

KNOWLEDGE ARCANIA

THE MILLER'S WIFE

A COMPLETE D&D
ADVENTURE!

PLUS:

HALLOWEEN M:TG DECK
EXCLUSIVE D&D MINIS
HECATOMB GOODNESS





All trademarks are property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ©2006 Wizards.

The World is Waiting . Go.
www.wizards.com/worlds

MAGIC™ GIVES YOU THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE.

⌘ [The best magic players
in the world are
coming — to your home.] ⌘



Well, almost. But you will be able to catch all the action on your desktop or laptop. This year, the **Magic: The Gathering™ World Championships** are taking place in the famed Louvre museum in Paris, France, with \$450,000* up for grabs. And in addition to crowning a World Champion, there'll also be a Rookie of the Year award and a Hall of Fame ceremony, with five new inductees.

Bookmark this site and return on
Nov 29th for all the action!
www.wizards.com/tournaments



MAGIC
The Gathering



*Aggregate prizes awarded. For prize structure, go to www.wizards.com/prizes

ARCANE KNOWLEDGE

with PENNY WILLIAMS

Welcome to our first-ever double-sized issue. You asked for more, and in this issue, you have it. Now bigger and better than ever before, this issue of *Knowledge Arcana* is jam-packed with gaming goodies. In future issues, we'll be presenting even more large-sized features, so if you have a great idea that you thought would be too big to send to KA, think again!

And while we're on the subject of firsts, this issue includes our very first full-sized D&D adventure—*The Miller's Wife*, by Pete Wyeth. Just in time for Halloween, this spooky adventure presents ghosts, witches, and more to challenge your 8th-level PCs. With a healthy dose of both combat and investigation, this adventure has it all. And as an extra-special surprise, the maps for this adventure have also been rendered in DDM scale and placed on the KA site for download. So you can use them normally for the adventure and use them for skirmishing as well!

Also for Halloween, Chris York has created a flavor-filled Halloween deck for Magic: the Gathering. Not only is it filled with ghosties and ghoulies and things that go bump in the night, but it plays reasonably well too. Chris also explains *Why Momir Magic is Mo' Fun* on page 45. Haven't had enough M:tG yet? Then check out *What Really Wins Games*, by Bradley Burnett, and find out how to improve your game. And if you still play Hecatomb, Anthony Baxter's *Aliens Have Invaded Hecatomb* article gives an analysis to warm an endbringer's heart.

In this issue's *Creature Feature*, we present the black recluse, a stealthy Underdark giant that literally eats drow for lunch. Spiritual in a creepy sort of way, these giants stand up for the little guys—the eight-legged ones, that is! With these creatures, you can stage a skirmish war in the Underdark as a backdrop for an adventure, or give those players who just love to play drow a nightmare encounter they won't soon forget!

Speaking of unusual lunches, check out our fiction offering—*The Great Kithanu*, by David Rodoy—for a gruesome entrée that gives a new meaning to the term fast food. And if the tale has you itching to play out the battle for yourself, just cut out the handy DDM cards included with the story and use them in your minis game.

Thinking of hosting a DDM game in your home? Check out *Hosting a Great Game of Minis*, by Frank Emanuel, for some invaluable tips on making the event a success. And if you've ever considered a solo D&D campaign, Doug Lohse and Kirk and Michelle Johnson-Weider have some tips for you on page 58. To wrap up our D&D extravaganza, WizO_Paradox discusses how you can use ideas from MMORPGs to spice up your tabletop games.

If AAM is your game, check out *Fielding an Italian Army*, by our own Jon Mayes. Though Italian units may seem inferior at first glance, Jon shows that they can become a force to be reckoned with when used wisely.

And last but certainly not least is our exclusive interview with one of the industry's busiest freelancers. Ari Marmell has contributed to dozens of D&D books and written some fascinating fiction as well. Now you can take a look inside his brain and see how he does it!

Although this issue offers plenty to keep you busy, we hope to see everyone at UnCon—the online game convention for the Wizards Online Community. Join us at the Meet the KA Staff chat on Tuesday, October 24, at 6pm Pacific to see how you can contribute to *Knowledge Arcana*, and what we're looking for in future issues. Most of the KA staffers are running other events at UnCon as well, so check out the [UnCon site](#) and join in the fun!

Keep those dice rolling!

PENNY WILLIAMS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

KNOWLEDGE ARCANA

ISSUE 7 | FALL 2006

Publisher: -Ras Pechuel
Editor-in-Chief: Penny Williams
Associate Editor: Monica Shellman
Assistant Editor: WizO_Unicorn
Content Manager: Bryce Whitacre (WizO_Sinister)
Art Director and Madman: Jose Boveda (WizO_Scion)

Community Editors:
Fiction: Mars Whitacre (ImpofIdres)
Hecatomb/Dreamblade: Anthony Baxter (Mtalmuzicfan)
Avalon Hill & AAM: Jon Mayes (Der_Leiter)
D&D & DDM: Dave Paul (Vrecknidjx)
MTG: Chris York (Cfyork)
SWM: Michael Bastian (Bastian)

Knowledge Arcana is a publication for the Wizards Online Community by the Wizards Online Community.

We are always looking for contributions and we would like to hear from you! You may submit your work by going to www.wizards.com/knowledgearcana, or email at knowledgearcana@wizo.wizards.com

COVER ART BY: LANA CROOKS

©2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Dungeons & Dragons, D&D, Dungeon Master, d20 system, the d20 system logo, Wizards of the Coast, Duelmasters, Dreamblade, Axis & Allies, A&A Minis, and the Wizards of the Coast logo are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. Star Wars is a trademark owned by Lucasfilm, Ltd. All Rights Reserved. d20 is a trademark of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Distributed worldwide by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and regional distributors. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America.

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURES

- 10 THE MILLER'S WIFE
A COMPLETE D&D ADVENTURE
by Pete Wyeth (Iddig)
- 40 WHAT REALLY WINS GAMES
by Bradley Burnett (Aitutau)
- 44 HALLOWEEN DELIGHT
A FLAVOR-FILLED DECK
OF SPIRITS AND BANSHEES!
by Chris York (Cfyork, Narcoleptic_one)
- 45 WHY MOMIR MAGIC IS MO' FUN
by Chris York (Cfyork, Narcoleptic_one)
- 46 ALIENS HAVE INVADDED HECATOMB
by Anthony Baxter (Mtalmuzicfan)
- 48 HOSTING A GREAT GAME OF MINIS
by Frank Emanuel
- 50 FIELDING AN ITALIAN ARMY
by Jon Mayes (Der_Leiter)
- 52 THE GREAT KITHANU
by David Rodoy (Edgecrusher)
- 58 SOLO CAMPAIGNS
A GUIDE TO THE
ONE-ON-ONE D&D EXPERIENCE
by Doug Lohse (Illion the Red),
Michelle Johnson-Weider (Dakini),
and Kirk Johnson-Weider (KJW)

COLUMNS

- 6 QUICK & DIRTY DM
MMORPGS AND YOU
by WizO_Paradox
- 9 MONSTROUS LIBRARY
- 34 CREATURE FEATURE
THE BLACK RECLUSE
by Penny Williams (Penny_Williams),
Monica Shellman (Elisandra),
Dave Paul (VrecknidjX),
Mars Whitacre (ImpofIdres),
and the Wizards of the Coast Online Community
- 61 CELEBRITY INTERVIEW
ARI MARMELL
by Dave Paul (VrecknidjX)
and Penny Williams (Penny_Williams)



ON THE COVER

COVER ART BY LANA CROOKS

Howdy folks, I'm back, bringing some double-issue love your way this October. You know you have priority problems when you spend all your time writing (or in my case, arting) about games and not enough time playing them. I know this may not be a problem with a majority of you, but as for me . . . well, let's just say the piles of Magic cards I have strewn about my dining room have seceded from my collection and designed their own game: "Scion: the Missing". Objective? Find the Scion before it's too late.

It's okay, though. The issue looks fantastic, and I couldn't be happier with it! I tip my vinyl hood to the great editors who find and work the content each issue.

But I would be remiss without a special shout to Lana Crooks, our cover artist. Never have I met a woman who could so aptly be described as "ballistic". Her art isn't that "grab you by the ouphe" kind, but there are always surprises in it that I, as a fellow artist, have appreciated for years now.

She will continue dropping art-laden bombs for the foreseeable future. Check her work out at www.crookedart.com. As for me, time to catch up on my gaming . . . or let it catch me, whichever comes first.

In a mad, mad world,
SCION

QUICK & DIRTY DDM



BY WIZO_PARADOX

Yes, I am of the old-school mentality when it comes to the D&D game. I started playing with books, back before massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPGs) existed. And apparently I'm not the only one. Recently, a lot of folks have been saying they don't like how today's D&D sometimes feels like an MMORPG. But hang on—you can use what's popular about MMORPGs to better your games. Think about what MMORPGs are doing right and why they're so popular, and then see if you can't graft some of those techniques onto your own campaign. And if you integrate it seamlessly enough, you may even be able to get some newer players interested in the old-school gaming style.

THE BENEFITS OF MMORPGS

Let's take a look at some of the aspects of MMORPG format that you can use in your own games.

SIGHT

One advantage MMORPGs have over paper-and-pencil games is that the players can actually "see" what's in front of their characters. They don't need someone to describe

a mountain in the distance, or what the surface of the ground looks like. They can see it for themselves.

So to adapt your play experience to the MMORPG style, you need to describe the hills, the valleys, and the forest to your players in great detail. Is the snow packed, or is it fresh and loose? Do the characters have a well-maintained, cobbled road to follow, or just a dirt? Is the sand white, or is it red with blood—or perhaps just rust? Imagine yourself playing an MMORPG and describe what you might see when you first enter the encounter area. Better still, grab some appropriate photographs or images from the Internet to show players what the area looks like—or if you're old school, pull out some of the classic artwork from the older game products to help set the mood.

Light is an important factor too. Is the encounter area dim or well lit? Is it bright enough for a human to see? Is the light red and flickering, as though generated by a fire? Do individual sunbeams stab down through the trees? Indicate where all the light sources are, then try to describe the impact that the ambient lighting has on the mood.



MMORPGS AND YOU

Dim light or even shadows can help to create a spooky effect, whereas a brightly lit area generally induces a feeling of well-being.

Color is another important factor to consider. Describe shades of blue for a cool night or a haunted area. A red glow might stem from fire or heat. Lots of green could indicate a poisonous swamp, or even a magical forest. Whenever the PCs enter an area, give it an overall color, using the following color statements as models for your own.

“At the edge of the trees hangs a dead gray mist.”

“Shafts of angry red light shoot out from among the branches of the trees in the forest ahead.”

“Deep in the swamp, a glowing, green mist rolls about.”

Put plenty of color in your other descriptions as well. The sky is usually blue, but magic or other atmospheric phenomena could change its hue. (“The deep red sky would be the most fantastic sunset ever seen were it not for the fact that it’s almost noon.”)

If you want to bring the color factor home even more

strongly, you can use various colored light bulbs in the lamp near your game table to simulate different areas. When the PCs enter the active volcano caverns, put on the red lights. When they exit the tavern into the moonlight, bring up the blue lights.

SOUND

A lot of gamers ask what type of music to play during their games. Movie soundtracks, video game music, and even popular rock songs are often suggested, but I prefer not to use any music at all. Music can be distracting, especially if it has words. Furthermore, you can’t really coordinate your combat so that the music emphasizes the blows in your melee, the way it does in a movie. After all, movie music is specifically crafted for a given film, and no note is there by accident. On the other hand, if you play an instrument, you have the perfect prop for a bard NPC, and you could even have a little snatch of a tune that serves as his trademark.

Ambient sounds often work much better for setting a mood than music does. If the characters are walking

through the woods, the sound of birds chirping works better than the theme from *Star Wars*. You can buy a wide variety of CDs with sound effects, or you could just pick up a white noise generator that simulates babbling streams, waterfalls, ocean waves, night scenes, and so on.

If you do use music, keep it low—nothing. Nothing is more distracting and irritating than having to shout over a song. Sound effects can also be distracting if they're too loud. So keep them soft and in the background unless a particular sound (a breaking door, for example) is intended to get the players' attention.

CHAT

Both old-style D&D and online games are primarily social activities, so it should be no surprise that people like to chat it up during a game. To make sure that the chatter doesn't detract from the action, set aside a bit of time before you start each session for your players to discuss their lives with one another. Letting them get recent events off their chests beforehand should cut back on the out-of-game chatter during the actual session. Off-topic tangents may still occur, but they'll be much less frequent.

That said, don't get upset if your game does get sidetracked with a story or two. Nobody likes a tyrant DM who forces all the players to speak in character from the moment they come through the door. By the same token, however, don't let out-of-game discussions go too far or for too long. Ultimately, your players are there to play D&D, not to gossip about office politics.

You can help to keep them interested and focused on the action by speaking in character with your NPCs. In online games, NPCs may go on at some length with their sob stories and pleas for help. In general, however, briefer is better. Write down a couple of sentences on one side of a note card that you can read aloud to the players. This technique limits the amount of text you have to write and read and keeps your players engaged. They may quickly zone out if you pull out a small stack of papers filled with NPC speeches. In the past, adventure modules sometimes had a page or two of boxed text to be read aloud to players. That's a lot of reading for a DM to do, and the players who are listen-



ing are likely to want to interrupt at several points. So give them a chance to respond by keeping your NPC statements short and sweet.

SIMPLE QUESTS

Computer games usually make the nature of the quest and the steps required for success clear from the very beginning. Bring item A to place B. Fetch item A from monster C and bring it back to place B. Go kill monster C. DMs in paper-and-dice games, however, often expect the players to be as clever as they are, or want them to solve puzzles to determine what has to be done next.

Furthermore, online games clearly define the methods that can be used to accomplish the goals, so players can't just act upon whatever random thoughts enter their minds. For example, a player in the above sequence really does have to kill monster C unless the game is programmed with other options from the start; she can't negotiate with it to stop the attacks on the town. But in a paper game, the DM could allow the monster to propose a separate quest in exchange for stopping its attacks on travelers. In a tabletop RPG, the DM has to think on his feet.

If you want to cater to the MMORPG crowd, keep the simplicity of the online game in mind when you're designing adventures. Tell the PCs they have to search for item A in location B. Then, with the quest clearly defined, you can branch out and allow other options and solutions. The players may decide to negotiate. Or perhaps they want to sneak into the enemy stronghold rather than mount a direct frontal assault.

If you're playing over a long period of time, however, be prepared to refresh the players' memory because they may very well forget what their original goal was. Note cards come in handy for this purpose. A brief description in the simplest of terms can serve as the kind of "quest log" that some online games use. You may need to spell out what the quest is in terms simple enough for the players to understand. "Secure peace for the land" is too broad a goal for some people. Better options include the following.

- Deliver the treaty to the neighboring nation.
- Go out and kill the orcs camped just inside your country's borders.
- Find the Orb of Peace in the Pointy Mountains and deliver it to the king, who will use it in upcoming peace talks.

Specific instructions are good because they tell the players what to do. How they do it is up to them. They might ignore the information and not bother with the quest at all, but at least they won't be asking, "What were we supposed to be doing?"

BRIDGING THE GAP

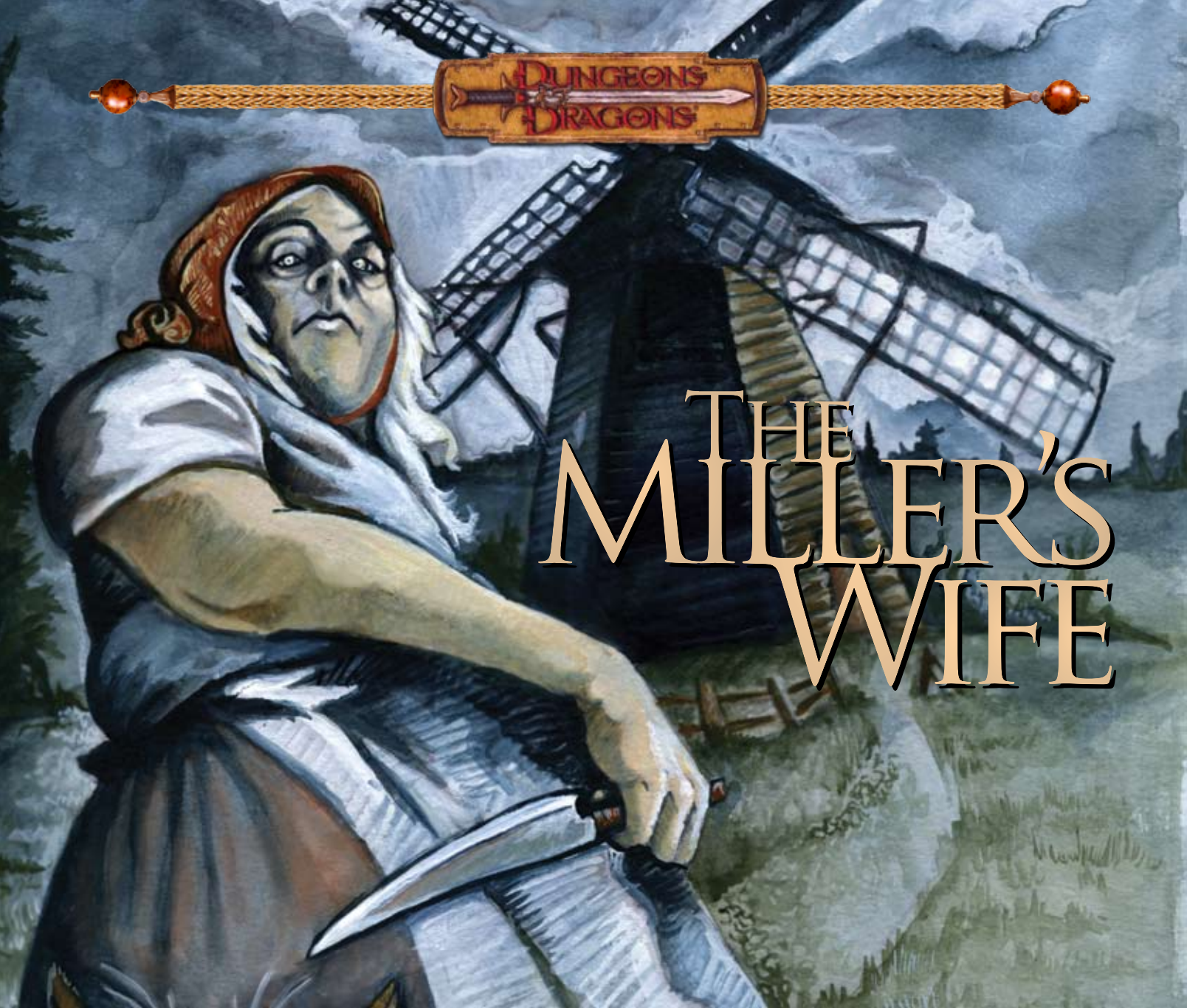
Many older D&D players got into the fantasy role-playing hobby by reading books. Most of the younger generation, however, found fantasy through computer video games, most of which were inspired by the old-school D&D games. Bridging the gap between online games and paper and dice games takes skill and practice, but it can and has been done. By realizing that online games are a part of the gaming experience and adopting the aspects that attract players to them, we can ensure that paper-and-dice gamers stay around for generations to come.

WizO_Paradox lives on the East Coast with his wife and her cat. He has played D&D since 1983 and likes all editions of the game. His favorite setting is Planescape, and he collects speckled dice.



By: M.L. Myers, -Ras Pechuel, and Monica Shellman





THE MILLER'S WIFE

A SHORT MYSTERY ADVENTURE FOR
FOUR 8TH-LEVEL PLAYER CHARACTERS

BY PETE WYETH (IDDIG)
DEVELOPMENT BY DAVE PAUL (VRECKNIDJX)
ART BY LANA CROOKS & DEVIN NIGHT

This issue features the first adventure ever published in *Knowledge Arcana Magazine*. *The Miller's Wife* is a short D&D adventure for four 8th-level player characters (PCs). The village where this scenario occurs can be placed in any temperate area of your campaign world where croplands are plentiful.

As always, feel free to adapt the material presented here as you see fit to make it work with your campaign.

PREPARATION

You (the DM) need the D&D core rulebooks—the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*—as well as *Fiend Folio*, to run this adventure. The information presented here utilizes the D&D v.3.5 rules.

To get started, print out the adventure, including the maps. Read through the scenario at least once to familiarize yourself with the situation, threats, and major NPCs (particularly their motivations). Text that appears in shaded boxes is player information that you can read aloud or paraphrase for the players at the proper times. For monster and NPC statistics not presented in the encounters, refer to the Appendix.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Far from the traveled trade routes, the impoverished keep of Lord Bolermo Destrier sits atop a small hill overlooking the village of Colmere. As farming communities go, Colmere is unremarkable. Most of its people are commoners, though a few experts, a couple of low-ranking aristocrats, and a few warriors who serve Lord Destrier in his yearly campaigns also call it home.

The economy of Colmere is driven by its dairy industry. The majority of the milk and cheese produced in the area ends up in Lord Destrier's kitchens—either as payment of taxes or outright purchases. The rest are used by the villagers or sold at the weekly farmers' markets.

Most of the fields surrounding Colmere are devoted to grain and pasture for the dairy cattle. The extra grain is ground into flour in one of the village's two mills and either sold to Lord Destrier or used by the villagers. One of the mills is wind-driven; the other is water-driven. The former mill—the first in Colmere—was built more than one hundred years ago and passed down through generations of the same family. The watermill was constructed only twenty-five years ago by Justyn Kadlow, a rich freeman and gentleman farmer who raises dairy cattle and operates a creamery in the area.

When the new mill was built, the money that Kadlow had invested in its construction paid off immediately. His watermill produced a higher-quality flour than the other mill did, and the people of Colmere began to take all their grain to Kadlow's mill. Meanwhile, the windmill's miller and his wife languished in poverty and want.

A short time later, however, the quality of the miller's flour and the output of his windmill miraculously improved, and people began to flock there with their grain once again. Some say that the change was the work of fairies, who enchanted the old mill in exchange for the miller's agreement to trade his only son for a changeling. Others claimed that the miller had merely worked hard to upgrade his mill and had therefore earned his good fortune.

All went well for the miller and his wife until about 6 months ago, when he was killed in a freak accident while working late one night at the mill. As best anyone could tell, the mill's wheel was somehow released while the miller was cleaning the grist out of the mechanism, and he was crushed to death between the grinding stones. His wife, who was also the town's midwife, healer, and wise woman, was devastated.

At the miller's funeral, Kadlow approached the widow and offered to buy the mill from her for a very handsome price. But because it was the only home she had known for some fifty-eight years, she turned his offer down and began working the mill herself.

For a short time, the miller's wife managed to keep the mill operational and even bring in a small profit. But the job soon proved too much for the old woman in addition to all her other tasks. The mill's business began to drop off, and rumors began to circulate through Colmere connecting the miller's wife with various strange happenings.

During the past three months, the rumors have grown even more vicious. Unusual creatures have been seen roaming near the mill late at night—including a large, black cat that everyone believes belongs to the miller's wife. Many of the village's dairy cows have dried up, and some have been found exhausted, terrified, or even dead in their barns and pastures at dawn. Worse still, babies have begun to die inexplicably in their sleep. The locals are convinced that the miller's wife has turned to dark sorcery and is the cause of all of their problems.

The miller's wife hasn't left her property in the past month because whenever she makes her way into Colmere, she is subjected to stares, hushed whispers, and in some cases, even outright hostility. Merchants refuse her services, and most citizens would rather do without a midwife and healer than deal with the miller's wife.

A few weeks ago, Lord Destrier summoned all the able-bodied menfolk of Colmere to fight in the summer campaigns for his liege. Thus, only women, children, and the elderly are left in Colmere at present. They aren't brave enough to move against the miller's wife on their own, but they live in fear of her dark arts.

THE REAL STORY

Some twenty years ago, when the new watermill began to threaten his business, the miller made a deal with a devil, exchanging his soul for a higher-quality product and higher output from his mill. To seal the deal, the miller sacrificed his one-year-old son, as instructed by the devil's agent—an imp of possession—then buried the corpse and the murder weapon in a hidden section of the windmill's cellar. Meanwhile, the imp arranged to substitute another human child for the murdered boy so as not to draw suspicion from the community. Unbeknownst to the miller and his wife, the imp possessed this child for most of his life.

For sixteen years, the miller produced the best flour in the entire county, and people brought their grain to him from miles around. The imp was patient and careful not to let on that the boy was possessed. The few evil acts that could be attributed to the boy were put down to youthful prankishness and forgotten. Then, 6 months ago, the time came for the miller to repay his debt. Seeking a way out of his predicament, he confessed what he had done to his wife and asked her to make him some charms against devils. Her wards prevented the devil who held the contract from coming near the mill or its inhabitants, but the devil was not to be denied. One night, during a severe storm, the imp talked the boy into entering the windmill, using its hide presence ability to bypass the wards set by the miller's wife. Then it left him, possessed a portion of the mill's mechanism, and sat back to await its chance.

Three nights later, the miller was working in the windmill on his own when the safety mechanism was tripped, activating the mechanism and crushing him on the millstone. The next day, the miller's son went to serve Lord Destrier, and the family cat (which was also the miller's wife's familiar) disappeared—another victim of the imp. Two weeks later, an old black cat with a limp (actually the imp in its cat form) showed up on the doorstep of the windmill, and the lonely old woman took it in. Shortly thereafter, the mysterious crib deaths began.

Time passed, the mill fell into disrepair, and the farmers once again began taking their business to Kadlow's watermill. The crib deaths continued, and some unknown creature began to attack the farmers' cattle at night, drawing the milk from them and often killing them in the process. The people of the village whispered that a witch was responsible, and suspicion fell on the miller's wife, who was often found near the sites of the incidents. The villagers began to make hand gestures to protect themselves from evil spirits whenever they saw the old woman.

In fact, the imp was responsible for all these events. Each night, it took the form of a hare (the legendary alternate form of a witch). Then it either visited the homes of newborn babes and slew them or crept into the farmers' fields and drained the milk from cows until they bled. When its night's work was done, it assumed cat form and returned to the mill, where it attempted to possess the miller's wife, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. On the nights it succeeded, it convinced her to get up and walk into the fields or into town, placing her near the site of a mysterious death in her nightclothes. Then it sat back, leaving her in suspicious circumstances and

unable to defend her actions. And always it talked to her in her mind, mentioning the times that she has become a hare (even though she hasn't), suggesting that she is insatiably thirsty for cow's milk, and vowing vengeance against the villagers who have wronged her and her family.

PRESENT SITUATION

Thus far, the miller's wife has resisted acting on any suggestions of vengeful acts, but her mental state has been deteriorating under the imp's relentless barrage and the continued wailing of her real son's ghost, which has haunted the area since its death. Deprived for months of a proper night's rest, she can no longer distinguish between the reality of her own actions and the lies of the imp, and she has taken to muttering to herself in answer to the voice in her head. Furthermore, the lack of sleep has given her red-rimmed eyes and a frowsy, half-mad appearance.

The imp's goal is to drive the miller's wife into making a pact with its master, as her husband did, thereby increasing the imp's chances for advancement in the infernal hierarchy. It hopes to anger the townsfolk enough to move against the miller's wife, thereby rendering her willing to trade her soul for protection and/or revenge against them.

For their part, the people of Colmere are desperate to end the trouble and death that have befallen their village. Because all the young men are away serving their lord as soldiers, the remaining villagers have so far been too frightened to move against the "witch" in their midst. However, their fear may overcome their caution given enough time.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Upon realizing that the PCs are adventurers, the people of Colmere ask them for help against the witch who has been plaguing them. If the PCs refuse, the villagers burn the old mill down 3 days later, but with the imp's help, the miller's wife survives. However, this act drives her over the edge of sanity, and she finally accepts the imp's suggestion that she seek revenge upon them. It may then be up to the PCs to keep the village of Colmere from becoming a field of death.

If the PCs accept the mission, the villagers pool their limited resources and pay what they can (DM's discretion as to exact amount). The characters must

conduct their own investigation of the strange events, interviewing villagers, checking out locations, and ferreting out information by whatever means they wish. While they do, small crowds of villagers periodically ask them for reports.

The simplest way for the characters to get to the bottom of the mystery is to stake out Farmer Kadlow's pasture at night. While they are there, the imp arrives in hare form and begins draining cows. Whether or not they attack at that time, they can follow it back to the mill. There they encounter the miller's wife, dazed and confused by the imp. If they attack her, she fights back, using a weapon empowered by the imp. Should the party prove too much for her, the imp leaves and heads for the mill, where it makes its last stand against the PCs. Either the characters or the villagers, who soon arrive, may set fire to the mill during the battle. Finally, the PCs can make their way to the cellar where the body of the miller's son is buried and lay his ghost to rest at last.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As DM, you know best how to involve your characters in an adventure. However, if you're stuck for an idea, you can use any of the following suggestions to spur your imagination, modifying them as necessary to fit your campaign and the characters' interests.

