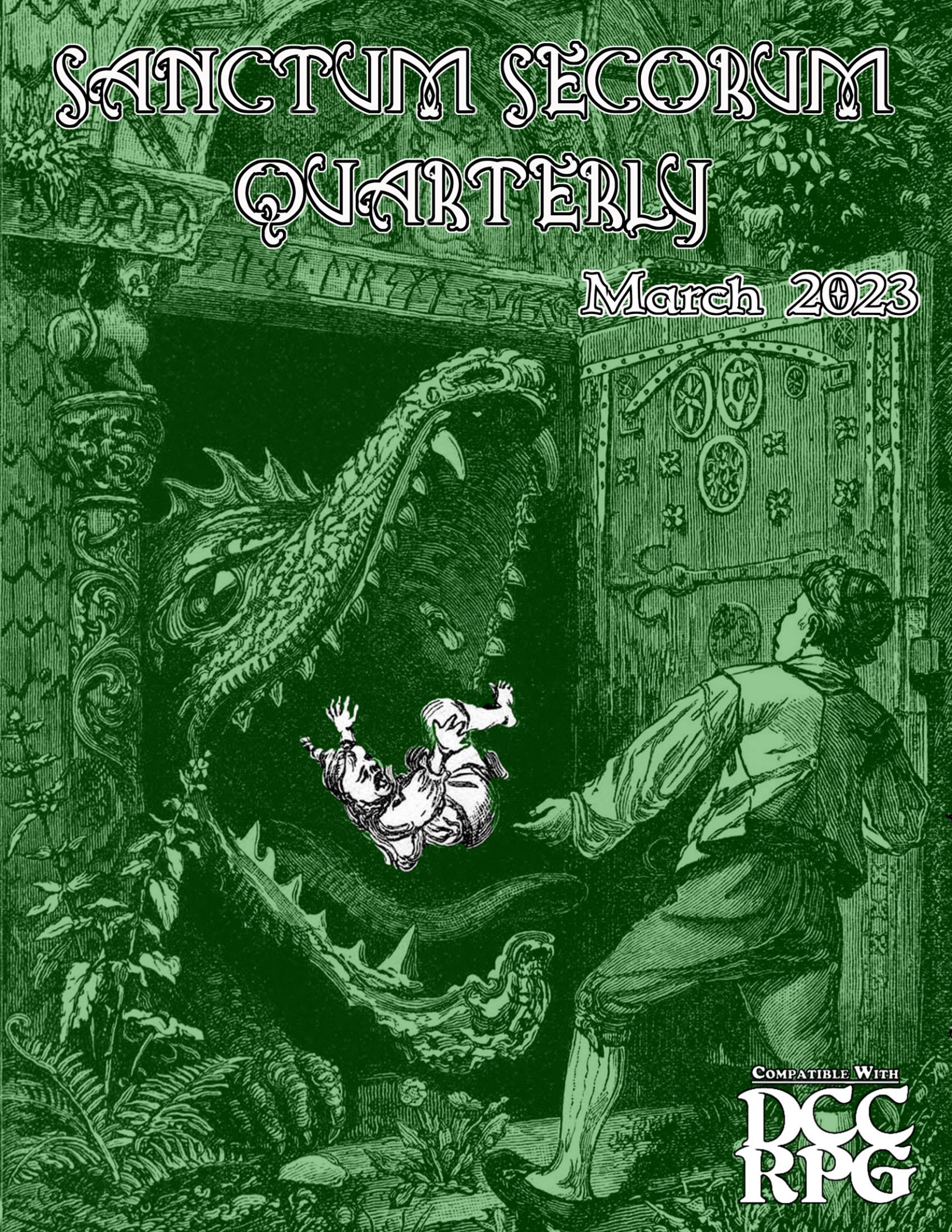


# SANCTUM SECORUM QUARTERLY

March 2023



COMPATIBLE WITH

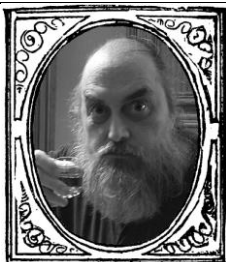
# DCC RPG





**Bob Brinkman** has been described as an egomaniacal force of nature. At different times in his life, he has made a living as a swordsman, fire-breather, Las Vegas entertainer, wizard, theater instructor, stable hand, and tax professional. He currently works as a freelance writer for Goodman Games and has worked on a number of projects including: Mutant Crawl Classics, DCC Lankmar, DCC Dying Earth, Original Adventures Reincarnated, and Crypt of the Devil Lich. Additionally, he serves as co-host on both the Sanctum Secorum and Sanctum Secorum Reading Room podcasts.

**Jen Brinkman** discovered DCC RPG on Free RPG Day 2012. In the decade to follow, DCC remains the only game she'll run! "Judge Jen" spent years editing for 3PPs, became the line editor for DCC Lankmar and DCC Dying Earth, and eventually the Convention and Customer Service Manager for Goodman Games. When not working the official day job, the Chief Acolyte of DCC continues to co-host the Spellburn and Sanctum Secorum podcasts, and occasionally still wields a red pen. She also serves as chief food slave for nearly 50 pounds of black cats (most named for Appendix N authors).



**Daniel J. Bishop** is a guy lucky enough to be able to do some writing for this game we all love. He lives in Toronto in Canada, where raccoons are the most abundant wildlife. He started gaming on Christmas Day 1979 with Holmes Basic and has been in the judge's chair consistently since then.

His primary blog is at <http://ravencrowking.blogspot.com/> and his Patreon is <https://www.patreon.com/RavenCrowking>

**Marc Bruner** is an avid gamer, father, and elected official of a town that shall remain unnamed. While Marc is best known as the project lead on the newly released DCC Dying Earth, he is also one of the masterminds behind the annual Gen Con DCC tournaments, and has brought death and mayhem to untold numbers of players for years. When not ruling with an iron fist or dispensing death to unsuspecting characters, Marc is one of the co-hosts of the Sanctum Secorum podcast beginning with the Dying Earth episode!



**Blair DeMarco-Wettlaufer** has been writing game content since 300 baud modems and bulletin boards were a thing ... yes, he's very old, but he tries to not look in mirrors. He's authored content for Columbia Games, Kelestia Games, Kingdoms of Legend, and the Gongfarmer's Almanac. On weekends he's been known to put on 40 pounds of armor and get hit by swords, in denial of being old. His blog with gaming content and contact information can be found at [archadestower.blogspot.com](http://archadestower.blogspot.com).

**Gord Hanson** is a cubicle jockey by day and animal wrangler (two cats and one dog) by night. His introduction to Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG came when he stumbled across the core rulebook in 2021, whereupon he immediately bought it purely on the strength of the art. It didn't take him long to discover how much he enjoyed the game and in short order he found himself welcomed by the DCC community.



**Michael Harrington** lives and writes in Colorado with his wife, daughter and dog. He's been a lifelong lover of the sword and sorcery genre and TTRPGs. He's currently working through his to-be-read pile that he's convinced is concealing several itinerant brownies. When he's not pursuing his day job in the cybersecurity field or avoiding immolation from the Skull, he scours old necromantic tomes for a spell that will kill the AI that wants to replace him.

# SANCTUM SECORUM QUARTERLY

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Listen to the Sanctum Secorum Podcast at [www.sanctum.media](http://www.sanctum.media)





Greetings one and all,

Welcome to the first issue of Sanctum Secorum Quarterly. It is hard to believe that we are celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> episode of the Sanctum Secorum podcast – especially when, if one factors in episodes of The Sanctum Secorum Reading Room, Sanctum Secorum Live, and specials, it brings us up to 70 episodes. The Sanctum Secorum is in its eighth year now, and it is hard to imagine how all of this began.

It started, as so many things do, with an email from a friend. Jim Wampler reached out to his co-host Jen Brinkman and suggested that the DCC community was large and healthy enough for a second podcast alongside of Spellburn. They key was coming up with a new format, something new, something that wasn't... Spellburn. So, the soon to be Keepers of Mysteries (Jen Brinkman, David Baity, and Bob Brinkman) put their heads together and came up with the idea of a DCC literary podcast that could help judges transition materials from the page to the table. With the working title of The Dungeon Crawl Cabal, the team started work. Ideas flowed, demo recordings were made, the title changed, and on October 5, 2015, the Sanctum Secorum podcast was officially announced – four days before the release of its first episode.

What was not announced at that time was the Sanctum Secorum companion 'zine. The publication started out with a discussion during the recording of the first episode, of how it would be interesting for all three Keepers to stat up the same item (atlercorn, of all things!), to emphasize that there is no right/wrong way to bring something to your table. It would be a fun way to show the difference in how they all thought and created. The idea grew into a 'zine to accompany each issue and it would be something given freely to the community. It would become a runaway train.

The first issue of the Sanctum Secorum Companion weighed in at 17 pages. Since then, the Sanctum Secorum has released 44 regular issues plus several compilations and special issues (including a few that were printed and distributed for Free RPG Day). Since the release of that first issue, over 41,000 copies of Sanctum Secorum companions have been downloaded from [DriveThruRPG](#).

Over time, though, time got a little more precious. David Baity left the show to devote his time to fully develop Weird Frontiers, and Marc Bruner became the newest Keeper of Mysteries. Marc's first show was one focusing on Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth* and, almost immediately after, he was appointed the lead on the DCC Dying Earth project. With all of the Keepers working on the project, production and publication at the Sanctum began to slow down and eventually came to a halt. A number of ideas were floated to reinvigorate the podcast and get things back on track, but things stayed quiet here in the library.

Finally, the Keepers returned (sans Marc) with the Sanctum Secorum Reading Room. Broadcast live on the Goodman Games channel, the show is one focusing on the literature, but not the gaming. It is the show that helped rebuild the creative momentum that the Keepers have been known for. Finally, in January, the Sanctum Secorum podcast returned with new episodes...and a new plan.

What you are reading now is more than the creative work of the Keepers with an occasional guest writer for good measure. We hope that you will agree that Sanctum Secorum Quarterly has assembled a team of talented creators for our first issue. So, we thank you for your patience as we've remodeled the library and hope you enjoy your stay.

Be Inspired!



# Be Inspired!

Bob Brinkman ~ Marc Bruner  
Blair DeMarco-Wettlaufer ~ James A. Pozenel, Jr.

## The Dolphin Cross

By John Bellairs

### (Not Quite) 500 Useful Pentacles

Bob Brinkman

*To those unlearned in the magical arts, one summoning circle or protective pentagram might seem as good as any other. However, to those who dive deeply into the waters of phlogistonical workings, there is a near endless variety of specialized seals and pentacles. Each provides its own benefits (and potentially drawbacks) when used.*

*Specialized knowledge of this sort is not among what is commonly handed down from wizard to apprentice. Instead, each seal must be found and researched on its own – often taking years of study to unearth a single sigil.*

*That is all a colossal waste of time. Just buy my book.*

- Anonymous, *500 Useful Pentacles*

If there is one thing that one can take away from *The Face in the Frost* and *The Dolphin Cross*, it is Bellairs' love of weirdly evocative book titles such as *How to Seem Monstrous* and *A Salad of Summer Earthquake Recipes*. Between the two stories there are easily a dozen or more tomes with titles sure to leave folks scratching their heads in disbelief while sincerely wanting to learn what secrets may be found within. One such title caught my attention: *500 Useful Pentacles*.

Drawing upon the 1916 publication of *The Greater Key of Solomon*, a real-life “magical” resource, laid forth is a proposed use for the contents of such a grimoire. Despite the following being inspired by antique books on witchcraft and magic, liberties are being taken and there is no

implication of any real-life applications. Just have fun.

#### **Specialized Pentacles**

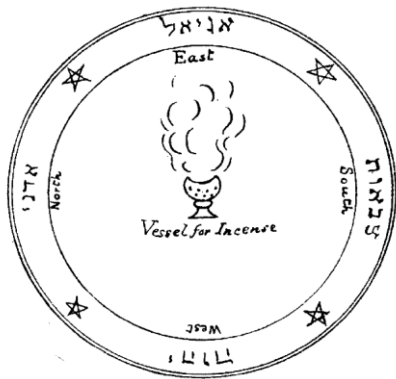
While a number of summoning and protective spells routinely require the use of magic circles, that is only the most commonly known use for such imagery and while there are “default” circles, sigils, and seals which are used, there are alternates which may be of interest to wizards.

To learn the proper use of a specialized pentacle or other seal, the wizard must succeed at a DC 20 trained Intelligence check. Failure indicates that the mystic geometry in question is beyond the grasp of their magical talents at the current time. The wizard is allowed to make another attempt once they have increased in level.

#### **Charms & Talismans**

Beyond use in spellcasting circles, a number of pentacles are fashioned as charms or jewelry to enhance the strength of an individual wizard, to provide protection to their comrades, or to do harm to their foes.

Crafting such pentacles costs 100 gp in materials, a successful spell check (see below for specific DCs), and the sacrifice of 1 point of temporary Luck. No wizard may ever have more talismans active than they have permanent Luck. Should the number of pentacles exceed their Luck, the talismans all fail, leaving the wizard to begin creating their collection of mystic trinkets anew.



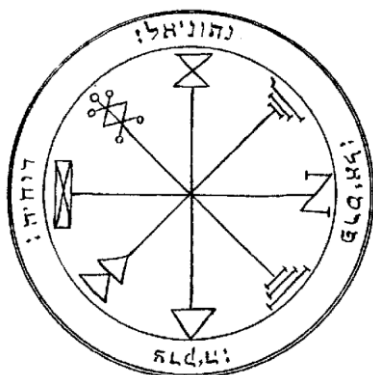
### Circle for the Consecration of Pentacles

(DC 17) This circle is used as a spell-working space and must be established prior to the manufacture of talismans. Use of the circle prevents ill-spirits and entities from interfering with the crafting of the talismans and grants a +2 to spell checks for crafting talismans.



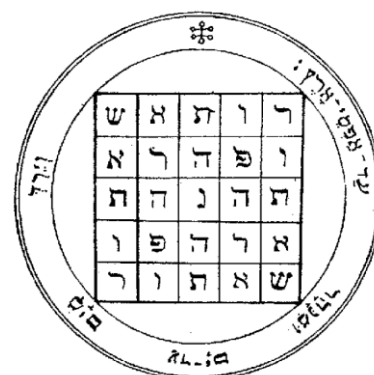
### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Pentacle of Mars

(DC 15) When pressed to the flesh of a person suffering from disease, this pentacle immediately grants a new Fortitude save with a +1d bonus.



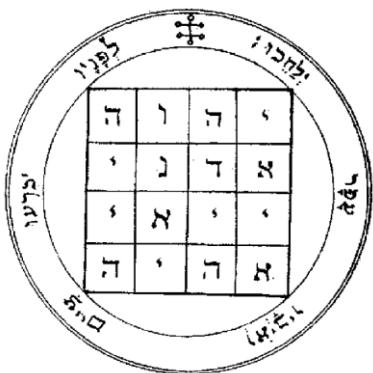
### The 1<sup>st</sup> Pentacle of Jupiter

(DC 10) This pentacle grants the wearer the ability to smell the presence of gold as if they were a dwarf and detects gems within 50'.



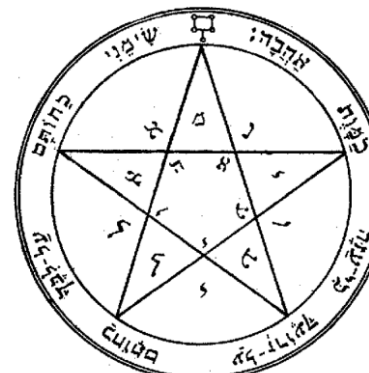
### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Pentacle of Saturn

(DC 14) This pentacle is of great value against enemies, granting a +1 AC bonus to its wearer. If worn by its creator, the wizard may expend all the energy within the talisman to negate a critical hit scored against their person. After such a use, the pentacle crumbles to dust.



### The 1<sup>st</sup> Pentacle of Saturn

(DC 12) This pentacle is a potent talisman against spirits. Upon its being shown to them, un-dead and demons submit to the will of its bearer for 1d3 rounds (DC 10 Will save negates; creatures of 3+ HD are immune).



### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Pentacle of Venus

(DC 15) This pentacle is for the granting of grace and honor. Its wearer gains a +2 to Reflex saves, Agility checks, and other associated rolls. While wearing this talisman, warriors wearing this gain +1 temporary Personality.



### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Pentacle of the Moon

**(DC 20)** When worn on a journey, this pentacle prevents all random encounters from sunset to sunrise. When traveling by sea, the wearer is protected from drowning, gaining a +5 to all rolls associated with drowning.



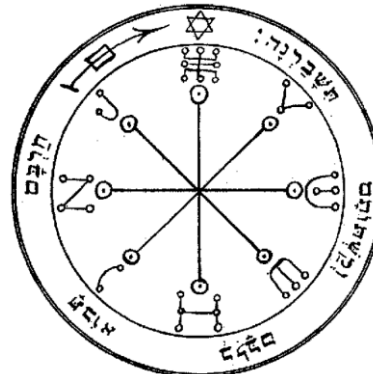
### The 5<sup>th</sup> Pentacle of Mercury

**(DC 25)** This pentacle opens any door with a touch, regardless of whether the door is locked or magically reinforced. It may be used repeatedly against ordinary locks, but crumbles to dust once used against a magical lock (such as *ward portal*).



### The 4<sup>th</sup> Pentacle of Saturn

**(DC 25)** This pentacle is useful for all workings and operations of ruin, destruction, and death. When worn it grants the wizard a +1d bonus to damage to spell check results of 32+.



### The 6<sup>th</sup> Pentacle of Mars

**(DC 30)** All those who attack the wearer of this pentacle suffer equal damage as that which they would have inflicted. The pentacle may absorb damage equal to the caster's Luck x 3 before crumbling to dust.



### The 4<sup>th</sup> Pentacle of the Sun

**(DC 20)** The wearer of this pentacle is granted the ability to see through all forms of invisibility and illusion both (including *cantrip*, *phantasm*, *mirror image* and similar) other than the invisibility which is granted by the 6<sup>th</sup> Pentacle of the Sun.



