

The Undercroft



I COULDN'T
SEE THE
FUTURE

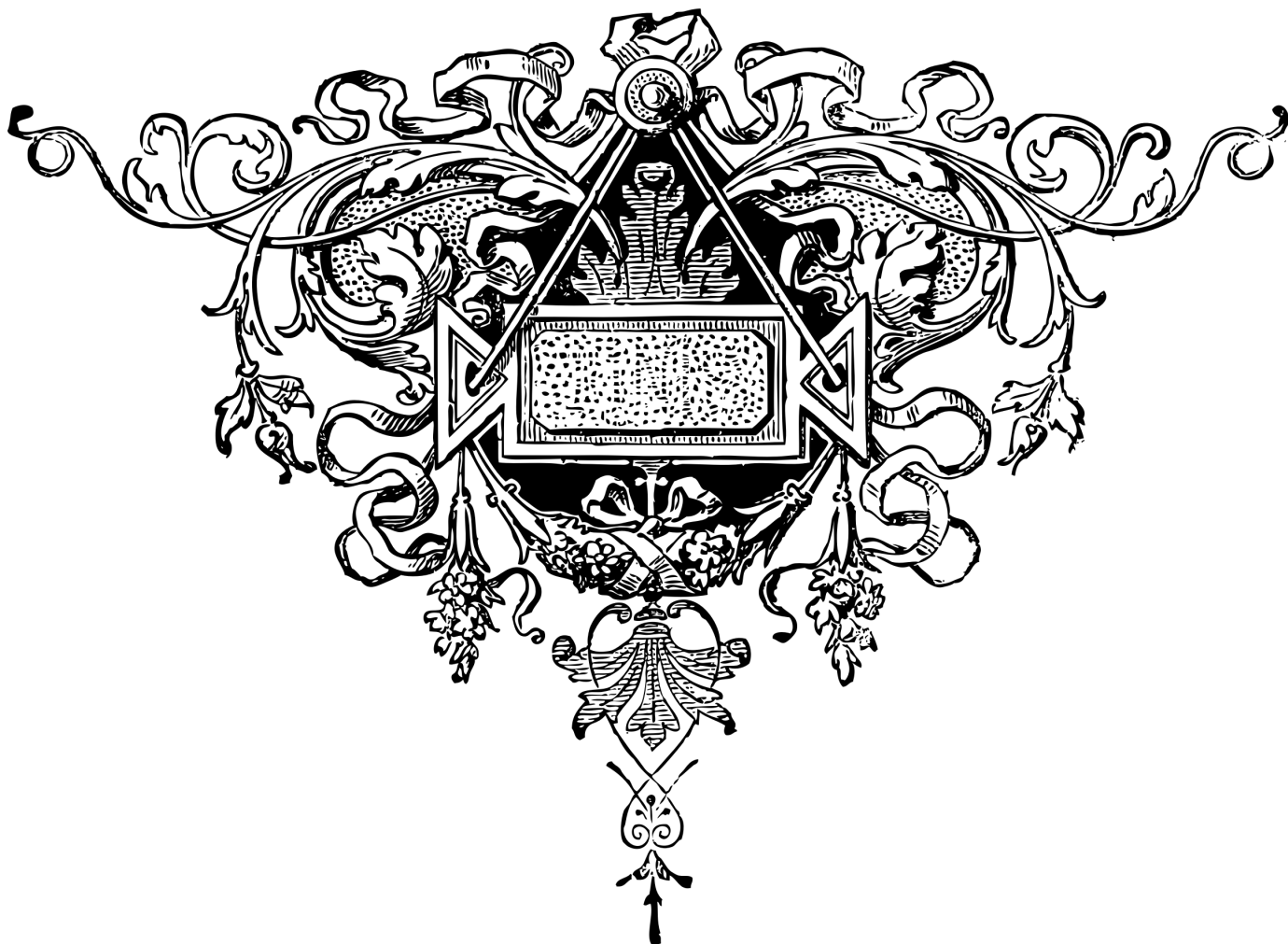




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SIDE SPLITTER

an editorial

The Undercroft had a birthday and no one sent any presents. What's all that about? I'll tell you what: death and decay and slick expectations and the smell of belly buttons and dirty teeth. We're getting older and dying on our sick feet

miles away from anyone that can help, or has a satellite phone (do you remember those?), outside a spooky house in the Lake District. You can wait for the mechanic but he's already dead.

Splattered with a shovel by the old lady and her cats while you're sat here reading this

book of delights that has unfolded to make a butterfly made of the shrink wrap you used to save the turkey. Gibbets of festive flesh *everywhere*. I don't want presents, it's too late anyway. The joy is in the giving and it's all mine.



wrapped in slippers and tinfoil (maximum freshness) while the lights wish they had a dimmer switch and time to consider onrushing dark. It's warm and humid, filled with bears and salt and sugar. Nothing like they told you. Consider it a gift, human catapillar, a

-Daniel Sell

LUDOLF'S FOLLY

by Forrest Aguire

When Jonas Ludolf, the celebrated Flemish tapestry cartoonist, set off as a passenger aboard the Dutch East India Company's *Fluyt, De Santillana*, no one, least of all those guild members who saw him off at Rotterdam, shaking their collective heads at the lad's borderline-stupidity (some called it "bravado") could imagine what lay ahead of him. His destination, ostensibly, was Formosa, where he would seek out the most erudite of eastern philosophers in an effort to find "truth". Ludolf was convinced that behind the veil of the everyday, certain powers moved, a reality behind reality, which manipulates and shapes the world that we experience, though we cannot see them. His goal was to uncover those powers, to peek behind the curtain of time and space in order to represent, through his art, the wonders that he would uncover.

