

Annual 2008 Issue 6

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Wolfgang Baur Presents

KOBOLD

Quarterly™

A tiny little magazine of Kobolds & Dragons

Blood Magic

Ecology
of the **Phantom
Fungus**

The Truth
About **Tieflings**

by David "Zeb" Cook

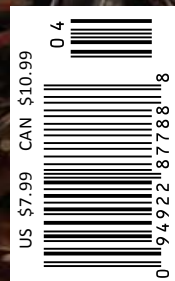
The
**Paladin's
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Interview with
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contents

Letters

5 From the Mines

Editorial

8 Three Clones Later

10 **The Truth About Tieflings**

by David "Zeb" Cook

The creator of the tiefling explains their crooked path.

18 **Ecology of the Phantom Fungus**

Ecology

by Scott Gable

A life cycle designed to kill.

29 **True Paladins**

Codes of Chivalry

by Richard Pett

The code that rules the Lawful and the Good.

36 **Monte Cook: Retreat into the East**

Kobold Diplomacy

Semi-retired but still a huge influence on the RPG world.

42 **Crab Diviners of Zobeck**

Strange Oracles

by Joshua Stevens

Fortune is a river.

48 **Knights and Pawns**

Flashing Blades

by David Schwartz

52 **Ask the Kobold: Q&A**

Rules Advice

by Skip Williams

54 **Secret Messages**

Dungeon Design

by Tim Connors

58 **Blood Magic**

Arcane Power

by Phillip Larwood

60 **Ioun Stones**

by Jonathan Drain

64 **The Alchemist's Lair**

Maps of Fantasy

by Darrin Drader and Sean MacDonald



On the Cover

Pat Loboyko's first cover for KQ is a simple look at how a blood mage puts on a suit of armor. Hey, we said simple, not pretty.

For more blood magic, see the article on page 58.

Reviews

Book Reviews 49

by Cynthia Ward and Pierce Watters

Cartoons by Stan!

10' by 10' Toon 33

Bolt & Quiver 62

The Free City

The Clockwork Oracle 70

by Wolfgang Baur

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From the Mines

Dispatches and Complaints

Attention to Detail

Dear KOBOLD,

I just read issue #5, and I wanted to tell you what an amazing job you did. This is the first issue I have read, and if this is any indication of what can be expected on a regular basis then I am certain you are on the path of success. I plan to subscribe soon and hope that I can sponsor a subscription for one of our fighting soldiers abroad too.

I loved the equal amount of content for both the player and the DM. I also enjoyed how everything was written in a non-specific setting way so as to make it as easy to introduce in any world as possible. I especially liked the real-world origins of Jezebel. I love attention to detail like that. To me it just adds to the overall quality of the article.

Also I enjoyed the article on “Maximizing Your Monk.” Honestly, I have always overlooked its stunning fists ability until now.

I would like to make two comments.

First, about staying B&W or switching to a color format, if staying in B&W keeps you in a print form then by all means stay with it. While I appreciate the fact you offer your fine publication in both print and PDF form, I am getting tired of so many publications going to an online-only format. Some of us still don't have access to broadband where we live!

Second, in regards to switching content to 4E or staying with 3.5E, please cover both until the industry as a whole makes up its mind as to which way it's gonna go. Though I would like to point out that a kobold has better stats in 4E than in 3.5.

As a side note when my current campaign ends I plan to play a kobold in honor of you. Thank you for carrying on the true spirit of the DRAGON.

-Will Piasecki

Thanks, Will, we're working to keep the magazine interesting for everyone. Unfortunately, the new 4E license will not allow us to present both 3E and 4E content at the same time, so we're sticking with 3E this issue.

And we couldn't resist adding a little color this issue. We'll see if we can maintain the advertisers who make it possible.

Dual Stat Hydra

First off — great magazine. I am glad that you were there to fill in the gap when DRAGON/DUNGEON went the way of the dodo.

I purchased the 4E books, and am going to give the system a chance despite the trolls. I want to have a good grasp of the system so I can be informed.

However, most of my gaming group will probably be playing 3.X.

So I guess I am saying, please continue to put out your articles in 3.5 content, but I think it would be interesting to see if these articles and modules could be in 4E format too. The story should be able to be played in either edition, ya know. It *is* still fantasy.

-Ron Pollard

Ron, I wish it were that easy, but unfortunately, the Game System License for 4th Edition content does not allow for dual stats. So that option is closed.

Even if it were possible, it would eat up



a lot of pages, so... A hybrid-stat magazine is pretty unlikely, barring a special deal with Wizards of the Coast.

What Works

I just received the newest issue. You asked for responses about the change to 4e, so I am giving it. I would prefer you not switch.

If the magazine goes to all 4e I will not renew it. I would very much like to be able to get new material for the edition I likely will continue to play.

-Derek Lloyd

Thanks to everyone who wrote in for their favorite edition. Currently, not many people are asking for 4E, which I guess I consider a little surprising. Unless that changes, we'll be sticking with old school 3rd Edition.

Adopted Soldier

Thank you very much for the free pdf of KQ5!

I wasn't sure if you received my email requesting to be added to the waiting list (connectivity can be “iffy” here at times) and didn't want to send a second at the risk of seeming pushy.

I have been selected as the coordinator for Worldwide D&D Game Day here at Bagram [Ed.—Afghanistan], though ours will have to happen later as the kits will take a while to reach us.

Tell all the kobolds “thank you” for me. Your generosity and hard work are very appreciated.

-David Cornwell

You can write to us at letters@koboldquarterly.com or send paper mail to
KOBOLD QUARTERLY, PO Box 2811, Kirkland, WA 98083

NEW GODS OF MANKIND



You're very welcome (though really, it's the subscribers who support these subscriptions directly)! The Adopt A Soldier program has been pretty successful, and we're happy to provide subscriptions worldwide.

PATHFINDER, Please

I have been getting KOBOLD since issue one and love it, but if you feel it best to switch to 4th edition I will have no reason to continue to order it.

I am going with Paizo PATHFINDER RPG so I can use all my 3.5 books that now overflow my book shelves.

Whichever way you decide to go I wish you the best of luck.

-Timothy Lauchnor

It's pretty clear we'll lose some subscribers no matter what we do, so we'll need it. However, since I've done my share of writing for the PATHFINDER adventure paths, the Golarion setting in particular is likely to get some support from KQ.

No More PDF

Dear Kobold-in-Chief,
I love what you are doing with KQ. The ecology and Ask the Kobold articles are my favorites. I received the third issue of my subscription last week and plan to resubscribe soon so I won't miss an issue. But before I do, I have a question. Will you be offering print-only subscriptions?

I am wondering because due to my incarceration I am not allowed access to a computer. This means that I am missing out on half of the subscription's benefit while still paying full price. I don't want to complain but my access to funds isn't what it used to be, and I don't like the idea of paying for something I can't use.

On an unrelated subject, I think you should stay 3.5. I am certain that 4th Edition will have some great content but so does 3.5. I hate to say it but I think the change to 4th edition had everything to do with profits and nothing to do with improving a game that was great to begin with. It's DUNGEON and DRAGON magazine all over again. They stopped printing the magazines because

it was cheaper to put it on the Internet. I'm sorry if I sound hostile but the Wizards of the Coast ended their contract with Paizo halfway through my first year's subscription to DRAGON magazine and I am still a little bitter.

Anyway, you have a great magazine, keep up the good work.

-Darren McCracken

The number of subscribers without access to an Internet connection is quite low, so for now, we're going to continue to offer the print+PDF option.

Why Fight City Hall?

I am in favor of staying 3.5E. A 4E magazine would be of no use to me, since I will not be playing it, and the pure "fluff" articles simply wouldn't be enough to justify a subscription. (Sorry.)

Consider this as well: WotC already has 4E Web sites, DUNGEON and DRAGON (such as they are these days), and people who like 4E will subscribe to them through D&D INSIDER. By keeping KOBOLD QUARTERLY 3E, you are filling a niche for those of us who are not switching. You avoid anyone potentially saying "I already get DRAGON, why do I need KQ?"

Also, while the decision to go 4E is irrevocable (as I understand it), the decision to continue publishing 3E material is not. So, if staying 3E doesn't work out, you can always switch later, but if going 4E doesn't work out, you cannot switch back. That is, assuming I know what I'm talking about with the licenses.

Anyway, add my vote to the 3.5/ PATHFINDER column. You've got a great magazine here.

-Andrew Phelps

Well, I'd like to think that even if KQ does someday go 4E, it would cost a lot less than the \$180 per year of a full-blown DDI subscription. But you make a good point. Why compete with the big guys, if all your subscribers are asking for 3E? So, we're sticking with the current rules for now.

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Three Clones Later

I've always loved summer as a season for gaming. Sure, it's hot and sunny, and you could go outside. But it's also the convention season, with GenCon and Origins and all the rest. And it's awards season, with ENnies and Origins Awards and... Well, ok, it's really just those two.

Combine the publishers launching their biggest releases of the year, and the awards honoring the greatest games of the last year, and it's easy to find something great to try out in the summer months. It's a prime time for RPGs.

And there's a good reason for this. School's out. Summer's a good time for college students and high school types alike to find a different reason to pull an all-nighter. Man, I miss having the summer off for massive gaming. Fortunately, I don't have to miss convention season.

My first convention experience was GenCon at the University of Wisconsin - Parkside. The dealer room was tiny by current standards, but I went to each booth and checked it out. I stopped in my tracks at the West End Games booth, where a bearded fellow was showing off some kind of SF game. It was a new-game demo (something I'd never seen before), and my pause in front of the booth gave the proprietor all the opening he needed.

"Hi, I'm Ken. Come try out PARANOIA!" he said. I didn't need to be asked twice.

The demo was short and funny and brutal (I think I lost three clones in 10 minutes), but I loved it and I bought the game on the spot. It was so new, the boxed part of the boxed set wasn't available yet. I didn't care, Ken made it so entertaining, and ran the system with a laugh and a wink. How could anyone not love this game? Humor in an RPG, amazing!

At the time, I was took my gaming maybe a little too seriously, looking down on anyone who mocked an



adventure's flaws, or played Chaotic Silly characters, or even (gasp) had too much fun joking during the game.

That demo made me loosen up a little (though I confess, I still take my gaming serious rather than humorous). I took the booklets home, ran a few entertaining games of it (more entertaining for me than for the players, I fear, as they wanted to go back to D&D pretty quickly after losing their first few clones).

I realized later that "Ken" was "Ken Rolston", the game's designer, listed right there in the credits. Holy cow, I should gotten an autograph! I'd gotten a demo directly from the designer. I was sold on the value of conventions from that day forward.

Putting together the first convention issue of KQ has been a blast. Yes, we've done a fifth issue of a quarterly magazine! Squeezing another issue into the schedule did involve a lot of scrambling, but if you like it and the con season goes well for us, we'll do this every year for GenCon. If it goes poorly and no one cares, well, we won't.

So please show your friends that KOBOLD QUARTERLY is worth their hard-earned cash! With the articles in this issue, it should be pretty easy: the truth about tieflings from the designer who invented them, an ecology with a Mythos spin, and knightly feats, blood magic, and more.

Share your comments on this issue's articles, request an article, or send us your own summer gaming and convention stories. Did your dice melt in the heat? Did you stay up till dawn? Let us know!

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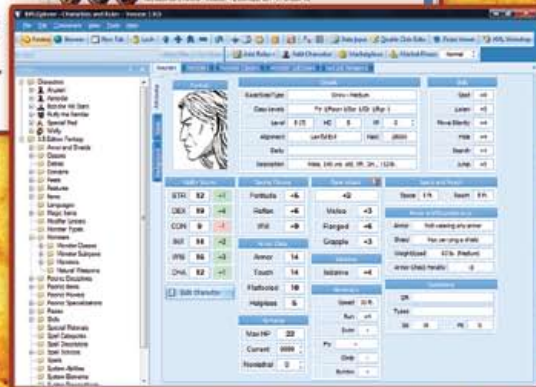
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by David “Zeb” Cook
Art by Cris Griffin

You think you know us. All that needs be mentioned is Caermalrath and those dark pacts supposedly signed there and now you think you know everything about us. Look at the horns, the wicked glimmer, the glide as we pass by—it’s all you need to define our existence.

We are the Others, the Touched, the Kissed, the Blessed, the Cursed. With a single word or

phrase, you seek to bind us.

The truth is, you know so little about us. Your ignorance hides behind tales, legends, and stories that everyone knows but cannot prove. The truth is, we are more—much more—than your stories, your fears, and your dreams.

Just remember that truth is convenient and serves many masters.

*Thus all the elements which ye
Destruction, Sin, or briefly, Evil, name,
As my peculiar element I claim.*

—Mephistopheles in Faust

While a tiefling will often talk about himself and his people as “we,” it is little more than a lie. Where humans often prefer the bond of tribe, cult, and nation, tieflings seldom feel such affections. Through painful lessons, tieflings have learned it is best to never trust or rely on others.

They especially suspect those of their own kind, since each knows exactly why he should “never trust a tiefling.” The idea that tieflings share a common identity, purpose, or goal is foreign to all but those who seek the restoration of the glories of the ancient empire of Caermalrath (cynics would say, those few seek only power).

Even then, they are only bound by a common target as each brings his own goals and ambitions to the endeavor.

Secret Histories

What is the truth of the tiefling? Is it the tale of Caermalrath? While for many it is no more than a mumbled curse, scholars of the ancient describe it as the source of our kind. But how could we be born out of a promise, a few words spoken, and a handful of spells? Are we naught but human blood perverted and corrupted? That would make us lesser people—and that is the lie.

When humans barely knew of the secret arts, who do you think walked among them and taught them the words of power? Who showed them the ways of the necromancer and the diviner? Certainly not the elves, who hide their knowledge out of jealousy and fear. The dwarves? Those lumpen dolts could only hoard and covet, certainly not generously share their secrets with outsiders. Nor did the dark

races, the orcs and other fell creatures, shed light on arts they themselves were to dim to perceive. No, it was us, your closest kin.

For we have always been among you, sometimes few in number, sometimes greater, as in the Age of Empire. How else could it be, for even if we are the product of human dabbling, the consorting with devils, then certainly humans fell long before Caermalrath. And where they dabbled, we entered.

Nor are we just your polluted blood, the product of your corruptions. Were that the case we would have overrun the land eons ago. No, we have been here since the beginning, since before the age of human might. We are old, and we know secrets you do not.

Tieflings as a group are a proud people, and while many do not inquire into their origin, few if any, accept the idea that they are an accident of human plotting. That would diminish them and their powers and make them subservient to humans in the grand order of things. Even those tieflings who believe the tales of Caermalrath and the Blood Pact deny any such accidental creation. Instead they hold that tieflings were and are the agents of the infernal powers, given a foothold in this reality because of the bargain the Old Houses made with the devils in those days.

Tiefling Bloodlines

But I am lax and beg your forgiveness. I am Luor, Seventh Son of Malachi, himself Eleventh Son of the Keeper of the 97th generation of House Aschenwald, foremost of the houses of Caermalrath, Commander of the Eastern Gate of the Conquering City, and Speaker for Grantoxices Heart-Squeezer, 37th Prince of Hell (should He ever so call upon that need). Know that what I write and say is the voice of my people, and none will question my words in these matters.

Perhaps because of their history, tieflings are inordinately proud of family history and lineage. The deeper and more detailed a family tree, the greater

the prestige for the owner. At the same time they do not wear their lineage on their sleeve the way many elves do. It is simply the knowledge of their past that provides them comfort, power, and, when needed, status among their own. Of course, tieflings being who they are, it is never wise to accept their claims at face value. Even the most orphaned of their kind will have some claim to greatness in their past (though never verifiable, of course).

This passion for family does not equate to bonds of family and kin, however. There is no special love between child and parent. Brothers and sisters are no more to be trusted than any outsider; if anything a tiefling trusts his own kin less, since who better knows the best way to strike at a weakness than his own family?

Living Among You

Dwarves have their cavern empires, elves their forest utopias. Even orcs build smoking fortresses and live under one banner. Yet in the centuries since Caermalrath, no scholar ever mentions so much as a tiefling town. Building is not our way. It is far more pleasant and useful to live among others. And even in your cities you will not find us gathered together in foreign enclaves like the gnomes or forced to dwell in the ghettos like half-orcs. It is much better to live among humans, side-by-side, so that we are accepted as no different from your own.

Still, we have our tastes. By human standards, a tiefling's house is both lavish and austere at the same time. We are not driven by false modesty, a hypocrisy that inflicts so many humans. There is no fear of vanity among us. Why should any tiefling deny themselves any pleasures they can acquire? If something is to be owned, let it be made of the finest materials that can be owned—the deepest silks, the purest steel, the rarest gems from distant coasts, all are worth having simply because they are better.

And yet at the same time, comfort breeds weakness and, too often, possessions become traps for their owners. No chair should be so comfortable that you cannot stand, no doublet fit so well that it dulls

your senses. Foolish is the tiefling who cannot abandon his home at a moment's notice, made prisoner by goods. Humans often complain that our homes are sparse, cold, and uncomfortable, and their complaints are a sign of their own weakness. Our homes are sparse, so we can disappear quickly when the time comes. They are cold because we choose not to reveal ourselves to anyone. And what you see as discomfort is for us pleasure, the knife's edge that keeps us keen.

Of all the major races, tieflings are unique in that they show little inclination to build, either physical or social structures. There is no traditional infernal building style that marks a tiefling home as unique (although hiring a tiefling architect will add a certain flair to human building projects). They typically occupy a house built for another race and adapt it to their needs. Humans sometimes denigrate tieflings as “magpies” for this habit of taking over abandoned buildings to use as their own.

From the tiefling point of view, driving away current residents or squatting in abandoned houses is a practical matter, by living among the other races, tieflings do not provide a single concentrated target for their enemies. “Destroy me, destroy yourself,” is an old saying among tieflings, and indeed, the effort of rooting them out of a community can destroy that community in the process. Of course, the trade-off is that tieflings give up the support of their own kind, but this is hardly a loss considering their general suspicion of their own kin.

In the social sphere, tieflings do not organize into overt political bodies. They form no senates, councils, kingdoms, or the like to rule over themselves or others. Such bodies would provide convenient targets for their enemies. Worse, such groups require a modicum of trust and cooperation among their members, properties very rare throughout the whole of the race. They are perfectly happy to be part of someone else's government, although even here they prefer the subtler roles



of advisor and courtier, positions where they can influence policy without being responsible for it.

Some humans mistake the tiefling taste for the finest goods as the passion of a merchant for his wares. They assume tieflings must be master tradesman at their core, since they apparently understand the value of goods. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is part of their racial makeup, as much as their horns or their smoldering eyes. They have a passion for fine things, but they have no special lust for coin or profit. It is the quality and style that matters most, the pride of showing the best.

Tieflings are most comfortable when all that they own can be packed up at a moment's notice. Thus, their love for fine possessions reflects itself mainly in their personal possessions—their clothes, their armor, their weapons, and their magic. Fine furniture, carriages, and statues are hard to make disappear in the dead of night, but a hammered breastplate, a bejeweled tiefling blade, and an always smoldering wand are easy—and practical—traveling companions.

It is quite true, also, that tiefling gear is uniquely uncomfortable even when

it is custom-fitted, as any human warrior compelled to wear tiefling armor will testify. Even the best made items pinch, prick, and bite at the wearer in subtly painful ways. These are not mistakes of construction, but deliberate, “small tortures”—willingly accepted by the wearer.

Called Armor of Tears, a perfectly matched suit enhances the senses of any tiefling who wears it, giving them a +1 equipment bonus to all perception-related checks. However, the armor has the opposite effect on any non-tiefling who wears it, resulting in a -1 penalty to all perception-related checks (such as Spot and Listen).

Tiefling “style” is embodied in personal items. Tiefling weapons are well-known for their elegantly barbaric twists and turns, designed for pain as much for killing.

Tiefling armor is beautifully fitted but agonizing. Their clothes are at the forefront of fashions. The work of a tiefling jeweler is dazzling but wise buyers always ask about the hidden features—the poisoned clasp or the razor-edged facets of the stone. Were such jewelry made by less treacherous hands, tiefling work would command elvish prices, but their penchant for deadly surprises means all but the most discerning connoisseurs pass them by.

Race Relations

Some believe that because we chose to live among you we want to be accepted by you. They are fools. What do we care of your people and your race? It is your arrogance that presumes you are superior to us. You say, “Tieflings are contaminated blood of our kind.” We know, however, that we are the refinement of your bloodline, burning out the weakness that cripples you. Surely it must humble you to know you are the weaker race.

There is no doubt tieflings hold themselves superior to all other races. They are, after all, the product of a what they see as a blessed mingling of bloodlines—human and devil. While

it might seem natural to hold humans in utter contempt, most tieflings feel quite the opposite.

Humans: Humans are, if not a noble race, a rich bloodstock to spring from. Tieflings see in humans many positive qualities—the facility for lying, the casual approach to virtue, and the untroubled acceptance of hypocrisy to name a few. Tieflings favor those who are adaptable and those who have a flexible understanding of morality—in short, humans.

Dwarves: Tieflings view the small races as usefully pragmatic, if perhaps too much so. Dwarven predictability—both their passion and their temper—is a weakness to be exploited. Tieflings like the fact that dwarves are easy to manipulate but seldom feel they have much in common with this race. To a tiefling, the dwarven passion for gems and riches is crass and shallow, a sign of their inability to defend themselves psychologically from others. The other small races deserve little more than condescension for their cowardly attachment to their staid homebound lives.

It might seem natural for tieflings to ally themselves with any of the various monstrous and vile races that abound in the world; however, tieflings view most of them with utter contempt. In their eyes, most of these races lack sophistication in one form or another—too brutish, too crass, too base, or too lacking in the refinements of pain, suffering, and evil. For a tiefling, it is only natural to rule and dominate these lesser brutes, to use them as pawns in their plans and schemes, and to exploit them for whatever gain and amusement they can provide.

It is the elves whom tieflings reserve their greatest scorn, even hatred, for. Tieflings have no use for many aspects of elvish culture—their sense of racial purity, their obsessive love of nature and beauty and their overall arrogance. The first strikes at the very essence of a tiefling, the second is a weakness to not see the cruel purpose of nature, and the third is just undeserved when compared to the greatness and history

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Tiefling Characters

Tiefling racial traits

- +2 Dex, +2 Int, -2 Cha
- Medium size
- A tiefling's base land speed is 30 feet
- Darkvision out to 60 feet
- Racial Skills: Tieflings gain a +2 racial bonus to Bluff and Hide checks
- Racial Feats: A tiefling gains feats according to its class levels
- Special Attacks: Darkness or Infernal Power
- Special Qualities: Resistance to cold 5, electricity 5, and fire 5
- Automatic Languages: Common, Infernal
- Bonus Languages: Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Gnome, Goblin, Halfling, Orc
- Favored Class: Rogue
- Level adjustment +1

Infernal Powers

All tieflings may take one power in place of the usual *darkness* spell-like ability, rolled from among the following during character generation. Additional powers can be gained at cost of 1 point of Con and 1 point of Wis for each additional power.

01-10 Hellstep: You can move magically as a swift action 3/day, suffering no attacks of opportunity, up to a distance of your level times 5 feet. This a limited *dimension door* spell-like ability.

11-19 Claws: You gain a natural attack with two claws for 1d4/1d4, using your base attack bonus.

20-27 Stygian Hide: You gain +1 natural armor.

28-36 Improved Resistance: One of your resistances increases to 10.

