

# The Fantasy Trip™

# HEXAGRAM

STEVE JACKSON GAMES ◊ Issue #5 ◊ October 2020 ◊



## Welcome to *Hexagram!*

Our spotlight this issue is on a double feature: an article on Skarg's Tavern from *In The Labyrinth*, and an interview with Dyson Logos, who made the map!

As you no doubt know, we had to cancel FnordCon 2 due to the coronavirus. We'll be back. Huge thanks to all the *TFT* GMs who had volunteered to help put it on. I hope we can have better luck next year!

But the good news is: we held an online convention, using a Discord server. It was a big success – we had 457 attendees! John Kovalic “spoke” and answered questions. There were an even 20 panels and Ask Me Anything presentations, plus other special events. (We also participated in the virtual Gen Con, and that went well.) While we haven't given up on the physical convention, we want to do another virtual event too! It's set for October 10, all day, so mark your calendar!

Kickstarter continues to be great for the game. The campaign for *The Book of Unlife / Red Crypt* was successful, with over \$20,000 in support. The campaign for this issue and *Ardonirane* beat that, with over \$30,000 in support.

The Postcard Contest entries, all 40 of them, are now posted as a free PDF on Warehouse 23. And *Melee* is now available as a free PDF. Tell your friends!

*Decks of Destiny* is now in the hands of most project supporters, and my design article is posted at [thefantasytrip.game](http://thefantasytrip.game).

And that's what I know this time!

– Steve Jackson

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## Letters

As someone that got the original *Melee* and *Wizard* when they came out, I was excited for the possibilities again . . . *Hexagram* and really all of the new content has just been amazing and a great way to enhance, for me, what was already an awesome game. Thank you!

– Christopher Kaster

[*Hexagram* is] frankly the best thing out there in direct support of a specific game. I've found every single article published to be at least useful for sparking ideas for TFT, and the vast majority of them have been both *very* useful, and crunchy enough to allow the GM to run them without a lot of interpolation or extrapolation. Other game companies try to do this from time to time, but generally fail both to keep focused on the primary subject, and to keep the schedule relatively regular. You guys have so far managed both, and I for one say "Hurrah!"

– Jeff Vandine



# #TheFantasyTrip

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## A Primer on the Enigmatic Gargoyle

*By Greg Miller*

The Gargoyle is a winged anthropoid. It possesses a thick hide, typically moss-green and spotted in appearance, with the texture of rough stone. This stony hide counts as armor stopping 3 hits.

Gargoyles vary in size. In the regions surrounding the Gargoyle Mountains, the typical Gargoyle is a little taller than the average human, but weighs almost twice as much. Rarer races of Gargoyles can be diminutive, only around four feet tall. But some, according to sailors returning from the uncharted volcanic islands of the South Káldašax Sea, can be as big as a bear and twice as fierce. Despite their weight, Gargoyles are excellent flyers and their wings, which magically allow flight through levitation rather than lift, are visually proportional to those of other much lighter flying humanoids on Cidri.

There is no accurate record concerning the normal life span of the Gargoyle. Other than combat or accidental death, a Gargoyle's life could be several hundred years. Beware of old Gargoyle wizards. Due to their very long lifespans, such wizards will know all or almost all spells available to them and will have considerable strength to back them up. These stony magisters are sometimes hired by academies as instructors for their beginning students.

The organic processes of the Gargoyle are silicon-based. Its blood color ranges from blue-gray (coming from the heart) to dark gray (returning to the heart). Gargoyle blood has a uniquely fast evaporation rate. A few moments after a melee, the spilled blood of a Gargoyle will dry into a deep blue, almost black, powder.



Gargoyles are dimorphic and do procreate. This becomes self-evident when encountering a Gargoyle in nature or one being summoned – they will always appear nude. Adventuring Gargoyles commonly do wear some clothing, kilts being the most preferred, but only at the behest of their fellow companions. Other than being unabashed exhibitionists, Gargoyles, as a species, are extremely private, so the manner of their birth and social structures remain largely mysteries.

No master naturalist has ever witnessed a Gargoyle live birth. Some suspect Gargoyles may lay eggs, but none have ever been found. (In some kingdoms, substantial rewards still remain for anyone who can produce a Gargoyle egg or fledgling.) Strangely, no Gargoyle children have ever been seen or are even mentioned in folklore.

All these gaps in knowledge lead most naturalists to believe there is some hidden continent or island where Gargoyles migrate and spawn. Based on the mineral content of Gargoyle skin, some speculate an archipelago of volcanic islands to be their ideal habitat, spawning in hot sulfur springs or blistering lava-heated pools. (This hypothesis conflicts with folklore, which references the Gargoyle Mountains as the Gargoyle's place of origin.)

Gargoyle brains are a puzzle for the naturalist as well. Dissection has yielded little information. Upon death or after exposure to air, the brain undergoes a rapid petrification. The result is a crumpled mass of jagged crystals, as gray and hard as fool's gold, rendering the scalpel and probe useless.

Based on the skull and the size of those few brains removed successfully before petrification set in, it is believed the structure

of the brain (assumed to be crystalline) and the size of the heavily armored skull limit Gargoyle intelligence. Barring some leap in evolution, the Gargoyle brain has a fixed capacity.

This isn't to say they are a stupid race. On the contrary, due to their longevity, every Gargoyle over 100 will have an IQ of 10. As a race they know they will not generate any geniuses, so they are avid consumers of other races' philosophy and science. Gargoyles earnestly seek out any magic or technology that can enhance their peoples' knowledge. The Mechanics' Guild and Sorcerers' Guild often employ Gargoyle adventurers.

Their skin is capable of an exhaustive number of textures and colors mimicking all manner of stones; this is an inborn talent. If a Gargoyle is hiding among stones, only on a critical success on an IQ/3 roll (GM makes it in secret) will it be seen if unexpected. If one is deliberately searching for hidden things in the stones chances are better, of course. A Gargoyle mimicking rock, or in the *tun* state (below) is spotted on a 4/IQ roll. This roll is 3/IQ with Alertness or if a Naturalist; 2/IQ for a PC with both.

Gargoyles can remain still for years, even decades. When in an extended "stone" or *tun* state, Gargoyle skin contracts, leaving no detectable water several inches below the epidermis. This is believed to be a form of deep hibernation. For purposes of an attack or exposure to a hazard during a *tun* state, treat the Gargoyle as the rock it imitated (e.g. a dagger would do little to no damage, while a Great Hammer would be devastating).

Though a Gargoyle's fearsome jaw and teeth are capable of crushing almost any stone and grinding it to a fine powder, biting is not practical in combat. The hemolymph pressure required for the



powerful bite seems to be only possible while the Gargoyle is at rest, and its application is quite slow. Due to their diet of rocks and sand, the word “hunger” is absent from the Gargoyle tongue. Woe to the ignorant warden who locks up a Gargoyle without precautions. More than one jailer on Cidri has woken to find, to their dismay, the jail’s iron bars on the cell floor, the stone that held them in place chewed away and the prisoners gone.

A handful of naturalists believe the Gargoyle possess a limited form of telepathy. It has been witnessed that when a group of Gargoyles fight, they seem to work in unison (some suspect the group receives +1 to DX). The wizard Alhanzen described a Gargoyle war party attack as “a controlled frenzy” of “many hands but one mind.” A sensible band of adventurers would only engage a pack of Gargoyles under the most dire of circumstances.

When encountering a Gargoyle settlement, it is wise to continue on one’s way. Gargoyles are not necessarily hostile, but they highly value their privacy. If one must camp near their homes, it should be done so at as great a distance as possible. Parties should continue on their way as soon as they can – never should they linger. Gargoyles have been known to employ informants in nearby villages to gauge the mood of the inhabitants toward the Gargoyles. Somewhat hypocritically, Gargoyles will not tolerate anyone spying on them.

Dwarves, in general, are indifferent concerning Gargoyles. However, some avaricious Dwarves, leery of any creature capable of eating a jewel – no matter how unlikely – will require a Gargoyle adventurer to sign a contract with an indemnity covering all precious stones. Elves and Gargoyles seem to get along well and there are whispers of a shared past. Gargoyles, themselves, have no real problem with orcs. However, they do recognize that other races despise orcs and will adjust their behavior accordingly. Goblins are fond of employing Gargoyles as bodyguards and sentries.

Concerning Gargoyles and humans, there is some bad feeling between the two races. For many human villagers, their image of a Gargoyle is that of a summoned Gargoyle from tales, a rushing, spitting monster shredding its victims with a savageness bordering on bloodlust. For Gargoyles, most humans, at their best, are a careless menace – at their worst, murderous hunters of their people.

Chemists and Alchemists suffer an equally bad reputation amongst Gargoyles due to the frequency with which Gargoyle gallbladders are found in their potions and elixirs. Gargoyle wizards are quick to point out that there is no real necessity for harvesting Gargoyle gallbladders, since there is always a viable substitute for each potion. While this is almost certainly true, the substitute is usually very expensive and it is sad economics indeed that create this murderous black market.

Gargoyles have a full range of emotions, but due to the physical limitations of their mouths, everything they say is hoarse and almost monotone. If you make a friend of a Gargoyle, unlikely but possible, you have a loyal friend for life. Those who know them find Gargoyles witty and extremely sarcastic but always with a deadpan delivery.



## Donning Rings, Taking Potions, Etc., in Combat

By Steve Jackson

This is one of the rule cards in the *Infinite Arena* set. Since many of the Battle cards include “grab this thing” objectives, we wanted to be explicit about some option and timing details. We will add it to p. 103 of the next printing of *In The Labyrinth*. Note that the new printing is just that – a reprint with small tweaks, not a whole new edition. But we’re taking the opportunity to fix typos and deal with some FAQ.

In combat, you might have the opportunity to grab a small item. This is a “ready” action, on your DX turn, requiring a free hand. If the item is in plain sight on the ground, on a shelf, etc., getting it is the same as readying a weapon. It is also “readying” to remove an item from your pocket.

Once you have the item ready, though, using it is a free action. (So: “Take out a ring and put it on,” or “Take out a potion and drink it,” is one Ready. But “Grab a ring and pocket it,” and later “Get it out and put it on,” requires two Readies.)

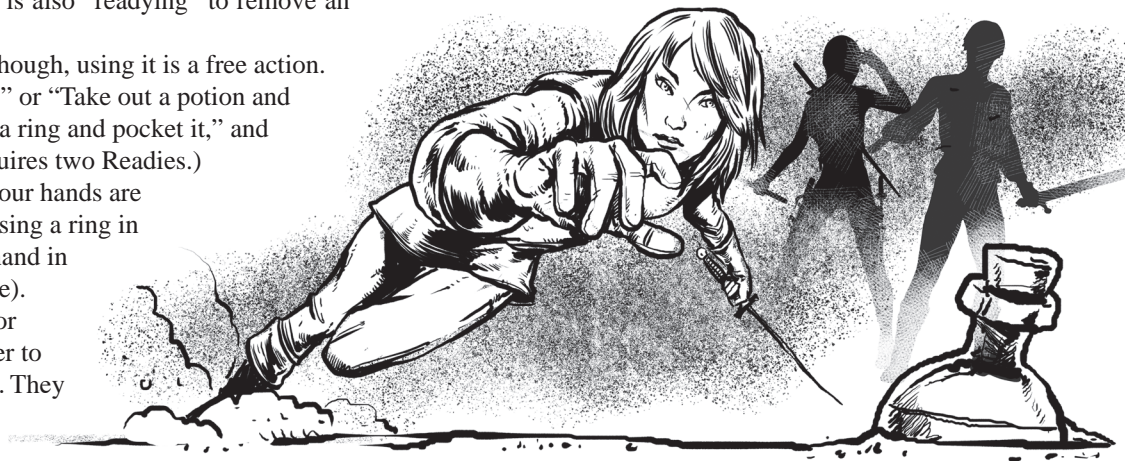
If you have Pickpocket talent, your hands are trained enough that you can start using a ring in your pocket just by sticking your hand in (free action, if you have a hand free).

If you have carefully protected or hidden your item, it will take longer to find and use – the GM is the judge. They can make the player act it out . . .

Scooping up an item on the run is treated like scooping up a weapon, but roll 4/DX if it’s a tiny thing like a ring or potion. (Note that an item to be picked up on the run, whether it’s a halberd or a ring, must be in a hex directly in your path.)

Handing an item to a friend takes one Ready (it’s a free action if the item is in hand). Receiving it, and pocketing it or using it, takes a Ready.

