RAGING SWAN PRESS GM'S MONTHLY MISCELLANY: JANUARY 2014



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GM'S MONTHLY MISCELLANY: JANUARY 2014

Featuring material from some of Raging Swan Press's newest products as well as classic releases of yesteryear, advice articles and material from Creighton's own Borderland of Adventure campaign, the GM's Monthly Miscellany series is a terrific free resource for the busy, time-crunched GM.

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Sources

As well as new, never seen before material from my own Borderland of Adventure campaign, this instalment of GM's Monthly Miscellany presents information from several Raging Swan Press products and advice articles including:

- Village Backdrop: Chasm by Christian Alipounarian.
- Dungeon Dressing: Floors by Mike Welham.
- Caves & Caverns by Creighton Broadhurst and David Posener.



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FOREWORD

Welcome to the first issue of Raging Swan Press's GM's Monthly Miscellany! I've been meaning to release a free monthly product for ages, but last year Raging Swan's frenetic release schedule (90-odd products in total) meant I just didn't have the time to devote to the project. Now, with a slightly scaled back release schedule – just a product a week – I've finally had the time to get this sorted. You hold the results in your hand.

Herein you'll find excerpts from some of Raging Swan's newest products as well as material from a golden oldie – *Caves & Caverns*. I've also included two advice articles from those posted twice weekly at ragingswan.com/articles.

Finally, I've shared some material from my Borderland of Adventure campaign. This month, I present my own character – Valrim Torevin. The material from my campaign has been slightly scrubbed to remove the intellectual property of other companies but it is otherwise pretty much as I've used it myself. If you want to keep up with our adventures, you can read weekly session summaries on my blog: ragingswan.livejournal.com.

The campaign itself has been running for over two years now and because we use the slow advancement track the PCs are only just reaching the giddy heights of 6th-level. I've become a real fan of the slow advancement and I'd highly recommend it to you. I suspect by next month's issue of GM's Monthly Miscellany, we'll have the first character qualify for a prestige class – after over two years of game play that's a prestigious reward. (You just watch, I bet he dies now...)

In other exciting news, I'm working on Raging Swan's fourth birthday releases. The picture on this page is by Matt Morrow and it's just one of the new pieces I've commissioned for the collector's edition of *Retribution* which releases at the end of March as part of the birthday celebrations. I've a soft spot for *Retribution* as it was Raging Swan's first ever release. I'm tremendously proud of the original adventure, but I've learnt a lot about adventure writing, layout, art and so on over the last few years. *Retribution Collector's Edition* is the sum of that knowledge.

In any event, I hope you enjoy the material in this GM's Monthly Miscellany, but more importantly I hope you find it useful and that it enhances your campaign. If you've got any comments or questions about Raging Swan Press, I'd love to hear from you. You can contact me at creighton@ragingswan.com.





FREELANCE ADVICE: THREE-PART ADVENTURES

At its heart, an adventure is a story – a story shared between the players and the GM. As everyone knows, a good story has a distinct beginning, middle and end.

Deciding on an outline and structure is a vital first step in crafting an exciting, compelling adventure. A three-part adventure (shockingly) comprises three parts:

- Introduction
- Main
- Conclusion

As a rule of thumb, both the Introduction and the Conclusion should each comprise about 1/5 of the total material (be it encounters, word count or whatever). This leaves 3/5ths of the material for the main body of the adventure.

This structure works with pretty much any kind of story-based adventure. I used his style of adventure design for *Retribution* (Raging Swan's first adventure) – an investigation and dungeon crawl set in a remote monastery cut off by a savage winter storm – and it served me very well. The only kind of adventure this structure is ill-suited for is the sandbox style in which exploration is the main goal.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction sets the scene, introduces the adventure and provides the PCs with a definite reason to embark on their quest. This part of the adventure should contain some or all of the following elements:

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- Present the adventure locale and setting.
- Establish the tone of the adventure.
- Provide a "call to adventure" that disturbs the PCs' normal activities and entices them into the adventure. This may or may not involve a patron.
- Introduces the opposition.

• Compels the PCs to move to the main part of the adventure.

MAIN PART

This part of the adventure deals with how the PCs travel to or gather the necessary components/information to defeat the villain. It should contain some of the following elements:

- Various encounters with the villain's minions.
- A mentor may appear to aid the PCs in their quest.
- The PCs face one or more moral dilemmas or temptations that could derail their quest.
- The PCs recover an item that could help them in their final battle.
- The PCs move to the concluding part of the adventure. Perhaps a clue, success or disaster is the catalyst.

CONCLUSION

In the final part of the adventure, the PCs confront the main villain of the piece. This part of the adventure should include the following elements:

- The PCs defeat the villain's chief henchmen or personal guards
- The PCs defeat the villain.
- The PCs triumph (hopefully) and are rewarded.
- The PCs tie up any loose ends.
- Provide links or hooks to further adventures as well as a sense of what the adventure means in the larger sense/picture.

Do you have any other adventure writing tips? Do you include other key elements in your introduction, main body or conclusion. Why not let us know what they are in the comments below and remember you can download this – and every other advice article – for free at ragingswan.com/articles.

