

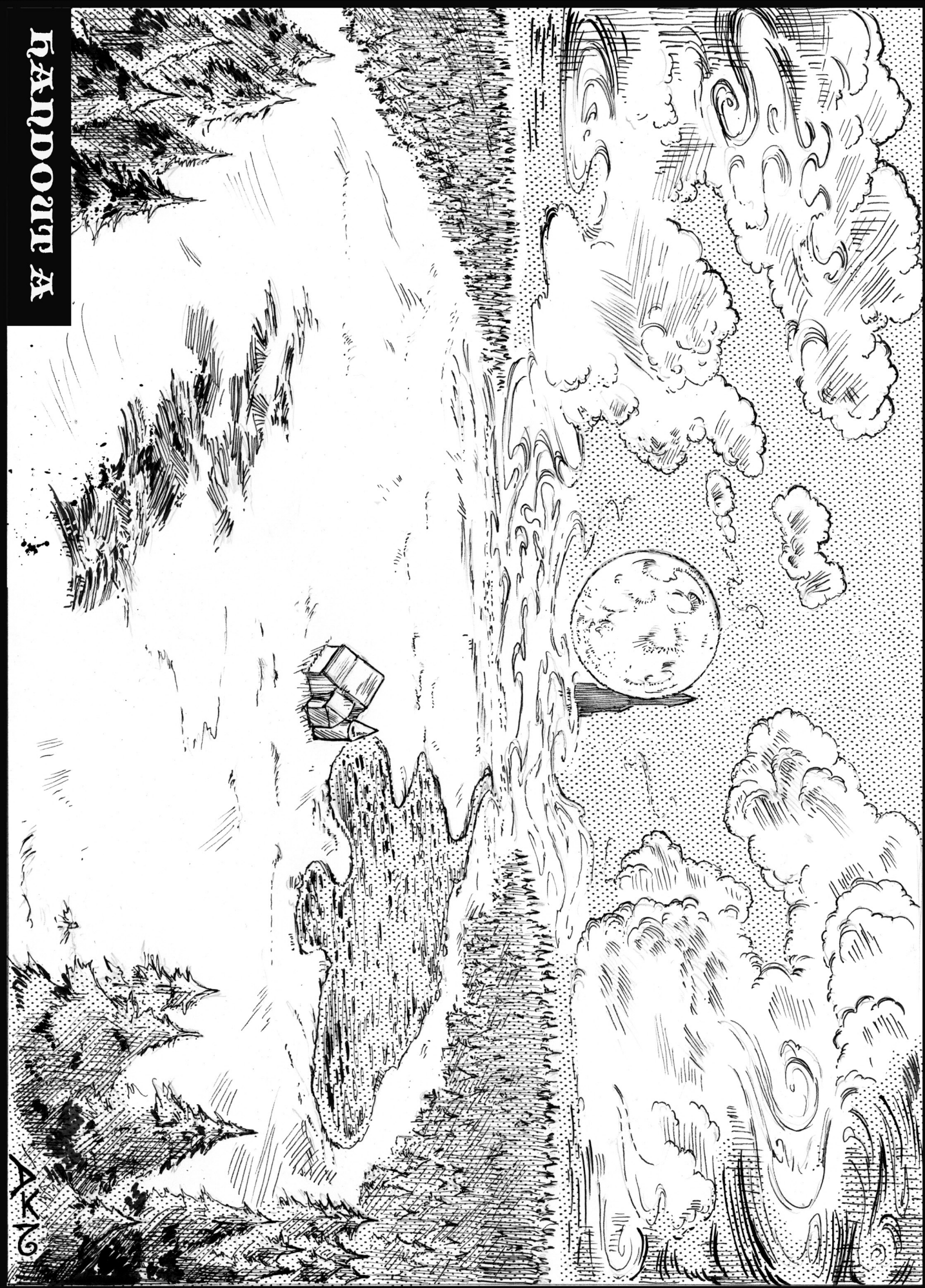
DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

FATE'S FELL HAND

#78: A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE
BY HARLEY STROH



Handout A



FATE'S FELL HAND

A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Remember the good old days, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Those days are back. Dungeon Crawl Classics adventures don't waste your time with long-winded speeches, weird campaign settings, or NPCs who aren't meant to be killed. Each adventure is 100% good, solid dungeon crawl, with the monsters you know, the traps you remember, and the secret doors you know are there somewhere.

In *Fate's Fell Hand*, the adventurers play the deciding role in a war of three wizards. Trapped within a demi-plane, the arch-magi and their vassals vie for their freedom, but with the coming of each new day all gains are lost and the game begins anew. The arrival of the PCs upsets this ancient balance, triggering a chain of events that will destroy the demi-plane and all trapped within.

To escape the shrinking realm, the PCs must do what the arch-magi cannot: achieve mastery over the Deck of Fates and its diabolic ward.

The adventure is designed for 4 to 8 second level characters aided by stout-hearted hirelings. The party can be composed of PCs of any class, though wizards and their kith are sure to find the adventure's rewards most intriguing. Success in the adventure demands creativity and ingenuity, more so than the specialized skills of any one class. Parties hoping to cut a bloody swath to freedom may find themselves frustrated and doomed by a trap of their own making.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Known only to certain sages and witches of ill-repute, the Deck of Fates is a relic from another time; a collection of ivory plaques painted with strange personages and icons. Sullied with the soot and grease of a thousand different worlds and times, the lure of the Deck has brought ruin to many a soul.

The latest in the march of the damned is a trio of powerful magi: the wizard Darjr, the enchantress Erodiade, and the accursed scribe Al-Hazred. Allies in their quest for mastery of the occult world, they fell upon one another like feral dogs when they succeeded in bidding a minor devil to fetch a mere twelve cards from the fell Deck.

A three-way spell duel ensued and the wizards' world was rent asunder. Their manor, the magi's vassals and the surrounding lands, were pitched into the roiling seas of phlogiston. It took the combined might of all three arch-magi to wall off the roiling chaos, and what shreds of material reality that remained were transformed into the demi-plane: a small vale ringed by woods, a fractured manor, the magi's surviving liege-men ... and the devil, Mordax.

Awash in waves of phlogiston, the vale is suffused with weird, generative energy, the very stuff of magic. Each of the natives has taken on the identity of one of the twelve cards, and each morn the alliances of the vassals changes as they are dealt to the three magi.

As for the arch-magi, the effort required to hold back the phlogiston requires nearly all of their prodigious might, with scant remaining to effect their return to the material plane. Fearing (rightly) their fellows, the magi are locked away in separate vaults. From their protected prisons, each magus directs his vassals as best he can, hoping to triumph over the other two magi, by acquiring all 12 original cards, and winning mastery of the realm and freedom from the far plane.

THE DEVIL AND THE WORMS

In the guise of the Fool, the devil Mordax draws from the deck each dawn. Cards are dealt to the three arch-magi, thereby determining the loyalty of the realm's courtiers and warriors.

The loyalty of these retainers is abject and absolute. Allies the day before awaken as forsworn enemies, and former adversaries are taken on as brothers, all according to the fall of the strange ivory plaques. Tabards, robes and raiments of office all change to reflect the owner's new loyalties – a sickly yellow for arrogant Darjr, blood-red for the jealous Erodiade, and star-blue for the unknowable Al-Hazred.

Each day the embittered wizards work their wiles, pitting warriors and courtiers against one another, in a desperate bid for freedom. But any gains are short lived: on the following morn the cards are drawn anew. Slain warriors and poisoned courtiers are drawn back to life by the power of the magi and the horrific cycle begins again.

This macabre and grotesque scenario might have continued for all eternity (or at least, until the devil Mordax grew

bored) had the trio of wizards not opened a portal ushering the PCs into the vale. But this portal came at great cost. Like a seeping gray tide, the phlogiston has followed the PCs into the far vale. It is a trickle at first, non-threatening and benign, but soon grows into a stream, then a torrent. Taking the form of terrible worms, the wild phlogiston consumes all it touches, leaving only dissolving tendrils in its wake.

Worse, the presence of the phlogiston – pressing through the void – causes the demi-plane to grow smaller with each passing day.

The worms begin in area 1-3, unable to venture far from their point of origin. But as the plane shrinks, the range of the worms increases until they devour all the vale, reducing it to shrieking streams of faceless phlogiston.

THE DECK IN PLAY



very dawn, the devil-jester deals from the deck, allotting plaques and their respective personages to the magi. This takes place in the great hall of the manor house (area 2-4), but the Fool deals only ghostly images. The true plaques vanish and reappear from within the magi's vaults. (Simply assaulting the Fool as he deals from the deck cannot win the PCs the plaques.)

With each card dealt, the raiment of the respective servitor changes to reflect that of his new master. When the last card is dealt, the magi with the greatest number of plaques rules for a day, the sun taking on the sallow cast of the liege's color.

Acquiring a magi's plaques (accomplished only by infiltrating one of the three vaults) grants the PC mastery over those same servitors. Stolen cards remain in the PCs' possession and are not re-dealt at the start of the day. Any magus losing all his cards vanishes into the phlogiston, unable to maintain his hold on the realm.

Certain plaques are a boon to the PCs. A party of adventurers possessing the Prince of Swords enjoys +1 to each PCs' critical hit range. Possessing the Hierophant grants +1 to all saving throws. The Ladies in Waiting are perhaps the most valuable, as each plaque possessed grants every member of the party +1 Luck. Any powers are, obviously, lost once the PCs escape the vale. However, judges are encouraged to award +1 XP for every card in the party's possession when they escape the Vale.

The loss of any plaques to the PCs immediately unites the surviving magi. Fearing for their souls, the magi do everything within their power to eradicate the PCs.

Perhaps the easiest way for PCs to gain information regarding the Vale is by capturing a plaque and instructing the personality to divulge all that they know about the plaques, the Vale and its curse. Different plaques possess different secrets and insights as follows:

All: Any of the NPCs can share or confirm the basic details of the Vale – that each of the personalities possesses a plaque, and that the jester deals the plaques each morning. Asked directly, any of the NPCs can confirm that they have never seen a plaque for the jester.

Four of Swords: The soldiers share that the PCs need not fear death within the Vale, for any slain characters are sure to be reborn within the ranks of the three magi. Death is meaningless here, and life is but a formless gray mist stretching on to eternity.

Ladies in Waiting: Any of the ladies can share that their devious friend, the jester, is the sole inhabitant of the Vale that remains free of any loyalties. Somehow the jester is free to mock the magi and their servants without fear of reprisal; the ladies don't understand how he has earned this freedom, but concede it makes him an entertaining companion.

Prince of Swords & the Hierophant: Both suspect (rightly) that something vile lurks beneath the manor house, but neither has taken the initiative to investigate. Pressed to reveal their suspicions, they direct the PCs to area 2-6.

The judge can expect to "read" the Deck at least once during the course of play. Photocopy the handouts onto card stock before play, making 5 copies of the Four of Swords, as well as one additional copy of the Four for each PC, in case the PCs opt to swear allegiance to any of the three magi.

Thus, your deck should be composed of the following cards:

The Magician (Darjr, area 5-4)

The Sorceress (Erodiade, area 4-2)

The Wizard (Al-Hazred, area 3-4)

The Hierophant (Father Moro, area 2-2)

The Prince of Swords (Captain Kaschei, area 2-4)

3x **The Ladies in Waiting** (area 2-3)

The Devil (Mordax, area 2-3)

5x **The Four of Swords** (Four warriors per plaque, area 1-1)

Before dealing for the players, set aside the Devil. Mordax's plaque is kept hidden in area 2-8 and never dealt, keeping him outside of the magi's control.

The cards are dealt, face up, into three stacks, or houses, until no plaques remain. When the Magician, Sorceress or Wizard is drawn, place the card at the head of one of the three houses. The stack beneath the cards are the vassals loyal to each house. If any of the PCs have been slain and resurrected with associated plaques (see Death within the Vale of the Magi, below), they also must serve whichever master they have been dealt.

The judge can opt to narrate dealing key cards (e.g. "The Prince of Swords swears fealty to the First House") or may deal the cards silently.

To assist in tracking the various NPCs and their alliances, statistic cards matching the cards from the Deck of Fates are included in Appendix B. These should also be photocopied prior to play for the judge's use. Once the plaques are dealt and the alliances determined, sort the statistic cards to match the plaques. This allows the judge to easily track the houses and their vassals despite the ever-shifting chaos of the demi-plane.

While the NPCs begin and are initially encountered in keyed areas, they are free to move about at will, pursuing their own agendas as dictated by the magi.

Should the PCs gain possession of a magus' plaques, the

wizard is banished from the demi-plane, instantly consumed by the phlogiston.

Destroying a non-magus plaque immediately slays the associated character, releasing a wash of negative energy. Any PC within 10' of the slain character must make a DC 15 Fort save or be cast back 1d30 feet, taking 1d6 dmg per 10' increment.

Ultimately, breaking a plaque accomplishes very little. The cards are re-dealt the following day, and the "slain" characters brought back to life. A broken magi cannot return.

DEATH WITHIN THE VALE OF THE MAGI



Boundless opportunities for a quick and ignominious death can be found within the vale. However, the magi control nearly every aspect of reality that falls within their domain. In this way, a magus is able to bring a fallen servitor back to life with the dawn — often after having slain the same just days before! Some personalities can go weeks or months without being called back into service, hence the bodies littering the battlefield (area 1-1). Eventually a magus needs the skills (or simply the sword arm) of a subject, and the servitor is brought back to life.

While the PCs have absolute mastery over the forces collected under their banner, only PC wizards, clerics or elves can marshal the arcane power necessary to raise their forces from the dead. Arcane casters choosing to reanimate their troops do so at great cost: reanimating a plaque costs 1d3 points of spellburn.

Any PC slain in the Vale arises the next morning, a subject of the magi in their weird game of alliances. Copy the Four of Swords and assign a card to each slain PC, re-dealing the character's alliances at dawn.

(Astute PCs — or their players — might wonder why the magi don't attempt to slay the PCs immediately, directly incorporating the party into the Vale's power struggle. The answer is a simple but nuanced: so long as the PCs are free, they might choose to serve a specific magus indefinitely. But as soon as they are slain, the PCs' alliances are fraught with chaos and change with every coming dawn. Put another way: as long as the PCs retain their freedom, they remain predictable.)

Commands to liege-sworn PCs are delivered by means specific to each magi. Orders from the Seer-King Darjr are delivered by a curious owl composed of wood and brass. Missives sent by the Sorceress Eriodade are spelled out in pools of water, and commands issued by Al-Hazred come as scrawled missives, drifting on the wind. Characters are free to ignore the commands to their own peril; a magi will always know where his ward is, and will send his other minions to chastise the rogue servant accordingly.

