

# #26 CRUSADER

Fighting Dragons  
Into the Darkness ~ Adventure  
Codex Celtarum ~ Preview  
Frankies Fineries  
The Angry Gamer, Fiction  
& More







# celtarum codex

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# CRUSADER



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1818 North Taylor, #143  
Little Rock, AR 72207  
email: [www.trolllord.com](mailto:www.trolllord.com)  
website: [www.trolllord.com](http://www.trolllord.com) or  
[www.castlesandcrusades.com](http://www.castlesandcrusades.com)

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**Editor: Tim Burns**



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## Notes from the Managing Editor

Last year passed in a blitz. I honestly can't put it all together. The year seemed to start strong but then descended into chaos and by summer it seemed to have picked up again. The Classic Monster book was a fantastic early addition to the line up but after that, in the middling months, we seemed to derail. Largely because the Players Handbook went out of print months before we expected it to. Then, forced to refocus and get it back into print, we turned our energies on the 5th printing.

That in and of itself turned into a bear. We thought long and hard about the color aspect and knew that it was something TLG and C&C had to do so after many long discussions with Peter Bradley, long time TLG artist and Art Director, we decided to do it (unknownst to me he had already started on the color version). We put it up on Kickstarter and had a fantastic campaign for it.

The game has been in print for 7 or 8 years, largely the same game, and has sold over 12,000 copies of the hard cover. That's not too shabby for some debauched Trolls in the middle of the wilderness and all that.

That project strained us. Short handed with too much to do and our flagship product out of print put some severe strains on the company. That ran us into Gencon which is its own little logistical battlefield. It was all weathered of course and the book released which much fanfare.

But while all that was going on we signed a new writer to the Dens. Brian Young. Brian comes to us from Oklahoma and has been a long friend of Peter's. Peter in fact sent him my way; after some dithering on the subject, I opened up a dialogue with him and before we knew it the first adventure, *The Goblins of Mount Shadow* landed on my desk. Our new editor that we signed on, Eric Bullis, took on the task of getting it to layout and before we knew it we had a new writer. In short order the next three adventures landed on my desk, *Crimson Pact*, *The Giants Wrath* and *To Kill a King*. These latter titles did not go to Mr. Bullis, but went to another editor we signed, Alicia Stanley.

But in the meantime, as it was abundantly clear that Brian could do what he promised to do, he agreed to take on a 10-year-old pet project of mine. The Codices of Mythology had been on my mind since we signed Gary Gyax. We had tried a number of writers that didn't fit the bill for one reason or the other and so the project lay in the vault.

As it turned out, Brian has a PhD in Celtic studies and when we began talking about it he became very enthusiastic. He had been working on a game book for Celtic mythology for some time. It fit the bill brilliantly and we moved on the project. Since the book, titled the *Codex Celtarum*, landed on my desk several months ago, he has completed the next two in the series: the *Codex Germania* and the *Codex Nordicarum*.

While all that was going on I stumbled upon an old friend on facebook, Hal Greenberg. Hal used to run Thunderhead Games

back in the heyday of d20 and he published a fantastic book entitled *Bluffsides City on the Edge* for the d20 system. We lusted after that fantastic sand box adventure for years. Hal eventually merged his company with Mystic Eye Games and they went their merry way.

But since those long ago days, the property fell from the shelves of retailers and languished unseen. Hal and I immediately talked about a Castles & Crusades version and shortly thereafter, he signed up and began work on it. The final copy just landed on my desk and I have it opened even now.

The failures of last year's release were most notably my own. Both to be penned by me, *Rune Lore* and *Codex of Aihrde*, failed to hit anywhere near their deadlines. As disappointing as this is to me it was something that could not be helped. Our attempts to remove me from the head seat here failed for a variety of reasons and I've had to keep my role as Chief Troll much longer than I wanted to. But the good news is *Rune Lore* is mostly finished now and a great deal of the *Codex* as well. That book however just keeps getting bigger and bigger.

In the middle of all this we released a great book by Paul Kidd, *The Town of Kalas*. This sandbox adventure is hitting stores even now. There were other titles that gave 2012 a slightly better feel than it had during the summer months.

So we set off on another year, 2013. That is Mac Golden's (co-writer of *Castle and Crusades*) favorite number, at least 13 is. So we are hoping for good things.

Out the gate we have the *Codex Celtarum*, presently in a Kickstarter role coming out and are looking at the final books in the A series hitting the street. *All The Wasting Way* is in layout now and *A12 The Blasted Heath* is about 1/3 written. After this we look to *A13 Aufstrag*, a monster undertaking. But before any of that, we wrap up *Rune Lore* and the *Codex of Aihrde* and after that the next in the Codex Series. And that doesn't even begin to touch on Shane Moore and his Abyss Walker series coming to Castles and Crusades this year . . .

Stephen Chenault  
January, 2013  
From the Dens

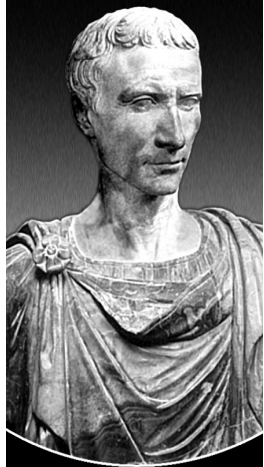








WHEN CAESAR  
STOOD UPON THE  
BANKS OF THE  
RUBICON LOOKING  
SOUTH TO ROME,  
HE HESITATED.  
BEFORE HIM STOOD  
THE VAST, COMPLEX  
MECHANISM OF THE  
PAST, GLOWING  
WITH A HOST OF  
INTRICATELY WOVEN  
STRATAGEMS.  
WITH HIM, HE HAD  
BUT ONE LEGION,  
WEARY FROM EIGHT  
YEARS OF BRUTAL WAR  
WITH THE GAULS.  
BUT WHEN CALLED  
TO SURRENDER  
HIMSELF TO THE  
SENATE AND CERTAIN  
EXILE, HE DID NOT  
HESITATE.  
HE CALLED HIS  
LEGIONARIES TO  
CROSS INTO ITALY,  
TO CROSS  
THE RUBICON.  
AND AS HE DID SO,  
HE SAID ONLY THIS:  
ALEA IACTA EST!



JULIUS CAESAR

# ALEA IACTA EST

 *"The Die is Cast" – An Editorial by Stephen Chenault*

## FIGHTING DRAGONS

The party's adventure led them into the wilderness of the Tar Kiln. Winter held the land and a foot or more of snow covered the ground; thick conifer trees grew along sharp ridges and deep gulches, shadowing the banks of frozen creeks and walling in small glades of open white snow. While traveling on a mission in a southerly direction, they heard the loud bleating as if some large bovine stood to slaughter. They veered to see what the commotion was only to discover a large minotaur upon a snowy field with a smallish -- only about 16 feet long -- white dragon upon its corpse, tearing away a chunk of arm from its fresh kill. Without a moment's hesitation they attacked, drawing blades and riding their light war horses across the open field.

Chaos ensued.

The dragon lifted its head from the corpse and roared. In its voice a wave of fear rolled over the party, and though none balked, all the steeds did. They threw one party member and forced the others to leap from the saddle and attack on foot. The dragon never left its kill, spreading its wings across the body of the minotaur and moving forward, it roared again. The party leapt into battle and as they did so the dragon reared, lifting its head and neck half a dozen feet above them and breathed. The breath sent a blast of wind so cold it froze the air around the party, in their mouths and even in their lungs. Everyone took damage but the knight took the brunt, his face freezing, instantly icing his left eye, which went white if any could have seen it in the madness of the battle. But they pummeled it hard with blades and spells, driving the small dragon from its kill, if only by a few feet.

The dragon rose a few feet buffeting its mighty wings and churning up a mighty mist of snow that blinded everyone (the spell-like effect of *obscuring mist*) within 20-40 feet of the beast. The party attacked on, swinging blindly, and the monk managed to score a horrific hit on the beast so much so that the dragon turned his rage upon him. He fell upon the monk with claws and fang, ripping flesh on his back, stomach and biting down on the offending arm, from hand to elbow. All the while he smashed the cleric with a mighty tail whomp, knocking him to the ground.

The party continued to press though it was looking grim. The dragon, gaining the upper-hand in speed commenced a death roll with the monk in tow; his arm almost came off, but instead it was just shattered like glass. The monk collapsed. A wave of magic missiles struck the beast and a mighty blow from the knight, slightly recovered but somewhat blinded in the eye. The spellcasters scattered the blinding snow and exposed the dragon and the flailing body of the monk in all its gore. They renewed their attack, hammering the dragon again, but undeterred, it bit the cleric in the arm and let loose another blast of frigid air, this time immobilizing the arm, freezing the blood within.

But at that the knight saw the beast's neck exposed and hacked repeatedly at it. At last the creature fell to the earth in wreck and ruin.

Unbeknownst to the party, the encounter was not over. They sniffed out the hole where the beast had stored its treasure and first noticed it was upon the banks of a frozen lake. The lake, they soon discovered, was oddly frozen, higher in ice than the water level or banks should have permitted. They then knew it was a dragon lair. Once entering they discovered the beast's horde of gold and weapons, magic and sorcery. Insanely cold though the lair was they entered. Each and every one felt the sting of frozen air, like only those in the deep north feel; it burned their lungs and promised agony if they remained long.

But the dragon fought on.

Striking torches and building fires they attempted again, only to find that the dragons treasure lay frozen in ice. Attempts to melt it proved futile and the treasure would not yield. They learned that the ice was magical. Indeed, so powerful are the dragons that their very presence creates magic, where the white dragon lay, its unnatural being frozen the earth and the air about it. The whole lair promised to be a death trap. Dispelling the creature's magic failed (bad roll). At last the wizard attempted to learn what he could of the magic ice, of its creation and maintenance. He donned the sash of languages and placing his hand upon the ice read its history, how the dragon



burrowed into the ground and it froze over him, how all the moisture that came his way, summer or winter borne, froze upon the ground, how he cultivated it and built it to his own design.

All the while the wizard's hand began to freeze, all attempts to warn him of his danger, proved futile and the wizard plied on with his sorcery. At last, his flesh gave way and his fingers died one by one, the flesh turning black from the extreme cold. At last, he pulled them away and found they were dead and could not be healed (minus a *heal* spell). All treatments failed so they let it set, only to discover hours later that the rotten flesh, once thawed, turned into a death sentence and black blood began mingling with red. In a frenzy of knife work, the magi's fingers were pared back almost to the bone, healed and bandaged.

But the dragon was not done yet. The frozen treasure proved a monumental task, where magic failed they at last set to with iron bars, shovels and pick axes. After a great effort they unearthed the bulk of it, leaving what they thought worthless. But days had passed and the corpses of the dragon and the minotaur began attracting other scavengers and several battles ensued in which the monk, horribly wounded from the battle, fell into a wounded coma.

So the fight proved a tremendous battle. For one, 11 hit dice white dragon, the party suffered greatly. Their horses were scattered and it took two days for the ranger to get them. The knight lost use of an eye, only a restore spell later brought it back to health, but it forever after was marked with icy white lines. The monk suffered multiple broken bones in his arm and hand and nearly lost his arm and then later died. The cleric, whose arm suffered a direct blow from the dragon breath, was permanently damaged, he gained a -1 from all actions where that arm was the dominate arm. The wizard lost two fingers and suffered similar penalties when casting spells of a somatic nature.

Dragon fights are and should be the toughest of fights. Even small dragons are intelligence opponents and able to fight with multiple attacks in any given round, as the party above found out to their dismay. In general melee, they should be striking six times, four claws and a bite; the sixth with the tail swipe. All these are generally focused at one or two opponents, depending on the size of the dragon and the party placement. The dragon of course suffers no impediment for multiple attacks. The wing buffet can come at any time, increasing his attacks to seven for the enterprising dragon.

The wings always offer a great opportunity for the dragon, as it stirs up all manner of debris to blind or confound their enemies. The wings are powerful and snow, sand, dirt, dust, even coins for the greater dragon, suffer from it, being thrown up in the vortex. This material cuts vision in half or completely in the case of material like sand. A dragon is not affected by this as its eyes are long accustomed to it, or in the case of Aihrdian dragons, they possess a protective lens that keeps the eye clear. Greater dragons can do even more damage with their wings, driving damage causing rocks or coins into characters. There is almost no end to it.

Of course the fear dragons exhibit by being dragons can impact most anything. Even very powerful characters can suffer from lost

of ability checks or combat roles. Though it did not turn out so, the horses in the above encounter could easily have thrown the players and injured one easily (they just made their saves).

The tail of greater dragons can easily pick up a foe and hurl him or bash him against the earth. This along can be a massive problem.

The breath weapon is of course obvious, but should never be used in a simple cone or gas. The weapon should affect everything around it. The icy blast of the white dragon above froze the ground (though it was already frozen) and crystallized the air the characters breathed (giving them a minus on constitution checks for 2 rounds); fire ignites everything, from clothes to wood, to anything the characters are standing on or near; acid destroys not just the characters but the ground they are standing on, killing plants (so that spells like entangle are useless) by melting the earth away, tripping them; gas kills plants and lingers and so on. A dragon's breath should be, much as Smaug relates, death.

But that isn't all. Dragons can fly. Long ago a party I ran slew a dragon and it fell to earth upon its back. One character leapt upon its stomach to dance upon his corpse and the dragon, not quite dead, leapt into the air grabbing the character with him and hurled into the skies. The battle ended but not before the character was dropped and killed on impact. Older dragons are often big enough that they can scoop up prey and carry it high into the air, dropping it to pulp upon the ground.

Some dragons of course possess magic, and this offers a whole new bag of tricks.

When running dragons the battle should always be epic and the players and their characters should never walk away without major scars and a great battle story.

**ROUSE YOURSELF!**

**ITS TIME  
TO DIE!**



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# CODEX CELTARUM ~ PREVIEW

Years and years ago, shortly after launching TLG in 1999, I put forward the concept of a series of mythology books, the Codices. The inspiration for these books came from the old AD&D *Deities and Demigods*, a book that tackled the gods of over a dozen myths. Before each chapter stood a short section describing the world view of the various mythologies. This had always been my favorite part of the book, I enjoyed the crash course into history and world view the short few paragraphs offered.

Thus, the idea for Codices came to me.

