

HACKMASTER®



HackJournal Issue #33 Summer - 2010

Welcome to the newest edition of HackJournal, the HackMaster magazine for players and GameMasters around the world! Whether you profess to be the greatest fighter, thief, mage or cleric, you can't afford to pass up a single issue! Here's just a sampling of the inventory of secrets revealed herein:

- New unarmed combat options
- Advice on character building
- An adventure opportunity for Frandor's Keep
- New battlesheets for Into the Realm of the Elm King
- Updated submission guidelines

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HACKJOURNAL 33

This quarterly PDF supplement is written specifically for (and by) the members of the HackMaster Association, a member-driven organization of HackMaster players and GameMasters who meet to discuss and play the HackMaster role-playing game. The HackJournal also previews special pre-release material, including 'alpha' and 'beta' rules previews for future HackMaster products! HackMaster Association members are encouraged to try out these new rules and provide feedback on the Kenzer and Company discussion forums.

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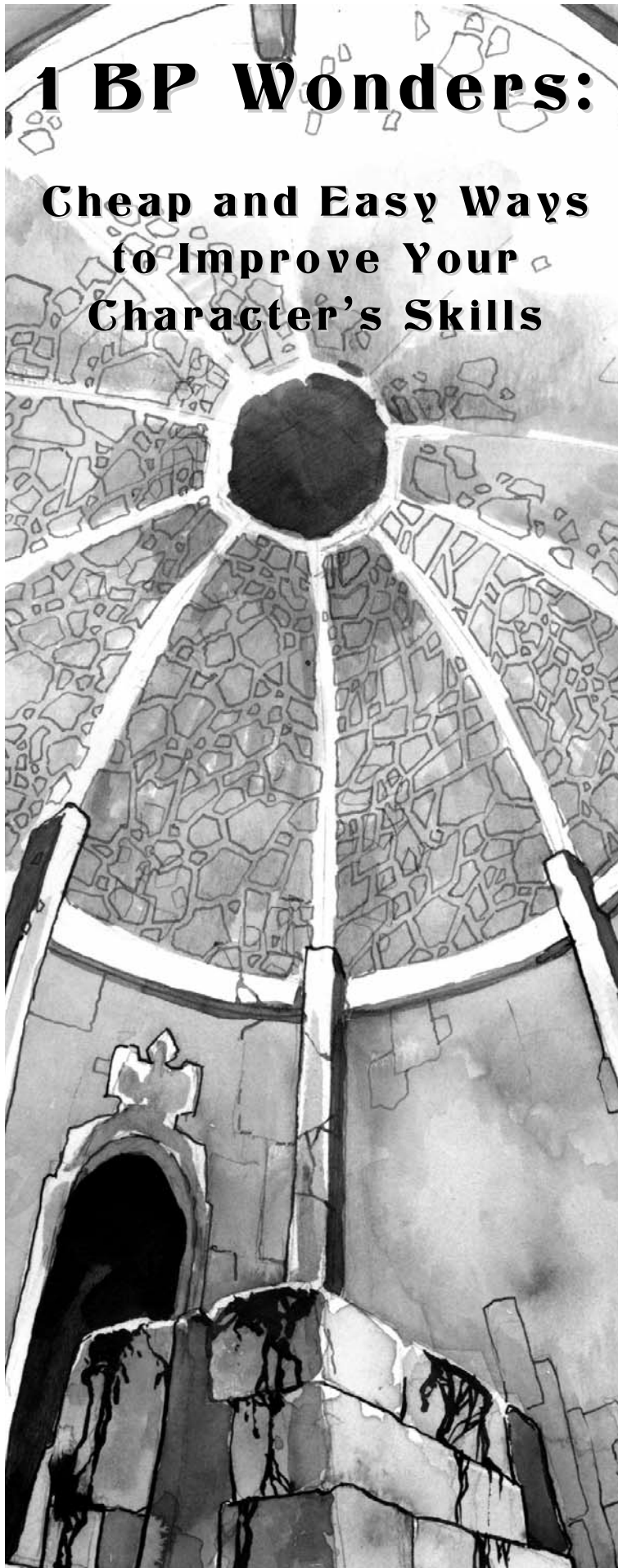
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1 BP Wonders:

Cheap and Easy Ways to Improve Your Character's Skills

During character generation, there is no doubt that you will be looking to spend the 50 to 100 Building Points you receive on abilities that are core to your character's class. Fighters will probably spend points on weapon specialization, thieves on Hiding and Sneaking skills, mages on the Arcane Lore skill and clerics on the skills most appropriate to their faith. There will probably be some expenditure on languages (at least, good enough to get by with in the region the players expect to be exploring) as well as skills that seasoned roleplayers consider necessary to their character's survival.

However, there are a few abilities that get overlooked during character generation. The benefits that these skills and proficiencies offer don't jump out to players as must haves. This is unfortunate, as there are no useless skills in HackMaster. In fact, there are 10 skills in HackMaster Basic that only cost one Building Point for each purchase. These skills can therefore be bought up easily and cheaply, and provide the character party with a useful ability that they may have overlooked.

Skills

Animal Herding

Sooner or later, your party is going to need some help carrying out all the loot that they have acquired from raiding monster lairs and hidden catacombs. Hirelings and henchmen can only carry so much and demand to be paid, fed and defended against monsters and bandits. Pack animals, on the other hand, don't complain as much, though feeding is still an issue. However, they don't follow orders and can't speak.

The Animal Herding skill allows a player to keep control of any beasts of burden within the party, and makes it less likely for the mule to wander off with that golden statue the party spent so much blood in retrieving.

Animal Husbandry

Not every adventure begins in the city. Small rural villages need defenders as well, and they don't always pay their heroes with silver. If your party finds themselves rewarded with a hen per character for saving the village, your first instinct may be to slaughter them for a finger-licking good dinner around the campfire.

A character with the Animal Husbandry skill can prolong the reward even longer by collecting milk and/or eggs from livestock. They can even breed some animals to allow for a continuous supply of nourishment. Say goodbye to trail rations.

Botany

Being able to identify plants in the wild makes a big difference between having a safe journey, or having to fight off a band of orcs while battling a nasty case of poison ivy. With Botany, a character can steer party members away from dangerous plants, while identifying safe, even edible, ones.

Cooking/Baking

So you've been rewarded with a chicken and you found some berries along the way. Thinking of whipping up some dinner with your newfound foodstuffs? Well you better have this skill, or you're going to end up with a burned mess that will leave your teammates hungry and the smell will probably attract a few unwanted visitors.

This skill does require cooking utensils, so be sure to spend a silver piece on a mess kit when you're in town.

