days hence, each affected character must make a second saving throw (again, vs. Poison) or die, as the fungus consumes their lungs.

Suggested Monster

The most logical monster for this room would be one or more Mummies (S&W Core Rules, p. 82), Skeletons (S&W Core p. 86), Zombies (S&W Core p. 90), or Flesh Golems (S&W Core, p. 76). Any other monster comprised of bits of the dead would be reasonable foes here as well. This room may also be home to the ghosts of one or more of its occupants.

The Taxidermy Room

Dead eyes peer at the party from every corner of this large round room. Taxidermy animals and monsters litter every inch of open space, with only the narrowest of aisles between them. Preserved beasts of the air hang by wires from the ceiling. A glass-fronted case containing butterflies, beetles, and other insects hangs on the wall opposite the door.

Suggested Tricks/Traps

Select as many or as few features from the list below to make the room more interesting.

1. A taxidermy goblin, posed with a bow, is trapped to fire an arrow at the first person to enter the room. 1d6 damage; save for half.
2. A strong magnet has been implanted in the head of a multi-horned beast similar to a triceratops. The head will tear loose and slam into the first person wearing full plate who enters the room, doing 2d12 damage and rendering the armor unusable (it has a giant head stuck into it).
3. A suit of armor stands posed in a diorama depicting a battle against a troll. It is clearly labeled, in common, "Saint Moderatus, The Troll-Slayer." Within the armor rests the spirit of the evil wizard Horvath, who once cast Magic Jar upon this container. His body was destroyed while the spell was active, and now his malevolent soul waits here, longing for a body to possess.
4. The skin of a taxidermy giant centipede, found near the back of the room, has had a map drawn upon it. This map is clearly not of the dungeon in which this room is found, but it might lead to a different dungeon or to some other perilous, but profitable, destination.

Suggested Monster

This room could easily contain any number of animated constructs, but in truth it is more ideally suited to creeping players out than it is to dumping them into yet another combat. The suggestion that the eyes of a taxidermy Owl Bear seem to follow them as they explore the room is probably more interesting than actually being attacked by one. Still, if the Referee desires, almost any creature (or rather, the taxidermy remains of one) could be thrown at the players here. Shape-shifting monsters like Mimics (S&W Monster Book, p. 65) might also have taken up residence in this room.

The Alchemist's Garden

A light as bright as the sun floods this mid-sized hexagonal room, its source a glowing ball set in the high ceiling. The room is a riot of overgrown planters, low raised beds choked with various herbs and weeds, and a small copse of different varieties of trees clustered at the center of the room. If more than a few minutes are spent examining this room it becomes apparent that the room's "sun" is, in fact, moving across the "sky" at a rate proportional to the speed of the real sun across the real sky.

A series of aqueduct-like troughs crisscross the room, fresh water flowing through them. At distinct intervals, drips, sprays, and jets of water descend from various locations of this system, providing water to the different varieties of plants that grow here.

Suggested Tricks/Traps

Select as many or as few features from the list below to make the room more interesting.

1. Silver-skinned apples grow from one of the trees in this room. Picking and eating one of these reverses the effect of gravity on the eater for 1d6 hours.
2. Mounted on the wall near the door is a burbling lion-headed fountain. Anyone who drinks the water from this fountain is cursed to eat only plants for the rest of his days. Eating meat or dairy products renders the character violently ill and unable to perform even the simplest of tasks for 24 full hours.
3. Bright yellow carrot-like root vegetables are spotted in one of the raised beds. Anyone who eats one of these is immediately transported to the Astral Plane as per the Astral Spell (S&W Core, p. 31).
4. Each full turn spent in this room, there is a 25% chance that a character will Shrink (as per a Potion of Diminution, S&W Core, p. 98).

Suggested Monster

Plant-like monsters (including these nasties from the S&W Monster Book: Assassin Vine, p. 6; Spiderweed, p. 92; Tree Ghost, p. 99; and Urrslumber, p. 102) are the natural choice for this room. Water-based creatures (such as a Keeper Of The Well, S&W Monster Book, p. 53) could easily have taken up residence in the irrigation system. Of course, given the nature of this room, any kind of vermin, lizard or insect might be found here as well.



Magic Items of the High Seas

By Kim Nicholson and James E. Bobb

Eyepatch of Loyalty: When worn by a captain of a vessel, the loyalty and morale of the crew are raised by +1.

