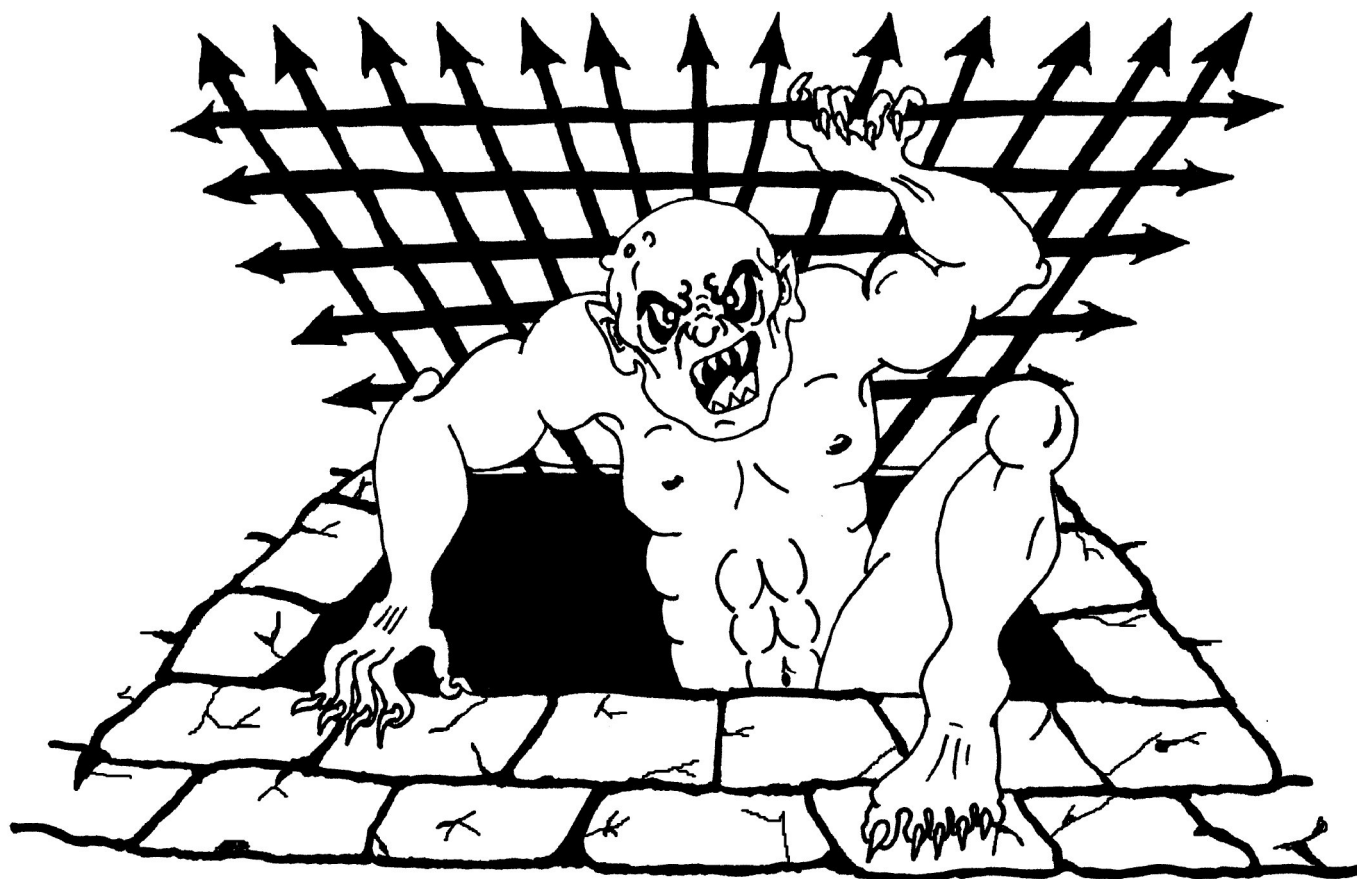# A magazine for old school fantasy roleplayers

Oubliette

Halfling Proof Fence
an adventure for Labyrinth Lord

The Rentalist
a shop that takes more than gold

Improvised Traps

Inheritance
a fantasy campaign setting

Plus: Original Fiction, Reviews, Mouse Watch, Monster Club and more ...

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Contents

Editorial

After a 15 year break from gaming, two of my old friends met up with me last summer and we decided to start playing again. One of them told us about a game called Labyrinth Lord, and since then we've not looked back. We meet up around once a month and already have two campaigns on the go.

Playing again had me sorting through boxes of old magazines and games from the attic with rediscovered interest. After flipping through some back copies of White Dwarf, I began to think how great it would be to publish a magazine that captured the spirit of those early issues, whilst embracing the Old School Renaissance movement. When I thought some more, I decided that I could produce one, and two days later I had a list of ideas for articles a couple of pages long, and the name. I plan to publish the magazine once a month, and a normal issue will be 24 to 32 pages.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines an Oubliette (from the French oublier: to forget) as: A secret dungeon accessible only through a trapdoor. That seems a to reflect the place that games that are now part of the Old School Renaissance went to. There must be hundreds of thousands of old D&D books hidden away in people's lofts, garages and junk rooms. The Old School Renaissance opens a small window onto these treasures as well as encouraging new development.

I find the development of the movement fascinating. Several different games all evolved from a core set of rules, which itself branched into different versions. Although I'm playing and writing for Labyrinth Lord, I have to stress that nearly all the content will work with any Basic/Expert/Advanced original or clone with little or no adjustment required.

Peter Regan, Editor   E-mail: oubliettemagazine@yahoo.co.uk
Blog: http://oubliettemagazine.blogspot.com/
Forum: www.freeyabb.com/goblinoidgames/index.php?mforum=goblinoidgames

Monster Club #1

A regular column that will feature encounters, lairs, traps and other fun stuff with monsters.

The Troll Kit – As a treasure guardian, a troll would be a powerful choice, but no sane person would put such a creature in a room with valuable possessions. This approach offers the protection of a troll, whilst at the same time keeping it away from the treasure unless it comes under threat.

The treasure is housed in chests in a decent-sized room (20' by 20' plus). In the centre of the room is an uncovered pit around 5' square and 6' deep. Lying at the bottom of the pit is our troll, which, unfortunately, is missing both arms and legs. Its arms and legs are in a sack suspended a few feet above the opening of the pit.

To get to the door that opens into the treasure room, the party must lift a portcullis and make their way down 40' or so of corridor. When the portcullis is raised, the sack of troll limbs drops into the pit. All things being equal, the troll will have himself back in one piece and just be climbing out of the pit as the party open the door. Having suffered such a long torturous dismemberment, he will be totally insane and starving.

A successful find traps roll on the portcullis will reveal that a small rope and pulley is attached to it. It can be unhooked from the gate to allow safe access to the treasure room.
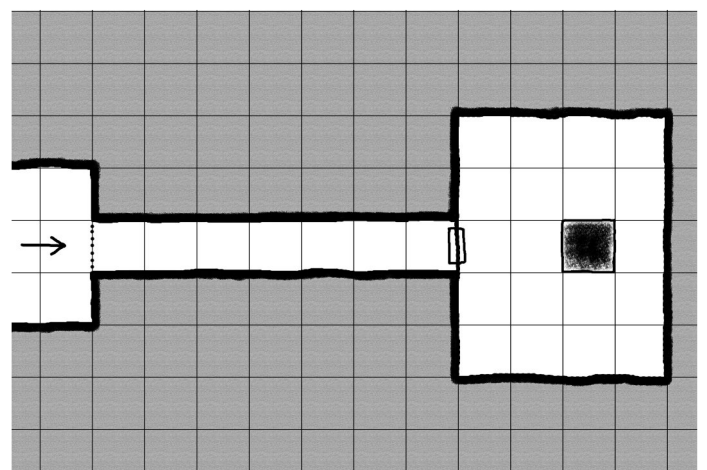
1 square = 5 feet

Halfling Proof Fence
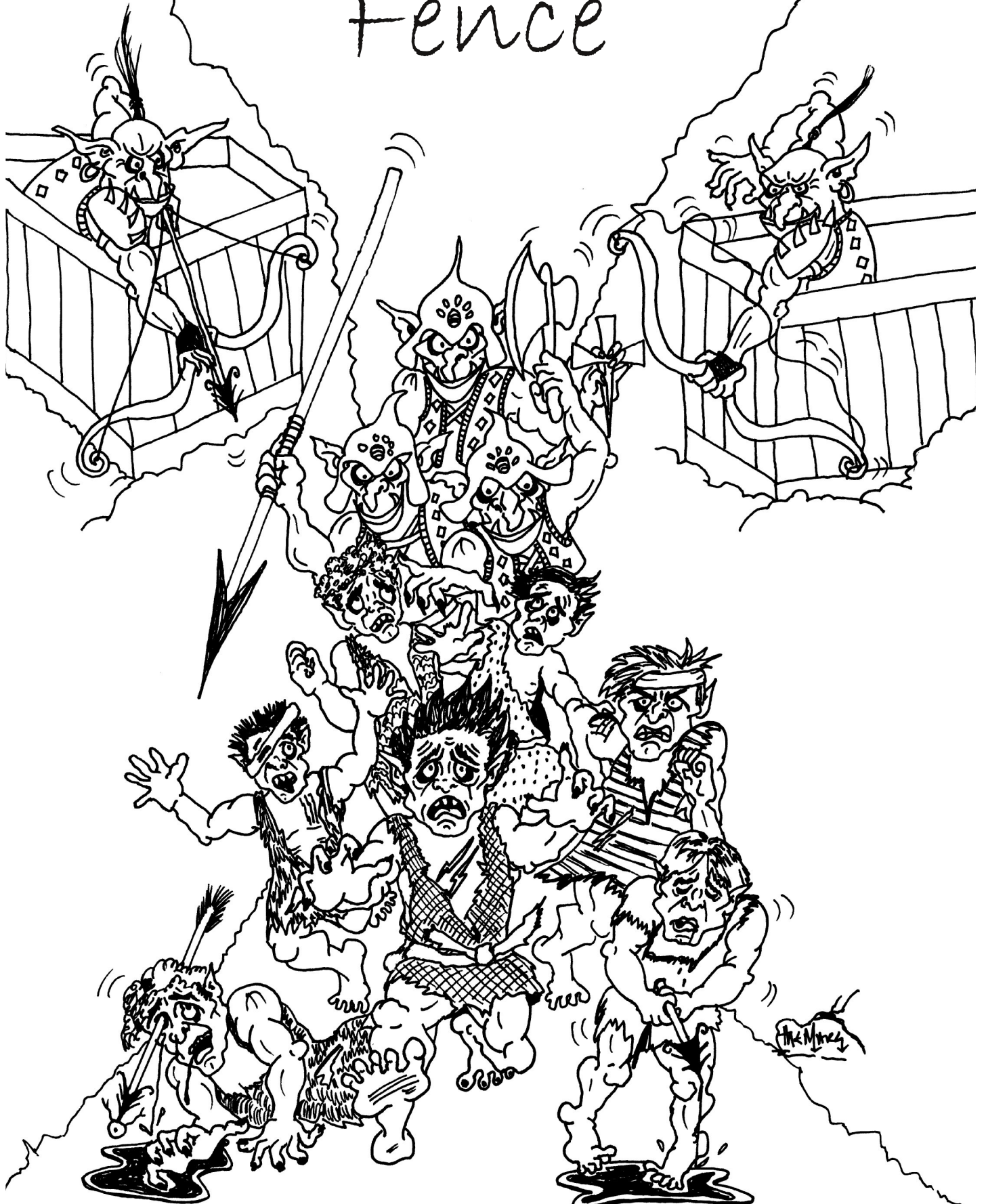
A Labyrinth Lord Adventure for Twenty-Six Nasty Characters

Halfling Proof Fence

A Labyrinth Lord Adventure for a party of 26 adventurers, split into two or more teams.

Background for Labyrinth Lord (LL) and Players

Udo, the goblin chief, is crafty and careful. He has established a thriving lair for his tribe at the end of a ravine which boasts an extensive cave complex. He has proclaimed himself King Udo of the 'Coarsened Paw' tribe – more a regional title for goblin leaders than a national one – but still an achievement that has earned him a fearsome reputation. The tribe's name is derived from the fierce pack of dire wolves on which they ride into battle. From his lair, he has spent over a year raiding caravans and building his tribe. For a goblin, he is exceptionally intelligent. Putting his resources to good use, he has 'persuaded' two other tribes of goblins to join forces with him.

About two months ago, the goblins raided a halfling village, the location of which they tortured out of a survivor from a caravan they raided. The village was about 50 miles away, which was pretty long-range stuff for the goblins, but the spoils were worth it: Food, livestock, gold, silver and other treasures.

Almost 200 halflings lived in the village, and an hour after the attack started, the goblins had slaughtered all but 40 of the males, whom they rounded up to be used as slave labour.

The halflings were marched back to the goblin lair and set to work. Each day, around a dozen of them were marched to the edge of the forest, just beyond the opening of the ravine, to cut trees. A second group were put to work building all manner of structures and fortifications for the goblins.

It is now late autumn and only around 30 halflings have survived. They have realised that the work the goblins have kept them for is almost over, and consequently, fear that they have only a few days to make good their escape. Previous attempts have failed and resulted in beatings, and even executions. But halflings are sturdy folk, and if the choice is between a risky escape or being fed to the goblins' pet wolves, they don't need much persuading.

Udo would normally have disposed of the halflings by using them for target practice and then feeding the remains to the wolves. However, a dispute between two of his toughest warriors has set him thinking of a different use for them. He has given each warrior a squad of 12 goblins and devised a way of letting the halflings escape. The two teams will then begin the pursuit. The team that brings back the most halfling scalps will win, and their squad leader will be proclaimed champion of the tribe.