Distraction

There will be times when it is better to sneak around an opponent rather than confront him directly. Those wishing to get away with their actions unseen and unheard will have great use of an individual that can make use of this skill. A Master of this skill can attract the attention of their targets for as much as 10 seconds. Plenty of time for a group to sneak by, grab an object, or place a dagger in someone's back.

Gambling

Short on funds? Need a few extra silver pieces to afford that suit of studded leather armor? Less savory types may choose to spend some building points on Gambling in order to raise money for themselves. Chaotic types tend to favor this skill more than others, but it can be useful to anyone that wishes to purchase it.

History, Ancient

Adventurers are constantly delving into ruins and catacombs of civilizations lost to the sands of time. The character with knowledge of Ancient History may be able to give the party some insight into where it is that they going.

Did the people that built the tomb regularly build traps to ward off grave robbers? A character with the appropriate skill in Ancient History can tell you. Just make sure to spend the points on Literacy if you want this skill to go above 20.

Leatherworking

Adventurers have a need for leather goods. Sacks, backpacks, armor, clothing, etc. You name it, your party will likely need it. If your party is going to be spending some time in town while the fighter is recovering from that nasty 10 point wound, spend some time with this skill repairing and

fabricating goods that will come in handy for the next adventure. You can even make some money off this skill if you play your cards right.

Pottery

Okay, I know what you are thinking. Why is pottery a useful skill for an adventurer? Truth be told, a potter's wheel is useless in combat, and not many people are clamoring for kiln-fired weapons. But in between forays into the unknown, a character with this skill can earn some coin on the side creating and selling decorative containers. They can even create bowls and plates that their teammates can use to eat the food that the character with the Cooking/Baking skill has made.

Swimming

This should go without saying, but I will say it anyway. If you don't have the Swimming skill, then don't be surprised when your GM puts you in a position where a large body of water is involved. If the GM gets a Total Party Kill because everyone drowned in a creek, you only have yourselves to blame.

Conclusion

Another thing to consider is the potential roleplaying situations that may arise by taking these skills. Spending a couple of points on one of these skills may give the player something to flesh out their character's background, and give them opportunities to earn experience and honor by playing them up in the appropriate situation.

Maybe that fighter that knows Animal Husbandry was the son of a goat farmer that got called to go to war and came back with a new profession, or that cook had an offer to serve as the king's personal chef but declined because he heard the call of the church (a slight the king may not have forgiven).

These are but a few examples of what can be done with the help of these 1 BP wonders. Clever players may find additional uses and opportunities for these skills. And with the low cost, many PCs may find themselves Masters of these skills in short time, and can provide help in ways that would normally go overlooked.

by *David Lawson (#IL-1-10282-08)*

Unarmed Combat

During the course of your adventures there will undoubtedly come a time when your character finds himself unarmed. Perhaps your dwarf fumbled and dropped his trusty warhammer, or maybe an orc ambushed him while he was away from the camp site taking care of business and didn't bring his weapon. In these cases you'll want to know how to manage an unarmed attack. This section covers these situations and more.

Note that monsters with fangs, claws and the like ignore these rules and attack normally, as their natural combat abilities, lack of reach and so forth are already factored into the monster's definition, combat modifiers and statistics. Furthermore, these rules do not apply to non-intelligent creatures, or characters with lower than 5/26 Intelligence, because they simply don't know they have an edge.

Unarmed Combat Specialization

Characters can specialize in unarmed combat by spending BPs to improve in the four key areas of Attack, Defense, Damage and Speed, at the same BP costs per class as if specializing in a melee weapon.



Unarmed Attacks

Two basic scenarios need to be addressed. First, when one character is unarmed while his opponent remains armed. The second, when neither combatant has a weapon.

Unarmed vs Armed Combatants

When unarmed, fighting an armed opponent is a tricky business for creatures without natural weaponry (*i.e.*, humanoids). The unarmed character must deal with a dangerous object wielded by his opponent, while the armed attacker has no such worries.

Consequently, armed attacks against unarmed foes occur twice as often (rounded to the slower speed [higher number]) since the attacker needn't fear a dangerous counter-attack. Note that this doesn't allow the armed combatant to attack faster than his maximum weapon speed allows.

Let's say that Doromok, a thief wielding a nasty-looking dagger, moves to attack the unarmed mage Elbren. Since the dagger has Weapon Speed 7(5 jab), and Doromok's total modifiers give him a Speed of -2, his normal attack rate with this weapon is Speed 5 (3 jab). Against Elbren, however, he can attack every 3 seconds (half of Speed 5 is 2.5, rounded up to the slower Speed 3).

Unarmed attacks versus armed opponents have a base Speed of 10 (modified in the usual ways by level bonus (if any), specialization, talents and so on, though these cannot reduce the unarmed attack below Speed 2). However, if an unarmed character attacks an armed character's front or flank, the attack triggers an immediate free armed-character counter-attack that occurs prior to the unarmed character's attack. This counter-attack is independent of where the armed character might be in the Count Up (*i.e.*, his later attack occurs as normal on his number in the Count Up).

For instance, if Elbren's player has been watching too many kung-fu movies lately, he might decide that his mage tries to punch Doromok in the face. Doromok's next attack would have occurred when the Count Up reached 14, but when Elbren tries to punch him (an attack that will occur on second 12), Doromok gets a free counter-attack on 11 as well as his usual attack on 14.

On a successful counter-attack, the unarmed victim can choose either of the following options:

(a) Back up and remain at bay, suffer half damage dice (as with a jab but can be accomplished with any weapon), forfeit any unarmed attack possibility, and wait his unarmed Speed again in order to initiate another unarmed attack. (Note that this is different and apart from the Give Ground and Hold at Bay maneuvers and does not provide any bonuses.)

(b) Suffer full damage and continue with the unarmed attack (*i.e.*, suffer damage and roll the attack at this point unless knocked-back, killed, failing a Threshold of Pain check, etc.).

Otherwise, unarmed attacks against armed defenders work the same as attacks between unarmed combatants.

Fights Between Unarmed Combatants

Unarmed attacks have a base Speed of 5, modified in the usual ways (by level, specialization, talents, etc.; unarmed attack speed cannot be reduced below Speed 2). In case of a tie, use Dexterity (highest to lowest) to determine order of actions.

To attempt an unarmed attack, the player chooses his unarmed combat technique (listed below) and then rolls a competing d20p attack against the defender. The attacker adds his standard Attack modifiers, while the defender adds his standard Defense modifiers. A successful hit delivers two (d4p-2) damage rolls plus any Strength and specialization modifiers.

Note that zero (0) damage is entirely possible. Damage Reduction for natural hide always applies, while DR from armor may or may not, depending on the type of attack made (*e.g.*, exceptions noted for the strike attack, which is essentially a called shot at an unarmored or vulnerable body part).