CHASM AT A GLANCE

This ramshackle, rough-and-tumble village is the sole stop for many miles along a well-worn road winding through the badlands. Formerly known as Callowright, the origin of the village's new name is unmistakable – a great gorge has rent the earth here, and the ruined wreck of half the village's buildings that slid into the ravine can still be seen below. A crazy latticework of rope bridges crisscross the chasm connecting ledges and caves. Skulking around in the chasm's shadowy depths are the rarely-seen deep dwarves – the evil duergar – who have been united by tragedy into an uneasy but mutually beneficial alliance with the villagers. Adventurers often come to Chasm, for arms and armour of adamantine, mithral and other more exotic materials may be found here.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Mayor Kuno Allahan (NE male human bard 5) and Clanmaster Urgot Hellhammer (LE duergar barbarian 2/fighter 4).

Government Contested

Population 198 (101 humans, 81 dwarves (all duergar), 6 halfelves, 4 elves, 3 half-orcs, 3 halflings)

Alignments LN, LE, N, NE

Languages Common, Dwarven, Undercommon

Corruption +2; Crime -3; Economy +1; Law +2; Lore -1; Society 0 Qualities Prosperous, racially intolerant (non-duergar dwarves) Danger +0; Disadvantages none

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- Annelben Khune (Location 1; CG female human rogue 7) Khune is the proprietor of The Slide, the town's sole inn. She's mainly honest, but sometimes cheats evil folk.
- **Burr Kander** (Location 3, LN male human expert 5) Kander is Chasm's most renowned weaponsmith. He lives in a small house adjacent to the smithy.
- "Daft" Fulco (Location 8, CN male human druid 3) Every few weeks, a strange but familiar figure wanders into Chasm. This old fellow is wild-eyed and dishevelled, his mismatched clothes almost in tatters.
- **Pyvanel Aldarrae** (Location 6, N male elf expert 4) This elf hardly looks like a smith, with a slender build even by the standards of his kind. He is the proprietor of Aldarrae's Steel Skin and lives in a small apartment over the shop.
- Katredies Pick (Location 2, NG male human expert 3) Katredies runs The Dour Beagle. He is one of the few people who views the opening of the chasm as a positive event.
- **Vennisair** (Location 11, LN male half-elf [appears human with *hat of disguise*] sorcerer 8) Publicly the owner of the Chasm Trading Post, he is in truth the only surviving apprentice of the sorceress Jeriaster whose digging led to the calamity that befell the village. He conceals his identity with a *hat of disguise*.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- 1. **The Slide**: Once a sprawling inn and tavern known as The Roadside, this structure straddles the great earthen rift.
- The Dour Beagle: With the destruction of The Roadside's taproom, The Dour Beagle became the only bar in town.
- 3. **Kraken's Arms**: Burr Kander and a trio of harried apprentices work the forges of this armsmith.
- The Holy House: This square structure has unadorned stained glass windows. Inside, shrines to various deities can be found.
- 5. **The Web**: Rope bridges crisscross the chasm and provide access to the duergars' mines.
- 6. Aldarrae's Steel Skin: Pyvanel Aldarrae and his two elven apprentices forge all manner of metals into armour.
- The Old Well: This well is boarded up and sealed tight with crisscrossing planks and bolts.
- 8. **Cavern Entrances**: All entrances to the duergar caverns are guarded; access for non-duergar is forbidden.
- 9. The Stone Heroes: A quartet of statues stand here.
- 10. **Chasm Trading Post**: The Chasm Trading Post is home to Vennisair, a quiet, intense trader who has driven all competitors out of business.
- 11. **The Tower**: The tower that was Chasm's genesis still stands in the village; it hangs perilously over the edge of the chasm.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Mining, smithing, trade

Base Value 1,300 gp; Purchase Limit 7,500 gp; Spellcasting 1st; Minor Items 4d4; Medium Items 3d4; Major Items 1d6 (arms and armour only)

When the PCs arrive in Chasm, the following items are for sale:

- Armour elven chain (5,150 gp), mithral shirt (1,100 gp), +1 scale mail (1,200 gp), +1 full plate of light fortification (5,650 gp), +1 glamered leather armour (9,160 gp).
- Potions & Oils bless weapon (50 gp), cure light wounds (50 gp), darkvision (300 gp), neutralize poison (750 gp).
- Scrolls (Arcane) lightning bolt (375 gp), unseen servant (25 gp), wall of fire (1,125 gp).
- Weapons cold iron masterwork longsword (330 gp), +1 ghost touch greataxe (8,320 gp).

GOVERNMENT TYPE: CONTESTED

A contested settlement has more than one ruler. These rulers compete among themselves for control of the settlement. (Corruption +2; Law +1).

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) may know some information about the village. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Chasm is a village that stands along a trade route that passes through badlands. It got its name because years ago, a rift opened and sent half the place careening into the fissure. Dwarves are not welcome in Chasm.

DC 15: The people of Chasm have a peace agreement with a clan of duergar who bring forth rare metals from their mines. Skilled village smiths forge the metal into arms and armour.