Eyepatch of Command: 3 times per day, the captain of a vessel may issue a command that the crew are forced to follow unswervingly (saving throw at -2 penalty negates).

Figurehead of Protection: Ships fitted with one of these shield-bearing mermaids (or mermen) gain a bonus of 4 to their armor class.

Figurehead of Ramming: Ships fitted with one of these trident-wielding mermaids (or mermen) do double damage when ramming another vessel.

Figurehead of the Watch: Ships fitted with one of these scholarly-looking mermaids (or mermen) keep a constant watch for one sight they are commanded with, such as icebergs, land, waterspouts, etc. When the object they are tasked with finding is within the horizon line (whether day or night) the figurehead raises an alarm, notifying the captain and crew. The figurehead can be commanded to look for one object per day.

Sails of the Zephyr: These magical sails have a minor air elemental bound within them. When sailing under wind power, ships with these sails move at double the normal rate. On calm days where the winds are negligible, the elemental can provide half normal movement under its own power.

Wheel, Undersea: Ships with one of these wheels attached to the rudder can submerge a ship and allow currents to pull a vessel instead of the winds. All creatures in contact with the ship while submerged are safe from drowning and all interior areas retain breathable air (even if a door or hatch is opened long enough to allow entry, as long as it's closed immediately).

Pegleg of Sure-footedness: When attached to a leg stump, the wearer suffers no hinderance to movement on the water slickened, rolling and pitching decks of a ship, being as sure-footed as if on land.

Cargo Door of Holding: When fitted to a ship with a cargo hold and the command word is spoken, this door allows access to an extra-planar dimension

(similar to a Bag of Holding) of similar size to the ship's normal cargo hold.

Flag of Displacement: While this flag is run up, the first attack made on the ship by another ship or siege engine automatically misses, and any further attacks suffer a -2 penalty on the 'to hit' roll.

Flag of Friendliness: While this flag is run up, all who view the vessel she is flying on see a friendly or allied vessel.

Masthead of Regeneration: When attached to the highest mast, the ship repairs itself at the rate of 1 hit point (or hull point) per turn. Ships with these mastheads will not sink unless totally destroyed.

Masthead of Deflection: When attached to the top of a mast, this masthead toughens the ship it looks down upon. Any successful attack made on the ship has it's potential damage reduced by one die type; a d10 becomes a d8, a d8 becomes a d6, etc.

Mutineer's Plank: When a crewmember is justly convicted of mutiny and sentenced to walk the plank, this magical plank summons 10d6 sharks of various sizes who make a spectacle of the demise of the offending crew member.

Explorer's Charts: These charts magically create maps of wherever a ship sails, detailing land formations, topside sea formations (such as sargasso groups or reefs) and deep water trenches.

Necromancer's Bell: A ship outfitted with one of these vile-looking bone bells immediately becomes a rotten-looking hulk. Sails appear to be tattered, wood is worm-eaten and salt-water warped, even the barnacles appear to be more repugnant than normal. The function of the ship is not compromised in any way by this transformation, but any crew member that dies on board is immediately animated as if an animate dead has been cast on the body. These zombie crew members still perform the functions they did in life and continue obey the captain of the ship.



'Don't Touch Anything'

Traps in *Swords & Wizardry WhiteBox Edition*
By Scott A. Murray

It is well understood by Referees and players across the spectrum of experience that no dungeon delve is complete without the menace of lurking traps and nefarious tricks. Such threats are iconic not only to the fantasy adventure genre, but are a cornerstone of what one might call the 'old-school' dungeon crawl aesthetic.

This article presents Referees with tips on designing mechanical and magical traps for use in the WhiteBox Edition of *Swords & Wizardry*. In addition to guidelines for trap creation, this feature offers Referees several example traps both novel and classic that can be adapted to any dungeon adventure.

Note that the information presented below is not intended to be divine writ, but rather suggestions, tools, and inspiration to help both novice and veteran Referees build exciting, challenging encounters.

Basic Mechanical Traps

A mechanical trap is a device intended to ward off intruders by attacking, hindering, or frightening them. While magic may aid in their construction, mechanical traps are entirely mundane and cannot be discerned with *detect magic*.