Unarmed Combat Dice

On a successful attack, the attacker may also need to roll his unarmed combat dice, depending on the chosen unarmed combat technique and what it entails. The relevant combat technique descriptions state when to roll these dice.

Character Class	Unarmed Combat Dice
Fighter classes	2d10p
Thief classes	2d8p
Cleric classes	2d6p
Mage classes	2d4p
Hybrid classes	one die from each class

Unarmed Combat Techniques

Strike. A punch, kick, knee, elbow or flurry of such hits against the opponent. After a successful unarmed strike, roll the unarmed combat dice for the attacker. The attacker should call out what body part he's targeting (for instance, "I'm kicking him in the jimmy!"). This is generally the head, groin, kidney, shin, or other unarmored or vulnerable body part.

An unarmed combat roll difference with a result of 3 plus the armor DR of the target or higher lands one or more blows on the called-shot area for full damage.

A roll of 16 or higher forces a Threshold of Pain check for the defender, but with a 6 point bonus to the defender's roll.

A roll of 24 or higher forces a standard Threshold of Pain check for the defender.

If a Threshold of Pain check exceeds the target's current Hit Point total and the Threshold of Pain check is failed, the victim is knocked unconscious for the amount of time he suffers from the failed Threshold of Pain check.

Overbear. This is a blow using your mass, strength and/or momentum to knock your opponent to the ground. After a successful hit, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice and add Feat of Strength modifier plus any unarmed combat modifiers due to size, shape and mass (see the Unarmed Combat Dice Modifiers chart).

Apply no additional damage. Knock-back rules apply to the loser, unless the result is greater than that required for a knock-back, in which case the character is knocked prone right where he stands. If the result is less than the knock-back requirement for the loser's size, neither character moves.

The attacker is considered one size larger for purposes of determining results. A moving character receives a +1 bonus for every 5 feet/second he is moving at the time of impact. A double-knock-back moves the character back 5 feet as well as prone.

Bull Rush. This is a blow using your mass and momentum to knock your opponent out of the way or off an area (*e.g.*, doorway, over a cliff). After a successful hit, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice and add any Feat of Strength modifier plus any unarmed combat modifiers due to size, shape and mass (see the Unarmed Combat Dice Modifiers chart).

Apply no additional damage, but knock-back rules apply to the loser. If the result is less than the knock-back requirement for the loser's size, neither character moves.

The attacker is considered one size larger with respect to the



Unarmed Combat Dice Modifiers

+6 per size difference

+1/-1 per 50 pounds of mass difference

Penalized by defensive adjustment of armor

+8 if a quadruped

+ shield defensive value (*i.e.*, +6 for medium shield) [shield-related maneuvers only]

- shield defensive value (*i.e.*, -6 for medium shield) [non-shield related maneuvers]

knock-back rules. A moving character receives a +1 bonus for every 5 feet/second he is moving at the time of impact.

Tackle. This blow uses your mass and momentum to shoulder your opponent to the ground, while grappling with him and committing yourself to the turf as well. After a successful hit, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice and add any Feat of Strength modifier plus any unarmed combat modifiers due to size, shape and mass (see the Unarmed Combat Dice Modifiers chart).

Apply no additional damage, but knock-back rules do apply to the loser based on the unarmed combat dice. If the result is less than the knock-back requirement for the loser's size, neither character moves or is taken down. If the attacker wins and the results indicate a knock-back, both characters are prone and in the same location.

The attacker is considered one size larger with respect to the knock-back rules. A moving character receives a +1 bonus to his unarmed combat dice for every 5 feet/second he is moving at the time of impact.

Toss/Take Down. With this move, you throw your opponent to the ground using a combination of leverage, brute strength and/or tripping. After a successful hit, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice and add the character's Strength or Dexterity ability score (player's choice) plus any unarmed combat modifiers due to size, shape and mass (see the Unarmed Combat Dice Modifiers chart).

Apply no additional damage, but knock-back rules apply to the loser (as always, based on unarmed combat dice). If the result is greater than that required for a knock-back, the character is thrown prone right where he stands, with the attacker holding the defender's garb. If the result is less than the knock-back requirement for the loser's size, neither character moves.

The attacking character receives a -1 penalty for every 5 feet/second he and his opponent are moving at the time of the attempt. A double-knock-back inflicts an additional d4p-2 points of damage.

Grab. With this technique, a character attempts to grab an opponent's body part or accoutrement, such as sword arm, head, shirt or leg. After a successful hit, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice and add any Attack modifier. A successful roll indicates that the character has been

grabbed, while a tie or failed roll indicates no effect. A grabbed item (or arm, or hand holding an item) cannot be used to attack or defend.

Hold. On the attack after a successful grab, an attacker can attempt to hold the defender. There are several types of holds, including, but not limited to head locks, arm locks, bear hugs, choke holds, and so on. The attacker rolls a normal unarmed attack. If successful, **both** attacker and defender then roll their unarmed combat dice and add their choice of Strength or Dexterity ability scores. A successful roll indicates the chosen hold has taken effect as noted on the Hold Effect chart.

Hold	Effect on Defender*
Armlock	Cannot use arm; competing Feat of Strength or drops item
Headlock	Suffers automatic two d4p-2 plus Str bonus every 5 seconds
Choke	Suffers automatic two d4p-2 plus Str bonus every 5 seconds (if damage exceeds Con, falls unconscious)
Leglock	Cannot use leg
Bear Hug	Suffers automatic two d4p-2 plus Str bonus every 5 seconds

*standard knock-out/submission rules apply

Break Hold. This technique gives the opportunity to attempt to break an opponent's hold. After a successful hit, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice. The defender (the holder) adds his Strength score while the attacker (the character being held) adds his choice of Dexterity or Strength score. A successful roll indicates that the hold has been broken.

Lift/Lift and Toss. A character that has his opponent in a bear hug may lift his victim off the ground. However, the character may not be of smaller size than his opponent, and must be able to lift that amount of weight (as defined by his Strength score). Furthermore, the victim can choose to roll his unarmed combat dice and add the result to his weight.

If able to lift his victim, the attacker can move at a walking pace. Further, the attacker can choose to simply throw his victim. On a throw attempt, **both** attacker and defender roll their unarmed combat dice and add any Feat of Strength modifier plus any unarmed combat modifiers due to size, shape and mass (see the Unarmed Combat Dice Modifiers chart). Apply no additional damage. If the result is less than the knock-back requirement for the victim's size, he cannot be thrown and is no longer lifted.

The attacker (lifter/thrower) is considered one size larger with respect to the knock-back rules. The attacker cannot move while attempting a toss.

Scramble-For-Weapon. If both characters are holding a weapon and want control of it, competing unarmed combat dice, modified by Feat of Strength, determines the victor.