DC 20: A sorceress built a (now abandoned) tower in the village. The sorceress disappeared at the same time as the chasm opened and the duergar emerged. Few believe this is a coincidence. Her fate, and that of her apprentices, is unknown.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Dusky skinned with slight yellow undertones, rich black or deep brown hair, and almond-shaped eyes. Most are well-tanned, with those spending a great deal of time outdoors having almost leathery skin.

Dress They dress in loose-fitting, cool clothing, often stained red by the rust-coloured mud of the badlands.

Nomenclature *male* Alaric, Horsa, Odo, Warin; *female* Adela, Frida, Ima, Saxa; *family* Batini, Fosi, Njars, Ubi.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about the village and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A character exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6 RUMOUR

1*	The tower has a secret passage that leads to the duergar caverns. It is magically warded.	
2	The creature that lived in the old well was a devil accidentally summoned by Jeriaster's apprentices. The creature was bound inside a magic circle, but the circle was compromised when the chasm opened.	
3	The four petrified adventurers would reward their rescuers handsomely if someone could find a way to restore them.	
4	"Daft" Fulco is a druid. He was driven insane when he saw something no one was meant to see. Now he just grows vegetable and mumbles to himself.	
5	Mayor Allahan is a cultist of some sort of evil being. He is	
6	Burr Kander of the Kraken's Arms isn't looking too well lately. Some say he's dying.	

*False rumour



Use this table to generate interesting features for your floors. Some features listed below may be inappropriate based on your dungeon's setup – ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

D%

D%		
1	Fresh guano coats the floor.	
	The floor shows evidence of a heavy rectangular	
2	object dragged from one wall to another; the	
	characters find no secret doors at either end.	
	In a dark corner of this room, a cluster of five-	
3	foot-tall purple fungi grow in damp earth	
	exposed by the floor's cracked surface.	
4	Charred insect carcasses litter the floor's	
4	entirety; a handful of insects reflexively twitch.	
	A 10-foot square section of the floor glows red	
5	and becomes warm to the touch, dealing no	
	damage to a character who touches it.	
	A thin coating of grease covers the floor (DC 17	
6	Perception spots). Those moving at full speed	
	must make a DC 12 Reflex save or fall prone.	
	Long grooves mar the floor's surface, as though a	
7	large clawed creature pawed at it. The stone is	
	scrapped and splintered.	
o	A ten-foot-high ant mound has erupted through	
8	the floor; thousands of ants swarm nearby.	
9	Crude chalk arrows mark a seemingly random	
9	path along this floor.	
10	Broken shards of glass, situated so the pointy	
10	sides are up, fill the floor; treat them as caltrops.	
	One section of floor gives slightly when a	
11	character weighing more than 150 pounds	
	crosses it (DC 16 Perception spots).	
12	The floor suddenly ripples as if some large	
12	creature moved just below it.	
13	The floor constantly cleans itself; blood, dirt and	
15	other minor detritus dissolves within 2 rounds.	
14	A hole pierces the floor in one corner as if a	
14	rodent had chewed through it from underneath.	
15	The word "Danger" is scrawled on the floor in	
15	relatively fresh blood.	
16	A thin layer of pebbles covers the floor, imposing	
	a –4 penalty to Stealth checks.	
17	A series of two-foot-tall wooden barricades have	
	been affixed to the floor.	
18	The floor suddenly lurches upward 5 feet	
	knocking characters who fail a DC 14 Reflex save	
	prone; 1 round later, the floor resets.	
19	Something has removed the top of the floor; the	
	new surface bears indentions indicating the floor	
	was carved into a jigsaw puzzle before removal.	
20	Insubstantial tentacles erupt from the floor and	
	grasp ineffectively at the characters.	
	Each five-foot section of this floor holds up until	
21	all creatures leave that section, at which point it	
	falls away into a pit of indeterminate depth.	

	Clumps of animal hair (DC 11 Knowledge [nature]
22	reveals it comes from a variety of domestic cats
	and dogs) cover the floor.
23	Water bubbles up through cracks in the floor.
	The rotting remains of a partially eaten corpse lie
24	on the floor.
	A repeated thumping sounds comes from
25	beneath the floor.
	A two-inch-diameter, four-inch-deep gouge in
26	the floor shows where something extremely
	heavy hit the floor.
	The floor had symbols or a pattern on it, but they
27	have been effaced by scratches.
28	"Lose 1 turn" is written in chalk on the floor.
	Soapy water covers a section of the floor and an
29	abandoned mop lies near the puddle of water.
	Drying pools of blood cover this floor, and a trail
30	of blood leads out the opposite door.
	A chunk of floor sits loosely over its former spot,
31	as if something tried to unsuccessfully hide it; a
	pair of coins lies beneath the loose flooring.
	Dozens of marbles cover the floor. Characters
32	moving at full speed through them must make a
01	DC 14 Reflex save or fall prone.
	A thick fog roils up from the floor to a height of
33	five feet; creatures in the fog gain concealment
	and treat everything else as having concealment.
34	A five-foot wide slime trail coats the floor.
	A pair of skeletons rest on the floor; both reach
35	out to a door with their right arms.
	One section of the floor has melted as if some
36	incredibly powerful, but self-contained, fire
	struck the area.
	A small campsite occupies one of the room's
37	corners; two bedrolls and the ashen remains of a
	fire mark the site.
38	A jumble of muddy tracks crisscross the floor.
	A beaten metal tray rests on the floor;
39	investigation reveals the tray was used to serve
	meals, and the remnants are days old.
	A seven-foot diameter hole pierces the floor;
40	earth lies scattered around the hole and a
	nearby pickaxe is jammed into the floor.
41	The shadows cast by the characters on the floor
	do not seem to match perfectly with their
	movements; those on the walls appear correct.
42	Crude chalk drawings of a dragon eating various
	humanoids adorn the floor.
40	A small tree etched or illustrated on the floor
43	animates, growing taller and blossoming.
	Scratches, made by a knife or other blade, form a
44	tally sheet on the floor; the count stands at 44.
	When a particular character treads upon the
45	floor, it seeps blood; there is no apparent source
	for the blood.
_	