- Word of Colmere's witch problem has reached Count De'Stune, the feudal lord of the region. He has dispatched the PCs to Colmere to investigate.
- The PCs are traveling through the Central Highlands to their next adventuring site. They arrive at Colmere just as night is falling and they need a place to rest.
- One of the PCs has relatives who used to own a farm just outside Colmere. Recently, they sold their property and left town because their dairy cattle had dried up. These relatives can provide the PCs with some of the common-knowledge information below about the situation in Colmere.
- Farmer Kadlow is intent on protecting his dairy cattle from the witch, so he hires the PCs to help guard them. He is willing to pay up to 200 gp for services rendered.

SOLVING THE MYSTERY

The PCs can go about solving this mystery in many ways. They can interview villagers to gather information about the situation, examine affected cattle, and talk to the miller's wife herself. They can cast spells to detect evil (most of which will not reveal the imp's presence unless they are clever enough to cast it when the creature is not using its hide presence ability), or to see a creature in its true form (though they are unlikely to have access to spells that can reveal this kind of information at their level). They can also make liberal use of *detect lie* and Sense Motive checks while talking to the miller's wife, with success revealing that she believes herself innocent at least part of the time, and that her mind is not entirely stable—and perhaps not entirely her own.

However, the PCs cannot actually catch the culprit until they see the imp in the act of committing one of its atrocities. Since no one in the village trusts the miller's wife as a healer or midwife anymore, the imp has been concentrating on draining and killing cattle. Thus, the most likely way for the PCs to get the evidence they need is to stake out Farmer Kadlow's pasture at night (see encounter 3). This tactic puts them in direct contact with the imp for the first time and sets the rest of the action in motion. If they do not set up a stakeout, they can rejoin the action of the adventure by confronting the miller's wife (encounter 2a) or poking around the mill long enough to convince the imp that they constitute a threat, thus precipitating its attack (encounter 5).

If the PCs get stuck and don't seem to know how to proceed, you can redirect them by introducing Gromon Phandruus (NG human male commoner 3/paladin 2/fighter 4), the groundskeeper for the local temple of Saint Cuthbert. Phandruus is an old man who always seems to know more than he should, and he's considered crazy by the locals. Phandruus was once a paladin of Saint Cuthbert, but he wasn't up to the task, so he took up adventuring as a fighter instead. However, he remained in the church's good graces and retired to Colmere when he had saved up enough money to buy a modest house. Now he works his days away in relative peace and harmony. He isn't really crazy, but he likes his privacy, and he has found that it's easier to maintain if people think he's a bit odd.

When the PCs encounter Phandruus, he asks if he can talk to them. If they agree, he gives them a cryptic hint to get them back on the track of the adventure. This information can range from "The answer is in the cows," to "Find the hare of the cow," to "The miller's wife is more and less than she seems."

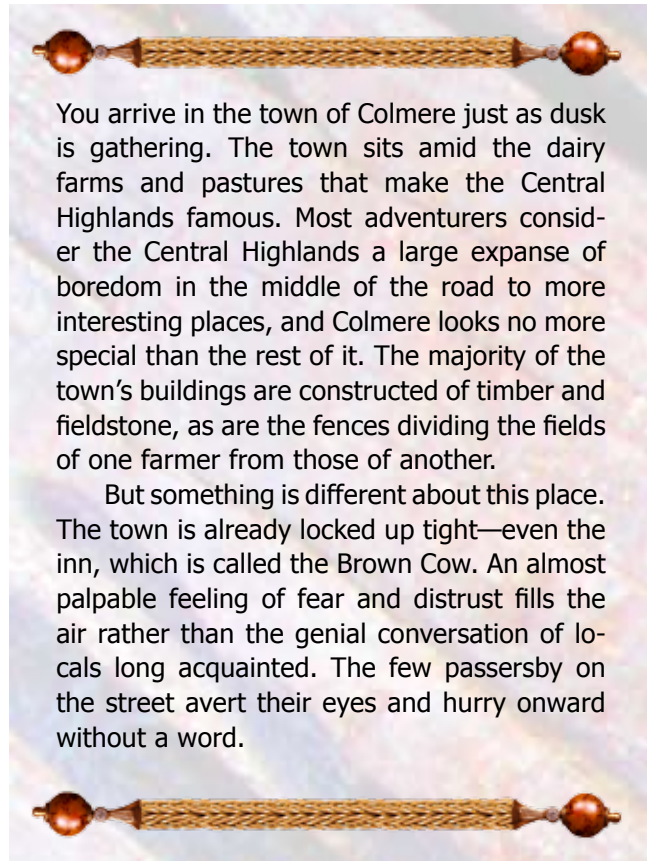
BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure consists of several freeform encounters and six placed encounter areas. The placed encounters are marked with numbers; the freeform encounters are indicated with letters. The encounters can be run in any order, though the order in which they are presented below is recommended.

1. COLMERE (EL 7)

Colmere is a small village, far from the main trade routes. No sizable rivers provide traffic to the area, and relatively few ruins dot the surrounding landscape. Dairy farming is Colmere's main industry, but the town does little trading with the outside world—its people do their best to remain self-sufficient. As far as travelers are concerned, the village is merely a wide spot in the road where one can stop and rest while moving from one place to the next.

The PCs arrive in town just before sundown. Read or paraphrase the following aloud when they reach Colmere.



You arrive in the town of Colmere just as dusk is gathering. The town sits amid the dairy farms and pastures that make the Central Highlands famous. Most adventurers consider the Central Highlands a large expanse of boredom in the middle of the road to more interesting places, and Colmere looks no more special than the rest of it. The majority of the town's buildings are constructed of timber and fieldstone, as are the fences dividing the fields of one farmer from those of another.

But something is different about this place. The town is already locked up tight—even the inn, which is called the Brown Cow. An almost palpable feeling of fear and distrust fills the air rather than the genial conversation of locals long acquainted. The few passersby on the street avert their eyes and hurry onward without a word.



If the PCs stop a local and ask about accommodations, they are directed to the Brown Cow Inn—the only place in town that offers rooms for rent. The PCs can gain admittance to the inn by hammering on the door.

1A. THE BROWN COW INN

Like most of the buildings in Colmere, the Brown Cow Inn is made of fieldstone and has a timber frame. Unlike the other structures, however, it is roofed with wooden shingles instead of thatch.

NPC: Bartholomew (LN male human expert 8, pictured above) is the proprietor of the Brown Cow Inn and a brewer specializing in ales. He's a bit surly, but despite his grumbling and protesting over the disturbance, he's actually glad to have paying guests—he hasn't had more than fifteen in the past 8 months. He hasn't been able to make nearly as much money as he thinks he should with his chosen professions, but he's unwilling to move to a larger city where he could expand his clientele because his wife likes Colmere.

If the PCs ask what's going on in town, he reveals the following pieces of information in response to appropriate questions (no check necessary).

- People are afraid because Colmere has been cursed by a witch. Babies have been dying in their cradles while they sleep, and the local cattle are regularly drained of their milk at night. The process always leaves the cows terrified and traumatized, and some are found dead in the morning, with their udders turned inside out. Thus far, Farmer Kadlow's cows have had the best survival rate.

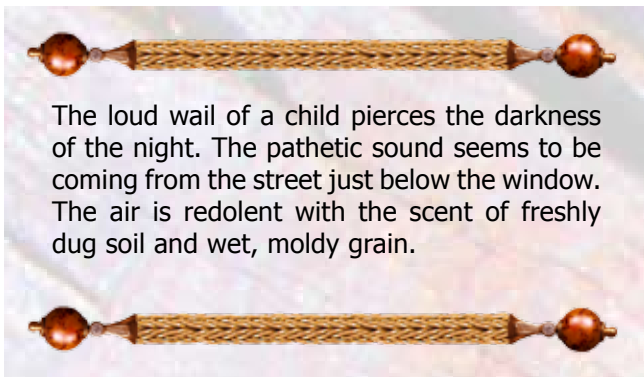
- The miller's wife is up to no good. She's often seen making her way through town at night in her nightclothes, her hair in wild disarray—sometimes with her big black cat following her.
- Her husband, the miller, died several months ago in a milling accident. Why he was milling in the middle of the night remains a mystery.
- A baby can often be heard crying at night near the mill or the temple of Saint Cuthbert.

Not all the villagers are ready to believe the worst of the miller's wife, but those who think more charitably of her do not frequent the Brown Cow. A DC 15 Gather Information check made while talking with villagers at the outlying farms reveals that some folks remember her as a kindly woman who delivered children and healed the sick. These few people believe that her recent spate of ill fortune has affected her reason, or that some other explanation for the odd incidents may exist.

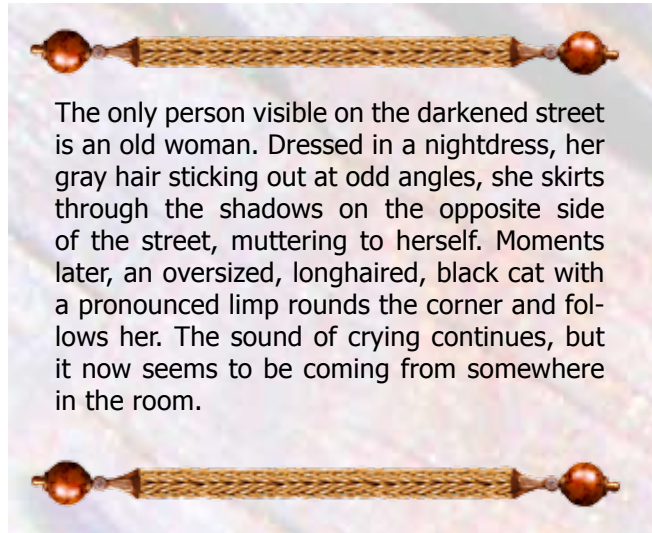
A. A CRY IN THE NIGHT (EL 2)

This encounter can be used any night that the PCs stay in Colmere, but it's best done on the night of their arrival, to acquaint them with some of the mysterious happenings in town.

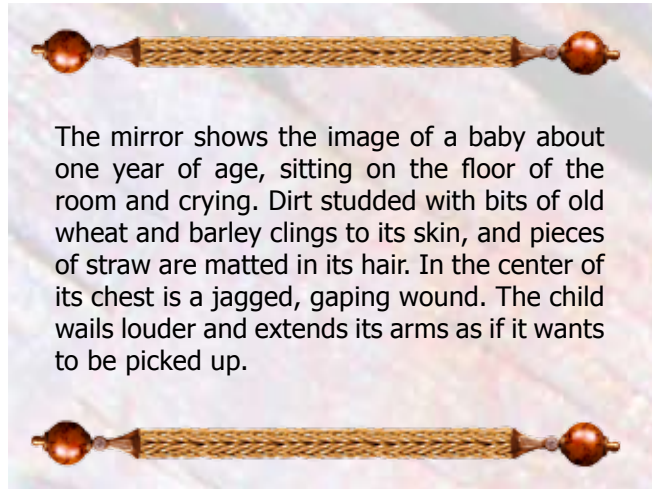
Read or paraphrase the following after the PCs have settled down to sleep.



Any PC who looks out the window sees the following.



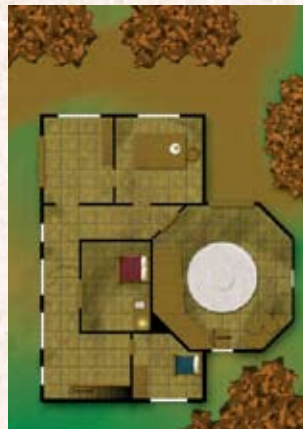
A PC who makes a successful DC 10 Listen check realizes that the sound is now coming from the mirror hanging on the wall. Read or paraphrase the following when someone goes to check.



WANT MAPS?

This adventure comes with three maps you can use as a battle stage or as inspiration for your own designs. They are located in Appendix A (page 28). Larger versions of these maps are available on the Knowledge Arcana website free for download. Links to the maps are in the KA archives page (warning, the files are a bit large).

Once you have the maps, you may want to write them to a CD or use a flash drive to store them and take them to a local full-service print store. They should be able to print the maps for a small fee.





The image persists until someone turns to look for the source of the reflection in the room. No child is there, and a glance back at the mirror reveals that it has disappeared. The sound of the crying fades away moments thereafter. No one else in the inn is awake at this early hour, and anyone the PCs awaken to ask about the incident is surly and uncommunicative.

Creature: The child is the ghost of the miller's real son, who was sacrificed as part of his deal with the devil. The baby's body is buried in a cellar beneath the old mill, but it haunts various locations in town.

Infant Ghost: hp 6; see Appendix B for statistics.

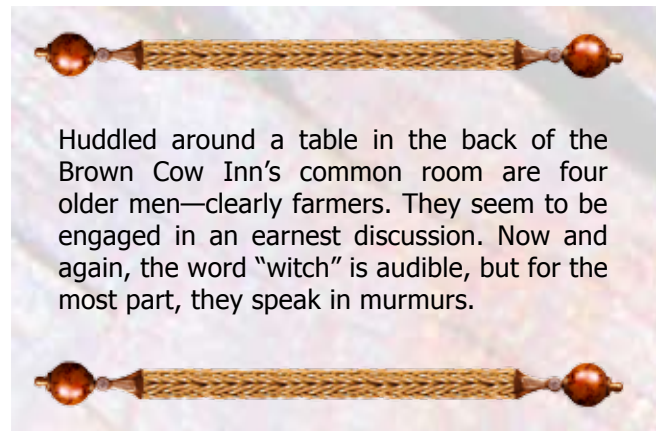
Development: If the adventure lasts for more than one day, have the baby's ghost make additional appearances from time to time. Images of it can be reflected in glass, mirrors, or ponds, and its crying should add to the sense of urgency to resolve the mystery. See encounter 6 for details on how the ghost can be laid to rest.

B. MOB ACTION (EL 6)

This encounter should occur at least three times throughout this adventure, as given below. The first occurrence should be soon after encounter A takes place. The mob grows in size and strength with each encounter.

B1. FIRST ENCOUNTER

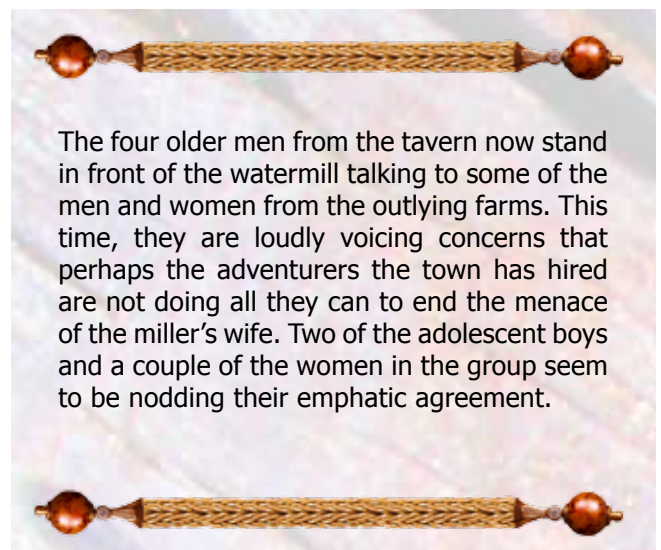
The first time the PCs encounter the mob, it consists of only four older men grumbling angrily about the situation. Read or paraphrase the following.



When the old men notice a PC paying attention to their conversation, they return to nursing their mugs of beer quietly.

B2. SECOND ENCOUNTER

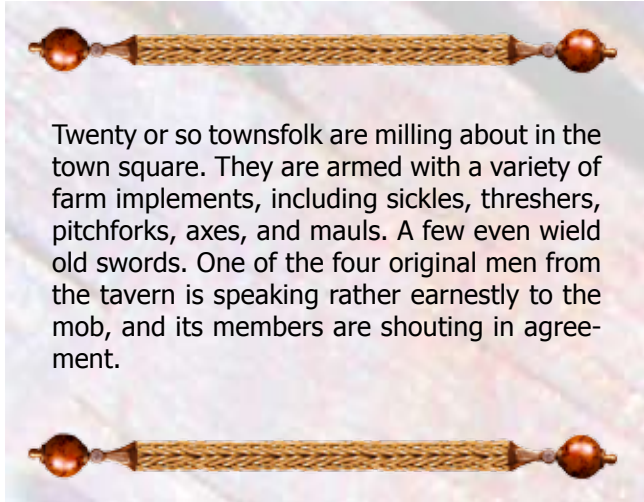
The next time the PCs encounter the mob, it consists of the same four older men, plus two boys too young to be recruited for service to Lord Destrier and two middle-aged women. These eight individuals are trying to stir others into action. Read or paraphrase the following.



When the group notices the PCs, the conversation drops in volume. After a few more muttered whispers and nods, the mob disperses on its own.

B3. THIRD ENCOUNTER

The third time the PCs encounter the mob, it has expanded to nearly twenty brave (or foolish) souls of mixed gender and age. These individuals have assembled in the town square, and this time they are armed. Read or paraphrase the following.



Twenty or so townsfolk are milling about in the town square. They are armed with a variety of farm implements, including sickles, threshers, pitchforks, axes, and mauls. A few even wield old swords. One of the four original men from the tavern is speaking rather earnestly to the mob, and its members are shouting in agreement.

The speaker is Colm Zagit, the manager of Kadlow's watermill.

NPCs: Colm Zagit (N male human expert 5) is Kadlow's manager at the watermill. His primary desire is to make a living and to support his family as best he can. Normally, he can be found either at the watermill working, or at the Brown Cow drinking. The other villagers are farmers and tradesmen (N or NG male or female human expert 3).

Dispersing the mob at this point requires a successful Diplomacy or Intimidation check opposed by Colm's check result (Charisma 14). If the check fails, the mob marches out to the mill and sets fire to it if not physically prevented (see encounter 5). Killing or knocking out one member of the mob disperses it, but it simply forms elsewhere when the PCs are not watching and carries out its mission of destruction.

If the PCs seem to be dragging their feet with the investigation, the mob can form at intervals throughout the adventure. Each time it forms, add +2 to Colm's check result to oppose the Diplomacy check made to disperse it.



2. THE MILL (EL 4)

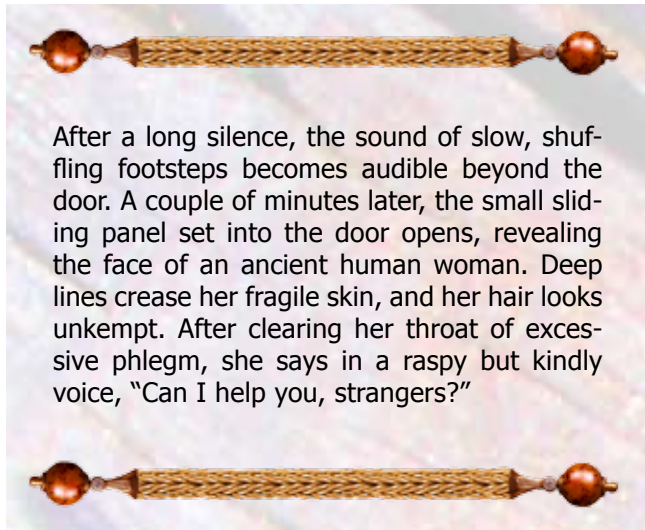
The old windmill on the northern edge of town stands about 45 feet high. The first story is built of fieldstone and mortar; the second is made of wood. The whole structure is roofed with wooden shingles.

The single-story cottage on the east side of the windmill is constructed of fieldstone with a timber frame, and it has a thatched roof. The miller's wife and her cat (the imp) live in this modest abode.

The mill is the nearer of the two structures to the road. A cobblestone path winds from the road to the cottage through an ancient rose garden now overgrown with weeds. The door into the cottage is made of oak planks bound together with iron strapping. The door opens outward and has a viewing hole set at human height.

2A. FIRST MEETING

If the PCs knock on the door, read or paraphrase the following.



The outcome of this encounter depends on what the PCs say at this point. See Development, below, for options.

NPCs: The miller's wife is tired to the point of exhaustion from another night under the control of the imp. In fact, the PCs have just awakened her, no matter what time of day they are here. She often sleeps entire days and has nearly given up on personal grooming.

The imp of possession is in the cottage with the miller's wife, in the form of a large black cat with a limp. (The limp is a real handicap of the imp's true form, acquired when its devil superior was angry with it.) It watches the situation from the shadows of the cottage, taking no action unless the miller's wife is attacked. It tries not to draw attention to itself, and if anyone approaches it, it lays its ears back and hisses. Should anyone try to pick it up, it delivers a swat with a clawed paw (no damage, though the scratch does sting).

The Miller's Wife: hp 22; see Appendix B for statistics.

Imp (Cat Form): hp 40; see Appendix B for statistics.

Tactics: If the PCs attack the miller's wife here, she fights back to the best of her ability with her spells and dagger, shouting all the while for the intruders to leave her house. The cat retreats to the shadows and becomes ethereal on the 1st round, then takes possession of her dagger on the 2nd round, turning it into a +4 weapon. The creature does not want the miller's wife slain until it has either turned her to evil (thus condemning her to the Nine Hells) or arranged a few more soul-pacts for its master. Thus, it does its best to protect her from the PCs.

If she seems to be losing the fight, the imp leaves the dagger and takes possession of any convenient household object, then animates it and attacks the PCs. The fact that it appears that the miller's wife must be using her witch powers to send objects against her attackers is not lost on the imp. For her part, the miller's wife is not awed by the animation of her belongings because she has seen them come to life before, when the imp was playing with her mind. She angrily orders them against the PCs, as though she were actually in control of them.

The miller's wife and the imp are content with driving the PCs from the house, so the two of them do not pursue if the characters depart. The imp leaves whatever object it was controlling and rematerializes in cat form.

Development: If the PCs request entrance, the miller's wife asks them what they want. Her responses to possible PC questions are summarized below.

Grain: If the characters inquire about purchasing grain for their mounts, the miller's wife gruffly tells them that the mill isn't working anymore and politely requests that they leave. Repeated requests bring a plaintive demand that they "leave a poor old woman alone."

Healing: If the PCs inquire about healing, the miller's wife gladly opens the door and invites them inside (see encounter 2b, page 19). She becomes extremely talkative and friendly, asking them about their ailments and bustling about the cottage, gathering herbs and ointments to help them. "Don't be afraid to tell me what ails ya," she says. "Dysentery, chillblains, mumps, rashes, ague—I've seen it all, and I can cure it."

Witch: If the PCs ask the miller's wife about the allegations that she is a witch, she allows them to enter the cottage (if they are not inside already) and says they are free to look around. However, she speaks guardedly, giving terse but honest replies to questions. She denies being a witch and claims to be only a healer. However, her memory is unreliable because of the imp's intermittent possession of her and nearly constant voice in her mind. Thus, she tends to ramble and make remarks that sound quite bizarre. Below is a list of sample replies that she might make to appropriate questions. Use these as a guide for conducting her conversation.

- "I ain't no witch, and I ain't done nothing bad. I just sit here with Fluffy and mind my own business."
- "I used to tend all their sickness, and I've brought every baby in this village into the world for nigh onto forty years now. Never a complaint, never lost nobody. And now they say I'm a witch. Hmmp."

- “I don’t go out much anymore—except at night. Hop, hop, hop, out there in the moonlight.”
- “I’m an old woman and a little forgetful,” she says, “but I ain’t killed no babies, nor hexed anyone’s cows. It’s all nonsense they’re talking.”
- “Of course I like milk. But it’s best when it’s fresh.”
- “Sometimes the baby cries at night, but I have no milk to give him.”

The Mill: If the PCs ask to look at the mill, the miller’s wife becomes agitated and asks them to leave. She does not give permission for them to see it under any circumstances. (In fact, she is afraid of the place not only because her husband died there, but because she has seen and heard the ghost of the child there.) She does not, however, physically try to prevent them from visiting the mill if they insist on going.

2B. THE COTTAGE

The interior of the cottage is cozy but messy, since the miller’s wife has not cleaned in some time. Dust covers the floor and furniture, and the remains of a meal are on the table. A large fireplace in the wall opposite the door houses a cauldron, blackened by fire and full of bubbling stew. Hanging from almost every rafter are bunches of herbs, bags of dried meat, and other preserved food products. Near the fireplace is a pile of wood and a bucket of coal.

Shelves line the walls of the cottage. Some contain books; others are stacked with dishes, pans, foodstuffs, or other supplies. One shelf is filled with small clay crocks, each stoppered with a piece of wood and wax.

Treasure: The books are without value, but the seventeen little clay pots each contain a pungent, yellowish healing salve flecked with bits of herbs. The salve in one of these pots is *Keoghtom’s ointment* (two doses). Ten of the others contain ointment equivalent to a *potion of cure light wounds*, four contain ointment equivalent to a *potion of cure moderate wounds*, and two contain ointment equivalent to a *potion of cure serious wounds*.

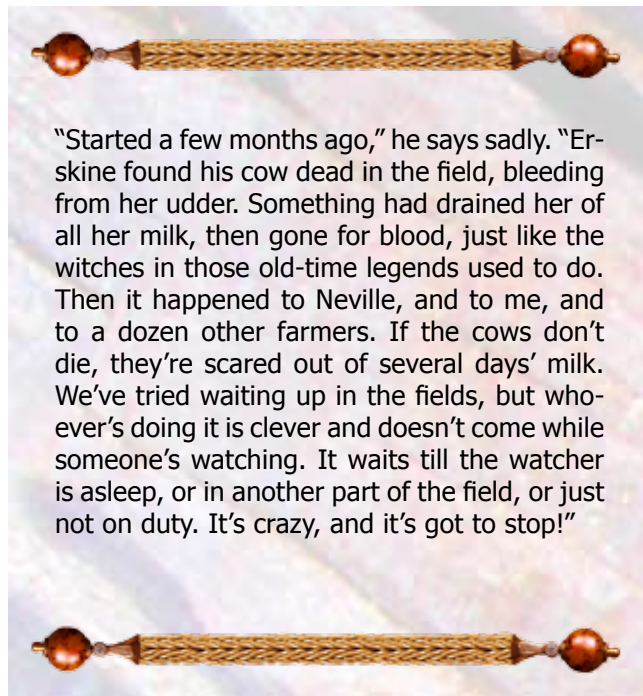
C. FARMER KADLOW

Kadlow’s farm is located about 2 miles east of Colmere, on a quiet lane lined with ancient trees. A neat and tidy outfit, the farm features a large barn, a well-built stone farmhouse, and a stone silo. Brown cows similar to those in the fields closer to town graze in the nearer pastures.

NPCs: Justyn Kadlow (N male human expert 5), the miller’s rival, lives here with his wife, two sons, and daughter, plus several farmhands. Kadlow is a wiry man in his sixties, with brown hair well sprinkled with gray. His wife is some twenty years younger, and his children are grown but not married.

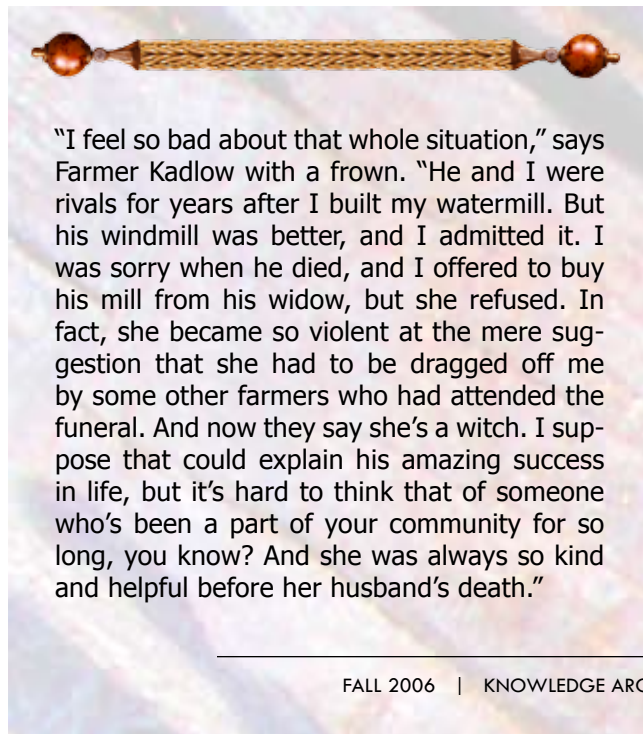
Development: The PCs can talk to anyone they wish here on the farm, but only Kadlow has anything useful to say. If the PCs tell him why they have come, Kadlow becomes very friendly. He invites them to join his family for a hearty lunch and asks them for news about events happening in other parts of the world.

If asked about the witch, he shakes his head and explains the situation. Read or paraphrase the following aloud.



