

W1

Requires the use of the
Dungeons and Dragons® Player's Handbook,
Third Edition,
published by Wizards of the Coast®

Adventure Module W1

The Wizard's Amulet

by Clark Peterson and Bill Webb



***The Wizard's Amulet** is a short, introductory adventure for six newly created good-aligned 1st-level characters. The adventure revolves around Corian, a fledgling Sorcerer. While an apprentice, Corian discovered a letter written by a wizard named Eralion, who it is said some years ago attempted to become a lich—and failed. Accompanying the letter was a mysterious amulet with strange markings. Joined by newfound companions, Corian set off in search of Eralion's keep and his supposedly unguarded treasure. But Corian is not alone in desiring to unlock the mystery of Eralion's fate. Darker, more evil forces have designs on the secrets reputedly hidden with Eralion—forces willing to stop at nothing to obtain...**The Wizard's Amulet**.*

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Adventure Overview

The *Wizard's Amulet* is a short, introductory adventure for six newly created good-aligned 1st-level characters. The adventure revolves around Corian, a fledgling Sorcerer. While an apprentice, Corian discovered a letter written by a wizard named Eralion, who it is said some years ago attempted to become a lich—and failed. Accompanying the letter was a mysterious amulet with strange markings. Joined by newfound companions, Corian set off in search of Eralion's keep and his supposedly unguarded treasure. But Corian is not alone in desiring to unlock the mystery of Eralion's fate. Darker, more evil forces have designs on the secrets reputedly hidden with Eralion—forces willing to stop at nothing to obtain...*The Wizard's Amulet*.

This adventure is designed to be used “out of the box,” meaning you can download it and run it right away with little preparation time. *The Wizard's Amulet* is the perfect adventure for new GMs who want to try their hand at running their first adventure. Just follow the steps outlined in the section entitled “Using this Adventure” and you should be playing your first Third Edition game within fifteen minutes!

The adventure itself covers several programmed encounters that Corian and his comrades face on the road from Reme to Fairhill, the purported location of Eralion's keep. The adventure culminates in an ambush by Corian's nemesis Vortigern who tries to capture Eralion's amulet by force. The adventure uses a rigid Act and Scene format to facilitate ease of use with little preparation. Veteran GMs should feel free to flesh out the adventure and include events on the road not covered in this module.

Using this Adventure

We presume you have the new *Dungeons and Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition*, and that you as the GM have spent some time familiarizing yourself with the new rules. We presume you have called over a bunch of your friends and ordered some pizza. We also presume you have secured a good table as well as paper, pencils and all those funny dice we gamers love so much. You should also have a dry erase board or some other way to draw up the “battle map” for any encounters your character will face. A big pad of paper will do in a pinch. If you have lead figures or some other way to represent the characters we suggest you use them. We recommend that you

print a hard copy of this adventure for your reference and copies of the pre-generated characters for your players' use. Now sit back, relax, break out the chips and dip (since the pizza is probably gone) and follow these steps. You should be playing within 15 minutes!

First, read the sections entitled “Notes for the Game Master” and “Adventure Background” to yourself, spending a few minutes becoming familiar with the plot line and the main non-player characters. Also, read Corian's Supplemental Information found at the very end of this module.

Second, pass out the pre-generated characters that you can download from the **Necromancer Games** web site. (See the section entitled “Pre-generated Characters” at the end of this adventure.) You can do this one of two ways: you can either pick which six characters you want your players to play and let the players divide those six as they wish. Or you can show them all of the pre-generated characters and let them choose which six to play.

You **must** include **Corian**, the Sorcerer, in the party. You also should include Galdar, the Cleric, in the party, though he is not essential.

If you decide to choose the six characters yourself, we recommend that in addition to Corian and Galdar you include at least two of the primary **fighters** as well as either Helman, Dai or Flarian the Bard because of the importance of having a character with stealth skills. Playtesting demonstrates that this party composition gives the best chance of success. You should use no more than seven or eight total characters—with six being the optimal number. If you add more characters you may have to increase the number of monsters encountered to keep the combat challenging. If you have fewer than six characters or if your players choose primarily non-combat characters, then you will have to reduce the difficulty of the encounters. Notes are provided to cover these situations.

Once the players have **selected** which characters they will play, you should give the player who is playing Corian a copy of Corian's Supplemental Information, found at the very end of this module. Make sure to keep the information private, since the contents are to be revealed at Corian's discretion.

Third, have the characters familiarize themselves with their characters. The person playing Corian should pay particular attention to his or her back-story and to the letter from Eralion.

Fourth, read the section entitled “Player's Introduction” to yourself so you understand it and then read it aloud to your players.

There you have it—fifteen minutes and you should already be adventuring!

D&D®

This module requires the use of the *Dungeons and Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition*, published by Wizards of the Coast.® You won't be able to run this adventure without it.

Character Selection

Make sure someone plays **Corian**; encourage someone to play Galdar; don't hand out Corian's Supplemental Information until after the players have selected their characters.

Fighters

Make sure at least two of your players select combat oriented characters. There is going to be plenty of fighting in this adventure and the party will need to be able to handle it.

GM Tip

Generally you should stay out of the character selection process, but if two players want to play the same character resolve it the old fashioned way: roll for it! The one rolling higher on a d20 gets to play the character.

Fifth, once you have read the Player's Introduction aloud, turn to the section titled "Running the Adventure" and play out the acts and scenes of the adventure in the order provided. You are officially under way.

Sixth, at the end of the night use the section entitled "Concluding the Adventure" to wrap things up.

If you want more information about continuing the story started by this adventure, about the d20 system or about **Necromancer Games** and our products, sections addressing these topics can be found at the very end of the module.

As a final matter, remember the **Necromancer Games** "golden rule": *use what you want, discard or change the rest*. We have presented this adventure in a strict step-by-step format to make it easy to get that first game going without any hassle. But if you want to change some things around, go right ahead. In fact, we hope ambitious Game Masters will use this adventure as a campaign seed. Feel free to flesh out the city of Reme and to roleplay Corian's discharge from his apprenticeship and his investigation into Eralion and the amulet. Go ahead and play out the meeting between the various characters. Draw up an overland map and handle all the travel rather than just the programmed encounters provided by this adventure. Maybe even throw in a few non-player characters of your own. It's your world. Your players are just playing in it.

Notes for the Game Master

This section is primarily aimed at newer Game Masters, though reading the tips in this section may remind veteran GMs of how they learned these same lessons through much experience. Your players will be mighty wizards, devout clerics, stout fighters and cunning rogues. But you are in a sense above even the greatest of these, for you are the shaper of the world in which your players adventure. It is your job to breathe life into these written words and make for your players a fictional reality into which they can immerse themselves.

Though players cannot function without a GM, it is also true that a GM cannot function without players. Thus, the best advice for a new GM is this: always remember that your adventures should be like cooperative stories written by both you and your players. You must work together for everyone to have fun. That doesn't mean you should break rules to make your players happy. What it does mean is that, like an enlightened ruler, you should adjudicate your games with fairness and graciousness. Your power should be unquestioned not because it is frequently exercised but rather because it is not. You should never be "out to get" your players. If your adventures are challenging and you run them fairly you will be heralded as a great GM.

You have many hats to wear as the Game Master. First and foremost, as already mentioned, you are the fair arbiter of the rules. But you are also the person who plays all the monsters and non-player characters (NPCs) that the players encounter. Where the players play one (or at most two) characters, you will play many: the person met at the inn or on the road, the vile orc, the mischievous leprechaun, the evil cleric, the friendly wizard, the power-mad king and all the gods. You are, in short, everything except the player characters. When you are the thief, be cunning and dishonest, when the orc, cruel and chaotic, when the paladin, noble and chivalrous, when the town guard, loyal and stern. Inject as much of your own personality into your roles as possible. Always remember, however, to be fair both to the characters and to yourself. As one of the best GMs to ever run a game once said: "When playing a monster or an NPC, temper your actions with disinterest in the final outcome and play only from the viewpoint of that particular monster or NPC." Being a GM is challenging—requiring more skill than that of the best player—but it is equally rewarding. Learn to wear all of your hats well, and to be fair while doing so, and your players will enjoy themselves immensely.

To assist you, we have provided "Side Boxes"—material in the margins which are specific GM notes deserving of special attention. Here you will find important things to remember, monster tactics, trap summaries, highlights of rule changes in the new edition and other material of specific use to you as the GM. We hope these notes make running this adventure as easy as possible.

We have also provided "Boxed Text"—pieces of narrative to be read directly to your players to describe key encounter areas and events. Normally, we believe that GMs should describe encounters in their own words. However, since this adventure is designed to be used "out of the box" with little preparation time by novice GMs, we decided to include the boxed text. You should, of course, use your own words if you desire.

Also, because this adventure module is designed for people using the new edition of the game rules for the first time (both novice and veteran GMs) we have provided a large amount of step-by-step material to help you make sure you are using the new rules properly.

One final note: Do not let disputes swallow the gaming session. Since this adventure is designed to be one of your first adventures under the 3rd edition rules, there is a greater chance that you or your players will not be entirely familiar with all the new rule changes. If a dispute arises, listen briefly to the party's complaint. If you can remedy their problem without unnecessarily bending the rules then do so. The point of the game is for everyone to have fun. If you intend to rule against the party, explain to them that after the session you can all discuss the matter at length but that you need to make a decision now and continue play. Then

Side Boxes

These side boxes contain GM Tips, highlights of new rules, monster notes, trap mechanics and other material helpful to you, the GM. You can use blank space between these boxes for your notes.

make the decision. Remember that your decision for that session is final. Continue with play. If, after discussion following the session, you determine that your decision was incorrect then you should do your best to remedy the faulty ruling. Either let the players replay the particular encounter or, if a character was killed, allow that character to return to life. Rules exist for a reason. They must be enforced. But not at the cost of damaging friendships and ruining everyone's fun. A good GM needs to be firm in his or her rulings but at the same time not afraid to admit he or she was wrong and correct that wrong. Remember, as GM you are a fair judge, not an opponent.

