



The Fantasy Trip™

HEXAGRAM

STEVE JACKSON GAMES ♦ Issue #4 ♦ February 2020 ♦



Welcome to Hexagram!

Welcome to *Hexagram* #4! We've got another great collection of *TFT* ideas for you, thanks to the creativity of our writers. . . .

. . . which makes this a good place for some suggestions about writing!

- Absolutely read the web page at sjgames.com/general/guidelines/authors/writing-thefantasytrip/.
- Feel free to inquire first if you think that the subject, length, etc., might put it out of bounds.
- Send to sj@sjgames.com.
- I need a Word file, either .doc or .docx. No PDFs, please. If you have a map or something of the sort, we can chat about what format is best for it.
- Title the letter with "Hexagram" and the name of the piece, not just "Hexagram Submission." I have gotten several like that, and it's too easy for me to mix them up.
- Use your full name, please!
- Read it at least one extra time before you send it, and if you can (you do have friends who play, right?), get some additional readers.

FnordCon

FnordCon is coming April 3-5. As I type this, we have 86 signed up to attend . . . plus staff, of course. We can handle up to twice that many, so join the fun and register! We want a con small enough that you get all the gaming and people-meeting that you want, yet big enough that we don't lose our shirts.

You can sign up at sjgames.com/fnordcon. See you there, I hope!

Decks of Destiny

This mega-box started reaching U.S. backers in January. International backers should see it in April. (Have I mentioned how much I hate international shipping?) At any rate, if you have not seen the big box, let us know at help@sjgames.com.

As always, thanks for your support, and we all hope you have fun reading this issue and more fun using what's in it!

— Steve Jackson

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Letters

During a dazed post-booth-duty evening at Gen Con, I wandered into a room where Kelly was running one of his *TFT* demo games. It was great fun to watch. The perfect guy to write up those guidelines.

— Stefan Jones



Hexagram #3 is so packed with great, useful information, I couldn't read it all in one day. Howard Kistler's "Legendary Artifacts" will lead to some grand adventures. Kelly Nall's "Tips for Running *TFT* at Conventions" is good advice for any GM or anyone wanting to become a GM. I'm looking forward to more amazing material in *Hexagram #4*.

— RVA_Grandpa



#TheFantasyTrip

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Headmasters and the Library of Lives

by Chris Warden

Sometimes, in the evening, a strange figure can be seen walking in the distance, casting a long shadow. It leads a chain of floating lanterns. Murmurs and mad laughter can be heard in the walker's wake. The townsfolk lock their doors and windows, for they fear that a headmaster is hunting.

The headmasters are the minions of a cult dedicated to the preservation of knowledge. They seek out learned individuals and “harvest” their minds by decapitating them. Killing the most knowledgeable men and women may seem a paradoxical way of preserving wisdom, but there’s a method to the headmasters’ madness.

The headmasters use magical cages that keep heads alive and immortal. Most of the heads lose their free will and become living repositories of the knowledge they accumulated in life. The cages, which look like lanterns, are chained together and float via an innate levitation spell. The headmaster typically holds one end of the chain in his off-hand and wields his sword in his fighting hand. Headmasters always travel with seven cages linked together. Often, not all cages are occupied. The first six heads are the headmaster’s own collection, which he calls his “portfolio,” and are chosen for the combat advantages they can give their captor. The seventh cage is always reserved for whatever head the headmaster has been sent to collect.

This seventh head is always taken to the Library of Lives – a fortified building, manned by 30 to 50 headmasters. No one can estimate how many heads they hold. The filing system is obscure and arcane. An inner circle of Librarians runs the Library. It is rumored

that they are immortal and inhuman. The Librarians communicate with outsiders via their headmaster minions.

In fact, there are several Libraries. The relationships among them are complex and changeable. Typically, a Library will be located in the territory of a tyrant who can protect the headmasters from a disgusted and terrified populace! In return, the tyrant gets information, and the occasional services of some very spooky assassins.

The symbol of the Library is a sickle.

Headmaster Stats

A typical headmaster would have ST 12, DX 16 (13), IQ 11, MA 6. Typical armor: 4 points (chainmail and Toughness).

Weapon: might be any one-handed weapon, but typically a sword . . . often a very good sword indeed.

Skills: Literacy, Writing, a weapon skill, Toughness, Tracking, and other skills of the GM’s choice. They will often know the Meal spell.

About one out of ten headmasters is a wizard. Stats are entirely up to the GM. A wizardly headmaster can cast any spell his heads possess as though he knew it himself!

Head Stats

ST 7, IQ 15, DX 12, MA 1 (if separated from the chain).

The cage provides 3 points of armor against non-ranged weapon attacks. Ranged attacks ignore armor but are -3 to hit due to the cover the cage provides.

Rules for a Headmaster Encounter

Heads do not have to have the same facing as their headmaster.

The GM should treat Headmasters and the heads as a team for initiative purposes.

A headmaster gets all the benefits of the skills his heads have. For example, a head with Tactics will give +1 on initiative rolls to the headmaster's side. The heads and the holder of the chain can cast Aid on one another without penalty. The heads will cast spells and take skill actions to help the headmaster. Treat them as a well-coordinated team. Heads will willingly go to zero ST using spells. Once unconscious, its skills and spells no longer help the "team."

Chain Breaking

To cut one of these chains in combat requires a regular DX roll with a bladed weapon. A hit doing 6 or more damage will cut through the chain; a lesser hit may damage the chain, but you won't hit it again in the exact same place, so the damage is ignored.

If the chain is cut, the headmaster can no longer use or move the cages on the far side of the cut.

Grabbing the Chain

If someone else grabs the chain, it has no effect on the headmaster's control. Grabbing a cage is a bad idea (see below). But if the chain is yanked away from the headmaster, by winning a contest of ST, the headmaster can no longer control the heads. He may attempt to regain control of it, or he may surprise his foes with an ordinary attack.

Movement

The headmaster and his portfolio do *not* occupy the same hex. Each head occupies a separate hex, and they must be a contiguous chain with no more than one hex between them. The order of the cages cannot change, though the chain can bend and turn. Following the above rules, the headmaster can move the heads freely during his movement. Headmasters will position their heads for tactical advantage.

Entering a space with a head or empty cage (or the chain between two cages) takes 2 MA. Players ending their turns in a head's hex are at -2 DX. Heads cannot be engaged in hand-to-hand combat; anyone grabbing a cage will receive a 2d shock, though striking it or brushing against it has no consequences.

A cage will still move under its master's control even if its head is dead or unconscious.

Killing the headmaster causes the heads to become will-less and unresponsive (unless they have retained their independence – see below). Removing a head from its cage allows the head to die. Note: before their first encounter, players should not know either of those things!

Running a Headmaster Encounter

Headmasters are a "scalable" foe. If you are dealing with starting characters, try running an encounter against a Headmaster with only two heads. Too many heads will get a low-point party killed. As a rough guide, a team of four starting characters should do fine against a headmaster with only two heads. The same group would find it challenging to fight three heads and would be defeated by four heads. Five heads would be a rout.

Spell selection can also make a big difference in an encounter, as can additional magic items like Powerstones. A headmaster with only four heads, all with Freeze and Lightning, would be formidable. A headmaster with six heads, all of which only know Sticky Floor, would be far less dangerous.

Lightning will make for a deadly ranged attack. The headmaster should first target opponents who have ranged attacks. Lightning can be devastating when combined with the Aid spell from another head.

Freeze is a very good spell to use, helping the headmaster “outnumber” his active foes. Stone Flesh is a solid choice if there are enough heads to support the cost of the spell.

The Wall spell and Summon Myrmidon can also be good choices: anything to stop the players from ganging up on the headmaster will make the encounter more difficult.

One thing to keep in mind is that this is a hard creature for an inexperienced GM to run. The many support spells it uses make for

a lot of bookkeeping. It would be best to have the spells written on index cards. Limiting the number of different spells to two (plus Aid) will make things easier for the GM.

Keeping track of the different heads on the hex map can also be challenging. It is a good idea to use dice for the heads and to track their ST by using the pips.

Roleplaying the Headmasters

The Library of Lives typically recruits hardened warriors who are seeking some form of redemption for past deeds. These warriors are always brave and zealous, sometimes fanatical, and do not view themselves as evil, especially since they are typically sent for victims who are older or at risk of death. They are definitely not stupid, and will talk to a strong party rather than commit themselves to a battle which guarantees their mission will fail. But they see themselves as working for the greater good, and they will break a bargain if they see advantage, with no concept of honor.



Headmasters may employ Invisibility, Teleport, or Unnoticeability spells to get into and out of places where their quarries are located. Long-Range Teleport is usually not an option due to its high IQ requirement. However, the Library may provide a capable head in rare circumstances.

Almost everyone will view a headmaster and their collection of heads with fear and loathing. Even monsters tend to avoid them. Use the same reaction rules that you would for zombies. A headmaster can stow their portfolio of heads somewhere hidden, but they are hesitant to do so unless they must go into society.

Virtually any skill is available for learning at a Library of Lives, if one gains favor with the headmasters. For the right price, one can even “check out” a head and use its skills. But heads must be returned promptly. Late penalties are harsh and strictly enforced.

Roleplaying the Heads

In combat, the heads will not speak. Out of combat, if a headmaster is negotiating, he may allow his heads to speak. Some heads will seem to retain their old personalities, while others will show no expression and talk in a drone.

The only way to restore a caged head to human life is a Greater Wish. A Lesser Wish can restore a head to full sanity and consciousness, but it will still rely on the cage for survival.

A head must make a 5/IQ roll when first captured. If the roll is failed, the head is truly controlled by the one who placed it in the cage, or any subsequent headmaster or librarian.

If the roll *succeeds*, the head remains fully aware and in control. It is up to the head at that point whether to reveal itself and be a

willing slave of its captor, or to conceal its mental freedom. Most such heads eventually go insane anyway and fall under their captor’s control. A few agree with the headmasters’ philosophy and enjoy their lives of immortal adventure!

Headmaster Magic Items

Should the adventurers defeat a headmaster and lay the heads to rest, they are left in possession of some very valuable items – items that only the Library can make. But selling them points a finger at the headmaster’s killer, and the nature of the items presents a moral quandary!

Lantern Cage: any head that died in the last hour can be kept alive by being placed in such a cage. It will have ST 7, DX 12, and IQ from life. It will retain all spells and skills from life. The cage levitates and moves as its “owner” pulls it along. The metal glows with a dim, bluish glimmer, though it goes dark if the cage takes damage. At a distance a cage looks like a lantern; up close, the undead features of the head within are illuminated in ghastly fashion. A five-foot chain connects each cage to the next.

An Armourer or Mechanician can make a 3/DX roll to remove a cage from the chain, but anyone who fails suffers a 2d electrical shock!

A cage is primarily silver and worth \$800 for the metal. An undamaged one, still glowing, might sell for \$5,000 or more to a collector. The price of a cage with a living head still inside is entirely up to negotiation; such a thing is a wonder, a miracle, and an abomination.

No one but a Headmaster can use the cage’s powers to preserve a head.

Silver Chain: The chains that connect the cages are five feet long. They are silver, to avoid interference with the heads' magic. The chains place the caged heads under the control of the headmaster; if he loses hold, he cannot use the heads.

A chain is worth \$500 as metal; an undamaged one might be worth more due to its workmanship.