### The 6<sup>th</sup> Pentacle of the Sun

**(DC 30)** The wearer of this pentacle may become wholly invisible at will for 1d3+1 rounds. During this time, they may not be detected by any means short of a cleric's *divine aid* ability (judge's discretion).

## Working for a Living

Bob Brinkman

One can never have too many potential occupations for 0-level character backgrounds. After my recent reading of *The Dolphin Cross* and encountering a couple of occupations which truly stood out, it seemed only natural to add a few more.

You can use the following occupations to replace others already on Table 1-3 in the DCC RPG core rulebook, or just add these in for an even longer list. It is hard to go wrong by adding a little more variety to things!

Table: New Occupations		
Occupation	Trained Weapon	Trade Goods
Coroner	Scalpel (as dagger)	Leather apron (+1 AC)
Dreyer	Crossbow	Horse and wagon
Innkeeper	Blackjack	Bottle of watered-down wine
Leech gatherer	Leech fork (1d3)	Bucket of leeches
Scarecrow stuffer	Pitchfork	Bag of straw and old rags
Temporal traveler (stranded)	Plasma trowel (as short sword)	Digital watch and flashlight

## The Charwoman's Shadow

By Lord Dunsany

### Expanded Potion Fumble Table

Marc Bruner

Would-be alchemists, amateur elementarists, novice witches, and vision-seeking dabblers who discover a potion recipe in some crumbling libram or even steal the notes of a learned master may endeavor to recreate it, heedless of any risk they may incur as a result of their limited study of the arcane arts. More often than not, these attempts to meticulously follow the required steps fail – sometimes with unintended consequences.

The table below provides a list of possible outcomes for those seeking—perhaps foolishly—to unlock this knowledge, and was inspired by Lord Dunsany's novel, *The Charwoman's Shadow*, which was featured on Episode 49 of the Sanctum Secorum podcast. To use this table, judges may opt to allow non-spellcasters to make a spell

check using the 3rd level arcane spell make potion and roll on this table with any result of “failure”, or 1 to 11 on a spell check result when attempting to brew a magic potion from a recipe they have acquired. Keep in mind that most non-spellcasters will use a d10 for spell checks, substantially increasing the likelihood of a failed result! This table may also be used in place of the normal make potion fumble table of a roll of a natural 1 by a wizard or elf spellcaster.

Unless specified, the brewer of the potion will not know the results of the attempt. Unlike other spells, the judge, not the caster, makes the spell check roll to determine the caster's success and note any fumble effects that result from a failed attempt.

Table – Expanded Potion Fumbles	
1d24 modified by caster's Luck	Result
1 or less	The potion explodes, flinging glass shards and caustic gas at everything in a 10' radius. Those within the area of effect take 2d10 damage from the blast (Fort save



	against a DC equal to the intended potion's spell check number is allowed for half damage).
2	The potion explodes, resulting in 1d10 points of damage to the potion-maker (Fort save against a DC equal to the intended potion's spell check number is allowed for half damage).
3	The draught bubbles over during the failed brewing, spreading phlogiston liquid onto any surface that comes in contact with it. Non-living surfaces become animated as per the 3 <sup>rd</sup> -level arcane spell <i>breathe life</i> cast with a spell result of 18, creating a creature hostile to the potion-maker. Living creatures touched by the liquid acquire a random corruption. Roll 1d6: (1-3) minor; (4-5) major; (6) greater.
4	The potion seems fine, but the elixir undergoes a phlogiston transmutation. Instead of the intended effect, the mixture transforms the imbiber into a random small animal for twice the duration of the original target potion. Roll 1d8: (1) crow; (2) frog; (3) cat; (4) snake; (5) salamander; (6) armadillo; (7) spider; (8) dog.
5	The potion transmutes whatever it comes into contact with into pure gold, including the throat, esophagus and stomach of anyone unfortunate enough to drink the corrupted reagent.
6	The act of inept brewing turns the concoction into a deadly poison. Any imbiber takes 3d6 damage as the toxin courses through their system. (Fort save against a DC equal to the intended potion's spell check number is allowed for half damage).
7	The potion dissolves the insides when consumed, inflicting 2d4 acid damage. (Fort save against a DC equal to the intended potion's spell check number is allowed for half damage).
8	The potion transforms the imbiber into stone for 1d6 rounds.
9	The potion stimulates the imbiber's fear pheromones. For the next 2d4 hours, nearby predators are attracted to the scent of terror exuding from the target.
10-11	Instead of the intended potion, the mixture has a strong intoxicating effect, causing anyone who consumes it to be -2d on all actions for next 1d4 hours.
12-15	Re-roll a normal result, and potion has the opposite intended effect as deemed appropriate by the judge. For example, a love potion would instead cause the imbiber to feel an intense hatred toward the first creature they see after drinking, a healing potion would cause harm, an invulnerability potion would make the consumer suffer addition damage from attacks, etc.
16-17	Re-roll a normal result, and potion has a partially opposite intended effect as deemed appropriate by the judge. For example, a love potion works, but causes an intense hatred for all others within sight of the imbiber when it is consumed; a healing potion heals damage immediately, but only for 24 hours when the effect suddenly reverses, an invulnerability potion protects from regular damage, but makes the consumer vulnerable to all other types of injury, etc. The specific partial reversal is left to the judge, but should be roughly equivalent to any positive benefit of the original potion effect.
18-23	The potion seems fine, but in truth the concoction is inert and has no magical properties.
24+	Despite the worst efforts of the caster, the potion is actually brewed with a modicum of success. Re-roll a normal result, and potion functions as intended but for half the usual duration.

# The Philosopher's Stone

Bob Brinkman

*Although we do not, in any point of science, arrogate perfection in ourselves, yet something we have attained by dear experience, by diligent labour, and by study, worthy of being communicated for the instruction of either the licentious libertine, or the grave student-the observer of Nature; and this, our Work, we concentrated into a focus: it is, as it were, a spiritual essence drawn from a large quantity of matter; for we can say, with propriety, that this little Treatise is truly spiritual, and essential to the happiness of man : therefore, to those who wish to be happy, with every good intention we commend this Work to be their constant companion and study, in which, if they persevere, they shall not fail of their desires in the attainment of the true Philosophers' Stone.*

- Francis Barrett, *The Magus*

## Craft the Philosopher's Stone

Level: 5      Range: Touch      Duration: Varies      Casting Time: 3+ months      Save None

General	<p>Creation of the Philosopher's Stone and its associated elixirs requires both the specific ritual instructions as well as <i>magical affinity</i> – alchemy. Such affinity is useful in the brewing of potions and the creation of ointments, but is foundational in the quest to create the Philosopher's Stone. Beyond the alchemical knowledge, one must be properly prepared during a series of rituals.</p> <p>Upon obtaining the alchemical instructions (itself worthy of a major quest), the wizard must then undergo a period of spiritual purification of no less than 3 months. If the wizard is not lawful, the period of purification is lengthened by an additional 3 months if they are neutral, and six months if they are chaotic. During this time the wizard must eschew all vile affections, levity, and inconstancy of mind. At the end of the purification the wizard must succeed in a DC 20 Will save. Failure results in the wizard either starting anew or abandoning their attempt to craft the stone.</p> <p>Once having completed their purification, the wizard is ready for their attempt. Gathering up 1,000 gp worth of gold, mercury, and other supplies, they may begin the lengthy and arduous task of creating the stone. Once complete, the stone has several uses, each slowly depleting the physical state of the stone.</p> <table><thead><tr><th>Points</th><th>Result</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>1</td><td>Create a 1 HD healing tincture.</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>Cure any disease or poison.</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>Create a 3 HD healing tonic.</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>Cure blindness or deafness.</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>Create a 5 HD healing draught.</td></tr><tr><td>10</td><td>Convert 10 lbs. of lead into gold valued at 7,500 gp.</td></tr><tr><td>15</td><td>Restore 1d20+10 years of youth.</td></tr><tr><td>20</td><td>Restore one living creature to full health (maximum 75 hp).</td></tr><tr><td>25</td><td>Regrow severed limb.</td></tr><tr><td>30</td><td>Alchemist cannot die of natural causes, although they still may be slain.</td></tr><tr><td>35</td><td>A living being slain within the past hour is raised from the dead (requires a successful DC 20 Fort save).</td></tr></tbody></table>	Points	Result	1	Create a 1 HD healing tincture.	2	Cure any disease or poison.	3	Create a 3 HD healing tonic.	4	Cure blindness or deafness.	5	Create a 5 HD healing draught.	10	Convert 10 lbs. of lead into gold valued at 7,500 gp.	15	Restore 1d20+10 years of youth.	20	Restore one living creature to full health (maximum 75 hp).	25	Regrow severed limb.	30	Alchemist cannot die of natural causes, although they still may be slain.	35	A living being slain within the past hour is raised from the dead (requires a successful DC 20 Fort save).
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Manifestation	As below.																								
Corruption	Roll 1d5: (1) alchemist's skin takes on the color of gold; (2) one of the alchemist's hands is turned into solid gold; (3) alchemist ages 20 years; (4) alchemist suffers a																								

	permanent -1d penalty to Fortitude saves; (5) alchemist begins to melt and requires a full 5 HD in healing at the beginning of each day to prevent them from expiring in a puddle of fleshy goo.
Misfire	Roll 1d4: (1) the alembic explodes. All creatures within 25' suffer 1d8 damage and must make a Fort save equal to 7+CL or catch fire (1d6 damage each round until extinguished); (2) foul gasses escape from the alembic. All creatures within 50' age 5 years; (3) corrupted liquids spray forth. All gold within 100' is transmuted into lead; (4) failure is a sign of ritual impurity. Alchemist must begin wholly anew.
1-3	Lost, failure, and worse! Roll 1d6 modified by Luck: (0 or less) corruption + misfire + patron taint; (1-2) corruption; (3) patron taint (or corruption if no patron); (4+) misfire. Also, unlike normal spells, this spell is lost for an entire month, not simply one day.
4-11	Lost. Failure. Unlike normal spells, this spell is lost for an entire month, not simply one day.
12-17	Failure, but spell is not lost.
18-19	Alchemist distills pure ethereal essence, "the living gold". When poured onto 10 gp worth of gold, the essence will meld with the metal, increasing its value to 100 gp.
20-23	As above, increasing value to 250 gp.
24-25	Alchemist succeeds in creating the Philosopher's Stone with 1d5+CL doses.
26-28	Alchemist succeeds in creating the Philosopher's Stone with 1d7+CL doses
29-33	Alchemist succeeds in creating the Philosopher's Stone with 1d10+CL doses.
34-35	Alchemist succeeds in creating the Philosopher's Stone with 1d20+CL doses.
36-37	Alchemist succeeds in creating the Philosopher's Stone with 1d24+CL doses.
38+	Alchemist succeeds in creating the Philosopher's Stone with 1d30+CL doses.

## The Philosopher's Shelves

James A. Pozenel, Jr.

### Philosopher's Wine

*"And the wine was a magic wine with a taste of flowers, yet of flowers unknown to Earth, and a flavour of Spices, yet of spices ungathered in any isles Spain knew; and it had in it a memory and a music, and came to the blood like one that was closely kin, and yet of a kinship from ages and ages ago. And all of a sudden the young man saw his folly, in deeming that philosophy prefers the way to the end, and so for a moment he saw his grandfather's wisdom; but that wonderful wine's inspiration died swiftly away."*

When consumed, this provides the imbiber a momentary flash of insight into a matter of current cogitation. It can be tempting to drink the wine without regard for one's thoughts, but a philosopher knows that such folly is not only wasteful, but potentially dangerous.

A single glass of wine coupled with the imbibers concentration on a particular subject (e.g., an Intelligence-based skill check, casting a spell, learning a spell, meditating on a riddle or puzzle)

grants a +2 bonus to a single roll that must occur within a number of rounds equal to the partaker's level (always at least 1 round). If there is no roll, the judge is free to provide whatever insight they deem appropriate.

If one drinks philosopher's wine without conscious and purposeful thought, the imbiber's thoughts are invaded by deep cogitation on superficial subjects, memories, self-contemplation, or fantastical dreams. A DC 20 Will save is required or the subject is lost in a trance only able to move at half speed for a number of rounds equal to their level (always at least 1 round). If the roll is a natural 1, the victim experiences a moment of surreal fright. The fright is so painful they take 1d8 points of damage (potentially dropping dead from fear!), and then immediately flee the area at maximum speed for the duration of effect.

In either case, philosopher's wine is a heady concoction and temporarily imposes a -1 penalty to Agility for 2 turns.



## Elixir Vitæ

*"A bottle of that medicine philosophers use, which is named elixir vitæ, wherein were sufficient doses to ensure his survival till the time when he knew that the world would begin to grow bad. He took one dose in every generation. By certain turns in the tide of life in those that he watched, a touch of grey over the ears, a broadening or a calming, he knew that the heyday of a generation was past and the time had come for his dose... Measuring his dose by moonlight he would drink it full in the rays, as though he shared this secret alone with the moon."*

Philosophers regard the elixir vitæ as perhaps one of the most important potions. Without it the expansion of philosophy is limited by a mortal man's short lifetime. Truly, nothing worth studying is mastered by the young nor in a short span of time. Philosophers are also very careful to avoid overindulging in the elixir. A young man's mind is even more useless than their body. A young mind is capricious and reckless and no philosopher desires to descend into impulsivity.

Elixir vitæ must be stored in a dark bottle and kept away from all sunlight. Even a few seconds in the sun robs the potion of its efficacy. A single dose removes 20 years of age from the drinker.

Elixir vitæ may be brewed by a wizard with access to the *make potion* spell. The wizard must use 500 gp worth of ingredients of which actual gold (preferably made by the alchemist themselves via their Philosopher's Stone) is the primary component. A spell check result of 36 or higher yields 2d6 doses of the elixir vitæ.

For an adventuring party, Elixir Vitæ might be a useful remedy to curses or magical misfortunes that cause premature aging.

## Gift of Tithous

*"For immortality of a sort," she said, and said so ruefully, with a look that told so much more, that the young man saw clearly enough it had been the gift of Tithonus."*

According to the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, when Eos asked Zeus to make Tithonus immortal, she forgot to ask that he be granted eternal youth. Tithonus indeed lived forever.

The Gift of Tithous is a name facetiously given to a poorly-worded wish that amounts to a cruel curse. The victim is granted immortality, but not everlasting youth. As the victim passes the years their body ages, eventually growing weak, crippled, blind, and likely insane. The curse is delivered over a fire while sprinkling ground ruby dust worth at least 20 gp.

*Eos asked Zeus, 'Make him immortal.'  
Zeus complied with a chortle.  
May you walk the earth as Tithonus,  
Forever alive, aging remains your onus.*

The afflicted cannot die. They still suffer damage and will fall unconscious upon reaching 0 hp. However, all checks to recover the body automatically succeed. The loss of their ability scores due to near death experiences does, however, leave their marks on the victim. The judge is free to create a framework for progressive aging and rulings for how such items as Elixir Vitæ interact with the curse.

The Gift of Tithous is a major curse and carries a -2 Luck penalty in addition to providing immortality without everlasting youth.

# The Tower of the Elephant

By Robert E. Howard

## Blood and Gem Magic

Blair DeMarco-Wettlaufer

In *The Tower of the Elephant*, Conan is bid by Yag-Kosha to kill him and take his heart and have his blood flow over a great gem called the Heart

of the Elephant, to imbue it with powerful magic ... and this imagery is not new.

Blood and gems intertwined with spells are common tropes in sword and sorcery fiction. While Robert E Howard first published this story in 1933, there have been pulsing gems, blood

sacrifices, and similarly terrible magics powered by such things in books, films and down through the years. So, if you have in your game the Heart of the Elephant, the Actorios Stone, or such other jewels, let's look at how to incorporate that sort of terrible magic into your Dungeon Crawl Classics game.

So, why does a valuable gem or blood power magic? Perhaps because of its perceived value by the caster. If elves held amber dragon wings in high value and coveted them, they might work as well – but the hearts of men avariciously crave jewels, and blood is revered as a symbol of life, bonds of family and friendship, and both can use the emotions of the caster and those they effect with their magic to power terrible magics.

Below are two forms of ritual magic that can be learned by casters (perhaps after a quest) to allow more options for spellcasting.

### **Blood Magic**

Those wizards that learn the secrets of blood magic can cast ritualized versions of selected spells (as allowed by the DCC judge) to great effect. A simple ritual sacrifice of an animal can power a spell, but there are things that must be prepared in advance, this is not magic that can be haphazardly thrown about.

Blood magic can be learned from tomes such as 'The Valebrook Grimoire' or 'Nibenfaler Extrus', with a month of dedicated study, or from a spellcaster who knows such magic already. High Clerics in worship of Ildivir or Malotoch will often know the secrets of blood magic.

By adding the sacrifice of a creature of at least 1 HD, and the additional casting time of 1 round (per HD), and a silver ritual dagger or similar weapon specially prepared for blood magic, a caster may add a bonus to their casting check equal to +1 per HD of the creature sacrificed. The creature to be slain must either be willing, bound and helpless, or unconscious.

Alternatively, the caster knowledgeable in blood magic rites may sacrifice their own blood, using the ritual weapon to rend their arm or chest, and while less effective than ritual sacrifice of a creature, suffering 1d4 damage and adding 1 round of casting will add +1 to the casting check.

### **Gem Magic**

Using valuable gems in conjunction with spells can cause them to be held in stasis, to be released at a later time. This is a form of ritual magic, and only certain spells (as allowed by the DCC judge) can be stored within a jewel.

Gem Magic can be learned from the dwarven lords of Threegate, or discovered by studying the Standing Stones of Pelin for 7 nights of the full moon, or from spellcasters who know such magic already. The High Priest of Amon Tor has learned the rites of gem magic and can teach it to their faithful.