At dusk, when the goblins normally stir, they take a little longer than usual changing the guard at the main gate, leaving it unattended. Then they send a rather unpopular member of the tribe to throw some food scraps to the prisoners. The desperate halflings, noticing the absence of the gate guards, make their move, manage to grab the goblin as he opens the hatch and silence him. Using his dagger, they cut their way out of the enclosure and flee.

As soon as the halflings open the large main gates, a horn sounds and the two squads of goblins begin the chase.

King Udo

Labyrinth Lords's Background

Halfling Proof Fence is a tournament-style adventure for two or more players. The aim of the game, as stated in the introduction, is for each squad of goblins to return with as many scalps as possible. The game is fairly linear in design but will be influenced by the chance elements of the monster encounters, the tactics of the goblins and pure chance. In order to make the game run at its best, the LL should consider making 'adjustments' as the chase progresses.

Number of Players – The adventure was designed and play-tested with a LL and two players. It could easily be adapted for three players by printing out three sheets of goblins, and removing a few goblins from each to keep the total number close to 26. For four or more players, you could make further divisions, or simply split the players into two teams and give each a selection of goblins from the squad. If your LL skills are up to it, you could also try letting a player take control of the halflings, but the thought of running such a game gives me a headache.

Mapping the Pursuit – This adventure works best if played with counters or miniatures on the tabletop. Ideally, the map should be redrawn to the scale of 1” to 2 yards. The overall length of the playing area required is about 10 metres/33 feet (about 800 yards in the game). The best way to produce this kind of map is to draw it on the reverse side of a spare roll of wallpaper. (If you don't have any around the house, then a cheap roll in the UK costs around £3/$5.) With the map pre-drawn, you can simply unroll it as you play. If you don't have the time or resources for this, then you can just use two lengths of string to represent the sides of the the ravine, although these will need to be adjusted as the chase progresses.

Two pages of colour, printable, stand-up counters are included as a playing aid for the game. You will find them at the end of the magazine (pages 32 and 33 of the PDF).

Starting Positions – The halflings start the game on the threshold of the the main gates that, in the absence of any guards, they have just opened. The goblins start the chase level with the inner gates some 80 yards back.

Movement and Actions – For the purposes of this game, both goblins and halflings can move at the rate of 20 yards per round (10” on the map if you have drawn it to the suggested scale). Usually, halflings can move faster than this, but as they are malnourished and have already sprinted to the gates, they are starting to run out of puff. During the game, it will be useful to have a couple of tape-measures handy for measuring movement and weapon ranges.

Both the halflings and the goblins have a number of possible actions they can take, instead of just running for all they're worth.

Halfling Movement and Actions – Normal movement 20 yards (10”) per round.

By the time they reach the gates, each halfling will have grabbed either a rock for throwing (Dam 1-3), or a stick big enough to use as a club (Dam 1-3). A halfling with a rock can elect to move up to 6 yards (3”) and turn and throw the rock. However, if they are throwing at a moving target behind them while running, they suffer a -6 to hit penalty. Even the bravest of the halflings is unlikely to stand and take aim with a rock, but if this circumstance arises, he suffers a -2 penalty for throwing at a moving target, and no penalty if the target is stationary. If a halfling requires another rock or stick, he can make a grab for one from the ground as he runs, but he will only move a maximum of 10 yards (5”) in that round. To see what a halfling manages to grab, roll a d6: 1 = 2 rocks, 2 = 1 rock, 3 = a branch, 4-6 = nothing.

Goblin Movement and Actions – Normal movement 20 yards (10”) per round.

Goblins with missile weapons can elect to move up to 6 yards (3”) and attack in the same round. If they are attacking a moving target while running, they suffer a -4 to hit penalty. A goblin may stand and aim and only suffer a -2 penalty against a moving target, and no penalty if the target is stationary. Goblins can retrieve missiles that missed their target, or harvest scalps as they pass them, but they may only move a maximum of 6 yards (3”) in that round.

Bottlenecks – During the chase, the narrowing of the ravine in places may cause bottlenecks where progress may be limited to two or three abreast. Any monsters encountered may also hamper things. When moving through narrower parts of the ravine, the front runners may move at their full rate, whilst others simply back up behind them. If a monster or a combat is blocking free passage, then as a general rule the next two runners can attempt to push past by rolling 1-2 on a d6.

Managing the Chase – If too many halflings get too far ahead, then you can place an additional giant gecko or two overhead to wedge them in for a while. Then, when the goblins come into view, the geckos can retreat. Alternatively, artificially hold them just a little way out of range, or move them at a slower rate until the goblins get back on track. The chase works best on a long tabletop. As a minimum, you should be able to see 80" of the map or more at any one time.

Ranged Weapons – I suggest limiting the maximum range of a short bow to 100 yards (50") to reflect the terrain and to keep the chase exciting. (It's less fun if all the halflings just get shot from a distance).


Game Map

The small-scale (1 square = 20 yards) map on this page shows the entire area of the game. On the following two pages, a four part larger-scale (1 square = 5 yards) version is included, which can be cut out and assembled to assist in drawing the 1" to 2 yards version recommended for playing on.

The map here is shown at 4 squares wide, which is 80 yards in the game. However, you'll notice that all of the map detail is contained within a 2 square wide section. When drawing the large-scale version you should only use this middle section. This will give you a playing map that is 20 inches or 50cm wide by 33 feet or 10m long.

Key to Map Locations:

1 Fenced-off storage area.

2 Goblin cave entrance.

3 Livestock pens.

4 Inner gates (goblin starting position).

5 Halfling enclosure.

6 Dire wolf pen.

7 Log pile.

8 Main gates (halfling starting position).

9 Gecko encounter.

10 Pool (no events or encounters here).

11 Grizzly bear's cave.

**12** Treant and stirges.
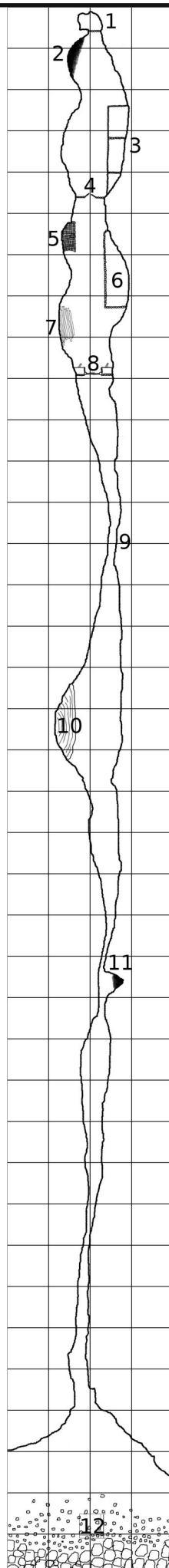
MAP 1
1 square
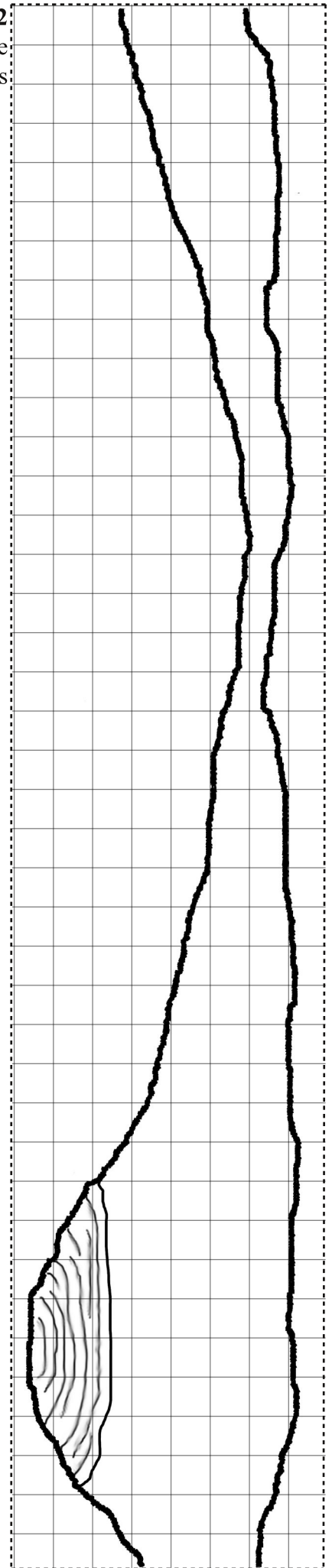= 5 yards

MAP 2
1 square
= 5 yards

The four maps produced on these two pages can be cut out and stuck together to produce a larger version of the map on page seven. These can then be used to help draw the very large-scale map required to play the adventure.

Once the magazine is out, I will put some images up on the blog of the play map that I used for play-testing the adventure.
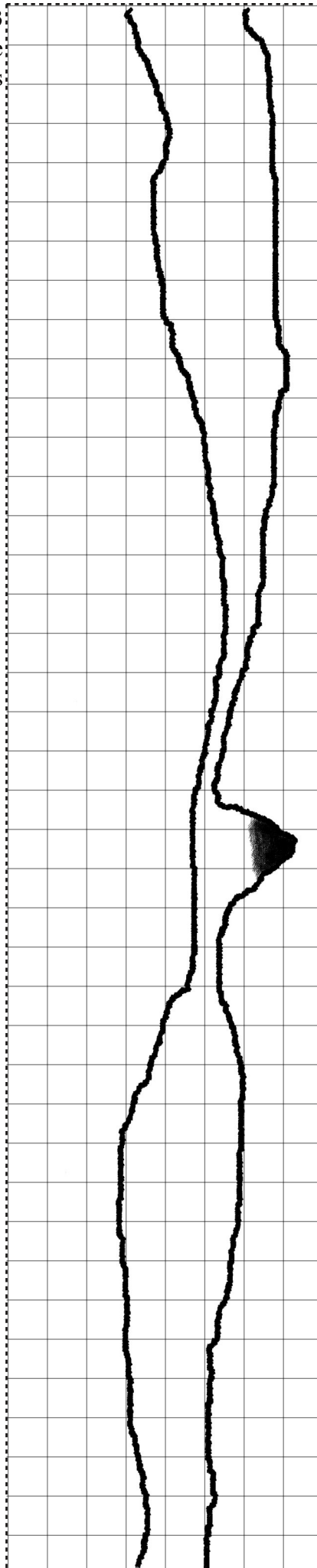
I'm happy to answer any questions about mapping or running the adventure. My e-mail, blog and forum links can be found on page three at the end of the Editorial section.
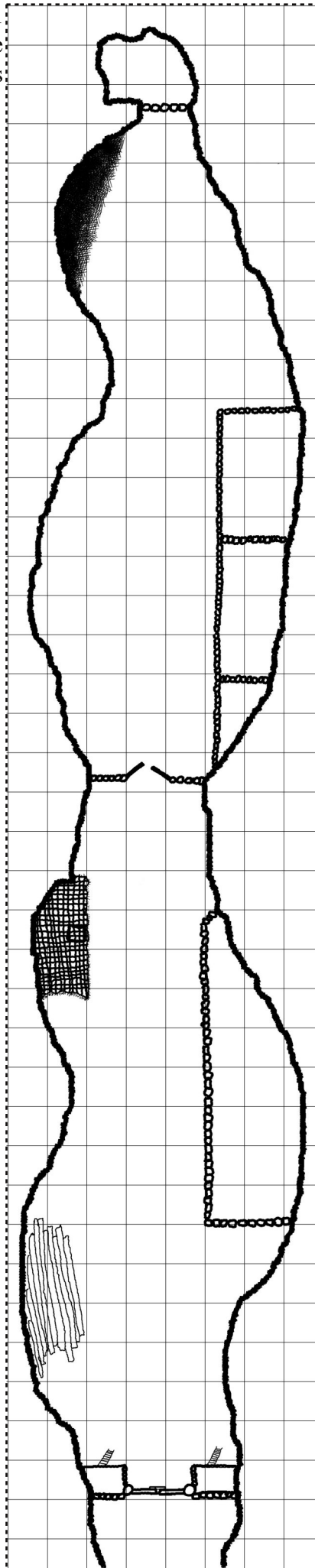
MAP 3
1 square
= 5 yards

MAP 4
1 square
= 5 yards
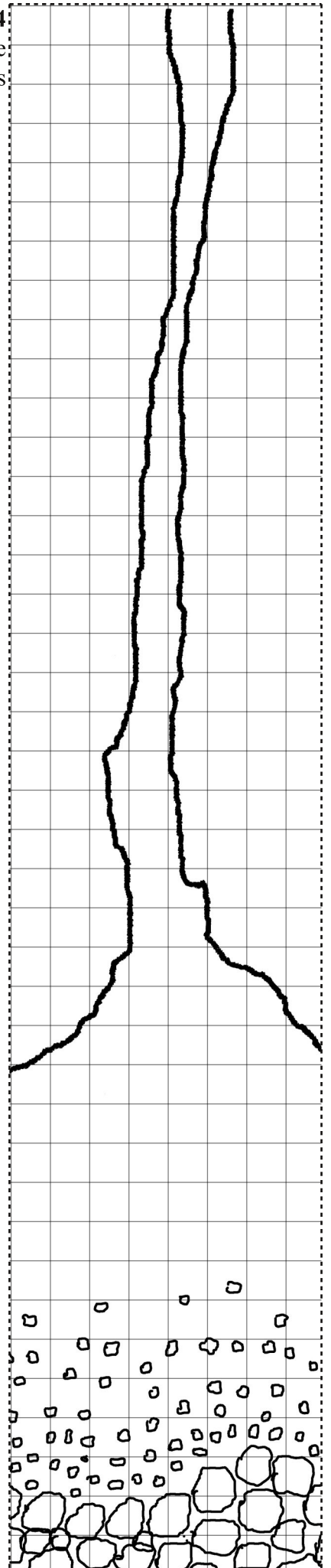
Goblin Play Sheet

To keep the game balanced, both squads of goblins are identical. Print one of these sheets for each player. Players can name their squads and goblins if they wish.