Adventure Seeds

The Rebel Head: The wizard Ra-Lee, head #3 in the portfolio of the headmaster Thorgeirr, pretends to be compliant, but he is in full control and doing his best to escape. While his headmaster sleeps, he gets the other heads to give him ST so he can cast Astral Projection on himself. Using Astral Projection and Telepathy, he sends short messages to the heroes, begging for help. If they try to free him, make an IQ roll for Ra-Lee every turn. If he succeeds, he fights for the heroes with his Lightning spell (DX 15); if he fails, he follows his captor's instructions.

If the heroes manage to defeat Thorgeirr, they must still restore Ra-Lee. If they do so, this powerful and strong-minded wizard will be in their eternal debt.

A Favor For a Favor: A wealthy miner is seeking ancient lore regarding the smelting of ore. She hires the adventurers to seek out the Library of Lives and negotiate with the headmasters for the information. But the headmasters ask for a service. They want the heroes to help them "collect" a powerful local baron who has proven to be beyond their reach. The baron is corrupt, downright evil, and all agree that his head deserves chopping, but he is very well guarded.

Not Our Fight: An eccentric mechanic named Sordine has learned that the headmasters are after his head. He hires the heroes to protect him, preferably by following rumors of headmasters in the area and attacking them first! What the inventor and the heroes do not know is that Sordine's rival Selat is the real target. When Sordine finds this out, he orders the heroes not to interfere. What should they do now?

It's Better Than Being Dead: A friend of the characters, a local scholar named Orios, has gone missing. His headless body is found at the edge of the town. The characters must hunt down the headmaster who took his head. But, atypically, the headmaster is willing to let his "portfolio" speak. Perhaps Orios is happy in his new position, or at least accepts it? After all, his back does not hurt any more. Should they fight, or just wish Orios well in his new career? (Alternatively, perhaps Orios was murdered by an old enemy who took his head to cast suspicion on a headmaster who was known to be nearby.)

The Ghost Lantern Ruins: A remote ruin is the haunt of seven heads. Their headmaster died of a fever, and in his delirium he removed the chain and ordered the heads to "go home." The result is seven conscious but slightly mad floating heads that can mentally direct their cages to move at a hex per turn. The party might stumble across them while adventuring, or be sent to investigate weird sounds and lights from the ruin. The heads might be a few years or a few centuries old. They almost certainly know valuable lore. They are sane enough to be aware of their circumstances and wish to live; a couple of them, in fact, are interesting people. They are all happy enough in their bodiless state, but none wish to return to headmaster slavery!



The Ensemble Campaign

by James Eisert

Much of the beauty of *The Fantasy Trip* is the detail of the combat system. It truly captures the old-school feel of death at every corner. Battles are never trivial, as even the weakest of opponents can seal your fate. The dice play God.

But some game masters may have trouble in transition from the “Attaboy, try again” modern style of play to *TFT*’s paradigm of bitter fate. Try as they may, they can’t seem to level out the lethality of *TFT* to make it work for an ongoing campaign. The stories stop midstream like a favorite show canceled halfway through a season.

Some GMs attempt to tweak rules in order to subvert the mortality rate, with patches like extra defenses, extra hit points, “hero points,” and the like. At best, these take away the tension that makes *TFT* exciting; at worst, they break the system outright.

The solution is an *ensemble campaign*.

Most roleplaying campaigns feature three to six players, each portraying one personality for the whole story arc. If one of the key players dies, the whole story can collapse. Therefore, modern games have many “get out of death free” cards to avoid this.

In an ensemble campaign, however, players know ahead of time that they will be playing multiple roles. Many, many roles, in fact.

The campaign may start an adventure with 3-6 characters as normal, but in true *TFT* fashion, they will come back bloody and fewer.

In a typical modern RPG, heroes this beat-up would go back out in short order. In *TFT*, things are different. Healing can take weeks and magical healing is expensive. So the party rests.

This is the pivotal point of an ensemble campaign. In a normal campaign, having the plot on hold for weeks may not work. The enemy forces are near; the assassin is almost at the King’s castle.

This is the time for the camera to fade to black and start the next scene or episode. The focus jumps to fresh characters, and the story continues somewhere else.

Of course, those who are resting can still be roleplaying while they are waiting for their next turn in the spotlight. Even while healing, they can get involved in roleplaying encounters in between the other PCs’ combat scenes. This is a great way to change the tempo for a bit before ramping it back up again.

And the campaign goes on, starting a new thread here, continuing an older one there. Character arcs and plot points will overlap as the original protagonists find themselves thrown back into action with new PCs to interact with. This allows for effortless creation of fresh back-stories. If you’re tired of the “your characters meet in the Inn” trope, the ensemble campaign is your caffeinated antidote.

Can you see a pattern? The action switching between scenes? Characters that are out of the heat of battle, but still involved in the story? It should sound familiar, because many of the great stories we read and watch use the same method.

The ensemble campaign emulates this style of storytelling. *The Fantasy Trip* creates the blissful anxiety behind every action. Together, they are a formidable tool to create moments that your players will tell and retell.

Suggested Reading and Viewing:

Game of Thrones. Seasons 1-3, HBO, 17 Apr. 2011.

Perez, George. *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. DC Comics, 1985.



A Band of Rogues

by Joseph Zakszewski

As a DM, I often find myself needing an NPC, or a new PC, on short notice. They might be rivals, enemies, or just other adventurers for the party to interact with. This article provides four complete starting *TFT* characters with complete backgrounds to drop into your own game as needed. Ideas are included for advancing them in the event you need slightly more powerful characters. These adventurers are all young (~16 in human years), and all are more or less on the run from someone back home. For those of you who read “No More Orphan Murder Hobos,” these are the characters created in that process. They have been allotted 2 free points to be used for job skills, languages, literacy, or area knowledge. This adds flavor to character background, and insures that multi-racial parties can all speak the same language.



Ayla Daxsa

ST 9, DX 14, IQ 9, MA 12

Talents: Bow (2), Missile Weapons III (3), Sword (2), Elven (0), Elyntian (0), Quick Draw Sword (1), Brawling (1), Area Knowledge (Elven woods) (0)

Weapons: Small Bow 1d-1, 2x per turn, Rapier 1d-1, Dagger 1d-1

Other gear: backpack, belt pouch, rations, labyrinth kit, camping gear, 4 healing potions, 20 arrows.

Ayla Daxsa is an elven archer who is on the run from an arranged marriage. She has just turned 80, the age of adulthood. Standing

under five feet, and around 90 lbs, she is almost childlike in appearance. Her long silver hair and violet eyes make her stand out, but her features are rather plain, despite her exotic coloring.

Ayla's father, Dax Zinfir, is a renowned jeweler, and her mother, Alea, is an herbalist. Both are well-known in and around Elfwood. Many wealthy families own priceless heirlooms created by Dax, and Alea is a reliable supplier of magical components and potions to mages all over the county. Neither Ayla nor her older brother Orym had any interest in following in their parents' footsteps. Orym left the woods several years ago to see the world, and has found work as a mercenary archer, often hunting and skirmishing with the Black Tail Orc raiders in the Gargoyle Mountains. This was the path Ayla wished to take, but her parents, determined to secure the family legacy, betrothed her to Veln Tenfir, the eldest son of Tiel Kosfir, one of Elfwood's wealthiest merchants.

Unfortunately for everyone involved, Veln is a terrible boor, and on the day of her wedding, Ayla was already in Osley, having fled the night before with the aid of her cousin Zalk Tikfir, a ranger serving in Elfwood. Both families are angry and embarrassed, and Veln's best friend Girn Delfir, an armorer of some repute, has vowed to bring Ayla back to the wood to be properly married to his friend. Both families' businesses will likely be affected by this scandal.

Life in the world outside Elfwood has been strange and problematic for the young elf. She paid no attention to her studies, preferring archery, swordplay, and roughhousing. She is quite ignorant of the ways of the world, and has run into trouble by taking food when she is hungry, but not knowing enough to pay. She has been chased off Bren Cordley's farm outside Dranning, and narrowly escaped arrest by Trederick Barnes, a guard in Dranning, when she helped herself

to a particularly tasty tart in the market. Barnes will be watching out for elves in the market, hoping to redeem himself by bringing Ayla to justice.

Many of Ayla's problems stem from her poor judge of character and her choice of companions. In Osley, she became friendly with Jak Smaldon, the captain of the guard, but was oblivious to his advances and jilted him. She also met Grumpul, a raffish goblin youngling who had just completed his basic magical studies. While Grumpul's behavior often makes Ayla uncomfortable, his keen intellect, confidence and grasp of magic all fascinate Ayla. Grumpul hopes to use Ayla's connections in Elfwood to make some easy money.

Traveling to Dranning, Ayla met her other two companions – Dexter Marlingspike, a halfling, and Cron, a mercenary. Because of their age and size, Ayla tends to regard Dexter and Grumpul as children, and is rather protective of them. She respects Cron as a fellow warrior. While she has always sought excitement and adventure, the pace of the human world is rather bewildering to Ayla, so she looks to her companions for guidance and direction, following them into trouble and generally making poor life choices.

If you need a higher point character, Ayla's progression could be as follows:

1. Add 1 ST (10); replace short bow with horse bow, replace rapier with saber. She can fire the horse bow twice per turn.
2. Add 1 ST (11); add a longbow. She can only fire it once per turn.
3. Add 1 DX (15); remove horse bow. Ayla can shoot the longbow twice per turn.
4. Add 1 IQ (10)
5. Add 1 IQ (11)

Future Advances

Add adventuring skills: Physicker, Naturalist, Running, Climbing, Swimming, or Horsemanship for a bit more versatility. For a more martial melee build, add Fencing. At this level Ayla might have acquired a finely made sword or some magic arrows.

Combat tactics: Stay out of melee. Freely shoot through friends to hit enemies. When engaged, fast-draw sword and defend. Count on companions to help. Disengage as soon as possible, with a DX 14 she will generally be able to kite enemies, disengaging before they can attack. If she has to fight, she will dirty fight in HtH.

Grumpul Spitskin

ST 8, DX 11, IQ 13, MA 10

Spells: Blur, Lock/Knock, Staff, Staff II, Staff III, Staff to Snake, Rope, Reverse Missile, Silent Movement, Repair, Avert



Talents: Knife (2), Literacy (0), Elyntian (0)
Weapons: 2 silver daggers (one with Staff III enchantment)

Other gear: Backpack, belt pouch, labyrinth kit, 5 healing potions.

A young Goblin mage who recently completed his magic studies in Osley, Grumpul foolishly gave his word to his father that he would pay back every silver of his tuition. After a semester of school in Dranning, Grumpul sought out cheaper alternatives, spurning his instructors and finishing his classes in Osley, stubbornly refusing to learn the Aid spell. Unwilling to serve as an apprentice, Grumpul is seeking a way to pay off his father quickly . . . most likely through

some kind of theft or illegal activity. Grumpul is as bound by his word as any other goblin, but he is not honest!

Headquartered in Bridgefort, the Grumpul family runs a small trading company with barges that sail the Bright River to Podliforku, and wagons that move goods across land from Bridgefort to Kell and Dranning. His father takes care of business and Mother handles security. Questions about Ogre ancestors in Mother's family tree should not be spoken in the presence of *any* Grumpul.