Shield Bash. Shield bashing is actually an attempt to injure an opponent by hitting him with your shield. Damage varies by shield size, plus Strength bonus, any shield bonuses due to magic or workmanship and any modifiers due to unarmed combat specialization.

Shield Bash	Base Damage
Buckler	0*
Small or Medium	(d4p-2)+(d4p-2)
Large or Body	(d4p-1)+(d4p-1)

*bucklers cannot shield bash, but can be used as an improvised weapon for d3p

Multiple Opponents

For all knock-back results, if a second character is behind the character being knocked back, that second character makes the same check as the defender, versus the difference between the attacker and defender's roll.

If multiple characters attempt one of the unarmed combat techniques in unison, use the best relevant applicable score (Strength or Feat of Strength or Dexterity). After the first character, the others add only 1 unarmed combat die to the check. All maximum number of opponents per combatant rules apply (due to size/space constraints).

'beta playtest' rules presented by the HackMaster Design Team



HackJournal

Submission Guidelines



Helping you navigate the publishing maze!

With the release of the new edition of HackMaster have also come some changes to the HackMaster Association and the HackJournal. The following information should answer most questions that may arise, but if you have something else to ask, feel free to email or post in our HackMaster discussion forums.

At the moment, we're looking for **new and interesting** material that uses the *HackMaster Basic* or *Aces & Eights* rules. We're not interested in new rules subsystems that provide options or variations for existing rules, nor do we want to see conversions of material that appeared in *HackMaster 4th edition* or any other game system. Also no new player races or classes.

For HackMaster Basic...

New Spells. Again, novel and interesting are the key words.

New Magic Items. Low-powered, miscellaneous, non-permanent/disposable are best. Potions are good.

NPCs. These are best at 800 to 1,000 words each, including statistics.

Short adventure opportunities or encounters. Total article length of 900 to 1,000 word minimum; no maximum.

GameMaster or Player advice. These could involve just about anything, from random tables to discussions on certain skills or useful ways to use magic spells or items, and so on.

Quirks and Flaws. Novel, interesting, and realistic.

Equipment. Realistic, as it would have been in medieval Earth.

New skills, talents and proficiencies. Again, novel and interesting. No conversions, variants or STPs that are too narrowly focused.

Monsters. These should be more than just a block of statistics. Why does this monster exist? How is it interesting and different? Is there a good reason for a GameMaster to use this instead of just another ogre/orc/etc? Is there a logical reason for it to exist? Develop the background; and remember that just saying "it's magic!" is not by itself a good background. The best monsters will have statistics, plus 300 words from the point of view of a character that encountered the creature and his experience, plus about 700 total words of monster description, combat/tactics, habitat/society, ecology and its location on Tellene.

For Aces & Eights...

We'd be happy to see much of the same kind of material as that noted for HackMaster (see below), only set in the western genre and without any monsters and magic!

Other Notes

Of course, even the above guidelines don't mean automatic approval. With the new edition also comes a tighter editorial process and articles may well be rejected. Rejections are not personal, it's just that the game is an evolving process and what you have in mind for the game may not be the same as the designers. Now for some Q&As...

Q) How do I send you my article?

A) Go to the HackJournal Article Submission and Editing Forum. Start a thread and post your article within. Only you (the author) will see your own threads. Editors will see all threads. (What does this mean to you? It means you will always know exactly what is going on with your article!)

Q) What format should I use?

A) You can simply copy and paste your text as a new post, or attach it as a TXT or DOC file. Don't use any fancy formatting or include images. At the beginning or end of the article, include your name, HMA number and e-mail address. This will ensure that our file monkeys don't lose your information and can give you proper credit for your submission.

Q) What if my article has a big table?

A) Attach it to the post. Your article text will probably be published as 10.5 pt Adobe Caslon Pro font, in two columns per page. Tables, on the other hand, will probably be 9 pt Myriad Pro font. We can work with tables that stretch as wide as 7.5 inches, but no wider. If you have wider tables, you need to break them up into multiple tables.

Q) Are there any legal forms?

A) Yes, there is one. Before we can print your article, we need a signed copy of what we call the Exhibit C, or Assignment of Rights, form. This is your signed permission for us to use what you've written. See the PDF attached to this post. The fastest method is to fax it to us at 847-680-8950.

If you don't have access to a fax machine, you could download the form, print it, sign it, rescan it as a 100-150 dpi grayscale JPEG, and electronically 'attach' it to your post. You can also email it directly to hma(at)kenzerco.com.

Alternatively, you can print it, sign it and mail this to us.

Stages of the Editing Process

A group of selected HMA members are your editors. They have the ability to read everyone's articles and post replies (comments) to them.

It is the author's responsibility to carefully consider an editor's comments and make any necessary changes to the article. After changes have been made, the author must repost the revised article in the same thread. If an author disagrees with editorial comments, he should post his problems so that he and the editor(s) can discuss the article in that thread.

In any case, if an editor has comments/problems with your article, **don't** argue with the editor. Discussions are fine — arguments are not. Furthermore, do not assume that other readers will be able to understand what you mean. If the editor is confused by something, you can be sure that some other reader will be confused as well. If an editor asks you to clarify something, be sure you also clarify it in your article, not just in a posted response to the editor.

Once at least three editors have posted (within that thread) that they approve the article, no more changes need to be made. The third editor to post approval should email HMA HQ and inform them that the article is ready for publication.

At this point, a HJ editor assigned by HMA HQ (or HMA HQ itself) will apply any style and grammar changes to your article. It will then be ready for publication. In the case of large grammatical changes, HMA HQ may ask the author to incorporate these changes and resubmit again.

Finally, HMA HQ will close the article thread, noting it has been chosen for publication.

“Dead” Articles

If you already posted an article, and no editor has given a response in a few weeks, then post again in that thread with a reminder request for editors, so it will “bump” your article post back to the top of the list. If a few more weeks pass, with still no feedback, “bump” your article again. At this point, you may also email HMA HQ and ask for feedback. (Provide a link to that thread in your email – HMA HQ will respond in that thread or via email.)

If two or more editors post that an article is unsuitable, the author needs to revise the article until it is suitable (see “Stages of the Editing Process”). Otherwise, the article will simply languish in that forum. If the author disagrees with all feedback and does not want to revise, he should post a reply within that thread stating that he is withdrawing this article and asking that the thread be deleted. In the case of major disagreements, involved authors or editors may petition HMA HQ for a ruling.

Rewards

As well as the adoration and respect of your peers, published authors receive +1 month of HMA membership per article published in HackJournal. *Remember, we must have your signed release form to publish!*

Editors receive +1 week of HMA membership per published article. You must have contributed significantly to the editing process, of course, helping to make the article better. *Comments like “Looks good” are not typically worthy of a +1 week bonus, unless you back those up with reasons why it's a good article and what fits well with the existing rules, etc.*

Now go forth and write!

