

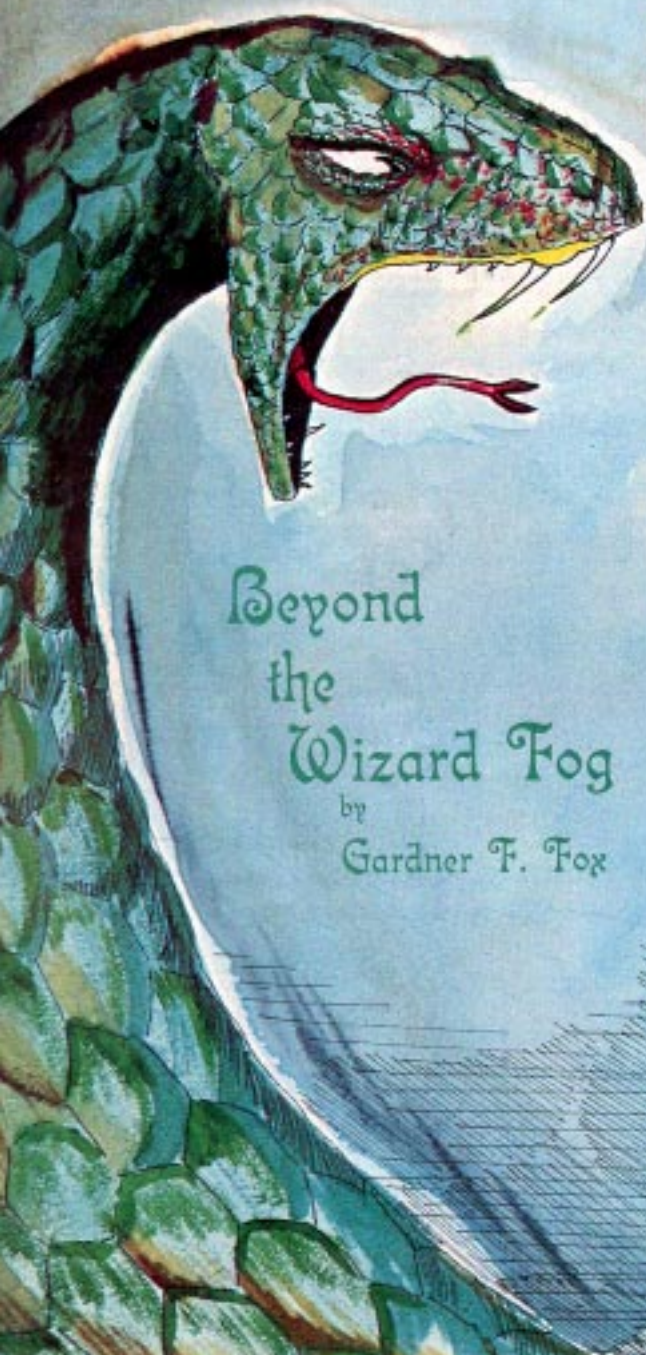
The Dragon

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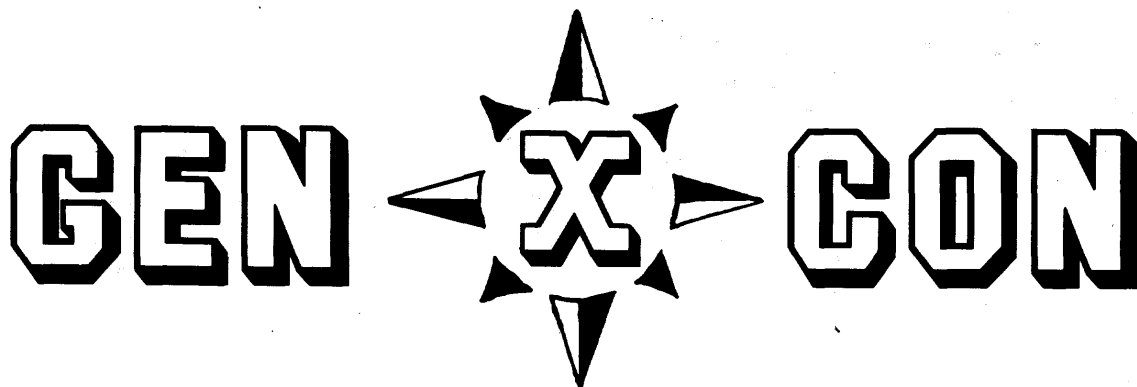
Vol. 1, No. 5
March

The magazine of Fantasy,
Swords & Sorcery and
Science Fiction Gaming

Beyond
the
Wizard Fog
by
Gardner F. Fox



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The eastern portion of the US is not the only area of the country to have suffered a blizzard this winter, though mine has been of a different nature.

A month or two ago, I placed a listing in WRITER'S DIGEST, as a market for science fiction, fantasy and swords & sorcery. Within two weeks of that appearance, I have been inundated with a barrage of inquiries and unsolicited manuscripts, most of which aren't right for these pages. But I'm reading, or having them read by Gary Jaquet, who has become my voluntary associate (meaning unpaid), every single one.

What this means to all of the writers that have sent me submissions is that you should expect a response, but not soon.

I have extended invitations to a number of authors of fantasy and science fiction games, other than D&D and EPT, to write on their creations for these pages. While we recognize that D&D started the fantasy gaming genre, there are now a number of science fiction and fantasy games available that we feel should be treated in this magazine. I extend this invitation to non-authors (of games) to do this also. I'm looking for articles on STELLAR CONQUEST, THE YTHRI, WBRM, GODSFIRE, STARSHIP TROOPERS, OUTREACH, SORCERER, STARSOLDIER, GREEN PLANET TRILOGY, OGRE, MONSTERS-MONSTERS, VENERABLE DESTRUCTION and others. It's time for THE DRAGON to expand its subject matter. I want to get into fantasy miniatures as well. (There is a very good chance that DRAGON will include a game in TD#7, our first anniversary issue. A very strange game . . .)

The enormous amount of fiction that has been submitted has given us a few ideas. Some of the stuff is of excellent quality, but doesn't meet the needs of you readers, as it doesn't really tie into any gaming background. But some of this material is so good that it deserves to be published and the enjoyment shared with as many people as possible. To that end, we are considering publishing an anthology of material of that calibre, provided there seems to be an interest in the market for something of this nature. I would welcome reader comments on this matter.

I've been saving the best news for last. DRAGON is expanding to eight issues per year. This came about as a result of several influences. First, and most importantly, DRAGON has been a great success to date, and shows no sign of slowing down in the foreseeable future. Second, and least beneficial, is the fact that LITTLE WARS, our sister publication, has not kept up with THE DRAGON in terms of growth. We decided to cut LW back to quarterly publication, but increase its size to 40 pages. We feel that this move increases the desirability of LW, and allows us two extra months per year, which we decided to devote to DRAGON. Subscription for both magazines is still \$9.00 for six issues.

The final important reason is the state of the hobby. Fantasy gaming is expanding at a lightning fast rate; by broadening the scope of DRAGON, we feel that we can better serve the hobby, as well as the hobbyists themselves, by increasing our frequency. (Publishing dates are listed in the Publisher's Statement on pg. three.) The increased frequency allows us to better stay on top of all the new developments and keep YOU, the readers, far better informed and more up-to-date.

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Cover by — Dave Sutherland

Editor

Publisher's Statement

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Witchcraft Supplement For Dungeons & Dragons

We received this ms. over 15 months ago, and have been unable to establish the identity of the author. If he or she is reading this, please step forward and receive your just reward. ED

Its origins long since buried in the mists of time, the full story of witchcraft will never be told, but it is certain that it held deep roots in even the most humble and God fearing of ancient communities. The legendary powers and most secret wisdoms of its members could make an interesting (and lengthy) addition to anyone's fantasy campaigns. Their greatest contribution will be evident in the murky dungeons, where a single witch could make a corridor almost impassable, or an enticing treasure almost unreachable.

Since no witches appear on the wilderness encounter chart, assume on a die roll of 5 or 7 there will be witches present fifty-percent of the time, and the chart's indicated monster on the other fifty-percent (this implies two die rolls). The number of witches encountered will be a factor of terrain, as they were best suited to certain environments, and favored the woodlands and orchards most of all.

Witches will be either Lawful (35% of the time) or Chaotic (65%). If a group is found to be chaotic, the "Order" of every witch must be checked individually with a 12-sided die. A 1-8 implies membership in the Low Order, while 9-11 will indicate she has graduated to High Order, and a roll of 12 means she swears her allegiance to the forbidden Secret Order. Low and High Order witches will mix in a group like warlocks and wizards, but Secret Order witches are a radical strain, and will **never** accompany the other types. If the first die roll is not a 12, assume none of the rest may be a 12 either. Likewise, if the first roll is a 12, all witches present will be Secret Order.

The Secret Order witches are an exception to the table which follows. Secret witches are to be found in lairs 75% of the time; they may be found in ANY terrain (including water), and there will only be one regardless of their location. All other evil witches and the Lawful witches will comply with this table:

| NUMBER APPEARING | ARMOR CLASS | MOVEMENT IN INCHES | HIT DICE | % IN LAIR | TREASURE |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------|------------|-----------|
| Mts., Desert: none | | | | | |
| Riv., Swamps: 2-4 | 8 | 9 on foot | 4-7 | Lawful | |
| Clear: 1-3 | | 24 on broom | | Witch: 30% | See Notes |
| Towns, Woods: 2-13 | | | | Chaotic | |
| | | | | Witch: 45% | |

When in her lair, a witch will have available to her the use of every portable magic device in her hoard of magic items. The GM must determine what items are in the treasure, as it may affect the outcome of battle when the lair has been invaded.

WITCH MAGIC

Witchcraft, including those spells which resemble Clerical or wizard spells, will not effect Djinn, Efreet, or Clerics of any alignment. These 3 character types are immune to witchcraft.

All witches (except for a Priestess) have saving throws equal to warlocks. For your saving throws **against** witchcraft, treat all witch magic as a "spell" on the Saving Throw Matrix.

A good witch may normally perform 7 spells per day from the following table. There is, however, a 4% chance that any good (Lawful) witch encountered is ancient, thereby qualifying her as a Priestess. A Priestess may use the ten ordinary spells daily, and once each week may employ one of her own, more powerful spells. (Be sure to check every good witch encountered for category.)

WHITE WITCHCRAFT R = range of spell D = duration (# of turns)

Commune - Cure Light Wounds - Detect Evil - Continual Light - Hold person - Remove Curse - Neutralize Poison

These spells are identical to those of a Patriarch

Sleep - Locate Object - Clairvoyance - Detect Invisible - Invisibility - Polymorph Others - Protection from Normal Missiles

These function as Magic-User spells of the same name

(none of the above magic will affect creatures immune to witchcraft.)

CALM R = 7" D = 6

All insects, animals, and man-types within range of the witch's spell will lose their will to fight. Even if engaged in life and death battle, combat will cease immediately.

SUMMON ELEMENTAL

The Elemental will have 12 hit dice, and will appear the turn **after** it has been summoned by the witch. If the witch loses her concentration, the elemental simply vanishes.

REJUVENATION R = 1"

Affects any one living creature, reducing the physical (game) age by five years. A lawful witch uses this spell to remain forever young and beautiful.

DISSIPATION R = 5"

With this spell, a witch may disperse any elemental, any cloud or mist, or any magic wall of stone, iron, ice, fire, thorns, or water (regardless of the level of the spell's caster).

COMFORT R = 2" D = 36 (6 hours)

From 1-10 recipients will feel no pain, heat, cold, fear, hunger, thirst, or exhaustion for 6 full hours. This does not negate damage due to poison, fire, weapons, etc., but it will benefit the recipient greatly; it adds +4 to morale, adds +1 to saving throws, eliminates need to eat or rest each hour, and neutralizes effect of fear wand, panic drums, sleep spells.

A Priestess has saving throws equal to an eleventh level wizard. She may daily perform any ten spells from the preceding table, and once each week may employ a single spell from the following list:

PRIESTESS WITCHCRAFT

CURE DISEASE (As with a Patriarch)

ANTI-MAGIC SHELL (As with a Wizard)

YOUTH Forty game years may be removed from the age of any single living (no undead) creature which is not immune to witchcraft. If desirable, twenty years may be taken from two living creatures, making each 20 years younger.

INFLUENCE Any one neutral or chaotic character touched by the witch's hand will be immediately converted to the Lawful persuasion on a permanent basis. This will not affect clerics or undead; use Hit Probability Matrix and common sense to determine if a "touch" has been made. It is **not** necessary to contact the target's skin.

BANISH ANY ONE CREATURE that is gravely threatening the life of the Priestess, whether it be undead, clerical, monster, man, or even another Priestess (regardless of alignment) may be instantly banished to hell with no saving throws. This spell is completely infallible and operates at any range and regardless of the precautions taken against it. Even creatures the witch cannot detect may be Banished, as long as they are threatening her life in a direct way.

ENCHANTMENT In a single day, any one item of magic from the list of rings, potions, misc. weapons, misc. magic items, or Table A or B with items may be produced. No wands, staves, or scrolls may be created in this manner. If the Game Master considers a price offer fair, he will allow a player to "hire" the Priestess to make a particular item, but there are conditions. The player must be either Lawful or Neutral, he must pay in advance, and for the 24 hour period he employs her he is bound to protect the witch since she will be in a trade and unable to defend herself.

SEEK It has long been understood that a witch has access to unearthly sources of information. With this spell a Priestess may locate any single item, place, or creature (like a super-Locate Object spell) and visual its surroundings. She will be able to describe its location, and tell vaguely what part of the world and what kind of terrain it lies in. The closer she approaches, the more definite she can be of its exact location. She will perform this spell for any Lawful creature at the price of a magic item or 10,000 gold pieces, whichever seems more valuable but the item that you seek must be described to her in great detail or she won't be able to detect it for you.

* * * BLACK WITCHCRAFT * * *

A Low Order witch may perform four Minor spells daily, while a High Order witch may use four Minor and two Major spells each day.

* indicates saving throws are not allowed

R = range in inches (spell may be cast this far from witch)

D = duration of spell or its effects in game turns

MINOR SPELLS

Commune - Detect Invisible - Infravision - Clairvoyance - Clairaudience - Locate Object - Continual Light - Polymorph Self - Polymorph Others - Charm Person - Charm Monster - Protection from Normal Missiles (As with Wizards)

Cause Light Wounds, Darkness* (As with Anti-Clerics)
Summon Elemental, Dissipation* (As with good Witches)

*PIT R = 5"
A pit 5 feet in diameter and 15 feet deep will form in the ground. If several of these incantations are used in succession, a very deep well may be dug. No horizontal pits may be dug (no tunneling), and if dug in desert sand the pit's walls will cave in on a 6-sided die roll of 1-4.

*FIRE BOX R = 7" D = 6
A hollow 10' cube of fire will form about the target creature or object and remain there six turns. It moves with the object it surrounds, and will not suffocate or harm whatever is trapped inside. Anything passing through the fiery wall takes normal damage from fire walls. This spell can be used as a refuge, a prison, a plant killer, ice melter, etc. If the witch uses telekinesis upon the item within, she can "mow down" ranks of enemy troops. Destroyed by cold, rain, or magic.

DIMINISH PLANT/ANIMAL/MEN R = 10" D = 3
All plants, animals, and men-types in a 10 foot by 10 foot area who fail to make their saving throw will be reduced to 1/2 their original size, with corresponding reductions in range of spells and weapons, in strength and hit dice, and in their movement. Successive uses of this spell may reduce a target to 1/4, 1/8, . . . of its original size.

*PLANT ENTRAPMENT R = 5" D = 2
Tree branches, grass, shrubbery, etc. within a 2"x2" square area will clasp at and attempt to hold motionless all living or undead characters within the boundaries of the spell. If ordered by the witch the plants will strangle or disarm the victim, but since this spell imparts no magic strength to the plants, the entrapped have a chance to escape the grip of smaller, non-wood vegetation.

MAJOR SPELLS

*PARALYZING PIT R = 7" D = 3
A pit 10" in diameter and 2" deep (game scale) forms immediately. All creatures falling in must make their saving throw against paralyzation each turn they are in the pit or else be paralyzed until freed by another.

*UNDEAD CONTROL R = 10" D = 4
From 1-6 undead characters of any type within a 10" radius of the witch are affected. They will obey her mental commands for 4 turns, but once they go beyond the 10" range this control will be permanently lost. Undead control may be maintained at any range if the witch has a crystal ball with her, but to **establish** the spell the witch must be within 10" of her target characters.

AGING R = 2"
A living thing will age 20 years immediately. Any amount of cloth, leather, or wood within range will rot in one turn. Just 2 turns after this spell is used a 3'x3' section of 6" thick iron will rust through, and 4 foot thick stone (8'x8' section) will crumble to dust in only 3 turns. Saving throws are applicable for men-types.

*CIRCLE OF BLINDNESS R = 7" D = 3
An **extremely** powerful and dangerous anti-sensing spell which prevents all means of detection. All creatures within 25' of the spell's impact point except Djinn, Efreet, Clerics, and witches will be affected (50' circle). This circle counteracts not only normal vision and hearing, but also prevents the functioning of ESP, detect invisible, detect magic or evil, locate object, seek, clrvoy. or clraud., infravision, and wizard's eye. Similarly, the use of medallions, crystal balls, or detection wands, potions, and swords will prove fruitless. The circle is immobile and its victims may blunder out of the affected area, but it provides a witch with a perfect refuge from combat and the spell is just too powerful for the use of "dispell magic".

*CURSE R = 1" R = infinite with ESP crystal ball
Any 1 creature or object may be cursed in practically any desired manner (within far-reaching bounds). It is **not** possible to curse a creature with immediate death! A curse will not affect holy items (bibles, crosses, blessed water, clerics, etc.), enchanted or magic items, those creatures immune to witchcraft, or anything which is more than 75% enclosed by silver. A fighter wearing a silver helmet, shield, and plate-armor would be safe, but one with just silver shield or just silver mail

armor would not be. Usually maps, scrolls, and articles of clothing or of furniture are likely targets.

POISON TOUCH R = physical contact is necessary
This spell is employable in two ways. Any one living creature touched by the witch must make a successful saving throw against poison, or die immediately. If used in the alternate and more devious manner, the first **three** objects handled by the witch (or a 4'x4' section of a flat surface, like a wall or floor) will be permanently contaminated with an undetectable paralyzing-poison. Creatures coming into contact with one of these items with their exposed flesh (note that gloves **will** protect you) must make a saving throw against paralyzation; and if they fail they become immobile and are unable to let go of the poisoned item or wall. After two turns of contact they will die.
Clerics are immune to the paralyzing-poison, as are other "witchcraft-proof" beings, but clerics have no means to detect the contamination. If a poisoned item is identified, a Neutralize Poison spell will make it harmless again. Holy items, silver, and magic objects may not be poisoned by the witch.
A cunning witch will choose her targets carefully (doorhandles, dagger grips, a random ladder rung, tent flaps, bedding, etc. are all likely places to contaminate.) Never let a witch sneak into camp!