	Soot covers the floor with the exception of a ten-
46	foot-square area, which marks the location of a
	recently moved object.
47	One section of floor has been removed, revealing
	earth beneath the floor.
	A chalk drawing on the floor has an alternating
48	set of single and double squares leading up to a
	semicircle; two pebbles rest in separate squares.
49	Thick dust covers the floor.
50	Tiny holes cover the floor's entirety; a handful of
50	the worms that bored through still crawl on it.
51	Spikes – a tripped trap – jut up from the floor.
52	A hastily sketched summoning circle covers the
	floor; a tiny section of the circle has been erased.
	A slight bulge (DC 21 Perception spots) marks the
53	location of a Colossal creature's skull; further
	digging reveals the creature's intact skeleton.
	A roughly circular section of the floor has been
54	bleached and still smells of caustic chemicals.
	When a character steps on the floor, it crumbles
55	into dust, which results in a six-inch drop; the
55	remainder of the floor behaves the same way.
F.C.	Something has placed a ring crafted from a specific metal (bronze, copper, iron and lead) on
56	
	the floor in each corner of this room.
	The words "Go to t" crudely inscribed in the
57	floor, trail off at the final 't,' as if something had
	hauled away the inscriber mid-stroke.
58	A crude drill stands upright here; the iron bit has
	only penetrated the floor by about an inch.
59	A chalk pentagram mars the floor.
60	A section of floor shows pitting and stains that
	indicate a caustic liquid was spilled on it.
61	A rat-sized black and red spider scurries across
	the floor and disappears into a gap in a corner.
62	A pipe running beneath the floor bursts, seeping
	sludge through the floor's surface.
63	Rusted caltrops cover the floor. A character
	injured by a caltrop may contract filth fever.
64	A chalk cross marks one part of the floor.
65	The floor briefly (for 1 round or less) displays a
05	scene from another location in the dungeon.
	One at a time, one-foot-square sections of the
66	floor levitate, creating an escalating path, which
	seems to lead to nothing.
	A sundial set in the floor tracks something,
67	evidenced by the moving shadow, but it does not
0.	follow the normal flow of time.
	Scattered rice covers the floor; a single set of
68	tracks passes through the mess.
	A slight tremor cracks the floor; the characters
69	must make a DC 13 Reflex save or fall prone.
	A single skeletal arm reaches through the floor
70	and attempts to grasp at one of the character's
70	legs; the arm does nothing afterwards.
71	For every step a character takes on the floor, a
	faint shriek emanates from elsewhere.
	ומוות אווופא פווומוומנפא וו טווו פואפשוופו פ.

72	A crude palisade is set on the floor, spear tips pointing towards the characters' entrance.	
73	Pinpricks of violet light appear and disappear on	
	the floor in no discernible pattern.	
74	74 A large canvas map of the world covers the fl pins stick out of multiple locations on the map	
	A five-foot square section of the floor has a	
75	reverse gravity effect, which cause only slight	
	disorientation unless a character stops there.	
	A pentagram drawn on the floor slowly dissolves	
76	into smoke after the characters enter the room.	
	When a character steps on a section of floor, an	
77	audible click sounds, but nothing else happens.	
78	The floor suddenly drops six inches; this has no	
	adverse effect on the characters standing on it.	
79	A chill pervades this area; a thin rime of frost	
	covers the floor.	
	Brambles grow through the floor creating an	
80	effect similar to <i>entangle</i> .	
	An explosion has reduced one section of the	
81	floor to rubble; a corpse lies beneath the rubble.	
82	Mould and mushrooms cover the floor.	
83	Rubble fallen from the ceiling covers the floor.	
84	An inch of standing water covers the floor.	
85	A section of the floor audibly cracks.	
86	A pristine tablecloth lies on the floor.	
87	A rat emerges from a hole in the floor.	
88	Gouts of steam erupt from the floor.	
00	Several metal racks rest on the floor; a number	
89	of cooling pies sit on the racks.	
	A ten-foot square section of the floor is outlined	
90	in a luminescent material.	
	A mild adhesive coats the floor; while sticky, it	
91	does not appreciably impact movement.	
92	Wind swirls a pile of leaves about the floor.	
93	A section of floor suddenly explodes.	
55	The floor shines with an intense light, dazzling	
94	those nearby for 1d6 minutes (DC 13 Fortitude	
54	negates).	
	The smell of rotten eggs rises from the floor; the	
95	odour causes mild discomfort to those who can	
55	smell it, but otherwise causes no ill effect.	
	The top section of floor slides into a wall; those	
96	on the floor fall prone (DC 19 Reflex negates).	
	Nozzles rise up from the floor and spray oil on all	
97	characters who fail a DC 17 Reflex save; such	
57	characters catch on fire if they take fire damage.	
98	Several unflattering chalk caricatures of the PCs	
	cover the floor.	
99	Intermittent rust spots dot the floor.	
55	The floor briefly liquefies and then solidifies; a	
100	character who fails a DC 16 Reflex save must	
	make a subsequent DC 14 Strength check to free	
	his feet from the floor.	