But most of all have fun.

Adventure Background

Long ago, **Eralion** was a good and kind wizard. He was devoted to his patron deity, a god of law and righteousness. As the shadow of his death grew long and he began to sense his own mortality, Eralion's heart darkened and his desire for power and fear of death became greater than his devotion to his god. He turned his attention to ways to lengthen his fading life. He learned the rumor of the fabled Mushroom of Youth in the dungeon of Rappan Athuk, the legendary Dungeon of Graves, but he lacked the courage to enter those deadly halls. He researched *wish* spells, but he did not have the power to master such mighty magics, being himself a mage of only meager power.

Finally, in his darkest moment, Eralion turned to **Orcus**, the Demon-lord of the Undead, imploring the dread demon for the secret of unlife—the secret of becoming a **lich**. Orcus knew that Eralion lacked the power to complete the necessary rituals to become a lich, as Eralion had barely managed the use of a scroll to contact him in the depths of the Abyss in his Palace of Bones. Orcus smiled a cruel smile as he promised the secret of lichdom to Eralion. But there was a price. Orcus required Eralion to give to him his shadow. “A trifling thing,” Orcus whispered to Eralion from the Abyss. “Something you will not need after the ritual which I shall give to you. For the darkness will be your home as you live for untold ages.”

In his pride, Eralion believed the demon-lord. He learned the ritual Orcus provided to him. He made one final trip to the city of Reme to purchase several items necessary for the phylactery required by the ritual. While there, he delivered a letter to his friend **Feriblan the Mad**, with whom he had discussed the prospect of lichdom—though only as a scholarly matter. Feriblan, known for his absent-mindedness, never read the letter, but instead promptly misplaced it and its companion silk-wrapped item.

Eralion returned to his keep and locked himself in his workroom. He began his ritual, guarded by zombies given to him by Orcus—sent more to make sure Er-

alio went through with the ritual than to offer him aid. As he uttered false words of power and consumed the transforming potion he realized the demon's treachery. He felt his life essence slip away—transferring in part to his own shadow, which he had sold to the Demon Prince. Eralion found himself Orcus' unwitting servant, trapped in his own keep. And there he would have stayed, forgotten to the world, had it not been for the actions of a lowly apprentice. Some twenty years later, a young wizard's apprentice named **Corian** learned of Eralion accidentally. During his final days under his uncle's tutelage, Corian and his master had traveled to the library of Feriblan the Mad in the city of Reme. Corian was never pleased to visit Feriblan, for while there he was always forced to have contact with **Vortigern**, Feriblan's apprentice, and his loathsome raven familiar—**Talon**. Luckily for Corian, this day he managed to avoid Vortigern. While perusing mundane documents in an outer sitting room as his master and Feriblan studied ancient scrolls, Corian nervously fiddled with a clasp on the back of a small reading stand. Quite to his surprise, a secret compartment opened which contained a small, bound piece of parchment and an item wrapped in silk cloth. Checking to see that his actions were unobserved, Corian slipped both items into the folds of his robe. The parchment proved to be the letter Eralion had left for Feriblan on his last visit before his ritual, and the item wrapped in the silk cloth an amulet of some unknown design.

Corian's actions, however, did not go unnoticed. Vortigern was fast becoming a wizard of some power. It was whispered that had the old wizard Feriblan not been mad, he would have discharged Vortigern from his apprenticeship long ago. It was believed—correctly—that Vortigern had learned all the skills of an apprentice and was remaining with Feriblan under the guise of an apprentice in order to have continued access to Feriblan's legendary library. Among the many musty volumes and forbidden tomes, Vortigern discovered a tract describing how to call forth an imp from the lower planes. Sacrificing the familiar that Feriblan had called for him, Vortigern summoned the small, devilish creature in secret to act as his familiar. The imp took the form of Vortigern's prior familiar—a raven—to prevent suspicion. It was this imp familiar who, while in raven form, saw Corian take the amulet and parchment. Talon reported what he saw to his master, though neither knew the significance of the letter and the amulet at that time.

Freed from his apprenticeship, Corian returned to Feriblan. Taking the risk of asking a direct question of the addled wizard, Corian learned that Eralion was nowhere near powerful enough to become a lich. “Eralion! A lich?!” the old wizard exclaimed. “He was no apprentice, my son, but neither was he a mage with the mastery of the eldritch powers necessary for such a dangerous undertaking! If you have heard such rumors, boy, I shall put them to rest. The magics required for such a transition were far beyond his grasp.” Once on

Cast of Characters

You should become familiar with each of these non-player characters: Corian, Eralion, Orcus, Feriblan the Mad, Vortigern and Talon.

Orcus

Orcus is a greater demon prince, depicted as a huge bat-winged, pig-snouted, goat-hooved beast wielding a skull-tipped wand which is rumored to slay any mortal it touches. He dwells in the Abyss in his Palace of Bones and he commands hordes of undead. He is a creature of utter chaos and evil. He also happens to be the unofficial Necromancer Games mascot.

Lich

The most powerful and evil form of undead, a lich is created when an evil wizard or cleric of high level voluntarily transforms himself into an undead creature to extend his life span and increase his power. The evil being who so transforms himself becomes a hideous skeletal creature, but retains his spell casting powers.

Talon

Talon is an imp, a devilish familiar from the lower planes. As an imp, Talon can take the form of a raven at will. Corian does not know that Talon is actually an imp in the guise of a raven.

the topic of his old friend, Feriblan spoke at length, though in a disjointed fashion. He told Corian of Eralion's keep near the village of Fairhill. Feriblan made reference to a staff that Eralion possessed which apparently had magical powers. He also mentioned that Eralion had never returned several valuable magical tracts and spell books. Corian left the old wizard determined to find this tower and the items it contained—for if Eralion was not a lich, the items should be there for the taking!

Once again, Corian's actions did not go unobserved. Vortigern commanded his imp familiar Talon to watch the old mage and Corian as they met together. And so it was that Talon overheard their conversation. Once informed by Talon, Vortigern guessed the connection between Corian's visit and the purloined letter and item. To solidify his suspicion, Vortigern commanded Talon to consult his devilish patron—Dispater—who confirmed that the amulet Corian possessed was somehow a link to Eralion's sanctuary within his keep.

Readying himself with the necessary equipment for travel to Fairhill, Corian visited a local tavern—the *Starving Stirge*. There he posted a notice seeking the aid of able-bodied adventurers willing to join him in an expedition to a wizard's tower. Promising an equal division of all gold recovered, he soon gathered a group of comrades-at-arms eager for adventure and glory. Corian was also joined by Galdar, a priest of St. Cuthbert, who was instructed in a vision from his god to seek out Corian and to follow where the amulet led him. Someone or something, it appeared, had angered the god of Retribution. Corian was glad for his company.

But Corian was reluctant to give the full story to his new friends, having on more than one occasion seen Talon, the familiar of Vortigern, peering into his chamber window in raven form. Corian, worried that his theft of the amulet and letter had been seen by the wicked bird, did not wish to risk further discovery while still in Reme. The party set out from Reme some four days prior to the start of this adventure, with light hearts and heavy packs—only Corian nursing the nagging fear that Vortigern and his loathsome bird somehow knew of his goal.

Their hearts would not have been so light had they known of Vortigern's plotting, for Vortigern had not been idle. While Corian gathered his allies, Vortigern assembled several magical items and two unsavory companions. Delayed with his magical preparations, Vortigern and his henchmen set out from Reme two days behind Corian and his band, intent on recovering the amulet at any cost. And that is where our story begins...

If you choose not to locate this adventure in your own world, the following description of the area will help you describe the setting to your players. Reme is a large port city on the eastern coast of an Inland Sea.

The tradeway—a merchant road—runs directly east from Reme to the city of Bard's Gate and on towards the forest kingdoms of the east. North of the tradeway, and running parallel to it, lie the Stoneheart Mountains. South of the tradeway, and also parallel to it, is the river Greywash. The vale between the river and the mountains through which the tradeway runs is verdant green and dotted with pine forests, though the forests have mostly been cleared back from the road. Fairhill lies just north of the tradeway about 8 days march from Reme, approximately half way from Reme to Bard's Gate. Hawks and falcons are a common sight, as are larger eagles. The vale is plentiful with game.

Player's Introduction

Read the following text to your players:

You have traveled four days from Reme with your newfound companions. Rain and cloudy weather have marred your travels since you left, slowing your pace and forcing you to keep off the main road and travel under the eaves of the light woods to the north of the tradeway. It seems odd at this time of year to have such strange weather. Sunshine can be seen on the far horizon, and you all have a feeling that something is amiss, as if a dark cloud is following you from Reme. Each of you thinks back to the *Starving Stirge*—the Inn where you formed your fellowship. You shift your packs, which seem even heavier in the rain, and recall Corian's notice: "Seeking Fellow Adventurers," it read. "Companions to share in glory and gold and adventures unnumbered." As you look down at your muddy boots, you think to yourself that you would gladly trade Corian's promises of gold for dry clothes and a warm fire.

Running the Adventure

Now that you have read the Player's Introduction, proceed through the adventure presented below in Act and Scene format. Each Scene begins with a section of boxed text to be read to your players. It then contains information for you to use to run the particular Scene.

Act I—A Safe Haven

The First Watch

Weary from the long walk, you finally find a nice sheltered area and build your campfire. One of your scouts makes a quick catch of a small brace of conies and soon the smell of roasting rabbit wafts through the air. Each of you feels as if you can finally relax, rest your sore feet and change into dry clothing. It appears your luck may be changing.

Setting

The Wizard's Amulet is designed to fit easily into any fantasy campaign. If you wish, you can use the setting provided here. This is the default setting for many Necromancer Games products. For a more detailed treatment of this area, see *The Crucible of Freya*, the *Bard's Gate* Supplement and *The Tomb of Abysthor*, available from Necromancer Games. You can read about these product at our web site:
www.necromancergames.com

Act and Scene Format

Now all you have to do is proceed through the adventure scene by scene. Veteran GMs should feel free to flesh out actions between scenes as they see fit.