A mechanical trap has a **Hit Die Equivalent** ("HDE") equal to the dungeon level it appears on (for more on HDE, see page 54 of *S&W WhiteBox*). Many mechanical traps, such as falling doors and gas vents, require the target to make a saving throw to avoid or reduce their effects. Other traps, such as thrusting spears and hidden darts, instead attack as a monster with a number of hit dice equal to its HDE, or +1 'to hit' per HDE (to a maximum of +15).

Many mechanical traps activate only once, and are designed to mortally wound or slay dungeoneers. Such traps, including crushing blocks of stone or deep pits, deal 1d6 points of damage per HDE. Others are meant only to harry or deter intruders, and thus do less damage. Traps that implement a weapon, such as a swinging axe or crossbow turret, deal damage appropriate for the weapon used.

The Referee might consider lowering the damage dice for traps that attack multiple times or target several creatures, such as a dart wall or flame jet. Conversely, he or she might increase the damage of or apply enchantments to weapon-based traps to challenge higher-level dungeoneers. Particularly fearsome traps might even inflict debilitating conditions on their victims, including poison, blindness and deafness, confusion, or immobilization.

The Referee may choose to heighten or lessen the danger posed to the dungeoneers by a mechanical trap by placing it on a dungeon level higher or lower than its HDE. A 4 HDE acid-filled pit trap hidden on level 2 of the dungeon, for example, makes for a nefarious threat that is sure to be deadly if not avoided. That same 4 HDE trap placed on level 6, on the other hand, is less menacing, not least due to the dungeoneers' increased saving throws and hit points.

Advanced Mechanical Traps

The following traps, while mechanical, operate in a more complex or unconventional fashion than basic mechanical traps. The Referee may set the HDE for these traps to any value.

Pendulum Blades

A row of swords, axes, or other blades swing across a narrow corridor at dungeoneers attempting to pass through. Each melee round, one or two (or more) of the pendulum blades attack with a +1 'to hit' per HDE. Creatures standing in the hallway have an 1 in 6 chance of being attacked per blade. This trap deals damage appropriate for the weapon used.

Ethereal Pendulum Blades: The blades of this trap pass through mundane armor and are unaffected by physical objects. Magic affects ethereal pendulum blades normally.

Vorpal Pendulum Scythes: Vorpal pendulum scythes decapitate their victim if a 'natural' 20 is rolled on the attack die.

Crushing Walls

Two opposite walls of a chamber at least 20 ft. wide close in on each other at a rate of 5 ft. per melee round. Creatures and objects caught between the walls when they meet take 1d10 points of damage per HDE and are pinned unless a Strength check can be made (dungeoneers are entitled to a new Strength check each melee round). Creatures that do not escape from between the walls after three consecutive rounds of crushing are slain, their bodies and possessions reduced to pulp and dust.

Descending Ceiling: As above, with the exception that a ceiling of at least 20 ft. in height lowers to the floor, crushing those trapped beneath it.

Wall Spikes: Hidden spikes jut from the crushing walls one melee round after the trap activates. In addition to dealing 1d4 points of damage to creatures trapped between the walls, they are also a dangerous hazard into which characters might be pushed by monsters – and vice versa. These spikes are often poisoned or coated in slime.

Water-Filling Chamber

Frigid water pours into a small chamber from several vents or chutes at a rate of 2' per melee round. When the water level reaches 4', movement for human-sized creatures and smaller is reduced by half. When the water level rises to 8', human-sized creatures or smaller must swim, while all other creatures have their movement rates halved (the Referee may rule that certain creatures are immune to this penalty). Living creatures submerged in the water risk drowning.

Acid-Filling Chamber: As the water-filling chamber, but the acid deals 1d4 damage per melee round to creatures exposed to it. The acid might be substituted with purple worm bile or dragon's blood.

Lava-Filling Chamber: As the water-filling chamber, but the lava deals 2d6 damage per melee round. The lava might be substituted with flowing elemental energy or molten iron.

Vermin-Filling Chamber: Rather than liquid, the chamber fills with vermin such as snakes, rats, scarabs, or insects. In addition to impeding movement and sight, the swarms bite creatures within the chamber, attacking with a +1 'to hit' per HDE. At the Referee's discretion, the bites may deal damage, deliver poison, or some combination thereof.