*CURTAIN WALL R = 2" D = 3 maximum, or until dispelled

Upon graduating from Low to High Order, the first and most useful spell a witch learns is this one. It is a means to summon into existence an extra-dimensional "room".
Upon invoking the spell, a curtain 10' wide appears in the air, floating vertically just off the ground. Behind the drapes is a smooth walled room 10' high and wide and 20' from back wall to front curtain. This, then is the lair of a High witch, and in it she can safely store her treasure, bedding, crystal ball, cauldron and potions, her broom, and her pet "familiar".
After 3 turns, or when sent away by the witch, the curtain fades and its contents are unreachable by anyone but the witch who first summoned it, for every High witch has her **own** curtain, and can invoke no other. It provides a lair, a refuge if attacked, a prison, and transportation. When outside she can only summon it to her location, but if she is **inside** when it fades, she can make it reappear in any location familiar to her (no places unfamiliar to her). It is like teleportation with no risk. Treasure hunters could try using Charm Person or some other control agent to force her into summoning her lair, but her will is great and two control agents are required simultaneously! And remember, her familiar will defend the lair when it appears before you, and a witch has other powers of passive defense (poison touch, curse, etc.).



SECRET ORDER WITCHES
AND THEIR POWERS

Fifty-percent of the primary survivors (players) in my current Dungeons & Dragons campaign are wizards above the 11th level, and about a quarter are lords magically armed (one has accumulated an astounding collection of over 20 enchanted swords!) We had once again reached the point where no ordinary outdoor encounter could present any sort of a realistic challenge. My solution:

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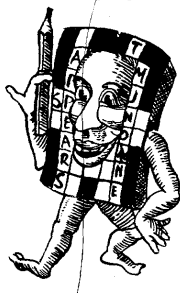
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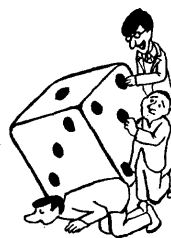
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witches, particularly those of the Secret Order.

Members of the forbidden Secret Order are fierce and direct when they attack, and a single one may easily destroy a swarm of overconfident or undercautious wizards and soldiers. However, they have certain weaknesses in their make-up which a cunning opponent may exploit. Their most obvious shortcoming is a character flaw: a distrust for disciples and ancient pride brings about their jealously guarded independence from all other witches. A Secret witch is a loner, and will never be encountered in a group of mutually protective members. A well planned counterattack by several magically endowed creatures can quickly overwhelm her one spell/turn capacity.

The Secret witches occupy their long lives in the pursuit of power; and usually will not trouble themselves to attack any creature(s) unless provoked. Still, they cannot tolerate intruders in their lair (a many chambered cave or mine-shaft) or interruptions in their endless experimenting, so anyone who stumbles into a Secret Order witch lair can expect big trouble.

Through the ages a Secret witch develops near-total familiarity with all terrain features and natural elements within several miles of her lair (i.e., she knows by heart every pebble, every leaf, every gust of wind), with the result that it is impossible to surprise her, but she has a 50% chance of sneaking up on you. (If she is not in the lair she will of course lose this advantage.) If your party does not appear hostile she will leave you alone, but if she has surprised you and your party contains a cleric and/or 15 fighting men she feels threatened and attacks.

Secret Order witches have no brooms or crystal balls and no familiar. They may perform 6 Group A and 3 Group B spells daily.

GROUP A

Dissipation - Summons Elemental - Seek (as with Priestess)
 Fire Box - Paralyzing Pit - Undead Control (as with evil Witch)
 Continual Light - Hold Person - Speak with Plants/Animals - Remove curse - Neutralize Poison - Insect Plague - Cure Serious Wounds - Ploymorph Self/Others (as with Patriarch)
 Detect Invisible - Invisibility - ESP - Clrvoy. & Clairaud. - Fire Ball - Lightning - Water Breathing - Hold Monster - Hallucinatory Terrain - Teleport - Transmute Rock Mud - Growth Plant/Animal - Control Weather (As with wizard)

GROUP B (These are not vulnerable to Dispell Magic.)

These awesome spells are the very heart of black witchcraft, the very essence of satanic powers. If a Secret Order witch surprise attacks your party, she will most probably use a spell from this list before trying anything else.

ST indicates a spell's chosen victim is allowed Saving Throws against Witchcraft (treat as a spell).

INTENSIFY R = 15" D = 1 turn

Multiplies the power of any one selected natural phenomenon. A cool breeze would become a raging hurricane, the rustle of leaves will create a deafening tumult, a sprinkle of rain turns into flash floods, etc. Only one phenomenon may be amplified with this spell.

ST-WITHER R = 7"

All living plants and creatures within a 50' diameter circle (centered at the spell's impact point) will rapidly age and die. In this manner a witch could destroy huge chunks of forestry or men-types, etc.

ST-WEIGHT CONCENTRATION/DILUTION R = 10" D = 6

From 1-10 creatures or objects will be affected. The witch may triple a target's weight (making it slower, unable to fly, etc.) or cut it to one-third (strong winds could blow away men, wagons, etc.). The witch may choose her targets at will, and decides how her spell will affect them on an individual basis (she needn't make all heavy or all light).

QUAKE R = 50" D = 2 turn maximum (1 if desired)

As the name implies, this spell creates earthquakes or great magnitude. Any patch(es) of ground within the 50" range may be shaken at will.

VAPORIZE R = 3"

This spell affects an area the dimensions of Cloudkill. Any rock or mineral matter in the affected area will turn into a thick fog and can be blown away. In this manner pits and caves may be dug quite rapidly.

SOLIDIFY R = 3"

The opposite of "Vaporize". The atmosphere takes only one half turn to coagulate, congeal, and then solidify into rock. Creatures caught in the affected area are not crushed, but will be trapped if they don't leave soon enough. This rock is true matter, and will not be affected by Dispell Magic or Dissipation. (Rock is slightly porous, so those trapped may still breathe.)

VOLCANIC CIRCLE R = 8" D = 2

This spell creates a circular line of cohesive lava around the witch. It flows outward from her at 4"/turn. (i.e., radius increases 4"/T) As

the circle expands the line remains 10' thick, and will not "thin out" like a rubber band when stretched. Any ground creature caught and "passed under" by the molten rock receives ten dice of damage (unless immune to ordinary fire, in which case no damage is done). Ground already passed over by the circle may be considered safe to walk on.

ST-REFLECTIONS D = 2

When invoked this spell creates a shimmering cloud about the witch. For two turns no magic can harm the witch, and any spell, potion, or magic device used against her will return to the attacker (regardless of range). The only spells this cloud will not reflect are Banish, Disintegrate, and certain "sense" magic such as ESP, Detect Evil, Clairaudience, etc.

WEAPONS OF THE SECRET WITCH ORDER

In forgotten ages past, in kingdoms unheralded and dead centuries of untold history, a fiery confrontation emerged between witch covens world-wide. The myriad witches of the woodlands and the fields formed an alliance which dominated all other covens. This group forcibly directed the studies of other witches, and great emphasis was placed on the magic of plants and animals, that they might grow stronger still in their respective domains. But there were those who sought darker and more Godly enchantments, pursuing powers of devastation and the very elements. They promised to teach what they learned, to enslave the world of men, and to shape raw power to the ends of witches everywhere. This the alliance would not permit, for power inspires fear, fear of those that have it. Those who allied with the new Secret coven were cast out, and in time only the mountains offered refuge to the members of this radical coven.

History has spoken little of this oven in the past, but a of late these witches have reappeared, and with them the stories of dark sorceries and wicked powers they learned in their centuries of isolation.

secret witch items are the creation of timeless magics, and no ordinary men may use them. Indeed, any Cleric to touch one of thee items will meet with instant death, for clerics are disciples of dieties, and the secret witches recognize no power but their own as supreme.

Only a priestess, a High Order evil witch, or a wizard above the 13th level may use these items.

1 • SKULL OF DEATH

A huge charred bejewelled dragon skull to be worn like a helmet. The wearer may mentally command any undead characters (up to three dice in number) at any range. Other powers imbued in the wearer are "The Finger of Death" and "Animate Dead", and these two powers may be used repeatedly. The wearer will regenerate from combat damage at the rate of 5 points/turn, even if killed (unless beheaded).

2 • MOUNTAIN SEEDS

Similar to Hill Seeds in function but much deadlier. When pitched into the air thee gloves will swell to the size of a castle almost immediately. With one such seed a wizard could crush armies or destroy a town. They are safest when dropped from above, but can be thrown up from the ground if you are able to use teleportation and escape before it comes down.

3 • LEECH DUST

A satchel of powder employable by any man-type except clerics. When a hand full is thrown (up to 2") it forms a cloud of the same dimensions as Cloudkill! Any living creature it contacts it will adhere to. The ominous name is derived from its ability to absorb blood, diffusing it out of the victim's flesh, arteries, and even the very bone marrow. The moment of contact a creature will begin to grow weak; in two turns he will be unable to fight or use spells, in three he will be paralyzed, and after four turns he will die.

This sadistic powder may only be removed by a sprinkling of holy water (see supply list in book 1). If the victim is freed of the dust before death ensues, he will require a full week of rest to restore his health. Wearing plate armor in the dust cloud prolongs death for two turns.

4 • ASSASSIN'S EYES

These are enchanted eyes obtained from the witch's human victims. They are endowed with many evil powers. In flight they will move 12"/turn and perform the function of a wizard's eye, but at any distance and with no time limits. The eyes are normally invisible and immaterial, allowing them to penetrate any solid barriers, but they must become visible to attack. (When visible they are highly vulnerable to being slashed, burned, crushed, etc.)

To attack they become visible and hover in from of their chosen victim, and anyone accidentally meeting their horrid gaze may not look away. The eyes may then use either a Charm Person spell or Death Ray (victim may use saving throws). If the spell fails to work, the victim has one turn to try killing the eyes before they turn immaterial and return to the witch using them.

5 • WITCH WAND

This wand performs 7 spells each day, doing so for years before the power wanes. It is capable of the following spells; Rejuvenation- Remove Curse - Neutralize Poison - Dissipation - Curse - Cure Light

Wounds - Summon Elemental - Calm - Comfort - Locate Object - Commune - Polymorph Self - Polymorph Others - Pit - Darkness - Diminish Plant/Animal/Men - Charm Person/Monster - Continual Light - Plant Control - and Hold Monster/Person. All of these function as witchcraft spells of the same name (plant control lasts 1 hour). The wand has additional powers. It acts as a 30' ESP medallion, protection from normal missiles, and shields the holder from Lycanthropes, undead, and elementals like scrolls.

6 • SERPENT BELT

High class snake belt with extra powers: infravision, relays audio and visual, 2 dice of damage to targets, can stretch to 10', may crawl on ceilings, and can disintegrate its way in or out of places (makes 1 inch holes, real scale). Finally, it is invisible and acts as +1 armor when worn.

* 7 • SEED SATCHEL

A package of 7-12 magic seeds. When dropped upon the ground a certain whispered phrase will cause a seed to "grow" into whichever of the listed features is desirable:

- a) a wyvern, commanded by the one who spoke the phrase
 - b) a 10" circular forest, sparse or rain forest type
 - c) a near impenetrable wall of thorns 10 feet high and 4 thick. The wall forms a straight line 30' long
 - d) an oak-sized flesh eating tree, with many limbs but slow movements
 - e) a 50 foot pool of acrid sulphur, 10 feet deep
 - f) hollow mound of rock 15' high and 30' in diameter, with a man-sized crack in one wall for passage
 - g) a 10 foot deep chasm, 10 across and up to 30' long
- The feature or object will disappear in one hour, and the seed may only be used once. No wizard may use this unless instructed by a witch.

8 • HORNET CAPE

With this the appropriate man-type (witch or wizard) may fly at 36" per turn indefinitely. When in flight all flying creatures and monsters (except man-types) within 50 inches will obey the wearer of the cape, but this control is lost when the wearer touches the ground. Whoever wears the cape may fire as many as three "stings" each turn. A Sting is a bolt of energy with a 7 inch range and will do 3 dice of damage to any creature struck (use Hit Probability Table). As with other witch weapons, the supply of energy bolts is inexhaustible. Wearing this cape gives protection against normal and magic missiles (but not blades or clubs), and will make the wearer invisible whenever desired (even firing stings).

Earlier, "Potion Cauldrons" were mentioned in connection with objects to be found in a witch lair.

Potion Caludrons are usable only by witches. With this a witch may produce any potion (in the potion list of book 2) in just one game-day. Any potion which is already available may be duplicated at the rate of one duplicate per hour.

Although they are capable, witches will not produce or even sell a Treasure Finding potion unless forced to or offered half the treasure to be found with it. If you choose the latter means of obtaining this valuable elixir, you must sign a blood pledge, and failure to keep your word results in prompt cursing.

All other potions will cost between 500 and 3000 gold pieces (roll a die to establish this price).

WITCH LAIRS & TREASURE

Every witch owns a Flying Broom (see Misc. Magic list), and when encountered outside the lair will be either flying it (35% of the time) at 4 to 40', or will have it close at hand to escape attackers. For every two witches found outside the lair, there will be one magic witch item among them; and for every three witches present, one will wear some kind of a magic ring.

As a precaution, from one to all of the evil witches encountered out of doors will be accompanied by her "familiar" as a bodyguard (see LAIRS to determine type of familiar). Good witches will only have small birds or fur animals with them, and when an emergency arises will polymorph them into a dragon bodyguard.

LAIRS — If found within their lair, witches will be sitting at a crystal ball table in deep concentration. Determine, before anything else, which of the three types of crystal balls it is (plain, ESP, Clairaud.) with a die roll, giving each type an equal chance to be the one chosen.

In this "circle of concentration" they will be heedless of their surroundings until the turn **after** they are attacked or summoned (or 2nd turn of melee). It is quite possible to enter their lair and carry off treasure unobserved. Still, they are not altogether as unprotected as they might appear. In a concentration circle a witch is exerting her full mental capacities, and is immune to all forms of Charm/Hold person, Sleep spells, feeblemind, and control items such as rings, potions, and staves.

Furthermore, each **evil** witch present will have posted her "familiar" on guard duty. Roll a six-sided die to learn the type of familiar each witch owns: 1, 2 - Basilisk 3 - Wyvern 4 - Warlock with 1 ring and 1 wand 5, 6 - one undead character (no vampires). The individual familiars will cooperate to protect the entire circle of witches, and not just their own owner. Good witches will lack this defense.

Finally, every evil witch lair is guarded with some type of curse to be imbued upon the first Neutral or Lawful trespasser (Lawful witch lairs are not curse-guarded). The lairs of good witches will be protected by ordinary manual traps, such as trip-wired crossbows. The referee will have to decide on an appropriate curse or trap before any attacking player enters the lair.

If there are three or more witches in the lair, a "Potion Caludron" will also be present. This will be described at the end of the list of witch items. For every witch in the lair, there will be a Flying Broom present, as in the out-of-doors.

In a lair may be found a) good witches, b) secret witches, c) Low witches, d) a combination of Low and High witches. You will never find a lair with only High witches present (see the Chaotic witch spell "Curtain wall").

TREASURE — Aside from magic cauldrons, brooms, crystal balls, and a warlock familiar's property, each lair will have secreted in the floor, walls, furniture, rafters, or in nearby tree trunks and buried in herb gardens, several tiny caches of wealth and magic items, guarded by various means.

Good Witch Lair:

- 1-10 thousand silver pieces (SP)
- 1-4 thousand Gold Pieces (GP)
- 1-10 Gems (Gs)
- 1-8 pieces of Jewelry (J)
- 1-3 Witch Items (WIs)

Protection is barely adequate. Most is wrapped in lead to prevent others from detecting it. A willingness to sell items undoubtedly prevents some magic-greedy people from resorting to violence.

Low Order Witch Lair:

- 1-6 thousand GP,
- 6-11 GS,
- 1-10 J,
- 1-3 WIS

Protection:

Mild curses and poison touch supplied by a cooperative High Order witch.

High Order Witch Lair:

- 11-20 thousand GP,
- 6-11 Gs,
- 1-8 J,
- 1-2 WIS

Protection is assured by hoarding everything in the Curtain room, although multiple control agents can force her to invoke her Curtain Wall.

Secret Order Witch:

- 1-4 thousand GP,
 - 1-3 Gs,
 - 1-6 WIs,
 - 1 ring,
 - 1-2 "Secret" WIs
- these 1-3 gems are all of superior value,
i.e. = 5,000 to 500,000

The most direct means to obtain a witch treasure hoard is, of course, to arm yourself with two wizards and a few clerics and tear them apart. Then just find a few expendable men to brave curses, poison, and infinite torture while they go over every inch of the witch lair searching for items and gold.

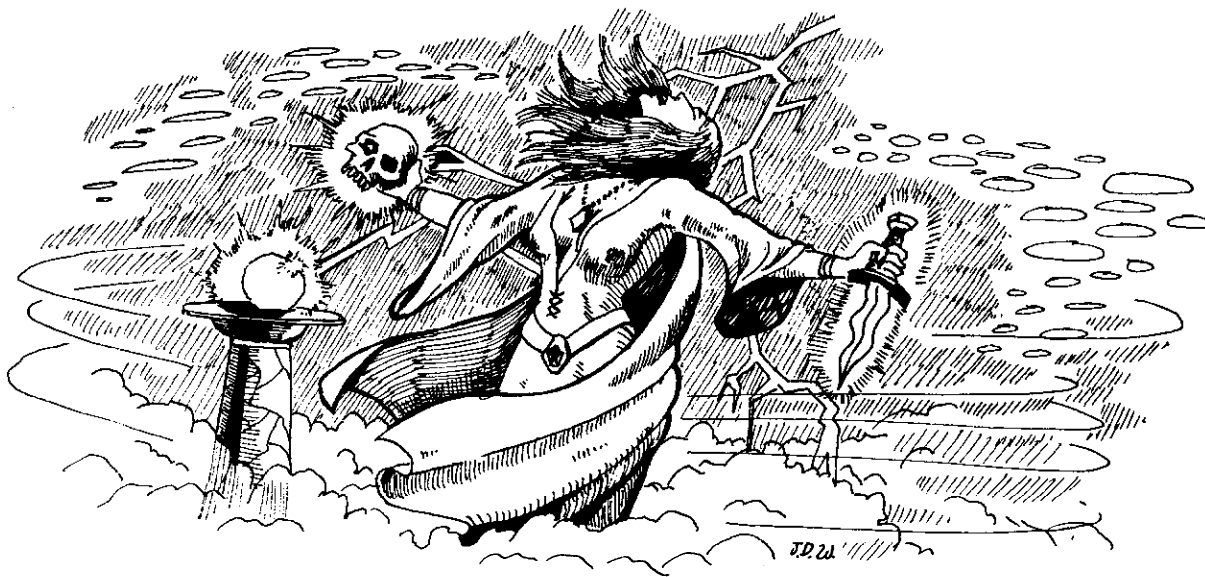
There are better ways. From a witch of similar alignment you buy. If you ever encounter a group of High Order witches out in the open somewhere, use control spells and potions so they will summon their lair and empty it at your feet. If you expect to meet Low Order witches, hire a dozen "expendables" and arm them with swords. Converging upon a coven of Low Order crones in a slashing mob should get you what you want, since they can't fight for more than four turns anyway. Finally, there are the Secret witches. They usually stick to the caves, being originally from mountain country. They have no interest in wealth, so if you're after gold try elsewhere. They ARE interested in power, undiluted raw power, so if you share the same hobby, grab a dozen wizards and clerics, 500 armored heavyfoot, and find a Secret witch cave. Just don't count too heavily on that treasure, because you may be in for a painful disappointment.

When examining the list of Witch Items, remember that when found in the lair a witch coven has use of all portable magic items in their treasure hoard. It is advisable to plan a defense against each particular object that may be used against you.

WITCH ITEMS

As explained on page two, a witch lair will contain various enchanted items. These objects are usable by any man-type character of any alignment (unless specifically noted otherwise). Some of the items require special training to handle properly, and you will find it absolutely necessary to hire a witch of your own alignment for one game day to teach you in the use of those particular objects. These items will be marked with a star (*). A witch instructress will earn 10 gold pieces per student per object!