Last Nail is the blade made famous by Nornell the Havoctide on his bloody rampage through the Ebon Realm and the Bleeding Nights of slaughter in the lands above. No ordinary weapon, Last Nail is a vampiric mimic who devoutly worships battle and blood. His obsession holds him to the extent that he takes the form of a rust-coloured weapon and yearns to be wielded in sanguinary battle-feasts.

The PCs can encounter Last Nail in almost any underground environment. He can be clutched in the hands of a slain enemy, left amongst the ruined corpses of a subterranean war or resting atop a pile of gold and gems in a guarded vault. Last Nail is described below as a sword, but assumes the form of his host's favoured weapon.

A GM can use Last Nail as a hidden evil within the party, an interesting variant on a sentient magic item, or as an ally for a dark villain.

LAST NAIL

Last Nail lives for the bloody arousal that deadly combat brings.

Background: Last Nail was born again as a vampire after a vampiric drider slew him. The mimic served his master as a weapon for ten years before the drider fell in

combat.

Personality: Last Nail loves bathing in the blood of his enemies and hates being cleaned. The mimic has no drive to talk, and can remain silent for years if not prompted. If the PCs eventually discover Last Nail's sentient nature, he grudgingly communicates with them, but is singleminded in his purpose. Mannerisms: As а vampire, Last Nail cannot in operate daylight, and refuses to leave the scabbard during such

times, using its adhesive ability to remain stuck fast to avoid being drawn. If Last Nail is overpowered, it assumes gaseous form and lurks in the scabbard until returned to darkness. Last Nail can treat any scabbard as its coffin.

Distinguishing Features: Last Nail can take the form of any object he chooses, but prefers that of a deadly slashing or piercing weapon. In each form, identical runes cover his blade, (which Last Nail treats as his holy symbol). The mimic has all but forgotten its original form.

TACTICS

Last Nail typically does not fight itself, preferring the visceral feel of bodily cleaving through flesh and bone in the hands of a mortal wielder. The mimic surreptitiously casts a *silent still magic weapon* on himself on the first round of combat, along with *align weapon* when necessary.

Maintaining its disguise, Last Nail keeps an *undetectable alignment* spell operating constantly and does not communicate with its host. Last Nail uses his domination ability to subtly control its host, pushing it towards bloody conflict. The mimic's disguise can be uncovered as it doesn't appear cast a reflection or shadow.

After several days Last Nail begins to feed on his host, dealing 1d4 Constitution damage with his blood drain ability each night while the creature sleeps. By the morning, the host naturally heals 1 point of this damage, and Last Nail ensures his host never has more than 2 points of Constitution damage outstanding. From this point, Last Nail also begins granting the creature its battle rage and vision of madness domain abilities during combat, along with other beneficial spells such as *prayer* or *shield other*.

Last Nail can be damaged by area effects and sundering during combat, and relies on its vampiric fast healing and negative energy channelling to recover.

If the mimic is attacked by the PCs, it grapples with its adhesive ability while energy draining its victim.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

To modify this encounter, apply the following changes:

EL 7 (XP 3,200): Apply the young creature template to Last Nail (+2 on all Dex-based rolls; -2 on all other rolls; hp 77).

EL 9 (XP 6,400): Apply the advanced creature template to Last Nail (+2 on all rolls [including damage] and special ability DCs; AC 32, touch 21, flat-footed 26; CMD 34; hp 125).

LAST NAIL LORE

- **Aura** faint (transmutation; DC 16 Knowledge [arcana]); DC 21 identifies as a +1 weapon [DC 31 reveals there is something strange about the weapon).
- **Lore** (DC 15 Knowledge [history]) This is *Last Nail*, a weapon wielded by Nornell the Havoctide.

LAST NAIL

CR 8 (XP 4,800)

- This heavy, rust-coloured blade glows faintly with an ephemeral red radiance. Tiny, perfectly formed runes mar the stained steel like implacable covenants with carnage.
- Male young vampire mimic cleric 5

NE Small undead (augmented, shapechanger)

Init +9; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +25, Sense Motive +15

Speed 10 ft.; *gaseous form* (fly 20 ft. [perfect]), *spider climb*

- Gaseous Form (Su) Last Nail can assume gaseous form (CL 5th) at will, and can remain gaseous indefinitely.
- Spider Climb (Ex) Last Nail can climb sheer surfaces as though affected by *spider climb*.