Rolling Boulder

The boulder rolls in a straight line at a speed of 5 ft. per melee round. This speed increases by 5 ft. each subsequent round, to a maximum of 40 ft. Creatures caught in the path of the boulder must make a saving throw or be crushed for 1d8 points of damage per HDE. Those succeeding on their saving throw leap out of the way; if this is impossible – such as in a narrow corridor – no saving throw is permitted.

Oil-Filled Boulder: This hollow boulder is filled with smoldering oil that leaks through holes bored into its surface. The trap leaves a burning trail in its wake,

dealing 1d6 points of damage to creatures passing through it.

Magnetic Spiked Boulder: This wrought iron boulder is hewn from magnetic stone and deals 1d10 points of damage per HDE. Metal objects and creatures wearing metal armor with 15' of the boulder must save each melee round or be pulled 10' toward it. The spikes are often poisoned.

Green Slime-Coated Skull Boulder: An 8' diameter obsidian skull is coated in a 2' thick membrane of green slime. A dungeoneer struck by the boulder takes no damage, but instead must save or be affected as if by a green slime and stuck to the boulder. A successful Strength check frees a stuck dungeoneer, but does not reverse the slime's effect.

Basic Magical Traps

Magical traps are spells that are designed to be cast from a focus (a gem, a hidden rune, a carving) when a trigger condition is met, such as a door being opened or an object being touched. Like mechanical traps, magical traps are most commonly used to protect important chambers, such as burial crypts and treasure vaults. Arcane magic traps are commonly referred to as 'wards,' while those implementing divine magic are deemed 'curses.'

The use of *detect magic* reveals the presence of most magical traps; *dispel magic* neutralizes them. At the Referee's discretion, spells such as *dispel chaos* or *dispel law* will also disable a magical trap. Magical traps automatically and instantaneously reset when triggered and remain active until dispelled.

A magical trap has a HDE equal to twice the level of the spell used. For example, a *fireball* trap (spell level M3) would have an HDE of 6, and a *death spell* trap (spell level M6) would have an HDE of 12.

Magical traps have a caster level equal to their HDE. The Referee may increase or decrease the HDE of a magical trap to create a spell effect with a higher or lower caster level, such as a 9 HDE *lightning bolt* trap that deals 9d6 points of damage or a 2 HD *telekinesis* trap that moves only 40 pounds.

Unique Magical Traps

The following traps are magical in nature, but do not implement spells listed in the S&W WhiteBox Edition rulebook. The Referee may set the HDE for these traps to any value.

Faerie Fire

When triggered, a *faerie fire* trap bathes the victim in a radiant purple or azure glow (saving throw negates) for 1d6 days. This glow shines as bright as a lantern and marks the victim as an intruder in the dungeon.

Quest Haunt

This magic 'trap' is applied to an object that can be opened: a vase, a chest, a sarcophagus, and so on. When a dungeoneer opens the object, a spirit is freed that believes the dungeoneer to be a hero of prophecy destined to free him from the dungeon and fulfill a difficult quest of the Referee's design. The spirit will harass the dungeoneer until her or she completes the quest; the Referee shall determine what penalties, if any, are incurred from the distraction. It cannot be harmed, though it can be dispelled or removed. Turning it (as a wraith) sends the spirit away for 1d4 hours.

Embalming Vise

An upright sarcophagus filled with necromantic runes hurls itself open when triggered and attempts to magically pull a creature within 15' inside (saving throw resists). A dungeoneer trapped inside the sarcophagus is slowly embalmed alive, taking 1d8 damage per melee round. Trapped creatures are entitled to a Strength check once per melee round to escape; allies may also attempt to pry open the sarcophagus with a successful check. A dungeoneer reduced to 0 hit points by the embalming vise dies and rises again on the next melee round as a mummy.

Dimensional Anchor

This fearsome albeit subtle trap binds its target to its physical form and the plane on which it exists (saving throw resists). If the victim teleports or becomes ethereal, they suffer 1d6 damage per HDE, and the teleportation or jaunting effect fails. This effect lasts until dispelled.

Mark of Truth

The subject of this curse is unable to willfully tell a lie or mislead another (saving throw resists). The victim must also correct others who lie in his or her presence, if able. This effect lasts until dispelled or removed.

