

SANCTUM SECORUM

Episode #38

Nine Princes in Amber

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Episode #38 Companion

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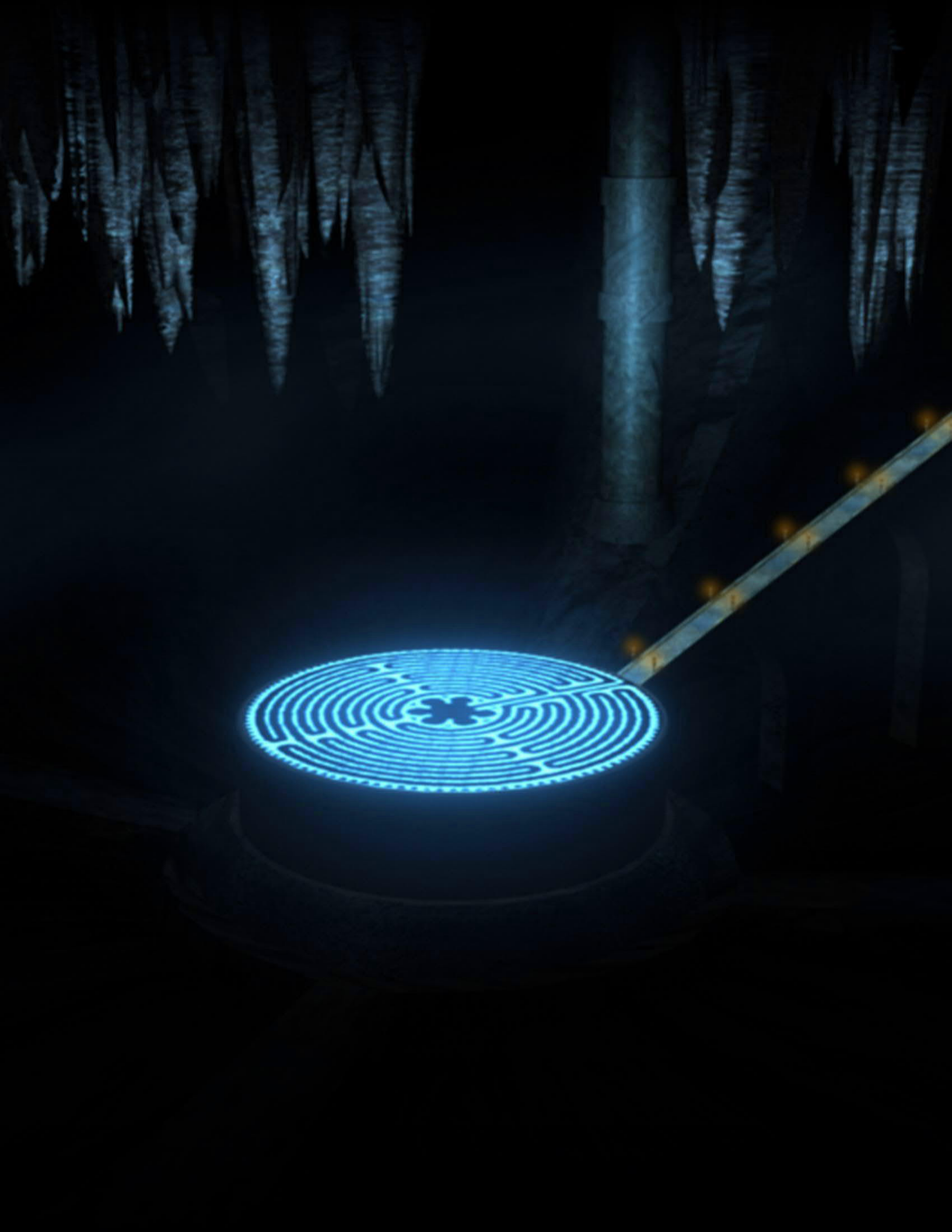
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Curses

Curses in Amber are no trivial matter. While used sparingly, just the potential for such a curse to be laid is cause for many to fear acting against the royal house of Amber, even other members of the family.

Amberite Curse

“Perhaps it was then that I pronounced the curse, or perhaps it had been at the time that the white-hot irons had descended. I don’t remember. But I knew that Eric would never rest easy upon the throne, for the curse of a prince of Amber, pronounced in a fullness of fury, is always potent.”