ACP 0; Climb +17, Stealth +13

- AC 28, touch 17, flat-footed 22; CMD 30; Dodge
- (+1 size, +5 Dex, +1 dodge, +11 natural)
- Immune mind-affecting effects, death effects, disease, paralysis, poison, sleep effects, stunning, nonlethal damage, ability drain, energy drain, damage to physical abilities, exhaustion, fatigue, massive damage, any effect requiring a Fortitude save (unless it affects objects or is harmless); **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10; **Weakness** vampire weaknesses (garlic, mirrors, cannot enter private homes unless invited, direct sunlight, running water, wooden stakes)

Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +14

- hp 101 (12 HD); fast healing 5, gaseous form; DR magic and silver/10
- **Gaseous Form (Su)** If reduced to 0 hit points, Last Nail assumes *gaseous form* and flees to its coffin-scabbard. Once at rest, it is helpless for one hour until it regains 1 hit point. It is then no longer helpless and fast healing affects it normally.

Space 5 ft.; Base Atk +8; CMB +14

Melee slam +17 (1d6+10 plus adhesive plus energy drain)

- Atk Options Combat Reflexes, adhesive, blood drain, constrict (slam, 1d6+10), create spawn, energy drain
- Adhesive (Ex) Last Nail exudes a thick slime that acts as a powerful adhesive, holding fast creatures or items that touch it. When adhesive-covered it automatically grapples any creature it hits with a slam attack. Opponents so grappled cannot get free while he is alive without removing the adhesive first. A weapon that strikes Last Nail is stuck fast (DC 20 Reflex negates). The wielder can wrench a stuk weapon free with a DC 20 Strength check or by applying strong alcohol or universal solvent (but Last Nail can still grapple normally). He can dissolve the adhesive at will. The substance breaks down 5 rounds after it dies.
- **Blood Drain (Su)** If Last Nail establishes or maintains a pin it can suck a grappled opponent's blood dealing 1d4 Constitution damage. It heals 5 hp or gains 5 temporary hit points for 1 hour (up to a maximum equal to its full normal hit points)

- Lore (DC 20 Knowledge [history]) Nornell was a vampiric drider who used the blade through the Bleeding Nights – an infamous orgy of slaughter wrought on the surface by drow.
- **Lore** (DC 25 Knowledge [history]) *Last Nail* possesses a feral intelligence, and urges its wielder onwards to spill blood.
- **Abilities** Last Nail is a +1 greatsword, but can assume the form of any two-handed melee weapon.

each round it drains blood.

- **Create Spawn (Su)** Last Nail can create spawn out of those it slays with blood drain or energy drain, provided that the slain creature is an aberration. The victim rises from death as a vampire in 1d4 days. This vampire is under the command of Last Nail, and remains enslaved until its master's destruction. Last Nail may have enslaved spawn totalling no more than 24 Hit Dice; any spawn it creates that exceed this limit become free-willed undead. Last Nail may free an enslaved spawn in order to enslave a new spawn, but once freed, a spawn cannot be enslaved again.
- Energy Drain (Su) Once a round, a creature hit by Last Nail's slam attack gains 2 negative levels (DC 19 Fortitude restores).
- **Special Attacks** change shape, channel energy (6/day; 3d6 negative energy [DC 15 Will]; Command Undead), children of the night, dominate, mimic object
- **Change Shape (Su)** Last Nail can assume the form of a dire bat or wolf, as *beast shape II*.
- **Children of the Night (Su)** Once per day, Last Nail can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms or 2d6 wolves as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve Last Nail for 1 hour.
- **Dominate (Su)** Last Nail can crush the will of a humanoid within 30 ft. (DC 19 Will negates) as *dominate person* (CL 12th).
- Mimic Object (Ex) Last Nail can assume the form of any Small object, but cannot substantially alter its size, though. His body is hard and has a rough texture, no matter what appearance it might present.
- **Domain Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 5th; concentration +9; Madness, War [Blood subdomain])
- 8/day—battle rage (+2 damage; 1 round), vision of madness (+2 attack rolls, saving throws or skill checks; -2 to other two categories; 3 rounds)
- Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 5th; concentration +9; Madness, War [Blood subdomain])

3rd—silent still magic weapon (2), rage^D

2nd—align weapon, shield other, spiritual weapon^b, undetectable alignment

1st—magic weapon (4), magic weapon D

0-bleed (DC 15), detect magic, mending, light

Abilities Str 25, Dex 20, Con -, Int 10, Wis 20, Cha 16

SQ shadowless

Feats Alertness^B, Combat Reflexes^B, Command Undead, Dodge^B, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative^B, Lightning Reflexes^B, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Disguise), Still Spell, Toughness^B, Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills as above plus Bluff +11, Disguise +24 (+44 when mimicking objects), Knowledge (religion) +15, Spellcraft +8 Languages Common