Laid out for the d20 system and set to release in conjunction with the *Codex of Erde* that I was writing and Gary Gygax's *Canting Crew* and *World Builder*, the Codices would bring in a mountain of material for the game master as well as the player. The focus would be the mythology, but the text would draw out of each mythology spells, combat techniques and similar cultural features peculiar to that mythology; for the GM the focus would be on new monsters, gods, powers, etc. also drawn from the mythology. All that material, folded nicely into the mythology, offered to bring everyone at the table a mountain of usable material. The books would contain the *Codex Germania*, *Codex Celtarum* etc. The *Codex of Erde*, as its title suggests was part of the series, only being the mythology of Erde/Airhde. It was to launch the whole series; true to form it contained magic items, monsters, spells, equipment, etc.

The *Codex of Erde* launched TLG into the game, our first release in hardback and contained material by Gary Gygax. His own *Canting Crew* and *World Building* followed in short order. But for a variety of reasons the Codices never made it out. The *Codex of Erde* sold very well and quickly became a stand alone product. Our own attention focused on the plethora of Gygax material and we tooled TLG in that direction. By 2004 we added *Castles & Crusades* to the mix and the Codices had long been set aside, joining the litany of good ideas time discarded.

Enter Brian Young. When TLG put a call out for new writers in July, Peter Bradley, our art Lord, put me in touch with Brian Young. Brian was ready to hit the ground running with a series of adventures he had in mind. We looked over what he had, liked it, approved it and in short order (literally short order) he was sending us material, the first book *Goblins of Mount Shadow* landed on my desk within a few weeks. Shortly after that I mentioned greater needs beyond adventure, he pitched an idea he had been working on for some years, a book that explored the mythology of the Celts, with deities, monsters, powers, etc. I remarked that sounded like a series we had set aside over a decade ago.

One conversation led to another and the Codices rose from the bin of time's discards like the proverbial Phoenix. and before August was over a completed manuscript landed on my desk. We wrestled with the title for a bit, discarded *Codex Celtae* and adopted *Codex Celtarum* but it did not matter. The Codices was back. Before that was fully digested Brian began work on the *Codex Germania*, the next in the series.



## **TLG 8130 Codex Celtarum, 144 pages, estimated MSRP \$27.99 for the hardcover.**

Druids have surmised that before the present Universe there was a Disharmonious Void that once existed. Torn by destructive chaos and strife, it was devoid of any creative powers and life completely. Nothing could exist in this Disharmonious Void. It was death for the dead in essence and completely uninspired. A spark of Inspiration or Awen, called the Great Spark, blazing red and shaped like a thunder-bolt, tore its way through the blackness with fury. The Fire of Creation split the shapeless Void into the (as yet empty) Three Circles (Trí Fáine) that were anchored around one magnificent, growing oak tree. This tree was the first in the Universe, and under its immense leafy crown hung golden acorns, swollen with potency.

### **A Celtic Cromlech**

The druids dwelt in a world wholly apart from our own, a world that comes down to us in the stones of the cromlech, the wild burnings of the wicker man, the priests who called on ancient trees and fey to bless or defend them and a language of such haunting beauty that its echoes stir memories within us of a people we once were.

The Codex Celtarum delves into the myths of the Celtic peoples, the powers of the world around them, the monsters that hunted them, and the gods that watched over them. Its author, Brian Young, a scholar by trade, introduces the Celtic mythos like never before, exploring the depths of that world to recast it for the fan-

tasy RPG Castles & Crusades. Within the Codex Druidum lies a wealth of information; gaming material that blows new life into the world of the fey, the druid, the ranger and all characters whose travels carry them through the wooded hills, broken crags and dark forests of our primeval imagings.

### **More than Myths and Gods**

The Codex Celtarum contains a veritable host of gaming material. New spells for your druid, new powers for your characters, combat, and more, within the Codex Druidum you'll find:

190 new druidic spells

90 gods and monsters from the Celtic mythos

150 powers for the fey monsters

Expand your character! With fey blood in your veins you too can possess the powers of the fey. Or even adopt new races for your game. The elder gods possessed powers of surpassing wonder and left a world with all manner of strange incarnations, those are yours to bring to life.

Codex Celtarum comes complete in seven glorious, fun filled, fact packed chapters. Chapter 1 covers a complete history of the Celtic world view. Chapter 2 delves into the world of fey. Chapter 3 presents races and monsters. Chapter 4 covers mountains of new spells and magical abilities. Chapter 5 tackles the lords of war. Chapter 6 looks at the gods themselves. Chapter 7 yields new material for the Castle Keeper.





# STRONG OF FEATS AND DEEDS

*I saw valiant men in battle array,  
And after the morning, battle-mangled flesh.  
I saw a tumult of three limits slain,  
A shout active in front was heard.  
In defending Gwenystrad was seen  
A mound and slanting ground obstructing.  
In the pass of the ford I saw men gory-tinted,  
Dropping their arms before the pallid miserable ones.*



Faery has as much need for the arts of war as the Mortal world. The majority of fans of the Faery-folk seem to forget the dozens of stories about their invasions and feuds. In the Celtic myths, Mankind learned the methods of warfare from the Faeries and gods. In some cases, as with the Milesians against the Tuatha Dé Dannan, the Mortals fought the beings from the Otherworld and won, usually at great cost.

Although the world of Faery is serene and blissful most of the time, fierce battles and wars are always on the verge of occurring. The Faeries of Darkness seem to be always plotting great schemes involving battles and terrible invasions of enemy lands. The adventurers are usually caught up in this, if not causing their share of turmoil.

Legendary Celtic heroes possess great combat feats and perform impossible deeds in the tales; these are often attributable to the Otherworld and the gods in origin. What the reader will find in this chapter are the many unusual feats that are possible, magical battle tattoos and warpaint, fighting orders, and the Celtic method of battle.

In the scope of an adventure in the Otherworld or in the Mortal, great deeds are expected by the warriors along the way to face the nearly impossible odds. First it is important to become acquainted with the ancient Celtic methods of combat.

## CELTIC WARFARE

*Ní gnáth orgain cen scéola.*

*However harsh the battle, someone usually survives to tell the tale.*

Because it is based on the observations of the Greeks and Romans (and later the English and French) who waged wars with them, our knowledge of how the Celtic peoples fought in battle is limited. Universally, the sources agree that the Celts approached battle as they did life itself – individual and boldly.

There is evidence of strategies being used by the early Celts on the Continent, and oftentimes succeeding. Warriors typically used spears and shields, since the iron to produce either is slight in comparison to swords. Foot soldiers formed the majority of the fighting force, while the fewer numbers of horsemen and chariots were considered the elite of their warriors.

Music was a major part of the Celtic army's plans and motives; it led them and helped to inspire rage. From the earliest era, against

the Hellenic forces in the East and in Greece, it was noted that the Celtic forces went to war with music behind them. Taking examples from the scarce references in Post-Roman and Early Modern Celtic peoples, bagpipes, drums, and loud battle songs were the normal practice.

The battle songs were deep in tone and violent in character, and the warriors would likely continue to chant these grim songs while hacking, slashing, and jabbing their way into the fray. Musicians would linger safely far behind their warriors and play until they were driven from the field or slain. This music was primarily meant to inspire the warriors towards the opening moment of the conflict, but also continued driving them through the battle.

The 'Celtic Charge' was dreaded by their foes. The simple strategy involved a mighty, forceful dash towards the enemy's lines and a slamming of shields and jabbing of spears into the thick of the foe to break its front-line. If the enemy could hold its front-line long enough, the Celts would wear themselves out, and their strength and fury with them. Sometimes the charging army would lose its morale if it failed to shatter enemy lines.

The Celtic warrior would use every method possible to intimidate and terrify his foe. Displaying their well-muscled bodies and wild hair styles, exhibiting their skill at weaponry, and reciting their fame and ancestry were meant to overwhelm their enemies. In the sometimes long minutes before the moment of conflict, the Celtic force would blast their animal-shaped war horns (carnyx), thunder their drums, cuss and yell aloud for as long as it took to psyche out the foe.

Large battles were fought with often gigantic Celtic armies in the field, and whatever discipline was shown at the beginning of the battle fell apart later into the bloody struggle. The Celtic method of battle was brutal, showy, and meant to end the combat quickly. In the early centuries of the Roman Republic, the Celts were unstoppable and had won more battles than lost, but over time the Romans evolved their fighting methods to curtail the Celtic system.

All of the techniques and documented methods of warfare the Celts once used sadly are lost to a score of missing manuscripts among the Greeks and Romans in time, so what is left is a simplistic understanding of their 'logic'. It is understood that among the Eastern Gauls in Galatia, a three-horse unit was employed, called a *Trimarcisia*. Two of the horsemen were charges or squires that rode fresh horses for their master who fought in the field. When he needed a fresh steed, he would be given a replacement by one of the men.

There are many instances of the Celts using clever tricks against their foe to win the upper hand, and they were unsurpassed in guerrilla warfare. Small, swift, mobile armies would duck into forests, mountains and hills only to re-emerge in a surprise attack on the enemy from the sides and behind, and then return to their hiding grounds before they were trapped. The Britons used this against Rome with plentiful success, and it appears to have been

## 100 CASTLES & CRUSADES

the preferred method for poorly armed or outnumbered forces.

Each warrior ultimately fought in the fray to satisfy his or her own personal ego and glory. They battled to claim personal fame and reputation among their peers and peoples, and to show a tangible proof to their success meant claiming a trophy in the form of their defeated foes' severed heads.

The severed head was embalmed in pine resin or other means, and put on show for guests in the home of the warrior, who would tell the blow-by-blow story of how the enemy met his fate. This claiming of the enemy's head by the Celts often horrified the other cultures around them, perhaps because it appeared to de-Humanize the fallen and reduce them to mere decorations, or because the souvenirs in question belonged to friends and relatives. *(The player character would gain 50 experience points for each head taken from a lesser enemy, 100 for greater foes and 250 for every king, noble, god, and monster.)*

Warriors would use lime to harden and spike their hair to appear taller and more inhuman. According to the sources, this was an attempt to seem like battle spirits and presumably what we today consider the 'Faeries' from the Otherworld. Hair was lathered in a thickening bleaching substance (most likely made with lime) and then spiked back from the front. Over time this process would gradually blanch the color from the hair.

Celtic warriors were known to bare colorful tattoos, which also helped them appear larger than life, particularly among the Britons, who also used blue woad body paint. Tribesmen would be decked out in bright colors to dazzle and overwhelm their enemies, even more so if they were non-Celtic in origin. Each warrior created his own personal, over-the-top image before arriving in battle or their lord's hall.

Swordsmen and those who wore armor, mainly chainmail and helmets, were most likely champions and nobles. These expensive items were inheritable and had required more time from the blacksmith. It was believed by the Ancients that the Celts invented chainmail armoring, but the irony is that the Celtic peoples typically didn't use armor.

Celtic armies lived to threaten and intimidate others by use of raids, sorties, and the occasional invasion. Unlike the Romans, the Celts did not seek to have complete control over those they terrorized, only to remind them that the warrior force was master to the lands. Tithes and tribute were demanded by hordes often, intimidating them into paying on threat of a much worse return visit. The Celts did not seek to change others' way of life to fit their own, only to have a limited influence on them, primarily financial in origin.

One more famous aspect of Celtic warfare is the inclusion of women. While other cultures in Europe denied them any hopes of equality, much less the ability to fend for themselves, the Celts saw no flaw in allowing females to hold power. It was a common joke among the Romans that to bother a Celtic man was bad enough and would take several soldiers to calm him, but to anger his wife was a far worse affair. Celtic women had a distinctive place in so-

ciety with the ability to rule peoples, lead armies into battle, and as some evidence shows, train men in the arts of war. The Britons and Gaels give plenty of mention of this in their tales on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Some of the protocols of Celtic warfare, as hinted at in Gaelic tales, show that riding a chariot or horse with the left side facing the enemy was a display of insult, meant to provoke them. To hold a spear with its head high meant one was ready for battle and would enter a company of people prepared for confrontation, but to place the spear head aimed at the ground displayed a request for peace. The changing of one's brooch from left to right also signaled the change from peaceful situation to agitated tension.

Tribesmen spent their off times training and keeping in shape for battle, whenever it came. Similar to the rest of Europe, the Celts had warriors ready to be mustered by leaders and chiefs at the time of need, with a few select professional groups assisting the ranks. Although greatly misunderstood, it is documented among the Gauls that an elite army called the *Gaesatae* ('Spearmen') fought for many of the tribes against their foes. The Romans said they were from the Alps, but had possibly their last stand at the Battle of Telamon in Italy in 225 B.C.E., although they were mentioned to have fought again in 222 B.C.E. at Clastidium.

Mercenary bands were common among the early Celts. They found fame and glory abroad in Babylon, Egypt, and other foreign territories, fighting for wealth and fame. Alexander the Great employed them in his famous conquests, albeit as expendables in the field, and many a Ptolemaic pharaoh in Egypt employed their services. The irony in this Celtic warrior profession is that, at home, they could not stop forceful invasions by their foes, or prevent the Germanic change that swept Europe after Rome's fall in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. Afar in the field, however, they were a necessary requirement for enterprising leaders bent on conquest.

In Celtic languages and poetics there are plentiful epithets for being a warrior. They are compared to boars, bears, lions, dragons, oak trees, bulls, stags and wolves. These and many more are used in Welsh and Irish poems honoring champions and heroes. Many names in Celtic Europe derive from animals and battles, and exhibit this connection (*See Chapter 7 on 'Naming Your Character'*).

*Bid co h-eistechtach cailli,*

*bid co féchsanach muigi,*

*oir ní fedraís, mór in mod,*

*nach biad t' escara it fharrad.*

*Keep your ears open in the forest*

*and your eyes open on the plain,*

*for you don't know — this is important*

*whether your enemy is near.*



## THE DARKWARS OF FAERY

In the timeless world of Faery, war does happen, often, and it is a terrible affair. But there are some occasions when the causes of the war are so explosive that all of Faery are included. There have been several Darkwars in Faery, each as terrible as the last. Effectively, a Darkwar, or *Cogadh Dub*, is a 'World War' which leaves destruction and death in its wake where ever it goes in Faery.

The first Darkwar swept across the Faery Isles as Taran led the Children of Light and Twilight in an epic struggle to end Goblin tyranny. The reign of the Fire King was brought to an abrupt halt by the Elven forces of the Pren champion. The two Darkwars that came later were also brought into being by Dark Faery leaders, each with lofty and sometimes ruthless causes. It is during wars of this nature that new heroes come forward to prevent the awful outcomes or to eradicate them in the end.

Events that lead to these all-inclusive wars are sometimes as epic as the wars that follow them. The most gory and rotten of conflicts in the Mortal world do not compare to their counterparts in Faery. Great deeds, extreme magical use, and ferocious slaughter on all sides are common. Only three Darkwars have been fought in all of the timeless years since the Horned One's Three Great Cries, but the next is always around the corner.