Although most of these items will undoubtedly have to be obtained through destruction of witch covens, it will be possible at times to simply purchase them. If you or your party encounter a witch(es) of your own alignment, check with the Game Master to learn which objects are in the witch lair. If you wish to buy, you



must learn if she (they) is willing to sell anything. On a six-sided die roll of 1-3, she is willing to sell an item at the price indicated below; on a roll of 4 she will ask double the usual price; and a roll of 5-6 indicates she refuses to part with the magic item. You must check her "willingness to sell" for each object you are buying.

Items from TABLE A will cost 6-15 thousand GP (or its equivalent in gems and jewelry). Determine the price with a die roll.

Objects from TABLE B call for hard bargaining between the player (customer) and the GM (witch). The usual price for TABLE B object is a payment of magic items **and** 10-50,000 GP (or equivalent).

NOTE: A witch coven willing to sell is willing to instruct!

TABLE A

(*indicates training is required prior to use)

- 1 • Medallion of ESP (30 or 90 foot range, 50-50 chance for either)
- 2 • 3 to 6 Potions (no Treasure Finding potions will be sold)
- 3 • 1 Cursed Scroll or cursed object (e.g., helmet, knife, fruit, wand that backfires, etc.)
- 4 • Treasure Map (a witch commonly asks for 20% of the haul of gold indicated by the map)
- 5 • Treasure-Magic Map
(If the amount of wealth indicated by the map is tremendous, roll a six-sided die. A 1-4 means the witch is willing to pack up her home and join you as an ally on your treasure-hunting expedition. She could be a valuable asset, and will do nicely if no Clerics or Magic-Users are available. The GM will make provisions for her alliance)
- 6 • Roll on Table B
- 7 • 3 Potions (no Treasure Finding potions will be sold)
- 8 • Dagger + 3 (add to hit probability and to damage against any size target)
- * 9 • SNAKE BELT (Similar to snake staff, but in belt form (3' long) and usable by everyone. It will silently crawl anywhere its owner mentally directs it, down, halls, through cracks, and even up stone or wood walls, at speeds up to 6"/turn! The belt relays a visual impression of all it passes to its owner, akin to a "Wizard's Eye". It does 1 die of damage to any creature it strikes, and is killed only by fire and lightning. The synthetic muscles are strong enough to strangle a Wyvern, pin a man's arms to his side, or hold shut or open a door.)
- 10 • Amulet vs. Crystal Balls and ESP (as in Misc. Magic list)
- *11 • IVY BRACELET (A fragile band of enchanted forest ivy, it is found only in the hoard of forest covens. It will impart to its wearer the power of "Plant Control" (as in potions) until it is removed. It also enables one to "Speak with Plants", as a Patriarch may do. A firm wind or any vigorous combat will probably destroy this delicate item.)
- 12 • DART RING (only to be found with woodland witches, the Darts fired by this ring are thornlike points. A dart, when it hits, does only one pip of damage, but the creature thus struck will die of poisoning within two days if no "Neutralize Poison" spell is used. The ring fires twice per turn at distances up to 30 feet; the darts are inexhaustible and the ring never misses!)
- *13 • LOCKET OF SATAN (Found only in the possession of evil witches, but usable by all neutral and chaotic man-types. Wearer may command any 3 chaotic creatures within the 7' range, regardless of intervening substances. No saving throws against its influence are allowed! If the wearer concentrates the power against a lawful character for two turns, there is a 15% chance that lawful character will turn permanently evil and corrupted. Has no effect upon clerics, lawful, neutral, or otherwise.)

- 14 • LOVE LOCKET (Found only in the possession of good witches and usable only by them. Any male humanoid to come within its 7' range immediately comes under the spell (no saving throws). The victim will do anything to please the wearer, even to the extent of offering her all his possessions. Of course, a good witch is not greedy, and will accept no more than 20 percent of his wealth, and no more than two magic items. Once she has chosen what to keep among his treasures, a highly charismatic man will -ahem- be amply rewarded. All her victims will be released from the spell the next morning, and **may not** seek to regain their treasure.)
- *15 • THORN TWINE (A 40 foot thorn vine which is flexible as rope and magically empowered. It may be used as a lariat, tangling any creature helplessly and doing 4 dice of damage each turn it remains ensnared. The strength of an Ogre, a plant control agent, or the use of fire or lightning is needed to free a victim. Assume a "hit" on the Hit Probability Chart indicates a successful cast. If surrounded on open ground, the user may swing the Twine in great, sweeping arcs to hold attackers at bay. In this mode, anyone approaching within 40 feet suffers 1 die of damage/turn. This rope is useless for climbing, and must be handled cautiously.)
- 16 • ILLUSIONWAND (This is one of the only three wands a witch ever uses. The other two are Polymorph and Witch Wand). (Only Witches and Magic-Users may use it.)
- 17 • POLYMORPH WAND
- 18 • 1 to 3 RINGS, 1 Misc. Magic Item (From tables in book 2.)
- *19 • GUARDIAN EGG (This brass orb is the size of a helmet and weighs as much as 250 gold pieces. A key word will transform it into a metal servant who will obey and protect its summoner until the next sunrise, when it will return to globular form. (Employable once every 48 hours.) If resting upon the ground when the key word is spoken it will take the shape, strength, and dimensions of a Hill Giant (8 dice). If thrown in the air when transformed a metal Roc is the result (8 dice); and if resting on or submerged in a pool of liquid it transmutes into a 7 foot Dragon Turtle (10 dice). The monster is unintelligent, and will only fly, swim, or go where directed, and fights poorly. Due to their metal bodies, treat these servants as armor class 2. If destroyed in combat they will **not** return to the egg shape.)
- 20 • 1 Ring (from page 25, book 2)

This completes the list for Table A. If you notice, number six indicates a roll on table B, which follows. These items are especially powerful, and are rare indeed.

TABLE B

- * 1 • HILL SEEDS (1-3 in number)
These black spheres are light and small as a baseball, until thrown. In flight they quickly expand to awesome size and mass. By the time they have travelled 50 feet, they will be several yards across and any structure they impact with will suffer from a **triple** bombard (see Chain-mail)! All living creatures will be crushed instantly. Range is 3" to 14", depending on thrower's strength. Usable by all, but need training.
- 2 • LUCK CHARM
These are various gems, coins, and talismans; and some are quite strong. A 20-sided die roll is used to determine the charm's strength in each category. The holder of such a charm benefits in these five ways:
a) Charm acts as + 1 (40% chance), + 2 (30%), or + 3 armor.
b) Increases saving throws by + 1 (65% chance) or + 2 (35%).
c) Increases chance of hitting opponents in combat by + 1 (50% chance), + 2 (35%), or + 3.

Continued on page 28

Metamorphosis Alpha Additions

SOME IDEAS MISSED IN METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA

by James M. Ward

In the course of writing anything about anything, when everything is done and sent to the printers, there is something that should have been added to it or changed in it. Such is the case, in looking over the TSR booklet **Metamorphosis Alpha** that I designed. Before going further, I want to say that everyone at TSR did a great job on the production of this booklet; it is just that some things (more my fault than theirs) were left out.

In working on the technological treasure items list, there are four items that should have been completely explained that were not.

Chemical Radiation Neutralizers: are small two foot tall cylinders that contain a blue gel having the power to absorb radiated material and completely neutralize it. The gell from one cylinder can cover a 100-square yard area. The effects are permanent and the cylinders can commonly be found in any radiated area that was dangerous before the starship passed through the radiated gas cloud.

Chemical Flammable Retardants: are simply CO₂ fire extinguishers that are 1 foot tall cylinders, with a nozzle on top. These little tanks shoot out blasts of cold air. The tank can last for 30 minutes of constant action. There are many plants and creatures that cannot stand the intense cold given off by the extinguisher, making it a very good weapon.

Radioactive Material In Containment: is some type of material (liquid, sand, ball bearings, or solid metal wedges) that is radiated to a variable intensity. This containment is always in the form of a duralloy cube with a screw top. A loud buzzing occurs whenever these containers are opened. When out of this container, the material has an effective damaging range of 90 yards.

Sensory Intensifiers: are pendants that hang from the neck and run for thousands of years on a tiny atomic battery. These devices increase the natural bodily senses many times over. A being with this device on their person can see, hear, smell, and move at one and one half times the normal human rate. They can, therefore, not be surprised, because they can hear beings approaching or laying in wait for them. They can follow a scent like the best bloodhound. In battle the being gets two turns every other melee turn-example; attacked and not surprised, the being strikes normally the first time with his weapon and on the next melee turn gets two attacks with his weapon while the attacker gets only one.

Along the same lines as the above is the poison chart that is closely tied to the constitution roll. This chart is tough and the point was not brought out clearly enough that there are lots of ways the affects of this chart can be countered. **Any** shaman from any tribe should have poison antidotes that he or she passes out freely for information or goodies or even the promise of future goodies. The number three humanoids, knowing all about poison, naturally have antidotes that are obtainable for things that these small humanoids could normally never get hold of. Plants of many different types can provide partial or total negation to the affects of any given poison. There are mutations that can also negate the affects of poison; the new body parts mutation can be a gland that negates/filters toxic liquids entering the body. The increased body parts mutation could include the expanding of the appendix, which, if one may stretch a point, could cleanse the system of poisons entering the body, (if given sufficient time and rest).

It should be obvious that the abilities given everyone, including Strength, Dexterity, and Leadership Potential, are all closely tied to the **D&D** abilities. The Mental Resistance factor is roughly analogous to the Intelligence factor in **D&D** and because of this, it instead of the Character Leadership Potential should be used when the judge uses the Item Complexity Level chart.

The above information came through playing the game, and I imagine that as time goes by there will be lots of reports from others that have noticed things that need clarification in **Metamorphosis Alpha**. I hope those wolfoids stay off your tail.

Designer's Forum

Tribal Society And Heirarchy On Board The Starship Warden

by James M. Ward

In viewing the many tribes of the starship Warden, several common traits are evidenced. All of the tribes have a **shaman** and a tribal leader. All of the tribes are aware of other intelligent groups on the ship and tribes usually treat strangers as enemies. All of the tribes explore the ship, with differing degrees of success. All of the tribes are influenced in some manner by androids and wolfoids.

The **shaman** of any given tribe is the most knowledgeable member of the group in dealing with the ship and its devices. The **shaman** is a indirect tool for the referee, in that this non-player serves as a catalyst in the shaping of the players' goals or directions, when they adventure. The **shaman** also heals poisons, translates written material, and often shows players how to use the devices they bring in, (for a price, of course).

The leader of any given group (tribe) is characterized by very high ability rolls, especially in the strength category. The being usually has weapons or devices far beyond those normally found in the tribe; devices like laser guns, slug projectors, or paralysis rods. If a leader lack these things, he or she invariably has support from sub-leaders or mutations that have been enlisted into the leader's service. Disputes over tribal leadership are rare. These battles entail an anything-goes confrontation, in which power weapons and mutated attacks are common.

Tribes frequently battle other groups on single levels or through out many levels of the ship. These battles often weaken both sides so much that third groups will move in and destroy the first two. Such battles are often methods of knowledge transfer: in the form of new weapons or fighting styles employed.

Exploring tribesmen are usually what players of the game represent. These explorations bring the tribe knowledge of the level and other parts of the ship. There are many knowledge giving devices and creatures on the ship that can be of great service to the would-be-traveler! Things like singing vines, computer screens, and peaceful intelligent creatures all aid the player in an environment that is not conducive to long life.

In the **Starship Warden**, the two dominant life forms are the Androids and the Wolfoids. The androids have infiltrated into every human society as **shamans** and have made themselves indispensable. This process gives them great power and allows them to use the human tribe to fight the mutated intelligences of the starship. The wolfoids, on the other hand, seek out other species and trade their considerable skill in metal working (mainly in the form of weapons) for knowledge and devices they otherwise do not possess. Both groups are aware of each other and seek the destruction of each other. The androids understand and use much of the vast technological power of the ship, but are hampered by lack of numbers and inbred handicaps. The wolfoids are numerous throughout the ship, but lack the knowledge of the androids. This lack in technology is partially negated by a deep understanding of the mutated life on the ship.

Many times during the battles between the wolfoids and the androids, player characters have aided one side or the other. This help has resulted in great rewards for those few that lived. One group of players recently killed four very important android scouts and naturally robbed the bodies of their duralloy shields and their color bands. This same group is aware that their **shaman** is not a human and have taken steps to invade the **shaman's** hut and gain some of his (its) power. Only time will reveal their success.

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by Grenadier



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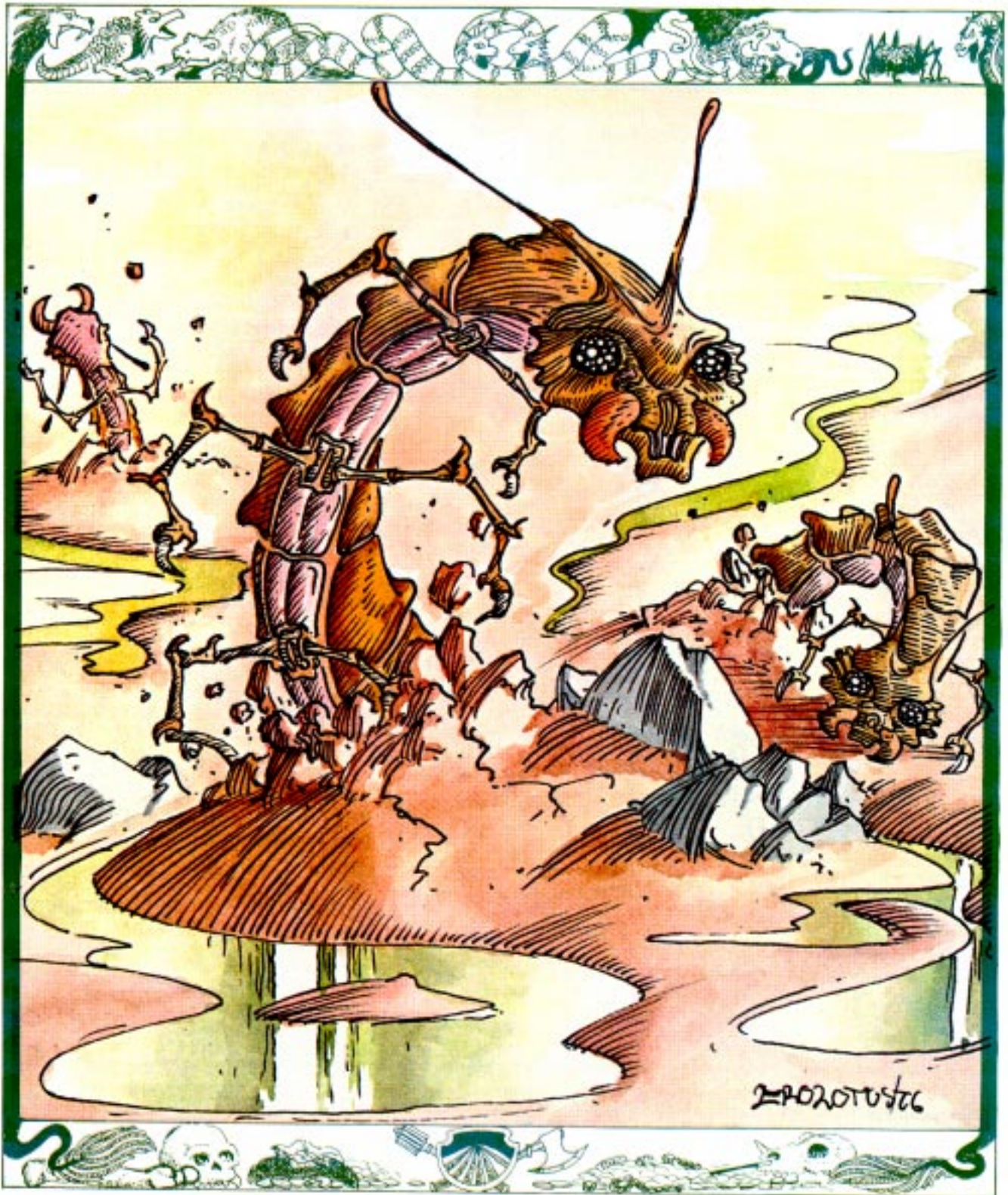
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FEATURED CREATURE

THE ANHKHEG:



Number appearing: 1-6

Description: 10-20 feet long, brown chitin overall, pink underside

Armor class: 2 overall, underside class 4

Movement: 12/6 through ground

Hit die: 3-8 (8 sided die)

% in lair: 25%

Treasure: B2

Squirt acid for 1-6 die of damage according to size

Bite for 3-18 points damage

Magic resistance: none

Alignment: neutral

Continued on page 28



Sirs,

In partial response to Mr. Pulsipher's letter October '76): I really cannot see what his problem is. He himself acknowledges his debt to Stith Thompson for many magical items and wilderness episodes, so when he states that fiction is a total waste of time, it leaves me wondering. Now I agree with his statement that one could probably find better material elsewhere, yet if *The Dragon* ceases to publish these stories, many new writers would be left out in the cold. After reading his letter, I don't think that Mr. Pulsipher would object to that at all, but in doing so, he is actually cutting his (and our, collective) throat. Just how does he think that all this got started? Yet allow me to regress for a moment in order that I might elaborate on this point.

To begin with, Mr. Pulsipher seems to have forgotten one of the fundamental rules of existence, namely that you have to take the good with the bad. Not all (perhaps none) of these writers are going to be Malorys or Tolkiens, but one should still give them a chance (at least tolerate their efforts) in the hopes that they one day might achieve that higher plateau of artistry. For these are the people that enable the genre to survive, and I think that Mr. Pulsipher should be thankful to them for enabling **him** to stand upon that height of literary excellence from whence he dispenses his wisdom. But how, you may ask do they enable him to do so? Why, by being the pile, of course. Perhaps Mr. Pulsipher has forgotten just who he is standing on. But then, pure air always was a little thin, and, as such, liable to go to one's head.

Sincerely,
Garth Wilcoxson
Ard-choille!

Hear! Hear! Ed.

Dear Mr. Kask:

I would like to tell you about the massive campaign that I have been working on. It is situated on the hypothetical world of Loera, a world of infinite possibility in fantastic adventure. Although it is not our own Earth, it is only about eleven light years from our world, and therefore most of the culture is a parallel of our ancient cultures.

However, the scope and size of the campaign is so much that I cannot create and run it all. Therefore, I am putting it on a national basis so as to get the entire campaign running. I need fifty-five DungeonMasters with time, and good judgment, who are willing to run an area about 600 by 600 miles. Each DM would gather up about twenty players, fill in any needed terrain and dungeons, and run that section, sending me monthly reports to keep the campaign up to date. Those who are interested, write to this address: Keith Abbott, 5305 Lake Harbor Road, Muskegon, MI 49441.

I hope that this campaign will prove to be a melting pot of ideas — sort of a DungeonMaster's union. And although I may get the help that I need from the fifty-five, I am planning to expand, so any and all applications will be filled, providing that I receive the mailing address of the applicant. I will then send an introductory letter to explain the campaign further, and if they are still interested, I will send a supplement to use with the Loeran campaign.

I hope that the Loeran campaign will be successful — it's a world of ideas.