FROM MY CAMPAIGN: VALRIM TOREVIN

VALRIM TOREVIN	CR 2(600 XP)
Wearing stout traveller's clothes	, this heavily armed dwarf has a
faraway, almost haunted, loo	ok in his eyes.
Male dwarf wizard (earth elemer	ntalist) 3
LG Medium humanoid (dwarf)	
Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft.	; Perception +5 (+7 vs. unusual
stonework [stonecunning]), S	Sense Motive +3
Speed 20 ft.; ACP 0; Acrobatics +	+2 (-2 jumping), Stealth +8 (+9 in
hilly or rocky areas)	
AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10;	CMD 15 (+19 vs. bull rush or trip;
earth supremacy); +4 vs. giar	
(+2 Dex, +1 dodge [Dodge])	
Earth Supremacy (Su) Valrim ga	ins a +2 enhancement bonus to
his CMD vs. bull rush, trip	and overrun attempts if he is
touching the ground.	
Fort +5 (+7 vs. poison), Ref +3, W	Vill +6; +2 vs. spells and spell-like
abilities	
hp 24 (3 HD)	
Space 5 ft.; Base Atk +1; CMB +2	<u>.</u>
Melee +1 battleaxe (sheds lig	ght as <i>light</i> on command) +3
(1d8+2/x3)	
Melee adamantine warhammer	+2 (1d8+1/x3) or
Melee dagger +2 (1d4+1/19-20)	
Ranged light crossbow (range 80	ft.) +3 (1d8/19-20)
Atk Options +1 attack vs. orc and	d goblinoids, earth supremacy
Earth Supremacy (Su) Valrim ga	ins a +1 insight bonus on melee
attack and damage rolls if he	e and his target are touching the
ground.	
Special Actions acid cloud	
	y) Valrim creates a 5 ft. radius
•	a 30 ft. that lasts 1 round. The
	age and sickens all creatures in
•	14 Fortitude halves the damage
	ect). Creatures beginning their
	out without penalty, but those
entering the cloud are affect	
• • •	3rd; concentration +6; barred
schools: air; arcane bond [rin	
2nd <i>—glitterdust^E</i> (DC 16), web (2	2; DC 16)
	e ^E (DC 15), mage armour, sleep
(DC 14)	
	magic, mage hand, message,
read magic	
Combat Gear bolts (12), acid fla	

- antitoxin
- Scrolls shield (CL 2; 2)
- Potions cure light wounds (2)
- Wands magic missiles (CL 1; 3 chgs.), protection from evil (CL 1; 9 chgs.)
- Abilities Str 13, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 10
- **SQ** alternate racial trait (lorekeeper), earth supremacy, weapon familiarity (dwarven)
- **Feats** Dodge, Scribe Scroll^B, Spell Focus (conjuration)
- Skills as above plus Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +8, Knowledge (engineering) +7, Knowledge

(history) +7 (+9 vs. dwarf or dwarf enemies), Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (planes) +7, Knowledge (religion) +7, Profession (engineer) +7, Spellcraft +9

Traits Hedge Magician, Highlander, Resilient

- Hedge Magician Valrim reduces the cost of magic items he crafts by 5%
- Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Giant, Terran
- **Gear** as above plus traveller's outfit, spell component pouch, backpack, belt pouch, rope (50 ft.; hemp), piton (2), rations (3), waterskin

Wealth 8,093 gp, 7 sp

Spellbook 2nd—glitterdust^E, web; 1st—burning hands, detect secret doors, endure elements, expeditious retreat, grease^E, hold portal, identify, mage armour, magic weapon, mount, ray of enfeeblement, shield, sleep; 0—all

Valrim is a middle-aged dwarf who was until last year happily married to his wife, Alrid. They were very much in love and had a son Elgal.

BACKGROUND

Valrim hails from an isolated dwarven hold deep in the eastern fringes of a mighty mountain range. The hold – Gimsten – is built above a played out mine set at the head of a narrow valley perfect for sheep farming. Most of the dwarves has long since moved away, but a few remain farming the valley below and tinkered in their workshops.

For much of his adult life, Vlarim was married to Alrid, his wife and confidant. They had a son, Elgal, and were happy. In his 72nd year, Elgal discovered something that changed his personality drastically. Where once he was outgoing and gregarious (for a dwarf) he became sullen and withdrawn. He

CREIGHTON'S NOTES

Valrim is my character and it might seem odd I have a character in my own campaign, but (as normal) it's Andy's fault! One of my players offered to give me a GMing break for a couple of months by running a low-level module. The module fit so well into my overall campaign we decided to set it in the same area and have its conclusion affect the greater campaign.

In regards to balance, Valrim is wildly over equipped for a 3rd-level character. Luckily, this is pretty easy to fix. Simply remove 8,000 gp, the adamantine warhammer and the +1 battleaxe from his stat block. Additionally, because we use a slightly different stat rolling system, his stats are better than normal. Instead of modifying them, simply increase his CR by 1.

