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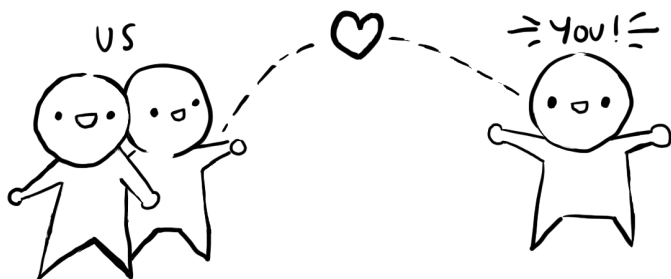
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Silver Swords

A zine for all role playing enthusiasts
by Stronghold Press Games



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Making New Classes is Easy

Nick LS Whelan

Folks make too big a deal about new classes. They're a simple matter of imagining a character with a fun quirk or power, extrapolating some benefits and drawbacks, then filling in the gaps by referring to core classes. If it winds up being too powerful, too weak, or too annoying, you can change it later. Even thoroughly vetted mechanics will play differently with different groups, so you should approach every game like a play test.

Consider the **Hapless Time Traveler**: a person who fell backwards in time from a future that approximates our modern world. The player starts by choosing a modern blue collar job like a forklift driver, hair stylist, or trash collector. Whenever they can convince the referee that an action is within the purview of their anachronistic profession, they have a 5-in-6 chance of success.

I imagine such a person would wrack their brain trying to remember anything that might help them thrive in this primitive time. At each even numbered level they manage to reconstruct enough knowledge to form a useful skill. Roll a d6:

1. **Half Remembered History:**

When the character encounters a place, person, culture, or event significant enough that it may have been recorded in history books, they have a 50/50 chance of remembering some useful tidbit of info. If rolled twice, becomes a 5-in-6 chance.



2. Camp Counselor First Aid Training: Character has a 50/50 chance of restoring on hit die worth of hp to an injured person. Each attempt takes 10 minutes, and cannot be repeated on the same patient until they are injured again. If rolled twice, becomes a 5-in-6 chance.

3. Took a Few Credits in Geology: Gain "Stonelore" as a dwarf. If rolled twice, character recalls the location of a massive gold mine that hasn't been discovered yet.

4. Figured out how to recount "Die Hard" in a way these nerds can understand: Drawing upon a wealth of future stories, art, and music, the character has a 5-in-6 chance to fascinate any crowd that's willing to be fascinated. If rolled twice, success becomes guaranteed.

5. Innoculated: Character realizes they are in generally better health than most folks. Must be their persnickety "hygiene" habits, and the fact they're vaccinated against half the stuff these people die from. Saves versus poison may be rolled twice, take the better result. Also, each time this is rolled the character's max hp is raised by 4.

6. Former Angry Teenager: With a little time, money, and a decent place to buy supplies, the character can make functional grenades which deal 2d6 damage in a 10' area after a successful throw. If rolled twice, the character recalls how to repurpose the same sort of explosive as a timebomb.

Finally, fill in the boring stuff by referencing core classes. The HTT feels a tad on the weak side, so I'll make up for that here. They level by the Thief's experience table, roll saving throws as Clerics, and share their hit dice with the Fighter. Just like that we've created something that sounds fun to play. Once it's on the table we can modify and tweak until everything feels right. Now: what fun quirk or power defines a class you want to make?

Creating Realism

Eric Steep

I'm a Dungeon Master. Most of the time, anyway. I rarely get the opportunity to play as a PC and spend most of my time trying to kill or trick the players. Trying to keep things fresh and engaging is always hard to do at the table, especially when you have players who don't really know what they're doing.

A lot of times, I end up converting my friends into the religion known as Dungeons and Dragons. They always start off with this indifference to the game and a sense of confusion over the freedom that the game creates. A lot of what elevates that is a battle-map. They don't understand the freedom that playing offers you in terms of interacting with NPCs, trying to gather clues to solve a mystery, or just trying to find an inn. Instead they can see pieces on a map, and can understand, "Okay, move and attack."

I started initially DMing using the "theatre of the mind" as it's often called, but had a hard time trying to explain things to a few of my buddies. I ended up sketching the battle out on a piece of scrap paper which quickly got blotchy. I've started to try and draw every area that the players could possibly explore,



but it's something that takes up a lot of my time in terms of preparation. On top of that, I always end up having to redraw maps because the dry erase wipes off, or I ran out of room. I have interlocking tiles of dry erase board, I have a giant battle map. All of these things are good in theory but end up quickly becoming a hassle to organize. Especially when you have a multi-layer tower that the players are ascending.

That brings me to the main point of this article: terrain. I've looked into several different methods of terrain. There are quality premade tiles, like Dwarven Forge. There are silicon molds that you can mix plaster into, like Hirst Arts. Additionally, there are 3D printers that have a plethora of possibilities. With that said, I've looked into each one a bit and here are my pros and cons for them.

With something like Dwarven Forge, you are shelling out some serious cash. When I say serious cash, I mean you're essentially spending, on the low end, one hundred dollars for a single room. While these rooms can have some seriously cool stuff in them, it's hard to keep recycling the same room and having that appeal last after players have seen the room a handful of times already. That said, you can buy whole sets, like the Encounter Area 14: Khri Colony. There, you have a giant underground maze that you could easily recycle for any underground dwelling monster. However, that five hundred dollars is for one themed cave. Do you want a town? There's another five hundred for one town. Do you want a castle? You're looking at a cool thousand.

That said, Dwarven Forge seems to have some of the most quality stuff I've ever seen in terms of terrain. It is all modular and can be mixed and matched. What's nice about the sets is that you can easily blend them together. You can start in a town, enter into the sewer system, and then through a broken part of the sewer into an underground cave. So, while this may run you a ridiculous sum of money, it's one of those permanent investments that will help you down the road. The more pieces of Dwarven Forge you buy, the larger and more complex you can create your campaigns.

When it comes to plaster molds, you're looking moderate initial cost. While some might disagree, I have a lot of factors into this: a vibrating table for your smaller pieces, a spray for the silicon molds, the molds themselves (which can run you fifty bucks per mold), the plaster, paint and paint

brushes, cork board and glue to attach the terrain pieces to, an organizer for all of the things I have previously mentioned. So if you want to run a traditional cavern type dungeon, you could easily end up spending over one hundred dollars for the floor and wall molds. While this doesn't seem like a lot, you're also forgetting all of the time and work that you have to put into making these molds. Some of the videos I have seen have recommended you letting them cool for a day or two, which means you have these plaster molds just on wait.