Rejarii, an uncle who knows how to have fun and get out of trouble, handles business in Podliforku, and has been a big influence on Grumpul and his triplet brothers, Grumpul Stickskin and Grumpul Splitskin. Grumpul Stickskin has worked deals with the wild Hobgoblins, Orcs, and Goblins south of the river, paying protection money, and giving them info on their competitors schedules. Similar arrangements have also been made by Grumpul Splitskin with unsavory elements (Orcs and bandits) around Dill.

Grumpul is not aware of his brothers' dealings, but watching how Rejarii does business, Grumpul is convinced that he can gather a crew and oversee a big "score" to clear his debt and establish himself comfortably. Stealing longevity potions from the Elves with the help of Thomas Herrick, an instructor mage, is his number one plan to quick riches. Thomas helped Grumpul graduate, and Grumpul is in his debt.

In his travels from Osley to Dranning, Grumpul has made the acquaintance of Basil Longears, a Goblin merchant from Terrik, who is rather interested in Grumpul's schemes. He realizes, though, that nearly everyone else Grumpul has met has ended up on the losing side of their transactions. Grumpul is exceptionally good

at crafting phrases and contracts that result in someone getting thoroughly fleeced.

His victims include Ayla's cousin Zalk. Ayla is not aware of this and would be most unhappy, as would her family to learn of her companionship. Other patsies include Gorm Tarrington, the Swine Lord of Horst, and Torvald TwinBeard, a dwarven smith in Tore who failed to read the purchase agreement for Grumpul's silver daggers carefully. Torvald took his fleecing poorly, and tried to recover his lost money in court, only to find the contract was ironclad, adding public humiliation to his monetary losses.

Master Arnuff, an instructor at the Magic Academy in Dranning, was Grumpul's first teacher, but having been insulted by Grumpul's leaving his school, this powerful mage would enjoy seeing Grumpul fail. Another mage who hates Grumpul even more is Farria Everlorn, an arrogant elven noble-mage, who lost several duels to Grumpul in school.

Three literal heavy hitters looking to take Grumpul down a peg are Wurok Aonaab, Torm, and Dhorg Skullsmasher. Wurok (the big lizard) is a Reptile Man guard of Father Grumpul who has bullied Grumpul for most of his life, believing Grumpul to be useless to Father and the company. Torm is a Fae knight in the Huldre forest who has been embarrassed by Grumpul more than once, and would like to even the score. Dhorg is an Orc chieftain who sometimes trades with the Grumpuls, sometimes robs them, and sometimes demands protection money. He will rob Grumpul if he gets the chance.

After finishing school, Grumpul was busy burning bridges and running out of friends in Osley when he met Ayla. Tall, naïve, and gullible, Ayla made an excellent companion. The pair traveled to

Dranng where they befriended Dexter, who always seemed to be surrounded by women, and Cron, an aspiring guard who appreciated the company of those women. Recognizing them, respectively, as a fellow businessperson and a useful meat shield, Grumpul involved them in his plans to get rich.

If you need a higher point character, Grumpul's progression could be as follows:

1. Add 1 DX (12); Grumpul's casting will improve quickly.
2. Add 1 ST (9); Grumpul is still growing!
3. Add 1 DX (13); Better for casting, stabbing, and skulking about.
4. Add 1 IQ (14)
5. Add 1 IQ (15)

Future Advances

Grumpul will add ST to his staff (up to IQ), and learn Staff of Power. Other spells to add would include Lightning, Shadow, Curse, Illusion, and Weapon/Armor Enchantment.

Combat tactics: Grumpul is clever, but weak. He must avoid damage and choose his castings carefully. If there is any personal danger, he will cast Reverse Missiles, Blur, or Avert, followed by Staff to Snake. The snake's attacks will bypass armor and deliver consistent damage while engaging foes. He may use Blur to buff Cron, Dexter, or Ayla if they are in danger. The Rope spell is excellent for neutralizing strong, low DX foes. He can Repair broken weapons . . . preferably not during combat! Repairing and recasting his Staff spell will be a priority if the snake is killed. Grumpul usually has healing potions and will use them for fatigue if a fight goes badly. He will cut and run – or surrender – rather than getting killed in combat.



Dexter Marlinspike

ST 4, DX 15, IQ 11, MA 10

Talents: Elyntian (0), Dancer (0), Thrown Weapon (0), Dagger (1), Quick Draw Dagger (1), Weapon Expertise (Dagger) (3), Two Weapons (2), Detect Traps (2), Silent Movement (2), Streetwise (1)

Weapons: 10 daggers (1d includes +1 for Expertise)

Other gear: two fancy bandoliers for daggers, two sets of upper-class clothing, belt pouch, rations, two healing potions.

Dexter Marlinspike is a boylike Halfling, charming on the outside, but rotten on the inside. As a youth growing up on the docks in Podliforku, Dexter has mostly fended for himself. His father, Roderick Marlinspike, is a fisherman, overly fond of whiskey and dice but less fond of actually working. Roderick is currently indentured on a fishing ship owned by Billy Bass, a local crime lord. Violently press-ganged into the crew, Roderick will likely be worked to death before he pays his debts. And when that happens, Billy will look to Dexter or his mother Loren for the rest of the money. Loren cares little for Roderick, spending her nights working at The Cod, a local dive bar, as a server, and supplementing her income plying the world's oldest profession. Dexter's older brother Albert left home when Dexter was a child, and has not been heard from since. Loren claims Albert is a scholar, but that may or may not be true.

Dexter is small, even for a Halfling, and learned at an early age that a blade evens the odds when you are 3 feet tall and only weigh

60 pounds. Dexter's charm, and his ability to fight despite his size, endears him to warriors and to women, and most of his contacts fall into those two categories. A night of drunken revelry has left his lover, Lydia Paynte, with child. Dexter has decided to leave Podliforku for a year or two. Lydia's father Donal is itching to get his daughter married properly. Donal and his dockworker friends will be very interested in Dexter if he returns.

In Dranning, Dexter befriended Sunda Kastigir, a foreign mercenary who would be a skilled fighter if he could stay sober, and Cron, another tough guy with lady troubles. The halfling also tried to convince Ayla to join him in a business venture, but instead she offered to work as his bodyguard, bringing along her little green friend Grumpul.

This merry band of adventurers has settled into the village of Bendwyn to look for work. In the short time they have been there, Dexter has run afoul of Enrico Pallazo, a wannabe thief, and Max Beerfoam, the guard sergeant, when a tavern brawl turned into a knife fight. Dexter talked his way out of trouble, but Kashi O'Tore will remember Dexter every time he feels the knife scar Dexter left on his cheek.

Future Advances

As a halfling, Dexter begins at 30 attribute points, so he can raise his attributes more easily than other races.

1. Add 1 DX (16); better throwing, especially for trick shots.
2. Add 1 DX (17); ditto.
3. Add 1 DX (18); ditto.
4. Add 1 IQ (12); more sneaky skills.
5. Add 1 IQ (13); ditto.

Dexter might take more social or thieving talents, or even learn a spell or two. Charisma, Carousing, Bard, or Diplomacy would help Dexter make even more friends. Pickpocket, Remove Traps, or Assess Value would help his career as a rogue. Spells with a low ST cost, like Friendship or Look Your Best, might benefit him. Dexter would spend some of his ill-gotten gains in Fine or Very Fine Daggers to increase his damage.

Combat tactics: Dexter cannot afford to be hit even once. Against unarmored foes he will gleefully throw a knife every turn, or sneak up behind them and attack twice. Against foes who are armored and engaged, Dexter will attempt a shrewd blow for extra damage. If he is engaged he will defend and parry and attempt to disengage, unless he is certain to be able to lay out his foe. With Knife Expertise and Two Weapon skill, he is *extremely* hard to hit in melee.



Cron Karsten

ST 10, DX 12, IQ 10, MA 10 (6)

Chainmail and Shield protection
(stops 4 hits)

Talents: Sword (2), Shield (1),
Literacy (0), Elyntian (0), Area
Knowledge (Dranning) (0), Quick
Draw (Sword) (1), Alertness (2),
Acute Hearing (2), Carousing (1)

Weapons: Saber 2d-2, Knife 1d-1

Other gear: backpack, labyrinth
kit, rations, wineskin, two torches,
lantern, two molotails, upper-class
clothing, two healing potions.

From the moment Cron was born, he was destined to be a guardsman in service of the Duke of Dranning. His older brother Taun was a guard, his uncle Maun was a senior guard, and his father was a captain in the guard. But fate often has a way of meddling in the ways of man. For Cron, fate took the form of the Sunspear family. Four brothers, all bigger and meaner than Cron. Thorin, Warin and Jorin always seemed to be around to give Cron trouble during training. When Torin, the youngest of the Sunspear family began training with recruits, Cron knew it was time for a change of scenery.

Cron's opportunity came when his mother passed away. His uncle Allano, a caravan guard from Bridgefort, came to Dranning for the funeral and offered to help Cron get work in Bridgefort. His problems seemingly solved, Cron celebrated with wine, women, and dice. Maybe Cron didn't know that the beautiful woman he left the tavern with was Kile Gronic.

Kile's mother and father, Jerald and Shanna, had gone to great lengths to encourage Warin Sunspear to court Kile. Jerald is only a stable keeper, and Shanna just a milkmaid, but they are serious when they say they plan to unman Cron if he doesn't marry their daughter. And the Sunspear brothers will be all too glad to help!

For his trip to Bendwyn, Cron joined with Ayla, an elf who reminds him just a little of Kile, her obnoxious green friend Grumpul, and Dexter. Cron is impressed with Dexter's ability to fight despite his small size, and the Halfling makes a great drinking buddy. Bendwyn seems like a good place to spend some time, even if Cron keeps losing his coin to Gindron Browning . . . a terrible gambler, except when he plays with Cron.

Future Advances

1. Add 1 ST; buy a shortsword
2. Add 1 DX; big jump in combat effectiveness
3. Add 1 ST; buy a broadsword
4. Add 1 DX; adj DX 12 with armor
5. Add 1 IQ.

More Advances: Add Crossbow Talent and levels of Missile Weapons, or Shield Expertise and Toughness to add range capabilities or tankiness. Horsemanship, Swimming or Climbing all have uses for an adventurer. A fine blade should be on Cron's wish list, as should a suit of plate or even fine plate if he falls into some serious silver.

Combat tactics: Having had basic guard training, Cron knows that his place in the party is "meat shield." With two skilled missile-weapon users and a wizard behind him, all Cron needs to do is focus enemy attention on himself for a little while. Grumpul will stay close behind Cron and protect his human shield with a Blur spell. Enjoying this added protection, Cron is perfectly willing to advance at half move and Dodge or Defend, counting on his chainmail and shield to stop any lucky hits while his friends behind him score the kills. It's just as well that he does not realize how quickly the goblin and halfling would abandon him if he went down . . .





Kicking Down the Door

by David Pulver

The first obstacle most adventurers encounter is the humble door! This article expands on the existing rules for forcing open a “regular” door (*ITL*, pp. 71-72) to cover doors and gates of varying strength, and also details the combat options required to open or close a door during a fight.

The Nature of Doors

The “regular door” in *TFT* is a stout wooden door with metal hinges, perhaps an inch or so thick. Such a door uses the rules defined on *ITL* pp. 70-71 to force open or destroy.

