



The Fantasy Trip™

HEXAGRAM™

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Issue #2 ♦ August 2019 ♦

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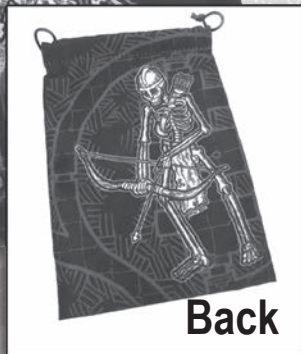
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Welcome to *Hexagram*!

Welcome to *Hexagram* #2! You liked the first one, so we did it again, and that's that.

This issue did not use Kickstarter. That's an experiment. If you are reading this, the experiment probably worked on you. If you are *not* reading this, don't tell anyone what it says. Fnord.

– Steve Jackson



Letters

Got mine today. Many thanks. Looks great!
– Christopher Kaster



Excellent zine! High quality paper, paper stock feels great. Fun and inspiring read. I'm looking forward to the next issue. Make it sooner rather than later! – Patrick Harper



Loving #1. Steve's stab at law school explains a lot.
– Glenn Copeland



Mine just arrived in the U.K. today. Looks great and I particularly like the bookmark which has gone straight into my *ITL* rulebook. – Chris Rice

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Four Esoteric Healing Items

By Stefan Jones

Every experienced adventurer is familiar with the techniques used to patch up wounds and get back to business: Healing magic, a physicker's skills, a quickly quaffed potion, or – if one has no silver – tedious bed rest. There are many more healing techniques and items out there; a few are described below.

Nowhere Bandages

No one is sure where they come from. The first cart full of carefully packed bottles was delivered to the barracks of the king's guard over twenty years ago. The driver, a Dehalan peasant, knew nothing of their origin, only that he was paid well for the job and was told that they were intended as a gift. A letter was included with this first delivery; written in humorous verse, it described the bandages' use and powers. More bottles are delivered every year, with an additional load arriving before the guard is preparing for a particularly dreadful campaign. Each year a dozen or so bottles are quietly sold on the black market by officers or army surgeons.

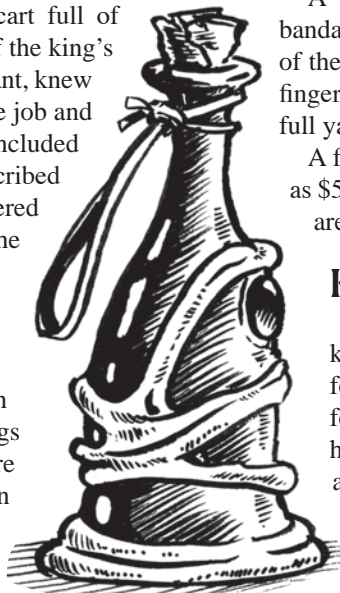
Nowhere Bandages are transported in stout bottles of crude green glass, reinforced with a winding of pitch and twine. A sturdy cork, a resin seal, and wire bindings keep the bottles sealed between uses. The dressings are crude-looking, little more than burlap, and immersed in bubbling green ichor. The bandages must be applied quickly, and the bottle carefully resealed after the

desired amount of dressing is pulled out and cut. The ichor on the cloth becomes sticky after five minutes, and hardens into a rocklike crust after ten minutes. The crust turns to powder and the bandages slough off after $2d6 + 7$ days.

Properly applied, the dressing will cure a mangled limb, and even re-attach a freshly (within 30 minutes) severed digit, hand, foot, or limb. Any application will cure half of the damage from the wound that mangled or severed the limb. The character must make a $3/ST$ roll for an attempt to repair a mangled limb, or $4/ST$ to re-attach a missing one.

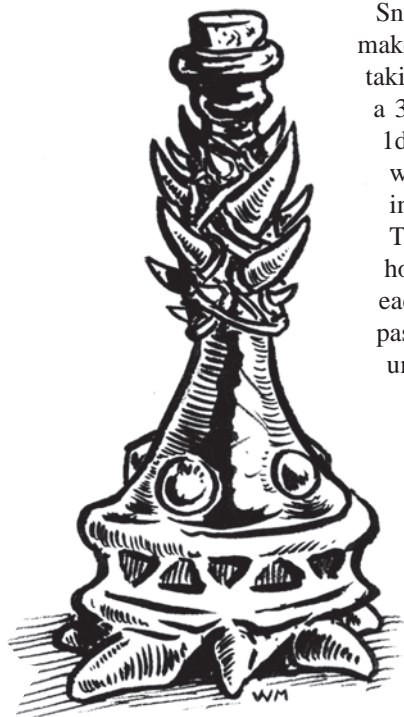
A newly delivered bottle contains $3d+12$ feet of bandages. ("Used" bottles may be missing $1d6 \times 10\%$ of the original supply.) 12" will be enough to re-attach a finger or toe, 2 feet to treat a severed foot or hand, and a full yard to deal with a detached limb.

A fresh bottle of Nowhere Bandages sells for as much as \$5,000; open bottles go for a fifth of this. Counterfeits are unfortunately common.



Ketcher's Healing Rest

The renowned physicker Lemule Ketcher was not known for his bedside manner. He had no tolerance for moaning or whining, and insisted on his patients following his directions to the letter. With the help of his alchemist brother-in-law, he created a potion which amounts to a magically enforced recommendation to "take two aspirin and call me in the morning."



Sniffing the fumes of the potion makes one light-headed; anyone taking even a tiny sip must make a 3/ST roll to avoid fainting for 1d x 10 seconds. A full dose will instantly send the imbiber into a deep, dreamless slumber. The enforced rest lasts 2d+4 hours. A 4/ST roll can be made each hour after four hours have passed; magic that rouses the unconscious will also work.

One who experiences a full six hours of healing slumber is treated as having rested an entire day. Rolls to see if a disease or poison progresses are made with one fewer die. Another dose may be quaffed immediately, but extensive use (that is, depending on the potion to

get to sleep for more than three

nights in a row) lowers the IQ of the user by 1 until he gets a night of natural sleep.

The secret of the Healing Rest potion is kept by his in-laws' family. One-dose bottles sell for \$50.

The Screaming Stones

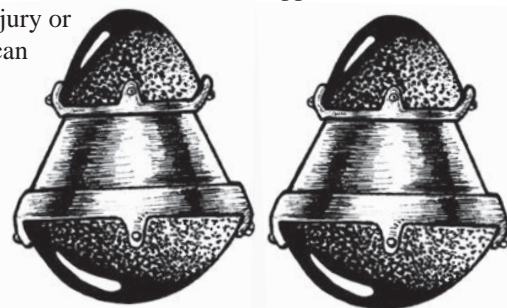
A product of the esoteric scholar-monks of far-off Sorpay, sets of Screaming Stones occasionally turn up in curiosity shops in port cities. Most treat them as an expensive novelty; physickers who have traveled to Sorpay or neighboring lands know they are a powerful diagnostic tool. When used properly, the stones can identify the site and intensity of a normally invisible infection, poison, tumor, or other malady.

The stones must be placed directly on the patient's flesh; even a layer of the finest silk will prevent them from working. Once two stones are in place they begin to hum quietly; as the pair are slid toward the source of the poison or infection they hum louder, and when the pair brackets the site they begin to scream. The din is loud enough to drown out all but shouted speech.

A character must have the Physicker or Master Physicker talent to learn how to use the stones. Mastering them requires a few days' study under a skilled user, or two weeks of trial and error.

Successful use of the stones requires a 2/IQ roll and takes about ten minutes. The user will know the location and approximate nature of any internal injury or malady. The physicker can also cast the Cleansing spell, if it is known, without damaging the (single) recipient.

A pair of stones generally sells for \$1,000.