It might seem like I'm knocking the plaster molds, it does have a lot of upsides. For one, you only really have to buy one or two fifty dollar molds in order to create a whole new theme for your session. The molds that they have over at Hirst Arts include paraphernalia for your dungeons, from chests to piles of gold and crates. You can really have some creative freedoms with Hirst Arts, as well as developing a new hobby for your other hobby. There's always something about finishing something by hand that makes you feel proud.

Finally we come to 3D printing. With 3D printing, you have the obviously high initial cost. With 3D printing, you have the freedom to print almost anything, as long as you were willing to dish out enough cash for a higher end 3D printer. You do have the unfortunate issue of timing to worry about, so while you spent five hundred dollars on a 3D printer capable of also producing minis, you're waiting hours for them to complete. Not to mention the steep learning curve. There is a lot that comes with learning how to 3D print. So much that I could only barely tap a toe into the water before I had to retreat ungracefully. Between plaster and resin, tip sizes, cleaning, assembling, loading up programs to run your software and connecting it to your printer. If it sounds like I don't know what I'm talking about, it's because I don't. I spent about three days trying to understand where to start, let alone getting to the point where I could print terrain that I wouldn't be embarrassed

about. I say all of this, and caveat with: I troubleshoot and repair missile systems. I still don't understand where to start with 3D printing.

All-in-all, there are several factors. One of which is money, another is time, and the last is learning curve. With buying prebuilt terrain like Dwarven Forge, you're always going to have that quality assurance covered. You know that if there are any issues, you can always contact them



and let them know and have faith that they will correct it. Additionally, you can get them painted or unpainted (to save some money), so the cost can really vary. The price is highest to continue building your campaigns, but you always have that modular build style you can use to change things around. There is also no learning curve. You just buy them and you're done.

With silicon molds and plaster, you have a slightly higher initial pay-in. However, I believe that the mold and plaster method is the most time consuming.

You will have to paint all of your plaster molds. Some people have difficulty taking out some of the pieces, so there is always the issue of breakage. However, since plaster is so cheap and you can just keep producing the pieces yourself, you don't really have much of a complaint if one of your terrain pieces break. You have the freedom to buy a new fifty-dollar mold and add an entirely new slew to your

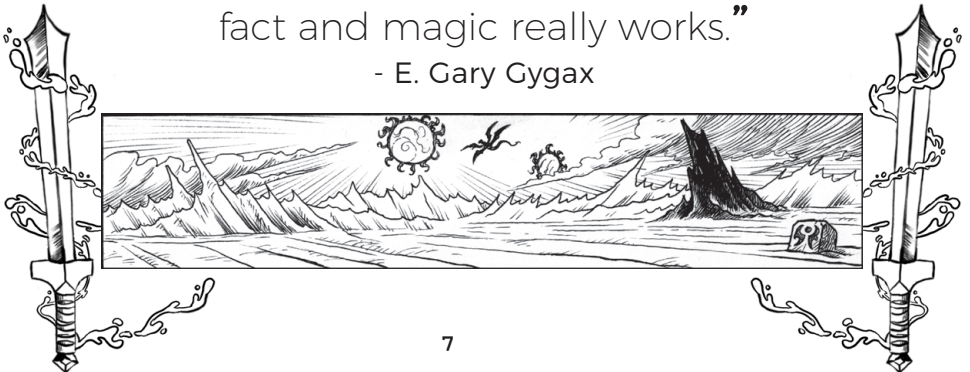
campaigns, plus you have the feeling of creating your terrain by hand. There is, of course, a learning curve with plaster molds. A lot of people talk about how it's more of an experience thing as it goes on, so it's something to keep in mind.

Finally, we have 3D printing. The subject I'm least familiar with because it seems the most daunting. It has the highest buy-in in order to actually start. You also have the issue of time, since some 3D printers can take a while in order to produce one piece. Finally, the learning curve is intimidating. However, I have heard of a lot of success stories with 3D printing your own terrain. It can be extremely cheap, around forty-two cents per terrain piece. Additionally, you can produce anything you can get a plan for. That means infinite possibilities for customization. If you're willing to handle that learning curve, then I think you can get the most bang for your buck with this method. You'll also have to paint your pieces, so don't forget about that. It could be neat to present your players with their very own custom-made 3D printed figures though.

I hope my rough analysis through the different methods of terrain building have helped any of my fellow DMs out there. I know it's something for me that I always want to try and include into my game. I spent a lot of time exploring the different possibilities and wanted to at least give my comrades the ideas that they might not know about completely.

“Enjoy a ‘world’ where the fantastic is fact and magic really works.”

- E. Gary Gygax



Bodings & Echoes



Olle Skogren

Low level magic users have precious few resources. The decision to cast a spell often prompts retreat as the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of the party has been spent. Bodings and echoes are minor versions of normal spells which alleviate this problem.

Bodings are cast from memorized spells, they represent surplus magic spilling from the magic user's mind or fragments carefully shaved off the spell. Bodings are declared and cast just like their parent spell, but they don't wipe that spell from memory and may be cast any number of times as long as the parent spell remains memorized.

Echoes are cast from spells cast earlier in the day. They fill up empty spell slots of the same spell level. Echoes are cleared from spell slots after 8 hours of rest. A single spell can echo multiple times. A magic user who cast Sleep and Shield could later cast Echo of Sleep twice as there are two empty 1st level spell slots to fill in with the echo.

A campaign can allow either bodings or echoes or both (my current campaign features bodings only). They encourage different behaviours and evoke different aesthetics. Another option is to allow only certain spells to have a boding or echo as a way to empower and differentiate them.

Below is a table for common 1st level spells. Duration is the same as for the parent spell.

Using these as inspiration coming up with effects for the higher level spells should be easy, though at that point the issue of limited resources has been solved.