If the CK wishes to place his adventurers into a Darkwar, it is best done in a typically 'Celtic' style with many motives:

- 1 The Raven-King/Witch Queen/Pen Annwn has designs on the simple goal of conquest of Faery.
- 2 A raid into one land from another, perhaps led by a rival Power, starts a chain of events that escalates into a full-blown Darkwar.
- 3 The princess or queen from one Faery race was abducted by another, and reclaiming her requires a war of unimaginable scale.
- 4 The involvement of Mortals creates a tension that explodes into a furious Darkwar. The nature of this involvement is the CK's decision. *Perhaps the Mortal character players are too close to their Fey acquaintances?*
- 5 The gods decide to stir things up in Faery by creating many dilemmas and unavoidable situations that expand into a Darkwar. This could be for their entertainment, or any other reason the CK feels is best to start the long-term war.
- 6 The CK could use the present adventures and campaign to somehow bring about the Darkwar, tying those events into what becomes an impossible and unavoidable conflict.

Once committed to bringing a Dark War to Faery, the CK will need to carry it through to its end. It should always be epic in nature and conclude on a dramatic or even anti-dramatic note. These wars spill out over into the other worlds often, and vice versa, as the worlds are closely linked.

The game-play isn't purely about endless battles, but the strategies between the many opponents in trying to reach their objectives and goals. These many small events within the whole will likely conclude in bloody battles, but it is essential that these rare wars in Faery include all races and Powers together in some way in the big picture.

This battle is akin to the Greek tales of the feuds between the Gods and Titans with Mankind caught in the middle of it all. In Faery, it is not unusual to find the gods taking an active part in the battles, if there is a factor that threatens them or they can benefit from it. The Faery-folk or Mortals that are in the middle are the weaker of the forces obviously, but they can often surpass their divine rulers.

## TATTOO BATTLE MAGIC AND WOOD PAINT

The Britons and Picts were famous for allegedly covering their bodies in brightly colored tattoos. Since the Celts were well-known in Antiquity for not wearing any armor into battle, it is easily surmised that they believed that possessing certain tattoos would suffice.

These tattoos would most likely be considered magical, granting the wearer any number of benefits. Their design would be, for a better word, 'Celtic' in style and in many bright colors. It was a rite of manhood to have these images inked onto the flesh, with each added tattoo becoming a trophy or badge of honor.

In fact, the very name 'Prydain' derives from the early Celtic word 'image/picture' (*Pryd*) implying that the origins Britons are the 'People of the Images'. The Picts obviously are famous for allegedly painting their bodies with elaborate tattoos, and their name, given by others, means literally the 'Painted Ones.'

In Faery, these images are more often magical in origin and can be given to anyone equally. Certain herbs and magical ingredients go into these inks to give them the required dosage that will prepare them for the magical benefits once they are drawn onto the flesh.

Tattoos in the form of beasts usually grant the possessor bonuses on their attributes and skills, while others that form patterns and designs would grant abilities. Listed below are the basics on how these tattoos can work in game-play.

Faery abilities, in some cases, can be inked into the skin of the character or NPC but the ability's own rules still apply. The character sheet must list the tattoos, the location on the body, and the properties of each, for organization.

The CK will need to maintain some sort of management of these tattoos because they could easily get out of control and compromise game balance. A 1<sup>st</sup> level character would be given an option of having one if their Charisma is 16 or higher. Every three levels (generally) the character can take another, or earn one with their deeds during game-play and CK's decision. Listed below are some examples on how these magical tattoos can work; the CK can base their ideas off this table if needed to derive their own in the process of game-play.

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### Handy Magic Items from the famous Illusionist Inventor, Frankitabulos Spellfilcher

The celebrated Gnome Illusionist, Frankie the Fantabulous, is well known for his odd but useful items. Frankie loves adventure and has worked alongside many different adventuring companies. Among those companies, he is well known for his love of the comforts of home. They say that laziness is the mother of invention. Well, she is in good company with Frankie. Here are some of Frankie's recent inventions:

**Traveler's Cape:** This is a light blue spider-silk cape of protection +1. It grants to the wearer the effects of the Repel Vermin and Resist Elements spells as long as it is worn. These effects include a +2 bonus to saving throws versus: fire/heat, water/cold, air/sonic and earth/acid. When Frankie commissioned this item his intent was not to protect himself from elemental attack. No, nothing that complex. He just wanted to make sure he would be comfortable while traveling and sleeping in the worst weather. The cape regulates the temperature surrounding the wearer to a comfortable level (between 65 and 75 degrees depending on level of activity). The cape will maintain this temperature up to 250 degrees and down to -100 degrees Fahrenheit. Beyond this point, the cape ceases to function. The cape never gets wet when exposed to water, never gets dirty, and protects the wearer from windy conditions.

**Prehensile Tail:** This is a belt with a three-foot tail attached to the back. The tail looks similar to a monkey's. Other types similar to a rat's tail or a scorpion's tail have been considered in the design process. Frankie has often been heard to say "A prehensile tail would be very handy to have. It's impossible to open the door when both arms are full of groceries, you know." This tail allows the wearer to use it much like an animal would. It would help you climb, open doors, hold items, etc. The tail is of no more use in combat than as a distraction. The limitations of the tail are similar to those of an unseen servant.

**Chef's Tools:** This is actually a cast iron cooking set. The largest is a large, black, iron cauldron big enough to hold stew for 15 people. It is also an extra dimensional space that holds what's left of the set. The set includes: a fire spit with stands, a grilling frame with stands, a small pot with a swing-arm hook, two frying pans, two casserole dishes with lids (also known as Dutch ovens), a coffee pot, three ladles, three spatulas, a cooking fork, a basting brush, tongs, a tub of lard, and two cooking mitts. Also included are 15 sets of ceramic plates, bowls, and mugs with silverware for each. There is also enough room in the extra dimensional space for 30 pounds of food items that are kept fresh while in the pot. Frankie keeps a spice pouch in the pot along with a Darkfire flint and steel and a Deodorant Candle. The Deodorant Candle eliminates all odors within 50 feet while lit. It can burn for 100 hours.

Darkfire and Coldfire are two Illusionist spells of Frankie's creation that affect normal fires. Darkfire eliminates the light produced by natural fire, leaving only the heat. Coldfire eliminates the heat produced by natural fire, leaving only the light. In both cases, the fire still requires fuel and oxygen to continue to burn.



**Charm Bracelet:** This is a bracelet (or necklace) of mithril with several clasps, each with a ring. The ring is somehow grafted to an item (welded, soldered, press fit, Mending, etc.). The item can then be held by the clasp and a command word spoken which causes the item to shrink to 1% of its actual size. It can then be clasped to the bracelet. Unclasping a shrunken item and repeating the command word causes it to return to full size. It takes one full round to change size. Maximum item size should be determined by the CK, but it is not recommended that anything larger than that which can be picked up by the character be allowed. It wouldn't do for characters to be carrying buildings around on their wrists. A bracelet has 3d4 clasps. A necklace has 5d4 clasps. Frankie's necklace has 9 clasps which he uses for: a pike (17 ft.), a 10 ft. ladder, a wand of cure moderate wounds, a set of lock picks, a dagger +1 that glows on command, a grappling hook with 100 ft. of silk rope, a crowbar, and a cooking pot (see item description above). For the last clasp, Frankie finds the best warrior in his group and buys an extra of whatever weapon that warrior uses and adds the clasp to it...just in case.

**Party Duck:** This is a wooden mallard similar to the type used as a decoy by hunters. When the command word is spoken, this duck animates and begins to dance. Dancing music begins to emanate from the duck. All within the range of the music (the room or 100' if outdoors) must make a Charisma save. This save must be made every three rounds while within range of the party duck. Those who fail the save begin to dance. A previously failed save imposes a cumulative -1 penalty to further saves. It is possible to voluntarily fail the save. All within 30' of the party duck who fail the save do not attempt further saves until outside 30' and gain +5 Charisma (max 17), but only toward others who have failed the save. Combat or other intense situations allow an automatic saving throw success. The party duck is usable once per day to a maximum of three times per week. The party duck remains active until the break of dawn.

**Fletch Grenade:** This is a composite magic item. Meaning it is not actually a magic item, but it is made up of magic items. Items required are: a hollow 3" diameter x 12" long iron cylinder with one solid end and one end with a cap enchanted with Magic Missile. Silver caltrops enchanted with Shocking Grasp. Glass beads filled with a potion of Freezing Hands (elemental inverse of Burning Hands). Glass beads filled with potion of Acid Spray (acid version of Burning Hands). Holy Water. Place equal parts silver caltrops, acid beads and cold beads inside the iron cylinder then fill until full with Holy Water. Place the cap on the top and cast mending. When the command word is spoken and the grenade

thrown the Magic Missile effect activates and it strikes unerringly, exploding for 4d4+4 Magic Missile damage, 1d4+1 physical damage from cold wrought iron, 1d8+9 electric damage, 1d4+1 physical damage from silver caltrops, 1d2+9 cold damage, 1d2+9 acid damage, plus effects of Holy Water.

**Owlbear Hide:** This cured hide is from a real owlbear, a creature that normally stands between 8 and 10 feet tall. When tanned and cured, the hide is allowed to shrink up significantly. However, it is still so large that only a humanoid of at least 6 ft. tall can wear it and not look silly. A minimum 15 Strength is required to wear the armor, and it provides its enchantment bonus to all Strength and Constitution checks. The claws were left on the hide and handles were inserted into the wrist bones to allow the claws to be used together in combat for two attacks dealing 1d4 damage (plus enchantment bonus) each. These attacks do not suffer the penalties normally associated with fighting with two weapons. The skull and beak are also left on the hide and provide protection as a helm when pulled over the head. When worn by a barbarian, Owlbear Hide provides its enchantment bonus as a penalty to the Charisma check when the barbarian uses his Intimidate special ability. The barbarian is also considered to be of a number of levels equal to the enchantment bonus higher than his actual level when using any class ability. A barbarian can use all class abilities while wearing this armor with no restrictions.





# INTO THE DARKNESS

By Kim Hartsfield

*“Not all deep, dark caverns are dens of evil. Just most of them . . . .”*

An overland and dungeon adventure for 4-6 characters of 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> that can be played in Aihrde or in any homebrew game.

Ostensibly set in the southern reaches of the Bergrucken Mountains in the world of Aihrde, this adventure is easily portable to any mountainous area, preferably one home to many Dwarf clans. While any assortment of members can successfully complete the adventure, having a Dwarf in the party would be advantageous.

Years ago, the Dwarven city of Daruk Haam consisted of three clans living together. The city housed almost a thousand Dwarves in its heyday, the clans of Kerish, Moltan and Trollbane living peacefully with one another. But like many good things, this too was fated to end. The origin of the feud has been lost to the ages, but the Trollbane clan became disgruntled with their position in the city and began an exodus from Daruk Haam. Soon after, the Moltan clan followed their lead, and left the city to the Kerish clan alone. While it would be dishonest to say the city flourished under the Kerish clan, led by Lord Draco Kerr, it did not fall into ruin like many of the Moltan and Trollbane thought it would. Indeed, Lord Draco led his people well for decades.

The city, once home to close to a thousand citizens, eventually saw itself housing but a few hundred as the Kerish clan began to dwindle. To keep the citizens better protected from the unsavory denizens of the deep rock, Lord Draco shut off a large portion of the town, ordering his miners to collapse the tunnels that led there. In this way, he kept his people in a smaller, more secure area. In truth, the area closed off had mainly been home to the clans that had abandoned Daruk Haam those many years ago, so there was no great commotion among the people. The city has thus survived in this fashion for the last twenty years or so with no ill effects. Until recently.

The Old City, as it is now called, became a refuge to a band of Red Caps, possibly a few dozen. The citizens of Daruk Haam, unaware of their new neighbors, still mounted trade caravans to the south and west. It was then that the Red Caps made themselves aware to the Dwarves, attacking the caravans without reservation, slaughtering the Dwarven merchants and destroying their goods. Some of the bodies of the merchants have yet to be discovered. It

is unknown to the Dwarves why the bodies were taken by the Red Caps. Lord Darakem, son of Draco, gathered his stoutest warriors to delve back into the Old City and eradicate this threat. Unsure of the number of Red Hats, the group was too small and many Dwarves were killed before Darakem could retreat and get his men back to safety. Since that day, Darakem and his small band of warriors have held off the Red Caps, owing to the fact that the only entrance to Daruk Haam is a small, well defensible tunnel.

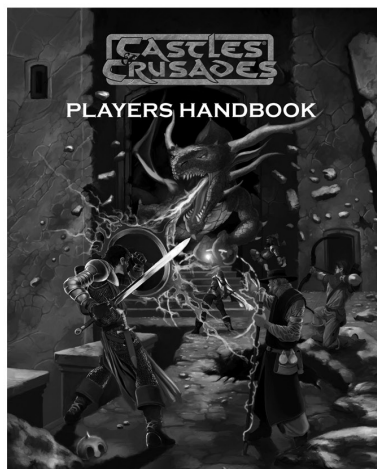
In the last few weeks, however, the citizens have reported noises coming from the collapsed tunnels closed many years ago. Darakem and his closest advisors fear that the Red Caps have found the back door to their small city. Rather than fall back from the entrance to protect the rear section, thus leaving the entrance poorly defended, he has decided to once again take the battle to them. Mounting a small, reconnaissance mission, Darakem and his three best warriors have decided to make their way to the entrance to the Old City, about a mile overland. As luck would have it, his small band met a group of a dozen Red Caps on patrol. A fierce battle erupted between the Dwarves and the Red Caps. It is here that the party enters the story . . . .

As the party makes its way through the lowlands of the Bergrucken Mountains, they hear the sounds of battle just over a small rise. As they approach, they see a group of three Dwarves battling a group of savage humanoids. A few dead creatures lay scattered about, along with the body of a slain Dwarf. It appears the Dwarves are about to be overwhelmed by the remaining creatures. One of the Dwarves, his huge, bushy red beard splattered with the black blood of these savages, sees the party.

“If you’re going to help us, now would be a good time!” he yells. His thick, Dwarven accent echoes through the valley. “If you’re in league with these foul beasts, then bring your best and be quick!”

**RED CAPS** x 5 (*These evil creature’s vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 25, 19, 17, 15, 12, AC 19. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with pole arms, doing 1d8 + 2 damage. They have darkvision, can become Invisible (as per the spell) once per day, can cast Fog Cloud (as per the spell) once per day as if 5<sup>th</sup> level and regenerate 2HP per round when wearing their vile caps.*)

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Darakem and his two remaining companions will fight alongside the party in an attempt to kill these creatures.