By using a finely cut jewel worth at least 50 gp, and an extra turn of spellcasting time, a 1<sup>st</sup> spell can be cast into it, allowing a delay of the spell effect for 1 turn. The release of the spell can be determined by the caster to be a specific effect (e.g., when Ashrak touches the gem), or upon a command word or phrase determined during casting spoken by the caster. The gem need not be held by the caster to have the spell released. If the conditions for triggering the spell are not met by the time limit allowed, the spell is lost. More valuable gems can hold more powerful spells (an extra 50 gp per spell level above 1st), and hold the nascent magic longer (a further 50 gp per extra turn). When the spell is released from the gem, it becomes clouded and brittle, ruining its intrinsic value.

Alternatively, if the caster knows both Write Magic as well as Gem Magic, they can inscribe a spell upon a gem as if they were scrolls, with a command word or phrase, or condition to release the spell rather than 'reading' the scroll.

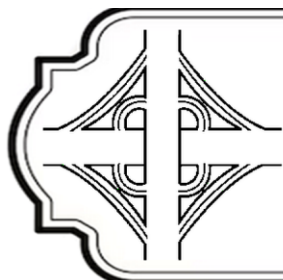


## **Order of Shan(n)a**

The Women Running DCC RPG

A podcast about the women in, of, and running Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG by Goodman Games.

<https://anchor.fm/orderofshanna/support>



# THE CRYPTIC CLOVERLEAF

MATT ROBERTSON

Welcome to the Cryptic Cloverleaf, my friends, where I will humbly attempt to DCC-ify your puzzles, traps, and riddles. What does it mean to add a little DCC to these things, you ask? Well, to make them scarier, trickier, more unpredictable, and filled with astonishment! Let's take a look at our first sample...

Consider any room in any module. Now add a huge, ornate mirror to that room. It doesn't necessarily need to be the main focus of the room, but this mirror does indeed contain a secret. Add an element or two that can only be seen in the reflection of the mirror.

For this example, we will assume there is an empty bed in our chamber. When the bed's twin is viewed through the looking glass, a humanoid shape can be seen occupying the bed under the blankets. Demonic glyphs can be seen in the mirror embroidered around the perimeter of the thick, wool, covering (DC 14 Int check). If deciphered, they offer the following enigma:

I am a vessel and a stone,  
When I am hot my tempter is known,  
I have no mercy when I am cold,  
If I am bad ill will shall unfold,  
I can be thirsty and have shot many eyes,  
In the dead of night as the curdling hound cries.

If the players believe or test the existence of the form under the bedcoverings then indeed they shall discover that there is something to be found. If they choose to ignore it, then nothing will bother them except for the gnawing emptiness of the unexplained.

**Slug, dimensional:** Init -4(SP); Atk acidic touch +4 melee (2d3 plus slime); AC 20(14); HD 4d8; MV 10'; Act 2d20; SP slime, rage; SV Fort +6, Ref +5(-6), Will +1; Crit M/d10.

Dimensional slugs are considerably larger than their underdark cousins. They have 4 stalks with oozing bulbous eyes on the end but are otherwise

massively large tubes of slime. Dimensional slugs are able to exist in multiple places at the same time, sending reflections of themselves to other planes of existence. With their true form usually being safe within the confines of their lairs, these reflections are invisible to the normal eye and anything coming in contact with the slug's form is usually consumed before it realizes what happened. Note that the AC and Ref save of the slug drop significantly if it is able to be seen and not use its invisibility as protection. See the table on page 427 of DCC RPG for the slime effect that should accompany a successful attack.

Due to being invisible, dimensional slugs almost always take their first actions with surprise, enveloping victims within the mucilaginous folds of their bodies. When recognized, they are extremely slow and easily escaped. Like their cousins, however, when they move they leave behind a viscous slime in their wake (see slime effect table, DCC RPG p. 427). Any creature crossing that path will suffer the consequences. When a dimensional slug's fractured form is defeated, it simply ceases to exist on that plane and the host slug undergoes a system shock that requires it to hibernate for several weeks. The true forms of dimensional slugs are much stronger than what is presented here (see Slug, Dimensional Host – coming soon).

Lastly, dimensional slugs will go into a berserker frenzy if introduced to **blood**, which is the answer to our riddle. Some demonic presence thought it amusing to mark one of this particular slug's favorite respites with a riddle that would enrage its senses. If blood is introduced to the bed coverings, the slug will go into a frenzy and gain the following modifiers: +5' MV, an additional +3 to hit for a total of +7, -4 to its AC, and 2d6 temporary hp (temp hp are used first if wounded).

The mirror is a mirror of true sight. If broken into pieces, the mirror loses its magical effect to see

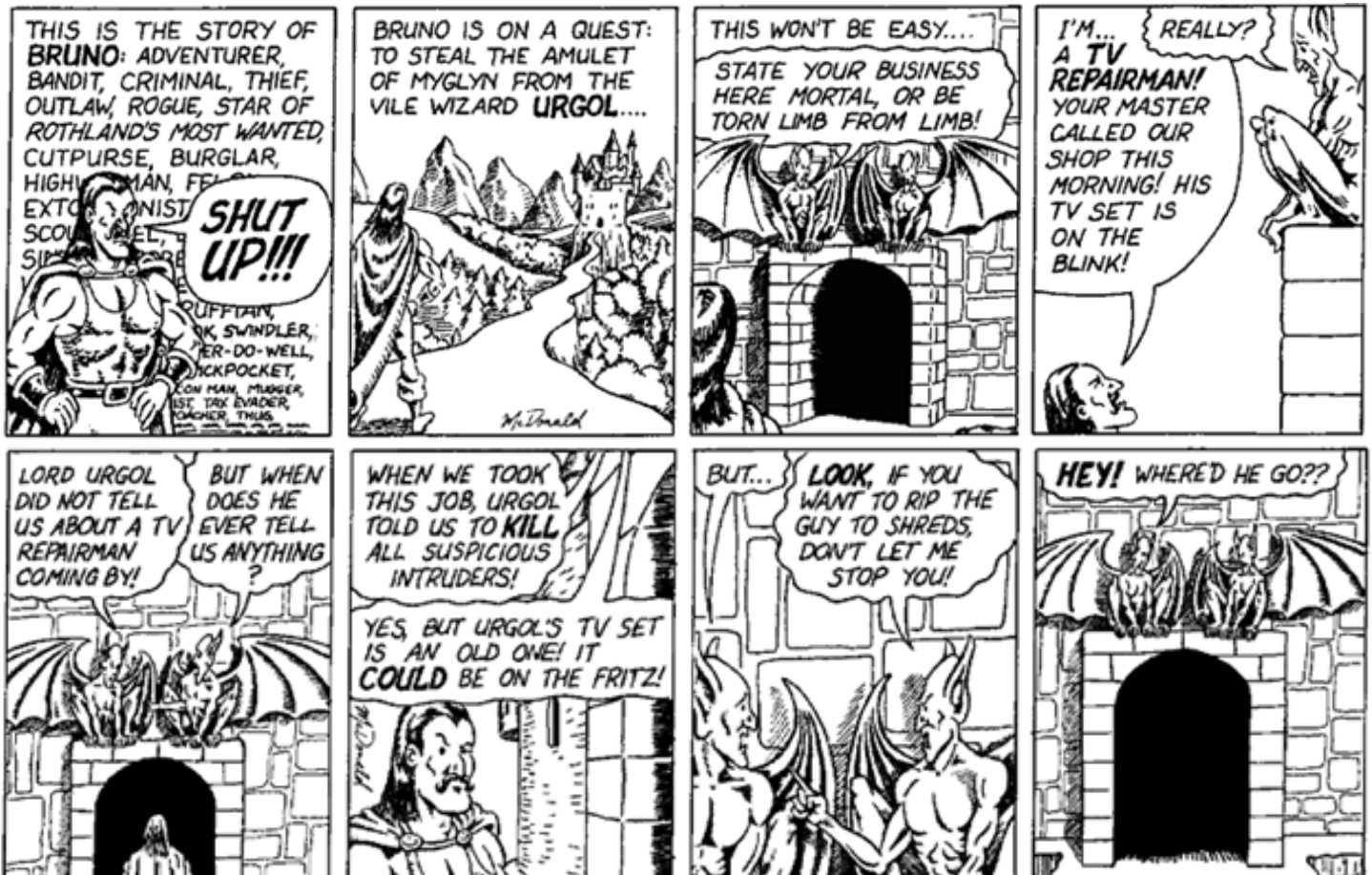


the true nature of things but can be ground into a powder to give a +2d bonus to divination spells like *detect invisibility*, *second sight*, etc. The slime from the slug can be collected by a thief with a DC 18 Handle Poison check, providing 4d3 applications. The demonically embroidered blanket can be used to give a +14 bonus to the spell *demon summoning* and will summon that particular demon (the blanket is also not consumed in this way and can be used repeatedly). Alternatively, it can be used as a one-time ingredient to give a +2d bonus to spells dealing with demonic energies like *eldritch hound*, *banish*, etc.



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# Tales from the Stacks

## Discovering Appendix N

### Gord Hanson

Below is a short selection of short stories by Fritz Leiber. After starting to read these I stumbled upon the Goodman Games page about him and repeatedly listened to the Sanctum Secorum podcast. For some, his stories may seem to have been beaten to death, but this is all new to me. I am new to a lot of these authors, as I had never opened a book by choice for two thirds of my life. It was a local used book shop that got me into some of the stories because of the gorgeous flashy covers and his take on the story. Let's discover them together.

#### **When the Sea-King's Away**

*Sword & Sorcery*. Pyramid Books, 1963

There's a hole in the sea! This short story follows Fritz Leiber's iconic characters Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser on a seaside adventure.

This scene opens as Fafhrd unwinds a tale of finding mermaids and damsels on their ship *The Black Treasurer*, only to encounter a mysterious tube and head down it to see what they find.

This story is an obvious continuation of the existing histories of Fafhrd and Mouser. Fritz published this short story some thirty years after their initial conception, so not much detail is given of the duo in this brief adventure. Instead, the focus is on the detail and imagery set of the environment they are in, as well as setting the scene and landscape. The banter between the two partners is quite fun, though the encounter here seemed a bit rushed.

In this tale there are three human-like creatures introduced, with non-human-like features. So, in summary, if you skip over the obvious history and backstory of this dynamic duo, one could dig in and see how this story also ties into MCC and the world of mutants.

#### **Friends and Enemies**

*If This Goes On*. Book Co. of America 1965

This short story deals with an odd pair of men getting run out of town in the far future of 1993. Watch out for another bomb! Never mind, it's just an earthquake. In this post-nuclear era we

follow Ellenby and Madson, a physicist and a poet.

This story seems to pick up near the end for Ellenby and Madson, as they are escorted out of town (before the mob wakes up). A teacher found out to be a nuclear physicist and a poet who sparks creativity are the last thing Ozona needs. As the two head towards New Angeles, they find they have a bit in common and run into a few hurdles along the way.

Overall, I would say the flow of this short story is similar to *When the Sea King's Away*, introductions-catch-chaos-resolution. This left me wanting more as I would have liked to see some stories of this era and timeline to give me a better grasp of how things in the post-nuclear timeline had gone. This could have lead into some further dialog on the hierarchy of the area and fleshed out some good opportunities for campaign-like settings.

#### **Spacetime for Springers**

*STAR Science Fiction Stories 4*. Ballantine, 1972

Fritz Leiber gives us a story of the life and times of a kitten with an IQ of 160. Gummitch, the kitten who has got it all figured out, is just waiting for his time (and coffee) to shine.

<Continued on pg.28 >





*A strange, blood-freezing story  
of an idol that wept on its throne,  
and a valiant barbarian from the  
fringes of an elder civilization*



*"Conan set his teeth  
and drove the  
sword deep."*

# The Pillar of the Pachyderm

by Morten Braten

COMPATIBLE WITH  
**DCC  
RPG**



# The Pillar of the Pachyderm

## A Level 3 DCC RPG Adventure

By Morten Braten

Conversion and cartography by Bob Brinkman

*The shimmering shaft of the tower rose frostily in the stars. In the sunlight it shone so dazzlingly that few could bear its glare, and men said it was built of silver. It was round, a slim perfect cylinder, a hundred and fifty feet in height, and its rim glittered in the starlight with the great jewels which crusted it. The tower stood among the waving exotic trees of a garden raised high above the general level of the city.*

- Robert E. Howard, *The Tower of the Elephant*

### Introduction

The Pillar of the Pachyderm is a low-level adventure based on Robert E. Howard's short story of a similar title. It is suitable for a group of 3<sup>rd</sup>-level PCs. For a challenge (and in keeping with the original story), players may attempt this adventure with a party consisting of only warriors and thieves.

### Judging Note

Although not absolutely necessary, it obviously helps if the DM has read *The Tower of the Elephant* by Robert E. Howard, prior to running this adventure. The adventure should be enjoyable even for those players who have read the original story; part of the challenge is to find Kag-Yosha and the Heart of the Elephant before the PCs stumble into Raya, the wizard of the tower.

### Background

In the temple district of Arenjun, Zamora's notorious City of Thieves, stands a glittering tower said to house a fabulous jewel called the Heart of the Elephant. The city's thieves avoid the tower and the jewel, fearing its master, the sorcerer Raya, who is said to be 300 years old.

The PCs, being brave or foolish (or both), have no such hesitations. They set out to steal the jewel from the wizard. Inside the tower, the PCs will learn why the jewel is called the Heart of the Elephant and how it turns out to be their key to destroying Raya.

The PCs should have little trouble getting directions to the tower. At the same time, they hear rumors of Raya's dark powers, his incredible age, and how his power is drawn from the magical jewel. No unwanted visitor has ever returned from the tower.

The PCs are able to pick up 1d3 rumors from the following table if they spend some time seeking out information. This provides ample opportunity for role-play, especially if the judge emphasizes the great fear everyone holds of the evil Raya.

Table TE 1: Rumors	
1d8	Rumor
1	The wizard of the Elephant Tower is over 300 years old. (True)
2	The tower was built in a single night using magic. (True)
3	Un-dead guardians stalk the gardens of the tower. (False)
4	Raya came to Zamora from Khitai, where he lived in a great jade palace with a hundred servants. (Partly true)
5	Even the king of Zamora fears Raya's power. The king drinks heavily to dampen his fears. (True)
6	The wizard has one known weakness: he can only die if he is slain with a silver dagger blessed by a priest of Ishtar. (False)
7	Raya once killed a foreign prince by turning him into a spider, and then crushing the spider under his heel. (True)
8	Re-roll (or judge's invention).

### Beginning the Adventure

#### THE GROUNDS

**Area G-1 – Outer Gardens:** The tower grounds are surrounded by two circular walls. Shrubbery grows thick outside the lower, or outer wall. The wall is only 8' high and requires no roll to climb.

The Royal Guard patrol the outer garden day and night. Every turn, there is a 1 in 4 chance that they discover the PCs. They will not bother with questions before

they attack, although at least one guard attempts to retreat to the tower to warn Raya of the intruders.

The guards are clad in studded leather armor and are resplendently equipped with silvered corselets, gaudily jeweled sword-hilts, and plumed helmets. There are a total of 24 guards present between the tower and its grounds.

**Royal guard (2d4):** Init +2; Atk longsword +4 melee (1d8); AC 14 (studded leather armor and shield); HD 2d8; hp 11 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; AL L; Crit III/d8.

**Area G-1 – Guarded Gate:** Two guards stand post at these gates at all times. They only open the gates for scheduled guests and tradespeople and do not willingly open the gates under any other circumstances.

**Royal guard (2):** Init +2; Atk longsword +4 melee (1d8); AC 14 (studded leather armor and shield); HD 2d8; hp 11 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; AL L; Crit III/d8.

**Area G-2 – Inner Gardens:** This garden is also surrounded by a wall. The wall here is 15' tall (to keep the lions in) and requires a DC 8 Climb Sheer Surfaces check to scale unaided. During the day, the gardens are also patrolled by the Royal Guard (see area G-1), although only from sunrise to sunset.

From sunset to sunrise, a pack of lions, normally kept caged beneath the tower (see area G-3), are released to prowl the gardens.

Should the tower come under attack during the day, the guards respond to intruders by first releasing the lions into the garden, and raising the alarm, before becoming personally involved.

**Area G-3 – Lion Pens:** Concealed within the shrub-beries here is a ramp descending into the pens where the lions are held during the day. The ramp ends at a reinforced door which may only be opened from the inside by using a lever in area D-2.

**Lion (1d5):** Init +5 (surprise); Atk bite +6 melee (1d6+2 plus grapple) or claw +6 melee (1d4+2); AC 14; HD 2d6; hp 10 each; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP rake, silent; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +3; AL L; Crit M/d8.

**Rake:** Upon a successful bite attack, the lion may immediately make a second attack roll and, if

successful, grapple its prey. In subsequent rounds, in lieu of making a new attack, the lion rakes its prey with its powerful back claws, inflicting 2d4+2 damage.

*Silent:* The lions have been cruelly muted, and bear the burn scars on their throats from when their roars were magically silenced forever. Unable to roar, or even growl, the lions are utterly silent and always attack with surprise when in the gardens.

## THE TOWER

Starlight and sunlight reflect from a great jeweled dome atop the tower. Each story is about 25' tall (including the stone in floor and ceiling; inner height is about 18'), and there are six stories, although this is not apparent from the outside. There are cleverly constructed doors and windows, but they are closed and not visible from the outside. The occupants of the tower breathe air that comes from above.

*Scaling the tower:* The walls of the tower are smooth and require a DC 27 Climb Sheer Surfaces check to ascend without the use of rope and grappling hook. Because of the tremendous height involved, PCs attempting to otherwise ascend to the top of the tower must succeed in an attack against AC 18 to throw and fasten a grappling hook to the balcony. Climbing up to the dome balcony then requires an ability check made against DC 10 (Strength or Agility, player's choice) at 50', 75', and 125'. Failure results in the PC plummeting earthwards and suffering 1d6 per 10' fallen (DC 13 Reflex save for half damage). Such a fall is likely fatal. PCs scaling the tower end up on the tower balcony (see area 5-2).

*Entering the tower from the ground:* Of course, the PCs might also choose to enter the tower from the ground level. They will need to fight, neutralize, or sneak past the gate guards (see area 1-1) and the guards on the lower floors. If any guards manage to sound the alarm, Raya is alerted and responds in force, after taking time to prepare himself with protective spells.