The historicity of the man himself cannot be argued. A receipt thought to have belonged to Alyssa, niece of the Duke of Orange, clearly shows Ludolf's signature – she had apparently commissioned him to design a tapestry showing the garden behind her uncle's summer home. Paulus Potter's famous idyllic painting, *De Jonge Stier*, shows the initials "JS" in the whorls of a tree-knot, barely visible behind the herder's upraised left arm, and it is rumored that the person posing as the herder is actually Ludolf himself, though wearing a false wig and beard. An early edition of Johan Weyer's *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Venificiis* mentions a "Jon Lvdlf" in handwritten marginalia (though the provenience of the handwriting is unknown), which some claim as a prophesy of Ludolf's mystical associations to come, as the death of Weyer in 1588 cannot be squared with Ludolf's christening in 1648, while others see it as an interpolation by later would-be occultists bent on shoe-horning Ludolf into the canon of the arcane.

What is not documented is what happened in the four years that Ludolf spent in Formosa. Visitors and regular inhabitants alike provide enticing, yet conflicting tidbits, most of them surrounding the artist's supposed training by any of several local mystics and shamans, further travels to a location known as "Leng", and the young man's supposed opium addiction.

After his return, he was eventually burned at the stake as a heretic in a spasm of millennial fervor in the years preceding the advent of the 18th-Century. His last words were: "I shall see the stars with eyes cleansed by flame".

The only artifact left behind, and we must suppose it was secreted away from his personal belongings by a curious guard, a greedy priest, or cult-elements working in darkness, is an un-named book which has earned the reputational title of Ludolf's Folly. The contents of the book are written in Dutch, with some oriental symbols and sigils of unknown origin interspersed throughout. The handwriting shaky, though it matches that of Ludolf's signatures in every meaningful way, as sewn into the many tapestries that he created before his journey. It is rumored that the book contains spells that Ludolf learned while in Formosa which can be used to see beyond the veil that Ludolf desired to pierce. Ludolf's Folly appears very plain on first sight. Its cover is leather, bound in a faded and tattered navy silk. A thong-and-button clasp can be used to secure the folio within. The button is silver and shows an embossed dragon's head, as commonly represented in Chinese art. The thong is simple leather, pierced through the opposite cover and secured with a double knot. Upon opening the book, one sees yellowed papers inscribed in black ink. There are five entries showing the proper words and casting techniques for the various spells contained therein. It should be noted that certain letters are over-written, as if Ludolf tried to make corrections, but could not decide exactly which vowels to use for certain of the foreign words that must be chanted for the spells to take effect. Furthermore, a slight ink spill seems to have spattered across the pages, obfuscating some segments of the words and rendering them unreadable. Several of these have scrawled, in different scripts, later owners' best guesses at the correct letters for these words. Some of this marginalia has itself been scratched out by a later hand with a second correction over-riding the first. The folio ends with a line drawing of a bloodshot eyeball with the optic nerve dangling behind, as if the eye is somehow floating in the air.

GAME MECHANICS

None of the five spells in the book are 100% complete. Though readable by any class or race of character (this is the draw of the book – anyone can cast these powerful spells . . . maybe), every reader will have to make some choices as to how to say the words where corrections have been made. Some of the words are outright incorrect, as Ludolf was in an opium stupor for most of his stay in Formosa, from which he emerged only long enough to take shoddy notes from his frustrated mentors. All-in-all, there is a very good chance that

the reader will miscast any given spell. Since magic, and these spells in particular, tug at the veil of reality, a miscast is likely to result in grave consequences. A spell may have one of the following failure modes: mild, moderate, major, or catastrophic. In instances where there is no failure, the spell operates as outlined in the *Rules & Magic* book (or whatever book you choose to use for your magic rules). This book is not a scroll – spells do not disappear once cast, though letters have been known to rearrange themselves once a spell has been cast. One wonders if the book doesn't have a mind of its own! Whenever a spell is cast, roll 1d6 and refer to the descriptions below for the results:

DIVINATION

1-2 Spell succeeds as described

- 3** Mild Failure: The spellcaster receives information, but it is incorrect. Despite any evidence to the contrary, the spellcaster is convinced that it is correct.
- 4** Moderate Failure: The “Divination” succeeds, but the spellcaster is compelled to shout the information as loudly as he or she can for the next 3d10 minutes.
- 5** Major Failure: Every time the spellcaster enters a new building, he or she is compelled to shout out historical facts about the structure (the knowledge of which is revealed through the “Divination”) for the next 1d10 minutes. This is a permanent condition, but can be removed by a “Remove Curse”.
- 6** Catastrophic Failure: All is revealed, causing instant enlightenment, insanity, and death from brain hemorrhaging in seconds. There is no save. The spellcaster may be dead, but is likely to be revered by the ignorant as a saint.

DETECT INVISIBLE

1-2 Spell succeeds as described

- 3** Mild Failure: The spell works as described, however all within the spell range appear as translucent shapes. There is no way to differentiate between who is invisible and who is not.

- 4** Moderate Failure: The spellcaster can see the invisible out of one eye only. The spellcaster loses all dexterity bonuses and is at a further -2 to hit for the duration of the spell. If casting a spell that requires line-of-sight, the spell fails.
- 5** Major Failure: The spell works as written. However, as the duration ends, the spellcaster finds themselves blind and deaf for 1d6 days. The spellcaster fails all listen checks. The spellcaster cannot cast spells that require line-of-sight or verbal components while thus blinded and deafened.
- 6** Catastrophic Failure: The spellcaster can see the invisible and only the invisible. They are blind to all visible light. This condition is permanent.

WIZARD EYE

1-2 Spell succeeds as described

- 3** Mild Failure: The spell works, but the eye does not have dark vision.
- 4** Moderate Failure: The spell fails and the spellcaster begins vomiting eyeballs, uncontrollably for 1d6 turns, after which the pile of vomited eyeballs disappears.
- 5** Major Failure: The spell works, but, upon the expiration of the spell, the spellcaster finds themselves blinded for 1d12 months.
- 6** Catastrophic Failure: The spellcaster's eyeballs eject from their sockets. The spellcaster suffers 2d12 points of damage, loses 3 points of charisma, and is permanently blinded.

VANISH

1-2 Spell succeeds as described

- 3** Mild Failure: Half of the object vanishes, with whatever consequences that entails, per the referee's discretion.
- 4** Moderate Failure: The object flits back and forth between its original location and "someplace else." How often it moves between planes and how long it stays on each is left to the referee's discretion.

