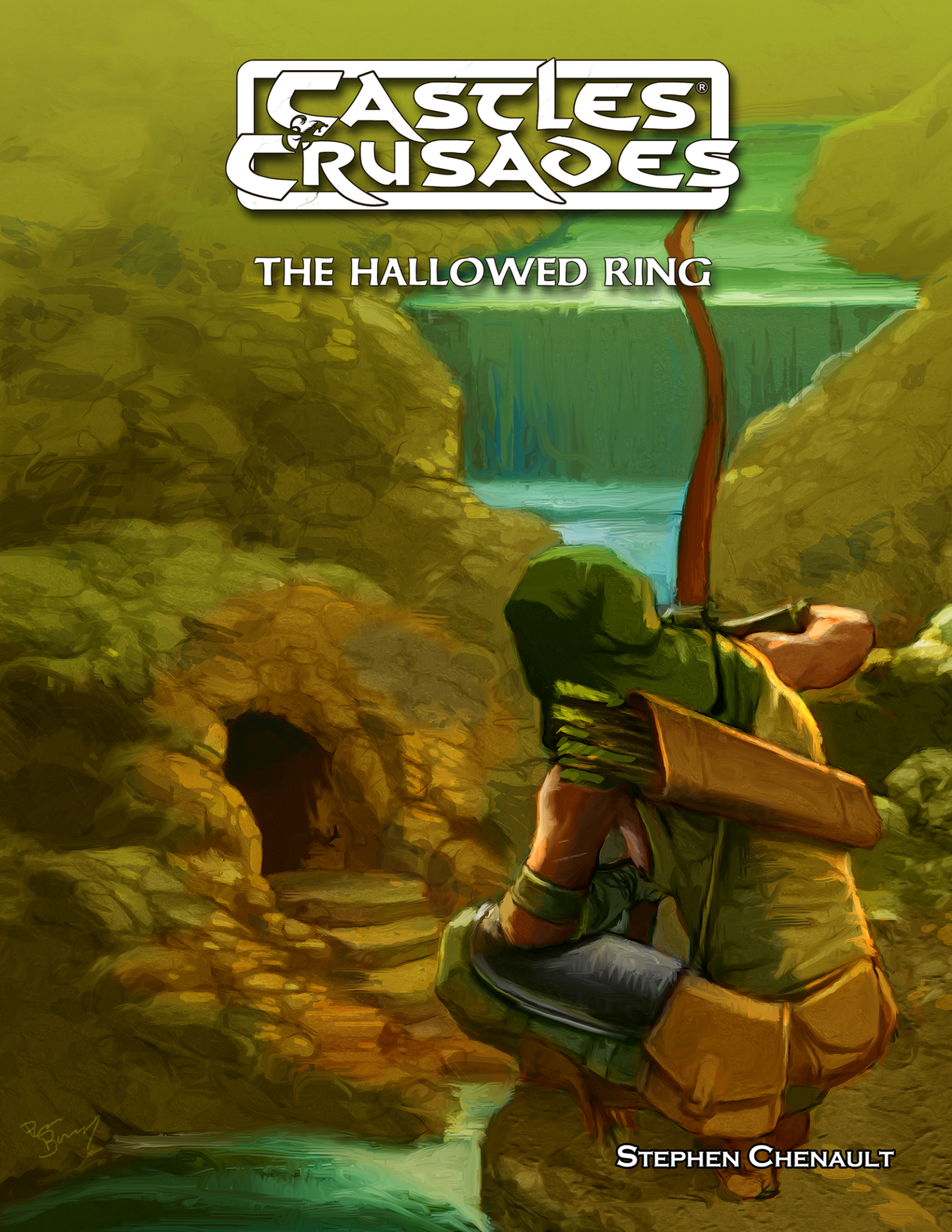


# CASTLES & CRUSADES<sup>®</sup>

## THE HALLOWED RING



STEPHEN CHENAULT



# THE HALLOWED RING

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It is a hard thing to cross the plains. The land is flat and seems limitless. The wind is forever blowing. The wild grass stretches on forever, until it mingles with the pale skies. Where one begins and the other ends is anybody's guess. It is easy to become disoriented, lost or turned around, and fall prey to the sun, wind or any of the many creatures who stalk the flat earth.

Somewhere on this unforgiving landscape lies the body of a man ravaged by hunting beasts. He holds in his possession an amulet, a trinket really, but one that must not be left on the plains. The body must be found, the amulet retrieved and returned to its rightful owner. But to do so one must brave the wild beasts and unforgiving nature and unearth the mystery of the grasslands.

This stand-alone adventure is designed for use with 3-5 low level characters. It begins in an Inn and leads the characters on a short overland trek in search of an amulet.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Hallowed Ring begins in a roadside Inn and Tavern called the Gum Log just off a major trade route. Here the characters, while taking a warm meal and seeking a bed to rest in, are approached by a man, Felgrin, who is horribly wounded. He is on his way to a nearby town where he intends to convalesce. He offers the characters 5 silver coins apiece to cross the plains to Givens Branch, a dry wash creek bed, and retrieve an amulet from the dead body of his friend, Thomlas. The amulet is of some value to a sage in a nearby town.

Felgrin was hired by the sage to retrieve the amulet, but he has no intention of delivering it to him. A group of cultists desires the amulet as well, and he was in the process of attempting to steal it from Thomlas and sell it to them. Since he cannot fetch the amulet himself, his intent is to return to town, alert the cult to the character's imminent arrival and get paid. What happens to the characters is of little concern to him.

The adventure involves the party traveling two days through the grasslands to a dry wash of a creek bed. In route they pass near, or camp, at a pond. This is the haunt of a pack of grigs.

Assuming they overcome the grigs, the adventure continues across the plains to the dry wash where they must locate the fallen body of the man and retrieve the amulet that he is carrying. The body has become the host of a rather strange creature, a flesh crawler.

But the body lies beneath a cairn of a stone giant, which itself lies over a tomb of a long dead dwarven hero. The tomb is a small dungeon that has long since been buried by debris. Its sudden opening in a flash flood gives the character's a chance to explore the ancient grave.