Bodies may also be looted during combat. In most circumstances, you must kneel (option d) by a body in order to loot it. If an item is worn visibly, it takes a Ready to get it and put it on yourself. If an item of any kind is in a pouch or pocket, the initial Ready to find it will take 1d turns, or 1d-2 if it is the *only* item in a *known* pocket.

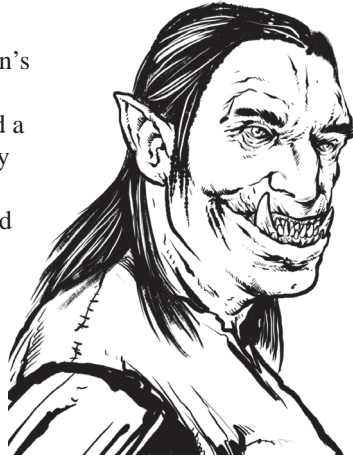




## Skarg's Tavern

By Steve Jackson

Skarg is the owner of Bendwyn's orc tavern. At ST 13, DX 12, and IQ 12, he's a tough customer, and a lot smarter than he looks. Nobody would ever think Skarg was the brains of a group, and that's saved him a couple of times. Skarg is 40-ish. He used to be a city thief. He got talked into one dungeon-crawl, made what to him was an unspeakable amount of money, and retired to a life of near-respectability.



Skarg's tavern opens an hour or so before dark. Before then, Skarg is about his own business, or sleeping. He has no permanent staff – he pours the drinks himself or hires a friend to help, does the light bouncing himself, and jobs the really rough fights out to whoever is at hand. It's amazing how many orcs will pile on when Skarg says "A silver apiece when that one can't stand up."

Skarg serves orc-ale (1 silver the mug) and popskull (3 silvers the shot, and he won't serve you more than two if he doesn't know you). He sometimes has a roast of some kind on the big spit outside (price varies). In fine weather there will be more customers than the little building can hold, and the outside tables will be full of singing miscreants.

Skarg's is dirty, smelly, disreputable, and serves an important role in the little town of Bendwyn. It attracts rough visitors the way a pie attracts slinkers, and it's a spot where anybody, even dwarves if they're tough enough, can go to blow off a bit of steam.

It's built to survive a bar brawl. Furniture is backless stools, very lightly built and replaceable, and tables too heavy to pick up and throw. There is no glass in the windows, just shutters and heavy hide "curtains." The cups are wood, too light to be used to smash a skull. There's no cutlery. Skarg has thought this all through! From behind Skarg's bar he can see every point in the tavern.

General level of peace: Fighting is fine! Fighting is fun! But don't use weapons inside. Take it outside. And don't kill anybody on purpose within sight of the building. Skarg doesn't fool with nonsense like "peace bonding" weapons – he just laid down the rule that they weren't to be used inside, and that was that. Skarg's *sroash* is strong

Other than that, the only rules are "No credit," and "Get out of here and use the damned privy." It's as unspeakable as you think it is, but if you mess up Skarg's "clean" floor, the night's fight will start early.

Max Beerfoam himself comes by once a night. Skarg always offers him a drink and Max always says "Not on duty, sir." Then they both laugh. The two don't actually like each other, but there's a bit of respect, and being amicable lets them both do their jobs better.

Skarg does not cheat or rob his patrons, except in card games. He absolutely turns a blind eye to smuggling, and occasionally takes a small cut if something needs to be stored for a few nights.



When things settle down for the night, Skarg shouts “Last call!” serves the last round of drinks, and counts down from 10. Everyone quaffs! Then everyone leaves who is leaving. Everyone who wants to stay the night in the common room, with the big fireplace, pays a silver. If you’re too drunk to leave, Skarg will just haul you out if the weather is fair. If it’s raining or snowing, he will take a silver from your pouch and put you in a corner.

The village of Bendwyn has a single guild: The Worshipful Company of Innkeepers and Tavern Masters. It’s made up of Skarg, Gunter Greenbeard of the Golden Ax, Murad Wallholder of the Broken Blade, and Anna Pike, who rents rooms in her big old house if she thinks the visitors are of good character. The Guild is half a joke and half serious. It’s the only guild in Bendwyn because no other trade has more than two practitioners . . . and the city elders are required by law and custom to consult with the guilds before important decisions. So the Guildmaster (currently Murad, but all the others have taken turns) has a say in village business. The Guild gets together once a month, in the afternoon while business is slow, and chats. Murad and Gunter advise Skarg on financial matters (the orc is sharp but no businessman). Skarg keeps the others apprised of people and things that might be bad for business.

If there *were* a Thieves’ Guild in Bendwyn, which of course there isn’t, Skarg would be the Guildmaster. As it is, he’s the one to talk to for business you wouldn’t discuss in front of the Watch. And he’s the one who will often advise that you take especially violent ideas out of town “where it’s safer.”

## The Tavern Building

The “bar” part of Skarg’s is one big triangular room with one big fireplace and one door, which can be heavily barred (ST 20) from the inside. The tables are round, made of slices of tree-trunk spiked to smaller trunks. They’re hard to move, let alone to throw, but you can tip one up and hide behind it. In the skinny corner of the room is the Good Table. It’s like all the others, but if you sit in the right place, nobody can get behind you to cosh you or take your stuff, and it is spaced a bit far from the others so quiet talk remains private. Naturally, fights break out over who gets the Good Table. A bribe to Skarg will help.

Along the long side of the triangular room is Skarg’s bar – just a couple of 12-foot planks over shelves. Only Skarg and his employees are allowed behind the bar. There are a few barrels of ale against the wall. The bottles of popskull, Skarg’s peacemaker, and the money box are all on the bar shelves, out of reach of customers.

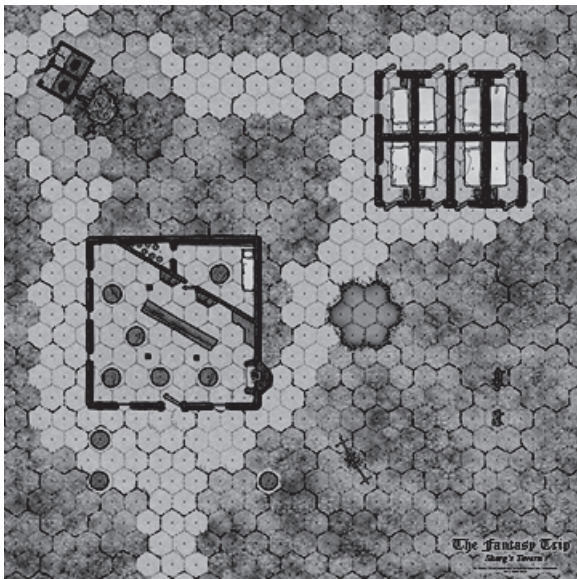
Skarg’s money box is an interesting device. It’s an iron safe, too heavy for one man unless his ST is at least 15. It has a slot on top, into which Skarg drops money, and a huge dial on the front. After he closes, Skarg works the combination and takes the money back into his bedroom. There is sometimes quiet talk about Skarg’s money box, but everyone agrees it wouldn’t be worth the risk. (The only money on the premises is a single day’s take plus what is in Skarg’s “go bag.”)

Also behind the bar is the door to Skarg’s room. It can be barred from the inside, and is just as strong as the front door.

The room is spacious if you’re a city-bred orc. It has a big cot, a place for a brazier full of coals, and a lot of shelves full of Skarg’s

“stuff.” Someone searching the room uninterrupted – which would be quite a feat! – would eventually find Skarg’s “go bag,” kept packed in case he has to hit the road very suddenly. It contains wilderness essentials like flint, steel, and jerky – and civilized essentials like \$20 in silver, \$200 in gold, and a gem worth \$100. Nobody has any idea about Skarg’s bag. He really doesn’t think he’ll ever need it, but he changes the jerky every few months. Just in case.

In one corner is a closet behind a curtain. This is where the ale-barrels, full and empty, are kept.



*Skarg's Tavern, rendered by Dyson Logos.*

## The Room-House

To the north and east of the bar is the room-house. It has eight tiny rooms, each with its own door to the outside. You can ask for a room with a window, or one without, depending on your paranoia and the weather. The doors all have bars and big iron hasps on the inside – Skarg will rent you a lock, or you can bring your own. Even in a locked and windowless room, you are advised to sleep atop your valuables. The rooms are weathertight but you don’t know your neighbors, and Skarg will laugh at any complaint.

## The Tree

Downwind of the tavern and the room-house is the great tree, underneath which Skarg has built a privy. The smell of the orc privy, which seats two, is every bit as ghastly as you might imagine. Contrary to rumor, there are no spiders as big as a hand in here. There used to be, but they couldn’t stand it, and left.

## Prices at Skarg’s

Mug of ale – \$1

Shot of popskull brandy – \$3

Some kind of meat – \$2 to \$4

Room for the night in the room-house – \$5

Lock for the room-house door – \$5, \$4 of which is returned when you return the undamaged lock and key.

Spending the night in the common room – \$1

Bribe to get the good table – variable, and may entail a fight if someone is there already.



## The Kraken, Expanded

By Henry J. Cobb

*In The Labyrinth* briefly discusses the Kraken (p. 97). Here's a bit more detail.

The Kraken has ST 60, DX 10, and IQ 4. It is a cephalopod, like a squid or octopus. Its slug-like body lives within a four-hex shell (use the four-hex dragon counter, but all side hexes are treated as rear hexes). The shell gives it 6 points of armor; the tentacles themselves stop 2 hits/attack.

The total reach of the ten tentacles is five hexes in any direction from its head, but the Kraken usually stays grounded underwater two hexes from the shoreline, giving it a reach of three hexes ashore. Kraken are known to anchor themselves to the bottom near docks, where they can grab a few sailors for a quick snack.

The tentacles snatch with the creature's DX of 10. A figure enraptured by a tentacle has a 3/DX saving roll (4/DX if enraptured by two tentacles) to break free, made on the Kraken's turn. Failure means the victim falls down if not already down, and is dragged a hex closer to the monster's beak. Success on an attempt to break free means the victim springs or rolls a hex away from the tentacle in any direction. Once a victim is dragged into the water, they can do nothing further except stab with a dagger and hope.

It is possible to cut a tentacle by doing 5 cumulative hits to it with an edged weapon. However, anyone actually enraptured is at -2 to DX for each tentacle.

Once the tentacles drag a victim to its head hex, the Kraken will bite in HTH for 2d with its beak. It can combine a beak attack with three tentacle grabs on the same turn at no penalty.

When not fishing for land creatures, the Kraken will produce gas to displace water inside its shell and achieve neutral buoyancy; it will release the bottom, and swim away at MA 10 to go find some shipborne snacks.

The largest Kraken seen so far had a nine-hex shell, tentacles with a 12-hex reach, and a ST estimated at 120 from the damage it did. This monster was not seen near shore. Instead, it attacked ships in the deep sea, swamping them and eating the sailors.

Occasionally, fragments of Kraken shells wash ashore, shattered by bites or blows from the really big things that live in the deeps.





## The Gallery of Glitching Gates

By Stefan Jones

This could be a one-shot adventure, the beginning of a campaign, or something worked into an existing setting. Inspiration comes from Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* and the Strugatsky brothers' enigmatic *Roadside Picnic*.

It is well known that the local Wizards' Guild chapter house was built atop a labyrinth. Indeed, establishing a lodge on an emptied-out lair is common practice; the tunnels are useful for training, storage, and (it is whispered) punishment.

Very few know that the sub-levels of this building have a deep and (literally) dark secret: a collection of self-sustaining gates of great antiquity, leading to far-flung destinations.

### Adventure or Death!

Characters who get into deep legal trouble, the kind that gets one shortened by a head after a week of public torment, may be offered an out by a representative of the Wizards' Guild: In exchange for the Guild using its influence to have their sentence commuted, the adventurers will undertake a potentially dangerous mission. It involves stepping through a gate, taking some notes, and returning home for a debriefing. The guild will cure any diseases and heal any wounds incurred on the jaunt, and pay extra rewards for careful observations.

Characters who accept the offer are blindfolded and led downward by a team of guards and guild "handlers." The Guild people have maps, keys, and passwords and can navigate the labyrinth without too much risk. The handlers warn, now that it's too late to turn back, that the gates aren't reliable!

## The Labyrinth

The top two levels of the maze are used for training purposes, and to house workshops where clandestine experiments are run and sensitive enchantments conducted. Guild apprentices know these halls well, from punishment duty and hours spent stirring cauldrons.

Locked and warded staircases lead farther down, through unlit tunnels and rooms. Stocked with magical guardians, patrolled by slimes, and rigged with traps, these levels have rooms for storing treasures, forbidden books, and dangerous artifacts.