<p>Charm Person</p>	
<p>Bodrig: An otherworldly breeze plays in the magic user's hair and his eyes sparkle like gems. He has +1 to reaction rolls with creatures that favor magic and -1 with those that shun it.</p>	<p>Echo: The magic user speaks of a shared memory and if the target fails a saving throw versus spells the memory will become fond or terrifying according to the framing of the magic user.</p>
<p>Detect Magic</p>	
<p>Bodrig: The magic user can detect magic with his bare hands if he handles an object or creature for 10 minutes. Magic tingles subtly.</p>	<p>Echo: Magic touched by the magic user becomes visible and obvious to all watching for 1 round.</p>
<p>Floating Disc</p>	
<p>Bodrig: The magic user can have a single goblet levitate and follow him.</p>	<p>Echo: The magic user conjures an invisible disc of force which he may hurl as a thrown weapon dealing 1d6 damage with +2 to hit. Counts as a javelin for purpose of range. It shatters on impact.</p>
<p>Hold Portal</p>	
<p>Bodrig: The portal is magically sealed as long as the magic user touches it with hand or staff.</p>	<p>Echo: A stuck or shut door swings open with great force dealing 2d6 damage to creatures hit by it.</p>
<p>Light</p>	
<p>Bodrig: The magic user's eyes glow bright providing enough light to read by but not enough to light a room.</p>	<p>Echo: A flash of light dazzles creatures facing a particular point unless they save versus spells or stand further than 30' from it. Dazzled creatures have -2 to hit for 1 turn.</p>
<p>Magic Missile</p>	
<p>Bodrig: A magic dart strikes unerringly up to 60' away and dealing 1 point of damage.</p>	<p>Echo: The magic user conjures a dart+1 which evaporates at the end of the day.</p>

Protection from Evil	
Bodding: Same effect as parent spell but only the magic user benefits from it and only as long as he is stationary.	Echo: A pulse radiates from the magic user once, prompting evil creatures to roll for morale. Evil creatures which normally don't roll morale do as if they were normal men.
Read Magic	
Bodding: The magic user gains the ability to write in a cipher incomprehensible to anyone but another who cast Read Magic (or a 4th level thief).	Echo: Magic touched by the magic user becomes visible and obvious to all watching for 1 round.
Magic Mouth	
Bodding: The magic user's voice carries for half a mile. This prompts morale rolls from normal animals.	Echo: The eyes of a statue, doll or painting are enchanted so that when they see something according to the magic user's specification they close and remain so. The eyes have 60' of infravision. Enchanted eyes give creatures the creeps.
Shield	
Bodding: An invisible shield is summoned in the hand of the magic user. It improves AC by 1 point and requires the use of the hand just like a normal shield. It is not possible to combine with the parent spell.	Echo: The magic user conjures an invisible and stationary shield of force which acts as partial cover for one person, granting two points of AC bonus. Any touch which is not an attack dispels the shield.
Light	
Bodding: The magic user's eyes glow bright providing enough light to read by but not enough to light a room.	Echo: A flash of light dazzles creatures facing a particular point unless they save versus spells or stand further than 30' from it. Dazzled creatures have -2 to hit for 1 turn.
Ventriloquism	
Bodding: The magic user's voice emanates from a puppet, bag or other object held by him as long as it has an opening or fold to act as mouth.	Echo: The magic user's voice echoes once in the distance.



Flexibility in Gameplay

Larry Hamilton

When you run an RPG, your world comes alive when the players buy in and the game master goes along with how the players respond to the happenings in their world.

It is all too tempting to make a detailed plot of how you want the story to go. That is a way to frustrate and alienate players. Rather than force your preconceived notions of what the story is or should be, let the events revealed in play via role play as informed by the dice draw forth the story in the cooperative back and forth between players and GM.

If the players latch onto an idea of what they think is fun or cool, let them have that moment. Very little effort on your part is required to make those ideas into a little story arc that makes a town or other location more real. In my home

campaign, the players managed to kill a minotaur and removed the head and brought it back to town. Then they asked, "Is there a taxidermist in town?" Now, I had never had that thought even enter my mind.



Rather than say, "No." and squash their fun, I said, "Yes." It was spur of the moment and I just went with the first thing that entered my mind. They find the taxidermist and he sets a high price, and they want this done so badly, they have no issue having the head taxidermied and mounted on a plaque. Meanwhile, while they wait, they hire a carpenter to build a wall behind the seat of their

wagon to mount this head to intimidate their enemies. Whenever they checked on the progress of the head, they find large crowds who the taxidermist is charging to watch him work.

Just by saying, "Yes," and putting a few moments thought into it, I have a new NPC in town who is now a go to whenever the players have another head of a creature to mount. Later they fought a group of ogres and took the largest head back and had it mounted and put

it on the wall on the wagon next to the minotaur. Lesser creatures avoided them, and only the clueless or very fearsome creatures ignored the message

these heads conveyed. Sometime later, they encountered a troll.

Being new players they had no idea

what it was. But it hit hard and was big. They made it to their wagon and fled, peppering it with arrows as it followed. They asked a few times, just how many hit points this thing had. They had rarely encountered something this tough. Finally they were in sight of the town walls and the defensive weapons of the town finally managed to stop it. One character hopped down to take its head as a new trophy. It was only because they were approached by the town guard who knew what it was that they didn't end up fighting the troll again. By saying "Yes," the players were looking for things to make into trophies. It encouraged them to take risks they wouldn't normally take. It made the loss of a potential trophy that much more frustrating because of all the events leading up to the troll. None of them were planned, other than each creature was part of an adventure hook or random encounter. It was how the players interpreted those events and wove that interpretation into the shared story of the game. Such things are powerful and become the stories players and GM will tell around the table, "Remember that time...."



The Hit Point Problem

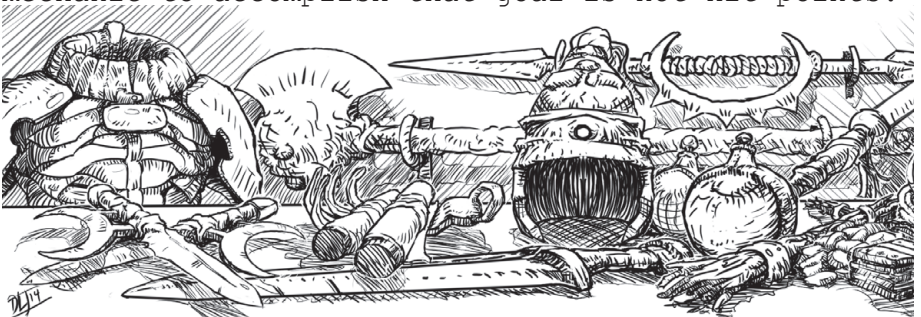
Jacob Bush

Combat has always been an integral part of the role-playing games we know and love. From the beginning, even the pre-history of fantasy tabletop, combat has been the primary focus. The games we play today are descended from wargames, and the literature from which the games were drawn revolved around the destruction and mayhem men and magic could create.