## **RROLFGAR AND ODEAN**

The dungeon is actually the tomb of a dwarven warrior Rrolfgar Stonestaff who fell long ago. Rrolfgar was a warrior of some renown named for his stone shod staff he bore in battle. In his youth Rrolfgar fought many campaigns, but his most famous saw the rescue of a young stone giant Odeon. A band of trolls

had bound Odeon with lash and fire and made him their slave. Though his many attempts to flee failed and he suffered for it, the trolls could not break the giant's will. Odeon had been enslaved for many years when the trolls ran afoul of Rrolfgar.

Upon a raid on his people's holds, the trolls slew many and carted several off to the cooking fires. Rrolfgar gathered those who he could, and who could fight, and pursued the trolls. They fell upon them with a vengeance and slew them one and all. During the battle, Odeon rose up against his masters and taking a fire brand in hand he attacked the trolls and fought alongside Rrolfgar and his kin.

When the dust settled Rrolfgar thanked the giant and they broke bread together. Odeon was still very young and he was far from his clan and lost. The dwarf took him and taught him many things, not least of which was the art of war. In time, the two became fast friends, fighting side by side. They wandered into the distant west and the south too, so that people came to know them and marveled at them. None closed their doors to them for the dwarf and the giant were an uncommon pair, friendly and free with the wealth of their adventurers.

It was Odeon that fashioned his stone-shod staff from which Rrolfgar took his name.

But the two lived dangerous lives and in the end Rrolfgar was felled by a wicked hill giant the size, or so the legends say, of a small tree. It drove a sharpened stake through his chest and pinned him to a cliff face in a dry river bed. Odeon slew the hill giant with a fist full of stone. However, it was too late for Rrolfgar and though he lived for several days after the battle, his ghost left him and he died.

Odeon and the other dwarves lay Rrolfgar to rest in a stone cavern that the giant shaped from the earth. His bones were set in the far room, meant to return to stone as is common for his people. The dwarves and giant both promised to honor his memory for all their days. His comrades, seeking to secure the tomb set several traps upon it.

And there the tomb stood undisturbed for man centuries until the river eventually buried its entrance and all memory was lost of the giant and the dwarf. Only Odeon remembered it and when felt his life's passing he returned to the tomb and built a cairn to house his body and watch over that of his long-fallen friend.

## **FOR THE CASTLE KEEPER**

This adventure is intended for a single game session, roughly 3-5 hours of play. The overland journey should be simple with a small chance of a random encounter in route to the dry gulch. Once there the discovery of the body of Thomlas leads to the tomb of the dwarf. Once explored it is a simple trip back to the Gum Log. It can be played as a stand-alone game or can lead into a larger campaign. It is designed specifically as an introductory adventure for The Hallowed Oracle campaign adventure setting, taking place immediately before The Hallowed Oracle begins.

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## PLAYING IN TERRIGAN

If playing in Teragan, in the Hallowed Oracle adventure setting, place the adventure a few days west of Lostom. After the characters have retrieved the amulet they travel to Lostom to deliver it to their contact, where of course they will be set upon by the White Sash Cult.

## CONVERTING HO TO AIHRDE

If you are playing The Hallowed Ring in the World of Aihrde, the adventure can be placed almost anywhere. It is perfect as an introductory adventure on the way to any town in most of the kingdoms and realms. It was originally conceived to take place in Maegersland, in the Kingdom of Augsburg, north of the Olensk River.

Moving the entire Terrigan setting The Hallowed Ring and the The Hallowed Oracle adventures to the World of Aihrde is easy enough. The adventure should begin in the realm of Eisenheim in the town of Ostanjo. From there the adventure should take one across Andrea's Ridge and into Zeitz, to the coastal town of Cordea Castle. From there across the sea to Trondheim and the Frozen Salt Flats where they encounter the final beast and unravel the mystery of the prophecy. The Abyss Walker should be treated as a Undead Lord of Aenoch who served Unklar during the Winter Dark. His return to the northern realms of Aenoch is presaged in the prophecy as foretold in The Hallowed Oracle.

## GETTING STARTED

The Hallowed Oracle begins in a roadside inn. There are any number of reasons the characters could be there. Use one of the following or invent your own.

1) The Inn offers the perfect starting point for an ongoing adventure. The party members have all agreed to meet at the Inn from various locales, their homes, on their way to a larger town.

2) For any ongoing campaign, the characters come across the Inn while traveling to town to find new employment, sell their present loot, etc. While seeking a good night's rest and some warm food they encounter Felgrin.

3) If in Terrigan the characters have gathered together and are headed to Lostom, seeking treasure and glory. On the way they come to the Gum Log Inn. Here they learn of the sage seeking an amulet. This same concept applies to the world of Aihrde, only swap the town name of Lostom with that of Ostanjo.

4) The party have heard rumors that some evil fey haunts the region about the Gum Log. They have traveled to the Inn to learn the truth of things and track the beast down if it is there. The evil fey are of course the grigs at the pond below.

## THE GUM LOG INN & TAVERN

The Gum Log is a large structure that sits just off the road. It consists of a two-story lodge house, a separate kitchen



connected to the lodge through a covered walkway, a massive stable designed to hold 20 horses and other livestock, a slaughter yard, horse pen to exercise horses, several small one room cabins, and a battery of outhouses. During the Spring and Summer months it is crowded with travelers, merchants, farmers, adventurers and the like, all coming to the Gum Log to rest and regroup.

The Gum Log is run by a matronly woman named Lusza. She purchased the Inn long ago when it was little more than a way station on the road. Through hard work and constant toil, she has built it into an establishment known far and wide.

The Inn employs several strong men to keep the peace. There are 4 of them during any busy season, and 1-2 during off seasons. There is often trouble in the tavern as there are many types of travelers who stop by; however, the troubles are usually short lived.

Lusza herself is an accomplished fighter-mage, having adventured for many years before retiring and purchasing the way station. She is chaotic good, kindly and generally forgiving of those who cross her or cause problems in the Tavern or Inn. She is in her mid-fifties, comely, with long auburn hair. She usually wears pants and a long shirt that hangs to her knees, though split up the sides, allowing her complete freedom of movement. She carries a long dagger at her side, though in her own apartment she has a full complement of weapons, armor and her spell book.