“Started a few months ago,” he says sadly. “Erskine found his cow dead in the field, bleeding from her udder. Something had drained her of all her milk, then gone for blood, just like the witches in those old-time legends used to do. Then it happened to Neville, and to me, and to a dozen other farmers. If the cows don’t die, they’re scared out of several days’ milk. We’ve tried waiting up in the fields, but whoever’s doing it is clever and doesn’t come while someone’s watching. It waits till the watcher is asleep, or in another part of the field, or just not on duty. It’s crazy, and it’s got to stop!”

If the PCs ask Kadlow about the miller and his wife, Farmer Kadlow expresses some regret. Read or paraphrase the following aloud.



“I feel so bad about that whole situation,” says Farmer Kadlow with a frown. “He and I were rivals for years after I built my windmill. But his windmill was better, and I admitted it. I was sorry when he died, and I offered to buy his mill from his widow, but she refused. In fact, she became so violent at the mere suggestion that she had to be dragged off me by some other farmers who had attended the funeral. And now they say she’s a witch. I suppose that could explain his amazing success in life, but it’s hard to think that of someone who’s been a part of your community for so long, you know? And she was always so kind and helpful before her husband’s death.”

If the PCs explain that they are attempting to rid the town of the witch problem, Farmer Kadlow heartily endorses their effort. He insists on paying for their expenses and offers them 1,000 gp over and above what the town offered for their services. He also promises to contact them first if the need for people of their skills should arise in the future.

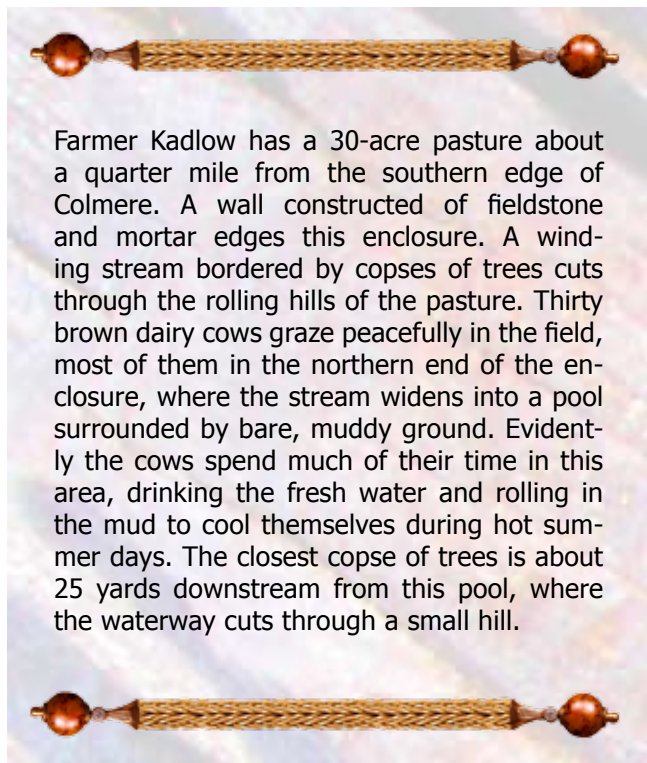
After lunch, Farmer Kadlow takes the PCs on a tour of his operation. His spread is quite extensive, but he doesn't seem to have as many cows as he should for so much pastureland (DC 20 Knowledge [nature] to notice). Kadlow has bought up quite a few of the local farms from other farmers whose herds have been decimated by the attacks.

3. THERE'S MILK IN MY HARE! (EL 9)

Use this encounter when and if the PCs decide to stake out one of Farmer Kadlow's fields.

3A. STAKEOUT

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs are choosing a spot.

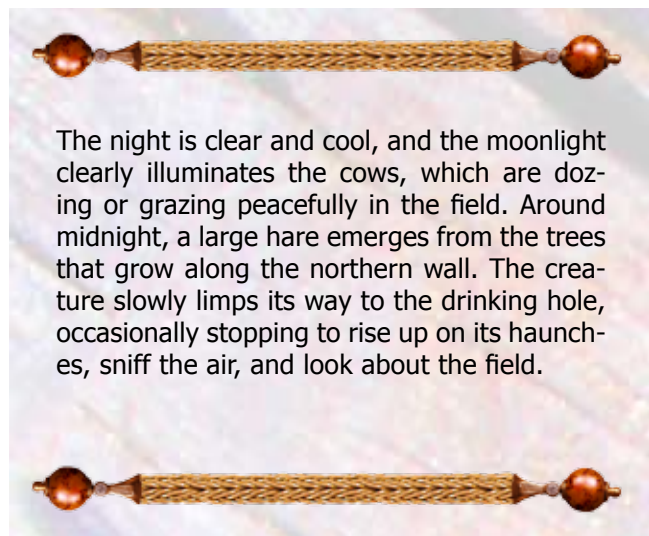


All the cows are either drinking at the watering hole or grazing nearby. If the PCs are in the field after nightfall, the moonlight illuminates the area clearly enough for

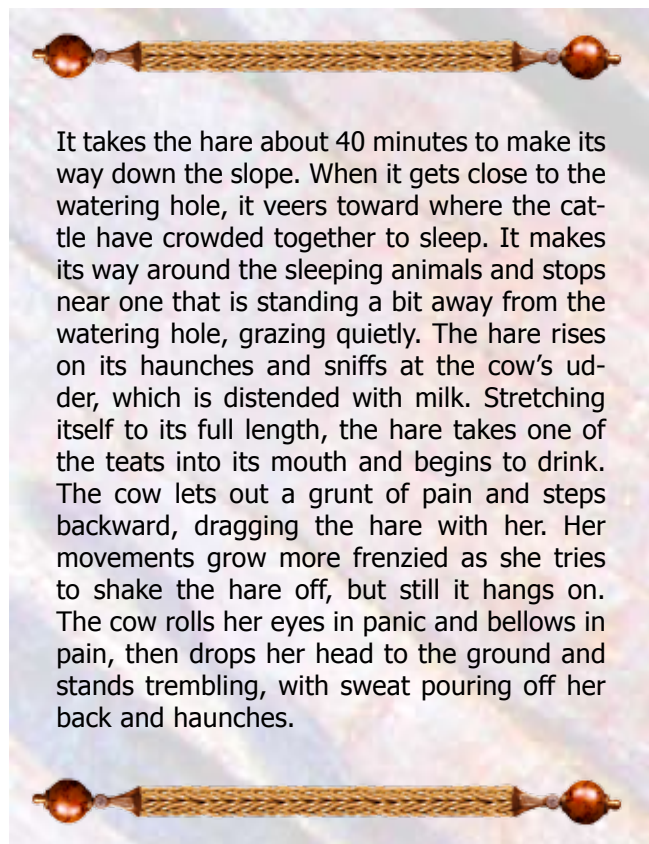
them to keep watch on the cows. If the characters build a fire, the cows become restless and move farther from it, making it more difficult to see them.

3B. THE "WITCH"

About midnight, the imp approaches in hare form. Let each character make a DC 15 Spot check, and read or paraphrase the following aloud to any who succeed.



If the characters attack the hare, it flees (see Tactics, below). If they continue to watch it, read or paraphrase the following aloud.





The PCs have about 15 minutes to interfere before the cow dies from the assault. The other cattle, meanwhile, wake up and begin milling about the area, mooing loudly.

Creature: The hare is the imp in disguise. It has been monitoring the PCs' investigation and expects to find them here at some point, so it is putting on a good show.

Imp of Possession: hp 40; see Appendix B for statistics.

Tactics: The imp continues drinking from the cow until either it is attacked or the cow dies. The cow's milk lasts about 10 minutes; once that is gone, the cow begins to bleed, and the imp allows the blood to run down over it and stain its fur. It neatly sidesteps the cow when she falls.

If the PCs attack the hare, the first attack that can draw blood does so. The hare immediately lets go of the cow and flees to the trees from whence it appeared. From there, it returns to the miller's cottage as fast as it can travel when running in its hare form (speed 80 ft.). It does not change shape or stop to fight the PCs because it wants to convince them that it is the miller's wife who has been turning into a hare and killing the cows. If the imp is in danger at any point, it assumes ethereal form to keep the party from getting too close.

Development: If the PCs don't intervene, the hare drains the cow of milk and moves on to another, then repeats the process. It can drain two cows before the rest panic and stampede back toward their barn. At

that point, the imp departs in the direction of the miller's cottage (see encounter 4).

If the PCs have injured the hare, they can easily (DC 15 Survival check) follow the trail of blood it leaves back to the cottage. If the hare has not been injured, it still leaves a trail, but it is a bit harder to follow (DC 20 Survival check). If the party does not have any other way to follow the trail, allow Search checks in place of Survival checks, but increase the time needed to follow the tracks in order to make the investigation a bit of a challenge for the characters.

4. WITCH OR MADWOMAN? (EL 5)

Use this encounter immediately after the PCs have seen the hare drinking from a cow in Kadlow's field, assuming that they have followed the hare's trail back to the miller's cottage.

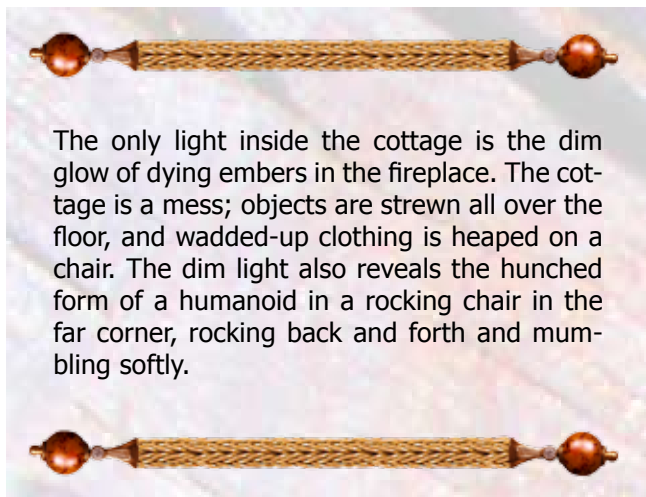
The imp has gone back inside the cottage and possessed the miller's wife while she slept. It then awakened her and moved some objects about the cottage. If the imp was injured in the encounter with the PCs, then it has injured the miller's wife in the same manner and the same location, so that the PCs will see her bleeding and assume she was the rabbit.

The hare's trail leads to the door of the cottage portion of the mill structure. The imp has gone inside and begun to prepare itself and the miller's wife for the eventual confrontation with the PCs.

ILLUS. BY DAVE DORMAN

4A. ENTRY

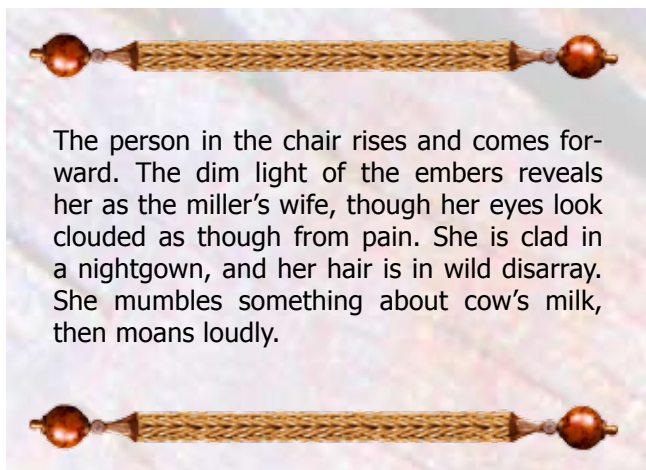
A DC 10 Listen check at the door of the cottage reveals the sound of one voice, but none of the words. No one responds to a knock on the door, but the door is unlocked. If the PCs enter the cottage, read or paraphrase the following aloud.



The person in the rocking chair is the miller's wife, who is currently possessed by the imp. The cat is not present, but do not mention this fact unless someone asks.

4B. TALKING TO THE MILLER'S WIFE

If the PCs approach the miller's wife peacefully, read or paraphrase the following aloud. If the imp has injured her to make it appear that she was the rabbit, adjust the text to mention that fact.



Creature: The miller's wife is the only creature here; the imp is possessing her at the moment and thus has no physical form.

Miller's Wife: hp 22; see Appendix B for statistics.

Tactics: The imp is using its hide presence ability to avoid detection while trying to make it appear that the miller's wife is mad. Its possession, however, does not extend to controlling its host. It perceives everything that she does, and it communicates with her telepathically, speaking directly to her mind. The frequent presence of this voice in her head has not helped her mental stability. Tonight, the imp has once again been telling her that she was a hare, describing the sensations, and suggesting that she is incredibly thirsty for cow's milk.

If the PCs attack the miller's wife, she fights back to the best of her ability (go to 4c). If they manage to get the imp to leave her body, it flees into the mill (see encounter 5), where a battle royal ensues.

Development: If the PCs try to speak with the miller's wife, they find that she's difficult to engage in rational conversation because of the voice she hears in her mind. She repeats portions of what the imp says to her, thus feeding the PCs' natural suspicions that she was the hare, and gives somewhat nonsensical answers to questions. But occasionally she seems to snap to lucidity and shouts "No, no, no!" At the moment, she isn't entirely sure whether she has been a hare or not, since the imp has been telling her for so long that she has.

Treasure: Hidden in a jar in the kitchen is an oilskin pouch containing a piece of hematite (worth 20 gp), a bloodstone (worth 50 gp), a golden-yellow topaz (worth 500 gp), a piece of obsidian (worth 20 gp), a moonstone (worth 50 gp), a tiger-eye (worth 20 gp), and an emerald (worth 500 gp).

4C. FIGHTING THE MILLER'S WIFE

If the party cannot find a simple and fast way to remove the imp from the miller's wife (a difficult task) or neutralize her, the imp tells her they're at fault for her problems and urges her to attack with the dagger she has in the pocket of her nightgown (if she has not already been attacked). She complies if the PCs seem hostile, but not if they have tried to cure her wounds or talk to her gently.

Creature: The miller's wife is still possessed by the imp, but she retains her own alignment.

Miller's Wife (Possessed): hp 22; see Appendix B for statistics.

Tactics: If the miller's wife joins combat, she yells that the PCs are out to get her, and that she's not a witch. Her grief coupled with the imp's possession have driven her very close to the edge of insanity, but she recognizes an imminent threat to her life. However, she may fight a little too recklessly, since she does long to be with her husband again.

As soon as the miller's wife strikes her first blow against the PCs, the imp leaves her and possesses her dagger, using its magic weapon ability to grant the weapon the equivalent of a +4 bonus. (You can choose to make it either a +4 *dagger* or a +2 *human bane flaming dagger*.) The weapon acquires a dark, smoldering glow, and at this point, it detects as evil (but not magical). The imp is hoping that the miller's wife retains enough residual fear to continue viewing the PCs as a threat, even though the voices have temporarily stopped.

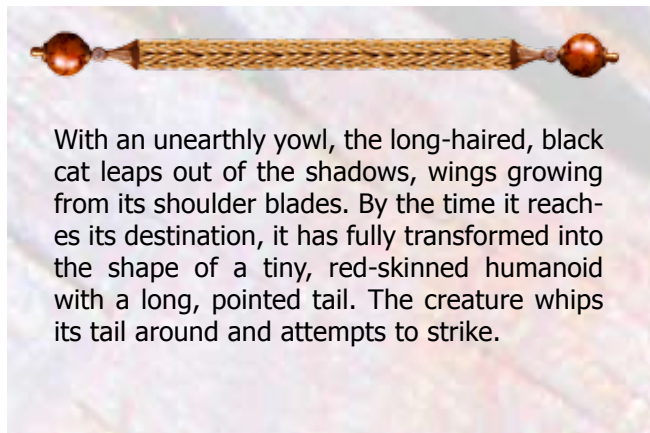
PCs who assume the miller's wife is guilty as charged may join battle and kill her without investigating further. Good-aligned characters and others who suspect that all is not as it seems may resist and try to incapacitate her.

If the PCs determine that the knife is part of the problem, they can try sundering it or disarming the miller's wife. If they sunder the dagger, the imp is forced back into ethereal form. If they manage to get it away from the miller's wife, the imp leaves it and attempts to flee in ethereal form. At that point, the knife becomes nonmagical, ceases glowing, and has no aura of any kind.

If it appears the miller's wife will lose the fight, or if the PCs try to sunder the dagger or get it away from her, the imp leaves the dagger and flees the combat in ethereal form. Once it has gone, the miller's wife (if she is still alive) realizes that her weapon is no longer as useful as it once was and surrenders to the PCs, begging for mercy. Go to encounter 4d after they have a chance to respond to her initial plea.

4D. FIGHTING THE IMP

If the PCs manage to track the imp's retreat and follow, it heads for the mill (go to encounter 5). If it detects no pursuit, it returns to the cottage 2 rounds later and reassumes its cat form. If the PCs have left the front door open, it returns by that route; otherwise, it passes through a wall and materializes as a cat in an unobtrusive location (Spot DC 20 to detect). It then waits for a suitable moment to attack, preferably by surprise. Read or paraphrase the following when it does so.



With an unearthly yowl, the long-haired, black cat leaps out of the shadows, wings growing from its shoulder blades. By the time it reaches its destination, it has fully transformed into the shape of a tiny, red-skinned humanoid with a long, pointed tail. The creature whips its tail around and attempts to strike.

Creature: The imp should be the only combatant in this portion of the adventure; the miller's wife should be dead, incapacitated, or in the custody of the PCs.

Imp of Possession: hp 40; see Appendix B for statistics.

Tactics: The imp tries to get in one attack with its tail, then flees toward the mill. Its primary goal is to goad the PCs into chasing it, not to fight them here.

5. JOUSTING WITH WINDMILLS (EL 9)

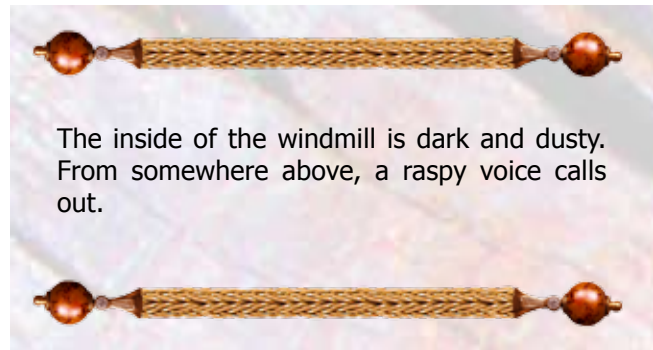
Use this encounter if the PCs chase the imp from the cottage in encounter 4.

The mill is three stories high, including the ground floor. A long staircase connects all three levels. No grain is stored here since it has been unused for so long, but old flour and dust coat most of the surfaces. This heavy layer of particulate matter creates a strong fire hazard (see *Fire in the Mill!* Sidebar). The mill's mechanism takes up most of the central section, and tools, parts, and other objects lie helter-skelter on all levels, right where the miller left them.

5A. BATTLEGROUND

The imp has previously set up the interior of the mill to give itself every advantage in a fight. When it enters, it flies to the top of the mill, where it turns invisible and settles down to fight a war of attrition, staying out of the PCs' reach but harassing them with its supernatural powers and abilities.

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter the windmill.



The inside of the windmill is dark and dusty. From somewhere above, a raspy voice calls out.

The voice is that of the imp, and it speaks the name of whichever party member the creature wishes to target with its suggestion ability. It chooses a target that looks like a fighter-type—preferably one with a silver or good-aligned weapon, if it can detect any such features from its position.



Creature: The imp is the only opponent in the aboveground portion of the mill when the PCs enter, though it can use its powers to create additional foes from objects (see below).

Imp of Possession: hp 40; see Appendix B for statistics.

Animated Objects (Variable): hp variable; see *MM* 13 for statistics.

Tactics: The imp has flown up to the highest point in the windmill so that the PCs have to climb the stairs to reach it. Because of its location and the many portions of the mechanism behind which it can hide, spellcasters shouldn't be able to target it with spells unless they have magical aid in pinpointing it.

Meanwhile, the imp uses its possession abilities to make the mill itself fight the PCs. It begins by animating objects and setting them on the characters to impede their progress and wear them down. Since it can animate objects of up to Gargantuan size, virtually every object within the windmill (except the structure itself) is a viable target for this power. The imp may choose to animate pieces of equipment (such as scythes, chains, barrels, tables, stools, and hand tools), or mechanisms within the mill (such as belts, levers, or the grinding wheel), or even portions of the structure (such the staircase or the rafters). Thus, the most likely scenario is that the party must battle its way up to the imp by fighting animated objects.

In addition, the mill itself is a firetrap because of the dust, flour, and bits of old oil and grease it contains, so any fire effects that the PCs employ can easily set it alight (see the *Fire in the Mill!* sidebar).

Development: While the PCs have been tracking the imp, the villagers have grown increasingly restless and have now formed an unruly mob bent on slaying the miller's wife. The villagers arrive at some point during the fight, bearing torches and weapons. Thus, if the party doesn't set the mill on fire, the approaching mob might (see encounter 5b). If the PCs have already determined that the miller's wife is innocent, one or more of them may wish to disengage to stop the mob from killing her. If she is already dead, the PCs might still want to prevent the mob from setting fire to the tinderbox in which they're fighting.

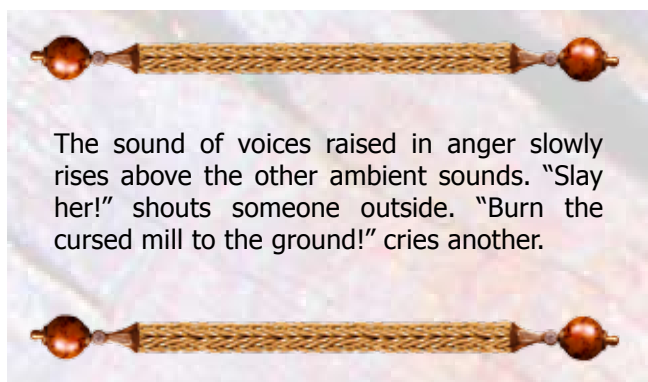
The fight with the imp can end in many different ways, based largely on your plans for the aftermath of this adventure. If you wish to have this imp and its devil boss serve as long-term adversaries in your campaign, the imp should do what it can to harm the PCs now, but ultimately try to flee. If you have no further use for the imp, it may decide that it wants to stay and fight to the death. If so, it should pull out all the stops, and utilize its special abilities to the best advantage it can.

The imp is a difficult adversary because of its ability to become ethereal, possess objects and creatures, and hide its presence. A correctly targeted *dispel evil* is the most effective way to get rid of it short of killing it on the Ethereal Plane, but the PCs may not have the means to achieve either outcome. Thus, they may wish to fall back, rest up, and tackle the imp again when they have had the chance to prepare the appropriate spells. Alternatively, they might be able to convince the imp (either directly by means of Bluff or Diplomacy checks, or indirectly by making remarks from which it can draw its own conclusions) that its cover has been blown and its mission here cannot be completed. In that case, it may decide to call off its efforts here for a while and return to the Nine Hells. Even if it does opt for escape, however, the PCs may still be able to neutralize it if they play extremely well.

If the imp is slain, its body vanishes. It returns to life in the Nine Hells but cannot return to the Material Plane within the PCs' lifetime.

5B. AN ANGRY MOB

While the PCs have been investigating the witch problem, the villagers and a few of the farmers who live nearby have grown restless with the delays and formed a mob. This unruly bunch intends to solve the problem by burning the whole mill to the ground. If the PCs haven't yet slain the miller's wife, the mob is more than willing to burn her at the stake. Read or paraphrase the following aloud when the mob approaches.



Any PCs who go outside before the mob reaches the cottage can try to reason with the villagers. With some fast talk (Diplomacy DC 25), they can turn back the mob and convince its members not to harm the miller's wife or the mill today.

NPCs: At least twenty villagers (N male or female commoner 2) have gathered to form the angry mob that now threatens the miller's wife.

FIRE IN THE MILL!

The imp long ago decided to make its final stand against any interference in the mill, so it has cleverly set the place up to be a prison of fiery death to anyone who fights it there. No grain is stored in the mill anymore, but it contains enough flour, dust, and bits of oil and grease to become a blazing inferno if any effects that deal fire or electricity damage are used inside it.

If an effect whose description specifies that it sets flammable materials ablaze (such as *fireball* or *lightning bolt*) is used inside the mill, the combustible materials automatically ignite. Similar effects also have a chance to start a fire, according to the following guidelines.

A spell or effect that deals fire or electricity damage has a 20% chance to accidentally start a fire in the mill if its duration is instantaneous; otherwise the chance is 40%. The chances for all subsequent uses of such abilities stack with the initial chance. Thus, an instantaneous effect has a 20% chance to cause a fire, and a second instantaneous effect has a 40% chance. A t-duration effect has a 40% chance to start a fire, and a second of the same type has an 80% chance. Finally, an instantaneous effect that follows a longer-duration effect (or vice versa) has a 60% chance to ignite the mill. Nonmagical fire- or spark-producing effects (such as alchemist's fire or a character's deliberate attempt to start a fire) automatically ignite the flammable materials here. Should a fire begin in the mill by any means, see *Catching on Fire* (DMG 303) for guidelines.

Since the imp has fast healing and resistance to fire, it's not particularly concerned about whether or not the place goes up in flames. Besides, if the fire becomes too uncomfortable, the imp can always escape using etherealness.

Tactics: If unchecked, the mob drags the miller's wife out of her cottage and holds her fast while a stack of kindling is gathered. The villagers then tie her to a stout stake set in the middle of the pile and set it alight. It takes 4 rounds for the flames to reach her, after which she takes 2d6 points of fire damage per round until she is rescued or dies.

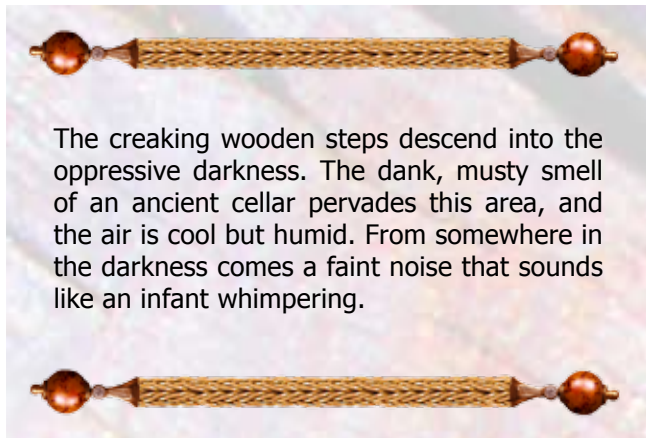
Once the mob has started the fire in the pile of kindling (or discovered the miller's wife already dead), its members turn their attention to the mill. If not prevented (that is, turned back with a successful Diplomacy check), the mob sets fire to the mill. See the Fire in the Mill! sidebar for details.

Development: If the PCs do not present the villagers with evidence that their problem has been solved within 24 hours of turning back the mob, another forms. This new mob has five more villagers, and the required Diplomacy check to send it away is DC 30. For each day that the problem remains unsolved, add five more villagers and increase the DC for the Diplomacy check by +5.

If the mill catches on fire, the cellar remains safe, since the earth between the cellar and the upper portion of the mill is thick enough to prevent the fire from spreading to the area below. In the event of a blaze, the townsfolk can be convinced (Diplomacy DC 20) to help put it out, since a large enough fire might threaten their homes and property.

6. THE CELLAR (EL 2)

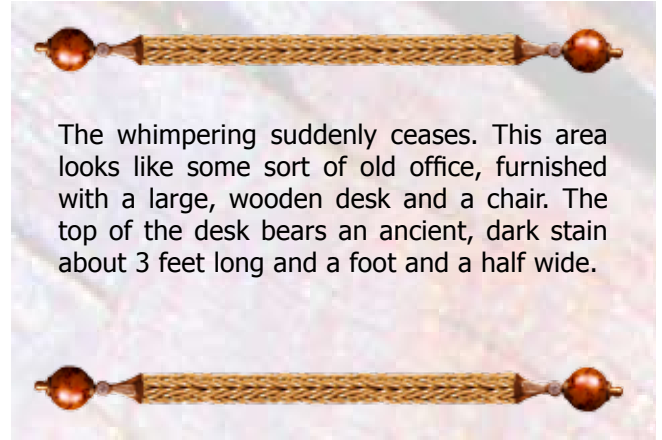
The PCs may or may not choose to investigate the cellar, which is accessible via a secret door in the southern section of the cottage floor. Read or paraphrase the following aloud if they choose to investigate this area.



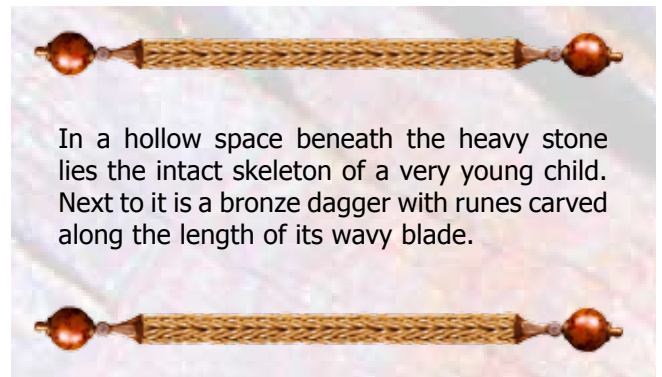
The cellar is filled with supplies once used to run the mill or supply the cottage, including tools, gunny

sacks full of old grain, and even canned foods and dried herbs.