During play, it is important to identify which squad a goblin belongs to, so the PDF Heroes (card stand-ups) have been colour-coded to give a red team and a blue team.

Maximum goblin movement rate is up to 20 yards (10" on the map) per round.

Each round, a goblin can move or attack once only.

Goblins with missile weapons can move 6 yards (3") and fire/throw at -4 to hit.

Missile weapons or scalps may be collected in one round, along with up to 6 yards (3") movement.

1 Squad Leader: Scimitar (used two-handed) and Dagger AC6 HD2 HP11

2 Short Bow, 20 Arrows and Dagger AC6 HP7

3 Javelins X3 and Dagger AC6 HP3

4 Club and Dagger AC6 HP7

5 Hand Axe and Dagger AC6 HP2

6 Short Sword and Dagger AC6 HP5

7 Spear and Dagger AC6 HP3
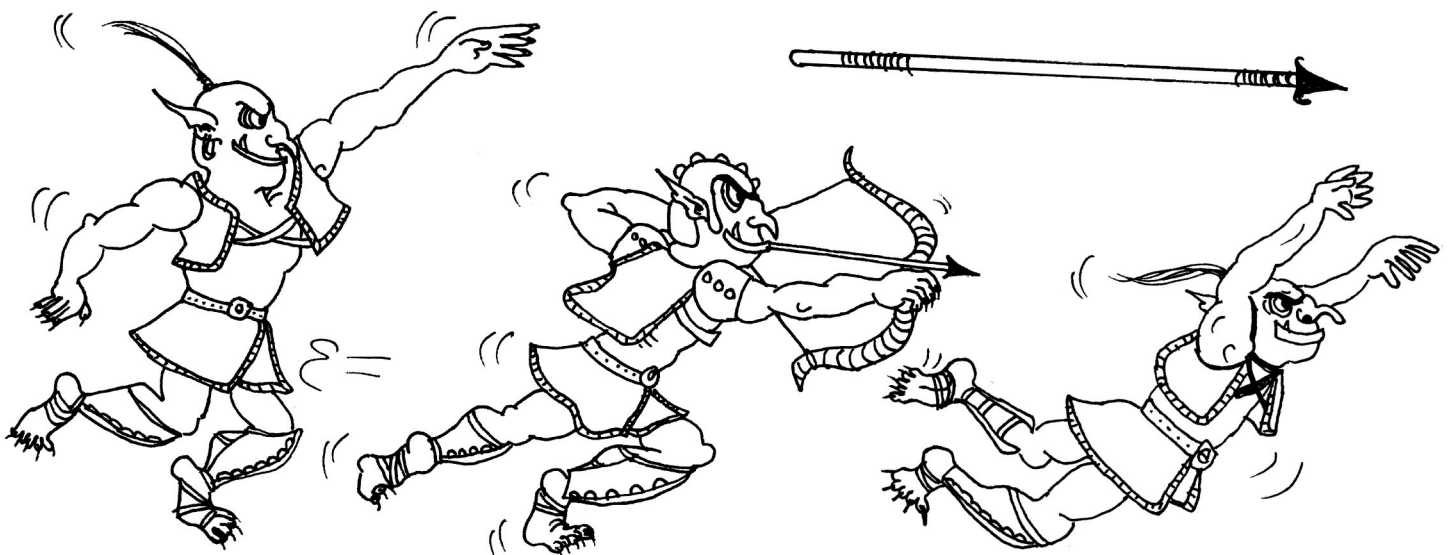
8 Hand Axe and Dagger AC6 HP5

9 Short Sword and Dagger AC6 HP6

10 Short Bow, 20 Arrows and Dagger AC6 HP4

11 Club and Dagger AC6 HP1

12 Spear and Dagger AC6 HP5

13 Darts x12 and Dagger AC6 HP3

Halfling Play Sheet

The halflings are fleeing in terror, and so their instinctive action should be to run and not stop.

Maximum halfling movement rate is up to 20 yards (10" on the map) per round.

Alternatively, a halfling can move up to 6 yards (3") and make an attack in one round.

Halflings with missile weapons can move 6 yards (3") and fire/throw at -6 to hit (assumes target is moving and behind them).

Rocks and Branches do 1-3 damage and may be scavenged from the ground in one round, along with up to 10 yards (5") movement. Roll a d6 to see what they manage to grab: 1=2 rocks, 2=1 rock, 3=1 branch, 4-6= nothing.

1 Branch AC7 HP6

2 Branch AC7 HP1

3 Rock AC7 HP4

4 Rock AC7 HP1

5 Branch AC7 HP1

6 Branch AC7 HP4

7 Rock AC7 HP6

8 Rock AC7 HP1

9 Branch AC7 HP3

10 Dagger F3 AC7 HP19

11 Rock AC7 HP2

12 Rock AC7 HP2

13 Branch AC7 HP4

14 Branch AC7 HP2

15 Rock AC7 HP1

16 Rock AC7 HP4

17 Branch AC7 HP4

18 Branch AC7 HP6

19 Rock AC7 HP1

20 Branch F2 AC7 HP12

21 Rock AC7 HP4

22 Branch AC7 HP5

23 Rock AC7 HP3

24 Rock AC7 HP5

25 Branch AC7 HP3

26 Branch AC7 HP5

27 Rock AC7 HP6

28 Rock AC7 HP4

29 Branch AC7 HP6

30 Branch F2 AC7 HP11

31 Rock AC7 HP2

32 Rock AC7 HP4

Encounters

Log Trap – This area has been set aside to store lumber supplies ready for construction tasks. Noticing that the goblins don't seem to have much interest in the details of their work, the halflings, a few weeks ago, decided to rig a trap. When triggered, it will send dozens of logs rolling across the ground. One of the 2nd level halflings has volunteered to man the trap in the event of an escape. He will attempt to spring the trap as soon as the first goblin is almost past the area. To set off the trap, the halfling needs to make a successful to hit roll against AC9. If it works, then all creatures in front of the logs must make a save versus Breath Weapon at +4 (+6 if they are near the edges or far side of the area) or take 1D8 damage. Regardless of the outcome, the halfling's position will be revealed to the goblins, and he will flee if he gets the chance.

Geckos – The goblins normally don't go anywhere without a few of their dire wolves – which is enough to deter most hungry or hostile creatures in the area. The two giant geckos have a lair high up on the rock face here and won't pass up a free feed when they see the halflings.

Gecko 1 Move 40y/20" HD3+1 AC5 HP13 Dam 1-8 Will attack on a 1or 2 after first creature passes (roll each round until a 1 or 2 is rolled or the last creature passes the area). The gecko will retreat if it goes lower than 5 HP or if the other one is killed.

Gecko 2 Move 40y/20" HD3+1 AC5 HP16 Dam 1-8 Optional creature will join the first gecko 2-4 rounds later. Will retreat if it goes lower than 5 HP or if the other one is killed.

Bear - Earlier today, a grizzly bear decided this cave would make a cosy place for hibernation. The goblins have made a bit of a mess of the local ecosystem, so he's going to sleep more than a little hungry. He'll wake up and emerge from the cave on roll of a 1 or 2 on a d6. Check each round after the first creature passes the cave. The grizzly will automatically awaken if there is any combat within 10 yards of the cave entrance. He'll attack, fighting to the death, until every creature within 10 yards of the cave entrance has either fled or been killed. He will then proceed to drag the corpses into the cave to devour them. Grizzly Bear Move 40y/20" HD5 AC6 HP25 Dam 1-3/1-3/1-6.

Treant - The ravine opens out into a small clearing and then a dense, sprawling forest. The goblins have levelled trees with no regard for the natural order. Hundreds of tightly-packed trees from saplings to ancient oaks have been felled, leaving a scar that will take decades to heal. The cries of the trees have not fallen on deaf ears. News of their felling has reached the treants in the forest's heart. A treant has arrived in the area during the day and, being a patient creature, has surveyed the destruction and rooted himself to wait for the deforesters to return.

The treant will advance as soon as a goblin reaches the first tree stump. He will ignore the halflings (he met some once and took a liking to them) and allow them sanctuary in the forest. The treant will kill as many goblins as he can and may also animate trees to join the fray. He will pursue goblins to the entrance of the ravine but no further. Treant Move 20y/10" HD8 AC2 HP51 Dam 2-12/2-12

Stirges - As the treant made his way to the edge of the forest, he disturbed some nesting stirges (it's just all happy coincidence, honest!). They followed him in search of a potential food source and will attack any and every warm-blooded creature they see. They will launch into the air when the treant moves to attack.

3d12 Stirges Move 60y/30" HD1 AC7 HPs 8, 4, 1, 1, 7, 3, 2, 2, 8, 5, 1, 8, 5, 3, 7, 4, 5, 3, 6, 2, 4, 1, 7, 5, 7, 4, 5, 3, 1, 3, 8, 8, 7, 7, 1, 6 Dam 1-3 +2 to hit

Ending the Adventure

Once all the halflings have either been killed or reached the sanctuary of the forest, the game is nearing completion. The stirges won't pursue the goblins very far into the ravine, especially if there are still goblins with missile attacks in play. The goblin squads may already have collected some scalps, so the rest of the game will be concerned with fighting over scalps that haven't been claimed along the way.

This is also the point in the game where, if they haven't already, the players might turn on each other. If a squad leader has already been killed, then for game purposes, the goblin with the next highest hit points can take his place. Either way, Udo only needs one champion, so the loser will be done for, no matter what. The culture of the goblins will allow them, as spectators, to take almost equal delight at suffering, whether it's a halfling or one of their kin that bites it.

If a goblin kills either a giant gecko or the grizzly bear, then they will earn great respect and status from it. They will also get an appropriate title, such as Lizard Killer or Bear Slayer. If, by some fluke, a goblin manages to kill the treant, then his deed will have the makings of a goblin legend. However, Udo will most likely have him secretly killed after all the excitement has died down.

With the game finished, here's a fun scoring system, so that winners can boast about by how much they have beaten their fellow player/players:

Per halfling kill +1
Per goblin death (own squad) -1
Per goblin kill (other squad) +1
Goblin squad leader kill +5
Gecko kill +5
Grizzly bear kill +10
Per halfling scalp +2
Treant kill +50

Sometimes, the end is just the beginning.

I wrote this originally as a fun introduction to a campaign that will see the players return to the ravine for a more traditional-style adventure. Depending on how well it goes with my group, it may appear as a short series in future issues.

Inheritance

A fantasy campaign setting by Christian Kitchener

The following is a potted history of my current Labyrinth Lord campaign world. I wanted something with a post-apocalyptic feel. Somewhere I could justify lots of ruins teeming with undead, and open country overrun by goblinoids. A place where the PCs have a reason to go out into the world. And kill things. And take their stuff.

I wrote the first draft before discovering Michael Curtis's Stonehell. Originally, I was going to keep the two separate, but then decided that Stonehell can fit pretty much anywhere, and so it's become the 'tent pole' for the whole sorry affair.

Part I
The Way Things Were

Humanity's highest achievement was The Empire. For centuries, the rich fertile lands of the west had been a patchwork of kingdoms constantly at war with each other and the numerous but disorganised goblinoid nations which occupied the vast, uncharted lands of the east beyond the mountains. Any attempts at unification were hampered by this constant conflict and the various squabbles which regularly flared up within The Church (monotheistic).

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the True Goblin Nation (Hobgoblin supremacists) swept over the mountains and threatened to push the humans into the western ocean. A unified response to this threat was hamstrung by The Church's incessant in-fighting. Facing slavery at best and extermination at the worst, salvation came from an unlikely source. One thing The Church's numerous sects all agreed on was that Magic was bad. Not God's magic which was pure and clean but the magic of Wizards, which was not a product of God's grace and must therefore come from Somewhere Else (somewhere unpleasant, somewhere not very nice etc.).