37-44 False Friend: You gain +2 to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks. The Bluff bonus stacks with your racial bonus.

45-51 Beguiler: You may cast *charm person* 1/day, with CL equal to your level.

52-59 Sneak Attack: Your sneak attack damage improves by +1d6.

60-66 Spawn of Baphomet: Your enormous will grants you *bull's strength* 1/day as a caster equal to your level.

67-72 Infernal Pact: All your spells' saving throw DCs increase by 1.

73-78 Shadowsteel: You ignore the first attack of opportunity against you each round; it passes through your body as if you were incorporeal.

79-84 Spawn of Titivillus: You can read all languages and gain 5 ranks in Use Magic Device.

85-89 Spawn of Belphegor: Once per day, you cast *slow* as a caster equal to your level.

90-93 Spawn of Mammon: You may purchase goods for yourself at half price if you make a successful opposed Bluff check. If you fail the check, you must pay double or do without, and may be reported as a sneak thief or swindler. Goods given to others must always be sold at full price; you may never give a gift without profit to yourself.

94-98 Heartseeker: On a confirmed critical, you always inflict maximum damage.

99-00 Spawn of Asmodeus: You are as smoke and can become incorporeal 1/day for a number of rounds equal to your level.

of the tiefling past. Elves attempt to hide from the pain and suffering of the world; tieflings openly and willingly embrace it. This, they maintain, makes them the stronger, better bloodline.

The Greater Purpose

Here's your folly, that you paint us all with the same brush—all dark and evil, against the good of the world. What you don't understand is our subtlety, that we change and flow as shadows over water. Good and evil are meaningless to us. We are what we need. We can be virtuous by our standards and do not give a damn about yours.

So, it is unfair to call us liars. After all, who is to say what is true and what is false? Me? You? What makes either of us right or wrong? Truth is only in what we choose to believe. Clinging to a belief is what we call the "unnecessary burden of truth." What is true and what is not are no more than leaves in the wind, constantly circling each other, never stable.

The only thing that lasts is pain and suffering. These are the secret truths of the world. Pain hones us, exposes our weaknesses and burns them out of us. Suffering is a gift we give others. Whether it breaks them or makes them stronger is not our concern.

In questions of morality, tieflings are flexible and yet constant. While human opinion maintains they are all damned villains, tieflings can choose to be good or evil. But for them, goodness is relative. Few adhere to the imposed codes of conduct of any religion. Instead they make their way through right or wrong by their own moral compasses. They have few, if any, qualms about using expedient measures—lies, treachery, murder, and worse—to reach good ends. The harm of an act is inconsequential to the goal attained. Thus, a tiefling sees no paradox in assassinating for a good cause or torturing for vital information. Indeed, they might even find a little pleasure in it. With this mindset, tieflings often find themselves employed by those unwilling to soil their own hands with ugly but “necessary” tasks.

And then there are your gods. We are tieflings; we have seen gods, bred from gods, and been gods. And someday we will be gods again. Your gods are no greater than what we can be, so why should we venerate them? It is better to use our energies to become great than waste time waiting on those who might be great. Gods and devils only offer promises and lies that we have seen many times before. We have been great in the past, and we will be great once more.

It is well known that tieflings have little use for the gods, demons, and devils. A vestige of that power runs through their blood, so they already know its taste. The trappings of religion, the need for reverence, and the dogmatic codes are the meaningless pantomimes of wretches who don't understand the essence of the divine. Gods are nothing more than goals—a power to ascend to but not to revere.

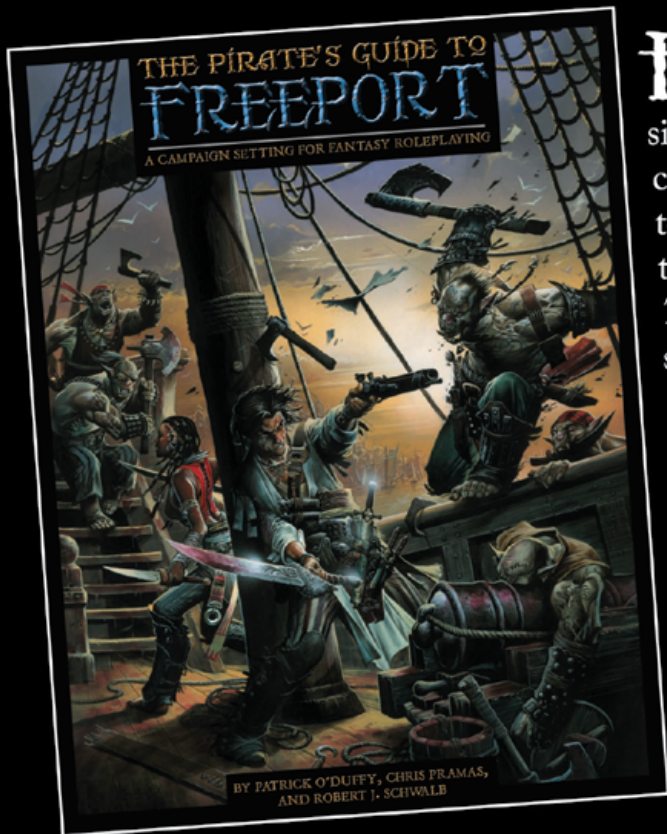
That taste of power, the racial memory of what they once were, is the core of a secret cult among the tieflings—the Keepers of the Pacts. This loosely knit group, for no tiefling can bind tight to his fellows, seeks the secrets of the ancient days of Caermalrath and before. Each member hopes to restore the might of that dread empire—and sit on its throne, of course. It is a cult few speak of, and few tieflings know of its existence. Its members operate in the shadows coming together in twos and threes to sometimes share secrets with each cultist hoping to learn more than he reveals. Indeed it is this competition between Keepers that hinders their progress more than anything.

Tiefling Roles

What do you see when you look at me? A fellow with horns, an affliction in your eyes, or something darker? And yet we are not all alike. Each of us chooses our place and our part—the role we will play amongst you. Some you see, but others we keep hidden behind the masks of merchants, tradesmen, and craftsmen.

To the outside world, tieflings are often lumped as scoundrels or merchants. While the first may apply to any of this

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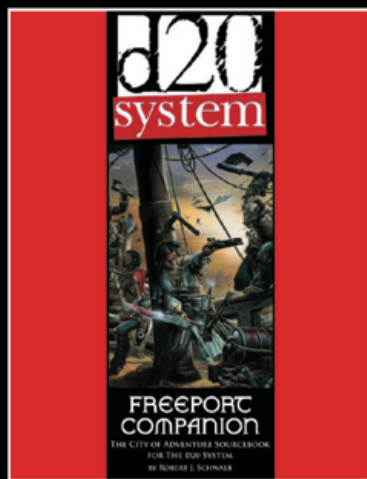
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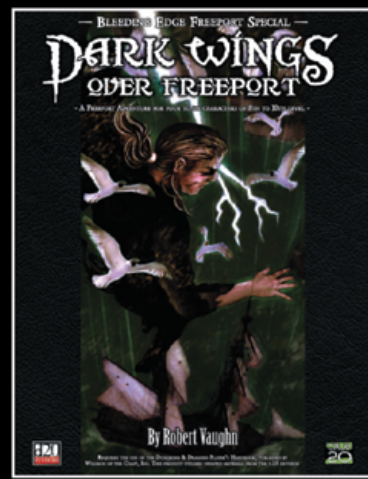
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race, tieflings more often than not despise merchants as a group. Those tieflings seen in the trade are most often there for one of two reasons—poverty or subterfuge. Those too impoverished or weak of spirit may take up a trade, but there are others who use the role of merchant as a shield for other activities and goals. Thus, it is wise to always question the motives of every tiefling merchant—especially the ones who offer particularly good deals.

Listed here are some of the roles tieflings adopt and what might be expected when each is encountered.

The Huntsmen of the Woods

Not every tiefling dwells in the great cities. There are those of who dwell in the vast deeps of the wilderness. With gowns of leaves, feathers, hide, and bone stitched together with spider silk, many equate them with wild druids or feral elves, but the huntsmen are no lovers of nature.

Nature is their home because that is where the ancient dark secrets are to be found, where packs of devilish hounds pull down game, where the Horned Man calls together his children, and where baleful and forgotten powers await their resurrection.

Villagers on the edge of dark forests whisper of the huntsmen and wisely fear them. While all are not evil, even the best are tainted by dark forces. As for the worst, they offer sinister herbs to jilted lovers, craft cursed arrows for ambitious warriors, guide hunters to the endless chase, and lure children from the sheltered fields for their dark rituals.

Oathbreakers

The oathbreakers are the rarest of all tieflings, those who have turned their back on their own dark nature to embrace the salvation promised by the gods. Why have they dedicated themselves to the good powers? Some hope to purge themselves of their dark bloodline; some hope to atone for the evils they have done; and some just find it an intriguing way to infuriate and confound their enemies.

It is a path filled with struggle. It is no easy thing to deny what runs even deeper than blood. Tiefling nature is not to be good, as others define it. Oathbreakers follow obsessive rituals and exercises intended to strengthen their will and fuel the determination to hold to the virtuous path. These can be grueling physical exercises, mind-numbing sutras droned over and over, even magical wards that deliver excruciating pain at the first sign of corruption. Other tieflings may look down on oathbreakers for their folly, but it is impossible not to admire their self-discipline.

Contempt is a problem they always face. Normal tieflings consider the Oathbreakers aberrations to be pitied or despised. Most other races look at them and see only a tiefling to be distrusted, feared, and hated. Even priests of their own order can find it hard to accept that they have truly reformed. Consequently, they almost never rise in the ranks of the priesthood and serve only as lay followers, bearing the standard of their adopted god in battle.

The Seekers

These are the elders of the tiefling race—or at least they like to claim so. Seekers gather the ancient lore and recovering their race's lost knowledge of Caermalrath and the ages before.

While many are also part of the cult of the Keepers, not all Seekers aspire to raise the ancient empire. Some work for knowledge, some for personal power, and some to restore the greatness of Caermalrath. All of them are driven by a passion for knowledge. Much was lost since the fall of Caermalrath and the Seekers see it as their duty to unearth those mysteries.

Seekers are often dismissed as unworldly sages with no adventuring skills. That underestimates them woefully. Only a fraction of the ancient lore can be found in arcane libraries and monastic cloisters. The vast bulk of what they seek can only be found in the most blasted and desolate corners of the world—no place for bookworms. A true Seeker lives for the risk

and the adventure almost as much as for the dark lore he hopes to uncover.

The Thief of Lost Things

Of all the shapes and patterns and styles of tieflings out there, none is more bizarre than those few who have descended into dark madness. For many, it is a trap they never escape, but a few emerge from their personal chaos transformed in ways that cannot be explained. These few are the Thieves of Lost Things; once mad, they now possess an insight into a cosmology beyond normal understanding.

Their name is not just a metaphor; it is a description of what they do. Driven by their strange insight, the Thieves obsessively collect, find, and steal very specific items. No two are the same, and value is not the objective. One day it might be a tattered sandal worn by a dead gladiator; the next a perfect gem from the coffers of the local governor. Individually there seems to be no rhyme or reason to their thefts, yet as a whole, one senses some hint of an arcane and unknowable pattern. They never sell what they acquire. Everything they gain is used in cryptic patterns—mandalas of debris assembled in scattered locations throughout the world.

What is their purpose? No one knows for sure, although human and tiefling scholars have grappled with this question for centuries. Such questions would have been dismissed long ago if it were not for the evidence that something powerful is happening. For, strangest of all, the Thieves are miracle workers: they or their strange assemblages somehow transport armies, rebuild cities after quakes, turn deserts into gardens and gardens into dust. Not often, perhaps not even in a person's lifetime, but when it happens they can change lives, reshape landscapes, and even alter the path of the future to some unknown end.

So there, now I've told you what I'm going to tell you.

And you still don't know us.



Before you is long,
dark night
waiting for the enemy's footsteps
and the knowledge that,
while the dawn will come again,
it's a long ways off
and you've got no guarantees
THAT YOU
AND THOSE
YOU LOVE
WILL BE AROUND
TO SEE IT.

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ECOLOGY OF THE Phantom Fungus

Terror from Beyond the Stars

By Scott Gable

Art by Michael Jaecks

“The rural tales are queer. They might be even queerer if city men and college chemists could be interested enough to analyze the water from that disused well, or the grey dust that no wind seems to disperse. Botanists, too, ought to study the stunted flora on the borders of that spot... People say the colour of the neighboring herbage is not quite right in the spring, and that wild things leave queer prints in the light winter snow.”

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*

From the field notes of Sir Randolph Corday, mycologist to the King (recovered from his staging camp in the lower Hazelwood):

Most adventurers know fungus only as the tiny toadstools that litter the forest floor. Sure, eating the wrong one could be disastrous, but otherwise, these strange growths pose no threat except to corpses—those that are prepared to return to the dirt. Mushrooms are harmless, right?

What if I were to tell you that many of those mushrooms you saw in the forest were actually the same creature? Or, that those mushrooms are really only the “flowers” of the creature and the rest of it lies hidden, just underground? Or, that this buried creature might span 3,000 acres with a total mass greater than any dragon? That, my friends, is exactly what a fungus is.

Fungus is primarily composed of chitinous threads called hyphae that branch and crisscross in a vast network throughout the soil. These hyphae are ever growing and seeking new food sources, which are promptly broken down into the basest components and absorbed by the fungus. In this way, fungus decomposes organic matter and performs a vital cycling of matter. While fungus proves both strange and fascinating, and perhaps a touch humbling, it is not typically a threat to the living.

However, I have found incontrovertible proof of an even stranger fungus. This fungus exhibits the strangest of behaviors and physiology. It acts with deliberation and intent. I believe this fungus can only be from beyond the realms that we know.

Physiology of the Phantom Fungus

“...when he see all the trees a-bendin’ at the maouth o’ the glen... an’ smelt the same awful smell... they was a swishin’ lappin’ saound, more nor what the bendin’ trees an’ bushes could make, an’ all on a suddent the trees along the rud begun ter git pushed one side, an’ they was a awful stompin’ an’ splashin’ in the mud. But mind ye... he didn’t see nothin’ at all, only just the bendin’ trees an’ underbrush.”

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*

My initial claims, at least, are clearly supported by various heroes’ tales of confrontations with a “phantom fungus.” Imagine, an invisible mushroom! It was this phantom fungus that I sought to study when I set out for the dark Crinderfeld domains.

The handful of stories that mention this strange creature are isolated to but a few regions. Seeking out the locals in the outer Crinderfeld Marches, I had hoped to discover clear evidence. Eventually, I found a few gnomes who had encountered and slain such a beast. They recounted the experience of being attacked by a foe they could not see, never knowing what was gnashing at their faces and defeating the beast only through luck.

The creature’s dead body, they said, became visible a short time later. Unprompted, they described it as a giant, grotesque mushroom with a gnarled, ropey texture. The stalk, however, divided into four equivalent stumps that served as a means of locomotion. The top of the “mushroom cap” opened in a gaping maw of four-fold, radial symmetry lined with what appeared as chitinous teeth. Ropye knots, consistent with a rudimentary sensory organ, clustered around this mouth and around the rim of the cap. Unfortunately, the remains dissolved after several minutes and left nothing behind. Several other accounts indicate that this fungus may have several types.

The locals of these secluded areas have developed a “leave well-enough

alone” attitude and avoid the phantom-filled forests. They have found that if they leave the creatures alone, the creatures typically leave them alone. However, according to local legends, much larger specimens have destroyed entire villages. Clearly, more investigation is needed.

The Phantom Fungus and the Fungal Collective

The phantom fungus is but a single stage in a strange and complex life cycle. Is it an individual creature or a part of a larger superorganism? Where does the individual begin?

The phantom fungus is a part of a communal organism more properly called a fungal collective.

Violet Fungus & Shrieker

As seen among mundane fungi, the mushroom found on the forest floor is merely the fruiting body of the fungus and is the result of the fungus’s sexual reproduction; sexual reproduction in fungi does not require multiple individuals. This temporary “flower” creates and distributes the spores that perpetuate the species. Whether carried on the wind or on passing creatures, the violet fungus spores will develop into a new fungal node (see below) if they survive.

The violet fungus remains attached to the fungal collective by its hyphae. However, as a free action, the violet fungus can detach itself from the greater organism to move about on these durable appendages; as a move action, the violet fungus can reattach itself by burrowing its hyphae into the ground wherever the fungal collective is established. As long as it remains attached, the entire fungal collective senses what the violet fungus senses. The violet fungus blindly attacks anything that approaches it when disconnected, but while connected, it shares the intelligence of the fungal collective and may delay an attack out of guile.

The shrieker is a separate species of fungus that occasionally forms a symbiotic relationship with violet fungi and the associated fungal collective.

Phantom Fungus & Variants

“Whatever the horror was, it could scale a sheer stony cliff of almost complete verticality....

...It’s invisible... It’s a frightful thing to have alive, but it isn’t as bad as what Wilbur would have let in if he’d lived longer. You’ll never know what the world escaped. Now we’ve only this one thing to fight...”

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*

The phantom fungus is a false fruiting body. Though it roughly resembles a mushroom and arises in a similar way, it does not bear spores and is the result of the fungal collective’s asexual reproduction. These structures all begin the same, showing differentiation only at the end of their development; the entire growth cycle can take as little as 12 hours. The phantom fungus is a common result, but other variations are also possible. The phantom fungus serves as sentry and scout. Other variations have their own niches; all specialize in service to the fungal collective.

Though a phantom fungus and its variants typically detach themselves from the fungal collective as soon as they can, they can re-establish the connection as a move action by extending their hyphae into the ground wherever the fungal collective is established. They must remain stationary when connected to the fungal collective, but as a free action, they can disengage and move normally.

A phantom fungus and its variants cannot reproduce. They arise only through the fungal collective, established by a fungal node. Once active, the phantom fungus continues to grow. The common phantom fungus is but a first stage: a mature fungal horror is truly terrifying to behold.

The fungal collective dictates the behavior of all phantom fungi and variants. When detached from the fungal collective, they are treated as “knowing tricks or having a purpose” as detailed under the Handle Animal skill. Treat the fungal collective or fungal node as the trainer; given the intimate nature

of all communication within a fungal collective, Handle Animal checks are automatically successful.

Typically, a phantom fungus stands vigilant and unmoving as a sentry, using its natural invisibility to good effect. When trouble arises, it acts quickly to defend the fungal collective. While connected to the fungal collective, it can respond to a threat in another area. Once it detaches itself, it loses that awareness until it sees the threat directly or reattaches itself to the fungal collective.

Phantom fungi may serve as scouts, but due to their limited intelligence when disconnected from the fungal collective, they can offer only their direct sensory impressions back to the collective. They return to the fungal collective when a mission is completed.

One last role of phantom fungi is to collect organic matter. When times are lean or more resources are required, phantom fungi scour the land for any organic matter, either living or dead. They carry this back to the fungal collective in their gaping maws, to be slowly absorbed.

Fungal Node

“The colour... was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all...”

When they looked back toward the valley... the farm was shining with the hideous unknown blend of colour; trees, buildings, and even such grass and herb-age as had not been wholly changed to lethal grey brittleness. The boughs were all straining skyward, tipped with tongues of foul flame... over all the rest reigned that riot of luminous amorphousness, that alien and undimensioned rainbow of cryptic poison... seething, feeling, lapping, reaching, scintillating, straining, and malignly bubbling in its cosmic and unrecognizable chromaticism.”

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*

A fungal node holds a fungal collective together. In a sense, it is the “brains” of the operation, but the intelligence of the fungal collective really comes from

the whole of each of its constituent parts. Clearly though, it is essential for managing and coordinating all activities performed by the fungal collective. Each fungal node differs slightly in personality and extends this personality into the collective intelligence. These give the collective a type of hive-mind.

The fungal node itself simply appears as a giant truffle, and it lies fully underground—typically just a foot or two below the surface. Its hyphae extend from it underground in every direction, forming a sort of a massive chitinous web. These hyphae may stretch for miles and, together, they form the mycelium of the fungal node. This connects it to each and every constituent member of the fungal collective. The mycelium is so extensive that any member of the fungal collective can extend hyphae into the ground, while within the fungal collective’s range, and establish a connection with the mycelium just below the surface of the ground.

The mycelium stretches in all directions to a range determined by the age of the fungal node and the availability of resources. The mycelium can extend through any organic matter; it cannot penetrate inorganic matter in the same way, but it can take advantage of minute cracks and, like tree roots, eventually break through most natural barriers. By secreting enzymes into the soil, the mycelium speeds up decomposition and absorbs the decomposed organic material as nutrients.

The mycelium extends throughout all available organic matter, including the local flora. This presents an opportunity to attack the affected plants, but the fungal collective instead uses it to exert control over the plants.

If the ranges of multiple fungal nodes overlap, they develop connections between their mycelia. The results are unpredictable. Often, the fungal collectives work collaboratively and toward the common interest. However, when there is a sizable difference in age among the fungal nodes, one fungal collective dominates and, ultimately, takes complete control. On rare occa-

sions, open hostility erupts between two fungal collectives.

Occasionally, five or more fungal nodes—all a part of the same fungal collective—divert all energy to one of their number and evolve into a grand fungal node. This highly intelligent creature appears to be the apex of fungal evolution. It grows from the fungal node upward and breaks the surface of the soil as a giant mushroom, with a distinct personality. These grand fungal nodes show great variety in appearance from one to another, but each correlates with strange, otherworldly colors. Telepathy allows for greater communication within and without the fungal collective, and they can shift their consciousness into an iridescent cloud of spores and move about. The increase of power with this new stage of life is dramatic, both in its potent abilities and the range of its control.

Occasionally, a grand fungal node must relocate. This is not a simple procedure and requires a tremendous amount of energy. For an entire year, the fungal node directs the fungal collective to focus on collecting organic matter: the fungal collective denudes their entire range of organic matter.

This is the grand sporulation and all plant and animal life—including humanoids—is at risk, as the grand fungal nodes considers all organic matter fuel for the process. With sufficient fuel, the grand fungal node, impervious within a capsule of strange organic material, launches into the sky in a supernatural display of pyrotechnics.

Within this capsule, it can relocate and start anew in any land far or near: some claim the capsules are even capable of interstellar and interplanar travel. The land left behind is drained of life and remains a barren wasteland of gray and brittle ash, devoid of all organic material. In every case, however, a single fungal node is left to attempt a fresh start.

Outer Ones (Mi-Go)

“They were pinkish things about five feet long; with crustaceous bodies bearing vast pairs of... membranous wings and sev-

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— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Whisperer in Darkness*

Within the larger and more advanced fungal collectives, special caretakers are often on hand. In a special process, the false fruiting body mentioned previously avoids differentiation into a phantom fungus or variation and begins incorporating both plant and animal characteristics. Requiring a full week of development, the result is a creature known simply as an outer one.

In addition to the grand fungal nodes, outer ones are among the only fungi of the fungal collective capable of communicating intelligently with the outside world using their limited telepathy and abhorrent buzzing approximation of speech. This makes them ideal for the role of ambassador to other sentient races. They are also the only ones (aside from the capsule of the grand fungal node) capable of surviving the void of interstellar travel, and they have been known to pass along the mind-shattering secrets of

things beyond that they have collected to those deemed worthy.

Origins

“The main body of the beings inhabits strangely organized abysses wholly beyond the utmost reach of any human imagination. The space-time globule which we recognize as the totality of all cosmic entity is only an atom in the genuine infinity which is theirs.”