If the PCs attempt to locate the source of the sound, read or paraphrase the following aloud when anyone reaches the corner of the cellar farthest from the entrance.



The drawers of the desk are not locked. They contain only bills to local merchants, paperwork, and other items related to the running of the mill. Any PC who looks around the area closely, however, can make a DC 15 Search check to notice a loose flagstone in the floor. If it is lifted, read or paraphrase the following.



The skeleton is that of the miller's son, whom the miller sacrificed to seal the bargain with the devil sixteen years ago. The child's grave measures 3 feet by 2 feet by 1 foot.

Creature: Because of its violent death for an unholy cause, the baby's ghost is not at rest.

Ghost: hp 6; see Appendix B for statistics.

Tactics: The baby's ghost haunts the mill and occasionally other sections of town as well. Because it was so young at the time of its death, it is not a particularly powerful or vengeful spirit, and it does not deliberately attack the PCs. It simply wishes to be laid to rest properly.

Development: The PCs aren't likely to know who this child is, but finding out will give them a great advantage in figuring out how the situation reached its current state. They can find out a limited amount of information from speaking to its ghost, but as a one-year-old child, it can't tell them much. It has a limited vocabulary and a limited understanding of questions put to it. It does, however, recognize the knife, and will recoil in horror and shout, "No, Dada!" if presented with it. It cannot tell the PCs its identity, but if the miller's wife is nearby and she speaks to it, it cries, "Mama!" She then puts her hand to her chest and remarks how similar it looks to her son when he was a baby. The ghost does not recognize the miller's wife by sight, since she is older now; she must actually speak to it.

A DC 17 Knowledge (religion) check reveals that for the child's spirit to rest, its remains must be sanctified and properly buried in a cemetery consecrated to St. Cuthbert. Either casting a *bless* spell on the skeleton or immersing the bones in holy water suffices for the sanctification process. If the PCs lack a cleric with sufficient resources to know what to do, they can consult the local priest of St. Cuthbert.

Treasure: Beneath the stone lies a +1 *bronze dagger*.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

A successful DC 15 Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (the planes) check reveals the party's adversary as an imp. A second check at the same DC reveals that imps are very often employed by other, more powerful beings. After the adventure is over, the PCs may wish to investigate the history of the situation further and may discover the true story behind the miller's brief period of success and death.

If the PCs failed to discover the imp, it continues to plague the miller's wife and the townsfolk. The villagers slay the miller's wife as soon as the PCs are out of the picture, but not before the imp has driven her to commit at least one evil act that condemns her soul to the Nine Hells. Several other townsfolk make pacts with devils for relief from their burdens, and the area gradually deteriorates into a center of evil in the campaign world.

If the PCs discover the imp's presence and it survives, it gives up its mission in this area. In this case, or if it dies, the miller's wife is free of its influence. If she

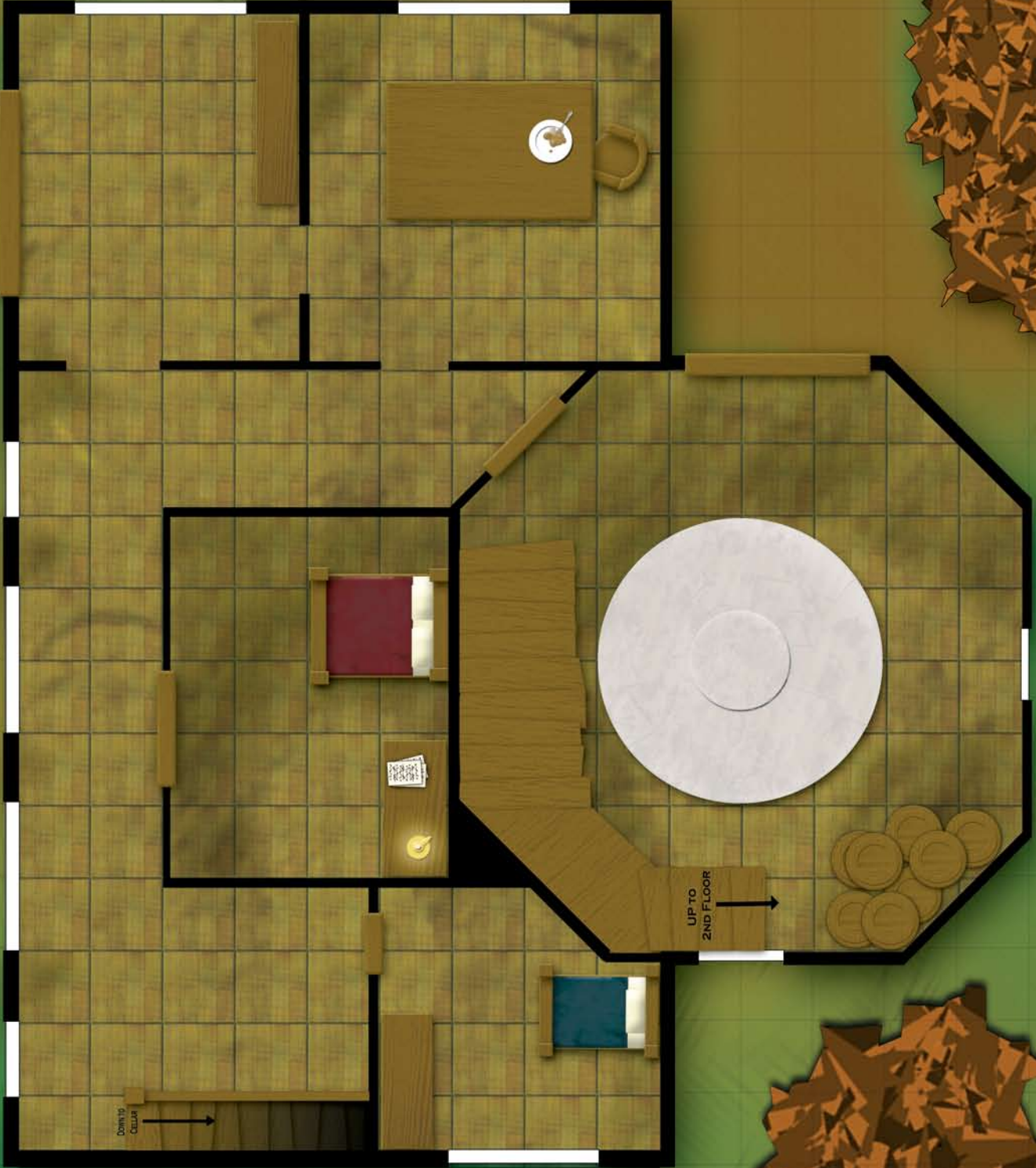
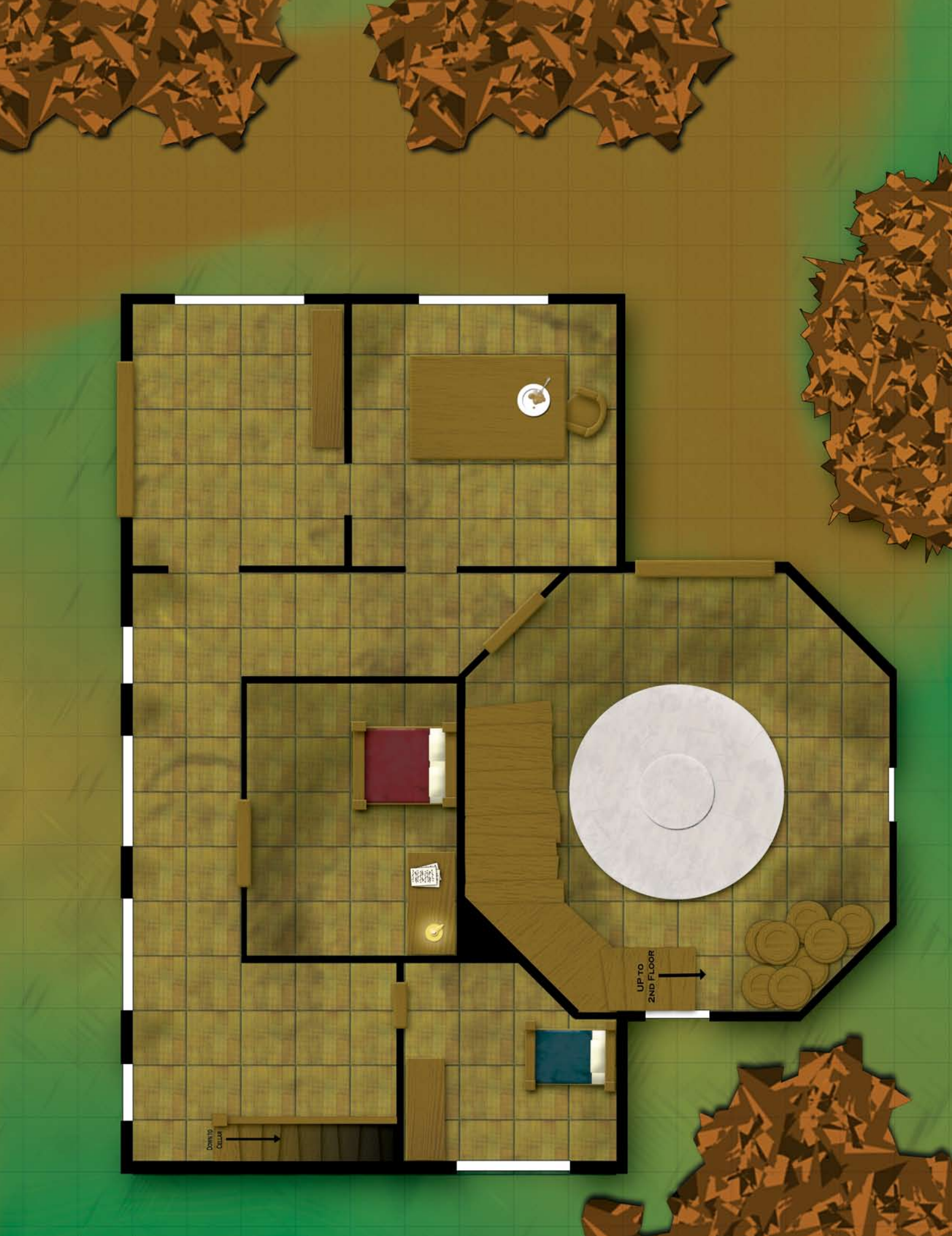
is still alive, the townsfolk continue their efforts to kill her unless the PCs explain the situation. Doing so takes a DC 20 Diplomacy check, since the PCs are unlikely to be able to produce the imp's corpse as proof. They can get some information out of the miller's wife in her more lucid moments about her husband having made a deal with a devil for success. But she does not know he killed their child, and her story is peppered with untruths that the imp has told her and that her own increasingly unstable mind has supplied. However, if the PCs locate the child's skeleton and the knife used to kill him, and correctly determine the entire story behind the miller and his son, this information plus the story of her husband's pact with a devil is sufficient to lower the DC for the Diplomacy check to 15.

If the miller's wife is exonerated, the villagers rally around her and take care of her until she recovers her sanity—a process that may take from 1–4 months. She recalls all that she knew of the story her husband told her and relates it to the villagers. She then sells the mill to Kadlow, who allows her to continue living in the cottage for life. She resumes her former midwife and healer duties for the village.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

If the imp dies, its superior may become particularly interested in the party. If the imp survives, it might choose to go after the PCs' souls instead. To ensure that it can follow them, it might possess an item belonging to a party member who appears particularly susceptible to temptation. It could then pursue any route it desires toward their spiritual destruction.



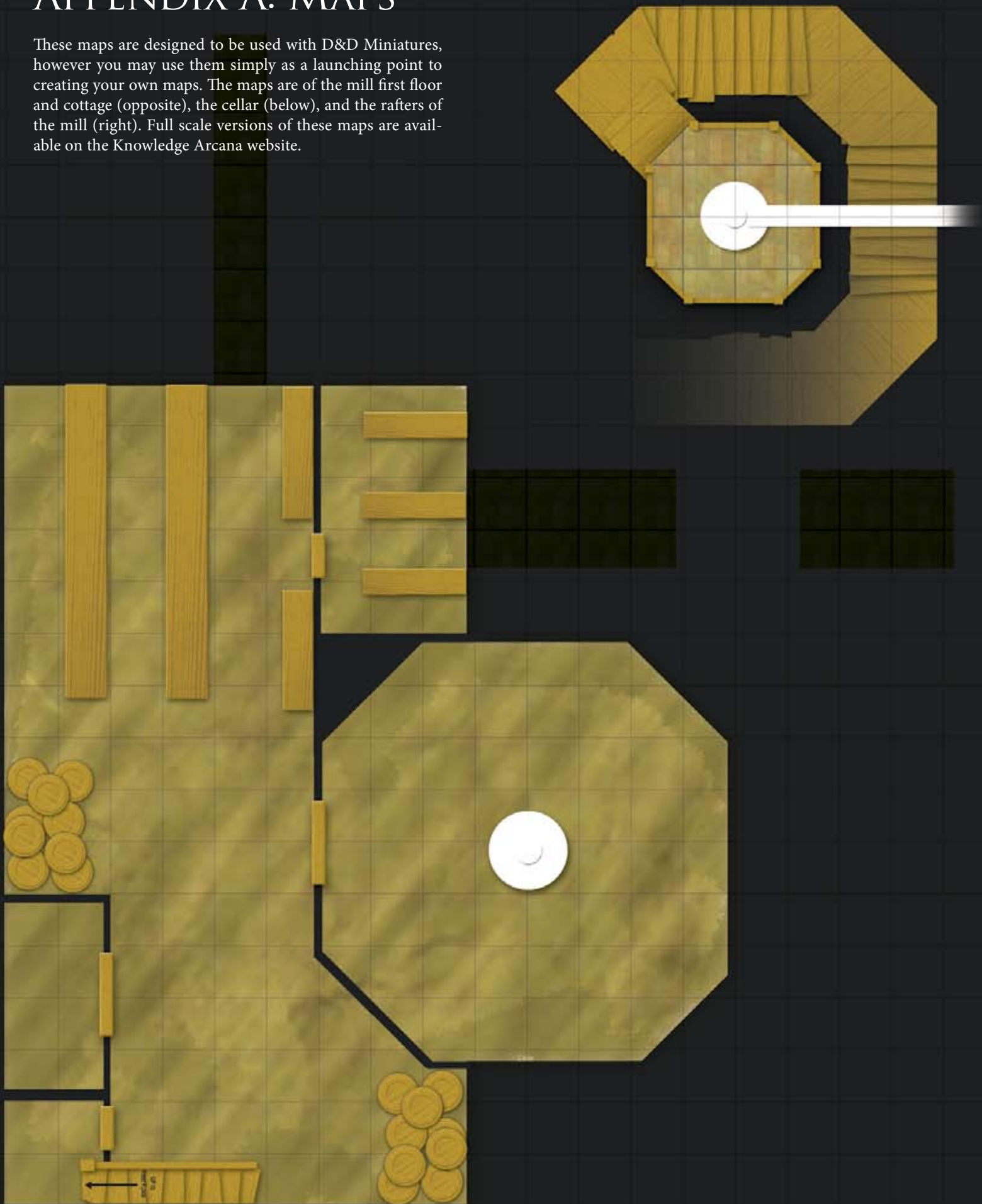


Down to
CELLAR

UP TO
2ND FLOOR

APPENDIX A: MAPS

These maps are designed to be used with D&D Miniatures, however you may use them simply as a launching point to creating your own maps. The maps are of the mill first floor and cottage (opposite), the cellar (below), and the rafters of the mill (right). Full scale versions of these maps are available on the Knowledge Arcana website.



APPENDIX B: NPC STATISTICS

This section provides complete statistics for the NPCs that appear in this adventure.

IMP OF POSSESSION

CR 10

Advanced imp fiend of possession 4
LE Tiny outsider (extraplanar, evil, lawful)
Init +3; **Senses** Listen +9, Spot +9
Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal

AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 17; Dodge (+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural)
hp 40 (10 HD); fast healing 2; DR 5 good or silver
Immune poison
Resist fire 5
Fort +9, **Ref** +12, **Will** +10

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)
Melee sting +13 (1d4 plus poison)
Space 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.
Base Atk +8; **Grp** +0
Atk Options poison
Special Actions animate object, control object, curse, possess creature, possess object
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th):
1/day—*suggestion* (DC 15)
At Will—*detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 15
SA animate object, control object, curse, poison, possess creature, possess object
SQ alternate form (cat, hare), ethereal form (CL 9th), hide presence (Hide +23), magic item +4, outsider traits
Feats Dodge, Negotiator, Stealthy, Weapon Finesse
Skills Bluff +7, Diplomacy +17, Hide +26, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +9, Move Silently +14, Search +7, Sense Motive +5, Spellcraft +8, Spot +9

Alternate Form (Su) The imp of possession can assume the form of either a cat or a hare at will as a standard action. This ability functions as a *polymorph* spell cast on itself (CL 15th), except that the imp does not regain hit points for changing form.



Animate Object (Su) The imp of possession can force an object with no inherent moving parts to animate, affecting it as if with the *animate objects* spell. See the description of animated objects in the *Monster Manual*. It can also possess (and animate) Gargantuan objects.

Control Object (Su) When possessing an object with some inherent mobility, the imp of possession can control the object's movement. It can cause a vehicle or similar object to move at up to 20 feet. Other moving parts—such as a clock's hands or a crossbow's firing mechanism—are under the imp's control. Thus, the imp could make a wagon steer toward a pedestrian, or roll out of a stable without a horse to pull it. It could make a crossbow cock itself and fire (but not aim or load itself). Exerting control is itself a free action, though actually moving an object requires a move action.

Curse (Su) The imp of possession can make a possessed item radiate a corrupt and befouling nature. Anyone touching the object must make a Will save or fall under the effect of a *bestow curse* spell. The affected creature does not know that the curse came from the item, and in fact might not know right away that he is affected by the curse. Nothing about the object's appearance

suggests that it is possessed. The curse lasts until it is removed, even if the imp vacates the object.

Ethereal Form (Su) At will, the imp of possession can become ethereal, as though using *ethereality* (CL 9th). Possessing an object or creature effectively ends a use of this ability, so time spent in another body or object does not count against the duration of this ability.

Hide Presence (Ex) While in possession of an object or creature, the imp of possession can attempt to hide its presence by making a special Hide check. Its modifier for this check is +23. A successful check allows it to avoid virtually anything that would betray its presence in the possessed creature or object. It can pass through a *magic circle against evil*, enter a temple warded by *forbidden*, or escape detection via *detect evil*. The DC for this Hide check is the same as the saving throw DC for the spell the imp is trying to avoid. It gains a +4 circumstance bonus on this check if it is not controlling the possessed creature or object at the time of the check. When possessing a creature, the imp can make this Hide check to protect the possessed creature from the full effects of alignment-based spells such as *holy smite*. If the imp makes a successful Hide check against the save DC of the spell, the possessed creature takes damage appropriate to its actual alignment, but if it fails the Hide check, the possessed creature is affected as if it were the imp. Making this check is not an action; the imp can do it in response to another creature's action (such as casting *detect evil*).

Magic Item (Su) The imp of possession can make a possessed weapon or armor function as a magic item, bestowing an enhancement bonus of up to +4 or the equivalent. If the possessed item is already magical, the imp can increase its inherent enhancement bonus by the same amount. When the imp uses this power on a nonmagical item, the possessed item does not actually become magical. *Detect magic* does not reveal an aura on it, though *detect evil* does.

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 15, initial damage 1d4 Dex, secondary damage 2d4 Dex.

Possess Creature (Su) The imp of possession can possess creatures as well as objects. It must be in ethereal form and adjacent to its target, and it must use a standard action to attempt possession. A *protection from evil* spell or similar magic wards a creature against being possessed in this manner. An unprotected target must make a Will saving throw. An evil creature takes a -2 penalty on this saving throw, as does any creature that is engaged in an evil act at the time the possession attempt occurs (at the DM's discretion). If the saving throw is successful, that creature is immune to that imp's possession attempts for one day. If the saving throw is failed, the creature is possessed,

though it is not necessarily aware of this fact.

While possessing a creature, the imp becomes part of the victim, so it is no longer ethereal. It cannot be targeted by spells or attacks separately from the victim, including attacks from ethereal creatures. Damage taken by the possessed creature has no effect on the imp. If the victim dies, the imp is forced back into its ethereal form. The imp can sense anything the victim can, even via blindsight or other exceptional senses the victim may have. At any time, the imp can communicate with the victim telepathically, projecting words in any language the victim understands directly into its thoughts. The imp is constantly aware of the victim's current thoughts. It can also choose to probe the creature's memories as well, but the victim is allowed a Will save against this effect. If this saving throw is successful, the imp cannot probe that creature's thoughts for 24 hours.

Possess Object (Su) While in ethereal form, the imp of possession can possess an object on the Material Plane. The object must be at least Tiny and no larger than Gargantuan. A magic item or attended item receives a Will save. Unattended magic items are automatically possessed. An imp of possession becomes part of the object it possesses, so it is no longer ethereal. The imp is aware of what is going on around the object. It can see and hear up to 60 feet away as if using its normal senses, but it does not gain blindsight. In any round in which it takes no other action (such as a spell-like ability), it extends its senses to twice its normal range (120 feet). The imp is vulnerable to spells that specifically affect outsiders or lawful evil creatures (such as *holy word* and *holy smite*, as well as *chaos hammer* or *order's wrath*) and mind-affecting spells or effects, but it is unaffected by physical attacks or standard magical effects (such as *fireball*). Harming the object does not harm the imp, although if the object is destroyed, the imp is forced back into its ethereal form. While possessing an object, the imp can use any ability it has that requires no physical action, such as using a spell-like ability or telepathy.

Hook "It's not your fault! It's theirs!"

THE MILLER'S SON**CR 2**

Male human child ghost (manifested)

N Small undead (human)

Init -2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12**Languages** understands some Common**AC** 11, touch 11, flat-footed 11

(+1 size, -2 Dex, +2 deflection)

Miss Chance 50% from corporeal sources (except force effects and ghost touch weapons), incorporeal**hp** 6 (1 HD); negative energy heals, cannot be raised**Immune** ability damage, ability drain, critical hits, death effects, death from massive damage, disease, energy drain, mind-influencing effects, necromantic effects, nonmagical attack forms (can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities), paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, nonlethal damage, and any effect requiring a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects**Resist** turn +4**Fort** +0, **Ref** +0, **Will** +2**Speed** 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 30 ft. (perfect); can pass through solid objects (but not force effects) at will, moves silently (cannot be heard with Listen checks unless desired)**Base Atk** +0; **Grp** —**Atk Options** attacks ignore natural armor, armor, and shields (though deflection bonuses and force effects work normally)**Special Actions** frightful moan**Abilities** Str —, Dex 6, Con —, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 14**SA** frightful moan**SQ** rejuvenation**Feats** Alertness, Iron Will**Skills** Hide +10, Listen +12, Search +8, Spot +12**Frightful Moan (Su)** The miller's son can emit a frightful moan as a standard action. Every creature within a 30-foot spread must succeed on a DC 12 Will save or become panicked for 2d4 rounds. This is a sonic, mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves against the moan cannot be affected by this ghost's moan for 24 hours.**Manifestation (Su)** When the miller's son manifests, he partly enters the Material Plane and becomes visible but incorporeal there. He also remains

partly on the Ethereal Plane, where he is not incorporeal. He has no physical attacks with which he can strike creatures on the Material Plane. While manifested, he can be attacked by opponents on either the Material or the Ethereal Plane. His incorporeality helps protect him from foes on the Material Plane, but not the Ethereal Plane.

Rejuvenation (Su) If "destroyed," the miller's son returns to his old haunts in 2d4 days with a successful level check (1d20+2) against DC 16. The ghost of the miller's son cannot be laid to rest permanently unless his remains are sanctified and properly buried in a cemetery consecrated to St. Cuthbert. Either casting a *bless* spell on the skeleton or immersing the bones in holy water suffices for the sanctification process.**Skills** The miller's son has a +8 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Search, and Spot checks.**Hook** "Mama!"

The following changes apply to the above statistics on the Ethereal Plane.

AC 9, touch 9, flat-footed 9**Speed** 20 ft. (4 squares)**Melee** unarmed strike -2 (1d2-3)**Grp** -7**Special Actions** frightful moan, manifestation**Abilities** Str 5**THE MILLER'S WIFE****CR 4**

Female human adept 5

N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4**Languages** Common, Elven

[rule]

AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10**hp** 22 (5 HD)**Fort** +2, **Ref** +1, **Will** +8**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)**Melee** dagger +2 (1d4/19-20)**Base Atk** +2; **Grp** +2**Combat Gear** *potion of darkvision*, *potion of levitate*, *potion of see invisibility***Adept Spells Prepared** (CL 5th):2nd—*animal trance*, *see invisibility*1st—*bless*, *command* (DC 15), *cure light wounds*0—*cure minor wounds*, *detect magic*, *purify food and drink*



Abilities Str 10, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 11

Feats Brew Potion, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Profession [herbalist])

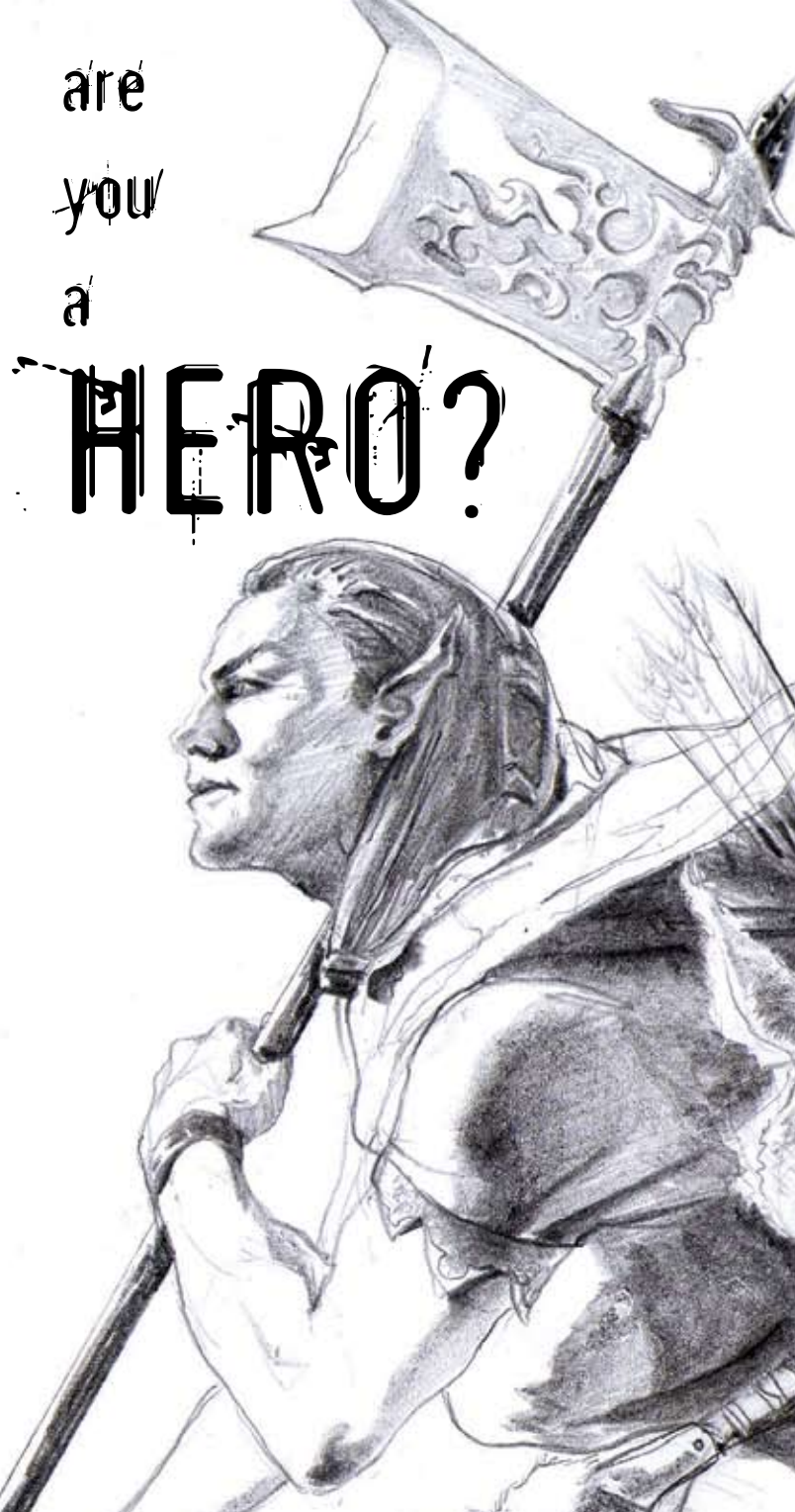
Skills Concentration +7, Heal +14, Listen +4, Profession (herbalist) +15, Spellcraft +7, Spot +4, Survival +8

Possessions combat gear plus dagger, *ring of feather fall*

Hook "I am not a witch!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pete lives in southern Wisconsin with his wife and two insane cats. He works all too often as a Newscast Director for a small-market CBS affiliate in northern Illinois. He doesn't spend enough time with his wife or his gaming because he has to mow the lawn. The Miller's Wife is Pete's first published adventure, and he hopes to follow it up with more in the future.



are
you
a
HERO?