- Roger Zelazny, *Nine Princes in Amber*

The royal family of Amber is most feared for their ability to pronounce a death curse (see below). Even when not in mortal danger, their ability to shape the world around them gives even an “ordinary” curse great gravitas and weight. Any curse (other than a death curse) can be pronounced in this fashion and will enjoy a heightened effect.

When casting an Amberite Curse, the Royal makes a DC 10 Will save. Should they succeed, that result is then added to the difficulty of the victim’s Will save to avoid the curse. This heightened curse also carries with it double the normal Luck penalty.



Death Curse

“If he was going to pay—whatever the price—for whatever he had done, I could see that he would pay it like a true prince of Amber—as our three dead brothers had done ages ago, I suddenly recalled. He would pay it, mocking them the while, laughing though his mouth was filled with the blood of his body, and as he died he would pronounce an irrevocable curse which would come to pass. I, too, had this power, I suddenly knew, and I would use it if circumstances required its use.”

- Roger Zelazny, *Nine Princes in Amber*

Without exception, the most feared curse in Amber is that which stems from the passing of a member of the royal lineage. Unrelenting and inescapable, there is no save against the curse. “Fortunately,” it requires the Royal to proclaim the curse as they are dying, so such curses are quite rare.

Another exception to the common form of a curse is that this curse may be invoked against an individual or a group. In the case of a group being targeted with the death curse, a DC 30 save is allowed (enacted by the targeted individual with the highest Will save). If the save is successful, the Royal merely bedevils half of the target group (determined randomly or by the judge) while the rest escape the clutches of malevolent intent.

The form taken by the curse is widely variable and might not be immediate. A curse placed against the ruler of the kingdom may cause them to drown in their own blood, or it may lead to an interdimensional invasion of the kingdom. The method and timing are, in part, determined by the form of the curse’s proclamation (at the judge’s discretion).

Magic Items

The Trumps

Created by Dworkin, these are possibly the most potent of Amberite magic items. The Trumps are specially-crafted decks of Tarot cards given to each member of the royal family after they have first walked the pattern. Significantly, the deck's major arcana have been enhanced to reflect members of the royal family as well as Castle Amber. While the cards may safely be used as ordinary Tarot cards, they are imbued with great magical energies, which may be called upon by any who hold the cards (not just those of noble blood). Among the major powers of the Trumps are:

Communication: The simplest of the Trumps' powers: by holding the correct representative card and focusing on the person pictured, a psychic link is opened between the target and the wielder of the Trump, allowing them to communicate and even perceive one another's immediate surroundings. While there are things that may prevent such contact (such as unconsciousness, extreme distance, et al.), if both subjects are willing participants, remote communication is easily established and maintained. So long as both are willing participants, there is no limitation to the length of communication, other than the participant using the Trump must maintain eye contact and concentration upon it. Conversation may be ended by the holder by merely passing one hand across the card (breaking the sightline) or other such acts; a willing participant may simply will the conversation to be at an end in order to sever the connection. Contact with unwilling participants is covered in *combat* (below).

Teleportation: Trumps bearing the physical image of a location allow instantaneous transportation to that location merely by holding the card and concentrating on the Trump. Two individuals in established communication also may avail themselves of this transportive function. If both individuals cooperate on bringing one to the other's location, both must simultaneously succeed in a DC 15 Will save to enact this power. No other action may be taken in that round but, in the event of failure, repeated attempts in successive rounds are allowed. The communicant not holding the Trump may attempt to move through to the location of the card's wielder, although such an effort is difficult. A DC 25 Will save is required to pull oneself through without assistance. Finally, either member of an established communication may attempt to drag the other unwillingly to their location. This requires a DC of 25 modified by the target's Personality modifier. Those observing persons traveling via Trump see the individual suddenly lose all depth as they flatten to two dimensions before vanishing in a prismatic flash.