- Mark Plemmons, HMA Manager



GAMEMASTERS ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT

The following section in its entirety has been expressly classified by the HMGMA (HackMaster GameMaster's Association) as GM Proprietary Information (a.k.a. "GAMEMASTERS EYES ONLY" material). What does that mean exactly? Well, for one, if you are a player, then this is your frickin' cue to stop reading. Put this book down, and step off — PERIOD.

You should only be reading this section if:

- I. You are already a certified HackMaster GameMaster or;
- II. You are a GameMaster-in-Training and have dedicated yourself to mastering the game of HackMaster and are working toward becoming a GM yourself (i.e., you plan to study the material herein, actively assemble your own group of players and step behind the Shield).

Take heed, the consequences for a player reading GM Proprietary Information are severe and such transgressions are taken very seriously. I should also add that it is reprehensible to feign interest in becoming a GM simply to gain access to GM restricted material such that one could use it to gain an edge as a player. Such individuals are the lowest of the low and are universally despised. They risk eternal banishment from the game. So please, consider this a friendly warning and proceed accordingly. If you do not meet the criteria set forth in I. or II. above, please stop reading now.

NOT EVERY CLOUD

A bonus adventure for Frandor's Keep

Belipar 63

This adventure opportunity is a new addition to *Frandor's Keep*, a setting for use with Kenzer and Company's **HackMaster Basic** fantasy roleplaying game. If you enjoy the material presented here, there are 144 more pages of danger and excitement waiting for you in the full product!

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GM's Background

Warning! *The adventure opportunity is intended for GameMaster Eyes Only! If you're a player, stop reading now before you ruin the enjoyment of playing through it!*

As detailed in Frandor's Keep (page 90), former Keep Prefect Bandrus Far'Raven was involved in some shady dealings during his tenure. Having fallen for a beautiful mistress, Bandrus showered her with valuables and spent vast sums of money on fulfilling her every whim and desire. Indeed, it was a very good, albeit brief, period for the merchants who supplied him with the lady's exotic demands. Many a rare item was sold with a good profit margin, and the Prefect became known as an easy mark. Unfortunately, almost all of this coin came straight from the coffers of the Keep.

The deficit grew deeper and deeper, until a barracks-snitch reported that two soldiers had been working a mine in secret. Bandrus summoned the men and cut himself in for half. The conspirators would work the mine and mint Bandrus' share into new coinage to replace what he'd taken. When the gold ran out, Bandrus debased the currency by cutting the remaining gold with copper; the actual amount of gold in his debased coins was only one-fourth that of a true gold coin. Unfortunately, the debased coins were eventually discovered and Bandrus fled the Keep before his part in the affair could become known.

Additional Background

One of the enterprising conspirators set about secreting a stash of the debased coins for himself. He planned on recovering his booty once his duties at the Keep were fulfilled, but this was not to be the case. The guard was slaughtered during the Great Orkin Reprisal and the loot remained hidden within the structure of Frandor's Keep for years. Until now...

Getting the Players Involved

Two traces of Bandrus' operation remain in and around Frandor's Keep. The PCs may encounter one or both, depending on the GM's preference.

Coin Mints

If the PCs have not yet encountered the mentally deranged hermit, you may add the following items to his simple possessions: three weathered and damaged round single-coin mints, and a larger rectangular block designed to press three coins at once. These objects now bear the brunt of the hermit's changeable, volatile mood – half the time he worships them for what could have been, the other half he berates and throws them against rocks and trees, blaming their poor quality for the events that unfolded. You may have the PCs witness this veneration when they encounter the hermit or find them (temporarily) discarded until the hermit's mood shifts again.

If the PCs have already met the hermit, and it seems unlikely they will see him again in the near future, you may relocate the mints as needed. They might now be found in one of the monster lairs in the vicinity, the hands of a beggar child playing in the Keep or any other suitable location.

PCs from P'Bapar immediately recognize that the mints have something to do with coinage, for they bear the visage of P'Bapar's Archduke above the words "1 Tower" (the common term for a gold coin) in the Baparan tongue.

- ▶ If any player is smart enough to attempt a Wisdom check (in this case, an attempt to roll under half his Wisdom score) and is successful, he realizes that the image and text would be backwards on any coins made from them.

Debased Coins

Whether or not the PCs find the dies, they may come upon the hidden stash of debased coins. This occurs whilst wandering through the Middle Bailey, close to the gateway leading to the Upper Bailey and near Cobbler's Corner (area M18), where the Keep wall is now out in the open.

Read or paraphrase the following text at the appropriate time.

The area is teeming with a crowd seemingly hurried by some unseen force — probably related to it being almost mealtime. Small groups of children seem to be running as a group, embroiled in some sort of play, several women bustle about, too busy to chatter, and many harried-looking bedraggled men seem to be hauling huge boxes and barrels, presumably from a large trade caravan having arrived, eager to quickly finish their task in hand.

One of the PCs should be severely jostled and knocked to the ground by a porter, whose barrel or box crashes lightly against the wall. He spends a moment berating the PC for getting in the way, before hurrying off. He is just one of the many pairs of hands from the Landing, eager for a piece of work and the small change that comes with it — any delay means less payment for him.

The dropped cargo, however, knocked free a loose but tightly fitted stone just above ground level. The shattered mortar is obviously of inferior quality to the rest of the wall, and secreted just behind this façade is a hollow containing an old, semi-rotten leather satchel. There are no markings or recognizable features adorning the bag other than a messy scrawl of ink reading *'I am watching'* in the Kalamaran tongue. (The guard was able to see this spot from his barracks in what is now known as Falcon Tower at location M22).

It is obvious that this bag has not been disturbed in quite some time. Inside the bag are six strips of rolled up leather, bound tightly shut with both stitching and knotted pieces of twine. Each of these packages contains a stack of eight (seemingly) gold coins.

▶ If a player makes a successful Observation check (Trivial for a Kalamaran speaker or Average for other characters), it reveals that the lettering and images are backwards. However, no amount of visual inspection reveals the coins are debased currency.

These coins are not common fakes (lead slugs plated with gold) where the forgery is easily revealed when the coin is clipped to make change. These are simply debased coins with a lower content of the precious metal. The clipping of debased coins reveals nothing, because the content is the same throughout. The PC has no reason to even suspect the coins are debased; he only knows that they are very badly stamped (rare but not unheard of).

As an alternative method of introducing the coins, it is perfectly feasible that the PCs may come across the long-discard-

ed rotting canvas bag in any number of hiding places. You might place it within one of the graves in the graveyard, in the stables, the goblin or kobold lairs, the piles of debris outside the Keep walls or in nearly any other location.

Actions

When the PCs have the items in hand, what happens next depends on them. If the PCs know or learn that the coins are debased, they now have a moral choice to make — whether to get the coins out of circulation or keep them for themselves and use them as if they were legitimate.