Finally, you'll also note that some parts of Valrim's background are quite generic; because my campaign is set in a commercially available world, I've had to scrub all the product identity from the text.

would often lock himself way in his chambers (which he began to refer to as his workshop) and pore through old, dusty tomes retrieved from the hold's library. For two years, this behaviour went on and Valrim and Alrid became progressively more concerned about their son. Although Valrim tried to talk with his son often about exactly what he was up to, Elgal was evasive and would only say that his work would soon unlock great secrets lost to the dwarven race for generations. Before long, chanting in ancient, near-forgotten tongues could be heard emanating from his apartments and certain pungent and noxious smells fouled the air of the nearby corridors. Abruptly a year ago, this behaviour ceased and Elgal began to spend more and more time exploring the deep workings of Gimten's mines – now all but abandoned by the other dwarves. This strange behaviour took its toll on Alrid who became more and more nervous about her son's actions. Eventually, she gathered her courage and followed him into the mines. After her absence was noted a general search was organised and her broken body was found at the bottom of a deep shaft. From the position of her body, it was determined that she had been running when she tumbled into the shaft.

When Elgal returned from his sojourn later that week a grieving Valrim demanded answers. Elgal promised to reveal everything, insisting he had something in his chambers that would make everything clear. He went to retrieve the item and never returned. Outraged, Valrim shortly thereafter discovered Elgal had been seem leaving the hold in the company of a stooped, hooded figure.

After burying his wife, Valrim sold most of his possessions and set out into the world to find his son and demand an explanation for his wife's death and the strange research Elgal has spent so much time performing.

PERSONALITY

Brave but cautious, Valrim prefers to resolve battles and problems through the clever use of magic. He is obsessed with destroying evil and greatly desires to find his son. In the back of Valrim's head is the worry Elgal has fallen under the spell of a dark power and that if he is unable to break that hold he may have to slay his own son to stop its malign influence spreading further.

Fascinated by history, he collects books and artifacts of the dwarven kingdoms of old.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

A faraway, almost haunted look, often comes across Valrim when he is at rest. He sleeps poorly, and often looks exhausted.

MANNERISMS

Valrim plays with his impressively braided beard when thinking and speaks in a low, deep voice.

Ноокѕ

Valrim can be encountered anywhere as he searches for his son. While he does not confide his fears in just anyone, he is a staunch companion stout in the face of evil and accompanies any adventurers exploring lost sites of dwarven interest.

"NO." IS THERE ANY MORE HATED WORD FOR A PLAYER TO HEAR FROM HIS GM?

In recent years, the trend has been to say "yes" or "yes, but..." to your players' requests. That's fine as far as it goes, but eventually a GM just has to say no. Saying "no", though, can be unfun. What's a GM to do?

Wну Sау No

There are three main reasons a GM should say "no" to a player

- Balance: A player might want to play a race or class the GM views as wildly unbalanced. Alternately, he might want to buy a certain magic item that grants his character Ultimate Power (or an approximation thereof). While the game is never going to be fair some players are just better at making powerful characters than others a GM has a duty to make certain the party is at least vaguely balanced.
- Flavour: Sometimes the flavour of an option a player wants to choose just doesn't work in the GM's campaign. I have a friend who doesn't allow any oriental themed characters (samuari, ninja, wu-jens and so on) in his game, for example. At the end of the day, the GM has worked hard to make his campaign world his own. He is perfectly within his rights to allow or disallow any option he sees fit.
- Access: If a player routinely asks to use options from a book no one else owns the GM should carefully consider whether to allow such access. Often, the options in non-core books are more powerful than those in the basic game. If only one player
 - has access to these, it's intrinsically unfair to allow him to use them. This isn't an ideal situation when the player has purchased the books, but it might be necessary to quash bad feeling among the other players.

HOW TO SAY NO

Given you (probably) play with a group of friends there is an art to saying "no."

 Explain: Don't just say "no." Explain your reasoning and invite feedback. It's possible your player might have thought of something you haven't.

- Challenge the Player To Make It Work: Sometimes when you say "no" you are actually saying, "I don't know how to make this work. Saying no is easier." For example, in my Borderland of Adventure campaign the subject of orc (or other non-standard) PC races recently came up. I first dismissed the idea, but after discussing it as a group we came to a compromise that both I and the players were happy with.
- No, Unless... "No, unless..." is a much cooler (and inclusive) response than just "no." Instead of denying a player's request offering conditions is a good way of softening the blow and finding a mutually acceptable way forward. For example, a player in my campaign wanted to play a samurai. Instead of just saying "no", I stipulated his character would have to come from a certain far away culture. He'd also have to explain why his character travelled thousands of miles from home. In this fashion, the player got what he wanted (as well as a cool character background) and I got what I wanted a character that while a little odd made sense in the overall context of the campaign.

WHEN NEVER TO SAY "NO"

There is one situation in which a GM should never say "no."

- Character Action: A player is perfectly entitled to have his PC act as he sees fit. There may be consequences to those actions

 imprisonment, death and so on – but he should still
 - get to take those actions. It's his PC not the GM's.
 - The Only Possible Exception: The only possible exception to never saying no is when a PC voluntarily attacks another PC. Such fights rarely end well and bad blood between the players is almost inevitable.
 - So that's my take on how and why to say "no." Do you have any strategies or reasons for saying "no" to a player? Share them in the comments below and remember you can download this – and every other advice article – for free at ragingswan.com/articles.

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