The party makes their camp to get out of the rain. Draw up a map of a small clearing against the base of a hill, amidst a grove of trees. The small clearing is about 20' in diameter. The hillside is steep and gives protection from the wind and rain, and the light trees give some protection from the rain as well. Stress that the characters should take off their armor and stow their weapons to keep them dry. Make a point of mentioning rust and the problems of **sleeping in armor**. Ask the players what they do with their other equipment. Figure out where they build their fire—if they build it in the open of the clearing, they will have trouble keeping it lit. The better location would be either against the hillside or by one of the trees under cover from the rain. Regardless of what your players decide to do, draw a map of the camp they set up. Ask the party if they set a watch and if so in what order the characters stand watch. Make them arrange their characters on the map—where they will sleep, etc. Once this is determined, darkness begins to fall, leading to the next scene.

A Voice in the Darkness

Darkness falls, and the fire begins to die down. As the characters not standing watch drift off to sleep, a child's voice can be heard, crying in the darkness. Taking a brand from the fire, [the person on watch] leaves the fireside to investigate, when suddenly he is attacked from the rear by a hideous stag-like creature with the head of a badger, large, yellowish-gray fangs and demonic red glowing eyes. The beast smells of rotting corpses. Twenty feet away is another, much larger than the first, crying in the voice that you thought was the child's. You are stunned that such a beautiful and innocent sound could come from so demonic looking a beast.

Read the subsection entitled "Encounter Modification," below, and determine what monster your players will encounter. Then determine who has the first watch. If you decide not to use the leucrotta, read the boxed text provided under "Encounter Modification." If you choose to use the leucrotta, then the person on watch has the following encounter:

Here it is. The first encounter. If you are a new GM, this is probably your first time refereeing a combat. So you might be a little concerned about running the encounter properly. Even if you aren't a new GM, the recent edition of the rules is probably new to you. For these reasons, we have provided a substantial amount of detail on how to run this encounter step-by-step, so that novices and experts alike will feel comfortable running the encounter under the new rules.

The person lured away from the camp has been drawn ten feet into the woods surrounding the clearing in which the party has made camp and there has been attacked by a young **leucrotta**. The mother leucrotta is making the noise of the crying child, drawing the character on watch right by where the baby leucrotta is

hiding, ready to spring. As the character passes by its hiding place the young leucrotta jumps out of the darkness to strike. Though the boxed text makes it seem as if the character has been surprised by the leucrotta, that has yet to be determined.

Starting Combat: The first thing you need to do is determine if the character lured into the woods is aware of the leucrotta prior to the attack. If he is not aware of the leucrotta then it gets a free round to act, known as the **Surprise Round**. Have the character roll to see if he has spotted the leucrotta as he passed by it. To see if he spotted the monster, the character has to roll against his Spot skill. His Spot check is an opposed roll (see Table 4-3). To know if he makes the Spot check, you first have to know how well the leucrotta is hiding. Roll 1d20 for the leucrotta and add his bonus for his Hide skill, plus a modifier of +2 (+4 for his small size, -2 for his hideous stench) for a total of +4 to the 1d20 check. If the character rolls a higher modified number on his Spot check than the leucrotta did on his Hide check then the character sees the leucrotta before it attacks and he is not surprised. If he fails his roll then he is surprised and the leucrotta gets a free Surprise Round. You do not have to roll for the other leucrotta (the mother) because she does not enter combat initially.

Surprise round: If the character is surprised then the young leucrotta gets a free Surprise Round. In that round, the young leucrotta will make a 5' move out of hiding and attack the character from the rear with its bite. This is a partial action, since the leucrotta has been readying, waiting for the character to walk by. The leucrotta, since it is attacking from behind, gets a +2 bonus on its attack with its bite. Remember, that during the Surprise Round, all surprised characters are "flat footed" and do not receive their Dex bonus to their AC. In addition, persons (and monsters) acting during the surprise round can only make partial actions. And don't forget that the leucrotta's bite is armor piercing—see its listed Special Quality. Because the attack in the surprise round is from behind, the armor piercing bite effects the target's armor, not his shield.

Initiative: After the Surprise round or if the character is aware of the leucrotta you need to roll **initiative**. All combatants aware of each other must roll 1d20, adding their initiative bonus if any. The higher roll moves and attacks first. If there is a tie, the combatant with the higher Dex moves first. Record the order of initiative. Persons who subsequently enter combat roll initiative and are added to this ranking. Remember, a person remains "flat footed" (without their Dex bonus to AC) until they have actually acted. So if the character lured into the woods loses initiative he remains flat footed until he acts.

What the Young Leucrotta Will Do: If the character is not surprised, the leucrotta will still take the action described above—do a 5' move and attack. The

Sleeping in Armor

The new rules provide that if a character sleeps in armor with an armor check penalty of -5 or worse (which includes all heavy armor and chainmail) then the character is at -2 Str and Dex the next day and can't charge or run.

Wait!

Before you read the boxed text, determine which encounter you are going to use—the leucrotta or the stirges.

Determining Surprise

The player ambushed rolls a Spot check. The leucrotta rolls a Hide check at +2 to his skill. Unless the character ambushed rolls higher, he is surprised. Until a combatant acts, he is "flat footed" and loses his Dex bonus to AC. Any combatant that can act during the surprise round is limited to partial actions and a 5 ft. move.

Initiative

Initiative is only rolled on 1d20 once for each creature (modified by the initiative modifier), when they become aware of their foe. When another creature becomes aware, their initiative is rolled and they are added to the initiative order. Actions are taken in decreasing order of initiative—highest goes first. Ties go in order of higher base Dex.

leucrotta will then, next round, turn around and retreat at full movement, using its special attack “Retreat Double Kick.” It still hasn’t mastered this attack technique, so its rear kick is at a minus (already reflected in the monster stat block for the young leucrotta). If the young leucrotta won initiative, then this kick attack happens before the character can turn around and so is at +2 to attack. After this initial attack and retreat, the young leucrotta will make a full movement to move around behind the character to try to attack him again. However, since it is still young, the baby leucrotta has not yet learned the importance of focusing its attack on one victim. If it encounters another person it will forget about the initial victim and launch an attack against the new target. If there are other persons nearby then they are just as likely to be attacked. You should randomize the victims of the young leucrotta’s attacks.

What the Mother Leucrotta Will Do: The other, larger leucrotta is the young beast’s mother, who stands and watches the fight, while the baby moves in, bites and leaps out kicking. The mother is interested in seeing whether or not the youngster is properly using the hunting techniques she has taught him. She will remain some 20 feet away watching his actions.

Leucrotta, Young: CR 1; SZ Small beast (4 ft. tall at shoulder); HD 2d10; hp 15; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 13 (+2 natural, Dex); Atk +1 melee (1d6+1, bite, slashing, armor piercing), -2 melee (2d6, double retreat kick, bludgeoning); SA armor piercing bite, double retreat kick; SQ mimic voice; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL CE; Str 9/-1, Dex 12/+1, Con 10/+0, Int 6/-2, Wis 5/-3, Cha 3/-4.

Skills: Hide +2, Listen +2, Move Silently +1. **Feats:** Sure-footed.

SA—Armor Piercing Bite (Ex): The bony ridges that a leucrotta has for teeth can chew through metal or wood. In addition to inflicting damage on the character attacked, compare the damage rolled against the hardness rating of the character’s shield or armor (see Tables 8-12 and 8-13). Subtract the hardness from the damage done. Then subtract the remainder from the hit points of the item (see Tables 8-12 and 8-13). If the damage caused by cumulative leucrotta bites exceeds the hit points of the shield or armor it is utterly destroyed. Sustaining more than half its hit points renders a shield useless. Initial attacks are against a shield. Subsequent attacks, or attacks from the rear, are against the victim’s armor, which is handled in the same fashion (again, see Tables 8-12 and 8-13).

SA—Retreat Double Kick (Ex): When a leucrotta turns to flee it instinctively kicks with both of its rear legs. Only one attack and damage roll is made for both legs. This is a free action. This attack also counts as a “Trip” attack in that the person kicked can be knocked over.

SQ—Mimic Voice (Ex): A leucrotta can mimic the voice of a man, woman, child, or a domestic animal in pain. This is often used to lure a victim into attack

The mother only joins in if the baby is killed outright or if she is attacked. The party would be foolish to attack her. If the mother does attack, she differs from the young leucrotta in one important aspect—she has the ability to do a Spring Attack, as the Feat of the same name. This means she can move before her attack and then move again, retreating and using her kick attack, as long as she moves in total no more than her full movement. A nasty attack combination. If someone attacks her she does just that. Then she calls for her and the baby to flee. If the baby has been killed she will not cease her attacks until she is killed or until every member of the party is dead.

Ending the Combat: If the baby takes a cumulative total of 6 hit points of damage or more, the pair will retreat into the night. Also, if more than three persons show up to fight against the young leucrotta, the mother will call out in their foul language and the two will retreat. Finally, if the fight is going poorly for the party, the GM in his or her discretion can decide that the beasts have had enough practice and have them retreat (mercifully). If any of these occur, the GM should have the mother “tease” the party for the next two nights, but not really attack them. They will continually hear a baby crying off in the distance or a

range. The young leucrotta has not yet mastered this ability.

Leucrotta, Mother: CR 3; SZ Large beast (6 ft. tall at shoulder); HD 6d10+6; hp 38; Init +6 (Improved Initiative, Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 14 (+3 natural, Dex, -1 size); Atk +5 melee (3d6, bite, slashing, armor piercing), +7 melee (2d6, double retreat kick, crit 19-20, bludgeoning); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; SA armor piercing bite, double retreat kick; SQ mimic voice; SV Fort+3 Refl+6 Will+2; AL CE; Str 14/+2, Dex 14/+2, Con 12/+1, Int 8/-1, Wis 9/-1, Cha 2/-4.