*Entering the tower via the dungeons:* Without aid from within, it is unlikely that the PCs will be able to muster the strength required to enter while still remaining undetected. There is no way to manually open the door from G-3 to D-2e from the outside, requiring it to be battered in (AC 18, hp 75). Such an effort, unless magically silenced, will immediately alert the entire tower to the PC's presence.

### **Taurus, Prince of Thieves**

At the judge's discretion, PCs within the inner gardens at night may encounter Taurus, the Nemedian Prince of Thieves. Taurus knows much about of the tower's background history (he knows 1d4+2 rumors from the rumors table and any further details that the judge cares to add from the original story).

The master thief is initially distrustful towards the party. He won't simply stand aside and let the PCs steal all the treasures of the tower for themselves, but neither will he join a party unless he feels he is properly compensated. If the party offends or threatens him, he leaves; but if sufficiently provoked, he waits for the right moment to sneak attack and use his black lotus dust against the offenders. As befits a Prince of Thieves, Taurus often swears by Bel, the Shemitish god of thievery.

*Taurus was as tall as the Cimmerian, and heavier; he was big-bellied and fat, but his every movement betokened a subtle dynamic magnetism, which was reflected in the keen eyes that glinted vitally, even in the starlight. He was barefooted and carried a coil of what looked like a thin, strong rope, knotted at regular intervals.*

- Robert E. Howard, *The Tower of the Elephant*

**Taurus, Prince of Thieves:** Init +2; Atk dagger +3 melee (1d4); AC 13; HD 4d6+4; hp 17; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Stygian black lotus powder (1 dose: 10'×10' cloud, DC 15 Fort save or die), Luck (13 points, d6 Luck die), thief skills (backstab +8, sneak silently +10, hide in shadows +9, pick pocket +5, climb sheer surfaces +9, pick lock +9, find trap +8, disable trap +5, forge document +4, disguise self +10, read languages +3, handle poison +8, cast spell from scroll d12); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C; Crit II/d16.

## **THE DUNGEON**

**Area D-1 – Great Hall:** *A large wooden table stands upon a floor of lapis lazuli. Upon the table are a dozen or so plates and half-empty wine goblets, as well as a pair of dice and a scattering of coins.*

This great hall is the living chambers of Raya's guardsmen. If the alarm has not been roused, there are 2d4 guards in this room. At night, when they are off

duty, they are unarmored. Scattered on the table are 2d10 sp.

It is worth noting that the guards are familiar with a number of different weapons and, should they be able to reach the armory (area D-4), they may grab supplemental arms.

**Royal guard (2d4):** Init +2; Atk longsword +4 melee (1d8); AC 14 (studded leather armor and shield) or 10 (unarmored); HD 2d8; hp 11 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; AL L; Crit III/d8.

**Area D-2 – Cells:** *Animal musk mixed with damp earth assails your nose as the door to this room opens. Appearing to be only partially finished, barred cell doors line the north wall and go around the bend to the east. The southern wall is rough, hewn from the living rock beneath the tower, with a dark passageway winding into the gloom to the south. A set of nine levers are set into the wall next to the door.*

These cells serve a dual purpose. In addition to keeping his prisoners here, Raya uses the cells as cages for the lions which patrol the gardens at night. The levers next to the door serve to work the latches of each cell door, with the 9<sup>th</sup> lever triggering the latches on all of the interior doors at once.

If alerted to intruders in the grounds above, the guards release the lions. If intruders manage to surprise the guards on the dungeon floor, they will release the lions into the tower itself to deal with the intruders.

Additionally, the judge might wish to place NPC prisoners in the empty cells (a-d) to be used as seeds for further adventures.

*Cells a-d: The prison cells currently contain nothing but empty chains and a few skeletal remains with cracked, yellowed bones.*

These cells are empty.

**Cell e:** This large cell is used to hold the lions during the day. They have a heavy bedding of straw on the floor flecked with bits of bone and gristle. A large metal door is on the north wall.

The door in the north wall is triggered by using the 8<sup>th</sup> lever on the wall next to the door. Attempting to force the door open from the inside requires a successful DC 15 Strength check (allow warriors and dwarves to add their deed dice).



**Lion (5):** Init +5 (surprise); Atk bite +6 melee (1d6+2 plus grapple) or claw +6 melee (1d4+2); AC 14; HD 2d6; hp 10 each; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP rake, silent; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +3; AL L; Crit M/d8.

*Rake:* Upon a successful bite attack, the lion may immediately make a second attack roll and, if successful, grapple its prey. In subsequent rounds, in lieu of making a new attack, the lion rakes its prey with its powerful back claws, inflicting 2d4+2 damage.

*Silent:* The lions have been cruelly muted, and bear burn scars on their throats from having their roars magically silenced forever. Unable to roar, or even growl, the lions are utterly silent and always attack with surprise when in the gardens.

*Cells f-g:* These cells, furthest from the view of the guards, have become infested with rats. These cells are collectively the home of a large swarm of rats. Should one cell be disturbed, rats from both cells will swarm to drive out the intruders.

**Rat swarm, large:** Init +4; Atk swarming bite +1 melee (1 plus disease); AC 9; HD 4d8; hp 24; MV 40' or climb 20'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'×20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, disease (DC 5 Fort save or additional 1d3 damage); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will -2; AL N; Crit M/d10.

**Area D-3 – Barracks:** *Sixteen beds are arrayed along the walls of this room, under which can be seen small chests, presumably containing personal belongings.*

Each chest contains mundane items, such as combs, mirrors, a few coins (1d8+2 gp), and a random piece of equipment (roll 1d24 on DCC RPG p. 73, Table 3-4).

**Area D-4 – Armory:** *This large area is dominated by several weapons racks, each holding an assortment of implements.*

Found on the weapons racks are the following: 2 battleaxes, 12 daggers, 10 longswords, 4 polearms, 7 short bows, and 80 arrows. Additionally, there is a +1 battleaxe with a silver wire-wrapped haft resting atop one of the racks (discovered by a successful Luck check while searching).

**Area D-5 – Guard Captain's Quarters:** *More nicely appointed than the spartan barracks without, this chamber is nicely appointed with a writing desk sitting*

*across from a comfortable looking bed. A drab rug lies on the floor and a footlocker sits against the south wall.*

The guard captain is found here unless an alarm has been raised. The writing table holds the expected accoutrements: a quill and ink, along with some ledger pages. Additionally, there are a number of larger parchment pages and a box of colored chalks. The ledger pages reflect the payments made to the royal coffers of Zamoria to cover the payroll of the guards.

Without the key (in the possession of the guard captain), the footlocker requires a DC 12 Pick Lock check to open. Inside are 3 wines of *very* fine vintage (each worth 120 gp), a leather pouch containing 600 gp and a pair of pearls worth 100 gp each, and three loose sketches of a rather prurient nature each signed by the subject of the sketch.

Concealed beneath the rug is a second group of ledger pages, also appearing to be the guard's payroll. Warriors and other PCs with military experience who succeed on a DC 10 trained Intelligence check will immediately realize that the pay rates shown here are higher than one would expect them to be. The guard captain has been siphoning funds from the guards' payroll for years, keeping this second set of books, and using the additional income to keep himself furnished with wine and women.

**Guard Captain:** Init +4; Atk longsword +6 melee (1d8+2) or dagger +6 melee (1d4+2); AC 17 (chainmail and shield) or 11 (unarmored); HD 4d8; hp 20; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N; Crit III/d8.

**Area D-6 – Latrine:** *This small chamber stinks of stagnant urine and filth.*

The sturdy door to the latrine is kept closed at all times.

**Area D-7 – Forbidden Vault:** *These heavy-looking bronze double doors are green with age, covered with cobwebs, and feature strange designs and carvings of demonic spiders.*

The doors are locked (DC 13 Pick Lock check to open) and are 2" thick, making them difficult to break down (AC 20, hp 30) and noisy.

*Inside the dark and unlit chamber, covered in more cobwebs, is a strange idol, 9 feet tall, carved of gray*

*stone and representing a man of Hyrkanian appearance.*

Raya has forbidden his guards to enter this room. While the idol appears to be made of solid stone, it is actually made of gold that has somehow been surrounded by unbroken stone. This may be detected by a dwarf with a successful DC 14 Underground Skills check. The origin, history, and true value of the statue is unknown and is left up to the judge to decide.

Lingering in this vault for more than 3 rounds draws the ire of a pair of ghosts. The spirits are those of a pair of Khitai warriors, clad in their ancient armor and bearing weapons.

**Ghost (2):** Init +2; Atk paralyzing touch +6 melee (paralyzed 1d4 hours, DC Fort save negates) or spectral blade +6 melee (1d4 physical abilities); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 20 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, immune to non-magical weapons; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C; Crit U/d6.

*Un-dead traits:* Ghosts are un-dead, and thus can be turned by clerics. They do not eat, drink, or breathe, and are immune to critical hits, disease, and poison. As un-dead, they are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, and *paralysis* spells, as well as other mental effects and cold damage.

## LEVEL 1

**Area 1-1 – Guard Post:** *This small chamber is flanked by two sets of 9-foot-tall bronze double doors, the sole visible point of entry into the tower.*

Both sets of doors are locked (DC 13 Pick Lock checks to open) and are 2" thick, making breaking them down difficult (AC 20, hp 30) and noisy. Three guards are always stationed here (and have the keys). In the event of an attack, two remain to hold off intruders while the third attempts to escape to raise the alarm.

**Royal guard (3):** Init +2; Atk longsword +4 melee (1d8); AC 14 (studded leather armor and shield) or 10 (unarmored); HD 2d8; hp 11 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; AL L; Crit III/d8.

**Area 1-2 – Grand Entrance Hall:** *A set of 9-foot-tall bronze double doors are set deeply in the stone walls here, looking nearly impregnable. Rich tapestries adorn the walls and catch the eye, but the room is dominated by a black stone statue of a giant spider which stands on a low dais to the north. In the center*

*of the tower a spiral staircase leads both down into darkness as well as further upwards into the tower.*

The statue is that of Zath, the spider god of the cult of Yedeth. Raya is a worshiper of the sinister god and has earned its favor in the past. When the last such dealing was concluded, he was gifted with this statue by other members of the cult of Yedeth.

Unbeknownst to the wizard, other members of the cult are jealous of his power and success and so crafted this cursed statue in an attempt to bring Raya to heel. The statue becomes animate during the night of the new moon, ready to attack the unwary. If the PCs are here at night, there is a 1 in 30 chance that the statue will allow them to get close before striking.

To the frustration of Raya's rivals, Raya is rarely found in his entryway, and thus has never been confronted by the animate statue.

**Cursed statue of Zath:** Init +6 (surprise); Atk bite +3 melee (1d6 plus poison); AC 16; HD 3d8+4; hp 28; MV 30' or climb 30'; Act 1d20; SP surprises 50% of time, poison (death, DC 10 Fort save negates); SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +0; AL C; Crit M/d10.

## LEVEL 2

**Area 2-1 – Lounge:** *The walls of this round sitting room are adorned with once-rich tapestries. The north tapestry bears with the image of an ancient Atlantean wizard, holding his hands aloft amidst spell casting. Four doors, each carved from massive pieces of ivory of unknown nature, are spread equally around the curved walls.*

The north tapestry is of Xor Gargothica, a powerful wizard from the lost ages of Atlantis. If facing the entryway of a wizard's tower, and activated, it will alert the wizard to all who enter. Raya is unaware of the tapestry's nature. The phrase, "*Awaken oh great Xor Gargothica, and watch over your humble apprentice,*" is delicately stitched into the tapestry, although it requires a successful Luck check (made with a +2d penalty) to notice it while casually examining the cloth. If aware of the magical nature of the tapestry, the penalty is reduced to +1d.

**Area 2-2 – Abandoned Bedchamber:** *Once a finely appointed bedchamber, this room smells of dust, decaying fabric, and rat filth. The furnishings here are in a state of utter disrepair.*

There is nothing of interest here; although, if the party or guards are being pursued, the furnishings here can

be used to barricade the door (requiring a DC 14 Strength check to push through).

**Area 2-3 – Kag-Yosha 's Prison:** *This large chamber has a domed golden ceiling with walls of green jade. The partially rug-covered floor is of ivory, matching the door. Smoke and the exotic scent of incense float up from a brazier on a golden tripod, behind which rests an idol on a sort of marble couch. Beside the idol is an altar of gold and ivory, upon which rests a huge crimson crystal.*

*The idol has the body of a man, naked and green in color, but with a head fashioned of nightmare and madness. Too large for the human body, it has wide flaring ears, and a curling proboscis, on either side of which emerge white tusks tipped with round golden balls. Its eyes are closed, as if in sleep...but it slowly begins to turn to face you.*

This is the prison of Kag-Yosha, the last of his kind. In his current state he is mangled, blinded, and broken. The crystal beside him is the Heart of the Elephant (worth 10,000 gp or more).

If the party approaches Kag-Yosha with kindness and respect, allowing it to "identify" them (by feeling their faces with his trunk), and he discovers that they can be trusted, the elephant-being begs for the PCs to kill him. He will instruct them to squeeze his heart's blood onto the Heart of the Elephant, empowering the stone. He tells them to take the stone to Raya and present it to him, telling the wizard, "Kag-Yosha gives you a last gift and a last enchantment." What is unsaid is that doing so will allow the PCs to attempt to imprison Raya.

On the other hand, if the PCs attack the elephant-being or behave disrespectfully, Kag-Yosha ignores them (killing him simply ends his misery, but if slain in combat he will obviously not help the party by enchanting the Heart).

**Kag-Yosha:** Init +0; Atk none; AC 12; HD 8d8; hp 4; MV 5'; Act 1d20; SP blind, telepathy (DC 20 Will save to resist), spellcaster (judge's discretion); SV Fort -3, Ref +0, Will +10; AL L; Crit N/A.

**Telepathy:** Kag-Yosha can reach into the minds of sentient beings and gather any information it wishes. A DC 20 Will save is required each round to prevent Kag-Yosha from entering a PC's mind. If blocked, it will not again attempt to enter that mind, but will not trust that PC.

**Area 2-4 – Map Room:** *On the walls of this room hang several large maps of Zamora, Shem, and Turan, including maps of major cities, caravan routes and oases.*

Close examination reveals that a few of the maps mark the suspected locations of treasure hoards, lost cities, and tombs. These maps may be used to point the PCs towards other great adventures, such as the Dark Tower of Set or others.

**Area 2-5 – Trapped Chamber:** The door to this room is locked and trapped with a poisonous needle. Discovering the trap requires a successful DC 12 Find Trap check and disarming it requires a DC 13 Disable Trap check. Failure to disable the trap triggers the needle, which inflicts 1 damage plus poison (lose 1d6 point of Stamina permanently). A successful DC 13 Fortitude save reduces this to a temporary loss.

The chamber itself is a simply-furnished sitting room with nothing of interest or value present.

### LEVEL 3

**Area 3-1 – Raya's Study:** *This room appears to be the archetypical wizard's study, with a white marble floor. The room is expensively furnished with rich silvered tapestries, two wooden divans with silken cushions, and a large ivory table.*

Concealed in a secret compartment in the eastern wall (requiring a DC 15 trained Intelligence check to find) are two small wooden boxes. Both boxes are trapped with poisonous needles, akin to that in area 2-4. Discovering and disarming either trap requires both a successful DC 12 Find Trap check and DC 13 Disable Trap check for each. Failure to disable either trap means that the needle has been triggered. The needle inflicts 1 damage plus poison (1d6 permanent Stamina). A successful DC 13 Fortitude save reduces the loss to temporary.

The first box contains a scroll inscribed with *forget and binding*. The second box contains a bronze circlet, set with an amber in the form of a spider, inscribed with ancient Zamoran letters and worth 500 gp. The furnishings of the room are worth an additional 500 gp.

**Area 3-2 – Library:** Raya's library contains a medium-sized collection of sorcerous tomes, each chained to the bookshelves. A table sits within reach of the shelves, allowing for study while discouraging anyone from removing the volumes without permission.

Unchaining any individual tome requires a DC 10 Pick Lock check. A turn spent searching the collection will turn up several titles of special interest. Among the titles are: *The Seven Curses of Khrosha*, *The Book of the Spider-God*, and *The Invocations of Zath*. These specifically-referenced tomes each contain 1d3 random wizard spells within their pages, as well as much interesting information regarding the spider-cult of Yezud and their god, Zath. The information contained in the latter tome holds enough wisdom that a supplicant may attempt to take Zath as a patron.

#### LEVEL 4

**Area 4-1 – Stairway:** *This round chamber is flanked by two doors. The first, to the southwest, is made of heavy iron and is both locked and visibly bolted from the outside. The metal portal seems to have been battered from the inside and bows out in a few places, looking as if it were struck by some great fist. The other door is artfully crafted of ebony, with a silver grinning skull in the center.*

The bolt on the southwest door (to area 4-3) requires a DC 12 Strength check to draw back, while the lock requires a DC 14 Pick Lock check to open. The door opposite (to area 4-2) magically swings open when approached within 5'.

**Area 4-2 – Raya's Chambers:** *These opulent quarters are lavishly decorated with rich Iranistani carpets and silken tapestries from Khitai depicting demons and devils. Ornate wooden chairs and divans, inset with gold are scattered about, furnishing the room, while a massively canopied four-poster bed dominates the space.*

Unless roused by the alarm, Raya, the wizard of the Elephant's Tower is here, slumbering in evil dreams induced by the yellow lotus.

The sundry furnishings of the room are collectively worth 600 gp to anyone able to cart them away. The bed, however, is too large to remove normally, and would require the use of *reduce* to accomplish. The bed has no extraordinary value other than as a curio. Of greatest value here is Raya's spell book, which includes all spells known by the wizard, plus 2 additional spells determined at random.