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Whisperer in Darkness*

Whoever reads this likely thinks me mad already, but I must go on. I have spoken to them; or rather, they have spoken to me. They are not creatures of the natural order that philosophers study. Yes, they have been here for eons and have integrated well with our natural world, but they originate from far away. Just by looking at some of them, you can tell they are not wholly within our world but rather they float between two worlds.

More than that, I believe they actually draw some sustenance from other planes. If my theories are correct, their hyphae are rooted not entirely within our reality but extend into the very fab-

ric of the multiverse and draw energy from the planes. This might begin to explain their supernatural abilities and amazing diversity. What if all of the fungal collectives throughout the multiverse are connected? Perhaps there is really only *one* fungal collective—massive and spanning ever greater realms.

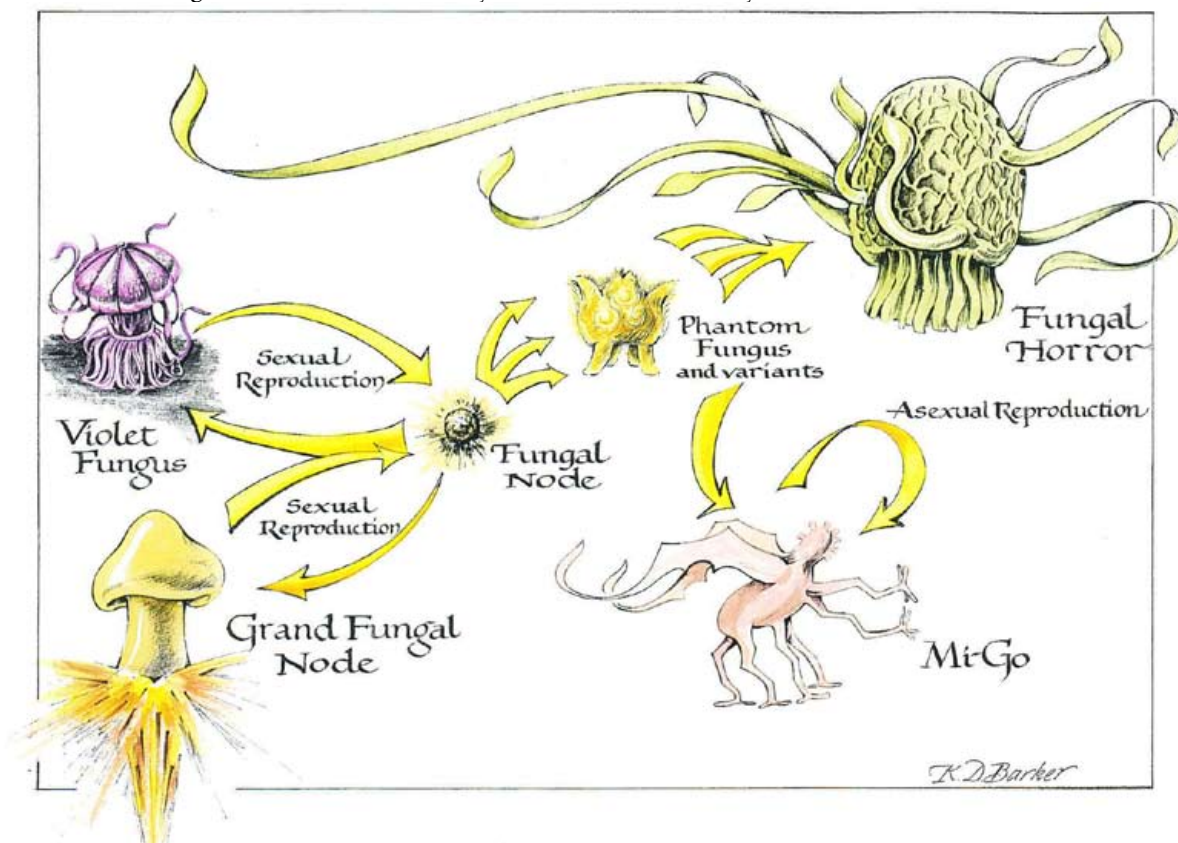
I must go. They promise to show me even more.

Differentiation

The fungal collective is a rich and complicated array of creatures. Some are detailed here, others are hinted at, and still others are left to be discovered. All its elements are able to join the fungal collective.

Variations (on the phantom fungus)

The phantom fungus is simply one of many variations of mobile fungus that arise from a fungal collective. The phantom fungus is reprinted here for reference. In each case, the variants are identical except for what appears under their individual entries; note that the invisibility power of the phantom fungus is not shared by the variants.



Phantom Fungus, CR₃

Always N Medium plant

Init +0; Senses Low-light vision; Listen +4, Spot +4

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 14 (+4 natural)

hp 15 (2d8+6)

Fort +6, **Ref** +0, **Will** +0

Defensive Abilities concealment; **Immune** criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee bite +5 (1d6+3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks –

TACTICS

Before Combat Phantom fungi make no preparations before combat. They may initiate combat at the first sight of intruders but may also simply hold ground. This is typically decided by the controlling fungal node—either directly if attached to the fungal collective or by standing orders if detached from the fungal collective.

During Combat Phantom fungi will typically wait motionless for the right moment to strike. Once engaged, they simply attack the nearest foe.

Morale Phantom fungi fight to the death unless ordered otherwise.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 10, **Con** 16, **Int** 2, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +3

Feats Alertness

Skills Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4

Languages cannot speak

SQ greater invisibility

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Greater Invisibility (Su) A phantom fungus is constantly under the effect of *greater invisibility* (CL 12th). This effect is not susceptible to *invisibility purge* but is susceptible to *see invisible*. They become visible one minute after death. (Invisible creatures receive +2 bonus on attack rolls against sighted opponents, ignore Dexterity bonuses to AC, and gain concealment. The attack modifier above is already adjusted for this.)

Skills (Ex) A phantom fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

ECOLOGY

Environment forest or underground

Organization solitary, rot (2-8), collective (9+)

Treasure none

Advancement 3-4 HD (Medium); 5-6 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment —

Engulfer Fungus, CR 3

Nothing but mouth, an engulfer fungus, also known as a trapdoor fungus, spends all of its life underground, lying in wait just below the surface. It tries to burrow underfoot and swallow its prey whole with its massive maw lined with thousands of sharp, chitinous teeth.

Always N Large plant

Init +0; **Senses** Low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 9, flat-footed 13 (+4 natural, -1 size)

Defensive Abilities — **Immune** criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

OFFENSE

Spd burrow 20 ft.

Melee bite +6 (1d8+9)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks improved grab, swallow

TACTICS

During Combat Engulfer fungi will typically wait motionless, just at the surface of the ground, for the right moment to strike. Once an intruder is in range, they move to swallow it.

STATISTICS

Str 22

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +11

Feats Stealthy

Skills Hide +4, Listen +2, Move Silently +2, Spot +2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Improved Grab (Ex) If an engulfer fungus hits a smaller creature, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If successful, it can attempt to swallow on its next round.

Skills (Ex) An engulfer fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Hide checks.

Swallow (Ex) An engulfer fungus can swallow a grabbed opponent with a successful grapple check. Once swallowed, an opponent automatically takes 1d8+9 bite damage per round. The opponent can climb out with a successful grapple check that leaves the opponent grappled in the creature's maw. As the creature is almost entirely underground, swallowed creatures are unable to cut their way out but can still damage the engulfer fungus from the inside.

ECOLOGY

Advancement 3-4 HD (Large); 5-6 HD (Huge)

Faerie Fungus, CR 3

A thin sheet of iridescence fluttering on the wind that pops in and out of view, faerie fungi are constantly in flight. The presence of sentient, living creatures, however, always stirs their hunger.

Always N Tiny plant

Init +4; Senses Low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 16, flat-footed 14

(+4 Dex, +2 natural, +2 size)

Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +0

Defensive Abilities blinking; **Immune** criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

OFFENSE

Spd fly 20 ft.

Melee hyphae +7 (1d3-3 plus 1d2 Wis drain plus 1d2 Con drain)

Space 2 ½ ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Special Attacks consume

TACTICS

During Combat Faerie fungi will typically flitter about randomly on the breeze until intruders are spotted. Once engaged, they simply attack the nearest foe.

STATISTICS

Str 4, **Dex** 18

Base Atk +1; **Grp** -10

Feats Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +12, Listen +2, Move Silently +10, Spot +2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blinking (Su) Faerie fungi exist trapped between two worlds and are treated as if under the effects of a continuous *blink*.

Consume (Ex) If a faerie fungus hits with its hyphae attack, it drains 1d2 points of Wisdom and 1d2 points of Constitution. The Wisdom drain requires only a touch attack.

Skills (Ex) A faerie fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

ECOLOGY

Advancement 3-4 HD (Tiny); 5-6 HD (Small)

Fisher Fungus, CR 3

Seemingly nothing but ropes and knots of long, chitinous vines, a fisher fungus—or snare fungus—lies on low branches or in the crotches of trees with its tentacles dangling in silent wait of prey.

DEFENSE

Immune criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

OFFENSE

Spd 5 ft.; climb 20 ft.

Melee 4 tentacles +3 (1d6+2)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks constrict, entangle, improved grab

TACTICS

During Combat Fisher fungi typically lie motionless on an overlying branch with their vine-like tentacles dangling to the ground, waiting for the right moment to strike. Once engaged, they simply attack the nearest foe.

STATISTICS

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +7

SQ –

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Constrict (Ex) A fisher fungus deals automatic tentacle damage with a grapple check.

Entangle (Ex) Any creature moving through an area that the fisher fungus threatens is considered entangled.

Improved Grab (Ex) If a fisher fungus hits a Large or smaller creature, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. Fisher fungi receive a +4 bonus to grapple checks.

Skills (Ex) A fisher fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

Fungal Horror

CR 13

“Bigger’n a barn... all made o’ squirmin’ ropes... hull thing sort o’ shaped like a hen’s egg bigger’n anything with dozens o’ legs like hogs-heads that haff shut up when they step... nothin’ solid aboaout it—all like jelly, an’ made o’ sep’rit wrigglin’ ropes pushed clost together... great bulgin’ eyes all over it... ten or twenty maouths or trunks a-stickin’ aout all along the sides, big as stove-pipes an all a-tossin’ an openin’ an’ shuttin’... all grey, with kinder blue or purple rings...”

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*

A fungal horror is a mature phantom fungus. Over time, any phantom fungus or a variant could naturally develop into a fungal horror. However, given one minute, 30 or more phantom fungi and variants can combine their masses into a temporary fungal horror.

Once a month, any phantom fungus or variant can combine with others in this fashion. Thirty individuals can hold the form for 10 rounds.

Always N Huge plant

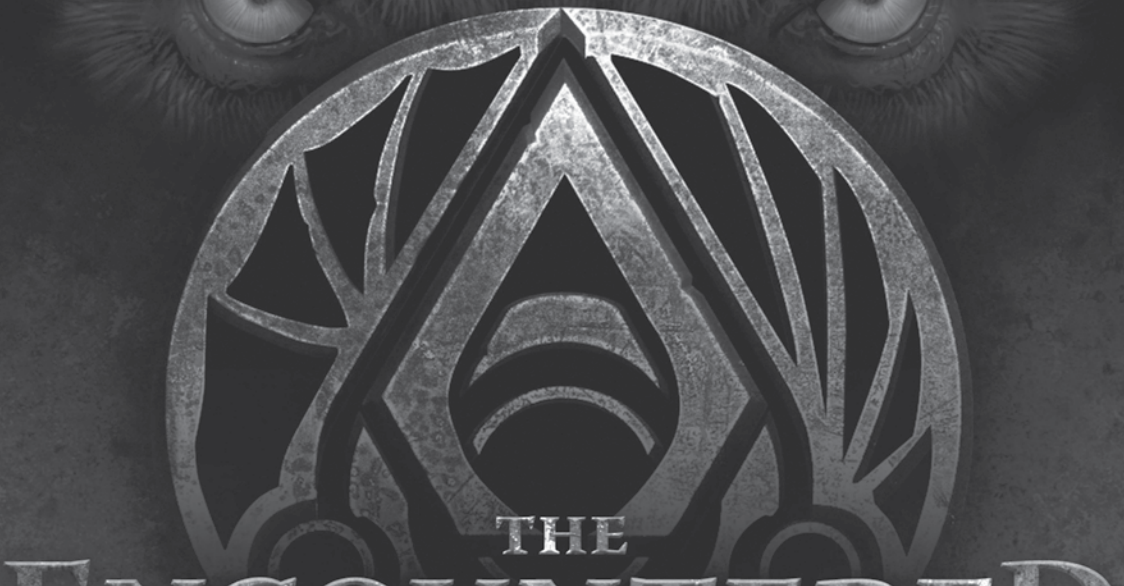
Init +4; **Senses** all-around vision, low-light vision, see invisible; Listen +12, Spot +12

DEFENSE

AC 25, touch 12, flat-footed 25

(+4 deflection, +13 natural, -2 size)

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hp 189 (18d8+108)

Fort +17, **Ref** +6, **Will** +6

Defensive Abilities concealment; **Immune** criticals, flanking, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Melee 4 tentacles +22 (1d12+9) and hyphae +17 (1d8+4 plus 1d6 Wis drain and 1d6 Con drain)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (20 ft. with tentacles)

Special Attacks constrict, consume, improved grab, trample

TACTICS

Before Combat A fungal horror makes no preparations before combat. They simply charge fearlessly into battle at the first sign of prey.

During Combat Fungal horrors trample as many foes as possible, then lash out with their four massive tentacles.

Morale Fungal horrors fight to the death unless they are in the middle of a mission.

STATISTICS

Str 29, **Dex** 10, **Con** 23, **Int** 2, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +30

Feats Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (tentacle), Power Attack, Run

Skills Climb +17, Listen +12, Move Silently +5, Spot +12
SQ frightful presence, greater invisibility, walk anywhere

SPECIAL ABILITIES

All-Around Vision (Ex) A fungal horror has eyes scattered all about its body, allowing it to see everywhere at once and giving it a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks and immunity to being flanked.

Constrict (Ex) A fungal horror deals automatic tentacle damage with a grapple check.

Consume (Ex) A fungal horror can consume a grabbed opponent with a successful grapple check. The fungal horror drags the grappled opponent within reach of its hyphae and begins to consume the opponent's essence, dealing automatic hyphae damage. In any round that a fungal horror succeeds with its consume ability, colorful wisps of the prey's essence flow through this creature's body and make it visible until the beginning of its next round.

Frightful Presence (Ex) The appearance of a fungal horror is greatly unsettling. Whenever a fungal horror becomes visible—such as by its use of the consume ability or with *see invisibility*—its presence takes a toll. Creatures within a 30-foot radius are affected if they have fewer HD than the fungal horror. A successful Will save (DC 19) negates the effect and grants immunity to this effect for 24 hours. A failed Will save results in the target being panicked for 4d6 rounds if it has 4HD or less and shaken for 4d6 rounds with 5 HD or more. This is a fear effect.

Greater Invisibility (Su) A fungal horror is constantly under the effect of *greater invisibility* (CL 20th). This effect is not susceptible to *invisibility purge* but is susceptible to *see invisible*. They become visible one minute after death. (Invisible creatures receive a +2 bonus on attacks against sighted opponents, ignore Dex bonuses to AC, and gain concealment. The attack modifier above already reflects this.)

Improved Grab (Ex) If a fungal horror hits a smaller creature with a tentacle, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

See Invisible (Su) A fungal horror is treated as if always under the effects of *see invisibility*.

Skills (Ex) A fungal horror gains a +8 racial bonus Climb checks and can always take 10 on Climb checks.

Trample (Ex) As a full-round action, a fungal horror can trample smaller opponents (Reflex save for half; DC 28). A fungal horror engaged in a grapple can trample at half speed with a successful grapple check and may include the grappled foe as a trample target. Instead of slam damage, any creature trampled by a fungal horror takes automatic hyphae damage.

Walk Anywhere (Ex) A fungal horror never suffers penalties to movement while on a natural surface—including soil, wood, or stone. Rough terrain is disregarded. Walls and ceilings are no obstacle, and a fungal horror moves across them as if walking on the floor: speed is never reduced, climb checks are not necessary, and its tentacles are always free.

ECOLOGY

Environment forest or underground

Organization solitary

Treasure none

Advancement 19-25 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment —

Grand Fungal Node

"[T]he hideous thing shot vertically up toward the sky like a rocket or meteor, leaving behind no trail and disappearing through a round and curiously regular hole in the clouds before any man could gasp or cry out... in one feverish kaleidoscopic instant there burst up from that doomed and accursed farm a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm of unnatural sparks and substance; blurring the glance of the few who saw it...

...returned the next morning to see the ruins by daylight, but there were not any real ruins. Only the bricks of the chimney, the stones of the cellar, some mineral and metallic litter here and there... everything that had ever been living had gone. Five eldritch acres of dusty grey desert remained, nor has anything ever grown there since."

— H.P. Lovecraft,
The Colour Out of Space

Grand Fungal Node

CR 20

Always N Huge plant

Init +0; **Senses** blindsight 250 ft.; Listen +50, Spot +50

DEFENSE

AC 34, touch 19, flat-footed 30

(+15 deflection, -4 Dex, +15 natural, -2 size)

hp 577 (35d8+420)

Fort +31, **Ref** +9, **Will** +23

Defensive Abilities otherworldly aspect; **DR** 15/cold iron; **Immune** criticals, flanking, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, *sleep* effects, stunning; **SR** 28

Offense

Spd 0 ft.

Melee 4 tendrils +31 (2d6+7 plus hyphal array)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft. (250 ft. with hyphal array)

Special Attacks hyphal array, spore cloud

TACTICS

Before Combat With a network of hyphae and scattered minions in almost constant telepathic contact, grand fungal nodes know what happens in their territories immediately. At the first sign of a threat, they send minions to investigate and direct a spore cloud in that direction. In times of plenty, they may negotiate with travelers.

During Combat A grand fungal node often strikes at the first sign of prey with tendrils, spore cloud, and minions. They are more tolerant if the intruders have not discovered its main body. Intruders that move toward the main body are met with everything the grand fungal node can unleash.

Morale Grand fungal nodes negotiate with other creatures if the main body is threatened by an overwhelming force. Otherwise, they fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 25, **Dex** 2, **Con** 35, **Int** 24, **Wis** 30, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +26; **Grp** +45

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bullrush, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (tendrils), Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Leadership^B, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack

Skills Bluff +42, Diplomacy +50, Intimidate +46, Knowledge (arcana) +45, Knowledge (nature) +45, Knowledge (the planes) +45, Listen +50, Sense Motive +48, Spot +50

Languages Common, Undercommon

SQ shifting consciousness, telepathy 500 ft., territory

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blindsight (Ex) A grand fungal node can sense vibrations within its territory using its extensive array of hyphae.

Hyphal Array (Ex) A grand fungal node has an immense network of hyphae burrowing through all organic matter in its territory. Within 250 ft. of the main body, the grand fungal node can manipulate the trees, vines, and roots as tendrils to attack foes. It may attack a single target or multiple targets anywhere within its range. Making one attack is a standard action and all 4 is a full-round action. Attacks of opportunity within this range are triggered normally.

When a creature begins its turn grappled by one of the grand fungal node's tendrils, hyphae exert their influence to feed on or usurp the victim. Each round as a part of its grapple, by feeding on grappled prey, the grand fungal node deals 1 point of Con drain and heals 20 hp. Alternately, the grand fungal node may usurp its prey: the victim must make a Will save (DC 31) or be controlled as per *dominate monster*. This Supernatural ability is Charisma based. Creatures can regain control with a *remove curse* or gain a new saving throw with *remove disease* or similar magic.

Additionally, the grand fungal node may raise corpses as temporary zombies using the usurp ability. This functions as *animate dead* (20th CL).

Improved Grab (Ex) If a grand fungal node hits a smaller creature with a tendrils, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Otherworldly Aspect (Ex) A grand fungal node has a pulsing, throbbing chitinous body with alternating whorls and pits and with coruscating patterns of color. This grants the grand fungal node the benefits of *displacement*.

Shifting Consciousness (Ex) Due to its enormous network of hyphae, a grand fungal node can shift its consciousness to other fungal nodes (free action) or to spore clouds (see below). As it shifts consciousness within its territory, its abilities transfer to each new center of consciousness. For instance, a grand fungal node normally has complete control over the organic matter within 250 ft. of the main body using its hyphal array ability; however, if it creates a spore cloud, the ability becomes centered on the spore cloud.

Spore Cloud (Ex) A grand fungal node's secondary form is spore cloud, a scintillating cloud ejected from the main body and containing thousands of minuscule spores. This distributes the grand fungal node's consciousness into the cloud; the main body retains just enough awareness that, if it is attacked, full consciousness is restored to the main body as an immediate action no matter where the spore cloud is located, dispersing the spore cloud. The spore cloud maintains telepathic contact with the hyphal array and the collective. The spore differences from the main body are:

Always N Fine plant (swarm)

Init +4

DEFENSE

AC 33, touch 33, flat-footed 28

(+10 deflection, +5 Dex, +8 size)

hp 60

OFFENSE

Spd fly 40 ft. (perfect)

Melee swarm (5d6 plus energy drain)

Space 10 ft.

Special Attacks distraction (Fort DC 29), energy drain, hyphal array



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STATISTICS

Str 0, **Dex** 21, **Con** 15, **Int** 24, **Wis** 30, **Cha** 19
Grp —

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Energy Drain (Su) Living creatures damaged by a spore cloud gain 1 negative level. For each negative level received, the spore cloud gains 5 temporary hit points. After 24 hours, creatures with negative levels must make a Fort save (DC 31) for each negative level or permanently lose that level. This ability is Charisma based.

Damage inflicted on a spore cloud does not transfer to the main body. If a spore cloud is reduced to 0 hp, it disperses, and the grand fungal node's full consciousness immediately transfers back to the main body. Only one spore cloud can exist at a time. A new one can be created as a standard action.

Territory (Ex) Each grand fungal node controls a territory. This territory will consist of a minimum of 1,000 ft. of dense, lush vegetation. Beyond this central 1,000 ft., the territory is more sparsely populated (for example, thinning woods and grasslands) or the densely packed vegetation may continue. The grand fungal node maintains its network of hyphae throughout the entire territory (up to several miles in diameter). The territory represents the grand fungal node's realm of direct influence. Spore clouds must remain within the territory.

ECOLOGY

Environment forest or underground

Organization solitary

Treasure double (only inorganic material)

Advancement 36+ HD (Gargantuan)

Level Adjustment —

Outer Ones (Mi-Go)

"They... traverse the heatless and airless interstellar void in full corporeal form, and some of its variants cannot do this without mechanical aid or curious surgical transpositions. Only a few species have the ether-resisting wings... Those

inhabiting certain remote peaks in the Old World were brought in other ways. Their external resemblance to animal life, and to the sort of structure we understand as material, is a matter of parallel evolution rather than of close kinship. Their brain-capacity exceeds that of any other surviving life-form, although the winged types of our hill country are by no means the most highly developed. Telepathy is their usual means of discourse...."

— H.P. Lovecraft,
The Whisperer in Darkness

These winged wonders have a soft, chitinous body with many legs. At the end of each leg is a pair of saw-toothed claws capable of the same fine manipulation that fingers allow. Where their heads would be one sees only stubby, wiggling antennae. Unlike most members of the fungal collective, outer ones are self-replicating. Like others, however, specimens dissolve several minutes after death.