The tavern itself consists of a large single-room with a vaulted ceiling. Heavy, iron candelabras hang from the rafters giving the room decent light. A host of tables of all sizes are spread about the room, allowing patrons to sit alone or with only a few people or at long common tables. It is served by a huge, rectangular fire pit where food is warmed or where people come to sit and dry off and get warm.

Beyond the tavern the Gum Log offers plenty of rooms, private cabins and good food. Follow the below guidelines for general costs of room and board.

MEALS	COST
Light Meal (fish, breads, fruit, cheese)	1sp
Heavy Meal (meats, vegetable, breads, butter)	3sp
Extravagant (meats, puddings, cold fruits)	1gp
Beers:	
Pale Ale	2cp
Dark Ale	5cp
Lager	1sp
Wine (most of this is Brindisium Wine)	
Red/White	5sp (5gp for a bottle)
Kathy's White (local, Caphryna)	1gp

ROOMS			
Type	1 Person	2 Person	Double Occupancy
Common (Floor with Straw)	5cp*		
Bare Floor (Average)	5sp	10sp	+10sp per person
Bed Only	8sp	15sp	+15sp per person
Furnished	1gp	2gp	+2gp per person

\*Per Person

The tavern portion of the Inn stays busy in the mornings, around noon and during the evening meal. It frequently stays busy long into the night.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The large common room is crowded with all manner of people. They are drinking, eating, sharing stories of their campaigns or journeys. Though they are crowded around tables and the two long bars in the tavern, the room itself is dominated by a huge, rectangular fire pit. Many have gathered around it, sitting on the stone hearth, warming their hands or buttocks and enjoying a break from the night air. The room is warm though the air is fresh as large openings in the roof allow the fumes...both body and food...to rise up and out into the

night sky. A song, sung by some deep voiced baritone, winds its way through the crowd from the left. It mingles with the music of some stringed instrument that comes from the far corner. Combined with the ebb and flow of continuous babble the room is filled with a discordant noise that is both confusing and comforting.

### FELGRIN APPROACHES

Felgrin is in the bar. He is wounded, his arm wrapped in a bandage and hanging in a sling. He has wounds on his abdomen, though they are hidden beneath his shirt, the tight bandage and unhealed flesh draw out a grimace whenever he moves too fast or talks too long. Allow any character that interacts with him a wisdom check (CL 1), to notice that he has more wounds than just the arm.

He is specifically looking for someone to employ in retrieving the amulet. His deal with the brigands in town depends upon it. He is keeping a close eye on the door, watching for potential applicants. Once the party enters he watches them, trying to determine if they are good or evil, and whether or not he can convince them to retrieve the amulet.

He waits until they have sat down and become comfortable, before he talks to them. He prefers to wait until they have eaten their meal and are comfortable and warm. If he does so, he gains a +1 bonus to any attribute checks he makes in attempting to convince them of anything, the characters suffer a -1 penalty on all charisma checks for the first half hour after their meal. All this is due to their warm and contented feeling.

Felgrin approaches with a grin that quickly turns into a grimace. The grimace is partially for show. Allow a wisdom check (CL 2) to notice the slight exaggeration. He introduces himself and offers to buy a round if the party will entertain an idea he has.

After introductions are made, read or paraphrase the following:

**"It's been a hard day for me and my comrade Thomlas. Harder for Thomlas than me, despite the wounds you see wrapped in a surgeon's bandage. I left my friend on the steppe, slain by some ungodly beast of a worm. It came at us out of the ground, literally bursting from the earth in the bed of a dry river we were camped in. The creature had at me first, biting me in the arm with its mandibles and Thomlas, brave man that he was, struck it with his axe. It turned from me to him and bit him in the head. I tried to free him, lost my blade in the attempt, but it struck me hard with its tail, lashing both flesh and bruising bone. By the time I caught my breath Thomlas was dead and nothing left for it but to flee.**

But my loss was greater still, for I left something there on the field of battle, an heirloom. Thomlas had it, in his pocket. It's why I'm here talking to you. I need your help. I need that amulet. I am tasked to carry it to town, further down the road. But I haven't the strength to battle that worm, nor even the ability to carry it to town. I would pay good money...well, all I have...if you'd go to

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**that dry river bed and fetch the heirloom and carry it to my master in town.”**

He offers them 5sp apiece, free room and board at the Gum Log for the night and they are allowed to keep anything they find on the field where Thomlas fell. This would include the axe Thomlas carried and a periapt of wound closure the man had upon a necklace he wore.

The characters can attempt to find out more about Felgrin's person, through asking around or pressing him in conversation. They do notice an occasional grimace as he takes in too much air and causes pain in his chest. Allow characters a wisdom check (CL 2) if they question or press him. If successful they discover that he is a bit self-serving, and perhaps a little disingenuous, but not any more than many people are. Lusza knows Felgrin as a regular, but she does not vouch for his character, saying only that he causes no trouble in the Tavern.

Once they have agreed, he calls for a round of drinks and more food and begins to give them directions to Givens Branch, the dry creek bed. It is very roughly a one-and-a-half-day journey to Givens Branch. A day's travel will bring the party to the banks of a small pond, there they can refresh water skins and rest. A half day beyond that they will come to Givens Branch. He explains that the body lies in the crook of a dry river bed beneath a stone pillar.

**FELGRIN'S WARNING:** In order to ingratiate himself, Felgrin explains that the pond is the only source of water for several miles and as such attracts all manner of creatures, so the party should approach it cautiously. The same goes for Givens Branch, the worm that attacked them, came from the ground, bursting out of it as if it were waiting for he and Thomlas to walk by it. He knows absolutely nothing about the stone pillar, the dungeon or the story of Odeon and Rrolfgar.

## **A DAY IN THE GRASSLANDS**

The first day's journey should bring the characters to the Pond. Allow for random encounters on the way.

### **WANDERING MONSTERS**

The Castle Keeper should check for wandering monsters as they pass through the grasslands. To determine if an encounter occurs roll a d12 six times during the day and six more at night. A roll of one indicates an encounter. If an encounter occurs, roll a d10 and consult the following table.