May your treasures always be plentiful,
Keith A. Abbott



Dear Sirs,

Allow me to congratulate you on your new magazine, as well as to order a copy of *The Dragon* #1. Although not a D&D player myself, I still find many of the articles and rules most interesting. However, I begin to wonder where it will all end. My meaning is this: I fear you are going to become bogged down in such a plethora of rules, sub-classes, etc. that, if all are used, the game could easily become practically unplayable. I wonder how many players use more than a tithe of them now? Over-complication can be as bad as oversimplification. I'm not saying it should be a game for the lowest common denominator, but it's not impossible to foresee a loss of interest in it due to its becoming almost incomprehensible. The most successful games are those which do not require one eye on the game and the other on a rule book. They're also the most enjoyable.

I must at this point disagree with the readers who oppose fiction in *The Dragon*. Frankly, I would like to see much more. I was especially pleased to see Gardner Fox writing for you. I find his heroes to be considerably more original than most of the "Conan"-types most other authors offer us. I missed the first installment of "Gnome Cache" but the author's writing seems to be improving from the se-

cond to the third. If he keeps up, he may be another L. Sprague DeCamp (who Ernst's writing seems to be resembling more and more). It was also gratifying to see you're offering new writers a chance to submit their works.

Aside from more fiction and artwork, here are a few things off the top of my head I'd like to see: articles on medieval tactics, (both personal combat and full scale battles); book reviews; critiques of various other games (like the article on War of the Empires); reviews and sources of other Fantasy magazines, especially the smaller "shoe string ones that most of us never have a chance to find out about much less see; an article on the Society for Creative Anachronism would be of interest to many readers I'm sure; battle reports from Dungeon players could be good if worked right; and mainly keep the magazine headed in the direction it seems to be going.

Yours truly,
Mike Lueders

The purpose of THE DRAGON is to provide a forum for communication pertaining to fantasy gaming. (By fantasy, I include S&S, SF and role-playing as well as boardgaming.) I certainly don't recommend that every DM adopt every item that I publish. I just publish them so that discriminating DM's can pick and choose as they see fit, within the confines and limitations of their campaigns.

The D&D field is sharply polarized between those who feel that every single contingency should be anticipated (and rules already laid out) and those that prefer to pick and choose the elements of their campaigns, and wing it whenever new alternatives present themselves. I try to satisfy both of these dissimilar camps, as well as those in between the two poles.

The medieval article you desire is more likely to appear in LITTLE WARS, our sister publication. For instance, check out Vol. 1, No. 3, for two fine articles on Crusades era gaming. ED.

Dear Out on a Limb;

Regarding your elf system, and the subsequent arguments thereon, this is the way it was, working from LotR, Guide to Middle Earth, and the Tolkien Companion [a 531 page ME dictionary.]

There was originally only one group of Elves, and they were in Middle Earth. They became divided into two groups in time; the East-elves, or Wood-elves, who were content to live in the forests of Middle Earth, and were also known as the "Silvan elves"; and the West-elves, a.k.a. the "Eldar", who "conceived an awareness of their destiny and awaited a manifestation of it." This eventually came in the summons by the Valar, Guardians of the World, to the Eldar to live in Valinor. The Eldar, of whom there were three kindreds [Noldor, Sindar, and the third kindred is unnamed . . . The names "Light-elves, Deep-elves, and Sea-elves", referring to the three kindreds, (Hobbit, p. 164) must be discounted as it is inaccurate in at least one aspect, that they all went to Valinor.], decided to go, and built their ships; but at the last minute, the Sindar decided that they were not ready, and they stayed behind. These Sindar, or Grey-elves, dwelt in later years with the lesser elves, the Silvan elves. There were now three Elfish **races**, the Sindar, the Silvan, and the Eldar [Grey, Wood, and High -elves, respectively]. When one of the Vala, Melchar [later, Morgoth] stole the three Sillmarili, it was the Noldor only of the Eldar who came over the sea, against the will of the Valar, to win the Sillmarili back by force. When the Noldor [who were now called the Exiles] got to Middle Earth, they were joined in their war against Morgoth by the Silvan elves, the Sindar, and the Edain, the "Fathers of Men" [of whom Aragorn, as well as all

the Numenorean descendants of Gondor and Arnor, was descended]. At this point, and all through the First Age, there were four races of Elves; the Silvan-elves [Wood-elves], the Sindar [Grey-elves], the Noldor [Exiles], and the unnamed third kindred of the Eldar [now the only official "High-elves", since the Noldor were out of favor with the Valar at this point]. The last three races named were the Three Kindreds of the Eldar. At the end of the First Age, the ban of exile was lifted from the Noldor with the exception of the **original leaders of the Noldorian revolt**, which applied only to Galadriel, since the other leaders had all been killed in the War of the Great Jewels, against Morgoth. The Noldor can now officially be called the High-elves again, as they are back in the Valar's good graces.

After the first call of the Valar, the only three Elf races **ever** in Middle Earth were the Silvan, the Sindar, and the Noldor. While both the latter two were Eldar, the Noldor were not "High-elves" until the second age [those that still stayed]. In addition, **all Elves can go over the sea**, but the probability is very minimal for the Silvan-kind.

By the end of the Third Age, there were damned few Eldar in Middle Earth, so I think your Elf-tables should be revised to: a 20-sided die, 1-16 = Silvan; 17-19 = Sindar; 20 = Noldor. In actuality, there were far less Eldar than that even, but the Eldar were more likely to go adventuring than the Silvan-elves.

Happy Dragoning,
David Michael Friedman;
LotR Lore-ist.

Sounds good to me — any objections out there? Ed.

To the average wargamer, regardless of his area of interest, the entertainment or pleasurable aspect as well as the serious side of the subject is simply a matter of balance. This balance is prejudiced of course, by the background of the individual wargamer and his personal likes and dislikes.

There is, of course, more to it than that. The average fan, especially the beginner, is generally exposed to three main characters in the wargaming society.

First there is the So-So fan (Not a new D&D Sub-class) who has only marginal interest in the field but seems to wish equal 'status' as it were, with all other fans. Attempts by the So-So to oversimplify games and repeated complaints about the complexity of games and game systems are symptomatic of these persons. However, their interest, minimal though it may be, should be considered and if possible, accommodated, if for no other reason than to help maintain a broad based and extensive support for all wargaming so as to promote expansion of the war and fantasy gaming field. Courtesy and helpfulness are never misplaced, even, or especially, to nitpickers.

A second character in wargaming society is the Fanatic (Not a religious sub-class). This nut cannot seem to live without wargaming of some type, which in itself is certainly good. But he cannot seem to tolerate anyone else who might have a different attitude. You simply should not put someone else down because they don't feel as you do. A Fanatic is certainly entitled to his opinion but he shouldn't force it down your throat. A Fanatic can actually drive wargaming beginners away by being overbearing. The worst possible example is the Fanatic DM, who should have a place in the game (D&D) as an evil monster. A DM who makes a newcomer feel welcome, such as MASTER MAGE ALLEN HAM-MACK of Birmingham can make a convert by

simply letting them enjoy themselves.

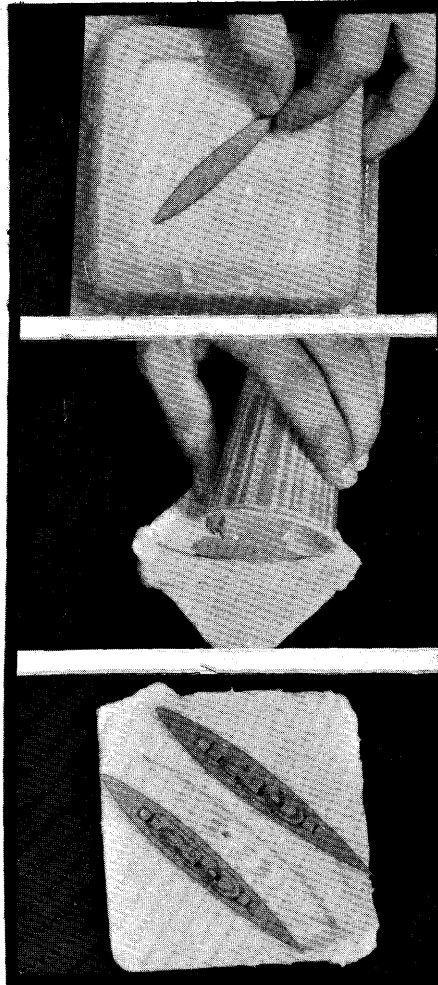
A third character met by the newcomer is the Money Monster. These dudes are so commercially inclined that wargaming fun gets lost in the financial manipulations.

It should be noted here that the 'founders' of modern American wargaming, TSR and associates have maintained what seems to me a **high quality** operation and still have kept their business in a prosperous and expanding state, much to the delight and long range pleasure of their fans. Without groups such as TSR the world of wargaming would soon die a slow 'communications' death.

A final point to be made is that for most of us, wargaming is a pleasure, a hobby. We tend to become very dedicated to it as most of us realize, and the involvement can be quite serious. The exercise of the body is important, as we have long known, but the exercise of the mind is just as necessary. Tactical and strategic operations, planning, quick response development, study of history and above these, imagination and a liberal dose of mathematics make a superb mental exercise program, healthy for any individual. Obviously wargaming fits that particularly interesting set of parameters exactly. The fact that you can have a ball as well, sits as icing on an extremely tasty cake.

In the final analysis, the beginner should be helped and encouraged, for the good of us all. The expert should expand and not allow himself to become bored, either with his hobby or fellow hobby-person. The wargaming field is wide-open and depends upon its individual members, Fanatic, Expert, beginner or whichever, to expand and grow properly. Therefore in the immortal words of Commander Spock of the Starship Enterprise,

"LIVE LONG AND PROSPER"
GARRY F. SPIEGLE



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HOW GREEN WAS MY MUTANT

THE APPEARANCE OF HUMANOIDS IN METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA

by Gary Gygax

Mutated humans, or simply humanoids, are a commonplace sight in the “worlds” of METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA. It is no great matter to describe the obvious when telling a player about his own appearance, or relating to a party of adventurers what they see when they encounter some humanoids. Thus, a mutant is very large, or quite small, has quills, or is winged. Large ears go with heightened hearing. A long, broad nose indicates a humanoid with heightened smelling ability. It is easy to go on, but what about general differences? Of course, you may

have humanoids appearing as humans in most respects, but if you would enjoy adding a bit of “color” to your campaign, I suggest the following tables for obtaining the general appearance of mutated humans, players or not. To determine the appearance just roll dice for as many of the categories as you desire, and, or course, you may delete, add, or change as you see fit!

| Die Roll | Skin/Hair Coloration | Skin Characteristic | Color Pattern |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | white | hairy | solid (or solid patches) |
| 2 | pink | hair patches | striped |
| 3 | tan | bald | dotted |
| 4 | brown | wrinkled | spotted |
| 5 | orange | warty | belted |
| 6 | black | knobby | banded |
| 7 | red | pocked | whorles |
| 8 | yellow | leathery | splotches |
| 9 | blue | normal | normal |
| 10 | green | normal | normal |
| 11 | purple | | |
| 12 | gray | | |
| 13-15 | 2 colors | | |
| 16-17 | 3 colors | | |
| 18-19 | 4 colors | | |
| 20 | 5 colors | | |

| Head | | Neck | Body |
|----------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | crested | long | round |
| 2 | long, pointed | long, thin | thin |
| 3 | flattened oval | short | barrel-like |
| 4 | bulbous | very thick | hunched |
| 5 | bullet shaped | wattled | long |
| 6 | quite small | normal | small |
| 7 | normal | | normal |
| 8 | normal | | normal |
| Die Roll | Facial Features | Hands and Feet | Fingers and Toes |
| 1 | very small | long | three |
| 2 | round eyes | short | four |
| 3 | drooping ears | narrow | four |
| 4 | no ears | wide | five |
| 5 | huge mouth | hard | five |
| 6 | big nose | soft | five |
| 7 | no nose | thick fingered/toed | six |
| 8 | very large | thin fingered/toed | six |
| 9 | normal | very large | seven |
| 10 | normal | very small | webbed |
| 11 | | normal | double-jointed/prehensile |
| 12 | | normal | nailess |



DIRT

by jake





| Arms | Legs |
|------------------|--------|
| 1 long | long |
| 2 short | short |
| 3 thin | thin |
| 4 thick | thick |
| 5 double-jointed | bowed |
| 6 normal | normal |

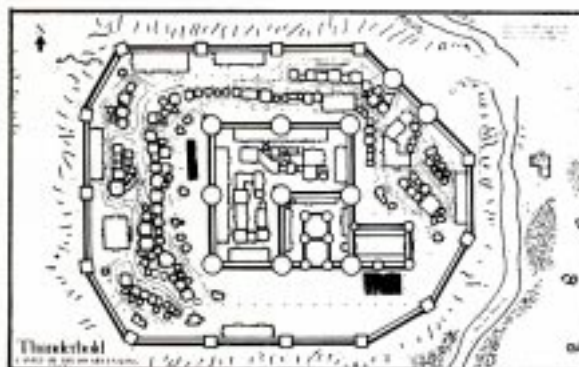


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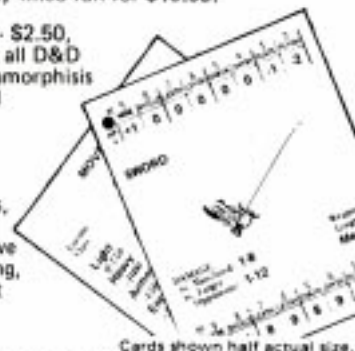


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BEYOND THE WIZARD FOG

by Gardner F. Fox

The ship lay becalmed on the great river. Its sails were motionless, limp and heavy. Men sat on the oar benches, the oar-handles gripped in massive fists, waiting for the clang of the overseer's hammer. Silence lay upon the **Hysso**p, as men turned their heads toward the great white fog that waited for them, spreading across the wide reaches of the waterway and up onto the land itself.

Niall of the Far Travels was uneasy. That uneasiness was a coldness down his spine, a restlessness in his every nerve. He stood leaning against the starboard railing, eyes seeking to pierce that shrouded whiteness which crept slowly but inexorably across the water and its shorelines.

They were three days out of Angalore, almost halfway to the great city of Urgrik, where he was to take service with Lurlyr Manakor who ruled those lands under his eagle banner. There should be no danger along the river Thalar, ships plied its waters every day. There had been no word of trouble. Not so much as a rumor.

Yet danger lay ahead. A barbarian sell-sword out of Northumbria to the far north, almost an animal in his instincts, Niall scented that danger. He did not know what that trouble might be, yet it waited there for the ship and for all the men on it.

A shadow touched the railing. Edron Hobbort, who was captain of the **Hysso**p, stood scowling at his side. "I don't like this. It smacks of magic."

Niall shrugged. "Magic? Aye, it could be. Or warm clouds touching the land. I've seen fogs like that, here and there across the world where I've wandered."

The captain eyed him respectfully. He had heard tales of this Niall of the Far Travellings in the alehouses back at Angalore, from men who had seen him in the palaces of the Kings of the South, or riding with the dreaded Swordsmen of Chandon, or even — so one old man had whispered — consorting with the demon-priests of Farfanoll at the Unmentionable Oasis which bestraddled the scarlet sands of the Inner Desert.

He seemed young for someone to have done all that, Edron Hobbort told himself. Yet there was a shadow in those grey eyes, a sensitivity on his sun-bronzed face, that told the captain this youth had been many places in his short lifetime, and had done many things.

He asked now, "What would you advise, Niall?"

"Turn back. I smell wizardry."

Edron Hobbort scoffed. "There's been no wizardry along this river for a thousand years. Except for Maylock, back there in Angalore and — you disposed of him."

"There is magic here. I can almost smell it."

"Come you to my cabin. I have charts of this river and its surrounding lands. Old charts and new charts. You can see for yourself."

They made their way to the cabin and after Edron Hobbort had lighted an oil lamp and unrolled parchment scrolls, they bent above these scrolls and eyed them carefully. One after the other Niall discarded, until only one was left. This last one was very ancient, cracked and marred by Time, and it crackled as he unrolled it.

"There," Niall said, jabbing his finger. "Those ruins . . ."

" . . . are only ruins," scoffed the captain.

"Na, na. They're more than a pile of rocks. There's evil there, Edron Hobbort. Ancient evil."

"Now, how can you know that?"

Niall straightened slowly. He tried to think, yet could not. Almost dazedly, he passed a hand across his broad brow. "I — cannot say. And yet — I know. It's as if — something whispered into my mind. But it told me of an evil that has come recently to life, back across eons of Time — and made its home close by this river."

Edron Hobbort snorted. "Nonsense. That ruin has been uninhabited since Porthia Malvia was queen in Angalore, and that's about ten centuries ago. We'll go on. If the sails won't work, the oars will."

He stalked from the cabin and Niall could hear him bellowing to the oarsmen, to the overseer, who began the beat with two bronze hammers in his hands that he banged upon the drum before him. Instantly the oars dipped, bit into the water, and Niall could feel the forward surge of the ship beneath his warboots.

He still leaned upon the table, his palms on that old parchment map. Yet, uneasiness was strong inside him, as though — as though some inner voice were warning him of danger. He shook himself, angrily. Was he turning into an old woman, to dread whatever lay ahead of him? Na, na! He was a warrior, a sell-sword. Had he not faced awesome dangers in the past? Was he to be fearful of a fog now?

Almost unconsciously he rolled up that parchment map and thrust it into its niche. Then he moved forward into thick greyness, saw that greyness creep across the deck to hide the rowers on their benches, the piled crates of goods being shipped northward from the lands of Korybia and Strumathis, the overseer, as he banged away on the timing drum. Even Edron Hobbort vanished.

And then those mists touched Niall.

He felt them sting his flesh, exposed where his mail hauberk and fur kaunake did not cover him. It stung his legs, naked above his fur-trimmed warboots. He opened his lips to bellow his anger, for it seemed almost as if a thousand tiny teeth were biting at his skin.

The little bitings ceased.

Those grey clouds still surged about him, buffeting his flesh, blinding him, seeking to crawl down inside his throat — or so it seemed — yet there was a calmness in him, an acceptance of that fog as if it were known and recognized from long ago. From — another time.

"Sistorississ' work!"

Now where had that thought come from? Had he, in his far travels, come upon that name? He did not think so. He moved forward, to stand beside Edron Hobbort.

The captain stood there, with legs apart, staring straight ahead. He did not turn when Niall touched his arm; he did not move. Niall drew back the hand that had nudged at the captain. His flesh had been cold. Cold! Now he peered more closely at his face and saw that his skin was white as the snows that cover the tip of the tallest mountain peaks in Northumbria in the dead of winter.

Niall put up his hand, passed it across those staring eyes. Edron Hobbort did not blink, did not turn aside his eyes. "Wizardry," whispered the Northumbrian as he made his way down the coursier which ran between the banks of oarsmen.

Every oarsman was white as falling snow, as blind.

He made his way to the foredeck and stood there with the wind blowing in his face, swirling the fog about him. It seemed that he could hear tiny voices in that fog, voices that cried out against him. Underfoot, he felt the forward surge of the **Hysso**p.

No wind bellied out the sail, no oar moved. Yet the ship moved on slowly, through those riverwaters. Niall felt an iciness creep up his spine. He put his hand on Blood-drinker, his sword, and brought it out of the scabbard. He waited then, as the **Hysso**p moved slowly forward.

In time he saw grey stones, where a wharf had been, long ago. Here the mists were less, they did not shield what lay ahead as they had done. It was as though puffs of wind came up suddenly to disperse them. Or — as though someone had whispered a command!

When the ship bumped against the wharfstones, Niall heard movement behind him. Skin crawling, he watched the oarsmen rise up from their benches, turn and begin to walk. He drew back, staring at those blank faces and empty eyes. He watched them leave the ship and walk onto the wharf and then along a broken causeway upward onto a hill.