Combat: Finally, adversaries may engage in combat via Trump communication. Either participant may attempt to clamp down upon the other in a contested battle of wills. Both participants make simultaneous Will saves, comparing the results. If the defender succeeds by 5 or more, they shrug off the assault and may act normally, including severing the connection. If neither participant succeeds by 5 or more, they both remain locked together in psychic combat. Should the attacker succeed by 5 or more, they have clamped down on their opponent, leaving them unable to move or speak. In subsequent rounds, they may either concentrate on holding their opponent (with the target only breaking free should they best the attacker's Will Save by 7) or they may relinquish some control to take other actions (allowing the victim to break free on a successful Will save vs. the attacker's Personality score). Additionally, once control is achieved, other mental and personality-based attacks (including spells) may be brought to bear against the held victim.



Mighty Deeds

While dueling weapons are not the most effective against armored opponents, against those without armor (or in the context of a duel proper) weapons such as the rapier or small sword can be used with terrible efficacy. The following Mighty Deeds of Arms are meant for use only with such weapons, although they may be expanded to other weapons with judge's approval.

Bleeding Wound (Rapier)

Using the razor-fine tip of a rapier with precision, the warrior may open their opponent's flesh, inflicting wounds that slowly drain them of vitality. While pressing one's hand to such a wound slows the flow of blood by half, a full round must be spent staunching any wound inflicting Stamina loss. Bleeding wounds are cumulative.

Deed Die Bleeding Result

- | | |
|----|--|
| 3 | Attacker's strike scratches open a bleeding wound in their opponent's flesh. Target loses 1 additional hit point on the subsequent round before the bleeding stops. |
| 4 | Attacker furrows their opponent's skin, leaving a bleeding wound from which trickles 1 additional hit point of damage for 3 rounds. |
| 5 | Attacker slices into their opponent, carving them open and inflicting a wound, which bleeds for an additional 1d3 damage for 5 rounds. |
| 6 | Attacker opens up a hemorrhaging fissure, slicing deep into flesh and sinew. The victim loses 1d3 points of Stamina per round for 3 rounds. |
| 7+ | Attacker wickedly rends their opponent, leaving a deep wound from which their victim's lifeblood pours. Target bleeds 3 points of Stamina per round for 5 rounds and must make a DC 15 Fort save each round to maintain consciousness. |

Disfiguring Slash (Epée)

While the épée's function for dueling is primarily for duels to touch, or first blood, as a weapon it is still capable of ruinous results. A skilled practitioner of this weapon may leave permanent reminders of their encounter on the flesh of their foe. While many warriors view such scars as a badge of honor and skill (for being able to take such blows and continue), to the uninitiated such scars are disfigurements and are looked upon accordingly in social dealings. The locations of such wounds are generally dictated by the "handedness" of the warrior, with right-handed attackers usually leaving scars on the left side of their target.

Deed Die Disfigurement Result

- | | |
|----|--|
| 3 | Attacker marks an easily-concealed portion of their foe's anatomy, leaving a small (1/4" or less) reminder of their encounter. |
| 4 | Attacker slashes their opponent, tracing an angry line 1d3 inches in length in an area that is most often not concealed (face, hands, or neck) during day-to-day affairs. |
| 5 | Attacker scores an exceptionally painful blow, removing a small fraction of their opponent's ear and permanently reducing the foe's Personality by 1. In addition to the scar, the opponent receives a -1 penalty on their next attack roll. |
| 6 | Attacker traces an angry wound across their target's face, leaving a "dueling" scar from brow to cheekbone, broken only by the eye socket. This scar is visible from 20' away and reduces the victim's Personality score by 3 when dealing with all but warriors. |
| 7+ | Attacker slices through flesh and aqueous humor, opening their opponent's face from scalp to chin and rupturing the eye. The sudden pain forces the victim to drop to the bottom of the initiative order. The lost eye impacts the victim's depth perception and all future missile weapon attacks are made at -1d. The scar permanently reduces the victim's Personality by 5 when dealing with all but warriors. |

Feint

Using a combination of bodily movement, loud noises, and swordplay, the warrior throws his opponent off-balance, reducing the efficacy of their defense.