#### **ENCOUNTERS ON THE GRASSLANDS**

D10	Encounter
1	Ogre
2	Gnoll Raiding Party (1-4)
3	Human (see below)
4	Will-O-Wisp
5	Wild animals (see below)
6	Spider, medium 1-4 (trap door)

7	Earth Elemental (3 HD)
8	Hippogriff
9	Wolf pack (4-8)
10	Wild Boar (2-6)

A human encounter consists of either a ranger, a villager or evil brigands. A ranger openly offers his aid as a guide. A villager requires a substantial reward and flees at the first sign of trouble. Brigands are always encountered in groups of two to eight and judge the relative strength of the party and attack only if a reasonable chance of success exists. Otherwise, they run away.

**RANGER** (*These are chaotic good, human 1st level rangers, whose vital stats are HD 1d10, HP 7, AC 14. Their primary attributes are strength, dexterity and constitution. They carry a longsword that does 1d8 points of damage, a short bow and 12 arrows, studded leather armor, cloak and 1d12sp in a belt pouch. He carries normal equipment.*)

**VILLAGER** (*These are neutral humans whose vital stats are HD 1d4, HP 3, AC 10. They have no primary attributes. He/she carries a club/knife and 1d12cp in a belt pouch.*)

**BANDIT** (*This is a chaotic neutral, human 1st level rogue whose vital stats are HD 1d6, HP 5, AC 12. His/her prime attributes are wisdom, constitution and dexterity. He/she carries a shortsword that does 1d6 points of damage, a short bow and nine arrows, leather armor and 1d12sp in a belt pouch.*)

### **THE POND**

As noted, the pond lays about a day's journey from the Gum Log. The journey is not particularly difficult, but it is hot and there is no water between the tavern and the Pond. By the time the characters arrive they are hot, tired and thirsty. This, even with no encounter along the way. If there were an encounter, they are even more tired.

The pond itself lies in a low valley, easily spied from a mile or more off from the gentle ridge that overlooks it. The characters cannot miss it.

The pond itself is roughly 60 feet across and 150 long. The water is clear and cool as it lies on a large rocky bed that extends up and beyond the water by about 40 feet. It is fed by a host of small springs that trickle up from below, keeping the pond full year-round. It has avoided the ravages of sediment build up and muck from dying vegetation as the rocky bottom and rocky shore give little purchase for growing things and the singular lack of trees offers no dying foliage to fill the pond's nooks and crevices.

Read or paraphrase the following:

**The day has been hot and the journey through the grasslands tiresome. The sky and grass seem to ramble on forever. At last you crown the slope of a long, low-lying hill, arriving at the lip of a valley. The valley stretches to the north and south as far as you can see, it's broad and open. It barely rates as a valley. Down below, perhaps a**

**quarter mile away is a single stunted tree growing several hundred feet from a reasonably large pond. A thick-chested mule deer drinks his fill until he notices you. He turns quietly and trots off in the opposite direction.**

The pool is occupied by more than just the mule deer. A small band of grigs have recently taken up residence in the deep grass about 20 feet north of the pond. They keep a spotter stationed in the tree, though usually several gather there to keep an eye out. They are casually watching the valley to see if something interesting should enter. They are specifically looking to rob other creatures, desiring silver, coin or otherwise, to cut it into strips so that they can decorate their clothing and pay proper homage to the moon.

The characters are definitely interesting. As soon as they top the hill that overlooks the valley, the grigs in the tree spot them and signal to their comrades to scatter. The grigs retreat into the deeper grasses further from the pond, all waiting for their leader to deliver the signal to attack.

Two of the grigs are in the tree, 5 are in the grass.

They watch carefully as the characters approach, listening to them and what they have to say. They are also looking for any signs that the characters have any kind of wealth, particularly silver. If anyone is carrying anything silver or a visible pouch that might have silver coin in it, that is the person the grigs single out to attack.

The grigs are not immune to being spotted. Though they are well hidden in the grass and tree, the two in the tree are seen on a wisdom check (CL 6). Anyone who explores the area around the north bank of the pond has a decent chance to detect the grass huts the grigs have built. Each hut is very small, about 10 inches tall and roughly 2 feet long. They are made of grass pulled over into an arch and tied to the stem of another blade of grass. The huts are fairly elaborate and are obviously unnatural. A hut is discovered on a successful wisdom check (CL 3).

If the group possesses a ranger and they track the area, they detect the huts but also the signs of small booted foot prints and other tell-tale signs that there are faerie about on a successful track check (CL 2). Whether or not the ranger can determine the specifics, specifically that the tracks belong grigs is entirely up to the Castle Keeper.

**NOTE:** If the grigs are spotted before they have a chance to spring their own trap they will scatter, however they do not fly unless absolutely forced to do so as there are so many predatory hawks that hunt the grasslands, and who love to feed on grigs. The two in the tree will most likely scamper up further into the tree. They rarely use invisibility as they tend to lose one another when they do.

The grigs begin their attack by playing the fiddle and singing a song. One of the grigs in the tree, the leader of the band, begins playing a soft tune that quickly picks up pace as he attempts to trap the characters in a maddening dance. The song is a strange ballad of a dwarf lord and a stone giant and how the two became

companions. Anyone caught up dancing is forced to listen to the song and will hear all the words.

See above for the full tale of Rrolfgar and Odeon.

Anyone within hearing distance must make a save against charm or be compelled to begin dancing. Those so compelled can take no action until they are snapped out of the charm or until the grig ceases playing his fiddle.

The primary target of the grigs is the one they most suspect of having silver. They first attempt to draw them out using ventriloquism and entangle. Failing that they use change self in order to mimic party members and cause as much confusion as they can while they attack and or rob the singled out target. The remaining grig attempts to acquire silver and flee.

**GRIG, x 7** (This neutral creature's vital stats are HD 1d4, AC 18, HP 3. Their primary attributes are mental. They attack with darts for 1d3 points of damage or daggers for 1d4 points of damage. Once a day they are able to use change self, entangle, invisibility, pyrotechnics, trip, and ventriloquism. One of their number has a fiddle that charms victims into dancing. They gain a +3 to all dexterity checks and a +3 to any attack with a ranged weapon.)