- 5** Major Failure: The item remains. Anyone touching the object vanishes (sent to the spirit plane), and a tiny doll is left in their place. It is very unlikely that they will ever come back, but if they do, they won't be quite the same.
- 6** Catastrophic Failure: A 20' x 20' gate to the spirit plane opens up, unleashing hordes of inimical spirits, ghosts, banshees, and so forth. It can only be closed by a successful “Dispel Magic” cast by a caster of equal or higher level than the one who originally cast “Vanish”. The object remains but no one will care much while this portal remains open.

REMOTE SURVEILLANCE

1-2 Spell succeeds as described

- 3** Mild Failure: The spell works, but the target realizes what is happening and knows he or she is being used as a spy.
- 4** Moderate Failure: As Mild Failure, plus the target knows who is using them by name.
- 5** Major Failure: The spell reverses. The target can now practice surveillance through the spellcaster's senses.
- 6** Catastrophic Failure: The spellcaster and the target become fully aware of each others' thoughts and emotions, but cannot differentiate between the two. Though the mixing of these thoughts and emotions only lasts for the duration of the spell, each person is psychically scarred for life and will permanently suffer the after effect, including depression, PTSD, confusion, and sporadic intrusive memories of the other person's thoughts and emotions. Each pair of victims of this Catastrophic Failure will experience a different set of permanent, lifelong issues than any other pair. The referee will determine the severity, type, timing, and manifestations. The only commonality between all victims of these incidents is that they are no longer fully sane, no longer fully themselves, and that the effects are permanent and irreversible.

THE PYRAMID OF FLESH AND THE UNKNOWN DISK

by Edward Lockhart

These were never meant to be brought together. Neither belongs in our world. Alone either is dangerous and strange. Together they are awe inspiring in their potential for devastation.

One, an artifact from an extinct civilization, a method of entry for an invasion that never came. The other, the result of an unfathomable being gaining a toehold into our world.

THE UNKNOWN DISK

It seems innocuous enough, a pale golden disk the size and thickness of a spread hand. An equilateral triangle has been stamped out of the disk's center, not quite four inches on each side. One side of the disk appears to have been hammered while the other side and the edges are polished perfectly smooth. The disk itself is as strong as quality steel and unusually resistant to being scratched, dented or marred.

Careful examination will reveal subtle repeated patterns in the hammer marks. This is in fact a completely alien system of writing. No amount of study will reveal anything else because there is absolutely no reference point for understanding this language.

If the disk is held vertically and perfectly plumb for more than one minute, a 5' diameter hole in reality will be ripped into being, centered on the disk. (Accomplishing this is relatively easy to do with a bit of string and a steady hand. Anyone holding the disk in such a manner must Sv. vs. Paralyzation or take 1d8 damage and lose their hand.) This hole in reality seems to exist only in two dimensions and can only be viewed and entered from one direction.

This lightning edged portal leads to another world. It is a verdant wilderness containing almost no sentient life. It is instead riddled with ruins of the strange civilization which created the disk.

The rift will remain open indefinitely until at least 100 lbs. worth of mass crosses through. The portal will then begin slowly shrinking at a rate of 1" per day for 2d12 days. After which, the portal will suddenly dilate closed, leaving the electrum disk behind in our world.

THE PYRAMID OF FLESH

It is hideous, a tetrahedron of wrinkled russet flesh, the size of a small fist. One face appears to have been torn free from some larger object or creature, revealing the black sticky meat within it. Each of the other three sides have what appears to be either a tightly closed, lipless mouth or possibly a firmly shut eye. Forceful investigation will reveal it to be both; a set of blunt rounded teeth in front of a bloodshot violet eye. The mouth-eye will bite for 1 damage before closing tightly again.

The Pyramid is no stronger than human flesh; however, all damage done to it is instantly regenerated. The slice of a knife is seamlessly healed before the blade finishes passing through. Throwing it into a fire causes the wretched thing to blacken and blister and burn, but beneath each layer of melting skin, new flesh awaits. Carefully cutting a piece off will result in the smaller of the pieces rotting quickly away to dust while the larger section regrows what was lost.

Any living flesh touching the ripped side of the Pyramid will become stuck fast, completely unable to be removed. Unspecified handling of the Pyramid results in a 75% chance of having 1d4+1 fingers adhered. Attempting to cut closely around the adhered flesh will almost always result in it becoming more firmly attached; blood seems to conduct the magnetic-like attraction of the pyramid to still-living flesh. The prolonged use of a tourniquet or a brutally quick amputation at least six inches away from the points of adhesion are two surefire ways to be rid of the Pyramid.

Should the pyramid become stuck to a character's torso:

They must Sv. vs. Poison or be rendered unconscious for 1d12 hours, all the while vomiting up a clotted slurry of what used to be their internal organs. When the character awakens they will no longer need to eat nor sleep, the pyramid now fuels them. They will never again feel hunger.

When damaged, the character will no longer bleed; in fact, their insides will have been replaced with tar-like ropery strands. The character will also regenerate lost HP at a rate of 1 per hour. However, for every 2 HP healed this

way without eating at least 1 lbs. of raw fresh meat, the character will suffer 1 point of CON damage. Unlike normal ability score loss, this CON damage cannot be healed. If their HP or CON ever drop to Zero, the character will become an animated corpse and the direct pawn of the horrible alien entity that sent this object into our world.

If the character passes their sv. vs. poison, then they will instead writh violently forth a 2 ft. long worm composed of ropery strands of tar and take 1d12 damage. Each morning thereafter, the character must make a Sv. vs. Poison or vomit up another of the worms. (The worms are AC 12, $\frac{1}{4}$ HD, Move 20, and simply try to make it to the nearest dark hiding place to gestate for 1d6 months. If left unmolested, there is a 1% chance it will form into another Pyramid. Otherwise it dissolves into a puddle of tar.)