Death at the fangs of a phlogiston worm is the sole exception to this rule. Any character (PC or NPC) that is unmade by the worm cannot be raised again, his spirit and soul consumed by roiling chaos.

ESCAPING THE VALE



Fate's Fell Hand — while advanced by character-driven exploration — is decidedly finite. Caught within a shrinking realm, pressed by titanic worms on all side, the adventurers must find a means of escaping the Vale of the Magi or see their souls torn asunder by the ravaging phlogiston.

There are a handful of ways for PCs to escape the Vale:

Mastering the Throne (area 2-4): If a PC can successfully gather 3 or more plaques, sit atop the throne of the Arch-Magi, and not be driven insane by the crush of occult knowledge, he can open a portal back to the PCs' home world.

Surrendering the Plaques: If PCs fulfill the initial premises of the magi and offer all existing plaques to a single magus, the magus is freed and made master of the realm. How the magus deals with the PCs once freed depends entirely on the PCs' behavior; the magi feel no compulsion to reward their lessers for service, and it takes masterful roleplaying to convince them otherwise. Judges will note that the threshold for acquiring "all existing plaques" lowers as the realm shrinks; conceivably a party could raid a single vault and wait for the phlogiston to do their dirty work. The hurdle in this plan is Mordax's card — the Devil — hidden in area 2-8; without acquiring or destroying this card, the PCs cannot claim to hold all existing plaques.

Rise of the Arch-Mage: The PCs need not surrender the plaques. A cleric, wizard or elf can attempt to use the powers of the plaques to open a portal back home. This is no mean feat, requiring the following:

- The caster must possess all existing plaques.
- The caster must perform an arcane ritual and succeed on a DC 25 spell check.

Just short of a miracle, the casting exhausts the most masterful caster and destroys the plaques. On a successful check the spellcaster falls into a deep sleep and cannot be roused for 1d5 days. During that time, the caster is assaulted on all sides by psychic threats from the outer dark — forces in the multiverse bent on destroying the nascent arch-mage or priest. For each day spent asleep the caster must attempt a DC 10 Will check. On a failed check the caster suffers 1d3 points of damage as wounds spontaneously open on his body. (These can be healed through clerical magic, or heal naturally.) If the PC survives the mental onslaught, he awakens hardened in mind and soul, receiving +1 to both his Intelligence and Personality scores. However, the caster is scarred by the ordeal, forever wary of once more encountering the beings from beyond.

ADJUSTING THE ADVENTURE

As little of the adventure need be combat, it is readily modified to suit lower or higher level PCs.

For third or fourth level characters, make the following changes: add two hit dice to each creature encountered; increase the AC and saves of the face cards by +1.

For first level PCs, reduce the number of Swords encountered by half (i.e. each card summons two Swords, not four.) Otherwise, make no changes. The odds spell almost certain death for the foolish, but the cunning and quick might still prevail.

KEY PLOT ELEMENTS

- There are three wizards: Darjr (area 5-4), Erodiade (area 4-2), and Al-Hazred (area 3-4).
- The devil Mordax (area 2-3) deals from the deck each dawn (area 2-4). Plaques dealt to a wizard force the loyalty of that NPC to that wizard – for the day.
- Phlogiston worms (area 1-3) devour the world from the outside, at rate of 1d3 hexes per day.
- Clothing of the realm's residents changes color to reflect the loyalty of this morning's deal of the deck: yellow for Darjr, red for Erodiade, and blue for Al-Hazred.
- The sun takes on the hue of the wizard dealt the greatest number of plaques for the day.
- Acquiring a wizard's plaques grants PCs mastery over their servitors, and those plaques are not re-dealt at the next dawn.
- A magus who loses all his plaques is destroyed.
- Slain NPCs may return to life at the next dawn, should their wizard master wish it. Slain PCs may be returned to life if they pledge fealty to one of the three wizards.
- There are three ways to escape the Vale, outlined on page 4.
- The passage of time is important to this adventure. Events occur each day as follows:
 - Dawn: The deck is dealt by the devil Mordax (area 2-3). Allegiances change, and garments change color to reflect the new allegiances.
 - Dusk, start: The bridge at area 5-1 appears. The fireflies swarm around Erodiade's lake (level 4).
 - Moonrise (one hour after dusk): The bridge at area 5-1 lasts for one hour, until the moon rises before the tower. Once the moon rises, the bridge disappears, and the fireflies at level 4 sink beneath the water to outline the 16 steps to area 4-1.
 - Night: Strange revels take place in the Manor – the Black Mass, the Hunt, or the High Fete (see introduction to level 2).

ADVENTURE HOOKS



When the magi open the portal to the mortal realm, they offer different temptations to different PCs. Judges should select from the hooks below, or use them as inspiration for designing hooks specific to their home campaigns. As in Fritz Leiber's short story, *The Price of Pain-Ease*, the characters are right to be wary of competing patrons.

WIZARDS & ELVES

In the course of his arcane research the caster comes across a scroll describing a cave: the mystical hermitage of Al-Hazred. After reading the scroll, is caster is haunted by a series of dreams, progressively revealing the cave and then a vale beyond the cave. (Show the player, and only this player, handout A.) In the seventh and final dream, Al-Hazred emerges from the darkness bearing a thick grimoire. The hooded arch-magus silently offers the caster the tome, but before the PC can accept, a misty gray serpent materializes from the mists, devouring the magus.

THIEVES & HALFLINGS

A large sewer rat with a scroll tied to its back seeks out the PC. Tied to the scroll is a platinum hair-pin set with a single ruby (worth 15 gp). The scroll is rendered in ancient Nimo-rian, and written in a flowing, feminine hand. If translated, it reads:

*seek the cave beyond the cave
the realm of three wizards and none
free me from my watery grave
earn the gratitude of the Lady*

On the reverse of the scroll is a crude map depicting the location of the cave (see Player Start). The scroll itself bears the faint scent of roses.

WARRIORS, DWARVES & CLERICS

When the PC next kills a foe, he experiences a fleeting vision: the wizard Darjr's face appears in place of the corpse's, and speaks thusly, "Champion: Free me! Two wicked wizards hold me in thrall in the Tower-Beyond-the-Moon! Aid me, and this sage shall serve you to the end of my days!" The PC sees an image of a path rising to a shallow cave (see Player Start) and then the vision ends, the wizard's face vanishing from the corpse.



PLAYER START



he adventure begins with the PCs at the entrance to a shallow cave, in search of the source of their mysterious missives and haunted dreams. Read or paraphrase the following:

The cave is shallow and dry, little more than an overhang carved into the side of the dark stone cliffs. Rustling twigs and dried leaves cover the floor, and decades worth of guano cake the back wall – hardly the mystical portal that you had expected to find.

The caked drippings conceal a seam in the back of the overhang. Persistent PCs easily discover the narrow cleft in the rock wall. Scarcely wide enough for passage, humans and dwarves need to shed armor to proceed.

Beyond the seam, the cleft opens just wide enough to permit the party to stand together shoulder to shoulder. Read or paraphrase the following:

The leaves crackle and crunch under boot as the walls open all around you. A ghostly form appears in the darkness. Dressed in the guise of a court jester or fool, giggling madly as it capers about, the fool seems ignorant – or blind – to your presence.

As the players watch on, deal the Deck of Fates as outlined above. Once all the cards have been dealt, the vision of the phantom jester capers away, shrinking into the distance.

If the PCs follow, pressing on through the darkness, they emerge into the moon-lit demi-plane. But even should they retreat from the cave, their fate is the same: the magi's trap has claimed the PCs, transporting them across time and space.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

Area	Type	Encounter
1-1	C	Four of Swords (20 skeletal warriors)
1-3	C	Worms of the Phlogiston
2-2	C	The Hierophant (Father Moro)
2-3	P	The Ladies-in-Waiting The Matron The Fool
2-4	C	The Prince of Swords (Captain Kaschei)
	P/T	Throne of the Arch-Magi
2-7	C	Devil-Kin
2-8	T	Pit Trap
	T	Devil's Coffin
3-2	C	Stone Drake
3-3	T	The Eye of Al-Hazred
4-0	P/C	Fireflies
4-2	T	Collapsing vault
5-3	T	Three vial trap
	C	7 Automata
5-4	P/C	The Torturer & the Broken King

INTO THE VALE

As the PCs emerge from the cave, read or paraphrase the following:

You step from the darkness covered in gray cobwebs that stink of sulfur. Even as you wipe the webs and strands from your face and limbs, they dissolve into smoky wisps that drift down into the tall, dewy grasses.

Give the players handout A. The PCs stand at Player Start, looking down upon the vale.

You and your companions stand atop a high ridge, looking down upon a darkened vale. Above, a fat, gibbous moon sinks slowly below the horizon. Below you can spy the lights of a manor house and trampled fields, all set upon the shore of a glassy lake lit by dancing fireflies. And beyond the manor, obscured by the setting moon, you see a lonesome tower, awash in waves of moon-lit clouds.

As the last of the moon sinks below the tall hills, the first hints of dawn streak the misty air.

LEVEL 1: VALLEY OF THE MAGI



Ringed on three sides by thick forests, the vale is circumscribed to the north by a sheer cliff perpetually awash in rolling mists. There is no base to these cliffs; climbers never reach the ground and those so unfortunate as to fall from its heights are never seen again.

During the day, a milky haze settles over the lowlands, lit by the glare of the dying sun. The heat of the same is far too weak to dispel the mists, which only clear at dusk. The sun always takes the cast of the magi with the most plaques.

At night, the skies clear, but are disturbingly free of stars, the sole light emanating from the pale moon.

With the entry of the PCs, the crashing waves begin to wear away at the far vale. This is a slow, inexorable process. With the start of each day roll 1d3 and reduce the diameter of the vale map by the same number of hexes. Anything within lost hexes (including magi and their vaults) is consumed by the ceaseless march of the phlogiston barrier (area 1-3). The shrinking happens gradually. Unless a PC is unconscious, asleep, or otherwise held, it is difficult to be caught by the slow march of roaring gray barrier.

AREAS OF THE MAP

Area 1-1 – Fields of the Fallen: *The long, plowed furrows are trampled into mud. Bodies litter the field, half buried and crusted with bloodied dirt. Shattered spears, splintered shields, and crushed helms are scattered all around. Cackling crows, their beaks wet with blood, hop about, making a feast of the slaughter.*

When the magi are given cause, they meet in battle on the fields outside the manor. The corpses are the forces of the Four of Swords, caught in a brutal fight to the death.

Adventurers desperate for equipment can find weapons and armor here, but looting the dead is a grim, gory task. On a successful Luck check the PC finds either a single weapon (either a spear or handaxe) or a serviceable article of armor (an unbroken shield or coat of studded leather).

If the magi draw upon any of the Four of Swords, the field comes alive as broken, skeletal warriors rouse themselves from the dripping earth. (While the magi can choose to return warriors back to the full bloom of health, such extravagances are frowned upon when the warriors will only die again.) While their appearance is that of skeletons, the warriors are not true un-dead and are unaffected by attempts to Turn.

Statistics for the skeletal warriors are found in Appendix B, under the Four of Swords. Each plaque represents four warriors.

Area 1-2 – The Shrinking Wood: *The grassy hills give way to dense woods. Beneath the thick canopy, the air is still and cool. The scent of wet, rotting leaves hangs in the air.*

The natives of the vale refuse to enter the woods; only the direct order of a magi can force them into the darksome

forest. Their fear is not without cause: the woods diminish daily, consumed by the march of the phlogiston barrier (see area 1-3).

Adventurers can easily hide within the woods, even circling the vale, without fear of disturbance from the denizens of the demi-plane. However, the phlogiston worms (see area 1-5) make a prolonged stay a risky gamble.

Area 1-3 – The Void: *You hear the wall long before you see it: a roar like the crash of an enormous waterfall amplified a thousand times, drowning out all other sounds. Stepping clear of the woods, you see the source of the roar: a wall of swirling gray shot through with violet and amber, streaming towards the heavens.*

The “wall” extends to the left and right as far as the PCs can see. Investigation reveals that it extends beneath the ground as well. The roar is loud enough to make verbal communication within 30’ impossible.

The wall is the barrier between the demi-plane and the roiling chaos of the phlogiston. It is permeable and – with the arrival of the PCs – shrinking daily. The barrier resists light and pressure, but is readily punctured by sharp objects or the weight of 10 lbs. or more. Objects (or characters) pressed through the barrier are rendered into ethereal threads and instantly dispersed. Only the portion of the object pressed into the void is evanesced – an adventurer could lose a portion of a sword (or sword-arm) and the rest would continue to exist so long as it remains within the material demi-plane.

In combat, a foe can be hurled into the void with a successful Mighty Deed of Arms (4 or better). Similarly, a judge may rule that a critical failure sends a character stumbling into the barrier (DC 10 Ref save to avoid).

The barrier is the point of origin of the phlogiston worms. The worms, a collection of shorn phlogiston threads, stalk the shrinking barrier and the nearby woods. Over thirty feet in length, the eyeless worms present the one threat of true death within the demi-plane.

Thankfully, the worms are slow and languid. Composed of phlogiston, they are also devoid of intellect, readily mistaking motion or noise for a true target. Tossing an object past a worm can easily distract it, buying the PCs a round to escape (DC 15 Will save, or the worm is distracted for a round). The judge should take liberties with ruling that more sophisticated gambits buy the PCs even more time (moving strawmen, for instance, or tactile illusions).

Reducing a worm to 0 hit points doesn’t slay the creature, but does cause the worm to disband in an explosion of icy gray threads. (A successful Turn Unholy, DC 17, does the same.) Unfortunately, the worms are as immortal as the phlogiston, reforming in 1d12 hours.

At the beginning of the adventure, the worms’ hunting range extends no further than one hex from the barrier. But their range increases for every hex ring the vale shrinks.

(Example: if the vale's borders shrink by 3 hexes, the worms can now range 4 hexes from the barrier.)

For every hour spent within the worms' range, roll 1d12. On a 2, 3 or 4, the PCs are discovered by a worm. On a 1, the PCs are surrounded by no less than three worms. PCs slain by a worm disperse into shadowy stands of phlogiston and cannot be resurrected by any means.

Worms of the Phlogiston: Init -5; Atk bite +0 melee (1d5+3); AC 10; HD 8d8; hp 32; MV 25'; Act 1d30; SP immune to *charm* and similar mind-altering effects; SV Fort +2, Ref -3, Will +5; AL N.