Over the years, people have critiqued the classic combat systems for many of their perceived flaws, the strangeness of hit points being paramount among them. Hit points do not represent what we imagine getting beaten to death would feel like, and the absurd levels of toughness high-level characters can reach breaks immersion for some.

It seems that people have come to the realization that these are not problems with hit points. They are preferences of play. The usual alternatives to hit points, however, have often been spurned and their problems ignored and left uncorrected.

Of course, many referees and players think of hit points as a character's mojo, stamina, or luck. When I play games with hit point systems, this is what I do, and it works great. However, many gamers (even in the OSR) have an itch for a different, more brutal system that makes injury, gore, and laceration concrete in the mechanics. The best mechanic to accomplish that goal is not hit points.



It is wounds. The average wound system works something like this:

You have a hit point total, and that total is divided into pools. Whenever a pool of hit points is lost, your character is considered to have taken a wound, and they suffer some negative effect.

This system solves one problem that people have with the hit point system in that it makes your character less capable the more injured they are. However, it doesn't solve the problems that are more significant.

The standard wound system does not address the un-realism of hit points that is set out to correct. You can still have characters with massive pools of hit points that can take blow after blow without bowing out, and you still have the issues of damage's representation being a granular countdown and not a modular one like many people imagine it should be.

The biggest problem with the standard wound system is the death spiral. Though many find it realistic, being more likely to die the further you get into the thick of things makes combat dreadful and discourages the kind of play that the classic games were meant to facilitate.

Hit points can grow so high and are so forgiving compared to the dangers of the real world because they encourage a reckless style of play. Creating a wound system that contradicts that heroic ethos will inevitably be rejected by the system in which it is utilized. However, the ethos upon which hit points are built can be improved upon with a risk/reward mechanic that requires richer player strategy than the helmet and pads that hit points provide.

An effective wound system - one that facilitates brutal combat, risk/reward decisions, and realistic toughness - requires a different approach.

Wounds, Grit, Adrenaline, and Injuries

How many wounds can my character take? This is the first question we must answer when we apply this system. Depending on the game we are attaching this to, the terms may vary, but a wound limit needs to be based on something like a constitution score or level. In a truly deadly game, you have wounds equal to your constitution score divided by 6. In an average game, you have a wound limit equal to your level, but who doesn't love deadly? When you reach your wound limit, you die.

How does damage work? This is the next thing we have to sort out. How do I know if my 4 damage causes my opponent to be wounded? Instead of subtracting that damage from their hit points, use it as a DC for a constitution check, fortitude save, etc. or add it to their roll if you are using roll-under. If they fail, they gain a wound and an adrenaline point. If they succeed, they lose grit points equal to the damage.

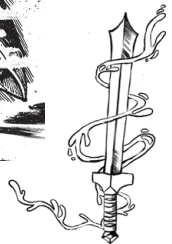
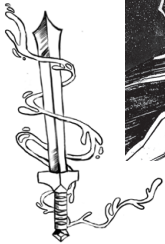
What are grit points? These are points that actually represent stamina like hit points are supposed to.

Let fighters roll 3d6 for grit at the beginning of each combat. Let specialists roll 2d6 and magic-users roll 1d6. You can spend them to modify your rolls, take additional actions etc. just as your character would choose to go just past their limits to get the upper hand, and you lose all of them at the end of combat.

What are adrenaline points? At the end of each round, you gain grit points equal to your adrenaline points - the opposite of a death spiral! When combat ends, you lose your adrenaline points and gain that number of injuries from your referee's favorite injury table. While you are in the fight, you don't notice the cuts, breaks, and tears - in fact, they make you fight harder - but when the fight is over... that's gonna hurt in the morning.

So you've got 4 new mechanics to replace hit points:

1. Wounds: CON/6, or 1 per level.
2. Grit: 3d6/2d6/1d6 for fighters/specialists/magic-users.
3. Adrenaline: Gain one per wound. Gain that many grit points at the beginning of each round.
4. Injuries: Pay for your brash fighting when you settle down after the fight.



Chase Rules

Luther Gutekunst

The Baron calls for a hunt. The Thorned Demon crawls over the battlements and runs off, leaving havoc behind it. The Lich descends into the catacombs, leaving its minions behind. The party gives chase. You look down at your notes, and sigh. You don't have a system for this.

It seems like you should, but despite the popularity of street chase rules, longer hunts are often compressed into a few rolls, even though a longer hunt could make for a session of content or more, with little to no preparation. To make it easier, this hunt system works off of many of the same rules as hexcrawls, so it can be quickly tossed into a preexisting game.

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Chases

While chasing a monster, it takes up one hex on a hex-map, as do the PCs. If the PCs are searching aimlessly, the PC with the highest Wisdom makes a Wisdom check: on a success, they've managed to find the trail where the monster was. On a success, roll 1d6 and add the creature's Simulated Speed. The creature is that many hexes away in a random direction.

- While the PCs are on the trail, they have advantage on the Wisdom check to find the next part of the trail: if they fail, the monster flees 1d2 hexes away from the group.
- If the players spend time actually exploring a hex, the monster moves 1d4 hexes further away.
- If the players wait for the monster to appear, roll 1d20. If you roll a 20, the monster eventually appears. If the players are waiting somewhere that matches the monster's Interests, you roll a 1d4. On a 4, the monster appears.
- If the PCs and monster are in the same hex, a fight begins.

Monsters

Ivory Strider

The Ivory Strider is a tall, 3-legged construct of shining white metal, stalking through the trees in the night. In some ancient era, it was built to scan and

capture fauna and flora for study: it continues even now, with none of its creators left to report to.

During the day, it crawls up hills and mountains in order to get closer to the sun. When it gets as high up as it can, a flower of blue glass panels opens atop it, and it sits silently until sunset.

HP: 50

AC: 13 (ascending) / 7 (descending)

Simulated Speed: 2 at night, 0 during the day.

- High Wisdom/Perception
- Immune to Poison & Charm
- Agile: The Ivory Strider has no penalties from moving over difficult terrain (mountains, bogs, thick forests).
- Preprogrammed Panic Response: When the Ivory Strider is brought below 25 HP, it releases the creatures it captured (roll a random encounter) and runs. When caught again, it uses the Phase 2 moveset instead of Phase 1.
- Interests: The tallest point on the map & especially strange creatures.