Once the battle is over, Darakem will thank the party and invite them back to his home, Daruk Haam. His two companions will solemnly pick up the body of their fallen brother and carry him back as well. While appreciative of the party's help, they will remain silent for the short trip back. They have seen much death in the last few months and have not the heart for it. If the party offers assistance in carrying the body, they will politely refuse, for obvious reasons.

Once the party has returned to the city, they will be met with happiness (dwarves), surprise (humans, gnomes and halflings), antipathy (elves and half elves) or outright hatred (half-orcs). Once Darakem proclaims they are friends, however, the citizens will stand a little easier, but are still apprehensive around these new guests. These Dwarves were an insular bunch before the arrival of the Red Caps, but now are distrustful to the point of suspicion. Only by Darakem's graces will the party gain even a modicum of trust or respect. Thankfully, he will tell the people of the party's deeds, for Dwarves do love a good story.

Darakem, being a hesitant leader, will not initially divulge his position among the Dwarves. In fact, he will downplay any salutations or revelry from his people in front of the party, claiming his title of "Lord" is but a hollow title. If the party refers to him in any sort of honorific way, Darakem will wave his hand and dismiss such gestures, claiming the real standing of a Dwarf, or Man, is through his actions not his titles.

After much dining and drinking (more drinking than dining), Darakem will weave his sad tale to the party. He fears the Red Caps are burrowing through the old tunnels and may attack at any time if the tunnels are breached. He has not the men to station guards at both the entrance and the old tunnels, and fears he no longer has the strength to attack the creatures. It will become obvious that the Dwarf is too proud to ask the party for assistance, but he would appreciate it if they offered (a Dwarf in the party will be almost honor bound to help this forgotten clan).

If the party offers assistance, Darakem will take them up on their offer. He has little to pay, but tells the party that they only desire peace, anything the old clans left behind in the Old City is fair game, and the party can have any booty they happen upon. Also, they will be hailed as heroes by the citizens and will always be welcome. Darakem will use the Dwarven phrase, "Ver Bund Det", which any Dwarf in the party will recognize loosely translated, as

"inner friend", or "someone that belongs to our clan." Normally, Dwarves refer to non-Dwarf friends as "Ver Bund Sak", or "outer friends." To be referred to in the former is quite an honor.

## THE CITY OF DARUK HAAM

The Dwarven city the party finds itself in is quite small, especially by Dwarven standards. At the present, only about one hundred Dwarves make their home here. Miners and craftsmen make up the bulk of society, with woman and children less numerous than in human (or elven) society. Like many Dwarven cities, Daruk Haam rests under the earth. The Dwarves, accustomed to the darkness, rarely have light of any kind (however, they do use torches to read and work by). Numerous forges dot the city landscape, giving the appearance of gigantic fireflies resting on the stone floor. Even into the small hours, the sound of hammer and anvil echo throughout the city. The Dwarves, like they have with the darkness, take the sound in stride. Indeed, without the familiar sound of the craftsmen at work, the Dwarves would fear the silence.

A few merchants make their home here in the city. Fine Dwarven steel, sought after for its precision and craftsmanship, are plentiful in Daruk Haam. Expert weapons and armor (as described in the *Players Handbook*, page 48) can be bought from the Dwarven smiths, albeit at a high cost. If the party attempts to use their newfound influence to garner a better price, have the player make a Charisma check (CL – 5). If successful, the item in question will be sold at only five times its normal value (as opposed to the ten times cost listed in the *Players Handbook*).



The main watering hole in town is the Kampferale, or “Strong Drink”. Darakem is a regular here, as are his most trusted allies. His closest friend is Kahrl, Son of Gonnor. The party will have first met Kahrl upon the field of battle, during the skirmish with the Red Caps. It is likely that the initial discussion about the Red Caps and the party’s help will take place around a table at the Kampferale.

The party will be housed during their time in Daruk Haam at Darakem’s home. He lives alone, but his position affords him a large home in the center of town. He is neither ostentatious nor pretentious, living fairly simple. Since Dwarven homes are not built for anyone taller than five feet, those taller folk will have a hard time getting around. In fact, they will have to sleep on the floor, since no bed in town will be big enough. Darakem will try his best to accommodate his new friends, but the taller members of the party will probably experience a long night. (Any Dwarves in the party, by contrast, will probably experience their best night of sleep in ages!)

## THE OLD CITY

Much of the adventure will take place in what the Dwarves now call The Old City. It has been blocked off and isolated from the main city for a few dozen years. In the past, when Daruk Haam was much more populated, it was an area of thriving commerce and boisterous Dwarves. Since its isolation, it has become dark and desolate. And this desolation has attracted a few unwanted guests.

While the Dwarves -- and by extension the party -- are aware of the Red Caps that populate the Old City, they are not aware that a Dark Naga has taken up residence as well, living alongside the Red Caps in a symbiotic relationship. The Dark Naga only wishes to be left alone, to study and peruse the old Dwarven tomes and tablets at her leisure. She has hired Red Caps to fulfill this wish. The Red Caps, in their desire for blood and savagery, thrive in the pure evil the naga projects, bringing to her the rare sacrificial lamb (the past few have been the Dwarven merchants that were missing... and the band of Red Caps have even offered up a few of their own people to her).

When the party begins their trek into the Old City, Darakem and his friend Kahrl will accompany them. Some of the citizens of Daruk Haam will plead with Darakem to stay, owing to the fact that he has no heir, but he is stubborn and refuses to stay behind. Darakem lived primarily in what is now the city proper as a child and never ventured much into The Old City when it was still in use. His clan lived where he lives now. As such, neither he nor Kahrl are very familiar with the Old City.

What they do remember is a huge cavern that housed many of the commercial and industrial buildings, and about a dozen smaller caverns, mainly used as residential pockets. Unknown to the Dwarves, many of these residential caverns have been isolated from the Old City by a natural cave-in years ago.

The entirety of the caverns here are coated with a thick, brown dust, the remnants of minor cave in and tremors that have shaken the stone walls these many years. A ranger attempting to track should receive a +2 bonus in addition to any he may normally receive due to the dust. Unless otherwise noted, the ceiling height for the caverns is fifteen feet and the width of the tunnels ranges from ten to twenty feet.

### Area 1 Entry

**This relatively small entry way is littered with bones, some with decaying flesh still clinging to them. They appear to be wild animals, possibly eaten by the Red Caps. A foul smell encompasses the cavern.**

The party members should all make a Spot check (CL -10). Those that pass are aware that they are not alone in this room, as there are two Red Caps using their invisibility power. Their plan is to observe the party and attack as they are leaving, preferably focusing their attack on a Wizard or obvious spell caster. If anyone notices something amiss in the room and starts alerting the party, the Red Caps will attack, though not focusing on a spell caster, but attacking a party member at random while they still have the element of surprise.

**RED CAPS x 2** (These evil creature’s vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 19, 15, AC 19. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with pole arms, doing 1d8 + 2 damage. They have darkvision, can become Invisible (as per the spell) once per day, can cast Fog Cloud (as per the spell) once per day as if 5<sup>th</sup> level and regenerate 2HP per round when wearing their vile caps.)

### Area 2 Cavern

**This cavern has a few old, stone houses against the south and west walls. A thick, brown dust, the same color as the stone all about you, covers everything. There is, however, a discernible path of humanoid prints leading into the cave.**

A few of the Red Caps have taken up residence in the abandoned homes of the Dwarves. They are currently sleeping, but will easily be awakened by any overt noise (i.e. battle, a group of people



talking, the tell-tale sound of heavy armor, etc.) If awakened before the party begins searching the houses, the Red Caps will use their invisibility to surprise the party. If the battle turns against the creatures, they will attempt to escape the party using their *Fog Cloud* ability.

**RED CAPS x 2** (These evil creature's vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 24, 18, 12, AC 19. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with pole arms, doing 1d8 + 2 damage. They have darkvision, can become *Invisible* (as per the spell) once per day, can cast *Fog Cloud* (as per the spell) once per day as if 5<sup>th</sup> level and regenerate 2HP per round when wearing their vile caps.)

### Area 3 Amnug Chamber

This cavern seems to have had a lot of activity lately, as noted by the conspicuous absence of the dust that one would normally see. That is not to say it is entirely gone, but there is much less of it. You can see remnants of stone houses against the east wall, into a small niche to the south. Another tunnel leads off to the north from the area.

The Red Caps have raised a pack of Amnug that they keep in this room. It is the Amnug that detected the Dwarves in the caverns that were once connected to these. They keep them now as guards and protectors for their leader (who lives in area #5). Due to the heightened since of detection, the Amnug are aware of the party and thus cannot be surprised. A check should be made by the party to see if they are surprised by the Amnug (CL – 2). If the party is surprised, the Amnug get a free attack before initiative is rolled.

**AMNUG x 5** (These chaotic evil creature's vital stats are HD 2d6, HP 10, 8, 7, 7, 5 AC 14. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack by bite that inflicts 1d4 damage. They can scale natural surfaces with no penalty nor need for an attribute check.)

### Area 4 Madgar Cavern

This appears to be another residential cavern, as small stone huts dominate the long west wall. What appears to be a statue is apparent in the north end of the cavern. The brown, rocky dust that has settled about these caverns is thicker here. To the layman, there are no obvious tracks or disruptions of any kind. A bitter, cold breeze seems to eke out of this cavern, embracing you in a frigid grip.

The cavern is home to a large patch of Russet Mold (see below for stats) that surrounds the statue. The Red Caps are aware of its presence and have avoided this cavern for months. A Ranger may

be able to detect the old tracks of the Red Caps (CL – 10), but it would be difficult as they were made months ago. If the party successfully defeats the mold, or works quickly, they will find a large hollow area under the statue. Inside, they will find 10 gems (worth 500gp total) and a large, stone tablet scribed with Dwarven runes. The statue is Madgar Moltan, patriarch of the Moltan clan. Both Darakem and Karhl will be aware of whom the statue is. Madgar was well liked by all the Dwarves of Daruk Haam before he was killed in a large battle with a horde of invading goblins centuries ago. If either Dwarf is asked about the runes on the tablet (or if there is a Dwarf in the party), they will translate them. They tell of the death of Madgar, and his final wishes. The gems, it says, should be consecrated to the living rock, "Give ye back from whence they come." Darakem, knowing he promised the party they could take any treasure, will not forcibly stop the party from taking the gems, but he will try and dissuade them from this course of action. Taking the gems, and thus going against Madgar's final wishes, will cause Darakem to lose a tremendous amount of respect for the party.

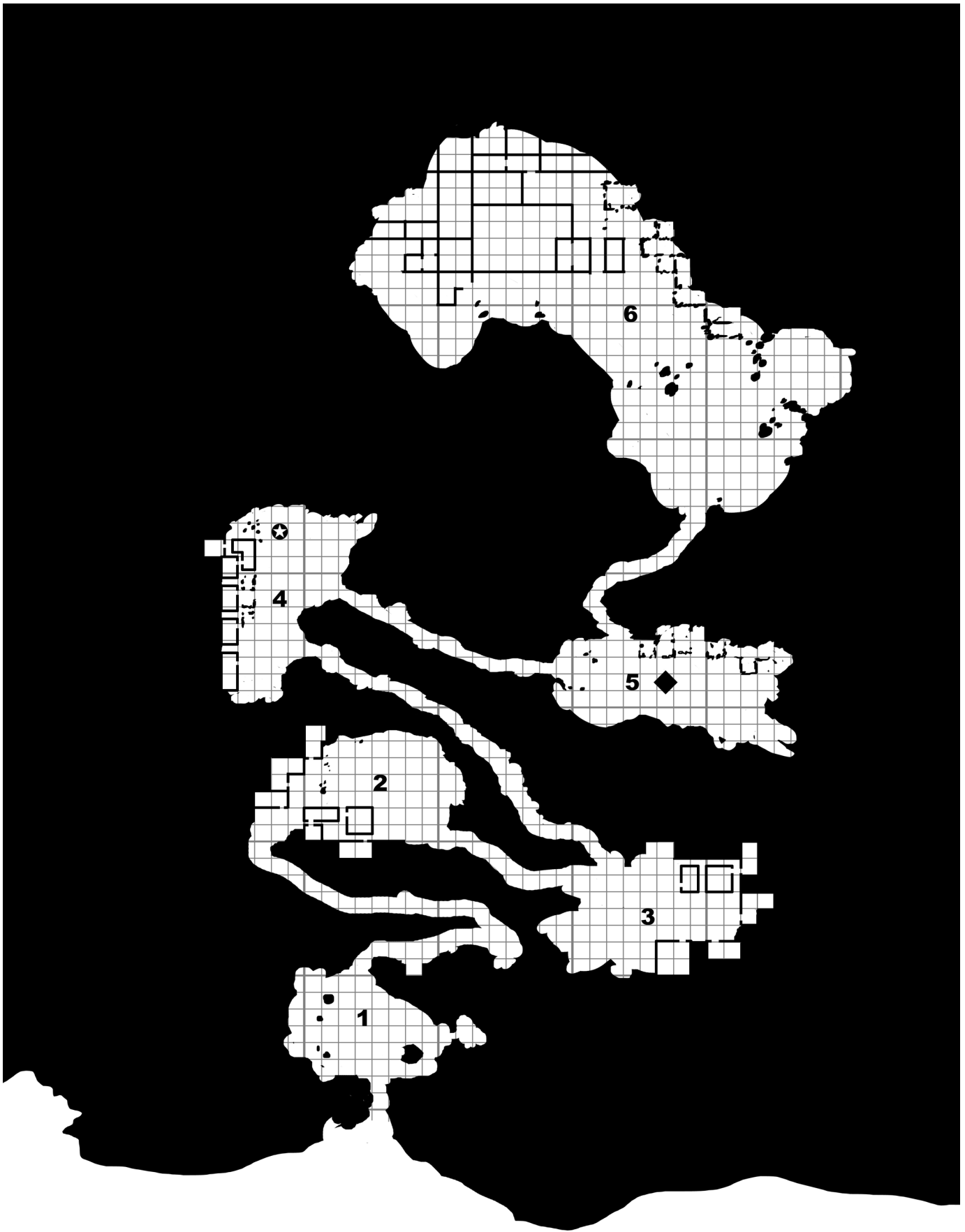
**Russet Mold** (This neutral creature's vital stats are HD5d8, AC (nil) and HP 24. Their primary attribute is physical. They attack by draining heat from nearby sources, doing 1d4 damage per round. The Mold will gain hit points as it absorbs the heat from others, growing stronger each round.)