Awarding Experience for Traps

Traps have an XP value equivalent to a monster of their HDE (see page 82 of *S&W WhiteBox*). Disabling or dispelling a trap should be rewarded

with full experience. However, at the Referee's discretion, the dungeoneers may earn one-quarter or one-half experience for merely surviving an encounter with a trap – learning from their mistakes, perhaps.



Sorcerous Servitors

By Jason Sholtis

Upon achieving a certain level of success in their endeavors, magic-users often establish a base of operations for themselves, frequently a private tower of some kind where their arcane activities can remain for the most part uninterrupted. In so doing, they take on the mundane responsibility of providing security for their hoarded treasures and simpering underlings. Typically, mages take to hiring professional help of some kind, whether mercenaries, armies of humanoids, or even more monstrous security forces. But some magi, a career's worth of victories serving only to amplify the hubris customary to the profession, their super-heated intellects craving the new and unusual, opt instead to magically create or otherwise harness more specialized guardians.

Sorcerers may also wish to invent new life to serve them in other ways, such as enhancing power, construction, planar exploration, and even waste disposal. Naturally, only highly unscrupulous mages with little regard for the sanctity of life would go around fashioning homemade creatures to enslave ruthlessly.

The processes required for the creation of unique and even self-replicating life forms are beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that a sorcerer so disposed must spend vast quantities of treasure and his nights (for weeks, months, or years, depending) in research and unholy experimentation, communing with unmentionable gods and other terrible cosmic entities. Insanity and horrible death are unavoidable risks in such pursuits, but the possible rewards (bragging rights in arcane circles not the least among them) can seem worth the perils.

The creatures detailed below are examples of sorcerous creativity in action.

Editor's Note: these follow the S&W monster format, but the numbers and descriptions work for other editions without any conversion effort.

Cerebromorphs

Hit dice: 2+1
Armor Class: 9 [10]
Attacks: electric shock (may strike any opponents within 10') 2d6, save for ½ damage
Save: 14
Special: immune to electricity
Move: 12
Challenge level/XP: 3/60

These pitiable beings appear entirely human with one major exception: in place of a head, a huge mass of convoluted tissues the shape of a brain glistens with moisture and crackles with electricity. When threatened, cerebromorphs lash out with a lightning-like blast of voltage in a 10ft radius (followed instantly by a peal of miniature thunder). Cerebromorphs are most often encountered as the thralls of evil wizards who use the creatures as adjuncts to their own intellects, enhancing spell-casting abilities (1 extra low-to-mid level stored spell per thrall). With the proper arcane techniques, cerebromorphs can also be utilized en masse for more complex magical effects.

Exonites

Hit Dice: 3
Armor Class: 0 [19]
Attacks: by weapon
Save: 10
Special: none
Move: 12
Challenge level/XP: 3/60

Created by a half-mad wizard to serve as her private army, these creatures are actually semi-intelligent gas-beings from another dimension, housed in animate exoskeletons shaped like suits of plate armor. This polished black shell, composed of both earthly and extra-dimensional materials, provides exceptional protection from most weapons and could be harvested for use by clever adventurers (suit of exonite chitin: AC: 0). Once this encasing armor is penetrated (at 0 hp) the gas-being within dies of exposure to the atmosphere with a mournful hiss. These creatures, innately warlike, lack any way to engage in physical violence in the form of a gas, and consequently relish their new lives as mighty fighters. Exonite guardians only rarely mutiny against their dark masters.

Pitch-dogs

Hit Dice: 5
Armor Class: 9 [10]
Attacks: envelop: on a successful hit; the target must make a saving throw (and again each round if enveloped) or be trapped in hot tar, suffering 1d2 heat damage
Save: 15
Special: immune to edged weapons, double damage from cold
Move: 6
Challenge level/XP: 6/400

These magic-spawned creatures lack any sort of consciousness beyond obedience to a single command, such as the typical, "trap all intruders". Pitch-dogs appear as vaguely hound-shaped globs of hot tar, steaming and reeking obscenely while sloppily advancing from their posts to envelop any trespassers, who must also contend with their deafening, non-stop howls of alarm.