Spending Spree

With such newfound wealth, it's understandable that PCs might treat themselves to a few luxuries. The vendors in and around the Keep will gladly oblige the characters, the sight of the (seemingly) gold coins putting caution to the wind. However, unless the PCs buy lots of expensive items, the merchants have great difficulty making change (if they are even able to do so). Most merchants recommend that the PCs visit Vas the jeweler or Nepra the moneychanger in order to get copper or silver currency that can be more easily spent.

At least one of the merchants who receive a debased coin eventually takes it to Vas the jeweler. When Vas discovers the debasement, he reports it to the authorities, who then follow the trail back to the PCs.

Interested Parties

Most locals treat the debased coins as real gold coins and the mints as nothing but junk. After all, the people that once inhabited the former Keep are either dead or long since departed, and few commoners have ever seen any dies for making coinage. Only a few persons know anything about them.

Greytar. This mage (Area U11) knows that a counterfeiting operation once occurred at a time that pre-dates the rebuilding, but does not know the names of the persons who were responsible for the debased coins. He has no interest in obtaining the mints or coins, but if he learns that the coins have been out of circulation for many years, he advises the PCs to take them to Vas and verify their authenticity.

Rikar. This villain (Area Q7) casually offers 5 sp for the mints, though he will go as high as 50 sp. Upon seeing the mints, Rikar quickly masterminds a plot to forge and disseminate fakes (gold-plated lead or similar metal), hoping to launder them for authentic coins. He and his men lack the tools and ability to forge debased coins. Rikar will gladly rob the PCs of the debased coins if given the opportunity, but he does not recognize them as unusual.

Nepra. The moneychanger (Area L9) recognizes the mints for what they are. She offers 5 silver pieces for them, claiming that she would like them as a present for her employer Vas, who collects such curios. In truth, she plans on re-selling the

items to Rikar. If pressed, she will go as high as 30 sp.

As for the coins, she offers to trade the PCs an equivalent amount of copper or silver, since the local merchants will be hard pressed to make change for gold. She recognizes the poor stamping but has no reason to think the coins are debased. If the PCs refuse, she tells the Ravens that the PCs are walking around with a fortune in their pockets.

Vas. The jeweler (Area U13) recognizes what the mints are and tells the PCs that they found some old mints for making gold coins. He does not immediately recognize the gold coins as being debased. However, if he learns that the coins have been out of circulation for years, he asks the PCs if he can perform some tests. (These are complicated tests involving water displacement and fine measurements; Vas is the only person in the area who can make these tests with any authority.)

While he works, Vas tells the PCs that, over a decade ago, a scandal occurred wherein debased gold coins were distributed through the old Keep. He does not know the guilty parties or many of the details. He is interested in purchasing the mints as a curio and offers a total sum of 10 silver pieces. He will purchase the debased coins at a fair price of 4 sp each (his estimated worth of the gold in the coins).

If the PCs refuse to sell the mints, Vas later mentions the incident to his wife Gira and assistant Nepra. Nepra soon approaches the PCs with a higher offer to purchase the mints, pretending that Vas changed his mind and is willing to haggle. She offers up to 30 sp and pays the PCs then and there. Afterwards, she sells the mints to Rikar (see above).

Other Ravens. If the PCs question any other Raven or associate of the Ravens, that NPC recognizes that the dies have something to do with coins and sees the possibility of forgery. This person may tell the PCs to seek out Rikar, or slip away and go tell Rikar about the items, or offer up to 30 sp for the mints (the exact amount depending on that NPC's wealth).

Authorities. If the PCs hand in the items to the guard Anoz Ghanesh (U1) or some other typical watchman, or find themselves in some trouble that leads to their persons or possessions being searched, that guard actually keeps the treasure for himself and proceeds to spend the debased coins. (Multiple guards divvy up the coins between themselves and keep it quiet from their superiors.) The mints get thrown in the rubbish.

Higher Authorities. If the PCs hand in the items to Keep Prefect Ganitek or any of his officers, the man praises the PCs as good citizens. He also states that that Keep owes the PCs a debt of gratitude for keeping these debased coins out of the local economy – a debt that no doubt the PCs will try to collect. After all, even a single act of military leniency could come in handy if the PCs get into trouble or need a moment of the Keep Prefect's time.

Charity Begins at Home

Charitable PCs may perform some good deeds by giving the coins to the poor or needy, such as the many beggars gathered around The Landing and the Lower Bailey. Depending on the PCs' past interactions with the guards, however, this may be viewed as violating some rule such as inciting mobs or encouraging vagrancy. Of course, a suitable 'donation' to the individual guard may make them appreciate the civic sense of the kind-hearted characters, but indiscreet PCs are equally likely to be mobbed by greedy guards as by beggars. Either way, the PCs draw attention to themselves, and the fame they crave may quickly turn to infamy...

Alternatively, the PCs may wish to donate their find to the Shrine of the Caregiver (M17), the Temple of the True (U12), or any other cleric with whom the party is on friendly terms.

Counter-Actions

Once it's revealed that debased coins are in circulation, perhaps deeply entrenched within the local economy, paranoia spreads. Rumors grow quickly amongst the citizens, starting simply with how one individual was duped into taking debased gold coins, but quickly escalating into worry about possibly debased silver as well. Merchants and their customers suddenly leave to take their coins to Vas.

This will be too much for the witnesses, who immediately seek the nearest guard. Along the way, they inform anyone they meet that thieves and forgers are running rampant. Loud, abusive mobs gather around any member of authority, demanding to be told what steps the military is taking. Those who have the most to lose or gain by these very serious allegations (namely Dasas of area M10, Jiric of M20 or a Raven member who is otherwise a non-notable resident of the Transient Apartments) spearhead the mob. All of their questions are met by blunt rebukes, being told that 'the Prefect is handling the matter', and that it would be in the locals' own interests to 'trade only for other goods' for the moment. Such comments only fuel speculation that the taint of the debased coins is much deeper than the rumors imply.

Any dismissive attitudes from the officials are met with an equal amount of frustration and tension. Unanswered questions receive increasingly louder shouting repeating the claim, until the guards, worried for their safety, retreat for backup from the closest tower. The gathered crowd descends upon the gateway to the Upper Bailey, whose gate drops at the first sign of trouble. Then events turn a little uglier...

Some locals gesture wildly, using crude weapons as symbols of extreme dissatisfaction, but this is interpreted as a sign of extreme hostility requiring an official show of force. Armed with shields and crushing weapons, the full strength of the Keep's watch bursts out with orders to disperse the unruly mob.