### Area 5 Undwella's Cavern

This cavern appears to be a residential living space for the Dwarves that lived here many years ago. Small, stone huts are lined up along the north wall. A stone obelisk, possibly ten feet tall, stands in the center of the room, Dwarven runes running up its sides. Aside from the dust, larger pieces of rubble lay scattered about.

The runes on the obelisk can easily be deciphered by Darakem or Kahrl (or a Dwarf in the party). They read, roughly: "The Stone is my sky / the stone is my ground. To Undwella we give our praise / For She watches and gives us our strength" (For more information on the Dwarven goddess Undwella, see "Of Gods & Monsters", page 54).

Hidden in the stone huts are eight Red Caps. If the party somehow avoids the confrontation with the Amnugs in room #3, they will be able to surprise the Red caps (normal surprise rules apply). If, however, they battled the Amnugs, the Red Caps will be aware of the party and will attempt to ambush, using their invisibility ability. The leader of this band makes him home in one of the stone huts. He carries with him a magic (+1) pole-axe, doing 1d8+3 damage.





**RED CAPS x 8** (These evil creature's vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 30 (leader), 22, 18, 16, 15, 13, 12, 10 AC 19. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with pole arms, doing 1d8 + 2 damage. They have darkvision, can become invisible (as per the spell) 1/day, can cast fog cloud (as per spell) 1/day as if 5<sup>th</sup> level and regenerate 2HP per round when wearing their vile caps.)

Hidden amongst the rubble and filth in one of the stone huts is an old, battered chest the Red Caps found. Inside they have stashed most of their monetary treasure: 267cp, 139sp and 193gp. There are also a few items that the Red Caps stole from the merchants they slaughtered: two casks of ale (10gp each), a crate of normal quality short swords (12 in all) (7gp each), a case of iron ingots (12 in all, each weighing 5 pounds) (2gp each) and 5 silver ingots (each weighing 5 pounds) (25gp each).

If the party searches the rest of the hut, they will find a small statuette of a Dwarven female, her hands on her hips and a look of frustration on her face. The statuette is only four inches tall, but is marked by exquisite detail. It can be sold for 20gp to a collector. However, the real value of the item lies in its magical properties, being that it is one of the fabled *Statues of Well Tiding* (*Monsters & Treasure of Aihirde*, page 173). Basically, the possessor of the statue is allowed one re-roll, for any reason, once per gaming session.

#### Area 6 Forge Room

This massive cavern was obviously the main commercial and industrial center of the Old City. The ceiling here is close to fifty feet and the length of the cavern is over three-hundred feet. Large buildings, some having crumbled decades ago, are cramped together, the only place in the complex you have seen any buildings taller than a single story. The vastness of this chamber is heightened due to its eerie silence. In the distance, you can hear an echo of a hammer.

The hammering sound heard by the party is coming from the collapsed tunnels that used to lead to the city proper. There are four Red Caps hacking away with pick axes, trying to break through. For almost a month now, the Red Caps have been working in shifts to try and breach the stones.

**RED CAPS x 2** (These evil creature's vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 18, 12, AC 19. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with pole arms, doing 1d8 + 2 damage. They have darkvision, can become Invisible (as per the spell) once per day, can cast Fog Cloud (as per the spell) once per day as if 5<sup>th</sup> level and regenerate 2HP per round when wearing their vile caps.)

As the party investigates the large cavern, they will invariably come across the Dark Naga that lives in the southeast area. She is aware of the party, as she has read their thoughts as they draw close, but wishes to be left alone in her research. Initially, she will try to bargain with the party, offering safe passage if they leave her be, threatening them if they insist on a confrontation. If pressed, however, she will attack them without abandon. She will initially attempt to constrict the most powerful warrior, effectively eliminating him from the battle. She will then focus her offensive spells at any spell casters and use her poisoned stinger on any melee combatants. If the fight appears to be going against her, she will offer her surrender and tell the party the whereabouts of her treasure. If freed, she will haunt the party for the rest of her life (unless she is forced to agree otherwise). It should be noted that Darakem will wish nothing but her death and will stop at nothing to achieve this goal, for she is thoroughly evil.

**NAGA, DARK** (This lawful evil creature's vital stats are HD 9d8, HP 56, and AC 14. Her primary attributes are physical and mental. She attacks with a bite for 1d4 points of damage. Her stinger is poisonous inflicting a powerful narcotic venom, rendering those that fail a constitution save comatose for 2d4 turns, suffering haunting dreams. She has a constriction attack that allows her to crush her enemies for 1d10 +2 points of damage per round. She has spell like abilities allowing her to cast as a 7<sup>th</sup> level wizard. She can detect surface thoughts of those near her and, if possible, will use this to her advantage. Spells: 0<sup>th</sup> level: 5 Endure Elements (cold), Light (x2), Dancing Lights, Ghost Sound; 1<sup>st</sup> level: 4 Jump, Shield, Magic Missile, Sleep; 2<sup>nd</sup> level: 3 Diminish Attribute, Darkness, Scar; 3<sup>rd</sup> level: 2 Dispel Magic, Lightning Bolt; 4<sup>th</sup> level: 1 Polymorph Other).

Surrounding the Naga are all sorts of tomes and stone tablets she has acquired during her travels, many of which she found here. The Dwarves will want many of the tablets, as they relate history of Daruk Haam. The rest of the books are fairly mundane and esoteric, save one. Hidden among the dozens of books is *Tome of Leadership and Influence*. Also, hidden underneath a huge boulder, the Naga has placed her treasure (she had the Red Caps move the stone for her). Moving the boulder requires strength check (CL - 4). In a large burlap sack, the party will find 838gp and 5 gems equaling 750gp. Also in the sack is an exquisite ring, forged of the finest silver and set with rubies. It can easily fetch 1000gp to a jeweler. In fact, a jeweler can be found in Daruk Haam that will pay this price without haggling.

And so ends the journey to Daruk Haam and the brief, but memorable time spent with the Dwarves. Darakem, true to his word, will hail the party as heroes and welcome them back at any time, granting them special status in the clan. Indeed, all of the Dwarves will show a great amount of respect for the party, even elves (though half-orcs still have some prejudices to overcome). Darakem, while not of great ruler of any nobility, is still a powerful ally to have and may, if the CK wishes, play a huge part in the party's future escapades.

**Lord Darakem Kerr, 8<sup>th</sup> level Fighter**

HP: 64 AC: 17 Alignment: LG

**S:17 I:13 W:12 D:9 C:16 Ch:17**

Possessions: Bearded axe (+1), Plate Mail

Abilities: Specialized in bearded axe (gaining +2 to both hit rolls and damage), Combat Dominance

**Karhl, Son of Gonnor, 7<sup>th</sup> level Fighter**

HP: 49 AC: 18 Alignment: LG

**S:18 I:9 W:9 D:12 C:14 Ch:9**

Possessions: War Hammer, Plate Mail, Shield

Abilities: Specialized in war hammer (gaining +2 to both hit rolls and damage), Combat Dominance

**RUSSET MOLD**

No. Encountered: 1

Size: M

HD: 5 (d8)

Move: nil

AC: nil

Attacks: cold damage (1d4)

Special: gains hit points as it harms living beings around it

Saves: P

INT: Animal

ALGN: Neutral

**Type:** Aberration

**Treasure:** nil

**XP:** 250 + 5

The Russet Mold is a creature of animal intelligence found almost exclusively in temperate, subterranean areas. It gains sustenance from absorbing the heat of living creatures around it. It can become dormant for years, not growing, but will reanimate if any warm blooded creature comes within twenty feet of it. The first round a creature is within the twenty foot radius, the russet mold will come to life. On round two, every creature will take 1d4 points of cold damage (the CK should tell the party they feel a frigid, cold air about them). For every four hit points taken by creatures, the russet mold gains a single hit point. Thus, if five hit points are lost in a round by multiple creatures, the russet mold would gain a hit point. If ten points were lost in a single round, the creature would gain two hit points. These hit points can regenerate lost hit points, as well as add them to the total hit points of the creature (i.e. if a russet mold has 25 hit points at the start of the encounter, it can raise its maximum hit points to 30, or 35 or 100, etc...).

Weapons do not damage the russet mold. Sources of heat actually make it grow larger. A russet mold will gain 1d4 hit points if "burned" by a torch and gain hit points if any fire-based spell is used against it (i.e. a 6 dice fireball would HEAL 6d6 points of damage). The only way to permanently kill the mold is by cold-based spells. Any spell using ice / snow / cold will inflict double damage to the russet mold.

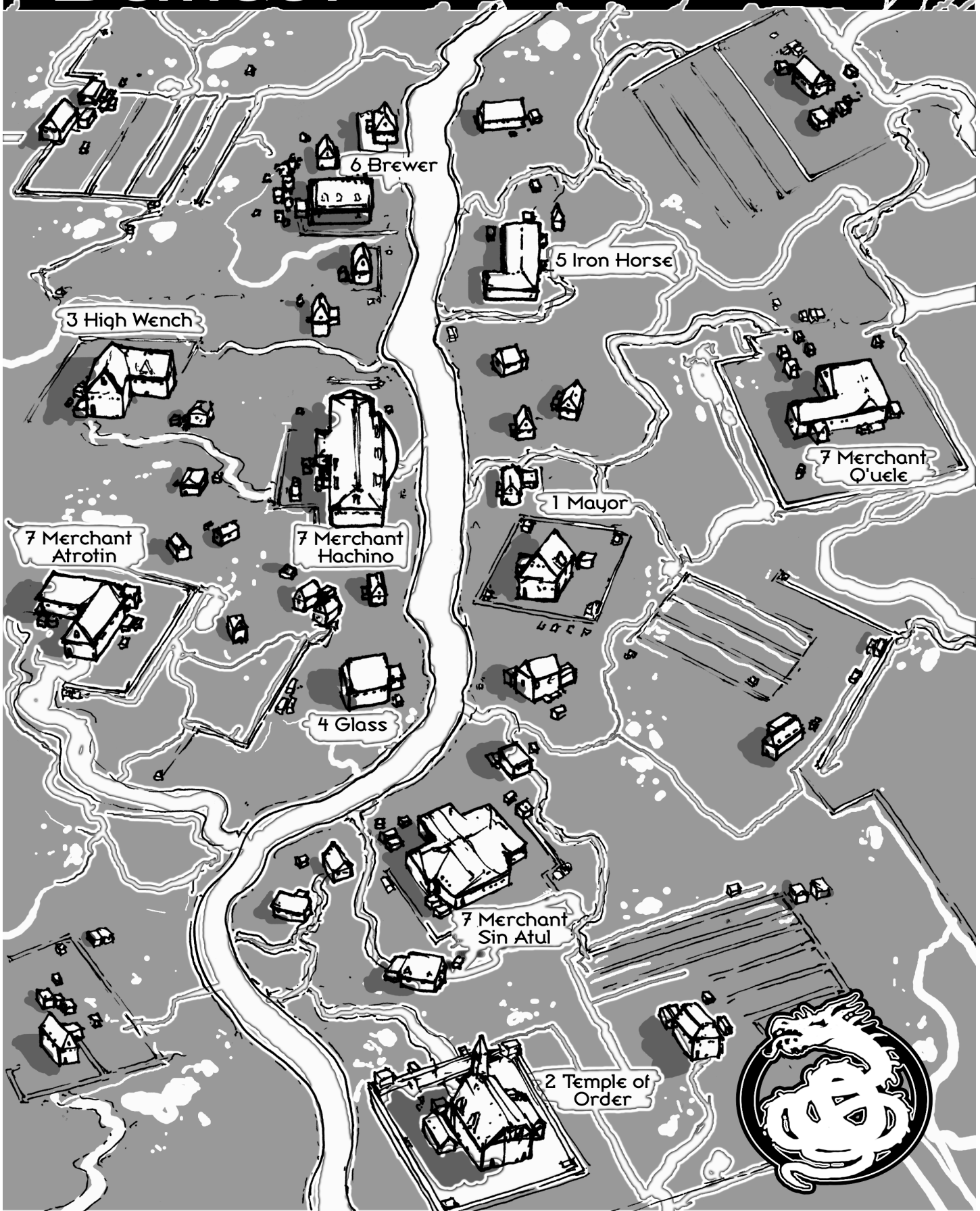
It should be noted that characters can stay within the twenty foot danger area and do normal, even difficult, tasks with little ill effects, aside from the damage of course. In other words, characters can search for traps, draw a sword, cast a spell, quaff a potion, et al. The cold is not severe enough to cause characters to become immobile.

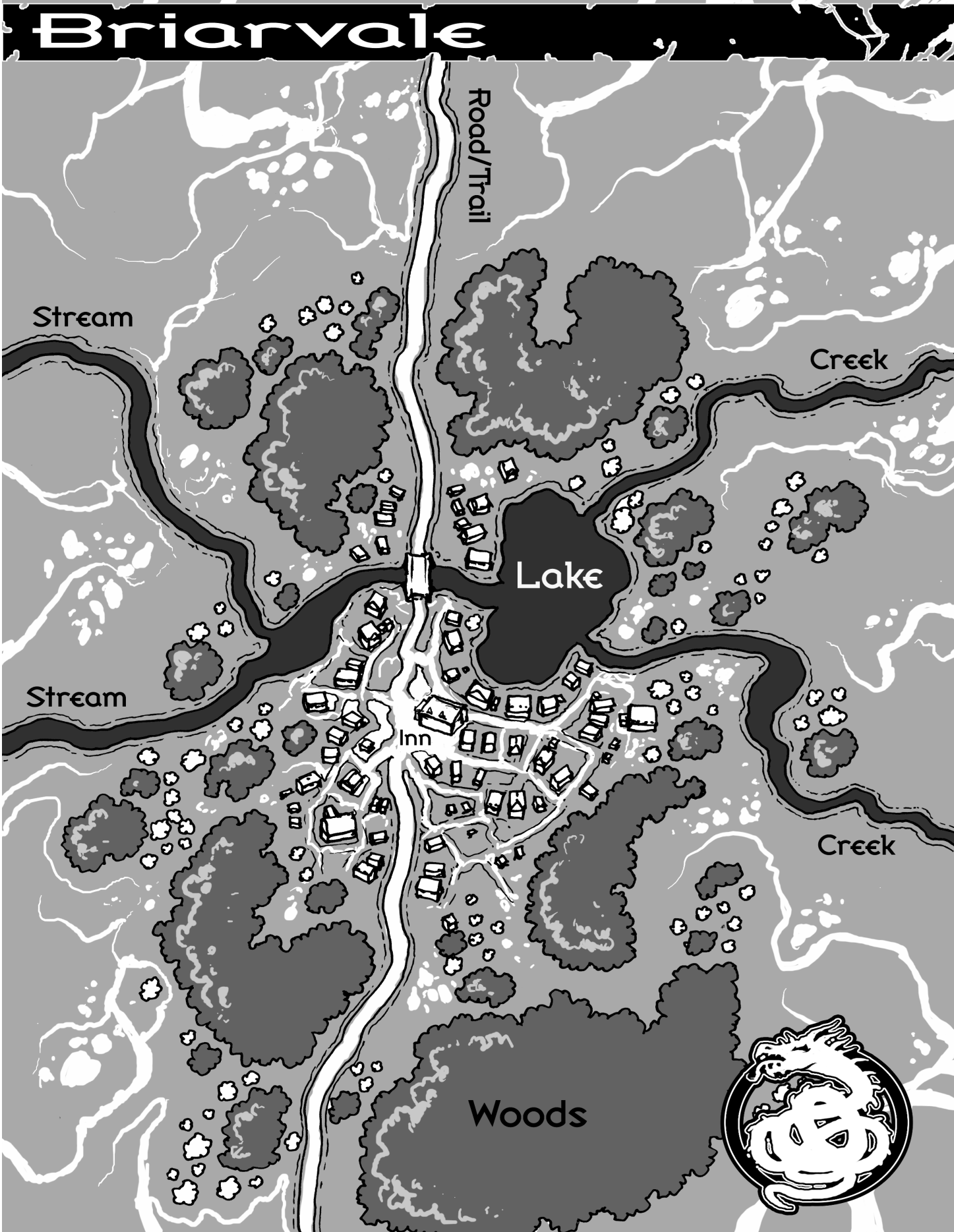
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# Beltlast