In addition to their innate abilities, outer ones are adept at using tools. While they can use the tools and devices of other races, they are excellent crafters and develop much new technology on their own.

Adventure Hook: the North Fields of Chilton


Those that farm the north fields of Chilton have long been known for their flights of fancy and their moonshine. The recent mangling of a young farmer, however, has brought serious attention from local authorities. The tale is spreading of the boy's arm disappearing almost to the shoulder into the very air—a clear cut through bone, blood everywhere. The lad swears that the air itself attacked him and on multiple occasions tried to block his long, frantic passage back to the farmhouse.

Many farmsteads have already been abandoned in the past year due to the phantom-filled woods beyond. The nights are filled with strange lights and stranger chitterings. What was only yesterday dismissed as wild imagination is today considered with deadly seriousness.

True Paladins

Codes of Conduct
that Make Sense

By Richard Pett
Art by Edmund Dulac
and Gustav Dore



*"Make us eternal truths receive,
And practice all that we believe:
Give us thyself, that we may see
The Father and the Son, by thee."
—Charlemagne (742-814)*

The core classes we know have actual historical and fantasy counterparts that can be adapted to add an interesting dimension to any adventurer.

The tale of the good warrior battling evil, for instance, is as ancient as humankind, and with each generation, a new embellishment is made for the telling. Perseus, Rama, Gawain, and Robin Hood are but a few names from thousands of tales.

However, some legendary individuals rise above being simply heroes and epitomize virtue, aspiration, and perfection—these are the paladins of history and fable.

Paladins in History

The term *paladin* derives from the Latin *palatinus*, meaning “palace official,” and is defined as an officer of the



palace. The “knightly” use of the term is traditionally drawn from the twelve peers (*les douze pairs*) of Charlemagne’s court.

Charlemagne (‘Charles the Great’) and his Twelve Peers

King of the Franks and first Holy Roman Emperor (Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne in Rome on Christmas Day, 800AD, making him the first Western Roman Emperor in more than 300 years), Charlemagne and his knights are the center of a series of chivalric romances, one of which—Roland—is briefly covered in the sidebar. Charlemagne, rumored to stand eight feet tall and of enormous strength, was a promoter of education and justice (he had a *pleiad*—a group of scholarly advisors to assist in his deliberations).

Briefly, the historic Charlemagne was the son of the mayor of the palace of Merovingians, and he eventually became King of the Franks. Charlemagne had a brother, Carloman, and these brothers warred, ending with Carloman’s death in 771. Charlemagne

expanded his empire, overcoming the Saxons and forcing them to convert to Christendom, and eventually, he helped the Roman Church to break away from Byzantine rulers and thus became the Holy Roman Emperor.

Like King Arthur and Barbarossa, Charlemagne now lies sleeping in wait, armed and ready for the enemy. In this case the enemy is the Antichrist, and on the day he appears, Charlemagne shall rise and go forth to rescue Christendom.

Naming the twelve peers is not always easy; subsequent authors embellished tales and changed the names of the characters to suit their times. *Bulfinch’s Mythology* names them “Orlando or Roland (the former the Italian, the latter the French form of the name), favorite nephew of Charlemagne; Rinaldo of Montalban, cousin of Orlando; Namor, Duke of Bavaria; Salomon, King of Brittany; Turpin, the Archbishop; Astolpho, of England; Ogier, the Dane; Malagigi, the Enchanter; and Florismart, the friend of Orlando.” You will no doubt note that this list does not come to twelve; one must also count Charlemagne himself and “Ganelon, or Gano, of Mayence, the treacherous enemy of all the rest” and then choose from several other candidates to make up the dozen.

Player’s Information

Paladins swear to follow a code of conduct that is in line with lawfulness and goodness. Tantalizingly, codes are not detailed in the class description of the paladin, leaving opportunity for expansion. These codes of conduct must, of course, be in line with the nature of paladinhood and its goals—upholding law, pursuing good, and defeating evil. They can also be great fun to devise. Does your holy order have a particular hatred for a monster type? Did giants ravage a temple of old and destroy it in a single night? Does your order have a particular penchant for horses and seek to dazzle and amaze with trickery from the saddle? If you have an idea you wish to expand on and weave into your

paladin character, work with your DM to find an appropriate solution.

Codes of Conduct from History

History and legend offer some interesting variations on codes of honor. Here is one from the period of Charlemagne to consider, together with brief notes on how it may be incorporated into your character or adventure path. A second order, playing on the term ‘knight of the palace’ is also given for your consideration to show how an order may be developed from a single historic phrase.

An internet search will bring up many other examples; ask yourself how they will fit into your adventures. For example, does a knight visit a secret round table of his order once per year to tell his fellow knights of his quests? Do the codes of the Duke of Burgundy instruct your paladin’s course against sin? Does your knight follow the Order of the Fleece, the Temple, or the Dragon in his travels?

Peer Knight

A peer knight follows the code outlined in the *Song of Roland*:

- To fear God and maintain His Church
- To serve a liege lord in valor and faith
- To protect the weak and defenseless
- To aid widows and orphans
- To refrain from the wanton giving of offence
- To live by honor and for glory
- To despise pecuniary reward
- To fight for the welfare of all
- To obey those placed in authority
- To guard the honor of fellow knights
- To eschew unfairness, meanness, and deceit
- To keep faith
- At all times to speak the truth
- To persevere to the end in any enterprise begun
- To respect the honor of women (or the dignity of men)
- Never refuse a challenge from an equal
- Never turn the back upon a foe

Use any appropriate god from your campaign. “Twelve Good Men and True” belong to each nation’s court, and these paladins follow the code of the peers.

They administer justice and oversee courts in the realm, dedicating their lives to travelling the lands to administer justice and vanquish enemies.

Peer Knights bear a great hammer of office known as the Lord's Gavel (treat as a light hammer). They wear crimson and always carry great tomes to record the justice they administer. As such, they always have a scribe assistant known as the Clerk of the Peer.

Knight of the Palace

The order of the Knights of the Palace prizes the palace of its god above all things. They seek to protect the holy shrine, holy images, and the holy house, while spreading the faith. They are missionaries out to convert those too ignorant to see the light. They love nothing more than blessing new believers, sitting in silent prayer in their temples, and creating roadside shrines. Use any god in your campaign that is lawful good.

A Knight of the Palace shall above all things:

- Pay homage at any temple, shrine, or altar to the god before all things. At any image, temple, or place of worship, from the humblest roadside shrine to the greatest cathedral, they must spend at least one minute per level in prayer.

- Seek, by purity and deed, to spread the word of the god—on arrival at any new settlement, the paladin must spread the word of his lord on the holy day of his church by holding a sermon.

- Teach others the will of the lord by spreading his image—Once per level, the paladin must create a shrine to the god. The cost of this shrine shall be 100 gp at first level, 200 at 2nd, 400 at 3rd, 800 at 4th, and so on. The paladin must bless this shrine with his own toil and sweat by succeeding in at least a DC 10 +2/level Craft or Profession skill check (maximum DC 40) in constructing the shrine. The resulting shrine gains the effect of a *hallow* spell at the paladin's CL.

- Never knowingly lie
- Never strike the defenseless
- Never abandon his mount
- Spread the holy word through deed

- Spend the last hour each day in prayer
- Be as brave as a lion
- Be as strong as an ox
- Be as wise as an owl
- Offer succor and tending to all

Knights of the Palace or their associates who suffer any ill

- Offer service to any lord who owns a castle or stronghold who worships the same god. The service is one day per level, providing it is in keeping with the order's beliefs, from the humblest and most menial task to the most glorious and demanding.

Knights of the Palace gain Perform (oratory) as a bonus class skill, and they particularly favor this skill. They also practice the Craft and Profession skills that enable them to build shrines.

DM's Information

Devising codes of conduct for your players and investing a little time in detailing or modifying historical versions of knights appropriate to your campaign adds an element of fun and realism to your game. However, don't stop at the simple code and order—the fun really begins when you consider the definition of good and alter and change the player's expectations with the paladins they encounter.

Paladins should be paladins—namely knights of pure spirit and fairness, bravery and generosity—and any deviation from that makes them something else. They may be fighters of great goodness, but they are merely fighters nonetheless. However, *paladin* should be a name looked on with envy by groups seeking to establish credibility among religious orders in your campaign. The next order is the opposite; consider what other *true* paladins make of this outrage.

The Knights of Secrets

The Knights of Secrets seek out dark tomes and spellbooks and burn them—superficially they regard all magic as evil and all wizards and sorcerers as the devil incarnate—putting whole villages to the sword to find a single witch and reveling in the title Witchburners.

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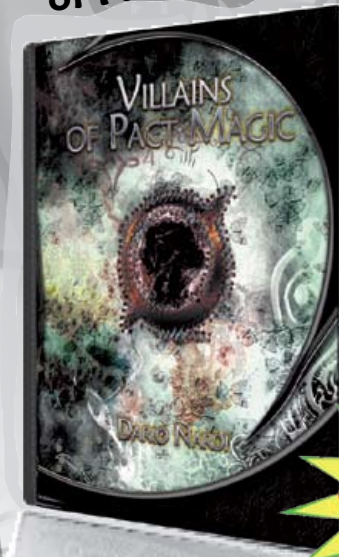
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As far from true paladins as possible, these wicked men obey the will of the church of the All-Seeing Face. Some suggest that their reputation is a sham, and that far from burning books, they gather them for their wizard masters. This may be a bit of slander by their enemies, or a deeper truth.

Do the PCs come upon the wreckage of what was once a thriving peaceful town laid waste by these knights? Do the knights seek a special child or a special tome, a gifted witch or a dark artifact? The knights are remorseless in their searching and woe betide any who cross them. Could a group of these knights masquerade as the rulers of a city—hiding a sick skeleton beneath a false skin of goodness? Do the requests and tasks of his Holiness, the Bishop of Tray, make the PCs suspicious of his motives, and can the PCs forge alliances with the other city rulers to cause an uprising, or do they become hunted rebels—wolves-heads with a price on their heads?

The Questing Knight

The Questing Knight is legend: his footfall echoes along the next valley, the neighing of his horse is just around the corner, he passed through the vil-

lage yesterday.

Questing Knights are of a holy order of knights who never rest—their bed is the ground, and their blanket the stars. The Questing Knight never owns property or has a family, he never calls anywhere home, for home is in his heart, and his heart follows his god. The only possessions the Questing Knight has are his armor, his sword, and his horse.

Do the PCs break an unwritten rule and offend the Questing Knight—what do the PCs do when they realize a knight of pure goodness is chasing them? Can they right the wrong they have unwittingly done, or do they turn on the knight and face him down? Does a paladin PC lead a quest to track down an insane Questing Knight who calls the Cave of Black Treants his home? The cave lies in a forest of flesh treants (see Green Ronin's *Advanced Bestiary*), and the Questing Knight has enchanted by a spirit naga called the Abbess of the Dark Church of Flesh.

The Holy Crusaders

Some paladins are better described as very zealous knights. One such order, the Holy Crusaders, wish to remove all heathens from the world—every man, woman, and child. In this way, they will

cleans the world of their foul beliefs. These knights have only one goal—the extermination of a race or country or religion. They pay tacit allegiance to the beliefs of true paladins, yet even this allegiance is twisted—they give all their wealth to the church, have nothing to do with heirs or family—even to the point of refusing to speak to relatives, and they will not eat the flesh of animals on holy days.

Exactly who the heathens are can be left to you. Are the PCs their enemies, or have they mixed with the heathens and need to be cleansed by fire?

10x10 Toon



by Stan!

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ECLIPSE PHASE

Your mind is software. *Program it.*
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We humans have a special way of pulling ourselves up and kicking ourselves down at the same time. We'd achieved more progress than ever before, at the cost of wrecking our planet and destabilizing our own governments. But things were starting to look up.

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Yet our race towards extinction was not slowed, and in fact received a machine-assist over the precipice. Billions died as our technologies rapidly bloomed into something beyond control ... further transforming humanity into something else, scattering us throughout the solar system, and reigniting vicious conflicts. Nuclear strikes, biowarfare plagues, nanoswarms, mass uploads ... a thousand horrors nearly wiped humanity from existence.

We still survive ... divided into a patchwork of restrictive inner system hypercorp-backed oligarchies and libertarian outer system collectivist habitats, tribal networks, and new experimental societal models. We have spread to the outer reaches of the solar system and even gained foot holds in the galaxy beyond.

But we are no longer solely "human" ... we have evolved into something simultaneously more and different—something **transhuman**.

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In this harsh setting, the players participate in a cross-faction conspiracy that seeks to protect transhumanity from threats both internal and external. Along the way, they may find themselves hunting for prized technology in a gutted habitat falling from orbit, risking the hellish landscapes of a ruined Earth, or following the trail of a terrorist through militarized stations and isolationist habitats. Or they may find themselves stepping through a Pandora Gate, a wormhole to distant stars and the alien secrets beyond

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The Roleplaying Game of Transhuman Conspiracy And Horror

Monte Cook: A Retreat Into the East?

The Master of 3&E Speaks

After co-designing 3e and leading the PDF revolution, Cook has mostly retired from game design — but he still has plenty to say

by Kobold Staff

Monte Cook needs little introduction; he is one of the designers of Third Edition, the creative force behind Malhavoc Press, and the generator of entire systems such as Arcana Evolved and the Books of Eldritch Might, fantastic settings such as Ptolus and Dark Matter, as well as many great adventures from Dead Gods to The Harrowing. He's also a novelist and one all-around nice guy.*

KOBOLD QUARTERLY: Does you feel Ptolus changed the way we do RPGs? And how?

Monte Cook: What I hoped was that Ptolus might change the way publishers approach doing rpg products, or at least the occasional rpg product, but it doesn't seem to have happened. One of the big goals of Ptolus was to make it as user-friendly as possible. So I attempted to envision how a DM uses source material, and then re-envision how a sourcebook might be set up to cater to that use. Lots of indices, lots of page references, and the inclusion of various details and encounters often overlooked or assumed.

I have yet to see anything like Ptolus

come along. The problem is, you have to pour so much work into producing something like Ptolus that you have to end up charging a high price for it. Despite Ptolus' success, I think people are still leery of higher than normal price points. But I know I'd rather pay \$80 or \$100 for some new hardcover as detailed as Ptolus (even if it is a smaller, less deluxe book) than something done in what is now the conventional "one big info dump" style that we've had for decades now.

Imagine a *Player's Handbook* as well organized and referenced as Ptolus. How much easier would the game be to understand and play?

KQ: Also with regard to Ptolus: what worked better than expected, and what didn't work as well? Why one big hardcover book, instead of, say, a boxed set or a series of smaller books?

MC: I may be biased, but I think I it all worked well. The only real complaints I've heard have been about the price, and that's come from people who don't have it.

It's one big book rather than a boxed set because you can't flip through a boxed set in a store.

It's one big book rather than a series of books because it's actually cheaper

for the end user that way. (Ptolus could have easily been six or seven \$30 books.) It's also easier to find things, and easier to keep it all together. If you write six books, you have to assume the DM doesn't have all six. They have to stand apart as well as hang together. With every part of Ptolus, I know you've got the other parts, so I can reference them freely and make it all much more cohesive.

KQ: Tell us about writing the Ptolus comic book, what you thought of the end result, how you tried to present D&D action and magic....

MC: It was a lot of fun, and I'm moderately happy with the end result. My only real qualm is that I never saw a single page of art until all the scripts were actually done. Seeing my first few pages was a learning experience, and I saw things I could have and should have done differently. There was also a change of artists part way through the series which I think kind of threw things off a bit, but that was out of my control.

It became clear to me early on that representing D&D action and magic was not going to be a blow-by-blow, round-by-round affair. In the comic, we see plenty of fights, lightning bolts and fireballs, and so on, but there's



never any real mention of how it works. It's just a facet of the story—a smaller part than in a typical game.

KQ: If you had only one campaign left to master, what would it be? Do you still run Ptolus?

MC: I'm not really sure. I always have new ideas for campaigns, so I can't imagine resigning myself to just one forevermore. I run two campaigns right now, one a Ptolus game and the other a very-non-Ptolus game that takes place entirely in the Underdark. I enjoy them both very much.

KQ: What is your most useful DM tool/device?

MC: A clock. I think one of the most important aspects of a good DM is timing. You have to know how long to spend on one encounter, on one player's actions, on a single scene, or a single adventure. Pacing is vital to keeping the game moving and keeping people's attention.

KQ: You are known as a GM, but do you ever play? And if so, can you tell us about your character?

MC: Right now I'm playing a human wizard in the *Red Hand of Doom* adventure. He's an odd combination of bookworm and foolhardy thrillseeker. I'm soon to play a dwarven wizard in a 3E update of the G-series. Normally I wouldn't play the same class twice in a row, but the DM of the Giants adventure is using my *Books of Experimental Might* and I haven't had a chance to be on the player's side of the screen using those rules yet, and I'm dying to try an *Experimental Might* wizard as a PC.

KQ: Which game designer(s) do you most admire, and why?

MC: Jonathan Tweet. I learned a lot from him working on 3rd Edition D&D. He's got a great mind for mechanics and a way to look at the big picture that is really useful in designing a robust game like D&D.

KQ: What is your favorite monster, and why?

MC: ...it's always hard for me to pick favorites. I guess I'll go with drow, even though they're terribly, terribly overused and they've suffered greatly over the years at the hands of writers and designers who, in my opinion, just didn't get them.

Basically, I ignore almost everything that's been done with them post D3 (*Vault of the Drow*). Gary created this wonderful (which is to say horrible) foe for the D-series of modules, an enemy that you love to hate. The drow are smarter and more powerful than you, and they're irredeemably wicked, decadent, and cruel. But they are mortal, not demons, so to use them properly you've got to really figure out how a society of such creatures could work (unless you're just using them for a single encounter or something).

I like to play up the fact that they're still elves, and so they still love music, beauty, art, and so on, but their tastes are twisted and horrific by any standards other than their own.

KQ: What are you looking forward to right now in RPGs?

MC: Frankly, what I'm looking forward to most is just playing them without having to think about the industry and its politics, its ups and downs, and so on. I think the tabletop rpg industry is in for some rocky times ahead, and I'm not too sad that I've stepped back from it.

KQ: What advice would you offer to a young game designer just starting out?

MC: It just might be tougher than ever to get into the industry right now, unless you want to self-publish material in electronic form (in which case, the door's never been more open). My advice would be to try to get some small pieces published in widely read venues, like *KOBOLD QUARTERLY*, for example.

Get your name out there, and have some respected credits you can use to your advantage, and then perhaps eventually you can get larger work from publishers. Don't start out by trying to publish your campaign world or your home-brewed system. It's hard to

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accept, it's harsh to hear, but the truth is, no one wants a whole setting or a brand new game from a first time designer. Have that be your ultimate goal, maybe, but don't try to start there.

KQ: Does you have an opinion you want to share about 4E coming out?

MC: 4E is in an interesting but somewhat unenviable position. It faces challenges that 3E never had to, and I have no idea what exactly will happen. To be sure, it will be a success, but will it be enough of a success for WotC's bottom line-watchers to be happy? To justify having such a large department of people? I don't know.

When 3E was launched, 2E was virtually dead. (By that, I mean as a viable commercial product, not as a game.) The general audience was ready for change, eager for it actually. No one had to be convinced that 2E was a bad game (it wasn't) in order to get them to be excited for 3E. 2E had simply run its natural course.

Also, 3E came out when the economy was doing pretty well. People had plenty disposable incomes to dump on three big hardcovers. Perhaps even more importantly, it came out when geek nostalgia was at its peak. D&D was showing up on TV shows, movies, and even GE commercials. There was a powerful zeitgeist there. Lastly, it came at a time when the kids who played it as teens in the 80s were now at the age where they could sit down and introduce it to their kids. The timing for a big resurgence for D&D was just right.

Now, the designers and WotC had nothing to do with any of those circumstances, obviously. It was just sort of a perfect storm situation. 4E has none of those advantages. WotC announced the new edition while 3E was still going strong. It has had to spend as much or more of its marketing push on convincing the audience that 3E is flawed as it has previewing and hyping 4E. (3E also had DRAGON and DUNGEON magazines to help support it and its marketing effort, and 4E does not, but that was by WotC's choice.) The economy is lot shakier. D&D is

portrayed (unfairly) in the media as the sad little precursor to online games.

So it will be very difficult for 4E to achieve 3E's success, and that has absolutely nothing to do with the game's design (which I actually know very little about). I do see that it is fracturing the D&D community in ways that 3E never did, but that's because there almost wasn't a community left back then—at least in comparison to now. That's sad to see, and I don't think it had to be that way, but what's done is done.

KQ: You're a design consultant for PATHFINDER. What do you think of Paizo's RPG? Would you be willing to include some of your material (from the *Book of Experimental Might*, for example) in it?

MC: I think it's interesting, and it has its own set of challenges. Basically, they want to put out a new version of the game for people who don't want a new version of the game.

That's oversimplifying, but it's really the case. Their potential audience are the people not switching to 4E. So how do you sell change to people who don't want change? You moderate the amount of change. And that's a tricky tightrope to walk. Plus, they want to be backwards compatible with existing 3E stuff, so that limits them as well.

Frankly, the *BoXM* material may be too radical for what they want to do. I don't know.

KQ: Most everything you have written has been in the medieval fantasy genre. Is that merely a favorite of yours, or do you think that RPGs lend themselves better to that genre than to others?

Both. I have loved medieval fantasy since I was very young. However, as a genre, it's one that has lost of lot of its luster, and I'm ready to move on to other things. There are other kinds of fantasy, and other creative directions to go in.

However, I do think that rpgs almost need some level of fantasy to work. To run a believable medieval fantasy game,

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I only need to read the core books.

To run a believable hard science fiction game, I not only have to read the rules, I almost certainly need to know something about science—astronomy, planetary ecologies, technology, and so on. Non-fantasy games are, by definition, rooted in reality in some way, and you can get a portrayal of reality wrong to the point where you lose your players. It's hard to get fantasy "wrong," because it's whatever you make of it.

So it's simply much easier for casual players to run a fantasy game than a more realistic one. To run a non-fantasy game, you need a greater level of dedication. (Which is great, but it's not nearly as common.)

KQ: What other games and systems do you enjoy, and why? Do you find that you develop your own house rules from experimenting with other games, or just through refinement of a current game's ruleset?

MC: I've played many dozens of different rpgs over the years. The only other RPG I play with any regularity any more, however, is *Call of Cthulhu*. I've always appreciated that game for its straightforward simplicity and the awesome Sanity mechanics.

My house rules (and all my game development) comes from refinement of the current game. Basically, if I create something new for my game, chances are a lot of other DMs will find a use for it in theirs.

KQ: What would entice you to return to RPG writing, either now or in the future? (Perhaps as a guest author for Open Design.)

MC: I don't know. A briefcase full of money? Better yet, a briefcase full of extra time to spend on it and still do the other stuff I want to do.

KQ: Monte, how do you interpret "retirement" from RPGs?

MC: I think you might be poking a little fun of me here. I've stated that I'm retiring from roleplaying game design, and since making that announcement, I've put out more rpg product.

If you compare the output I had back when I was working on it full time to now, though, you'll see what I mean about retirement. I haven't considered rpgs my full time job since about April of 2006, about two years ago now. In that time, I've co-written two products and written another, about five months of work spread across twenty four.

Still, it's more than I had envisioned. Leaving RPG design has been much harder than I thought it would be, partially because I do enjoy it, and partially because I've had some cool offers in that time I had not been expecting.