The Church had always suppressed the Wizards, but they had survived through the centuries in secrecy, not least because of their occasional usefulness to one petty king or another in settling a score. During the fight for survival against the TGN the western-most kingdom came to the fore, thanks to the efforts of the King's pet Wizard in gathering together a large cadre of Magic-users. The TGN were pushed back over the mountains with the aid of massed magical artillery and the kings of the west sought to put their useful but dangerous magical pets back in their cage of secrecy enforced by religious persecution. But the Wizards had anticipated this and prepared for it. They
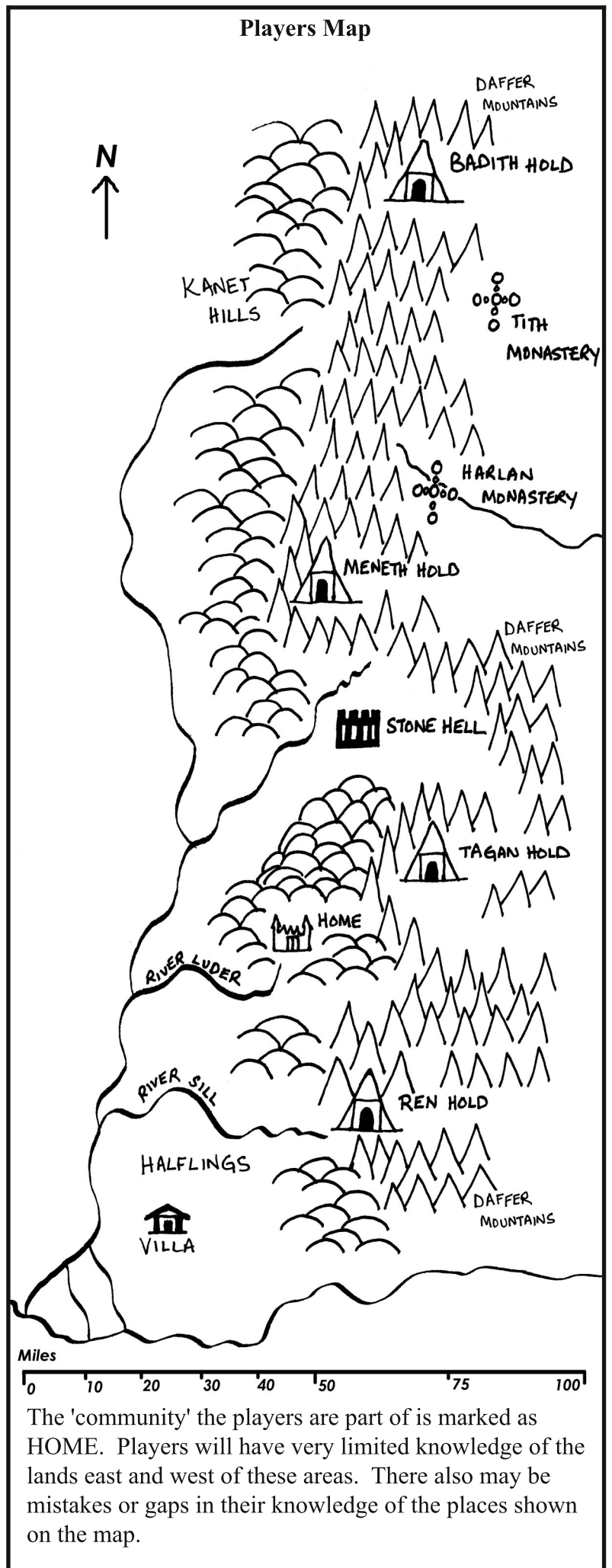
moved quickly and ruthlessly. Within six months, they had taken control of three-quarters of the territory west of the mountains. A relatively brief period of consolidation followed with the original cadre forming into a nominal ruling class which left the actual running of things to their professional soldiers, and a secret police force formed from the remnants of the Thieves' Guilds who had formed a resistance against the TGN in some of the occupied cities. The Empire was born.

The following 250 years were relatively peaceful. All citizens of The Empire were, in principle, equal, with the Wizards existing as a class above and apart. But as they rarely directly exercised any temporal power, everyone was happy by and large. Trade flourished with the Dwarven kingdoms under the mountains as the peaceful and prosperous Empire was able to use its reliable surplus of food in exchange for the products of Dwarven mining and craftsmanship. Even the Elves sent trade delegations and embassies from their fiercely insular kingdom far away in the east.

Agriculture received an unexpected boost when, about a century ago, the mysterious race known as Halflings began to arrive in great numbers from somewhere over the mountains, far away to the south and east. In the vast majority of cases they arrived with little or no material wealth, and skills which had served them well in their simple agricultural society, made them suitable for little besides indentured labour and domestic service in The Empire.

The Church receded into obscurity. Some heavily fortified Abbeys existed beyond the mountains, and discreet missionaries were tolerated, with any overly vocal priests conveniently 'disappearing'.

Then The Plague came. Within a year, 90% of The Empire's population had succumbed to the disease and died. More died as a result of famine and unchecked goblin incursions. The Dwarves sealed themselves away under the mountains, and, for the most part, the Elves returned to their distant home. The Halflings survived well, initially, but this gave rise to rumours that they carried the plague.

Players Map

The 'community' the players are part of is marked as HOME. Players will have very limited knowledge of the lands east and west of these areas. There also may be mistakes or gaps in their knowledge of the places shown on the map.

Some pockets of human civilisation formed around returning priests who were well suited to the new circumstances, being able both to treat victims of The Plague, with God's help, and to create fortified self-sufficient communities as a result of two and a half centuries' experience in building such. The Wizards suffered disproportionately high casualties. This was made worse by the refusal of the Priests to help them should they fall ill.

Part II
The Way Things Are
The visual feel of the campaign is very late Roman (Western Empire). A longsword will look like a Spatha. People will dress in trousers and rough shirts. Cavalry will be light to medium with no chivalric juggernauts.

Although The Empire built densely populated metropolitan settlements, in the wake of The Plague the survivors have gone back to living in easily-defended hill forts on sites which had been abandoned for centuries or had changed use entirely. These look like Maiden Castle in its prime or other British Iron Age hill forts.

The PCs are members of such a community headed by a former senior member of the Secret Police (an 11th level thief). Conditions have been harsh as the community struggled to establish itself, but now, after eight long years, the community is entering a period of consolidation and starting to turn outwards in

search of solutions to long-standing problems.

A pressing concern is the community's reliance on the nearest Dwarven Hold for trade goods such as salt, metal ores, and weapons and armour which are too time-consuming or labour-intensive to manufacture locally. The Dwarves have profited a great deal from their position as sole providers of such goods. Several possible solutions are being explored:

- The community is looking for other possible sources of salt, including an expedition to the coast to the port of Sarnmouth (which had salt pans).
- A search for the private house of a pre-plague Wizard whose research interests included the production of detailed maps including information on mineral deposits.
- Attempts to contact other Dwarven Holds and open up new trade opportunities.
- A small group (the PCs) have gained dispensation to explore the infamous Stonehell, an ancient prison which The Empire had inherited and decided to seal. Great treasures can be extracted from its depths and these are things which the Dwarves are eager to trade for, albeit on terms which are favourable to them.

So that's the setup. Next time, I'll talk a little about how the different character classes in LL and the *Advanced Edition Companion* fit in to all of this and what monsters the PCs are likely to run into in the big, bad, scary world.

Designing House Rules for Labyrinth Lord

This article makes the assumption that most groups don't play Labyrinth Lord 100% by the book. Even if they do, then the publication of the *Advanced Edition Companion* means there are rule choices to make about what to use in addition to existing rules, and what to replace entirely.

In my group, we have around one page of house rules for our game. I've reproduced the current version of these on the next page for reference, but I'm not suggesting they are better than the rules they replace, or anybody else's versions.

It can be helpful to consider house rules that are both formal and informal. The formal ones can be written down, whereas the informal might be simply left for the LL to deal with on a case-by-case basis. For example, in the Stonehell campaign that I play in, elves are few and far between, whilst the LL will allow an elf PC, the background has to reflect the demographics of the setting. If we wanted a party with three or four elves, I doubt our LL would allow it, but it's not a rule we need to write down. Whatever form they take, the purpose of these rules should be to facilitate a style of play that the group will enjoy, and avoid bickering.

The best way to establish a successful set of house rules is to agree them as a group ahead of a gaming session. In my group, this took the form of a list of rules being e-mailed backwards and forwards for a few weeks. In most areas, there was very little difference of opinion and, where there was, we gave the final say to the LL. With our own rules, we wanted to keep them very simple so that we could use them in the game without constantly re-reading them. We also didn't want to create any extra calculations or note-taking that would slow down the game.

There are lots of aspects of the game for which one could consider incorporating house rules. Here are some ideas to get the ball rolling:

Character Generation – Consider how many dice are rolled, how many strings are generated. Decide whether players are allowed to redistribute scores to get a better and/or more balanced character. Determine what classes/races should be allowed in the campaign.

Combat – This is potentially the largest area where house rules might be used. You should consider how you want combat to play out, and remember that enemies may also employ tactical options against the party. Here are some common options: critical hits, all-out / aggressive attack, all-out defence, weapon specialisation, weapon proficiencies, surprise attacks, etc.

Rest/Healing – How long do characters take to heal? Can they bind wounds, or give each other first aid? Are they dead at zero hit points, or can they go negative and still recover? Does spider poison kill them for real, if they fail that saving throw?

Henchmen – If your gaming group is quite small, decide if players should run multiple characters or recruit NPCs to join the party.

Encumbrance – I've seen character sheets for some games that have a whole page devoted to recording exact locations for items, and their weight, down to the last ounce. In the last few sessions of my current game, I can't remember a single instance where we talked about weight, even when carting sack loads of treasure back to base. However, even though we don't rule on it, the players don't push it and overload characters too much.

Skills – There are plenty of ideas for skill systems, whether they're published for Labyrinth Lord, or just based on rules from another game. Skills could be randomly generated before writing a character's background. Alternatively, skills might be chosen based on a written background.

Experience – There are lots of potential options for awarding experience. You need to decide when experience gets given, how experience for treasure is awarded, and what credit players get for role-playing and mission success. Also, it can be useful to decide whether replacement characters that join the party after a fatality, should start at first level or at the same level as the rest of the party.

A final thought on getting the best out of house rules: Ideally, they should be jointly developed by players and the LL. Also, just because there isn't a rule for something, players should still be encouraged to try tactics, stunts, or even just something for comedic or dramatic effect. Just rule on the spot and let them (in my games often quite literally) knock themselves out.

Sample House Rules for Labyrinth Lord

Character Generation – Players roll 6 rows of 6 using 3d6, and then select the string that fits the type of character they would like to play best.

Starting Hit Points – All starting first level characters receive maximum hit points. If you are using the *Advanced Edition Companion* rules, Rangers only get the maximum for the first of their two hit dice.

Race/Class – All non-standard race and class combinations for player characters are at the discretion of the LL.

Party Size – As there are just two players, each can run 3-4 characters at once.

Replacement Characters – After a fatality, a new character can join the party at the next session. They join with enough experience points to be equal in level to the lowest level character in the party.

Coins – All coins are the same weight, and there are 20 to 1 pound.

Crossbows – Magic-users and their subclasses may use crossbows.

Active Defence – All characters can defend against a single opponent, instead of attacking. They must elect to take this action before initiative is rolled in a given round. The nominated opponent attacks at -3 to hit. Characters may retreat while defending, but are limited to 50% of their normal movement rate. This defence option may be used against a melee or missile attack. Intelligent monsters, humanoids, and NPCs can also elect to defend, and if they do so, the LL should tell the players after they have stated their actions.

Two-Weapon Fighting – This option is only available to standard fighters, and not their subclasses. It allows the use of two single-handed weapons, giving a fighter one attack with each. The primary weapon suffers a -2 to hit penalty, and the secondary weapon a -4. Other characters can use two weapons, but can only attack with one of them each round, and still suffer the -4 penalty when using the secondary weapon.

All-Out Attack – This option is only available to standard fighters, and not their subclasses. A fighter must elect to take this action before initiative is rolled in a given round. It gives the fighter +2 on both to hit and damage rolls. However, it makes the fighter easier to hit adding 3 points to the fighters AC (AC will never be higher than 9).

Critical Hits – This option is only available to standard fighters, and not their subclasses. When making a to hit roll, if a player rolls a natural 20, the fighter doubles the damage rolled. Bonus damage points from strength or magic effects are not doubled.

Subdual Rules – These are so much fun, that the whole of the next page is devoted to them – although the rules part of it is only three sentences.

Skill System – Each starting character gets 6 skill points. All skills can be taken as a beginner for 1 point, or as intermediate for 3 points. As characters advance, the LL may allow them additional skills at his discretion, or offer them further advances. To reach Advanced Level, characters would need to successfully apply their skill many times, and/or receive specialist instruction.

All skills are linked to an attribute (eg. swimming would use dexterity) and to succeed in using a skill, players must roll under the attribute score on a d20. They get a +1, +3 and +6 respectively for basic, intermediate and advanced skill levels. The LL may apply modifiers depending on the level of difficulty involved. However easy or hard something is, a roll of a 1 will always be a fail, and a roll of 20 will be a success.

Languages – Additional languages count as skills but the LL may allow 'free' languages based on race and background. A beginner would have a few hundred words, an intermediate would be fairly fluent, and an advanced would sound like a native, with understanding of regional variations.
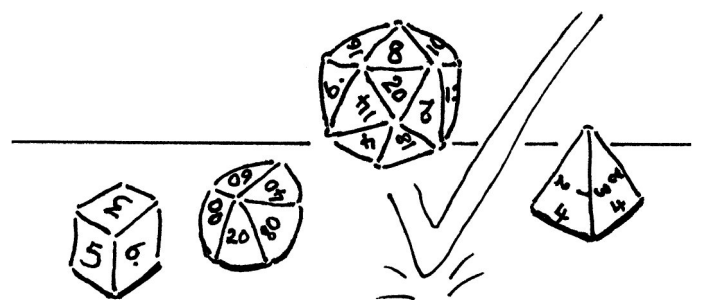
Alternative Subdual Rules for Labyrinth Lord

As someone with an artistic, rather than a mathematical background, there are few things I dread more than players trying to knock out opponents. You have to keep track of permanent damage and temporary damage, and then work out a percentage chance of success, based on damage and hit points. This all has the potential to slow combat down, and as a result, I suspect in many games, the rules are fudged or just avoided altogether. I also have problems with the idea of pulling blows. If you pull blows, then you should do less damage. Adventurers enter a labyrinth equipped to deliver lethal force, and the existing rules don't take this into account. Below are two alternative systems for subdual. The first is extremely simple. The second provides, in my opinion, a more playable option in preference to the published rules.

Simple Subdual Rule – All attacks are made as normal, but damage is halved (rounded down). Strength/magic adjustments are not halved, and a hit will always do at least one damage. A person is knocked out on reaching zero or less hit points. At -4 hit points, they must make a save versus poison/death or die. At -5 hit points, they die instantly.

Advanced Subdual Rule – Characters roll to hit as normal. All subdual attacks do 1d4 damage, regardless of weapon type, and strength/magic bonuses are applied as usual. If a natural 4 is rolled for damage, then the opponent must make a save versus poison/death, or be knocked out. If an opponent falls to zero or fewer hit points, they are knocked out instantly. At -4 hit points, they must make a save versus poison/death or die. At -5 hit points, they die instantly.