Attacks

Phase 1

2 actions per round

Kick (+2 to hit, 1d6 damage)

Capture (1st round shines a light on the target, 2nd round lunges for it. On a hit, target is grabbed and dragged into the Strider's stasis pods: plastic sacks that quickly fill with a hard gel. The sacks have an AC of 0/20 from the inside, but 10 HP. After 3 rounds, they are completely filled, and whatever was inside is trapped.)

Heat Ray (2/day, -1 to hit, 1d8 damage)

Phase 2

2 actions per round

Flashbulb (CON save or be blinded)

Multiattack (2 attacks at +2 to hit, 1d6 damage)

Capture (1st round shines a light on the target, 2nd round lunges for it. On a hit, target is grabbed and dragged into the Strider's stasis pods: plastic sacks that quickly fill with a hard gel. The sacks have an AC of 0/20 from the inside, but 15 HP. After 3 rounds, they are completely filled, and whatever was inside is trapped.)

Angel of Maws

The Angel of Maws is an ungodly abomination, a castoff from some long-dead pantheon. It manifests as an infinite abyss of teeth, held up by bat-like thin wings.

It sounds like a rock in a garbage disposal, except the rock is screaming and the garbage disposal is screaming and you feel like a bad person now. It wants its lost gods to be worshipped again, for its heathen celebrations to begin, for its living temples to be regrown from dead flesh. Its song slowly corrupts people: these acolytes are kept by the Angel, who drains them to protect itself.

Rumors abound of the Archangels of Maws: titanic horrors that possess entire towns, tear apart churches, and come ever-closer to raising their dead gods.

HP: 35
AC: 15 / 5
Simulated Speed: 3

- High Dexterity, Low Intelligence
- Acolytes: The Angel of Maws has 6 Acolytes (AC 10/9, HP 1, immobile) knelt in prayer towards it. When

any Acolytes are alive, the Angel of Maws cannot be damaged. When an Acolyte is killed, the Angel immediately takes a turn. When 3 of the acolytes are killed, they begin to fly wildly across the battlefield, crashing into the PCs and making bite attacks (1d4 damage) before flying away. When all 6 Acolytes are killed, the Angel begins to take 2 actions per round.

- Winged: The Angel of Maws can fly, but it must return to the ground to make a Gnaw attack.
- Song of the Maw: Each round, everyone fighting the Angel of Maws must make a Wisdom check or lose 1d2 Intelligence. If this effect brings a character to 0 Intelligence, they are possessed by the Angel of Maws until the Angel is killed.
- Interests: Churches, clerics, & paladins

Attacks

Gnaw (+1 to hit, 1d6+1 damage)

Abyss of Teeth (20' area becomes a field of points and blades. Everyone within the area takes 1d6 damage per round.)

Perfected Fangs (The next Gnaw attack has +2 to hit and deals 1d6+1 damage, exploding on a roll of 6).

Skin Wyrms

Skin Wyrms are large, scaleless dragons most often found in thick forests, where they can hide from the sun. They rarely attack villages and settlements, but are threats to hunters that go too far from home. Skin Wyrms can be appeased (or at least distracted) with shining things, even if they're worthless. They bash them together into wide plates used in courtship.

As a defense mechanism, the Skin Wyrms' skin grows far larger than the rest of its body. If it's attacked, it molts, losing its skin and flying into the air while bleeding continually.

Phase 1

HP: 40

AC 10/9

**Simulated Speed: 1-2
to Initiative**

Phase 2

HP: 20

AC: 14/6

Simulated Speed: 3

- High Strength, Low Constitution
- Caustic: Successful melee attacks against the Skin Wyrms deal 1d4 damage to the attacker.
- Hemophilia: After being damaged, the Skin Wyrms lose 1 HP per turn until it can spend an action covering its wounds.
- Phase 2 Flight: During Phase 2, the Skin Wyrms begin to fly.
- Interests: Shiny things, dark places

Attacks

Phase 1

Bite (1d6+2 damage)

Crush (-2 to hit, 1d10 damage)

Thrash (1d6 damage to everyone in melee with the Skin Wyrms)

Charge (The Skin Wyrms spend 1 round standing up. The next round, it barrels forwards, dealing 2d8 damage on a hit.)

Acid Breath (The Skin Wyrms spend 1 round standing up. The next round, it regurgitates a waterfall of its acidic blood, creating an

area with a 30 foot radius that deals 2d4 damage per round to everything else inside it. 1/day.)

Phase 2

Bite (1d6+2 damage)

Grab (Grabs PC and flies away with it. Tries to drop the PC next turn for 2d10 damage. Strength check to hold on.)

Blood Haze (1d4 damage in a 30 foot radius. The Skin Wyrms can spend an action to increase the distance to a 60 foot radius.)

Spaceship Tables

Jake Butcher

I've long struggled with incorporating Science Fiction tropes into my own Fantasy games without having those ideas feel out of place. Through my own experimentation and experience, I've come up with these two random d6 tables for adding spaceships to your Fantasy or Space-Fantasy world. These tables are meant to provide ways for players to explore and interact with space, aliens, and other planets, without disrupting the cohesion of the world you've made for your players. These spaceships are powered by magical sources and they don't necessarily need to look like products of science or engineering, but rather, can also look like the results of strange cosmic magic.

1d6 Fantasy Spaceships

1. Old Rusted Derelict

Orb: This once-powerful vessel is capable of one final leap across the galaxy, but it will not be able to bring you back.

2. Translucent Squid: The head of this creature is a permeable membrane in which a small number of pilots can submerge in order to fly quickly between planets.

3. Space Lobster of

Unknownable Age: For aeons this lobster has wandered the galaxy, only growing larger. It's segmented shell is marked by old

1d6 Fuel Sources

1. Blood spilled in battle:

The ship's floor-plan includes a gladiator ring directed above the hungry engine.

2. The ship itself is a beast, and it devours asteroids like a whale eats krill.

3. Gold.



craters and ecosystems blossoming up between the cracks.

4. Eelship: These slithering beasts are outfitted with greenhouse-like glass structures on their backs, inside of which feuding goblin pirate crews live.

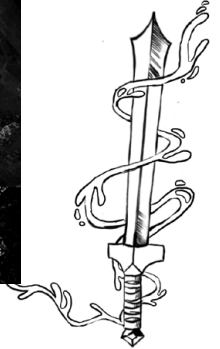
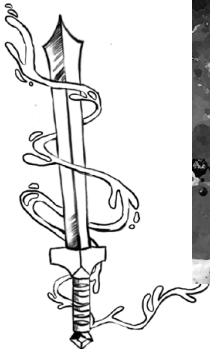
5. Comet-ship: transporting a cryogenically frozen woman to an incredibly distant destination.