THE AIHRDIAN  
CHRONICLES  
BEING THE 24TH NARRATIVE  
OF THE  
LAY OF THE LOTHIAN PRINCES

*The Elven Warlord, Meltowg-Aet-Ohd, Prince of Lothian, travels west with his Vale Knights and a company of mercenaries on a journey to find the fabled Castle of Spires. Ruled by Melius the Wise, the Castle is rumored to hold gates to other worlds, wherein the Elven hosts of old have taken refuge. The Prince is possessed of a grim determination to open those gates. Carried across the Sea of Shenal upon a magical boat, fashioned by the puala beast, they have at last arrived upon the shores of the Ethrum. Entering the Twilight Wood, the last leg of their journey ends at the bowl shaped valley that contains the Castle of Spires.*

"Rise now my men. The feast for which we've traveled so long is at hand." Meltowg gathered his war gear, leaving behind his packs, food and other possessions. "We'll slay this bastard wizard, open those gates and bring the great host of my kin to the world; with them at our backs we'll vanquish that dark god Unklar in his far off pits of Aufstrag."

His men followed suit; buckling armor, strapping on swords, replacing bow strings, picking up swords, axes, hammers, whatever their preference. Some joked as they prepared themselves, others looked askance, glancing nervously at the tower below. Still others moved about in silence, making themselves ready for what was to come. In short order the Company was mounted and ready, 87 men, 30 of them Vale Knights, the rest mercenaries tested and true.

"Announce our presence."

Without hesitation, half a dozen of the men set horns to their lips and blew long, clear blasts upon them. The voice of those instruments carried down the hill and into the trees, startling flights of birds. It carried over the forest as well, rolling across the leaf covered rooftop to wash over and around the bastion below. They unfurled their banner, a long red cloth lined in gold, baring the feathers and sword of the House of Lothian.

In two columns they rode. Meltowg at the head of both, behind him rode Sagramore and their standard. Decked in plate and chain, with shields of iron, helms great and small, lances and pole axes, swords and studded hammers they crossed into the deep shadows of the tree-covered valley. The cacophony of their passage carried far and wide and creatures fled from them for such a sight of iron and steel, horse flesh, elves and men had not been seen in the woods for countless years.

The top of the main tower seen from the ridge behind them vanished into the forest canopy. The forest lay open and the space between the great trees proved an easy passage for the men of the company. Within a few minutes they came to a still lake, invisible from above, sitting at the foot of the western ridge. Here, upon an island in the lake, stood the Castle of Spires.

A fence of stone stood back from the shore, ringing the island and the castle. A gate, dark and closed, breached the wall, but beyond it stood the four towers. The greatest, the company had seen from the road, but the lesser towers they had not seen. They stood, one against the other, crowding the greater tower. Capped with long spires upon riled roofs they gave the whole fortification its name.

No pinnate flew or sign of armament noticed. But a man mounted the main great tower. He wore a breast plate of bronze with a two-headed dragon worked into its metal. His limbs were long and his face bore a sadness that only years of thoughtful struggle might bring forth. He watched the company come to the edge of the lake. He watched the Prince's great war-steed, itself decked in armor, clatter into the stony water and reign at the last.

"I am Meltowg-Aet-Ohd, Prince of Lothian, Lord of Elves and Men. I am the Prince Who Remained. Captain of the Vale Knights. I have crossed seas of blood and passed through the fire to come here. Open the gates lest I pull down these walls of dust and slay all that dwell within."

The figure on the wall spoke back. He did not shout but his voice carried to the men at the lake's edge. "We know you well Prince Lothian. I have seen you in the days before the dark, in all your glory and might, before you led this company of refugees. I know too the road of wreck and ruin you have traveled and I know your purpose. It is not here that you shall find salvation."

"Melius the Wise. I know you of old. But in our youth, when the world was warm, your bones were made of stronger stuff. I will not banter with you wizard. Open the gates."

"Your coming I have seen, your desires are known to me. You wish to enter this castle to find the Ring of Brass and break the stone that binds it. With that you hope to breach the Shroud of Darkness, open gates to the outer planes and to bring the hosts of the elves to the world of men and drive back the Winter Dark and the horned god who holds these lands in servitude."

"I will."

"This I cannot permit. The gates to the plane, like my gates, are closed to you Prince Lothian. I bid you return to your war on the dark one. You have done great deeds; you have made songs and stories that must surely echo through time. Make more. But make them elsewhere, for if you cross those waters this will be accounted the worst of your deeds."

"I care not for the poetry of little men in their little houses. I care not for the songs of bards to little kings. I care not for these walls, or you. I will have the gate opened. I will have the towers given to me and the stone upon the Ring of Brass I will break. You can aid me, give me passage, or quench my blade's thirst."

At that, the gates opened and a company of knights rode forth. These were high elves, adorned in plate, riding destriers of their own, with lances and swords. Their armor shone brightly, their shields and helms catching even the faint light of the day. Their beauty stood out in that dark wood and the old forest seemed, for a moment, a lighter place. They fanned out in a "V" formation. Their Captain rode at their head, adorned in a blue tabard and the mane of hair that fell from his helm was died blue as well.

"I am Herigold, Captain of the Castle. You shall not pass my Prince." Cased in iron, his visage was like a blue flame in the darkness. His voice hung in the air, the tone of music in it.

For their part, Meltowg's men seemed taken aback, if only a little. The horses stirred. Meltowg, an elf lord, did not notice. "I know you Herigold. I fought alongside your brother long ago. Though he is dead, his spirit no doubt roams the Mistbane River far away. I would not have blood between us, if for nothing else, for his memory and the long years of service."

"I too would not have blood shed My Prince. You are great Captain of our people, a Lord of Elves and warrior without match in song or deed. But you cannot pass."

"I will Herigold." The Prince shifted forward in his saddle. The movement was slight, but all the men, long veterans of the trail with him, took note, for he moved thus for room to clear his sword, Noxmorus, from its scabbard.

Herigold too took note and shifted his horse to the right a hoof step, making his shield, which he wore casually on his arm, more prominent. "Your errand is lost Meltowg. I have the sight of our people and if you cross that threshold you may never return. Go now. In peace."

Sagamore leaned forward and spoke, the mage's voice clear and clean in the crisp air. "Herigold My Lord. You know the curse that befell us. When we die our immortal souls are lost, cast into the Void. Thus the Horned One cursed us, barring us from the Fields of our Fathers and the Seven Rivers. But this need not be your fate, his fall must surely cure that curse. Let My Prince pass and you and yours can wait to see a new day with a promise of an afterlife if ever you should fall."

"I fear not death or oblivion Lord Mage."

"Then you shall have oblivion today Herigold." Meltowg slowly drew Noxmorus from its scabbard. The long, two-handed claymore, hummed at its release, the green-gray metal of its blade shone pale against the snow.

Herigold lowered the long, narrow lance across his horses' neck and raised his shield.

Like a bolt Meltowg's horse leapt into the water. All followed. Their great steeds crashed into the lake, curtains of water spreading before them as they rode. The men's blades and axes, lances and spears brought to the fore. Shouts carried on every lip but the Prince's.

Herigold's men held on the far side of the lake, unmoving.

But the water was ensorcelled by Melius and held the curse of mirrors. Men rode into the water and saw not their foes but saw monsters rearing from the deep. Twisted creatures of madness and evil, rising about them, coils of rage and hate wrapping them in a cold embrace. The stench of fear overcame them, so palatable, that the charge faltered and ground to a halt. Even Meltowg's charge failed.

In the waters the men saw monsters, but monsters of their own making. They saw themselves as others saw them, their victims; all those they slew, good and evil, cast back the images of their dying sight. The monsters that gripped them were only reflections of their own persons, seen as all those they slew on the open road saw them. And the terror of those they had slain, became their own. They lingered in the water, struck dumb.

And Sagamore cursed, for he saw the hand of the sorcery. But before he could summon his own wizardry a trumpet sounded, its clear, cold note hanging in the air. Herigold put spurs to flank and the horse leapt forward, riding the air as much as the water. His lance he lowered to take Meltowg in the breast and kill him with a single stroke.

The horse's charge created cascades of water. Whatever sorcery held the Prince broke, if only for a second, and Meltowg saw Herigold's charge. Though the power of the waters held him still, he brought down his sword, if only a little to block the lance. The blade of the lance missed its mark, driving home in and through Meltowg's side instead of his chest.

The clash rang loud over the water, Meltowg's plate ripped open and the steel shod shaft of the lance shattered against it. But the blow was grievous and the Prince fell into the water, driven from his steed. Herigold threw aside the broken haft and leapt into the water, drawing a long, blue-white sword from his sheath, his face grim and cold.

The Prince of Lothian rose upon an arm, lifting his sword to ward the coming blow. All about him the line of Herigold's people crashed into his own, grinding it to meal. Cold steel clove through iron shields and chain shirts, cutting men from their saddles. In a wash, the lake turned red with blood as knights and men fell to the elven lords. In the wreck and ruin Meltowg saw his long quest unfold.



# FROM THE HIGHEST CLIFF...



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# ADVANTAGES

## NEW GENERAL ADVANTAGES

### EXPERT HAGGLER

**PREREQUISITE:** Charisma 14

**BENEFIT:** The character is skilled at haggling prices and deal-making in the marketplace. You receive a 10% reduction in cost for regular (non-magical) items bought. This does not apply to starting equipment.

**SPECIAL:** The character can work their haggling skills and attempt to receive an even greater discount, at a risk. The character may attempt a Charisma check to receive an additional 10% bonus, but if he/she fails, the character receives no discount at all.

### DIPLOMATIC

**PREREQUISITE:** Charisma 12, Charisma Prime

**BENEFIT:** The character's natural charisma and negotiating skills grant him/her a +4 bonus to Charisma checks when interacting with others. This bonus is reduced to +2 when dealing with those outside his race.

**SPECIAL:** The character may attempt a Charisma check to retain his +4 bonus to those outside his race. Failure means the character receives no bonus at all for the interaction.

### WINDFALL

**PREREQUISITE:** Can only be taken at 1<sup>st</sup> level.

**BENEFIT:** The character comes from a wealthy background, has sold the family's farm upon their death, escaped with her dowry, robbed the duke's coach, or have had any other fortuitous event happen. When determining starting coin, multiply the result of the roll by 3. The character may keep any left over money from purchasing starting equipment.

**SPECIAL:** The character was particularly fortunate. At the CK's discretion, there is a 5% chance that the character also starts play with an expert-craft weapon (+1 damage) or a 100 XP-value potion or scroll. The item received is also at the CK's discretion. None of the benefits of this advantage grant experience points.

### UNBURDENED

**PREREQUISITE:** None

**BENEFIT:** The character knows how to pack a pack or is otherwise not as affected by weight as others would be. The character has a base EV of 15, instead of 10.

### MIMIC

**PREREQUISITE:** One Mental Prime, One Physical Prime

**BENEFIT:** The character has a particular knack for the specialties of others. Once per day, the character may attempt the class skill of another class that requires a single SIEGE check. The character may add his or her level to this check.

**SPECIAL:** If the character fails at a particular attempt, he or she may not attempt that skill again for one week.

### NATURAL LEADER

**PREREQUISITE:** Charisma Prime

**BENEFIT:** The character is looked favorably upon by those in his employ. Henchmen and hirelings look to the character for guidance. The character has a natural quality that lends itself to leading the less heroic. Any henchmen or hirelings in the party's service receive a +1 to all saving throws.

**SPECIAL:** If the rules on henchmen and hirelings from the CKG are used, the character receives a +2 on loyalty checks in addition to the above.

### EXPERT SWIMMER

**PREREQUISITE:** Constitution 12, Constitution Prime

**BENEFIT:** The character has been trained in swimming, or is a natural prodigy. When making a strength check to swim, the character receives a +4 bonus to the swimming check.

**SPECIAL:** This advantage can be used in conjunction with the rules in the CKG with no modification.

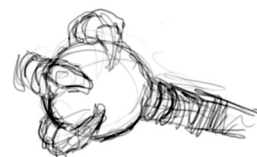
## GENERAL/COMBAT ADVANTAGE

### WEAPON TRAINING

**PREREQUISITE:** BtH +1

**BENEFIT:** Through training (either from a teacher or self-taught) you have gained competence with a weapon of your choice. The character selects a weapon he or she is not proficient with and is considered proficient with that weapon – it can be wielded without the -4 penalty for non-proficiency.

**SPECIAL:** The character must still adhere to any special class limitations (a rogue's sneak attack weapon size restriction or a druid's raw material requirement, for example).





# The Angry Gamer

by Some Angry Troll Dude



## MOVIE REVIEW: Valhalla Rising

A movie that chronicles the journey of a Viking named One Eye . . . and some other people.

Like all Viking Movies, this one promised to be really cool. But rather than a movie about adventure in unknown lands it turned into some strange allegory that, well wasn't that good of a movie

The movie started really cool, with superb settings and with characters decked out much like one would expect from the time period. It was grim and grisly and promised to be spot on.

However, this was not to be.