The Nibbling Cure

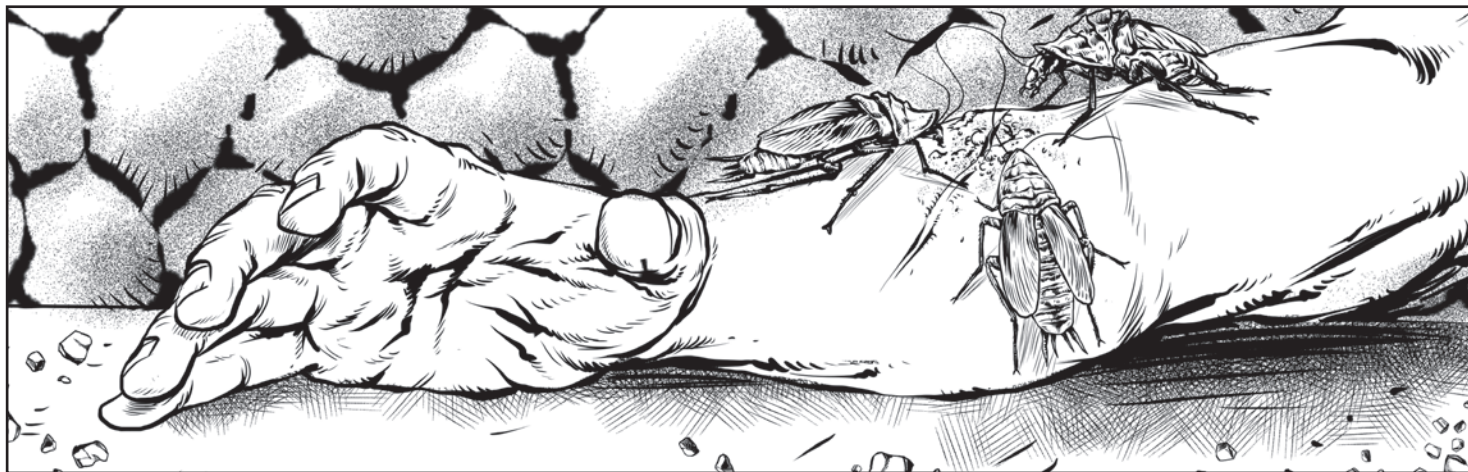
The exotic port city of Chiabin is a source of traveler's tales, curious souvenirs, and unusual magic items. Ships coming from this far-off port almost always arrive with something novel. One feature unlikely to be brought home by a sailor or merchant is the Nibbling Cure. This treatment, prized by wealthy and vain travelers, is believed to have a rejuvenating effect; this is not proven, but it does erase some of the cosmetic effects of aging.

Taking the cure consists of lying for hours in a large basin full of swarming insects. The recipient must first take a hot bath; Nibbling Cure parlors are often set up inside one of Chiabin's fine public baths. Except at the very cheapest parlors, the patients are kept

distracted by poetry readings and performances of shadow-puppets, jugglers, and clowns. (Low-rent parlors will just get the patient drunk, instead!) After the session, recipients are anointed with oils and treated to medicinal tea and cakes.

The carefully bred insects selectively chew off warts, wens, moles, excessive scar tissue, calluses, fungus-infected tissue, and the like. The process deals 1d-4 damage (minimum 0); parlor owners offer a free healing potion to customers unlucky enough to suffer nibbling damage.

A session of the Nibbling Cure lasts an hour or two, and costs \$75 to \$200, depending on the amenities offered. For the right price, a parlor will arrange for the cure to be given in a private home.





By Guy McLimore

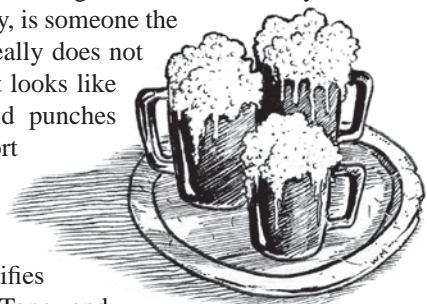
This encounter can be dropped into any existing campaign. The GM should alter names, places, and details to fit the game campaign, blending it with the world the PCs live in.

Everyone's Entitled to My Opinion

This incident starts, as many do, during a night at the local tavern. On a busy night, when it is getting a little drunk out, an older man no one in the party knows starts getting a bit mouthy about various local officials and prominent citizens, relating a number of rumors and conspiracy theories which are none too flattering. He has a serious grudge going, and he's talking too much, too loudly.

The innkeeper (who, ideally, is someone the PCs know at least slightly) really does not want things to escalate, but it looks like people are picking sides and punches may get thrown. He has a short conversation with the older man, who quiets down.

If any PCs speak with the innkeeper afterward, he identifies the loudmouth as Waggoner Tong, and says "old Wag" used to be a regular a number of years back until the innkeeper suggested he find another bar. "Wag is harmless enough," says the innkeeper, "but when he gets going like this – well, let the competition have him for a while."



A short time later, the PCs may notice a dapper, mustachioed man, perhaps a wizard from his dress and the short staff he carries, sit down with Tong. After some quiet talk, the wizard hands a small package to Tong and departs with a polite bow. If the PCs attempt to approach or follow either, they'll find both gone within a few moments.

The innkeeper will not witness this exchange; he's busy at the time. If advised by the PCs he will be momentarily concerned, having the usual healthy respect-at-a-distance that many hold for wizards. But the concern won't last long. "Wag's an old guy with a mouth. Not much else."

The Little Man Who Wasn't There

The following morning, just before the PCs are ready to come down for the day, they hear someone speak to them, as if standing right behind them. Since they are still in their room or rooms, this may be a bit startling, especially when they turn around and find no one is there.

"All right, you poor, witless sheep! Listen up! It's time for you to hear the truth about things."

All the PCs hear the Voice as if the speaker was standing right next to them, but no one is visible. It sounds like an older male, speaking the common tongue with a local accent. He proceeds to give a rambling lecture regarding his views on modern society, life in general, individuals and groups he doesn't like or trust, and – especially – local and regional politics.

Wherever the PCs go, they can hear the Voice quite clearly, but it does not answer them if they speak to it. No matter how they move about, it does not seem to get closer or farther away, nor does it seem to come from a fixed direction.

In the common rooms of the inn and in the street, everyone else can hear it, too. The matter goes from surprising to mysterious to annoying pretty quickly. To converse, folks have to speak over the phantom Voice, as if there is someone present who won't let anyone get a word in edgewise.

PCs may (3/IQ roll) recognize the Voice as that of Waggoner Tong, he of the free-flowing opinions. The lecture isn't a nasty harangue. It sounds more like a cranky old uncle who is certain that the world would be a better place if everyone would just wise up and listen to him. One topic flows freely into another, with no end in sight.

The market square is soon full of people listening to, agreeing/disagreeing with, and even trying to argue with the Voice. It seems to be audible only near the square. After a time, people begin searching the area, figuring the source must be nearby.

The Man Behind the Voice

The innkeeper can confirm the Voice is that of Wag Tong. The other merchants, inn patrons, local farmers coming into the market square, and so on are having their daily routine completely disrupted by the Voice, people talking and arguing about the Voice, and the chaos ensuing from people's attempts to find (or get away from) the Voice.

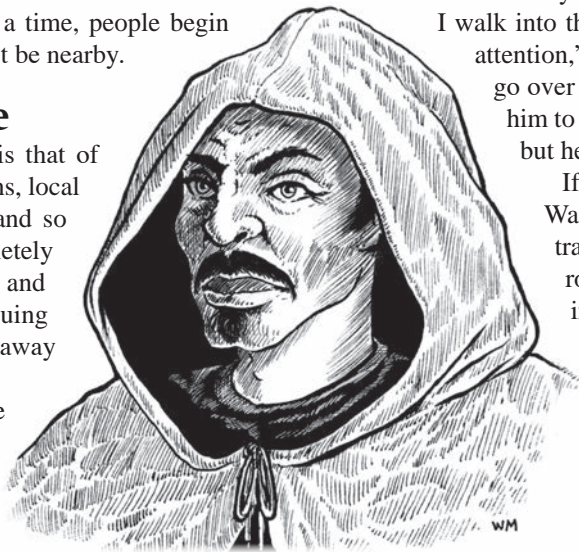
It is obvious that magic must be involved. If the party has a wizard (or a wizard is consulted), give them a 4/IQ roll to have heard of a minor IQ 11 spell

known as *Great Voice*. A town crier or herald will almost certainly have heard of it, since the purpose of the spell is to allow a person speaking normally to be clearly heard by everyone within bowshot (essentially, anywhere in a radius of about 300 yards). A normal casting lasts only about a minute, but with the Voice droning on and on, it is evident that this is more than a casually cast spell.