## The Guard Rooms

At the "bottom" of the labyrinth, down a spiral stair behind a secret door, is a suite of rooms occupied by three guards: two sturdy warriors and a battle wizard. The three also act as caretakers, keeping the place swept up, patching cracks, and cleaning up when returning adventurers don't arrive in one piece. Yes, the Guild has sent a lot of people down here over the years.

They will equip the adventurers with rations, clothing, weapons, and equipment necessary for a wilderness jaunt.

## The Hall of Curiosities

Just outside the gallery is a corridor lined with large niches. Flanked with sconces containing oil lamps, these are used to display *things* which came through the gates. Some were returning adventurers, others were beings from beyond who met their ends in the gallery. Some are mounted, others are preserved in bottles of alcohol. Plaques mounted nearby explain the circumstances of their deaths. A few samples:

*A large granite bowl containing a cluster of skeletons:* The bones have fallen apart at their joints, as they are wont to do as flesh and sinew decay, but they are joined to each other in horrifically random fashion: foot bone connected to a knee bone, knee bone connected to someone else's skull, and so on.



The remains of seven people are tossed together in this way. The plaques notes that they were convicts sent out to investigate a sunny jungle glade. Mercifully, they died almost immediately.

*An orc warrior:* A handsome fellow, frozen in the act of stepping through the gate. A glitch transformed him into a crystalline substance, without distorting or discoloring his flesh in any way.

*Two merchant-adventurers:* This pair arrived through Gate #3 with sacks of intriguing trade goods and a roll of paper sheets; the latter were covered with cartoon-like figures and diagrams explaining what they wanted to trade for. They aren't human; as best the guild's zoologists can tell, they are carnivorous marsupials. Now mounted by expert taxidermists, standing a good seven feet tall, they have carefully groomed piebald coats, elegant six-fingered hands, and large golden eyes (now replaced with oversized marbles). Their clothing is *magnificent*: Black silk cloaks covered with intricate geometric patterns embroidered with silver threads, shimmering polychrome waistcoats, wide-brimmed leather hats and kilts printed with a tessellated pattern that makes an Escher look like polka-dots. Guild accounts describe the creatures as gracious, perceptive, and patient. Alas, the pair took ill and died of raging fevers within hours of their arrival.

## The Gallery

The "gallery" is a large eight-sided chamber with buttresses and pillars supporting the roof. The floor is level, tiled, and clean; the roof is studded with what appear to be large octagonal lanterns with silvery reflectors, but these are not lit. Instead, the room is illuminated by four oil lamps mounted on stands, and by the light that spills from the niches around it . . .

Set into the walls, between the pillars, are eight openings; each has eight sides. Short, broad ramps lead up to these openings. Six of the openings are occupied by flickering, dim images of strange lands and places; these hint at the gate's destination. The last two openings seem inactive, with only dark cave-like spaces beyond.

Adventurers will be led to an active gate by their handlers, and made to wait, possibly as long as an hour. They will see the image within change at least twice. When a particular image comes up, the handlers will wish them luck and gesture at the opening.

## Glitching Gates

The gates have become corrupted, and passing through one is dangerous. Some of the results can be quite fatal, but since the PCs are the heroes of the story, they won't be killed in the opening sequence. Not *quite*, anyway. Start by rolling a die for the experience of the journey:

- 1-4 – The party is translated to their destination instantly.
- 5 – The trip takes a minute through utter soundless blackness.
- 6 – The trip takes a subjective 287 minutes through utter soundless blackness. Each traveler must succeed at an IQ roll or be temporarily maddened (-2 to effective IQ for 1d6 hours).

Now roll 3d to determine the effects of the trip. The same effect applies to each traveler:

3-10 – No harmful effects.

11-12 – Jarring: The travelers are knocked about, and suffer 2 points of fatigue.

13-14 – Nauseating: The characters arrive with vertigo. -2 to adjDX for 3d6 minutes.

15 – Injurious: Each character takes 1d in wounds from being tossed about, frozen, or burned.

16 – Damaging: As above, but each traveler has a serious injury to a random body part. This could be a broken limb, bleeding chest wound, or concussion. First aid is called for!

17-18 – Anticlimactic: First, roll again on this table for injuries! Then the characters emerge from one of the other gates in the same room. Go immediately to *The Debriefing*, below, and make a reaction roll for the handlers. They will be totally surprised by this outcome, and both injuries and pleading will affect their roll. On the worst reaction, the travelers will be forced to test another Gate after they are healed. On the best reaction, they will be paid 100 silver each and freed.

## Mysterious Sites

Where do they end up? Once they have stepped through a Gate, the GM is free to launch them into any sort of planned adventure, or just to let them explore the remnants of ruined greatness. Some possibilities (roll 3d):

3-4 – Infrastructure: Enigmatic, awe-inspiring, and potentially dangerous. Was it created by the Mnoren, or a successor state? Are we looking at magic, technology, or both? Merely observing from the gate's destination platform is fairly safe; mucking about with the "works" could be dangerous.

5 – Abandoned infrastructure site: As above, but apparently no longer in operation. A good place to hunt artifacts.

6 – Abandoned residence: A remote ruin, only intact because it was built of advanced materials. The place has been stripped, but there is always a chance of finding something of value, if only as a curiosity. Many of these sites have become the lairs of dangerous beasts and demi-humans.

7-8 – As above, but inhabited and repurposed. The ancient ruins may be so thoroughly modified as to be unidentifiable. The current inhabitants could be *anybody*; a suspicious tribe who jealously guard their home, or a cosmopolitan people eager for trade and news of other places.

9-14 – A desolate place in a remote wilderness. Bits of ruined structures can be found here, as can enigmatic artifacts and hungry wild creatures.

15-16 – Inhospitable: As above, but very cold, or very hot.

17 – Hazardous: Any sane person would take notes and head back to the gate. Roll on this same table for a hint as to the nature of the hazard.

18 – Dangerous: A flooded cave, or inside a volcano. Turn around and leave immediately, if you are able!

## Sample Destinations

### *The Crater*

The gate leads to a stone platform built into the inner wall of a collapsed volcanic crater. The air is very dry, thin, and cold. A pair of staircases lead down to the floor of the crater, an almost seamless slab of smooth stone, nearly five miles across.

Spaced here and there are spheres, fifty feet across, made of an unknown mineral. They constantly twitch and shiver, and occasionally roll for a few feet.

### *The Cavern*

An underground chamber, hundreds of feet high and wide, and miles long. The air is hot, thick, and difficult to breathe; characters lose 1 point of Strength to fatigue for every ten minutes they spend here.

High overhead is a writhing arc of blazing green plasma. Stretching the length of the chamber, it emits a crackling sound and the smell of a thunderstorm.

There are *dozens* of bodies littering the chamber floor. Some are little more than skeletons, others just a few weeks old. They have arms, armor, personal belongings, and coins ranging from pocket change to purses fat with gold. Here and there are artifacts that weren't brought by visitors. Some are recognizable, and usable, simple tools; most are baffling.

Characters returning to the gallery suffer 1d3 wounds due to decompression sickness (“the bends”).

### *The Tower*

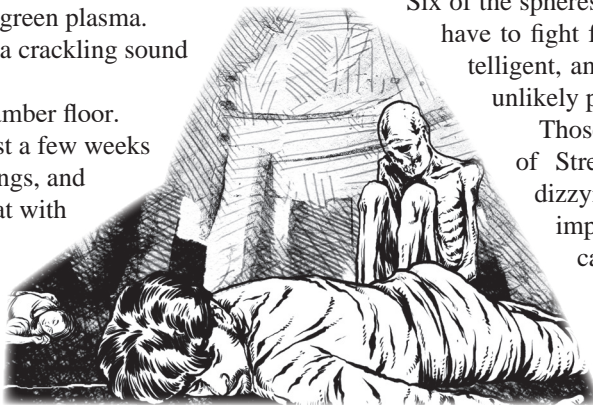
The gate emerges in a gallery identical to the one they just left. Stairs lead upwards to a complex of grand halls and residence suites. The windows overlook a landscape of shifting sands broken with spires of barren rock. Investigation shows the place is indeed a tower, at least 200' tall.

Most everything of value in the lower levels was looted long ago, and what is left is mixed with the muck and squalor left by the current inhabitants, a tribe of prootwaddles. They speak no known language, but urgently try to dissuade adventurers from climbing further up the tower.

Up 12 arduous flights of stairs is a circular room with a high vaulted ceiling, towering windows, and walls decorated with elaborate geometric designs. There are dozens of curving benches; set on pedestals between these are crystal orbs, each about 4" in diameter.

Six of the spheres remain intact, but the characters will have to fight for them. The place is guarded by intelligent, and malignant, sand-devils; possibly an unlikely pairing of earth and air elementals.

Those who stare into an orb lose a point of Strength to fatigue, and experience a dizzying sequence of visual and auditory impressions. On a 4/IQ roll, the viewers can weave these together into a coherent “memory” of visiting a strange place; sometimes a wilderness, sometimes a city, peopled by unfamiliar animals and creatures.



## Random Lands

*For an even more random journey, roll four six-sided dice, one at a time. Do not reveal the results all at once! The unwilling travelers find themselves in*

### Die 1 . . .

- 1 – The dark, cluttered cellar of a building . . .
- 2 – A pleasant glade – or is it a large park? . . .
- 3 – A weathered marble plaza . . .
- 4 – The back room of a little shop . . .
- 5 – The audience at a hanging . . .
- 6 – A deep pit . . .

### Die 2 . . .

- 1 – in a completely empty city . . .
- 2 – in a nearly deserted city . . .
- 3 – in a busy, cosmopolitan city . . .
- 4 – in a city under siege . . .
- 5 – in a run-down harbor town . . .
- 6 – in a tiny village . . .

### Die 3 . . .

- 1 – surrounded by wasteland . . .
- 2 – surrounded by fertile plains . . .
- 3 – surrounded by jungle . . .
- 4 – surrounded by completely alien jungle . . .
- 5 – on a small island in the ocean . . .
- 6 – on what appears to be an island floating in the skies . . .



### Die 4 . . .

- 1 – in a remote portion of this continent.
- 2 – on the next continent over.
- 3 – on a far-off, but known, continent.
- 4 – on a far-off and unknown continent.
- 5 – someplace where even the stars are different.
- 6 – someplace without stars.

Roll one further die to determine how they will get home:

- 1 – The Gate looks like the one they came through, and they can step back through.
- 2 – The Gate is a glowing magenta octagon hanging six feet in the air, and they can step back through if they can reach it.
- 3 – The Gate is a pentagram incised in the floor, with no glowing magenta anything, but it will return characters one at a time.
- 4 – There is no sign of any way to return, but they will snap back after 1d6 hours.
- 5 – There is no sign of any way to return, but they will snap back after 2d6 days.
- 6 – There is no sign of any way to return.

## The Debriefing

The guild keeps its promise, healing and releasing all survivors. They must turn over anything of interest, but they will be compensated. Things as mundane as coins and jewels may be returned to the adventurers with a wink. Characters who are literate and take notes, or make maps, will be paid for their diligence.

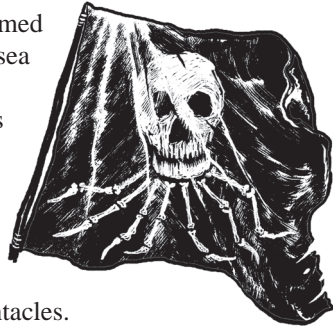




## Adventure Hook: The Ship of the Seven Hands

By David Austin

Sarah Seven Handed, a seven-armed Octopus, is quick to talk about the sea dragon that took one of her arms. She commands a crew of cutthroats too savage to ever set foot in any civilized port. Her ship, the *Black Leaf*, leaves no captive alive save for huge ransoms. It can be recognized by its flag of a human skull surrounded by seven bony tentacles.



Rumors (roll a die)

It is entirely up to the GM how much truth is in each rumor, and whether any of them are relevant to the current adventure.

1 – A dark-hulled ship, with a peculiar flag, ran aground on the rocks south of Granite Head.

2 – Sarah Seven Handed has been captured, and is to be hung at noon tomorrow. She has asked to speak to the son of a long-legged sailor who retired to a nearby fishing village.

3 – An empty sea chest was sold in the market last week that bore the iconic “skull and seven bony tentacles” of the pirate ship the *Black Leaf*.

4 – A seven-armed Octopus was begging on the docks a month ago. A passerby spit on the poor suffering creature, and now the village is under a plague.