A regular door is treated as having 30 hits when attacked by missiles, axes, etc., so it’s referred to in this article as a ST 30 door. In a labyrinth, building, etc., assume any door is a regular door unless otherwise mentioned.

You can quickly define the toughness of other doors by giving them higher or lower ST scores (and also specifying how wide they are, and their locks, if any). For instance, a heavy ironbound door might be ST 60, while a city or castle gate might be ST 120 to ST 240. On the other hand, a thin sliding door might be only ST 15.

In the Labyrinth describes several different ways to get through a regular door, each with its own rule. Let’s take a look at how changing a door’s ST affects each method!

As mentioned, a regular door has ST 30 when it is attacked with blunt or chopping weapons (axes, clubs, hammers, your feet, etc.) or with missile spells, petards, siege catapults, or grenades. For the rules

on doing this, see *Missile Spells Can Help* and *Total Destruction* (*ITL*, pp. 70-71). Destroying the door with any such method is just a matter of reducing ST to zero. Realistically, however, a door should also have some armor, so that a ST 6 halfling or goblin can’t bash one open with a tiny club! A regular door stops 2 hits/attack. Tougher doors and gates stop more: a rule of thumb is the portal’s ST/15 or 8 hits, whichever is less. Round up.

It’s possible to force open a door on a successful ST roll. Prying it open with crowbars (see *Crowbars Can Help*, *ITL*, p. 71) requires tools and a 3/ST roll. Similarly, brute force (*Knocking the Door Open*, *ITL*, p. 71) by slamming into it with a shoulder, feet, or battering ram requires a 5/ST roll (if using a ram, against the wielders’ combined ST). If the door isn’t a regular ST 30 door, assume the ST roll is (door ST/10) dice to pry it open, or two ST higher to knock it open, rounding up to the nearest die. Thus, a ST 60 door would be 6/ST to pry and 8/ST to knock open.

An alternative to totally destroying the door is to burst it open through the sheer impact of missile spells (or siege artillery or explosions). The regular ST 30 door will burst open after taking 10 hits from a missile attack. Assume higher or lower ST doors will burst open if any single attack inflicts at least 1/3 their ST in damage (before applying armor). Thus, a ST 60 door would burst open if a hit by a Lightning Bolt, etc., rolled 20+ damage.

Then there’s fire. The *Total Destruction* rules say that carefully dousing a door in oil and setting it ablaze would take 10 minutes for a ST 30 regular door. Assume other doors require ST/3 minutes to burn. (Note that this is generally impractical in sieges, as defenders could dump sand, etc., to douse the flames.)

Sample Doors and Gates Table

Portal Type	ST	Burst	Pry	Knock	Burn	Armor	Notes
Light Door	15	5	2/ST	4/ST	5 minutes	1	light sliding door
Regular Door	30	10	3/ST	5/ST	10 minutes	2	standard TFT door
Heavy Door	60	20	6/ST	8/ST	20 minutes	4	a reinforced or 2 hex version of the above
Light Gate	90	30	9/ST	11/ST	30 minutes	6	manor, walled village, tower, or postern gate
Regular Gate	120	40	12/ST	14/ST	40 minutes	8	small castle, small fort, or walled town gate
Heavy Gate	180	60	18/ST	20/ST	60 minutes	8	a large castle, walled city, or fortress gate
Great Gate	240	80	24/ST	26/ST	80 minutes	8	great city, or a mighty castle or fortress gate

ST: The door's basic ST. This is also the hits required to destroy it with axe/mace or grenade, or petard, or blow it to fragments with a missile spell or siege artillery (see *Missile Spells Can Help* and *Total Destruction*, **ITL** p. 71).

Burst: The damage needed to burst it open with a missile spell (see *Missile Spells Can Help*, **ITL**, p. 71) or catapult type siege artillery. The GM may also rule that this applies to the blast of a petard, grenade, or blast gem.

Knock: The roll to knock it open (see *Knocking the Door Open*, **ITL**, p. 71) with brute force or combined ST of multiple people using a ram.

Pry: The roll to pry it open with a crowbar. Two people using crowbars can combine their ST.

Burn: The burn time when using molotails (see *Total Destruction*, **ITL**, p. 71).

Spells, Spikes, and Bars

Lock spells further strengthen doors and gates as detailed on **ITL**, pp. 70-71. *Spiking* a door has the effect detailed under *Keeping a Door Closed*. It increases the door's ST by 5 per spike (up to a maximum of 10 spikes) for most purposes, except armor or resistance to fire.

Barring a door is equivalent to spiking it; assume an iron bar weighs 1 lb. for each ST 5 (equivalent to one spike) it adds, to a maximum of +50 ST; for multi-hex gates or doors, multiply this by the bar's length in hexes. Unlike a spike, it just requires a Change Weapon

or Ready Weapon option to attach or remove a bar from the barred side. But a bar for a heavy gate might require a few men to lift!

Opening or Closing a Door in Combat

Figures with a free hand or who drop their ready weapon can open adjacent doors or turn keys by taking the Change Weapon and Ready Weapon options; instead of changing a weapon, they open the door. A figure can also kick shut a closed door during a Move action with the same difficulty as picking up a dropped weapon; use the *Action During Movement* rule (**ITL**, p. 104).

That's the simple rule; GMs who want considerably more detail can use the following guidelines:

If a door is shut but not locked (or there's a key in the lock on your side of the door), opening or closing it requires the same effort as a Ready Weapon option if you're disengaged or a Change Weapon option if engaged. You need one hand free; you can drop a ready weapon as part of the option. If the door you're trying to open turns out to be already locked or jammed (spiked, barred, etc.), you instead rattle it and realize it's stuck.

If you want to physically lock or unlock a door, you'll need a key ready. Again, you can ready (or put away) a key just like readying or changing a weapon.

If you already have the correct key in hand, the GM may assume that inserting the key and opening it requires the same effort as opening a door, as detailed above. However, if you're already engaged, the GM may require a 3/DX roll to avoid dropping the key! If the lock is old and rusty, the GM may require two turns worth of actions: one to insert the key, another to open or lock the door.

Opening a door is much easier than closing it, as long as it's not locked. A character that is engaged can shut an adjacent door instead of taking his shift action on a 3/DX roll. A disengaged character can shut a door as part of a move action. Use the rules for *Action During Movement* (*ITL*, p. 104), treating it as equivalent in effort to picking up a dropped weapon. That is, he can spend 3 MA, or not spend MA but try a 3/DX roll (but failure ends his movement). This doesn't require a free hand; you're bumping the door with your hip, kicking it shut, etc.



Realistically, you can only do this as part of a Move action if on the proper side of the door. For instance, if it swings open from a corridor into a room, you could open the door this way if moving into the room, or shut it if moving into the corridor. (If the GM isn't sure which way a particular door opens, he can roll randomly, or just assume whatever favors the players.)

The above rules for closing a door can also be used for opening a door that is ajar rather than fully closed.

A free-swinging door (e.g., in a Wild West saloon) can simply be kicked open by spending one extra MA if disengaged, or freely moved through with a one hex shift.

Of course, instead of fumbling with a doorknob, you can try to knock open or attack a door. If you slam into a door, you can't miss . . . otherwise, assume it's +4 DX to hit. Knocking open a door (5/ST to force open) requires a charge attack, and you will go at least one hex through the door if you succeed. Effects are detailed in this article and on pp. 70-71 of *ITL*. As these rules indicate, only certain weapons are suitable; if desperate figures persist in attacking doors with unsuitable weapons (swords, arrows, spears, etc.), any piercing weapons like arrows or rapiers will be useless; swords may do half damage but will quickly reduce the weapon itself into a blunt club.

SJ note – Obviously, if you are using variant doors in an adventure, you will want to pre-compute the various destruction stats and add them to your notes, rather than halting play to refer to this article.



Questions Three: Mixam

by Steve Jackson, interviewing Adam Smith



All our issues of *Hexagram* have been printed by Mixam, and they are a very zine-friendly operation. If you're interested in creating your own zine or RPG supplement, we heartily recommend these folks. So . . . interview time!

Tell us about your company! Where are you, how long have you been in business, how big is the staff?

Well, Mixam means 'magic' in ancient Hebrew. I think it also means 'to mix everything together' in Italian. Both sum us up pretty well.

The magic comes from our unique online ordering system (with instant price calculator) and automation that streamlines the whole process.

We're on a mission to make printing easy for everybody. We do this by giving creators access to the best industrial printing machines, quality, and prices. Previously, this was all reserved for big publishing companies. We also teach people how to print their own zines, books, posters, etc.

We recently moved our head office to the Warner Brothers Studios in Leavesden, Hertfordshire, UK. It's an awesome office space with a great cafe in the main hall and we see a few famous faces every now and then. Tom Hardy frequents the café . . . probably for the club sandwich, which is to die for! We also have small operations in the U.S. and Canada.

We were founded in 2003. Although Mixam didn't start marketing until 2018. That's when things got *weird*! The company wanted someone from outside the printing industry to bring a different perspective. Two years in, it's all going rather well.

At this moment, we have over 20 folks. We're constantly recruiting to keep up with all the orders. We have a wonderful group of people of all ages and ethnicities from all over.

How should a fan contact you if they want to talk about printing a zine?

We're easy to reach on social media @mixamprint. Just send us a direct message. Although I'd also recommend checking out our instant price calculator at mixam.com/zines to get an idea of options and prices. It's fairly self explanatory. Typically, 400 copies of a zine is when printing production switches from digital (low run) to offset (high run). Once you hit this 'critical mass' for production, the cost per unit comes down dramatically. You can really 'game' our calculator tool to find the best prices. I do it all the time. We have free design templates, too.

What other gaming products do you print? Are there any gamers on your staff? What do they play?

In addition to zines and adventure books, we're printing a lot of hardback books lately. I'm talking big lore books! We're also printing loads of play mats as 'posters' too. There's also talk of us doing playing cards in the near future.

I really enjoyed *Protest Singer* – an RPG of magical music and demonic deals by Adam Vass. You choose your music genre with magic powers to match, then make a deal with the devil for fortune and fame. Black Metal gives you telekinetic powers, so you can make people's heads explode. Brutal.

A few of us dabble in games. Drew is a board gamer (he loves a bit of *Catan*), Lucian enjoys lore books, while I mostly play *Blood Bowl*, although I may start up a Mixam games club when the new edition of *Car Wars* is out.





The Spore Lizard

by Kelly Nall

The spore lizard evolved in a jungle environment along with many forms of fungus, and rather than fighting the fungus, it adapted to it and used it. Unlike its reptilian cousins, it has no scales; instead, its soft, damp skin grows a plethora of mushrooms, toadstools, and puffballs. In the jungle or rain forest, its fungal skin is camouflage, possibly even with brightly colored blooms and flowers, allowing it to blend in with tropical flora. Anyone would spot a jungle spore lizard within 4 hexes on a 3/IQ roll. A person with the Alertness or Naturalist talent would only need a 2/IQ to see one, and a Woodsman would spot one almost immediately. Underground, the brightly colored growths serve to warn away predators.

The spore lizard weighs over 100 lbs. and is a 2-hex creature, with a powerful bite doing 2d+2 damage. Typical stats would be ST 30, IQ 5, DX 12, and MA 10. Instead of armor, its hide gives a special defense. Roll 1 die for each successful hit made on the lizard. A roll of 1 or 2 indicates the blow released poisonous spores. Each adjacent foe must roll 3d/current ST or take 1d poison damage. Alternatively, the GM could have some spores subtract 4 from the attacker's MA or subtract 1 from DX; these effects last 2d turns. One lizard may have multiple effects, but only one per turn. Armor provides no protection against inhaled spores.