Should the pyramid become stuck to a character's head:

It begins. There is no saving throw; it is unstoppable now. The onslaught of secrets will not cease. All three mouth-eyes begin to open and close, indistinctly mouthing words. Three voices whisper in the character's mind. It never stops. No one else can hear them. The secrets of all the world are whispered, one on top of another and another, again and again and again, unending.

This constant barrage of unavoidable noise causes the character to suffer a penalty of -1 on all actions until they gets used to it, taking 2d10 - INT days.

The character must actively listen to get any coherence from the three sibilant voices whispering constantly in their head.

INSERTING THE PYRAMID INTO THE DISK

The Pyramid fits too perfectly into the Disk. It may be inserted until one face of the Pyramid rests flush with the Disk's surface. They seem almost made for each other. They are not. The incompatible energies of the two transplanar objects react violently with one another.

Whenever the Pyramid is being inserted into the disk, all three mouth-eyes open and screech in a terrible cacophony of inhuman noise. The mouth-eyes will continue to do so until removed from the vicinity of the disk.

ROLL 1D100 TO DETERMINE THE NATURE OF THE SECRET

- 1** The Name of a Demon or Angel
- 2** A Secret from a PC's childhood (Family dog didn't run away but was instead killed by character's sadistic uncle; Had a stillborn sister when character was too young to remember, etc.)
- 3** The exact location of one of the other PC's hidden items.
- 4** Scandalous behavior of a nearby public figure. (Myriad Affairs, Snuff Fetish, Embezzling, Member of a Doomsday Cult, etc.).
- 5** Location of the nearest source of hidden danger and the name of the party responsible for it.
- 6** Location of the nearest hidden treasure and how it came to be there.
- 7** Location of a secret room in a place the character has previously been.
- 8-9** How a childhood crush actually felt about the character.
- 10-29** Something unimportant about someone the character doesn't know (Margaret got drunk and shit the bed last night; Lucien looks at chickens when he touches himself; Brendan ate the last pastry; etc.).
- 30-39** Something in a foreign language the character does not speak.
- 40-49** Something in a dead language no one understands.
- 50-59** The secret and unintelligible rantings of a madman.
- 60-69** The truth of how a crime was committed without any context (Walter bumped into Stephen and took two pennies; Beatrice, not Anne, drowned young master Isaac; Sir Gilbert overturned Andrew's applecart; etc.).
- 70-79** The favorite hiding place of a random child from a foreign country.
- 80-89** A few sentences from the research journal of a very esoteric scholar.
- 90-99** The name of a pet (but not the nature of the pet) and how that pet feels about its owner.
- 100** The unspeakable Name of the entity which sent this pyramid into the world.

The first time the Pyramid is inserted until flush, a wave of devastation flashes into existence destroying all life within $1d6 * 100$ ft. Those within 10 ft. of the disk are spared.

The second time, all life within $2d6 * 1,000$ ft. is destroyed. Only those within 5 ft. of the disk are spared.

The third time, all life within $3d6 * 10,000$ ft. is destroyed. Only those actually touching the disk will be spared.

The fourth time, reality warps and tears, all matter within 10 ft. is irrevocably destroyed. The alien entity now forces its way into our world. A several ton mass of flowing flesh, bespeckled in horrid screaming and blinking mouth-eyes, the Unspeakable Entity seeks to birth more tar worms, create more human puppets, and procreate itself through new Pyramids.

Should the Pyramid be inserted into the disk while stuck to a character, skip directly to the fourth instance.

THE UNSPEAKABLE ENTITY

AC 12, 20HD (Attacks as 8HD), Mv. 30', Crushes 1d12 damage, Special attacks, Morale 12.

Special attacks:

After each crushing attack, if the character survives, they must make a Sv. vs. Paralyzation or be held down. Held characters may be automatically crushed each round for 2d12 damage. Alternatively, the Entity may choose to implant a pyramid of Flesh onto the torso of a held character. Implanted characters will be unmolested unless they attempt to attack the Entity.

WHERE ARE THESE TERRIBLE THINGS?

An ancient king hid both items away in his long lost tomb, behind a hidden and heavily trapped door. The walls within the small, lightless vault are covered in pictograms warning of the horrors wrought by these items. These will of course just serve as an instruction manual to most fledgling grave-robbers.

WOLFMOTHER

by Daniel Sell

Stories of the Wolfmother are told to the boys of the Kairnlaw. Marry early, not well. Marry before the hair of manhood sheaths wick and willow. Marry before the dog-stink, and the stag-dreams. Marry before the Wolfmother catches scent and visits your bedside, dower in hand.

"How kin and kine?" goes the stranger's reception, "Well and fat" goes the reply. Liars found with the musk of the mother about them in the morning are likely to be dragged to a paddock and married to the jabobos; a humiliating punishment for the perfidious Kairn bachelor and a confusing one for those not privy to these customs.

While visiting the Kairnlaw, all unmarried gentlemen have a 1 in 20 chance of being visited by the Wolfmother each night.

The wolfmother appears as a woman with the face of a wolf. She will be dressed for a spring wedding, with thistles and blackcurrant in her hair and a gift to be given. Anyone not accepting her gifts will be consummated rudely with animalistic lust. Within two weeks the wolfmother will give birth to a litter of wolf cubs who will hound their father, bitter at their abandonment. They will nip his friends' heels, kill his chickens, bother his herds, howl in the meadows until sleep is chased away, all until finally their father wakes in the middle of one peaceful night to see his children at his bedside.

The Wolfmother herself has the might of an ogre and a delicious, intoxicating musk. Anyone not being offered a gift must save vs. magic to wake up, otherwise they sleep soundly while she ravages their friends. If she is defeated she will turn into a hemp sack full of dog fur cuttings with the gift inside. This does not stop her from coming back.

For those fool enough to accept the gifts instead of immediately stripping to their skin and taking to the street, calling for a wife, they may roll on the following table of suitable wedding gifts. After three visits she will take their hand and walk them into the brambles, to a place from which the groom will never return.