5 – A goblin girl was arrested for trying to steal a loaf of bread. She has no money to make bail, but swears she knows of a map to a treasure of Sarah Seven Handed and will give it to anyone who pays her fine.

6 – A man has been circulating pamphlets claiming that Sarah Seven Handed is a human cursed to become an Octopus for one week every month. An elegant woman in the market is offering a thousand silvers to anyone who can prove the pamphlet is true.

*Sarah Sy'Gnathenen (Sarah Seven Handed), Octopus Pirate*

ST 17, DX 13, IQ 12, MA 8

Talents: Boating, Captain, Literacy, Mimic, Pole Weapon, Seamanship, Swimming, Sword, Tactics, Two Weapons

Languages: Common, Octopus

Weapons: Cutlass (2d-1), Cutlass (2d-1)

Armor: Leathery hide stops 2 hits/attack

Equipment: as necessary worth up to \$500

Sarah is an Octopus under a curse. For the first seven days of every month she becomes a normal human woman, and will say her name is Sabrina. She has ST 9, DX 12, IQ 12, and MA 8 in human form; while human, she fights skillfully with two rapiers (1d each) and wears leather armor. Sarah has at least \$10,000 available to hire heroes to do her chores, and is not above sending adventurers searching for her *other* self. In her true form, Sarah really does have only seven arms, but no one knows if her stories of a sea dragon are true. She is ruthless, cunning, and shrewd, but like many of her kind, not brave, and will not take on more than she knows she can handle.



## Archer Crab

By Steve Jackson

ST 2, IQ 3, DX 12, MA 4 (water), 8 (land)

Attacks: Goo jet (adjacent hex only), Claw crunch – 1d-2 damage

The archer crab is an ordinary-looking heavy-set crab, mottled in camouflage colors so no two look alike among the rocks. Its name is something of a misnomer, because the archer crab does not fire a missile at its victims, but a jet of goo. When it hits the air, the goo turns to a tenacious, gluey mess. It remains sticky for an hour, after which it dries hard.

A big archer crab weighs 9 pounds.

The archer crab is found at the tidal margin, where waves wash over the beach. That is a favorite haunt of seabirds and scavenger lizards, which are its main prey. The crabs are usually found in groups. They may climb atop each other to look like a pile of stones, or bury themselves in sand. They track their prey by both sight and sound. When a target is within range, it will be hit by one, or two, or a dozen jets, which foul and clog its feathers and hobble its feet. The crabs will then rush to grab it. Once a single claw locks on a wing or foot, it's all over. A young crab can only spray once before returning to the water; big ones can spray twice or more.

When it is not hunting, the archer crab eats kelp, both for its nutritional value and to build up its supply of goo. A crab will spray underwater in self-defense, but the goo will not harden – it only serves to distract predators, much like the ink of an octopus.



They breed like other crabs, taking no care of their young. The babies live in the seagrass. When they are about the size of a clenched fist, they swim to shore and join the hunting parties. A young crab won't have much of a spray, but with practice, it improves quickly.

## Crab Combat

The crabs are sophisticated hunters, as crabs go. A single crab would attack a small target, but someone the size of a human would be ignored, and the crabs would remain hidden, unless they numbered at least 10. If there are more than four human-sized targets within a few feet, the crabs are likely to remain hidden anyway.

The goo jet will only reach to an adjacent hex; the crab rolls at its DX to hit in the same or adjacent hexes.

For a human-sized victim, roll 1 die each time a spray hits. On a 1-3, the victim loses 1 DX. On a 4-5, the victim loses 1 MA. On a 6, lose one of each! On a critical success, the jet hits the face and the target is blinded. Washing the face with water will remove the goo. But unless you can kill the crabs with the power of your mind, you will need to be rescued before they swarm you.

The shore folk hunt the "snotcrabs," which are delicious, in an unusual fashion. To keep from destroying their clothes, they wear nothing except sandals (in case of sharp shells) and simple masks to keep the goo out of their eyes. They coat their bodies with butter or grease to keep the goo from sticking, and they carry tridents or similar weapons. Thus attired, the hunters promenade through crab country, and when crabs reveal themselves by squirting, the hunters stick them! The spray slides right off a buttered hunter. Properly done, with someone to help you in case of problems, this is safe. But

a nude hunter will have to flee at full speed if (for instance) crabmen are encountered.\*

## Natural Enemies

The young crabs have the thousand predators of any small sea creature. Older ones may be attacked by large birds, striking from above, or by crabmen. The fine pattern of nubs on a crabman's shell tends to make the goo roll off, giving -2 to archer attacks. Archer crabs that see big crabmen will hide or flee to the water, but they haven't learned to avoid buttered hunters.

Octopi relish archer crabs and can ignore their spray. Crabs will hide from an octopus, because if they flee, they will quickly be caught.

## Economic and Cultural Value

In general, the crab is a minor nuisance and occasional food source. Unaccompanied children are not safe on a beach infested with archers. Living archer crabs taken to the city will bring \$10 apiece. Shore natives and octopi sometimes use fresh crab goo as glue. Mechanics have copied the squirting apparatus, using a flexible bladder, to make joke crabs (and octopi, and flowers) that shoot water, ink, stink, and so on.



\* A Naturalist might know about the crabs' spray (roll 3/IQ), but would not know the technique to hunt them safely. Area Knowledge of the location, or friendly interaction with the locals, would teach this trick.



## Pick Your Poison: Toxins in *The Fantasy Trip*

By Howard Kistler

Poison is usually a straightforward matter in *The Fantasy Trip*, typically dealing simple damage. But there are a number of ways poisons can manifest interesting effects within the game.

### Toxin Categories

Poisons come under the broader category of toxins, which are things that are harmful to life. While there are many kinds of toxins, we are interested here in natural or synthetic toxins of a chemical nature. These toxins can be defined by the effect they exert and the parts of the body affected.

**Cytotoxic** – Cytotoxins are systemic and impair the basic functions of cells. Many poisons fall into this category, with potassium cyanide a famous one. The basic poisons encountered in *TFT*, including *Simple Poison* and *Weapon Poison*, are cytotoxins. In game terms cytotoxins cause straight damage, with survivors often feeling poorly afterwards.

**Hemotoxic** – Hemotoxins cause blood cells to rupture (hemolysis) and can lead to uncontrolled bleeding (hemorrhaging). They are common in venomous animals, including brown recluse and violin spiders, centipedes, and fer-de-lance snakes. Hemotoxic venom would also be found in scolopendra and in some spiders and snakes of both normal and giant varieties. Hemotoxic wounds can blister and hemorrhage, and are intensely painful. Hemotoxic poisons have a damage roll and also incur a DX penalty. The bite of a giant scolopendra in *TFT* is a good example of how this effect works.

**Neurotoxic** – Neurotoxins are highly lethal since they can cause failure in the involuntary nervous system, shutting down respiration and other autonomous bodily functions. Some are also cardiotoxic and can induce heart failure. Even low doses can have neurological effects like spasms, numbness, and stiffness. Many snakes have neurotoxic venom, including rattlesnakes, coral snakes, and sea snakes, as do poisonous fish like the lionfish. Further creatures on Cidri with the same venom are some giant snakes and wyverns. In game terms, neurotoxins have a damage roll plus a secondary fatigue roll caused by neurotropic effects. If the fatigue roll brings the victim below zero ST, they go into crisis and need medical attention within 12 turns if they are to survive. Antivenom, antidote, or a physicker can bring them out of crisis when this occurs.

**Paralytic** – Paralytic toxins, also known as neuromuscular toxins, target the muscles and the voluntary nervous system. This can slow or stop the victim, but does not always kill them, since involuntary nerve functions such as breathing continue. Wasps, textile cone sea snails, and the blue-ringed octopus produce paralytic toxins. Other Cidri creatures which produce them include some intelligent octopi and the giant *mellipheon* hive insects. In game terms, paralytic toxins will typically have a low damage effect, then a second damage roll against the target's MA. This will slow the target, and if their MA falls to 0 they are fully paralyzed until either they are treated or they shake off the poison. Paralyzed targets should roll versus ST at regular intervals to check recovery, with the number of dice and time period depending on the strength of the toxin.

**Dermatoxin** – Dermatoxins are dangerous on contact. Unlike toxins which are injected, swallowed, or inhaled, just a touch is enough for a dermatoxin to enter the victim. It can be harmful to the skin itself, causing blistering and even necrosis, or can enter the body through the skin, where it may cause dizziness, palpitations, nausea, and any of the effects of other toxins. Poison dart frogs, fire coral, and quite a few caterpillars produce dermatoxins. *Contact Poison* is a dermatoxin. In game terms, a dermatoxin can be virtually any kind of poison, as long as it is one which can be introduced through the skin.

**Histamic** – Histamic toxins trigger histamine production in the body. These toxins include allergens, some of which can be quite deadly, particularly to the allergy-prone. Even those who aren't allergic can suffer from histamic response, which can include swelling, watering eyes, hives, a maddening itch, and respiratory distress. Some compounds, such as mosquito saliva, are almost universally allergenic. Other histamic toxins are bee venom, jellyfish venom, and aggressive pollen varieties like ragweed and cedar. In game terms, a histamic toxin does regular damage to the allergic, double damage to the highly allergic, and half damage as fatigue to the non-allergic. Since it's unlikely that many players have mapped out their characters' allergies, the GM can use a general guideline based on race, species, or place of origin.

**Soporific** – Soporific toxins induce lethargy and sleep. They seldom do lasting damage, and are designed instead to incapacitate the victim. There are plants which produce soporific compounds in their sap, leaves, and fruit. One would find similar ones on Cidri, along with soporific mushrooms and creatures with soporific venom.

*Sleeping Potion*, obviously, is a soporific. In game terms, a soporific will have a fixed strength rating or damage roll, either of which results in a number that is compared to the target's ST. Subtract their ST from the number, and whatever is left over is how long the target sleeps in minutes. If the target has a higher ST than the soporific's effect they do not fall asleep, but may still feel groggy or lethargic.

**Psychotoxic** – Psychotoxins, which include hallucinogens, do not cause damage but interfere with the normal operation of the brain. Mild psychotoxic exposure can cause confusion, forgetting, misperception, and difficulty with even simple tasks. Severe psychotoxic exposure can cause psychosis, hallucination, fugue state, amnesia, and personality break (where the sufferer behaves completely out of character). A number of mushrooms and cacti have psychotoxic (or psychotropic) effects, as do the secretions of certain amphibians. On Cidri there is a cave-dwelling worm known to dwarves and goblins as the *nemoadram*, whose skin secretes a powerful, and slightly euphoric, psychotoxin. In game terms, a psychotoxin does fatigue damage against the IQ rather than the ST. Lowered IQ impairs spell and talent use as well as general perception and alertness, and an IQ taken to 0 or less is temporary insanity.

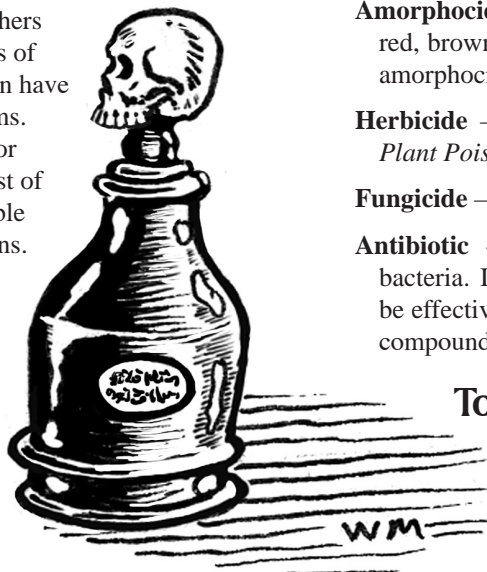
**Anamantic** – Anamantic toxins are magic inhibitors. They interfere with the flow of magical energies through the body, blocking spellcasting and in some cases suppressing magical abilities. Permanent and passive magical abilities, such as the flaming plumage of a phoenix, are not affected, but temporary and active magical abilities, like the gaze of a basilisk, are inhibited. Low levels of the toxin penalize spellcasting, and higher levels block it entirely. The damage roll of an anamantic toxin is subtracted from

DX for spellcasting attempts, and if the damage roll also happens to be higher than the victim's IQ, magic is entirely blocked for them while the toxin remains in their system. The strength and duration of the toxin depends on the toxin's formula. The rare *crepuscular chanterelle* of Cidri, a black mushroom whose gills emit ultraviolet light, is one of the few natural anamantics. This mushroom does 1d of toxic effect for four hours if eaten fresh, or 2d for eight hours if dried and then boiled as a tea. *Potion of Imprisonment* is a powerful anamantic which blocks all magic use for a full day.