Young spore lizards look like bits of moss and are much more difficult to see whether in the jungle or underground: 6 /IQ with Alertness or Naturalist, and even a Woodsman must roll 5/IQ. There is no chance for an untrained eye to spot them unless they move!



Once every other turn, the spore lizard may spend 1, 2, or 3 ST to breathe a MH cloud of similar spores. This cloud is concentrated, however, and if the lizard makes a successful roll to hit, each figure within the target MH takes 1 die of damage for every ST the lizard used. The cloud may be centered on the head of the lizard or up to 3 hexes away. It has no effect on the lizard itself.

The spore lizard has not been well studied; carrying a specimen home, alive or dead, would expose the whole party to its spores.



Not By Iron Alone: Material Usage in Arms and Armor

by Howard Kistler

One of the elegant simplifications in *TFT* is that there is a basic spectrum of weapons, and all of those weapons are assumed to be made of the same material – iron. Bows, of course, are made of horn or wood, but it is the iron arrowheads that deliver the damage. The one variant material in the game is silver, which is useful in making weapons for wizards (iron impedes magic) or for use against vampires and werewolves. But some GMs may wish to use a wider range of materials for constructing arms and armor. This can distinguish different levels of development across Cidri, where some cultures may still be in a Stone or Bronze Age rather than an Iron Age level. Or the GM may wish to introduce exotic materials that make standard weapons more potent. Here is a breakdown of basic materials and the effects they have when used in the construction of arms and armor.

The six factors of how material use affects arms and armor:

Effectiveness – How does the material affect the damage or protection value of the item?

Weight – How does the material change the weight of the item?

Durability – How long does an item made of the material last compared to the iron item?

Cost – How does the material affect the price of the item?

Special Effects – Does the material add any different effects to the item?

Availability – How easy is it to obtain the material? The ratings are:

Ubiquitous – Can be found almost anywhere, including in the wild.

Common – Easy to come by wherever there are people.

Uncommon – Not frequently found, at least in arms and armor.

Rare – Unusual to find this material at all.

Wood

Wood is a basic material readily available to most civilizations. Useful for constructing tools and dwellings, it naturally finds its way into weapons as well. Other plant materials, such as grass, thatch, reed, withe, rattan, and wicker can be used to create primitive types of armor. Some weapons, such as staves and bows, are commonly made of wood. “Metal” melee weapons made of wood instead are suitable for training and practice, or for when one wishes to subdue a foe rather than kill them outright. It is of course possible to kill with a wooden sword, but it takes much more effort than with an iron one. Similarly, wicker armor may look impressive, but it offers nothing like the protection of chainmail or plate.

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Wooden swords and the like are great for training purposes, but they are basically clubs, regardless of the weapon they simulate.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – These are essentially the shaft or haft of the weapon, only sharpened. Such weapons do 3 fewer points of damage than the standard version. They lack the penetrating power of metal-tipped weapons and cannot pierce tower shields or chainmail (or stronger) armor, except on a critical hit.

Armor – Woven grass or reeds may be used to create the primitive equivalent of cloth armor. Similarly, rattan or wicker can make a crude armor with the stopping power of leather. At the GM's discretion they may incur an additional -1 DX penalty due to how cumbersome they are. All of these armors are quite flammable, as well.

Shields – A small or large shield could be completely made of wood. It would stop the same amount of damage, but lacking the iron banding and reinforcement of the standard small/large shield, it would deteriorate four times as quickly. On the plus side, such a shield weighs half as much as a regular one.

Weight – Half the weight of standard metal weapon/armor.

Durability – Lasts one quarter as long as a standard item.

Cost – Costs 50% less than a standard item.

Special Effects – Non-conductive. Non-magnetic. Doesn't impede magic. Flammable. Floats in water.

Availability – Ubiquitous.

Organics (Bone/Horn/Shell/Fur)



Plants and animals can yield a number of useful materials for arms and armor. These materials can be paired with wood to make more effective weapons, and some can be adapted in protective coverings. Bone, horn, and shell are all hard materials that can be shaped and given an edge or point. Fur can be treated and bound into a flexible (and warm) outer garment that also offers some protection in combat.

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Organic melee weapons do 2 fewer points of damage than their standard counterparts. They are also fragile compared with iron, and have a 2-in-6 chance of breaking when striking iron (or better) armor, or blocking an iron (or better) weapon.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – These do 2 fewer points of damage than the standard equivalent. They cannot penetrate plate mail (or better) armor except on a critical hit.

Armor – Bone, horn, or shell may be woven into grass armor to provide the equivalent protection of leather (and with the same DX and MA penalty as leather). Fur armor also functions as leather armor.



Shields – A small, spiked, or large shield could be made by combining the hard organics with wood. It offers the same protection as the standard shield of that type, but deteriorates more quickly in use.

Weight – One quarter less than standard weapon/armor.

Durability – Lasts one quarter as long as a standard item.

Cost – Costs 40% less than a standard item.

Special Effects – Non-conductive. Non-magnetic. Doesn't impede magic. Funky smell.

Availability – Ubiquitous.

Exotic Organics (Dragonhide, Gargoyle Teeth, Bloodtree Timber, and the like)

In a world of magic, with flora and fauna drawn from multiple dimensions, it should not be surprising that some organic materials can be more than mundanely potent as weapons and armor. Details are beyond the scope of this article. But note that, like wine or cheese, exotic organics are affected by both origin and processing; for instance, one suit of dragonhide armor might have powers quite different from those of another.

Stone

From smooth river rocks to knapped stone flakes, these are some of the most ancient tools in any civilization's arsenal. Stones can crack open shellfish and nuts, scrape hides for tanning, grind corn and wheat for meal, and make handy tools for bashing heads and breaking bones. They are not refined weapons, but they deliver more killing power than wooden or organic ones. The sheer weight of stone makes it impractical for all but the smallest armor components, however.

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Any one-handed edged melee weapon could be made using a knapped stone blade, such as obsidian. Blunt one- or two-handed melee weapons, such as great hammers, could also be constructed with a stone head. Stone weapons do 1 point less damage than the iron equivalent. Stone is more fragile than metal, however, and has a 1-in-6 chance of breaking when striking harder armors or weapons.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – Knapped arrowheads are fairly effective, doing 1 point less damage than iron arrowheads. They may shatter when hitting bone, which ruins the tip and can leave troublesome stone fragments in the wound (2-in-6 chance on impact).

Armor – Some civilizations fashion stone bracelets and anklets which can be used to enhance striking damage, and which may also be used to block attacks. This is probably the closest stone comes to being counted as an armor material.

Shields – Stone is too heavy, and too susceptible to fracturing, to make an effective portable shield. At most, stones serve as ornamentation on shields.

Weight – One quarter more (+25%) than standard weapon/armor.

Durability – Lasts one quarter as long as a standard item.

Cost – Costs 30% less than a standard item.

Special Effects – Non-conductive. Non-magnetic. Doesn't impede magic.

Availability – Ubiquitous.

Bronze

This alloy of copper and tin ushered in the first metal age of human civilization, and remains a mainstay of many Cidri cultures. Easier to forge and work than steel, it is also softer in comparison. Thus, while bronze weapons can offer similar protection and damage potential as their steel counterparts, they tend to wear out more quickly and require more frequent sharpening. Note that the earliest forms of iron were not always as good as bronze, so these same guidelines could be used for primitive iron, also known as wrought iron or black iron.

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Any melee weapon made of iron can just as easily be made of bronze. It will deliver nearly the same damage, too, with just a -1 reduction. Bronze-edged weapons also require more upkeep to stay keen.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/ Spears) – Bronze tips are quite effective at penetration and damage, and only do 1 point less damage than the iron equivalent. They do not tend to break or blunt like more primitive materials, so they can always be reused.

Armor – Any iron armor could be made from bronze. Bronze is denser than iron, so the corresponding weight of the bronze armor would be +10% of the iron weight. (A 10-pound piece of iron armor would weigh 11 pounds if made of bronze.) It also stops 1 less hit than its iron equivalent.

Shields – A bronze shield is almost as good as an iron one. It stops 1 less point of damage, and it tends to wear down more quickly.

Weight – Bronze items weigh +10% more than their standard counterparts.

Durability – Lasts half as long as a standard item.

Cost – Cost 20% less than price of a standard item.

Special Effects – Doesn't rust, but gets verdigris. Doesn't impede magic.

Availability – Common.



Iron and Steel

Hard iron and forged steel are the basis of not just arms and armor, but industry and technology on Cidri. Swords, shields, plate mail, ploughshares, chains, and locks are all cast and shaped from tempered steel. Durable, versatile, and plentiful, steel undergirds both war and peace across the lands.

This is the standard material for metal weapons and armors in *The Fantasy Trip*, so there are no changes or modifications to the attributes or costs of the items listed there.

Availability – Common.

Silver

Due to the suppressive effect of iron on magic, wizards wishing to maintain battle parity with warriors rely on silver weapons. This is actually an alloy of silver, strengthened with elements like tungsten and bismuth. The resulting metal can be shaped into any kind of weapon or armor that steel is used for. The most obvious downside is that silver is both less common and more expensive than iron.

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Same as the iron equivalent.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – Same as the iron equivalent.

Armor – Same as the iron equivalent.

Shields – Same as the iron equivalent.

Weight – Same as the iron equivalent.

Durability – Same as the iron equivalent.

Cost – Ten times more expensive than the iron equivalent.

Special Effects – Friendly to magic. Does lasting damage to vampires and werewolves. Ostentatious. May attract bandits.

Availability – Uncommon.

Meteoric Iron

A falling star at times may be tracked to where it strikes land, and a starstone of metal is discovered. These are sometimes found when digging or excavating in new places, too. The ore from these celestial visitors can be added to iron to create an alloy with interesting properties. It has an unusual grain which persists in the forged state, so that items made from it are embossed with a lattice-like pattern. Weapons made from this alloy do additional damage, and armor made from meteoric iron stops 1 additional hit.

One other curious attribute of meteoric iron is that it has even more antipathy towards magic than common iron. This does not affect weapon users very much, but meteoric armor gives a -1 DX to all magical attacks against its wearer (and reduces the wearer's own DX for magic by 6!). A finely-woven chainmail cap of this iron will give the same defensive bonus against magic that affects the mind. Used in any defense against scrying, meteoric iron reduces the attacker's effective IQ by 2; this can stack with the benefits of silver.

This alloy is also referred to as “starsteel.”

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Edged weapons (swords, axes) do an extra +1 damage per die of damage done by the equivalent.

This is fine manufacture and cannot be stacked with the regular “Finely Made” damage bonus.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – Do an extra +1 damage over the iron equivalent.

Armor – Stops 1 additional point of damage above the iron equivalent.

Shields – Stops 1 additional points of damage above the iron equivalent.

Weight – The same as the iron equivalent.

Durability – Lasts twice as long as the iron equivalent.

Cost – Can cost 25 times as much or more than the standard item.