- 1** A rat in a cage. It gives good lifestyle advice, except for one time when it will give you the worst advice ever.
- 2** A little lost child from under her skirt. It doesn't speak any language you know and is altogether quite exotic looking.
- 3** A rope that leads out of your window and into a field. It will not budge and does not end unless pulled by three stout men. On the end of the rope is an unconcious sorcerer of middling power.
- 4** Dirt in a jar. Any plants set in it will grow overnight and black lotus flowers will burst forth.
- 5** A pen made from the feather of a white peacock. It will only write sonnets fit to break the hardest heart. Readers of said poems must save vs. magic or seclude themselves away for a night and a day. A second failed save will drive them to a fit of passionate suicide as they know they can never know a love so sweet.
- 6** Three mice tied together by their tails, alive and trying to run in different directions.
- 7** A burning bulrush. Save vs. magic or fall into a deep sleep, haunted by dreams of the wolfmother, for d3 days. She will not visit while the effect lasts.
- 8** A hand mirror that will age you 10d10 years if you look at it beneath a clear sky.
- 9** A lead button, shockingly heavy. If thrown away save vs. magic or lose all your hair and fingernails. -1 to hit until your nails grow back.
- 10** A walnut box. Save vs. device when opened, as inside is an adder. It sinks its teeth into your arm and withers away like a rotten fruit. Save vs. poison or die, refilling the snake like a balloon. It then rolls away.
- 11** A handsome set of underwear. While worn (she will insist you try them on) they tighten when in the presence of women other than the wolfmother, dealing d3 damage per round. They resist being torn or cut and are removable only with magical assistance.

- 12** A flock of seagulls tied to a staff. They will loyally follow the stick wherever it goes, sitting on any convenient perch and viciously attacking any food they spot.
- 13** A black cat that can communicate silently with whomever it pleases. He gives valuable council and has been familiar to many great women. He is here as a favour to the Wolfmother and will leave if mistreated. The Wolfmother will hear of it.
- 14** A rope. Anyone tied with it must save vs. magic or run to the nearest source of magical wrongness. Once there they must save again or lose their minds and become a drooling vegetable.
- 15** A rose and a song. The Wolfmother's singing is haunting and nothing like any you have heard before. Save vs. magic or never be able to enjoy music again.
- 16** A bundle of nettles tied with a yellow ribbon.
- 17** A cradle made of chicken bones tied together with ligaments. It creaks and cracks but is very strong. A child who uses it until they outgrow it will never know fear and be bold as the dawning sun. He will die too young.
- 18** A mollusc attached to a locket. Anyone approaching the wearer with sinister intent will cause it to emit a high pitched squeal until they are dispatched. Inside is a picture of the Wolfmother.
- 19** Gloves made of whole rabbits. They don't look much like gloves but they fit wonderfully. They will run away at any loud noises, hiding in your pockets or inside the folds of your clothes, taking your hands with them. Their morale is 6. Taking them off will kill them horrifically as your hands distend their innards out their nethers.
- 20** A kettle made from a goat's skull. No matter what is poured in, thick clotted blood will come out. Drinking the blood will give you visions of all the hurtful things that have been said behind your back, and by who.

FURNACE ARTHROPOID

by Ezra Claverie

The Furnace Arthropoid consists of a suit of powered life-support armor protecting an Operator from an extremely hot environment on a chthonian planet. Designs vary by size and Hit Dice, but all have at least six limbs, and the whole appears made of articulate ceramics and metal-matrix composites. Using an amplifier within the Arthropoid, the Operator psionically hails sentient beings, with unpredictable side effects. On the Operator's home planet, explorers pilot Arthropoids through a space-contorting Gate that they found deep underground. Theologians argue that Coronals (immortals believed to inhabit the sun of Operators's world) built the Gate as a means for mortals to visit the frigid Lakes of Howling, the region to which the Ultimate Tribunal consigns the souls of apostates. Skeptical philosophers argue instead that if Coronals built the Gate, then Coronals are not divine but mortal, beings with superior arts but inscrutable motives. The Society for Armored Liminautics remains studiously neutral on this question, hesitant to provoke controversy that might impede the work of exploration. (At the Referee's discretion, Arthropoids in the campaign world may have been pulled off course by Summoning or other spells.)

The Operator attempts to communicate by using the psionic abilities native to its species. In the absence of translation magic (e.g. Tongues), this communication remains one-way and incomprehensible at the explicit level. (At the Referee's discretion, one could develop a code for communicating with the Operator by conventional means—provided the Operator cooperates—but this takes 10d10 hours.) All tool-using beings must make a Saving Throw versus Paralysis upon first encountering an Arthropoid. Success means that the character succeeds in ignoring its subliminal murmur; failure means that the character submits unconsciously to part of the Occupant's communication. Anyone failing the Saving Throw versus Paralysis finds that for the next twelve hours, an urge continually intrudes upon his or her thoughts. Roll d12 for its nature.

- 1** Start or stoke fires to warm the Arthropoid
- 2** Find mineral specimens to offer the Arthropoid (visions of specific rocks and ores spring into the mind)
- 3** Find biological specimens to offer the Arthropoid (roll d6: 1-2 own species, 3-4 animal, 5-6 plant)
- 4** Enumerate one's anatomy to the Arthropoid, naming each part and explaining its biological and social functions
- 5** Enumerate one's belongings for the Arthropoid, naming each and explaining its production and uses
- 6** Embrace the Arthropoid (despite the heat)
- 7** Prevent all creatures larger than a fly from approaching the Arthropoid
- 8** Find political or religious leaders to introduce to the Arthropoid
- 9** Lead the Arthropoid to some nearby landform (Referee's choice) (The Arthropoid will follow)
- 10** Recite series of prime numbers for the Arthropoid (If the character does not know what a "prime number" is, he or she simply feels the urge to recite large numbers)
- 11** Explain to the Arthropoid the customs of one's homeland, down to the village or the neighborhood
- 12** Tell the Arthropoid one's life story, in maximalist detail

As long as the Arthropoid remains in sight, anyone who failed the Save versus Paralysis also feels an overwhelming (and not unpleasant) compulsion to act on this urge. The player may narrate how the character obeys this compulsion.