When Edron Hobbort came toward him, Niall fell into step beside him. He sheathed his sword, he walked as the others walked, as though asleep or under a necromantic spell. Yet his eyes went this way and that, and he searched the fog for some foe that might attack.

Ahead of him he saw the stark lines of an old tower, the crumbling ruins of buildings that were a part of that tower. They stood stark and empty beneath the grey sky; there was a menace about them that made his flesh creep.

They came at last to what had been a courtyard in days long since forgotten, and there the men stood unmoving, as though awaiting a command. Niall did not stand with them, but where he saw the outlines of a door set between stone uprights, he moved toward it.

Beyond the doorway, there was no fog, only the empty desolation of the past. Niall walked swiftly, eagerly, and in time he came to a flight of stone steps leading downward. He took those steps, moving as warily as a wild beast.

From far ahead, he heard a cry.

It was a wail of utter terror, of hopelessness.

Niall ran. He fled down the steps and along a subterranean passageway, past many doors, until he saw pale light ahead of him. And now he could hear, mixed in with those wails, a harsh scrape of something on stone, and a fearful hissing.

He came to an opening, he stood before a vast chamber with a great opening in the floor, rimmed with stone. Hung in that opening was a girl, caught by chains dependent from the ceiling. Her long black hair fell toward the opening, she writhed and twisted in the manacles that held her by wrists and ankles.

Those chains were lowering her slowly into that pit.

Niall ran forward crying out. The girl heard him, turned her head, stared with disbelief at his mail-shirted body, at his long yellow hair, at the anger on his face.

When he came to the rim of that pit, he stared downward and cried out in horror. A mighty snake was coiled in the depths of that opening, its fanged head rising upward, jaws gaping. Niall could see a forked tongue, glittering white fangs, multi-faceted eyes.

"By Emelkartha herself!" he rasped.

"You can't save me," the girl wept, still struggling. "Nothing can!"

Niall felt his muscles tense. He crouched on the rim of that pit and his eyes went upward to the chains, saw them lowering the girl slowly. Slowly! It was as if whatever evil brain had put her there wanted that girl to know the agonies of approaching death long before death touched her.

Niall leaped outward, over the pit.

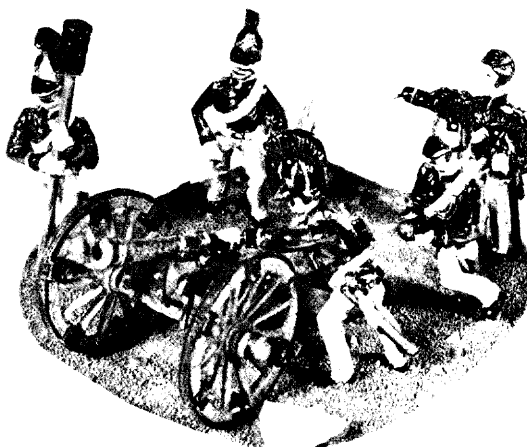
The huge snake hissed in fury, fangs glittering to catch him when he fell. His hands caught those chains, they slipped, and then they clung.

The snake lifted upward.

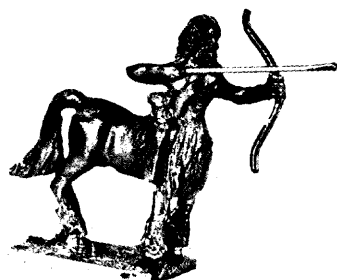
Only for a moment did Niall rest motionless, clinging to those chains. Then he was swinging them, pulling with his arms, pushing with his feet. Back and forth he swung them, toward one edge of the pit and then the other. He could hear the links rasping to that strain, he heard the pit-demon hiss in outraged fury.

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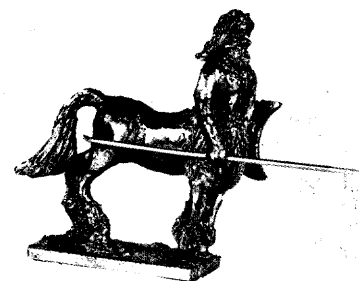
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The girl hung motionless in her manacles, staring upward at him.

Like a pendulum, Niall swung those chains. They were dropping him more swiftly now, soon that gigantic serpent would be able to reach the girl with its fangs. Whatever he was going to do — he must do soon!

He heard a link scrape on the stone rim. One more swing! His muscles bulged in arms and legs and back as he put all his weight, all his strength, into his swinging.

Then he leaped. With one hand he held the chains even as he swung outward toward the pit's rim. His warboots landed, scraped. He fell full length. But his hand still held a link, and the girl fell beside him onto the cold stones.

She sobbed, she wept with relief.

But they were not yet done with danger. Upward over the pit's rim came the fanged wedge that was the serpent's head. Niall cursed and yanked his steel free of its scabbard. With Blood-drinker naked in his hand he leaped to the edge of the pit, swung the sword.

Steel grated on a serpent's tooth, snapped it. Instantly, even as the head was drawing back, Niall curved the aim of his blade, cut upward under the jaw of the massive snake. Through bone and sinew and flesh went the edge of his blade.

The reptile hissed. That hiss was a sussuration of rage and fury, of pain and agony. It reverberated from wall to wall, from the bottom of the pit upward.

Forward lunged that bleeding head. Outward swept the forked tongue. The fangs glinted cruelly in the faint light of the chamber. Niall could see the brownish scales, which seemed like armor plate, tinted greenish, here and there, as that flat head darted toward him.

Niall swung Blood-drinker, drove it in an arc of bluish light straight for that head. Deep into the skull went the blade, the shock of the blow ran up Niall's powerfully muscled arm into his shoulder.

The giant reptile hissed out its pain and anguish, its fury.

Bracing his thickly thewed legs, Niall tore the steel from its living bed. Yet in that moment he felt hate surge up about him, almost like a scarlet mantle: not his own hate, but that of another. It was a human hate, mingled with fear, and it shook him for a moment as he yanked free his steel and watched the skull-smitten reptile draw back, sink downward.

He whirled, sword in hand —

— yet there was no one there, only the girl who crouched naked on the stones of the flooring, half hiding her face behind a veil of fallen hair. His eyes went from her to the chamber in which he stood panting, blood and ichor dripping wetly from his swordblade to the pavement.

"The wizard," he muttered. "Who is the wizard behind all this?"

The head of the girl jerked up so that he could see her eyes through the spill of black hair, vivid and fearful, tinted a pale yellow.

"Ulkarion," she whispered, and with her whisper a chill came into the air.

"Is that his name? The name of the warlock who inhabits this ancient pile of stone?"

He knelt beside her, lifting out his dagger and using it to pick the locks that held the manacles to her slender wrists. She shuddered away from him but he smiled at her.

"Na, na. There's no reason to fear me, I'm just a traveler on my way to Urgrik. Something bemused my fellow travelers and —"

"But not you?" she asked wonderingly.

Niall frowned. "No, and that's a strange thing. They all became like the living-dead, but whatever it was did that to them didn't affect me at all."

As the last manacle fell from her ankle, the woman rose up, proudly naked in the dim light, and

raising her hands, parted her hair so that she could see him the more clearly. For his part, Niall did his own staring. She was beautiful, her black hair was almost like a robe that hid a part of her nakedness from his eyes, and her yellow eyes softened as they regarded him. Slowly she shook her head.

"We can never escape Ulkarion, you know," she said softly. "He is a very potent wizard, he has searched for many years for this place." Her hand rose, indicated the vast stones of the walls, the viper pit, the dark entrances that lead into this vast room.

Niall rose to stand beside her. "What can you know of this mage?"

She shrugged. "Ulkarion needs sacrifices for Sistorisiss, the snake-like god who dwells in labyrinthine hells far out in space. Long ago, Sistorisiss was worshipped here in Kor Magnon." She caught the bewilderment in his eyes and smiled faintly.

"Kor Magnon is the name of this place where we stand. Long and long ago, it was the lair of a race of serpent-men who were worshippers of Sistorisiss. They stole human sacrifices to offer the snake-god, until the peoples of this region rose up and attacked it.

"Kor Magnon fell, everyone in it was put to death. From that day on, it has lain empty, abandoned, until all record of its location was forgotten. Yet Ulkarion searched for it, hampered only by the efforts of another wizard named Iphygia. Eventually, he defeated Iphygia and came here to worship Sistorisiss, so that the snake-god would make him powerful and almighty."

The girl shrugged. "I was to have been the first sacrifice to Sistorisiss — until you came along. I — am grateful."

Niall eyed her cautiously. "You know a lot about this magician."

"I was hand-maiden to Iphygia. When he destroyed Iphygia, he captured me, Kathyla. I was to have been his first sacrifice to the snake-god."

The Far Traveler grinned. "Looks to me as if he needs a new god. That one who came for you is dead. I clove in his brain."

The girl shrugged. "That was only the manifestation of Sistorisiss. Sistorisiss himself is — beyond death. Nothing can kill him."

"Then we'd better get out of here."

"It's no use. There is no escape."

Niall shrugged. "Stay here if you want, then. I'm leaving."

He moved toward one of the exits, black and yawning in the stone. Behind him the girl stirred, called, "Not that way, Traveler! That door leads to certain death. There is a trap door somewhere ahead of that walkway. If you put foot on it, the stone slab would turn and drop you into everlasting fire, into the very bowels of the planet."

Nial turned; asked, "Then where?"

She ran ahead on bare feet toward a different adit. "Our only hope is by this way. It may take us to safety."

He moved toward her, his eyes running up and down her bared legs, her hips, the tilted breasts half-hidden by her long black hair. "You seem to know a lot about this place."

"My mistress — Iphygia — did her own research. She also wanted to find Kor Magnon and set herself up as priestess to Sistorisiss. She failed. Yet I have talked with her about Kor Magnon and I know it almost as well as does Ulkarion."

"Lead on, then."

He followed her swaying haunches across the tiles and into a narrow tunnelway. Darkness closed in around them, for it was black as deepest space where they walked, and Niall could not even see the girl ahead of him, nor could he hear the footfalls of her feet. Yet his animal senses knew she walked ahead of him, proudly yet warily, and once he felt the brush of her hand, though only faintly, against his arm.

"Beware here, Traveler. There are hidden traps in all these corridors."

He strode more warily, and after a time the walkway rose upward at an angle, before it turned suddenly and he could see the girl now, and also a round room with two doors at its far side.

She started forward and as she did, out of both of those entrances came a dozen liches — dead men clad in scraps of burial garments, wielding in their skeletoned hands rusted weapons that had been buried with them long ago — and as they caught sight of Niall and Kathyla, weird ullulations broke from their skeletal throats.

The girl shrank back even as Niall leaped forward. Blood-drinker in a hand — not one of these mummified liches had blood, but that made no difference — he ran to meet them. They moved slowly, as though not yet aroused from the sleep of death, as though they still dreamed in the sepulchers in which they had been entombed.

Niall swung his sword, he ravened in among them with his steel always moving, slashing, darting. He was like an enraged panther in the fury of his fighting. Skulls rolled, clicking on the tiles, boney arms dropped where they were severed. In moments, those skeletal figures flopped and rolled across the floor, dismembered but still under the spell of some awful wizardry.

The Far Traveler paused, glancing about him. With his warbooted foot he kicked away a skull that sought to bite him, then tromped hard on a boney hand that still held a sword.

"Come along. There must be a way out of this hellhole, away from magicks such as this."

The girl shook her head, smiling faintly. "There is no escape from Kor Magnon. Nor," she added darkly, "from Ulkarion, either."

"If he's flesh and blood, he can die."

Her slanted yellow eyes slid sideways at him, mockery in their depths. "Do you think you can defeat Ulkarion, barbarian?"

He shook his bloody sword at her. "If he's human, he can die. If there's a way, I'll find it."

She whispered, "Perhaps you can, at that." Her hand lifted, she beckoned to him. "This way, now. If I remember the old scrolls, there should be safety down this passageway."

They stepped over the still flopping forms of the liches and moved into a narrow tunnel which led upward. Niall still held Blood-drinker in a fist; at any moment he expected attack. He had no way of knowing how Ulkarion could trace their movements in these subterranean tunnels, but apparently he could. The attack of the liches seemed proof enough of that.

Upward they walked, with the girl leading the way. Once she paused, her hand held high. They listened, but even though they heard only the silence of these long-unused corridors, Niall tightened the grip of his hand on his sword-hilt.

He had no knowledge of how long he had been without sleep, but even his gigantic muscles were showing the effect of his constant walking, fighting. His eyes slid sideways at the girl. She had stumbled once or twice lately, he saw lines of tiredness on her face.

"We need sleep," he muttered.

Her eyes were fearful as they turned toward him. "To sleep in Ulkarion's lair is to die."

"And if we don't sleep, we die from exhaustion."

She paused, thinking, "There is a place — maybe. It is not far from here, off one of these corridors. There we may sleep a while, reasonably safe."

Now Kathyla ran ahead, her black hair flying, and Niall trotted to keep up with her. Along two ramps they went, and then they came to a room off a short corridor, a room hung with arras and drapes, quiet as a tomb, and almost as dark. Only a tiny candle which Kathyla found and lighted, enabled them to see.

The girl said, "You may sleep here, Niall. Without fear."

She settled herself in a corner of the room and closed her eyes. Niall watched her a moment, shrugged, and lay down himself. In moments, he was asleep.

Later, Niall was to recall that he dreamed of Emelkartha the Evil, that demon-goddess whom he had known as Lylthia in Angalore, and whom he had followed into the halls of her Eleven Hells. She came to him in his dream, as lovely as he had remembered her, and she put her hands upon his closed eyes as downward she bent, to kiss him with her blood-red mouth, soft and fragrant. Niall stirred under that kiss, he strove to put his arms about her nakedness, to hold her to him.

He struggled, but he could not move.

Emelkartha ran her hand down his side, to where he kept the jewels she had given him when, as a shadow, she had freed him from the manacles with which Maylock's warriors had fastened him, and later brought him into a strongroom and told him to take what jewels and gold he would. Niall protested, mumbling. Did Emelkartha want those gifts back?

The demon-woman laughed, and her merriment rang in his ears as his eyes snapped open.

Kathyla was crouched beside him, trying to open that pouch at his belt in which he carried those jewels. His hand stabbed downward, caught her wrist.

"What's this?" he mumbled. "Robbery?"

She tried to free herself, but he was too strong. Kathyla stared at him with her yellow eyes, and for an instant — before her eyelids fell to cover those lemony eyes — Niall would have sworn he saw anger and stark fear in them. She tried to draw away from him, but his hand was like an iron band, holding her.

"Na, na, girl. Would you steal from me and run away?"

She shook her head, but her eyes still widened in that fright which seemed to grip her. "There is something about you — something I can sense — that terrified me."

He laughed. "And do you think to discover the secret in my pouch?"

Niall put his hand into that leather pouch and lifted out a handful of the gems he had taken from Maylock's strong-room. He held them on his palm so that the candlelight glittered on them.

To his amazement, Kathyla shrank back, averting her face.

"What's this? Do you fear a few jewels?"

"Put them — away. I have seen — enough!"

Niall did as she bid, but his eyes rested on her averted face. He was curious. There was nothing so terrifying about a few rubies, diamonds and emeralds. What was there about them that so frightened the girl?

He rose to his feet, shook himself. "I know not how long we've slept, but it's time to go. I have a hunger in me to see blue sky and green grass. I've been in these pits long enough."

Kathyla rose also, but she hung back, away from him.

"Come along, if you don't want to spend the rest of your life within these walls."

He walked with swinging stride, his hand ever near his swordhilt, his eyes searching the dark passages down which he strode. Behind him, Kathyla came at the trot, and he could hear her rather harsh breathing. What was it about him that so frightened the girl? Niall thought about other girls he had known in his travels, and could think of none that shrank away from him.

When they came to a branching corridor that led upward, Niall waited until the girl came up beside him. "This place is a labyrinth of walkways," he grumbled. "I've been going upward, but I can see

no way of escape."

"We are near the subterranean dungeons of that building which served as Kor Magnon's temple to Sistorississ. Here were the victims fed to the snake-god, here the people of Kor Magnon worshipped that evil being."

Niall nodded, putting a hand on her wrist, gripping it. "Good. Once inside that temple, we'll find a way out of it."

She shrank back, using her weight to hamper him. "It is the temple of the snake-god. There, Ulkarion will seek to rouse him from his far-off worlds, to bring him here to — destroy us!"

Niall scowled. He did not like this talk of demon-gods and warlocks. He was a warrior, a sell-sword, more used to fighting other men than battling with demons and their hell-inspired desires. Yet he understood that by going into that temple to Sistorississ, they would be risking a confrontation with the serpent-demon. His broad shoulders shrugged.

He could not stay in these pits forever. Besides, he was growing hungry.

"Do what you like, girl. But I'm for the sunlight and some fresh air."

He moved upward along the ramp and into a cellar where dampness and mildew glittered on every stone of the walls. It seemed that he could hear a thick chanting, which rose and fell in mesmeric harmony, though faint and very far, far away. Those rhythms seemed to seep inside his flesh.

Kathyla was there beside him, whimpering.

"Ulkarion is worshipping! He calls on Sistorississ to rise upward from the lands where he dwells, to come here and greet his worshippers!"

"Now how can you know that?"

"I have studied the ancient scrolls, the forgotten writings of the ancients. As handmaiden to Iphygia, that is."

"Perhaps now, while Ulkarion is busy, we can get away."

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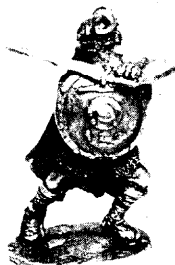
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"There is no escape," Kathyla moaned, but she ran beside him on bare feet, sobbing softly to herself.

They turned a corner, they ran up worn steps hollowed out by the feet of long-dead men and women, they slid against walls wet with dew, they came at last to an archway. They peered in at a great altar of blue stone set beneath what seemed to be a round opening in the wall behind it. The wizard Ulkarion, in flowing robes of black and silver, stood with up-raised arms before that black opening, chanting those words which had been old when the world was young.

Niall ran, with the girl beside him.

No one paid them any heed. The people who stood chanting in the great temple, Niall was with sickening revulsion, were as dead as the liches he had cut apart with Blood-drinker. They stood in their serements, the flesh shredding from their bones, eyeless sockets dark in the candles' light, and the sound of their singing was as the wind whistling past a forest of gravestones.

But with that eerie chanting —

— there was another sound!

Very faint it was, as if it were coming from the depths of ancient earth itself. It moaned, it wept, it cried out with soft whispers that promised unknown delights and pleasures. Yet beneath that cacophony of sound there was laughter! As a man might laugh as he crushed an insect, as a monster might laugh as it prepared some fiendish torture for a helpless woman, so was that laughter.

Niall slid his sword out, yet there were drops of perspiration on his forehead. Whatever made those sounds — was coming closer! Closer!

Beside him, Kathyla moaned.

It came to Niall that the chanting in the temple had stopped, by now. He heard a whisper of sound and turned. The dead were also turning away from the altar, toward him and the girl. Their eyesockets were empty, but it seemed they watched them.

Beyond them was Ulkarion, on the dais before the altar.

He was smiling cruelly and his arms were making strange gestures.

"Fools," he shouted. "Fools! None can escape the vengeance of Sisstorississ! Behold — your doom!"

3.

Niall whirled, sword up. He could see nothing as yet, nothing but the entry way of the temple, dark and ominous. Yet always the sound of those invisible voices — and that eerie laughter — grew louder, louder, until it drowned out every other sound.

And then he saw them.