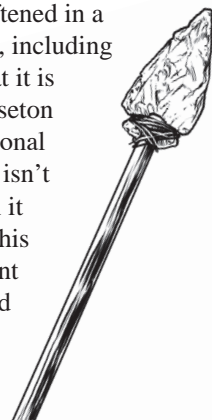
A lump of raw meteoric iron is worth \$2,000. One pound of such iron can make up to four pounds of weapon-grade alloy.

Special Effects – Greatly impedes magic.

Availability – Rare.

Chryseton (*krī'se·tòn*)

This material forms deep below ground, in caverns filled with waters rich in metallic salts. Chryseton grows as a malleable crystal, transparent and rose-tinted. It can be softened in a bath of acid and worked into a variety of shapes, including arms and armor. Its most unusual property is that it is a caustic catalyst – any wound caused by a chryseton weapon will burn and blister, inflicting an additional 2 points of damage. A chryseton arrowhead that isn't pulled out will do 2 points of damage every turn it remains in the body for up to three turns. After this the crystal is surrounded by dried blood and burnt flesh and is no longer reactive. It can be removed and cleaned and used again, however,



since it is a catalyst and is not used up by the reaction. This caustic reaction occurs only with blood, and it is safe to touch a chryseton item otherwise. However, armor made of it is still uncommon, for if the wearer were injured . . .

Note that this caustic property only affects living, red-blooded creatures. So, for instance, a skeleton or gargoyle would take no extra damage, nor would an octopus with its green, copper-based blood.

Because of its interaction with blood, chryseton is also called “blood crystal.”

Effectiveness –

Cutting Weapons – Do an extra 2 points of caustic burn damage over the iron equivalent.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – Do an extra 2 points of caustic burn damage over the iron equivalent, and further damage if the weapon stays in the wound (see above).

Armor – Stops 2 extra points of damage over the iron equivalent. If the wearer becomes injured they must remove any chryseton piece from over the wound site or suffer 2 points of damage per turn for three turns.

Shields – Stops 2 extra points of damage over the iron equivalent.

Weight – Same as the iron equivalent.

Durability – Lasts three times as long as the iron equivalent.

Cost – Can cost 33 times as much or more than the standard item. The per-pound value of raw chryseton is \$3,000. It is typically prepared in acid by a chemist or alchemist before a smith can work it. Weapons and armor made from chryseton require half of the

item weight to be made of the crystal. The other half of the weight for weapons is the metal tang and hilt or the wooden shaft, and for armor is the woven undergarment layer that holds the crystal scales together.

Special Effects – Caustic, transparent. Doesn’t impede magic. Does not rust.

Availability – Rare.

Volkastre (*vōl-kas’trə*)

Found in the dormant caldera of deep-rooted volcanoes, the strange metal called volkastre is prized by goblins for their weapons and artifacts. When blended with iron it produces an alloy that is curiously both lighter and stronger than steel. Volkastric alloy is green-black in color, approaching an emerald green the more it is tempered (such as along the edges and points of weapons, and at the joins in armor). Weapons made from this alloy do additional damage, especially with the point, and armor made from volkastre stops 1 additional hit.

One other curious attribute of volkastre is that it has antibiotic properties. A wound from a volkastric weapon seldom becomes infected, and a cup made of the alloy will, in just a few minutes, kill all the microbes and pathogens in any water poured into it. Thus it is often sought by physicker-surgeons and others who value its sterile property.

Some call this material “goblin steel” or “volcanic iron.”

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – All melee weapons do an extra +1 damage (+2 for the rapier).

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – Do an extra +2 damage over the iron equivalent.

Armor – Stops 1 additional point of damage above the iron equivalent.

Shields – Stops 1 additional points of damage above the iron equivalent.

Weight – 20% less than the iron equivalent.

Durability – Lasts four times as long as the iron equivalent.

Cost – Can cost 40 times as much or more than the standard item.

The per-pound cost of raw volkastre is \$4,000. One pound of raw metal can make up to two pounds of weapon-grade alloy.

Special Effects – Light, strong. Impedes magic. Antibiotic.

Availability – Rare.

Abdurum (*ab·du`r´,əṁ*)

Forged by the dwarven master-smiths of old, the formula for this incredible alloy has been lost, though many smithies labor yet to recreate it. The metal itself is a deep, rich blue the color of the sea. Occasionally items made from abdurum are found in old tombs and hoards. It's possible to melt down these things and reforge them, though this requires a pool of magma. No ordinary fire can affect abdurum, nor for that matter can magical fire or dragon's breath even warm it up. Thus, any body part covered by abdurum armor is



effectively fireproofed, as per the enchantment of the same name. Often called “blue dwarfsteel” and “dragonvex steel.”

Effectiveness –

Melee Weapons – Edged weapons (swords, axes) do an extra +2 damage over the iron equivalent. Blunt weapons (hammers, maces) do an extra +3.

Tipped Weapons (Arrows/Bolts/Spears) – Do an extra +2 damage over the iron equivalent.

Armor – Stops 3 additional points of damage above the iron equivalent.

Shields – Stops 3 additional points of damage above the iron equivalent.

Weight – Same as the iron equivalent.

Durability – Indefinite. An abdurum item simply does not break, and there are abdurum weapons with a thousand-year history that show no wear.

Cost – Can cost 50 times as much or more than the standard item. The per-pound cost of abdurum is \$5,000. It is possible to make composite weapons and armor with only half of the weight being abdurum, similar to chryseton items, but such weapons and armor are not immune to breaking. Nor are they as heat-resistant, as the non-abdurum parts are vulnerable to flame and dragonfire. Only items made entirely of abdurum are unbreakable and completely fireproof.

Special Effects – Immune to breakage, including the *Break Weapon* spell. Fire resistant. Does not rust. Impedes magic and is mildly magnetic (cobalt is part of the alloy recipe).

Availability – *Extremely* rare.



A Temple of the Six Gates

by Henry J. Cobb

The mysterious Six Gates cult operates a network of magical gates which stretches across Cidri, usually with little regard for current political boundaries. It is tolerated by most rulers because it seems generally beneficial and only slightly dangerous, just like the common honeybee they seem to worship. Or perhaps it is geometry they worship and the bee is revered because it embodies mathematics. The decoration of the temples, as well as the cultists' simple clothing and jewelry, follow the motif of plants, bees, and hexagons.

The layout of each Six Gates temple is the same, and while the nuns and monks who run these have well-defined hierarchies, there is no known "head temple." Perhaps there is some chief priestess who roams the gate-grid like a queen bee? Or perhaps there are several, ranked by seniority or skill?



Each Six Gates temple is laid out in four-foot-wide hexagons marked on the floor or ground. The twelve-foot outer wall is 45 such hexes across, with a megahex size mini-gatehouse in each of the six corners. This has two additional twelve-foot stories on top of that with six-foot merlons alternating with three-foot-tall crenels, in the style of a castle on the very top. There are similar foot-thick merlons and crenels along the outer wall next to the three-foot walkway between the corner gatehouses. There are four-foot-wide inner and outer gates with doors that drop down from these gatehouses in slots carved into the stone walls and a port to observe passers-by below. There will generally be one lower-rank monk in each tower, who will remind noisy patrons that they must remain silent inside the temple.

Within the outer wall is a courtyard filled with trees and plants, with six walkways leading straight from each gatehouse to the central tower. There are trees and plants in the courtyard and beehive boxes are brought here when these are in flower. Some mountain temples have turned these areas into triangular greenhouses, the only apparent departure from the uniform temple design.

The 19-hex-wide central tower is in the exact middle of the outer wall with a single recessed door in each of the six corners, in the same style as the gatehouse doors. The ground floor is a single open room with a megahex pillar in the middle. The north, southwest, and southeast hexes are cut away from five feet high to the ten-foot ceiling. There will be a priestess seated in each of these recesses; all three read aloud in synchronicity from their holy texts. There are six monks seated around the core pillar sides, with a magical Gate at each of the six points. The name of the temple (usually just the closest village or city) is on the inside wall above each of the six external doors, while the name of the destination is visible behind the invisible magical gate. These



inner monks will require one silver piece for each traveler or animal, coming or going. There is also a monk seated next to each external door. There are rails for doors of the same type to slide down and cover each gate, but these are almost always raised while the matching station in that direction is active.

Staircases to the next level rise along each inner wall facing one of the priestesses, while the other three walls have staircases down to the storage cellar below. Each priestess

casts the Ward spell on “her” doorways at the start of her shift. Each temple includes a symbolic map of the local gate network in hexagonal Stonemason (*ITL* p. 96) tiles on the northeast wall under the staircase. This is in the Province scale of five miles to the hex with the temples six hexes or thirty miles apart in a hexagonal layout (one day journey on good roads).

When one of the gates starts to flicker, the priestesses and monks gesture for traffic to stop (the gate rules require the chanting so the gates are not active once the chanting stops) and gather at the gate. Each casts Aid on the senior priestess so that she can stabilize the gate using the strength of all 15 of the cultists. Once this is accomplished, they all return to their cushions and gesture for traffic to resume. There is a “traffic” limit of a dozen figures entering or leaving every five minutes; if this is exceeded or two gate failures occur within one hour, then all of the visitors will be escorted out of the temple and the gates closed for an hour or two of rest.

The floor above the ground level is used for education and training. The free education for the children of the surrounding families is of course the cult’s primary source of recruitment. Unwanted daughters with an affinity for magic are eagerly adopted as future nuns. This floor also has the kitchen. Their honey buns are only one copper each, with the day-old leftovers given to the destitute.

The topmost floor has the living quarters of the cultists; the roof above that has the same crenelations as the gatehouses, surrounding potted plants and seasonal beehive boxes along the roof.

The known ranks of the cultists are as follows. Each of these templates should be considered the minimum for the given rank. Add attributes, talents and spells as needed.

Almost all the cult members are human.
For any random cultist roll two dice; on a total of 12 the figure is a half-human of some sort and on a roll of 2 the figure is an orc.