Here's a couple of examples to show how this system might work:

A 4th level fighter meets a hill giant and decides he'd like to knock him out, so he can question him. The fighter has no strength or magic adjustments when using his long sword, and as the giant bends down to bash him, he jumps and cracks the giant on the head with the hilt of his sword. He needs to roll a 13 to hit the giant. Assuming he hits, he then rolls a d4 for

subdual damage. If he rolls a natural 4, then the giant must save versus poison/death or be knocked out (7 or less on a d20 is a fail). This means he has a 3.5% chance of success per round. Of course, tactically, even in a straight fight to the death, the fighter would be foolish to engage the giant, as his chances of survival are limited.

If the same fighter wanted to attempt knocking out an orc, then he would find it much easier. He would need an 11 to hit, and roll 4 on d4 subdual damage. Then, on a roll of 11 or less, on his saving throw, the orc would be out cold. As the orc can only have 1-8 hit points, he will also be knocked out if these are reduced to zero or less. Even if he has the maximum 8 hit points, the fighter should render him unconscious in just a few rounds.

Recovery – Recovery time is best left to the LL to decide. As a general rule, people will come around fairly quickly if they are given some assistance. However, it is also quite possible for someone to stay unconscious for several hours. The LL should also decide what hit points are regained when someone comes round. If someone has been repeatedly bashed with a sword hilt on the back of the neck, there should be some longer term damage to recover from.

Improvised Traps

Adventurers often find themselves on the receiving end of traps of all kinds. In some dungeons, the traps are so elaborate, that they may well have cost more to install than the treasure they protect. Also, complex traps of a non-magical nature would probably need regular servicing, which requires a suitable expert to be on hand. Not that there's anything wrong with cunning pressure pads, gas clouds, or poison needles in locks, but I can't help thinking that more often than not, traps might be cruder in design. These are also the kinds that the adventurers themselves could set which, whether they work or not, would be great fun in a game.

This article covers some simple traps which would perhaps be more in keeping with the resources available to typical dungeon inhabitants and adventuring parties. As there is no official skill system in LL for the purposes of this article, I'm simply going to grade building/setting the traps as easy, medium or hard. In my own games, I would let players make an ability check, usually against Dexterity and, possibly, Intelligence for something involving calculations. Then apply modifiers based on the character's background, how complex the trap is, and any environmental considerations.

Before placing a trap in an adventure, or setting a trap as a player, the first thing you should decide is what outcome you want from the trap when it is triggered. This could be anything from providing an audible or silent alarm, to scaring off, capturing, or even killing a predator or enemy.

Tripwire (easy/medium) – A tripwire is simply a rope or cord that is either fastened or pulled taught as a victim runs past it. Its success will depend upon how fast the victim is running, and whether they are able to detect the rope. Their ability to detect it will be influenced by the lighting conditions, and the fineness of the rope or twine used. The tripwire can be set at ankle height to simply trip, or at neck height where it could do real damage - although, the higher the line is set, the easier it will be to spot.

Trigger Line (medium/hard) – This is a fine line which, when stepped on, will trigger a trap or event of some sort. It is a lot harder to set than a trip wire, especially if the intention is for the person that steps on it not to realise that they have done so.

Audible Alarm (easy) – This trap is very easy to set up, and in its simplest form, may be nothing more than a container of rocks, carefully placed atop a slightly opened door. It could also involve a basic tripwire in a corridor, fixed to the walls with iron spikes, with the other end tied to some scrap metal objects. These basic traps should work well, but are also fairly easy to detect and avoid.
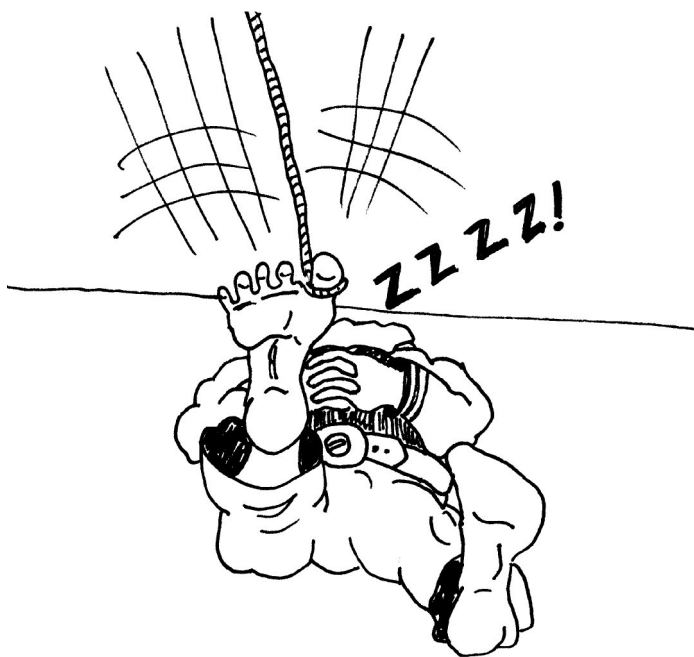
Silent Alarm (medium/hard) – This trap is similar to the audible alarm, but requires a little more skill to set, and ensure silence when triggered. It will typically involve string or twine attached to a door, and rigged so that the other end of the line is attached to the trapper, who will feel a gentle tug from tension created by the door opening.

Concealed Pit Trap: Capture (easy/medium) – Simple pit covered over with sticks, and disguised with materials to match the surrounding ground coverings. Uncomplicated to dig, but also time-consuming. The medium skill level applies if it is harder to match the existing surroundings.

Concealed Pit Trap: Lethal (medium) – A pit trap with sharpened stakes or similar at the bottom. Will potentially impale anyone that falls in.

Stake Trap (medium/hard) – A basic stake trap will comprise sharpened stakes attached to a bent back tree branch, held in place by a peg, and sprung using a tripwire. A more complex version would involve building a portable rig to provide the spring action instead of using a tree.

Snare (easy) – This trap can be as simple as a rope noose hung from a tree, in an area that the desired prey is likely to frequent. Intelligent creatures may spot a snare and avoid it. A skilled trapper can camouflage the snare and/or position it close to the ground, in a way that makes it hard to spot.

Weighted Snare (medium) – This trap is the same as a normal snare, but with the addition of a counterweight. This will lift the prey or victim into the air, making escape harder, and reducing the risk of interference by predators.

Rolling Log Pile Trap (medium) – This requires a large stack of tree trunks or logs, arranged so that when their supports are hammered away, they roll downhill over anyone or anything in their path. Unless there is already a good supply of logs, this sort of trap will involve hours of heavy, noisy work. This trap is easy to set, but tough to trigger, especially from a remote location. Even when camouflaged it's fairly easy to spot.

Boulder Trap (medium) – This opportunistic trap requires an appropriate pile of boulders, or one large one, and suitable terrain with a gradient, to roll them down when released. To make the trap, the boulders need to be loosened and balanced at the point where additional leverage will set them rolling.

Cage Release Trap (medium/hard) – This trap can take a number of forms, but essentially involves the release of dangerous creatures of one sort or another, when triggered. A simple version of this trap would be a bag of snakes, suspended in a room by a rope that is held in place by the door. When the door is opened, the rope is freed, the bag falls, and the snakes emerge from the bag in an agitated state. (See Monster Club #1 on page 3, for an example of this sort of trap.)

Other versions might involve large metal cages, or even tiny wooden boxes filled with spiders or scorpions. The hardest aspects of these traps will, of course, be acquiring and handling the creatures involved.

Caltrops (easy) – Caltrops are short, four-pointed, iron spikes, bent so that a single point remains vertical when they are scattered on the ground. If they are scattered across a 10' square area, then anyone moving across them at full speed must make a save versus breath weapon to avoid treading on one of them. When trodden on, the caltrop will inflict 1 hit point of damage, and for the next 24 hours the victim will be reduced to 50% of their normal movement rate. Anyone at half speed or less, is able to step around the caltrops, if it is light enough to see them, without making a save.

Arrow Trap (medium/hard) – A trap made by converting and positioning a crossbow, so that it will fire on targets as they open a door, or trip a wire. These traps become harder to rig if multiple crossbows are used, or if mounting the crossbow is awkward.

Swinging Log Trap (hard) – This trap can be manual release, or employ a tripwire that, when stepped on, sets two large, suspended logs swinging head-on together. If successful, the logs smash together with tremendous force, and crush the victim.

It is very hard to get right, as it requires spot-on timing and accuracy. However, even if the logs don't smash into each other, they could still cause substantial damage by swinging around.

Firetraps – Many characters make tactical use of flaming oil in their endeavours. Fire is a powerful tool, and has both defensive and offensive applications. Here are several oil based traps and tactics:

(i) Basic Throw and Light Trap (easy) – This trap is ideal for use against monsters and creatures that are unable to open doors, and are encountered in an enclosed area. It assumes the adventurers gain surprise, and close the door between themselves and the creatures. They then prepare several flasks of oil and a torch. In a quick motion, they open the door just enough to throw both into the room, and slam the door shut again. Of course, success depends on getting enough oil on the targets, and not allowing any of them to escape. I would normally ask for a couple of to hit rolls at this point. The resultant fire may also destroy anything flammable in the area. If they fumble throwing the oil and torch, then they should make to hit rolls against themselves.

(ii) Flaming Portal Trap (easy/medium) - This barrier trap is set by pouring several flasks of oil under a door, if there's enough of a gap, and igniting it without opening the door. Then, the door can be opened, and the party can look beyond from a position of relative safety. If they can see opponents they can make missile attacks and cast ranged spells.
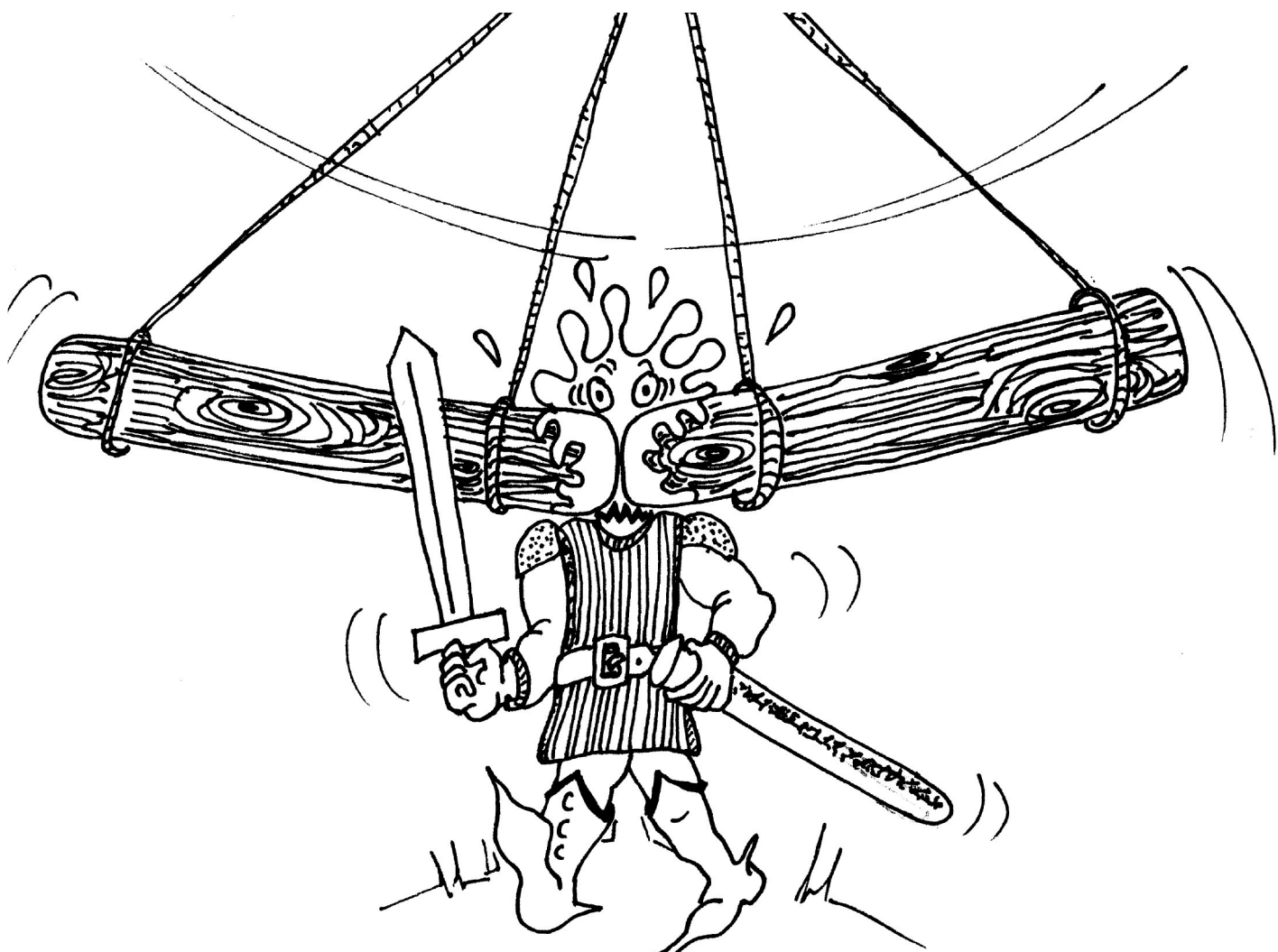
(iii) Firepit (medium/hard) – An immense version of this trap is demonstrated in the film 'Outlander' (2008). I'm not recommending the film, just the trap they designed, so if you want to watch it, be warned, this next bit contains spoilers. In the film, the Vikings are up against a nasty monster – think a bulette but with added agility and other abilities. They build a pit about 20 feet long, and 12 feet deep, and fill it with whale oil. With the top disguised, two runners then taunt the creature, which chases them, and falls into the pit. Torches are then thrown in.