So in my retirement, I'll likely continue to do the occasional product. Small ones, maybe one or two a year, if the circumstances are right. I don't know. It's not like I've put any hard and fast rules on myself. But my plate is very full (overflowing even) with other kinds of work right now, so that certainly shapes my future as well.

KQ: How hard is it to run games for Sue Cook (since she edits your work), and how did your marriage influence your decision to create and maintain Malhavoc Press?

MC: It's not hard to run games for Sue at all. Stuff for Malhavoc always came from the game, not into the game. So, for example, I would introduce the new spells and whatnot from *Book of Eldritch Might* into my game, and only after we'd used it there would I write it up for the book. (I also had the advantage of having two different game groups for most of the time I was running Malhavoc.) So Sue didn't get any unfair spoilers when she would edit my material.

Malhavoc would never have worked if I didn't have Sue at my side, doing not only the editing, but most of the art direction, contractor wrangling, and other duties. It was very much a partnership and I doubt I would have even considered it had I not been married to her. It likely wouldn't have even occurred to me.



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The Crab Diviners of Zobeck

The future is not seen in crystalline orbs, tea leaves, or paper cards. It is whispered by crabs.

By Joshua Stevens

Art by John William Waterhouse

“You, boy, you have the look of a lost one about you. I can speak with Mother Crab on your behalf, but her truth does not come cheaply. Will you bare your soul to Mother Crab? More importantly boy, can you bear the weight of your destiny?”

—Mama Rye

For ages untold, the Kariv matriarchs have passed down to their daughters the secret rites of the ancient practice of Caruth, better known as crab divining or crab soothsaying. Originally, the travelling Kariv practiced Caruth to survive, divining safe passages, the weather, and sources of food and water. Now, however, the Kariv use crab readings to divine the answers to any number of topics.

During Caruth, a crab diviner or soothsayer will draw a female garrotter crab from the waters of the river Argent, ritually cleanse it, and use it to perform a divination. The crabs can reputedly answer yes-or-no questions and reveal portents of the future through their actions and behavior. A crab divination always ends in the death of

the chosen crab, and their corpses are examined for hidden clues about what the uncertain future holds.

The Kariv and the garrotter crabs reputedly have an ancient pact whereby crabs willingly divulges secret truths to the Kariv at the price of their lives. What the crab gain in return is a mystery, and certainly the Kariv say nothing of it. If crabs are unavailable, the Kariv can substitute a spider, but most are loathe to do so. Spiders are known to lie and are not bound by any truth pacts with the Kariv.

People that have experienced a crab reading are often awestruck by the power of Caruth and the eerie accuracy of the reading. These readings are not cheap however, and a river of golden coins flows into the pockets of Zobeck’s more renowned crab diviners. Often, a crab diviner will demand gold and favors as payment, depending upon their particular whims at the time.

Calling the Crab

Before Caruth can be attempted, long hours are spent choosing the right crab for the ceremony. The crab diviner will speak to various crabs to determine



which crab is most knowledgeable about the topic at hand, in a process known as Calling the Crab. Once the crab has been properly called, it must be cleansed in a solution of equal parts rock salt and powdered silver. Thereafter, the crab must be handled with gloves, for the touch of flesh will contaminate the cleansed crab.

The crab diviner must then prepare her soothing bowl—a large urn made of woven river reeds and painted with arcane symbols, passed down by the matriarchs of each clan. Meticulously, the crab diviner sprinkles handfuls of white-grey ash into the bowl with eyes closed while uttering barely audible intonations. This special ash is made of the cremated remains of prior crabs who have given their bodies to Caruth. Apprentice crab diviners are given a pinch of their mentor’s ash to cultivate their own soothing bowl, and in this way, modern practitioners trace their power back to the very first crab divin-

ers. Using a special ivory comb, the crab diviner then grooms the bed of ash 13 times, top to bottom, then side to side, until the ash is perfectly level and even. Reverently, the crab is then lowered into the soothing bowl.

The garroter crab sits listless in the bowl, slowly moving its strangling claw back and forth. When the crab diviner ensorcelles the crab using *charm animal*, the crab stops whipping the air and stands on its hind legs with claws outstretched in a penitent position.

Now the reading may begin, and the crab diviner pulls the tools of her trade from a black velvet sack—a masterwork dagger of exquisite design and a polished, rune-scored finger bone. The finger bone is placed on the left of bowl, and the crab diviner takes the client's outstretched right hand. Quickly and without explanation, the client's palm is deeply slashed with the diviner's dagger, and the bleeding palm held over the bowl to guide a single drop of blood into the ashen bed. The client's hand must bleed freely throughout the reading; any attempt to stop the bleeding or bandage the hand bring a sharp warning: "Close the wound, you close my window. Hold still."

Yes-or-no questions may be asked of the crab by the diviner, who slowly circles the top of the bowl with the dagger, alternating clockwise and counter-clockwise direction with each question asked. To signal "yes," the crab paces to the right of the bowl and touches the client's blood, and to signal "no" the crab veers sharply to the left and touches the finger bone.

This crescendo of questioning builds until the crab diviner feels the time is right to bark a sharp command at the crab, which rolls over onto its back. The crab diviner then drives her dagger into the crab, killing it in a single smooth stroke. The crab is removed from the bowl, and the shapes left by its wanderings in the ashen bed are examined, as are the crab's blood spattering. Finally, the crab's shell is peeled back and the markings on its inside are scrutinized to discern Mother Crab's secret truth.

Gameplay: Divining the Shell

As with all divinations, the best readings for game play are often vague or in the form of riddles, and the full weight of their meaning is not realized until a crucial point in time when the PCs have that sudden "Aha!" moment. You should never part with more information than you are willing to put into the players' hands. If used correctly, divinations can be a great tool for adventure and campaign advancement. If all else fails and the players are absolutely stumped and need help getting to the next point of the adventure, a crab divining is a flavorful way of getting them back on track and back to enjoying the game. Of course, a visit to a crab diviner is also a great way to supply the party with adventure hooks, as their destiny unfolds according to the ken of Mother Crab.

Mood and tone are central to a crab divination scene. The reading should be methodical and not rushed. The crab diviner slowly circles the soothing bowl with her dagger (which you can pantomime for the players) and phrases questions as such: "Mother Crab, we must know your truth. If the vampire is truly slain, choose the blood, if not, then grasp the bone" for basic true or false type questions.

Additionally, the spot of blood can represent life or good, whereas the bone can represent death or evil. (If a spider is being used instead of a crab, instead of using the reverent title "Mother Crab" the crab diviner uses the term "foul witch." The Kariv believe that wicked people reincarnate as spiders.)

After a series of "yes" or "no" responses, a particular question that stymies Mother Crab or leads to indecision on her part could also be a powerful plot catalyst. ("Mother Crab says you are not ready for such knowledge" or "Mother Crab cannot answer that question. Your acts shall decide the answer.") It is also a particularly useful way of dealing with unexpected or off-topic questions directed to the crab diviner from the players.

Less significant points should be the

subject of direct "yes" or "no" questions directed to the crab while larger issues and plot points should be saved for the final vague divination of the crab's shell. As the crab diviner scrutinizes the crab's behavior, certain "yes" or "no" responses become more emphatic and meaningful based on the crab's actions in choosing either the blood ("yes") or the finger bone ("no").

For example, the crab could dip its tentacular claw into the blood and taste it, signifying "yes" to a question but with a decidedly macabre undertone. An emphatic "no" response might entail Mother Crab snapping the finger bone in half with her claw or flinging it across the bowl. If possible, make the crab's behavior symbolic of something the PCs are likely to encounter later. This requires some planning on the GM's part, but a little planning can go a long way when it comes to foreshadowing events.

As for reading the actual markings beneath the crab's shell, this is a wonderful opportunity for the GM to create a climactic and spooky moment, capping off the entire visit with the crab diviner. Examples of possible signs include:

- Garroter crabs reproduce prolifically and carry hundreds of eggs beneath their shells. When the shell is removed, no eggs can be found. The crab's barren nature is a sign of impending death.

- An actual word or short phrase, easily read by the party but ambiguous in its meaning, appears on the underside of the shell formed out of natural convolutions in the shell structure.

- A rudimentary map can be seen on the underside of the shell, made by the scratching of the crab diviner's blade as the crab squirmed beneath it in its death throes.

- A crude picture, resembling an ink-blot, formed of the crab's blood appears on the underside of the shell. This picture could be anything—a portrait of someone the PCs will later meet, a scene involving one of the PCs, or an ominous symbol.

- When the shell is peeled back, an object that plainly should not be there

Table 1: Knowledge of Caruth

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (local) can learn more about the practice of Caruth. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following information, including the information from lower DCs. PCs who associate with the Kariv receive a +2 circumstance bonus to their skill check.

Knowledge (Local)

DC Result

- 10** Many Kariv are known to practice a type of divination known as Caruth where garroter crabs are drawn from the river and used to reveal the future during a special ceremony. The technique is passed down from mother to daughter and is never taught to “dechas,” or non-Kariv.
- 13** Only female crabs are used in Caruth. They can be called on to answer questions, and their bodies examined to reveal portents of the future. A true Caruth reading always ends in the death of the crab, which delivers the final message. If a crab survives, the reading is incomplete and is bad luck, as the crab carries that person’s future away with it (-2 to all saving throws for a month).
- 17** Due to their semi-nomadic nature, the Kariv cannot always find crabs for their divinations. They may substitute a large spider, but they rarely do. Spiders are known to lie, whereas the crabs pact with the Kariv ensures they always tell the truth. A crab diviner using a spider in a Caruth reading is either a fraud, intentionally trying to swindle the party, or unable to call a crab for some reason.
- 20** Reveal all information from the “Calling the Crab” section above.

is found, such as a lock of hair, a pearl, or a key. This is especially powerful if the party is tracking someone and something of the target’s appears beneath the crab’s shell, signifying that they were nearby recently.

- When the crab’s shell is removed, an incomplete proto-shell is found beneath. Under the surface, things are not as they appear.
- The bottom of the crab’s shell is rotten and diseased. Something evil has been fomenting for some time and threatens to consume the party.
- The crab’s shell is brittle and breaks into hundred of tiny pieces. The party’s current plans may fall apart and fail.
- When the crab’s shell is removed, a noticeable and strange scent escapes. This scent could be anything, and the PCs could notice it again in the future at a critical time to warn them of danger or help them find someone.
- A rough outline of a spider can be seen beneath the shell, huddled above a number of dots equal to the number of party members. This signifies that an evil force is pursues the party.

Prophet of the Crab: Mama Rye

Mama Rye—matriarch of the powerful Galati clan and the closest thing the Kariv have to nobility—is the most

renowned crab diviner in Zobeck, the city of steam and brass. Despite standing just over five feet tall with thin, iron gray hair, no one is fooled by Mama Rye’s age and physical frailty; a domineering personality instantly establishes her as a force to be reckoned with in any social exchange.

Her prowess in Caruth is legendary, and her readings are only given to those of prestige and standing in Zobeck. Even then, her readings often cost several thousand gold pieces, and this price can increase dramatically depending upon the nature of the information sought.

Mama Rye is so named because of the elixir she frequently brews from rye infected with ergot, which produces vivid hallucinations. Under the influence of her concoction, Mama Rye’s consciousness travels other planes. Her frequent use of ergot led her to suffer a stroke several years ago, and as a result, her right eye is dead and clouded. The Kariv believe Mama Rye’s dead eye only increases her powers, giving her second sight into the world beyond.

Mama Rye also prominently bears the sign of the Cloven Nine, a nine-pointed star, on the back of her left hand. If asked about her diabolical branding, Mama Rye coolly responds,

“Aye, in the battle between the heavens and hells, my allegiance was chosen for me.” Beyond this, Mama Rye refuses to elaborate.

Mama Rye’s familiar, a homunculus named Aden, resembles a kewpie doll covered in black raven feathers. Mama Rye often carries Aden around in her belt, and he appears as nothing more than a strange fetish. Aden can often be found lying about motionless in Mama Rye’s wagon, mentally reporting all that he sees and hears about Mama Rye’s clients while they wait for their crab divining. To those who know about Aden though, he is quite animated and chirps frequently. Aden has a long prehensile tail that is completely hidden by his feather coat, and he can occasionally be found hanging upside down from one of his various perches in Mama Rye’s wagon.

Mama Rye CR 9

Female old (62 years old) human

(Kariv) Sorcerer 7/Expert 4

N medium humanoid

Init -2; **Senses** Listen +3, Spot +3

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 15

(-2 Dex, +4 *mage armor*, +2 amulet, +1 *ring*)

hp 26 (7d4-7 plus 4d6-4)

Fort +2, **Ref** +1, **Will** +14

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th):

1/day - *divination* (practicing Caruth)

1/day - *speak with animals* (crabs or spiders only)

Spells Known (CL 7th):

3rd (5/day) —*arcane sight*,

clairaudience/clairvoyance

2nd (7/day) —*darkness*, *detect thoughts*, *scorching ray*

1st (7/day) —*charm animal*, *color spray*, *mage armor*, *protection from evil*, *silent image*

0 (6/day) —*detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *light*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *message*, *read magic*

TACTICS

Before Combat Mama Rye always casts *mage armor* before meeting with clients.

During Combat Mama Rye attempts to use *color spray* and *charm person* to subdue an opponent and, if necessary, a maximized *scorching ray*. Mama Rye is always surrounded by members of the Galati clan, and thus, 1d10+1 Kariv appear if Mama Rye is in trouble within 1d3 rounds. Further, her homunculus Aden will defend Mama Rye with its life, trying to buy Mama Rye time to escape.

Morale Mama Rye is frail and never enters battle. She attempts to flee as soon as possible if violence breaks out.

STATISTICS

Str 5, Dex 7, Con 9, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 18

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +3

Feats Caruth Practitioner^B, Empower Spell, Extend Spell, Improved Familiar, Iron Will 1

Skills Appraise +7, Bluff +10, Concentration +9, Craft (alchemy) +10, Craft (sculpting) +13, Decipher Script +4, Handle Animal +10, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (history) +6, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (nature) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Profession (crab diviner) +15, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +13

Languages Common, Draconic, Gnome, Infernal

SQ Summon familiar (homunculus named Aden²)

Gear Raven skulls necklace (*amulet of natural armor* +2), ruby *ring of protection* +1, fetish adorned darkwood walking cane (lesser metamagic rod; maximize), 1,500 gp jewelry

Caruth Practitioner {General}

You are descended from a long line of crab diviners, or you have been taken in and trained by one. You hear the whisper of Mother Crab, and she guides your path.

Prerequisites: Kariv only (typically female), able to cast *charm person* or *charm animal*, Sorcerer or Wizard level 4, minimum 1 rank in Profession (crab diviner), minimum 2 ranks in Craft (alchemy).

Benefit: With 4-9 ranks in Profession (crab diviner), the crab diviner is able to use speak with animals 1/day (spiders and crabs only) as a spell-like ability as a caster of your character level. With 10+ ranks in Profession (crab diviner), you can cast *divination* 1/day (only when practicing Caruth) as a spell-like ability at your character level.

Special: With 4-9 ranks in Profession (crab diviner), only yes-or-no questions may be directed to the crab. With 10+ ranks in Profession (crab diviner), this is effectively equivalent to a *divination* spell with a base chance of success of 70% + 1% per rank in Profession (crab diviner). Failure means that the future is clouded or that either the client or the crab diviner has displeased Mother Crab, and she is unwilling to part with her truth.

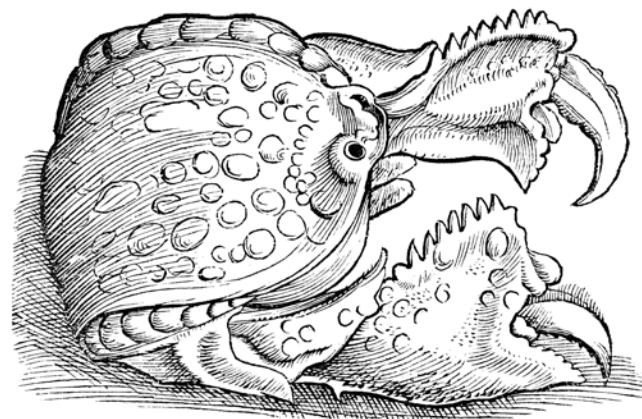
1 If you have *Kobold Quarterly* #5, you may substitute Iron Will with the Witch's Mark feat.

2 Aden has 6 HD and the feats Improved Initiative and Lightning Reflexes. If you have *Kobold Quarterly* #5, you may substitute these feats with Alchemical Variant [Screech] and Physical Variant [Scorpion's Tail].

This success rate is halved (rounded down) if a spider is used, and failure means the spider misleads the sooth and gives a false prophecy.

A crab diviner must use the proper tools—masterwork dagger (302 gp), ivory comb (400 gp), soothing bowl (priceless, usually from the sooth's mentor), polished finger bone (priceless, usually from the diviner's deceased mentor's hand), fine gloves (5 gp), ceremonial ash (priceless), and an alchemical concoction of rock salt and powdered silver (25 gp material cost, consumed with each reading, Craft (alchemy) DC 13 to create).

A crab diviner, on average, can earn 100 gp per rank in Profession (crab diviner) per reading, although a host of other factors may influence the price.



Garroter Crab

This small crab's pincer can strangle prey.

Garroter Crab CR 1/2

Always N Tiny animal

Init +0; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+1 Dex, +4 natural, +2 size)

hp 6 (1d8+2)

Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.; swim 20 ft.

Melee barbed claw +0 (1d6-2) and claw -5 (1d2-2)

Space 2 ½ ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Special Attacks constrict 1d3, improved grab

TACTICS

Before Combat These crabs are skilled chameleons, and their shells resemble the river rocks scattered along the river bottom. When hunting, these crabs lie still and wait for their prey to stumble upon them. A garroter crab then locks its barbed claw around its prey's neck and chokes it to death.

During Combat A garroter crab strikes to constrict.

Morale A garroter crab is a cowardly creature and retreats if injured to below half its starting hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 6, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 1, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -2

Feats Weapon Focus (barbed claw)

Skills Climb +1, Hide +14, Spot +2, Swim +1

ECOLOGY

Environment aquatic, coastal

Organization solitary, pack (2-7), or pod (8-20)

Treasure none

Advancement 2-4 HD (Medium), 5-6 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment -

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Constrict (Ex): A garroter crab deals 1d3 points of damage with a successful grapple check against a creature the same size or smaller. Because it seizes its victim by the neck, a creature in the garroter crab's grasp cannot speak or cast spells with verbal components.

Improved Grab (Ex): If a garroter crab hits a creature the same size or smaller with a barbed claw attack, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict. Garrote crabs gain a +8 racial bonus on grapple checks (included above).

Skills (Ex) Garrote crabs receive a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks while in an environment that contains river rocks and receive a +2 racial bonus on Climb and Swim checks.

These aggressive, blue-black freshwater crabs inhabit Zobeck's river and its tributaries, scuttling along the muddy terrain in search of prey. Garroter crabs are named for their abnormal right claws, which have evolved over time to strangle prey like a barbed whip. This long whip is lined with powerful muscles, and joints at the beginning, middle, and end of the claw give it great flexibility. During mating season, thousands of garroter crabs congregate in remote riverbanks, and the males will whip their shells with a clacking sound to attract a mate.

Ecology

Garroter crabs are the preferred (and common) crab used by the Kariv crab diviners in their divinations. The garroter crabs garners much respect among the Kariv people for the ties to the future, but the males of the species are considered good eating by most other locals.

Habitat and Society

Much larger garroter crabs exist, and the Kariv believe that these incredibly rare crabs can be used to not only divine the future but to shape it as well.

Red-Banded Line Spiders

These spiders are named for both the deep red swirls on their abdomens, unique to each spider, and for their peculiar hunting technique.

Red-Banded Line Spiders CR 1/2

Always N Tiny vermin

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +6

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 15, flat-footed 13
(+3 Dex, +1 natural, +2 size)

hp 4 (1d8)

Fort +2, **Ref** +4, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.; climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +6 (1d4-1 plus poison)

Space 2 1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Special Attacks poison, swingline

TACTICS

Before Combat These large, furry, brown spiders are essentially cowards, and they attack only smaller creatures.

During Combat Line spiders do not spin webs but instead perch and watch for prey. When prey wanders by, they fire a tensile line of webbing and pounce in surprise. Their potent venom incapacitates their prey and they will quickly devour flesh with their powerful maws.

Morale A line spider fights fiercely until it is injured, then retreats up its silk line to safety as a swift action.

STATISTICS

Str 8, **Dex** 19, **Con** 10, **Int** 0, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -5

Feats Weapon Finesse [b]

Skills Climb +11, Hide +14, Jump +8, Spot +6

ECOLOGY

Environment temperate forest

Organization colony (2-5) or swarm (6-11)

Treasure none

Advancement 2-4 HD (Medium), 5-6 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment -

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex): A red-banded line spider has a potent poisonous bite. The save DCs are Constitution-based, and the indicated damage below is initial and secondary damage.

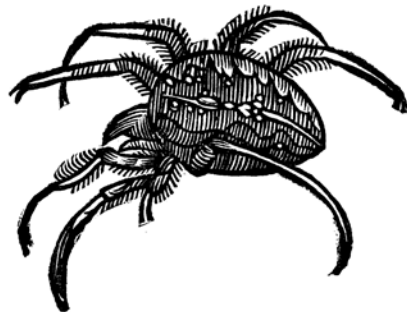
Red-Banded Line Spider Poison

Size	Fort DC	Damage
Tiny	10	1d3 Str
Small	12	1d4 Str
Medium	13	1d6 Str

Skills (Ex) Line spiders receive a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Spot checks and a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. A line spider can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. Line spiders use either their Strength or Dexterity modifier for Climb checks, whichever is higher. Line spiders receive a +8 racial bonus to Jump checks.

Swingline (Ex) When using its webline to attack, a line spider has a speed of 60 ft., receives a +2 bonus to attack, a +2 bonus to damage, and a +4 bonus to grapple. This ability can only be used for one round and only as long as the spider is at a higher elevation than its prey and has sufficient room and height to attack its prey. A line spider can fire its webline with a maximum range of 60 ft.

Small line spiders are occasionally found in Zobeck, and their size and susceptibility to calling make them the most likely replacement for a crab in the practice of Caruth. Larger varieties hunt the dark canopies of the Margreve Forest.



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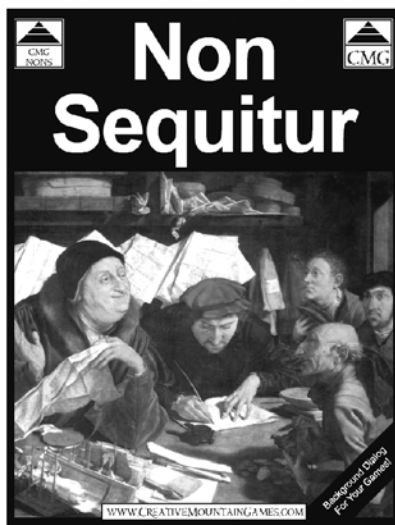
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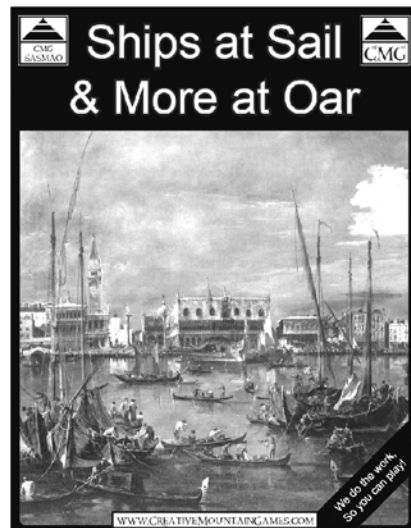
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Knights and Pawns

New Feats and Weapons for Cavalry and Infantry

by David Schwartz

“For many, coin spent on masterwork weapons and armor would be better spent on training.”