## Targeted Toxins

While some toxins work broadly, others are tailored for the biological processes of specific types of life. These toxins often have little to no effect on untargeted lifeforms. Any of the above toxins can be found or made in these targeted forms, with most of the ones from the *Chemistry Potion* table mentioned here being general cytotoxins.

**Mammotoxin** – Targets mammals, including most of the humanoid races of Cidri. When a combat toxin isn't a broad toxin that affects everything, it is usually a mammotoxin, as mammalian humanoid races are the most common enemies. *Mammal Poison* is a mammotoxin.



**Herpetoxin** – Targets reptiles, including reptile men. *Reptile Poison* is a herpetoxin.

**Piscetoxin** – Targets fish and other aquatic life, such as molluscs (including octopi). It does not affect aquatic mammals, such as mer-men, deep elves, dolphins, or whales. *Fish Poison* is a piscetoxin.

**Lithotoxin** – Targets stone-life organisms, such as gargoyles and stone beetles.

**Insecticide** – Targets insects and arthropods, including spiders, scolopendra, and scorpions. *Insect Poison* is an insecticide.

**Amorphocide** – Targets slimes of both the *Gigamorphus* (green, red, brown) and *Allomorphus* (silver) genera. *Slime Poison* is an amorphocide.

**Herbicide** – Targets plants, including bloodtrees and crabgrass. *Plant Poison* is a herbicide.

**Fungicide** – Targets mushrooms, molds, and other fungi.

**Antibiotic** – Targets microorganisms, including protozoa and bacteria. In theory, a large enough dose of the right one might be effective on a goo. Physickers know of a number of antibiotic compounds for fighting illness and infection.

## Toxin Cohorts

Sometimes a natural toxin will be delivered along with other agents that hasten the toxin's effect or do damage on their own. Assassins and chemists have adapted these principles for their own purposes.

**Acid & Alkali** – Some toxins are borne in a caustic medium, such as a strong acid or powerful alkali. These can cause additional damage alongside the toxin. *Corrosive Poison* is one such compound.

**Digestive Enzyme** – For some animals, the injection of venom is merely the prelude to dining. Along with the venom they will inject digestive juices to begin breaking down the target's flesh for consumption. Spider bites are famous for this, and such enzymes will be found in other venomous creatures as well. Flesh severely damaged by digestive enzymes may become scarred or necrotic, with the possibility of functional impairment as well.

**Osmotic Accelerant** – Toxins may be accompanied by chemicals that speed the absorption of the poison into the tissues. Any venom or poison with such a cohort will take effect quicker than usual, or have a more potent effect.

## Antitoxins

With so many harmful substances out there, it's good that chemists, alchemists, naturalists, and physickers have come up with ways to combat toxins. These are the primary methods used to counteract toxic exposure.

**Universal Antidote** – As the name says, it works against every kind of poison and chemical toxin. The downside is that it takes a long time to make and is rather expensive. Adventurers, hunters, and foresters who know what kinds of toxic threats they are likely to face can choose some of the cheaper but less broadly effective options.

**Antitoxins** – Antitoxins are formulated against each of the toxin types listed at the beginning of this article. So antihemotoxin

would work like Universal Antidote for any exposure to a hemotoxin, antiparalytic for paralytic toxins, and so forth. There is no cheap anticytotoxin however, as those poisons are too pernicious and only Universal Antidote has been found to reliably counter them. Antitoxins take six weeks to make and require two doses of the toxin itself, plus \$30 in common ingredients. Antitoxins typically retail for \$500-\$1000, depending on the toxin type they counteract.

**Antivenoms** – These are the cheapest counters to toxins available, in large part because each is only effective against one kind of organism. Giant spider antivenom works just as well as Universal Antidote against a giant spider bite, but is hardly more effective than water against a snake bite or wasp sting. Still, if you know you are going into a cobra nest or mellipheon hive, these tailored cures can be useful and economical choices. Chemists will typically have antivenoms against local creatures, but not those which aren't indigenous. This is in part because there is little call for such exotic antivenoms, and in part because the antivenom is made from the venom of the creature itself. No source, no antivenom. Antivenoms take three weeks to make and use five doses of the creature's venom for every 10 antivenoms made (chemists who specialize in antivenom often farm the smaller creatures). Basic formulations for things like bee stings and spider bites can be bought for as little as \$10; those for snake bite and other common animals can be had for \$100 or less. The ones for truly dangerous creatures may retail for \$250 or more. A lot of the price depends on the demand, and on how much risk is involved in securing the venom itself.



## Questions Three: Dyson Logos

*Interviewed by Steve Jackson*

Dyson Logos is a very prolific cartographer and illustrator who has brought an exciting, detailed style to RPG maps. He has made hundreds of maps available for your use, free, at [dysonlogos.com](http://dysonlogos.com), and is working on more! You can follow him @DysonLogos on Twitter and see his very newest creations. And check out p. 10 for his map of Skarg's Tavern from *In The Labyrinth*.

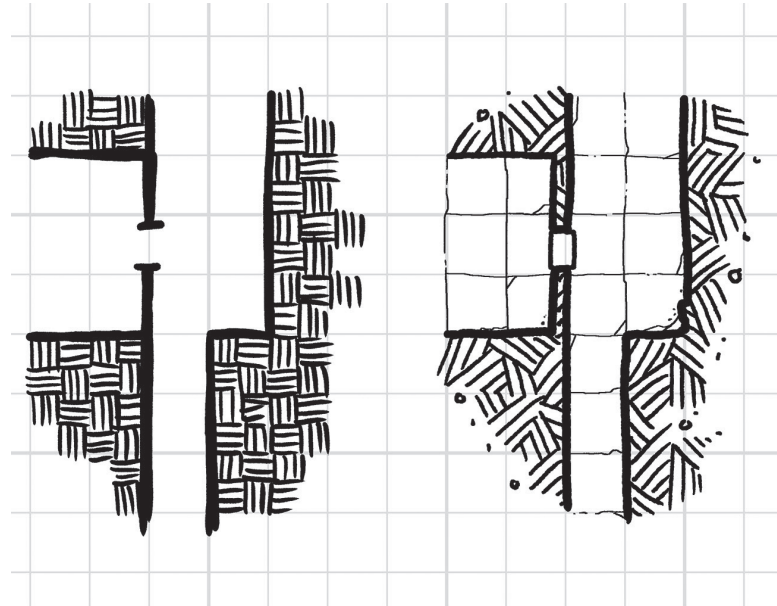
### 1. How did you get so awesome? Art school, or self-trained?

I've been *playing* RPGs since 1979, and running them since 1981. Like most GMs at the time, a big part of the appeal of running a game was making up the adventures, and thus the maps. But my "style" of maps is only something I started actively working on in the last 12 years. In 2008 I met a gamer who drew his maps with a lovely basket weave hatch.

And I looked back at the maps I had drawn over the years and realized that the biggest difference between his pretty maps and my utilitarian maps was the hatching and the use of ink instead of pencil.

So I started drawing maps again for my games. And to keep myself doing it, I started posting them to my blog, which was fairly new at the time. Over the last decade I've posted over a thousand maps, averaging 9-10 maps a month for the last five years. The "awesome" is from practice, practice, and more practice. I have a background in advertising and marketing, but not in art. It is amazing how much your work improves over a decade of regular practice.

When I started, it wasn't my art style that stood out, it was my design style. I worked from what I had learned and loved from 30 years of running and playing RPGs. The memorable maps, the fun maps, the maps that really left an impression. And one of the elements that came up the most often was working in three dimensions – to include multiple elevations in the dungeon overall, and within individual spaces. Ten years of drawing two of these maps a week and the art style has caught up too. :)



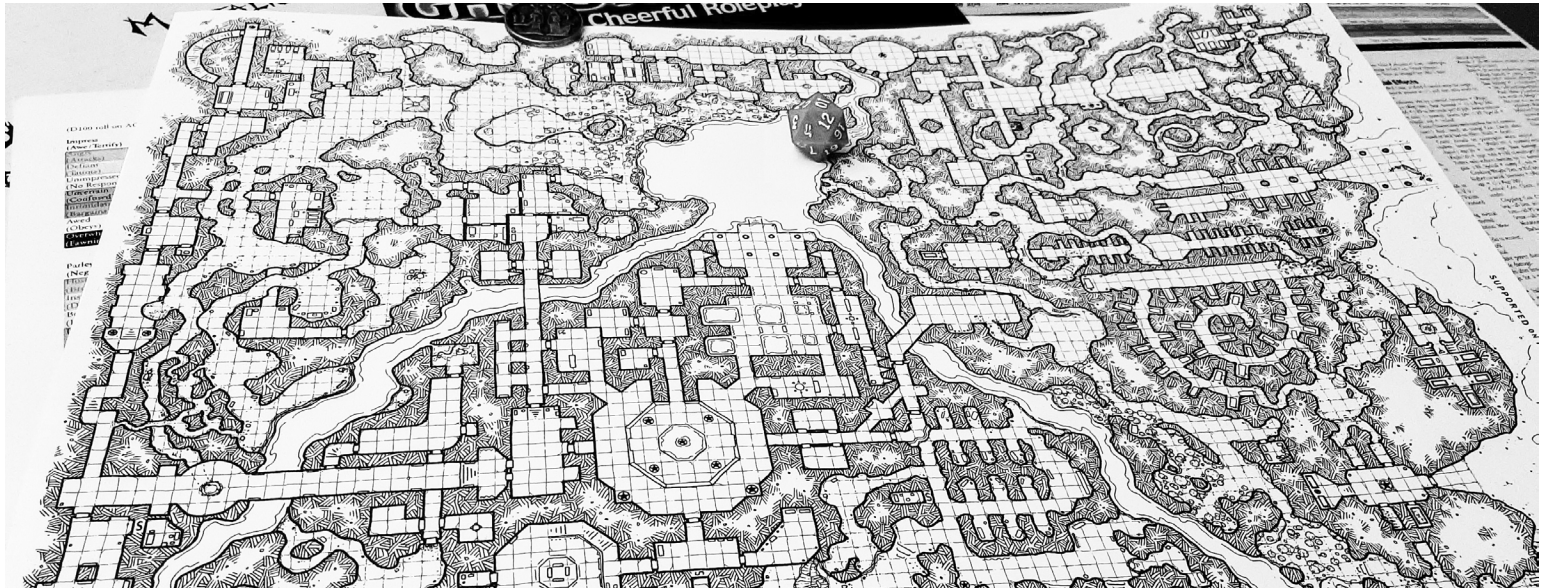


## 2. What do you like to do besides RPG maps? Is there a day job?

RPG cartography is my full time gig these days (between drawing and promoting). In 2019 I drew a total of 182 maps. My goal in 2020 is to bring that number down to a more reasonable 130-140 maps so I don't find myself in as many time crunches as I did last year and so I can put a bit of work into illustration. I'm finally getting comfortable enough with my work that I've been branching out from pure cartography into practicing more traditional B&W illustration work with the goal of getting good enough that I can illustrate some of my intended scenes and scenery from my maps.

## 3. Where do you want to go with your art?

In the last two years I've begun transitioning to direct-to-digital work. Like a number of my favorite cartographers, a big part of this has been trying to make sure my style survives the transition and this has been made possible by the pen graphics tablets on the market now. While I'm working in Photoshop directly for most of my work these days, the actual process hasn't changed much. I don't clone stuff or use "assets," I just draw everything like I would with ink and paper.





## Giant Ants

By David Pulver, Guy McLimore, and Greg Poehlein

*Editor's note: As Guy and Greg were completing their work on the **TFT Bestiary**, David submitted an independent article on giant ants. The timing was right to avoid contradiction by mashing the writeups together, so the official **TFT** giant ants are the work of all three authors and my own ant-loving imagination. – SJ*

Ants are six-legged social insects, with segmented bodies, large antennae, and strong mandibles. Ordinary ants are everywhere. But far from civilization one may find their much bigger sisters.

Giant ants live in colonies, typically of 30 to 3,000 ants. They do not normally co-exist with other hills of the same species . . . or with anything else, really. Anything within five miles of the anthill is an enemy, or food, or both!!



Giant ants communicate via complex chemical signals. To humans, this simply smells like citronella; the odor is usually noticeable when giant ants are within 10 feet.

Though individually stupid, they have a collective intelligence that is increased with numbers: +1 to IQ if there are at least 50 ants, +2 if there are at least 500 ants in the colony, +3 for 5,000 ants.

They are divided into castes, the commonest of which are worker, scout, soldier, queen, and drone.