The fire doesn't kill the monster (maybe it made a saving throw for half damage), but I don't think many creatures would have survived it. On a smaller scale it would work in the same way. The trap would be built in the same way as a normal pit trap, but with the added oil and a means of igniting it.

There are plenty of other ideas involving fire, but they cross more into warfare tactics than trapping. These could include flaming trenches, flaming logs rolled along the ground, or a flaming wagon of straw sent rolling down a hill.

I've purposefully not included damage or saving throw rules for any traps. In my own games, I make spot rulings for them, and decide to check for any or all of the following:

1) A roll to check if the trap is successfully made.

2) A roll to set/arm the trap.

3) A roll to see if the potential victim notices the trap.

4) A saving throw to avoid and/or reduce the effect of the trap.

5) A damage roll as required.

6) A roll to see if the victim can free themselves from the trap.

7) A roll to see if any failures result in injury to the trapper.

8) A wandering monster roll to see what might get caught or trigger the trap.

Monster Club #2

A regular column that will feature encounters, lairs and other fun stuff with monsters.

The Goblin Rope Trap – This comprises a wily old goblin who has teamed up with a somewhat disabled roper. The roper was left for dead by a party of adventurers, but the goblin found it, and dragged a couple of corpses into the cave for it to feed on. The roper slowly recovered, but only has one 30' strand and one 20' strand left (some rules say they should grow back, but these haven't – the roper is pretty ancient and was just too badly injured). However, it is just as deadly as a normal, intact example of the breed. The roper used to grab passers-by from the passageway, and drag them into the cave, but now they actually need to be in the cave, for it to get the drop on them.

An unusual working relationship has evolved (see map below): The goblin lures victims into the cave getting them close enough for the roper to attack. The goblin will then scuttle along the narrow passageway at the side (the entrance to this is 7' up the side of the cave, so he uses a rope to climb up) and watch from a ledge, above the pool at the back of the cave.

After an encounter, the roper gets to feast on fresh meat, and the goblin gets to pick through the victims' belongings. The goblin has a little cave he calls home, housing an ever-growing treasure hoard.

The roper has never attacked the goblin, but then, the goblin is smart enough to keep his distance if no fresh food comes along for a few days or more.

1 square = 10 feet

Good Shop / Bad Shop

A regular feature highlighting unusual retail establishments which offer useful, bizarre and sometimes dangerous goods and services.

The Rentalist

Picture a fairly nondescript shop in a back street. It presents no windows to the street, and has a sturdy oak door that suggests passing trade isn't part of the business plan. Even if passers-by were curious, they would find the door locked. From the outside, the only thing that anyone might notice, would be a small design on the door featuring a crossed quill and sword.

The shop is, in fact, owned and run by a secretive figure known as The Rentalist. If people knock on the door, they will be ignored, unless they do so during the first hour after sunset. If they knock at this time, then a small hatch in the door will open, and a quiet voice will simply say, "Card?".

The card in question is an plain black card with the same crossed quill and sword design inlaid in gold.

Not invited? Don't even think about it!

Unless a character presents the required card, the hatch is quickly closed and will not be opened again. The door is magically locked and cannot be opened normally. A Knock spell or better will open it, but anyone that crosses the threshold will be struck by a Magic Missile, once per round, until they die or exit the premises. If unbidden characters are foolish enough to remain inside, they will see the room is about 15' wide by 20' long. It has several unlit candles along the walls, a large table, and two chairs. There are no doors other than the one through which they entered.

The Rentalist offers a highly specialised magic item rental service. He only deals with customers that are vetted by his discreet network of local agents.

When suitable customers are identified, they are given a card, and told when and where to present it. For clients to be offered a card, they must satisfy a number of requirements. First, they must have available funds in cash/gems equal to at least 1,000gp. Secondly, they must be in dire need of an artefact in order to complete a task. Finally, they must agree to never speak to anyone about their invitation or visit, on pain of death.

If a character presents the card when requested, the door will be opened by an elderly gentlemen. He is average in height and build, with refined features and close-cropped greying hair. He will grant entry to the invitee and anyone accompanying him.

He will listen with interest to any requirement or predicament with which the character needs assistance. Then, he will ask for patience whilst he consults his records. He will sit for about 10 minutes, studying a large leather-bound book. Carefully closing the book, he will then make his pitch, offering the character a magic item that will fulfil the intended purpose. If a suitable item is not listed, then the LL can design a new one as required.

Based on the power of the item, The Rentalist will require a deposit of 1,000gp – 10,000gp, which will be the first week's rental charge. The rental period can be extended indefinitely, but all fees are payable in advance. If a payment is missed, then there is a penalty. If a character is killed whilst in possession of an item, their soul is forfeit in lieu of the item. The items provided by The Rentalist are, in fact, non-magical versions of the item, with enchantments placed on them to provide the magical effect for the duration of the hire period, or until the death of the renter. Items take 24 hours to 'prepare' for hire.

The penalty for a late payment is a costly one. Each week a payment is missed, part of the character's life-force is drained into the item. The draining effect may take a mental or physical form, causing one of
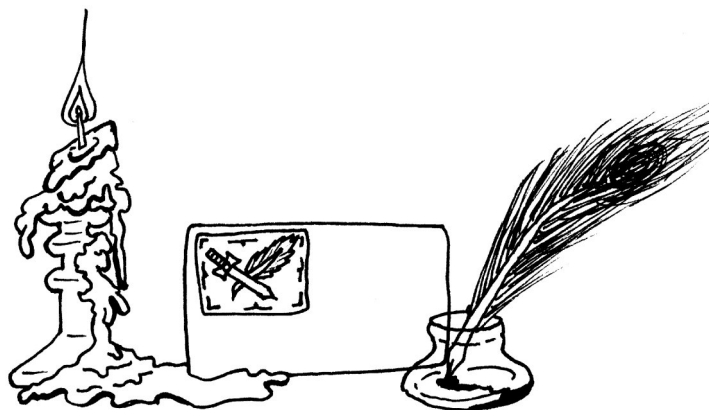
that character's attributes to be permanently reduced. To see which, roll a d8 and consult the table below.

1 = Strength reduced by one point
2 = Dexterity reduced by one point
3 = Constitution reduced by one point
4 = Intelligence reduced by one point
5 = Wisdom reduced by one point
6 = Charisma reduced by one point
7 = Hit points reduced by 5% (1 point min)*
8 = Hit points reduced by 10% (2 points min)*
*This is the minimum amount of hit points that will be lost. All percentages should be rounded up.

If any ability score falls below three, or hit points are reduced to zero, then the character dies. If pressed about the nature of the penalty, The Rentalist will explain that the magic item requires an energy source to function, and non-payment will cause the item to take this from its keeper. He will then offer the character a lengthy, largely illegible contract, and a quill pen for them to sign it with their own blood.

The Rentalist provides a controlled way of incorporating immensely powerful magic into a campaign, but only on a temporary basis, and at potentially great cost.

The LL can portray The Rentalist in any way he chooses, and there will be many rumours about him. Here are some possible ideas on his background. A LL can decide which, if any, of these are true and which might surface as rumours.

1. He is the servant of a powerful Necromancer to whom he lost his own soul long ago.
2. People who take items from him rarely make it back to return them.
3. Sometimes, the items he rents sap the will from their keeper and they refuse to give the item back. This usually has grave consequences.
4. The items he gives out are all cursed and will fail at a critical moment.
5. He is a powerful Mage who uses his magic to work against those who rent items to ensure their failure.
6. When someone tries to return an item on the day it is due, he will suffer a series of unfortunate events, which will result in him being late and having to pay for another week.

Sample Rental Prices:

Here are some sample rental prices for magic items. The actual gp value can easily be changed to reflect the value of items in different campaigns, and how powerful an item is within the context of the game.

When items that normally involve doses or charges are requested, The Rentalist will offer them with a certain number of uses per day or week, depending on the item in question. The Rentalist will be somewhat crafty with item powers. For example, he will let the party rent a Rod of Resurrection, but it will not work on a person killed before the item was rented.

1,000gp per week:
Arrow of Location
Bracers of Armour AC4
Rope of Entanglement
Slippers of Spider Climbing
Sword +1 Flame Tongue

3,000gp per week:
Bracers of Armour AC2
Figurine/s of Wonderous Power
Horn of Valhalla
Ring of Regeneration
Sword +4 Defending
Wings of Flying

10,000gp per week:
Apparatus of the Crab
Crystal Ball with Clairaudience or ESP
Rod of Absorption
Rod of Lordly Might
Staff of the Magi
Custom Item*
*A custom item will be an extremely powerful item designed for a specific purpose. For example; a Sword of Dragon Slaying, or a Wand with a 9th level Magic-user spell.

If a rented item is lost or broken, the bond with the renter ends, and the contract is breached. The player must then make multiple rolls on the late payment table: One roll for each 1,000gp of weekly rental value plus and additonal 1d6 rolls. The character will also suffer the same fate if he returns an item to The Rentalist with unpaid rent.

What's in the Oubliette?

A regular review column covering Labyrinth Lord compatible material, with occasional diversions into other games, and the odd book, film or TV show. Product submissions for review are welcomed.

Turntracker – Labyrinth Lord Accessory
Faster Monkey Games (2010) $3.00

Having seen numerous mentions of the Turntracker, I decided I'd order one, more out of curiosity than anything else. For your three dollars, you get a single, A4 page PDF, which, once printed, can be assembled to make the tracker. The instructions suggest printing on card, but I didn't have any handy. I used paper and put it through a laminator. A couple of minutes later, I had a seven inch disc and a smaller disc with a sword pointer on it. I joined the two pieces with a split pin to allow the pointer disc to rotate.

The outer disc is split into 24 turns, which, as this is the Labyrinth Lord version, covers four hours of game time. Each turn, the Labyrinth Lord moves the pointer, and has an instant visual reminder of what to check during the turn. The actions and events included are: wandering monster checks, rest turns, torch burn times and burn time for a lantern.

Whilst this isn't a new idea, the method of execution is, and I would much rather have this than a scribbled tally sheet for turn ticking. I also like the fact that not too much detail has been added. The $3.00 tag is a little high, especially considering you have to print and make the item yourself. As a $1.00 product I would give it 9/10, but at the current price 7/10.

Dead Tower Island – Generic Adventure
Tabletop Armoury (2010) $1.00

This adventure is from a series marketed by Tabletop Armoury as '$1 Adventures'. I think that is a great way to market short PDF adventures. For your buck, you get a nine page PDF, but the first three pages are really just the cover and blurb, so check if you need them before hitting print. Likewise, a token map is included as the last page, but it only covers one of the adventure's locations, and isn't a very good attempt at that. The other four and a bit pages contain the adventure proper.

Without providing any spoilers, the adventure begins in a troubled fishing town where vessels have been going missing. The party are hired to join the crew of the 'Live Bait' to investigate, and provide protection should it be required. The adventure is written without any stats, so once fleshed out, it could be used in any system. Along with the basic thrust of the adventure, numerous suggested plotlines and potential outcomes are provided for the GM.

The ideas are good, and from a single reading, I had a reasonable picture in my head of how I would run the adventure. As a detailed background idea, with developed plotlines, this is a good product, just don't download it and expect to be able to run it without putting several hours of preparation into it. The map provided was rather basic and only the final location was included, which was disapointing as I would have expected one or two wilderness maps covering the coastline and surrounding waters. 6/10

The Lichway
White Dwarf 9 (Oct/Nov 1979) $ try eBay

I've decided to include a classic piece of gaming material, more for nostalgic reasons, than to provide a critical review. This month, I've picked out my favourite adventure – The Lichway, in which I was a player aged 10 or so, in 1980 or thereabouts. This four-page gem provides everything you could ask for as a beginner: monsters, treasure, baddies running riot, and a background that justifies why everything is where it is. As kids, we just launched our White Dwarf Barbarians, and bashed through it. But even then, the game conjured images for me that totally captured my imagination, and helped keep me hooked on gaming for years to come. If you've never played it, you owe it to yourself to track a copy down. It also appeared in the *Best of White Dwarf Scenarios One*.

Caprica Season 1 - TV Show
Airing on SyFy 2010 (Pilot 2009)

Caprica is the prequel-sequel to the storming re-imagining of Battlestar Galactica (BSG to ardent fans). The pace of the first eight episodes has been quite slow, but this should not be a turn-off for those who value world-creation and character development. Caprica begins fifty years before the time of BSG.

Presented with a world alien to our own, we immediately recognise parallels to our current political climate, with its sinister counter-measures to that which it considers the ideology of terrorism. We are privy to the moment when the Cylons first become self-aware, which presents unusual slants on the morality of generating consciousness. But it is in the repercussive events that unfold that we are surprised by the decisions of key characters, and how they shape a future that BSG followers know so well.

Visually, the microcosms of the various characters are carefully crafted, and affiliations to class, wealth and culture are suggested through specific colours and washes. Caprica itself is defined within clean, rich, genteel colours. Whether we are in the metropolis, or at a country pied-a-terre, the colours suggest wealth and good taste, reflecting the general image of the planet as viewed by those living there and those off-world.

Graystone Industries is constructed in steely greys, washed in ice blues, reflecting the affluent but ultimate soullessness of a corporation that has prioritised acquisition and success over the innovative brilliance that made it flourish in the first place.

The Taurons embrace earthy colours: reds, oranges, and browns. They are a people with a strong sense of culture and a love of their homeworld. They are, of course, considered an underclass by the Capricans, who look down on the people of the soil.