The grigs do not fight to the death, of either the party or themselves. Their primary intent is to acquire silver, and as soon as any one grig is able to take something of silver such as a weapon, a necklace, a pouch, he signals the others and they all break and run up the valley. They scatter into the deep grass. If their leader is slain, the others break and flee, though 1-2 attempt to grab the fiddle before they do.

If a grig is captured, cornered, wounded or threatened with imminent death they will offer information or a tale for their freedom. They have little else of value (aside from the magic ring

the leader carries but he will not barter that). Being immortal creatures who have occupied the grasslands since before there were grasslands, they are well versed in legends and tales that permeate the region. As such they are well versed in the tale of the dwarf lord Rrolfgar and Odeon the stone giant. They relate the story as they know it and even offer to guide the characters to the cairn of the stone giant if necessary. None of the grigs know of the entrance to the dwarf tomb, but they do know that legends have the giant being buried above it.

**TREASURE:** The grigs have little in the way of treasure. The leader however is wearing a magic ring that allows the wearer to heal 2-4 hit points per day and it grants them a +1 bonus on all intelligence and wisdom checks. Aside from that the only thing of value on the grigs is the fiddle itself, though small for any normal human it is almost large enough for a halfling or gnome to play and is worth 100gp. Only grigs can play it such that it makes others dance.

## THE DRY WASH

The dry wash of Givens Branch is roughly a half day's march from the Pond. The country is little changed from the previous day's journey, bringing the characters through long, hot grasslands with little water and no shade.

Roll for random encounters as necessary or desired.

Felgrin described the dry wash as a river bed roughly 30 feet wide and bordered by stark walls of dirt and rock. The riverbed lies at the bottom of a deep gulch, the seasonal water having cut through the soft soil of the grasslands over many years. The jagged cut of a gulch is visible from several miles away as it winds its way from the distant north and continues on to the south, toward the road that leads past the Gum Log Inn. The sides of the gulch are steep, ranging between 15 and 30 feet. The grass grows up to and over the edge of the gulch, clinging in thick tufts here and there on the sloping walls of the gulch.

The river bed follows this course for many miles and is impossible to miss. Thomlas was slain beneath a particularly high point in the cliffs that is crowned by a pile of large rocks, the giant's cairn.

## GIVENS BRANCH

Givens Branch is a small seasonal river that begins flowing in the early spring and continues until the dry months of early summer. It picks up again in the fall when the rains return. The river bed, though dry on the surface, covers an almost permanently moist soil and pockets of water. Digging down only a few feet into the river bed usually yields a little water. The river bed is dry more often than not, as it requires heavy rains to flood its banks. This makes the river rather dangerous, as sudden storms flood the river bed and fill the gulch very quickly. Those caught in the way of such a flash flood can easily be swept off their feet and taken down stream, pummeled into the riverbed and drowned.

It is a particularly tricky river to navigate. Not only are the sides of the gulch steep and narrow, but the course of the river winds

back and forth through the grassland as it cuts its way through the soft soils. The earthen cliffs that flank the gulch offer few stable handholds for any attempting to climb out. This makes the river bed even more dangerous during flash floods.

Read or paraphrase the following:

**Topping a low ridge, you spy the river gorge. It cuts a jagged path through the grasslands as it winds its way through the soft earth. The gorge is steep, though not terribly deep, you can see the dry river bed, covered in rocks and tufts of grass. To the north, up the course of the river you spy a heap of rocks about 5 feet tall, standing on the far bank of the river gorge. At first, they seem natural, but as you approach they seem deliberately placed, as if some unknown hand set them there long ago. In the distance storm clouds rumble, bringing rain, something to cool the grasslands and break the heat of the sun.**

**NOTE:** The promise of rain can both heighten the sense of adventure or derail a short game. If the CK wishes to have the flashflood encounter below, continue on with the description of the rain storm building. If not, allow the clouds to pass without actually bringing any rain.

## FINDING THOMLAS

Thomlas fell beneath the pillar of stones, slain several days previous by an adult flesh crawler (see Monsters & Treasure for a full write up). It has since ripped open part of his back and eaten out Thomlas' innards. There the flesh crawler has settled, waiting for his next victim. Flesh crawlers are of course able to animate the corpse of their victims and use it to their own ends. They do not have perfect control of the corpse and for this reason attempt to only do the simplest of movements.

In this case the flesh crawler has moved the body to a sitting position, propped up against the cliff bank, on the river bed, beneath the pillar of rocks. So, in effect, Thomlas is looking up at the approaching characters. No rot has begun as the flesh crawler is able to keep the body intact for many weeks. There is no smell of decay as most of Thomlas' insides have been carved out and eaten. Furthermore, the body has not been molested by insects or scavengers, as they can sense the unnatural state of the body and the beast that lies within.

Read or paraphrase the following:

**Looking down from the cliff face you spy the body of a man, he is pale and drawn, though appears to be alive. His clothes are bloody and his face covered in dark purple bruises. The ground around him is dark, the obvious signs of blood loss. Scattered about him are pieces of his equipment. An axe, a satchel and water bottle. Thomlas gently lifts his hand, signaling for help.**

The flesh crawler is attempting to lure one of the characters down into the gulch and to within five feet, striking distance.



## CLIMBING DOWN

Approaching the body is no easy task. The party must crawl down into the narrow gulch, using the soft dirt walls to cling to.

**NOTE:** If the CK desires a flash flood encounter, make note to the party that the temperature suddenly drops and a wind picks up from the east. The smell of rain is everywhere and in fact they can taste the moisture in the air.

Anyone attempting to climb down using their hands, unless they have a natural climb ability, must make a successful dexterity check (CL 3) or tumble down to the bottom of the gulch. Though the fall is 20-30 feet, the falling victim will not suffer more than 1d6 points of damage due to the soft nature of the river bed and the cliff walls.

Using a rope to climb down the cliff is possible but there is nothing to tie the rope to and the characters will have to devise some method of anchoring the rope. If they do, no attribute checks are necessary.