UNCON
The •UNconventional•Convention

OCTOBER 23-29
WIZO.WIZARDS.COM/UNCON





the Black Recluse

BY PENNY WILLIAMS (PENNY_WILLIAMS), MONICA SHELLMAN (ELISANDRA), DAVE PAUL (VRECKNIDJX), MARS WHITACRE (IMPOFIDRES), AND THE WIZARDS OF THE COAST COMMUNITY, WITH ASSISTANCE FROM SKIP WILLIAMS (SKIP_WILLIAMS)

The monster for this issue's Creature Feature was created by the Wizards Online Community at an impromptu Monster Builder Workshop conducted by Penny Williams in RPG Live. The playtest was conducted with gidimanunaki as Lidda, Baron_Sargon/VrecknidjX as Jozan, Wayne_the_Game as Tordek, Yukino/AndrewW as Mialee, and Penny Williams as DM. All four characters were 5th level. The KA staff also thanks WizO_Ettin and all the folks in RPG Live! who participated in the creation of this creature.

"The Underdark? Ah, fer crying out loud. . . ." Lidda, the halfling "scout," rolled her eyes heavenward, then glared at the haughty elf across the table.

Mialee arched her left eyebrow at the complaining halfling. "Yes. Try not to whine too much. I am no more eager than you are to descend into that pit of iniquity, yet we must. If Jaharizin's Token is not recovered, certain disaster will ensue."

"Oh, come on, Mialee!" snorted Lidda. "You wizards are always overstating things. It's a piece of jewelry—and a pretty sweet one, at that. A nicely shaped platinum ring with a marquis-cut diamond surrounded by star motifs—it

would sure bring a nice chunk of change at the guild. But disaster?"

The elf frowned. "Yes, disaster. Do not scoff at forces you do not understand, little one."

Tordek laid a restraining hand on the halfling's arm as she opened her mouth to deliver a stinging retort. "Easy, lass," he said, leaning back in his chair and inhaling the bouquet from his tankard of ale. "Let's hear the rest." The stout dwarf warrior turned to regard Mialee, his eyes alight with interest. "End of the world again, eh elf?"

Mialee shook her head in a gesture of mild irritation. "Not the end of the world, precisely. But still very unpleasant."

"But it's the Underdark," Lidda protested again. "You guys know that Jozan and me don't see in the dark like you do. We'll be stumbling around and running into things while you two complain that we're useless." The halfling crossed her arms over her chest and glared first at Mialee, then at Tordek.

"Nor can I see in the total darkness of the Underdark, Lidda," Mialee replied a shade tartly. "I am sure that some sort of arrangement will be made to take our disabilities into account. The Consortium is not made up of fools, after all."

Tordek snorted, but changed the sound to a cough when Mialee shot a glare his way. “Got some ale in m’nose, that’s all,” he mumbled. It didn’t pay to push the elf lass too far—she wasn’t above “missing” with a *magic missile* or three when she was unhappy.

Jozan, who had remained silent during the repartee, rose and extended his hands toward the group in blessing. “It is the will of Pelor that we should find this article and make certain that it does not fall into the wrong hands.” He smiled warmly at his companions. “There is no need to squabble. We can trust in our friend Mialee to make sure that we all can see in the deepest darkness.”

Mialee inclined her head toward Jozan, ignoring the gagging sound that Lidda made. “Then it is decided,” she said. “We leave for the Underdark this very eve. Of course, we must still address the matter of our disguises.” The elf wizard took in a deep, cleansing breath, yet her hands did not relax.

Tordek looked up from his drink. “Ya? Whutterwe goin’ as? Snirfneb . . . smurf . . . uh, deep gnomes?”

The elf donned her most ingratiating smile. “Not exactly.”



“Well, this is another fine mess you’ve gotten us into, lass,” grumbled an unusually short, stout, and highly annoyed drow warrior. Scratching his bare chin, he glared at the silver-haired, dark-skinned wizard gliding gracefully down the craggy tunnel beside him.

“I dunno, it’s not that bad actually,” an even shorter drow commented, admiring her sleek, inky skin by the light of a sunrod. “It’s kinda pretty, and it makes sneaking around in shadows a cinch.”

“But I don’t have me beard!” wailed Tordek in anguish. “T’ain’t natchural!”

“Tordek, I already told you that your beard will come back as soon as the magical disguise is dispelled. You only think you don’t have a beard. It’s still there—really.” Mialee glared at him, tossing her silvery hair angrily.

“Even if it’s not, beards grow back,” said Jozan, who also looked like a drow warrior. “I’m much more concerned about the loss of the medallions that gave us darkvision. If anyone from around here sees us like this, we’re drider food for sure.”

The elf wizard snorted. “If any of you think I am happy looking like a wicked drow, you’ve got another think coming. And as for the light issue, was it my fault our house emblems were outdated? I couldn’t very well tell that drow official that we needed them to see, now could I? We had just better hope that our informant is correct, and the thief who stole the ring is in this vicinity.” Her tone suggested that the subject be dropped permanently.

“Hey, will you look at that!” said Lidda, pointing down the hall. “That’s really kind of pretty.”

Everyone looked where the little rogue had pointed. A

hoop about 2 feet across hung from the wall about 7 feet off of the floor. Within the hoop, delicate strands of webbing were woven into an intricate, beautiful pattern. Something dangled from the bottom of the hoop on a thread, but none of them could determine what sort of object it was.

Tordek nudged Lidda. “Can ya creep up there an’ take a look-see?” he asked.

Lidda grinned and elbowed the stout drow in the ribs. “Gee, can I?” she asked saucily. Before the dwarf could frame a retort, the inky rogue crept forth as quietly as a black cat. Stopping just below the web-wrapped hoop, she backed up until the angle of her vision allowed her to see the object clearly. Her eyes flew open wide, and an expression of dawning horror crept across her features. Slowly, she backed away from the object until her hands found the stone wall on the opposite side of the corridor. Her mouth worked a few times, but no sound came forth. “Um, guys? Just a guess, but I think I may have an idea where that thief went,” she finally said.

“What are ye talking about, lass?” demanded Tordek. “I dinna see anyone.”

Lidda remained crouched against the solid wall of the tunnel. “I looked into the pretty thing . . . and it looked back at me!” she exclaimed.

Tordek shot Mialee a questioning look. The slender wizard shrugged her elegant shoulders and began to move forward until she was squarely in front of the object. Her face became a mask of horror as comprehension dawned. “Oh, my gods,” she whispered, moving away from the hoop to join Lidda near the opposite wall. “This is not good.”

“Are ye both daft?” asked Tordek impatiently. “What in the Nine Hells is going on?”

“The eyes just stare and stare,” said Lidda with a catch in her voice. “It’s still bleeding! And so are the . . . the hands. . .” Lidda unconsciously rubbed her wrists.

“Lidda, I know it’s against yer nature, but would ye please try to make some sense?” hissed Tordek.

“In a niche behind the hoop is a severed head,” said Mialee in a curiously flat voice. “A drow’s head. And two severed drow hands are dangling below the hoop. This thing is set up like a trophy case.”

“Or maybe a shrine,” said Jozan thoughtfully. “I’ve heard of primitive races displaying portions of their kills like this.”

The dusky-skinned rogue started suddenly, turning to face a sound that only she had heard. “Hello?” she called out in a quivering voice. “Anyone there?” In answer, a stream of smoking liquid spewed forth from the tunnel beyond, hitting Mialee square in the chest. The elf wizard staggered back, her legs shaking from a sudden weakness.

The stout drow warrior growled low in his chest. “Alright, ye beastie, yer gonna pay fer that! Come out where I can see ye!” he cried.

From the darkness stepped a gigantic, ebon-skinned humanoid unlike any creature the four friends had ever seen. Silvery lines crisscrossed its skin like pale, glistening webs. Its many eyes reflected the light of the sunrod like

silver mirrors, and a single, curving horn protruded from its forehead.

Before any of the companions could utter a word, the creature bore down upon Tordek, slashing at him with glowing claws and that wicked horn. One claw gouged through the dwarf's armor, rending two of his ribs with a sickening crack. "Death to the infidels, defilers of spiders!" roared the creature in a booming voice.

The rogue carefully sighted along her bow and planted one of her arrows deep into its flesh. "Ha! Take that, you big jerk!" she crowed.

"How'd ye like a taste o' me axe?" cried the dwarf, sweeping his blade across the creature's legs even as blood poured from his side.

Though still wobbly from whatever poison the creature had used upon her, Mialee managed to summon forth a glowing green arrow, which she fired into the creature's massive chest.

"Perhaps, foul beast, you misunderstand the meaning of 'infidel,'" shouted Jozan. "I follow the sun! You, who dwell in darkness—you are the infidel!" Arming himself with the favor of his god, the priest strode confidently toward his wounded friend and laid hands upon him in blessing. "Thankee, Jozan," said Tordek with a grateful smile.

But Jozan's speech seemed to agitate the creature even more than the wounds it had received. "The sun?" bellowed the black-skinned giant. "The sun is only a myth!" With that, it launched itself at Jozan, slashing at him with its glowing, red-hot claws. Angry, flame-blackened gashes appeared on the priest's arm and chest. "See how you like your sun now!" the creature roared in triumph.

The beast's cruel laughter was cut short by another arrow from Lidda's bow. As the acid from her previous magic arrow continued to pulse in the creature's body, Mialee stepped toward Tordek and placed her hand on his shoulder. Closing her eyes, she murmured a *bull's strength* spell, and Tordek felt renewed strength washing through his limbs.

Jozan stepped back out of the creature's reach and sent up a quick prayer to his god. "Praise Pelor in his glory, he has healed me with his blessed light," intoned the priest as his injured flesh repaired itself.

"Wanna ask Pelor if he can smite this thing for us?" quipped Lidda, as she struggled to maintain line of sight to the monster.

"Have faith in Pelor and he will shower you with his gifts," maintained Jozan calmly. "With his blessings, we can defeat this abomination!"

As Jozan finished his statement of faith, Lidda loosed another arrow, which flew wide of its target. "Thanks a lot, Pelor!" she yelled, scrabbling for another arrow and keeping her eyes on the action.

Meanwhile, Tordek hefted his axe and prepared to attack with his newfound strength. "Look out, Tordek! I think it likes you!" cried Lidda as the giant began its charge. Tordek turned to intercept the creature just in the nick of time, and the blade of his axe flashed in the dim light of Jozan's sunrod. The weapon bit into the giant's ebon flesh with

a sickening crunch, but the monster only tossed its head and laughed. "You infidels will taste good in the stewpot tonight!" it taunted.

"What is it with big ugly things always wanting to cook the halfling?" muttered Lidda, sinking back into the shadows for a moment.

As the creature loomed over Tordek, bolts of mystical energy flew from Mialee's outstretched fingers, slamming into the giant's chest and dissipating along the traceries of silver. "That's not good," muttered Mialee.

The beast laughed again, and Jozan seized the opportunity to charge forward, brandishing his mace. "The glory of Pelor shall endure!" he cried, swinging a blow that might have crushed the monster's ribs had it not managed to block it with one heavily muscled forearm.

The monster grinned evilly, displaying a mouthful of sharp, yellowing fangs. "What of your sun now, filth?" it demanded. The dull thud and fiery sizzle of the creature's claws mingled with Jozan's screams as it ripped into his torso with both clawed hands. Lidda gasped and sprang forward as the priest fell to the ground, fishing hurriedly in her pouch for something to heal him. Not quite quick enough to avoid the monster's grasping talons, she collapsed next to him in agony just as she managed to uncork the bottle. Clutching her own wounds with one hand, she used the other to dribble potion between her friend's lips. "Get up, sunny boy!" she hissed.

"Ye'll pay fer that, beast!" shouted Tordek. Swinging his axe in a horizontal arc, he struck the monster a solid blow. Meanwhile Mialee, shielded by Tordek's silvery blade, raised one hand, pointed behind the creature, and spoke three words in an arcane tongue.

"Pelor be praised! Lidda, your courage will not go unrewarded!" said Jozan, struggling up to an elbow. Laying his hand on Lidda's forehead, he intoned a benediction, invoking Pelor's name on her behalf.

Suddenly, a brilliant light blossomed behind the creature and grew rapidly. Turning its massive head to look, the creature was blinded by the radiance of Mialee's spell. Taking this turn of events as a heaven-sent cue from Pelor, Jozan rose swiftly to his feet and swung a mighty blow with his mace. "There is the sun, you fool!" he cried in triumph. As his blow connected, Lidda loosed another arrow and Tordek sliced again with his axe. With a long, low growl, the giant fell to one knee, then tumbled to the ground with a crash.

Lidda and Tordek stood stock-still for a moment, stunned at the sudden end to the fight, then began to cheer. Clapping Jozan on the back with his free hand, Tordek exclaimed, "Jozan, ye fight almost as good as a dwarf! Truly yer god smiles upon ye."

Bowing his head in brief humility, Jozan smiled. "Praise Pelor in his brilliance, my friend," he said quietly.

"This creature has fallen," said Mialee, "but might others of its kind be nearby?"

Tordek nodded, dispelling the celebratory mood. "Ye speak the truth, lass. We need to stay on guard."

A little farther down the corridor, the four friends found the creature's lair. Like the hoop that had hung on the corridor wall, this chamber was filled with grisly trophies—mainly severed body parts of drow. On the finger of one bloody hand lay the trinket they had been sent to retrieve.

But before Mialee's fingers could close around the prize, another ebon hand snatched it up. "Thanks for getting rid of that nuisance," said a chipper voice. As Mialee began chanting a spell and the others readied their weapons, the drow tossed her red-streaked silver hair, slipped the ring on her finger, and twisted it. "Things are going to be so much more interesting around here from now on," she said as she faded away. Their weapons connected with empty air.

BLACK RECLUSE

A mysterious, ebon-skinned giant lurks in the darkness, just barely visible in the dim glow given off by the phosphorescent moss. Its many eyes and the delicate tracery of silver tattoos covering its skin glitter in the soft light. From the center of its forehead juts a single curved horn, and tight bands of muscle knot its massive arms. Spiders of varying sizes scurry around the brute, scrambling over its legs and shoulders as well as up the walls and across the ceiling around it. Evidently, the giant and these arachnids exist in some sort of synergistic relationship.

Only recently discovered by surface-dwellers, the black recluse has been a denizen of the Middle Dark for centuries. The drow and the duergar have always known of these mystical giants, but rarely do members of either race speak of them. The drow prefer not to show their fear before others, so when asked about the black recluse, they testily remark that the creature's association with spiders is unnatural and irreligious. The duergar are happy to exploit others' fears of the creatures by incorporating the tales into their own legends, but in truth, the gray dwarves are as leery of the lurking giants as the dark elves are.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

The black recluse is an extremely dangerous opponent. Centuries of living near the powerful Underdark races has made the creature a cautious and deadly foe. As a hunter, it relies upon stealth and surprise—but even without those advantages, it is more than a match for most other creatures in its territory.

Because these creatures prefer to live, hunt, and worship in relative isolation, only one is typically encountered at a time. The black recluse studies its opponents from a safe distance to learn their weaknesses, then moves with surprising speed to paralyze or weaken the foes it perceives to be the greatest threat. Over time, black recluses have developed a knack for recognizing which individuals are most resistant to its spectral claws, so they reserve these attacks for the targets they're likely to affect. A black recluse's



BLACK RECLUSE

CR 6

LN Large giant

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, see through magical darkness; Listen +14, Spot +14

Languages Dwarven, Elven, Giant, Terran, Undercommon

AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 1; uncanny dodge (–1 size, +5 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 66 (7 HD); fast healing 2

Immune fairie fire, illusions, poison

Resist evasion; **SR** 12

Fort +10, **Ref** +7, **Will** +4; +2 against enchantments and mind-affecting spells

Weakness light blindness

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 spectral claws +10 (1d6+6 plus 1d4 energy) and horn +5 (1d6+3) or **Melee** punching dagger +10 (1d8+6/x3) and

Ranged poisoned spittle +9 touch (poison) or

Ranged hand crossbow +9 touch (1d8 plus poison/19–20)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +15

Atk Options Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes; poison spittle (30-ft. line, Fort DC 18, initial damage 1d4 Str, secondary damage paralysis), spectral claw (1d4 acid, cold, fire, or lightning)

Special Actions rend +9 (2d6+6)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th):

3/day—*invisibility*

Abilities Str 23, Dex 20, Con 20, Int 18, Wis 15, Cha 11

SA poison spittle (30-ft. line, Fort DC 18, initial damage 1d4 Str, secondary damage paralysis), rend +10 (2d6+6), spectral claw (1d4 acid, cold, fire, or lightning)

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Track^B

Skills Climb +16, Hide +15, Jump +16, Listen +14, Move Silently +15, Spot +14

Poison Spittle (Ex) A black recluse can spit its venom up to 30 feet as a standard action. This is a ranged touch attack with no range increment. Each opponent hit by this attack must make a successful save against the creature's poison to avoid the effect.

Rend (Ex) A black recluse that hits with both claw attacks latches onto the opponent's body and tears the flesh. This attack automatically deals an extra 2d6+6 points of damage.

Spectral Claw (Su) A black recluse can deliver energy damage with its claw attack in addition to the normal claw damage. Each round on its turn, it can choose one form of energy (acid, cold, electricity, or fire) to channel through its claws. With each successful hit, it deals 1d4 points of the selected energy damage in addition to its normal claw damage. The monster's claws glow with the color of the chosen energy (green for acid, blue for cold, yellow for electricity, or red for fire).

Hook "Death to infidels!"

senses are exquisitely tuned to its surroundings, and the race has evolved powerful resistances to the many dangers lurking in the Underdark.

SAMPLE ENCOUNTER

Unmapped, twisting passages are common enough in the depths of the Underdark that many dwellers belowground don't pay them much notice. Each black recluse seeks out a small chamber—usually off a side tunnel that sees little traffic—and turns it into a lair where it can dwell unmolested by the other denizens of the dark. Black recluse lairs are difficult to find, and the creatures like it that way—a fact that probably explains their name.

Occasionally a mated pair with one or two offspring may occupy such a lair, but most such cubbyholes are the homes of single individuals. No one is sure whether black recluse communities exist, or what might constitute their issues if they do. Given what is known of these creatures, it seems likely that several individuals meet briefly now and then to discuss territorial issues and matters of joint interest.

ECOLOGY

Black recluses leave the comfort of their homes in adolescence. The few that manage to reach adulthood are so meticulous about their living arrangements that they are remarkably difficult to find. Each stakes out its own territory and seems to know instinctively whether it's in another recluse's turf. Most adult black recluses live alone, hunting occasional prey, but otherwise subsisting on the various underground insects and plants. They often live near or among spiders, with which they seem to have a strong affinity.

Black recluses consider spiders their spirit animals and hate the drow for their blasphemous relationship with these arachnids. These giants are quite fond of ritual, and each observes many of its own personal rites. One ritual common to the entire race is eating fallen foes—particularly drow. Black recluses believe that incorporating a drow's physical body into the body of a "believer" helps to negate the sins of its victim's soul against spiderkind. Most black recluses also keep grisly trophies of their victories—heads, hands, and feet are especially common—and work these severed parts into decorative designs. One of their favorite designs is a wooden or metal hoop filled with intricate spidersilk knotwork, with battle trophies suspended below it on leather thongs.

These creatures mate for life, though couples share quarters only after the female has conceived. Females have no particular seasons that are better than others for giving birth.

Environment: Black recluses live deep underground, usually near the bottom of the Middle Dark, though they tend to avoid bodies of water and very hot regions (such as volcanoes). Most live just on the outskirts of drow enclaves—far enough away that they are unlikely to be spotted, even by scouts, and yet close enough that they could nab an unwary adventurer or drow explorer. Given the number and sizes of drow communities, the black recluses have plenty of room to establish their own individual spaces without encroaching on each other's territory.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A typical adult black recluse is humanoid in shape and stands about 12 feet tall.

Throughout its life, it tattoos its night-black skin with intricate patterns in a mysterious, silver ink that has remained unanalyzed by surface folk. These designs fundamentally resemble spiders' webs, though many seem quite elaborate. An adult black recluse has eight silvery eyes, two powerful arms that end in wicked, translucent claws, and a single silver horn. The claws can glow different colors depending on the type of energy with which the creature has decided to infuse them.

Because black recluses depend on their mobility in combat, they tend to wear either light armor or none at all. Their equipment is designed to be easily discarded, and they routinely leave their prized possessions in their lairs. They favor their natural attacks in combat, but occasionally a black recluse employs a punching dagger. Speculation suggests that this weapon mimics the bite of certain spiders.

BLACK RECLUSE LORE

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (Underdark local) can learn more about the black recluse. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including the information from lower DCs.

DC	RESULT
14	A black recluse is a nimble giant that dwells underground.
19	The black recluse is sometimes found near drow-controlled areas and other places where many spiders reside. According to drow legends, black recluses are fond of hunting lone drow.
24	Each black recluse sports mystical silvery tattoos and can imbue its claws with elemental power. Its poisonous spittle is used to hold its prey in place. Black recluses have a synergy with spiders and find the relationship between drow and spiders to be blasphemous.

TYPICAL TREASURE

Black recluses do not adventure solely to acquire treasure. However, they're not wasteful either, so their lairs usually contain valuables taken from their victims—typically items considered valuable by drow or duergar. Because black recluses are well aware of the dangers that lurk belowground, they tend to keep a few potions or other magic items that would help them against beholders, mind flayers, and other aberrations. On rare occasions, a black recluse creates objects of art, most of which depict spiders or spiderwebs.

ADVANCED BLACK RECLUSE

The black recluse advances by taking class levels. Its favored class is ranger. Its most common favored enemy is drow, but a black recluse who advances enough as a ranger to merit a second favored enemy typically chooses mind flayers or duergar.

BLACK RECLUSES IN EBERRON

Eberron's black recluses can appear in any nation or terrain, but they are always underground. They owe no allegiance to any other creature.

BLACK RECLUSES IN FAERÛN

Black recluses can appear virtually anywhere in the Middle Dark region of the Underdark. On rare occasions, one may also be found in the Upperdark or Lowerdark. None, however, have ever been seen on the surface.

Monica Shellman lives in southern California with all her gaming stuff and some kid who calls her "mom" and makes her feed him. She has previously been published in the prestigious Tsurlagol Herold. It is not her fault you are too uncool to have ever heard of it.

Penny Williams joined the roleplaying game industry as Game Questions Expert for TSR, Inc. in the 1980s. Since then, she has served as RPGA Network Coordinator, POLYHEDRON Newszine editor, and Senior Editor and Coordinating Editor for the RPG R&D Department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Now a busy freelancer, Penny edits for several game companies. When not enhancing the cruelty of designers' creations, Penny puts up jam, does jigsaw puzzles, and works as a substitute teacher for all grade levels.

David Paul lives in lower southwestern Michigan with his wife, two sons, two dogs, four cats, a few hundred RPG books, and several thousand little plastic miniatures. He edited for Pencil Pushers Publishing, d20 Filtered, and Silven before joining the staff of Knowledge Arcana. When he's not busy daydreaming or plotting the downfall of his own D&D players, he teaches philosophy by night at a nearby university and high school mathematics by day at a nearby private high school.

WHAT *Really Wins* GAMES



^ BY BRADLEY BURNETT (AIUTAU)

GRIP COURTESY OF WIZO SCION

Defining how you lose a Magic: the Gathering game is easy. Typically, you either end up with zero life, or you need to draw when you have no cards left in your library. (Yes, we all know that poison counters exist, but do those really count?)

But pinning down what wins games is a little tougher. Most competent players narrow the winning formula down to two principles: card advantage and tempo. Card advantage is a pretty straightforward concept, but tempo is harder to grasp.

THE VITAL RULES

The most important of the many rules governing Magic: the Gathering are the following.

1. You must draw one and only one card during the draw step of your turn.
2. You may play only one Land card during each of your turns.

So how can you use these rules to your advantage? Let's explore the various ways that building up tempo can help you influence the outcome of the game.

TEMPO

Tempo is easily the most misunderstood principle of the game. In its most simplistic form, tempo is how you spend your land resources (that is, mana) in relation to how your opponent spends his. If you can use your resources more wisely than your opponent does, you will be in a better position to win the game. Sounds like a great theory, doesn't it? But how does this principle actually translate into play?

WALKING THROUGH TIME

It's best to start any discussion of tempo with Time Walk, one of the oldest, most powerful, and least understood cards in the history of the game.

This Alpha rare card is obviously quite powerful, but where does its power truly lie? Is it in drawing the card for the extra turn? Is it in untapping your Lands? Is it in the ability to play another Land? Or is it in the ability to attack again?

If you said the power lies in playing another Land, you'd be right. Drawing an extra card isn't that great because you're really only replacing the Time Walk you just cast. Untapping your Lands isn't that big a deal either because, again, you're really only untapping the Lands you tapped to play Time Walk. And even the ability to attack again isn't that fabulous because Blue isn't about forcing a lot of dam-

age through. No, the power of Time Walk is the extra Land drop and the ability to play it early.

Let's look at an example of how Time Walk exerts its power in play.

- **Player A:** Island, go
- **Player B:** Mountain, go
- **Player A:** Island, Time Walk
- **Player A:** Island, go

The above plays give the Time Walk player three Lands to his opponent's one. Effectively, he is now two whole turns ahead of his opponent because the latter can play only one Land per turn. So unless she has some way to destroy the Time Walk player's Lands, that advantage becomes permanent for the duration of the game.

JUST SAY "NO"

Another aspect of tempo is the mana investment of the spells that you and your opponent play. To illustrate this concept, let's look at Counterspell, another powerful Blue card.

At first glance, this Alpha uncommon is an obviously powerful card, since it lets you counter any spell an opponent casts for UU. But what does it have to do with tempo?

Well, for UU, you can counter any investment of mana your opponent has made—no matter how large. Thus, if your opponent has played a large Fireball and spent 10 mana to cast it, you can counter it for UU. That's a five-to-one investment your opponent has just made for a spell that doesn't even resolve. That delay gives you more time to find your own win conditions and stalls your opponent.

An even better option for this purpose is Mana Drain.

This Legends uncommon is obviously too powerful. Not only can you neuter an opponent's thread for UU, but you can also use the mana she spent to cast your own spells next turn. Clearly, tempo is such a strong principle that having too much of it can prove detrimental to the game.



DUDE! IT'S LIKE A DISCOUNTED CANCEL!



OFF TO PLOW THE FIELDS

Another way to create tempo is by killing creatures that are already in play. Let's look at Swords to Plowshares as an example.

This Alpha uncommon is a mixed bag, really. On the one hand, it costs only W and can target any creature in play, but on the other hand, it gives life to the removed creature's controller. In the grand scheme, however, gaining tempo by removing a creature far outweighs the drawback of granting its controller life. Furthermore, when a creature is removed from the game in this manner, it is not subject to effects that target graveyard creatures, nor can it trigger effects that occur when a creature is put into the graveyard.

Cards with global removal effects can also increase tempo at the price of a small drawback. Let's look at Wrath of God as an example.

This Alpha rare can be a great tempo enhancer, given the right situation. Yes, it destroys whatever creatures you have in play, but it destroys your opponent's as well—a good situation if your opponent has more creatures in play than you do, or has creatures in play that you cannot deal with in any other way. The tempo factor stems from the fact that Wrath of God lets you overcome multiple threats with a single card.

OH FUGITIVE DRUID, HOW FAR YOU'VE FALLEN...



THEY JUST KEEP BOUNCING BACK

Another way to gain tempo from permanents is to return them to your opponent's hand. Although doing so doesn't get rid of permanents for good, it does work well if you're bouncing a Land or creature, or if the ability is combined with another effect. Let's take a look at Boomerang—the quintessential “bounce” card—as an example.

Because it can target any permanent in play, this Legends common can be used in a variety of ways to create tempo. You can use it to return a Land, a Creature, or even a powerful Enchantment to its owner's hand.