They were grey in color, and they rotated swiftly, like tops with which some demoniac child might play. They were twice as tall as a man and there were so many they hid everything that was behind them. They came on slowly, twirling faster and faster, and here and there in all that greyness, it seemed that Niall could see glittering red eyes. Eyes that taunted, eyes that gloated!

Kathyla moaned.

"These are the demon-things that serve Sisstorississ! Spawned in the depths of some unknown hell, the serpent-god sets them free to do his will! We are lost, Niall — lost!"

"Not yet," he growled, and lifted Blood-drinker.

He hurled himself at those eerie servitors. His bluish blade circled, swung. Through those grey bodies went his steel, and it seemed to him that where his steel touched them — green flames danced!

Something screamed. It was not a human voice, whatever made that sound. It seemed to come from

far away, yet it pierced his ears, it reached deep into the soul of him, it fingered his nerve-ends. There was no pain, only an — awareness. Yet even as Niall swung his blade, he felt a numbness come upon his arms, his legs. He fought that numbness as he fought those twirling greynesses.

On the high altar, Ulkarion still chanted.

High and shrill were his chantings, filled with fright and worry. Never yet had Ulkarion summoned up the demon-god Sisstorississ, he knew only from his readings of ancient scrolls what Sisstorississ might do. He had no control over that awesome demon, he stood in no pentagram, he knew no words with which to control that which he had summoned up.

Yet as he watched, he grew more hopeful. For Niall was weakening. *Aye!* His swordstroke were not as crisp, as sure. And where he faltered, those twirling imps surged in upon him, at times almost hiding him from Ulkarion's straining eyes.

Niall raged. Were these things men, they would have fallen away before the sweep of his sword. Yet though some were damaged — he could see them lying on the flaggings — there were so many others they were all about him, touching him, weakening him, drawing his vital life force from his body.

He tottered, nearly falling, and he heard Kathyla scream in fright. He fought to put his back against a wall and used his blade to destroy those grey wraiths that swirled around him. But he could not keep on fighting. The mere touch of that greyness sapped his strength, weakened his muscles.

It grew harder to use his swordarm, more and more of the twirling things darted in under his blade, touched him to weaken him still further. And now he heard the faint whisper of burial garments as the dead of Kor Magnon moved toward him, their boney hands outstretched.

Out of the corners of his eyes, Niall saw those dead things put their skeletal fingers on Kathyla. She screamed and fought them, but she did little more than tear a burial garment or shred a bit of rotting flesh from bone. They overcame her, lifted her into the air and held her there with skeletal fingers as the others came on toward Niall himself.

The Far Traveler rasped a curse as he sought to spring from the wall at his back and reach the girl. But the whirling grey imps had expected this, they swarmed upon him and where they touched he felt the sting of their greyness, weakened under it. Even as he weakened, the dead stretched out their arms and put their boney hands upon him.

He was lifted upward, still fighting. But now he fought as a babe might fight, weakly and without purpose. His right hand still clasped his sword but Blood-drinker was like a weight attached to his arm. He could not use it, it just hung there.

Like that, he and Kathyla were carried toward the blue stone altar.

The skeletal hands put them down, to stand before Ulkarion. The mage was rigid with triumph, it glittered from his eyes, it could be seen in the width of his smile.

"You die this day, both of you! You are my first gifts to mighty Sisstorississ! The woman for her beauty and her wisdom, the man for his strength and the might of his swordarm!"

His black eyes studied Niall where he stood, upheld in his weakness by those many boney hands. Faint was Niall, and only dimly aware of what went on about him. Wizardry had sapped his muscles, turned them into water. He knew this, knew also there was no sense in fighting against it. If he was doomed, then he would meet death as bravely as he had in the past.

To one side of him, Kathyla was whimpering. She shuddered from moment to moment and on her forehead were beads of sweat that testified to her terror. Yet she was still beautiful, still lovely, with that black hair and those burning eyes, and her body — where the candleflames' light touched it — shone

as enticing as ever.

Ulkarion stepped aside, gesturing.

Golden chains lay on the tiled floor, fastened to plates of gold screwed into rock. There were many such chains, but two in particular were foremost among the others, and it was toward these that the skeletal figures pushed them.

One by one, golden manacles were lifted, clamped to their wrists.

They stood chained, after a time, and were aware that Ulkarion walked around them, nodding his head and smiling.

"The victory is mine," he said softly to the woman. "It is to my call that Sisstorississ shall come, and not to yours. You have had a few hours more of freedom, but that does not matter. The demon-god will come for you soon. You he will take first, and then this barbarian swordsman who has made himself your champion."

The black eyes slid sideways, touched Niall, and in them was a faint shadow.

"As for you, swordsman, I do not know how you escaped the fog. No living thing is safe from it. Unless one receives aid from the gods." His lips quirked into a mocking smile.

"Did you, swordsman? Have you invoked the protection of a god? But that I cannot believe! Who are you to have caught the fancy of some demoniac being? Pah! The mere thought is ridiculous."

His gaze went to the length of Blood-drinker.

"A good weapon, that. I shall make it mine — after Sisstorississ has come for you. The demon-god has no need of swords."

Niall eyed him coldly. Were he free, were his weakness gone from him, were those golden chains that bound him fallen from his wrists — ah, then he would leap with his hands outstretched and his fingers would fasten in Ulkarion's throat and the world would be without one more wizard. Something of this Ulkarion saw in his eyes, for he drew back suddenly, and his face was pale.

"Enough," he rasped. "It is time for the Summoning."

He turned, his black and silver cloak swinging wide. Upward went his arms, in invocation. His voice swelled, rose upwards, reverberated from wall to wall. As magicians had stood since the birth of Time, so stood Ulkarion and intoned his words and phrases, that formula which would unlock the barriers of space.

Niall listened, his body sick, his mind numbed.

Soon now, he supposed, Sisstorississ would come from the void where he dwelt, through the unimaginable abysses of deep space, to make his way to this adit which had been created by those who served him so many millenia ago. No man knew how old was this temple, this stronghold above the river Thalamar. Even the myths that surrounded it were old. Old!

And yet —

He felt it first in his muscles. They seemed to gather strength, they seemed to swell, to harden, to band outward as they had always done. No longer was that weakness so rampant in him. His mind cleared, too, free at last of that paralyzing pall which held him in its grip.

The powerful fingers of his big right hand worked on his swordhilt.

Not yet, Niall. Oh, not yet, my warrior!

Shock held him frozen. That voice! Yet it had not been a voice, not as a human would understand a voice. It had spoken in his mind. But — with the sweet tones of Lylthia, whom he had met in Angalore! Lylthia — who was merely the human manifestation of Emelkartha the Evil!

Soft laughter filled his ears.

You remember, do you? Know then, that neither have I forgotten!

Niall stood bemused, only half believing what was happening. It was not like him to hear voices where there was no body to make them. Yet he knew

that Emelkartha was close beside him. Emelkartha, who men named The Evil One, yet whose beauty was like a flame inside Niall of the Far Travels. It was she who had carried him to the threshold of her Eleven Hells, then sent him back to Angalore. It was she who had taken him in her arms, there in her Eleven Hells and kissed him as no woman had ever kissed him.

Aye, she had put her mark upon him!

He waited, every muscle tensing, and listened with half his mind to the sombre chanting with which Ulkarion sought to summon Sisstorississ. The rest of his attention was concentrated on Emelkartha.

Why was she concerned with Kor Magnon? Or was she concerned only with her own safety? Could he care what happened here? Did the fact that Sisstorississ was emerging from his own dwelling space into the boundaries of Earth worry her?

"Why?" he whispered.

Inside him an anger was growing, very faint and small. It was as if some strange fury — a godlike rage — was deep in his innermost parts. He shook to that fury, quivering like a hound at the end of a leash. His right hand clutched Blood-drinker.

Not yet, my love. There is a time to wait.

His muscles eased, yet he was ready.

Ulkarion had finished his chantings. He stood with upraised arms, his black and silver cloak hanging motionless from his shoulders. A silence grew upon that vast chamber where he stood, as though all creation held its breath.

Faintly and from far away, there came the sound of something slithering against the stone walls. The hackles on the back of Niall's thickly thewed neck stood up. A faint reek of slime and corruption came to his nostrils and he tensed, there in his golden chains, waiting.

Ulkarion took a step backward. A shiver seemed to run through his body, so that his black and silver cloak rippled.

Beside Niall, Kathyla sobbed, eyes wide and taring.

Only that sound broke the funereal silence, as vast coils rasped and churned against cold stone. The coming of the snake-god grew louder with each moment, and now Niall could hear a distant hissing, rightful and unnerving.

Sisstorississ comes! Be ready, Niall of the Far Travels!

What could he do, linked as he was to these golden chains and manacles that held him prisoner to the floor? He shook those chains so that they rattled, and fought as if to tear them from the tiles to which they were riveted. Yet inside him that anger swelled upward, almost as if it were something alien, something foreign to his nature.

Closer that rasping came. Closer!

Now in the deeps of that black hole above the altar, Niall could see — a something. Red eyes, glittering with hate, with fury, glowed in that ebon darkness. Nearer they came, until now he could make out that herpetologic head covered with scales, win horns rising upward from the brow, the flickering tongue twice the size of a tall man.

That head filled the hole, slid through it.

Kathyla screamed, a throbbing ululation of utter terror. Even Ulkarion fell back a few paces, awed by the sight of that which he had summoned up. And Niall felt the fury rise up inside his flesh, until it seemed to choke him.

All eyes were on that awful head.

Only Niall noticed that a strangely greenish mist was rising up about him. It seemed to come from **inside** his body, stretching outward. Like a verdant smoke it rose about his chest — moved outward.

This is my power, Niall! Be not alarmed!

With awed eyes he watched that green fog slide about him, and where it touched the manacles on his wrists, it ate the gold. That gold it turned to powder,

so that the powder fell away from him and his arm was free. In seconds, the other manacle was gone, as well.

Niall rose to his full height, shook himself.

Now, Niall! Strike for Emelkartha!

He leaped forward like an arrow released from the bowstring. One big hand hit Ulkarion, knocked him to one side. Onto that black altar he leaped, his sword held high, and like that arrow, he launched himself at Sisstorississ.

As he swung his blade, he saw that the green glow covered the blade. It touched the snake-head even as his steel clove through the scales on that head, drove deep into the brain-pan.

Sisstorississ wailed. In that wail was an agony beyond words, and a paroxysmic rage that seemed almost to shake the very altar on which Niall had planted his warboots. That vast mouth gaped wide, the red eyes flared hatred at the man whose muscles bulged as he sought to tear his blade from that skull into which he had driven it.

The sword came free, glittering greenly.

Again Niall struck, and again.

Blood and a colorless ichor spewed forth, like a fountain shedding its waters. Where that blood and ichor touched, steam rose upward and a faint hissing. Drops fell on Niall, but he did not feel them for that verdant tint covered his entire body.

Twice more he struck before that titanic head was withdrawn, back inside the hole and out of sight. For an instant, Niall heard the scrape of scales against distant stone, and then there was only silence.

Sisstorississ had fled! The victory is yours, Niall!

He turned, his swordblade dripping blood and ichor onto the top of the altar. He stared at Ulkarion who glared back at him disbelievingly. The archmage was shivering, but with fear or with anger, Niall did not know. Nor did he care.

He came down off the altar and moved toward the magician.

Ulkarion lifted his hands, began to make archaic symbols in the air. Niall felt a coldness touch him, but even as it did, he leaped, swinging Blood-drinker in a wide arc.

Ulkarion sought to turn, to flee.

Yet even as he did, the length of Blood-drinker swept at him, its steel edge honed to razor sharpness. Through meat and gristle, blood and bone, that edge drove — and Ulkarion's head leaped from his shoulders and went flying through the air.

The body remained on its two feet for an instant, then collapsed.

As the body fell, so also did the dead bones and serments of the dead whom Ulkarion had raised from the grave to be his worshippers. There was a vast sigh throughout that chamber, and then a whisper of sound, a click or two as grave vestments and dried bones collapsed.

Niall found himself staring at a chamber empty of life, save for himself and Kathyla. The dead lay in heaps upon the tiles, and Ulkarion's body rested lifeless at his feet. The girl was staring at him with wide eyes in which fright lurked with awe.

"You — drove Sisstorississ away," she whispered.

"Not I. I had help from Emelkartha."

"The Evil One? The Mother of All Wickedness?"

Niall grinned. "She's not so evil. I have the notion that she fights for that which she considers to belong to her. Or maybe it's her pride. What difference does it make? She helped us, and I honor her for it."

He moved toward her, reached for his dagger. He began to work the steel point against the golden rivets that held the manacles to Kathyla's wrists. In time he loosed one, and then the other.

"We can go now. There's nothing to keep us here."

Kathyla glanced down at the dead body of Ulkarion. "He would have slain me," she breathed. Her eyes lifted, touched Niall.

"Go you, Far Traveler. I will stay here in these ruins for a while."

Niall eyed her wonderingly. "Now why should you stay here, Kathyla? The world's out there, waiting for you, and this is a dead place, filled only with the dead."

She shook her head. "Trust me, Niall."

He shrugged and turned away. He walked toward the far end of the chamber, but it seemed that as he walked his body grew more tired, so that occasionally he stumbled. Once he paused to lean against a pillar, letting his head hang. His eyelids were so heavy! His brain so bemused! It was almost as if there were some sort of spell on him.

Now — he heard singing.

It was a chanting such as Ulkarion had made, and as he heard it, his very bones seemed to turn to water. His hand clung to the pillar against which he leaned, and his legs trembled. He could not move. He tried, but his muscles refused to listen to his mind.

Bare feet came running.

Kathyla stood before him, eyes glowing. "Fool," she whispered. "Did you not suspect — when Ulkarion sought so hard to kill me?"

He eyed her dully. His brain was numb, but he remembered the manner in which this girl had shrunk away from him, the first time he had seen her, still in those chains. She had never touched him, or very lightly, nor had she permitted him to touch her. It was a puzzle, one he could not solve.

"I am not Kathyla, but — Iphygia! Aye, Iphygia the enchantress, the witch-woman, mortal foe of Ulkarion. He and I sought to come here to these old ruins, to what had been Kor Magnon. Ulkarion knew! And so he tried to slay me, to offer me up as sacrifice."

Her lips smiled, but it was a cold and deadly smile.

"Ulkarion trapped me with his wizardry, would have given me to Sisstorississ, but for you. I owe you a favor for having saved me, for having rid me of Ulkarion."

"And yet — were I to favor you, I think you would find a way to slay me. And this must not be. For now Sisstorississ will serve — me! I will give you to him, to do with what he pleases. It will not be a nice death, Niall. The snake-god will be very angry with you."

Her laughter rang out, mocking.

Deep inside himself, Niall felt again that hatred. He knew now it was not he who hated, but Emelkartha herself, whose demoniac powers were represented by that green cloud which had come from him. She waited now, deep inside some corner of his being, and he sensed that she was smiling even more cruelly than Iphygia.

He shook his head. "Do you think Emelkartha will let you kill me — when she stopped Ulkarion and drove Sisstorississ back into his far abodes?"

Iphygia stared at him. "What are you talking about."

"Didn't you see that green cloud that ate my manacles?"

She touched tongue to lips. "I saw no cloud. I — didn't see how you got free." She shook herself. "Why bother talking to you? Turn around. I'll put you back inside those chains and then summon up Sisstorississ once again."

Emelkartha was stirring. Slowly she was expanding inside him, as once before she had lifted out of him and along his arms to shed his golden bonds and coat the blade of Blood-drinker. He could sense the hate, the fury in her. As she hated Sisstorississ and Ulkarion, now she hated Iphygia.

He could do nothing. He understood that, dimly. He was only a focal point for her power. As that

verdant power grew within him, he lost his bemusement, his lassitude. He saw that green fire flow out of him, along his arms, covering his chest, his legs. And as it expanded, it drove out the magical spell under which Iphygia had placed him.

She did not see the verdant flame. Her expression was merely puzzled, for Niall was straightening, rising away from that pillar, and he was smiling down at her.

He raised his right arm. He held no weapon in his hand, but he could see that his arm was green, that it glowed. Iphygia stared at that arm, at the fingers of his extended hand.

From the tips of his fingers, tiny green balls fled outward. They touched Iphygia, ran over her like a malachite slime. And now Iphygia threw back her head and screamed. Agony was in that scream, and a

deadly fear.

"No! Niall — save me!"

He cannot. You have offended me, Iphygia, you and Ulkarion! You would have brought back into being That-Which-Was-Conquered! For that, you must die!

Niall watched, unable to move, as that green tint ate at Iphygia. In moments it consumed her, as it had consumed the golden manacles. A bit of dust drifted to the floor, where she had been.

Go on, Niall of the Far Travels! My work here is done.

He stood alone in the ancient temple. A cool wind came off the river and moved through the halls, the vast chamber. Niall shook himself, touched the hilt of his sword, and walked past that which had been Iphygia.

In the outer courtyard, Edron Hobbort was stirring, as though rousing from a deep sleep. All about him his men were staring, looking this way and that. As Edron Hobbort caught sight of Niall, he came forward.

"What is this place? How came we here?" he asked.

"Wizardry. I'll tell you of it, on the way to Urgrik."

Yet as he followed Edron Hobbort and his men along the old causeway to their ship, he turned and stared back at those crumbling ruins. He thought of Emelkartha and her powers, and he told himself that he would sacrifice a fowl to her, once he came to Urgrik.

He owed her more than that, but what sort of gift could a mere man give — a goddess?

WIZARD RESEARCH RULES

by Charles Preston Goforth, Jr.

The following rules are designed to supplement the research rules found in *Men & Magic* at 6-7 and *The Dragon*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Aug. 1976, at 29. These rules have been playtested in the "Kingdom of Blake" game at the Historical Simulation Society in Charlottesville, Virginia, for over a year, real time, or over nine years, game time.

1. New spells (spells not found in existing rules) or spells which are initially unknown due to the "Intelligence" rules set out in *Greyhawk* at 7-8 may be researched by any level magic user, cleric, or healer at the following cost:

| SPELL LIST | CHANCE OF SUCCESS | TIME REQUIRED | GOLD PIECE INVESTMENT |
|------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1st | 20% | 1 week | 2,000 |
| | 100% | | 10,000 |
| 2d | 20% | 2 weeks | 4,000 |
| | 100% | | 20,000 |
| 3d | 20% | 3 weeks | 8,000 |
| | 100% | | 40,000 |
| 4th | 20% | 4 weeks | 16,000 |
| | 100% | | 80,000 |
| 5th | 20% | 5 weeks | 32,000 |
| | 100% | | 160,000 |
| 6th | 20% | 6 weeks | 64,000 |
| | 100% | | 320,000 |
| 7th | 20% | 7 weeks | 128,000 |
| | 100% | | 640,000 |
| 8th | 20% | 8 weeks | 256,000 |
| | 100% | | 1,280,000 |
| 9th | 20% | 9 weeks | 512,000 |
| | 100% | | 2,560,000 |
| 10th | 20% | 10 weeks | 1,024,000 |
| | 100% | | 5,120,000 |

A magic user, cleric, or healer doing research on this chart may only do research at those spell levels in which (s)he possesses spells due to level and experience points.

2. A spell to **permanently** increase one stat. (strength, intelligence, wisdom, dexterity, constitution, charisma, or beauty) and to have that stat. treated in every way as if it had been initially rolled up at that higher level may be researched from the following chart. However, the spell may only be used once per stat. per character (including all clones). These spells may not be combined between different magic users, or by the same magic user throwing the spell twice, or throwing different spells designed to raise the same stat., to increase the same character's specific stat. more than once.