Voracites

Hit Dice: 2
Armor Class: 7 [12]
Attacks: 1 bite (1d10)
Save: 10
Special: flies
Move: 14
Challenge level/XP: 3/60

Thought to be three-dimensional manifestations of a single, chronically-famished, six-dimensional being whose unutterable name has never been heard by human ears, these entities resemble 200 pound flying tadpoles, with outsized mouths filled with disturbingly human-like teeth. Their powerful jaws bite through flesh, bone, stone, and steel with equal ease and instantly transmit any ingested matter to their native dimension, making them desirable slaves for mages powerful enough to summon and command them.

Watchflowers

A research fellowship of sorcerers developed these magical, plant-animal hybrids as a self-perpetuating defense for strongholds and towers. The watchflowers must be telepathically linked to the wizard in question, or, more conveniently, to a bank of dedicated cerebromorphs (see above). Watchflowers are large white flowers with a human-like eyeball growing from the center of a lush mass of petals. The plant has a bulbous, urn-shaped stem, into which the flower retracts if endangered. Particularly vain mages often clone their own eyeballs for use in these constructs, adding a personal touch for anyone lucky enough to meet the flowers face-to-face.

NPCs of Note

Claude de Sarlat, Monster Eater

By Rob Hewlett (aka “ze bulette”)

Claude de Sarlat is an eccentric and very wealthy gourmand. He regularly employs groups of adventurers to hunt down, kill (or trap), and retrieve various creatures for him - mostly four footed monsters, but also exotic flora and fowl. Claude eats it all. His chef, one “Tirel,” himself an eccentric and worldly character, gladly indulges Claude’s culinary desires. Without Claude knowing it, Tirel has even expanded his repertoire to include bipedal beasts such as owlbears (and others) but has not yet dared to directly introduce Claude to these more acquired tastes.

Claude owns a keep and has inherited a small fiefdom. While not exactly encouraging monsters to forage for human and demihuman fare of their own, he does seem to tolerate a large number of monsters in the vicinity, or at least does so according to many of his not so loyal nor admiring subjects. Rumors of his more exotic tastes have recently spread throughout the land, and his appetite is already legendary.

He is a large man: short of stature, but it would be wrong to call him “fat” - obscenely obese would be more accurate, or as Claude prefers, “most long of girth”. He wears an unfashionable mustache, typically encrusted with the remains of food, and he is almost constantly eating. Short-tempered and demanding, he’s very unpleasant to be around; were it not for the fact that he pays extremely well (and can afford it), he would no doubt be quite alone in the world. He’s always surrounded by personal servants and bodyguards, one of whom will have a bucket handy should Claude need to vacate his stomach’s contents quickly to make room for another course.

Claude is eager to employ experienced travelers and dungeoneers in his territory, to retrieve for him some “free-range” meats from nearby grottos, preferably alive or very freshly killed. Some of his servants stay busy watching the local taverns for such (ahem ... seasoned) travelers and will occasionally approach them with offers of employment (not revealing the actual name of their own employer). Acquired “game” should be presented to, and will be paid for, by Tirel directly.

Several other nobles have heard of Tirel’s exotic meals, and some wish to try them. Others feel the notion of eating monsters is an abomination.

A long time ago, Claude was a dungeon explorer himself. Trapped by a cave-in, he sustained himself by living on the carcasses of monsters while awaiting rescue from outside. His survival was aided by his family’s greatest treasure, a Ring of Invisibility. Claude trained for a time as a magic user, but his last dungeon experience turned him away from it (it also made him a touch mad).

Claude: Magic User 7: HP 28, AC 9 [11], Atk dagger d4, Str 10, Dex 9, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 7, Ring of Invisibility, Spells: Charm Person, Magic Missile, Read Magic, Sleep, Continual Light, Detect Invisibility, Stinking Cloud, Haste, Lightning Bolt, Charm Monster. He will seldom use the ring unless in extreme danger, and will only do so in conjunction with casting Haste upon himself.

Tirel: Fighter 4: HP 21, AC 5 [14], Atk long sword d8, Str 12, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 14.

Bodyguards (1d6 at any given time) are 1st level fighters with a 2nd level captain.