6. The Skull of a Dead Star, still saturated with divine energy, acts as a capital ship for the waning order of cultists who worship it.

4. Death Flowers: A mind-altering purple flower has completely overtaken the planet now known as the Violet Deadworld. Prolonged exposure turns living organisms into flower-eating Viophagi who spread the infection.

5. Draining the power of a Magic User (HD 8 or more). Ships of this nature will capture powerful wizards or liches and keep them chained to their engines, powerless, for decades or centuries.

6. Ambient life-energy: The ship is overgrown with flowering plants and beasts, harboring an entire ecosystem.



How to Introduce Kids to RPG's

Jon Spencer

Are you a parent that wants to share the joys of role-playing games with your kids? Maybe you're somebody who regularly works with children, like I do, and want to promote problem-solving skills, focus, and creativity. However, it can be difficult to know where to start. Worry not! Today, I'll be sharing the process and games that I use to get kids ready to role-play and have fun doing it.


Think of playing games of this nature like reading a book, but instead of reading words off a page, you and the kids will be creating the story together in a collaborative manner. You will serve as the narrator, while they act as characters within the story itself. I mentioned some benefits previously, but here are a few more your children will gain by participating in this hobby:

- Public speaking
- Social skills
- Teamwork
- Active listening
- Exploring consequences in a safe environment
- And a whole host of other excellent benefits that will help your child in their day-to-day lives.


The first thing you need to do is find a system that will engage your child or the children you will be playing the game with. Personally, I use Hero Kids, a system that is ideal for children as young as 4 years old up to 10 years of age in a typical fantasy setting not unlike that of D&D (just more youth-friendly). Of course, other systems may work, especially with older kids, but I'm going to focus on Hero Kids specifically.

Why Hero Kids? The first big reason is that it is easy to set up and run. The game is





created for those of you who lead a busy life and don't want to memorize a whole series of novels, have to juggle a bunch of complicated rules, and keep the story (as well as the kids) focused. This system offers plenty of tools to keep the game as complex or as simple as it needs to be for your kids. Want to focus on role-playing? You can do that. Want to raid a dungeon and beat up the bad guys? No Problem. Don't have time to write a whole adventure yourself? Don't worry! The game has








HERO KIDS



Hunter: _____




Ranged Attack: Hairwhip Strike
Ranged attack at a target up to 6 squares away (1 fewer dice against adjacent targets).

Special Action: Lasso Hair
Ranged attack at a target up to 6 squares away (but not adjacent); if the attack hits the target takes no damage but is pulled to an empty square closer to you.

Bonus Ability: Tangled
When defending melee attacks, you gain 1 extra die to your armor pool.

Inventory and Skills



plenty of options to choose from and even comes with one to get you started, plus most kids won't mind playing them over again!

Alright, so you are armed with your system and know what kind of content will be both appropriate and engaging for your group. What now? Here's the method I employ to fire up the kids to play as well as quickly teaching them the rules.

You'll need to manage expectations. Briefly explain what the game is, consider using my example of a collaborative story but with some rules if you'd like. Emphasize that the kids are the heroes of the story. Explain that they may

fail, that not everything will go their way all of the time, but sometimes that's part of the fun because they have chances to overcome those obstacles.

What I do next is take all of the roles they can choose from and tell them to think of two characters they like. After that, I have them point to the one they enjoy the most. If two kids are interested in the same concept, I then ask them what their second choice was. Most kids will resolve this issue themselves without any additional prompting from that point but offer guidance as necessary.

Next, have the kids start coloring their characters. Go to each child individually and discuss what the symbols mean, name the character, and answer any general questions. If you have older kids at the table, they can assist you with this task in a leadership/helper position should you decide to appoint them.



Lastly, have the kids then tell you what rules they think everybody needs to follow at the table. Some examples include:

- Not interrupting while others are talking
- Not touching other people's characters
- Not making fun of other kids at the table
- Not being mean to each other in the game

And have them all sign a "social contract" that you write together. Have it on the table every time you play and remind them of the rules that everybody agreed on together. Then you will be ready to play!

However, there are some significant things to keep in mind while playing:

- Kids can only handle about an hour of play compared to adults who can go much longer.
- Your game won't be 100% focused, allow for some wiggle time.
- On the same token, keep things moving. Allow the kids to think, but always guide things forward toward the goal.
- Don't just ask kids, "What do you do?" Offer choices and guidance. Instead, try, "Would you like to explore the cave or continue down the path?" as an example.
- Children are tactile, they need to touch stuff! Have interactive puzzles, minis for them to move around, and offer a physical reward for winning the adventure (I use chocolate coins stored in a metal treasure chest as "payment", or we eat some ice cream at the tavern). The game suggests even having health represented by candies. The point is, get creative here. Sure, it's extra work, but it will make the experience better for everybody and way more memorable.
- Have, "special stuff" for each kid. This may seem like bad advice that will lead to fighting, but it won't. For my group, I bought multi-colored dice and let each kid take their favorite colors. These are their dice.
- Make sure each child gets fair treatment and an equal chance in the spotlight. This is extra true if you are playing with kids that aren't just your own. Like adults, kids don't like feeling like they aren't important!

Unfortunately, that's all the space I have in this issue, but I know that this is enough to get you started. If we get a second print, let us know how your games go and any advice you have so we can feature it here!

-JS

Looking Back at the Thawing Kingdom

Monsieur Le Battlier

"At long last, when the throne room was so crowded with frozen wives that terrified servants had started to stack them for optimal spatial management, King Iceheart's love-deprived heart hurt so much that in a fit of mad desperation and contempt for all the little loving people, he cast a spell that banned the sun from his kingdom for five hundred years. Without the light of the sun the lands were cast in thick ice, and everyone was frozen solid. It was a still picture of the precise moment that King Iceheart cast his darkest spell, which killed him as it turned his heart to ice. It was a final defeat for the king as he gave in to his moniker.

For five hundred years, not a soul stirred. Everything was cold, dark, and silent.

Until the Frozen Kingdom, became the Thawing Kingdom."

A few months ago, orc-o-fluorescent sword in hand, I followed a cruel master and his goblin into the temple of the Old School Renaissance movement. Alas, it was an ambush, a trap of en-dearment, because I did not expect to love the OSR as much as I did. It's the feywild of the RPG planes, full of high strangeness, a lot of which can and will kill you or drive you mad. The concentration of unorthodox thinkers and novel ideas is higher in this OSR crowd than I have seen in any other RPG community. Adieu pre-chewed fantasyland, maze-shaped shackles of bloated rules. Bienvenue absurd and wondrous world, rules with a simple and deadly grace.