Note that Anarai the weaponsmith and armorer (M5) will not be a part of any such activities, fearing his future commis-

sions and livelihood will be affected. He attempts to make his arms shop as secure as possible with his sons, but may well attempt to buy another strong-arm or two with the promise of a commission (to be forged by his sons-in-training rather than himself, but he won't let that little aspect be made known).

Although the official response is meant as a show of authority, GMs may opt to have one or more innocent parties severely injured or killed. If this is the case, there may be severe repercussions within the Keep, such as (if a guard is taken down) curfews being introduced, harsher penalties for trivial matters that before would have gone ignored and greater use of the pillory, to show that civil unrest will not be tolerated in this military outpost.

If a citizen is the wounded party, then an intense hatred towards the guards begins to brew, and smaller confrontations occur on a regular basis. Rikar and his gang of Ravens spur many of these on. There should be plenty of opportunities for PCs to shape the overall outcome of the troubled Keep, if desired.

Throughout the following days, fights break out amongst merchants who believe other traders to be passing debased coinage onto them, with multiple disturbances throughout both the Lower and Middle Bailey. Many traders barricade themselves into their premises, only opening for verifiable friends and trade-links, and only then when they are alone. No groups or parties will be attended to at all, for abject fear of looting or other troubles. Even Quarry Town is affected by this virtual lock-down (if the Ravens are perceived as being the source of the problems, see below).

Otherwise, much of the traffic that would normally find its way to the Keep becomes stuck here. Tents spring up on all of the mined-out sections, and provisions are in short supply and high demand. The farmers and fishers of the area risk reprisal for the extra profit offered by taking their supplies here, consequently reducing the amount of food within Keep.

Official attempts to verify all coins within circulation prove to be mostly successful, though it takes several days and no one can truly be sure that all have been accounted for. Whatever happens, morale takes a significant beating and everyone continues to plague Vas with work for many months to come.

Conclusions

The repercussions of the PCs' actions depend on what they did within this scenario. If they sold the items to Vas or turned them over to an officer of the Keep, none of the chaos occurred and life in the Keep is unaffected. However, if debased coins get out into the community, traders become much more vigilant and suspicious of coinage.

During the immediate aftermath of the trouble, many sellers raise their already high prices by an additional 25% to offset their losses, while other return to the barter system and refuse to take any coins whatsoever; some of these return to their

more usual methods quicker than others. The trouble may also cause more nervous residents of the Keep to seriously reconsider their position here, but this is left for the GM to act out as desired.

Awards

Treasure Yield:

- 48 debased gold coins (actual value of 192 sp)
- coin mints (up to 30 sp resale value)

Story Awards:*

- Keeping the treasure out of circulation before it can cause trouble [selling it to Vas or turning it in to the authorities] (250 EP)
- Knowingly spending or utilizing the treasure under false pretenses or to cause trouble (250 EP)
- Donating or disposing of the treasure in good faith [unwittingly causing problems] (100 EP)

**Only give to players for whom such an act is appropriate role-playing of their PC's alignment.*

Spending the Coins (Unwittingly). If the PCs spent the debased coins unwittingly, they are identified and turned in to the authorities by various NPCs. Though they were not knowingly culpable, they still have to convince the authorities of it. If successful, they receive a stern lecture and the brief history lesson (noted above), and are fined an amount equal to 3x the forged gold they spent.

You may also have Prefect Ganitek informs the group that, as part of their punishment, he requires them to perform a task for him (either now or at a future date). Unless the PCs leave the Keep, this allows the GM with an easy way to introduce a new adventure opportunity.

Spending the Coins (Knowingly). If the PCs spent the debased coins knowingly, witnesses eventually identify them to the authorities. In P'Bapar, distribution of fraudulent coinage is typically punished by mutilation (chopping off a hand) and exile for life, or a period of hard labor with heavy fines, or confiscation of property with a ban or edict against the individual, as well as the pillory and/or public flogging. However, Keep Prefect Ganitek is a fair man, and allows the PCs to stand trial before handing out sentence. If the PCs put up a convincing defense, they avoid mutilation and suffer only heavy fines (equal to 10x the forged gold they spent) with a period of indenture under Prefect Ganitek.

Donating the Coins (Unwittingly). If the PCs donated the debased coins unwittingly, the recipients identify them and the guards bring them in for questioning. If they can convince the authorities of their innocence, they receive a stern lecture and a (very) brief history lesson - that these debased coins appeared something before the old fall of the Keep, but no one knows or remembers who was responsible.

If the Ravens Spread the Coins. If the Ravens were deemed responsible for the spread of the debased coinage, they name the PCs as the persons who gave them the debased coins.

Though the authorities take no action against the PCs (who'd believe the Ravens, after all?), the guards become more suspicious of them and the PCs' reputation suffers.

In addition, there will be an even greater crackdown on any person or activity thought to be associated with the Ravens. Any incoming goods suffer delays due to intense scrutiny, in a bid to try and cut off anything remotely associated with the thieves. Quarry Town residents will be effectively banned from the Keep until the paranoia begins to die down. Regular patrols and inspections sweep through the area as the renewed interest in taking down the gang promises significant prestige for any captures, and several young members of the Ravens will be brought in for 'questioning' – a fact that will not escape furious gossip mongering throughout the area.