LEVEL 2: THE MANOR



horn from its home plane, the manor house languishes on the point of near-ruin. Weary with existence, its inhabitants have ceased to care for their domicile and the air is heavy with the despair of lost splendor. Shards of broken roof tiles lie strewn about the floor, the plastered walls are cracked with rot, and cobwebs drape the corners like ghostly tapestries.

The manor is quiet during the day, but come night the liegemen host dour, melancholic fetes to pass the hours. Should the PCs opt to participate in the strange revels, the vassals demand that the adventurers respect their bizarre rules and customs. If at any point the PCs balk, the angered liegemen enforce their nonsensical order with the threat of violence.

Judges are encouraged to choose from the selection below, or create their own grim galas. As a guideline, the fete should always require some degree of investment and risk from the PCs.

Black Mass: Father Moro hosts a debased service in the ruined chapel (area 2-2), taunting the gods that have permitted them to languish in the demi-plane. The vassals gather shortly after dusk, solemnly lighting the black candles at the head of the chapel. Once all are seated, the Hierophant gives a brief sermon on the uncaring nature of the universe and its fraudulent gods, concluding the sole sane solution is to beg – not for salvation – but for a merciful release from the suffering of existence. The service concludes with Moro choosing a “sacred host.” His first choice is always one of the PCs, but failing their presence he chooses the vassal of a rival magi. The host is beset upon by all sides by the congregation, borne up to the altar and skinned. The skin is cut into swatches and offered to the congregants as unholy host. Those who partake of the host receive Moro's blessing, while those that refuse the offering are set upon by the congregation.

The Hunt: On certain nights, vassals of all three magi gather in the throne room (area 2-4) dressed in their finest hunting tunics and oiled cloaks. Jacks of wine and ale are bandied about in grim silence as the liegemen sharpen their weapons. Straws are drawn by all in attendance, and the holder of the short straw is designated the “stag.” The stag is given the length of time necessary for Captain Kaschei

Area 1-4 – Cliffs: *The cliff-edge is awash in a sea of clouds. Beyond stands an ominous gray tower, floating atop the clouds. A cool breeze and the smell of salt water roll up from below.*

Attempts to descend the cliffs end in failure (DC 10 Climb), as the cliffs seem to have no bottom. Inquisitive PCs may realize that despite the cool breeze and the smell of the ocean, there is no sound of waves breaking against the cliffs.

Those falling from the cliffs plummet into the mists, before passing into the roaring phlogiston encircling the demi-plane.

to down a skin of wine, before the entire party pours out into the night in raucous pursuit of their prey. If the stag can survive until dawn when the vassals are assigned new lieges, the hunt comes to a close. But if the hunt succeeds in bringing down their quarry, they slaughter the unlucky soul and celebrate by roasting his flesh over an open fire.

The High Fete: The ladies in waiting (see area 2-3) hold a ball to determine the strongest champion of the far vale. Each of the three ladies chooses a champion, and at the height of the night all three are forced to face off in a battle royal. The trio are expected to fight until only champion remains standing; the winner is awarded the affections of all three ladies, and is the toast of a feast that lasts until dawn (though the two fallen ladies do their best to dishonor the champion out of jealousy).

AREAS OF THE MAP

Area 2-1 – High Gate: *Worn stone steps rise to the ruined manor house. The once-mighty door hangs ajar, covered in moss and vines. Above, a weathered arch bears the relief of three sigils: a crown, crossed wands, and a star.*

An air of gloom hangs about the place, the tyranny of time without hope for renewal.

The entrance was impressive, once a testament to the combined might of three arch-magi. Now it stands only as a reminder to how far the magi have fallen.

The sigils atop the gate represent the three magi, but are harmless. If a PC manages to ascend the Throne of the Arch-Magi (in area 2-4) the three sigils are replaced with an emblem of the PC's choosing.

Unless a magus decides otherwise, the gate is left unguarded. The great doors can be hauled closed in an emergency and barred from within. The barred doors yet retain some of their former strength (25 hp or DC 15 Strength check to burst).

Just inside the gate is a large rain barrel (half-full of stagnant water), a muddy iron bar used to seal the gate, a sheaf of 6 spears, and a shield. The spears are unremarkable, yet serviceable. The shield is pitted with rust, but if polished,

the boss gleams with unmistakable magic. Etched into the shield boss is the image of a great warrior withstanding blows from all sides. Any day the bearer makes an offering to the god of the shield, he is granted a DC 10 Fort save to ignore a single critical hit. The offering must be equal or greater to the character's level x 15 gp. The effect works but once per day, but at the judge's discretion multiple offerings of geometrically increasing value may be considered.

Extremely curious or attentive PCs may note that of all the items inside the gate, only the bar shows signs of recent use. This runs counter to the gate, which clearly hasn't been closed in some time. The Fool uses the bar to pry up the flagstone in area 2-6, accessing one of the two complexes beneath the manor house.

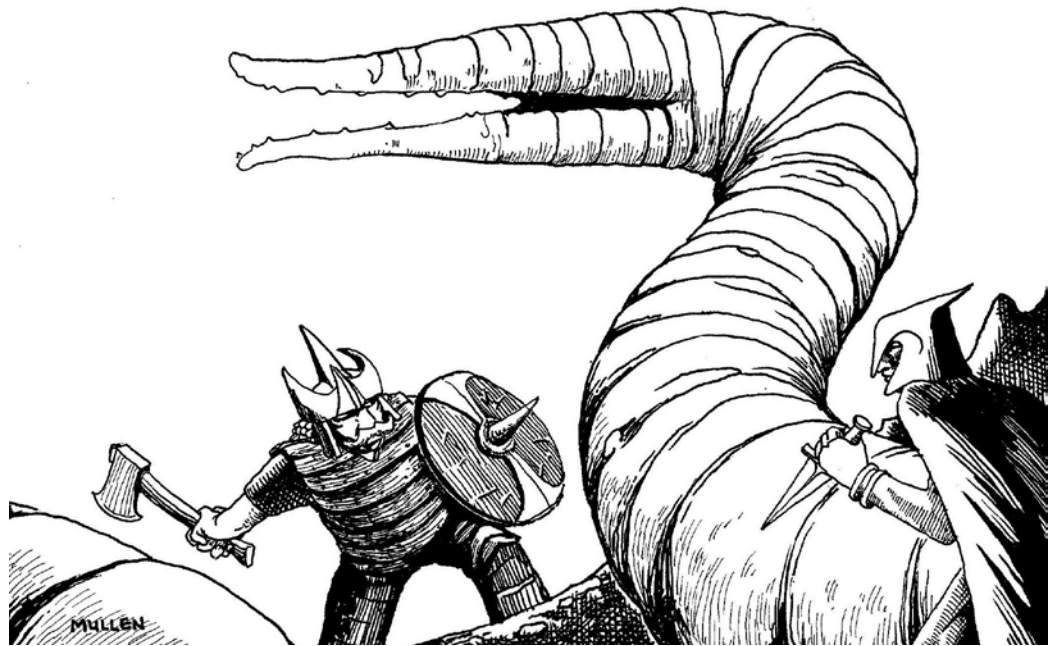
Area 2-2 - Chapel: *The small chapel stinks of mildew and blight. The walls drip with mold, and the pews are spongy with rot. At the far end of the dark chapel, three steps descend to a low altar. A tattered white tapestry hangs behind the altar, stained black and green.*

The chapel is the abode of Father Moro (c: The Hierophant). The Father makes his bed atop a thatched straw mat in a nook behind the tapestry, emerging from prayer to investigate disturbances in the chapel. Unnaturally tall and gaunt, with long spidery fingers extending from rotting sleeves, Father Moro exudes a malefic, predatory air. He is dressed in a hooded black robe that bunches on the floor, and walks unsteadily, leaning on a 12' crosier. The head of the staff is decorated with wicked barbs, short spikes and blades, and is used to great effect in combat.

The Hierophant is intrigued by the PCs, but only insofar as he can inflict fear. He is infuriated by PCs refusing to defer to his foul presence, dismissing them from the chapel.

In combat, the Hierophant lifts his robes revealing six folded, stilt-like legs in place of his human limbs. The spidery legs unfold, nimbly hoisting him into the air. Towering above his foes, the chaos priest hammers at the PCs with his crosier. If pressed he resorts to magic, calling upon beings of the outer dark to afflict his foes with soul-damning torment.

The Hierophant can cast three harmful spells per day, each of which causes 1d8+2 damage at a range of 100' (DC 13 Will save for half damage). Finally, a Father can use his religious symbol to turn away his foes. This can be done three times per day, and the foes must make a DC 13 Will save or be held at bay, unable to approach within 20' of the Father. Such foes can still make ranged attacks.



The Hierophant's full statistics are found in Appendix B.

The priest's scant possessions are concealed behind the ratty tapestry. In addition to the thatch mat, PCs discover a trio of partially burned candles, and a hammered copper bowl stained with blood. Resting within the bowl is a short dagger, sharpened to a razor's edge.

The blade and the bowl bear the taint of the Hierophant's foul ceremonies. Empowered with the sacrifice of ten thousand souls, the implements grant clerics +3 to spells checks. However, each time the bonus is employed, the PC must succeed on a DC 10 Will save or succumb to madness and the desire to kill themselves.

Area 2-3 - Ladies-in-Waiting: *The door opens to reveal three ladies seated around a glowing brazier. All three wear pale half-masks and diaphanous gowns accented with silk. Slender keys hang around the necks of each lady-in-waiting.*

Behind the trio stands a dour woman, her round face framed with a black mantle, girded in a long tunic dress the color of midnight.

And finally there is the Fool: sitting atop a tall stool in his striped hose and gaudy tunic, casting clever finger shadows on the wall and entertaining the ladies with a bawdy tale.

At the sound of your entry the seated ladies look up from their needlework, devious smiles flashing beneath their masks. The matron crosses to stand before them, moving with sprightly speed in spite of her considerable frame. The Fool watches on, bemused.

The three Ladies-in-Waiting - Signe, Nyx and Morai - are immediately enamored of the PCs and desire nothing more than to speak with them. The Matron does everything in her power to prevent this, fearing the moral corruption of her wards at the hands of professional reavers. Left to their own devices, the opposing sides are evenly matched: the superior numbers of the distractible Ladies thwarted by the Matron's agility. The PCs are the deciding factor in the power play.

The sisters see the PCs as little more than playthings and

status symbols. Each wishes to have the most powerful PC (in her estimation) serve as her champion, cutting down all those that would besmirch her dubious honor. The Ladies delight in debating the merits of all would-be champions, and their decisions are seldom final. If a champion is chosen, he (or she) has the privilege of choosing a token from his chosen lady.

Complicating matters, each Lady is fiercely jealous of her sisters. The slightest compliment or honor done to one Lady immediately draws the ire of her sisters, who strive to receive better accolades, or – failing that – eliminate the giver. PCs interacting with the Ladies are trapped in an ever-escalating war of compliments and gifts, where nothing is ever sufficient, and no sister is ever fully satisfied.

Each Lady bears a key, worn on a slender silver necklace around her neck. Each unlocks a portal to one of the three magi. Clever PCs can agree to champion the Ladies, and then demand the keys as tokens of the Ladies' favor.

Signe – iron key

Nyx – copper key

Morai – gold key

The ladies are all too jealous of each other's influence to reveal where their keys might be used. Each of the keys opens one of the stones in area 2-4 and one of the coffer's locks in area 2-8.

Unknown to all but the Fool, the Matron also carries a key, hidden in the folds of her tunic dress. Cast in silver, with the image of a laughing devil cut into the bow, the key opens the Fool's coffer (hidden in area 2-8).

Suspicious to a fault, there is little to cause the Matron to give the PCs her key (or even tell them it exists). However, should the PCs somehow win the Matron over, the Fool does everything in his power to keep the key out of their possession.

The Ladies shrink from combat, but their Matron defends them to the best of her ability. If combat erupts, the Fool sits back to enjoy the slaughter, only intervening if it appears that the PCs might discover the Matron's key.

The Fool takes three forms in combat, each with its own stat block. When the jester-form dies, a hulking, 12' demon with hooves, a bull's head and vestigial wings tears its way free of the corpse. And when the demon is slain, it vomits out a black fly the size of a fist. The fly attempts to escape, but is slow and languid, rising no higher than 6' off the ground. Should the fly manage to escape the PCs, the Fool returns, fully healed, on the next morn.

Treasure: Apart from the four keys, there is little within the room to interest adventurers. Searchers find three beds (for the Ladies), a single cot for their mistress, and trunks of clothes for the same. Despite the apparent opulence of the surroundings, inspection reveals that all of the furnishings are moth-eaten and soiled. The sole treasure to be found is a

quartet of matching silver candlesticks, cast in the likeness of fearsome demons. Each is worth 5 gp.

Statistics for The Ladies, their Matron, and the Fool can be found in Appendix B.

Area 2-4 – Throne of the Arch-Magi: *The great hall is dominated by a large throne set atop a high dais. Flanked by statues of white marble lions, chased in silver and jewels and sheltered by a canopy of the darkest velvet, the opulent throne is fit for a sorcerer-king.*

For all its grandeur the throne sits abandoned. Cobwebs hang from the canopy and dust has gathered on the once majestic lions.

To the left of the dais sits a much simpler demi-throne of dark, polished wood, carved in the likeness of rearing lion. A warrior sits sprawled atop the throne, his head hung with melancholy. Empty wine bottles and a discarded broadsword rest against the throne.

The warrior is Captain Kaschei (the Prince of Swords). Once an unrelenting terror and implacable foe, the warrior's mettle has little value in the demi-plane where death is as passing as the morning dew.

In the unchanging, aimless world, the PCs offer a welcome challenge. The Captain hopes to find a worthy foe that can grant him eternal death – an impossible proposition unless the PCs possess and destroy Kaschei's plaque. The Captain is honorable to a fault; he does not pick false battles with the PCs, but if the opportunity arises, he gladly offers himself up for single combat. However, like all the beings in the demi-plane, he is utterly beholden to his magi masters; if ordered to lie, or fight unfairly, he will, even as his soul turns with distaste.

Roused from his drunken slumber, Captain Kaschei morosely welcomes the PCs to the vale, and takes pains to explain their doom: to live a gray eternity within the demi-plane. The Captain is certain that there is no escape, dismissing any plans and plots, preferring to spend his time sizing up his potential foemen.