The measure of a knight is not the gleam of his weapons but the skill in which he uses them. The feats in this article expand on oft-neglected parts of a knight’s arsenal: lances, polearms, and shields. Following this are three historical variations on some well-known weapons.

New Feats

Agile Shield [General]

Your deft shield movements distract your opponent and obscure your weapon.

Prerequisite: Shield Proficiency

Benefit: When using a shield (except a tower shield), its shield bonus increases by +1. Add your shield bonus to Bluff checks made to feint in combat.

Special: A fighter may select Agile Shield as one of his bonus fighter feats.

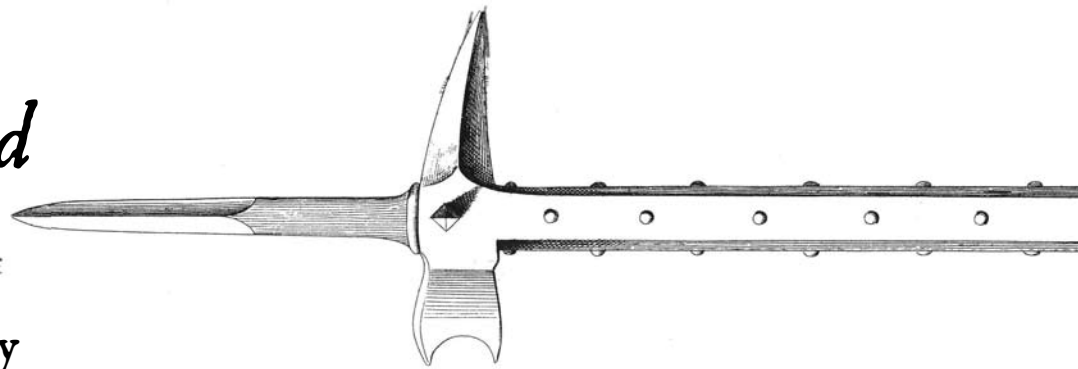
Hedgehog [General]

Your rapid strikes and thrusts force an opponent to keep his distance.

Prerequisite: BAB +6, proficient with any reach weapon.

Benefit: When you make a full attack with a reach weapon (except a spiked chain) with which you are proficient, you may also attempt to push back one target of the attack. Treat this as a bull rush, but you automatically move into the target’s space, and you cannot push the target more than 5 feet.

With a weapon that provides 10 foot reach, you move 5 feet toward the target and push the foe an equal distance.



Special: A fighter may select Hedgehog as one of his bonus fighter feats.

Shield Barge [General]

You are trained in both forming and breaking shieldwalls.

Prerequisite: Shield Proficiency

Benefit: When using a shield you are proficient with, add your shield bonus to opposed Strength checks (or your combat maneuver bonus) both when making bull rush, overrun, and trip attempts and when being targeted by such attacks.

Special: A fighter may select Shield Barge as one of his bonus fighter feats.

Unhorse [General]

You are trained in unseating a rider.

Benefit: When you damage a mounted foe, that character must make a Ride check of DC 5 + the damage dealt in order to stay in the saddle.

Normal: The ride check to remain in the saddle is DC 5.

Special: A fighter may select Unhorse as one of his bonus fighter feats.

New Weapons

There’s more than one way to swing a sword. Don’t presume to know the fighter by his weapon.

Bec de Corbin: This polearm derives its name (meaning crow’s beak) from the distinctive hook at its head that is used to pry open or puncture metal armor. Opposite the beak is a ham-

mer or spike with a spearhead between them.

A bec de corbin has reach. You can strike opponents 10 feet away with it, but you cannot use it against adjacent foes. With a bec de corbin, you gain a +2 bonus on attack rolls (or combat maneuver checks) to sunder a held or worn item.

Crusader Sword: To the layman, this weapon looks no different than any other longsword. In the hands of a warrior, though, the difference is clear: unlike other swords, the balance of this blade is weighted towards the hilt rather than the point. The wielder has less momentum, but more control over the blade. It can thus be used to pacify as well as kill.

A crusader sword can inflict either normal or nonlethal damage with no penalty.

Zweihander: This blade is as long as a greatsword although not as heavy and sharpened only near the point. It has an elongated hilt and two or more sets of quillons (or crossguards).

Although it can be wielded with both hands on the hilt, a zweihander is properly wielded with one hand on the hilt and the other on the ricasso (or the dull part of the blade). This gives the wielder greater control of the weapon.

You can use the Weapon Finesse feat when wielding a zweihander sized for you.



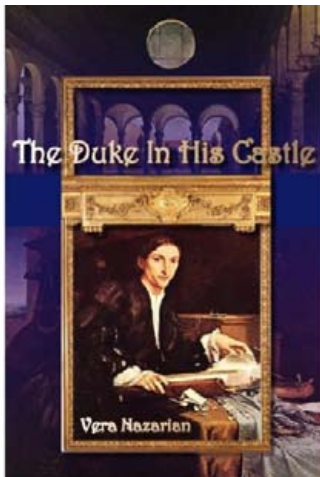
New Martial Weapons

	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Weight	Type
One-Handed Melee						
Crusader sword	15 gp	1d4	1d6	19-20/x2-4 lb.		Slash
Two-Handed Melee						
Bec de corbin*	10 gp	1d6	2d4	x3	12 lb.	Pierce or Bludgeon
Zweihander	50 gp	1d8	1d10	x3	6 lb.	Pierce or Bludgeon
* Reach weapon						

BOOK REVIEWS

ALL TOMES READ BY CANDLELIGHT

by Cynthia Ward and Pierce Watters



The Duke in His Castle

by Vera Nazarian
Norilana Books, June 2008
Hardcover
978-1-934648-42-1
\$17.95 124 pages

Rossian, the Duke of Violet, is lord of an immense and ancient castle. He is young and handsome and possessed of sorcerous talent. And yet, inwardly, he is dying, for an ancient curse imprisons him within that castle.

Centuries ago, the nobles rose against the Just King. But he was a mighty sorcerer, and bound the rebels in their castles-and all their heirs after them. A Duke or Duchess may win free by discovering the secret of his or her confinement, but none has ever done so. And, in this late age, many have stopped trying.

Then a bizarre woman named Izelle brings Rossian a casket of bones. Izelle says Rossian can resurrect the bones as a living woman, and makes a claim even more unlikely: she says the Duke of Violet knows how to escape his enchanted castle.

As they contend in word and deed,

Rossian begins to suspect Izelle is not wrong. And he wonders if she might be a Duchess who has done the impossible, escaping her own prison-castle.

Nebula Award finalist Vera Nazarian has a gift for words and an ability to take her narratives in consistently unexpected directions. These talents are on impressive display in her short, decadence-tinged novel, *The Duke in His Castle*.

That being said, the back-cover praise does something of a disservice to Nazarian by comparing her to the late Angela Carter and comparing *The Duke in His Castle* to the late Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* novels. Nazarian doesn't have Carter's superlative control of language, and her trim novel is not as baroque as the sprawling *Gormenghast* trilogy. But she does have one of the year's loveliest and most unpredictable fantasy novellas in *The Duke in His Castle*.

-C.W.

Lavinia

by Ursula K. LeGuin
Harcourt Books, April 2008
Hardcover, \$24.00
288 pages

Brave Aeneas fled the fall of Troy. He sailed on to Egypt, visited the underworld, and then on to Latium to found a mighty kingdom that would one day be called Rome. Ursula K. Le Guin, creator of the Earthsea Trilogy and winner of numerous Hugo and Nebula awards, has written one of her finest books, perhaps her best.

Vergil's *Aeneid* is the Latin answer to Homer's *Odyssey*. Augustus Caesar sponsored Vergil in the creation of the



poem that tells the story of the founding of the Roman Empire, and Vergil makes a brief mention of Lavinia, daughter of Latinus, King of Latium, who weds Aeneas and gives him a son.

Le Guin brings Lavinia to vivid life in a wild and tribal Italy. Through Lavinia's eyes we see the daily life of the people of ancient Italy, their chores and their pleasures, and their gods. As daughter to the King, Lavinia must

From Lavinia

"The numbers of men encamped to the north and east of Laurentum grew daily. Ufens arrived with his rough Aequians. An even rougher troop came from Praeneste, men in wolfskin caps, who went into battle with one foot shod in leather and the other bare...I looked at Mezentius to see what a traitorous, murderous tyrant looked like. I expected something more sinister than this tough old soldier, clearly very fond of the slender, dark-eyed son whom he kept close by him."

carry out daily rituals and household duties. She accompanies her father, Latinus to the Oracle at Albunea and speaks with the ghost of Vergil, not yet born. Lavinia foresees and endures the war that presages Rome, the war between Aeneas and Turnus, her Latin suitor.

Foreknowledge is often tragic. “When the poet sang me the fall of Troy, his story told of the king’s daughter Cassandra, who foresaw what would happen and tried to prevent the Trojans from letting the great horse into the city, but no one would listen to her: it was a curse laid on her to see the truth and say it and not be heard. It is a curse laid on women more often than on men. Men want the truth to be theirs, their discovery and property...”

Read about the legendary founding of the Roman Empire and the tragedy at its heart. Read about Lavinia’s mother driven mad by the loss of her two sons. Read one of the best works by one of the greatest living writers, and discover the fate of Lavinia.

-P.W.



Swordmage

**Forgotten Realms:
Blades of the Moonsea: Book I**

by Richard Baker
Wizards of the Coast, May 2008
Hardcover, \$24.95
352 pages

In a world altered by the Spellplague, human swordmage Geran Hulmaster returns to the Northern Moonsea to investigate the murder of his childhood friend. After ten years away, he finds much changed in his hometown of Hulberg. It’s grown, and its streets have filled with foreigners. His uncle, Hulberg’s aging Harmach, has lost power to scheming outlanders and a treacherous kinsman. Geran’s friend was murdered while investigating the looting of ancient tombs, a pursuit banned because it may release deadly phantoms. One of the looted tombs may have held the forbidden tome of an immensely powerful necromancer. If all this isn’t bad enough, the orcs and ogres of the North have forged an unprecedented alliance, and they’re marching on Hulberg.

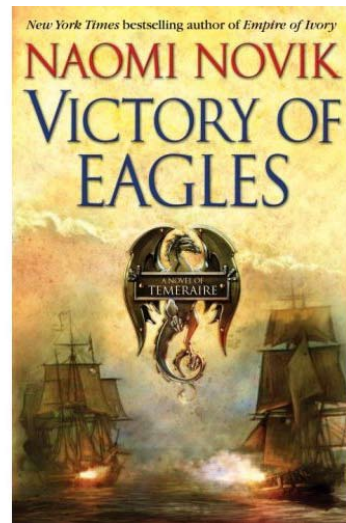
Written by Richard Baker, an award-winning game designer and bestselling author, *Swordmage* is the first book of FORGOTTEN REALMS trilogy Blades of the Moonsea. *Swordmage* is also the first book to incorporate the new 4th edition rules.

Swordmage is an enjoyable novel. Baker ably develops several subplots and, while the story moves slowly in the early chapters, the action becomes thick and furious as the plot-threads entwine for an exciting climax. The characters, while two-dimensional, are interesting and sympathetic. Disappointingly, Geran Hulmaster’s dark aspect is not explored beyond the opening; perhaps this is being left for the sequels.

And, speaking of sequels, the storyline in *Swordmage* is concluded, but a couple of intriguing plot-threads are left for the next book to develop.

To the possible joy (or disappointment) of gamers eager to explore the newly remade Realms, *Swordmage* doesn’t delve significantly into the 4th Edition rules modifications. This makes sense, given how many books are likely to be set in this changed universe. But readers of *Swordmage* should set their expectations accordingly.

-C.W.



Victory of Eagles

by Naomi Novik
Del Rey, July 2008
Hardcover, \$25.00
352 pages

Captain Will Laurence has been imprisoned and sentenced to hang for treason. His dear Chinese Celestial dragon companion, Temeraire, has been sent to the dragon breeding grounds in Scotland. And Napoleon is invading England.

Thus begins the fifth volume in this alternate history fantasy series starring Temeraire. Imagine the Napoleonic wars, but with dragons. There are little dragons, medium sized dragons, big dragons, and immense dragons. They range widely in color and in special talents. Both the British and the French use them in war.

Historically, the Napoleonic Wars ran from 1803 to 1815. But this is not your father’s history. In a time of wooden ships and iron men, the larger dragons are fitted out a bit like sailing vessels themselves, with rigging and tents and men and guns. The smaller dragons act as couriers, and the ones in between do a little of both and fight each other and the human enemy as well. As Napoleon invades, Captain Laurence and Temeraire seek each other while acting independently to help England repel the hated invader.

In this fantasy Europe, dragons are allowed to act only under the command of their captains and little better

respected than cavalry horses. As Temeraire assembles a volunteer team of unharnessed dragons, he fights for respect from humans as well as for the beloved country of *his* human, Captain Will Laurence.

Victory of Eagles may be the best novel yet in this thrilling adventure series. Start with this book or begin at the beginning. There is no way to err. John W. Campbell Award-winning author Naomi Novik not only brings a fresh and creative perspective to the Napoleonic Wars, she also offers a new way to look at dragons. Recommended!

-P.W.

“As I was reading these books, I could see them coming to life in my mind’s eye. These are beautifully written novels—not only fresh, original, and fast-paced, but full of wonderful characters with real heart.” Peter Jackson

The Born Queen

The Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone: Book Four

by Greg Keyes

Ballantine Books/Del Rey, March 2008

Hardcover, \$26.00

448 pages

The Briar King has been slain, and the law of death has been broken. The world is dying, but those who might save it are working at cross purposes.

Anne Dare, the young new empress of Crotheny, has some big problems. The kingdom of Hansa and the Church are both attacking Crotheny. She doesn’t know whether her instructor in the sedos powers is an ally, or an enemy who will doom both Anne and the world. And if she masters her powers, others wait to seize them.

The holter Aspar White was charged with preserving the King’s Forest. But the forest is dying and Aspar is wounded. Too, he has lost his lover, he has an implacable enemy, and he is controlled by the Sarnwood Witch, who is filling the world with monsters, one of whom might turn out to be Aspar’s own



unborn child.

Leovigild Ackenal has penned a composition that kills anyone who hears it. Further, it weakens the barrier between life and death. He has no desire to play this piece; but others know the notes, and one of them is playing his song.

These are just a few of the major players and subplots in *The Born Queen*, the fourth and final novel of Greg Keyes’s ambitious high fantasy tetralogy. With so much going on, Keyes has his work cut out for him in resolving everything. Does he pull it off?

Generally, yes. He juggles the subplots skillfully, shifting from one character to another at the right moment (often with an effective cliff-hanger), and he keeps the characters distinctive; even readers who’ve skipped the previous novels can distinguish the players (though you need to read the earlier books to really appreciate *The Born Queen*). The prose is lean (though Aspar fights enough monsters that they begin to feel like padding). And the pace is fast.

Sometimes, the pace is too fast. The most important scenes would have benefitted from further development. And the ending, which needs to wrap up four volumes, rushes by entirely too quickly. This leaves readers feeling unsatisfied. Some will even be confused about just what happened and why.

Overall, however, *The Born Queen* is an exciting, successful concluding volume for a superior epic fantasy series.



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Ask the Kobold

Overlapping Area Spells, Paralyzed Actions, and the Combat Grid by Skip Williams

Skip Williams is a co-author of 3rd Edition and the author of the world's longest-running rules advice column.

If you have a question for the kobold, send it to tsrsage@aol.com.

I've been involved in quite a debate involving spells such as *wall of fire* and *blade barrier*. If you're caught in multiple *walls of fire* or *blade barriers*, do you take damage just once, or do all of them deal damage to you? What happens if you pass through several *walls of fire* or *blade barriers* doing your turn? Would all of them deal damage to you?

The rules say that when the same effect operates more than once in the same place, only the strongest prevails. Does that apply to all magical effects? Or does that rule apply just to bonuses and penalties? If effects are spread out in several different places, does that count as multiple effects operating in the same place?

The rules for stacking or overlapping magical effects apply to effects of all kinds, not just to bonuses and penalties. The text in the Player's Handbook speaks at length about bonuses and penalties, but that's just because most questions about stacking arise when bonuses are in play.

In the case of area spells that have durations longer than instantaneous, such as *wall of fire* or *blade barrier*, multiple spells in the same place deal damage only once (some DMs I know roll damage for each effect and apply the highest result). There is a different rule for instantaneous effects, such as *fireball*. If you're subjected to multiple instantaneous effects, even in the same place on the battlefield and at the same time, all of them harm you.

For game purposes, two or more effects are in the "same place" when they're in the same square (or squares) on the grid. That applies to secondary effects as well. For example, *wall of fire* can damage creatures that are merely near it. The rules for stacking effects still apply. So, if the space that you occupy is within 10 or 20 feet of multiple *walls of fire*, you take damage from only one wall—usually the closest one to you.

When effects are spread over the battlefield, you can take damage from all of them, even if they are same effect, if you are impetuous enough to move through all of them (or unfortunate enough to be moved through all of them). You are subjected to the same effects multiple times, but in different places and at slightly different times.

Even if you must take damage from multiple effects in a round, you only take damage from any particular effect once. For example, if you are a large creature you fill more than one square on the battlefield. If a *wall of fire* or *blade barrier* covers multiple squares that you occupy, you take damage only once. On the other hand, if several different walls or barriers fill squares you occupy, you take damage from each one.

Don't go overboard here. You can't fry an opponent to a crisp by shoving that foe repeatedly through a *wall of fire* or grind a foe to bits by shifting someone in and out of a *blade barrier*. Treat such incidents as a single exposure to the effect. I heartily encourage DMs to ignore this suggestion whenever players start getting silly. If someone deliberately slaloms in and out of an effect like a *wall of fire*, or jumps back and forth to recover treasure or make



attacks, feel free to assess damage for each contact.

Exactly what can a paralyzed creature do? For example, can it still use a spell-like ability like teleport?

The description for the *hold person* spell says the subject becomes paralyzed and freezes in place. It is aware and breathes normally but cannot take any actions, even speech. However, the paralyzed condition text says that a paralyzed creature can take purely mental actions. Still, the *hold person* spell's prohibition against taking actions seems absolute—no actions at all.

So, what gives here? Is being magically held different from being merely paralyzed?

Paralyzed creatures cannot move, speak, or take any physical action. They can take purely mental actions, such as casting a spell with no components. Since spell-like abilities have no verbal, somatic, or verbal components they're at least as easy to cast as spells with "no" components.

You can think of paralysis as a disconnect between brain and body. A paralyzed creature can think just fine, but its limbs won't respond. A hold effect, however, is a slightly different phenomenon. A *hold spell* is a compulsion that literally forces the subject to freeze in place and refrain from acting. As such, a hold effect prevents purely mental actions in addition to any physical action. In short, a hold effect goes beyond mere paralysis.

The World on a Grid

The grid regulates all movement and combat in the game. The world is not literally covered in a network of 5-foot squares; nevertheless, the 5-foot square (or 5-foot cube in some cases) is the smallest significant unit of measure of area or distance in the game. Clearly, the world contains many things, animate or otherwise, much smaller than 5 feet. It is the 5-foot square, however, defines every location on a battlefield.

If you can reach into a square you can reach everything in that square. A magical effect that extends into a square can affect everything in that square. This is an abstraction, of course, and it ignores certain realities that all of us have to face from time to time. Anyone who has reached for something and found it just a fraction of an inch too far away knows what I'm talking about here. Success or failure in real life often comes down to mere inches or fractions of an inch.

Working in inches (or fractions of inches) would quickly become cumbersome during play, and that's why the game works on a grid. Working in units of 5 feet allows players and DMs to quickly decide where things are and which things can interact with each other. The grid isn't always supreme. The rules for high jumping and vertical reach, for example, measure things down to the foot (or sometime the half-foot). That, however, is a fairly specific exception to the general rule, and it's intended to cover those situations when characters are straining to reach as high as they can.

The grid's general supremacy puts some hard limits on just how precisely one can aim or stack up magical effects. For example, if you line up three or four *walls of fire*, each a foot apart, those effects probably will lie in the same squares and effectively be in precisely the same location for game purposes. The example *walls of fire* would have overlapping effects and anything entering the square that holds them would take damage only once.



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by Ross Byers

Finally, all the necromancy you'll ever need.

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Not to mention an interview with Sandy Peterson, our personal idol, whose shrine we replenish with offerings weekly. We're a little excited about this one—oh please let it happen!



Secret Messages

Hidden Knowledge in Ciphers and Puzzles

by Tim Connors

Art by Tim Connors

W ywh te mfwll xju xftzoe w eomfoz th whl uzjof xwl zjwh uho xjtmj xtrr muhmowr tz ifuy zjo gprbwf.

—Fubof Kwmuh, *Eomfoz Xufqe ui Wfz whc Hwzpfu whc Hprrtzl ui Ywbtm*

In the Middle Ages, a rose hanging from the ceiling pledged everyone present to secrecy. While “under the rose,” councils debriefed spies, generals revealed battle plans, and dissidents organized revolts. Before they departed, these confidants shared one final secret—their strategy for sharing secret messages while apart.

The art of hiding the existence of a message (steganography) and the science of encrypting a message (cryptography) were born. War, spycraft, and fantasy gaming would never be the same.

Inspired by real-world techniques, the following steganographic and cryptographic methods allow two parties to send each other secret messages in a fantasy RPG without the use of magic. Each offers an intriguing way to flavor an adventure. Used as a plot-critical puzzle, as a means of pacing revelations in a mystery, or as a plot hook for adventurers who find an unlikely decryption key, secret messages offer fantastic gaming potential. Best of all in a fantasy setting, such messages cannot be detected or decoded by magic.

Codebreaking

Like locks, ciphers come in varying qualities and require training to conquer without a key. The Decipher Script DC for decrypting ciphertext varies from 25 to 40, depending on the quality of the cipher technique, as

given on the table below. If the check succeeds, the code breaker understands the complete secret message in a flash of insight.

Cipher Quality	DC
Simple	25
Average	30
Good	35
Amazing	40

Hints

A code breaker who fails his Decipher Script check by 5 or less recognizes the method of encryption employed (e.g. scytale, turning grille, etc). He knows how this particular encoding process works, usually in the context of a historical account of its use. While the message itself remains a secret, the encoding method often suggests the form of the decryption key to seek—a valuable clue. At the GM’s discretion, failure by 5 or less also reveals some (possibly misleading) fragment of the message.

Improving Cipher Quality

By altering an encryption method in minor ways, a GM can promote the quality of a cipher method and thereby increase the DC to crack the ciphertext it produces. For example, a scytale that is corkscrew cut to vary its diameter along its length promotes the method from simple to average. An increase in grid squares promotes a turning grille from average to good.

A GM can also combine cipher techniques to create more difficult puzzles. That is, the ciphertext of one method becomes the plaintext of another, resulting in a double-ciphered message.



Choosing a Cipher Method

The most satisfying ciphers are neither easy nor impossible to break. A good rule of thumb is to choose a cipher method that has a Decipher Script DC that gives the PCs a 10 to 20% chance of success. Because failure by 5 or less indicates the form of the decryption key to seek, that kind of failure is also useful; it may lead to a quest to find the key. Failure by more than 5 means the PCs require outside assistance to break the code—a dangerous prospect with sensitive information.