**Raya:** Init +1; Atk dagger +2 melee (1d4); AC 11; HD 5d4+4; hp 24; MV 30'; Act 1d20 + 1d14; SP spellcaster (+8 spell check: *charm person*, *chill touch*,

*force manipulation*, *magic missile*, *magic shield*; *levitate*, *mirror image*; *lightning bolt*); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +5; AL C; Crit I/d10.

**Area 4-3 – The Failed Experiment:** *The door to this chamber is ponderously heavy, made of stout iron six inches thick. The chamber is devoid of furnishing, decoration, and ornamentation. Broken chains hang from the wall, having been snapped by some great force. The inside of the door has been cratered by the repeated impact of massive fists.*

#### Raya, Wizard of the Pillar of the Pachyderm

Raya is a tall, gaunt old man. His eyes are cold and cruel when the sorcerer is awake; dilated and far-staring when he is intoxicated with the fumes of the yellow lotus. He dresses in silken robes and his voice is like the hiss of a cobra.

Although Raya is well-versed in arcane lore and magical spells, it is the magical jewel known as the Heart of the Elephant which is his true source of power.

Raya had traveled far and wide, learning black and forbidden magic, when he came upon a yellow-skinned people worshipping an elephant-headed being in the jungles of Khitai. Through trickery and magic he turned this godling, Kag-Yosha, into his slave and brought him back to Zamora in chains of steel and sorcery.

It is said that Kag-Yosha built Raya's tower in a single night, and that the Heart of the Elephant keeps Raya immortal – he is already over 300 years old.

The wizard is driven by a fiendish ambition and is feared by all. Even kings tremble at the mention of his name.

If the PCs have successfully negotiated with and/or freed Kag-Yosha from his terrestrial prison, Raya becomes the target of a magical trap set by Kag-Yosha. This means that if the PCs have the gem prepared by Kag-Yosha and can convince Raya to take it from them (easily accomplished with a DC 8 Personality check), he is painfully compressed and drawn into the gemstone, trapped forever (DC 18 Will save negates).

If Raya refuses the stone, or succeeds in his save, the PCs are in for trouble!



Raya used this room to attempt to imbue life into a creature he had fashioned from multiple limbs and mismatched body parts. He was only partly successful; his rituals have awakened a hideous amalgam of dead body parts with a small spark of unintelligent life. Raya has no control over the creature, and so has locked it away in this room. The flesh-beast attacks anyone entering the room, lashing out with its disquieting number of arms.

**Flesh-beast:** Init +2; Atk slam +5 melee (1d6+6); AC 16; HD 4d8+4; hp 30; MV 30'; Act 3d20; SP un-dead, bear hug; 360° vision; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C; Crit G/d4.

*360° vision:* The creature can see in all directions simultaneously, rendering it impossible to surprise without magical means.

*Bear hug:* If the creature successfully strikes a single target with two slam attacks in a round, its opponent must succeed at an opposed Strength check against its 20 Strength (+5). Failure means they have been trapped in a bear hug. Each round thereafter, the creature crushes them for 1d6+6 damage and is still free to lash out with its third arm. The victim can attempt to escape each round using an action for an additional Strength check.

*Un-dead traits:* The flesh-beast is un-dead, and thus can be turned by clerics. They do not eat, drink, or breathe, and are immune to critical hits, disease, and poison. As un-dead, they are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, and *paralysis* spells, as well as other mental effects and cold damage.

## LEVEL 5

**Area 5-1 – Trapped Treasure Chamber:** *Massive iron-reinforced double doors divide this chamber from the terrace beyond. The door is covered with sigils of a disquietingly magical nature. Heaped within the room are Iranistani and Khitai silks. Four, ironbound chests sit midst the piled cloth.*

The door is locked (DC 14 Pick Lock check to open) as well as magically protected. The first person other than Raya to attempt to open the door is struck by crimson energies (1d7 damage, DC 13 Fort save for half).

The treasure here is not modest: Iranistani carpets (400 gp), Khitai silks (700 gp), a small coffer containing a potion of heroism (DCC RPG p. 224), an ornately

carved wooden box worth 10 gp and holding 2 potions of healing (see DCC RPG p. 224), and several chests containing 4,000 sp in Kothian coins and gold from the mines of Ophir (700 gp).

An abyssal spider guards this treasure room, initially concealed in the shadows near the ceiling. It will drop down from the ceiling, swinging from its webbing, to ensnare its prey.

**Abyssal spider:** Init +5; Atk bite +6 melee (1d6+2 plus poison) or web +6 melee or missile fire (special); AC 14; HD 3d6; hp 15; MV 40' or climb 40'; Act 2d20; SP poison (DC 12 Fort save or death in 1d4 rounds), spider web, web-swing; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +3; AL C; Crit M/d8

*Spider web:* Abyssal spiders may spray their webbing at a target up to 50' away. A creature that is struck by or touches the web is held fast, able to escape only by a DC 15 Strength or Agility check. The web can be burned off (possibly wounding captured creatures) or hacked through with a very sharp blade by a creature not already caught (AC 16, 5 hp to free one creature). A dull blade or blunt object will simply become entangled; even a strike with an exceptionally sharp blade has a 25% chance of entangling the weapon.

*Web-swing:* When striking from the ceiling, the abyssal spider uses its webbing to swing down into combat. The spider may use all or part of its movement prior to or after making a bite attack. When swinging into combat, the spider may not target victims with its webbing.

**Area 5-2 – Outer Terrace:** *The terrace here is surrounded by a gem- and crystal-encrusted wall. It is flat, composed of some dark blue substance, set with gold that catches the light, so that the whole looks like a wide sapphire flecked with shining gold-dust. At the center of the terrace there an entrance into the tower, a single golden door of gold, its surface cut in scales, and crusted with jewels that gleam like ice.*

Attempts to scale the tower, if successful, will end here on the terrace which juts out 20' from the main tower walls.

The wall surrounding the terrace is inset with a myriad of precious stones. For every turn spent chipping them loose, the party gathers 1d7×20 gp worth of stones. However, taking such an action bears the risk of alerting any guards on the grounds (Luck check to

avoid alerting the guards), who will enter the tower to quietly assemble Raya's forces.

## LEVEL 6

**Area 6-1 – Observatory:** *Several large windows in this chamber provide a great view of Zamora's night sky. A pair of strange-looking telescopes are pointed upwards into the heavens.*

It is here that Raya has been studying the movement of the planets and the stars. Using magically-crafted telescopes, the wizard has been trying to discover the green planet Kag – which, according to Raya's prisoner, Kag-Yosha, circles on the outer rim of space. He has so far been unsuccessful.

**Area 6-2 – Shrine to Zath, the Spider God:** *A black, three-pronged pedestal stands in the middle of the room, surrounded on all four sides by curtains of filmy, finely spun cobwebs. Atop the pedestal is a silver amulet set with a yellow-amber stone.*

Raya is a worshipper of Zath, the spider-god of Yezud and this is a shrine to that dark being. The cobwebs shrouding the pedestal prevent passage, the gossamer threads are as resilient as steel and require a DC 16 Strength or Agility check to bypass. Failure results in the PC becoming entangled in the webbing, unable to take any action other than attempting to break free. The phrase, "Ia! Zathar!" (known only to Raya) will allow a being to pass through the webbing unhindered.

Inside the amber of the amulet is a tiny black spider. For a cleric of the spider-god, the amulet grants a +1d bonus to all spellcasting (including *turn unholy* and *lay on hands*). Should a non-believer be so bold as to wear this amulet of Zath, they lose 1d4 Stamina per day, as their abdomen fills with feasting spiders (DC 15 Will negates; may attempt one save per day). Raya cannot use it himself and keeps it for future bargaining with a priest of Yezud.

Removing the amulet from the pedestal releases a swarm of spiders from within a hidden hollow in the pedestal.

**Spider swarm:** Init +5; Atk swarming bite +1 melee (1 plus poison); AC 11; HD 4d8; hp 24; MV 40'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'×20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, poison (DC 7 Fort save or additional 1d4 damage); SV Fort +0, Ref +10, Will -2; AL N; Crit N/A.

**Area 6-3 – Storage Room:** *A dozen crates, each marked "incense", are stacked in this room.*

The incense stored in this room has little value. If all 12 crates are hauled away, they are worth 120 gp total.

**Area 6-4 – Alchemical Laboratory:** *This chamber reeks of brimstone and other alchemical reagents. Several worktables are scattered about the chamber, each lined with beakers, alembics, and other alchemical tools.*

This is a very advanced, and functional, alchemical lab. Making use of the materials in this lab for the brewing of potions or other alchemical workings grants a +2 bonus (increasing to +4 if the alchemist has *arcane affinity: transmuter*).

**Area 6-5 – Storage Room:** *The room is lined with shelves holding various mundane supplies used in the art of wizardry – candles, chains, chalk, ink and paper, oils and powders, wax, spare robes, and the like.*

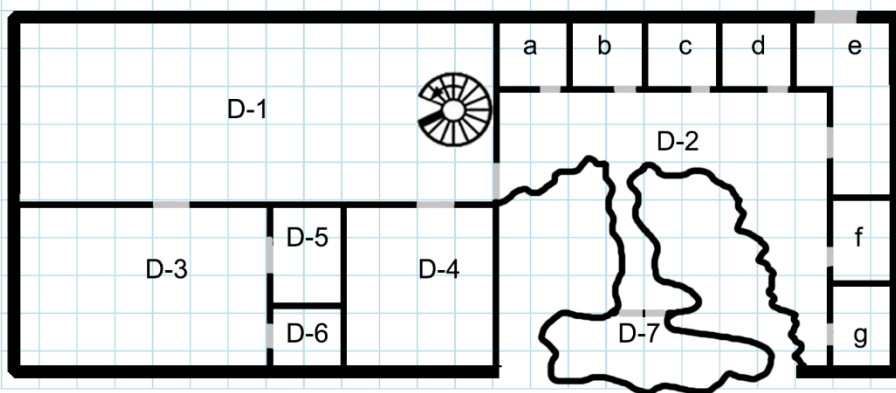
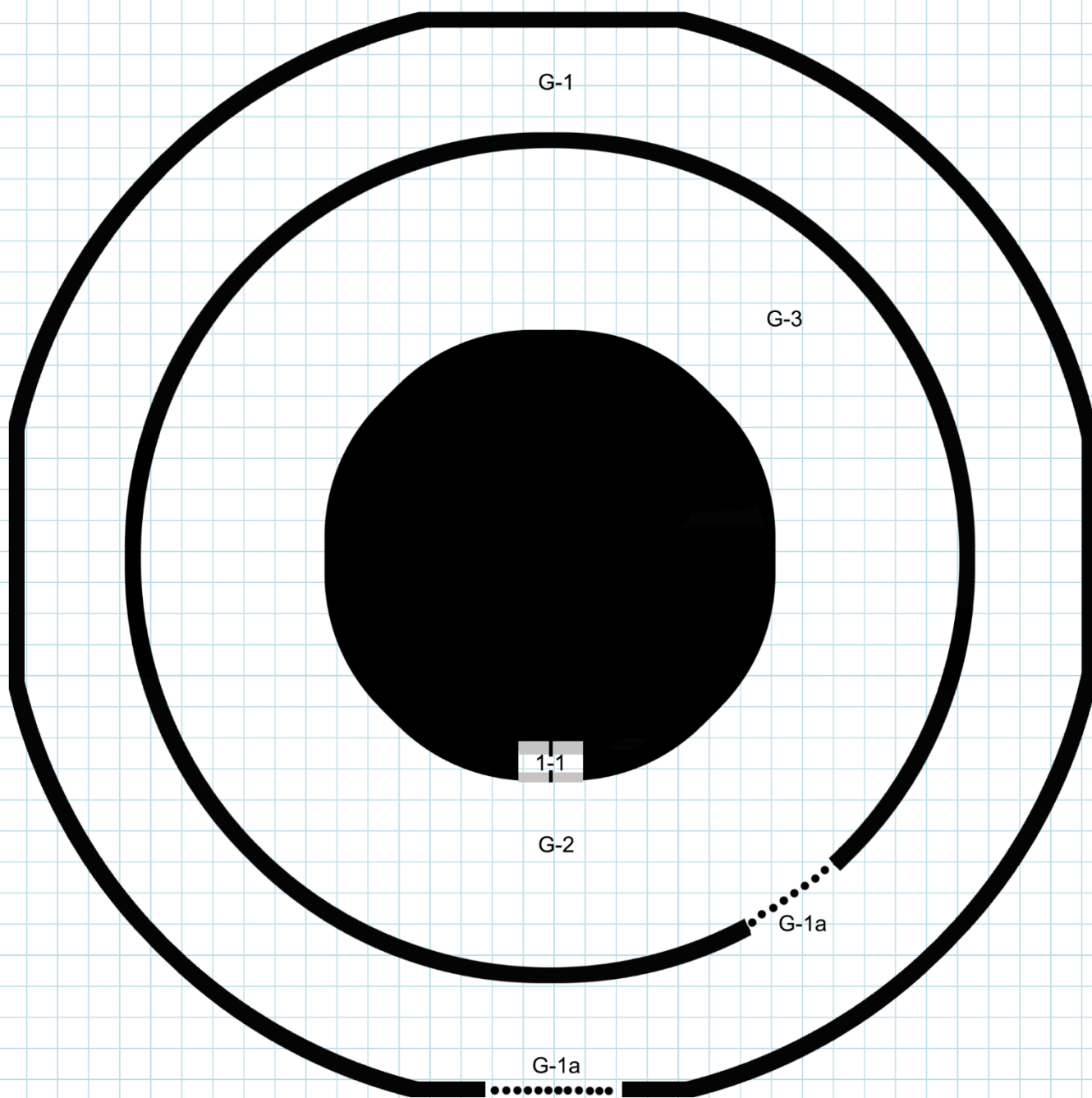
Thorough searching (which requires a DC 12 trained Intelligence check) reveals a silver ritual dagger (worth 30+1d20 gp to a collector of such materials) and 1d3 pearls (each worth 25 gp).

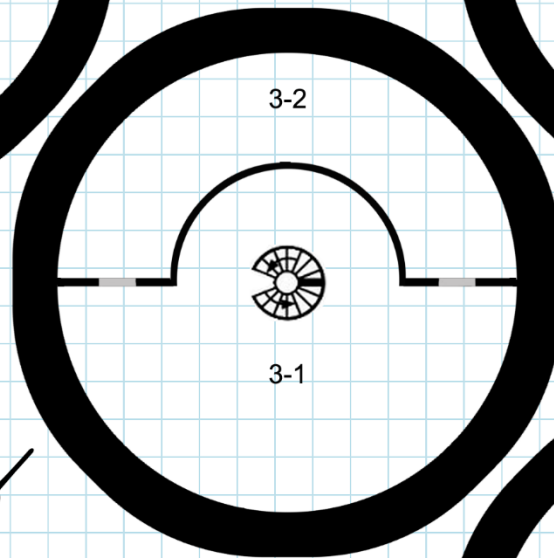
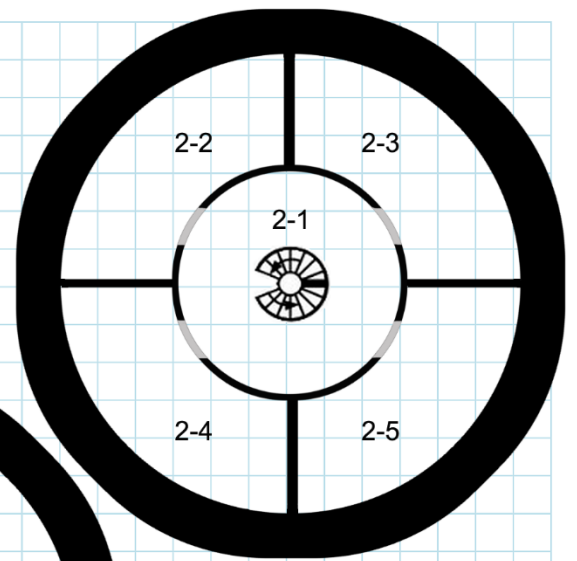
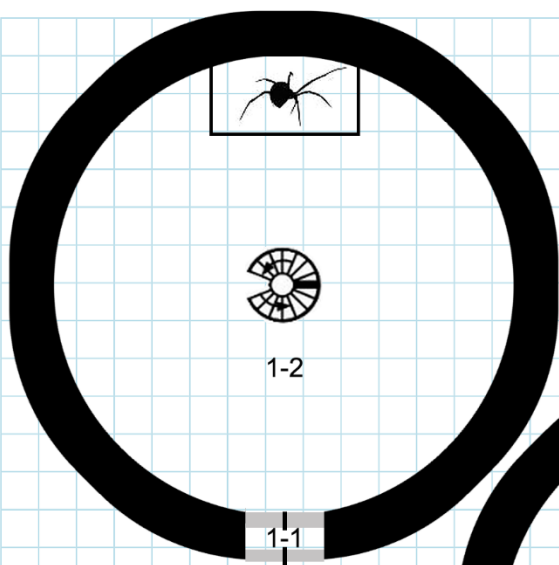
## Concluding the Adventure

Raya is a powerful wizard and may kill the PCs whether they have Kag-Yosha's enchanted heart or not. The outcome of the adventure depends on the PCs' tactics, luck, and timing. At the judge's discretion, since the tower was built using sorcery, it may collapse if the wizard is killed – the ruins becoming forever cursed, or haunted, by strange creatures from outer realms come to claim their due from the late Raya's corpse.