*Workers* are sterile females who build and maintain the anthill and forage for food, often scouting several miles from their home. They are by far the commonest caste. They can carry a load of twice their own weight at full MA, or drag six times their weight at half MA!

*Scouts* are similar to workers, but can fly. Rarely will a colony have many scouts. They are usually posted, singly or in pairs, as overwatch above war parties, large work groups, or the hive itself. They are capable of combat but rarely risk themselves.

*Soldier* ants are stronger, with enlarged heads and powerful jaws. They defend the colony, and emerge to protect work parties that have been attacked. They also war against rival ant colonies or other creatures. Soldiers eat a lot and do no useful work, so a colony will try not to have more than it needs.

*Drones* are the only males in a colony. They will be rare. Depending on the queen's own preferences, her drones may be tiny, insignificant creatures, cheap to feed and useful only for breeding . . . or a royal bodyguard of super-warriors.

The *queen* is the only fertile female caste. Rarely is there more than one queen in a nest. She is a huge, bloated thing, constantly popping out eggs that are received by waiting workers, but she is the ruling intelligence of the colony. An adult queen cannot move or attack on her own; all her facings are “rear.” Should the queen be killed, the colony will die out unless (unlikely) there is a second queen, or (slightly likelier) the surviving worker ants succeed in raising a larva to be a new queen.

In a chamber near the queen will be scores of eggs and several ant larvae: they have the same size and ST as workers, but no effective DX, IQ, or MA. The workers carry food to them; they can do 1 hit/round to a paralyzed or restrained victim. Depending on the needs of the nest, they may grow into any caste.

Some queens secrete hormones that, carried by their workers, let them enslave other species of giant insects as food and workers.

A colony that is ready to multiply will produce winged queens and drones. This happens on the same day across a very large area. The winged breeders fly great distances, and the queens will usually mate with drones from other colonies. Once fertilized, they settle down with their little drone retainers to found new colonies.

Giant ants come in different sizes; the smallest are only the size of a cat, while the biggest have soldiers as large as ponies.

## Black Giants

Black ants are the smallest and commonest giant species. A worker is “only” a bit over a foot long. They are often found in woodland or jungle areas; they climb trees readily, and may nest among the roots of a forest giant.

These creatures can swarm like rats, meaning two ants may occupy a single hex.

### *Worker*

ST 4, DX 10, IQ 2, MA 8

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d-3 damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Scout*

ST 3, DX 12, IQ 3, MA 16 (flying) or 8 on the ground

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d-3 damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Soldier*

ST 6, DX 11, IQ 2, MA 8

Armor: Chitin stops 1 hit

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d-1 damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Warrior Drone*

ST 7, DX 12, IQ 2, MA 8

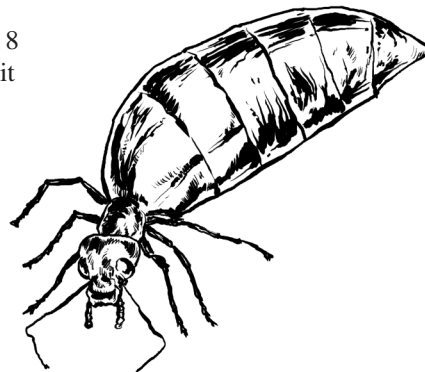
Armor: Chitin stops 1 hit

Attacks and damage:  
Bite does 1d damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Queen*

A two-hex creature.

ST 8, DX 11, IQ 4,  
MA 0



## Brown Giants

These are mid-sized giant ants. A worker is about a yard long. Typically, the brown giant is a creature of the plains. They dig the deepest of all the giant species, lining their earthen tunnels with their spittle, which dries to rock hardness.

### *Worker*

ST 12, DX 10, IQ 2, MA 8

Armor: Chitin stops 1 hit

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d damage in regular or HTH combat

Special attack: Workers will quickly move to drag downed enemies back toward the nest

### *Scout*

ST 6, DX 12, IQ 3, MA 20 (flying) or 8 on the ground

Armor: Chitin stops 1 hit

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Soldier*

ST 15, DX 11, IQ 2, MA 8

Armor: Chitin stops 3 hits if attacked from the front hex, 2 otherwise

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d+2 damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Warrior Drone*

ST 18, DX 12, IQ 2, MA 8

Armor: Chitin stops 4 hits if attacked from the front hex, 3 otherwise

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d+3 damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Queen*

A three-hex (triangular) creature. ST 20, DX 11, IQ 4, MA 0

## Red Giants

The largest species of giant ants is red in color. A worker is more than six feet long; all the red giants are two-hex creatures, except for their huge queen.

This type of ant is rarely seen except in remote mountains and deserts, and occasionally deep jungle. They are very dangerous to humans and their kindred, but so far the humans are winning the war, pushing the greatest giant ants farther into the wastelands.

Luckily for explorers, these monsters are usually met in small groups (2d workers).

### *Worker*

ST 20, DX 10, IQ 2, MA 10

Armor: Chitin stops 3 hits

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d+1 damage in regular or HTH combat

Special attack: A worker can easily carry a human-sized morsel. About a third of the time, a worker will make a grab attack rather than biting. A grab does no damage and is at only DX 7, but if it succeeds, the victim is caught in the ant's jaws. They may still strike at the ant, but they will be carried back toward the nest until the ant is killed. (Foes paralyzed by a soldier's sting can be grabbed at the worker's regular DX of 10!)

### *Scout*

ST 12, DX 12, IQ 3, MA 24 (flying) or 10 on the ground

Armor: Chitin stops 2 hits

Attacks and damage: Bite does 1d damage in regular or HTH combat

### *Soldier*

ST 24, DX 11, IQ 2, MA 10

Armor: Chitin stops 5 hits if attacked from the front hex, 3 otherwise

Attacks and damage: Bite does 2d+1 damage in regular or HTH combat

Special attack: A soldier may attempt to sting foes in rear hexes, or when in HTH combat, for 1d-1 damage. This replaces its regular attack. Anyone stung must make a 3/ST roll or be paralyzed, and in agony, for (20-ST) turns.

### *Warrior Drone*

ST 30, DX 12, IQ 2, MA 10

Armor: Chitin stops 6 hits if attacked from the front hex, 4 otherwise

Attacks and damage: Bite does 2d+2 damage in regular or HTH combat

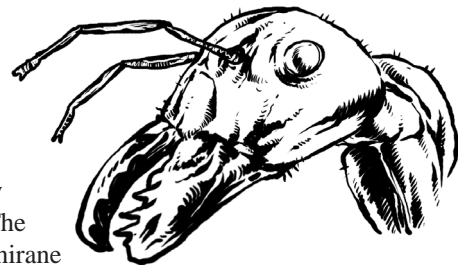
Special attack: As for soldiers

### *Queen*

A seven-hex (megahex counter) creature. ST 40, DX 12, IQ 4, MA 0

## Titanic Ants

There are reliable reports of giant ants as big as warhorses. No intact specimen has reached an authority who could describe it. The Scholars' Guild at Ardonirane



possesses a giant soldier-ant head well over 18 inches in length, with mandibles extending a like distance. It is speculated that these titans must be solitary or live in small groups, because a nest of thousands of such monsters would exhaust the food in an area.

## Imperial Ants

In rare instances, a giant ant colony of any type may have a fully intelligent queen. She will have IQ 7, increased as above for colony size. She is a person in her own right, rather than operating by instinct. An imperial queen can talk (baffling to scholars, but true). She may learn languages, talents, or magic, and negotiate with other species to better her colony. Some develop the ability to see through the multifaceted eyes of their swarm; others simply depend on a constant flow of messengers, or develop a talking "emissary" caste. The imperial queen is still unable to move or fight, but her DX score is used if she knows magic.

Colonies of imperial ants may enslave lesser ant colonies, even of larger breeds. They may go to war against rival ant colonies, or attempt to ally with or conquer other species rather than just eating them.



## Death Test Refresh

By Peter von Kleinsmid

The Thorsz studied the sheet of parchment. “This will do nicely,” he nodded. “And down here, where you are allowing better-trained hobgoblins . . . If any of them make it through four fights, give them the option. We’ve got dumber fighters in the Guard already; in the ranks, it’s about skill and heart.”

The original *Death Test* was designed before *In The Labyrinth* introduced Talents to *TFT*. Some talents can increase the combat effectiveness of a fighter even beyond the trade-off of shifting points to IQ, meaning that when PCs with combat talents (and especially, Physicker) enter *Death Test*, the original balance of the adventure is altered.

Below are three variations of the *Death Test* fighter table, adding combat talents, to restore some of the original balance and challenge, and to provide more variety and surprises.

The first table is the least changed and the least difficult. The second table is a little more optimized to use talents. The third table has different fighter designs using the same attribute totals.

Also, if the PCs are being allowed to carry more than two weapon/shield choices, then some of these fighters probably would too. Some fighters below are marked (Small shield\*) to indicate fighters that could/would like to carry small shields as well.

One table can be chosen, or they can be combined as desired. For the most variety and unpredictability, for each fighter, first roll one die, and on a 1-2 use the first table, 3-4 use the second, and on 5-6 use the third table.

And, of course, you can use these tables without *Death Test* whenever you just need a few fighters!

### Table 1 – *Death Test* fighter table with *Legacy ITL* talents added:

3. ST 15, DX 14 (11), IQ 10, MA 6. Chainmail. Battle axe, two-handed sword. Toughness II, Brawling.
4. ST 14, DX 13 (11), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather. Light crossbow, two-handed sword. Brawling, Running.
5. ST 13, DX 16, IQ 8, MA 12. No armor. Longbow, morningstar. Brawling, Running.
6. ST 13, DX 12 (10), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather armor. Halberd, small axe. Thrown Weapons, Running.
7. Halfling. ST 9, DX 13, IQ 10, MA 12. No armor. Javelin, small shield. Running, Unarmed Combat I, Shield Expertise.
8. Dwarf. ST 15, DX 10 (8), IQ 8, MA 8. Leather armor. Pike axe, battle axe. Brawling.
9. ST 13, DX 11 (10), IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Large shield, morningstar.
10. ST 11, DX 13, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Longbow, shortsword. (Small shield\*)
11. ST 12, DX 12 (9), IQ 8, MA 8. Leather, large shield, broadsword.
12. ST 10, DX 14 (11), IQ 8, MA 6. Chainmail. Hammer, horse bow. (Small shield\*)
13. ST 11, DX 13 (11), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather armor. Small shield, mace. Brawling, Running.
14. ST 12, DX 12, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Small shield, broadsword. Brawling.

15. Elf. ST 9, DX 17 (15), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather. Small bow, rapier, main-gauche.

16. ST 13, DX 13 (10), IQ 8, MA 6. Chainmail. Small shield, morningstar. Brawling.

17. ST 11, DX 18, (15), IQ 9, MA 6. Chainmail. Small shield, small axe. Brawling.

18. ST 12, DX 18 (13/16), IQ 11, MA 6. Plate armor. Broadsword, light crossbow. Missile Weapons III, Brawling, Toughness, Tactics. (Small shield\*)

**Table 2 – Death Test fighter table with Legacy ITL talents and some tweaking:**

3. ST 14, DX 14 (12), IQ 11, MA 10. Leather. Two-handed sword. Toughness II, Sword Expertise, Running.

4. ST 13, DX 13 (11/13), IQ 9, MA 8. Leather. Light crossbow, bastard sword. Missile Weapons II, Toughness II.

5. ST 13, DX 15 (18), IQ 9, MA 10. No armor. Longbow, morningstar. Missile Weapons III, Toughness.

6. ST 13, DX 12 (10/12), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather armor. Halberd, small axe. Thrown Weapons, Running.

7. Halfling. ST 9, DX 13, IQ 10, MA 12. No armor. Javelin, small shield. Running, Unarmed Combat I, Shield Expertise.

8. Dwarf. ST 15, DX 9 (8), IQ 9, MA 10. Cloth armor. Pike axe, battle axe. Toughness II, Brawling.



9. ST 13, DX 11 (10), IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Large shield, morningstar.

10. ST 11, DX 13, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Longbow, shortsword. (Small shield\*)

11. ST 12, DX 12, (9), IQ 8, MA 8. Leather. Large shield, broadsword.

12. ST 10, DX 14 (11), IQ 8, MA 6. Chainmail. Hammer, horse bow. (Small shield\*)

13. ST 11, DX 13 (11), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather armor. Small shield, mace. Brawling, Running.