Deed Die Feint Result

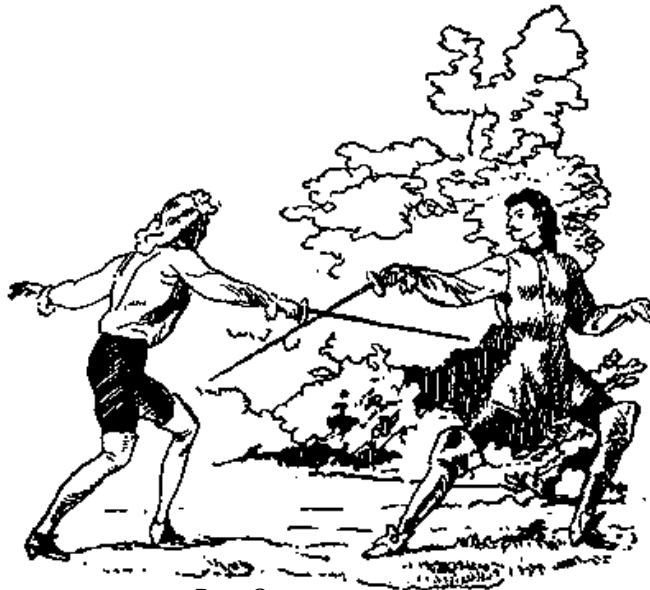
- 3 Attacker draws their opponent out of position, gaining a +1 bonus to the next attack roll against the target.
- 4 The warrior bluffs their foe into dropping their guard and making a dangerous error. The warrior gains +1d on their next strike against this target.
- 5 Target misjudges the warrior's intent and leaves a vital area unprotected. The warrior gains a +1d bonus to attack and damage on their next strike.
- 6 Attacker blindsides the opponent, gaining a free follow-up attack against the victim. This attack uses the same modifiers as the initial attack, save for the deed die (which must be re-rolled) and any Luck originally spent.
- 7+ Defender is wholly confused and leaves themselves wide open to a second attack. Warrior makes a free follow-up attack and rolls a fresh deed die. This result may be gained multiple times, leaving a victim staggered and slashed to ribbons before they can think to react.

Flickering Strike (Small Sword)

The blade of the small sword is often both short and needle-fine, making the blade hard to see in combat situations. Compounding the dangerousness of the blade is its near-feather lightness, which results in attacks faster than the eye can truly follow, allowing for multiple hits. Defense against such attacks is more on level with instinctual level reaction than planned ripostes. These fast (but light) blows can quickly add up, making a master of the small sword a dangerous opponent indeed.

Deed Die Flickering Strike Result

- 3 Their blade dancing through the air, the warrior strikes their opponent an additional 1d3 times, inflicting 1 point of damage with each subsequent hit.
- 4 Warrior strikes their opponent with a flurry of stinging blows to the face and hands. Target suffers an additional 1d3 points of damage, 1 point of Personality damage, and must make a DC 12 Reflex save. Failure results in the victim dropping everything and reflexively clutching at their face.
- 5 In an attack reflective of their mastery of the small sword, the warrior repeatedly nicks and cuts their opponent an additional 1d3+CL times, inflicting 2 points of damage with each subsequent hit.
- 6 The warrior's strikes are so fast as to cause awe and fear in his opponent. Foe must make a DC 15 Will save or be forced to attempt to flee (suffering a -3 penalty to all attack rolls if cornered and forced to defend themselves from the warrior).
- 7+ Warrior strikes opponent with an assault of near-superhuman speed and precision, catching their opponent with 2d3 additional strikes, each inflicting 1 point of damage and a critical hit.



Monsters



Irish Wolfhound

“At that point an enormous dog entered the room—an Irish wolfhound—and it curled up in front of the desk. Another followed and circled the globe twice before lying down.”

- Roger Zelazny, *Nine Princes in Amber*

Taller than a Great Dane, yet built like a greyhound, the Irish Wolfhounds were bred from an ancient line of war hounds as many as 7,000 years ago. These hounds, or *Cú Faoil* (or, more simply, *cú*) were once solely allowed to nobility.

It is believed by some scholars that the *Cú Faoil* are merely the earthly shadow reflection of the *Cú Stoirm*, the storm hounds of Amber (see next page).

Irish Wolfhound: Init +3; Atk bite +2 melee (1d5); AC 14; HD 2d6; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP formidable; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +3; AL N.