While working in that feyish cavern, after designing rules and classes, I had the realisation (probably influenced by the cave's bizarre fungus) that that wasn't really what I wanted to do. So, I made a setting. I made the Thawing Kingdom.

The Thawing Kingdom is a land waterlogged by the flood which the ice's melting has caused, creating a cold and wet country of marshes, rivers, fens, lakes, and trench foot. Abandoned castles, flooded or submerged ruins, and in the land's middle, within the greatest remaining glacier, the spires of the King's castle Vengenheim.

It's a harsh place, and the thawed people return to their home with a snow-covered memory: they don't remember who they were before, only gaining insight into the past by the things unfrozen around them. Some of them haven't even thawed properly. There are oracles in the remaining ice, people whose head has been unfrozen but not their body, who can only think and speak, so they become frostbitten philosophers by necessity. And there is the reverse. The dreaded half-thawed, rime-covered undead with brains still cast in the frost, shambling through wood and bog looking for a fire to thaw them. It cannot, nothing can. But they seek it nonetheless, as if a moth were twice the size of a lamp, and was ready to kill whatever was around its much craved light source.

The Thawing Kingdom is a setting that, I hope, reinforces many themes of the original dungeoneering and adventuring sensibilities, but subverts their heart from a loot-grabbing assumption of greed to a search for means to survive, for the party themselves and perhaps for their community. I also hope to provide a setting of dark fantasy that doesn't rely on war, tension of the races (because we all know Elves aren't to be trusted, dammit!) or religious inquisition to distinguish itself as dark. Rather, I've suffused it as well I can with spiritual loss, abandon, harsh conditions and, both literal and thematic, cold. That way, instead of the dark fantasy aspect feeding brooding, torment and distrust, I aspire to in-spire comradery between the humans of the world. I seek out the wistfulness of interacting with NPCs in games like Dark Souls, where the world

is a looming, painful place, but you can find solace in some, any, company. The happy-sad feeling of friendship with strangers, because they're all you have. The sound of Majula's Theme from Dark Souls II. After all, everyone's favourite computer says:

"Sometimes, life is scary and dark. That is why we must find the light."

I also do not divulge, or elaborate on, every single aspect of the Thawing Kingdom. I don't give in-depth details on factions or history, nor do I ever intend to provide any map, only a deck of notable locations to use in adventures (this will be coming soon to my blog, the final post about the Thawing Kingdom). My reasoning for this is that it both makes the setting more accessible, and that it lets it retain its sense of mystery. I think this is a very important thing about designing a setting: that it has a theme, a feeling, a terroir (credit to Jeff VanderMeer for introducing me to this quintessential word), not that it is complete, detailed or in-depth. The dungeon masters that pick up your setting can easily fill in the blanks you leave, which makes their version of the setting unique. It is instinctive for many, I think, to want to flesh out every aspect of this world we as its creators are so endeared to. Yet in our eagerness we may kill what we love.

If I have any message related to the creation of a setting it is this: it is much more important to give your setting character, than to give it depth. Let people play with your world, let people feel rather than know your setting. That's the best balance of keeping whatever your readers create for your setting within your intended vision, and accepting your authorial death at the hands of the people's own creativity.

Getting the Most out of Encounters

Olobosk

Encounter tables are a hallmark of D&D. However, for a long while, I didn't really... get them. They seemed rudimentary to me. Like an excuse to roll a die. Surely a better GM would instead simply pick intelligently from a list. I felt like I was kind of delegating my work to randomness, not utilizing it. A player could roll a dice, read the stat block and run a combat for every 10 mins in a dungeon, or every 6 hours travel, and get the same experience.

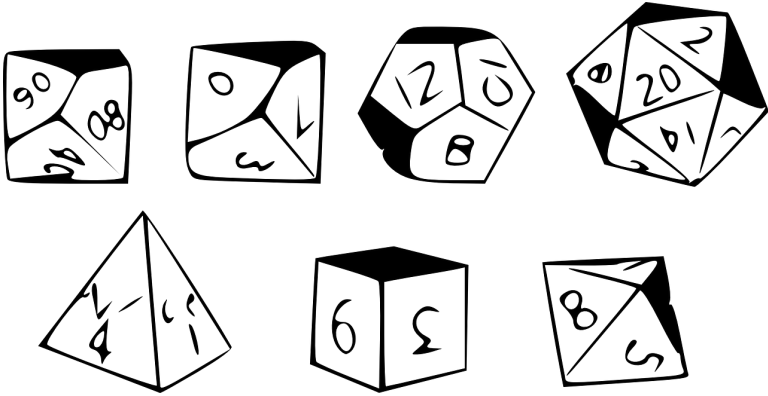
Since then I have read and run some incredible supplements that really squeeze their random encounter tables of all the juicy content they're worth. Now I feel like I get them, and I even have some of my own ideas as to how you can utilise even the most boring tables to inspire variety your own games.

So let's think about what a random encounter table conveys. Well firstly, it defines and limits the kinds of monsters the players will encounter. This may sound obvious, but it informs you, the Game Master, as to what the adventuring landscape is like. Wandering about the local area represented by this table, are those specific creatures, and that can tell you a lot. As a GM, we can use this information to start to think about what kind of ecosystem this might result in.

Taking that prompt literally, if this was a food chain, what is on top? Which creatures are predators and which are prey? How might they interact with each other? How about with the environment? Are there non-hostile characters/creatures also in the area? If so, how might they encounter creatures on this table? If it's a dungeon, how do they interact with the architecture, the traps, the puzzles, etc?

At this point, before we even pick up a die, the random table is doing work. Its communicating in a few short words or phrases, a presence. If we think deeply about the fiction, as we often do as Game Masters, an ecosystem emerges from which we can elaborate.

What about when we actually roll, what can that tell us? Well firstly and obviously, rolling on the encounter table will provide a random obstacle for the players to overcome. This doesn't



have to always be a fight mind you. Think about why the monsters would encounter the party. What might the creatures want from them when they do? In all likelihood they aren't bumping into each other in a corridor, or are they? Who finds who? Is there an ambush? Does someone try to get away?