To start, the movie never introduced any characters. A litany of them crossed the screen in rapid succession without any background or in most cases without any names. There was nothing to grasp onto with any of the characters, except perhaps the boy who befriends One Eye. Some you would get an idea of their clothing, but they left the screen too fast to figure it out.

The movie's pace began decent but slowed to a crawl after the first action sequence and never picked up pace again. It was very slow, very very very slow. And by slow I mean that during the scene where they were lost in the mist (roughly 575 minutes of screen time looking at a mist covered boat) it became impossible to maintain focus. Nothing captured the eye or attention. The dialogue fell flat and the boat was drab. If this was the Viking life at sea, no wonder they were so angry when they got off the boat.

It turns out the story is about this guy with one eye. We don't know who or what he is, maybe Odin? We do know he is a bad ass, though he never says a word so we don't know anything beyond that. (In fact we don't know the names of any of the characters and every time a new one is introduced it is done so with no tangible information, even dialogue). So this guy, who we'll call Odin, is a slave and made to kill these other guys in a mud pit. His bearded master gambling on his most certain victory (you've actually seen this in Conan the Barbarian, Arnie style. It's the exact same scenario, really. Exactly). Then the bearded master is told to get rid of his slave and he figures its time and does so. While he is getting rid of Odin, the slave escapes his bondage and kills everyone. But you don't really see this. He's so bad ass it happens before your brain registers that something is happening. Then you see him staking out bearded dudes head.

Then he walks. After a little while he meets some dudes with stacked naked chicks next to them and joins them to go to the Holy Land in a 20 foot fishing boat, one the Vikings might have used to cross the north sea, but probably not one to cross the Atlantic and Mediterranean. These guys, we don't know who or what they are, but it is implied that one is a Crusader wanting to go to the Holy Land but got caught up stacking naked people up in his homeland (?). I think maybe they were from Scotland...but could be Norway, Ireland, England, Wales, Sweden, Denmark, or Iceland (though who really cares, the characters are screen shots of Vikings). Odin joins them without a word.

They promptly get lost at sea in a mist and they bob around for a couple hours, days, years . . . who knows . . . I couldn't tell. Apparently there is no day or night when it's foggy on the Atlantic. Who knew? But apparently enough time passes that one dude starts to drink from the ocean, well maybe. I couldn't tell. One guy dies (why I don't know, he just died, maybe he drank the ocean water, but probably out of boredom I suspect), then another guy tries to kill Odin and gets killed so fast you can't tell that something interesting had happened.

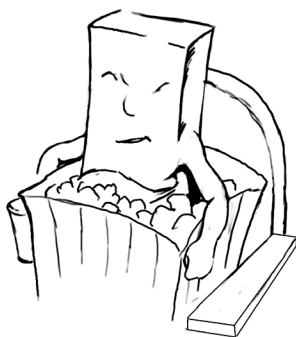
Back to bobbing in the ocean for another 20 minutes of screen time.

Later the story started to pick up as they come out of the mist and onto a river, and they start to explore the river estuary. Immediately the story hemorrhaged when they stole a scene from Young Guns (remember where everyone was eating peyote and going crazy) these Vikings (though I don't think the Christianized Norsemen were technically Vikings) began drinking some brew that came from nowhere (they could have given it to the dude drinking ocean water earlier that day) and all went crazy and stacked rocks and rolled around in the mud. It was all very confusing. It only made sense because of Young Guns, that movie about Billy the Kid where Chavez made everyone eat peyote and Crazy Charlie come running out of the cave with his six shooter screaming "I hate chickens!" or some such. But no, no such luck. The only reason the scene made sense is because it reminds one of that scene!

What follows is a weird exchange between the Vikings and then most are killed by One Eye. Then the movie turned into a strange quest until everyone just died. Literally. One guy sits down and

dies. One guy comes out of Troll Lord knows where and goes back to another dude, the Crusader, who was apparently his father, and dies. And then the Odin drops his weapons and gets beaten to death by an Indian. Roll credits.

The movie was rather boring and I think the artists were trying to say something about, well, something...who knows what. It utterly passed this viewer by. MAKE NOTE: they landed in the NEW WORLD, quested, went crazy, wandered, and all died in the space of an afternoon. Not one night had passed. Tom Hanks lived on an island for like 5 years with no one but Wilson to talk to and he came out just fine. These Vikings didn't make it a single afternoon.



## From the Troll Dens...TLG BLOG

If you haven't already, check out the Troll Dens, the TLG Blog. Its a blog of popular culture observations more than anything else. We don't necessarily keep it just for the C&C fans, nor the TLG fans, nor the old school people. Here's a few snippets.

### Eye Balls in Rome(january 9, 2012)

In 1974 researchers unearthed...or unwatered?...a ship wreck of the coast of Tuscany. It was later determined that the wreck was a Roman vessel from about the year 130 BC (to place this in the historical record, the hey day of Sparta and Athens was 300 years passed, Alexander's Empire 200 years gone, and the Roman Republic on the rise after the collapse of Carthage in the Punic Wars).

The wreck revealed the typical artifacts, bowls and such, except for a small box

The box itself was largely gone, only the remnants gave clue that it had ever been a box (not sure that sentence works) but what it contained lay in the ruin. Within were a cup, some vials and a small tin can with lid called a pyxis. The pyxis held five small pills or tablets. The tablets had a variety of properties, including zinc. Archeologists have, by cross referencing ancient sources, determined that zinc was used to treat irritation to the eyes according to an article just published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (the Abstract, full article you must pay for, here).

It seems the tablet was laid upon the eye and water poured over it in order to dissolve the tablet. Some question the findings, though it sounds highly plausible. Romans are us and we are them after all.

### Light in the Darkness (september 21, 2012)

Last night we gamed our weekly game. The characters, battered and wounded, built a fire for warmth, to cook their food, etc. The problem was that they were located on a long barren ridge in easy sight of the country around them. The fire, of course, a light in the darkness, attracted creatures, great and small.

I got to thinking why. There is a process called phototaxis, an organisms automatic attraction to light. Some animals have this and some don't. Cock roaches move away from light, they have negative phototaxis. Moths have phototaxis, they are attracted to light. The reasons for this are not completely understood. There are some single cell organisms whose flagella reverse direction the moment they leave the light.

Very interesting. Though that doesn't answer my question. Unless we're hard wired in our DNA as mammals to seek light.

post script: The fire attracted some bat-riding xia from Classic Monsters and a wicked looking cat beast that tackled the ranger/knight and ripped him up pretty good. Then wolves came to eat all the dead creatures. They had an entertaining night.

<http://www.trolldens.blogspot.com/>





# RINGS of ORASS

## THE GODS OF AIHRDE



### TIAMAT

**ORDER:** Val-Austlich

**PROVINCE:** Darkness, Shadows, the Evil Dead, the Undead

**ALIGNMENT:** Chaotic Evil

**HOLY DAYS:** 3<sup>rd</sup> day of each month, Dusk.

**SUPERSTITIONS:** Running water.

**PREFERRED WEAPONS:** Butchers tools.

**MISSIONARY:** Grant me passage to feed the maw.

**SYMBOL:**

*"Pass through the Tiamat's Maw oh ye Wretched Souls; for beyond lies your just share."* Excerpt from the Imperial Codexi.

#### Of Tiamat and the Five Caves

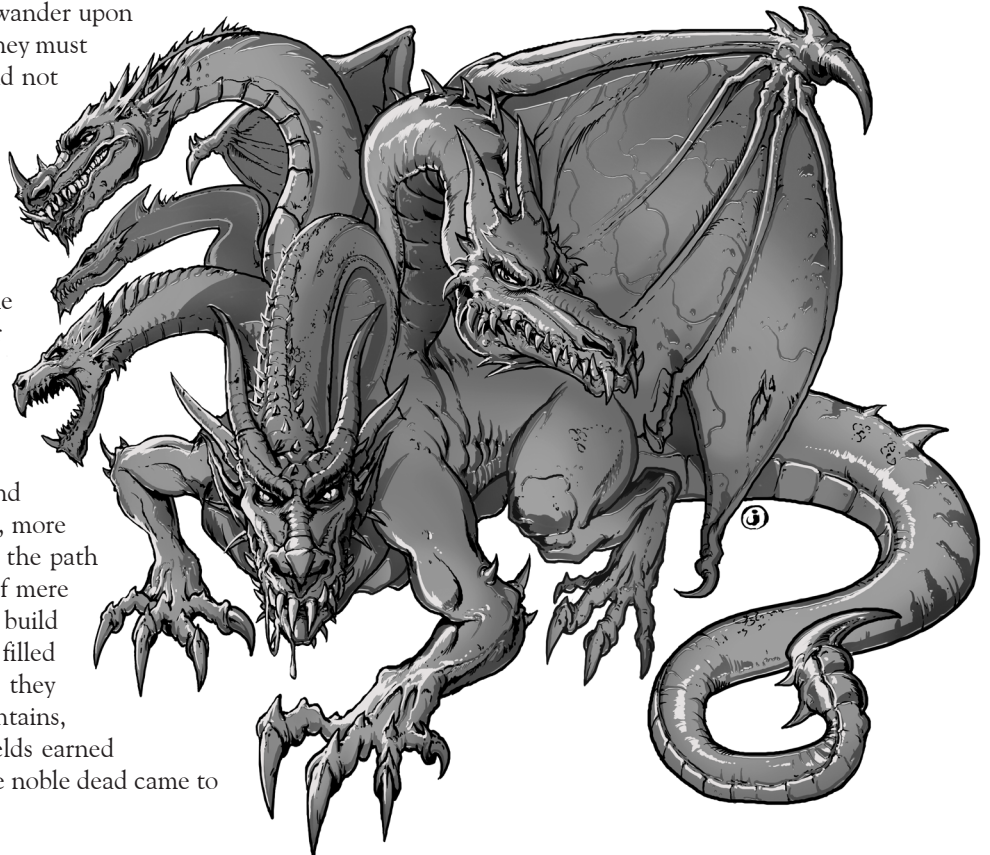
After unnamed years passed, the first Dwarves laid their minds to rest and returned to stone; but the fire of their being remained in Aihilde, without house or purpose. The All Father grieved at the sight, though he was not surprised, for as with all things, from his being had they come and his fire resided within them; and the All Father is deathless. He saw them wander upon the arc of time and knew that eventually they must end beneath all creation; and this he could not abide.

The All Father took the houseless fire and rose above the Maelstrom of Creation and looked out into the Great Empty, the Void. There he cast a thought upon the Void and made a place for the fire to dwell; a land of mist where matter assumed the form of the fire's desire. There he set the fire to dwell until the Gonfed should come.

The fire of the dwarven dead dwelt there and made of it a field of its own liking. In time, more Dwarves died and they too rose and took the path laid out for the noble dead to the plane of mere to mingle with their fallen kinsmen, to build their own dreaming. Soon the plane was filled with the souls of departed Dwarves and they made of it a world of stone, with high mountains, green fields and blue skies. Thus these fields earned their name, the Stone Fields, and there the noble dead came to dwell, of whatever race or people.

But some souls were not bent for the Stone Fields for they were evil or disturbed, or their lives ended in murder and the road to the Stone Fields confused them and they could not find the way. So they were lost. They wandered upon the arc of time for there was no other way. They followed the arc to its end where time flows to the bottom of the world, beneath the deep oceans and through the Gates of Ea-Lor, Lord of the Seas. Beyond the Gates time flows until the end where the Futhnopt lays, the "Five Gates"; these mark the end of those legendary paths the restless dead must travel on their way to the Wretched Plains that house the dead. These plains lay at the end of time, where the weight of time's passage gathers in five great pools, called the Shadow Realms by some, the Wretched Plains by others.

Into this darkness and wretched timelessness, the souls came to rest. Here the weight of time settled upon the dead and forever after, or until the Gonfed, they were forced to carry the weight of it upon their shoulders; the burden bore them down, crushing them.



It was here, at the Futhnopt, that Thorax, the Red Duke, built his House; here he brooded upon the conquest of the world. He used the shadows of time to fashion weapons for his wars and his House became a morass of twisted thoughts haunted by the shades of the dead; its labyrinth filled with darkness, chaos and evil. From the House of Shadows he fought many long wars against the world of Aihilde and the gods, his siblings. There came a time when his foes assailed him, pursuing him even to the House of Shadows, though it consumed them as they became lost in its twisted mazes. But Thorax grew fearful for their wrath came too close. He set his thought toward guarding his realm and he fashioned from his own malice a beast of such hideous demeanor that few living could look upon her. He set her to guard the way to the Shadow Realms and keep all living from entering. So Tiamat came to be. She was the greatest of his servants, born in the maw of his spite, shaped from his disdain for life, and cast in the mold of the unquenched fires of his madness.

Tiamat guarded the Wretched Plains and the House of Shadows beyond by splitting herself into five heads, placing one before each of the Five Pools and she devoured all that came to the Shadow Realms. In time she grew great, bloated and unmoving, resting her heads upon the arc of time where it met the pools and each of her heads became a cavern wherein the dead entered and were devoured by passing into the dragon. These are the Futhnopt, the Five Caves. Her jaws closed the Timeless Pools to the living; for any who sought entry through the arc of time must do so through very powerful magics such as only Wizard's possess. Either that, or convince Tiamat to let them enter through some flattery or trick.

Tiamat has no end, only a beginning. Her heads are called iaimat's Maw, the Five Caves or the Futhnopt, and they are the gateway to the Wretched Plains through which all the damned must pass. She has grown immense in power and size, so much so that many creatures beyond the damned have settled within the Shadow Realms, relying on her hunger to Here the Tvungenos the "demons" and the Tvungen the "devils", and some gods such as Agorl have come to dwell.

She broods there in misery and hatred ever longing to see the light of the sun where it is said she will rise as a great five headed dragon, and breaking the gates of Ea-Lor in violence, bring the oceans to boil. Their steam will cover all the land and blind those who dwell in peace. Tiamat then will rise to vomit up the damned upon the sun and blot out its light forever. In the darkness that follows the Bull, the Red Duke, must finally return and visit his vengeance upon the world. Or so the Tales of the Gonfed relate.

But Tiamat is a creature whole and of herself, and as such, she possesses the powers of creation. Once in a great while, she births the tuoth drauk, the two headed dragon.

When Tiamat is roused for battle she assumes the form of a massive five-headed dragon. Each head holds the power of one of the greater dragons, red, black, blue, green and white. Thick scales coat her body, both above and beneath. The crack of her tail is able to rend the fabric of time, opening up the halls of the dead. Her heads breathe a black noxious vomit that poisons the air and

lungs. She is utterly without mercy and incapable of understanding suffering or pain.