Obeying may send the character out of sight of the Arthropoid, which temporarily negates the compulsion but not the urge behind it. (That is, doing [X] for the Arthropoid will continue to seem like a capital idea, but getting out of its sight allows the character room to consider other actions instead.)

Moreover, the compulsion resumes the moment the character sees the Arthropoid again. To resist the psionic compulsion while in sight of the Arthropod, an affected character must make a Saving Throw versus Magic. Success means one round of free action; failure means that the character must act on the compulsion. The character may make this Saving Throw again in a subsequent round, but the result of the second Save will be decisive: a success leaves the character free of compulsion and untroubled by the psionic address of this Arthropoid for life; a failure leaves the character obsessed with acting on the compulsion for the next d12 weeks, whether or not the Arthropoid remains in sight (or even in this world).

The Arthropoid makes a grinding sound when it walks. Its legs end in re-configurable claw assemblies that allow it to climb vertical surfaces as hard as stone by digging holds. These claws continually tear up bits of substrate—stone, soil, and so on—which the Arthropoid analyzes, then processes for use as engine coolant.

Anyone approaching within six feet of a Furnace Arthropoid must Save vs. Breath Weapon or lose a Hit Point per round from the intense heat it radiates. Anyone touching the Arthropoid without the benefit of insulation loses d4 Hit Points.

Three to six of the Arthropoid's limbs (i.e. $d4 + 2$) have ports from which it can extend jointed ceramic tentacles to manipulate delicate objects, each with the same dexterity as a human hand. If the Operator wishes, it can cool these tentacles so that they can safely manipulate objects or creatures who might otherwise be damaged by the Arthropoid's heat. Each tentacle has a reach in yards equal to the Arthropoid's Hit Dice, and may grapple at its normal Attack Bonus.

An Arthropoid also has at least two ports from which it can vent magma-like engine coolant in high-pressure jets to defend itself. The Operator can fire one jet every other round, causing two Hit Points' damage per Hit Die, and at a range of three yards per Hit Die, of the Arthropoid. (At the Referee's discretion, this risks igniting the target's belongings and hair.)

The Arthropoid suffers no damage from weapons of wood or ordinary stone, or from non-magical heat. Metal weapons and magical attacks cause only half damage. Cold-based attacks cause normal damage. Water costs the Arthropoid one Hit Point per bucketful thrown against it, and rain costs it one Hit Point per minute of exposure; immersion paralyzes the Arthropoid in 2d4 rounds. Its lubricants freeze, rupturing the joints and then the carapace. The Operator will freeze to death in d20 minutes.

An Arthropoid reduced to zero Hit Points ceases to function. The interior of the machine will cool in three hours per HD (half that, if immersed). Long before this, the Operator will probably commit suicide to avoid capture on a hellish alien world.

Afterwards, the Arthropoid's carapace can be opened, revealing its neutronic engine block(s), as well as the tantalum-hafnium armature and boron-honeycomb insulation surrounding its control chamber. That chamber now resembles an artificial geode, feathered with inward-pointing crystals of halogen salts and organoidides: the atmosphere once breathed by the Operator has condensed and frozen. At its center curl the remains of that Operator, no larger than a human infant, resembling a poecilostomatoid copepod. Its mandibles likely still clench a poison ampule; antimony oxides and lead sulfides rime its pilot jacket. The exotic materials and crystal formations within the carapace will fetch (d8 x 1,000) Coins per Hit Die of the Arthropoid. The Operator's wire-spool mission logs may prove still more precious to natural philosophers, priests, or wizards able to decipher them. (At the Referee's discretion, a skilled armorer may work carapace elements into 0-2 [i.e. d6 minus four] breastplates or shields that grant a +1 to their ordinary Armor Class due to lightness and great strength.)

THE MANIFOLD-CRUST WHIPPETS

A NOBLE GIANT FAMILY

by Anxious P.

A SYMPATHETIC NOTE

I report, and it is something which brings me significant shame, but it must be said that I may have behaved ignorantly on behalf the antithetical folk. That Noblest of Giant.

My research into the existence of Noble Giant Families now requires substantial revision, for it has become an apparent possibility, over the recent years, that this crippling and frothing pursuit towards an understanding of the Nobles has lead me to a transcendent place.

It is the case that I have been exonerated towards all prior transgressions involved with my place in human civilization. Yes, I now understand that they need not our forgiveness for the actions they take and thus I revere them... Nay, worship Them for this resolve.

Truth be told, as of recent, I have fashioned myself sturdy stilts of oak. Leather straps secured to my ankles. The fur cloak, which I wear whilst stilted, took me a full year to complete. It makes me proud. To be of their stature and dress. For these Giants are so beautiful. Are they not? Such that even the human idea of Grace submits to their gait. Noble.

I will tell you of this Gait. Of this Giant Family.

THE MANIFOLD-CRUST WHIPPETS

I am compelled to admit, and my goodness it is something of a difficulty, but upon first viewing the Manifold-Crust Whippet Family, their unique kinesthetics - a powerful and rubbery stride, tender to the wind - were, at first glance, offensive. Of course, I thought them of having fool's minds. Some retardation, I had imagined, or some curse (I had hoped) as a result of in-mating for unknown generations. And I would haughtily laugh as they melted and swelled amongst the surrounding hills. Evening after evening, my study found me following them to and from a nearby dale. Their home, tucked deeply into the hill-lands' shallow valleys, was hidden from the viewpoint of my camp. I became obsessed with encroachment. Thus, when they would leave on their "errands", I would visit. Large mounds of tilled earth. I still think that they are beds. A watering hole and hastily-built, open air furniture such as chairs and tables and containers. Everything seemed/seems exceptionally tidy. The mounds, though, seemed to increase in size over time.

I never found out where it was that they went, once monthly. For certain, the Nobles would traverse into the forest line and I would quickly lose them. I simply could not keep up. And doing so would have compromised my research agenda. But, it was an obvious curiosity that they would always return from their excursions with a small pasture's worth of wildflowers, wooden barrels filled well above their rims with beehives (still vibrating angrily and dripping wet with golden honey). Most interestingly, they would also arrive carrying a few large, black bears nestled within their cloak pockets. The creatures, made small by comparison, could be seen resentfully accepting their powerless state, merely groaning or snarling with each enormous footfall. I cherish this memory: The Giants sweet grins filled with stone colored teeth, innocent eyes looking downward, filled with endearment (perhaps love) towards the grumpy bears.