## THE FLESH CRAWLER

The flesh crawler is able to animate the corpse and walk it if it desires. It cannot make the corpse talk, but it can force it to make a gurgling noise with its mouth, spitting up a little blood and saliva. At the moment it is trying to make the characters come down into the gorge, so that it may attack.

The creature's ability to maintain a dead person's life-like visage is extraordinary and it is almost impossible to discern that there is something wrong with Thomlas unless someone approaches within 20 feet. Anyone approaching within 20 feet must make a successful wisdom save (CL 3) in order to notice something is amiss.

Anyone approaching within 5 feet is attacked. If the characters hesitate to approach, the flesh crawler directs the corpse to rise and stagger toward their chosen target. As soon as they are within five feet of anyone, it bursts from the corpse and attacks.

**NOTE:** If the CK desires a flash flood allow the water to begin spilling down the dry wash as the battle unfolds. It is a trickle at first, flowing past the character's feet.

**FLESH CRAWLER** (*These neutral creature's vital stats are HD 3d8, HP 24, AC 17. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with 2 bites for 1d6 points of damage and 6 claws for 1d4 points of damage. They are able to cause paralysis in their victims and animate them. When killed they explode into death throes splashing everyone within 10 feet of them with maggot-filled acid, causing 1d3 points of damage (dexterity save for half). They have no treasure but that found on their latest victim.*)

## LOOTING THOMLAS

Thomlas has little in the way of worldly goods. In a pouch at his belt are 12gp and 14sp. Tied into a complicated leather wrist band is an elongated red gem, the periapt of wound closure, and stuck into his inner vest pocket is a small amulet.

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Beneath him, where he sat, is the axe he used in battle. It is an expert battle axe, granting the wielder a +1 to hit bonus and a +1 damage bonus.

## THE AMULET

The amulet itself is a small bauble with the religious etchings of a god upon it. It seems to have little value, not made of gold or silver, or even of a high quality. It is of value to someone however and taking it to town will finish the deal with Felgrin.

## RELEASING THE PAST

If the Castle Keeper desires a flash flood it should begin to pick up speed about the time the characters are looting the body. As the water begins flowing it triggers a small landslide beneath the giant's cairn, triggering a collapse of part of the cliff-face wall and exposing the entrance to some type of tunnel about 4 feet above the river bed and a foot or so above the flooding water line.

Read or paraphrase the following:

**Having slain the beast that exploded from Thomlas' body, you settle down for a moment. But within a few seconds you realize a rumbling sound coming from up the gorge. The water that began flowing past your feet picks up speed and it is clear the gorge will soon be a raging torrent. But even as you take note of the water about you a section of the cliff face beneath the stone pillar gives way, exposing a small opening about four feet above the river's bed.**

Anyone caught in the initial stages of the flood can leap for the tunnel opening and attempt to crawl through and into the tunnel beyond. There is no attribute check required, however, the CK may elect to ask for rolls to heighten tension.

## **SURVIVING THE FLOOD**

Those who fail to jump into the tunnel or scramble up the cliff are caught in the flood waters.

The water is moving very fast. The rain falling very heavy to the north has rolled over the grasslands and into countless feeder streams that all pour into the gulch that houses Givens Branch. The water appears first as a slow-moving current only an inch or so deep, but within a few minutes it picks up speed. This is followed by a wall of water upwards of 3-4 feet deep.

There is very little debris in the water, only some rocks and bits and pieces of brush and that have fallen into the gulch. These quickly brush by, striking anyone in the water. Everyone caught in the water wall must make a successful dexterity check (CL 1) or suffer 1d2 points of damage.

The real danger lies in the volume and force of the water crowding down the dry river bed. Water that is 1 foot deep can exert tremendous lateral force on an object. It is difficult for anyone caught in the flood's path to maintain their footing.

Everyone in the flood water must make a strength check (CL 3+1 per round they are in the water) to maintain their footing. If they are holding a shield in their hand they suffer a -1 penalty to their role.

Anyone who fails their strength check is swept off their feet and downstream. They now must regain control by catching a root or bush on the side of the gulch. To do so they must make a successful dexterity check (CL 4). If they grab onto something they may attempt to pull themselves out of the gulch. Anyone attempting to climb out of the gulch without a rope must make a successful dexterity check (CL 3). If successful they pull themselves to the top of the cliff and out of the gulch. If they fail they simply cling on.

Anyone clinging onto the side of the gulch is being battered by a constant wall of water. To maintain their position, they must make a successful strength check (CL 3 +1 per round they are in the water). Any loose clothing or items on their person is swept away in the flood. If they hold something in either hand they suffer a -1 penalty for all strength and dexterity checks.

Any character swept downstream suffers 1 point of damage every other round from being battered on the cliff walls and dug across the river bed. Furthermore, they must make a constitution check each against drowning for each round they are submerged in the water. The CL for the check begins at 0 but increases by 1 for every round the person is being carried in the flood waters. However, each check is made at a +8 as the character is not fully submerged. If at any point the character misses their saving throw, they are reduced to -7 hit points, suffering 1 point of damage thereafter until they are dead.

If other characters are actively helping someone by using a rope or similar items the Castle Keeper should award them a bonus on any attempts to break free of the gulch.

The flood waters carry Thomlas' body off and downstream.

## **UNEARTHING THE PAST**

As noted above the pillar is a gravesite that overlooks a small dungeon; however, time and the elements buried the dungeon long ago. Years of flood water slowly filled the entrance with mud and soil. That however, was long ago, and the earth along the base of the clog is weak. The present flood carries it away, causing a collapse in the cliff that opens a rift about 4 feet over the river bed. The rift is about 3 feet high and several feet wide.

**NOTE:** If the flood is not used, allow the collapse to occur during the fight, exposing the tunnel within.

## **RROLFGAR'S TOMB**

The dungeon is easy enough to access once one crawls over the dirt that still clogs the entrance.

**NOTE:** Each of the doors has a stone latch on the outside of the door, and none of them can be opened from the inside.

### **ENTRANCE**

The entrance to the dungeon is still largely blocked. Years of soil, debris and sediment are heaped in the entry way and sloping down into the tunnel a good dozen or more feet. By the time anyone entering the tunnel is clear of the dirt and debris, they are a good 15 feet inside.