When you bounce a land back to its owner's hand, you put your opponent a turn behind in Land count because he must spend his next turn playing a land that was played last turn. This tempo advantage is only heightened if your opponent was playing a Land that returns another Land to its owner's hand (such as Treva's Ruins from Planeshift), a Land that comes into play tapped (such as Coastal Tower), a Land that requires its owner to pay life (such as Overgrown Tomb or the “Karoo” Lands from the Ravnica block), or a Land that returns another land to its owner's hand *and* comes into play tapped (such as Gruul Turf).

Bouncing a creature to its owner's hand doesn't provide a permanent removal the way Swords to Plowshares does,

but it does enhance your tempo. Furthermore, if you can return a creature affected by an Aura to its owner's hand, the Aura is discarded to the graveyard.

Man-O-War provides a good example of what happens when another effect is associated with the bounced card.

Not only is Man-O-War an efficient creature for Blue (at three for a 2/2), but it also bounces a creature. Even if the creature you return to its owner's hand costs less than Man-O-War, you gain tempo because you now have a creature in play and your opponent has one fewer than before.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT US

So far, we've been talking about creating tempo in response to what an opponent does. However, you can also create tempo through the use of an aggressive mana curve.

LEARNING THE CURVE

Simply put, a mana curve is a tool that allows you to better utilize the amount of mana available to you each turn. For an example of an aggressive mana curve, let's look at Mark Herberholz's Gruul Beats deck, which won Pro-Tour Honolulu.

Mark's deck contains eleven cards with a converted mana cost of one, eight cards with a converted mana cost of two, fourteen cards with a converted mana cost of three, and four cards with a converted mana cost of four. As you can see, the general trend is that as the converted mana cost increases, the number of cards at that level drops. Only at the three-mana level is this trend broken.

This sliding scale allows you to maximize the number of cards you can play with the mana you have on any given turn, thus increasing tempo. On turn 1, you should have a card with a converted mana cost of one available; on turn 2, you should have one with a converted mana cost of two, and so forth. By building your deck in this way, you should be able to outpace your opponent and win quickly.

LAND IS THE KEY

Another way to create tempo—or more importantly, to make sure you don't lose tempo—is to make sure you have enough Lands in your deck. When playing an aggressive deck, you can't afford to lose tempo by missing your chance to play a Land each turn. Every Land is precious, especially in a deck geared for an early win, and you must have one available to play each turn if you want to be successful. Stalling out with two or three Lands in play spells certain death, since it gives your opponent more time to catch up with you.

In a sixty-card deck (the minimum size allowed in Constructed Magic), you should have about twenty-three Land cards to ensure that you have Land to play each turn. This value ensures that you don't miss a Land drop and can apply pressure to your opponent each turn. Decks that are more control-oriented may have more Lands, and decks that are more aggressive may have fewer, but twenty-three is a good starting point.

TEMPO AND TIMING

It has been said that tempo is lost over time, but that adage isn't necessarily true. Tempo is arguably most important in the earlier stages of the game, because you have fewer mana sources then and are therefore more susceptible to tempo loss. And in the late game, you have more mana sources with which you can catch up in the tempo race. These facts, however, don't mean that you should totally disregard tempo in the later stages of the game. After all, you may be able to put your opponent in a hole so large that she cannot overcome it, even in the late game.

ONE LAST WORD

Tempo is one of the most important concepts in Magic: the Gathering and yet one of the hardest to pin down and master. The best way to learn how to handle tempo, and indeed every other necessary skill in the game, is through practice. Only by putting theory to work for you over and over can you become a better player.

Bradley Burnett resides in Austin, Texas. When not contemplating Magic theory or posting on the Wizards.COMmunity message boards, he is working in the retail industry or spending time at the gym. Though he remains busy most of the time, he tries his best to help the Wizards.COMmunity as much as possible, and he hopes that this article has aided even one Magic: the Gathering player.



MARK HERBERHOLZ'S GRUUL BEATS DECK

Below are the main deck and sideboard that won Pro-Tour Honolulu for Mark Herberholz.

MAIN DECK (60 CARDS)

LAND:

- 2X SKARRG, THE RAGE PITS
- 7X MOUNTAIN
- 6X FOREST
- 4X STOMPING GROUND
- 4X KARPLUSAN FOREST

CREATURES:

- 4X SCAB-CLAN MAULER
- 4X SCORCHED RUSALKA
- 4X GIANT SOLIFUGE
- 4X DRYAD SOPHISTICATE
- 4X BURNING-TREE SHAMAN
- 3X FRENZIED GOBLIN
- 4X KIRD APE

OTHER SPELLS:

- 3X MOLDERVINE CLOAK
- 4X CHAR
- 3X FLAMES OF THE BLOOD HAND

SIDEBOARD (15 CARDS)

- 1X FLAMES OF THE BLOOD HAND
- 2X TIN STREET HOOLIGAN
- 2X RUMBLING SLUM
- 2X NATURALIZE
- 4X BLOOD MOON
- 4X UMEZAWA'S JITTE



HALLOWEEN DELIGHT

A FLAVOR-FILLED DECK OF SPIRITS AND BANSHEES

BY CHRIS "KRUGER" YORK
(CFYORK, NARCOLEPTIC_ONE)

PLAYTEST REPORT

Once I realized that Ravnica provides all the right components for a flavor-filled Halloween deck, it was hard to resist the compulsion to assemble those components and see how they played out. After all, cards such as Macabre Waltz, Belfry Spirit, and Keening Banshee seem just made for the season. Upon further consideration, I also added Ghostly Prison from Kamigawa block to improve the deck's performance a bit.

Be warned—this deck is a bit slow, and it depends a great deal on Grave Pact, so if you encounter enchant-hate, you are likely to be in for a real problem. However, this deck was designed more for fun than for tournament play, so use it and enjoy!

Once I had my Halloween deck designed, I headed for the Magic Online casual room to get a feel for how it played. Winning wasn't that important, since I was really just going for the flavor of Halloween, but I wasn't going to complain should it happen.

GAME 1

My opponent was playing a Green/White token deck, which was bad news for my Grave Pact shenanigans. I got the Turn 5 Belfry out while he churned out tokens and two Scions of the Wild, which proved too much for me to handle.

SCORE: 0-1

GAME 2

I could tell I was in for a beating this time. My opponent seemed to be playing the popular Orzhov tourney deck Ghost Husk. After he castigated a Dimir House Guard out of my weak starting hand, then laid down a Dark Confidant, I asked him if this is the case, and he confirmed it. Luckily, the stars were on my side. I managed to get out a Belfry Spirit and Grave Pact, and suddenly I was out sacking the husk. My opponent made a series of deft plays, such as wiping the board when my Belfry Spirit was about to haunt. But once it hit the graveyard, I promptly reanimated it, and he was in a whole new world of hurt. He failed to find a Mortify for my Grave Pact, and Halloween conquered net decking! Score one for the good guys.

SCORE: 1-1

GAME 3

My opponent for this game was playing one of my favorite net decks of all time—Snakes on a Plane! The deck runs by gaining advantage from Sosuke's Summon and Coiling Oracle. I got out the early Grave Pact, which held off the slithery horde for a time. Then I tried to work in a pair of Gravediggers to continue the hijinks, but it was not to be because of my opponent's pesky yet effective countermagic. The snakes continued to mount, and Halloween was defeated.

So far, I've learned that my deck has serious problems when my opponent has lots of disposable creatures to sacrifice to the Pact, which comes as no surprise. Hmm, moving on.

SCORE: 1-2

HALLOWEEN DECK

26 CREATURES

4X PLAGUED RUSKALA
4X THOUGHTPICKER WITCH
4X DIMIR HOUSE GUARD
4X GRAVEDIGGER
4X KEENING BANSHEE
4X BELFRY SPIRIT
2X AGENT OF MASKS

10 SPELLS

4X MACABRE WALTZ
2X GHOSTLY PRISON
4X GRAVE PACT

24 LAND

4X ORZHOV BASILICA
6X PLAINS
14X SWAMP

GAME 4

I'm not sure what my opponent is playing here, but I get only two Lands for the game's short duration, and he brings the beats with an Avatar of Discord starting on Turn 4. He plays a Loxodon Warhammer on his final turn but doesn't need to equip it. The lesson learned here is that mana screw is no fun, and I can't deal with artifacts even should I have mana. That's good to know.

SCORE: 1-3

GAME 5

Looks like I'm in for more snakes here, though they appear to be traveling on foot and leaving the plane behind—a fact that can only help me. My opponent leads off with a foil Birds of Paradise, apparently trying to win on the intimidation factor alone. I attempt to avoid eye contact with the daunting foilyness and am moderately successful. Meanwhile, I transmute a Dimir House Guard for a Grave Pact on Turn 3, then play it in all of its puddnhead glory on Turn 4. But the BoP foilyness still grates on my resolve, and I know I must act fast if I am to win this psychological battle. His snakes continue to slither out of his hand, but Lady Shuffler smiles upon me, giving me two Belfry Spirits and a Dimir House Guard. I swing, sac the spirits to make approximately a bajillion bats while wiping his board, and victory is mine. After the game, my opponent bestows the ultimate compliment upon Halloween by dubbing it a "spooky" deck.

SCORE: 2-3

FINAL ASSESSMENT

Halloween was a great success flavorfully, and a decent success at actually winning, with a 2-3 record through the first five games. That's a pretty good showing for a deck built primarily for flavor.

C. York lives in the central part of the United States with a cat and three dogs. He has played Magic: the Gathering since Ice Age and D&D since Chainmail. He has a fascination with the card Necropotence and has amassed a collection of more than thirty.



Why Momir is Mo Magic FUN

BY CHRIS YORK

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL PATTEN

Everybody knows a Mr. Suitcase—the guy who has every card from every release, including alternate art and promo versions. We all have fantasized about such collections, and just about every Magic player plans to have one just as soon as that wind-fall from the lottery comes in. Well, for those who play Magic Online, the lottery has arrived, in a manner of speaking.

MOMIR MAGIC

The phenomenon dubbed Momir Magic has created a sensation of sorts. Momir Magic is essentially Vanguard format, in which two (or more) players each use a Momir-Vig avatar—the participation prize for the Dissension release in June 2006. But what's so special about this avatar? Let's take a closer look at it.

X, Discard a card: Put a token into play as a copy of a random creature card with converted mana cost X. Play this ability only any time you could play a sorcery and only once each turn.

What does that text mean? In short, it means that you could get a copy of any creature that's been released for Magic Online since its inception. This ability lets the budget player bring the beatdown on opponents with the likes of Akroma or any of her other high priced relations. That's not a bad result for the price of a \$5 avatar. And to top it all off, the format is a lot of fun.

If the casual player ever needed a reason to try Magic Online, Momir Magic might just be it. So spring the funds for the avatar and give it a try!

ALIENS HAVE INVADDED HECATOMB

BY ANTHONY BAXTER
(MTALMUZICFAN)

The Hecatomb game may have been discontinued, but its fan base remains active on the Wizards of the Coast message boards. Therefore, we present this review of the game's last expansion, *Blanket of Lies*, which was released on February 24, 2006.

With only seventy-two different cards, *Blanket of Lies* is the smallest expansion ever offered for the game. However, it gave endbringers some new technology with which to conquer any and all worlds that crossed their paths. Thus, it's appropriate to start off by reviewing the newest concepts that this expansion introduced.

THE ALIEN INVASION

The most important addition that *Blanket of Lies* brought to Hecatomb was a group of extraterrestrial creatures commonly referred to as aliens. What's so special about aliens? In this case, they introduced a new concept called relic minions into the Hecatomb game. Relic minion cards are affected by anything that would normally affect either minion or relic cards. Some

Magic: the Gathering players may immediately recognize a similar concept in that game's Artifact Creatures, but the Hecatomb game never even scratched the surface of the potential these cards offered.



“SPAWN”ING THE INVASION

Spawn abilities, the last to arrive in Hecatomb's atmosphere, can pack quite a wallop. Marked as purple conditional abilities, they work only when you play a minion with a Spawn ability as a size-1 abomination. As with other conditional abilities, you may choose to activate the Spawn ability or forego the process and keep playing the game.

Now let's take a closer look at those Spawn abilities with Neck Redder.

When played as a size-1 abomination, Neck Redder simply eradicates the bottom minion of each abomination, including itself. This particular card helps to get rid of Hosts that have high strength, powerful abilities, or a combination of both. Any of your bottom minions with the Martyr ability go into your mana zone untapped upon destruction, enabling you to play more cards. Neck Redder is also a greed minion, so it shouldn't be too hard to play it whenever you need to gain the upper hand.

STRONG POINTS

Blanket of Lies puts quite a few interesting cards at our disposal. Let's look at Krakon, the strongest minion currently available.

Normally, a high-strength minion is either a Host or a large fattie with a drawback of sorts. This minion is no exception when it comes to cost/strength ratio, but it is one of the few large minions that players might consider running in their decks.

When played on top of a greed minion, Krakon allows you to draw an additional two cards by sacrificing a mana card. In Hecatomb, you can't lose for being unable to draw, so this effect is not quite as harmful as it sounds.

Furthermore, a majority of large minions have the Parasite ability, which prevents the controller from playing new minions on top of them. Krakon isn't a parasite; therefore it's not quite as bad as some say it is. And since it's also an Alien, you may use it to play with your new Alien toys.



Throughout the history of TCGs and CCGs, a few cards have been known to break the rules. Furthermore, on occasion, the rules would state that a given card takes precedence over a contradiction in the rulebook. In *Dr. Frost*, *Blanket of Lies* has given us a unique minion that allows you to perform an action that you otherwise couldn't.

As previously mentioned, some of Hecatomb's strongest minions have the Parasite ability, but Hosts have a lot of strength because they're played before any other minions when building an abomination. An abomination built with *Dr. Frost*, however, allows you to play Hosts onto it. *Forsaken Shell* (from the Hecatomb Base Set) and *Squirming Horror* are prime examples of how Hosts provide great strength at affordable costs because of the bottom-of-the-stack restriction that the Host designation places on them. If a particular Host is already in play and you want to play it on top of *Dr. Frost*, you may play ol' Frosty on top of one of your deceit minions and exile it back to your hand.

WEAKER POINTS

As great a set as *Blanket of Lies* is, it does have some drawbacks that make some players consider it only semi-adequate for an endbringer's use.

The first drawback is the size of the set. A small number of cards isn't normally a problem, but this set has a preponderance of pro-Alien and anti-Alien cards and relatively few good cards outside the Alien archetype. And while the ability to choose from four new Gods (one of each doom) may seem awesome, it just isn't enough compared to the sixteen Gods released in earlier sets. Also, a set with fewer cards by necessity has more occurrences of the same cards in booster packs. But don't worry, you won't pull the same rare twenty-four times out of a booster box.

Furthermore, even though the relic minion concept is undeniably innovative, it's also a weak point of the set. Some of the minions offered in *Blanket of Lies* are infused with the characteristics of a relic, rendering it vul-

nerable to fates and abilities that affect both relics and minions.

This extra vulnerability makes these cards twice as hard to keep in play. For example, *Husker Glass Armor* is a 2-strength corruption minion with a cost of only 2. An even cost/strength ratio adds to its playability, as does the fact that it can stitch one of your minions onto itself when you play its *Spawn* ability. But sadly for this axe-wielding fellow, he's a relic minion and thus much more vulnerable during the game.

THE INVASION AS A WHOLE

The inherent weaknesses in *Blanket of Lies* only serve to make the expansion that much more interesting. After all, who wouldn't want to invade an opposing endbringer's world with a custom-made alien invasion?

If you would like to take an in-depth look at *Blanket of Lies*, just check out www.hecatombtcg.com and click on the Cards link. The *Blanket of Lies* Gallery shows images of all seventy-two cards, or you can go into the Hecatomb card database and get an even closer look. And if you happen to spot a UFO or think you might be seeing aliens, it may just be your Hecatomb deck.

Anthony has been playing M:tG since October of 2003 and has also picked up other WotC games, such as Dreamblade and Hecatomb. He has served as Hecatomb Community Editor since joining the staff of Knowledge Arcana and has recently added Dreamblade to his growing list of responsibilities.



ONE OF THE MANY SYMPTOMS OF CTHULFU



HOSTING **of** A GREAT GAME MINIS

BY FRANK EMANUEL (ONEFORFREEDOM)

Like many other members of the Wizards of the Coast community, I have a lot of enthusiasm for the *D&D Miniatures* (DDM) game. The most important factor in maintaining this passion, however, is not the new releases—fabulous though they may be—it's the other gamers with whom I can share my interest. Not much can beat getting together with so many great people to play a great game.

Unfortunately, some find running a minis gaming night to be a daunting task. Thus, I'd like to share a few tips for organizing and running a DDM event in your home. After all, everyone should have a great time when playing DDM—including the host.

ORGANIZING A GREAT HOME GAME

One of the best ways to make sure everyone has fun is to be prepared. When you decide to take the plunge and invite some friends over to play DDM, you need to consider two main points: information and space. Specifically, you must give your guests enough information so that they can come prepared to play, and you must set up a space in your home for the actual game.

Only a few DDM sets had been published when we first started playing. Many of us showed up with all our minis and cards, ready to build warbands on the spot. But as the game developed, transporting all of one's minis became impractical. And with all the great options available, building a warband began to require more and more time to do well. Nowadays, if I am going to enjoy myself, I need to know what format we are playing well in advance so that I can pull the appropriate miniatures and cards, my favorite d20s, and a map. Therefore, when hosting a minis game at your home, the first thing to consider is what information people need to make ready for it.

MAKING THE ANNOUNCEMENT

My group enjoys playing a lot of different formats—even campaigns—so about a week before the game day, an email goes out to the list of local players. This message includes the game location and time, the game format, and any build peculiarities (such as themed warbands or specific maps). Typically, it also includes a request that each person bring a few dollars for prize support. Finally, the email ends with an RSVP request, so that we know how much table space to prepare.

A typical announcement for a 200pt DCI compliant skirmish would look like this:

Game Friday at Frank's House
(address here)
8:30PM (trades at 8PM)
200pt, DCI – bring a map.
1 hour games, Assault format
No Epics or Huges allowed.
We're all pitching in \$2
toward a prize booster.
Let me know if you can make it.

Make sure that your announcement includes enough information so that each player can not only build an appropriate warband, but also assemble the necessary maps, tiles, traders, and so forth. Also, make sure you note in the email whether or not the games are DCI sanctioned. (Yes, you can sanction a game in your home, but someone must sit out and judge it.)

PREPARING THE GAME SPACE

Once you've provided your players with the information they need to prepare, you need to make sure you have enough space for the people you've invited. Take out your maps and test each table to see how many players it can accommodate. I have a few backup tables that are too small to support maps, but they work fine with a board on top. If you do not have enough table space, ask some of the other players if they have card tables that they can bring. Make sure you clean off any tables you plan to use before the gamers arrive—I can tell you from experience that sticky maps make unhappy players.

When you're hosting, it's helpful to have some extra strings and templates kicking around. I like to place a set of templates and a string on each table before the game. You can take the templates to a photocopy store and have them copied onto transparency sheets, which are a bit easier to work with than the solid paper templates that come in the starter box. If you cut the templates out, make sure you leave the outside line intact. I like to keep such supplies, as well as a few copies of the most current rules, in a box so they are easy to grab just before the game.

You may also wish to make an extra warband or two. Inevitably, you'll end up hosting a game with an odd number of people. You could have people take turns sitting out, but most came to play. On occasion, my group asks for a volunteer (preferably a more experienced player) to play two skirmishes simultaneously. If you choose this solution, select a new volunteer for each skirmish to make it fair. You can't use this arrangement in a DCI-sanctioned game, but it works great in casual games. Thus, most of our veteran players now bring more than one band to our games.

PRIZES

Everyone likes prizes, so make sure that everyone pitches in enough to cover the cost of the booster. The easiest way to handle prize support is simply to give the booster to the person who wins the most games.



You can also have a lot of fun with prize drafts. To draft a booster, decide who is going to choose first, then simply pour the minis out on the table. Our group sometimes lets the person who lost the most go first, since the loser is often the one who needs the most pieces.

DCI SANCTIONING

DCI in the home is an excellent option for those of us who do not have easy access to a venue for playing regular DCI tournaments. If you want to run a DCI-sanctioned game in your home, you must submit an application, usually a few weeks in advance. The great folks at DCI will email you the necessary forms, which you must return after the game. If you have never judged a DCI DDM tournament before, they will also send you the Tournament Organizer's Handbook, which includes everything you need to run a DCI-sanctioned DDM tournament. Because a person cannot both judge and play in a sanctioned event, you may want to have your group take turns organizing and judging DCI events.

ENJOY THE GAME

The above tips should help you feel a bit more at ease with the idea of hosting a great DDM game. Trust me, hosting gets easier with each game. Be prepared for word to get around that you run a great game, and for your community of gamers to grow. Good luck, and may your dice roll 20s when you need them the most.

Frank Emanuel is an avid gamer from the Great White North. He has been playing D&D and other RPGs since the early 80s and strategy games since long before that. He has also written several DDM scenarios for Wizards of the Coast, Inc. When he is not rolling dice, Frank finds time to be a father, husband, student, and minister.

▼ EACH GAMER BROUGHT THE SAME MINI: BEERSTEIN BARBARIAN

FIELDING AN ITALIAN ARMY



^ ITALIAN SOLDIERS MARCHING TO LUNCH. WAR. I MEANT WAR.

BY JON MAYES (DER_LEITER)

Italy is the only minor nation to receive at least one unit in every set thus far, and only the French have more pieces. Thus, you would think it should be easy to create an Italian army. Doing so, however, is not as easy as it looks.

Players often perceive that the biggest obstacle in fielding an Italian-only army is that so many of the Italian units seem inferior to those of the other nations, and many have significant drawbacks. To some, however, such difficulties only make the Italians more interesting to play. Thus, quite a few players find it worthwhile to look for ways to work around the drawbacks.

CREATING AN ITALIAN-ONLY ARMY

Let's examine how we might build an all-Italian army. Once we have it, we can predict how it should fare against other armies.

COMMAND UNITS

The Stalwart Lieutenant is the only choice the Italian army has for a commander. Because he has extremely limited combat ability on his own, the lieutenant should not be put on the front lines unless the situation is truly desperate.

While his command ability (Stalwart—+1 to hit on defensive fire) is also very limited, it can at least serve as a deterrent. However, it's useless if the soldiers under his command have been disrupted, since they can't then make defensive-fire attacks.

Lastly, the Stalwart Lieutenant has a mere +1 Initiative, which is what you would effectively be buying this command for. This value does increase your odds of winning the roll by a significant amount, but +1, +2, and especially +3 are still considerably different. Thus, I wouldn't recommend using the Stalwart Lieutenant unless you truly feel the initiative is that important.

ARMOR

The Italian army has two options for armor: the Carro Armato M13/40 and the L3/35.

Carro Armato M13/40

Perhaps the most important unit in an Italian army is the Carro Armato M13/40—or rolling coffin, as it was known. At a cost of 12 points, this unit is the best way of dealing with armor threats. It can also be used to support your forces against infantry because of its fairly high anti-soldier dice. Overlapping fire provides increased protection against enemy infantry, though you may find yourself in trouble if you rely too heavily on the Carro. It has a moderate defense, speed, and anti-vehicle attack, but it suffers from the Highly Flammable drawback. (If the Carro is damaged, you must roll 1d6. On a result of 3 or higher, it's immediately destroyed.) For this reason alone, you may want to go first whenever you can to ensure that your Carro gets to fire off a shot. Furthermore, if you're using Fucile Modello 1891s, the destruction of the Carro also instantly causes them to lose their Bravado dice.

While the Carro's dice are adequate against most light or medium tanks, it has significant difficulty against heavy tanks. When facing such units, you must either avoid the enemy as best you can or attempt to swarm it by getting all your tanks as close as possible during the movement phase to earn those extra dice, then hammering away at the enemy. Supporting infantry can be useful if you disrupt the enemy tank so that they can move in close to assault it. Expect to take casualties though; most heavy tanks have enough dice to destroy the Carro regardless of its Highly Flammable drawback. Not every player has several of these rare Set I tanks available, but the Set II Panzer III F makes a decent substitute.

L3/35

Set IV provides the Italians with a new tank—the L3/35. It's best not to think of this unit as a tank, however; it's actually more of an armored car. Its Excellent Suspension ability gives it the speed and mobility to move into position, and Double Shot lets it take out key units.

Use the L3/35 to hunt down enemy snipers and artillery wherever you can. Its anti-soldier dice aren't good enough to do much to regular soldiers and are useless against elite ones. But despite the high cost and low defense, one or two of these little tanks may prove quite useful. If all else fails, consider the psychological warfare aspect of this tank—your opponent may laugh so hard at seeing them fielded that he actually makes a mistake.

SUPPORT

The Brixia M35 45mm Mortar provides the Italian Army with some moderate fire support. While it doesn't have the long range of machine guns or some of the other mortars, its rapid fire makes it quite threatening once it is within range.

Rapid Fire can be tricky sometimes, so it may not always be a good idea to use it. Already disrupted mortars might as well not take the chance of rolling a 1 so that they can fire more accurately next turn; with 5 dice hitting on 6s,

the odds aren't as good. However, if your mortar has already taken a hit, then by all means fire away—you have nothing to lose. Furthermore, the Brixia Mortars make excellent supporting weapons for the Blackshirts because they can disrupt multiple units, allowing the Blackshirts to use their Ruthless ability on the next turn.

INFANTRY

The Italian army features two kinds of infantry units: the Fucile Modello 1891 and the Blackshirts.

Fucile Modello 1891

The basic infantry unit of the Italian Army, the Fucile Modello 1891, is generally inferior to other 3-point infantries, such as SMLEs or Mausers. While it initially has +1 dice over the SMLE/Mausers, it takes only one casualty to put it at -1 dice. More importantly, a 7/5 infantry attack has a great deal of trouble harming enemy units. Even so, however, a few Fuciles can be useful. While the unit has the Bravado ability, the 9/7 attack is quite powerful—on a par with elite units.

Place the Fuciles as close as you can to the battle and use them as shock troops. You want them to get their shots, but in the end they're expendable. And if they draw even a few shots away from your Blackshirts or Mortars after losing Bravado, then they've done their job.

Blackshirts

The Blackshirts—the elite infantry of the Italians—have statistics identical to those of the SMLE or Mauser rifle, but with one important advantage: for +1 point, they have gained the Ruthless ability. The Blackshirts are good units for following up attacks because their Ruthless ability increases the number of successes they score against enemies. Yes, the Blackshirts hit them while they're down—they are Ruthless after all.

While the bulk of your infantry should stick together and advance on the objective, it might be wise to let one or two Blackshirts do their best to keep up with your armor. These units can provide some support against enemy infantry, assault disrupted vehicles—and perhaps most importantly, provide some extra air cover.

OBSTACLES

Because the Italian army is so slow, obstacles can be quite useful—but don't go overboard and spend too many points on them.

Mines

Minefields are useful against both vehicles and soldiers, and you don't have to place them immediately. However, they can be difficult to place because of their restrictions, and they are ineffective against popular units with Veteran Crew or SS-Determination.

Tanks and Barbed Wire

Tank obstacles slow down the enemy armor, allowing yours to move into position. Place them at strategic locations such as bridges or near forest hexes to reduce your opponent's

options. In like manner, Barbed Wire can be used against enemy infantry, slowing down its advance to the objective to give you time to get there.

Pillboxes

Pillboxes are perhaps not quite as useful for the Italians as other obstacles because they lack long-range support weapons. If you place them too close to the objective, your opponent might take them over first.

OVERALL STRATEGY

The Italian army is likely to have a difficult time against later war units, such as the Tiger or Pershing, but it's fairly strong against infantry. The Italians are best in a 1940–1943 game, but they can still be somewhat competitive in 1944–1945.

An important weakness of the Italian army is its complete lack of anti-air support. It has neither planes nor AA guns, and with a rear defense of only 3, the Carro can be very susceptible to air attack. The Carro Armato is the Italians' best unit against aircraft because of its high anti-soldier dice, but it may be too busy dealing with other threats to serve as anti-air support. Blackshirts, as well as any Fuciles that haven't lost their Bravado, are the best bet. It may be difficult to win with the Italians, but it's not impossible.

THE FINISHED ARMY

Because of the low average cost of the units, making an effective Italian force without using a large number of Carro Armatos is very difficult. The 15-unit limit also makes it difficult to fit in the cheaper obstacles, since the army fills up fast with units. Keeping these points in mind, a standard, 100-point army might be as follows.

100-POINT ARMY	
5X	CARRO ARMATO M13/40
1X	L3/35
1X	STALWART LIEUTENANT
2X	BRIXIA M34 MORTAR
3X	BLACKSHIRT
1X	FUCILE MODELLO 1891
2X	TANK OBSTACLES

Have fun playing the Italians!