A somewhat monochromatic wash gives us an insight into the virtual world (V-World). It has all the realism of a black and white movie, and therein lies the appeal. Sophisticated, anarchic, and primal, those who inhabit this world go there to escape and recreate themselves within the pixellated illusion.

Costuming serves to demarcate different nationalities and their place in an exotic class system. Suits from the forties with accompanying trilbies appear comfortably with the sort of clothes that might grace a catwalk in Milan under the name of 'Future Aspirations'.

There is great attention to detail in creating a world vastly superior to our own in terms of technological advancement, but none the wiser in its emotional and spiritual literacy. We are allowed to fully inhabit a universe that might be a possible future, but one that we rapidly hope will not be realised.

MOUSE WATCH SPRING 2010

| DESPERATE FOR SUPPLIES THE MICE OF FAUXHAVEN VENTURE FORTH | WINTER HAS CHANGED THE WORLD AND THEY FACE UNFAMILIAR CHALLENGES | THE REWARDS IN THIS NEW WORLD ARE GREAT... | ...BUT A HEAVY PRICE MUST BE PAID. |
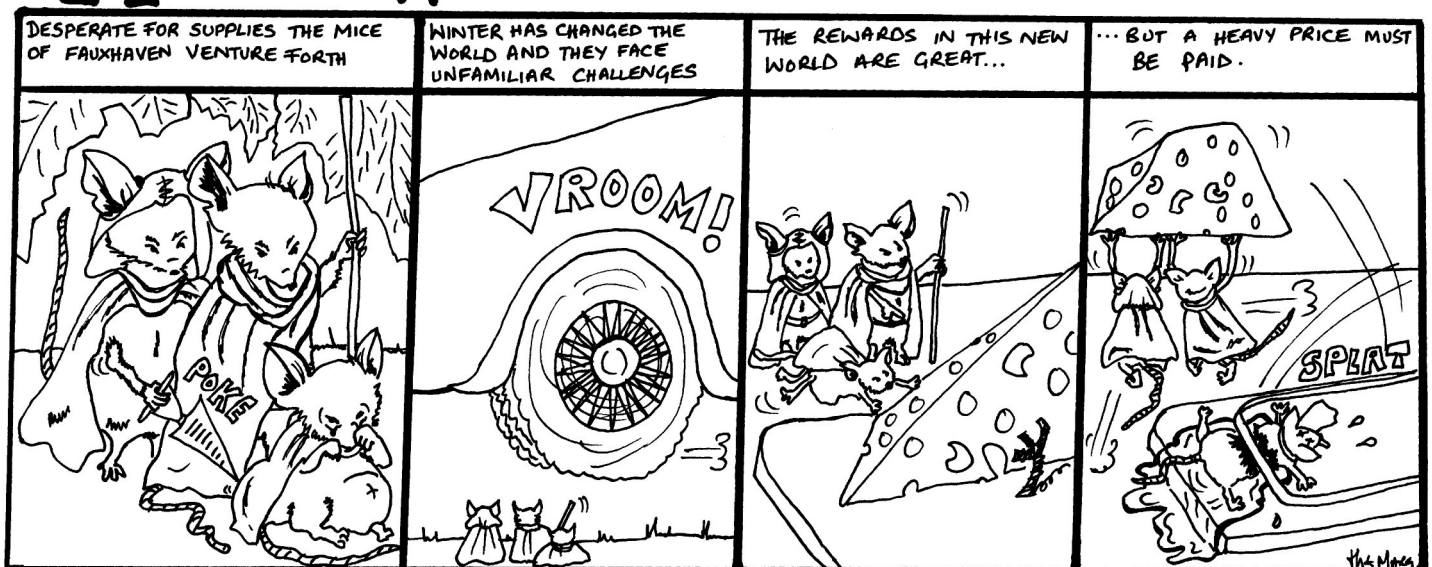
THE SONG OF SITHAKK

Translated by Elk Runnymeade

Editorial Note:
The original of this document was seemingly dictated in Early North-Eastern Dwarvish, to a Second Dynasty scribe of the Old Kingdom.

In translation, I have attempted to preserve something of the flavour of the original. Where no exact English equivalent exists, the Editorial Committee has proceeded according to the principles of the Fifth Dwarftung Congress (Riga, 1872).

I have used the simple expedient of capitalizing the initial letter to designate words of particular cultural significance, marked in the original with a karth.

PART I: The Warrior

Sithakk, most newly elect of the Blackfell Barreldwarves, stirred, cursing, beneath the oak that protected him. Even in sleep, his hand yet gripped the thick-bladed Fadur-Sword, the patterns of its hilt obscured by the black, cloying earth ingrained in every intricate swirl. As his quivering eyelids awoke to the dancing light of the aurora, high above the dawnglow, his mind flew back in tumult to the events of the night before:

In the torchlight, Estinore, Priest of Hrath, had listened to his supplication, that despite his youth he should be named a Death-Singer, admitted to the warrior caste for whose honour his battle-dead father had gloriously fallen, long ago and obedient to the Great Code.

"You are yet too young," said Estinore, a frown descending upon his massive brows.

In anguish, Sithakk cried out: "Hengelgar the Shaman has spoken – He, the Far-Seer of Kriegholm."

Estinore started forward: "You blaspheme … Seven years he has kept silence."

"He is silent no more … He has spoken and endorsed my plea, written it all on the loin-skin of a sacred goat and sends it to you … here. Behold!" And Sithakk boldly stepped forward, laid the bloody item with its message carved in Old Dwarvish upon the stone altar for all to see.

Then Sithakk turned to the Assembly, and called in a great voice that belied his youth: "See … it is written … I must follow my destiny, or I shall surely die." With a sudden and violent gesture, he tore at his jerkin and threw the shredded garment aside that all might see where the livid track of the fabled death snake began beneath his navel, and twisted its way upward towards his chest. Indeed, it was only the breadth of three fingers from his heart. The Priestly Conclave understood. It meant death within the month.

Estinore was aghast. He laid his hands in blessing on Sithakk's head, kissed the long lobes of his ears, and symbolically felled him with a blow of the bejewelled gauntlet that adorned his right hand. "Arise and sing of death, and may your melody echo in our halls forever. Now go, for you know what must be done."

Thus Sithakk ran bellowing from the Songhall, and before the echoes of his Bloodcry had died away, he was gone into the icy night seeking the buried Bonepile of his Ancestors. There, in accord with hallowed tradition, he tore at the cold earth, seeking by pale moonlight the sword of his father, buried

with him so many years before in the fetid Pit of Mortality. Rank and sticky was the earth, and it clung to blade and hilt as Sithakk, pushing aside the bones of his forebears, seized the sword from the remnants of his father's hand, and lifted it high to the moon with an exultant roar. Swiftly, he closed the grave, paid obeisance with bowed head, made the sacred promises, and departed to spend the first night of his maturity in the Sacred Grove of Hrath.

Sithakk gazed at the aurora, in thrall of the heavens. His head rested on the rugged knapsack that his brave and weeping mother had given him the previous night, when, in desperate hope he had set out for the Songhall. Crudely but stoutly sewn with all the strength of a warrior's wife, it was an ever-present reminder of the hunt, a pastiche of skins from no fewer than nineteen different creatures of the forest. Hidden within its multiple pockets, kept safe from damp in bladders smeared with animal fat, lay the potions his grandmother had taught him to make and use. Fatherless, he had learned the herbal skills and sorceries of the womenfolk ... until beardstrength and loinblood caused the natural inclinations of the warrior to be asserted.

Sithakk grunted and heaved his massive frame upright. Disciplined, instantly alert, and surprisingly light on his feet, he quickly gathered up his battle-gear, glanced skywards, and took the forest path picked out for him by the fading Pole Star. And through the scrunch of his boots on the frostengrund the words of Hengelgar the Wise whispered soft and hoarse in the ear of recall: "If you might live ... Where guides the Circle-Star, white pillars hold the Lake of Ice aloft ... There, from fog and fire descended, sits Athelgeist the Warlock. He and only he ... perhaps ... perhaps."

The journey, if it could be made, would take him through the tribal lands of the Sylvmorten. Intensely territorial, they seldom ventured far from the safety of their own realm. It was reported that they attacked like wolves, in packs, and killed outlanders without exception. Beyond, lay the Kingdom of the barbaric Elvensmerts ... And beyond this, the lands of legend — legend, and lies peddled by minstrels and vagabonds seeking meat and nightrest in the lodges of the Barreldwarves.

Sithakk strode on, his breath condensing in vast clouds. In a little time, the risen sun illuminated the glittering treetops, and as if inspired, a flock of crows brought, from a stand of elms, a bass note to the cacophony of the morning chorus.

Then, in the time it takes to snap a twig ... a silence deep and sudden. Sithakk stopped in that same moment, as if turned to stone. Then slowly, quietly, and methodically, he hid his bulky frame from sight where the split trunk of a wind-blasted elm provided him with a view of where the path crossed a wide clearing.

It was fully two minutes before the sounds of pursuit reached his ears: Hoots of evil glee, shrieks of derision, and brutish insults in the barely intelligible though unmistakable dialect of the Sylvmorten. Then rasping, choking, wheezing, reeling, a short figure with long arms and enormous chest burst abruptly through the undergrowth a stone's throw in front. Sithakk recognized him instantly as Hordehund the thief ... he who had attempted without success to steal the silken cloth of Dinek the weaver and fled thirty, forty days ago, lest he serve a 'Year of Joy' driving Coypu from the privyshafts of Vergeldorf.

"To me, Hordehund … to me!" Sithakk's booming call shook the small icicles, tinkling, from the trees, and the renegade staggered to him, foul and bloody ... collapsed, and the blood bubbled and gurgled where the broken shafts of two arrows protruded from his heaving back.

And then they were there ... Sithakk saw them on the other side of the clearing, eight, nine of them — though how many more were attempting to circle round behind him he knew not. He had never seen their like before. Taller than the race of men, though similarly proportioned, they were gaunt, slim, sinewy and well fitted to slipping through their forest domain. Bows and swords, just like him. Yellow and grey were the skins they wore.

Shield to the fore, Sithakk drew his sword from the scabbard mounted between his shoulder blades. Long and thick was its still-tarnished blade.

"Eaters of badgerkrupp," roared Sithakk — a ritual insult — for 'twas rumoured that the Sylvmorten sprinkled their meat with a condiment based on herbs and badgers' excrement. "Skinny as the worms you vomit!"

Sithakk extended his arms in a gesture of contemptuous welcome. From fingertip to fingertip

he was far wider than he was tall.

A howl of anger and disbelief: "He is but one, the fool!" ... And they came at him.

The birds rose from the trees as Sithakk gave his Bloodcry full throat, flipped the Fadur-Sword casually point-down into the earth in front of him. With a speed born of meticulous practice, he hefted the bow from his right shoulder and simultaneously selected a red-flighted arrow. Where his left hand gripped it, the bow was thick as a heifer's fetlock, but the mighty strength of his massive chest and shoulders bent the great weapon like a reed in a storm. A strange, deep musical sound drifted through the forest.

The first of the Sylvmorten pack was nearly halfway across the clearing with three at his heels, and five more brandishing their swords a short distance behind. Sithakk released five arrows in rapid, flowing succession.

The archer who lurked in the shadows at the edge of the clearing fell first, fell like a puppet when the strings are cut, fell staring in horror at his abdomen, where the arrow that had shattered his spine had entered.
A moment later, the foremost attacker, howling as he charged, took a barbless arrow in the shoulder, the second was hit in the head so that the shaft protruded grotesquely from the back of his skull, the third clutched at his stomach, and sank on one knee, and the fourth swung round, his left arm pinned to his side as the arrow pierced his wrist and then sank deep into his body.

The impetus of those behind caused the pack to collapse in an untidy heap, and by the time they had formed a shield-wall, another's leg had been grazed by the red-flighted lightning of Sithakk's bow. Sithakk murmured his thanks to Fyrhamer the Smith who made such arrowheads of hardest dwarfenstihl. His sixth arrow clanged through a shield, and he was rewarded with a yelp of pain.

So far so good. All done in little more than the time it takes to draw breath.

He lifted Hordehund under the armpits, dragged him into the undergrowth for safety, retrieved the great sword and prepared himself for the onslaught that would come from the rear.

He cared no longer for those in the clearing. Already they cut and chopped at each other, frenzied, crazed with bloodlust, lethally demented, drugged into murderous insanity, attacking the closest thing that moved, screamed, fell, twitched, bled.

"Grandmother," breathed Sithakk, with the smallest of smiles. The red-flighted arrows he had coated with a quintessence of the mushrooms of madness, mixed with the liver juices of an exotic fish for rapid absorption. Death was guaranteed by a poison that took perhaps the space of a hundred heartbeats to still the body forever.

Sithakk waited, sword before him once more, bow half-drawn. And here they came. Four of them. He had time for one arrow to the heart of the first. The flights formed a little puffball on the enemy's breastbone, while the rest of the arrow sailed off into the forest behind.

Sithakk tossed his bow aside and snatched up his sword. The great weapon jarred as he brought it up to protect his head against a two-handed chop from the leftmost of the three who faced him. The Sylvmorten were surprised. They had not anticipated the effect of Sithakk's long arms and great sword. Despite his shortness, he outreached

them!

Swords flashed in the cold morning and sparks flew as the battle raged in sunshine and shadow. And sometimes beneath, and sometimes above the din, a deep and resonant hum caused the catkins on the willows to tremble. Thus, Sithakk sang the Death-Song of the Barreldwarves ... and there came from the depths of his massively muscled chest, distracting, abstracted, having a rhythm independent of the ebb and flow of the fight, interrupted only by the stifled grunts of attack and parry — such notes as might arise from a massive cello[1] played by the God of Soil and Stone.