As the Voice goes on, talk starts to circulate about calling out the Town Guard to search for the perpetrator. This makes the innkeeper nervous, especially if the PCs tell him that Tong was talking to a wizard just before he left the inn the night before.

The innkeeper confirms Tong told him that since his return to town he has been staying at a travelers' inn across the square. "If I walk into the competition's place, I'll just draw their attention," the innkeeper tells the PCs. "Would you go over there and see if you can find Wag and tell him to knock it off? I don't know what he's up to, but he's gone too far."

If the PCs check, they will find that Waggoner Tong does have a room at the small travelers' inn on the square, but he's not in his room at present. If the PCs are not careful in their questioning, the innkeeper where Tong has been staying may recognize his voice and start talking freely with his patrons and any guardsmen who come around with questions. If the PCs have seemed too interested in Tong, this could get them into trouble.



The PCs may begin searching for Tong. The GM should push them a bit, making sure they stay ahead of city guardsmen, angry mobs, and so on. If they make a general search of the area, string them along for awhile, but if any of them decide to get a high view of the square from an upper window, church tower, etc., they will quickly spot a lone figure sitting in an out-of-the-way corner on the roof of the little travelers' inn itself.

Good Rings Come in Small Packages

The roof venue is accessible by metal rungs leading up from the alley behind the building. Sitting up there, chattering away happily to his captive audience, is Waggoner Tong. On his right hand is a silver ring with a blue stone, to which he seems to be directing his speech. The ring radiates magic if appropriate spells are cast to detect it. It is, in fact, a self-powered ring containing the Great Voice spell, making anyone who speaks normally while wearing the ring audible to everyone within a couple hundred yards, just as if the speaker was standing right beside them.

If the PCs speak to Tong, their voices will not be broadcast by the ring, but any replies Tong makes will be heard abroad, unless Tong takes the ring off first. The GM should be very aware of this, even if the PCs don't think of it, and the proper trouble should be stirred up later depending on what is said on Tong's end of their conversation.

Confronted by the PCs or the innkeeper, Tong will admit he was approached by a wizard – a man he didn't know. He praised Tong for his “insight into the human condition.” He presented Tong with the ring, explained how it worked, and suggested he share his wisdom with his less perceptive fellows the next morning. The

wizard recommended the rooftop venue, encouraging Tong to keep his location secret until people had a chance to “benefit from his experience” and learn to appreciate him. Any wizard among the PCs or the innkeeper will get a +1 to reaction rolls to convince Tong it is prudent to give up the ring before he gets into real trouble.

Aftermath: A Slip of the Tong

The mysterious wizard has played on Tong's ego quite successfully to get him to become a public nuisance – but the reason for the “gift” will become clear once the PCs return to the square. The town guard, first occupied with the search for the Voice, now is discovering that someone used the distraction to mount a host of quiet thefts, ranging from careful pickpocketing in the tumultuous square to bold burglary of buildings entered while people and guardsmen were busy. The ring itself (as the PCs will figure out) was no doubt expensive to make, but has netted many times as much in stolen goods and left a perfect patsy behind to take the blame.

Everyone is beginning to figure out that the Voice was a distraction set up by an organized band of thieves; soon they become very, very angry. If the PCs have done anything that links them to the incident (or Tong himself is overheard in person), this means trouble.

The PCs and the innkeeper will want to keep Tong tucked away somewhere and keep his mouth shut (not easy, given his personality) until they can track down the mysterious wizard and the band of thieves he is working with, with poor Tong as their unwitting accomplice. Spinning this into explorations of underworld connections and back-alley wizardry – just ahead of local law enforcement – is left as a happy exercise for the GM, who should be able to keep the PCs very busy indeed.



Steps in Melee Combat

By Steve Jackson

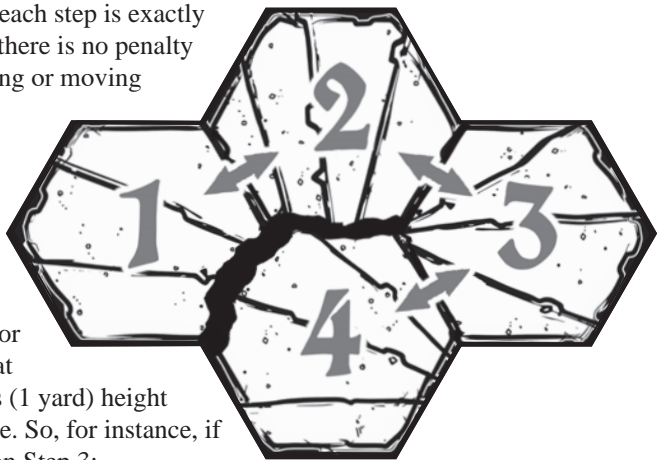
The *TFT* rules give combat modifiers in increments of a half-yard. As we continue to build our miniature terrain set, this is a standard “step” piece that we have been using. Several copies of this went into the *Decks of Destiny* set.

The top of step 1 is 1.5 feet above the floor. The next one is 3, then 4.5, then 6. One more step up would bring you to the height of the lighted hexagon features on our miniature set, making those 7.5 feet high in scale.

Since each step is exactly 1.5 feet, there is no penalty for fighting or moving between adjacent steps.

The rules give a +2/-2 penalty for fighting at two steps (1 yard) height difference. So, for instance, if you are on Step 3:

You have a +2 to strike down at anyone on Step 1. They have a -2 to hit you.



You have no bonus or penalty to hit someone just below you on Step 2, nor have they any bonus or penalty to hit you.

And, of course, if there is an adjacent hex at your own level of 3, you have no penalty or bonus to hit them.

You have no bonus or penalty to hit someone just above you on Step 4, nor have they any bonus or penalty to hit you.

You have a -2 to hit anyone on Step 5. They have a +2 to strike down at you.

You may “charge” up or down steps if you take them one at a time.

The rules as written don’t address movement up or down a two-step difference at once. But realistically, you could scramble up a yard, or jump down a yard, into an unoccupied hex. So:

- moving up two levels costs 3 hexes.
- moving down two levels also costs 3 hexes.

What about three hexes? You cannot climb a three-step boundary during a combat move, though out of combat, someone could certainly boost you. As for going down: you can step over the edge, but a good landing is not guaranteed. Roll 3/DX to stay on your feet; otherwise, you fall prone, and a critical failure drops or breaks your weapon. Your movement is over, regardless.

You may not “charge” during a move in which you cross a boundary of more than one step, either going up or going down. It breaks all your momentum.

You may attempt to enter HTH by jumping down onto a foe from 2 or more steps above them. You may *not* attempt to enter HTH by moving *up* onto them.

If you, the readers, do not break this horribly, it will become an official part of the rules.



Take Adventure to a New Level

By Phil Reed

The Fantasy Trip is a tactical dungeon crawl at its core, a skirmish game where positioning matters and a clear vision of your character's surroundings influences your decisions in battle. So far, we've provided you with tools to build your next dungeon – the *Melee* and *Wizard* paper maps, playmats illustrated by Dyson Logos, as well as double-sided, dry-erase megahex tiles in both the *Legacy Edition* and *Decks of Destiny* boxes – but all of those represent only a flat dungeon.