Jon Mayes, aka Der_Leiter, lives somewhere up north (Canada, or so we hear). He's currently taking History and Psychology at York University when he's not busy with more important pursuits, such as Axis & Allies Miniatures, D&D, Munchkin, Star Wars Miniatures, Magic: The Gathering, and—well, whatever else comes along. One wonders how he keeps the rules straight, and whether he will soon tap a dwarf Jedi to remove a mine from the battlefield.



THE GREAT KOTCHANU

**BY DAVID RODOY (EDGECRUSHER)
ART BY KATRIN KROHMANN (NEPHTIS)**

As he swam up from oblivion, Ksast was met by a sound that seemed to shudder in his heart. It was the great call of his people, the pulse of life in his blood. The call to battle. The call to strife. The call to joy.

He opened his mouth wide to roar, to join his voice with the call of thousands—and took in thick gobbets of gore. Choking, he rolled his head and spat the stuff out. His throat palpitated violently to clear itself until he could breathe easily again. The taste of his own blood, familiar and reassuring, was strong in his mouth—a lingering after-taste that reminded him of past gore-drenched days.

He sniffed, drawing in the cloying scent of blood both old and new on the air, plus the heavy animal scent of prey and the familiar scent of his hunt-mate. He felt the wind scouring his form, blowing dust into his open wounds and battering his face. With a heavy grunt he turned over, annoyed by the wind's assault, but the sound of his armor scraping on the hard ground seemed distorted and distant somehow.

That evidence plus a sharp, flaring sensation like freezing air blown rhythmically against the side of his head led him to the realization that he had lost his left ear. He focused on the signals his body was sending for a moment, then let out a rumbling, irritated growl that rippled up his throat from the depths of his massive chest. Finally, he opened his eyes. The sight before him confirmed the truth that his body had spoken, and told him that his chances of survival were not as high as they could have been.

Ksast was looking at his left arm. It had been severed at the shoulder and lay a foot away from him, still clutching one of his throwing hatchets. He sat up and regarded the limb almost in accusation. It had failed him, and he would not miss it. Another would grow in its place if he lived through the next month. But that loss was just the beginning of his woes.

One of his curled, rolling horns had been broken off, and an inch-wide slash cut through his left eye—two of many gifts from their prey. Other gashes riddled his stomach, chest, arms, and legs, though the large plates of heavily dented, bronze-chased armor that were buckled to his body had protected him from some damage. Several of his ribs had been snapped, making breathing a little difficult, and his left leg had been broken in two places.

He kicked with it experimentally to determine whether it was actually useless. A pair of dull, answering aches told him that it was not, but it would slow him down while it healed. When he closed his eyes, the flaring, cold sensation from the left one told him it was useless for now. But the eye would be back with the arm. Most of the gashes in his body had stopped bleeding already, though the deeper ones that had bitten into muscle or scratched bone were closing up more slowly.

“Too slow, too stupid. Shouldn’t have ducked. Should have rolled.”

Ksast blinked a couple of times, puzzling at the strange sensation in his mouth, then spat a great gobbet of blood into his hand. He enclosed the thick, sticky lump with a fist that could crush skulls, tensed his muscles in a squeeze, then unfurled his fingers. The redness that stained his muddy, green skin reminded him of a sunset he had watched on a pool of water back at his tribehold. But the whiteness in his palm now was not a flyfish leaping from rock pool to rock pool—it was three of his teeth. He hadn't even noticed that they'd been dislodged. With an awkward little movement, he put the teeth into one of the pouches at his side, then drew it shut again and stood.

For an instant, he wondered what had happened. The creature had attacked suddenly, and he remembered nothing afterward. Part of the mystery was solved when a keening screech made him turn his head to look at their quarry. A smile spread across his battered face at the sight. The kithanu before him was a giant among its kind. Its twin sets of tusks, almost as wide as Ksast's arm, ended in deadly ivory points—spires of death extending above and below its muzzle.

The creature snarled, shifting its massive bulk, then let out another deafening screech, but it could do no more. Its short, thick neck had been pinned to the dusty ground by one of the heavily reinforced catch collars that Ksast and his

hunt-mate had carried with them. The collar consisted of multiple bands of steel that could be configured in two ways. One was a tight circle around the neck, restricting mobility and limiting the threat of a bite—the shape they'd be using to take it back home. The other—its current shape—was a hoop, bladed on both ends so that it could be driven into the barren earth to pin their prey. And what prey it was!

Its scales were red mottled with black, running back from its bony head across the majority of its bulk. Its four squat legs ended in viciously clawed feet, and its huge body was defended by a heavy spikes. At the end of its long tail was a bony lump the size of Ksast's torso. Even now, while the creature lay pinned—unable to do more than claw at the ground in a feeble attempt to dig the collar free—that tail was swinging lazily back and forth, daring someone to take advantage of its owner's apparent weakness. It was probably that tail that had struck Ksast in the chest.

He grinned. The kithanu was magnificent beyond words—a savage storm capable of destroying anything in its path. The devastation that surrounded Ksast only widened his smile. The damage done to him and the surroundings in the opening flash of combat confirmed his every wild imagining about what had transpired. A thick, pounding laugh reverberated from his throat as he surveyed the scene.



At his back lay a rolling wasteland, scoured by the ravaging wind that blew mournful storms of dust in swirls and eddies. Boulders and rocky outcrops jutted from the land like bare bones. Here and there great gashes marked valleys that Ksast knew were filled with decay and poisonous stink. Nothing lived in the valleys—not even his hardy people.

As he stared about him, images flickered through his mind. He felt himself taking steps that he had not and saw his own claws scratching marks into the boulders before him, though he had never traveled this path before. The call of his people shuddered through his mind, bringing up racial memories from the hundreds of Cyldon troglodytes who had traveled this land in years past. Echoes of their voices told him what to expect here—terrior hunters and kithanu packs, blood beetles and swampland. He knew he wasn't taking his prey back to the tribehold that way—even though this prey was bountiful. His injuries were too serious.

He turned and looked upon the oasis—a spot of brilliant life in this blasted land. Wide-branched, leafy trees stretched up around a deep, luminous pool of water that gleamed as if moonlight had turned to liquid and gathered here to be admired. Dark grass grew around the pool, and another experimental sniff of the air revealed that the scent of blood and battle was mixed with the pungent aroma of the fruits hanging from the trees.



The battle with the kithanu had left a scar upon the oasis. Torn earth and trees shattered by the beast's rage marked the site, and bright red Cyldon blood dotted the leaves and stained the ground. The kithanu lay pinned in the center of this scar on the earth, eager to release its rage once more upon its captors. In truth, Ksast would relish a chance to fight it again, to test his mettle against it once more, as his ancestors had tested theirs against thousands of kithanu in the past. His mind began to fill with the successful hunts of his predecessors in hundreds of places he had never ventured. He watched them fight hundreds of different kithanu—every one smaller than the one he had caught today. And the call filled his mind, resonating within him, growing louder and stronger.

At last, Ksast added his voice to the call, raising his arm above his head and roaring with all his might, but his snapped ribs made his voice wheeze strangely. The kithanu answered, joining its deafening, high-pitched screech to the call. Its frustration at defeat only made the sound of victory ring sweeter. Theirs would be a truly great memory for future generations of the Called to savor. And not only was the prey more marvelous than any taken before, but he and his hunt-mate had even found an oasis around which to form a new tribehold.

At that thought, Ksast wheeled around to look for Bot, wondering where the architect of this victory was. A few slightly awkward paces, punctuated by aches from his mutilated body, gave him his answer.

Bot lay impaled by a broken tree on the other side of the pool, as though she had been launched from the scar all the way over the water. A trio of small, reptilian creatures suddenly straightened from the grasses at his approach, then fled into the undergrowth like a gust of wind. Ksast snorted in disgust at the scavengers that had come to feed on the helpless Cyldon. The instinct to face the Called openly was not within them. They made decent meals, though.

With some difficulty, Ksast walked around the pool's circumference toward Bot, who was clawing feebly at the stake that pierced her side. The curling horns on her head were intact, both of her ears were still there, and the cheeky lines of a smile played around her snarling mouth, as if she were ready to joke or laugh at a moment's notice. Like Ksast, Bot had muddy green skin, with dark lines running across it. But unlike Ksast, she would not recover from this day.

The kithanu's tail had struck true and cleanly. Bot's breastplate had offered no protection, and the damage dealt had been extreme. Ribs peeked from the ruined mass of chest into which her dented breastplate had been driven, and that was only the beginning of the damage. Though all of Bot's limbs were still attached, one leg was all but annihilated.

As Ksast stared at his hunt-mate, the call surged in his mind, and the scene of Bot's final battle flashed before his eyes. He saw himself facing the kithanu and felt his heart pounding in his chest as if it were striking a drum. He felt the joy of facing such great and terrible prey and of having achieved victory. Then he felt the impact of that whipping

tail when the kithanu spun as far to the side as it could. The sweeping tail struck his leg, tossing his entire body into the air like a plaything. He was still upside down when the tail coiled back like a scorpion's sting and thrust into his chest with all the power in the creature's body.

Ksast nodded. That memory said it all. Bot was beginning to join the call already. Her voice was leaving her shell and flying free to unite with those who had gone before. Ksast found Bot's eyes, dark small orbs with brilliant points of red in the center, above a mouth fixed into an irritated snarl.

"Best hunter," Bot declared, twitching the claws of one hand and pointing at Ksast.

"Best hunter," Ksast replied, pointing back and grinning. Bot, the younger of the two, had always let Ksast take the spoken credit for all of their hunts. But the credit for this hunt would be hers beyond doubt. With that thought, Ksast stepped forward, raised his good foot, and brought it down with all his might on Bot's throat.

Ksast spent a few minutes stripping Bot's body of armor and clothes that could be passed on, taking only a moment to sigh when he looked for the last time at the triple rows of her hard, small breasts. Even mired in the ruins of an obliterated ribcage, enough of her femininity remained to bring back fond remembrances. She had been a strong female and had borne him several children. The loss of her shell among the Called would weaken his tribehold. Ksast truly was the best hunter now. Though he would rather have earned that place through talent, his heart swelled with joy and the knowledge of the new responsibility that would fall to him. His shell was strong, and his voice was stronger. He knew he would not fail his tribe.

As he gathered up Bot's swords—those great curves of razor-sharp metal that she had always wielded, one in each hand—he felt the memory of the battle with the kithanu flooding into him. That sense of satisfaction he had previously felt only in glimpses settled on his soul as he assumed the role of the true hunter. The other memories he and Bot had shared would soon be his and his alone, while her knowledge and experience would diffuse through the Called, so that all could benefit from her life. No Cyldon voice could ever be silenced. Before long, all other tribeholds would know of this oasis, and soon more of the Called would come to settle here. With every death, the collective voice of the Cyldon grew stronger, and the power of their shells grew with it.

Ksast found their hunting packs, which they had dropped at the edge of the oasis after they had tracked their quarry here. He scavenged all he could carry from Bot's pack before tying his own to his back. Its rough lizard skin rubbed comfortably against his body, filling his nose with its familiar old sweaty scent. He hooked four hobbler collars over his arm and dragged the heavy pull chain along with him. It was his role to end the hunt and bring the prey back to the tribehold. This creature would be the tribe's finest prize—the great kithanu of the North that no other Cyldon had succeeded in bringing down. It would serve as the steed of their great leader Garak, and he would lead them against the soft-shells to test the Called and the listeners.

Both sides would fight. Most would die. All would grow.

Such was the purpose of the Called—to thrive, to test, and to grow, in preparation for their one great battle—the battle that slept and would one day awaken again. When that day came, the Called and the listening soft-shells would once more stand as one and end the sleeping war forever.

His heart bursting with pride, Ksast once again faced the great kithanu, snarling when it hissed a challenge at him. He grinned and pinned his severed arm to the ground with his foot, then yanked his hatchet free

MINI KITHANU

Think you can do a better job kicking the kithanu in the tail? Here's your chance, with exclusive alternate cards for some popular D&D Minis. We suggest using the Troglodyte or Troglodyte Barbarian as the Ksast mini and the Redspawn Firebelcher as the kithanu. Print them out, cut them out, and start gaming! Can't read the text? Download high-quality versions from the KA website.



GREAT KITHANU 67 POINTS

CL

LEVEL (SAVE) 9

SPEED 6

AC 21

HP 105

MELEE ATTACK
+15/+10 (20)

TYPE
Large Magical Beast

SPECIAL ABILITIES
Wild (Always out of command)

Tail Slap 20 (Replaces attacks; 20 damage to one adjacent enemy, and push it 1 square if Large or smaller)

Powerful Charge +10
(Melee damage +10 when charging)

Blood Frenzy (If this creature fails a morale save, it does not rout. Instead it treats all other figures as enemies, moving and attacking in the most efficient way possible.)

The kithanu before him was a giant among its kind. Its twin sets of tusks, almost as wide as a man's arm, ended in deadly ivory points—spines of death extending above and below its muzzle.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ©2006 Wizards



KSAST, REPTILE HUNTER 48 POINTS

CG/CE

COMMANDER 2

LEVEL (SAVE) 8

SPEED 8

AC 17

HP 45

MELEE ATTACK
+10/+10 (10 magic)

RANGED ATTACK
+10/+5, range 6 (10 magic)

TYPE
Humanoid – Reptilian – Troglodyte

COMMANDER EFFECT
At the start of the skirmish, choose a creature type. Followers gain damage +5 against that type of creature.

SPECIAL ABILITIES
Unique
Reptile Foe, Stench
Regeneration 10 (This creature heals 10 hit points at the start of its turn)
Headless Assault (This creature may take 5 damage to deal +5 damage on a melee attack)

Ksast truly was the best hunter now. His shell was strong, and his voice was stronger. He knew he would not fail his tribe.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ©2006 Wizards

EXCLUSIVE NEW MINIS!

Play the story your way in 3 easy steps:

1. Print out this page, front and back, on the same sheet of heavy paper. Alternately, print out the high-quality versions of the cards available at the KA website.
2. Cut out the cards.
3. Find suitable minis to proxy (see recommendation on previous page) and hold your own Kithanu hunt!

GREAT KITHANU: CE H Magical Beast (Reptilian)



HD: 15d10+105 (187 hp)
AC: 29 (T 9, FF 28)
ATK: +20 melee (2d4+7, 2 claws) and +15 melee (3d6+3, bite); or +20 melee (1d8+7, slam); or +20 melee (2d6+7, tail slap)
SA/SQ: bonus +5 on attack and damage against grappled opponent, damage reduction 5/magic, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision
SV: Fort +16, Ref +10, Will +4
AB: S 24, D 12, Cn 24, I 10, W 8, Ch 10
SK/FE: Hide -7, Listen +15, Survival +15, Swim +11; Clave, Great Clave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Power Attack
POSS: None
CR: 16

D&D ROLEPLAYING STATS *Illus. Katrin Krohmann*

KSAST, REPTILE HUNTER: CN M Humanoid (Reptilian) Rgr 7



HD: 9(8)+54 (98 hp)
AC: 23 (T 11, FF 22)
ATK: +11 melee (1d4+3, 2 claws) and +9 melee (1d4+1, bite); or +12/+7 melee (1d6+5, +2 returning throwing axe) and +12/+7 melee (1d6+3, +2 returning throwing axe) and +9 melee (1d4+1, bite); or +12/+7 ranged (1d6+2, +2 returning throwing axe)
SA/SQ: Stench (all within 30' sickened for 1 min, Fort 13 neg), favored enemy magical beasts +4, favored enemy animals +2, wild empathy +7, woodland stride
SV: Fort +14, Ref +6, Will +4
AB: S 16, D 12, Cn 22, I 13, W 15, Ch 9
SK/FE: Climb +13, Hide +13, Listen +9, Move Silently +13, Survival +12, Swim +13; Diehard, Endurance, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Martial Weapon Proficiency (throwing axe), Multitask, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (throwing axe)
SPELLS: 2/day—Longtender, Magi: Fang
POSS: Two +2 returning throwing axes, +1 bronze breastplate

D&D ROLEPLAYING STATS *Illus. Katrin Krohmann*

of his own death-gripping hand, snapping the fingers like dry twigs. The sound brought forth memory echoes of verdant forests where the human soft-shells roamed. For a moment, memories of Cyldon running and hunting in that forest blinked behind his eyes like motes of dust through a shaft of sunlight.

Shaking his mind free of the memory, Ksast walked to the kithanu, matched its screeching challenge with a wheezing roar, then started kicking it violently in the head with his strong leg. His broken leg collapsed beneath him, and pulsing aches ricocheted from his leg to his mind as the ground rose up to cradle him. He rose and put the haft of his hatchet to use, pounding the kithanu with all the strength his one-armed body could offer.

The beast cried out in high-pitched whines, but Ksast, grunting with exertion, rhythmically rained blows down upon the beast's brow. At last, its whines turned to keening whistles, and its eyes seemed to glaze. The beast slumped heavily against the ground, throwing up a little cloud of loose dust.

Ksast took a few deep breaths, then tossed his hatchet over his shoulder and shook his head in disbelief. Most prey would have been reduced to paste by such treatment. Any soft-shell would have been, for certain.

He took up the first of the hobblers and moved cautiously toward the great kithanu's flank, testing to see whether it was trying to lure him into a fatal mistake. As he approached, it shifted its great bulk and whipped its tail against the ground, sending up a great spray of dirt and causing the earth to vibrate beneath his feet. Then it slumped to the earth again with a keening whistle, and he made his move.

Stepping in beside it, Ksast slammed his shoulder stump against its leg, forcing it to bend closer to the ground, and slapped the hobbler on. The device snapped shut around the kithanu's knee and lower thigh, and Ksast hugged it against his body while tightening the screws with his remaining hand. Gritting his teeth, he muttered obscenities when the kithanu began to resist, shifting this way and that until one of the forearm-thick spikes from its shell had wormed its way into his body through the stump of his shoulder. Ignoring the ache from the new wound, he just kept working, tightening the screws patiently and meticulously. The spike couldn't possibly kill him, and that was all that mattered.

The kithanu raised its massive, trunklike leg, lifting Ksast off his feet, but it could do no more with the hobbler attached. Planting its foot again, it let out a whine of frustration, then shrugged against Ksast, driving the spike deeper into his shoulder. He felt a stream of fresh blood pouring down his side, and some insects, drawn to the scent, began to buzz around him.

When the hobbler finally clicked into place, Ksast pulled his shoulder stump free of the impaling spike, leaving it slick and dripping with his bright red blood. He smiled. Now that his scent was on it, the creature felt more, not less, like his.

Before proceeding any further with the hobbling, Ksast took a moment to numb the creature's tail by cutting into the scales just above the base. It was a very minor wound—one that the kithanu would recover from in mere hours, but it served the Cyldon's purposes for now. Over the next half hour, Ksast hobbled the creature's remaining three legs, beating it half unconscious before each attempt.

At last Ksast stepped back, dirty and sheened with a mixture of sweat and blood from fresh gashes. The scent of it was strong in his nostrils, but not so strong that he could not smell the carrion birds approaching for Bot's shell. He looked up and shielded his eye against the sun. The circle of dark feathers slowly descended, then swooped in to alight around Bot's body. Almost immediately, the birds dived into the meal.

Ksast drank from the oasis, filled his waterskin, took some fruit from the trees, and began to make his final preparations. Concussing the kithanu once more, he yanked its catch collar free of the earth, then clamped it shut around the creature's throat, switching it to its second configuration and telescoping it to sheathe the entire neck. Now the kithanu could barely move its head from side to side. Its bite was still a threat, but a much more predictable and avoidable one. As he fixed the heavy chain to the back of the collar, he smiled at the familiar scrape of metal on scale. The easy part was complete. Now the difficult part began.

He wrapped the chain around his body, looping it through hoops built into his battered armor. Taking up his discarded hatchet, he hung it from his belt, then picked up his severed arm, walked back to the kithanu, and kicked it lightly in the head to stir it. When it raised its head to hiss, he thrust his arm in its face.

"Eat," he said. "Must stay strong."

The creature blinked at him stupidly, then opened its maw wide, revealing massive razored teeth, and ripped off a quarter of the arm with a single bite. While it chewed, Ksast pulled the rest of the meat away, leaving sinews and bone protruding, so that the beast couldn't eat it all at once. He didn't have that much food for the two of them, and in his current condition, he couldn't guarantee that he would be able to find more on the way back to the tribehold. This great battle would be for nothing if his voice escaped his shell before he could return with his prey.

Taking a bite out of his own bicep, Ksast felt his senses come alive at the flavor of his blood and flesh. He drank up some of the dripping blood from the other end, then awkwardly reached back and shoved the bloody remains of the arm into his pack. It would all be gone by the end of the day, but it would keep them both going for that long. He wished he could have taken some of Bot's shell with them, but he could not leave any of their equipment behind, and he could carry no more. He was a good hunter—no, he was the best hunter. He would get back alive, even without Bot's help.

Gritting his teeth and angling his body forward, Ksast worked his feet into the hard earth to gain leverage. Slowly, he started dragging the hobbled, weakened kithanu after him. His senses were alive, and the danger of his position rode high in his mind. His hunter's instincts were ready to counter all the traditional escape tricks that kithanu usually tried.

His mind flooded with the experiences of generation upon generation of hunters. The memories overlapped and informed, helping him to see what was and was not likely to work. At the same time, the thousands of feet that had explored these lands in the past two generations pattered out a mental path that would lead him back to the tribehold.

He smiled, feeling more of the memories he had shared with Bot flowing into him—those useless memories that only he could ever care about. With sudden intensity, he knew how funny he would have looked to Bot—one-armed, one-eyed, one-eared, almost one-legged, his half-eaten and severed arm protruding from his pack. A wreck of a Cylodon, dragging the largest kithanu in the history of hunters behind him—a scaled mountain humbled by a lizard.

Ksast laughed Bot's laugh in his mind. This story would make for some fine entertainment beside the fires.



David Rodoy lives in the south of the United Kingdom in the City of Bristol and is three years out of a degree in English Literature with Creative Writing. He has been developing the setting where this story takes place for approximately a decade, and he hopes to spend the majority of the writing career he doesn't have yet exploring it. David is currently 24 years old, employed in a random bad administration job, and working on his second novel in this setting. He is active on the Wizards.com Once Upon a Time forum as Edgecrusher, and The Great Kithanu is his first published piece of fiction. Though we have no pictures, word has it that he is currently doing a "happy dance."



BY DOUG LOHSE (ILLION THE RED), MICHELLE JOHNSON-WEIDER (DAKINI), AND KIRK JOHNSON-WEIDER (KJW)

"So what are we doing this week?" asked Dave.

"Finishing our research papers," said Bill. "That's why we're still here for spring break."

"Sadness, but that can't take all week, right?"

"Probably not."

"How about if you run me in a D&D campaign?"

"We don't have any other players, and I don't know if I can run with just one."

"Sure you can! You ran Stephen through that side adventure all by himself! Come on, it would be fun."

"Well, all right. I'll check online to see if you can run a game with just one player. Maybe we can give it a try. Hmmm, I already have a cool adventure idea. You start thinking about a character."

"Great! Let's go get our gaming books."

"Yeah, like you said, our papers won't take us all week. I think I can be ready to DM tonight if I really focus."

"Then let's get to it!"

Simply put, a solo campaign is a series of D&D adventures in which a DM runs the action for only one player. Two basic types of solo campaigns exist. One is an adventure or series of adventures connected to an ongoing group campaign. Pre-adventures for characters just entering play and side adventures for lone PCs who, for whatever reason, have become separated from the party fall into this category. The other kind—the independent, stand-alone, solo campaign—is the sort we will address here.

ADVANTAGES OF SOLO CAMPAIGNS

The D&D game is built and balanced for parties of four or five characters. So how can a DM possibly build an entire solo campaign, and why would she want to? Though solo campaigns vary widely, we can make a few broad generalizations about their advantages over the traditional type.

1. Solo campaigns are faster-paced and have greater depth than the typical group campaign. For a variety of reasons, they also tend to be more challenging for both DM and player.
2. Scheduling for a solo campaign is generally quite flexible. With only two people involved, arranging meetings that fit both parties' schedules is fairly simple.
3. A solo campaign is a great opportunity to playtest material, tinker with game rules, and expand an existing campaign setting.
4. Solo campaigns can be specifically tailored to suit the interests of both DM and player.

These advantages make the solo campaign a very attractive choice for working adults, creative DMs, and gamers who live in isolated areas where players are not plentiful.

HOW THE SOLO GAME WORKS

Now that you've made the decision to run a solo campaign, let's look at some of the major issues involved.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

"I have a great character concept—Cardigan the Lavender, a water genasi with light purple skin who has become a feared pirate!" said Dave.

"A character called the Purple Sweater? Well, it could be worse. But I wanted to set the campaign in the Endless Sands—you know, the desert part of my campaign world," replied Bill.

"I was kind of hoping to be a pirate."

"What if he captains a magic ship that skims over the sands?"

"Cool! Then can I be a swashbuckler-wizard? What level should I be, and where am I from?"

Solo campaigns work best when both DM and player are on the same page. Setting up a campaign that pleases both parties requires good communication right from the start. Typically, the DM chooses the setting and the player picks the character, but each should provide input to the other to make sure their choices mesh well. This process shouldn't be adversarial; it's just a friendly negotiation for the purpose of developing a campaign that both DM and player can enjoy.

As the campaign progresses, this communication should continue, though it's generally better if it can be handled in-game. For example, a player who is getting frustrated with game time spent in dungeons might let her character express those feelings to an NPC. Such a remark is a signal to the DM that maybe he should shelve the dungeons for a while in favor of some different adventure focus. If the DM and player can communicate honestly with one another, the solo campaign becomes far more effective and fun for both.

FILLING THE ROLES

"Well, since you're the only player, why don't you create an 8th-level gestalt swashbuckler-wizard? We'll put you in command of the Sirocco, a famed raiding ship with an elite and fearless crew. But you're also a prince from the city of Sy'narba, and you wield the legendary Crimson Scimitar," said Bill.

"Wow! I'm a prince?" marveled Dave.

"Why yes, yes you are."

Like the d20 System, most game systems are founded on the concept of balancing characters so that all the players have an equal chance to shine. But in a solo campaign, party balance isn't an issue. You have only one player, so make him feel special. Perhaps you don't want to allow gestalt characters, warlocks, evil PCs, or psionics into your regular group campaign, but in a solo campaign, you can take more chances. So go ahead and let your solo player run the legendary character he wants—it won't unbalance play for others, and your storyline can take on the proportions of high fantasy. Just don't start the PC at the height of his power—after all, a solo campaign is about the character's journey, so you need to leave plenty of room for him to grow and develop.

You may, however, want to start the character at a higher power level than you otherwise would, since a single character is not nearly as durable as a group. If one

character in a regular campaign dies or is disabled for a time, the rest can still press onward. But the death of the PC in a solo adventure usually marks the end of the campaign. Thus, strengthening the PC a bit with extra levels or magic items helps to prevent the need for saving him (and thus salvaging the campaign) by DM fiat.

ACHIEVING A GOOD FIT

"Prince Cardigan has sailed the Sirocco to Naratyr with the intention of raiding the mighty Zobran Caravan," continued Bill. "Guarded by the Terracotta Legion, this caravan is a rich prize indeed, since it carries the annual fealty tax from Vanasa to Emperor Belagon. But raiding is not Cardigan's only purpose here. He also intends to woo Princess Amelia, since a marriage between the royal houses of Sy'narba and Naratyr is likely to strengthen both lands."

"Wow! I have a princess to woo?" asked Dave.

"Why yes, yes you do."

When running a solo campaign, it's best to tailor the action to the player's preferences and the PC's strengths. If you don't know what kind of a game your player likes, take your time developing story arcs and experiment with different types of adventures, then incorporate the ones your player likes best into the fabric of the campaign. Even if you do know your player's preferences, it's wise to start slow and build the story over time, so that you can figure out how your player intends to roleplay his character. After all, a solo campaign is the PC's story, so it should be one that your player can enjoy to the fullest.

Though you need to provide enough action to keep your player on his toes, you can take time to smell the roses on occasion as well. So if your player wants to haggle for an item in the market, indulge him. A solo campaign provides an excellent opportunity for a player to delve into his character and pursue activities that are often skimmed over in group campaigns. Whether your player wants his character to research a new spell, woo a princess, or build a manor house, you can take the time to explore that story with him. But when you sense that he's getting bored, change the pace by throwing in some action and adventure. With only one player, it's far easier for you to keep your finger on the pulse of the campaign and ensure that both you and your player are happy.

ADD SOME INTERESTING NPCs

"Babar, your loxo first mate, pulls you aside before you disembark," continues Bill. "'Cap'n, be wary in Naratyr,' he warns in a low voice. 'It's a dangerous port. You should take Elsie and a few men with you.'"

"That's a good idea, Babar," says Dave. "I'll take Elsie, Mawen, and Lorit. But don't worry; I have a plan."