Ducking beneath his uplifted shield, Sithakk sliced like a reaper in an ecstasy, cutting the tendons at the front of an exposed ankle, leaving the foot flapping, useless. The Sylvmortan reeled back into a thicket. His comrade on the right unleashed a great blow to the dwarf's shield causing him to sink onto one knee, but Sithakk came back at him with a thrust up through the diaphragm and out through the shoulder-blade, but, staggering back from the force of his own blow, lost the Fadur-Sword , jammed tight in the flailing corpse.

Behind, the remaining Sylvmortan gave a triumphal laugh, leapt over the body, sword aloft, a living vision of revenge and death. Sithakk swayed to the side, reaching as he did so for the dagger in its scabbard behind his right knee. He threw. It hit the howling warrior just behind the jaw and beneath the ear, and his howl turned to a gargle and the grass, trees, and path were sprayed with blood as he staggered his last few steps into oblivion.

Without pausing, Sithakk wrested the Fadur-Sword free from the body of his previous assailant, found, and swiftly dispatched the Sylvmortan with the butchered foot.

Then, backing up against an enormous oak, he gave birth to a Bloodcry that caused the birds to darken the sky, as affrighted they took flight.

And now, silence ... He watches and waits. And eventually he is satisfied that there are no more, and warily, warily, he seeks out Hordehund.

[1]An approximation to Dwarvish 'Gulsa'.

The blood came as froth from Hordehund's nose and mouth, and his breath had the hesitant rasp of death as Sithakk gently moved him to a position of greater comfort.

"Forgive me, brother, that I could not save thee," whispered Sithakk, softly.

"No matter," said Hordehund, "I die in the company of mine own, and in the knowledge I am well avenged." He smiled a little, for the pain was leaving him. "Here ... ," he reached inside his jerkin awkwardly and produced a leather pouch, bound tightly with rawhide at the top ... "I have no-one ... This is now yours ... You may find it of use ... " Again the little smile. He clasped Sithakk's forearm. And in the ritual words of the Barreldwarves, Sithakk

responded: "Farewell, my brother ... Go this day, and sing in the halls of the Gods forever." And unblinking, he gazed into his kinsman's eyes until the light left them, and all was still.

Sithakk buried him beneath a cairn, in a grave otherwise unmarked, in the shadow of a great oak.
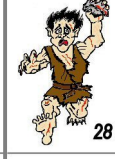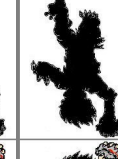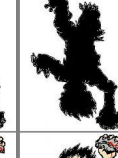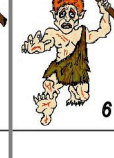
The others he left open unto the wind and sky, and the animals of the forest.

Halfling Proof Fence PDF Heroes Sheet 1
The following 2 sheets provide all the printable cardstock figures required to play this month's adventure. To make them, simply print them on to 150gsm or thicker inkjet paper. To assemble, score them lighty, fold the two flaps together underneath and stick with double-sided tape. The figures can be further improved by sticking them on to small coins or counters, to give them a more solid base.

TREANT

Halfling Proof Fence
PDF Heroes Sheet 2

The stirges are not produced as stand-up counters due to their small size.
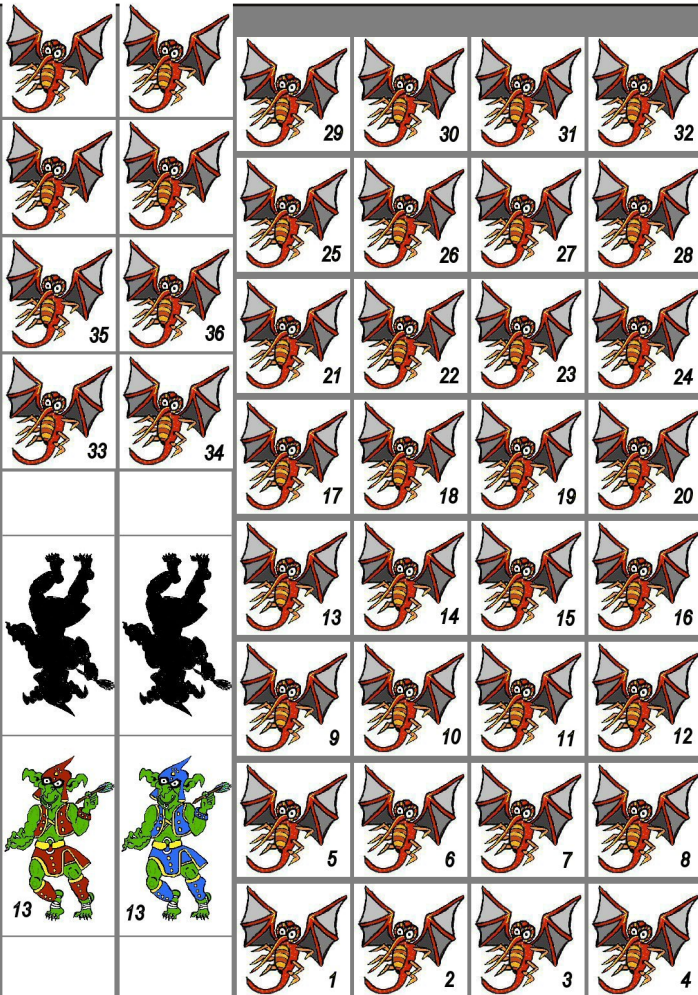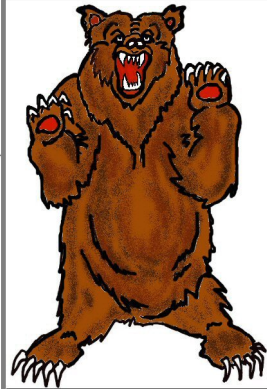
GECKO   GECKO   GRIZZLY BEAR
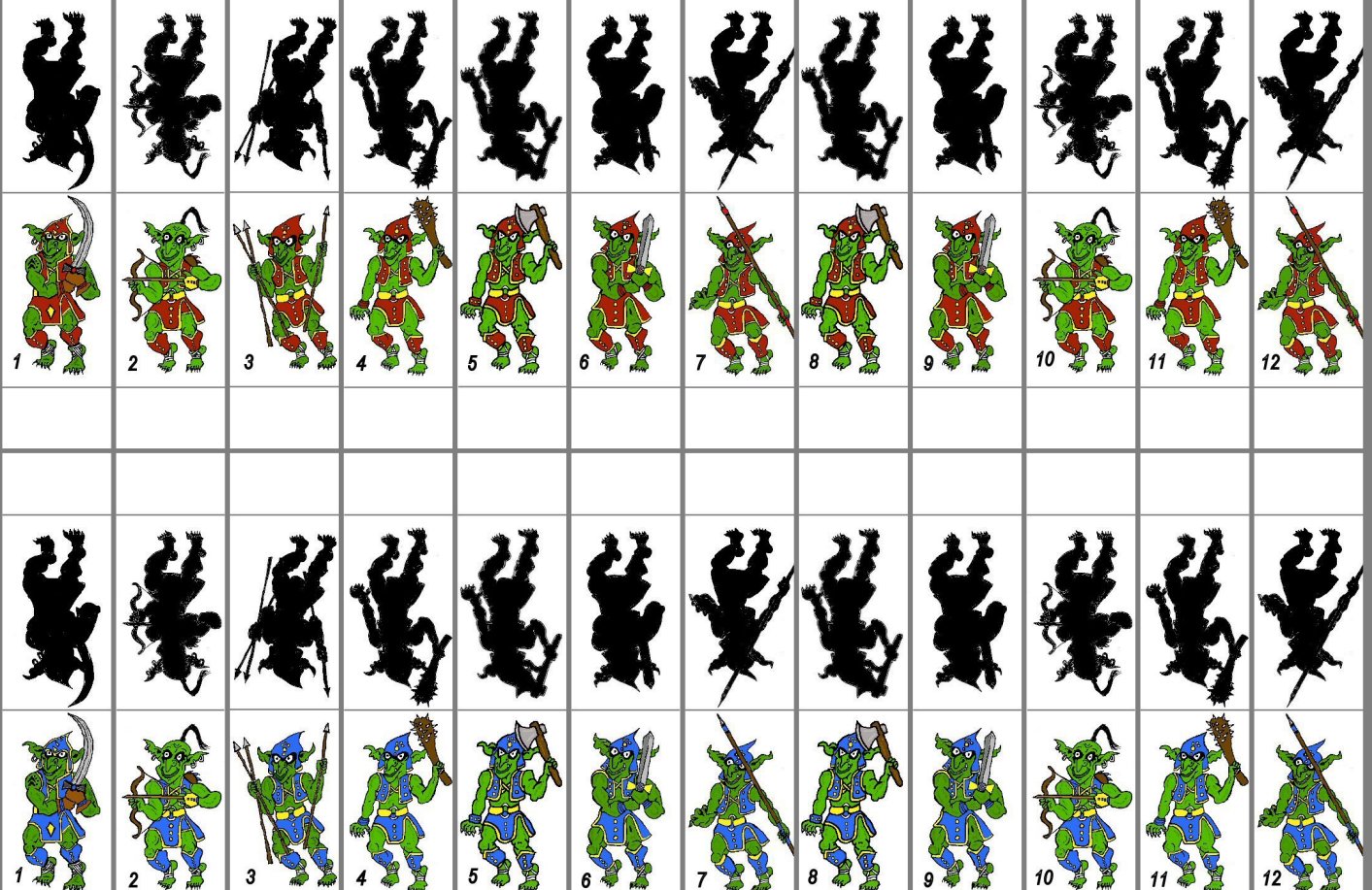
Hungry for more?
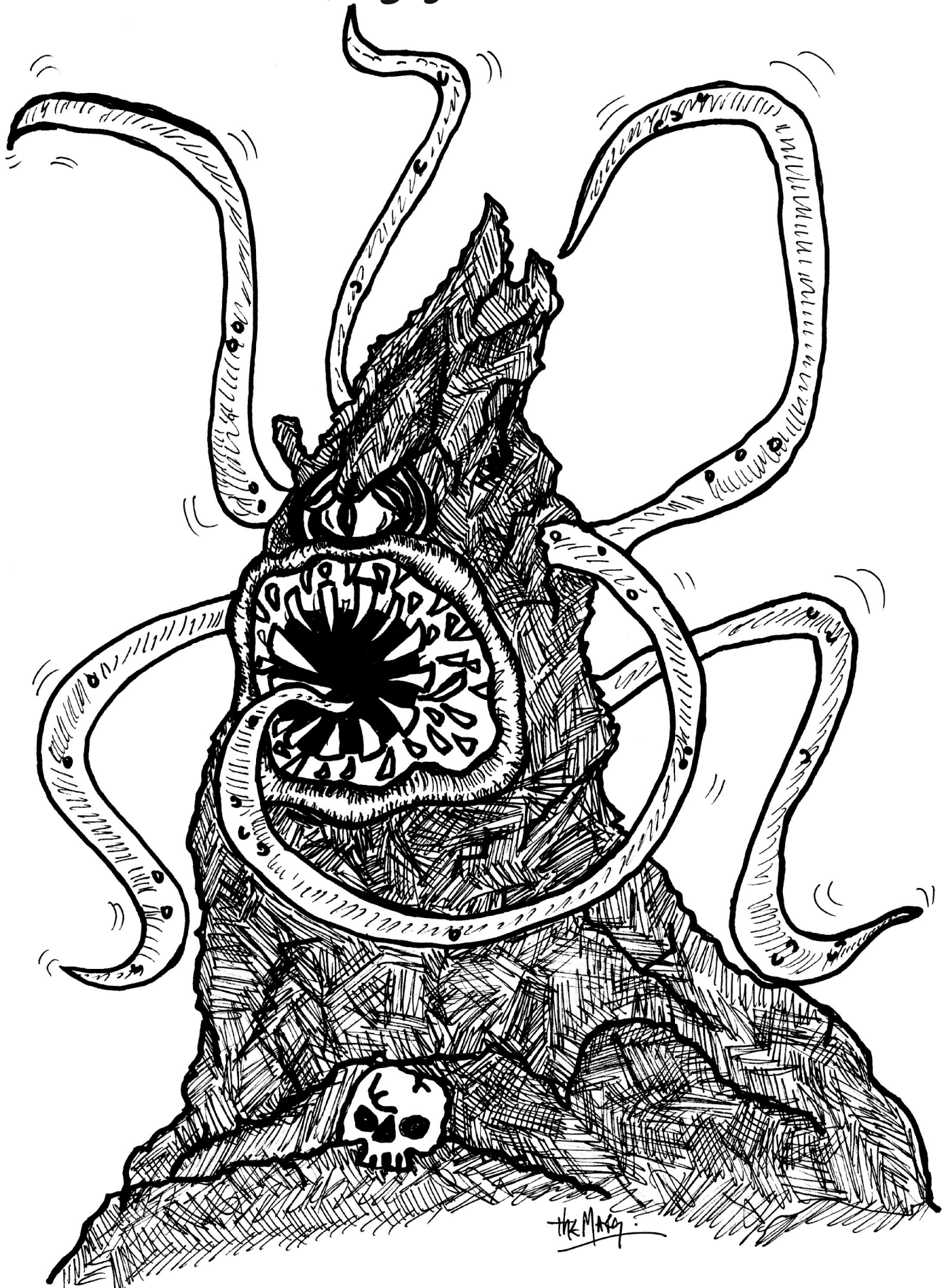
Keep an eye out for Issue 2 of Oubliette in May

DESIGNATION OF PRODUCT IDENTITY

The names Oubliette, Monster Club, Halfling Proof Fence, Inheritance, Mouse Watch, The Song of Sithakk, PDF Heroes and The Rentalist are product identity. All artwork, maps, diagrams, logos and design are product identity.