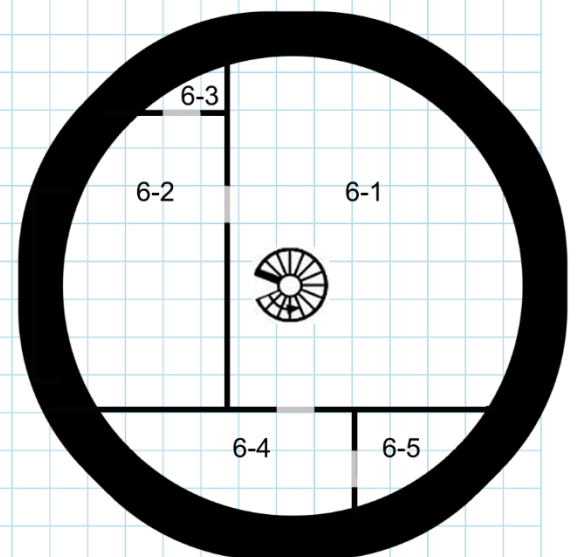
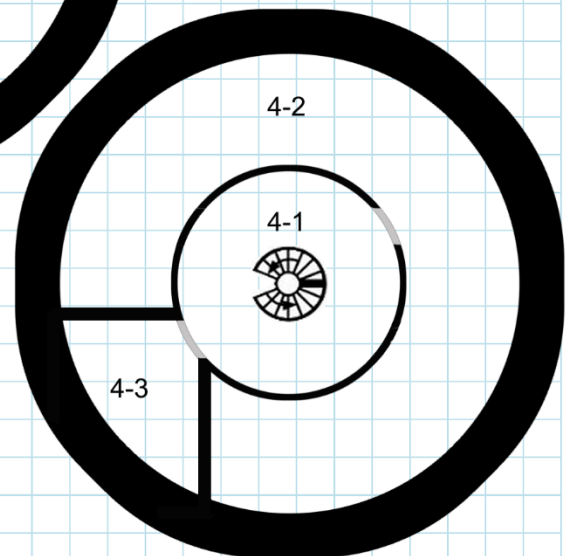
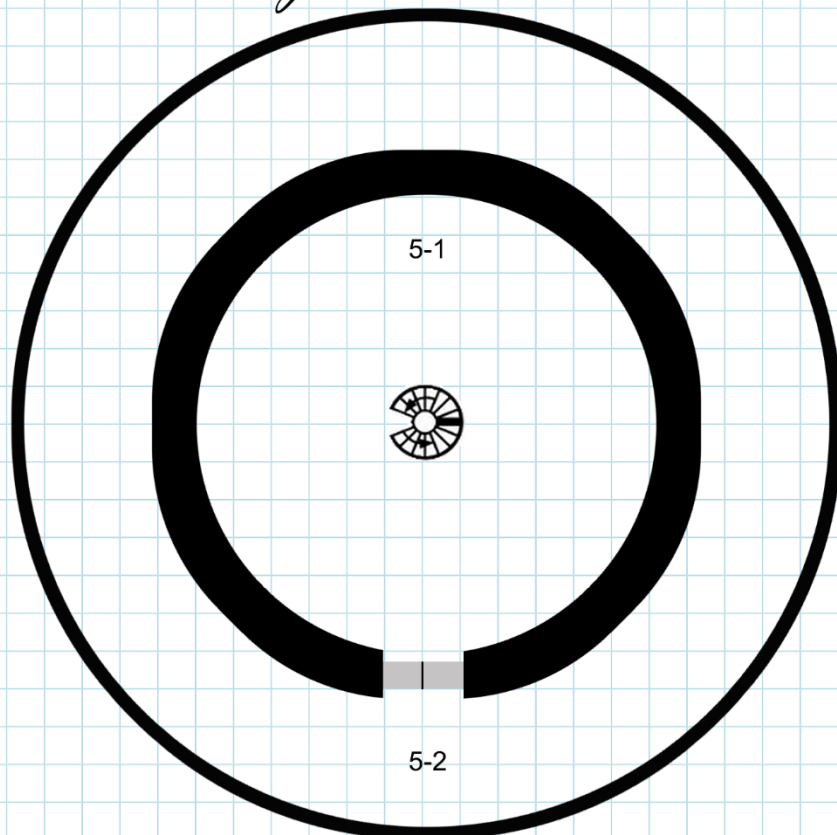
Of course, eventually someone will brave even those challenges, to plunder the gemstones from the outer walls – after all, Arenjun is the City of Thieves.

Beyond the experience and treasure gained during the adventures, if the PCs free Kag-Yosha and use the Heart of the Elephant to trap Raya, they should be awarded 2 points of Luck (to a maximum of 18).





*The Pillar of  
the Pachyderm*





# **Mysteries of Mhu Thulan**

## **The New Edge of Sword & Sorcery**

### **Michael Harrington**

Welcome to Mysterious of Mhu Thulan, where we dive deep into the dynamic world of Sword and Sorcery literature. Whether you're a lifelong fan or a curious newcomer, we're here to guide you through the thrilling and ever-evolving landscape of this genre.

First, let's clarify what we mean by Sword and Sorcery. Coined by Fritz Lieber and Michael Moorcock, this genre is characterized by lean, action-packed, and weird writing that emerged from the pulps of the 1930s. While it has a rich history and legacy, the genre struggled in the 1980s with tired tropes and clichés that threatened to obscure its potential.

However, despite being near death, Sword and Sorcery survived, and in the mid-2000s, Howard Andrew Jones and his fellow authors coined the term the [New Edge of Sword and Sorcery](#). The New Edge seeks to restore the fantastic sense of the genre while moving beyond those tired tropes and clichés. It's about finding inspiration in the pulps without relying on pastiche, creating new and original characters, and writing without irony. And the best part? A new generation of talented authors is bringing this genre back to life with exciting new directions and perspectives.

Join us on this thrilling journey as we explore the New Edge of Sword and Sorcery wherever it may be found. From the pages of *Tales from the Magician's Skull* to the Whetstone Tavern and beyond, we'll guide you through tales of dark magic, epic battles, and heart-stopping adventure. No matter what you're looking for, we've got you covered.

So come along for the ride and discover the exciting possibilities of Sword and Sorcery in this new era. We're excited to share our love for the genre with you and can't wait to see what adventures await.

For this inaugural article I am reviewing Issue #0 of [The New Edge Sword and Sorcery Magazine](#). This fascinating and ambitious project was born out of passionate and thoughtful discussions among members of the [Whetstone Tavern Discord server](#), who were seeking to expand and diversify the audience for Sword and Sorcery literature. The resulting publication is a celebration of the genre, filled with stunning artwork, engaging essays, and thrilling fiction that show-cases a range of voices and perspectives.

What's most impressive about the *New Edge Sword and Sorcery* magazine is that it was created entirely through the collaborative efforts of a group of dedicated enthusiasts. These individuals worked without pay to bring their vision to life, driven solely by their love of the genre and their desire to make it more accessible and thought-provoking for readers.

So why should you read this magazine? For starters, it offers a refreshing and exciting take on Sword and Sorcery that breaks free from tired tropes and clichés. From the thought-provoking essays to the thrilling fiction, every page of the magazine is packed with fresh ideas and perspectives that will challenge and inspire you. And, of course, the stunning artwork that accompanies each piece is worth the price of admission alone.

Overall, the *New Edge Sword and Sorcery* magazine is a must-read for anyone passionate about this genre. It represents a powerful example of what can be achieved through collaborative effort, creative thinking, and a deep love of storytelling.

Let's take a quick look at what's waiting for you in the pages of Issue #0:

Issue #0 of *New Edge Sword and Sorcery* was a passion project. It was also an experiment - to see whether or not there was an appetite for a magazine that focused on Sword and Sorcery literature that had as its aim to take the genre existing virtues and merge them with inclusivity, a supportive creator community, and enthusiastic promotion of the works.

Judging that Brackenbury and others have launched a Kickstarter to fund the creation of Issues #1 and #2 of the magazine, I'd say that there was a lot of interest. So much so that even Sword and Sorcery icon Michael Moorcock is contributing a tale to the project.

Issue #0, while slim, contains some noteworthy pieces of fiction and essays. Among them are six original stories that draw inspiration from classic sword and sorcery tales, including "The Curse of the Horsetail Banner", and more traditional sword and sorcery fare, like "Old Moon Over Irukad" by veteran author David C. Smith. There are also meditative and lyrical stories, such as "The Ember Inside" by Remco van Straten and Angeline B. Adams, and "The Beast of the Shadow Gum Trees" by T.K. Rex.

While all of the stories have their merits, some stand out more than others. In particular, "The Curse of the Horsetail Banner" by Daniel R.A. Quiroque, and "Vapors of Zinai" by J.M. Clarke, are two exceptional pieces of writing. Quiroque's story is reminiscent of Harold Lamb's work and takes readers on a journey through the Steppes while grappling with complex moral dilemmas. Clarke, on the other hand, invokes Robert E.

Howard's style while introducing a compelling new hero, Kyembe of Sengezi, and his world of ancient gods and dark sorcerer priests.

Issue #0 of *New Edge Sword and Sorcery* also contains 7 essays that cover various topics related to the New Edge Movement.

These essays cover various topics about the genre from Howard Jones's origin story about the New Edge movement and Brian Murphy's monograph on the outsider archetype in *Sword and Sorcery* to discussing gender performativity in Robert E. Howard's *Dark Agnes* and the great C.L. Moore's creation, *Jirel of Joiry*.

For me, the latter two essays, by Nicole Emmelhainz and Cora Buhlert, respectively, are the standouts in the issue.

Emmelhainz floored me with her scholarship and introduced me to tales of Howard that I had yet to encounter – but now eagerly want to read using Emmelhainz's lens. Buhlert, for her part, does an excellent job of focusing needed attention and praise on a little known but highly influential sword and sorcery writer – especially drawing attention to how Moore used *Jirel* and the genre to explore such hard topics as sexual and physical abuse toward women.

If Issue #0 is any indication, the New Edge is heralding a resurgence of *Sword and Sorcery*. This volume might have been a passion project but it contains some damn good yarns and essays. I highly encourage you to check out the volume available for free on the magazine's website, <https://newedgeswordandsorcery.com/>.

<Continued on pg. 28>



# APPENDIX N (NIGHTMARES)

DANIEL J. BISHOP & BOB BRINKMAN

## The Joy of Swarms

By Daniel J. Bishop

Swarms are some of the most dangerous opponents you can encounter...not because of the individual prowess of the swarm members but because they are cumulative. Sword, bow, and axe do little to dispel a swarm of yellowjackets, and even firearms cannot stop a tide of army ants. The mightiest warrior in the kingdom is no match for several hundred rats.

It is not surprising, therefore, that swarms made the cover of several pulp-era adventure magazines. But what if you want to use some of these covers as the basis for an encounter or two in your adventure? The core rulebook offers statistics for four types of swarm: mundane bats, vampiric bats, insects, and rats. It does not, sadly, offer a swarm-specific Critical Hit table. If the judge uses Table M (Monsters) for critical hit effects, the results are often absurd within the context of the encounter. We will rectify that here.

In general, DCC swarms are enough creatures to occupy a 20-foot by 20-foot space. They take half damage from normal weapons and non-area effect attacks. When they attack, they make a single d20 roll (plus modifiers) against all targets in their area. Although swarms usually have a low number of Hit Dice, taking reduced damage from most attacks really makes them hard to disperse.

Every swarm in the core rulebook also has a special effect if it hits, requiring a saving throw to avoid it. In the case of rats and bats, this is the potential for disease. In the case of insect swarms, this is a venomous sting that can deliver additional damage. For some reason, bats care more interesting/diverse diseases than rats, but you can easily change that in your own adventures!

So far so good. Now, let's add a few swarm types from pulp-era magazine covers! If some of these seem silly to you, well, you are not alone.

**Crab swarm:** Init +2; Atk swarming attack +1 melee (1d3 plus shred); AC 14; HD 6d8; MV 20' or swim 20'; Act special; SP attack all targets within 20'x20' space, shred (Reflex DC 10 or 1d3 extra damage), half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d12.

Crab swarms are far more dangerous to slow characters or those who have been disabled due to injury. They attack with claws and bite, and shred flesh from opponents who do not dislodge them quickly enough. Some crabs also have a 20' climb speed.

Crab swarms occur in real life, although not usually as dramatically as they do in pulp fiction. There is some evidence that aviator Amelia Earhart, having sustained injuries in a crash landing, was eaten by giant coconut crabs. The most effective use of crab swarms I have encountered was in *Allan Quatermain* by H. Rider Haggard. I attempted to reproduce the effect in an encounter in *Stars in the Darkness* and in *Chanters in the Dark*. Clark Ashton Smith's *The Master of the Crabs* is another inspirational source.

**Flying squirrel swarm:** Init +4; Atk swarming bite +1 melee (1d3); AC 11; HD 3d8; MV 30' or climb 30' or glide 40'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'x20' space, half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d10.

This is a bit of silliness, but it might make a good encounter in a forest of evil repute. Flying squirrels are not normally dangerous. Even the few reported "attacks" seem pretty tame. But for some reason there may be large flying squirrels which apparently have a taste for meat. Do with it what you will.

**Lizard swarm:** Init +2; Atk swarming bite +4 melee (1d2); AC 11; HD 3d8; MV 30' or climb 20' or swim 20'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'x20' space, half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d8.

10% of lizard swarms carry a venomous bite, requiring a DC 5 Fort save to avoid 1 point of temporary Stamina damage (heals normally).

Lizard swarms are common enough in role-playing games, Individual lizards can and do bite humans, and some of them may have bites that are painful, or even dangerous, but you are extremely unlikely to ever encounter lizards attacking *en masse* in real life.

**Monkey swarm:** Init +4; Atk swarming bite +5 melee (1d5 plus disease); AC 13; HD 8d8; MV 40' or climb 40'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'x20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, fling feces and sticks, disease (see below); SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d12.

Monkey bites are unfortunately not at all uncommon. Monkeys can carry diseases such as tetanus and rabies. The judge is recommended to use the disease table for bats in the core rulebook. You could even pump up the risk, considering the virulence of some monkey bites, but if you do this you should make sure that the players have some way of knowing that monkey bites are dangerous.

An arboreal monkey swarm can also fling feces, sticks, overripe fruit, and the like at targets prior to melee attacks. These attacks allow the swarm to target all creatures in a 30'x30' square, which must make Will saves (DC 5 +1 per additional round) to avoid fleeing the area. Of course, the monkeys can move faster than most targets, so fleeing is seldom effective. A monkey swarm can use this tactic to drive targets toward preferred attack sites, or away from their territory.

**Piranha swarm:** Init +0; Atk swarming bite +5 melee (1d3 plus frenzy); AC 15; HD 7d8; MV swim 40'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'x20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, water protects from fire-based spells, frenzy; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d12.

This doesn't have to be just piranha; this can be any relatively small but dangerous fish the judge desires. Are there swarms of freshwater eels? If the judge wants them, there are! Obviously, the easiest way to avoid these dangers is to not get into the water in the first place. Once you are attacked, the easiest way to survive is to get out of the water.

Water protects piranha swarms from fire-based magic and similar effects, granting a +2d shift on the dice chain to saving throws and reducing any damage suffered to one-quarter. The judge may rule that the medium allows electricity-based spells to affect all targets in range (including any potential PCs), and cold-based spells to affect all targets in half normal range, so long as they are at least partly in the water.

When characters are successfully attacked by the swarming bite of piranha, they must succeed in a Luck check, or the piranha attack in a frenzy that round, doing an additional 1d5 damage to all targets that failed their Luck check. For creatures without Luck scores, assume a base score of 10. Particularly cruel judges may have "exploding" frenzy damage. Each time a "5" is rolled, add an additional 1d5 damage. In this way, cattle - and adventurers! - may be stripped to the bone in seconds.

**Serpent swarm:** Init +5; Atk swarming bite +2 melee (1d3 plus venom); AC 10; HD 6d8; MV 40' or climb 20' or swim 30'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'x20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, venom; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d12.

Crack open the core rulebook and pick your favorite snake venom from Appendix P. If the serpent you want isn't there, you will find a few additional options in *50 Fantastic Functions for the D50* ...less than half of the options included therein are serpent venoms, though, because the article I wrote for that book details venoms from spiders, reptiles, insects, and even mammals.

If you have not had a chance to check out *Primal*, it comes highly recommended as a DCC-type adult animated series. And by "adult" I do not mean risqué, I mean that it deals with strong themes and violence. Anyway, the second episode of the first season is "River of Snakes",



and despite being drawn almost cartoonishly, the sense of horror is effective.

**Spider swarm:** Init +2; Atk swarming bite +1 melee (1 plus venom); AC 9; HD 4d8; MV 20' or climb 20'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'×20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, venom; SV Fort +0, Ref +10, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d10.

As with the previous swarm, you can find potential venom effects in Appendix P of the core rulebook or in *50 Fantastic Functions for the D50*. Or you could simply choose to have a DC 5 Fort save to avoid an additional 1d4 damage. Spider swarms are not going to have webs strong enough to capture PCs, but they may impede vision or slow characters down.

For other versions of the spider swarm, see *Tales From the Magician's Skull #1* and *Both Foul and Deep*.

1d3 or even lower. Turtles with softer shells might even have a lower AC.

**Weasel swarm:** Init +3; Atk swarming bite +3 melee (1d4 plus blood drain); AC 12; HD 6d8; MV 40'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'×20' space, half damage from non-area attacks, blood drain (any target wounded by the swarm takes an additional 1 damage per round until entire swarm is killed or dispersed); SV Fort +1, Ref +8, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d12.

For some reason, swarms in these covers love attacking anyone who ventures into the water, even if the creatures attacking are not normally aquatic. Nonetheless, in a world where some might bond with Mulferret, Queen of Weasels, things like this just might happen. In fact, I think I included weasel swarms in her write-up, and as I do not have the book in front of me at the moment, they may be different.

**Final Note:** Swarm Criticals and Fumbles  
When a swarm rolls a nat 20, that is a crit against everyone. That is, perhaps, a bit over the top and breaks suspension of disbelief just a little. I recommend that, if a swarm rolls a 20, each character is given a Luck check to avoid the critical effect. Each character who fails has a critical effect rolled, so that everyone is not always the recipient of the same effect.

**Turtle swarm:** Init -2; Atk swarming bite +3 melee (1d5); AC 20; HD 5d8; MV 5' or swim 20'; Act special; SP bite all targets within 20'×20' space, half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +7, Ref +2, Will -2; AL N; Crit SW/d12.

I took this idea from a pulp-era men's magazine cover where the turtles could apparently leap up from the water, and I was tempted to give them an extra ability where a hit requires a DC 5 Will save to avoid fainting for 1d5 rounds.