Also, what if the random encounter roll... doesn't even mean an encounter! A popular option is to have your players find a spoor, or a trace of the monster. This might mean tracks, a scent, a carcass, or a lair. This informs the players of their environment, without throwing them into immediate danger. It provides them the opportunity for them to make a choice or even a plan, a classic move in RPGs! Do they follow the tracks? Do they avoid them? Do they set an ambush? The players interact with the world through information, and so providing them some for free only increases their options.

If finding a trace of the creature is still too on the nose, you could provide an event involving the creature. Perhaps its attacking a village, or another traveler. Maybe the party find one injured and afraid, and could help it and gain its trust or adoration.

My point with all these ideas, is that an encounter doesn't have to just mean an immediate fight, and in fact, probably shouldn't so that things remain interesting. Approach a random encounter result, like you would a request from a player; consider the situation, and improvise. As a GM, improvisation and creativity are your greatest weapons. It's what separates role playing games from videos games, and what keeps them relevant alongside them. In my eyes, an encounter result is a prompt. Its should be interrogated and expanded upon, informed by



your knowledge of the world, environment and players. The result is just the bare bones, it's our job as arbiters to flesh these out with meaning and flavour.

These may all be good points and questions to ask ourselves, but nothing about this is inherent to tables. We would just as easily be served by a simple list. If this table is a tool, how is it best utilised? What tricks and techniques can we use to evoke these ideas, not just think about them?

Well, simply rolling a single d6 to determine a random encounter conveys some meaning. It says, every result is as likely as any other. Think for a second about what that communicates to the players. They are just as likely to bump into the 20HD Dragon-Eater Giant, as they are the weedy Buttgoblin scout. These random and arbitrary results... serve up random and arbitrary feeling

encounters! Maybe you want this, but I think we can do one better.

Rolling 3d6 produces a bell curve of results, meaning that middling numbers are more likely than high or low ones. This sort of simulates varying populations or spread. Some things are more likely to appear than others, perhaps because there are more of them, or because they aren't avoiding the party? Maybe some results are more likely because those creatures are actively seeking the players! This can give different tables a specific "feel" to the players, providing some texture or theming to certain areas. Of course, different numbers of dice in various combinations produce different curves. These can be modified further by adding or subtracting from the roll.. etc.

Messing with the numbers can convey something that difficult to communicate to GMs and harder still to rule fairly. Really, that's why we roll and don't pick. It reduces the cognitive load of the decision of if this next encounter is fair, or balanced, or interesting, or whatever, and hands it off to chance.

When balanced intelligently, random encounter tables can communicate a sense of a living world, and when elaborated, encounters can be varied and engaging. Combining both, can stretch even the simplest encounter table, into a complex adventure generation tool.

So the next time you flip to the back pages of a new supplement, contemplate the real potential of those few simple lines. Question why the designer chose those things in particular, and think a little deeper about what those few simple rolls can really cook up.

“The essence of a role-playing game is that it is a group, cooperative experience.”

- E. Gary Gygax

The Prince's Armory

William Cord

Knowing you were in town, Prince Algot has called you to court and given you a task. His personal Armory is under siege by a devious monster and you're going to fix this.

When you arrive at the door to the Armory, where two weak and tired looking guards stand watch against the bolted door. They don't know how that thing got in there, but they know it's dangerous. They tell you watch yourself, and be weary.

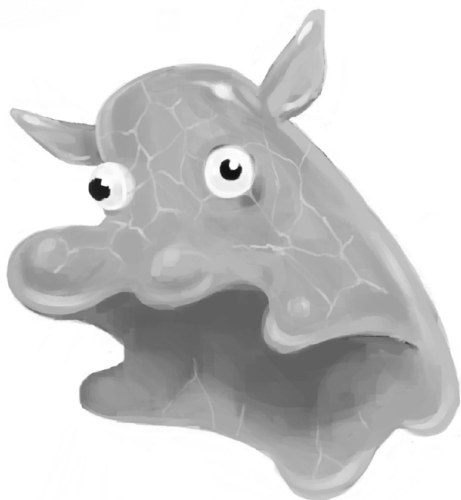
They unlock the door and unceremoniously shove you in the room where you are met face to face with a creature you don't recognize. Unbeknownst to you, you have encountered the world's first Hugger!

Do not let this beast's cute demeanor and cuddly behavior catch you off guard, it is a dangerous foe, latching onto it's foes, it deceives them by enveloping them in a warm embrace, which feels like a loving hug. Secretly though, for every turn that this creature embraces it's target, the target's Strength score is drained by 1, to a minimum of 1. One drained strength is restored for each day of rest.

“Nasty bugger darn
near hugged my
wife to death!”

- Bob the Gaurdsman

Hugger (1) - AC 9 (10)
HD 3+1, hp 10 #AT 0
Warm Embrace, 60' (20')
THACO 18, XP 50

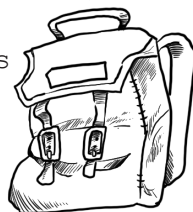


Once the Hugger has been dealt with, the Armory is restored to safety. As a show of his gratitude, the Prince has four items brought forth from the Armory and tells you to select which one you would like to take.

Silver Brooch of Charm - This illustrious medallion grants a +2 to Charisma. Those of the opposite gender will be more easily charmed by you.



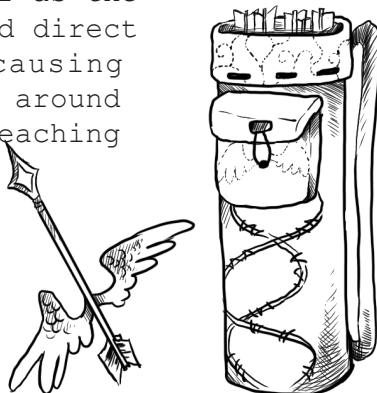
Backpack of Holding - This rucksack is enchanted by a great wizard, and can hold thrice as much as a normal backpack.



Longsword of the Elven Woods - This ancient Elven blade is enchanted to enhance the health and growth of all trees around it, making them grow at 10 times their normal rate. In turn, when wielded in a forest, this sword becomes a +2 Longsword.



Quiver of Hermes' Arrows - This illustrious quiver contains 10 magical arrows which possess an improved power of flight. These arrows have small wings on them and, when fired, can travel thrice as far as the bow would typically shoot, and direct themselves to the target, causing double damage and maneuvering around any obstacles in the way of reaching



We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of Silver Swords! It was made with love, care, and more than a few late nights. If you like what you see be sure to check out our other work at **strongholdpress.blogspot.com**