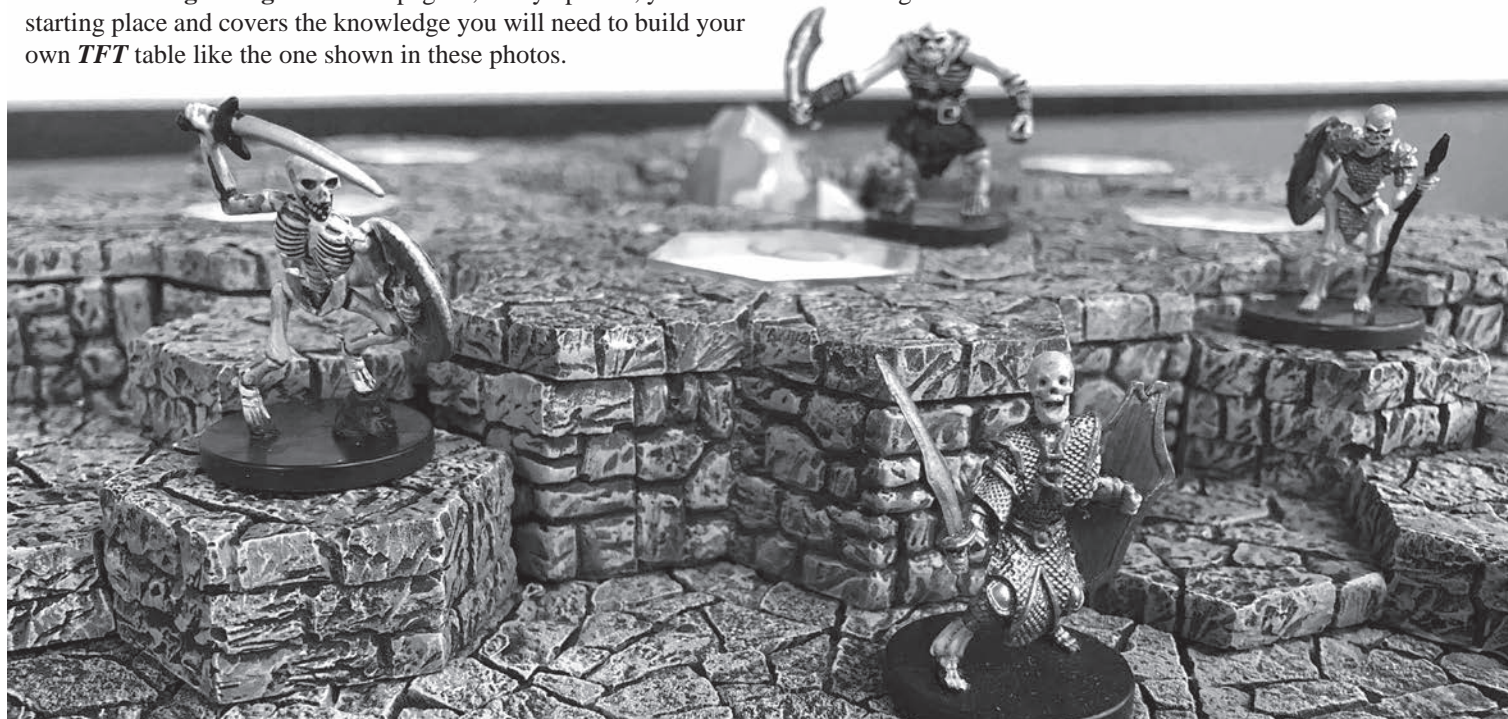
Those of you who are crafty at heart can elevate your dungeons to an entirely new dimension with time, dental stone, paint, and Hirst Arts' fabulous terrain molds. At www.hirstarts.com/gloom/gloom.html you will find a complete listing of the company's molds that are used to construct 3-D labyrinths using 1.5-inch hexes. To start, you can get by with molds #701 and #179; all of the other listed options can be added to your library of molds later, after you have built your first dungeon.

You'll need to select a casting material. For our terrain, we used SheraPure Type IV Die Stone, which is easy to use and cures quickly. A little pricey, but it has worked well and we've crafted hundreds of tiny bricks and hexes using SheraPure without any significant difficulties.

The internet is loaded with videos and tutorials for the creation of custom dungeons using the Hirst Arts molds. The official www.hirstarts.com/gloom/gloom.html page is, in my opinion, your best starting place and covers the knowledge you will need to build your own *TFT* table like the one shown in these photos.

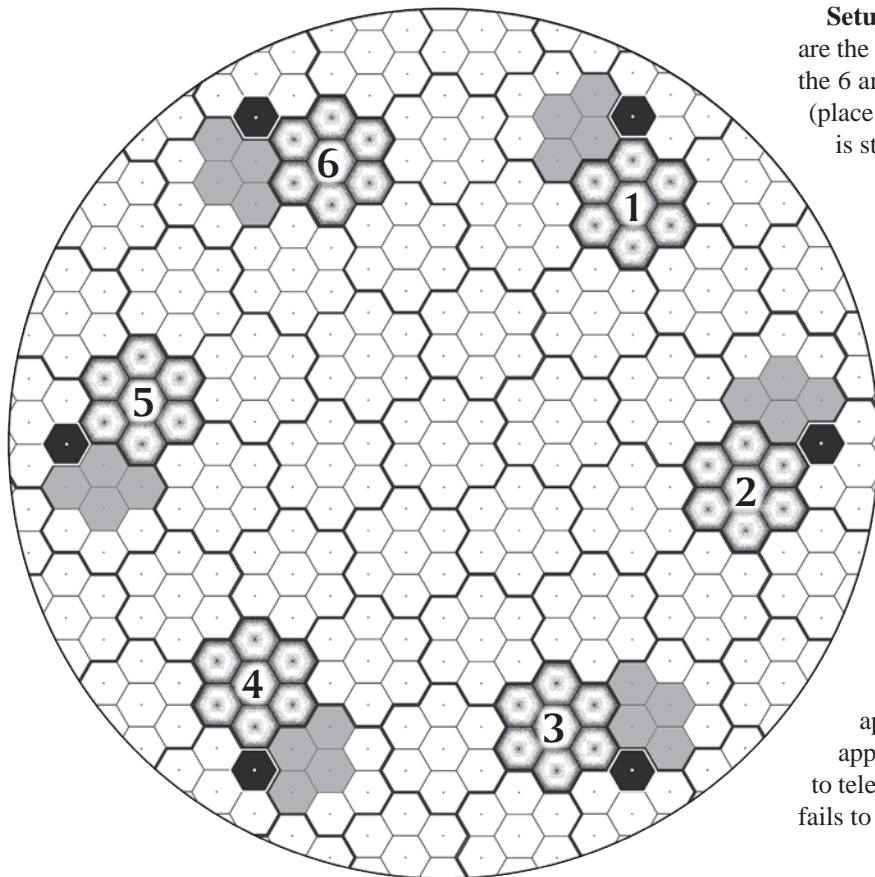
For more pics of our table in action, as well as background info on its creation, please visit www.sjgames.com/ill/archive/May_11_2019/Constructing_A_Demo_Table_For_The_Fantasy_Trip. And if you build a table all your own, please share pics! You can tweet us @sjgames or email us at info@sjgames.com.

On the following three pages are multilevel combat arenas designed for a round table.





Teleport Race



A Battle Arena for *The Fantasy Trip*

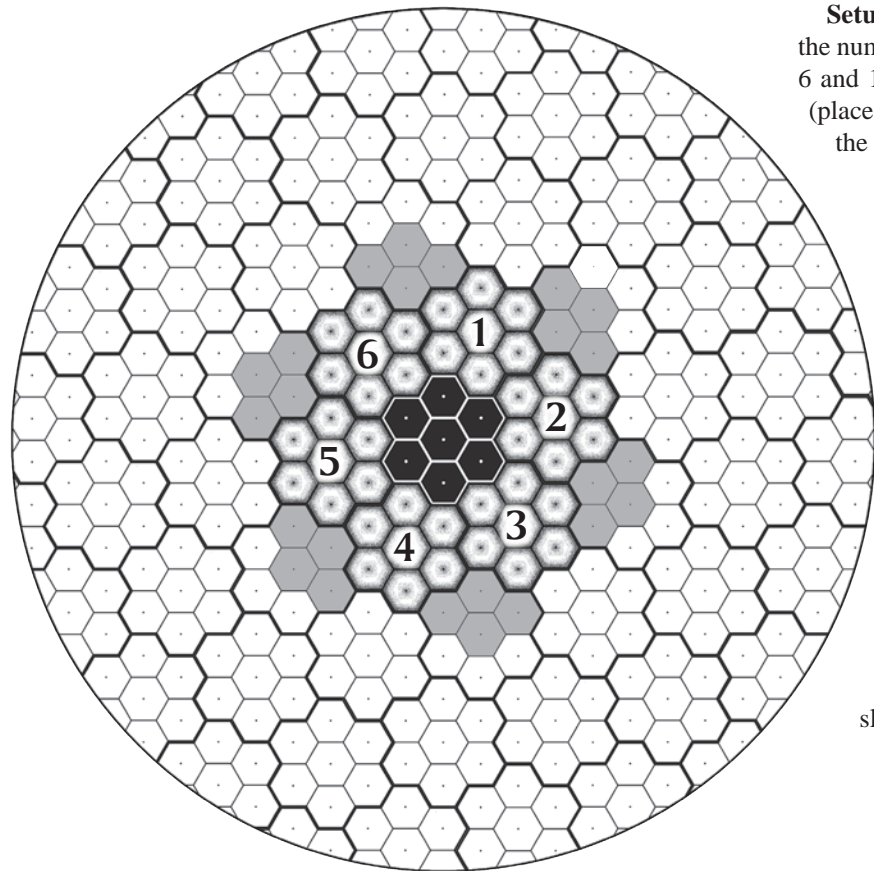
Setup. Arrange the terrain on the table as shown. Shaded hexes are the numbered terrain pieces (place them 1 through 6, clockwise; the 6 and 1 will be adjacent to each other), gray hexes are the steps (place them so the highest point is near the numbered piece). Black is starting spaces (see below).