As with piranha swarms, the easiest way to deal with these is to get out of the water if you can. Easier said than done if you are trekking through a swamp. Needless to say, although turtles can bite - and snapping turtles can sever digits - being attacked by a swarm of turtles isn't something you need to worry about in real life. Well, all of these stats are a bit more gameist than realist.

If your swarming turtles are not large, snapping-turtle types, consider reducing the damage to

When a swarm rolls a 1, that would be a fumble in all of its attacks. Rather than trying to figure out what that means, consider having the swarm just break of its attacks and/or disperse. A 5% chance per round of getting out of a swarm attack alive, just by luck, might not be realistic, but it is true to the nature of pulp fiction.

Table 9-10a: Swarm Critical Hit Matrix

Swarm HD		Swarm HD	
Less than 1	SW/d3	4	SW/d10
1	SW/d5	5	SW/d10
2	SW/d7	6	d10
3	SW/d8	7+	d12

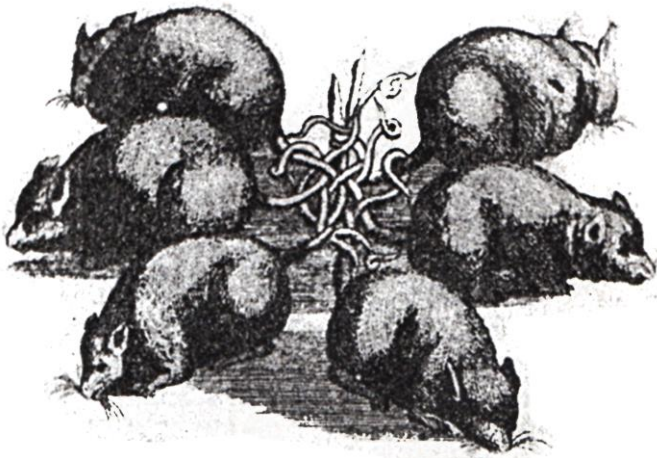


Table SW: Swarms	
Die Roll	Critical Result
1 or less	Tangled in your hair! Some part of the swarm becomes momentarily entangled in your hair, beard, clothing, etc. You drop to the bottom of the initiative count as you drive it away!
2	Some part of the swarm gets under your feet. You must succeed in a DC 10 Reflex save or fall prone.
3	Unnerving! The swarm crawling all over you causes a -2 penalty to all attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks until the swarm is dispersed.
4	Sensitive location! Some part of the swarm bites/stings you in a particularly sensitive spot. +1d3 damage.
5	Virulent sting! If there is a save to avoid additional effects from the swarm, make that save with a -1d shift on the dice chain. Any damage dealt by a failed save is at +1d on the dice chain, or is at +2 if a die is not rolled.
6	Suffering from multiple bites, you take +1d4 damage. For each extra point of damage, you must make a save to avoid any additional effect based on the swarm type.
7	You are knocked prone and require a DC 10 Strength check to stand. Until you regain your feet, you have a -4 penalty to AC against the swarm.
8	Eyebite! You are stung or bitten near your eyes, blinding you for 1d5 rounds. At the end of this period, make a DC 15 Fort save or be blinded for 1d3 hours. At the end of this period, make a DC 10 Fort save or be permanently blinded.
9	Part of the swarm gets into your clothing/under your armor! You take automatic damage each round until you can remove your armor or remove the vermin! Removing armor takes 1 Action Die per point of AC; removing vermin from clothing takes 1d3 Action Dice.
10	Submerged by the swarm! You are overwhelmed, taking 1d6 times normal damage, and requiring a save to avoid additional effects for each additional die of normal damage you take. You are knocked prone, and must succeed in a DC 15 Strength check to regain your feet. Until you regain your feet, you take automatic damage from the swarm each round.

## Zolla the Eye

By Daniel J. Bishop

Zolla the Eye is one of the strangest beings in existence – an enormous eyeball supported by two sets of legs (one male, and one female), with over a dozen tentacles ending in hands. The curtain-like cloth it uses to cover its body hides something even weirder and more grotesque. Some things are not meant to be seen, and can scar you for life.

**Zolla the Eye:** Init +0; Atk spell; AC 17; HD 6d6; hp 20; MV 20'; Act 3d20; SP infravision 300', telepathy, mind-bending appearance, spellcasting (+10 spell check bonus: *charm person, detect evil, detect magic, Ekim's mystical mask, magic shield, sleep, detect invisible, ESP, forget, knock, locate object, mirror image, scare, planar step, slow, wizard sense*); SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +10; AL C; Crit M/d12.

*Mind-bending appearance:* Those catching a glimpse of its true form – and Zolla will never intentionally let that happen – must succeed in a DC 17 Will save or retch for the next 2d6 rounds, being able to take no other action. At the end of this period, victim must succeed in a DC 12 Will save or lose 1d3 permanent points of Intelligence and Personality.

Zolla the Eye is not able to spellburn but can use all three Action Dice for spells due to their numerous hands.

It is said that *what Zolla wants, Zolla gets....*but just what does Zolla want? When Zolla the Eye is encountered, roll 1d5 to find out!

1d5	What Zolla Wants
1	Reproduction! This requires both a male and a female subject, to be painfully...blended...into a new creature similar to Zolla the Eye. The process takes several days.
2	Entertainment! Zolla the Eye seeks distraction from their boredom. There is a 50% chance that entertaining them will be rewarded, and a 50% chance that Zolla will seek to <i>charm</i> and abduct the entertainer(s) instead. When encountering the less-than-entertaining, there is a 75% chance that Zolla will simply ignore them, and a 25% chance that the Eye will seek to kill them instead.
3	Treasure! There is some specific object that Zolla wants or needs. It may even seem mundane on our plane, although it is potent where Zolla the Eye resides. There is a 25% chance that the PCs have this item.
4	Assistance! Zolla is looking for someone to help them do something. The job takes 1d6 days, and consists of (roll 1d5): (1) trimming Zolla's toenails; (2) helping brew something nasty and tarlike; (3) putting Zolla's library of trashy novels into some semblance of order; (4) being the guinea pig for some horrendous experiment (Fort DC 10 to survive, gain 1d4 XP if successful); or (5) turn pages so Zolla can read some of those trashy novels – their arms are ridiculously short. Helping Zolla results in (roll 1d3): (1) payment equal to 2d50 gp; (2) the Eye is willing to cast a spell for the assistant, which may be banked for up to a year; or (3) nothing – helping Zolla is its own reward!
5	Psychopathic Tendencies! Zolla just wants to kill someone, then take the body back to be stuffed and mounted in their private collection.

## Flaming Skull

By Bob Brinkman

Forged in the darkest recesses of the nine hells, made from the skulls of fallen priests of Law, these un-dead creatures are part demon and part weapon. Looking like nothing more than a flying skull that is trailed by a billowing plume of smoke and hellfire, flaming skulls are commonly found in the service of powerful infernalists and priests in servitude to certain powerful demons and devils.



**Flaming skull:** Init +4; Atk burning touch +8 melee (1d6+4) or flaming bolt +6 missile fire (1d86, range 50'); AC 18; HD 6d5; MV fly 40';

Act 1d20 (or more); SP burning touch, wieldable, immune to heat and fire, un-dead traits; SV Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +4; AL C; Crit U/d10.

*Burning touch:* Any creature which touches a flaming skull may catch fire. Targets must make a DC 16 Ref save or catch fire and take 1d6 damage each round until the fire is extinguished with another DC 16 Ref save (+4 if "stop, drop, and roll", +2 if aided by allies).

*Wieldable:* Creatures of 6+ HD may use flaming skulls as missile weapons, hurling them up to 50'. When thrown, the flaming skull may boost its range with its own flight, counting as a charge attack.

*Un-dead:* Flaming skulls are un-dead, and thus can be turned by clerics. They do not eat, drink, or breathe. As un-dead, they are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, and *paralysis* spells, as well as other mental effects and cold damage.

# Arc de Triomphe

## The Deed & the Die

Joan Troyer

Conversations about the rules of Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG are a flow of constant questions and answers. Many forum posts, Discord discussions, and even Facebook threads, discuss rules daily. One rule in particular appears cyclic, that of the Deed die.

The simplest answer to the Deed die is that it is the modifier to the attack and damage roll for the warrior and the dwarf class. The Deed die is thrown with the attack die, usually the d20 and the number shown on the die, the result, is added to the result of the d20. For example, a first level warrior has an attack die of d20. The result on the d20 is 12. The first level warrior has a d3 Deed die and throws that with the d20. The result, let us say it is a 2, is added to the 12 resulting in a 14. If the AC of the monster/NPC is 14, then the warrior has hit their target. Damage is then rolled with the damage die assigned to the weapon. The Deed die result of 2 is added to the damage die result. Example: d8 is rolled for damage and result of 6 is shown on the die. The Deed die result of 2 is added to the 6 and the total damage done is 8.

The Deed die does more than just add to the attack and damage though. The Deed die has the ability to assist the warrior and dwarf either do more damage, disarm the monster/NPC, or help increase their AC for the following attack, etc. The DCC core rulebook, **Steel and Fury**, and **Gongfarmer's Almanac** have multiple ideas for what the Deed die can be used for. So, what is this extra that the Deed die can do? It is called **Mighty Deeds of Arms**.

**Mighty Deeds of Arms** are special abilities that the warrior and dwarf have when in combat.

The Deed die result is what causes the ability to trigger or not. The result of 3 or higher, the Deed succeeds. How does one get a result higher than 3? Leveling the PC. The Deed die advances as the warrior/dwarf increases their level. By 5th level the warrior has a Deed die of d7. The mechanics for **Mighty Deeds of Arms** are on page 88 of the DCC core rulebook. There are examples of Deeds and, of course, you, the player can create your own signature deed for your warrior/dwarf.

The Deed die's function in a Mighty Deed is to create lots of action in combat. The result on the Deed die can add much flavor to the action. The warrior/dwarf just doesn't get to hit more often and cause more damage. No. The higher the result on the Deed die the more dramatic the attack and affect. For example, there are different types of Deeds and there are a few listed in the DCC RPG core rulebook starting on page 98. Each result is different depending on the Deed die result. So, the higher the level a warrior/dwarf is, the better result they can get on their Mighty Deed.

Can the Deed die be modified? The Deed die is the modifier for the Attack die. So, the answer is, no: while Luck can be used to modify the result of any roll, the Deed die is a modifier to both the attack and damage rolls. While Luck can be used to modify each of those rolls individually, it cannot be used to change the deed die's result.





# FILMS OF HIGH ADVENTURE

## Ladies First ~ Red Sonja

Bob Brinkman

### *Red Sonja* (1985) ~ PG-13

The movie that introduced Brigitte Nielsen also introduced movie-going audiences to Red Sonja. The character of Red Sonja is not a creation of Robert E. Howard, but is inspired by one: Red Sonya. While the two characters are both women of adventure, the differences pretty much end there. The character of Red Sonja as we know her (the She-Devil with a sword) first appeared in the pages of the Marvel book, *Conan the Barbarian*, issue #23 (February 1973). The creation of writer Roy Thomas and artist Barry Windsor-Smith, Red Sonja became the most well-known of Sword & Sorcery heroines.

Fast-forward twelve years to 1985. Dino De Laurentiis, who brought us both *Conan the Barbarian* as well as *Conan the Destroyer*, is looking to return to the well of fantasy. Bringing back Richard Fleischer, the director of *Conan the Destroyer*, they green-light *Red Sonja*.

The movie opens by quickly establishing Red Sonja's back story. In many ways it does not stray far from the standard Sword & Sorcery film tropes. Her family is killed, her home burned, and she is violated by her family's killers. Left for dead she rises and seeks vengeance on the evil Queen Gedren. So, suffering the victim's trifecta of murder, arson, and rape our main character is approached by a spirit who offers an unequaled sword arm for her quest of justice and vengeance. In the written Red Sonja storyline, this is an important moment. This is where the Red Goddess Scathach appeared to Sonja... In the movie it is a misty figure with a mostly disembodied voice, who touched Sonja on the head with a misty sword. Vague and unsatisfying, much like the rest of this movie.

While we do have Arnold Schwarzenegger in this movie, we do not have Conan. He certainly

sounds like Conan, but even if you squint, he doesn't look like Conan. The character of Lord Kalidor is dressed as if he combined the fashion sense of Olivia Newton John and wrestling superstar Rik Flair. It is seriously painful to look at. The character was meant to be Conan, but rights were not acquired in a timely fashion. Seeing Conan as not-Conan is a bit jarring, but the usage of Schwarzenegger is even more bothersome.

Filming what he thought was going to be a cameo, Schwarzenegger's time on set stretched from one week to four weeks. What the role turned into was a top-billed co-star, who was only on set for a few weeks. This leads to several lengthy action sequences where Arnold Schwarzenegger suddenly appears by stepping through a doorway after a lengthy absence. The constant coming and going for a co-star (and romantic interest) is abrupt and jarring. The reluctant co-star of this movie has publicly stated that it is the worst movie he ever made (and he's made some stinkers) and joked that he uses the watching of the movie as punishment for his children.

The plot, if you can call it that, of this cinematic mess, revolves around "the talisman". A glowing, green, orb of magical power. The destruction of the device is thwarted in the beginning of the movie by the forces of Queen Gedren who have come to steal it for their queen's plans of conquest. The talisman draws energy from light and so is to be destroyed by placing it in permanent darkness. Why anyone waited so long for such an easy fix is never explained...but this is fantasy. Who needs logic?

Leaping across that plot chasm, the queen's men charge in and steal the talisman, capturing and

killing all of the priestesses who protect it. One lone priestess escapes, the villains in hot pursuit. Coming to a chasm she sees ~~Conan~~ Lord Kalidor and she attempts to zip-line to safety. Shot in the back, she delivers her news to Kalidor and lies dying. It is vital that the talisman be destroyed and it is important that Kalidor finds...her sister.

Sister?

Yup. Remember that family that was slaughtered in the beginning of the movie? Well, it appears that Sonja's sister was alive and doing well as a priestess, up until today. When told that her sister is dying, Sonja shows no surprise that she has a sister that is alive. Then again, the wooden acting of fashion model Bridgette Nielsen shows no real concern that her sister is dying, either. So, the two rush back to where Kalidor left Sonja's dying sister lying on the ground. She repeats the importance of destroying the Talisman by sending it into darkness, asks her sister Sonja to swear to do so....and dies.

Okay, *now* Red Sonja's family are all dead. Conveniently, they are all still dead at the hands of the forces of Queen Gedren. Hurrah! The back story from the first three minutes is still intact! Moving on...

Riding on alone (because she doesn't need the help of a man), Sonja arrives after the destruction of the city of Hablac. Rescuing the bratty Prince of the city (played by annoying Ernie Reyes Jr) from the rubble, Sonja is greeted by youthful sexism (the Prince's army may need a cook) and we observe just how clueless the young Prince is as he decrees that he will dine in an hour..in the middle of his city.. which is nothing but smoking rubble. Showing solid common sense, Sonja gets directions and rides on alone.

Two pointless fights later and young Prince Tarn and his long-suffering man-servant Falkon are once again rescued by Sonja. Why they left the city and how they got in front of Sonja (who took the short cut) are things never explained. But this is fantasy. Who needs logic?(x2) This time, Sonja's maternal instinct kicks in, showing concern for the young boy. She begins to take him under her wing, trying to make him a better person. It doesn't really stick, but it's a nice effort

as Sonja builds a strange sort of replacement family around herself.

Finally, after many further forced and hokey scenes, we arrive at the climactic battle between Red Sonja and Queen Gedren. The scene lacks any real tension, and drags on like the rest of this painful movie. Finally, Sonja destroys the talisman by throwing it into a river of brightly glowing lava.

...you know, because that is just like destroying it in darkness. But this is fantasy. Who needs logic?(x3) Seriously, if one has made it this far, they are either watching it for the purposes of review, they are one of the Schwarzenegger children being punished, or they are waiting for their brain to melt.

The pure awfulness of this movie never crosses into the realm of "so bad it is good", rather choosing to linger on the far side of "just awful." Sandahl Bergman (who was the romantic interest, Valeria, in *Conan the Barbarian*) was offered the role of Sonja but reportedly turned down the role in favor of Queen Gedren to avoid being typecast. It seems far more likely that, as an actress, Bergman didn't want to pass on getting work but preferred to spend her time wearing a mask to cover the shame of being involved in this movie.

### Characterization

Bridgette Nielsen was just not right for this role. Sandahl Bergman might have been able to play the role believably, but the missed opportunity is Laurene Landon. With a bit of hair dye, Landon could have played the role perfectly, easily shown by her playing of virtually the same character two years earlier in *Hundra*. Of course, the similarities between that film and this were too great and so she was passed over for the job. To date, few people have played the role.

1) Bridgette Nielsen's portrayal here was wooden at best. She doesn't have the look, nor the attitude, to pull off this character. She was nominated for a Golden Razzie for Worst Actress and won a Golden Razzie for Worst New Star.

2) Wendy Pini (of "ElfQuest" fame) portrayed Red Sonja for years, performing "Sonja & The Wizard" on stage at conventions in the 1970's. If

you can find any footage of those performances, I strongly recommend it. Her portrayal is strong and believable, and despite her wearing a comic-book-accurate armored bikini, the power of Red Sonja comes through.

3) Angelica Bridges portrayed Red Sonja on a single episode of the TV series, "Conan the Adventurer". There is a pretty good reason for this.

4) Rose McGowan was to play the role in a 2008 re-make/re-imagining. Massive nerve damage in her arm prevented her from playing the role and the film was scrapped.

5) Amber Heard was rumored to be slated to play the role back in 2013. After personal and career issues, that never manifested.

6) Matilda Lutz is currently in production, starring in M.J. Bassett's upcoming Red Sonja film. No information has yet been released.

### **Sexual Themes**

Queen Gedren wanted Sonja for herself. Sonja, not interested in women, spurns her advances – by slashing Gedren's face. Sonja's family are then murdered, her home put to the torch, and Sonja's body violated by the soldiers of Queen Gedren. Yes, the evil lesbian queen has the object of her desires brutally raped for saying "no". Pretty strong back story, even if mostly handled off camera. This little bit of plot caused the Encyclopedia of Fantasy's labeling the film "morally dubious" and led, in part, to their calling it a "great embarrassment". If only it stopped there.