Cryptography

There are dozens or even hundreds of cipher techniques. Here are a few appropriate to a fantasy medieval game.

Scytale (Cryptography—simple)

Hetric knelt over the wounded warrior. The arm could be saved, but... he reached to his acolyte, and commanded, “Give me your belt, boy!” Hetric hadn’t expected his acolyte’s reluctance. Nor had he expected the seemingly random letters branded down the hidden face of the boy’s belt.

In this encryption technique, the encoder winds a leather strap in a tight but non-overlapping spiral around a wooden baton. He then writes his message down the length of the baton, turning it as necessary to continue with subsequent lines. If any space remains, he fills it with random letters. When he removes the strip, the writing appears garbled.

A messenger, wearing the leather

strap as a belt (writing side in), conveys the message to the intended recipient. To decrypt the message, the receiver winds the strap around a baton of the same diameter as the sender's.

History: The Greek historian Plutarch (AD 46-120) described the cryptographic use of the scytale in *Parallel Lives*, his biography of Lysander, Spartan Admiral for the Aegean Sea (407 BC).

Props: A paper towel roll and a long strip of cloth or adding machine paper (or leather belt that the GM removes from his own waist at a dramatic moment) are recommended.

Sewn Disk (Cryptography—average) *Peppercorns spill from a tear in the dead rider's saddlebag. A curious clay disk follows them out. Small holes puncture the eight-inch disk, and a single length of twine dives in and out of the holes, forming haphazard lines across the disk's surface.*

Each hole in a clay or wooden disk represents a single letter of the alphabet. To encrypt a message, the encoder "spells" his message by threading a string through the holes that represent the letters of his words.

The receiver must know which holes represent which letters. Typically, a symbol next to one of the holes helps orient him. To decrypt the message, he records the holes passed through as he removes the string.

History: Aeneas Tacticus (4th century BC) suggested this technique in his encryption book entitled *On the Defense of Fortified Places*.

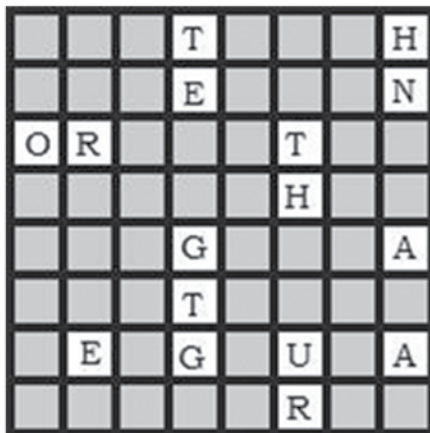
Props: A cardboard disk with twenty-six randomly placed holes and a length of string are recommended.

Turning Grille

(Cryptography—average)

In the scuffle, the chessboard flips end over end, smashing its pieces upon the floor and popping out sixteen of its sixty-four squares.

The creator of this cryptographic device punches out sixteen squares of a chessboard—four in each quadrant—



A Turning Grille Cryptographic device

such that when he rotates the board in 90-degree increments, the holes never reveal any of the same spaces underneath.

To encrypt a message of up to 64 letters, the encoder places the chessboard stencil over a piece of parchment and writes one letter per hole horizontally. Each time he fills all of the holes, he turns the stencil 90 degrees and continues writing. If his message is less than 64 letters, he fills the remaining squares with random letters.

The decoder orients an identical stencil atop this seemingly random grid of letters, starting with an agreed quadrant. By reading through its holes and turning the stencil, he reads the message with ease.

History: Baron Edouard Fleissner von Wostrowitz, a retired Austrian cavalry colonel, invented the turning grille cipher in 1880. Jules Verne used it as a plot device in *Mathias Sandorf* (1885), and the German army adopted it for WWI encryption.

Props: A stiff piece of cardboard with squares cut out is recommended.

Paper Folding

(Cryptography—amazing)

Individual letters appear at various points on this map—most near the edges, some rotated, and some on the reverse.

Masters of this technique first fold a piece of parchment into a complex figure, usually into the likeness of an animal. They then write their message across the numerous creases of its surface. Unfolded, the message is scattered

across both sides of the page.

To decrypt the message, the receiver duplicates the process, making the same folds in the same order. Since the fold lines suggest the encoding method, encoders first execute their folds and write their message onto a piece of scrap paper and then transfer the resultant encoding positions to the actual carrier document.

Props: A wide piece of paper or map, a book on origami, and patience are recommended.

Wheel Cipher

(Cryptography—good) *Filching the purse from the stranger unnoticed, the thief ducked into the alley, loosed the drawstring, and examined his take: a handful of three-inch wooden wheels, each with a scrambled alphabet inscribed around its edge.*

Shaped like a rolling pin, this cryptographic device uses 24 wooden wheels threaded onto a dowel. Each wheel has a complete but scrambled alphabet inscribed on its edge.

The encoder turns the wheels to spell out the message he wishes to encrypt. Then he writes down the letters of the line above it (or any other line).

To decode the ciphertext, a recipient must possess a wheel cipher with both identical letter ordering and identical wheel ordering. He turns the wheels to spell out the ciphertext, and then looks for a sensible line.

Wheel cipher owners store the wheels separately for safekeeping. Adventures featuring wheel ciphers frequently require the PCs to locate the wheels and assemble the device.

History: Prompted by the European postmasters' practice of reading his mail before delivering it, Thomas Jefferson invented the wheel cipher while serving as George Washington's secretary of state (1790-1793).

Props: A paper towel roll sliced into wheels is recommended.

Steganography

Steganography isn't a code, but is a way of hiding a message within another text or communications.

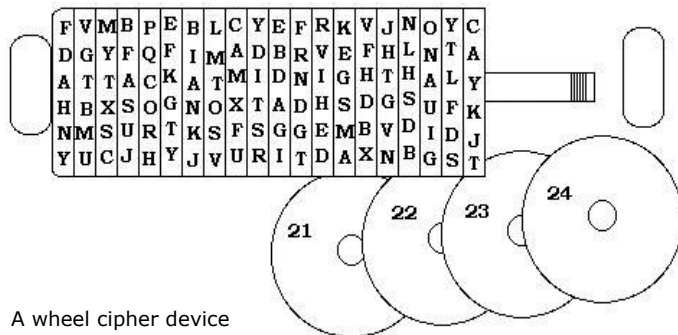
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A wheel cipher device

Stutters & Decoration

(Steganography —simple)

Murmurs and open dérision are an of-fense to thê hardworking citizen.

In this steganographic technique, the encoder decorates the syllables of words in an innocent carrier document with minor symbols or colored ink. Taken together, the decorated syllables spell out the hidden message. Additional decoration, executed in a different colored ink or composed of nonsense symbols, camouflages the scheme.

In a verbal version of this technique, a storyteller, puppeteer, or town crier gives voice to the carrier story or proclamation. For decoration, he employs stutters, throat-clears, and pauses.

Posted proclamations and verbal delivery have an advantage. While some listener may detect “murder the king” in the decoration of a public announcement, he remains ignorant of the intended recipient(s) of the message.

History: WWII German spies used invisible ink to decorate the letters of secret messages. Kurt Vonnegut made the verbal version of this technique famous in his novel *Mother Night* (1961).

Sole Tattoos (Steganography, Cryptography—simple)

Sixteen muddy bodies lie side by side in a mass grave. Someone has sawn their feet off.

The sender tattoos a message upon the soles of the feet of slaves, orphans, or lepers—one syllable or word per foot and ordering the persons by height or some other metric. The message bearers literally walk the message to the

intended recipient who summons them one by one to read it and pay for their service.

This technique enjoys remarkable success, particularly in cultures that consider the display of a person’s soles rude. The meaning of the message is lost on the illiterate tattooed, but they do understand that it serves some importance. In one case, four survivors of a group of twenty proudly presented the thirty-two dismembered feet of their dead, hoping for full payment without realizing that the deceased’s height was key.

History: In the 5th century BC, Histiaeus betrayed the Persian king Darius using a variant of this technique. Histiaeus shaved the head of his most trusted slave, tattooed instructions for a Persian revolt upon the man’s scalp, waited for the hair to regrow, and then sent him through Persia to his son-in-law Aristagoras to be shaved anew.

Noticing Hidden Messages

Noticing a message with a steganographic component requires a minimum Spot DC of 20. If there is no cryptographic component, success reveals the complete message. Otherwise, success reveals the complete ciphertext which remains to be decrypted. For example, a successful Spot check reveals sole tattoos on a group of passing lepers, but the message remains unreadable until the lepers assume the correct order.

Verbal steganographic techniques do not require a Spot check. Instead, they require a Sense Motive check opposed to the speaker’s Bluff result. Speakers who have had a chance to practice the delivery receive a +5 competence bonus.

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Blood Magic

by Phillip Larwood

*I shall prepare thee unto blood,
and blood shall pursue thee.*

—Ezekiel 35:6

In the fetid reaches of Rotting Swamp stands the fire-scorched tower of Taergash the Bloodpurger, a wizard whose unhealthy obsession and mastery over the hidden powers of blood are legendary. His collection of blood magic is without peer.

As an apprentice, Taergash long dreamt of wielding arcane magic with the ease of a sorcerer, and he sought to capture the essence of this arcane prowess by studying their vital fluids. Taergash believed that by mastering the power in his blood he could join their ranks, but his dreams suffered frequent setbacks as his attempts failed in ever more vigorous ways. Desperate, he grew increasingly abhorrent in his pursuits. Bleeding sorcerers and other creatures with inherent magical power dry, he used the blood of these sacrifices in perverse experiments that exceeded any proper study of the arcane.

In the end, Taergash could not have predicted that a simple cut from a broken alembic, the result of an arcane experiment gone awry, would strike him down so easily. Instead of achieving mastery over the magic hidden his veins, he bled to death amid the trappings of his life's work; his blood a temporary repast for a swarm of starving stirges.

Despite his ignominious passing, Taergash's spells are still sought by necromancers, sorcerers, and blood mages, and they can be found in blood-drenched grimoires and bile-dripping tomes. Most notable among these is the *Sanguine Compendium of Taergash*.

Blood Lure

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

Level Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 2

Components V, S, F

Casting Time 1 standard action
Range close (25 ft. + 5ft./2 levels)

Target a pool of blood

Duration 1 hour/level

Saving Throw will negates

Spell Resistance none

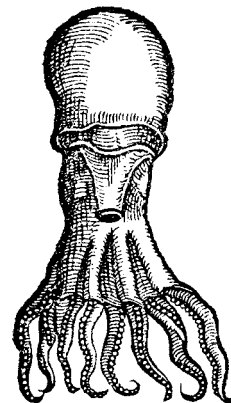
You intone the incantation and point at the blood. For a moment, it flashes with sparkling light before regaining its former hue.

This spell causes an ordinary pool of blood to radiate a powerful compulsion effect. Only predators and creatures that feed on blood are affected by the compulsion, but even blood-feeding undead, which are normally immune to mind-affecting spells, are susceptible to it. (Immunity to mind-affecting effects granted from a source other than creature type still blocks this spell).

Any creature that feeds on raw flesh or blood that moves within 60 feet of the blood can smell it. If the creature has the scent ability, the range of detection is 180 feet. As soon as the creature notices the smell, it must make a Will save or be drawn towards the blood. The creature is treated as fascinated (per the bard ability) for as long as it can smell the blood and moves unerringly towards the source unless impeded. Once it reaches the blood, it does everything in its power to feed, foregoing all other actions until the blood is consumed.

A successful attack on the affected creature ends the effect, as does the complete consumption of the blood source (a full-round action). Creatures with the scent ability or that specifically feed on blood (such as stirges and giant leeches) take a -2 penalty to the save, while an undead that feeds on blood (such as a vampire) gains a +4 bonus.

Focus a pool of blood (at least a quart)



Exanguinating Cloud

Necromancy [Evil]

Level Clr 6, Sor/Wiz 5

Components V, S, (DF)

Casting Time 1 standard action

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Effect 20-ft. radius, 20 ft. high

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Fort negates (see text)

Spell Resistance No

You gesticulate and intone the words of the spell, the blood in your veins singing with power. As you finish, rose-colored mist billows up from the spot you point at.

This spell creates a billowing mass of pale red mist. The cloud obscures all sight as *fog cloud* does and leeches the blood from any creature in the area that possesses blood or fluid of similar consistency. Any creature engulfed by the cloud must succeed a Fort save or take 1d2 point of Constitution damage. The save and damage apply to the creature every round that the creature remains within the cloud.

As it absorbs blood, the cloud gets thicker and darkens to a deep crimson color. Once it has absorbed 10 or more points of Constitution, it solidifies and gains the same qualities as *solid fog*, limiting vision, movement, and attacks.

Undead creatures within an *exanguinating cloud* gain a +2 turn resistance but, otherwise, suffer the full effects of being within the cloud (except for the Constitution damage).

An *exanguinating cloud* cannot be cast underwater. Before it solidifies, it can be dispersed by wind in the same way that a *fog cloud* can. Once an *exanguinating cloud* has solidified, only very strong winds (50+ mph) can disperse it.

When *exanguinating cloud* ends, any

drained blood showers down over the area the spell covered.

Some necromancers and death clerics use this spell to drain blood from large numbers of creatures and then collect the blood for various purposes (using urns, jugs, or other means to collect the blood).

Blood Tide

Necromancy

Level Sor/Wiz 0

Components V

Casting Time 1 standard action

Range close (25 ft. + 5ft./2 levels)

Target 1 living creature

Duration 1d4 rounds

Saving Throw Fort negates

Spell Resistance Yes

You utter a brief word of power, and the creature in front of you begins bleeding from its nose, eyes, ears, and mouth.

This spell causes a single living creature that has blood to begin bleeding from its nose, eyes, ears, and mouth. This bleeding causes no damage but imposes a –2 enhancement penalty on all checks based on Intelligence, Charisma, and Wisdom until it runs its course.

A bleeding creature might also inadvertently attract the attention of creatures such as stirges, sharks, or giant mosquitoes depending on the circumstances.

A *cure minor wounds* or DC 10 Heal check can stop the bleeding created by this spell.

Greater Blood Tide

Necromancy

Level sorcerer/wizard 2

Components V, S

Duration 1 round/level

You make a short jabbing gesture with two of your fingers as you blast out an arcane phrase. As you finish, the creature in front of you begins bleeding profusely from its nose, eyes, ears, and mouth.

This spell functions like blood tide but lasts longer and has a more dramatic effect. A creature that fails its save against a greater blood tide suffers a –4 enhancement penalty to all checks based on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma and takes 1d4 points of bleeding damage per round. A creature already suffering from

blood tide takes a –2 penalty to its save against this spell.

A *cure moderate wounds* or DC 20 Heal check can stop the bleeding created by this spell but does not cure any previous damage inflicted on the creature.

Quell the Tide

Abjuration

Level Sor/Wiz 8

Components V, S, M

Casting Time 1 standard action

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target one creature

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Fort negates

Spell Resistance Yes

As you finish the spell, the air around you shimmers with barely suppressed power, and you feel lightheaded, as if your blood thinned to water for a moment. In the next instant, the creature before you staggers, suddenly cut off from its reservoir of arcane power.

Taergash knew that sorcerers' blood holds the secret to their power, so he developed a spell that would seal the power away, preventing the sorcerer from accessing it. It was the last spell Taergash developed and, certainly, his most powerful.

Any sorcerer or creature with spell-like abilities targeted by *quell the tide* must make a Fort save or feel the arcane power stripped from its blood. While affected by *quell the tide*, a sorcerer cannot cast any spells, and a creature with spell-like abilities cannot access them. In either case, the targets are also sickened.

Creatures that have access to both spells and spell-like abilities (like some outsiders) lose the ability to use either.

Any creature affected by this spell can make a Fort save each round to negate the effects. Once the effects end, the creature regains full use of its spells and spell-like abilities and is no longer sickened.

Material Component a draught of blood from a spell-using creature

Note If you are using the *PATHFINDER* Chronicles campaign setting, *quell the tide* can be used to deny a sorcerer access to his bloodline powers, causing them to fail while the spell is in effect (this is de-

spite the fact that they are Extraordinary or Supernatural in nature). In all other respects, the spell works normally.

Weapon of Blood

Transmutation

Level assassin 1, Sor/Wiz 1

Components V, S, M (see below)

Casting Time 1 standard action

Range personal

Duration 1 minute/level

You cut yourself with your nails and speak a short arcane word. As the spell takes hold, the blood flowing from your hand transforms into a short, sharp blade of solid red metal.

When this spell is cast, the spellcaster must make a cut on his body with an available weapon or use his nails or teeth. He can also open up an existing wound. This cut deals 1d4 points of damage that cannot be healed until after the blade it creates is destroyed or the spell ends. This wound has no effect on the spell's casting and does not require the spellcaster to make a Concentration check.

Once the spell is cast, the blood flowing from the spellcaster's body transforms into a razor sharp blade that has the same properties as a +1 dagger. This dagger has the hardness and hit points of steel and lasts until sundered or the duration expires whereupon it transforms back into normal blood and flows away.

At higher levels, the spellcaster can increase the power of the dagger as follows:

Spellcaster Level	Weapon
3 rd -6 th	+2 dagger
7 th -9 th	+2 keen dagger
10 th -13 th	+3 keen dagger
14 th -17 th	+3 keen wounding dagger
18 th -20 th	+5 keen wounding dagger

For every increase in power, the spellcaster must spend an additional amount of blood equal to 2 points of damage. Therefore, a 12th-level spellcaster must take 1d4+6 points of damage to create a +3 keen dagger. He could also take just 1d4+2 points of damage to create a +2 dagger or 1d4+4 points of damage to create a +2 keen dagger.

Sorcerers and wizards often used this spell when deprived of their weapons while assassins typically use it to strike down enemy targets by surprise.



Rolling Stones

A selection of new *ioun stones*

by Jonathan Drain

Some centuries ago, an inventive human spellcaster by the name of Darven Regance found inspiration in *ioun stones*, and he took it upon himself to inject new life into this field, which he considered an over-priced and outmoded area of magical artifice. Wealthy from a long career in designing and building magic items for his country's military and aristocracy, he invested a great deal of time and money into the creation of an array of all-new *ioun stones*.

Recently, explorers have uncovered rare and unusual *ioun stones* that divinations reveal to be the inventions of the genius Regance. The discoveries have piqued the curiosity of a number of researchers, magic item artificers, and adventurers. Skeptics argue that Regance may simply have reverse-engineered the work of others and that some *ioun stones* attributed to him may have been created by other people entirely. One of the more outlandish rumors is that Regance still travels the world today in search of arcane knowledge, thanks to his greatest invention—an *ioun stone* that grants its user immortality.

Description: Like the 16 commonly known varieties of *ioun stones*, these tiny crystals orbit around their owner's head and provide a plethora of magical benefits. *Ioun stones* come in a variety of colors and shapes with each variety corresponding reliably to a different effect. Unless otherwise specified, *ioun stones* have AC 24, 10 hit points, and hardness 5.

Activation: When a character first acquires a stone, she must hold it and then release it whereupon it takes up a circling orbit 1d3 feet from her head. Thereafter, a stone must be grasped or

netted to separate it from its owner. The owner may voluntarily seize and stow a stone (to keep it safe while she is sleeping, for example), but she loses the benefits of the stone during that time.

Effect: Each kind (color and shape) of *ioun stone* has a unique effect.

Silver ellipsoid *ioun stone*

This stone feels warm to the touch and brims with powerful and sacred life energy. It grants a +5 divine bonus to saving throws versus spells or spell-like effects of the Necromancy school.

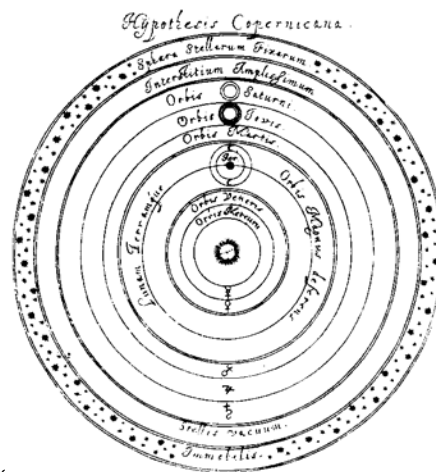
Marble sphere *ioun stone*

Rather than protect the person using it, this stone protects all *ioun stones* orbiting the character, including the marble sphere *ioun stone* itself. All affected *ioun stones* have double the normal hit points and hardness, increasing to 20 hit points and hardness 10, and are immune to shatter.

In addition, the stones are affected as if by *displacement*, giving all attempts to strike or grasp them a 50% miss chance. An illusory glamour also switches the color of each stone to a different one, preventing knowledgeable opponents from identifying them. These defenses do not hinder the owner of the stones, who can snatch and identify each stone normally.

Pale yellow prism *ioun stone*

This simple stone glows brightly, shedding light equal to a sunrod (30 feet of bright illumination, 60 feet of shadowy illumination). It ceases glowing when not in orbit around a character's head. The magical light from this *ioun stone* counters or dispels any darkness spell of second level or lower.



Brown sphere *ioun stone*

The use of this stone prevents a party from becoming lost. Orbiting its owner, it flashes with a faint light whenever it points north relative to the owner. This flash of light imposes a -1 penalty to the owner's Hide checks unless the stone is stowed.

Golden sphere *ioun stone*

This stone glitters and dazzles when set into motion. Anyone trying to look at the owner of this stone suffers a -6 penalty to Spot checks to recognize them (such as when disguised), read their lips, or see through an illusion centered on the character (but not to notice that they are there or to oppose a Hide check).

Tan ellipsoid *ioun stone*

Primarily of use to spellcasters who engage in mage duels, this stone affords a +4 enhancement bonus to Spellcraft checks made to identify a spell being cast, identify a spell effect in place, or determine an aura's school when using *detect magic*.

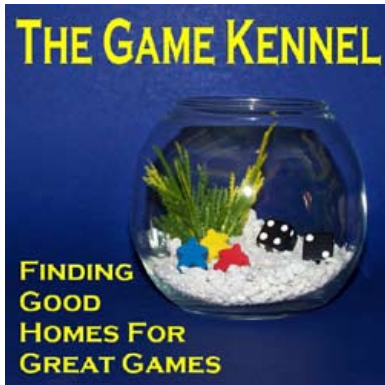
Black spindle *ioun stone*

This stone appears as pure, dull black at all times, even in the presence of bright light. The user is granted darkvision to a distance of 60 feet as well as low-light vision. They can see through nonmagical fog, mist, and smoke without penalty to a distance of 60 feet. The user is also immune to being dazzled, such as by racial light sensitivity or the spell *flare*.

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Glowing rose prism ioun stone

Discovered to be an upgraded variant of the dusty rose prism *ioun stone*, this powerful item fills its owner's mind with the knowledge of thousands of battles past, giving him incredible foresight into every possible attack an opponent could make and how to avoid it. A glowing rose prism grants a +5 insight bonus to AC.

Sky blue sphere ioun stone

A valuable protective item and a masterpiece of magical engineering, this item protects its wearer from elemental magic by temporarily absorbing it until the owner can take measures to protect herself.

When the user of this stone takes any amount of magical acid, cold, electricity, fire, or sonic damage, the stone absorbs up to 50 points of that damage. The character takes this damage 1d4+1 rounds later, giving her time to take defensive measures: for example, she might cast *resist elements* or drink a potion of *cure serious wounds*.