Skills: Hide +2, Listen +6, Move Silently +5. **Feats:** Improved Initiative, Sure-footed, Weapon Finesse (rear kick), Spring Attack.

Special Attacks and Qualities: As above, though this full-grown beast does 3d6 damage and is thus much more likely to ruin armor and shields than is the young leucrotta.

Description: A leucrotta is a horrible, unbearably ugly beast. It has the body of a stag, the head of a badger and a lionine tail. It has bony, yellow-gray ridges for teeth and burning, feral red eyes. Their bodies are tan, darkening to black at the head. The stench of rotting corpses surrounds the beast and its breath reeks of the grave. A full-sized male can reach seven feet tall at the shoulder, though they average six feet. Other animals shun this foul creature. Leucrotta are very intelligent for beasts and speak their own evil language. They are wicked and malicious. Because of their mountain goat-like surefootedness, leucrotta normally make their lair in treacherous, rocky crags accessible only to them.

Escape Hatch

If the combat is going poorly for the players (more than one player is seriously wounded or one player is unconscious), and the baby leucrotta is still alive, then the mother and the baby retreat, having had enough practice for one night.

Playing the Leucrotta

Jump in and bite; don’t forget the bite is armor piercing; then retreat and use the retreat double kick; people kicked have to save or fall over like a Trip attack; then run away and circle around the character for another attack two rounds later. Lather, rinse, repeat.

wounded animal in pain.

Encounter Modification: If you are a new GM and running the leucrotta encounter seems too complicated, then replace the leucrotta with **3 stirges**. Note, however, that 3 stirges are more dangerous than one young leucrotta. Obviously, since the leucrotta are no longer involved, the player on watch is not lured away from the fire. Instead, the three stirges come flying in with a horrible buzzing, concentrating their attacks on the character on watch. If the players encounter stirges they do not encounter the leucrotta and if they encountered the leucrotta they don't encounter the stirges. One encounter is enough for first-level characters! If you decide to use the stirges, read the following to your players:

With a horrible buzzing, three strange flying insects the size of large rats with bat wings, grasping claws and hideous mosquito-like snouts swarm all around you. You shout to wake your comrades as the grotesque monstrosities are upon you—seeking your warm flesh with their evil beaks.

The stirges are not particularly quiet. The character on watch can make a Listen check (DC 12). If successful, he is aware of the stirges' approach and is not surprised. In addition, he can make a Spot check (DC of 14) to see them coming. The stirges concentrate on one victim until they drain enough blood to sate their thirst, at which time they will detach themselves and fly away at one-half their speed—bloated from their recent feast. If an attached stirge sustains a hit and takes damage—even if not enough to kill it—that stirge will detach itself and fly away seeking less resistant prey elsewhere.

Stirges (3): CR 2; SZ Tiny beast (2 ft. wingspan, 1 ft. body length); HD 1d10; hp 6,5,5; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (poor); AC 16 (+2 size, +4 Dex; AC 12 if attached); Atk +6 melee (1d3, touch, piercing, plus special attack blood drain on subsequent rounds); Face 2 ½ ft. x 2 ½ ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SA attach, blood drain; SV Fort+2 Refl+6 Will+1; AL N; Str 3/-4, Dex 19/+4, Con 10/+0, Int 1/-5, Wis 12/+1, Cha 6/-2.

Skills: Spot +8 (acute sense of smell), Hide +14.
Feats: Weapon Finesse (touch), Darkvision (200 ft.).

SD—Attach (Ex): If a stirge hits with a **touch attack** (target's armor bonuses ignored), it uses its eight pincers to latch onto its target's body. A stirge attaches itself with incredible strength and cannot be pulled off. You must kill a stirge to remove it. If an attack is made against an attached stirge, that attack is at -4 because the other person must be careful not to hit the victim. The victim does not suffer this penalty. An attached stirge has AC 12.

SA—Blood Drain (Ex): An attached stirge drains

The Smiling Skull

You have driven off the beasts, though some of you are wounded. You know that you must get out of this wilderness soon. You travel for two more days, and finally you believe the beast's haunting childlike cry is behind you. At last, the weather starts to clear, and as you stop for a water break along a stream, you see a strange rock formation atop a hill to the west. You can't be sure, but from your current angle it looks as if the rocks have been placed purposefully. You venture closer and discover that someone has arranged large rocks on the top of the hill in the shape of a grinning human skull.

This is a red herring, and has nothing to do with this adventure. In fact, it is an homage to a classic old adventure, which had just such an arrangement of stones on the hill in which a certain tomb was located. The party may wish to waste a lot of time and energy here, but there is nothing to find. One of the rocks, however, has been enchanted with a *Nystul's magic aura*, detecting as *abjuration* magic (DC 18) if the party casts a *detect magic* spell.

Act II—A Bird in the Hand

A Pleasant Camp

Today's travels were a pleasant change from the previous four days. You even found some fresh blueberries and two of your group downed a small deer. You make camp in the open, near a copse of trees, and bask in the warmth of the late afternoon sun with full bellies and dry clothes. You figure your party is still four days travel from Fairhill.

blood, dealing 1d4 **temporary Constitution damage** each round it remains attached. Once it has drained 4 points of Constitution, it detaches and flies off to digest its meal. Temporary Constitution damage is regained at a rate of 1 point per day.

Description: Stirges are an obscene cross between a bird, a bat and an insect. They feed off the blood of living creatures and are universally feared. They have a long beak-like proboscis that they use to drain blood. They have four or six insect like legs that end in incredibly strong pincers they use to attach to their victims while at their vile feast. They normally feed on animals or children, though they are known to attack humans when hungry. Because of their enhanced sense of smell and the range of their darkvision, it is difficult to surprise a stirge unless they are sleeping and digesting after drinking their fill of blood. When they sleep they hang upside down like a bat.

GM Tip

You should get into the habit of drawing up the night's campsite on the battle map even if you know there won't be an encounter. Otherwise, players will quickly figure out that you only draw the map when there will be an encounter. Keep them on their toes. Don't ignore drawing up the map just because *you* know there is nothing special about this hill.

Touch Attack

A touch attack ignores the armor and shield bonuses of the target, though the target retains their Dexterity bonus and any magical bonus. A stirge's initial attack is a touch attack.

Temporary Damage

Some attacks such as poison or stirge bites do temporary damage to an attribute. A character reduced to 0 Constitution from such damage dies. Brutal!

At this point, draw up a camp on the battle map. Talk about a proposed watch order, as if you are going to proceed to spending the night. Once those matters are all settled, continue on to the next scene.

Corian's Tale

As the sun drops below the horizon and the fire dims, Corian asks you all to gather. You have been waiting for Corian to explain more of his purpose behind the formation of your group, wondering at his true motives. Before tonight, he has always rebuffed your questions, saying that he will speak further when you are far from prying eyes and ears in Reme. It appears that time has come.

This Scene is entirely for the players, and you should stay out of it as much as possible. Let the player who is playing Corian tell as much or as little of Corian's back-story as he or she wishes. Encourage the player to speak to the group contemporaneously rather than simply reading from the provided background sheet. But remember that this is probably the first major block of role playing in this adventure and that it is being done with pre-generated characters, not characters the players made themselves, so the Corian player will have less of a connection than usual with his or her character. Let the other players ask questions of Corian. The length of this Scene should be dictated entirely by the interaction of the players. Just sit back and watch. You should only intervene if the Corian character makes an obvious mistake. But even in that situation, don't correct it immediately—the player may be having Corian lie on purpose. Let them bring the Scene to a conclusion—not you. Just as they seem to be coming to a comfortable conclusion, shift immediately to the next scene.

Talon

Just before Corian finishes speaking, one of you notices that you are not the only listeners. About fifteen feet away is the largest raven you have ever seen, and it's eyes glow with red fire. You jump up, frightened, as the raven flies off into the night with a shriek. This must be Talon, the familiar of Corian's nemesis, Vortigern. You fear that your enemies are near at hand.

There is no way the PCs can kill Talon now, and he automatically gets away in the round it takes the characters to grab their weapons. Let them take several shots at Talon if they want (DC of 35). Play up the fear of the impending attack which never comes and make them hear plenty of "things that go bump in the night" for the rest of the night (2-3 noises disturb the watch). Vortigern, however, remains a day behind the group and will not appear until Act III. He sent Talon ahead to scout...successfully, it seems.

The characters may be frightened into traveling at night—which is unwise. If they do, halfway through the night they are attacked by **3 stirges**. The stirges are completely unrelated to Vortigern and Talon and are a random encounter. The party will not have this encounter if they remain in their camp through the night. Use the stirge statistics from the alternate encounter described in the "Encounter Modification" section of the "Voice in the Darkness" scene, above.

Stirges (3): CR 2; hp 6,5,5. See the stirge description above.

Act III—Vortigern's Trap

The Farmhouse

You have traveled two days and nights since the demonic bird disturbed your camp, drawing within two days travel of Fairhill. Finally, you feel as though your enemies have lost your trail. You see a farmhouse off in the fields, near the woods, and you decide to see if the farmer will let you rest in his barn for the night. As you approach the small dwelling, you notice that something is terribly wrong. The farmer—or what is left of him—lies in the front yard of the home, half eaten and missing one arm. His wife, and three small children lie in various contorted positions, the smallest boy completely disemboweled. Blood covers the hay in the yard, and a chicken pecks at the corpse of a young girl lying in front of the barn.

You need to **draw this map**. Depict a simple farm dwelling with one door and several windows, as well as a barn, with an open front and small three-foot high wooden-fenced pen enclosing the front area. The gate in the wooden fence is open allowing the animals out of the barn and pen. The farmer's body lies in front of his home. His wife's body and two of their children lie just inside the door to the farmhouse. Their young daughter's body is inside the animal pen in front of the barn.

Examination of the bodies by a healer or any fighter familiar with combat wounds easily determines that they were all killed with swords or axes and that the murderers were enthusiastic in their work. If a healer or cleric with healing powers makes a successful Heal check (DC 15) that character discovers that two of the children have dagger-like wounds that drip a strange poison. Allow any character with the Heal skill to make a check (DC 28) or any person with Knowledge (Poisons) skill to make a check (DC 24) to evaluate the poison. If, somehow, they make the roll, tell them it appears to be poison from some magical creature. If the roll is failed (which it should be), tell them they have never seen such poison before.