In battle, the Captain is terrible to behold, cutting down lesser foes like chaff before the scythe. If well matched, he softens his blows (reducing damage by -1 or -2 as the judge sees fit), savoring the challenge. If duped or betrayed, he attacks with righteous fury, offering no quarter.

Statistics for Captain Kaschei can be found in Appendix B.

Throne of the Arch-Magi: Sitting atop the throne incurs the wrath of the magi; impudent PCs are blasted from the throne and must succeed on a DC 15 Fort save or take 2d6 damage.

However, a wizard or elf possessing three or more plaques takes no damage, and has the opportunity to master the throne. Crackling sheets of lightning wash over the PC as he is assaulted by arcane knowledge beyond the common ken. The PC must attempt a DC 15 Will save. On a successful save, the character is suffused with esoteric knowledge, gaining one level and 1d3 randomly determined spells.

However, on a failed save the arcane truths overwhelm the PC, driving him mad. Henceforth, any time the PC is placed under stress (judge's decision), he must attempt a DC 15 Will save, or succumb to his madness. Roll 1d5: (1) caster drops to his knees and attacks the foe as if he were a hound; (2) caster does everything in his power – including attacking allies – to escape; (3) caster falls into the fetal position, screaming arcane secrets in an effort to buy his life; (4) disbelieving the madness around him, caster gouges out his own eyes; (5) caster falls into catatonic state, and cannot be revived for 1d3 turns.

Spells cast from atop the throne receive a +5 spell check bonus. Additionally, any caster successfully mastering the throne can, with a DC 15 spell check, open a portal back to the mortal realms, offering the PCs an escape from the Vale of the Magi.

The Hidden Tomb: A woven rug covers the floor of the throne room, depicting a party of mounted warriors pursuing an enormous serpent.

Rolling back the rug reveals a rectangular capstone, some 6' in diameter, set flush with the floor. Chiseled into the capstone is the crude image of a decapitated, three-headed dragon.

The capstone is locked in place with three rotating stones, set with keyholes. The keyholes are set with plates – iron, copper and gold – and match the respective keys held by the ladies-in-waiting, in area 2-3. The trio of locking blocks can also be picked with DC 15 Pick Lock checks.

Removing the capstone permits access to area 3-1.

Area 2-5 – Ruin: Much of the manor house has fallen into ruin. Kitchens, storerooms, latrines and the like have all succumbed to the passage of time. These areas are littered with rubble, broken tiles, cracking plaster and rotting beams of fallen timber.

Area 2-6 – Low Gate: *The walls of the stairwell are heavy with moss. A rivulet of water trickles down the steps, pooling on the flagstone landing below. A rusted stone gate rests against one wall. Beyond the low stone lintel, you can see marshland running down to the lake.*

The faint scent of rotting meat hangs in the air.

The low gate is seldom used. Tiny insects hang in thin webs stretched between the walls, and the worn steps are free of recent tracks. The gate is rusted in place, and breaks free of its rusted hinges if forced closed.

Only the most astute PCs notice that the pooled water doesn't run down into the marsh. The water sinks into the seams around the flagstone; a hidden passage lies below.

The flagstone is easily broken or lifted clear, revealing a narrow, muddy shaft descending 20' down to area 2-7. The shaft is too narrow permit the passage of all but the scrawniest humans or dwarves in metal armor; note which PCs are forced to remove their armor prior to entering area 2-7.

PCs peering down into area 2-7 can hear a buzzing coming from below, the droning wings of thousands of flies. The air wafting from below stinks of rotting meat.

Area 2-7 – Master of Flies: *The narrow descent yields to a crag-walled crevice cut into the rock beneath the manor. Hundreds – no, thousands – of black flies crawl along the walls, creeping in and out of cracks spider-webbing the wall, the drone of their wings filling the air.*

The stink of rotting meat is nearly overwhelming. Water is pooled on the floor, rising nearly to your calves. You can spy broken swords and the occasional spear half-submerged in the inky waters.

The flies are larval devil-kin, vying for the chance to win Mordax's favor. The horde of flies is slow to rouse, only attacking 1d5+1 rounds after the first PC enters the crevice.

The devil-kin swarm together to form a towering, seething bipedal form, composed entirely of flies. The fly-devil attacks by taking up arms from the weapons in the pool: spears, hand-and-a-half swords, and spiked maces. It can also attack by hurling a bit of itself at the target, a ball of swarming flies that burrow into any exposed orifice. The devil-kin swarm does its best to incapacitate intruders, dragging them back to area 2-8, where victims are fed to the wall of maggots.

The entrance from 2-6 is too narrow to permit humans and dwarves girded in metal armor; rather, the PCs must descend first and have their armor lowered down to them. The judge should account for PCs' reduced armor classes; however, the flies can also use unoccupied armor to their own ends: If any unoccupied armor is in the chamber at the start of the encounter the devil-kin swarm inside the armor, increasing the AC of the devil-kin accordingly. It takes the devil-kin one round to swarm (or un-swarm). While not swarmed, the flies cannot attack, and can only be harmed by area attacks.

In combat the swarmed devil-kin can choose between three attacks: battering at the target with one of its swarmed fists; attacking with a spear or broken sword; or hurling a ball of buzzing flies.

The first two attacks inflict normal damage, but on a successful ball attack, the flies force their way into PCs' mouths, ears and nostrils. Victims must succeed on DC 10 Ref saves or begin suffocating, their lungs filling with devil flies. (Suffocating creatures take 1d6 points of Stamina damage per round and die when Stamina reaches 0; lost Stamina is restored immediately if they are removed from the mound of flies.) Saving the PC requires extraordinary measures: the flies can be forced from the target's lungs with a DC 15 Turn Unholy check, but other creative means can be entertained at the judge's pleasure.

A successful Turn Unholy (DC 15) cast at the devil-kin causes it to unswarm, but the hellish creatures re-swarm after one round. Finally, so long as the swarm is fed by additional flies from area 2-8, the devil-kin "heals" 1d5 hp per



round. If the swarm is reduced to 0 hp, it cannot reconstitute itself.

Treasure: There is little in the chamber to interest explorers. A close search of the water pooled on the floor reveals 1d12 weapons (spears, daggers and swords of varying lengths) but all have been rendered nearly worthless.

Devil-Kin (flies): Init -2; Atk fist +0 melee (1d5+3) or spear +0 melee (1d8+3) or ball of flies +2 ranged (1d3 + DC 15 Ref or suffocation); AC 10; hp24; MV 25' or fly 10' (unswarmed); Act 2d20; SP 1 round to swarm/unswarm, traits as demon, regenerate 1d5 hp/round, vulnerable to Turn Unholy (DC 15 forces unswarm); SV Fort -1, Ref -1, Will immune; AL L.

Area 2-8 - The Droning Wall: *The buzzing from within the chamber is nearly deafening. Opposite the low entrance is a towering wall nearly 20' in height. Pitted, cracked and gouged, the wall is alive with black flies and crawling white larvae.*

The raw stench of unholy rot threatens to overwhelm you and your companions.

Judge's Note: The Fool / Mardox is immediately aware of intruders entering this area. The devil responds as quickly as he can, attempting to sneak up on the party to observe PCs. If possible, the devil will attempt misdirection, luring the PCs away and keeping his disguise in place. However, if the PCs are on the verge of discovering the coffer, Mardox intercedes with violence.

The wall is the source of the devil-kin flies found in area 2-7. Drawn by the power of Mordax and his coffer (hidden in area 2-8), the devil-kin flies cluster here in the vain hope of winning the devil's favor.

Characters carried here by the devil-kin are found mashed into the wall, their bodies swarming with the flies and larvae.

All the devil-kin that aren't able to swarm are encountered in area 2-8. These flies and larvae cannot swarm, but present a different sort of danger: If a character comes within 5' of the wall, the flies and larvae fall in great globs (DC 10 Ref save to avoid). The flies and larvae crawl over the PC, infiltrating any open wounds. So long as a PC is free from injury (at full hp) the flies and larvae cause no harm. However if the PC bears an injury, the foul devil-insects converge upon the wound, working their way into the PCs' body. The larvae inflict 1d3 damage worming their way into the wound, where they lay eggs that hatch in 1d7+5 days. The worms work their way to the brain where they transform the host into a cambion, aligned with the forces of Hell. (It is left to the judge to determine whether or not the character remains playable as a PC.) The eggs can be destroyed by a priest successfully Laying on Hands for 4 or more dice.

The Hidden Door: Set in the middle of the wall, 6' off the ground, is a narrow copper door. Ten inches wide, and six inches high, the door is caked with blood; a slim keyhole is set within the door. The key to the lock is found with the Matron, in area 2-3.

Set in the floor directly beneath the small door is a pit trap, 10' in width and extending away from the wall. Concealed by hardened ooze and caked filth, the pit trap can only be discovered by PCs explicitly searching the floor beneath the portal.

The lock can be opened with a DC 15 Pick Lock check, but a DC 20 or better check is needed to avoid triggering the pit trap: the trap doors open up, dropping the PC 20' into the pit below. Any characters within the trap's area of effect tumble to the rocky floor below, taking 2d6 points of falling damage. Simultaneously, a horde of flies and larvae slough off the wall, pouring into the pit.

The mound of flies and larvae attempt entry through any new wound (as noted above) and also pin the PC to the floor of the pit (DC 15 Strength check to escape). Trapped PCs begin drowning (as per suffocation rules in area 2-7).

Successfully opening the door reveals a niche containing a diabolic coffer.

Mordax's Coffer: Decorated with scores of leering faces with open maws, the coffer is accented with razor-sharp edges, a forest of needles, and strange glyphs. All of the blades, needles, razors and pins are obviously coated in a dried lacquer (readily identified by chaotic thieves as poison).

Simply handling the coffer requires a DC 10 Handle Poison check. On a failed check the PC has cut himself on one of the edges or triggered one of the spring blades, taking 1d3 points of damage. The handler must make a DC 10 Will save, or succumb to the coffer's geas: defending the coffer from the other PCs with his life. The compulsion lasts so long as the coffer remains unopened; however, the geas forms a link between the PC and a devil of the judge's choosing – how this relationship unfolds, and what one asks of the other (and receives in return) is entirely the domain of the campaign.

There are three keyholes set within the forest of needles and pins, matching the keys held by the ladies-in-waiting (in area 2-3). A careful Find Traps check (DC 15) reveals that all three locks must be opened simultaneously (whether by key or pick). Even if all three keys are held, each character turning the key must succeed on a DC 5 Agility check or trigger the final trap. Of course, if the PCs don't possess all the keys, the locks' tumblers must be triggered simultaneously.

Failure to do so activates the last of the coffer's traps: the blades lash out, needles fire, and razors slash at the hands of those attempting to open the locks. Each of the 3 characters must attempt a DC 15 Ref save or be caught by the whirling blades and firing needles; any PC failing the save takes 1d5 damage and must succeed on the DC 10 Will or succumb to the coffer's geas – potentially slaying each other in "defense" of the coffer.

For all its baroque defenses, the coffer is readily smashed open with a DC 17 Strength check, or by a series of blows inflicting 20 or more hit points of damage. However, breaking open the coffer also crushes the ivory plaque held within.

If the PCs are able to open the coffer without resorting to brute force, they discover the last of the 8 plaques: the Devil. Possessing the plaque grants the PCs (grudging) mastery over the devil Mordax. While compliant to the letter of his orders, the devil does everything in his power to win back his freedom and punish the mortals so arrogant as to assume command of a devil.

LEVEL 3: THE MANOR TOMB



he manor tomb is the simplest of the magi's three vaults. Once the home of the family catacombs, the vault has instead been put into service as the holding cell for the mad magus Al-Hazred.

The air is cool and damp, smelling faintly of reptiles. Save for area 3-1, there are no light sources. Adventurers insisting on absolute silence will hear a slithering sound emanating from area 3-2, but the sound is too soft for PCs to pinpoint the location without a thief making a Hear Noise check (DC 10).

Area 3-1 – Dome of the Drake: *The stone stairs wind down to the base of a domed vault. Fractured skulls and bits of dried bone litter the worn steps, and gossamer cobwebs drag at your boots and sandals.*

Peering into the darkness below, you can see the vault ringed by six archways. Bright mirrors hang on chains from the ceiling, each suspended at different heights, spinning slowly in the flickering torchlight.

As soon as the adventurers set foot on the floor of the vault, the stone sconces along the walls spring to life. The magical light is caught and reflected in the mirrors, brightly illuminating the vault.

In the amplified light, the dome is a wonder to behold. Elaborate mosaics stretch from floor to ceiling, depicting complex geometric patterns. Polished gems are set within the mosaics, flaring in the light. Astrologers, sky-seers and sages are quick to recognize the ceiling and the jewels as constellations. The constellation of the Dragon stands most prominent, bright in the southern "sky." Given the overhung dome, the gems are difficult to reach (DC 15 Climb); there are 23 jewels in all, worth 15 gp each.

The mirrors are brightly polished discs of steel. They readily cast reflections of the PCs as they descend the stairs. Harmless to the adventurers on their own, the mirrors act as a barrier to the drake prowling area 3-2. If the drake enters the chamber its reflection is instantly cast throughout the chamber. PCs failing to cover their eyes prior to the drake's entrance must succeed on a DC 10 Ref save or be turned to stone. The drake is not so lucky and is instantly turned to stone.

The sconces are carved from the stone blocks making up the walls. The flames give off heat and burn just as normal fires. Attempting to remove the sconces results in their destruction, extinguishing the flames. There are 12 sconces in all. If, for some reason, more than half the sconces are extinguished or covered, the save DC for the drake's gaze is cut to 5, and the drake is able to avoid its own gaze, escaping the vault. If all the PCs exit the chamber, climb the stairs, or otherwise cease touching the floor, the sconces are extinguished, plunging the chamber back into darkness.

Adventurers carefully searching the circumference of the vault discover a trio of large scales, each roughly 3" by 5" in length. Torn from the drake, the scales have the appearance of rough stone flecked with mica. Touching flesh to the scales causes a thin layer of skin to turn to chalky stone dust. This causes no damage, but hints at the powers of the stone drake in area 3-2.

Area 3-2 – Scales in the Darkness: *The inky darkness seems to press in on all sides. You can hear the sounds of dripping water and smell moisture on the air, mixed with a faint, acrid odor.*

This vast cave chamber is preternaturally dark. Even when the sconces are lit in area 3-1, the archways cast but feeble arcs of light in the cave. Mundane light sources brought into the area have their range cut by half, providing scant light at all. The unnatural darkness can be dispelled for 1d6 rounds with a DC 15 Turn Unholy check, permitting torches, lanterns and other light sources to function as normal.