### THE WORSHIPER

**Preferred Weapon(s):** Axe, Cleaver, Knife

**Armor:** Leathers

**Province:** Seeing the Evil Dead to the Shadow Realms

**Alignment:** Any evil.

**Sanctum:** Underground pools in caves.

**Ceremony:** Sacrifice living to feed the maw.

**Taboo:** Trees; anything that reaches for the light or sun.

**Granted Abilities:** At 7<sup>th</sup> level clerics can *raise the dead* as the spell. At 17<sup>th</sup> level clerics can open a *gate* to the Five Caves.

In order for a cleric to gain the granted abilities of the chosen deity, the cleric must adhere to the following guidelines. First, the cleric must train with the chosen weapon(s) for 3 months time. During this time, the preferred armor of the deity must be worn (if necessary). Second, the cleric must follow the ceremony for the chosen deity. Failure to do this results in the cleric losing use of the granted abilities for 1d6 months. Finally, the cleric must pay close attention to the taboo of the chosen deity. Failure to do so results in losing use of the granted abilities for 1d6 months. Should the cleric fail to honor the ceremony as well as the taboo of the chosen deity, then the cleric loses the use of the granted abilities for one year.

Once the granted abilities have been lost, the cleric must work to regain them. The cleric must train for another 3 months with the weapon(s) and armor of the deity. Also, atonement (as the spell) must be sought out by another, higher level cleric of the same deity. If the superior cleric deems it necessary (CK's discretion), the atoning cleric must perform some quest or task to return to favor with the deity.

## WHAT'S BEST IN LIFE?

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# DRIED INK: MAGIC ITEMS

## SASH OF COMPREHEND LANGUAGES

The sash allows the wearer to understand script, magical or otherwise, that they would not normally be able to read by opening up a window into that moment in time when the script was written. To utilize its magic the sash must be tied over the users eyes, blinding them utterly. They must be able to touch the item, to trace it with their fingers. As they do so a "window" opens, allowing the wielder to look back into time, enabling them to see who wrote the script, what tools they used, and their immediate environment. For a moment the caster steps into that person's mind and reads his thoughts, and through that person's thoughts read the script. With a successful intelligence check they are able to discern the writer's state of mind and even skim their surface thoughts. In this way the sash allows them to determine nuances of the script, such as its relative importance to the script writer, etc.

## TAEFLES LEAF

The Ethvold was a mighty wood, it grew from the Bay of Lothian and the Sea of Charon in the east to the Rhodope Mountains in the west; from the Bay of Brand in the south to the Wilds of the North. Towering white oaks lorded over their smaller bur oak cousins, ash, elm and locust trees grew in their midst and whole forests of sycamore trees ran the banks of rivers and streams. Here the Og Aust ruled, the old gods, fey of wood, rock, hill, and stream. Here too grew many wondrous plants, not the least of which were the small, purple veined tae fles. It grew where fey dwelt, at the mouth of springs and from the deeps of the Ethvold spread throughout the wide world, so that now it is found in many forests throughout the temperate belts. The leaves of the plant allowed one to see things more clearly, to perceive things that might otherwise have gone un-noticed.

The early kings of Ethrum used the leaves, soaked in a mixture of honey and water, when they held court. The magi of the umbrians used it to understand the runes of lore. The rangers of the deep woods took the leaf to help them on the hunt. It grows still in the wilds, used by those who know its worth.

The tae fles leaf is a small, leafy plant that grows in temperate environments. It grows around the mouth's of springs and creeks; it is less commonly found where water surfaces in the rainy season. A plant generally consists of 2-12 adult leaves. The adult leaf, when soaked in water and laid on the tongue increases all perception checks by +1. This includes finding secret doors, spot checks, etc.

## FLETCHER'S OINTMENT

The Gelderland is a wild and dangerous land; monsters great and small hunt the deep valleys and jagged, rock-cleft hills. There the orcs of the Ulgars hunt with massive wild-eyed dogs, the war mad fontenouq dwell in hidden towers, Halflings travel in tight clans and men build walls around lonely towns. It is here, in the towns of men, that the Fletcher's ointment was first used. Made by druids from the boiled eyes of crows, and pollen of the blue rose the concoction is a slick, greasy, colorless fluid. Once it applied to the

fletching of an arrow it steadies the shaft's flight and makes the aim deadly true. Hunters and rangers carry it small leather pouches on their belt, dipping thumb and forefinger into the grease and running it over each of their arrows fletching.

Fletcher's Ointment is rare for it is difficult to make, requiring a druid of at least 8th level. Any pouch costs 50gp. A pouch carries enough ointment to cover 8 arrows. When used the archer gains a +1 to hit with the treated arrow.

## THE BREATH OF LIFE

The Breath of Life is a sending from the gods that lingers in holy places, temples, sacred groves, churches, cemeteries and the like. The breath is invisible to all but clerics, druids and paladins. Those that can see it, see the breath as a current of translucent blue gas that lingers in the air. The Breath of Life is heavy and moves slowly with the air current, in this way it can be moved several inches per round. It cannot be contained. It cannot be removed from the locale in which it lingers for to do so destroys it. If breathed by anyone of a similar alignment to the temple in which it is found the Breath of Life restores 3d6 hit points or 1-2 attribute points; or it can cure disease, blindness and any similar affliction. In addition to these benefits the person who consumes the Breath gains 250 experience points.

## WINTER'S CLOAK

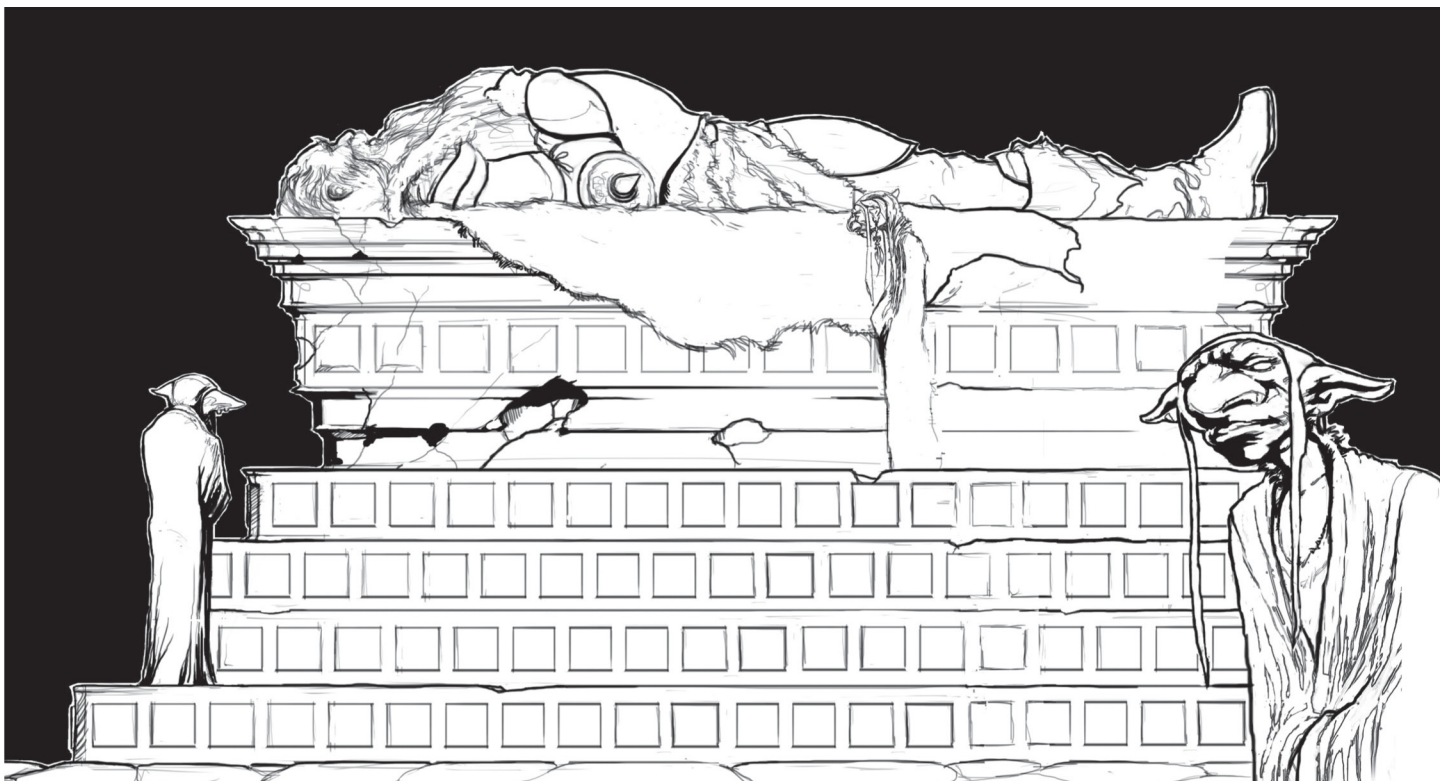
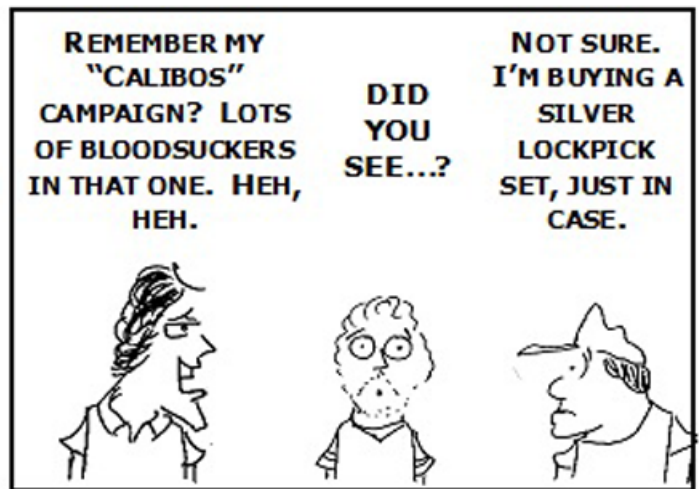
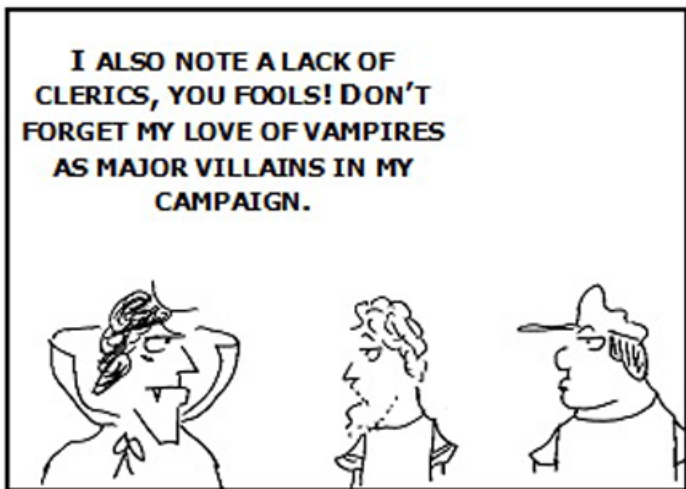
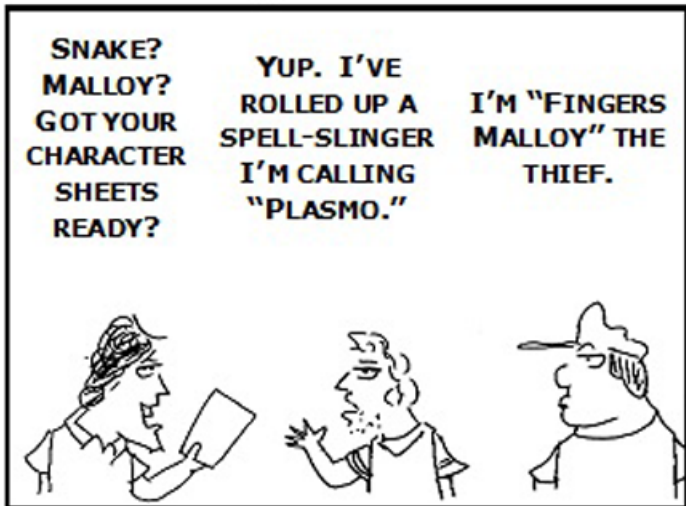
The rangers of old hunted the winter wolf for the value of its fur. When fashioned into a cloak by the priests of the Og-Aust, the old gods, the spirit of the wolf remained, imparting the wolf's powers to those who wore it. The cloak is white, or white with touches of grey, or on very rare occasions black. It is long, at least 5 feet and broad, wrapping around a normal human with ease. The head and upper snout oft times remains on the cloak, for warmth and decoration.

The cloak gives the wearer a base AC of 15. It also imparts heightened senses to the wearer, giving them a +1 on all listen, scent and sight checks. The wearer can withstand temperatures up to -20 degrees below zero. The winter's cloak also gives the wielder the ability to send a chilling blast of air, once per day, for 4d4 points of damage; constitutions save for half.

The cloak can be used with armor but does not impart any extra AC. For instance if worn with banded mail, that gives the wearer 16 AC, the cloak adds nothing more to it. The cloak can be used with other items however, such as bracers of defense, ring of protection, etc.



# Finarvyn's Fellowship of Foragers #3







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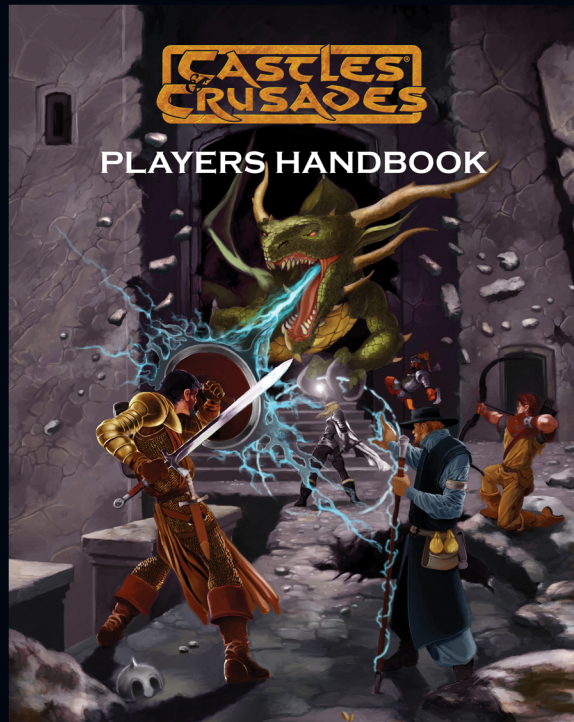
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