Searching the House: The house and barn have several animals running around: 4 pigs, 30 chickens, and

GM Tip

There is a really cool picture of the farmhouse on the next page. You should show it to your characters as they approach. Hey, we give you this art for a reason. Use it!

Drawing the Map

Use the farmhouse picture on the next page and the description here to help you. Make sure that off to one side of the farmhouse (we suggest off to the left, a little to the back) you place a copse of trees about 60 feet away—this is where Vortigern will appear later.

Ambush!

Once the characters start to make camp, or start to bury the bodies of the farmers, you need to think about having Vortigern spring his trap as detailed in the next scene. Take a break (it will put your players at false ease), read the next section and decide what you want to do.

a draft horse. In the trees a few hundred feet away—in the opposite direction of Vortigern—are 3 cows. There is little of value in the house, but an old short sword hanging above the fireplace is in fact a *+1 short sword*, though it has no outward appearance of being magical. A hidden compartment in the bed (DC 20 Search check unless they specifically search the bed, then DC 15) contains 22 silver and 45 copper pieces. Two lanterns and numerous other dry goods are about as well. If the party buries or consecrates the bodies, they will not have to fight zombies when Vortigern springs his trap (see “Ambush!” below). If they wish to search or bury bodies, let them do so. As soon as they either make camp at the farm or leave the farm to make camp somewhere else, proceed to the next scene immediately. Don’t let the party get set up inside the house. The encounter with Vortigern is at hand...

Ambush!

All right, here it is—the grand finale. But before we begin the fight itself, a little background is in order.

Vortigern’s Plan: Vortigern orchestrated this encounter to get the amulet from Corian. He has underestimated the party and believes he can simply take the amulet by force. Vortigern and his thugs have been following behind the characters for some time. Using

Talon as a scout, Vortigern learned the party’s direction of travel. Projecting the party’s path, Talon scouted and found this farmhouse. Vortigern and his thugs came here and slaughtered the farmers, figuring that would draw Corian and his comrades to investigate—setting the perfect trap. So far it has worked exactly as Vortigern envisioned. Vortigern plans to summon undead to surround the characters while he and his thugs hide in the nearby trees and fire missiles and spells at them. He then intends to send Talon to retrieve the amulet from Corian. In preparation for this encounter Vortigern cast a number of spells on himself. He is protected by the following spells: *resistance*, *shield*, *mage armor*, and *protection from arrows*. See his description for more details.

Encounter Difficulty: Now that you know the basics of Vortigern’s plan, you will have to decide how difficult you want the combat to be.

Difficult: This level of difficulty should be used only if your players are veterans and if they are relatively uninjured going into the combat. Now is a good time to remember the GM advice we gave you at the beginning of the adventure—don’t be out to get you players. Only use this level of difficulty if your players can handle it. If you decide on using this level of difficulty:

- Vortigern springs the trap at the most strategically

Difficulty Level

This encounter can kill characters. So before you run it, you need to pick the difficulty level. The default level of difficulty is “Average.” Don’t use the “Difficult” level without good reason.



advantageous time—just as the characters are burying the farmers' bodies (which veterans will certainly do).

- Vortigern will lean towards attacking after dark if the players are still outside, since he and all his allies have Darkvision.
- Vortigern will know the whereabouts of every character because Talon, who has been flying around invisible, is telling him this information telepathically. This will let Vortigern summon a ring of skeletons around the characters and will allow the zombies to rise up within the circle.
- The thugs will fire right into the circle of skeletons, since they are immune to piercing weapons. The party will have to deal with zombies inside their group, skeletons circling them, thugs firing arrows at them and Vortigern casting offensive spells at Corian, trying to kill him.
- Vortigern will use all his offensive spells against Corian, starting with *magic missiles* and leading up to *melf's acid arrow*. Vortigern will save his *flare* spells for use on any characters that charge his location.
- Vortigern will also command Talon to use his stinger on Corian and to pry the amulet from him once he is dead.

This is probably the most true to what Vortigern *would* do in this situation. It is also probably going to result in one or two dead characters. Don't worry. If you continue on to *The Crucible of Freya*, Shandrill the priestess can raise them from the dead. Though there might be a small price...

Average: This is the default level of difficulty and the one that you should use unless your players are veterans. You may even use this level of difficulty if your players are veterans but several of the characters are injured. The general set up is the same as above, with the same number of foes, except:

- Don't send Talon out to use his stinger on Corian. Send Talon out invisibly to retrieve the amulet.
- Have Vortigern use his *magic missiles* on Corian, but have him reserve his *acid arrow* for his own protection if someone charges him. He will use *flare* on other fighters.
- At this difficulty, Vortigern has not been using Talon as an invisible spy, so he might not know the location of all the characters. He, therefore, might not spring the trap at the best strategic time—meaning that all the characters may not be inside the circle of summoned skeletons.

Easy: If your players are all new or if they have some experience but several of the characters are injured, you should use this level of difficulty. At this level of difficulty:

- Vortigern only has one thug with him.
- Vortigern doesn't cast any offensive spells at Corian.
- Vortigern sends Talon out to steal the amulet, but Talon will be visible.

- Vortigern will not have gotten all the characters within the ring of summoned skeletons
- There will only be 4 skeletons, not 5.
- The farmers, also, will not rise as zombies.
- If someone charges Vortigern's location, the thug with Vortigern will flee rather than defend him.

Starting the Encounter:

Watch what your players do around the farmhouse. When it seems like a good time to spring the trap, read the following text:

As you move about the farm, Corian suddenly hears a familiar voice. He looks over and sees Vortigern and two large men with bows drawn, just inside the cover of the surrounding woods some 60 feet away. Vortigern has his familiar—the devil-eyed raven—perched on his shoulder and he is reading a *scroll*. As Vortigern finishes reading the *scroll*, the raven transforms into a small, devilish, winged creature and with a hideous shriek flies off Vortigern's shoulder and immediately goes invisible. Instantly, the ground comes alive. [Select the names of two PCs other than Corian] scream in terror as skeletal hands claw through the ground and begin to encircle the party. (Read the following only if the farmer's bodies were not buried and if you are not using the "Easy" difficulty setting) The corpses of the dead farmers also rise and move slowly towards you.



Summary of Tactics:

Before we spell out the combat step-by-step, here is a summary of what the various combatants will do.

The Crucible of Freya

For more information on *The Crucible of Freya* see the section entitled "Continuing the Story," below.

Vortigern: Vortigern will use his spells from a distance, focusing first on taking out Corian, as detailed in the difficulty level you selected. He uses the trees on the fringe of the farm as **cover**, which gives him +4 to his AC. See his description for more details. As mentioned above, Vortigern has prepared himself with several spells prior to the encounter—see his stat block for details. He should be nearly impossible to hit from distance. If the battle goes against him, he will use his *dust of disappearance* to escape. In addition, if Talon recovers the amulet, Vortigern and Talon will flee, using his *dust of disappearance*. See the section entitled “Escape?” below.

Vortigern's Thug(s): Vortigern's thugs are an NPC class known as Warriors, which are essentially lesser fighters. Neither of Vortigern's thugs will engage the party in hand to hand combat unless directly attacked. They prefer to fire their missile weapons into combat, letting the summoned undead handle melee. Vortigern and his thugs take advantage of the natural cover provided by the grove of trees. If any members of the party break through the ring of undead and charge Vortigern's location, the two thugs will drop their bows and engage any such characters to prevent them from reaching Vortigern. They will foolishly protect Vortigern with their lives. He, of course, would not hesitate to leave them behind to save his own skin.

The Undead: The summoned skeletons emerge from the earth in a ring around the player characters, encircling them. If the party is in the process of burying the farmers when Vortigern animates them, they will rise as zombies and the party attack inside of the ring of skeletons (unless you are running the encounter as “Easy,” in which case there are no zombies. The skeletons and zombies (if present) attack the characters mindlessly and do not check morale. Remember that the zombies will not be present if the characters buried and consecrated the bodies of the farmers prior to Vortigern launching his trap. Of course, Vortigern would most likely have sprung his trap before letting that happen...

Talon: Vortigern will telepathically command Talon to attempt to steal the amulet from Corian—or whoever else obviously possesses it. If you are running the encounter as “Easy” then Talon is visible, otherwise he uses his invisibility. Talon must roll against a DC of 16 to steal the amulet if it is exposed. Once he has successfully grasped an exposed amulet he will fly away with it. If the amulet is tossed to the ground or to another character Talon will chase after the amulet since retrieval of the amulet is his primary goal. If you are running the encounter as “Difficult,” Talon will try to kill Corian with his stinger if he can't find the amulet. But even at “Difficult,” if Talon sees the amulet go somewhere else, he will chase after it. Aside from stinging (if you are running the encounter as “Difficult”) or trying to snatch the amulet, Talon will not fight directly unless wounded or cornered because Vortigern has commanded him not to. If frustrated in

his attempt to obtain the amulet and injured in combat, Talon will flee to Vortigern. He does not want to risk being killed—that would damage Vortigern and would result in his imprisonment in Hell for 66 years before he would be allowed to serve as a familiar again, and he likes his current job here on the material plane. If Talon does get the amulet, he will go invisible and return to Vortigern. The two will flee. See the section entitled “Escape?” below.

Running the Combat:

You got a taste of running combat with the leucrotta/stirge encounter. But now things get tricky—multiple opponents, missile fire and NPC spell casters. If you can run this encounter then you have definitely graduated from the novice GM ranks. It's our job to help you do it. So here are step-by-step instructions on running this encounter. Even experienced GMs should appreciate having this encounter spelled out.

Determining Surprise: At this point, the characters can make a Spot roll and a Listen roll both at DC 20 (includes distance, cover and other relevant modifiers). If any character makes either skill check, then they may act during the Surprise Round. If this happens, roll initiative for all combatants that are aware of each other.