Formidable: Irish wolfhounds are massive animals, with full-grown males weighing anywhere from 140-180 lbs. and they can run at speeds upwards of 40 miles per hour. The sight of a pack of wolfhounds in pursuit has often been enough to break the will of their quarry. Intelligent beings fleeing on foot and confronted with the sight of a wolfhound pack (minimum of four hounds) in pursuit must make a DC 14 Will save or immediately change their flight objective from one of escape to one of safety from the hounds (climbing up a tree, for example). A failed roll indicates that the quarry will do anything to avoid the hounds, even surrendering to the owner of the wolfhounds.

Manticora

“I could not believe it. Never in my memory had one been seen this near to Amber. Perhaps twelve feet in length, bearing that terrible parody of a human face on the shoulders of a lion, eagle-like wings folded above its now bloody sides, a still-twitching tail like that of a scorpion, I had glimpsed the manticora once in isles far to the south, a frightful beast that had always held a spot near the top on my unclean list.”

- Roger Zelazny, *Nine Princes in Amber*

Manticora: Init +4; Atk bite +8 melee (1d5) or 2 claws +4 melee (1d7); AC 16; HD 6d8+6; MV 40' or fly 60'; Act 3d20; SP barbed tail, pack hunter; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.



Barbed Tail: Manticoras have long scorpion tails. In combat, as an action, they may lash out with a single tail strike per round at +8 melee (1d14 plus poison). The poison requires a DC 12 Fort save or the target loses 1d5 Stamina with each strike.

Pack Hunter: Unlike its nearest relation, the manticore, the manticora are a race of highly-intelligent and dangerous creatures. The manticora prefer to hunt alone; however, if something has been determined to be interfering with their ability to hunt—or worse, responsible for manticora deaths—the creatures will unite into packs of 11-17 members (1d10+7). For each additional manticora attacking a group, the manticora gains a cumulative +1 to attack and damage rolls.



Storm Hounds

More fearsome than any terrestrial dog are the *Cú Stoirm*, the Storm Hounds of Amber. These massive animals are capable of pursuing automobiles traveling at speeds of 55 mph or more—and doing so successfully. With their powerful jaws, they can tear the bumper from an auto as easily as they rip limbs from bodies. Employed nearly exclusively within the confines of Amber, these beasts do not run wild; rather, they are trained hounds in service to some members of the royal family of Amber.

Storm Hound: Init +5; Atk bite +4 melee (2d8+3); AC 15; HD 4d6; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP pack attack, steel jaws, terrifying; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; AL N.

Pack attack: Rather than striking individually, storm hounds can collectively attack as a pack. Unlike a swarm, they do not forgo their individual hit points and AC and are still treated as separate creatures for defense. The true benefit is in the ferocity of the attacks rendered. Like the hounds themselves, the pack has 2d20 actions. For every five hounds in the pack (rounding down), the pack receives the following bonuses:

- +1d20 action die
- +1d to damage rolls

No more than 10 hounds may attack a human-sized creature, although threats of greater size may be targeted by substantially larger packs.

Steel jaws: The bite strength of the *Cú Stoirm* applies up to 1,000 psi, able to sever human limbs and crush the spines of lesser animals. In addition, their sheer physical strength used in conjunction with their jaws allows them to tear apart larger structures, like automobiles, by the application of group effort.

Terrifying: Storm hounds cause fear in all creatures 2HD or less. All such creatures within 50' immediately attempt to flee, often causing the hounds to give chase (unless ordered not to). Once out of the presence of the hounds, terrified creatures will continue to flee for an additional 1d14 rounds. If restrained and unable to flee, animals panic, while intelligent beings enter a catatonic state.

Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Range	Cost in gp
Epée *††	1d5/1d12	-	10
Rapier *	1d7	-	25
Small Sword *‡	1d5	-	50

*Light weapon. Characters using light weapons roll a d24 for initiative checks.

† This weapon is particularly effective when used with the element of surprise. A thief who succeeds in a backstab attempt with one of these weapons uses the second damage value listed.

‡ The blades of these weapons are exceedingly fragile. In addition to any fumble, they break on an attack roll of 2 or lower (natural or otherwise).

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SANCTUM SECORUM



Coming Soon
Episode #39

Greyfax
Grimwald

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