14. ST 12, DX 12, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Small shield, broadsword. Brawling.

15. Elf. ST 9, DX 14 (12/15), IQ 11, MA 10. Leather. Small bow, rapier, main-gauche. Fencer, Missile Weapons III.

16. ST 12, DX 12 (10), IQ 10, MA 10. Leather. Small shield, war axe. Toughness, Shield Expertise, Running, Brawling.

17. ST 11, DX 16 (13), IQ 11, MA 6. Chainmail. Small shield, mace. Ax/Mace Expert, Shield Expertise, Brawling, Tactics.

18. ST 12, DX 18 (13/14), IQ 11, MA 6. Plate armor. Broadsword, light crossbow. Sword Expertise, Missile Weapons I, Brawling, Toughness, Tactics.

**Table 3 – Death Test fighter table with Legacy ITL talents, same point totals, but different designs for variety:**

3. ST 14, DX 13 (11), IQ 12, MA 8. Leather. Bastard sword, small shield. Toughness II, Sword Expertise, Shield Expertise.

4. ST 12, DX 13 (11), IQ 10, MA 8. Leather. War axe, small shield. Shield Expertise, Toughness, Brawling.

5. ST 15, DX 13 (15), IQ 9, MA 10. No armor. Heavy Crossbow, battle axe. Missile Weapons II, Toughness II.

6. ST 13, DX 12, IQ 8, MA 12. No armor. Halberd, morningstar. Running, Brawling.

7. ST 11, DX 13, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Spear, shortsword. Brawling. (Small shield\*)

8. ST 14, DX 10 (9), IQ 9, MA 10. Cloth armor. Halberd, two-handed sword. Toughness II, Brawling.

9. ST 13, DX 11, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Small shield, morningstar.

10. ST 11, DX 13 (11), IQ 8, MA 10. Leather armor. Longbow, shortsword. (Small shield\*)

11. ST 12, DX 12, IQ 8, MA 8. No armor. Crossbow, broadsword. (Small shield\*)

12. ST 11, DX 13 (15), IQ 8, MA 12. No armor. Mace, mace. Thrown Weapons, Running, Brawling. (Small shield\*)

13. Elf. ST 9, DX 15 (14/16), IQ 8, MA 14. Cloth armor. Javelin, javelin. Thrown Weapons, Running. (Small shield\*)

14. ST 12, DX 12, IQ 8, MA 10. No armor. Small shield, broadsword. Brawling.

15. ST 12, DX 12, IQ 10, MA 10. No armor. Small shield, broadsword. Shield Expertise, Toughness, Brawling.

16. ST 14, DX 11, IQ 9, MA 12. No armor. Light crossbow, two-handed sword. Toughness II, Running.

17. ST 10, DX 17 (13), IQ 11, MA 6. Half plate. Saber, spike shield. Fencer, Shield Expertise, Brawling, Tactics.

18. ST 11, DX 19 (16/18), IQ 11, MA 6. Chainmail. Spear, spear. Spear Expertise, Thrown Weapons, Quick-Draw Spear, Brawling, Tactics. (Small shield\*)

### Fighters for numbered paragraphs:

65. Note that the hobgoblins don't have the ST for their small axes, unless the small axes are hatchets. Since this is usually a very easy fight anyway, more so given their peculiar preferred tactic, I suggest the following:

ST 11, DX 11 (13) IQ 8, MA 10. No armor, two small axes (one ready) and a dagger. Thrown Weapons talent.

(If the PCs have been allowed to carry more than two weapon/shields each using *ITL* encumbrance rules, give each hobgoblin three small axes rather than two.)

Apart from their preferred tactic, they should try to avoid being shot at by moving behind pillars, and also try to avoid melee attacks by staying out of range. They should hope to win initiative, move second, and throw at the nearest foes from positions where they cannot be attacked, if possible.

66. Note that "the first 10 spells in the Spell Table" refers to original basic *Wizard*, not *ITL*, so that's: Staff, Magic Fist, Blur, Slow Movement, Drop Weapon, Image, Clumsiness, Confusion, Avert, Aid (so not Light or Detect Magic). For a more competitive 10 spells, consider replacing one or more of those spells with Fire, Summon Wolf, Summon Myrmidon, Dispel/Turn Missiles, Speed Movement, Staff to Snake, or Trip.

67. Perhaps give these archers who carry three daggers each the Thrown Weapons talent (and/or Quick-Draw Dagger), so they can use their daggers without taking a turn to ready each of them.

127. As for 67 above.







## Naturalist's Notebook

By Anthony Shostak

Those who wish to learn about Cidri's less common flora and fauna must sometimes read beyond the established Naturalist literature. Travelogues, memoirs, field reports by civil servants, and even love letters can contain mention of creatures rare enough to have escaped scientific scrutiny. Too often dismissed as old wives' tales, these first-hand accounts should be taken by the scholar of the natural world as evidence of cryptids that deserve more thorough study. What follows are but a few examples.

### The Lurker

ST 3-6, DX 9, IQ 7, MA 10

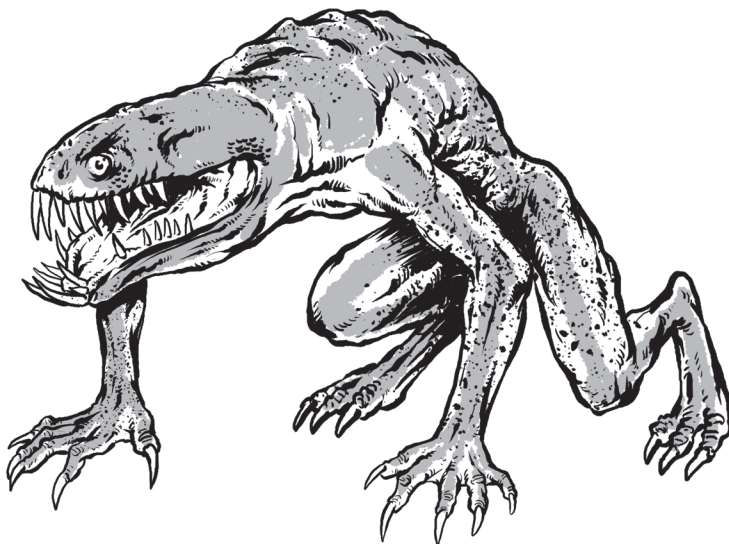
Attacks and damage: Claws 1d-2, bite (HTH) 1d-1

Notes: Venom requires 4/ST roll or suffer -1 DX (cumulative), -2 DX to attack Lurkers in normal light, -4 in dim light

*Spindly, almost transparent save for their delicate skeletons, they stand only about as tall as a Halfling, resembling some grotesque hybrid of a monkey, a hawk, and a deep-sea angler. Take heed! The loathsome Lurker haunts dark, lonely places – caves, deep forests, isolated bridges and ravines, even secluded pools where you might hope to slake your thirst on the long, dusty road. Their long fingers end in needle-like claws, and row upon row of tiny, razor-sharp teeth fill their hideously wide mouths. Both tooth and claw drip with venom. I have*

*beheld the cunning Lurkers hunting in packs, skittering about on long, backward-jointed legs with a sparrow's quick movements. On killing our bodyguard, the horde set up a blood-chilling, twittering cacophony eerily suggestive of songbirds imitating the murderous glee of the triumphant hyena, thanks to which my heart now and forevermore greets the dawn chorus with skips of terror instead of joy. Beware, oh gentle traveler, and journey not alone!*

– from *Pleasures of the Spice Road* by Yotoro Haitora, Assistant Secretary to the Emissary of the Imperial Throne of Nataro



Lurkers attack HTH and favor ambushes, though a large pack may directly confront a small party. When attacking armored prey, they will aim for vulnerable spots. Their venom numbs the skin and slows the nervous system, causing clumsiness; each time a figure is injured by a Lurker's claws or bite, they must make a 4/ST roll or suffer -1 DX for the next hour (after which time, DX recovers at 1 per 30 minutes). This effect is cumulative with successive wounds. Any figure whose DX is reduced to 2 or less by a Lurker falls to the ground, helpless.

Lurkers are hard to see, even in normal conditions – add an extra die to the roll to spot them, and attack at a -2 DX penalty. In dimmer conditions, add +2 dice to spot them and attack at -4 DX! For unknown reasons, they are resistant to images and illusions, disbelieving as though they have an IQ of 13.

## Leadfoot Lurker

*In the gloaming, Glass Goblins with eyes of fire  
us did waylay and, by fang and claw  
did draw our blood and with eldritch gaze  
shod our feet with heavy clay.*

– from *The Collected Songs of Melotron of Mirim*

These are identical to other Lurkers in all respects save one: they can cast Slow Movement (*ITL* p. 18) as a missile spell once per hour at no ST cost. Perhaps as many as one in every 12 Lurkers is a Leadfoot Lurker.

## The Webwing

ST 10, DX 12, IQ 4, MA 12/18

Attacks and damage: Bite 1d-1

Spat web (costs 1 ST)

Armor: Chitinous exoskeleton stops 1 hit

*They are not mere legend, I tell you! From their deep woods or caverns on nightmare wings they range far from their nests to hunt, subduing prey with their strands of silk and then hanging them in a cocoon from which they slowly feed. Sometimes, instead of consuming their unfortunate quarry, the vile creatures inject eggs which hatch a week or two later as large, eyeless grubs – gods, they stink, I must say! These awful worms eat their way out of the victim before finding a protected spot to pupate. I am happy to report from firsthand experience, Dear Reader, that a timely application of Insect Poison can be most efficacious in dealing with these blasted eggs so the host suffers few lasting effects. I swear, I am as virile as ever! (And the scars give one an air of danger that never fails to impress in the rooms above the taverns!) Their fresh or properly preserved spinnerets are not to be overlooked by the enterprising Seeker of Fortune; indeed, I myself have put them to ingenious use in the Subtle Arts of Alchemy!*

– from *Being the True and Unembellished Adventures of a Wayfaring Wizard*, by Volto Szgygycz of Zhedzelsk

Combining characteristics of the spider, bat, and spitting cobra, the terrible Webwing family is among Cidri's stranger predators. Quick flyers, they spit webs from the air (remember the -4 penalty to hit flying targets). When they land, they bite.

Treat the Webwing net-spit as a thrown weapon attack made with Thrown Weapons talent. Each net that hits a figure reduces its DX by 1; it takes 4 points of bladed-weapon damage to cut the net. However, the net is flammable; any flame will instantly ignite and remove any number of webs. The victim is momentarily engulfed in flame doing 1d damage, but armor protects normally.

The DX penalty is cumulative for each web entangling a figure, and anyone whose DX has been reduced to 2 can no longer move and is helpless.

Spitting a web costs the Webwing 1 ST. If a web misses its target, treat that hex as Sticky Floor (*ITL*, p. 26) for the next hour – but not against the Webwings, which can run without penalty on their own webs!

Because of their multiple eyes, treat side hexes as front, and rear hexes as sides.

## Poison Webwing

ST 10, DX 12, IQ 4, MA 12/18

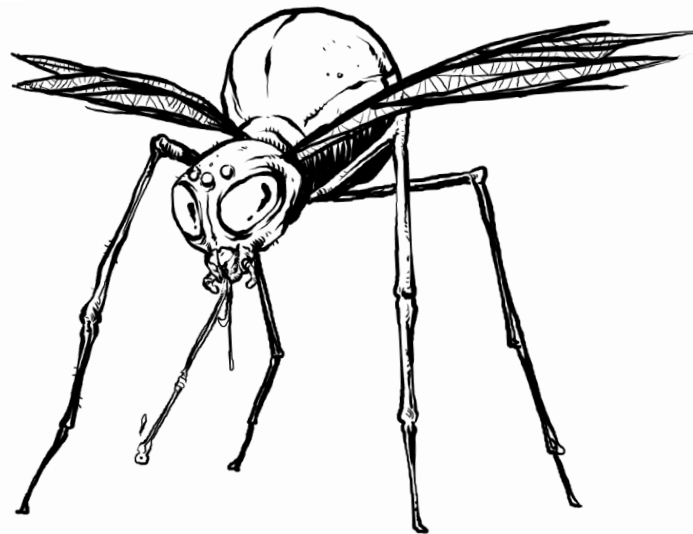
Attacks and damage: Bite 1d-1

Spat web (costs 1 ST); acid inflicts 1 hit

Armor: Chitinous exoskeleton stops 1 hit

*We captured one to use as a means of persuading prisoners to be prompt with their confessions, and, in sooth, fear of the bat-winged beast's burning nets made the little birds sing! But alas! It did not suffer captivity long and soon perished.*

– from an unsigned memorandum found in the library of Ran-Ling, in the Chongarol-Ondar Empire



This subspecies spits a web covered in acid which causes 1 hit of damage when it strikes. Armor does protect against it. Steel or wooden weapons used to cut an acid web suffer degradation; the first time one is used to cut a web, it is rendered useless on a roll of 6 on 1d, the second time on a roll of 5+, and so on.