Surprise Round: Vortigern more than likely surprises the party. He and his thugs are hiding in the trees some 60 feet away from the farmhouse. They are out of sight until Vortigern springs the trap. Talon is either flying around invisible (“Difficult” level) or is outside of the trees watching the characters. Once the characters are outside the farmhouse in a group, Talon telepathically tells Vortigern. He motions to the thugs to get into position. Vortigern then reads his scroll of *animate dead*. This scroll, which Vortigern purloined from Feriblan's library, contains an unusual version of the spell and brings 1d6 skeletons (in this case it has been predetermined to be 5 skeletons) in addition to animating the zombies. Vortigern and the thugs stay inside the cover provided by the fringe of trees.

During the surprise round, Vortigern finishes reading his *scroll*, and the skeletons and zombies (if appropriate) rise from the ground. The skeletons appear on Vortigern's initiative. The skeletons and zombies cannot attack this round as they form, nor can they make attacks of opportunity at characters who try to run by them this round (if any of the characters can move, that is). The skeletons are flat footed until they act next round. The thug(s) take one bow shot each **into the melee**. Talon shrieks, goes invisible and flies towards Corian at double his movement. If (by some miracle) a member of the party is able to act in the surprise round then he or she can move out of the forming ring of skeletons without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Cover

Cover provides a bonus to AC. See table 8-9. In this case, Vortigern and the thugs get the benefit of one-half cover and get a +4 to AC because they are firing from behind trees.

Firing into Melee

Normally, if you shoot into melee you do so at a -4 to avoid hitting your allies. The thugs don't suffer that minus because they don't care about hitting the skeletons or zombies. It's nice not to have a conscience! You may, however, treat the skeletons as partial cover for the characters.

First Round of Combat: All persons now should be aware of their opponents (unless there is some character inside the farmhouse). Make sure everyone who hasn't done so yet rolls **initiative**, including the monsters. Make the initiative list in order of initiative from top to bottom. This round, Vortigern casts a *magic missile* at Corian (unless you are using the "Easy" level of difficulty, in which case he just watches). The thugs reload, stay behind the trees and fire another round into melee. The skeletons and zombies attack. If any characters try to run past the skeletons or zombies they open themselves up to **attacks of opportunity**, even if the skeletons or zombies have already attacked!

Subsequent Rounds of Combat: Here is what the combatants will do:

The Undead: The skeletons will continue to stay in a circle around the characters, attacking them. They will take attacks of opportunity on any that pass by them—always taking the first attack of opportunity. They are too mindless to delay their attacks of opportunity. The zombies also will continue to attack.

The Thugs: The thugs will continue to reload and fire bow shots at the characters. If any character has broken free from the circle of skeletons, they will focus their shots on those characters. If a character moves

Vortigern and his Allies

Vortigern, Ex-Apprentice to Feriblan the Mad, Male Human, Wiz3 (Wiz4 with Imp familiar): CR 5; SZ Medium humanoid (5 ft. 7 in. tall); HD 4d4+4; hp 17; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 23 (robes, +1 ring of deflection, Dex, +4 from *mage armor*, +4 from one-half cover from trees, +4 cover from *shield*); Atk +2 melee (1d4, dagger, crit x3, piercing); SQ telepathic link with Talon, regeneration (1 hp/round), darkvision (120 ft.); DR 10/+1 vs. arrows from *protection from arrows*; SR 10; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +5 (includes +1 each from *resistance*, -1 each after 1 minute; also includes +3 Refl from *shield*); AL LE; Str 10/+0, Dex 13/+1, Con 12/+1, Int 16/+3, Wis 10/+0, Cha 12/+1.

Skills: Alchemy +9, Concentration +8, Gather Information +3, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (Arcana) +10, Listen +1, Sery +7, Search +5, Spellcraft +10, Spot +2. **Feats:** Brew Potion, Empower Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Mastery.

Wizard Spells (4/4/3): 0—*resistance*, *daze*, *flare* (x2), 1st—*mage armor*, *shield*, *magic missile* (x2), 2nd—*protection from arrows*, *darkness*, *melf's acid arrow*. Vortigern cast the spells in bold on himself just prior to encountering the party.

SQ—Telepathic Link (Su): Telepathic link to Talon if he is within 1 mile.

SQ—Regeneration (Ex): 1 hit point/round (from Talon).

SQ—Darkvision (Ex): 120 feet (from Talon).

Possessions: Robes, 2 daggers, *potion of healing*, scroll of *animate dead*, a map to Rappan Athuk (a nefarious dungeon set somewhere in your game world), *dust of disappearance* (2 uses—each use renders one man-sized object *invisible* for 30 minutes), *ring of deflection* +1, imp familiar (disguised as a raven), 102 gp, 58 sp, 3-20 gp gems.

Talon, Vortigern's Imp Familiar: CR 2; Tiny outsider (devil, evil) (2 ft. tall); HD 3d8; hp 18; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 20 ft./fly 50 ft. (good); AC 18 (+2 size, +6 natural); Atk +6 melee (1d4, sting, piercing, plus poison); Face 2 ½ ft. x 2 ½ ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SA spell-like abilities, poison; SQ damage reduction (5/silver or

+1), poison immunity, fire resistance (20), regeneration, darkvision (120 ft.), polymorph; SR 10; SV Fort +3 Ref +6 Will +4; AL LE; Str 10/+0, Dex 17/+3, Con 10/+0, Int 10/+0, Wis 12/+1, Cha 10/+0.

Skills: Hide +15, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Search +4, Spellcraft +4, Spot +5. **Feats:** Alertness, Dodge.

Spell-like Abilities: An imp can use the following powers at will, as 6th-level sorcerers (save DCs, where applicable, are 10 plus the spell level): *detect aura*, *detect magic*, and *invisibility*. Once a day, an imp can use a *suggestion* effect, also as a 6th-level sorcerer. Once each week, an imp can cast a *commune* effect. The imp can ask 6 questions of its patron devil. Otherwise, the power works like a *commune* spell cast by a 12th-level cleric.

SA—Poison (Ex): Hits from an imp's stinger cause the opponent to make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or suffer 1d4 points of temporary Dexterity damage. One minute later, the opponent must make another Fortitude save (DC 13) or suffer an additional 2d4 points of temporary Dexterity damage. As a person's Dex is reduced, they suffer the effects of the lower Dexterity—minus to AC, minus to Dex based skills, minus to ranged attacks, minus to initiative. A person reduced to 0 Dexterity or lower falls into a paralytic coma.

SQ—Poison Immunity (Ex): Imps are never harmed by poison.

SQ—Fire Resistance (Ex): Imps are resistant to fire. They are immune to non-magical fire. Each round that they suffer damage from these attacks, they ignore the first 20 points of damage inflicted upon them.

SQ—Regenerate (Ex): Imps regenerate one point of damage each round. They suffer lethal damage from acid, holy water, and blessed weapons (provided they are also made of silver or enchanted).

SQ—Polymorph (Ex): An imp can polymorph itself at will. This works like a *polymorph self* spell cast by a 12-level sorcerer except that the imp can only assume the form of a raven or a giant rat.

Description: Imps are small, lawful evil denizens of the planes of Hell. They are, on occasion, sent by their arch-devil masters to the material plane to serve as familiars for lawful evil wizards and priests. Imps

Initiative for Monsters

Don't just make one initiative roll for all the bad guys. You should make one roll for each group of monsters: one for Vortigern, one for Talon, one roll for both Thugs (since they have the same modifier), one roll for the skeletons and one roll for the zombies.

Attacks of Opportunity

A major addition to the new rules, attacks of opportunity occur when a person moves through the threatened area of another combatant. Even if the combatant has already attacked, they get an attack on the person moving through their threatened area. However, unless a Feat allows for more (such as Combat Reflexes), a combatant only gets one attack of opportunity per round even though several persons may move through their threatened area. See tables 8-1, 8-3 and 8-4 and the Combat chapter.

Resistance and Regeneration

Remember that Talon has damage resistance against all but silver or magic weapons. Also, both Talon and Vortigern (because of Talon) regenerate 1 hp per round and have Spell Resistance 10, which even applies against *magic missiles*.

Spell Resistance

This is handled differently under the new rules. To penetrate a target's spell resistance, the spell caster must make a roll of 1d20 plus caster level that is equal to or greater than the subject's Spell Resistance DC—it's like a magical Armor Class. Make it and the spell gets through. Miss it and the spell is wasted.

within 30 feet of their location, they will drop their bows and draw their weapons. They will remain in front of Vortigern and protect him.

Vortigern: Vortigern will fire another *magic missile* at Corian, unless he is being charged then he will cast a *flash* at the person charging him. If a person gets close enough to engage in melee with his two thugs, Vortigern will step back into the woods, out of view of the ring of skeletons. If things get tough, he will use his *dust of disappearance*. He will not flee until Talon recovers the amulet, Talon is injured and forced to retreat or his thugs are killed. Then he will flee. See the section entitled “Escape?” below.

Talon: Talon will finish his movement to Corian and will try to obtain the amulet. If Corian isn't wearing it openly, Talon will use his innate ability to *detect magic* on Corian to see if he has it. If he doesn't find the amulet on Corian he will sting him if you are playing the “Difficult” level. Otherwise, he will use his *detect magic* ability to locate who has the magical item. Of course, if another member of the party has a magical item, Talon will not be able to differentiate which one has the amulet in particular. He will check all of the persons who are carrying magical items. Talon will try to take the amulet from them if he can see it. Regardless of difficulty level, if someone other than Corian has the amulet and they have the amulet hidden on their person so that Talon can't get it, Talon

average 2 ft. in height. They have leathery, bat-like wings, a barbed tail, and sharp, twisted horns. Normally an imp's skin is a dark red and its horns and jagged teeth a gleaming white. Talon is slightly different. Talon was sent by Dispater, an arch-devil that rules the second plane of Hell from his Iron Fortress of Dis. Talon, thus, is steely-gray and his horns and teeth are the color of cold iron. Talon can assume the forms of a raven or a giant rat at will. The imp confers some of its powers upon its master. A telepathic link connects the two whenever they are within one mile of each other. This enables the master to receive all of the imp's sensory impressions, including its darkvision. The master also gains the imp's inherent spell resistance and is able to regenerate just as the imp does. If the imp is within telepathic range, the master acts as if he were one level higher than he actually is.