The passage way is a natural cavern and leads to a series of steps that lead up about 8 feet to a small landing and a stone door. The door is closed and held fast with a stone latch. A small handle allows one to pull the latch back and open the door.

There are runes set in relief on the door. They are written in dwarf and say simply: "Here lies the stone of Rrolfgar Stonestaff." Beneath the inscription is a simple symbol, two circles, one within the other and a straight-line bisecting both. The symbol is a *glyph of warding*.

**GLYPH OF WARDING:** Anyone who attempts to open the door by sliding the stone latch triggers the glyph. It immediately releases a wave of burning energy that strikes anyone within five feet of the door for 1d4 points of damage. A successful wisdom save reduces the damage by half.

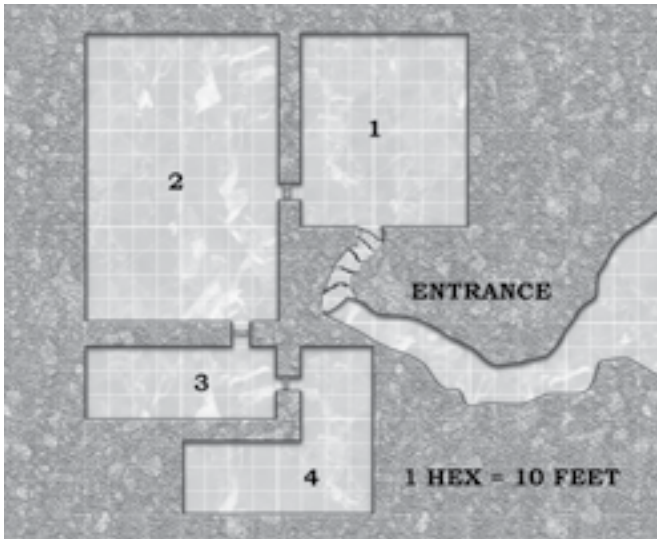
### **1 CLEANSING POOL**

The room is dominated by a large pool with clear, clean water in it. It is roughly 12 feet in diameter with a foot-high wall around it. The pool itself is about 3 feet deep, the water coming up to within a few inches of the top of the wall. The wall with broad, smooth stones that overlap both the water on the one side and floor on the other allowing one to sit comfortably.

The water is cool and clean and if one drinks of it, it is very refreshing. Anyone who does drink of the pool heals 1-2 hit points. They can only do this once per day.

Here the dwarves cleansed Rrolfgar's body before he took him to his final tomb.

There is nothing else of value in the room.



## 2 FEAST HALL

Rrolfgar's comrades built a feast hall for their fallen friend. Within this room is one long stone table with five stone chairs set around it, with one at the north end. There are six place settings at the table, each consisting of a bowl, a cup and spoon. The setting without a chair was set there in honor of the stone giant. The pottery dishes are black, decorated with white geometric designs burned into the hardened clay. The setting at the south end, where there is no chair, is slightly larger than the other five. The setting at the north end is placed cup and bowl down with the spoon set laterally to the sitter.

Anyone with knowledge of dwarven customs or a bard who is able to successfully legend lore the room (CL 3) knows that this is a traditional way to honor the dead. Dwarves set the table for them, but in such a way that all know they shall never break bread again.

There is nothing of particular value in the room, other than the pottery itself. If taken it sells for 25gp a set. An antiquarian would pay double that, knowing the pieces are very old.

## 3 ROOM

The door to this room is latched much like the entryway, however there are no glyphs to protect it. When the door is opened however, an odd smell, something akin to undisturbed sewage, escapes into the feast hall and quickly permeates the whole room.

Read or paraphrase the following:

**Within is an odd assortment of chains lying upon the floor or hanging from the ceiling. The chains are all rough-hewn and misshapen, none the same as the other. They are thin as well, and long, and seem to have no end, or perhaps it is one long chain that hangs from the ceiling and lies about the room. The chains are clearly metal but stained various shades of black and dark brown.**

The room was once an armory that sported the weaponry and armor of the noble dwarf. But sadly, it also held some of the spoils of his battles. One of those spoils was a book with an imp

imprisoned within its pages. At some point in the long years the imp escaped the book but was not able to escape the room. In its madness it began to unmake the armor and weapons, scattering the metal in chunks about the room. Eventually it made the chains as a symbol of its imprisonment.

In its growing madness the imp took the chains and bound them to the ceiling with hooks fashioned of the metal shards. He lay them across the floor and eventually began binding the links together, so that many smaller chains became a few longer ones. He has spent the many years in the tomb flinging himself against the hallowed walls, swinging from the chains, flinging them about, binding himself and escaping and whatever other madness induced pleasures he has concocted.

He has long since forgotten anything of a world beyond the room and he now sees only chains, their links, their shape and form.

When the door opens, the imp has only one thought: to defend his curtain of chains.

He attacks immediately, with a wild abandon, swinging from the chains in a furious assault, leaping forwards, swinging with a particularly nasty barbed hook and then back into the chain vines, only to return for a second attack.

**IMP** (This lawful evil creature's vital stats are HD 2d8, AC 15, HP 13. Its primary attributes are physical and mental. It attacks with a bite for 1d4 points of damage and a stinger for 1 point of damage. He wields a barbed hook on a long 3-foot chain for 1d4 points of damage. It is able to turn invisible, has an SR of 3 and regenerates 1 hit point per round. Its stinger has a poison barb that can cause a further 2 points of damage for 4 rounds.)

**Treasure:** There is little of value in the room, as most of Rrolfgar's worldly possessions were destroyed by the imp. All that remains are his iron-shod staff and the magical book.

**The Staff:** The staff is a well-made stone shod staff that deals 1d6+2 points of damage. It leans in the corner, untouched by the imp all these years.