Fighters. Two teams of one, two, or three fighters/each. Each fighter starts on the surface behind a different numbered space (black hexes); one team on odd and the other on even numbers.

Objective. Eliminate the opposing team or collect 5 tokens. After 45 minutes, the team with the most tokens wins. A draw is possible.

Terrain. The arena field is standard terrain and has no impact on gameplay. Stepping down or up one level is free. Elevation does not affect range. If you descend more than one level when moving across hexes, you have fallen: 2 hits per level down after the first. (Fall three levels, suffer 4 hits.)

Teleport Hexes. The numbered hexes are teleporters. As soon as a character steps into one, roll 1d6. On a 1, teleport to the center of the arena and collect one token. On a 2 to 4, teleport to the next numbered space (step into 2 and appear in 3). On a 5 or 6, move back one space (step into 2 and appear in 1) and collect one token. A character may only attempt to teleport once each turn. If the target hex is occupied, the teleport fails to activate.



A Battle Arena for The Fantasy Trip

Setup. Arrange the terrain on the table as shown. Gray hexes are the numbered terrain pieces (place them 1 through 6, clockwise; the 6 and 1 will be adjacent to each other), green hexes are the steps (place them so the highest point is near the numbered piece), red is the pit megahex.

Fighters. Two teams of one, two, or three fighters/each. Each fighter starts on a different numbered space; one team on odd and the other on even numbers.

Objective. Eliminate the opposing team. After 45 minutes, the team with the most surviving fighters wins. A draw is possible.

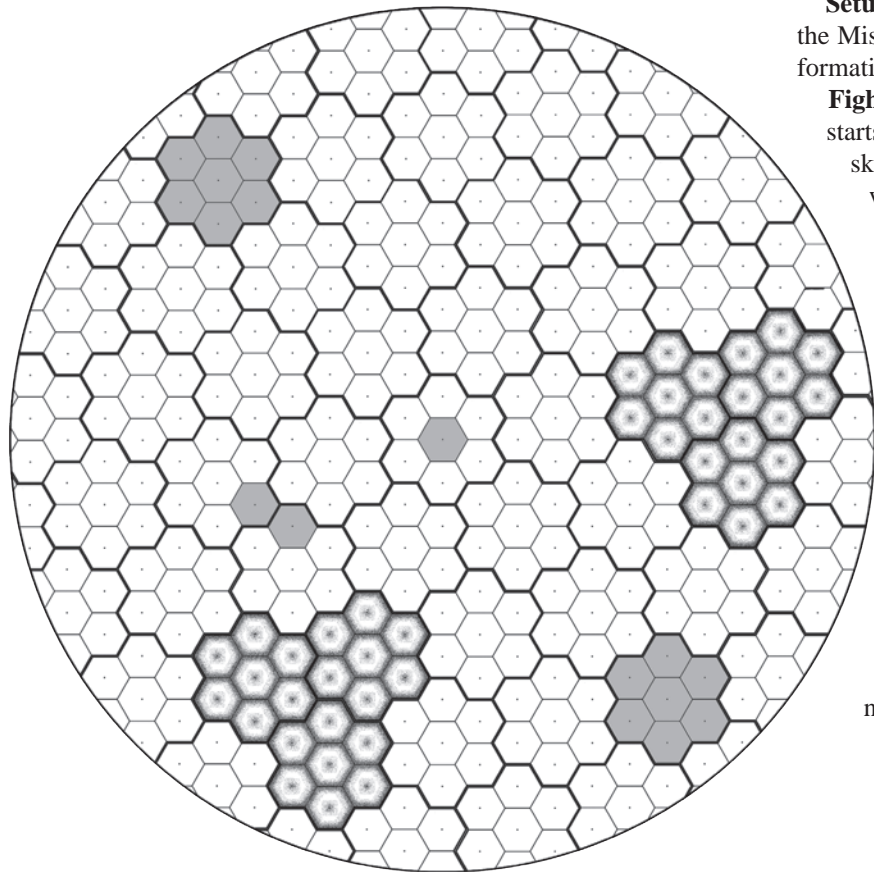
Terrain. The arena field is standard terrain and has no impact on gameplay. Stepping down or up one level is free. Elevation does not affect range. If you descend more than one level when moving across hexes, you have fallen: 2 hits per level down after the first. (Fall three levels, suffer 4 hits.)

Magic Hexes. The numbered hexes may be moved across as normal. During the game, roll 1d6 at the end of each turn. For that turn, everyone in the hex number rolled (and all adjacent hexes) regains 1 hit.

The Pit. Any fighter falling into the pit is automatically slain.



The Misfortune Stones



A Battle Arena for *The Fantasy Trip*

Setup. Arrange the terrain on the table as shown. Blue hexes are the Misfortune Stone terrain pieces, gray hexes are the skull tower formations.

Fighters. Two teams of one, two, or three fighters each. One team starts their characters anywhere within two hexes of one of the skull tower formations. The second team starts their characters within three hexes of the megahex Misfortune Stone terrain that is farthest from the skull towers.

Objective. Eliminate the opposing team. After 45 minutes, the team with the most surviving fighters wins. A draw is possible.

Terrain. The arena field is standard terrain and has no impact on gameplay. You may not enter or use partial hexes on the playing field. The skull towers are obstacles; the hexes where the towers sit are blocked and inaccessible. The magical stones are special; see below.

Misfortune Stones. If a character is in any hex adjacent to a Misfortune Stone, that fighter's player rolls eight-sided dice instead of six-sided dice when making any action, including attacks. (Damage rolls are unaffected by the stones.) The magical aura of the stone terrain does not extend more than one hex from its position on the arena.



The Little Merlad

By Howard Kistler

Traveling along the seashore, the party sees a mermaid rise up from the waves. She calls out to them and approaches.

From the buffeting surf, the mermaid Meresu tells the players of how her son Nereon has been taken. A sensitive young man utterly lacking in aggression, he would often sit upon the rocks near the shore and serenade passers-by with music and song. He found land-dwellers fascinating and would ask about life on land from those who stopped to listen. Unfortunately, he came to the notice of a wicked enchanter named Agarelle Nux who dwells in a lighthouse-like tower along the sea.

Agarelle became smitten with the music, and the beauty, of Nereon. Vowing to have Nereon for herself, she used the *Shapeshift* spell to change Nereon into a human. She then forced the young man away to her tower, where he is being held captive still. Meresu pleads with the party to free her son, and if possible break the enchantment upon him and make him once again a merman.

If the party succeeds in freeing her son, she will reward them with gold and items recovered from sunken ships. If they also manage to break the enchantment, she will reward them further with a magic item that merfolk only give to those land-dwellers who do them a great deed. The item is a **Merfolk Jug**, and is described below.



Merfolk Jug

Carved from red coral in the shape of a carp, with an open mouth and the tail curving around to touch the chin. This circular jug has the *Fresh Water* enchantment upon it, and once a day it can be called upon to fill itself with clear, pure water. One simply holds the jug and says into the mouth of the carp “*boshu, boshu, boshu*” (“fill up” in the merfolk language), and within 3 minutes the jug will be full of water. It holds the same quantity as a standard waterskin.