If this item is removed from orbit around the user's head while it still contains stored damage, the full amount of damage stored is immediately dealt to the ioun stone itself. If this damage destroys the ioun stone, the excess damage discharges harmlessly.

Only damage from a magical source such as a spell or spell-like effect is prevented by this *ioun stone*. For example, it would protect against an *acid arrow* spell or the extra fire damage from a *flaming weapon*, but not damage from falling into lava or nonmagical acid.

Lime green prism ioun stone

The user of this stone feels comfortably warm at all times. Firstly, they are permanently protected as by an *endure elements* spell, protecting them from severe heat or cold environments. Secondly, the character gains fire resistance 5, and any equipment she carries are immune to catching on fire. Finally, the character gains cold resistance 5 and suffers no penalty to movement or skill checks for walking on ice.

Pale turquoise prism ioun stone

The user of this stone feels a great burden lifted from their shoulders. The weight they carry is halved for the purposes of encumbrance.

Flawed clear spindle ioun stone

Although this stone appears at first glance to be a clear spindle *ioun stone*, a DC 20 Spot or Appraise check will note that it contains numerous tiny air bubbles. Not only does this stone fail to sustain its user without food or water as a normal clear spindle ioun stone would, it prevents its user from being nourished by any food or drink they consume.

The item is not considered cursed and can be removed normally. However, the effect of the stone has an unexpected magical corollary that gives the user a +3 resistance bonus to saves versus disease and ingested poison. Although users cannot be nourished by normal food and drink, they can still use spells or items that nourish them, such as a clear spindle *ioun stone*. Negating the stone's starvation and thirst in this way comes at a cost, though, as doing creates a magical resonance that has a 10% chance per day of destroying the flawed clear spindle *ioun stone*.

Slate blue prism ioun stone

Divine wisdom infuses this stone, which is finely inlaid in gold. The user of this stone has access to a daily reservoir of divine energy, which she can use to empower her existing class abilities.

Once per day, the energy in this stone can be used to make an extra smite attempt (such as smite evil) or an extra turn undead attempt. Alternatively, it may be used to prepare an extra divine spell of 2nd level or lower.

Golden rhomboid ioun stone

A rare example of an intelligent *ioun stone*, the golden rhomboid ioun stones were originally embedded in the hilts of enchanted swords, and many are still found in this form. Each stone has the following ability scores: Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12. They are of neutral alignment, can see and hear to a range of 30 feet,

and can communicate empathically with their owner. The stone has 10 ranks in Sense Motive (+11 modifier in all), which it typically uses to size up any creatures within thirty feet, communicating what it notices to its owner. While the stone cannot communicate specific details, it communicates a sense of "danger" if it gets a hunch that something is wrong or that an ally's behavior is affected by an enchantment, a sense of "pride" when a hard-fought battle is won, and a sense of "joy" if another gold ellipsoid ioun stone comes within thirty feet.

Having experienced decades of combat, the stones can mentally advise their owner to make a sudden attack when an opponent presents an opening. Whenever the stone's user makes a full attack action, she may make one extra attack at her highest base attack bonus. She may make up to five such attacks per day. This extra attack is not cumulative with the extra attack provided by *haste* or a *speed* weapon; the extra speed confuses the ioun stone's instinctive perception of the flow of battle. The ioun stone is always steadfastly loyal to whoever owns it at the time.

Ochre spindle ioun stone

This ioun stone spins swiftly when it orbits a character's head. Its user is granted 360 degree vision. He cannot be flanked and enjoys a +4 competence bonus to Spot checks.

Aura/Caster Level: Varies (see chart on next page).

Construction: Varies (see chart). In addition, creating any *ioun stone* requires the Craft Wondrous Item feat and the creator must be at least 12th level.

Variants: As with the flawed clear spindle *ioun stone*, many of these stones or the original 16 *ioun stones* might be low-quality copies, decreasing the price dramatically and giving an opposite effect.

Weight: Negligible.

Price: Varies (see chart).



Color	Shape	Effect	Price	CL	Aura and School	Construction
Silver	Ellipsoid	+5 to saves vs Necromancy	10,000 gp	12th	Strong enchantment, strong good	5,000 gp, 400 XP, 10 days, <i>death ward</i>
Marble	Sphere	Protects ioun stones	6,500 gp	12th	Strong illusion	3,250 gp, 260 XP, 7 days, <i>minor illusion, displacement</i>
Pale yellow	Prism	Glowes like a sunrod	250 gp	12th	Strong evocation	125 gp, 10 XP, 1 day, <i>continual flame</i>
Brown	Sphere	Discerns the direction of north	2,000 gp	12th	Strong divination	1,000 gp, 80 XP, 2 days, <i>know direction</i>
Golden	Sphere	Distracts viewers from your disguise	7,200 gp	12th	Strong enchantment	3,600 gp, 288 XP, 8 days, <i>enthral</i>
Tan	Ellipsoid	Identify spells and magic	2,240 gp	12th	Strong divination	1,120 gp, 89 XP, 3 days, <i>identify</i>
Black	Spindle	Darkvision and see through mist	29,000 gp	12th	Strong transmutation	14,500 gp, 1,160 XP, 29 days, <i>darkvision</i>
Glowing rose	Prism	+5 insight bonus to AC	125,000 gp	17th	Strong transmutation	62,500 gp, 5000 XP, 125 days, <i>foresight</i>
Sky blue	Sphere	Delay elemental damage	27,000 gp	12th	Strong abjuration	13,500 gp, 1,080 XP, 27 days, <i>resist elements</i>
Lime green	Prism	Ignore the effects of heat and ice	30,000 gp	12th	Strong abjuration	15,000 gp, 1,200 XP, 30 days, <i>endure elements</i>
Pale turquoise	Prism	Double carrying capacity	5,000 gp	12th	Strong transmutation	2,500 gp, 200 XP, 5 days, <i>bull's strength</i>
Flawed clear	Spindle	Cursed spindle	1,260 gp	12th	Strong transmutation	730 gp, 50 XP, 2 days, <i>create food and water</i>
Slate blue	Prism	Bonus smite attempt, turn attempt or 2nd level spell	20,600 gp	15th	Strong transmutation	10,300 gp, 824 XP, 21 days, <i>polymorph, holy smite</i>
Golden	Ellipsoid	Intelligent stone, provides extra attacks	32,000 gp	12th	Strong transmutation	16,000 gp, 1,280 XP, 32 days, <i>haste</i>
Ochre	Spindle	Grants 360 degree vision	17,200 gp	15th	Strong divination	8,600 gp, 688 XP, 18 days, <i>greater scrying</i>

Bolt & Quiver

by Stan!



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The Alchemist's Lair

by Darrin Drader

Maps by Sean MacDonald

Art by Rembrant van Rijn

It happens to every DM. You've scheduled the game for Friday night. You have the Coke, the Mountain Dew, and the corn chips ready to go. People will be there soon, and everyone is ready to go for the next great adventure.

The problem is that you aren't ready. Oh sure, you have a few neat ideas, and you have a pretty good sense of what monsters to throw at them, but you're completely unprepared for every other aspect of the game that night.

You slap together a map, and just before the group shows up, you have it populated with monsters. Just one problem—you forgot the traps. Oh, and what are all those rooms normally used for? You could just throw some monsters in them, but what are they doing there, exactly? No matter, the players will be entertained for the evening, right?

"Maps of Fantasy" provides a detailed adventure location. The alchemist Kataldin is the owner listed, but you can easily replace him with a wizard from your campaign. Some specifics are intentionally vague so that you can flesh them out during the game. This article provides room descriptions, challenges, and ideas for expansion to keep the adventure going. All you need to do is populate the place with adversaries and additional treasure.

The Alchemist's Abode

The alchemist's abode is a relatively small, innocent looking house that can be placed within any city, though it is far more likely that it would appear near the outskirts or nearby wilderness. The inhabitants prefer that it not be widely known what rare plants they grow there, what concoctions they create, and what other activities they indulge in from time to time.



Background

The Alchemist's abode is a relatively new structure, having been built a mere forty years ago by a woodsman named Fairghnell Caine, who shared it with his family. Due to the occasional incursions of evil creatures in this area, he excavated some tunnels beneath the house where the family could take shelter during these events. Eventually the children grew into adults and left the house. Fairghnell's wife died of natural causes. He sold the house for a handsome amount to Kataldin, a mysterious young wizard who had recently taken up residence nearby.

The alchemist Kataldin had already lived a life of adventure, but at some point after he moved into this house, he fell in with vile companions. The group never bothered the nearby area, but their exploits abroad were notorious. As evildoers will, Kataldin made many enemies, some very powerful. Knowing that his reputation was ruined and that he could no longer walk around openly, he retreated to this quiet house, where the rest of the world could forget he ever existed.

Despite his retirement, Kataldin continued his alchemical work, creating potions, medicines, poison, and chemical compounds. He sells these items to the locals unaware of his troubled past (and unaware that they would be rich if they turned him in to the proper authorities).

Kataldin likes to create things. He keeps a golem workshop in the small

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ALCHEMIST'S LAIR



- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Main Hall | 8. Garden |
| 2. Dining Room | 9. Landing |
| 3. Kitchen | 10. Wine Cellar |
| 4. Room of Oddities | 11. Workshop |
| 5. Laboratory | 12. Magical Storage Area |
| 6. Bedroom | 13. Study / Private Chamber |
| 7. Cellar and Secret Stair | 14. Treasure Hoard |

1 Square = 5 ft.

dungeon beneath his house, so the DM may wish to place golems or other constructs guarding various rooms within his house.

Outside the House

From a distance:

The house is relatively small, with a natural brown lacquered wood exterior and tiled roof. Several small windows, no larger than a foot per side are set into several of the walls. The front door is heavy, wooden, and appears to be quite sturdy. A five-foot tall fence encloses an area that is roughly 40 by 30 feet.

There are windows set in the walls of each of the rooms except rooms 4 and 5; however, it is difficult to see the details inside due to the trees and plants within blocking the view. The windows break easily and do not require any sort of a check to break, but only a small-sized creature may fit through.

A locked strong wooden door bars entrance to the inside. The lock is of good quality and requires a DC 30 Open Lock check to open. The house is not warded against magical movement, such as *passwall*.

1. Main Hall

This room is roughly rectangular in shape and is roughly thirty feet to a side. Two doors are set into the north wall and a hallway provides an exit in the center of the east wall.

The room contains a number of plants and small trees scattered throughout the room. A small table lies in the center of the room, and large wooden chairs surround it. Two stone idols lie along the opposite wall. A bright point in the ceiling in the center of the room provides illumination for the room.

A permanent *light* spell that was cast on a point in the ceiling keeps this room well lit. Kataldin blocks the light source when he goes to bed so that the plants can complete their daily cycle. This room is used primarily for reading and relaxing. The plants in this room are slightly rarer and are more valuable to the alchemical processes than the ones outside in area 8.

Creatures adjacent to the walls are partially concealed by the foliage in this room and gain a 20% miss chance. Creatures hiding in those squares receive a +5 bonus to Hide checks.

The two idols on the far wall are pieces Kataldin stole from a castle. He shows them to his visitors despite the fact that they are trapped with a potentially lethal poison. Any creature that examines the bottom of either of the idols triggers a poison dart trap.

Poison Dart Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +10 ranged (1d4 plus poison, dart); poison (bloodroot, DC 12 Fortitude save resists, 0/1d4 Con plus 1d3 Wis); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 18. Market Price: 700 gp.

2. Dining Room

The primary feature of this room is a long table, which is surrounded by eight chairs.

Kataldin and his visitors dine here at mealtime; the room serves no other purpose. The chairs are valuable, with inlays of pearl for anyone who makes a DC 20 Search and Appraise check.

3. Kitchen

A cast iron wood burning stove sits under a window in the wall to the right. A narrow countertop with knives, plates, bowls,

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and silverware scattered atop it lies along the opposite wall.

This room does not serve any special purposes aside from preparing food.

4. Room of Oddities

The door to this room is locked, requiring a DC 30 Open Locks check to open.

Five small cages sit on the floor of this room, each occupied by a different small animal. A number of other unusual objects are in this room, including a stylized doll-like representation of a person hanging from the ceiling, a miniature human skull, a bar of dark metal, and several other strange objects.

These are arcane components of one sort or another, collected by Kataldin either for use in spells or simply for their oddity.

The dark metal is lead. The cages are filled with small animals, rare but harmless, collected from around the world for use as ingredients in his concoctions. The specific animals are left up to the DM.

5. Laboratory

The door to this room is locked, requiring a DC 30 Open Lock check to open.

A large metal work table sits in the center of this room. Sitting on the table are a collection of glass beakers filled with differently colored fluids, bronze bowls containing powders, several dried plants, and some ceramic and stone bowls likely used for mixing.

Kataldin works here, creating various potions and alchemical components. This room counts as a lab for the purposes of magic item creation, and the collected items in this room qualify as an alchemist's lab and can be sold for the standard price of 500 gp.

6. Bedroom

This room is locked and trapped. Unless the PCs possess the key to this room, which is only carried by Kataldin, they spring the trap unless it is first removed.

Lightning Bolt Trap: CR 4; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset; spell effect (*lightning bolt*,

5th-level wizard, 5d6 electricity, DC 14 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 28; Disable Device DC 28. *Cost:* 7,500 gp, 600 XP.

The lock requires a DC 30 Open Lock check to open.

This room is a bedroom. A bed lies in the corner opposite the door, and there is a chest at the foot of the bed. Directly across from the door is a wardrobe with doors open, displaying a variety of dark colored robes within.

The chest is locked and requires a DC 30 Open Lock check to open. The wardrobe contains clothing.

7. Cellar and Secret Stair

The door to this room is locked, requiring a DC 30 Open Lock check to open.

This area contains a variety of mundane objects needed for the upkeep of a house, such as a broom, rags, tools, nails, glue, roofing tiles, and various other odds and ends.

This room contains little or nothing of value. Concealed behind the small mountain of items is a stairway leading down, which descend for 30 feet before ending in room 9.

The stairs leading down are trapped. Concealed in a crevice between two boards in the wall of this room by the stairs is a lever. This requires a DC 20 Search check to find.

If the PCs do not flip the lever, the stairs fold down after they have all entered the stairway. The PCs must make a DC 20 Reflex saving throw or fall, suffering 3d6 points of damage.

Folding Stairs Trap: CR 3; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Damage (3d6); DC 20 Reflex save prevents falling; Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 25. *Market Price:* 2,100 gp.

8. Garden

This door opens up to a fenced off area next to the house. Rows of several types of plants grow from the dirt here. Some of these are leafy and others are vines, which coil around long sticks that have been placed into the ground.

This room is the garden where Kataldin grows many of the ingredients for his potions and other concoctions.

He grows a variety of useful plants here as ingredients for potions, medicines, and poisons such as mandrake, hemlock, poppies, aconite, and hellebore. A successful DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check identifies them.

9. Landing

The stairs from above end in this small, unremarkable room. It appears to contain some of the less used items that would not fit in the storage area above.

This is a good room for a surprise encounter or hidden treasure, such as a fey creature, a summoned devil, or an invisible stalker. Hidden treasures might include potions beneath a floorboard or a chest of jewels sealed into the stonework by fresh mortar.

10. Wine Cellar

This room contains several racks filled with various types of wine.

A variety of wines are stored here, including some that are valuable, with details determined by the DM.

11. Workshop

This room is filled with small tables, upon which are a variety of unusual items, including arms, legs, and torsos made of stone and metal. There are also a number of desiccated body parts that look as though they were taken from a human or humanoid creature, such as skin, bone, and muscle.

Kataldin shapes and assembles constructs here. A guardian creature of some sort may inhabit this room, but it is incomplete and its movements are halting. This could be a gargoyle or an animated object, a golem in female form, or servant automaton. It might be an ornithopter framework. Any completed constructs should be placed in area 12 (if the DM wishes to use those as challenges in this location).

A DC 20 search reveals a set of instructions for a new variety of construct, supposedly capable of flight with a Small rider.

12. Magical Storage Area

This is where Kataldin keeps the magic items he has created. One or more complete golems or constructs lie in

wait in this room. This might be a simple one-armed animated statue at a low encounter level, all the way up to several Huge animated objects at higher levels. The more refined items might be statues, entire workbenches, stone pillars, or animated tapestries sewn with barbed hooks and spikes.

A variety of magic items, such as rings, potions, weapons, armor, and wondrous items, are stored here, some of them locked in chests and others left in the open.

13. Study/Private Chamber

A long, short table sits in the center of this room. Also here are a number of bookshelves, several chairs, and a couch with a pair of folded blankets at one end. Three open books lie on the table top, each of them opened to pages containing information regarding the various poisonous properties of plants.

Kataldin uses this room as a quiet and isolated study, and it serves as a place to sleep when needed. The books are valuable for reference, but provide no one other clues.

14. Treasure Hoard

This room is always locked with a DC 30 lock; Kataldin carries the key on a chain around his neck.

Chests, jars, and entire shelves are covered with neatly-aligned wooden cases full of documents and dried plants. The room is dusty but organized.

Kataldin keeps all of the treasure that he has accumulated through a life of adventure and misdeeds in this room; many are mementoes, but others are treasures such as only adventurers carry home, such as dried heads, horns, skulls.

Place treasure in here appropriate for the party and challenge level. It might include alchemical treatises, valuable minerals and powdered gemstones, dusty scrolls that Kataldin could not decipher (or sought to forget), and canopic jars full of preserved unicorn brains, deep ones' eyes, and dragon hearts.

One chest contains a fortune in gold and silver coin.

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The Clockwork Oracle

By Wolfgang Baur

Art by James Keegan

The temple of the Gear Goddess inspires the citizens of Zobeck to great deeds of industry, to the manufacture of ever-better clockworks, to the understanding of mechanisms and the natural philosophy of breath, blood, and steel that led to the birth of the Ironborn. But the temple is also a place of mysteries, and nothing is more mysterious about the Gear Goddess than the Clockwork Oracle, a wall of silver dials, actuators, golden balance wheels and reciprocating gears that together form a face said to be inhabited by the goddess herself on high holy days.

On those occasions when the Oracle speaks, roughly every 60 days, the temple is packed with supplicants that the priests must organize and whose petitions the priests weigh. Unlike the city's crab diviners, the Oracle's pronouncements are not a matter of simple yes-or-no fortunetelling. The Clockwork Oracle tells when a person might die, who might betray a merchant's secret dealings, and other secrets of the Free City's highest and most powerful. More than that, she speaks to the members of the Spyglass Guild (see issue #4, "Gangs of Zobeck"), and she actively works to keep Zobeck independent. The Oracle is the Goddess's most powerful form of support for the city's peace and prosperity.

Supplicants to the Oracle

In any particular session, the oracle may speak for hours or may refuse to speak at all. As a result, the priests of the Gear Goddess monitor access to the Clockwork Oracle very strictly indeed. Wealth and power are important considerations when determining who might speak to her, but so are arcane knowledge, piety in the faith of the city's patron goddess, and devotion to civic duty.

Only four supplicants are usually chosen, though in times of great danger to the city, more supplicants are sometimes granted a chance to ask their questions of the oracle.

A donation to the temple helps one's odds, and many desperate merchants offer hundreds of gold ducats to the temple for this purpose; many are disappointed.

Citizens are always given preference in gaining an audience with the Oracle. One Praetorian from the council, one guild master from the city's great guilds always gains an invitation, and one hero or arcanist of note is usually invited to attend the day. The fourth is usually a petitioner from the public.

The Face of the Divine

The lucky few enter the sanctum beneath the temple's rotating pulpit, a place filled with the smell of metal and oil, not far from the workshop where the goddess's followers create small examples of clockwork magic in her name. The small shrine below the temple is just large enough for four supplicants and two priests, one of them invariably Lena Ravovik, the high priestess of the Gear Goddess, and the other often the youngest and strongest of her followers.

With them are the chosen supplicants, who may each ask one question. If the question is deemed worthy, there may be an answer, but on many occasions, the goddess answers no questions, but instead charges her listeners with a quest or task in service to the city. Those who refuse this task are invariably exiled from the city, or even attacked by the ironborn, whose zealotry in the goddess's service is extreme.

The supplicants who succeed in such tasks are hailed as heroes, if they survive. Those who fail are said to be reborn within the forges of the Foundryman's Guild as new ironborn souls.



Voice of the Goddess

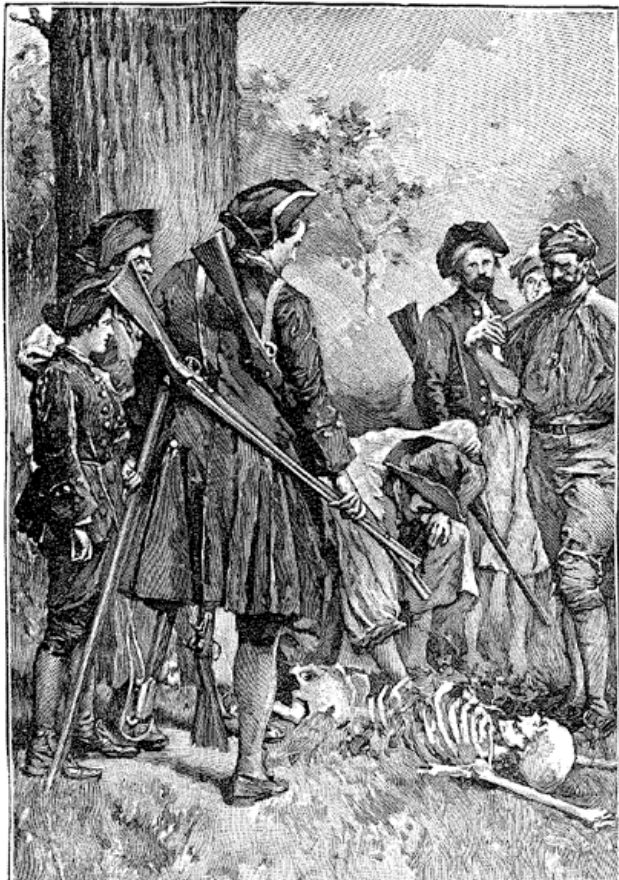
The answers granted by the gear goddess are often strange and sometimes physical. A strip of paper may scroll out of the Oracle's mouth, or rest on its clacking wooden tongue, for a supplicant to take. This small paper is neatly marked with a map or a message written in some strange cipher; the priests can read it and will do so for a small fee.

Sometimes the Oracle's communication takes the form of a weaving or a clever piece of inlaid steel instead, but the physical prophecies of the Oracle are always holy items. They are kept and revered by the priests of the shrine. A few are hidden away from public eyes, but many of the older ones are displayed as a manifestation of the goddess's power, and her word made real.

Ironborn and clockwork mechanisms who ask questions of the Oracle generally understand the answer without speech. No one but the clockwork creatures seems to understand how this works, exactly.

A small clockwork mechanism (usually but not invariably humanoid) may step forward to act out a scene in answer to a question. Or the many-gear face of the Oracle may whirl and click and buzz, and within the overtones and harmonics of her mechanism, the faithful may hear her voice speaking, though the impious or faithless hear nothing but noise...





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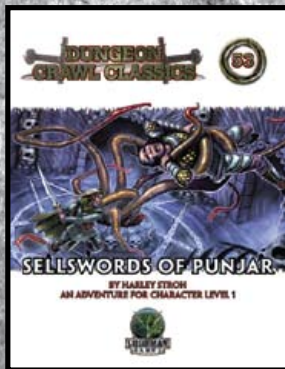
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