INCREASE

| SPELL LIST | IN STAT. |
|------------|----------|
| 7th | 1 |
| 8th | 1-2 |
| 9th | 1-3 |
| 10th | 1-4 |
| 11th | 1-5 |
| 12th | 1-6 |
| 13th | 1-7 |
| 14th | 1-8 |
| 15th | 1-9 |
| 16th | 1-10 |
| 17th | 1-11 |
| 18th | 1-12 |

3. Only wizards, patriarchs, witches and matriarchs (*The Dragon*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Oct. 1976, at 7-10) may create or change magic items through research. Normal research involves making or changing the magic item over a period of time while the item is placed inside of a magic furnace. It is necessary to throw gold pieces or other items of value into the furnace during the research.

4. Any weapon, shield, armor, or indeed anything else, can be enchanted to + 1 in 2 months for 2,000 gold pieces.

5. Serious enchanting is the process by which weapons, shields, and armor above + 1 can be produced. Serious enchanting requires 10 months and the investment of 10,000 gold pieces. When seriously enchanting a weapon (of any type) use the rules for determining swords found in *Monsters & Treasure* at 27-31 and *Greyhawk* at 40-41, but substituting the following table for the table in *Greyhawk*.

| | |
|-------|--|
| 01-03 | Cursed Weapon of Backbiting + 1 |
| 04-06 | Cursed Weapon of Backbiting + 2 |
| 07-09 | Cursed Weapon of Backbiting + 3 |
| 10-25 | + 1 Weapon |
| 26-29 | + 2 Weapon |
| 30 | + 3 Weapon |
| 31 | Weapon of Slaying |
| 32-34 | + 2 Weapon |
| 35 | + 1 Weapon, +2 vs. Lycanthropes |
| 36-38 | + 1 Weapon, + 2 vs. Magic-Users and Enchanted Monsters |
| 39-41 | + 1 Weapon, Locating Objects Ability |
| 42-45 | + 1 Weapon, + 2 vs. Goblins & Kobolds |
| 46-47 | + 1 Weapon, + 2 vs. Orcs, Goblins & Kobolds |
| 48-50 | + 1 Weapon, + 3 vs. Trolls (Clerics) |
| 51 | Weapon of Speed (+ 3 on initiative dice) |
| 52-55 | + 1 Flaming Weapon, +2 vs. Trolls (Pegasi, Hippogriffs, & Rocs), + 3 vs. Undead (Ents) |
| 56-58 | + 1 Weapon, Wishes Included (2-8 Limited Wishes) |
| 59 | + 1 Weapon, Wishes Included (2-8 Full Wishes) |
| 60 | + 1 Weapon, + 5 vs. Druids, Monks, Psychics, Healers, Samurai, Idiots, and Jesters |

| | |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 61-65 | + 1 Weapon, + 3 vs. Dragons |
| 66 | + 1 Weapon, + 5 vs. Player Characters |
| 67 | + 2 Weapon |
| 68 | + 3 Weapon |
| 69-70 | + 2 Weapon, Charm Person Ability |



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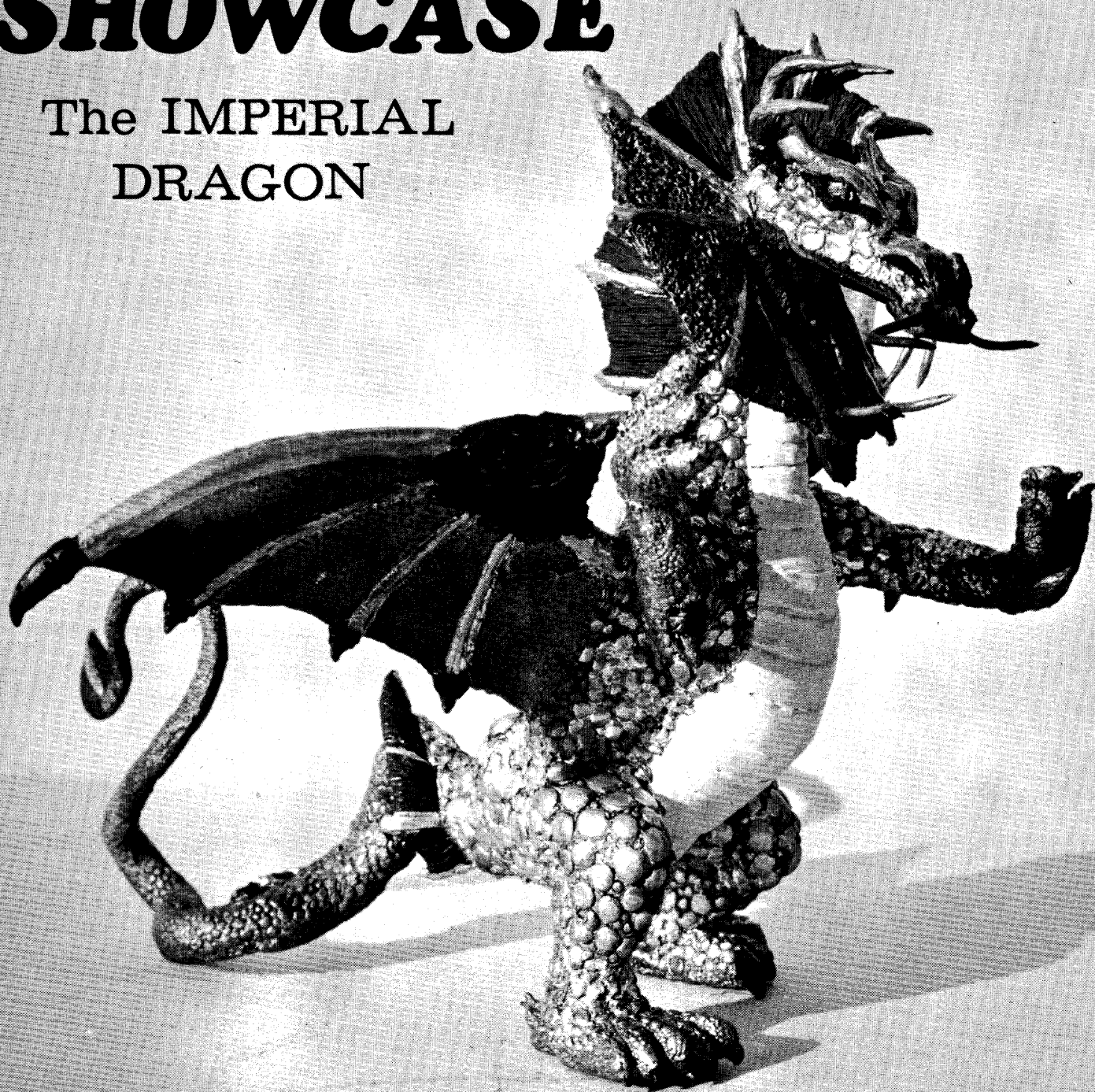
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| | |
|-------|--|
| 71-72 | + 3 Weapon |
| 73 | + 2 Weapon, Nine Steps Draining Ability |
| 74 | + 3 Weapon, One Life Energy Draining Ability |
| 75 | + 4 Weapon |
| 76 | + 5 Holy Weapon |
| 77-78 | + 3 Weapon of cold, + 5 vs. Fire Using/Dwelling Creatures (Including Magic Users Employing Fire or Fire-like Spells) |
| 79-82 | + 2 Dragon Slaying Weapon |
| 83 | -1 Cursed Weapon |
| 84-89 | -2 Cursed Weapon |
| 90 | -3 Cursed Weapon |
| 91 | -4 Cursed Weapon |
| 92 | -5 Cursed Weapon |
| 93 | + 3 Weapon, 6" Throwing Range with Return |
| 94 | Roll Twice For Weapon |
| 95 | Weapon Like Sword of Kas (<i>Eldritch Wizardry</i> at 41) |
| 96 | Weapon Like Mace of Cuthbert (<i>Eldritch Wizardry</i> at 41) |
| 97 | Dancing Weapon |
| 98 | Weapon of Sharpness (Use the Samurai Critical Blow table at The Dragon, Vol. 1, No. 3, Oct. 1976, at 25, for damage done when 19 or 20 rolled on the attack dice.) |
| 99 | Weapon of Disruption |
| 00 | Vorpal Weapon |

If a curse or a purpose is rolled up, the person doing the research may name and define it. When seriously enchanting armor (of any type) or shields, use the table in *Greyhawk* at 42.

6. Spell embedment is the process which the researcher can use to embed (place) any spell which (s)he knows in any enchanted object at the same cost as learning that spell through research. See rule number 1.

7. Already enchanted objects may *not* be re-enchanted, but new spells may be embedded in them. Spells may be removed at the same cost as embedding the spell.

8. Rules for the manufacture of scrolls appear in *Men & Magic* at 7.

9. Rules for the manufacture of potions appear in *The Dragon*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Aug. 1976, at 29.

10. A researcher may enchant a duplicate of any magic item *except* scrolls, potions, rings containing spells, wands, weapons, shields and armor. The list of items which may be duplicated includes (but is not limited to) all staves and rods and all gauntlets, bracers, and cloaks. Rings other than rings containing spells may be duplicated. For example: A wizard could use this process to duplicate a ring of spell storing, but without the spells stored in the original ring — the new ring would be empty. The cost of duplication is 10,000 gold pieces and ten months *times* the number of the Miscellaneous Magic Table (if any) where the item is found or (if the item is not found on any of the Miscellaneous Magic Tables) times one (1).

11. Enchanting rings and wands. Spells may be embedded in normal rings and wands or already magic rings and wands and staffs. Rings so made have unlimited charges, wands and staffs have 100 charges of the new spell.

12. Serious ring making. A Wizard may create a ring determined at random from all rings which do not contain spells (see 10.). Cost = 10,000 and 10 months.

13. True Ring Making. Cost = 10,000 and 10 months and 300,000 Experience Points. This ring controls all rings which were either made by the Wizard who made the true ring or physically touched to the true ring. The true ring wearer may read the thoughts of all persons/things wearing true rings. The wearer of the true ring has total knowledge of all properties of all controlled rings. The true ring will try to make its location known to its creator and return to him. The true ring wearer has total control of all ring creatures wearing controlled rings. When true rings touch through control of the same lessor ring they will struggle until one control is broken. When true rings touch, they will struggle until one is enslaved or destroyed. The only other method which can destroy a true ring is to consume it in the fire of the same magic furnace where it was created. The true ring will try to corrupt its wearer to the alignment of its maker. A true ring contains spells picked as for a human magician with the same number of experience points. The maker picks the spells. Stronger true rings may be created by adding more experience points. More gold or time makes no difference.

14. Wizard Blade Making. Cost = 10,000 and 10 months and 200,000 Experience Points. The Wizard may name the blade's level (+ 6 to -6) and roll one 8 sided die and choose that many properties from the following list: flaming, with a purpose, with another purpose, with a vorpal blade, with a curse, with another curse, of life draining, of

sharpness, holy, dancing, of disruption. This sword may be used by any magic user or fighter or druid or (if and only if holy) lawful cleric. The sword will necessarily be the same alignment as the maker. It may only be destroyed in the fire of its creation. Larger rolls for properties; 300,000 Experience Points 12 sided die - 400,000 Experience Points 16 sided die — 500,000 Experience Points 20 sided die.

A Wizard Blade contains spells picked as for a human magician with the same number of experience points.

15. Rules 13 and 14 represent the ultimate enchantments — the creation of the *Eldritch Wizardry* class item by the player character. These are weapons "forged by more powerful forces for an express purpose." *Monsters & Treasure* at 30. The experience point cost drained-into the weapon or ring permanently lost. Restoration will not restore the lost experience points. A clone which contains even one of the drained points must attempt to do away with the magic item or both the magic item and the clone will become insane. All Simulacrums in existence when the magic item is created are destroyed. Any attempt to evade this rule is taken as a personal insult by virtually everyone in *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes*.

16. Guesswork. A Wizard may tell the games master how much money, time, and experience points he has invested. The games master will then tell the player what he has ended up with.

17. A wizard up against the wall is a foe indeed — and this power born of desperation is reflected by The Sorcerer's Memorial Enchanting In Distress Rules. These rules allow a wizard, witch, patriarch or matriarch to create any magic item without any expenditure of time or money. The wizard holds the item to be enchanted, speaks the Power Word of Distress, and bends his strength to the enchantment. Often, the blood flows from his hands. Always, he rolls one eight (8) sided die for hits. These are magical distress hits — they cannot be cured by time — or by healing spells. These hits can only be removed if the wizard spends *twice* the amounts of time and gold which would have been required to create the item normally on complete rest. Wizard Blades and True Rings may be created by this method. Since the wizard has the experience points at hand there is no additional experience point cost to make up in rest.

Continued on page 28

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GANDALF WAS ONLY A FIFTH LEVEL MAGIC-USER

by Bill Seligman

What?? I hear you scream. Impossible, you cry; Gandalf was at least 30th, 40th, even 50th level!! After all, he was an Istari, and he had lived at least 2000 years! Oh, really?, I reply. Let us take a look at all the magic he ever performed, and see what was so high level about him.

First, let us leaf through the **Hobbit**. In order, Gandalf's spells were: 1) To make fancy colored smoke rings and have them fly about the room. This is no more than a variant on Pyrotechnics, with perhaps a bit of Phantasmal Force mixed in. 2) Tricking the trolls with Ventriloquism, a first level spell. 3) Lightning Bolts from his staff to kill the Orcs as they kidnapped the Dwarves and Bilbo. Third level spell. 4) Pyrotechnics to confuse the Orcs to rescue the Dwarves and Bilbo. Second level spell. 5) Lighting the way for the Dwarves and Bilbo while in the caves, with a glow from his staff. Second level spell. 6) Making pine cones catch fire and tossing them down upon the Wargs from a tree. A variant on Fireball, Pyrotechnics, and even the Druid spell Produce Flame. It is not specifically a spell mentioned on the D&D lists, but it is not terribly powerful all the same. 7) Tossing Sauron out of Dol Guldur. He did this in combination with the White Council, and so this does not count as an individual effort. (Besides, as I shall later show, Sauron was no more, or not much more, than 7th or 8th level.) 8) A combination of either Lightning Bolt or Light from his staff to warn the "good" side of the Battle Of Five Armies to get together, as you wish. Depending on the spell system you use, you may be able to change these figures by a level or two, but so far Gandalf has shown no abilities above 5th level.

Now, let us go to **The Fellowship of The Ring**. 1) His fireworks display at Bilbo's party: again, assuming they were magical, which does not have to be true, a variant on Phantasmal Forces, Pyrotechnics, etc. No more than second level. 2) Lightning Bolt battle with the Nazgul. Third level spells. (All right, if you wish to call the taming of Shadowfax magical, O.K. After the episode at the gates of Moria, there is no reason why Gandalf could not speak Equine, but a "Charm Animal" spell would be easier than Charm Person anyway.) 3) Adding fighters to the foam of the river that was overflowing the Nazgul. Phantasmal Force, perhaps a variant on Monster Summoning I (since we have not a hint as to the level of these fighters). 4) Lighting a fire in the middle of the snowstorm. A touch of Fireball, or even Produce Flame. (Note here Gandalf reveals how even this simple bit of magic can be detected for such a large distance. This shows the magical "weakness" of Tolkien's Middle Earth. Ah ha, you say, I see where you are wrong! Hold on, I'll come to that point later.)

To continue: 5) the flames when fighting the Wargs. Variant on Fireball, 3rd level. 6) Lighting the way in Moria. 1st level spell. 7) Fighting the Balrog. In his description of the battle, it seems to me he used only, or mostly, Lightning Bolts, with perhaps some Fireballs if you are generous. Still only third level. 8) Being resurrected. But this is not done by Gandalf, he was "sent back" and therefore had nothing himself to do with the feat.

On to **The Two Towers**: 1) The bursting into flame of Legolas' arrow. A mild Fireball, perhaps even an unusual form of Protection from Normal Missiles. 2) The awakening of Theoden. A combination of Lightning, Light, and Darkness. No more than 3rd level. 3) The breaking of Saruman's staff. This could have been a natural result of one Istari saying that to another, a mild Charm Person effect, or something of that nature. It is not spectacular enough, in any case, to go beyond third level spell-casting.

And now, **The Return of The King**: 1) The beams of light used to rescue Faramir. No more powerful than Lightning Bolt, for all the effect they had. They could have been the 3rd level spell Firebeam described in, I believe, **Alarums and Excursions #12**. 2) In the Battle of Slag Hills, when Gandalf should perhaps have used the maximum amount of his powers, he did nothing mentioned in the book. Perhaps he used Lightning Bolt of Fireball/-beam, but still this is no higher than 3rd level spells. 3) Talking mind-to-mind with Elrond and Galadriel. You don't need any more than ESP to make this work.

And that is it. If I have left any spells out, like Gandalf using the

Hold Portal or Wizard Lock in Moria, it is not intentional. But I do not think that they would go beyond 3rd level. If the words I have used such as "variant" make you think that he must have been at least 11th level to research the spells, remember that he had his Staff, and the ring Narya the Great, which was associated with fire-type spells anyway. Since he was forced to use them several times, when, as I have shown, a 5th level mage did not need them, perhaps he was even less than 5th level, but I shall not try to press my point too far. If you ask how he lasted so long battling a Balrog, I reply that that is a fault with the D&D combat system, so the point that a 5th level mage could not withstand the blows of the 10th level Balrog does not quite hold water. (I am referring only to the Balrog in D&D, not including the Eldritch Wizardry characteristics, as this type of Balrog is usually said to be too weak for a true Tolkien Balrog. In fact, when placed in perspective with Gandalf's battle with one, the Balrog described by Gygax and Arneson originally was of normal strength. As far as I am concerned, the type VI demon is a type VI demon, not a Balrog.)

As for Sauron: without going to too much detail, Clairvoyance, ESP, and perhaps an advanced Wizard's Eye, with much longer ranges than described in D&D. But since he had the Palantir, maybe he let the thing do most of the work for him, and his "Red Eye". If you are going to be nasty, then let him have Control Weather, which makes him 12th level. Still not spectacular, when there are those who regard Sauron as 75th level or so.

So how do we reconcile our intuition with the bare facts? Well, for one thing, as I hinted above, the universe of LOTR was magic-weak. It is easy to assume that it was run by "a very tough DM" who rewarded experience so slowly that it would take 2000 years for a pseudo-angel to get to the 5th level, and 6000 years or so for an EHP to reach 12th. But it is still unsettling. I would rather place the blame on the scale we are using: the D&D magic system. It seems a more likely thing for Gygax and Arneson to misjudge the spell levels. So what can we do? Change the spell system, the experience system or the levels of the spells, or all of the above? What is your response?

Please address your responses to Out on A Limb. - Ed.



The WESTFINSTER WARGAMERS have become a regular feature in **LITTLE WARS**, and will be appearing here from time to time. ED.

CREATURE . . . from page 12

The Ankhkeg burrows through the earth like an earthworm preferring soil rich in minerals and organic matter. Thus it will usually be found in forests and choice agricultural land. This causes farmers great consternation since Ankhkeg likes to supplement its earthy diet of soil with a bit of fresh meat, human or otherwise. Since its mouth is not designed to rip and tear meat its mandibles crush its prey and secrete a digestive enzyme causing an additional 1-10 points per turn until the prey is completely dissolved. If sorely pressed in battle it is able to squirt its digestive acids 30 feet once per six hours. However when it does this it cannot digest anything for the same length of time, so it will usually bite. The Ankhkeg's favorite method of attack is lying 5-10 feet underneath the ground until its antenna detect a likely victim passing overhead. Then it burrows out directly underneath the prey and CRUNCH.