These jugs are only given to select people, so one would never find one for sale in a shop. A collector of rare magic items might have one. Any merfolk who meet someone with such a jug will have a +2 reaction to that person, as it signifies that the bearer is a good friend of the merfolk.

Magic Canteen (Lesser Magic Item)

Requires knowledge of *Lesser Magic Item Creation* & *Fresh Water* (*Fresh Air*) spells;

3 weeks creation time, 25 ST & \$600 a week, start with a \$200 high-quality waterskin;

Costs \$4,000 to purchase.

This magic item uses the same enchantment principle as the *Merfolk Jug*, with the exceptions that it (1) is easier to obtain, (2) is more convenient to carry, and (3) costs ST to use. By spending 1 ST per turn, the person holding the waterskin can cause the *Fresh Water* enchantment to begin filling the skin. It takes 10 turns to completely fill it, but it can be filled to any desired level up to the full amount. Self-powered versions of this item can be created, but they are uncommon and very expensive.

OCTOGRAM™

The Natural History of the Octopus



By Steve Jackson

A fan favorite since the original *Fantasy Trip* release is the Octopus: smart, slimy, and dangerous.

Just as there are several different kinds of humanoid on land, most of which look very similar if you are an Octopus, there are several species of Octopus in the waters of Cidri, and a variety of underwater cultures. There are also many unintelligent species of octopus, ranging from tiny to huge. This article covers the intelligent Octopus domains in the coral reefs and swamps near the Duchy of Dran.

Octopi require water to live, though they can leave and walk on land for many hours. This water does not have to be salt; Octopi can live in lakes and marshes. Underwater, Octopus usually get around by walking on the bottom. They can swim by jetting through the water, but it takes a lot of energy.

Intelligent Octopi are not numerous. They are usually found in underwater or swamp villages of 30 or so adults and a variable number of children. There is a common “tongue” shared by most intelligent groups of Octopi, regardless of species, but all Octopi who deliberately deal with humans will learn what we consider the “common tongue.” Octopi also make use of skin color changes when communicating; each species and culture has its own color codes.

Most wild octopi, and some kinds of intelligent ones, are very short-lived, with one or both sexes dying right after breeding. Nevertheless, the intelligent Octopi show family care, with the eggs being left in the underwater “village” and raised either by relatives or the whole Octopus community.

Octopi are as smart as humans. The species around Dran has an average IQ of 10, but remember, that means that there will be as many octopi above that number as below it. An octopus wizard can be formidable, and not just because of its high strength.

It is sometimes very hard to tell what an Octopus is thinking. They are more closely related to snails than they are to humans! Their big eyes show no human expression. Humans think that the Octopi are cowardly, greedy, and dishonest. That’s probably natural when dealing with a completely alien species that thinks you taste good. In fact, Octopi usually deal fairly among themselves, and are capable of dealing fairly with humans, though with a lot of caution on both sides.



Thrown to the Octopi!

In some coastal cities, an especially savage form of the death penalty is to be given to the octopi. Some octopus societies won’t go along with this, because they know it enhances their reputation as awful monsters. Others don’t care – or like having a frightening reputation! – and will accept human meat as well as any other.

Not generally known, but true: some octopi keep human slaves, in places they don’t think humans can escape, to do above-ground work.

Octopi are carnivorous. Little wild octopi eat a variety of small fish and shellfish. Intelligent Octopi eat all these things, but they also cooperate to catch larger prey, and one reason they venture on land is that warm-blooded meat is considered especially tasty. This includes human flesh, which seems alarming, but people eat octopus too. Octopus cultures can reach an understanding with their human neighbors such that neither eats the other, or they can feud constantly, interspersed with occasional banquets.

In the swamp, Octopus hunt for Scum Bunny and will help keep their numbers down; they think scum bunny is yummy.

Some wild octopi have quite deadly poison, but the bite of the intelligent Octopus is not venomous to humans, or even especially powerful. Octopi are famous for their ability to discharge ink to foil an underwater opponent, but on land the ink just squirts out in a glob, as inconvenient to the octopus itself as it is to the foe.

(Octopus ink does have some alchemical uses, but is not at all costly on seacoasts, because almost any friendly octopus will be happy to spit for a few silvers.) While we are on the subject of the magical uses of the octopus, it would be appropriate to give a warning: If you are ever a wizard's apprentice, and the senior apprentices send you to the market for a pound of octopus bones, take the afternoon off.

The perils that face an octopus community are similar to those of a village on land. Instead of wolves, an underwater town must deal with the occasional shark (or a school). Instead of marauding orcs, the octopi must face an occasional gang of crabmen (either way, the winners will feast on the losers). And, rarely, sea monsters appear.

The Minipus

Are they children of the intelligent Octopi, or an evolutionary forebear, or just another kind of cephalopod? The Octopi say they are no relation, and they will fight with (or even eat) minipus that annoy them.

It is unusual for minipus to be common in one place for very long. There will be a brief infestation, and then they will vanish . . . died? Moved on?



They may not breathe fire, but they are as great as dragons and as hard to slay.

Trade with the Octopi

What we have that they want: worked metal; warm-blooded meat such as beef and pork; books written in waterproof ink on water-resistant parchment. They like stony, colored semiprecious stones such as turquoise. Gems are not of great interest, except for diamonds, and these are valued because of their hardness when used as an engraving tool.

What they have that we want: pearls, shells and coral, rare and tasty fish. Also, of course, the contents of shipwrecks. Octopi like treasure, just as we do, and much of it is taken from sunken ships.

Octopi can also provide services that humans can use. An octopus is a formidable bodyguard. The Thorsz sometimes uses octopi in his Death Test labyrinth. Octopus dancers and jugglers are incredible. And an octopus spy can investigate an enemy harbor in far more detail than any human agent can manage.

Combat and Technology

Octopus combat is covered on *ITL*, p. 82. Basically, Octopi can coordinate "three hands worth" of weapons or items at once, and, as that page warns, the best way to fight octopi is to outnumber them. Failing that, you can outrun them if you are unarmored. Note that the ST of an octopus represents its overall tenacity. An octopus would probably lose an arm-wrestling contest with an average man. Therefore, octopi don't get to use two-handed weapons with a single arm!

When hunting underwater, octopus will often carry a trident or two to increase their reach, ward off sharks, and drag interesting prey out of holes. When fighting among themselves underwater, octopus like tridents and shortwords . . . but such battles are not common.

Every warrior octopus with experience on land has asked himself how missile weapons might work underwater. The octopi continue to experiment with crossbows that fire finned missiles, either free or carrying a line, but so far they have had little success. Underwater crossbows are as persnickety as black powder weapons on land, with much less range and stopping power. On land, of course, octopi love crossbows, and “crossbow and shield” is a common combination of weapons.

Octopi know how to use fire but do not like it. They do not cook their food. They have been known to come ashore on deserted islands and build open-air laboratories and forges, but they would rather trade with humans for things that can best be made above water. See below.

Linguistics

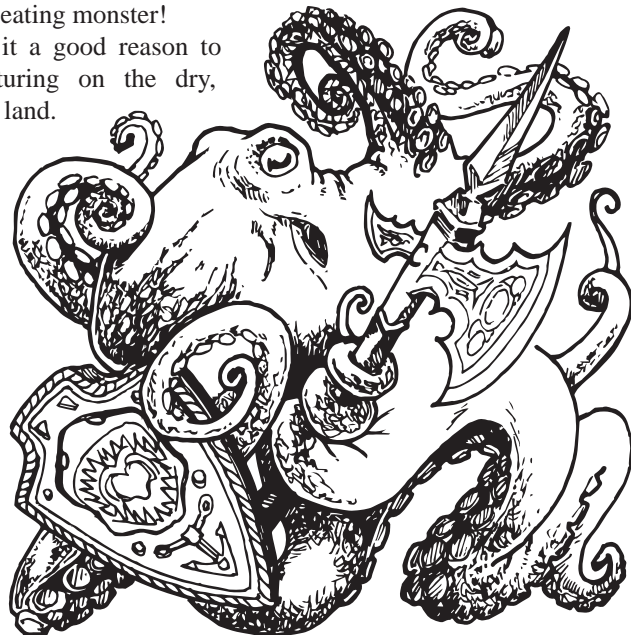
The limbs of an octopus are its “arms.” A “tentacle” is the kind of limb a squid has, with suckers only at the tip.