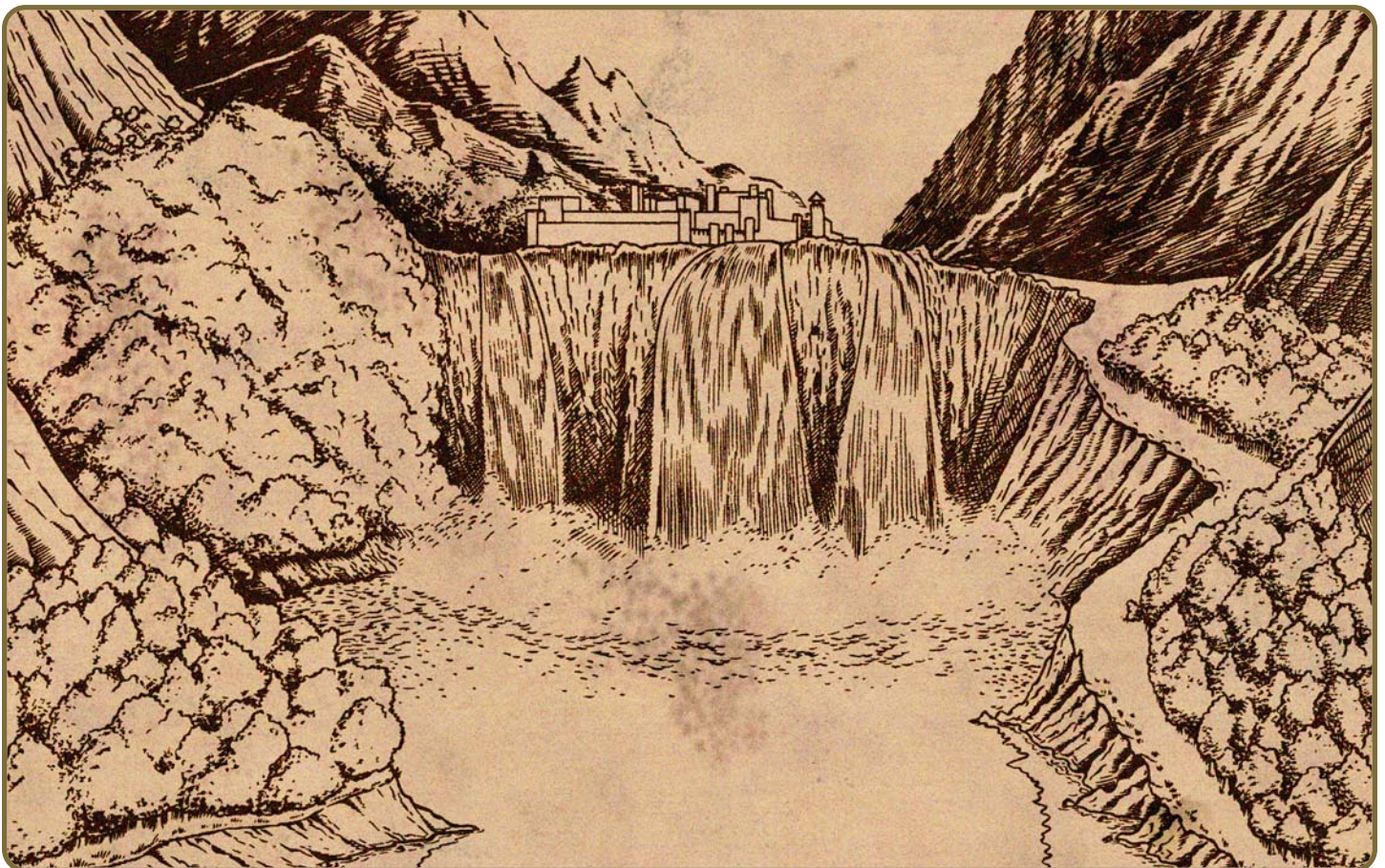
The Ravens will be condemned as true traitors, and the punishments for any form of association, correspondence or collaboration with them will be similarly escalated. The Ravens unfairly resent the PCs, and future dealings between the two groups cannot be resolved peacefully.

If the Guards Spread the Coins. If the debased coins surface via the guards, the offenders are flogged and reduced in rank. All guards within the Keep are also faced with a much tighter system of logging incidents, involving receipts and written reports being kept on all visitors for the period following the troubles. Illiterate members of the watch often receive the despised tower duty. The resentment from all the troops is widely felt, with intentional delays in any dealings while they check paperwork and authenticities.

The punished guards treat the PCs poorly and refuse to give them any leeway, though they are careful to not take harsh action for fear of being punished again.

If Rikar Starts a Counterfeiting Operation. If Rikar gets his hands on the mints, fake plated coins start to appear within the next few weeks. The furor is much milder than it was (or could have been) with the debased coins, since fake coins can be immediately clipped or cut to show their true nature. A few fights break out between merchants and buyers, guards are more suspicious and prone to make arrests, and fines are heavier but little else of significance occurs unless the Ravens are found to be responsible. In that case, the Ravens are punished just as if they had distributed debased coinage (see below). They name the PCs as the origins of the mints and suspicion falls upon the PCs but no action is taken against them without proof.

Author's Note: My personal favored punishment is to have a most unpleasant example set forth involving as many of the Keep's inhabitants, guards, beggars and general laborers as possible. The identified leader of such treasonous activities is summarily whipped while tied to the pillory, but strapped around his body is placed a number of unsealed bags and pouches containing the coinage. Every lash unleashes a shower of the coins like candy from a piñata, and anyone who feels inclined to recover some (greedy individuals being particularly prone here) is also punished immediately afterwards. The Prefect justifies this under a moralistic view to 'purge the greed of those who would readily partake in such plots – only honest work deserves payment'.



4. HP (28/7):

Act:

5. HP (28/7):

Act:

2. Giant Centipedes

Encounter: 6 giant centipedes (14 EPs each)

Giant Centipedes (6): HP 3 ea; Init -1; Spd 5; Rch 1' (short); Atk 0; Dmg none; VF 5 poison; Def +1; DR 0; ToP n/a, Size T; Move 5 ft./sec

Poison: lose 1 hp/10 seconds until 1d6 total lost.

1. HP (3): Act:

2. HP (3): Act:

3. HP (3): Act:

4. HP (3): Act:

5. HP (3): Act:

6. HP (3): Act:

3. Kobold Raiding Party

Encounter: 8 kobolds (17 EPs each)

Potential Story Award: Preventing some innocent farmer being killed and thereby creating a new crisis in Has (25 EPs)

Kobolds (8): HP 15 ea; Init 3; Spd 6; Rch 0'; Atk +2; Dmg 2d4p-3 (dagger); Def +4; DR 2; ToP 6/4; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.

1. HP (15/6):

Act:

2. HP (15/6):

Act:

3. HP (15/6):

Act:

4. HP (15/6):

Act:

5. HP (15/6):

Act:

6. HP (15/6):

Act:

7. HP (15/6):

Act:

8. HP (15/6):

Act:

4. Giant Ticks

Encounter: 2 giant ticks (67 EP each)

Giant Ticks (2): HP 28 ea; Init 3; Spd 16; Rch 1' (short); Atk +5; Dmg 2d4p (plus subsequent d4p blood drain every 10 seconds attached); Def 0; DR 4; ToP n/a; Size S; Move 5 ft./sec.

1. HP (28):

Act:

2. HP (28):

Act:

5. When a Body Meets a Body

Potential Yield: 1 mess kit, 1 whetstone, 1 wineskin, 1 flint and steel, 1 piece of chalk, 1 woolen blanket, 1 dagger, 2 sp, 7 cp and a grubby, stained piece of crumpled parchment.

Potential Story Award: Confirming with relative certainty that the Elm King is real by translating the letter (or having it translated): 100 EP

6. Lost in the Woods

Potential Yield: First Aid provider

Talus Somar: N Baparan human male; HP 22; Init +2; Def +0; DR 0; ToP 7/5; botany 60, first aid 51, language (Merchant's Tongue 32, Baparan 73); Quirk animal phobia (rodents)

HP (22/6):

PART TWO: Revelations

The Witch on the Hill

Potential Yield: Puzzle Box (100 or 120 sp)

Potential Story Awards:

- ▶ Solving the puzzle box (80 EPs)
- ▶ Learning of Bomari's location (100 EPs)