Grenag and Slaaroc, Male Half Orc Thugs, War2: CR 2; SZ Medium humanoid (5 ft. 7 in. tall); HD 2d8+2; hp 14, 12; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 18/15 (+3 armor, Dex, +4 due to cover/with +1 shields out of cover); Atk +3 ranged (1d6, short bow, crit x3, range 60 ft., piercing), +5 melee (1d8+3, longsword, crit 19-20, slashing) +5 melee (1d8+3 battle axe, crit x3, slashing); SQ darkvision (60 ft.); SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will -1; AL CE; Str 16/+3, Dex 12/+1, Con 11/+1, Int 9/-1, Wis 9/-1, Cha 8/-1.

Skills: Ride +3, Intimidate +2, Listen +1, Spot +1.
Feats: Weapon Focus (sword and axe respectively).

Possessions: Studded leather armor, small shields, long sword/battle axe, short bows, 20 arrows, 23 gp, 16 sp each.

Skeletons (5): SZ Medium undead (6 ft. tall); HD 1d12; hp 8; Init +5 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+2 natural, Dex); Atk +0 melee (1d6, short swords or hand axes, slashing) or +0 melee (1d4/1d4, claws, slashing); SQ undead immunities; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10/+0, Int -, Wis 10/+0, Dex 12/+1, Con -, Cha 10/+0.

Skills: none. **Feats:** Improved Initiative.

SQ—Undead Immunities (Ex): Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, and necromantic effects; not subject to critical

hits, sneak attacks, ability damage, ability drain, or energy drain; immune to anything requiring a Fortitude save.

SQ—Reduced Damage (Ex): Skeletons are not damaged by piercing weapons (like arrows) and take only half damage from slashing weapons (like swords). They take full damage from bludgeoning weapons (like maces).

Possessions: Small shields, short swords or hand axes.

Zombies, Common (2): SZ Medium undead (6 ft. tall); HD 2d12+3; hp 17, 16; Init -3 (Dex, -2 poor reflexes); Spd 20 ft.; AC 11 (+2 natural, Dex); Atk +2 melee (1d6+1, claw, slashing); SQ undead immunities; SQ poor reflexes; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13/+1, Int -, Wis 10/+0, Dex 8/-1, Con -, Cha -.

Skills: none. **Feats:** Toughness.

SQ—Undead Immunities (Ex): Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, and necromantic effects; not subject to critical hits, sneak attacks, ability damage, ability drain, or energy drain; immune to anything requiring a Fortitude save.

SQ—Poor Reflexes (Ex): Zombies have very poor reflexes and thus have reduced initiative. Unlike most creatures, they can move or attack during their action, but cannot do both. In game terms, they can only take partial actions.

Possessions: none.

Zombies, Children (3): SZ Small undead (3 to 4 ft. tall); HD 1d12+3; hp 10, 8, 7; Init -3 (Dex, poor reflexes); Spd 20 ft.; AC 12 (+2 size); Atk -1 melee (1d6-2, claw, slashing); SQ undead immunities; SW poor reflexes; SV Fort-1 Refl-3 Will+0; AL NE; Str 6/-2, Dex 8/-1, Con -, Int -, Wis 8/-1, Cha -.

Skills: none. **Feats:** Toughness.

SQ—Undead Immunities (Ex): As above.

SQ—Poor Reflexes (Ex): As above.

Possessions: none.

will sting that person. This means if he detects that two people have magical items hidden on their person, he will sting both of them. He will then search their corpse(s) to retrieve the amulet. Talon will always immediately go invisible after attacking unless you are playing the encounter at the “Easy” level of difficulty. If he is injured, Talon will flee back to Vortigern. Vortigern is more concerned with keeping Talon alive than finding the amulet at the price of Talon.

Killing Talon: Since Talon is Vortigern’s familiar, if Talon is killed, Vortigern will lose 4 levels (becoming 0 level), and fall into a coma. Note that this is different from the standard Familiar rules because Talon is not your normal familiar. Vortigern will also lose the power of regeneration and his Spell Resistance.

Ending the Combat:

Basically, you just have to play this out until one of four things happens: everyone in the party dies, all of the bad guys are killed (which would be quite an accomplishment), Vortigern and Talon get away with the amulet or Vortigern and Talon get away without the amulet. Once any of these conditions occur, go to the next section entitled “Escape?” Everyone will agree that the first ending (the party dies) is not very fun. So how do we avoid that result without using some cheesy “bolt from the blue” to save the party? Easy—use an “escape hatch.”

Escape Hatch: OK, so what if things are really going poorly for the party? Here are a few suggestions:

- If it has been several rounds of combat, you could have Vortigern’s *animate dead* spell expire (the party doesn’t know this isn’t the normal spell duration) and have the undead fall to the ground in pieces—leaving just Vortigern, Talon and his thugs.
- You could have Vortigern’s thugs flee because they are cowards at heart. After all, the hardest thing about being a bad guy is that “good help is hard to find.”
- Or you could have the skeletons and zombies start to attack each other or turn to go after Vortigern and the thugs. Make a die roll behind your GM screen and look disappointed, as if the fact that the undead might fight each other is actually some legitimate part of the spell effect.

We don’t mean for you to use these escape hatches just because it looks like Vortigern and Talon are about to escape with the amulet—that’s OK. That just leads to more adventure. Escape hatches are for situations where it looks like the party is about to get wiped out. Here is a good rule of thumb: if two or more characters are dead use an escape hatch. Or, in this particular adventure, if Corian dies use an escape hatch.

If you do decide to use an escape hatch, whatever you do—and this is a key GM skill—don’t let on that you are saving the party. That’s just between us. Don’t

worry, everyone has done it. But remember these two important rules: first, give them a full and fair opportunity to win on their own—meaning, don’t use the escape hatch too early. And second, don’t do this often. Your players need to understand that death is a consequence of adventure. You can’t let your players come to expect that you will always save their bacon. A dead character isn’t the end of the world. In fact, in this case, a dead character is incentive for the party to get to Fairhill as soon as possible...which leads right to *The Crucible of Freya*.

Escape?

If Talon manages to snatch the amulet, read the following:

Vortigern’s devilish familiar seizes the amulet and with a shriek flies off, becoming invisible. Vortigern, too, ducks back into the surrounding woods escaping from your sight. You search everywhere, but you cannot seem to locate the evil apprentice. Yet his laughter is all around you.

If the tide of battle turns against Vortigern and Talon and they have the opportunity to escape without the amulet, read the following:

Sensing defeat, Vortigern yells a command to Talon, his devilish familiar. Leaving his henchmen to finish the battle, Talon and Vortigern disappear into thin air. You search everywhere, but you cannot seem to locate the evil apprentice. For the time being you have prevented Vortigern from obtaining the amulet.

In either case, Talon will use his innate *invisibility* and Vortigern will use his *dust of disappearance* to render himself invisible. Neither will stay to harass the party. They will immediately flee the area. If they have the amulet, they will proceed towards Fairhill, though they will not enter the village. They have abandoned their henchmen, but should the thugs manage to survive, Vortigern and Talon will link up with them. Vortigern will have Talon use his ability to contact Dispat to learn the location of Eralion’s keep. With this information, they head towards the keep. If Vortigern and Talon are forced to flee without the amulet they will head towards Fairhill. These events are detailed further in the Necromancer Games adventure module *The Crucible of Freya*. Proceed to the section entitled “Concluding the Night’s Adventure,” below.

If the party vanquishes Vortigern and Talon, which should be a tale well worth retelling, read the following:

Your foes are defeated. Talon, Vortigern’s devilish familiar, writhes and smokes as he dissolves into a stinking mass of slime. The hired thugs, routed or slain, shall trouble you no more. And the foul undead

Escape Hatch

If things are really going poorly for the characters, consider using an “escape hatch.”

conjured by Vortigern have found their final rest at the end of your blade. This farmhouse, previously a scene of slaughter, is now a scene of vengeance.

Obviously, your players will want to search the bodies. They find all the items listed under the Equipment sections of the various foes. Once they do so, proceed to “Concluding the Adventure.”

Concluding the Adventure

Following the final encounter with Vortigern, regardless of the ending, read the following text to your players:

Corian's worst fear has come to pass. But now your encounter with Vortigern and his minions is over. It has become too dark to look for other lodging, so you light the fire in the fireplace of the farmhouse and bar the door. You clean the blood from your blade and tend to your wounds as well as those of your comrades. You set watch, and each of you says a silent prayer to your respective gods that the spirits of your foes find their rest and trouble you no further this night. You eventually drift off to sleep, but your sleep is fitful—filled with Talon's devilish screams. You wake to the sound of rain and gray skies. The sun, even hidden behind the clouds, is a welcome sight.

If any of the party was slain in the encounter with Vortigern, remind them that Fairhill is two days away. Suggest that perhaps there is someone there who can aid them and that possibly the party could trade something or pledge their service in return for having their friend restored to life.

Awarding Experience

Finally, after you handle any healing and any other record keeping, you can determine experience for the night's session. The new edition of the rules handles the computation of experience differently. It uses a “Challenge Rating” system for each monster. Here is a scene-by-scene breakdown of experience:

First Watch: If the party made a good camp and were smart about their preparations, let them split 50 XP.

A Voice in the Darkness: If the party encountered the young leucrotta and drove him off without having to fight the mother, award 300 XP plus 200 XP for avoiding the mother for a total of 500 XP. If the party had to fight the young leucrotta and the mother, then award 1200 XP (the monsters' CRs are 1 and 3, worth 300 XP and 900 XP respectively) to be divided equally between the party. If you had to use an escape hatch, subtract 200 XP. If the party only encountered the stirges, their value is 900 XP (3 stirges at 300 XP each).