The dictionary gives the proper plural of octopus as “octopuses,” with the archaic variant of “octopodes.” Nevertheless, for the Common Tongue of Cidri and the purposes of this game, the plural is the shorter “octopi.”

Octopus Player Characters

It is certainly possible to play an Octopus as a PC, as long as the other players are comfortable with a super-strong, super-dextrous alien companion. However, the eight-leggers were not designed and balanced as PCs; they were intended as monsters. If you allow an Octopus PC:

- Don’t let it go without immersing itself totally in water for at least 12 hours each day.
- Remember that most strangers will react to an Octopus at -2 – it’s a man-eating monster!
- Give it a good reason to be adventuring on the dry, dangerous land.





TFT Competitions

By Steve Jackson

Since **TFT** has a tactical game at its heart, it's only natural to look at it with competition in mind. Such a game is (and should be!) very different from a roleplaying adventure, though it's awesome if the GM keeps roleplaying in mind as the scene is set. A **TFT** competition would be some form of battle arena, and there would definitely be winners and losers.

Some notes toward competitions for game clubs or conventions:

- Having some objective, in addition to "kill the enemy," may make things more interesting. Phil Reed's articles on pp. 11-13 give three different arena scenarios, and each one has its own special map and features.
- Single-player games are over very quickly and are very influenced by lucky die rolls. A longer fight gives time for the dice to even out. A battle with two or three sides, and three or four characters per side, is about right. Designing the perfect team is challenging; be sure to allow time for it, unless the fighters are to be assigned randomly!

These characters may be divided among players in several ways, but my suggestion is to have no more than six players around the table, just for speed of play.

- A game with magic is very interesting but will be slower than a purely battle game. Suggestion: if magic is used, try teams of one wizard plus two or three fighters.

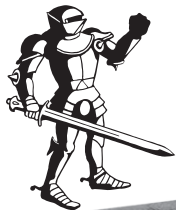
- There may need to be a time limit. My current suggestion is to use 36-point characters for an arena battle designed to last from 45 minutes to an hour. Starting characters will give a quicker battle.
- If wizards are allowed, they can have any spells, and if they know Staff, they may start with a staff. If it has a Mana stat, it starts out full of ST.

Fighters should be limited to weapon abilities unless the scenario has specific map features and rules that invoke other skills – e.g., Climbing. Fighters should start with the weapons that fit their skills and whatever armor they wish to use.

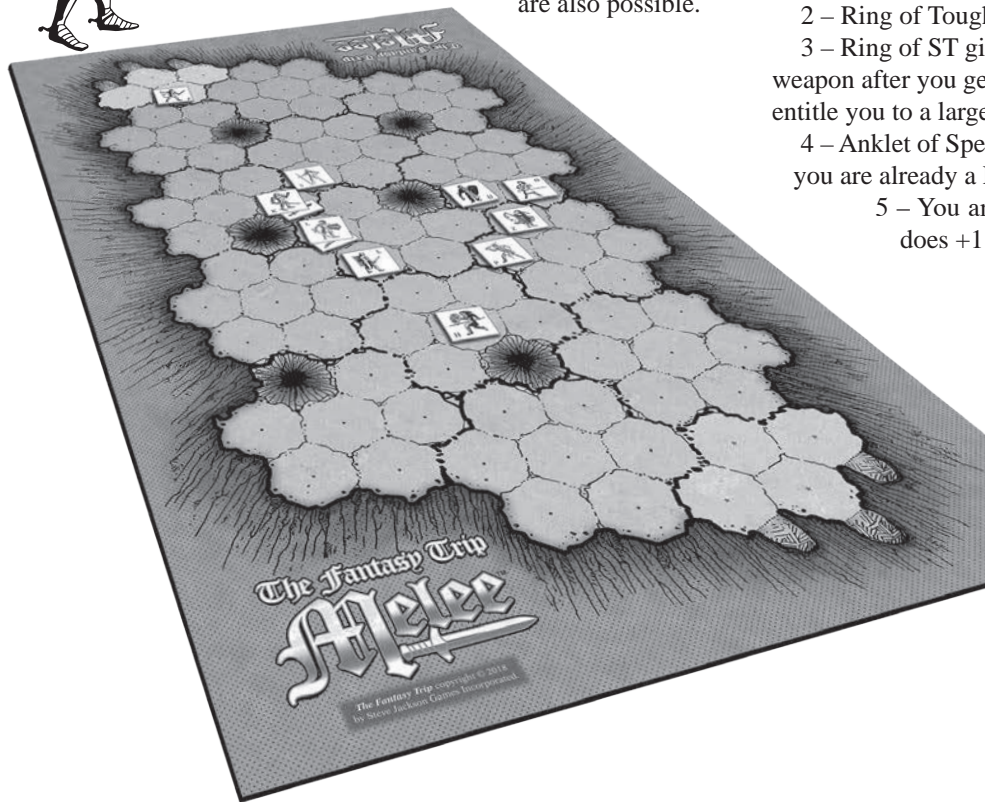
Toughness is a special case – should it be ruled out for competitions, where the idea is to get some of the characters killed? But it does require IQ 9 . . . Good question. Further research is needed.

As to Tactics and Strategy – they might be very useful, but in themselves are they worth spending points on a high IQ? Probably not!

- For a very quick start, draw character cards and play those fighters! Most of our current cards are 32-point starting characters, but it's easy to add 4 points and change weapons/armor if necessary. A very fast way to improve a 32-point fighter card:
 - (1) Start with a character with ST of at least 12, and
 - (2) Increase the character's DX by 4!
- The Gameboard Option. If you want to use existing characters but don't want to slay half of them in an afternoon, just assume they are the *players*, exercising their tactical skills by playing themselves in a game of *Melee*.



- A battle competition does not have to allow any form of healing, but it can be interesting to have a few bottles of healing potion about the arena. Other magic items are also possible.



- Random Magic – The GM might let each player roll on a table of generally equivalent magic items and take one. No need to do this for your first game; this is to add some random differences.

1 – Blur ring.

2 – Ring of Toughness stops 1 hit.

3 – Ring of ST gives you 2 extra ST, but you cannot change your weapon after you get the ring, so these are just hit points and do not entitle you to a larger weapon.

4 – Anklet of Speed gives you +2 MA, but only to a max of 12; if you are already a Runner or Elf, roll again.

5 – You are loaned a fine equivalent of your weapon that does +1 damage.

6 – Your side gets +1 on initiative; this lasts only as long as this character is conscious.





No More Orphan Murder Hobos! ◆◆◆

By Joe Zakszewski

I recently started a *Fantasy Trip* campaign with my online gaming group. I run one game a week virtually on Roll20, and a second weekly game for friends in my neighborhood. I consider myself lucky to have not one, but two solid groups of reliable players. But my one frustration is that my players do truly embrace the “Murder Hobo” play style. A session without combat will be met with comments like “It was ok, but I hope we get to kill something next week!” And to be fair, I run combat-heavy games. But as a GM, I aspire to a more vibrant game setting, where NPCs have motives, and heroes are part of a living, breathing society.

I dabble in many games (RPG, board, card, and miniature). Polygamorous, is what my players call me. I run short campaigns, and change systems every campaign, circling back to those we like. *TFT* was an early favorite; *GURPS* has been on the table many times. We have tried some of the “story games,” but they seem to lack the detail and crunch we prefer. But one aspect of the story games that did work for my group was Collaborative World Building, where everyone is adding bits and details to the campaign.