Trainee nun

Human Wizard
ST 8, DX 9, IQ 9
Weapons: 1-hand club (1d-1)
Punch (1d-4)
Talent: Literacy
Spell: Aid

Junior Nun

Human Wizard
ST 8, DX 10, IQ 10
Weapons: Staff
(1d-1/1d), Punch (1d-3)
Talents: Literacy,
Unarmed
Combat I
Spells: Aid,
Staff, Ward

Senior Nun

Human Wizard
ST 8, DX 11, IQ 12
Weapons: Staff (1d-1/1d), Punch (1d-2)
Talents: Literacy, Priest, Unarmed
Combat II
Spells: Aid, Staff II, Ward

Junior Priestess

Human Wizard
ST 8, DX 11, IQ 15
Weapons: Staff (1d-1/1d), Punch(1d-2)
Talents: Literacy, Priest, Unarmed
Combat II
Spells: Aid, Create Gate, Staff II, Ward

Senior Priestess

Human Wizard
ST 8, DX 12, IQ 18
Weapons: Staff (1d-1/1d), Punch (1d-2)
Talents: Literacy, Theologian, Unarmed
Combat II
Spells: Aid, Create Gate, Control Gate,
Staff II, Ward

Copper Monk

Human Hero
ST 8, DX 10, IQ 10
Weapons: Punch (1d-3)
Talents: Beekeeper, Literacy, Unarmed
Combat I
Spell: Aid

Silver Monk

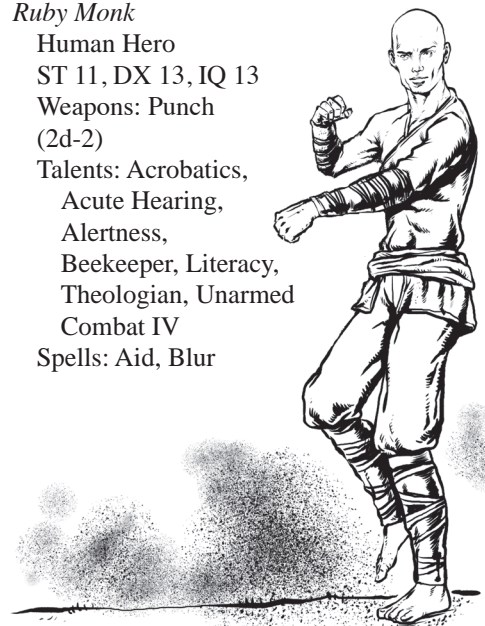
Human Hero
ST 8, DX 11, IQ 11
Weapons: Punch (1d-3)
Talents: Acrobatics, Beekeeper, Literacy,
Priest, Unarmed Combat II
Spell: Aid

Gold Monk

Human Hero
ST 10, DX 12, IQ 12
Weapons: Punch (1d-1)
Talents: Acrobatics, (Acute Hearing or
Alertness), Beekeeper, Literacy, Priest,
Unarmed Combat III
Spell: Aid

Ruby Monk

Human Hero
ST 11, DX 13, IQ 13
Weapons: Punch
(2d-2)
Talents: Acrobatics,
Acute Hearing,
Alertness,
Beekeeper, Literacy,
Theologian, Unarmed
Combat IV
Spells: Aid, Blur



Diamond Monk

Human Hero

ST 12, DX 14, IQ 14

Weapons: Punch (2d-1)

Talents: Acrobatics, Acute Hearing, Alertness,

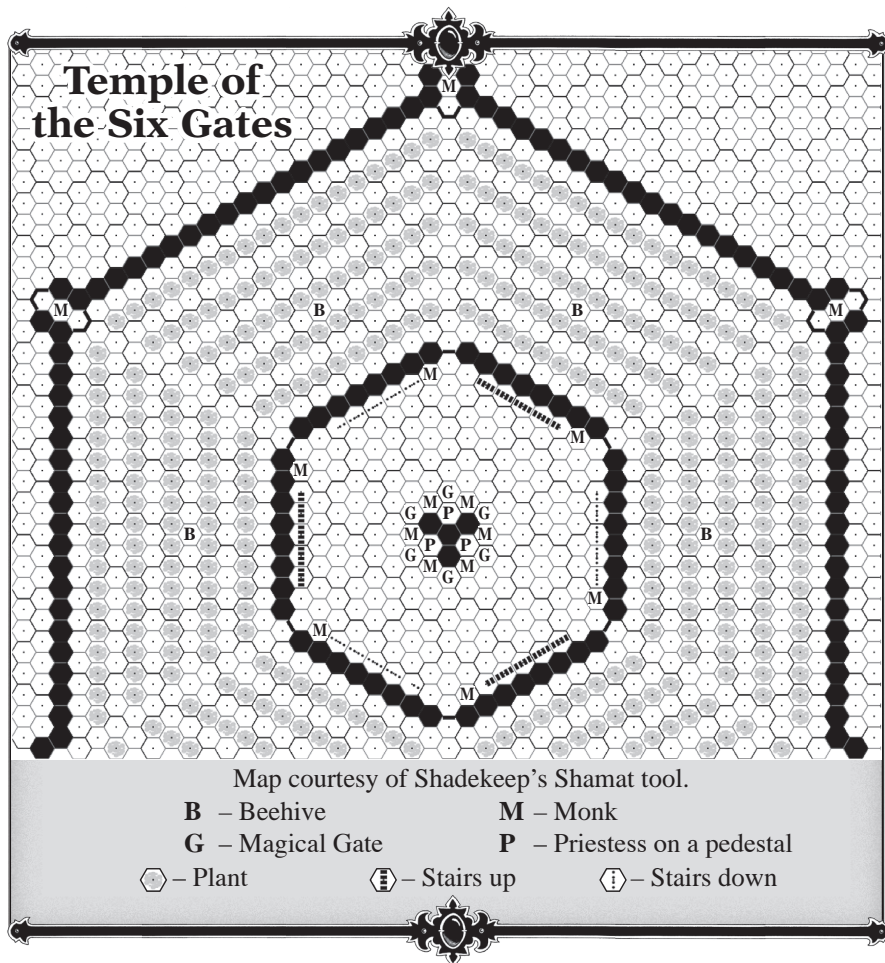
Beekeeper, Literacy, Theologian, Unarmed Combat V

Spells: Aid, Blur, Ward

These spells are useful to gardeners and beekeepers, and there will almost always be more than one priestess who knows each: Control Animal (to catch a queen safely, every time), Ferment (to make mead from the honey), Scour and Cleansing (for hive equipment), Friendship (yes, it works on bees), Magic Rainstorm, Repair, Flight (to help find an escaped colony), Stone Flesh (more than enough to avoid bee stings), Calling.

Notes: The gates are keyed to the cadence of the chant. (6/IQ to realize this, minus one die for each of Create Gate, Control Gate, Scholar, Bard, and Master Bard.) This can be imitated by a single figure on a 6/IQ roll, minus one die for each of Beekeeper, Mimic, Bard, and Master Bard, or a pair of helpers.

Any wizard has a 6/IQ chance (minus one die for each of Mathematician, Create Gate, and Control Gate) to determine that the two silvers per hop cost (one each at the two temples) exceeds the operating costs of their network, especially as the cultists seem to work for free. The Wizards' Guild generally charges the same rate and uses these funds to subsidize wizardly education.





The Vampire Man o' War

by Greg Miller

From a safe distance these distant cousins of jellyfish are magnificent, with their iridescent spheres bobbing in the water like giant ornaments. Not one creature, but a colony of specialized organisms, the Vampire Man o' War can reach a total length of 40-60 feet. (A mature float will appear to be at least a 3-hex creature, and the Man o' War will have many of them.) The floating globes, beautiful in the sun, are hypnotic at night, glowing purple, blue and green. Gas-emitting apertures within the float control the buoyancy. (This gas is extremely flammable; treat it like a 1 MH molotail if ignited.) The luminosity lures in prey at night; it is uncertain if the prism "rainbow effect" aids the man o' war during the day. Below the surface looms its massive trunk and from it, sprawled out in all directions, are thick, ropy, orangish-yellow tentacles, each capable of killing a man.



It is how the Vampire Man o' War consumes its prey that the creature gets the first part of its name. Victims are stunned into unconsciousness and then slowly digested. As far as combat is concerned, the creature has no real form of locomotion, but each turn an unfortunate PC is in the water with one of these creatures,

he must make a saving roll: -3 against DX when three MH away; -4 when two MH away; and, -5 when in the same MH. Every failure to avoid the tentacles results in 1d fatigue against ST.

Once a PC is reduced to 1 ST, the Vampire Man o' War keeps its helpless victim afloat. They like their food fresh! Rarely are prey drowned, but rather slowly consumed from the inside out. This process might take weeks, depending on the size of the trapped creature. From close by, a man o' war will be seen to be surrounded by many seemingly dead fish of different species, all in various states of desiccation, floating on or just below the water's surface. If a victim is somehow extracted from the embrace of the venomous tentacles and given rest, a full recovery can be expected in 1-4 weeks.

No one has ever witnessed what kills a Vampire Man o' War. Old sea dogs know to never cut one up. From large severed pieces whole new creatures have been witnessed to rapidly sprout, as the component creatures reorganize themselves and multiply.

This is an open-sea creature, but the odd current occasionally pulls them toward land and after violent storms they can be found beached. Intact bells from the float fetch a pretty penny (at least \$200) and are highly sought after by chemists and alchemists alike. The venom is rumored to be used as a topical painkiller by the mermen.

Adventure Ideas: The Vampire Man o' War is extremely rare and can provide a bit of ominous atmosphere for seafaring adventures (anyone ever stung by a jellyfish will have a natural aversion to them). Or they can serve as a water hazard or even a clever trap. PCs with Seamanship or Naturalist will recognize and be knowledgeable about the Man o' War with an IQ-2 roll; a Captain on an IQ roll; and an Expert Naturalist will recognize the monstrosity on sight.



The Order of the Four Humors

by Stefan Jones

A bit of background material for an adventure I'm nibbling at.

Every class entering a Wizards' Academy seems to have one: a young man or woman who is fascinated by the concept of "minded matter" . . . elementals, as they are commonly known. Guild students are encouraged to be curious and inquisitive, but this particular branch of knowledge seems oddly stunted, at least to judge from what can be found about it in academy and chapter house libraries. Even the faculty tasked with teaching the theory and practice of elemental magic seem indifferent about the subject. Most of these young seekers give up on their pursuit, sensing that there simply isn't much "there" there, and find another subject for their passions.

Young wizards who continue to pester their instructors with questions about the nature of minded matter, and elder mages who submit overly insightful papers on the subject, will gain the attention of *The Order of the Four Humors*, a shadowy secret society embedded in the Wizards' Guild. The agents of the society



(*The Kind Hand of Forgetting*) are subtle and skilled, rarely tipping their hand as they assemble a dossier on the habits, relations, and skills of an overly inquisitive mage.

The Sealed Stacks

Every Wizards' Academy student has heard rumors of books of lore so dangerous that they are kept in locked cabinets and back rooms, lest they fall into the hands of the careless, amoral, or ambitious. Young men typically imagine these to be full of tawdry secrets such as magical seduction techniques and the summoning of succubi. They're not wrong, but the sealed stacks of the guild contain much more than such unseemly things.

The most dangerous books are kept in labyrinths deep beneath chapter houses. The passwords, keys, and trap locations of these mazes are distributed among senior Guild masters. Only a cooperating team of senior wizards can safely enter, placate the guardians, and avoid the mechanical hazards.

In addition to torture spells and rituals for summoning extra-dimensional abominations, the sealed stacks and library-labyrinths contain primers and monographs on the mystical nature of the four elements. These tomes – fetched by members of the Kind Hand of Forgetting for disposal – were carefully copied by illiterate calligraphers capable of diligently reproducing characters without understanding their contents. The Guild keeps them in case the knowledge in them is required to counter a world-threatening outbreak of elemental knowledge.

If the Order determines that the subject has true skills and insights into things elemental, they will be approached by a trio of society members and offered membership. If they accept, they are hustled off to an isolated retreat equipped with impressive-looking elemental research laboratories. There they undergo a weeks-long induction procedure. This gives the Order an opportunity to assess the wizard. In rare cases, an inductee will have an unfortunate “accident” during this assessment, and end up serving as a gruesome lesson to other novices.

Initiates who turn out *not* to be especially adept are awarded Associate membership in the order, sworn to secrecy, and guided into sinecures at an academy. There they teach the dumbed-down curriculum designed to avert curiosity in the field, and become the first line of defense against the next generation of clever students.