The stone drake that lives here is over 15' tall when standing upright, with the head of a featherless rooster, the scaled body of a theropod, and long, drooping claws atop vestigial arms. The lizard-thing's thin scales are the color of stone, flecked with mica.

The drake has a trio of white, unblinking eyes set in its forehead; anyone meeting the beast's gaze must attempt a DC 10 Ref save to avert their eyes or be turned to stone. If shown its own reflection, the drake must attempt the same save or suffer the same fate.

Cutting open the corpse reveals a bulging gullet. Within are 1d6 gems, ground to a smooth polish. The gems are worth 1d6 x 10 gp each. If the beast is skinned and used to fashion a cloak, the strange scales grant a +1 bonus to Hide checks made in stony environs.

The Stone Drake: Init +0; Atk bite +0 melee (1d10) or claw +3 melee (1d4) or gaze (special); AC 15; HD 6d8; HP 34; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP gaze (DC 10 Ref or turn to stone); SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +3; AL C.

Area 3-3 – Scrying Pool: *A small grotto is set into the wall of the cavern. You can make out a wide stone basin emerging from the floor like a stalagmite. Oily black liquid is pooled within the circle, glowing with a faint violet hue in the dim light.*

Those peering deeply into the pool for a round or more can attempt to scry any person, creature, object, or location within the multi-verse. The gazer must attempt a Will check to master the Eye of Al-Hazred; the DC hinges on the scryer's knowledge of the location:

- Known: DC 5
- Seen from a Distance: DC 10
- Accurate Secondhand Knowledge: DC 15
- Inaccurate Knowledge: DC 20
- Known Only by Name: DC 25

On a successful check, the gazer succeeds in accurately viewing the chosen person, creature, object, or location for 1d5 rounds.

On a failed check, the inky violet ichor animates, attempting to drown the PC by rushing down the victim's throat, flooding his lungs. Drowning creatures take 1d6 points of Stamina damage per round and die when Stamina reaches 0; lost Stamina is restored immediately once the violet ichor is removed.

The ichor attacks only the failed scryer, even if others join in the battle.

Hidden at the base of the pool are the plaques assigned to Al-Hazred. The plaques are revealed if the ichor attacks, and are easily removed.

Eye of Al-Hazred: Init +3; Atk pseudopod -3 melee (1d5 + special); AC 10; HD 6d6; HP 23; MV 10', climb 10'; Act 1d20; SP half damage from slicing and piercing weapons, drown victim; SV Fort +6, Ref -8, Will -6; AL N.

Area 3-4 – Vault of Al-Hazred: *A robed figure stands silent at the rear of the chamber. Its face is hidden by a hood, and its hands are buried within the folds of the robes. The robe itself seems fashioned of a mantle of stars, set within fabric the color of night.*

This silent, motionless form is the sorcerous being Al-Hazred (one of its seven manifestations, the others being scattered across the multiverse). He can speak – in a slow, raspy whisper – but has no ability to move or physically interact with the PCs. Al-Hazred begs the PCs not to come too close, but can do nothing to prevent their approach. If the PCs are willing to parlay, Al-Hazred beseeches them to acquire the plaques of the other two magi and bring them to his chamber. Al-Hazred promises the PCs any and every reward; an unrepentant liar and masker of truths, he never fulfills any of the promises.

If the form is disturbed, the hood slips away, revealing an empty void. The air in the chamber is drawn – screaming – into the vacuum of the void. PCs within 20' of Al-Hazred must attempt DC 10 Fort saves or be sucked 5' per round towards the void. On a successful check, the PC moves 5' away from the void. Creatures and objects drawn into the void vanish from existence. Characters withdrawing more than 20' are freed from the draw of the vacuum.

The howling rift collapses after 1d24 rounds. If the robe hasn't been taken by this time, it vanishes through the collapsing rift.

If a PC manages to get close enough to seize the robe, yet escape the howling void, he can tear the robe from the form (DC 10 Strength check). This reveals a gaping rift in the fabric of the multi-verse, the origin of the void.

Won free, the Celestial Mantle of Al-Hazred is a magic item of no small import. The mantle grants the wearer +5 to spell checks when casting *invoke patron*, *patron bond*, *summon monster* and *summon demon*. Any time this power is used, the caster permanently loses 1 hp.

COLOR CARDS FOR 2ND PRINTING

For this second printing of *Fate's Fell Hand*, we have included this special insert of colorized versions of the cards. (The original black-and-white versions are also included elsewhere in this book.) If you have access to a color copier, permission is granted to photocopy these cards for home use. We recommend you copy the cards, then make a number of copies of the card back (the blue-gray image with mystical symbols). Cut to size, glue or tape the backs to the fronts, and use these cards in play! Also included are two blank card faces (one blue and one yellow) should you wish to design your own cards. Check page 3 to determine how many versions of each card are needed for play.

Additional, we've included the Magical Decks section below with further ideas for integrating magical decks of cards into your games!



MAGICAL DECKS



ainted decks – stained with wine and grease – are common in gambling dens, among mercenary companies and in the dusty, patchwork tents, littering the Souk. Noble folk and priests do well to eschew such company; the mere possession of a deck of plaques or cards risks being labeled as an itinerant gambler, or worse, a heathen diviner of fortunes.

Unlike other worlds, there is as yet no commonly agreed upon standard deck of playing cards. Gamblers bring their own handful of cards to a game, building a community deck of cards and plaques. Being able to recognize one's own cards is expected and respected. Only a fool or a farmhand sits down to a game with an unknown deck.

Rumors of haunted and magical decks are passed around dens of iniquity like jacks of cheap wine. Whether cards are – by their nature – predisposed to enchantment, or actively draw luck, is left to the whim of the judge.

THE DEVIL'S DECK

Alternately known as the Haunted Deck and the Luck-Eater, the deck appears in various cultures under any number of epithets and guises, but always functions in the same manner.

Firstly, the deck's possessor (not *owner* – the deck is only truly owned by its diabolic entity) receives +1d to gambling-related checks.

Secondly, the character may also bet against the spirit of the deck to receive a Luck bonus. The PC plays for 1d3 to 1d7 Luck points, against the same number of his own Stamina. Both the player and the judge draw randomly from the deck; high card wins. This is an instant, psychic transaction taking place between the PC and a fire-limned, horned devil seated upon a throne of sooty skulls.

If the player wins the draw, he receives the chosen die worth of Luck points, which must be spent immediately on his PC's next action. If the judge wins the draw, the PC loses points of Stamina.

Any Stamina lost may be regained through normal or magical healing; *however*, the player must track the total amount lost to the deck. When this amount exceeds the character's original Stamina total, the PC vanishes into the deck, appearing at the foot of the devil. What transpires next, and how the devil puts his newest slave to work, is left to the devices of the judge.

When first discovered, the deck is always composed of 26 plaques – offering a total of 13 opposed draws. If a PC miraculously wins all 13 draws, the deck explodes in a flash of absolute darkness, vomiting forth the thousands of souls consumed during its existence along with a non-corporeal devil. The PC is immediately granted +1d7 to his Luck score (which need not be spent immediately). Henceforth, the devil's enmity knows no bounds, and the foul being attempts to hamper and harm the PC for the remainder of his life.

DECK OF MISFORTUNE

The deck is composed is a score or more hand-carved wooden plaques, painted with black and red lacquer and set with skull-shaped borders. Each card depicts a character succumbing to a doom.

Despite its ominous name, the deck actually serves as a means of divining against ill-fortune. By drawing from the deck, adventurers-of-fortune can glean some knowledge of the dangers they face in their near future.

In game, the deck functions in one of two fashions:

- If the judge knows specifics of the next adventure, he should select and lay out the cards as accurately as possible (see below).
- If the judge doesn't know what encounters and challenges are in store, draw and place the cards at random and then tailor the adventure to the cards. (Thus, generating the adventure through the draws.)

In both instances, the deck predictions should be "true," to the best of the judge's ability. Use a standard 52 card deck for the reading.

The reading: Deal out a single card in answer each of the following queries:

Who is my foe?

What is its weakness?

What are the rewards?

How can I persevere?

A fortuneteller may entertain similar additional queries, at the judge's discretion. The judge, playing the role of the fortune teller does his or her best to "read" the cards in the context of the adventure.

The suit of the card determines the nature of the answer, and the card's rank offers clues to its strength or weakness in relation to the PCs.

Hearts: Priests, deific magic, divine power

Diamonds: Thieves, secrets, Chaos and Law, wealth

Spades: Wizards, arcane magic, forbidden knowledge, demonic and diabolic powers

Clubs: Warriors, brute violence, overwhelming odds, magical weapons

Jokers or Jesters are left entirely to the judge's own whims, and spell the PCs' almost certain doom.

Example: Black Dougal sits down across from the Wizard of El, who deals Dougal's fortune. The judge doesn't have anything planned for the session so she lets the cards fall where they may. (If she did have plans, she would have instead selected cards, or stacked the deck for the reading.)

The judge draws the queen of hearts, the jack of diamonds, the four of diamonds, and the ace of spades. Considering the cards, the judge gives the following reading:

Who is my foe? *The daughter of the gods plots against you. (High priestess of a temple.)*

What is its weakness? *She conceals her darkness within a shroud of light. (The priestess is secretly a charlatan.)*

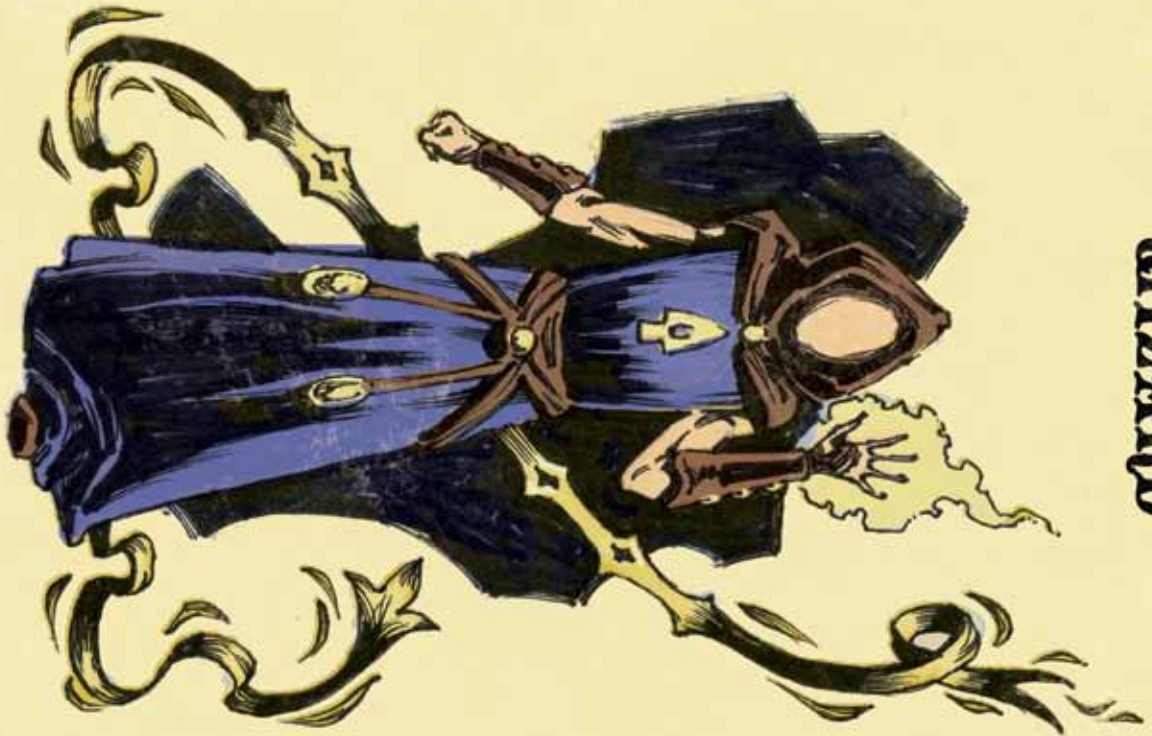
What are the rewards? *Drops of gold and silver adorn her ankles. (Minor gold relics can be looted from her vault.)*

How can I persevere? *Her fell enemies are your allies. (Demons seek to undo the priestess and will aid the PCs.)*

As the PCs pause to consider the clues informing their next heist, the judge scrambles to write up a handful of stats for the priestess and her allies.

Note that, after a reading, the PCs can work to escape their fate by refusing to take part in the adventure, or by actively working against the reading. However, especially cruel and creative judges might still be able to make use of the predictions come true. The Fates have spoken, and both the PCs and the judge must abide by their decrees.