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COVENS . . . from page 9

d) Will grant 1 wish (70%) or 2 wishes of limited power/week.

e) Increases chance of finding an opponent's lair by 10%. If the lair is found, the charm enhances chances of finding each category of treasure by either 20 percent (75% chance of this) or 50 percent. Note the charm does not affect the amount of treasure, only the chance that coins, gems, etc. will be present.

After determining how good your charm is in each category, keep a record of the results. Not a!! charms are the same.

3. MIRROR-CRYSTAL

Usable by a!! characters, this beautiful silvery gem serves as magic armor against certain subtle spells. When held in our hand, put in clothing, or mounted on shields, swords, rings, wands, helmets, etc. it provides you with complete protection against Charm/Hold Person-Monster, a!! Sleep spells, paralyzation, curses, and all control agents (i.e., potions, rings, staves, and spells).

The origin of these precious stones dates back to a very ancient wizard who needed to shield his castle guards from crafty intruders. As time passed they fell into the hands best suited to subtle magic: witches!

4. AMULET OF POWER

Usable by clerics, witches, and magic-users, this object serves to periodically boost latent magic energies. One day each week, the number of spells (of each level) you may perform, and the range, duration, and power (dice, area, number affected, etc.) of those spells, will increase by 50%! An Enchanter could, for example, do 6-4-3-1 spells on one day a week, rather than the usual 4-3-2-1. (Always drop fractions when calculating a fifty-percent.) Due to the increase in power, reduce a target's saving throw by -3.

Upon acquiring the device, a new user must wear it for 30 consecutive days before it adjusts properly to his mental capacities. After that period the amulet will be fully functional, but any attempts to make use of the power boost before the month is out will be in vain.

RESEARCH . . . from page 26

18. A wizard, witch, patriarch or matriarch can embed spells in distress. The wizard simply speaks the Power Word of Distress and drains one or more of his spells into the magic item. The item gains and the wizard loses the spell. Of course, the wizard can always relearn the spell, or pick up another to replace it, using rule 1.

19. A Wizard Blade or True Ring has an intelligence equal to the higher of (1) the prime stat. of its creator or (2) the number of levels that its creator lost as a result of its creation. The Wizard Blade or True Ring has an ego equal to its intelligence.

20. Any player character may sacrifice magic items to his or her gods in the hope that the god will reward him or her with aid, increased experience or perhaps increased stats. The magic item is consumed by the god and removed from the game. The gods may not answer, but this is a great way to keep your magic items out of enemy hands.

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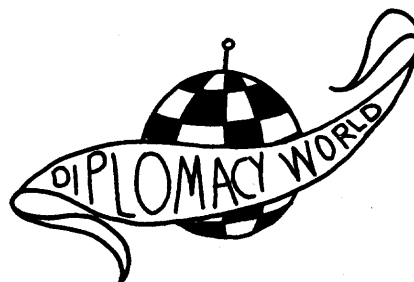
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THE GNOME CACHE

by Garrison Ernst

Summary:

Unable to resist the wanderlust any longer, Dunstan has robbed his father's strongbox and set forth on his quest for adventure and glory.

In his naivete, Dunstan casts his lot in with a band of scurrilous cutthroats, believing them to be adventurers sharing his noble pursuits.

Having narrowly escaped from having his meagre possessions pilfered by his erstwhile companions, Dunstan gets stuck with the bill for their repast, which he pays with ill grace, resolving to get even. In the ensuing squabble at the Riven Oak, Dunstan makes his escape, only to blunder into the Warders, who are on his trail. By distracting him with the tale of his recent plight, Dunstan manages to persuade the chief Warder to return to the hostelry to set matters aright, and in so doing hides his true identity. In the confusion at the Inn, he makes good his escape on a "borrowed" horse, and heads for the Upplands, where he spends the night in the stable with his horse, in the hamlet of Huddlefoot.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Upplands were desolate and wild beyond the Crosshill road. The vegetation was sparse and low, broken only occasionally by a little copse of trees or thickets of brush. The ground was stoney, slopes steep and shot with layers of rock. The wind played over and around the hills, moaning softly to itself in sorrow at its solitude and seemed to tug at Dunstan's cloaked form hoping thus to gain attention. A lone bird circled high overhead, sending a raucous cry to grate upon the nerves of any who happened to hear. The rider hunched upon himself, wishing that his journey had taken him elsewhere. Sliding rocks brought him around with a jerk, but seeing that it was only the boy, Mellerd, tumbling a bit when he lost his footing, Dunstan resumed his unseeing inspection of the inhospitable terrain ahead. The interminable trek finally did end — at least until the morrow's sun renewed it — but the sky grayed long before evening, and a lurid gloaming brought the first cold drops of rain.

The horse needed no urging to make for a sheltered hollow, where trees and tall grass tempted the beast, and the man was happy for the shelving hillside which promised at least some protection from the downpour to come. Dunstan hurriedly unsaddled his mount and tied it to one of the trees with a long rope. By the time he returned to his dry cranny, the boy was there, huddling as far away from Dunstan's gear as the space would permit.

"Why do you still follow? Go back to your master, and leave me to my business." There was no force behind his words, however, so the lad said or did nothing. Hunching down and trying to get comfortable, Dunstan noted that there was a pile of sticks at the boy's feet: "Can you make us a fire?"

Mellard nodded and set about kindling a small blaze. There was soon a cheery glow and pleasing warmth reflecting from the rocky wall and roof of their abode. "It's a right nice fire, it is," he said to no one in particular, and rubbed his hands appreciatively before it.

Dunstan also moved close to the friendly light, feeling relaxed for the first time that day. "Come now, let bygones be bygones. Tell me why you persist in following?"

"It was you who tricked me into guiding you — what's to happen to a runaway 'prentise? 'Course there ain't a doubt. Don't like serving that mean old devil anyways, so whys to go back to get beat until I can't walk no more." After thinking a bit on his statement, Mellard added, "It's you who should get whupped."

"Don't talk such rubbish! If you hadn't been dishonest, you'd not have been in a position of having

to serve — but as I just said, let us forget all that. What have you to gain by following me? Naught lies ahead but a perilous journey, for while I can expect honorable service with some noble lord, what can you do?"

The boy pondered this for a long moment, shrugged and said: "I know not what's to happen to poor Mellerd, but not knowin' ain't so bad. I'll take my chances." With these words he turned away from Dunstan and began taking out the few scraps of food he had left.

"Shan't we make the best of both our situations then, Mellerd?" Dunstan inquired with a comradely tone. The boy looked at him wonderingly at this unexpected change: "That's better! Here's what I offer: You can take service with me — no tricks this time. In return I'll see to your provision and protection, for ahead lie many dangers."

"Service? What'll I have ter do?"

"Why not much . . . there's the horse, and meals, and caring for my garments . . . no more."

This was more like it, thought Mellerd. In a trice he was agreeably accepting orders from Dunstan, as he readied a meal and placed the saddle and packs in a more convenient spot. His new master doled out a reasonable portion of food to him when the viands were spread and even gave him his former covering, the saddle pad, to sit upon while they ate.

"Listen to me, boy, for if you are to serve a man who will soon be a knight and champion you must be fit for the station. Now, while we rest, as we travel, whenever you work nearby, you are to receive instruction from me in manners and speech. You are far too rude at present, but if you apply yourself vigorously I can perhaps make something better of you."

"Thanks, Sor! Did yer say champion and knight?" Mellerd was overwhelmed by the thought of serving a knight. "Would I be yer squire then?"

"Nay, certs not! — Well, that remains to be seen," he added. "For the nonce you are merely my servant. Serve well and learn from an Honorable Gentleman, and who knows what the future will grant to you."

Much encouraged by these words, the boy set to with a will and hung upon every word Dunstan uttered. The whole turn of events was most satisfactory to Dunstan also. He now did no menial labor whatsoever, and tutoring the lad helped pass the miles of hilly travel. As an added benefit, Mellard urged an early halt one evening in order to set snares. His master was dubious, not only of his ability but of the likelihood of game as well. The next morning he awoke to the fragrance of rabbit roasting on a spit, so thereafter Dunstan decreed that snares would be set every evening as soon as the boy had completed setting up the night's camp. During the course of the week it took to arrive at the village of Deepwell, both travelers actually fleshed out a bit and became more fit.

"There is a bit of tricky work ahead of me, Mellerd, so you are to say nothing. Answer only if spoken to directly and then only sufficient to accomplish was asked."

"Yes, So — Sir."

"You will say nothing regarding the Overking's mark on the steed, the Writ I once showed to you, nor how you came to be my servant, do you understand my rede?"

"Aye, master Dunstan."

"Good. We will then proceed into the hamlet. When we arrive at the place most likely to be able to provide us with new mounts, you go on about the business of provisioning while I deal with other matters." The lad nodded his understanding once again, and Dunstan was finally satisfied. The road

was hot and dusty under the noonday sun, but Dunstan felt a shudder despite the heat, for he could end his errantry in the burg before him. Arrest was certain if word had come to this place or if he mismanaged the deception he meant to practice.

Two travelers in worn garments came down the pike into Deepwell under the watchful eye of Evan the Trader. A large young man with curly head bared to the elements rode proudly upon a tired-looking horse, while an urchin with straggling locks and unshod feet walked at the animal's head. Evan noted that although a sword was in evidence at the rider's side, they had few possessions, so the observer immediately lost interest in them. There was little else to do for the moment, however, so he gazed idly as the pair made their way into the village and separated. The tad headed for the rear of the ostel, while the mounted fellow approached the place where the trader leaned. Evan watched him bring the horse into the shade of the barn and dismount, looking about for the proprietor.

"Good day to you, traveller," Evan spoke. The young man appraised the speaker carefully before replying.

"Good day to you. Are you the liveryman?"

Evan shook his head: "No. I am waiting for the fellow's return in order to conclude my business and away from this ham." The traveler seemed uncertain of what to do, so the trader continued: "Dolph sits over his noonday fare at the ostel — where he's likely to be for some time yet. If you wish to stable your mount, and you don't mind caring for the beast yourself, go inside and choose any empty stall."

The young man looked nervous and irritated. After a moment he evidently reached a decision: "Thank you, but I'll await the return of Master Dolph — I have other business with him."

At this Evan pondered a time. The traveler wasn't the ordinary kind one found on the road, although the Heavens knew there were always enough odd ones and rascals during the best of times. This one was possibly gentle born from his manner, but something was certainly bothering him, for he was ill at ease. After studying him hard for another moment Evan said: "Perhaps I can be of service to you. Allow me to introduce myself, Sir: I am Evan the Trader, dealing in the rich furs from Nehron-land."

"My pleasure, Sir. I am Dunstan of — no town. I have seen the pelts from Nehron in my fa— travels; they are rich indeed. You must do a fine business. But, no, you cannot help me. I am here to obtain a pair of new mounts, for my own beast is spent, and my servant must also ride; we have long to go ere we reach our destination."

"Pardon my presumptiveness, friend Dunstan, but I trow I can serve you better than master Dolph. It so happens that I have a brace of spare steeds, and I'd happily part with them for a fair price."

The young man drew nearer: "Will you take my horse in trade if I buy from you?"

"Sorry, but that I cannot do. As soon as I complete my affairs here I am setting off to Rheyton and thence to Nehron's forests. Still, you should have no trouble striking a bargain with Dolph, for with some good feed and a few days rest your present mount will be back in shape and command a good nob."

"Rheyton and Nehron you say? and leaving today?" The young fellow was smiling a bit now, and Evan wondered what changed his mood. "Would it be possible to accompany your train?"

"Certs. Especially if you can use that sword as well as I guess you can. Beyond Rheyton-Town the tracks are narrow and ill-kept, and the lands about abound with gallymen and bandits — may a wanion take them all! If you'll agree to accompany me all the way there as an additional guardsman, I'll ask nothing else in return."

"Done, master trader, for we intend to journey there in any event." It was now Evan's turn to be surprised, for he could imagine no purpose for such a trip by the pair; however, he remarked on it not, for 'he was right glad to have another stout blade to protect the caravan of goods he was to lead north to exchange for the furs. Dunstan went on: "It will take me a time yet to manage my own business here. How soon will you be leaving?"

"Your star must be smiling upon you today, sir, for I had planned to be off with the dawn. Various difficulties arose to detain me, and it now seems that no start will be made for at least an hour — perhaps two. . . Damn the fleshpot here! My fourrier still lies in a stupor. He is sleeping it off, for nothing would serve to arouse him, and I am making the best of it. Now about the fee for the mounts you wanted —"

During the bargaining Mellerd appeared, but Dunstan motioned him off. The boy disappeared, and a price was soon agreed upon. For three scruples gold (which Dunstan groaned over parting with) he obtained a really fine stallion for himself and a small palfrey of uncertain worth for his servant. An additional bit of haggling bought harness and saddle for the second horse at a cost of a few more silver coins. Trader Evan then set off to put his new funds to work, while Dunstan awaited Dolph's tardy return. That worthy finally wended his way to the livery stable, being well steeped in ale and jolly as a grig.

This couldn't be better, thought Dunstan. A drunken man will not look too carefully at marks — on horses or on paper. He at once engaged the man in conversation, and before long the former mount of the Warder had been sold. Dunstan didn't agree to too low a price, but neither did he demand its full value, thus insuring a quick sale. But as Dolph was leading the animal into the barn he spied the Overking's mark. This brought him up short. Dunstan saw what had happened, and he immediately rose to the occasion. Taking Dolph by the arm, he told him a tale in tones most confidential regarding service of a highly secret nature in behalf of Eddoric: "Can you read, good master Dolph?" The man, flustered by drink and the confidence of one of the Overking's henchmen, mumbled that he could make out some words. "Nonetheless, cast your eyes upon this document, but read it not too closely, for there are things put there at the Overking's command which cannot be viewed by any save myself and certain high nobles —" Here, Dunstan displayed the Writ, and Dolph was totally deceived. He bid the young man farewell with utmost respect, feeling honored to be able to be of such service to and in the confidence of his sovereign.

"One last thing, Goodman Dolph, there are certain spies who actually dare to work against the wishes of our Royal Lord — men who seem to be honest officials. You must not only keep this matter to yourself, but the mark upon the horse must be shall we say ah — enhanced so as to be unrecognizable . . . you understand?"

"Assuredly, Sir. It shall be done as you suggest, for the wild Kimbry often brand their animals in fashions similar to — well, it shall be done," said master Dolph. And a highly satisfied Dunstan took his leave.

The trader's caravan was encamped at the edge of town, and Dunstan decided to go there immediately after locating Mellerd, for he feared missing its departure even though the fellow had thought it would be several hours hence. Undoubtedly, Evan wished to leave the place behind as soon as possible so as to avoid further roistering on the part of his crew, which meant that he would await no tardy travelers. A tug at his sleeve brought his attention to Mellerd. The boy had returned to lingering at the kitchen of the ostel, keeping watch for his master's approach.

"Prices here are awful! I bought nothing, for I knew you'd not approve . . . whatever we are to have you'll have to decide upon, for they ask a com for a

jug of small beer!"

Dunstan merely smiled at this: "Don't worry about it, my good boy. We shall need only a few luxuries," and he then rattled off a surprisingly long list of choice items Mellerd was to acquire. "You see the two steeds before the livery? Well, the roan stallion is mine," and pausing for effect, "the bay is yours!" Mellerd's face seemed all mouth, so large was his smile of pleasure.

"Oh, thank you, Sir, I don't know how —"

"Just get on about your duties, and save the thanks. Naturally, I'll take the cost out of your wages. It cost two scrups, and at a reasonable rate of interest I make it you owe me a year's service at the wage of one silver noble per month." The boy never trained at counting, and overcome at the ownership of his own horse, made no objection to either the assumption or the twenty percent interest. Rather, he happily ran off to complete the purchases.

There were matters Dunstan wished to handle before departure also. He first stopped at the smithy, hoping to find something more to add to his armaments as befitted a warrior guarding a valuable train. Somewhat disappointed, he nevertheless managed to acquire an iron cap, an old shield of Nehron manufacture — although stoutly made and well rimmed and bossed, and a long lance of ash. Leaving these with the smith for a moment, he asked where garments could be purchased, and received directions to the cott of the tailor. Going thence, he found that coarse shirts, galligaskins, and heavy woolen cloaks were all that were readily available. These items he bought for himself, two of each, as well as some linen. He also purchased needles and thread. Finally, he went to the cobbler's and was lucky enough to find a pair of riding boots which fit well enough, a jack, and a wide balderic from which to hang his trusty blade. After paying for all of these items, Dunstan found his pockets empty of all save a few odd plumbs, but his gold was hardly touched, and he was well pleased with the course of the day's events. Time to hurry now, thought he, for his errands had taken longer than he had anticipated.

Mellerd's eyes were round with surprise as he saw his master approaching with helmet, shield and lance, a bundle swinging beneath the shield. The latter item was tossed to him, for Dunstan would take no time to don his other garb now. Off they galloped, folks turning to stare at the warlike figure of Dunstan, spear held proudly erect. Although the young man had never practiced at tilting, he felt assured he could handle the weapon well enough in combat, it rested so well in his hand now, and he was proudly conscious of the attention it attracted.

When the pair reached the camp Evan assured them that there were a few loose ends to tie up before he could order a start, so they should see that all of their gear was properly packed in the nonce. When he complimented Dunstan on his new armaments, the youth visibly swelled with pride. Evan shook his head uncertainly, and hurried away to attend his other affairs.

"Here," said Dunstan, throwing his old garments and worn buskins to Mellerd, "these are for you." Going through the other items he found the needles and thread and gave them to the boy also. "You can alter them to suit you, and after that practice there'll be plenty of sewing to be done for me." He had put on his leggings and jack, leaving the warm cloak for the chill of night, and he stomped around in his new boots trying to break them in as quickly as possible. As an afterthought he added: "As a rule you will carry my shield and lance until battle calls me, but today I shall bear both as they are new, and I wish to become accustomed to them."

As Dunstan spoke, the lad had shucked off his tattered smock and trousers to try on his new apparel. Although he fairly swam in the clothing, he wore it with great pleasure. There would be opportunity tonight to make it fit with thread and needle. "You are the best master a boy ever had!" Mellerd exclaimed.

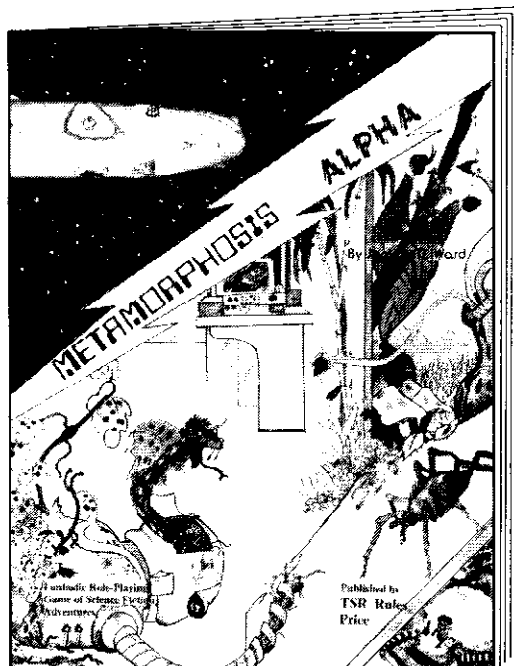
"Yes," affirmed Dunstan, "I suppose that is so. Let us call it even . . . those garments for your services up to today. It will be easier, that way, to reckon the debt for the palfrey."



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