The Smiling Skull: Award 50 XP to be split between the party for searching around the hill and finding the rock with the *Nystul's magic aura*.

Corian's Tale: This award is for good roleplaying. Give anyone who did a good job 25 XP. If Corian did well, give him or her 50 XP.

Farmhouse: Making a roll to identify the poison is worth 25 XP. Evaluating the cuts on the farmers gets 10 XP. Deciding to bury and sanctify the bodies gets 25 XP per person involved in doing so; 50 XP for a good-aligned cleric.

Ambush!: Actually making your Spot roll or Listen roll to avoid being ambushed is worth 25 XP to any character who made the roll. Calculating experience for the main combat is tricky. The thugs are a total CR 2. The CRs for Vortigern and Talon depend on the difficulty level of the encounter. If you used the “Difficult” level, then Vortigern is CR 6 and Talon is CR 2. If you used the “Average” difficulty level, then Vortigern is CR 5 and Talon is CR 2. If you used the “Easy” difficulty level, then Vortigern is CR 4 and Talon is CR 1. Note that no extra experience is given for the skeletons and zombies because Vortigern summoned them and thus they are calculated in his CR value. Thus, the final XP value is as follows for the final encounter: Difficult—3900 XP, Average—3000 XP, Easy—2250 XP.

Escape? If Vortigern and Talon escape with the amulet, subtract 400 total XP. If they escape without the amulet, subtract 200 total XP. If you had to use an escape hatch to save the party, subtract 200 XP. If the party manages to kill both Vortigern and Talon, award an additional 300 total XP.

A party of six characters who roleplay well (using the final encounter at “Average” difficulty) should earn about 3600 XP, or about 600 XP each.

With the dawn, Fairhill awaits two days march ahead. What will your characters find there? What will become of the Wizard's Amulet? What secrets lie buried with Eralion?

Continuing the Story

The story line started in this adventure can be completed in *The Crucible of Freya*, available from **Necromancer Games**. In *The Crucible of Freya* the characters finally arrive in Fairhill and learn rumors of Eralion's nearby ruined keep. The village of Fairhill is fully described and mapped, including details of all its important NPCs. The characters quickly become involved in assisting Shandril, a local priestess of Freya, in recovering a stolen holy item which eventually leads them to Eralion's keep. Of course, Corian's amulet unlocks the secret to the keep. The ruined keep is mapped as are the levels beneath it where Eralion re-

sides—tricked by Orcus into his horrid fate. If Vortigern escaped the final encounter in this adventure, *The Crucible of Freya* provides ideas on using Vortigern as a continuing antagonist for the party—as he will travel to Fairhill himself to seek Eralion's keep, possibly running afoul of the party a second time. Unlike this adventure, which was tightly scripted and linear to accomplish the goal of playing without much preparation, *The Crucible of Freya* can be run either as a tight story continuing this adventure or it can be used as a sourcebook for GMs to run their own adventures in Fairhill.

Of course, you are free to develop the story started here without following up with *The Crucible of Freya*. Eralion's lair can be placed in any keep or tower near some small out of the way village in your own campaign world. Eralion would not have set up shop in a highly visible area—he sought privacy. Place a secret door somewhere in the tower or keep that is enchanted so that only Eralion or a person who possesses the amulet can open it. You should detail a small wizard's lair, which is now haunted by Eralion. Perhaps the rumors are wrong. Perhaps Eralion did succeed in becoming a lich but is somehow trapped in his lair—the limiting enchantment on the secret door no longer allowing him to pass since he is no longer truly Eralion, nor is he a lich. Perhaps he has some task for the party. Or perhaps he wishes to undo what he has done. A party of first-level characters encountering a lich and being asked by him for aid would certainly make an interesting adventure. Or maybe he is some other twisted form of undead. You are free to draw this up on your own. Or you can check out *The Crucible of Freya*, where we have already done it all for you (and more). And remember—this adventure was FREE. Imagine what you'll get from a product you actually have to pay for. It boggles the mind.

Pre-generated Characters

Pre-generated characters can be downloaded from the Necromancer Games web site. They are provided for your players' use. All the characters are male by default, but any one can easily be changed to female, as there is no statistical difference. You may notice there are no Halfling Paladins or Dwarf Monks. Sure, the Third Edition rules allow them, but we at **Necromancer Games** won't have any of that nonsense. Remember: “3rd Edition Rules, 1st Edition Feel.”

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Product Update Password for *The Wizard's Amulet*: Talon.

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Corian's Supplemental Information

You have chosen to play the character of Corian, the Sorcerer. You are the motivating force behind the formation of the party. For that reason, you have additional background information. Read the following information so that you will be better able to play your character. It is up to you whether or not to reveal this information, and if so whether you reveal all or only some of the information contained here.

Initially, if the other characters press you for information, rebuff them by saying “We are not yet far enough from Reme,” or “There are still too many ears that may hear us.” Be cryptic. At a specific time later in the adventure, you will be prompted by the GM to reveal your story. Again, even when that time comes, it is up to you how much to reveal and whether or not to tell the truth. You should begin to think now about what you will tell the group later so that you will be prepared.

Your Background: During the final days under your uncle's tutelage, you and your master traveled to the library of Feriblan the Mad in the city of Reme. You were not pleased to visit Feriblan, for while there you are always forced to have contact with Vortigern, Feriblan's apprentice, and his loathsome raven familiar—Talon. Luckily for you, this particular visit you managed to avoid Vortigern. While perusing mundane documents in an outer sitting room as your uncle and Feriblan studied ancient scrolls, you nervously fiddled with a clasp on the back of a small reading stand.

To your surprise, a secret compartment opened which contained a small, bound piece of parchment and an item wrapped in a silk cloth. Checking to see that your actions were unobserved, You managed to slip the amulet and parchment into the folds of your robe. The parchment proved to be a letter from a person—apparently a wizard—named Eralion. It appears that Eralion left this letter for Feriblan on his last to visit to Reme before some “ritual” that he spoke of in the letter. The letter apparently also refers to the amulet you found with the letter. A copy of the letter from Eralion can be found at the end of this section. You should read that letter now.

Intrigued by the letter, you returned to visit Feriblan some months later, once you were freed from servitude to your uncle. Figuring the old mage was addle-brained you took the risk of asking him direct questions about Eralion. You learned that Eralion was nowhere near powerful enough to make the transition into a lich. “Eralion! A lich?!” the old wizard exclaimed. “He was no apprentice, my son, but neither was he a mage with the mastery of the eldritch powers necessary for such a dangerous undertaking! If you have heard such rumors, boy, I shall put them to rest. The magics required for such a transition were far beyond his grasp.” Once on the topic of his old friend, Feriblan spoke at length—though in a disjointed fashion. He told you about Eralion's keep, which was located to the east of Reme some six days travel, near the village of Fairhill. Feriblan made reference to a staff that Eralion possessed which apparently had magical powers. He also mentioned that Eralion had never returned several valuable magical tracts and spell books. You left the old wizard determined to find this tower and the items it contained—for if Eralion was not a lich, the items should be there for the taking!

Readying yourself with the necessary equipment for travel to Fairhill, you visited a local tavern—the *Starving Stirge*. There you posted a notice seeking the aid of able-bodied adventurers willing to join with you in seeking out a wizard's tower. Promising an equal division of all gold recovered, you soon gathered a group of comrades-at-arms eager for

adventure and glory. Quite unlooked for, you were also joined by Gal-dar, a Cleric of St. Cuthbert, who was told in a vision from his deity to seek you out and to follow wherever the amulet led. The god of retribution and justice, it seems, has business with Eralion.

You have been reluctant to give the full story to your new friends, not for lack of trust in them but rather because you have on more than one occasion seen Talon, the raven familiar of Vortigern, peering into your chamber door. Nevermore will you believe your theft of the amulet and letter went unseen by the wicked bird, and you don't wish to risk further discovery while still in Reme. Who knows what spells Feriblan or Vortigern might have at their disposal to read your thoughts or hear your words? You promised your new friends that you would reveal more to them once you had left Reme. So you and your companions set out from Reme some four days ago, with light hearts and heavy packs—only you harboring the nagging fear that Vortigern and his loathsome bird would somehow know of your goal: Eralion's keep and its unguarded treasure.

Eralion's Letter

My Dear Feriblan—

I must confess to you—my closest friend—that I was not entirely truthful with you at our last meeting. I feel compelled now to tell you of it, as this may be the last time I write with mortal hands. Do you recall our discussion some months past regarding liches and how users of the arcane arts might achieve that particular state? I must admit to you that the topic for me was not entirely scholarly, as I led you to believe. And for that I am sorry.

I know that you, my friend, have gazed into darkness in the name of knowledge. That is why I sought your learned counsel. For I too have gazed into darkness. And like you, I found knowledge—knowledge beyond imagining. From the demon-lord Orcus himself I have wrested the secret to lichdom, and I plan to move beyond scholarly talk and bring myself immortality. Imagine it, my friend! An eternity to study the arts, to master arcane power!

As I pen these words I have arrayed before me unguents and phials, instruments and tomes, all necessary for my transformation, save only one—an arcane phylactery of elaborate design. The ingredients for that item will bring me once again to your city. By the time you read this letter, I shall have retrieved the necessary items and shall be on my way back to my keep.

Yet, as I begin to prepare my mind for my wondrous fate, my thoughts turn to you, my oldest friend. Accompanying this missive there is a small silk pouch. In that pouch is an amulet—an amulet I have created for you. I know of your thirst for knowledge. With this amulet, you will have access to my keep where I shall reside in immortality. If you wish to learn that which I have learned, you may visit me.

Long have others of our kind called you “mad.” Perhaps it is I whom they will now call mad. But I do not care for their appellations. Let them say what they will. I have won something far greater than words—I have won immortality, and with it, power. I shall share that knowledge with you, my friend. Visit me soon. Gaze into the darkness again.

Eralion