**The Book:** The book hangs in the corner of the room. It hangs there, bound tightly up in thin-linked, long chains. If released it falls to the floor with a leaden thud. Lifting it is difficult, though it is made of paper and cloth covering, it is heavy, weighing roughly 30 lbs. The book is 5.5 inches wide and 8.5 inches tall. It seems to have about 80-100 pages in it. It radiates magic. The book is actually a prison. It requires a successful intelligence check to master the book (CL 12), but once mastered the book is a potent weapon against creatures from the nether realms (demons, devils and daemons). When held up and read before them, the target must make a successful mental check or be drawn into the book and bound there. The magic user cannot take any other action while reading the book. If they are interrupted the spell is broken and they must begin again. It takes four full rounds for the creature to be drawn into the book. Once within, the book must be closed and the clasp shut

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to hold the creature in. If the book is opened again, the demon can escape with a successful mental check.

#### **4 TOMB**

This is the room where Rrolfgar was laid to rest.

He was laid to rest in dwarven fashion. A section of the floor was left unpaved, so that the raw, unworked, natural stone was left exposed. His body was stripped of its earthly possessions, cleaned, and he was placed in a suite of armor and laid upon the cold stone floor. There, in a short time, he returned to stone. The body looks much like an effigy carved on a tomb and is in fact stone. It is cold to the touch and if broken open it is hollow. The dwarf has passed on to the Stone Fields and his body truly returned from whence it came, the stone of the earth.\*

There is nothing of value in the room.

\* Returning to stone is a very particular funeral right of the dwarven people in the world of Aihrde. If you are not playing in the world of Aihrde, change and alter as fits the needs of your campaign.

#### **THE PILLAR OF STONE**

The pillar of stone that sits upon the cliff face is not in fact a pillar at all, it is a cairn. Upon close examination it is a pile of stones about 11 feet long and 5 feet wide. A small pillar of stones, about 5 feet tall stands at the head of the pile, overlooking the riverbed. To all appearances it seems a cairn for some giant of a creature. The stones themselves are all rather large, ranging from 100-300 pounds and are set in such a way that the whole edifice is extremely stable.

Within the cairn is the body of a male stone giant, laid to rest with his knees beneath his chin and his arms pulled down over his legs, in typical stone giant fashion. He is naked but for a single necklace, on which hangs a ring.

The giant is of course Odeon, whom Rrolfgar rescued from the trolls. After his adventures with Rrolfgar Odeon dwelt with the dwarves for many years until at last he returned to his own people in the mountains to the east. There he lived out the long centuries of his life. Though the stone giants and dwarves were never openly at war, Odeon's people and the kin of Rrolfgar were particularly close and they learned much from each other, they fought side by side in their many disputes with the goblins, other giants and the trolls, they traded goods and knowledge and at times traveled together.

And though time eventually sundered the people, Odeon never forgot his friendship with Rrolfgar. Age eventually overtook him and when it came his time to die he traveled across the grasslands to the tomb of his own making. There he shaped the rock and made a bed for his head, and it stood over the burial room of Rrolfgar. After his labors Odeon lay down upon a long slab of stone and took his last breath. His children set rocks upon him and wove them together to guard them against the ravages of beast and time. There he passed into stone as had his dwarven savior.

Time has eroded what magic held the stones of the cairn together and it is possible to move them and open the grave, though not very easy. The stones are heavy and unless some magical means to move the rocks is devised, the effort will take several hours.

Read or paraphrase the following:

**The giant lays upon a broad flat stone, clearly his death bed. The shape of him remains, though it is difficult to tell whether this is a statue carved from stone or was once a living creature. His knees drawn up beneath his chin and his arms stretched down to his side. His eyes are closed and his mouth set in a grimace, with drawn lips clinched tightly over his broad teeth. The necklace hangs around his neck, the ring still attached to it.**

#### **THE HALLOWED RING**

The ring around the giant's neck hangs on a silver chain but itself is made of a light brown-laced-with-black colored stone. It has a head with two faces, one bearded, the other clean shaven and bald carved into it. These are clearly the heads of the dwarf and the giant. Anyone who closely examines the ring can note this on a successful intelligence check (CL 2). The ring itself was crafted by Odeon and the stone of the ring taken from flakes of the stone of Rrolfgar's body, buried down below. The giant shaped it and imbued it with a powerful magic.

The ring radiates magic and though it is presently sized for a giant's finger, anyone who picks it up changes the size almost immediately so that it will fit their own finger. The ring is hallowed by the spirits of the giant and the dwarf. Anyone wearing the ring gains a +1 to their AC and +1 to all wisdom saves. If a cleric or paladin wears the ring they gain an additional +2 to any turn check. In addition, they gain a bonus +1 in any encounters with dwarves or stone giants.

#### **RETURNING TO THE GUM LOG**

Assuming the characters retrieved the amulet, their only task now is to return to the Gum Log Inn and Tavern. It should take as many days, roughly a day and a half, to return to the Gum Log. However, any attempts to track down Felgrin fail as he is no longer at the tavern. He left the party a message with whom to meet in town and when to deliver the amulet and where to collect their money. However, a night's room and board are covered at the Gum Log.

The journey to town should take a day or so, where they are set to meet a man named Thelius and deliver the amulet for their well-earned pay.

Thus, begins the grand adventure of the Hallowed Oracle. If you intend to continue playing this adventure campaign please refer to **The Hallowed Oracle** campaign book now available from Troll Lord Games.

If you are playing this as a stand alone allow Thelius to pay the silver coin or to betray the party as Felgrin intended and as your own campaign dictates.

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# CASTLES CRUSADES

## THE HALLOWED RING

It is a hard thing to cross the plains. The land is flat and seems endless. The wind is forever blowing. The wild grass stretches on forever, until it mingles with the pale skies. Where one begins and the other ends is anybody's guess. It is easy to become disoriented, lost or turned around, and fall prey to the sun, wind or any of the many creatures who stalk the flat earth.

Somewhere on this unforgiving landscape lies the body of a man ravaged by hunting beasts. He holds in his possession an amulet, a trinket really, but one that must not be left on the plains. The body must be found, the amulet retrieved and returned to its rightful owner. But to do so one must brave the wild beasts and unforgiving nature and unearth the mystery of the grasslands.

This stand-alone adventure is designed for use with 3-5 low level characters. It begins in an Inn and leads the characters on a short overland trek in search of an amulet, involves several encounters and a small dungeon.



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