## Giant Webwing

ST 20, DX 12, IQ 4, MA 14/24

Attacks and damage: Bite 1d+1

Spat web (costs 1 ST)

Armor: Chitinous exoskeleton stops 2 hits

The rare Giant Webwing reaches at least a yard long, with a two-yard wingspan. Its web is no stickier than those of other webwings, but it has the strength to make many more web attacks. Fortunately, this monster is usually found only alone or in pairs at most.

## Dwarf Webwing

ST 6, DX 12, IQ 4, MA 12/18

Attacks and damage: Bite 1d-2

Spat web (costs 1 ST)

*They fell upon us with the swiftness of falcons, quickly spotting the weakest in our caravan and covering them with silken nets that bound them fast as leather thongs. They struggled in vain, trying desperately to escape from the devilish cords before the beasts could alight to begin their horrid feast. Our companions' screams were pitiful indeed, freezing our heart as we – even the hired swords! – shamefully abandoned them in that dreadful place. My dear son, I can still hear their cries echoing reproachfully in my mind, raising gooseflesh at the mere memory.*

– from a letter from Amulkarmat of Gar, spice merchant, to her son, Parsha-Parshan, the renowned Evil Eye champion

### *Dwarf Webwing*

The dwarf webwing attacks in numbers; each one will spit only once or twice before landing to rend and tear. It is only the size of a small falcon, and its exoskeleton is not thick enough to serve as armor.

## The Nebulid

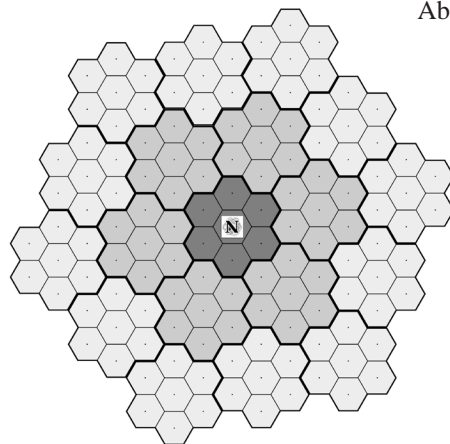
ST 8-16, DX 9-11, IQ 6-7, MA 8

Attacks and damage: Digestive enzyme does 2 hits/turn

Notes: Goopy body halves damage (round down); only has front hexes

*In the cavern, a strange creature clothed in clouds came menacingly upon me. Though I could not see it clearly, I summoned a Myrmidon to smite it, but its weapon was wrenched from its hand. Upon my word, what follows is the truth: in desperation, I let loose my most powerful Wizard's Wrath upon the demon and you can imagine my horror when I beheld that, far from destroying the fiend, my spell split it into two equally ravenous terrors! I am fortunate indeed to have escaped alive!*

– from the memoirs of Trongpo Gunkyar of Bho



Able to live nearly anywhere but deserts, this monster can be easily (perhaps fatally!) mistaken for a bit of mundane fog, for the Nebulid emanates an occulting mist which fills its own megahex and the two adjacent circles (see illustration). Treat the Nebulid's

megahex as a 75% Shadow (-3 DX and sight limited to just adjacent hexes). In the next megahexes sight is limited to 2 hexes and all attacks are at -2 DX; in the tertiary megahexes sight is limited to 3 hexes, with attacks at -1 DX (penalties are cumulative per hex for ranged attacks). Within this entire area, fireballs and lightning suffer -1 damage per hex they pass through. Finally, the heavy mist muffles sound; the loudest scream at the center is barely audible at the edge, which is convenient in that this makes a victim's shrieks less likely to cause much distress to any but the nearest companions.

Lurking in this damp gloom is a sly amoeboid killer. Nebulids attack by lashing out with ensnaring pseudopods, which deal 2 hits due to powerful digestive enzymes. On the turn after a successful attack, the Nebulid can automatically flow onto its victim and continue to attack in HTH combat in which it deals 2 hits per turn. Attacks made by others against a Nebulid in HTH have a 50% chance of hitting the victim instead. The creature's digestive enzymes will destroy cloth and leather armor in just 1 and 2 turns, respectively. The beast will flow through other armor in three turns.

Physical assaults inflict only half damage to Nebulids, which flow and ooze around weapons; pole weapons get no charge bonus against them. One may target its brain, much as one might against a Goo (*ITL* p. 95) – roll 5d to hit.

The Nebulid is affected by magic in unpredictable ways (damage may heal instead of hurt, spells may “bounce” or cause them to multiply, etc.). Roll a die:

- 1-3 – Spell works properly.
- 4-5 – Spell misfires in a way that benefits the Nebulid.
- 6 – Spell misfires in a way that harms the Nebulid.

GMs are encouraged to be creative!





## Breaking the Breakers

By James Eisert

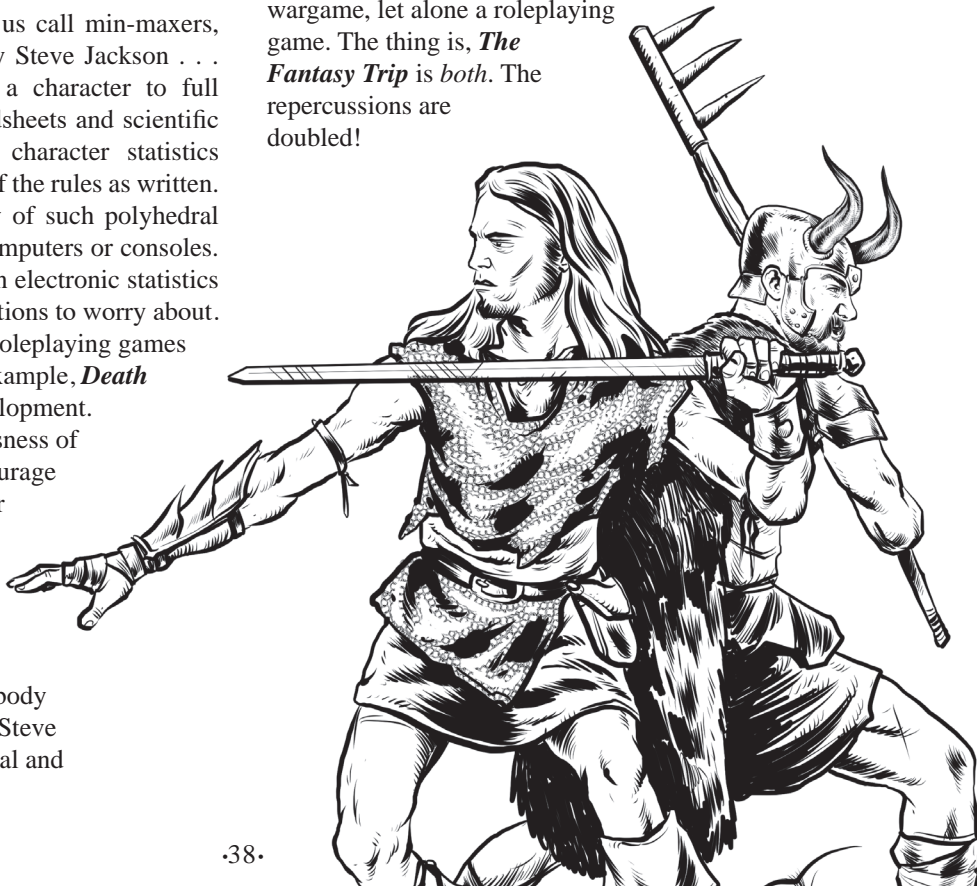
I try not to be too hard on what many of us call min-maxers, power gamers, or the moniker popularized by Steve Jackson . . . *munchkins*. These players try to maximize a character to full mathematical potential. They break out spreadsheets and scientific calculators to formulate the most optimal character statistics possible. They squeeze every +1 they can out of the rules as written.

It isn't their fault, really. We are all guilty of such polyhedral crimes when we play roleplaying games on computers or consoles. Characters, in this sense, are nothing more than electronic statistics and not flesh and blood characters with motivations to worry about.

There is an argument this happens because roleplaying games can morph into a full-fledged war game. For example, *Death Test* and *Death Test 2* aren't for character development. Rather, they exist to be defeated. The mercilessness of *Death Test* and *Death Test 2* does tend to encourage players to add a layer of optimal cheese to their character's recipe for a chance of survival.

But for roleplaying sessions when *every* character is optimized, something starts to degrade. Gamemasters start to run into the same problem that attribute bloat gave in the first incarnation of *The Fantasy Trip*. . . everybody looks the same! It is as if the Gold Cross from Steve Jackson's *Car Wars* had entered through a portal and started cloning everybody in Cidri.

Looks are just the beginning of the dullness. Tactical gameplay becomes predetermined. Without variation, there is less to think about on the board. Battles become repetitive. This is true for any wargame, let alone a roleplaying game. The thing is, *The Fantasy Trip* is *both*. The repercussions are doubled!



So, what can a GM do? The rules are right out in the open. Players can buy the equipment they wish with gold. They can buy the talents, spells, and attributes they like with experience points. Sloppy direct gamemaster intervention to hinder them will feel forced and vindictive. Is there a better way to tame this numerical beast?

A powerful option is to make it clear from the *beginning* that there are limited commodities available to shops in the areas and not everything may be available. The local shops are not full of the entire list from the pages of *The Fantasy Trip*. Supply and demand rules Cidri like any other realm. By stating this, you create a new rule that they will understand and follow.

If you've read the magic creation rules, you should be aware how long the process is to make magic items. Even something as small as a +1 flaming sword will take weeks to make. Only the most mundane of magical items would be on display . . . magical pens that write by themselves, curtains that open when sunlight hits them, garbage bins that remember to empty themselves on Tuesday, and so on. Those would be the bulk of purchases. The odd powerful item or two *might* be in a shop somewhere. Those items, however, will be a lot more random in abilities. The chances of a perfect, optimized fit for a hero will be less commonplace.

Players may *want* to wait for custom items, but there's an adventure around the corner and time is short! This temptation for getting something now will often peck at a player's resolve to wait for the perfect item.

These suggestions work because magical items are under the gamemaster's control. But what of upgrading with experience points? This is the place where the players feel they should have agency without interference.

Luckily, there is a block in place within *The Fantasy Trip* to curtail statistical exploitation. Unless a character starts with a high IQ, the path towards skills and spells necessary to maximize potential are costly.

However, there is more a gamemaster can do to subvert the path to numerical monotony. Gamemasters should be sure to reward secondary skills and spells in play *often*. The reason munchkins do what they do is because they see combat as the mechanism for return on investment. Prove it can be otherwise. Make that character with courtly graces use the skill often and to impressive effect. Give a fencer a substantial reason to pick up a bow through a storyline, such as receiving one as an honored gift.

The largest gamemastering mistake is to create spiteful penalties and situations to punish the player. We all know a GM can take away powerful armor or place players in searing heat or drown them in the depths of a watery pit. Remember though, that most players who play this way do so because they feel justified by the rules. Geekdom has never been known for "reading between the lines" easily.

Try to be empathic about it all. Instead of hitting them with a spiteful cudgel, give them a friendly heroic nudge in the right direction. By helping people develop as players, you will also grow as a gamemaster.

Suggested reading and viewing:

Jackson, Steve. *Car Wars Compendium*. Steve Jackson Games, 1996.

Jackson, Steve. *Munchkin*. Steve Jackson Games, 2001.



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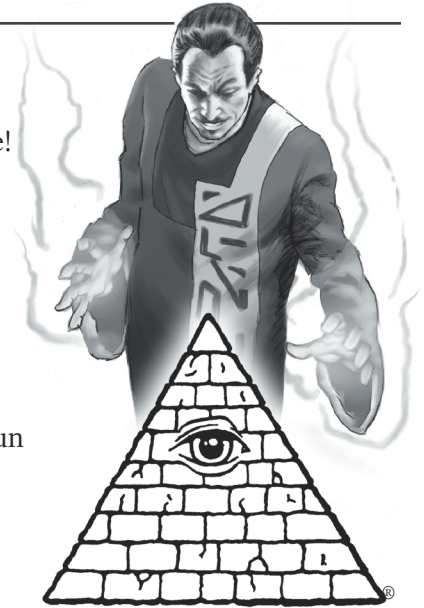


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