Perhaps, soon, they will tell me of their intentions, habits. I would like to know them, fully.

As such, it came to be that I began to look forward to the Whippets' return trips. If not only to laugh. To feel ecstatic, irrational joy. I was rendered unconscious in the sensation of childhood glee. I missed them. And with each passing trip, I found that I crept closer towards their dale, growing more courageous per month. They did/do not seem to mind. It was very nice to see them goof and love on one another. Enjoying one another. I need to see them in their home.

Through this experience, I was forced to confront a deep envy. We simply do not have the connections to our own families/friends/etc. that a Noble Giant Family possesses amongst its members. They are not Other to each other (my goodness... They could not even say that). Truly, I have made a discovery that will be ignored by all, for certain. But, it seems apparent that, what at first appeared as a vapid cultural cannibalism of our civilized humanity, is actually the Noble Giants inability to distinguish between the Self and the Want, to such an extent that they do not understand our idea of Want... They are Want.

And it is also what I desire for my own life. To the point of tears. I would abandon my family. I want to abandon myself. Thus, I traverse my way down into the Whippets' dale, for the first time, tomorrow evening before they return. To greet them warmly.

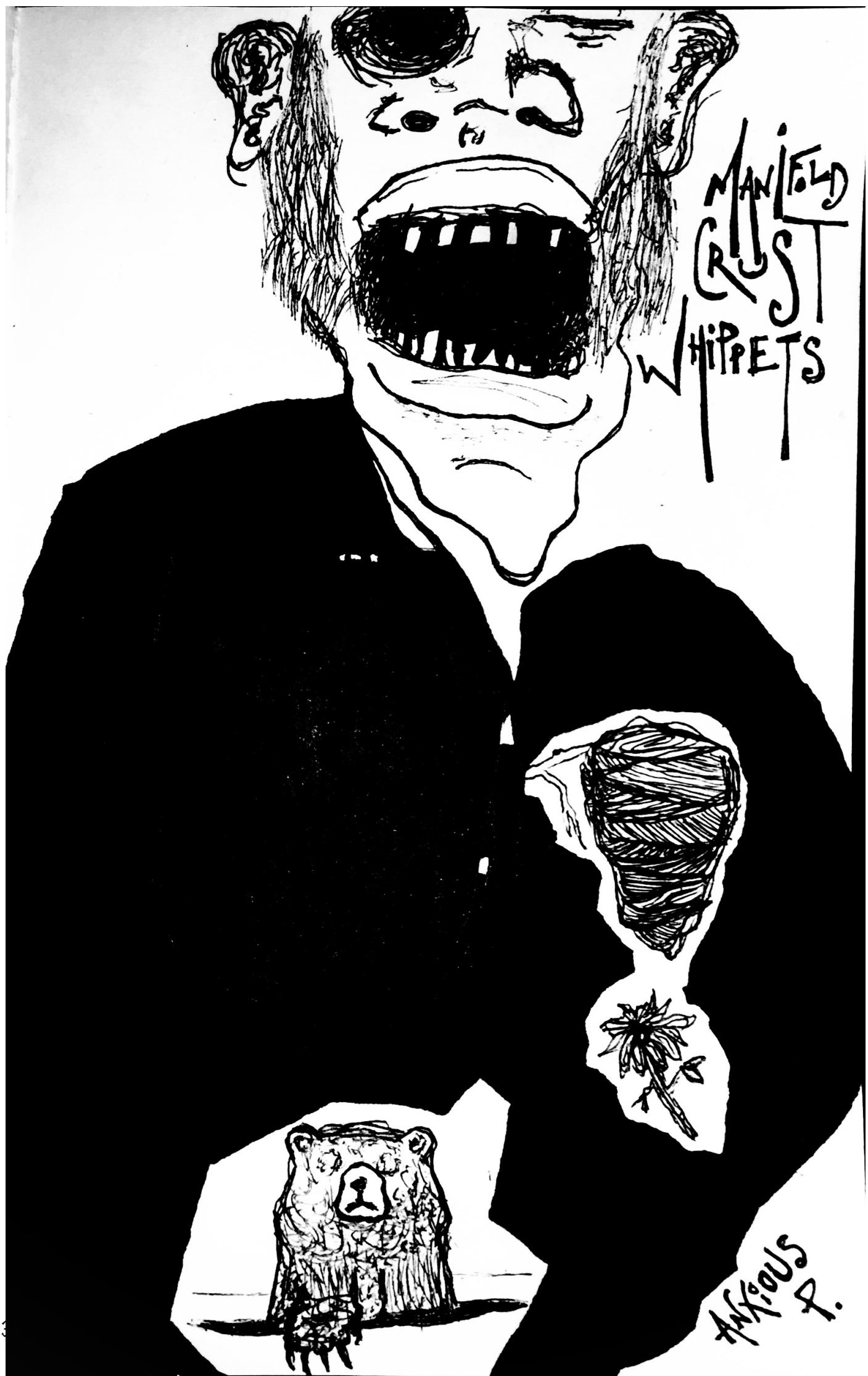
Tell them all, I love nothing.

A MOST NECESSARY REVISION

I will never recover from what I witnessed in the Whippets dale last evening. The flowers. The bee honey. The fornication of the bears. Seeing the piles of dead bears, unburied, has irrevocably unhinged my heart. For I know how they died. Anuses the diameter of sewer drains. The grass sweet and sticky, clinging to my boots. Pollen blinding my eyes with swollen ecstasy. Magnolia aroma of semen. The Aluminum of blood.

And the smiles, the Giant's smiles, they were the same. The happiness. I will never... They wanted me to witness. Now, I must run until God takes my body. It is from this that I choose not to return. I want to know what it is to Want again.