The Bestiary

Toad Dragon

By Matt Finch

FREQUENCY: Very Rare
NUMBER APPEARING: 1-4
ARMOR CLASS: 4
MOVE: 9
HIT DICE: 4-10
CHANCE IN LAIR: 45%
TREASURE TYPE: H
NUMBER OF ATTACKS: 1 bite (3d6)
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Breathe fire
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Standard
INTELLIGENCE: Average
ALIGNMENT: Chaotic Evil
SIZE: L
PSIONIC ABILITY: Nil

Toad dragons are huge creatures, neither entirely dragon nor entirely batrachian. They are capable of squeezing through relatively small spaces, and can leap to the attack. Toad dragons are fire-breathers, and like dragons they can breathe goutts of fire thrice a day before their innards are depleted of the pyrotechnic venom they spit forth to produce a cone-shaped blast of flames.

Swords & Wizardry Stats:

Toad Dragon: HD 4-10; AC 4[15]; Atk breath weapon or 1 bite (3d6); Move 9; Save 8; CL/XP 8/800; Special: Breathe fire (1d6 damage per hit die, save for half).

I used a toad dragon in the fourth level of my Mythrus Tower game at NTRPGCon '10, and it was made up entirely on the fly when the players got into an area I'd mapped but not yet keyed. This write-up is based on the stats and abilities that I (pretty much arbitrarily) assigned to this nasty as it pursued the characters, who were rolling a big wheel of gold away from it at the highest speed they could manage. It all came to a head when they reached the elevator room and realized that they couldn't all fit into it with the gold before the dragon arrived. In defense of their gold they challenged the dragon to bring it on for an Alamo-style defense ... and they won. Battered and scorched, they managed to limp out of the dungeon rolling the wheel of gold along with them, and leaving behind the toad dragon's body to be raised as a zombie by a nearby necromancer...

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C1 The Circle of Fire

Publisher: Pacesetter Games & Simulations

http://pacesettergames.com/c_series

Pacesetter Games & Simulations announces the general release of its newest adventure game module, C1 The Circle of Fire. This module is designed for the OSRIC rules system and/or the First Edition game. The Circle of Fire is part one of the three-part City of Spire module series, although this adventure is also designed for stand alone play. The Circle of Fire includes two new monsters and eight new magic items.

The Circle of Fire includes a detached full color, card stock cover and a 36-page adventure book. The module includes more than 20 illustrations by Christopher Letzelter. Additionally, the adventure can be dropped into virtually any campaign setting so long as a desert is present.

The first print run of C1 The Circle of Fire is limited to 125 numbered copies. Price: \$11.00

Forthcoming Publications

Jungle Ruins of Madaro-Shanti

Scott Casper

Publisher: Frog God Games (<http://www.talesofthefroggod.com/index.php>)

Jungle Ruins of Madaro-Shanti is an adventure for a party of 4-8 characters of fourth through seventh level. A century ago or more, when the town of Chologadi was just a frontier fort on the coast, Madaro-Shanti was the most powerful city-state in the entire Ambicuaria Jungle. Its citizens were highly advanced in the arts of magic, and even retained some vestiges of magical quasi-technologies perhaps more ancient than humankind itself. Their prosperity made for jealous enemies, none more covetous than the powerful and sorcerous Kiengaa Tribe of the deep jungles. The Kiengaa plotted against Madaro-Shanti, making dark pacts with the monstrous ape-centaurs known as the Borsin, and with the monkey-faced, snake-like monsters known as the Hanu-Naga. Once this terrible, unnatural army was gathered, the Kiengaa and their allies laid siege to Madaro-Shanti itself.

As the walls of Madaro-Shanti fell, and the invaders swarmed into the city, the high priest of the city closed himself within the royal shrine, praying to all the gods for intervention. Yet none of the gods answered his prayers until the last – and that was Ojala, whom the people of Madaro-Shanti knew as a god of evil and treachery. A deadly bargain was struck that night, and true to his promise, Ojala caused a horrible wasting disease to strike the besieging army. But the full extent of the evil god's treachery became clear when the surviving people of Madaro-Shanti themselves began to succumb to the same disease which had slain their enemies. Within a fortnight, all the people of Madaro-Shanti had either died of the plague or scattered into the depths of the predator-filled jungle.

In only a few years, the city was overgrown by the jungle and fell into ruin, but the magical disease was to have one final consequence. Not only did the contagion affect the Kiengaa and the Madaro-Shanti – it also infected the mind of a powerful nature-spirit that inhabited the surrounding jungles. The nature-spirit Cho-Odaa, driven mad by the disease and hungry for vengeance against all humankind, has discovered the means to exact a terrible reckoning.

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