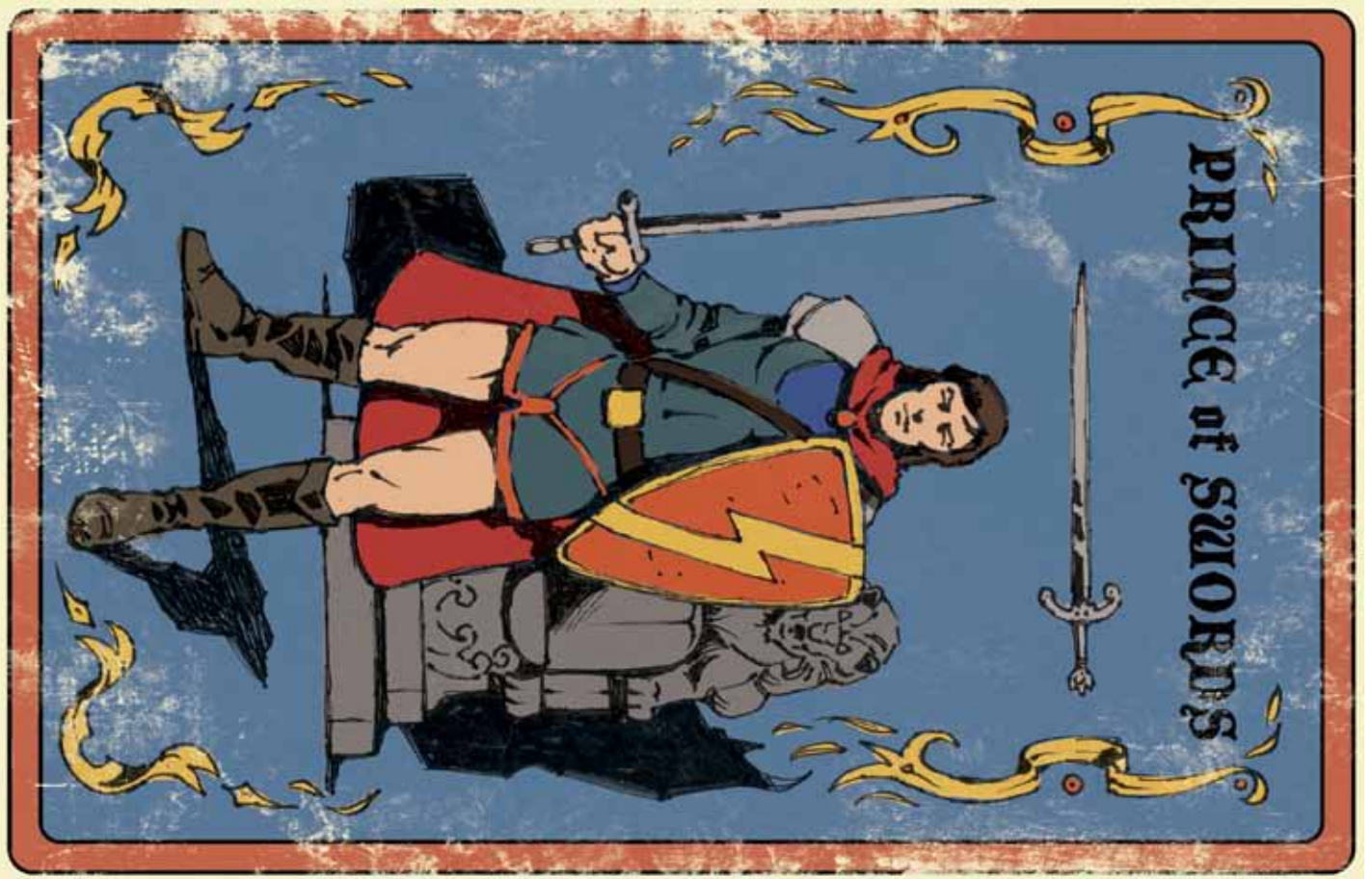
WIZARD



FOUR of SWORDS

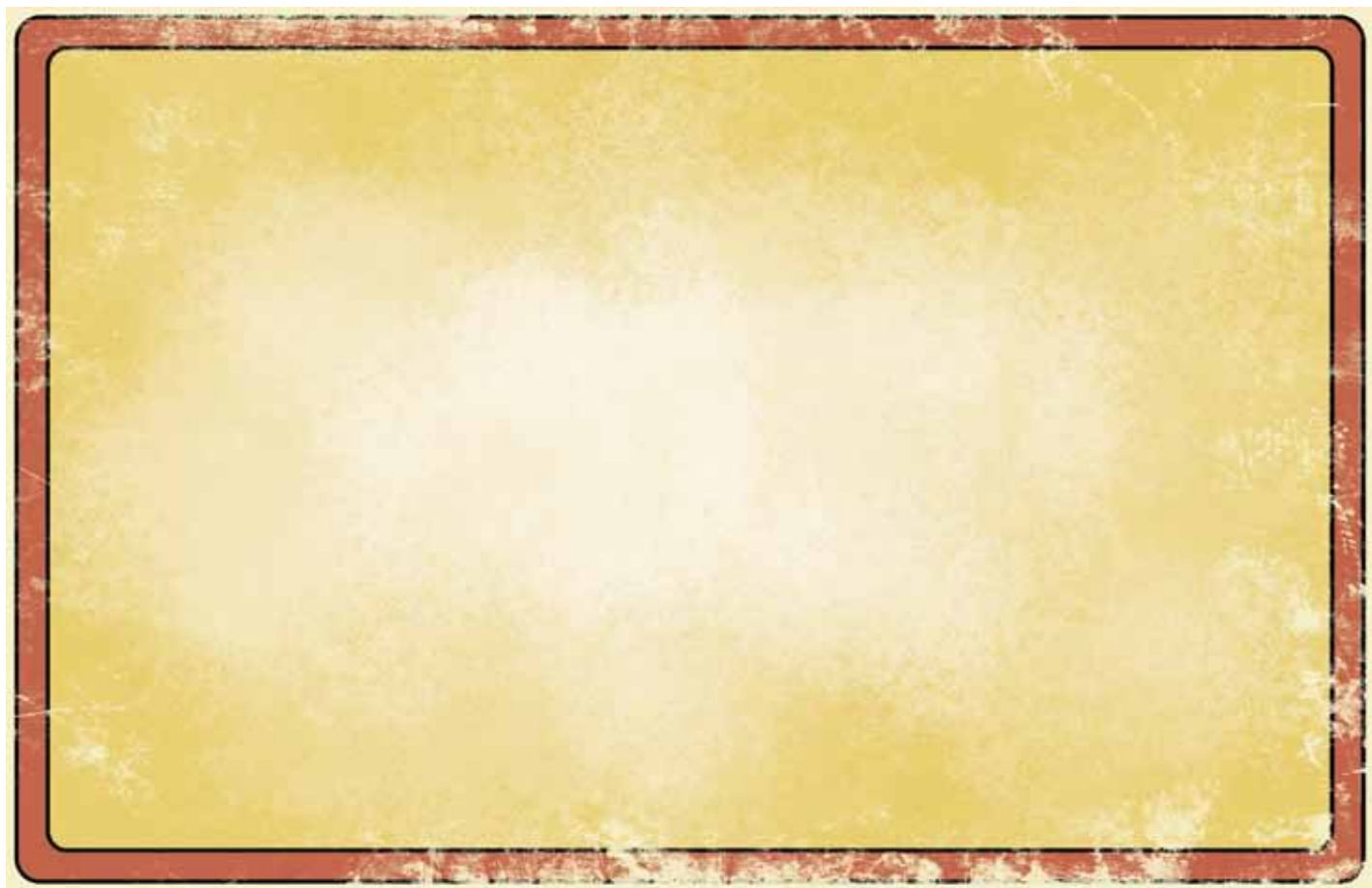
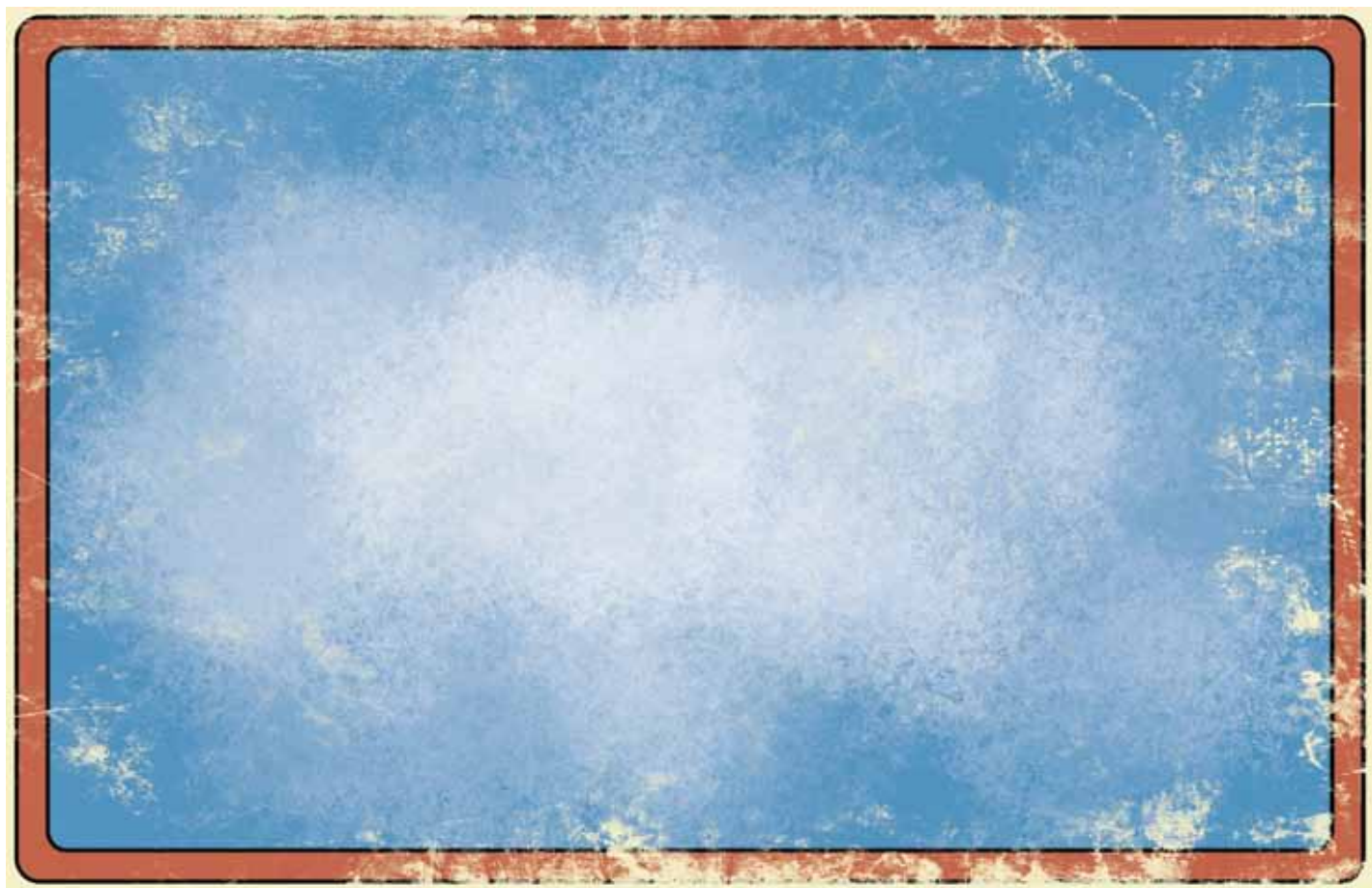














LEVEL 4: BENEATH THE LAKE



he resting place of the sorceress Erodiade, the lake appears mundane and commonplace during the day. Efforts made to investigate the lake reveal naught.

At dusk, the lake begins to reveal its supernatural nature. Countless fireflies dance about the marshy grasses, casting a glow about the lake's glassy surface. Far from harmless, the fireflies assault anyone attempting to enter the water. The fireflies alight upon intruders, setting them aflame. The blue flames sear the victim, and cannot be extinguished by mundane means for 1d3 rounds.

On any given round 1d5 fireflies attack the party, but killing individual fireflies does nothing to reduce their numbers. Effectively, there is no end to the flying terrors.

The threat of the fireflies ends when the moon passes before Darjr's tower (level 5). The hundreds of fireflies sink to the water's surface, outlining a series of 16 steps across the surface of the lake. At the end of the path is a portal, and stairs leading down beneath the lake's surface, to area 4-1.

The portal remains open for the hour the moon stands before the tower. Once the hour has passed, the path and steps vanish, causing water to flood the level. See area 4-2

for details on the dangers of the flooding level.

Fireflies (1d5/round): Init +0; Atk flames -1 melee (1d5/round for 1d3 rounds); AC 15; HD 1d4; HP 1; MV 1', fly 10'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -2, Ref +2, Will -1; AL N.

Area 4-1 - The Watery Way: *Clear, crystalline steps descend beneath the water's surface, to the muddy lake floor below. The air is fouled with the stink of muck and rotting wood. The stairs descend into a small chamber on the lake floor, lit by the glow of fireflies through the waters above.*

The chamber is set on the floor of the lake. The mud sucks at the characters' boots, shoes and sandals, as they sink into the muck down to their ankles. The walls and ceiling of the chamber are composed of lake water, held back by the powers of Erodiade. Characters can press through the wall, into the lake water, but this only produces a small stream of water, trickling down the walls and pooling on the floor. If the characters are so foolish as to slash the walls or ceiling with bladed weapons, inflicting a cumulative 20 points of damage or more, the walls and ceiling crash in. See Flooding the Level in area 4-2 below.

A narrow passageway, scarcely 2' in width, exits the chamber to area 4-2. Characters proceeding down the passage can feel the weight of the entire lake pressing all around them.

FLOODING IN AREA 4-2

Initiative Count	Round One
20	Water rains down from above, showering the PCs.
10	Area 4-2 fills to a height of 3'. The ceiling and walls of the entire level begin to tremble.
Initiative Count	Round Two
10	A crash of water courses through 4-1. PCs must make DC 10 Fort saves or be swept back to area 4-2.
5	The passageway between 4-1 and 4-2 pinches closed. PCs caught within the passage take 1d3 points of crushing damage.
Initiative Count	Round Three
10	Area 4-1 collapses. PCs caught at the base of the stairs take 1d8 points of crushing damage.
5	Area 4-2 collapses. Enormous waves come rushing in from every side, crashing together in a crushing torrent. PCs remaining within the chamber take 1d5 points of crushing damage and must make DC 10 Fort saves for be stunned for 1d3 rounds (possibly drowning). Erodiade, her plaques, and the treasure vanish.

Area 4-2 – Vault of Eriodade: *Scintillating colors cascade down the liquid walls and ceiling of the domed chamber. The pervasive stink of rot is heaviest here.*

In the center of the chamber, ankle-deep in the muck of the lake bottom, crouches a young woman. Dressed in veils resembling sheets of falling rain clasped with a belt of silver, she radiates a self-assured majesty. She is drawing lines and shapes in the mud with a narrow twig.

The lady remains crouched, and beckons you to enter.

As the PCs draw near, they can see the sorceress' plaques laid out before her, resting atop the mud. She is inscribing sigils and runes around the plaques, and muttering aloud as she plots her next play.

The sorceress immediately recognizes the PCs and welcomes them warmly, in hopes of luring them into a false sense of safety. While she looks the part of the helpless damsel, nothing could be further from the truth; of the three imprisoned magi, Erodiade is the most powerful by far.

Unlike Al-Hazred, she does not bargain or plead with the PCs. And unlike the arrogant Darjr, she avoids dramatic threats and grandstanding. Rather, the sorceress simply expects the PCs to fulfill her sole wish and command: to bring all the plaques to her abode.

If the PCs prove so gold-grubbing as to demand a reward, the sorceress waves her wand towards the far wall. A portal appears in the watery wall, revealing a trio of chests spilling over with silver, gold and platinum coins. The sorceress drags her hand through the pooling coins offering the PCs 1d24 of each type (silver, gold and platinum), promising the balance of the wealth once the PCs bring her the remaining plaques. Of course, her promises are false.