I will ensure that another is handed down my observational tasks. I do not want to pass from this mortal shell, having been the only man to witness such curses against nature. I can only hope that my successor is of stronger heart.



MANIAC
CRUST
WHIPPETS

Anxious P.



A BRIEF GUIDE ON RUNNING NOBLE GIANT FAMILIES

Giant Size-type:

Roll 1d20. Mark your number.

(Note: Each potential roll on this table is accompanied by a Giant-Human relationship description. This is a list of common societal responses, taken from collected observational resources. It is, of course, quite possible that a Giant's relationship to mankind and/or near-mankind deviates from the assumptions presented below. Social response is, at times, determined by the Giant's actions and general disposition, which could entirely depend upon what makes them peculiar in general. Feel free to include your own anomalous reports.)

1-8

15'- 20' in Height

HD 10

Armor as Chain

Attack – 2 per round

Clobber – Unarmed attack d10 damage

Anything'll Do – May improvise weapon from surroundings +4 to hit d8 damage

(Locals are familiar, if not comfortable, with the Giant's presence in the area, interaction with civilization is potentially a frequent occurrence. Depending upon the available resources, an armed opposition may be employed against the Giant(s) if necessary.)

9-13

25'- 30' in Height

HD 15

Armor as Chain +1

Attack – 2 per round

Clobber – Unarmed attack +2 to hit d10 +2 damage

Anything'll Do – May improvise weapon from surroundings +6 to hit d10 damage

(Locals are either considered disconcerted and guarded, though not overwhelmingly frightened by the Giant's presence or they are found captivated by a sublime awe over its existence. In the first case, if it is possible, the humans will retire to a nearby, preferably well-covered location until the Giant has either left or forced an interaction with the public. In the second case, individuals tend to gawk at the Giant in small groups, following its path and at barely inconspicuous distance.)

14-17

40' - 50' in Height

HD 20

Armor as Chain +1

Attack – 2 per round

Clobber – Unarmed attack +4 to hit d12 damage

Anything'll Do – May improvise a weapon from the surroundings +6 to hit d12 damage + paralysis save

(This is the fight-or-flight size, in which locals tend to either cower in fear, fleeing from any sight of the Giant, or they quickly respond with a manic and desperate, albeit impotent, hostility.)

18-20

60' - (?) in Height

HD 25

Armor as Plate

Attack – 2 per round

Flesh Boulder – Unarmed attack +6 to hit d12 damage +4

Improvisation Decimation – May improvise a weapon from the surroundings +6 to hit d12 damage +4 + paralysis save

(The Locals who choose to reside within habitable proximity to the largest of Giants have been known to commit themselves to the lifelong worship and ritual servitude of a particular Giant Family.)

Religious practices are framed according to dramatic performances/interpretations of the Giant Family's Peculiarity. Objects of sacrifice depend upon this symbolic exchange as well. i.e. if a 75 foot Giantess lies on a bed of hills near a Giant-sworn village and spends the majority of her time harvesting corn from her feet, then perhaps the villagers would

incorporate that unique characteristic into their daily activities by consuming their own foot corns, elevating the social status of the barefoot elderly and establishing the left foot as the primary sacrificial object. It's really impossible to tell without visiting. In addition, if the Giant is a recent fixture to the community's environment, it is possible that the populace will choose to abandon the area entirely.)

Family head-count:

Giant families are numerous, this is true enough. The number of members within a Giant family is usually composed of still living relatives, plucked from both the immediate and extended, thus making successful reproduction an improbable event.

To know how many members a Giant family possesses, simply consult the number previously rolled on the Giant Size table above.

1-8. 1d10

9-13. 1d8

14-17. 1d4

18-20. 1d2

NOTES

Manifold-crust whippet specific:

Regardless of size roll, this Noble Giant family lives in the seclusion of a hilled valley.

Regardless of size, their physical appearance is ghastly pale and rubbery.

There is always a 60% chance that they are present in the dale. Depending on size, this may be obvious. Otherwise, there will exist a vacated space of depressed and trampled acreage littered with large dirt mounds and the aforementioned makeshift, outdoor furniture (the sizes of these objects are contextual to the size roll). If excavated, the PCs will discover the remains of decomposing black bears (the brutality associated with their death is conceptually equal to the Giants size roll and/or Penis. Use your imagination). Withered flower petals of assorted color, shape and size will be buried into the dirt and, also, organized in loose piles across the Whippet's acreage. Intact

pieces of large beehives and other bits of natural detritus/etc. can be found, at the referee's discretion. Though, it must be noted, buried treasure is not to be considered the usual purpose of the mound's creation.

The mounds are very clustered with 15' being the greatest distance between one another in any direction.

Roll a single d6 if the Family proves to be present:

1.
The Giants are literally fucking their recently acquired bears (half the number of family members) to abysmal death. It's horrible. The End. But, in which case, the family is considered distracted and will automatically lose initiative unless circumstances demand otherwise. There will also be flower petal piles laid between the mounds of their impressive landfill (see below), swarming bees and puddles of honey are aimlessly present.

2-3.
The bears lay dead, along with the appropriate viscera. The Giant Family will be in the process of slathering one another in flowers and honey. A PC, made victim to any subsequent melee attack from a honey covered Whippet, must make a Paralyze Save or be helplessly immobilized by honey for $d2 + 1$ rounds. Taking a "honey-hit" immediately imbues the character with an immunity to the flower's magical effects (again, see below).

4-6.
The Giant family will have recently tidied up and subsequently buried the evidence of their monthly ritual. The Whippets might be masturbating, dining, bathing in the filthy and pollen-caked watering hole or simply weeping profusely, etc. They will undoubtedly be "a bit moody" and, in so many words, be Coming Down from the recent events.

Special:

The flowers, brought back to the Giant's dale, are unique while still fresh. Inhalation by an unaware character (within a 15' radius of any present petal pile) will be required to make a Magic Save versus the equivalent of a Charm spell, in which the concerned victim will abandon humanity for the company of the Manifold-Crust Whippets. This effect lasts $d6 + 2$ rounds or if the fornication of bears is witnessed.