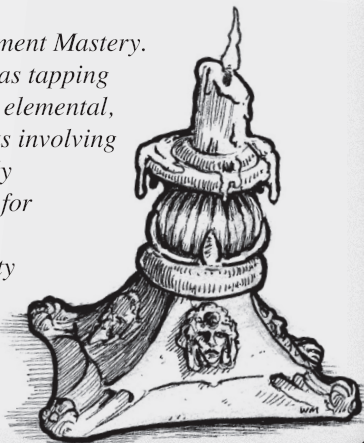
Element Mastery (3)

This IQ skill comes in four variants, one for each element. It is extremely rare for a mage to learn more than one. Even expressing an interest in becoming a master of multiple elements is begging for a visit from the Kind Hand (see below).

In addition to gaining mystic insights into the element of study, this skill gives a +2 bonus to adjDX or adjIQ when casting spells (Create/Destroy Elemental, Control Elemental) related to elementals of their specialty. At the GM’s discretion, the adept may also produce scrolls, magic items, and potions whose spell effect is closely tied to the element at a 25% discount in time and cost.

Prerequisite: Alchemy.

There are deeper levels of Element Mastery. They allow fantastic things such as tapping the arcane senses of a controlled elemental, resistance to damage from attacks involving the mastered element, temporarily assuming the form of an element for concealment or rapid travel, and commanding the long-term loyalty of an elemental. The Kind Hand of Forgetting will make an example of anyone they suspect of pursuing these advanced studies.



Life in the Order

Surviving initiates are put to work. While involving, responsible, and high-paying, the jobs given probationers amount to the alchemical equivalent of material science. Very little of it involves summoning or controlling elementals. Members of the Order are

also kept busy working on committees and caucuses, and tasked with trivialities like the decorations and catering for the Order's next soirée. Ambitious junior members who object to this busy-work are assigned "traveling jobs," acting as scouts and bodyguards for senior agents going abroad for secretive, dangerous work.

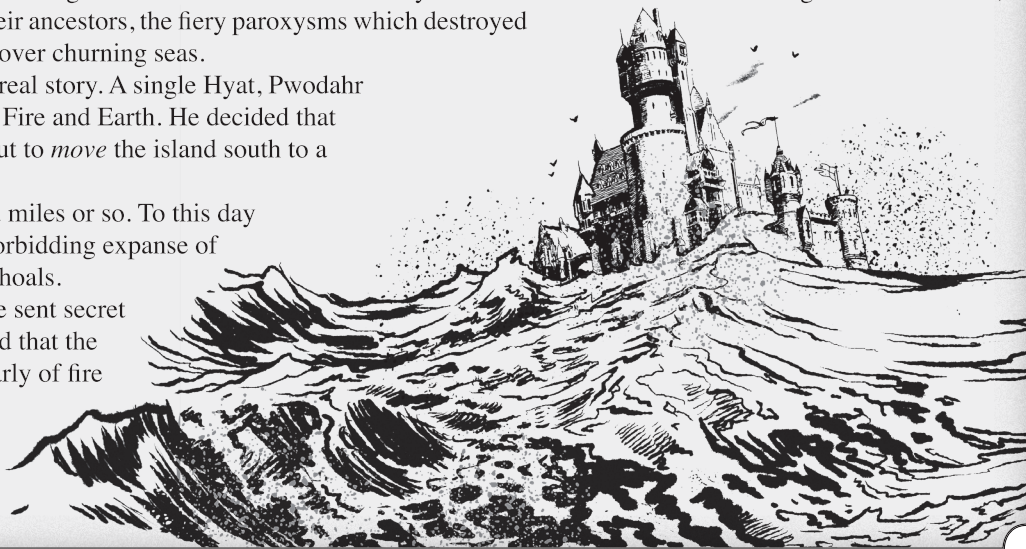
Hyatah: Cidri's Atlantis

Communities of Hyat – a somber, devout folk – can be found in many parts of Cidri. Even centuries after they fled their far-northern island home they still consider themselves refugees. During the mid-winter devotions the Hyat elders recite the Lament of Transgression and Exile, which describes the pride and arrogance of their ancestors, the fiery paroxysms which destroyed their homeland, and their harrowing journey over churning seas.

The Order of the Four Humors knows the real story. A single Hyat, Pwodahr Sillum, managed to become a master of both Fire and Earth. He decided that Hyatah's winters were too harsh, and set about to *move* the island south to a warmer latitude.

It actually worked . . . for the first hundred miles or so. To this day the shallow sea where Hyatah once lay is a forbidding expanse of steaming water, volcanoes, and treacherous shoals.

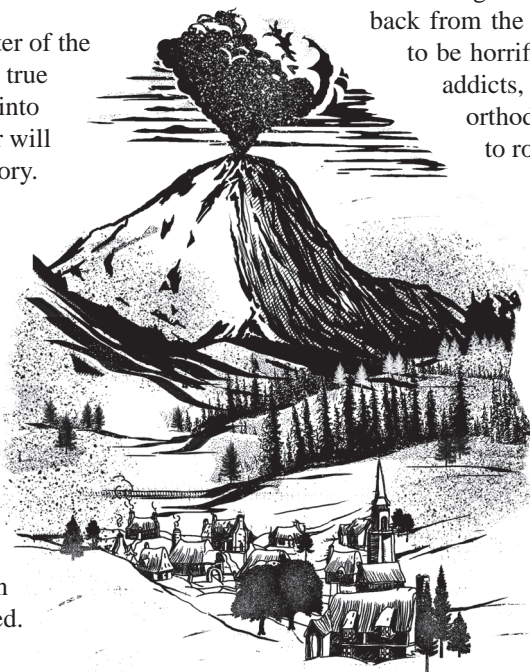
A small clique of masters of the order have sent secret expeditions to the region. They've determined that the area is ripe with elemental energies, particularly of fire and water. They theorize that this could be tapped to charge specialized Powerstones. So far news of this effort has been kept from the Kind Hand.



Like any secret society, the Order features secret handshakes, code words, harrowing advancement rituals, and layers within layers of mysteries. Just as a novice begins to master the basics, they are given a choice of which elemental school – Earth, Air, Fire or Water – to join. These “houses” have their own secrets and rituals. True strivers within these competing houses are allowed access to the Element Mastery skill.

The Terrible Truth

Only when a member becomes a Master of the Second Circle do they learn the society’s true purpose: To suppress advanced research into the nature of elementals. The new master will be given access to volumes of secret history. These detail the horrifying consequences of out-of-control elemental magic. Many notable “natural” disasters (volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, maelstroms, and devastating windstorms), responsible for destroying cities or entire regions, were in fact the work of out-of-control elementals and the mages who summoned them. The Order has determined that immersing oneself too deeply in elemental lore invariably leads to an altered state of mind in which morality, loyalty, and even long-term self-preservation are abandoned.



The Inquisitors

New masters are obligated to assist in this centuries-old mission, and are introduced to the local contingent of the Kind Hand of Forgetting, the order’s secret police. Nominally he or she is their commander, but it is strongly implied that the agents will also be keeping an eye on *them*.

Many of these agents began as mages whose research into elemental magic entered dangerous territory. They were either pulled back from the edge of madness or retained the self-awareness to be horrified by the path they were taking. Like reformed addicts, or heretics tortured into confession and a return to orthodoxy, these mages have become fanatics dedicated to rooting out fanaticism.

In addition to investigating overly-curious mages and evaluating inductees, members of the Kind Hand are tasked with tracking down and destroying books of elemental lore that expand upon the basic knowledge approved for academies. They will not hesitate to assassinate mages who have learned too much and seem to be on the path to disaster.

Members of the Kind Hand rarely make it into the most senior ranks of the Order of the Four Humors. They are trusted, but feared, and kept as busy as possible, if only to keep them from looming over the shoulders of the order’s masters . . . some of whom have private projects that the Kind Hand wouldn’t care for.



Retreats Revamped?

by Steve Jackson

There have been questions about the retreat rule, and no wonder. It is discussed in *ITL* on pp. 102 and 118, and on neither page is the *complete* rule stated. I expect better of myself . . .

The rules as written, with commentary:

(1) You may force an enemy back only if you put hits on that enemy with a physical attack (Intended: *melee* attack. Not thrown or missile weapons!) and you took no hits yourself *from any source*.

(2) Retreats happen in the order of the adjDX of the *attackers*.

(3) You may force a retreat only into a vacant hex or one that contains only a fallen figure. BUT:

(4) (*ITL*, p. 118) “If the only adjacent vacant hex is dangerous – e.g., fire, water, a pit – the defender must make a 3/DX roll to avoid stepping into it.”

So if the saving roll is made, the defender does not have to step back at all. But then, why do you not get a saving roll to avoid less immediately hazardous steps? And why the stipulation that that be the only adjacent vacant hex, when the attacker is the one choosing the hex to be retreated into? Clearly that doesn’t make enough sense.

Paths Not Taken

It has been suggested that a figure which cannot retreat should take more damage, or alternatively that a figure which retreats should avoid some of the damage it has just taken. But I really do not want to change the balance of the damage rules.

Should there be an option somewhere to “give ground” to avoid damage, if you are hit by the exact roll the attacker needs? If I were really redesigning the game, I’d consider that.

Or can you say that you are giving ground *before* the enemy attack, and reduce its adjDX? That could also be worth testing – but it would be a bigger change than I want to make right now!

Proposed Amendment

This is *not* written in rules-ese. It’s an attempt to describe the flow of play.

If you, the readers, do not break this revised rule, something like it will go into Errata and into the next printing.

I have just put a hit on you, and I was unhurt during the turn. There is at least one hex that is adjacent to you, one hex farther from me, and not completely blocked.

(1) I tell you to retreat. If you *want* to retreat, fine. Choose an adjacent hex 1 farther away from me, move into it, and adjust your facing.

(2) If you don’t want to retreat, we roll an immediate Contest of (basic, not adjusted) DX. The winner is the one who beats their DX by the most, or misses it by the least, as the case may be. Ties go to the *attacker*. If you win, you stay still. If you lose, then choose a hex 1 farther away from me, move into it, and adjust your facing.

(3) If you retreated and your new hex is hazardous, you must now resolve the hazard. See below.

(4) If you retreated, then after I see what happened to you, I now have the option to move into the hex you vacated and adjust my facing.



Now You Stepped In It!

Now we need to define the results of some involuntary steps. Remember that Acrobatics skill affects DX rolls for falling, reducing your roll by 1 die.

Going Off The Edge

- 1 step – Make a regular DX roll (3/DX). On a 17, drop your weapon.
On an 18, fall prone. (So Acrobats never suffer those results from a 1-step drop.)
 - 2 steps (1 yard) – Roll 2/DX to stay on your feet; otherwise, you fall prone, and a critical failure drops or breaks your weapon.
 - 3 steps – Roll 3/DX to stay on your feet; results as above.
 - 4 steps (2 yards) – Roll 4/DX to stay on your feet; results as above.
- And so on. Actual damage does not come into play until the fall reaches 5 yards, but even an Acrobat will be unlikely to remain standing after a long surprise fall.

Other Hazards

- Fire – If you are forced into fire but did not *start* the turn in fire, then at the end of the turn you take 2 hits of damage, less whatever protection you get from armor or magic. If you started and ended the turn in fire, take 4 hits.
- Fallen body or bodies, or equivalent bad footing – Ignore for the sake of playability. Depending on the obstacle, penalties may accrue next turn.
- Water – Ditto. Fast-moving water over loose rounded rocks, even a single step deep, would be very bad footing indeed, but the time to abstract that is on the defender's next move. Unless he falls prone or drops his weapon in the water!



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