Flooding the Level: If the PCs steal the plaques or are foolish enough to attack the sorceress, she draws back enraged. Her form grows in magnitude and ferocity, until she seems to fill the chamber. As Erodiade grows, the level begins to weep water, causing the chamber to flood over the course of three rounds.

Statistics for Eriodade can be found in Appendix B.

Referring to the sidebar above, call for an initiative roll, and apply the appropriate effects on the corresponding descending initiative count until all the PCs are dead or have acted. Adventurers suffer all effects that take place prior to their initiative, and, depending on their actions, potentially escape effects taking effect after their initiative count.

The Plaques: Should the PCs try to gain the plaques by stealth or force, the lake-bottom mud rises up, grabbing at the would-be thieves (Atk grab +5 melee; AC 5; hp 3). The attacks do no damage, but hold the PC in place. A caught PC can either break free of the muddy grip with a DC 10 Strength check, or cleave through the mud; 3 hp of damage is sufficient to slice the mud from the lake bottom. A missed attack by another risks striking the grappled PC (Luck check to avoid).

Treasure: PCs can dart into the nook and fill their sacks and backpacks with coins, but their greed may be their undoing. The coins are mixed; in a single round PCs can either grab 1d12 of each coin type, or pick through the piles, acquiring 1d20 of a specific coin. Judges should make note of increased encumbrance and how it will impair the PCs' swimming ability.

Unless the PCs succeed in stealing all of the plaques, the magi and her complex reappear the following night, when the moon passes before Darjr's tower.

LEVEL 5: TOWER BEYOND-THE-MOON



parison to the vale's third and final magus, the tower stands awash in mists, some 200' distant from the cliff-edge. Attempts to descend the cliffs (see area 1-4) inevitably end in failure, as the cliffs come to an end in the misty air, far below.

Area 5-1 – The Moon Bridge: The bridge connecting the cliff-edge to the tower appears at dusk and then vanishes when the rising moon begins to pass before the tower.

Read or paraphrase the following for PCs standing at the moon bridge at dusk:

A silvery span shimmers into existence, arcing through the clouds to the foot of the dark tower. Billows of brume roll over the moon-bright bridge, flaring briefly, as if lit from within.

The bridge exists for only a single hour. As the moon rises between the cliffs and the tower, that distance seems to magnify in relation to the rising moon. The bridge vanishes from sight and the tower grows distant, the hint of darkness at the rim of the moon. This is not simply an illusion; the tower is mysteriously distant while the moon passes, eliminating any chance of the PCs roping back to the cliff. The bridge does not reappear until the following dusk. Characters caught inside the tower when the bridge vanishes must either wait until the bridge reappears or find a magical way to cross the gulf.

Warriors in the service of Al-Hazred or Erodiade stand guard over the bridge at dusk, warding against intruders. The forces are aware of the Maw (area 5-2) and are not above withdrawing long enough for the PCs to pass, then returning to ambush PCs caught on the bridge.

The bridge is three paces in width, dangerously narrow for those caught in melee. On a successful melee blow, the target must make a DC 10 Agility check or slip from bridge. A falling PC can avoid certain doom by succeeding on a DC 15 Reflex save, catching the lip of the bridge as he plummets past.

Area 5-2 – The Maw: *The arched stone portal is carved in the shape of an enormous maw built into the side of the tower. Within the portal a forked stone tongue divides the spiral stairs in two; one set of stairs curving to the left and the other to the right. Both rise into darkness.*

Though both stairways curve towards each other, they arrive at entirely different locations within the tower. The left set of stairs rise to area 5-3 while those climbing the right steps arrive in area 5-4.

Area 5-3 – Path Sinister: *The stairs rise into a warmly lit throne room. An elderly man, draped in a voluminous yellow toga, rests atop a throne overseeing a court of automata. The king's long white beard and bald pate belie his muscular form, giving him an ancient, yet timeless air.*

Automata – clever mechanisms disguised as the living – bustle about the court. A silk-feathered nightingale sings from their

perch atop the throne. A trio of musicians, their faces formed of leather and clay, play tunelessly in the corner. A pair of towering eunuchs, armed with a painted wooden falchions, watches over the throne. Strange mechanized courtiers pass left and right, ignorant of your presence.

The man atop the throne is not the mighty seer-king Darjr, despite all appearances. It is, instead, simply another automata, albeit far more cleverly designed than its peers. Those that have sworn allegiance to Darjr will recognize this almost immediately – their liege demands nothing of them and cannot command them.

The False Darjr beckons the PCs into the chamber, and bids them welcome. He apologizes for the clumsiness of his court, saying that the creation of mechanical servitors helps him to pass the time. Finally, inexplicably, the False Darjr congratulates the PCs for accomplishing what all other had failed: solving the Riddle of the Magi.

If questioned, the False Darjr cannot expound upon this "riddle." In fact, the automata is unable to engage in spontaneous conversation whatsoever, trapped within the narrow confines of its mechanical programming. Even if the PCs get up, leave, or examine the automata, the scene continues, unabated. However, if the PCs elect to attack the automata, see below.

After welcoming the PCs, the False Darjr claps his hands twice, and a wooden serving girl, supported by cables, rolls into the chamber, bearing a platter with three flasks.

The False Darjr tells the PCs, in its unceasing, programmed monologue, that the PCs may choose one of the three vials as their reward. Each contains – the seer-king avers – colored sand, that when poured out, produce magical effects. Courteously, he goes on to note their effects:

Blue Vial: "To free you from our realm."

Black Vial: "To free us, its captives."

Yellow Vial: "To a quick end."

Of course, none of the vials has the powers alleged – the entire presentation is an elaborate charade, a trap. While the vials do have magical properties, they are unlike anything intimated by the False Seer-King:

Blue Vial: Clouds of choking midnight-blue gas fill the chamber, persisting for 1d10 turns. A DC 10 Fort save is required for every PC, for every round spent in the chamber. On a failed check, PCs take 1d3 points of Stamina damage, dying when their Stamina reaches 0; lost Stamina is restored immediately if they are removed from the chamber.

Black Vial: The black sands evaporate into silver mists that disintegrate all they touch. The mist-clouds eat non-living organic materials in 1d6 rounds (including all the puppet automata), and inflict 1d3 points of damage per round to living creatures. The silver mists persist for 1d10 turns. The mists also eat away the tapestries and the panel concealing

the secret door to area 5-4; if the PCs manage to stay in the chamber longer than one round, they spy the secret door.

Yellow Vial: The yellow sands billow out to reveal the true Seer-King Darjr. Imperious and arrogant, he commands the PCs to acquire all the remaining plaques and to return them to his tower immediately. Above the concerns of mere mortals, Darjr expects the PCs simply to obey, offering them nothing in return for their service.

There is no “correct” choice, the entire game is rigged against the PCs. Cunning adventurers will surely apprehend that no wizard (not even a false one!) can ever be trusted, but the realization may come too late.

Attack of the Automata: The automata don’t have mechanisms that permit them to interact with characters, but they do have mechanisms allowing them to attack – after a fashion. The automata are far too unsophisticated to track and attack living creatures, but they are more than capable of launching area attacks throughout the false throne chamber. If a single automata is attacked, all respond in kind.

The following attacks take place each round once triggered:

Initiative Action

- | | |
|----|--|
| 15 | False Darjr spews oil-mist from his mouth (avoiding fixed-position automata); DC 10 Ref save to avoid. |
| 10 | The nightingale knocks its beak on throne, casting sparks into the oil-spattered chamber. Oil-coated PCs catch fire for 1d5 damage. Moving automata catch fire (see count 0). |
| 5 | Two eunuchs swings falchion in wide arc, striking anyone close enough to melee with the False Darjr. Attack +6 (1d4-1 damage). |
| 3 | Three flute players fire darts at back of chamber. Ref save DC 10 to avoid or 1d4 damage; up to 3 attacks. |
| 0 | Moving court automata, set aflame by the oil attacks, struggle through the chamber, swinging wildly from cables and spinning madly on their tracks. All characters in chamber must attempt a Luck check. On a failed check, a flaming automata blindly charges PC. Attack -3 melee (1d4+3 damage). |

Each of the automata share the same statistics:

Automata (7): Init -3; Atk variable (see above); AC 10; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 0'; Act variable; SV Fort +2, Ref -5, Will Immune; AL none.

Area 5-4 – Path Dexter: *The arched portal opens to a musty dungeon cell, lit by glowing braziers. On the far side of the cham-*



ber is a man in chains, suspended by shackles bolted to the wall. His long beard – once white, now caked with blood – hangs to the stone floor. His thin, bony frame is stripped to the waist; a muddied yellow toga hangs in tatters.

Across from the prisoner an enormous porcine form reclines atop a rusted iron throne. The creature’s bristled belly spills out over its lap, and its jowls hang loosely around great ivory tusks. The stinking man-beast clutches a glowing poker and a coiled whip in its meaty fists. The smell of burnt flesh is thick in the air.

Directly between the two forms – the broken man and the torturer – a set of ivory plaques hang in the air.

The broken King and the beastly Torturer are both manifestations of the magician Darjr. The seer-king’s body and mind were split by the devil Mordax and now spend their time punishing one another.

If the PCs insist on trying to free the Seer-King or take the plaques, the Torturer intervenes. Standing a full 10’ in height, his imposing bulk does little to slow the beast in combat. He strikes twice a round, once with the blazing poker and once with his whip, with brutal results. The poker burns searing wounds across its victims, while the Torturer uses the whip to disarm or grapple foes with a successful attack.

Adventurers caught in the heat of battle may not notice that blows to the beast inflict wounds upon the body of the hanging man. However if some PCs are attempting to aid the broken man while others engage the beast in combat, the effects are obvious.

Similarly, attacks to the King harm the Torturer. If the broken body is dealt more than 15 points of damage, the Torturer collapses to the ground.

The body of the King can be freed by picking or breaking the locks on the crude shackles (DC 10 Pick Lock, or a cumulative 15 points of damage to each of the two shackles). However, the body is insensate and utterly dead to the world. The Torturer does its best to keep the PCs from taking the body or the plaques from the tower – pursuing them all the way to moon bridge—but if the PCs make off with either, Darjr’s mastery over the tower shatters. The tower falls away, tumbling through the clouds, vanishing into the darkness below, crashing through the barrier into the roiling seas of phlogiston.

The plaques are easily torn free. On a DC 5 Agility check, a PC can snatch free one of the plaques. A missed check sends the plaque spinning and dancing across the chamber; subsequent checks to seize the same plaque require a DC 10 Agility check.

The Torturer: Init +3; Atk poker +3 melee (1d5+3) and whip +1 ranged (1d3+disarm); AC 13; HD 6d10; hp 45; MV 25'; Act 2d20; SP whip; SV Fort +3, Ref -2, Will +6; AL L.

APPENDIX A: TIPS FOR RUNNING THE ADVENTURE



Left to their own devices, some parties are quickly mired in indecision. Fearful of making the wrong decision, they shy from committing to a single plan of action. Ironically, taking no action is the only wrong action.

Proactive antagonists are key to keeping the adventure moving. As soon as the PCs enter the Vale, the magi marshal their respective forces, sending them in search of the PCs, in hopes of making the first – and deciding – contact.

While regarded simply as pawns in the greater struggle, the PCs are also immensely valuable to the magi. While the magi do not respect the PCs, they cannot afford to ignore them.

In general the vassals of the magi reflect their master's whims, and proceed along the following ways:

Al-Hazred: Servitors of the alien wizard are keen to cajole the PCs into a mutually beneficial bargain (though their master never upholds these promises). Offers of treasure, arcane might, and power over death are all offered to the PCs in return for the plaques of Al-Hazred's bitter foes.

Eriodade: The sorceress plays one of two roles: either that of the helpless princess, or the supremely confident monarch. Her liege-men act accordingly, either beseeching the PCs for their aid in saving the fair lady, or demanding their obedience, in turn.

Darjr: The weakest of the three magi is also the most demanding. Ever arrogant and contemptuous, the Seer-King and his followers command the PCs as if they were serfs, fully expecting the PCs to fall in line. If challenged, his ser-

vants respond with force, hoping to eradicate foes before their master's weakness is revealed.

While the other NPCs in the Vale spend their half-lives in slavish devotion to their fickle masters, they are not utterly devoid of compulsions and drives. So far as they are able, the lesser NPCs strive for the following:

Father Moro: The corrupted priest hopes to grind the PCs under his bleak world view. If he can command the newcomers by fear, all the better.

Captain Kaschei: The Prince of Swords seeks a worthy foe in battle, dismissing all others as worthless and weak. He accords great respect to those demonstrating martial prowess, impatiently waiting for the opportunity to test his skills.

The Ladies-in-Waiting: The three ladies seek only to improve their own standing, playing the PCs against one another like pawns. If one PC shows himself to be the party leader, the ladies inundate the PC with offers.

The Matron: Contrary to her wards, the stern matron yet hopes for escape from the timeless demi-plane. Clever in her deductions, the matron is watchful for PCs that demonstrate cool reserve under pressure. If a PC manages to earn her respect, she entrusts the adventurer with her key.

Finally, the Devil: He eagerly plays the part of the fool, hoping to distract the PCs, lure them away with red herrings, and otherwise stymie their efforts to escape the demi-plane. Mordax wins his gambit if the magi and all the PCs are consumed by the phlogiston, returning to haunt the PCs should they escape.

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APPENDIX B: NPC STATISTICS

FOUR OF SWORDS

Skeletal Warrior (4): Init +0; Atk spear +0 melee (1d8) or handaxe +0 ranged (1d6); AC 7; HD 2d8; hp 6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +1; AL L.

THE HIEROPHANT

Father Moro: Init +0; Atk staff +3 melee (1d6+1) or harmful spell; AC 15; HD 2d12; hp 14; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP harmful spell 3/day (range 100', dmg 1d8+2, DC 13 Will save for half), turn 3/day (DC 13 Will save or can't approach within 20'); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +4; AL C.

THE LADIES-IN-WAITING

Ladies-in-Waiting (3): Init -2; Atk fist -1 melee (1d3-1); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 2; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref -2, Will -1; AL C.

The Matron: Init +3; Atk club -1 melee (1d4-1); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 3; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref -2, Will -1; AL varies.

THE DEVIL

The Devil has a succession of three forms, taking the next after the last is slain.

The Fool: Init +4; Atk dagger +4 melee (1d4+2) or dart +5 missile fire (1d3); AC 16; hp 16; MV 35'; Act 2d20; SP traits as demon; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +5; AL L.