The next piece is from Sonja's back story and actually comes from the original character source prior to being continued into the movie. The goddess Scathach orders that Sonja will not lie with a man unless he defeats her in fair combat. This is mentioned much later in the movie, and there is no direct connection to the goddess provided. Now, at first glance, this may seem like she will accept no man who is not her equal. It almost seems reasonable. However, upon second look? We have a rape victim who will only have sex with a man who can dominate her on a physical level. Sonja is a rape victim who has the

need to be faux-raped to have any sort of intimate contact.

Once Kalidor returns, he shows interest in Sonja and so, the two fight. The lengthy fight, filled with grunting and heavy breathing, is certainly an allegory for the sex that they both are wishing for. In addition, young Prince Tarn comments "Why does she fight so hard? She doesn't want to win."

That comment is representative of what is wrong with the movie. This isn't a movie about a strong heroine. This isn't a movie about a woman who "doesn't need the help of a man" (because she often does). This is a movie about a woman who has been brutalized and craves what she loathes. The sexual attitudes in this movie are just plain creepy.

### **What Didn't Stink**

Despite all of the flaws in this movie – and there are many – there are some high points that do stick out. While not always used very effectively, the score of the movie was penned by legendary Italian film composer Ennio Morricone. The music is very evocative of the genre and certainly well worth enjoying if you can find a copy of the film's soundtrack.

Secondly, as bad as the acting was, the sets were wonderful. Much like the first Dino De Laurentiis offering in this genre, *Conan the Barbarian*, the sets are large-scale and envelope the viewer. That the sets work so well to draw the viewer in whilst the acting is failing to build upon this foundation is the tragedy of the movie. Certainly, the crews that toiled to build those sets worked much harder than the people who strode about them woodenly reciting their lines.

### **Final Thoughts**

Painful. The genre offers much better, especially in the 1980s.

**Rating ★ ★**



# Rules vs. Rulings

## Keepers Nafets & Zinolestimus

Are you a judge looking for a little advice? Are you a player needing a little clarity on a rule? Do you want a suggestion for how to handle a tricky in-game situation? [Contact Keepers Nafets & Zinolestimus](#) with your questions and have them answered here in Sanctum Secorum Quarterly.

Dear Keepers,

*I want to run Colossus Arise [DCC #76], but my PCs are only level 4 and I'm afraid I'll kill every last one of them. How would you do this?*

*Pondering in Punjar*

Dear Underpowered,

Don't fear running higher level modules for lower-level characters or vice-versa. With a few quick changes you can make any adventure more agreeable.

One way is by lowering or raising the amount of hit points the creatures have. The longer the bad guys are alive the more they have the opportunity to beat up the PCs. By adjusting the hit points they have listed, you can vary the level of difficulty of the monster. For example, the Prophetess on page 11 has 12d12 HD or 81 hp. Try reducing that by the amount of levels between the PCs and the module. Test how a Prophetess with 8d12 HD or 54 hp manages against the daring reavers.

The second thing you can easily modify is how much damage the monsters do. The Prophetess packs a punch with a +21 to hit living flame that does 3d10 damage AND ignites the target. Here is another great opportunity to use the dice chain! Dropping the damage down by 4 steps (the difference in PC level vs module level) makes the Prophetess seem a little more manageable when she's only dealing 3d6 damage with perhaps a Ref Save or be ignited.

I'll also offer this advice, on any given day the players, regardless of level, could be aided by the Three Fates and have killer rolls with their dice, come up with earth shattering ideas, and completely roll over the obstacles set in their path. Don't be scared to challenge them. As the author Harley Stroh says in the foreword of the module (Curse of Cadixtat):

*"No matter how your players wail, whine, or gnash their teeth, do not, under any circumstances, tip the dice in the PCs' favor. The adventure offers players a true test of cunning and courage. To tip fate in their favor only denies them the challenge, and title, of Adventurer."*

*Keeper Zinolestimus*



Dear Pondering,

Generally, I try to not adjust levels too much, but sometimes the theme of an adventure is too perfect for an ongoing campaign and you just have to use it. As always, let's do some research before we go reinventing the wheel. Thankfully, *DCC Lankhmar #6: Cheating Death* has a quick level adjustment guide. That adventure has a good mix of traps and combat so it's a great point to start. However, we should also remember that it is a level 1 adventure so the advice is geared to raising the difficulty of an adventure and not lowering it.

- If the module is only different by a single level, simply add or subtract 1 to attacks, damage, and saving throw DCs.
- If the module's suggested level is 2-4 levels away from the PCs, double or halve the damage output.
- If the module's suggested level is 5+ levels away from the PCs, either triple the damage output or reduce to one-third.
- Be careful when tinkering with enemy HP and AC. You don't want to prolong combat.



So, there's my baseline advice. However, you're more likely than not to accidentally "overcorrect" at some point during the session. But have no fear! You can make a mid-combat adjustment when a mal-adjusted enemy reaches half health by giving them some new ability. Perhaps the creature goes berserk or is suddenly wreathed in infernal flames. Or, more simply, drink a potion. You can also just let the "overcorrection" play out and then tweak following encounters as needed. The next group of monsters may still be recovering from a recent battle and not at full health. Inversely, these monsters may have heard the PCs coming and prayed for a boon from their dark lord.

However, you may not need to adjust a module at all! Instead, give the PCs some consumable items or a temporary boon. PCs might discover a cache of useful potions or receive a deific bonus to rolls that is only "active" while they are on a specific quest. The rulebook has numerous potions that rarely get usage and precedent for such boons written into the bless spell. These temporary buffs are also great for pushing players to make quick progress in a dungeon. A PC who drinks a potion of super-heroism only has 1d6+1 turns to make use of their +6 bonus so they're going to try to get as much out of those turns as they can.

Lastly, foes need not to fight until death. We often forget the Morale rules from the rulebook. All monsters in a group should make a morale check the first time that one of their own is slain and then again when half their number is defeated. A single monster should likewise make a morale check when it is reduced to half health. I think many stories from *Sailors* [DCC #67] would be quite different if we all had the beastmen flee more often.

I hope these suggestions help you on your way and help you PCs not get flattened by those giants!

*Keeper Nafets*



*Dear Keepers,  
My PCs are too powerful! They're level 3, but just blew through [DCC #99] The Star Wound of Abaddon! How can I adjust modules to fix this?*

*Aghast in Abaddon*

Dear Aghast,

I think all experienced judges have been through this at one point or another. Discounting the possibility of the "dice gods" favoring the PCs that night, this usually happens because the PCs have gained some marvelous magic items during the course of a campaign. Though it may also be a recurring issue related to certain spells like bless or magic shield. So what can you do? Well first of all, you should allow players to be powerful. Your campaign will have more memorable moments if you buff the enemies and resist nerfing the PCs. Taking away the PC's toys is rarely a popular move so it must be done with caution.

So, let's get those monsters strong! Your villains need to hit the gym! The DCC Annual has some great solutions for this. Try giving your monsters some mutations and let them start invoking a monstrous patron. Or add a shaman into the mix and have them bless and enlarge the baddies.

But one size does not fit all so let's explore some other options. Back in the TSR days, you'd see modules where certain spells are altered by the environment. There would be temples where you couldn't teleport into them and demi-planes where fire spells do less damage than normal. We see DCC do this too! The Purple Planet is not a welcoming place to all gods and patrons. Clerics of Daentharr can't cast higher level spells, but servants of Azi Dahaka get a bonus on the die chain when invoking the demon prince. When taking this route, always make sure to make these changes for a solidly thematic reason. Arbitrary changes are never satisfying.

However, sometimes we do need to rid the PCs of some magic items. Perhaps they've got an old sword laying around that they don't use anyway, but it's still there on the character sheet! Such a magic sword might be the perfect offering for a king or deity who demands offerings. They could also give some of these magic items away to retainers and hirelings who are then sent on their own quests. But we can get nasty and also create a creature from beyond the phlogiston that is resistant to magics. A creature only capable of being harmed by mundane means. Or worse, a creature that dispels any magic that it touches! That would make for a very hated monster indeed.

So, I hope that helps you in your quest to teach those PCs a lesson. Don't punish them for too long, but go knock them down so they can feel the accomplishment of rising back up!

*Keeper Nafets*



Dear Aghast,

My first piece of advice would be to remember that your gaming session doesn't need to be thought of as The Judge vs The PCs. As long as you and your players are enjoying yourselves and having a great time during your adventures, then you might not need to change anything! But I understand wanting to ensure they are being challenged and making that hard-fought victory at the end that much sweeter, so consider two things.

Increase the amount of enemies. The solution almost seems too simple, but by raising the amount of a particular enemy you can greatly control the difficulty of an encounter. With more enemies the players are forced to decide which enemies might be the greater threats, if their characters should attempt risky area attacks, or use precious resources that they may otherwise decide against when having the advantage of a 6:1 ratio. Maneuvering through 6 crystal statues in PUTS was difficult enough but imagine trying to get to that side door with 12 crystal statues in the room! You're almost guaranteed to bump into one and start a fight.

Another option is to increase the amount of actions that a creature can take. There's nothing worse than having an awesome attack and the dice just aren't with you, you roll a 3! Now you have 3-6 PCs that are ready to cut your head off before you get another opportunity to fight back. Increasing the amount of actions can seriously change the outcome of an encounter. I'm kinda glad your players busted up the crummy, little Harvester of Sorrow who invited me into his home, fed me food, and then... sorry, sorry, I'm projecting. Would the players still blow through the encounter if Hastion the Red had 2 or 3 actions? Would they even have survived?

*Keeper Zinolestimus*



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<Mysteries of Mu-Thulan continued from pg. 16>

Though the [Kickstarter for issues #1 and #2](#) will be done by the time this review sees publication, I still encourage you to check out the pledge to see what will be included in those issues. Not only will you see some stories by authors that appeared in Issue #0, but also a new story by the venerated creator of Elric – Michael Moorcock!

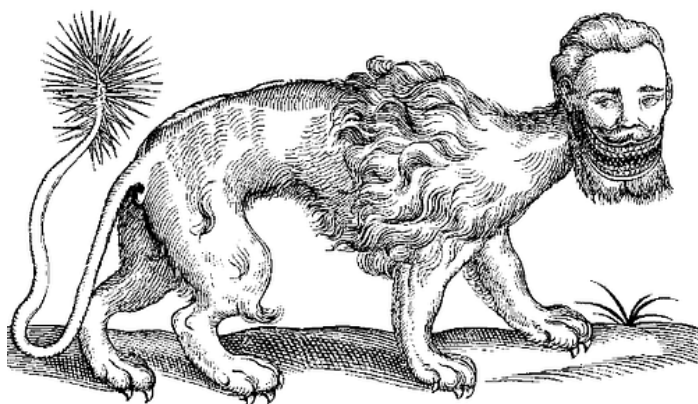
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< Tales from the Stacks continued from pg. 14 >

Leiber tells the tale from Gummitch's perspective, describing what their take on the world they live in is like. Without a doubt, Leiber, at some time, had a cat. Never thinking like this myself, now it is all I can imagine going through the mind of our cats.

This is a biased opinion, but I thought this was just a great and unexpected story, especially having read the previous two first. It really shows the greatness and diversity Fritz Leiber had in his storytelling abilities.



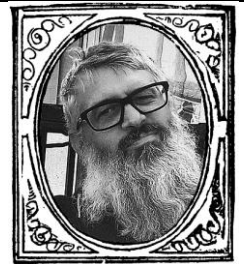
**Keepers Nafets & Zinolestimus** have toiled endlessly within the stacks of the Sanctum Secorum for untold centuries. Having absorbed the sum total of knowledge found within the library, they have chosen to emerge from the shadows to share their combined wisdom with the masses. Of course, they don't always agree with one another... centuries spent fighting over a single copy of the DCC RPG core rulebook will cause some amount of enmity.



**Ian McDonald** is the creator of the wildly popular, long running webcomic [Bruno the Bandit](#). Having spanned 11 years, the strip has been collected into eight volumes of *The Brutal Blade of Bruno the Bandit* as well as having also spawned a card game from [A.I.M. Comics](#).

Secretly, Ian McDonald is just a really, really nice guy.

**James A. Pozenel, Jr.** is a freelance writer for Goodman Games and also publishes under Horse Shark Games. His credits include DCC Dying Earth, Yearbook #8, and Under the Salvage Pits, Enchiridion of the Computarchs, and The House of the Red Doors. He also has A top secret project Netcrawl under development at <https://patreon.com/lectrotext>. James A. Pozenel, Jr. games, lives, and works in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He can be reached via Twitter @lectrotext.



Find him at <https://goodman-games.com/store/product-category/horse-shark-games/>



**Matt Robertson** (aka GrapeApe) is the co-host of the Goodman Games Twitch program RAW: Rules As Written as well as GrapeApe's Reaver Express. When he's not hosting shows, running online games, or moderating the DungeonCrawlers DCC fan Discord server, Matt publishes 3rd party DCC modules for Goodman Games. Matt is the founder of Split the Party Games and has published the cult classic DCC horror module *A Conspiracy of Ravens*, with his next module set to be released in mid-2023. It goes without saying that his favorite color is purple!

**Stefan Surratt** has been playing one or another form of TTRPG for over fifteen years. As a child, he found his way into sword-and-sorcery fiction after learning that R.E. Howard had lived only a couple hours away. Now Stefan channels his gaming passion into Dragon Peak Publishing, where he's published for DCC, MCC, Weird Frontiers, Mothership, and more. When online, he can be found on Twitter and Discord under the handle DMBadWrongFun and co-hosting Rules As Written (R.A.W.) on the Goodman Games Twitch channel. In his free time, he likes to read sword-and-sorcery fiction and spend time with his wife, son, and their pets.



**Joan "of Arc" Troyer** discovered Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG at Better World Books in Goshen, IN. A fellow gamer brought their book to game night and asked if there would be players who would like to try a funnel. It... didn't go well. However, since then, Joan has learned to embrace the mayhem of the funnel, with DCC RPG being the first role playing game she ever ran.

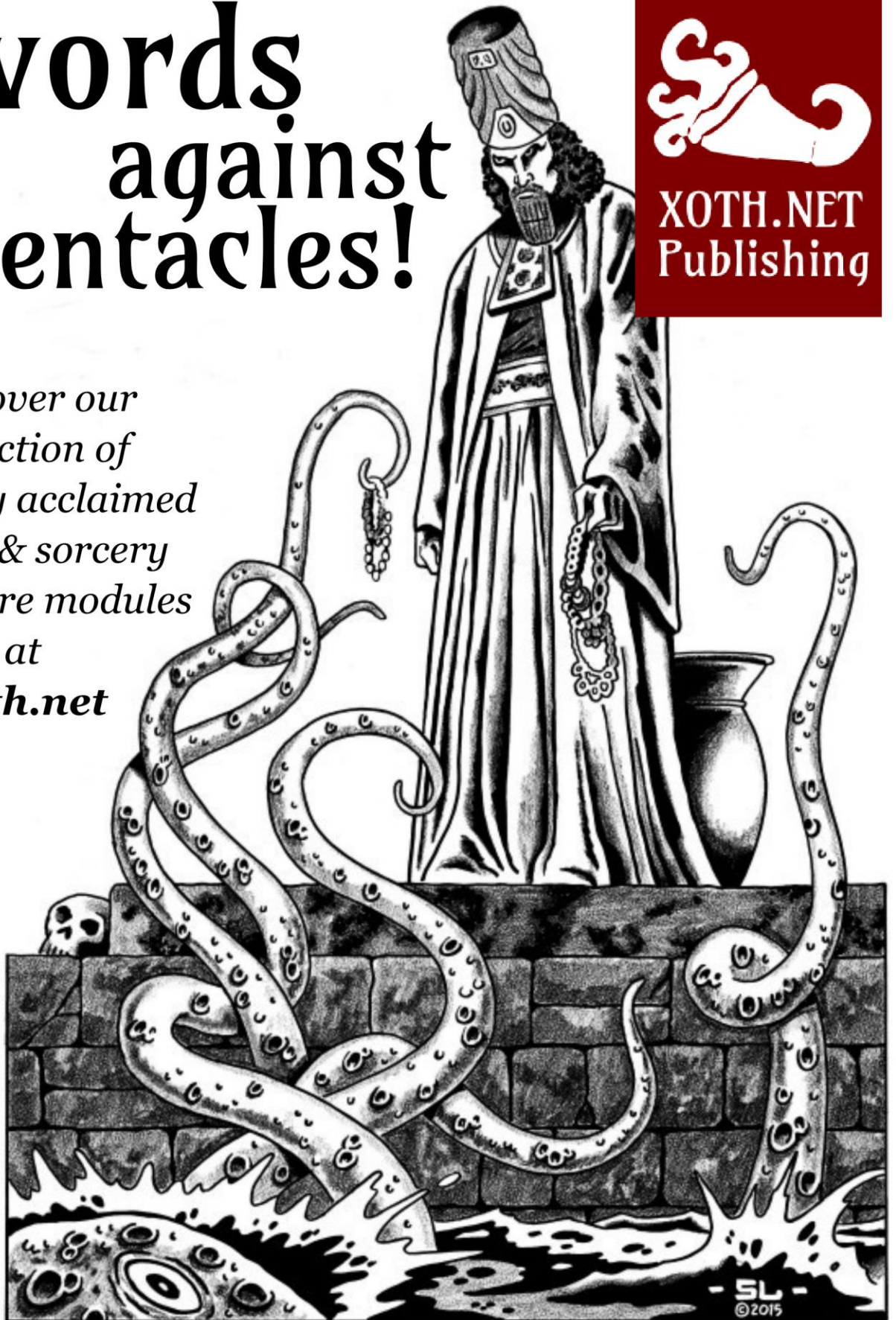
Joan is the host of the Order of Shan(n)a podcast and has written for the Gongfarmer's Almanac as well as Shield of Faith publishing.



# Swords against Tentacles!



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