"Aye, Cap'n, but your plans have a tendency to get out of hand. No matter what, though, the ship and crew will be ready for action at your command."

"Good, Babar. I will be careful, and I know I can rely on you."

More than any other single factor, memorable NPCs can make or break a solo campaign. If you develop your NPCs as fully as you would a PC, your player will feel that she is dealing with a group of real individuals. Here are a few tricks that can help you create effective NPCs for a solo campaign.

First, practice having conversations with yourself. If you can play two NPCs holding a conversation with one another, both will become more real. Playing multiple NPCs at once can seem awkward at first, but with practice, the technique creates a very realistic dynamic between the PC and NPCs.

Second, let your NPCs contribute to the campaign. In a solo campaign, you don't have to worry as much about NPCs outshining the PCs as you do in a regular campaign. Indeed, even if the PC has more than the usual amount of expertise, she can't fill all the necessary roles that the D&D game demands for a balanced party. Thus, she must depend on the aid of NPCs from time to time—and therefore, she must build relationships with them. Competence and loyalty are the best tools for earning a PC's trust in-game, so let your NPCs shine. Certainly you'll want to keep the spotlight on the PC, but give all your key NPCs their moments as well.

Third, make sure that the NPCs grow along with the PC—not just in ability, but also in personality. Do not let them become static. A significant part of the DM's fun in a solo campaign is the chance to do a lot of roleplaying, and running a multitude of well-developed NPCs helps you keep your hand in the action. So if you miss playing, try running a solo campaign in which you can share the stage with only one PC and build the story cooperatively with your player.

MANAGING COMBAT

"The Terracottan captain hammers Babar with his stone fists, and your first mate crumples to the ground," says Bill.

"No, not Babar!" cries Dave. "Elsie—heal Babar! I charge the captain with the adamantine hammer and yell to Mawen to start emptying the vault into the bag of holding."

"All right, Elsie tries to maneuver toward Babar so that she can heal him, and Mawen starts emptying the vault. You step over Lorit's dead body and face off against the Terracottan captain, whose soulless eyes are fixed on you."

"Wow! I'm in big trouble!"

"Why yes, yes you are."

Combat is tricky in any campaign, but in a solo game you have to be particularly careful to avoid situations in which bad luck can cause the death of your one and only PC. In particular, spells and effects that require the target to save or die should be directed only at NPCs or reserved for extreme situations, since one unlucky roll can end the campaign.

In D&D v.3.5, the CR/EL system is founded on the premise that the party is composed of four characters. When you have only one, you need to adjust the lethality of your encounters—even if the potency of that PC is higher than normal. You can achieve this goal by either reduc-

ing the EL of each encounter by 3 to represent the missing PCs, or adding NPCs to the party. The latter option gives you more wiggle room and provides more personalities for the PC to interact with, but it also presents greater logistical and roleplaying challenges for you as DM.

WRAPPING UP

"The Royal Guardsmen are marching up the sandstone wharf toward your ship like a sea of steel," says Bill with a grin. Princess Amelia must have informed her father that you were the one who sacked the Zobran Caravan."

"Sadness, I was afraid this might happen," replies Dave with a sigh. "She didn't seem too impressed with my derring-do. Babar, get us underway, fast! Mawen, ready the archers in case we have to fight. Elsie, start singing to make the crew work faster."

"Babar and Elsie get the ship moving out across the Salt Sea. It looks like the enemy isn't going to pursue—this time. You start heading for Sy'narba. This looks like a good stopping point."

"This was great! Hey, can we do the homecoming to Sy'narba tomorrow night?"

"Well, we still have a few more days to do those papers. All right, we'll start up again tomorrow afternoon."

Solo campaigns can be great experiences for both player and DM, and they're ideal for introducing new players to the rules, rewarding a player who wants to develop a great character further, and getting some game time in when you're short of players.

This article has only scratched the surface of solo campaigning, but becoming adept with it really just takes practice. If you want more advice on running solo campaigns, visit the [Guide to Solo Campaigns](#)—our thread in the *What's a DM to Do?* forum. Good luck and happy gaming, but be careful—solo campaigns can be addictive!

Kirk and Michelle Johnson-Weider live in Rockville, Maryland, with their two kids and three cats. Kirk is a stay-at-home dad who spends his limited free time DMing several solo and group campaigns and posting to the D&D forums. Michelle is a legislative drafter for the U.S. Senate. Doug Lohse divides his time between his lovely wife and his gaming hobby.





CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

ARI MARMELL

BY DAVE PAUL (VRECKNIDJX)
AND PENNY WILLIAMS (PENNY_WILLIAMS)

In this issue, we turn our celebrity spotlight on Ari Marmell, one of the most prolific freelance game designers in the hobby today. Ari has contributed to numerous books for Wizards of the Coast, as well as several other game companies.

KA: Who is Ari Marmell really? Tell us a little something about your life and family.

AM: Here's the quick background. I was born in New York, moved to Houston when I was a year old, then moved to Austin in 2001. I graduated with a degree in Creative Writing from the University of Houston in 1996. After a series of unpleasant jobs, I finally broke into freelancing in late 2000.

I've been married for more than nine years now. My wife, George (yes, George), is currently a graduate student at the University of Texas here in Austin. Though we have no kids, we do have two cats (named Leloo and Pippin).

KA: When did you first become interested in roleplaying games? Are you an avid gamer now?

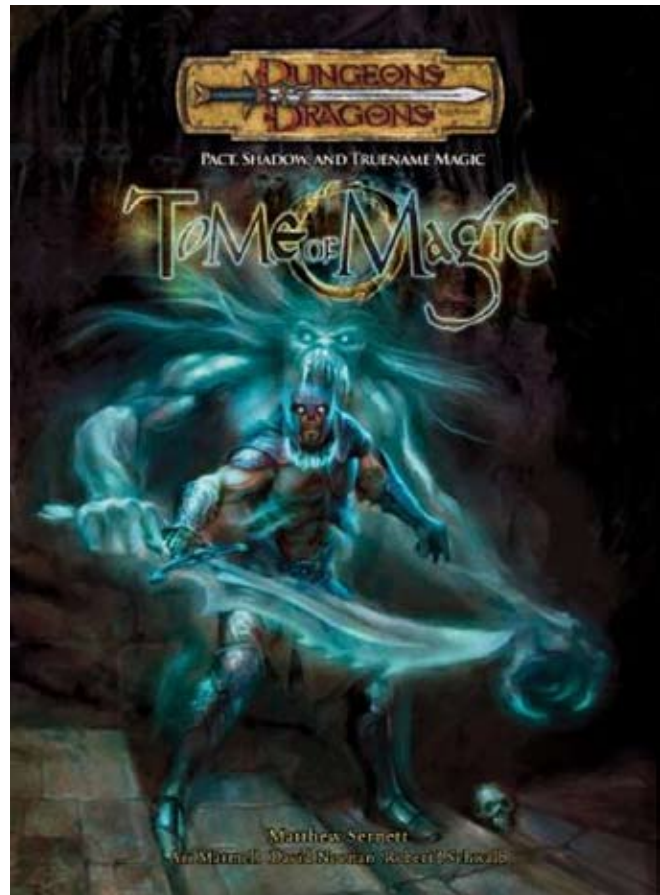
AM: When I was about nine or so, back in the historical epoch known as 1983, a friend of mine introduced me to the old red-box Basic Set, and I was pretty much hooked from the get-go. I moved on up to AD&D within a year and haven't looked back since. I've played many other games in the interim, but I always come back to D&D.

And yes, I'm very much an avid gamer now. I play in two weekly games, one on Thursday evenings and one on Sundays. I just wrapped up running a year-long urban campaign a month or so ago, and I'm looking forward to a long stretch of just being a player in both games. I love being the DM too, but it's nice to take a break for a while.

KA: What's the history of your Mouseferatu handle?

AM: Back in 1999, I was a regular on the White Wolf forums, where I went by the handle Charybdis. After a while, I developed a reputation there as a fairly polite, friendly guy. I realized that I wanted to keep that image, but that it was preventing me from talking honestly about certain topics. I decided to create a new ID that I could use to argue a bit with people, so I came up with "Mouseferatu" as an obvious play on "Nosferatu." Eventually, I decided I liked that handle better.

The irony is that today it's the Mouseferatu handle that carries the reputation of politeness, which occasionally forces me to be a little more circumspect in



my answers than I'd like. But hey, I guess anything that enforces manners on the Internet is good.

KA: How and when did you first start writing for Wizards of the Coast?

AM: Well, I'd been working in the RPG industry since late 2000—primarily for White Wolf, though I had also branched out into some of the d20 companies. Once I had a few sizable d20 products under my belt, I approached Wizards of the Coast, both at GenCon and via email, looking for work. When Chris Perkins took over the D&D line, he offered me my first gig for Wizards of the Coast—the chance to work on *Heroes of Horror*. I think the fact that both C.A. Suleiman (my co-freelancer on that book) and I had had a lot of RPG horror experience was what got us on board.

KA: Describe what you do for Wizards of the Coast. Does your work extend beyond writing?

AM: So far, it's been entirely freelance writing, and I'm actually happy to keep it that way for a while. I certainly wouldn't mind working my way up to a staff position eventually, but the truth is, I prefer writing to editing or development. I wouldn't mind a little more autonomy in coming up with my own projects, and I certainly wouldn't mind some benefits, but overall, I'm happy freelancing for the nonce.

KA: Which is your favorite D&D v.3.5 edition book? What is your least favorite?

AM: Aside from the three core books, I'd have to say that my favorite is *Unearthed Arcana*. I love books that provide optional alternatives and rules, and I've made use of a lot of stuff from it.

Very, very close runners-up would be *Lords of Madness* (for its flavor and story potential), *Spell Compendium* (for its sheer utility), and the *Eberron Campaign Setting* (because, well, it's Eberron).

For my least favorite, I'd have to go with the *Miniature's Handbook*. It has plenty of great stuff, but since I don't play the miniatures game—heck, I don't even use miniatures for about half of the fights in my games—a lot of it just wasn't of any use to me.

KA: Which is your favorite book from older editions of the D&D game?

AM: Core books aside, it's a toss-up among the base publications for the *Dark Sun*, *Ravenloft*, and *Al-Qadim Campaign Settings*. Among the books not dedicated to a single campaign, my favorite is the 2nd-edition *Book of Artifacts*, which is chock-full of fantastic flavor and ideas.

KA: What interests and passions do you have besides writing?

AM: I don't really have as many as a well-rounded, healthy individual probably should, but I do enjoy reading—mostly fantasy, but some science fiction and horror as well. And although I haven't had the spare funds to acquire any recently, I also collect period weaponry, such as longswords, rapiers, spears, and the like. I have—oh, maybe two dozen or so weapons already.

I'm trying to pick up a few more physical activities as well—as much to get myself in better shape as for any other reason. I've started hiking—well, you can hardly call it hiking; maybe “wilderness strolling” would be a better term. I've been talking about taking up Tai Chi, but right now that's in the beginning stages.

KA: Do you write for publications outside the game industry? If so, which ones?

AM: I've tried to expand my writing horizons. I've written a handful of short stories and several fantasy novels that I've shopped around, but as of yet, I've had no takers.

KA: What, if anything, can you tell us about your latest book *Complete Mage*? Considerable negativity has cropped up on the boards about it already, but many of the comments look like sour grapes over previous “Complete” books. Do you have any comments about the concerns of the community?

AM: First of all, *Complete Mage* is not a rehash of *Complete Arcane*, as some posters have suggested. It contains all new (or at least mostly new) material. Some of it expands on material in *Complete Arcane*, and some takes the fundamental concepts of arcane magic in different directions, but none of it is “*Complete Arcane Redux*.” To those who have been unhappy with prior “Complete” books, all I can say is give it a look. You may like what you see.

I'm particularly happy with the way the spells and prestige classes in *Complete Mage* turned out. From what I've seen of the finished book, I think we actually managed to expand existing options, find new uses for spells, and come up with new purposes for the prestige classes. If the first run of “Complete” books essentially added new tools to the D&D kit, then it seems to me that *Complete Mage* not only adds more, but also provides new ways to use those you already have. I can't pretend to be a totally unbiased source, but I hope most of the fans agree with me.

KA: You once joked that you would have given your left leg for the chance to work on *Castle Ravenloft*. What did you like most about that setting?

AM: For starters, I really like dark/horror fantasy. I think, when done right, this genre has more potential for both intriguing story and in-depth roleplaying than any other sort of fantasy does.

Furthermore, I've always loved *Ravenloft* specifically, partly for the aesthetic aspect, and partly for the characters and potential stories. I'm not fond of every aspect of the setting—with so many disparate realms, it would be impossible to like everything—but I love the setting as a whole.

I've always preferred playing *Ravenloft* natives to characters from other worlds who just got sucked into the setting. When you remove “escape” from the equation—when you have characters who understand how their world works and know that they have to deal with it—you can really get into the meat of the campaign.

The absolute best short-term campaign (that is, half a dozen games or fewer) that I've ever run was a *Ravenloft* game. Even though I ran it six or seven years ago, I still think back on it with great fondness and consider it a benchmark that I can only hope to reach again.

KA: Of the recent Wizards books that you haven't worked on, which are you personally most interested in and why?

AM: *Fiendish Codex 1: Hordes of the Abyss* tops the list of recent releases that I didn't work on. The chapter on various layers of the Abyss alone is worth the price of admission, and the book is just brimming with cool story ideas and plot hooks. (Plus, Demogorgon looks like he's supposed to again.) *Players Handbook II* has some material I really dig as well, and *Red Hand of*

Doom is the first large module in a long time that really made we want to play in and/or run it.

I haven't gotten my hands on the Xen'Drik book for Eberron, but I'm looking forward to that, too.

KA: What projects have you worked on for other game companies recently? Can you tell us anything about them?

AM: I haven't worked on any projects for other game companies very recently. I've been pretty devoted to Wizards of the Coast for a while—and I certainly have no objections to staying that way.

I think my most recent non-Wizards release would be *The Doom of Listonshire*, an adventure module published by Necromancer Games and distributed through Kenzer. In addition, a number of my small pdf projects have been published recently, or are coming out soon, through the Lion's Den Press imprint that I founded alongside C.A. Suleiman. For the near future, Lion's Den has primarily new classes and new monsters in the pipeline. None of these projects are too earthshaking, but I'm pretty happy with how they've turned out.

Finally, I have a book called *Tome of Artifacts* coming out late this year from Necromancer Games. This project was inspired by the 2nd edition *Book of Artifacts*, although it departs from that model in quite a few ways. While I've been the creator and primary writer on a number of small books (adventure modules, mostly), and while I've served as lead designer/developer on some larger books, *Tome of Artifacts* was the first truly sizable book that I proposed, guided, and designed/developed from beginning to end. Although the other writers I brought on board all came through with flying colors, the project took a great deal of work on my part as well, and it's an achievement that I'm particularly proud of.

KA: Which books you have contributed to are your personal favorites, and why?

AM: Wow, that's a tough call. I'll have to start with the novel *Gehenna: The Final Night* (from White Wolf), and the Eberron anthology *Tales of the Last War*. These two books are among my favorites primarily because they represent my first successfully published forays into fiction writing. And as much as I love the game material, I'd kill to move further into fiction work.

Victorian Age: Vampire is among my favorites. I'm incredibly proud of how well the geography chapter turned out, given how hard it was to write and how boring it *could* have been. *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* represents the sort of product I'd love to do more of—namely, taking a fascinating historical culture and creating a D&D setting out of it. As I mentioned before, *Al-Qadim* is one of my favorite old-edition settings, so it was great to work on something in a similar vein.

I feel that the module I mentioned above, *Doom of Listonshire*, is my best adventure to date. I tried really hard to capture the spirit of some of the old-school adventures without making it just a dungeon-crawl—in short, I made it the sort of adventure I'd love to play myself now and again.

As for my Wizards of the Coast game books, I don't know if I can pick a favorite. *Heroes of Horror* has the advantage of being my first, but I think I'm especially happy with *Cityscape*.

KA: What projects are on the near horizon for you?

AM: Well, I have more projects coming from Wizards, but I can't discuss them, since they haven't yet been announced—and in some cases, my participation hasn't even been formally finalized. But between larger projects, I'll be doing an installment of *Template Troves* for Silverthorne Games, and I'm really looking forward to that one.

KA: If you could work on any project at all, what would it be, and why?

AM: If we're not limiting it to actual game books, my first choice would be novels for some of the Wizards of the Coast settings. I'm not all that knowledgeable about the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, but I'd love to do an Eberron novel (or trilogy). Furthermore, I know that Wizards of the Coast is issuing reprints of some of the Ravenloft novels. Should they ever decide to commission new ones, they're actually going to have to fight me off with sticks and rabid dogs.

As far as gaming material, I want to give the *Al-Qadim/Oriental Adventures* treatment to several other cultures. I've done ancient Egypt, but I'd be thrilled beyond measure to do a mythic Greek-based D&D setting or rulebook.

I'd also love to work on some of the monster books. I don't mean *Monster Manuals* (though I certainly wouldn't turn those down), but books along the lines of *Draconomicon* and *Lords of Madness* interest me greatly. I'd particularly like to work on another *Fiendish Codex*, a book on fey, and/or a book on giants.

Furthermore, I'd like to do a second *Tome of Magic*. I like the shadowcaster, but I have a lot more design experience now, and I'd like to see what else I can pull off in terms of new magical systems.

Finally, since Wizards seems to be revisiting some classics (such as the upcoming *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* and *Expedition to the Demonweb Pits* books), I'd be delighted to work on one of those. The history of the game is replete with fantastic adventure sites just begging to be updated for the current edition.

Oh, and if/when there's ever a 4th edition of the game. . . .

KA: Different writers use different methods. Some just let the muse flow, some set aside a certain time of day to write, and some treat writing like a 9-to-5 job. How do you do it?

AM: I treat writing as a job, but not a regular 9-to-5 job. I try to start writing within an hour or two of getting up—any earlier, and I’m still too much of a zombie to type anything beyond “Brrraainnnnnssss. . .” I don’t work for any set period of time each day; instead, I write until I have produced no fewer than 2,000 words of relatively solid, usable text. I can frequently write more, but 2,000 words is the minimum I’m satisfied with. I usually write six days a week, but I’ve been known to do seven if I’m facing a deadline or feeling particularly inspired, or to drop down to five if I’m well ahead of schedule.

KA: Before you were an established author, which writers did you hope you’d get to meet or collaborate with? And now that you’ve been writing professionally for a while, have you had the chance to do so?

AM: There weren’t a lot of writers I wanted to meet before I began in the industry because—I must admit—I didn’t pay much attention to who had written what until I started doing it myself.

Beginning in the early days of my writing career, however, I particularly wanted to meet and work with the three primary writers of D&D 3rd edition—Monte, Skip, and Jonathan—as well as Zeb Cook, Jeff Grubb, Wolf Bauer, and (just to say that I had) Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. I’ve since collaborated with Skip, Wolf, and Dave Arneson, and I got Zeb to write the foreword for my *Tome of Artifacts* book. I’ve also met Monte Cook and Gary Gygax, though I haven’t had the chance to work with either of them.

KA: Is the home gamer the primary target of your writing, or do you have a different audience in mind when you write?

AM: Assuming that I’m writing a gaming book as opposed to fiction, the home gamer is my primary target. I’m not especially interested in creating tournament scenarios or writing for the various Living campaigns; such projects are fine, but they just aren’t my cup o’ grog.

In point of fact, however, I prefer to write for specific parts of the home gaming audience—namely, those who prefer story- and character-driven campaigns, as opposed to a primarily tactical or wargame style. I can play the numbers as well as anyone (well, almost anyone), but given a choice, I would rather do projects that give me at least some chance to flex my plotcrafting and flavor-writing muscles.

KA: What nongaming media have influenced your writing the most?

AM: Novels would have to be the first on that list because I’ve been reading fantasy nonstop since elementary school. In terms of my actual prose style, Steven Brust, Simon Green, and (to a lesser extent) David Edings have been my greatest inspirations.

I’ve also drawn a lot of inspiration from the television series *Babylon 5*. I love the way the long-term, overarching plot of that show was structured, and it has definitely influenced the way I create and plan out my plotlines.

And finally, let’s not forget the influence of bedtime stories. When I was quite young, my father told me stories about myself and my magic toy horse, Jack. Each night, Jack would come alive and fly me to visit various characters I wanted to meet, such as Luke Skywalker and Superman. I can trace my desire to tell stories (whether RPG adventures or novels) directly to those formative years.

KA: If you could work with anyone outside the gaming industry, who would it be, and why?

AM: First of all, I’d choose Steven Brust, because I really like the way he writes and I think we’d get along. I’d also like to work with Joe Michael Straczynski, creator of *Babylon 5*, because I think he’s a fascinating idea man, and with Joss Whedon, because he’s Joss Whedon.

KA: What do you feel are the greatest challenges in writing new material?

AM: The toughest part is the very fact that it has to be new material. When you’re writing fiction, it doesn’t necessarily matter if your plot is similar to one in a prior book—and only a handful of truly “original” plots exist anyway. As long as you tell your story well, people will enjoy it.

But with gaming material, each new mechanic really does need to be new. You can’t just phrase Alertness differently, or swap a few numbers around in the balor’s statistics block and call it brand new. New mechanics have to generate different results, or at least combine existing abilities and effects in new ways. With each book, that goal becomes more difficult to meet.

KA: What is the editing and development process like for you? Do you have the opportunity to weigh in about changes to your work? Is it a team effort right down the line, or are you sometimes surprised to see how your work has turned out?

AM: The process has varied book by book and developer by developer. With some books, I was in constant contact with the developers and editors, going back and forth and correcting problems even during the writing process. In other cases, I’ve gotten vari-

ous chunks back with requests to rewrite this, this, and that portion. And in still others, I've heard nothing at all and discovered the changes that were made only after the book came out. I tend to prefer a little bit of the first arrangement combined with the second, but it has most frequently been a combination of the second and the third.

KA: What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you as a writer?

AM: I've actually had very few funny (as in "ha-ha") experiences directly related to my writing. I don't even have any really good convention stories, although I've heard some great ones from other people. (If you ever interview Anthony Pryor, be sure to ask him about the "tarrasque with monk levels" story.)

I did have a really weird writing experience, though. *Gehenna: The Final Night* was my first published novel and obviously a major milestone in my professional career. But my maternal grandmother passed away the very day I began writing that book, and my paternal grandmother died the day that it hit shelves. I've always said that if I could learn to aim that power, I could rule the world.

KA: You sometimes step in to defend your material and that of other authors on the Wizards of the Coast message boards, or to answer questions posed there. Not all authors maintain such a strong presence. What motivates you to do so?

AM: Well, just to clarify—I try not to defend my work to people who simply say they didn't like it. Everyone is welcome to an opinion. I usually respond to criticism only if it contains a blatant factual error, or if involves a question I can legitimately answer, or if I'm asking for clarification of a point. Nevertheless, I do try to maintain a strong presence on ENWorld and (to a somewhat lesser extent) on the Wizards boards and in various other communities.

Let's get the self-serving reason out of the way first. Maintaining a presence means that, as a writer, I remain in the market's consciousness even during the gaps between releases of my books—and exposure is never bad for the career.

Lest I sound too mercenary, however, I do have other, stronger reasons as well. I'm trying to be the sort of writer that I like to deal with as a fan. I really enjoy being able to question writers about their processes and ideas, get clarifications, and become acquainted with them as people. It would be hypocritical of me not to do the same for others.

And in truth, I also enjoy the sense of community that such forums engender. Clichéd as it sounds, it really does often feel like a group of friends sitting around discussing a favorite topic. I'd be on the boards even if I weren't writing, though probably not as much.



KA: Do you have any comments on the feedback you give and receive on the boards? Is it useful to you in your writing?

AM: I have actually found quite a bit of fan feedback useful. I sometimes float ideas on the boards—for my own campaigns or, in a subtle and roundabout way, for inclusion in projects—just to see whether people react positively or negatively, and to figure out what tweaks they might prefer. I try to learn from people's responses to my mechanics so that I can correct any mistakes for next time. For instance, a lot of folks have been saying recently that my shadowcaster in *Tome of Magic* might be underpowered compared to other spellcasting classes. I've been giving a lot of thought to that point, and it will certainly influence how I approach the next similar design.

The trick is not to take forum feedback too much to heart. As wide as the cross-section of forumites might be, those individuals don't necessarily represent the majority opinions of the market as a whole. And in general, people who dislike something tend to be more vocal than those who like it.

KA: What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

AM: Write. No matter how busy you are, no matter how tired you are, you need to write almost every day. Write because you love writing, even if you never make a sale.

If you're trying to get into the RPG industry specifically, *Dragon* or *Dungeon Magazine* is your first stop. Wizards of the Coast gets a lot of its writers from the pages of those magazines. Alternatively, check the websites of some of your favorite d20 companies and see whether they have submission guidelines posted. If they do, follow them *to the letter*. Never assume that your proposal or project is so good that you don't have to follow the rules. It's not. Ideas are easy; it's the follow-through that kills you. Ignoring submission guidelines is the best way to make sure the companies ignore your stuff.

Don't even try to approach Wizards of the Coast if you haven't been published somewhere else first. WotC has its pick of freelancers in the industry, and it hires only people with proven track records.

Furthermore, don't get into the industry expecting to make a living from it. I've been writing freelance for five years, and I'm only just now coming close to the income I could earn doing something else. Do this because it's what you love doing, or don't do it at all. This advice is especially appropriate in the current market climate. As Mike Mearls recently said in his online blog, "If you aren't working fulltime in the industry right now, you won't be at any time during the next few years."

KA: Do you have anything else you'd like to say to the readers of *Knowledge Arcana*?

AM: Thanks, primarily! Writing is the first job I've ever had that I both liked and was halfway decent at. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to do it—without you guys, there wouldn't be an industry to work in.

Penny Williams joined the roleplaying game industry as Game Questions Expert for TSR, Inc. in the 1980s. Since then, she has served as RPGA Network Coordinator, POLYHEDRON Newszine editor, and Senior Editor and Coordinating Editor for the RPG R&D Department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Now a busy freelancer, Penny edits for several game companies. When not enhancing the cruelty of designers' creations, Penny puts up jam, does jigsaw puzzles, and works as a substitute teacher for all grade levels.

David Paul lives in lower southwestern Michigan with his wife, two sons, two dogs, four cats, a few hundred RPG books, and several thousand little plastic miniatures. He edited for Pencil Pushers Publishing, d20 Filtered, and Silven before joining the staff of Knowledge Arcana Magazine. When he's not busy daydreaming or plotting the downfall of his own D&D players, he teaches philosophy by night at a nearby university and high school mathematics by day at a nearby private high school.

THE ARTISTS

COVER, THE MILLER'S WIFE: *Just as liable to kick your ass as blow you away with talent, Lana Crooks is an illustration graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design currently plying her wares in windy Chicago. As much a tormentor as a muse, her art is impressive, tinged with a quiet horror not often seen this side of death. Don't believe me? Check her out at www.crookedart.com*

GREAT KITHANU: *A lifelong draftsman, Katrin Krohmann is currently doing technical illustration and using fantasy illustration as a means to relax after days of drawing teeth or joints of extinct animals. Now, Katrin turns that adept eye to character drawings for D&D groups or on our boards, and of course in the pages of KA.*

MOMIR MAGIC, BLACK RECLUSE: *Daniel Patten is a student in the Graphic Design & Illustration program at the Seattle Central Community College. He lives out in Edmonds, Washington with his absolutely awesome wife Arim. If he's not drawing or designing, he'll be out doing Kendo, snowboarding, or getting housed by his wife at Magic: The Gathering.*

THE MILLER'S WIFE: *Devin lives in Ohio with his wife and two beautiful girls. A graduate of CCAD and classmates with the likes of Steve Prescott and Storn Cook, he spends most of his free time creating art and freelancing. His latest project is creating virtual tokens at www.FourUglyMonsters.com. For more of his work, check out his site at www.immortalnights.com.*



When you're in dragon territory, it's good to know everything you can about every type of dragon there is. *A Practical Guide to Dragons* is a fully illustrated field guide filled with exactly the kind of tips, maps, secrets, sketches, drawings, and details you'll want to have on hand, just in case. Because knowing is half the battle.

PRACTICALGUIDETODRAGONS.COM



Wizards of the Coast, Mirrorstone, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. in the U.S.A. and other countries. ©2006 Wizards.



Confront your Enemies



■ BAXAR the Soulstitcher

Draw upon the conflict of *Baxar's War* against the Bloodcut and use new blade abilities, including Trample, Venom, and Mindstrike. Spawn 60 new creatures and locations, including a newly formed lineage—the Stitched—when the war alters the Dreamscape this October.

Find a store and a cash prize tournament near you at: dreamblademinis.com

DREAMBLADES
COLLECTABLE Miniatures GAME
BAXAR'S WAR

All trademarks property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ©2006 Wizards