The Devil: Init +1; Atk fist +3 melee (1d8+3); AC 12; hp 23; MV 25' or fly 20'; Act 2d20; SP traits as demon; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +5; AL L.

The Fly: Init +4; Atk bite +3 melee (1d3+1); AC 17; hp 6; MV 15' or fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP traits as demon; SV Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +5; AL L.

THE MAGICIAN

The Magician appears in the form of the Torturer (area 5-4), who may be harmed by dealing damage to the King (AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 15). Attacks directed at the Torturer result in visible wounds to the King's body; dealing 15 or more points to the King causes the Torturer to collapse. See area 5-4.

The Torturer: Init +3; Atk poker +3 melee (1d5+3) and whip +1 ranged (1d3+disarm); AC 18; HD 6d10; hp 45; MV 25'; Act 2d20; SP whip; SV Fort +3, Ref -2, Will +6; AL L.

THE SORCERESS

Attacking the Sorceress triggers the collapse of her watery lair. However, clever PCs might still find a way to engage her in battle. She fights back by targeting PCs with her fell wand. Even if the PCs succeed in subduing or slaying the witch, this does not halt the collapsing walls and ceiling of her abode.

Erodiade: Init +4; Atk wand ray +5 ranged (1d16+1); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 12; MV 30' or fly 45'; Act 1d24; SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +8; AL C.

THE WIZARD

Al-Hazred collapses at a touch, transforming into a howling void. Any attack (AC 5) or spell disturbing his form triggers the change.

THE PRINCE OF SWORDS

Captain Kaschei: Init +4; Atk sword +5 melee (1d8+3) or handaxe +3 ranged (1d6+3); AC 19; HD 4d12; hp 42; MV 40'; Act 1d24 or 2d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; AL L.

VAT

of the MIGHT

Shrinking
Realm
Tracker

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6 → Tower Destroyed
- 7
- 8 → Lake Vault Destroyed
- 9
- 10 → Realm Vanishes Into Phlogiston

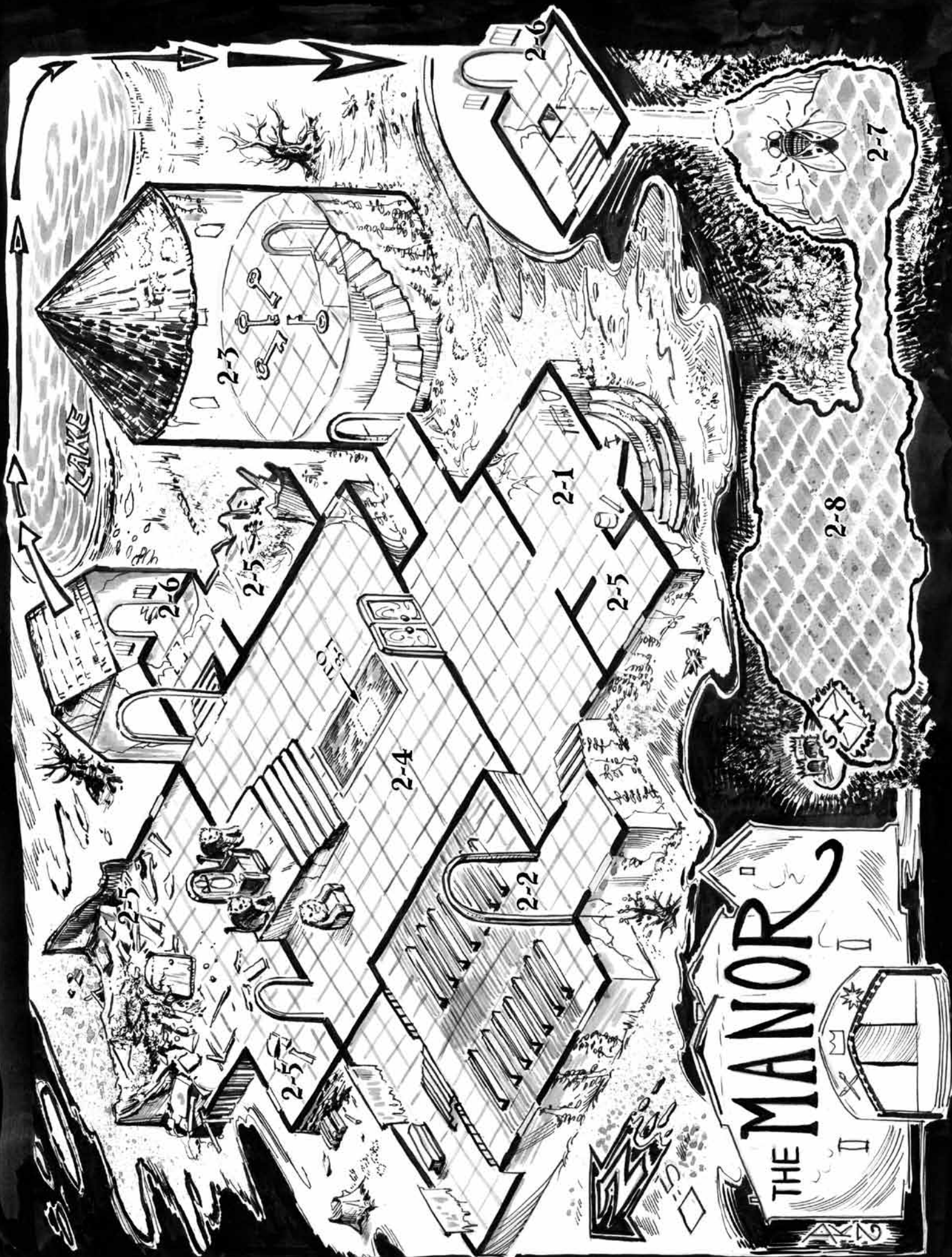
1 MILE

TOWER
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THE MOON

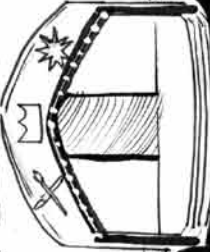
THE MANOR

Player Start





THE MANOR



AXIS



TOWER BEYOND THE MOON



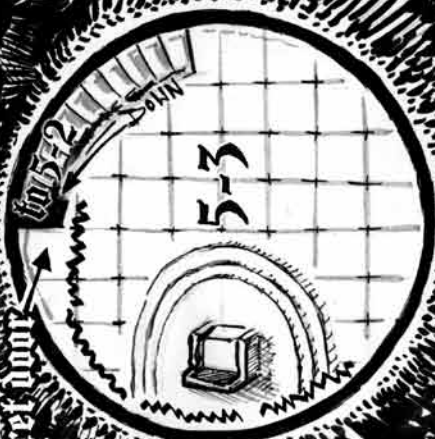
5-2

5-1



5-4

5-10



5-3

secret door

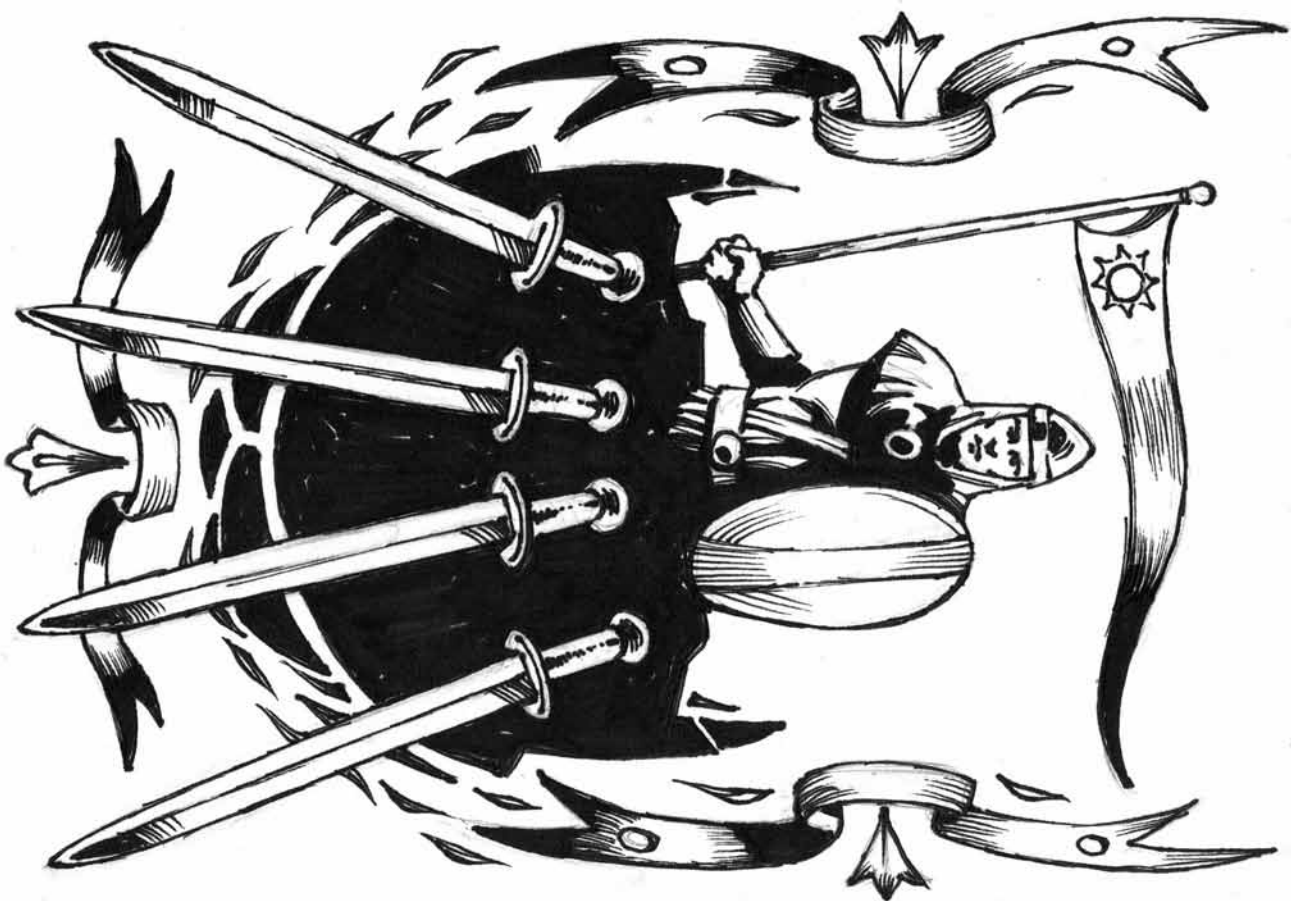


SIDE VIEW OF THE TOWER

WIZARD



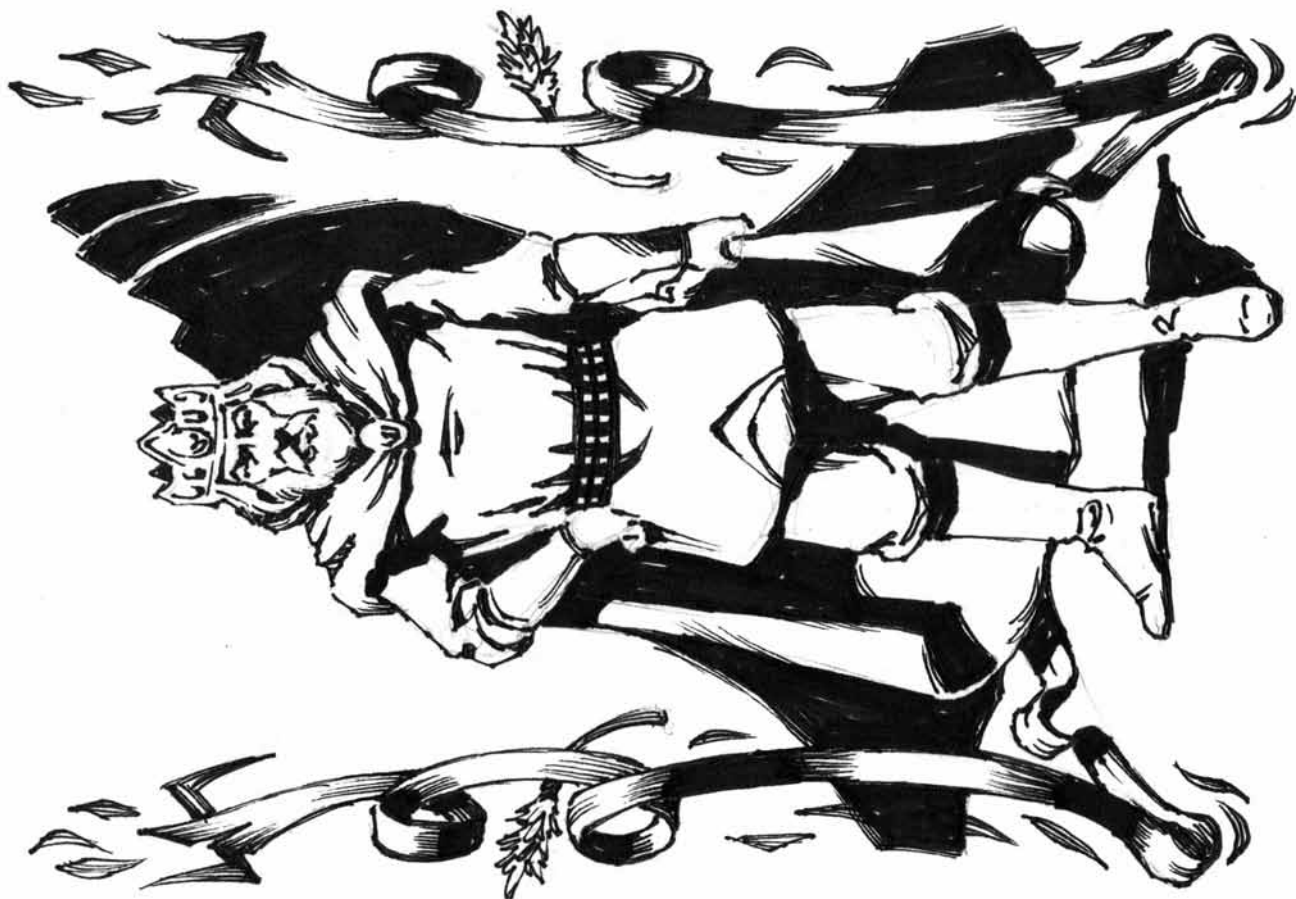
FOUR OF SWORDS



DEVIL



MAGICIAN



PRINCE OF SWORDS



HIEROPHANT



LADIES-IN-WAITING



SORCERESS



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