In my current *Fantasy Trip* game, I initially just wanted to run a quick adventure or two. But the more I read and reread the rules and the adventures, the more I realized how well-suited *TFT* was for a long-term campaign. The rules include just enough setting detail to start a campaign. The village of Bendwyn seemed like it would make a good home base. I resolved to make the NPCs likeable, and give the PCs discounts and positive interactions as regular customers. But this didn’t seem to be enough. I wondered: How do I get the players more engaged with the setting? How do I make them care about the world? What would spur them to spend the time to craft a backstory better than, “I am an Orc fighter.” I pondered: What do murder hobo players like? I knew I must reward the behavior I wanted to encourage with . . . **experience points!**

Before we started our campaign, we played a couple games of *Melee* and *Wizard* on Roll20. I gave XP to the winners. When we began the campaign, I told the winners they could use those characters and keep the 50 XP they had earned. This gave the group an understanding of the rules and how combat works. In addition to that, I wanted the players to have a history and a social network: family, friends, rivals, and business contacts. I offered the players the chance to earn an additional 50 XP for building a web of contacts we could use to flesh out our campaign.

Knowing that the players would need guidance, I created a Google Sheet for each player to add people their character knew and had history with. The first section was for Family, Friends, Allies, and Contacts. Players chose names, noted the location of the NPC, and noted what skill or value that NPC has to their character. Players earned one XP for the first entry, two for the second, etc. The entire section was worth 30 XP.

Every campaign needs antagonists, and so the players all got XP for creating “Rivals, Jerks, and Pains in the Ass.” These would not be deadly enemies, but rather (hopefully) fun, annoying foils for the players (and for me to roleplay) in non-combat encounters. Players named five NPCs they had a negative history with, each worth 1 XP.

Ayla Zinfir

Family, Friends, and Allies

| XP | Name | Relation | Location | Skills/Value | Notes |
|----|---------------|-------------|----------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Dax Zinfir | father | Elfwood | Jeweler | Disappointed. |
| 2 | Alea Zinfir | mother | Elfwood | Herbalist | Angry. |
| 3 | Ehlark Daxfir | brother | Elfwood | Scribe | Angry. |
| 4 | Orym Daxfir | brother | Osley | Merc/Archer | Doesn't care. |
| 5 | Shalana Daxsa | sister | Elfwood | Artist + Flutist | Disappointed. |
| 5 | Zin Drakfir | grandfather | Elfwood | Elf Construction (Druid?) | Angry. |
| 5 | Zalk Tilkfir | cousin | Elfwood | Archer Guard | Doesn't care. |

Rivals, Jerks, and Pains in the Ass

| XP | Name | Relation | Location | Skills/Value | Notes |
|----|--------------|---------------|----------|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Veln Tielfir | ex-fiancé | Elfwood | Merchant | Supposed to marry him, ran away. |
| 1 | Tiel Kosfir | Veln's father | Elfwood | Merchant | Outraged. |
| 1 | Jezzy Fizdon | acquaintance | Dranning | Innkeeper | Caught me sleeping in stable. |
| 1 | Jak Smaldon | acquaintance | Osley | Captain-Guard | Has a crush on me. |
| 1 | Bren Cordley | acquaintance | Dranning | Farmer | Caught me stealing food from field. |

And then we added up to three actual enemies for a total of 5 XP. These would be potentially, but not necessarily, combat encounters when they interacted.

The second half of this sheet gave the players XP for identifying who their characters answered to (liege lords, guild masters, and so on), why they were adventurers, and how they knew the other players. This section was worth up to 15 XP.

Enemies

| XP | Name | Relation | Location | Skills/Value | Notes |
|----|----------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---|
| 1 | Blacktail Tribe Orcs | | Gargoyle Mtn | Raiders | Frequent raiders of Elmwood. |
| 2 | Girn Dellfir | Vel'n's best friend | Elfwood | Armorer | Hates what I did to Vel'n, swore vengeance. |
| 2 | Frederick Barnes | | Dranning | Guard | Caught me stealing food from market. |

Why are you willing to risk life and limb to be an adventurer? What are you trying to achieve, and what is your Win condition?

XP

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 5 | I am unable to live in the Elfwood, and I want to become rich and powerful so that maybe I can return home. I may retire when I think I can return home. | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

Relation to other PCs

| XP | Name | Relation | Location | Skills/Value | Notes |
|----|---------|----------|----------|--------------|--|
| 1 | Grumpul | | Osley | | Met in Osley, did a job tipped off by Zalk. |
| 1 | Dexter | | Dranning | | Tried to recruit me, I decided to follow as guard. |
| 1 | Cron | | Dranning | | I know him through Dexter as a john. |

Who do you answer to?

XP

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 2 | Dexter – kinda feel like an employee of his. I am his bodyguard. | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

50 BONUS XP TOTAL / Possible

How It Worked Out

One player took to the sheet with a vengeance and had it all filled out within about half an hour while the others were finishing their characters. This really helped give the rest of the group a foundation to build from: Who met whom where. How did they get from the place they grew up to the place they met another PC. Like a puzzle, the pieces all fell together.

After our session zero, this is what the players have built.

Our party consists of Ayla Zinfir, an elven archer who has left the Elfwood to avoid an arranged marriage. Her parents and siblings are angry at her selfish choice. Ayla's former fiancé and family are all rivals, and she was caught stealing food by a farmer near Dranning, who let her off the hook but won't be happy to see her around again. And Ayla was nearly caught stealing food again by Trederick Barnes, a guard in Dranning. She escaped Trederick, but he will be looking for her if she comes back. Her fiancé's best friend, Girn Dellfir, is on Ayla's trail, having sworn vengeance for what she did to his friend.

On her flight from the Elfwood, Ayla met Grumpul, a recent "graduate" from the Magic Academy in Osley. Grumpul is part of a large family of goblin merchants. His father runs a trading post in Bendwyn, and his relatives run a ferry on the Bright River. Grumpul believes he is too talented to be an apprentice, and is looking for a big heist to pay back his family for the money they spent on his education. Grumpul has cheated and tricked his way to Bendwyn, leaving behind guardsmen, dwarves, and elves he has taken advantage of. But his plans for a big score have inspired a few possible co-conspirators, who may be able to help him.

In Dranning, Ayla and Grumpul met Dexter Marlinspike, a halfling, and Cron, a veteran warrior who has killed in the arena. Dexter is a rogue and hustler, on the run from both his baby mama and Bill Bass, a gangster in Poldiforku who shanghaied Dexter's father onto a fishing boat to pay off gambling debts. Both Dexter and Cron have problems with the fairer sex. Cron had a liaison with a guardsman's betrothed, and Dexter's side squeeze is blaming him for her current condition of "with child." Needless to say, there will certainly be some potential for interesting encounters when those characters return home.

My players are now invested in several locations in the Duchy, and we have a great rogues' gallery of NPCs for our adventurers to interact with. Going forward, when we have downtime and the PCs are working, I will probably allow them to add another contact. The less friendly the contact, the more XP they will get. An ally might only be worth 1 XP, but an enemy might be worth 5. I have intentionally kept the values low, but one could easily adjust them to suit their own campaign. I will probably double or triple them when a character dies later in the campaign, so they will be able to start with enough bonus experience to get one or two stat boosts.

If you try this, I would love to hear how it works in your game. I am GhengisRexx on the forums and on the Discord server.



Link to a copy of the Google Sheet we used:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Ny4VnEY60kSuviyUq43d-7szH0FEfgGuYtzCvcqK_mE/edit?usp=sharing



Horoscopy and Cosmic Alignment: Astrology on Cidri

By Stefan Jones

Belief that the heavens affect the lives of mortals is widespread on Cidri. The nature and sophistication of astrology varies from culture to culture. It can be as crude as believing one's birth sign determines personality, or a complex system requiring mathematical skills and consultation of volumes of lore and commentary.

Respect for astrology varies widely as well. In some lands it is considered a laughable pastime of housewives. In others, including some high civilizations, no one dares plan a wedding, start a business venture, or crown a king without consulting an astrologer. Some theocracies declare the heavens off-limits except to the priesthood; even a grandmother's careless observation about the fortune of a baby born under the sign of the plow could result in a visit by the defenders of the faith.

Scholars and many wizards in the most familiar lands of Cidri consider consumption of horoscopes to be a vice of the ignorant, and the astrologers who write them little better than scam artists. Still, writers of horoscopes find enough customers, high and low born, to make a good living. The Astrologers' Guild is regarded with a mixture of fear, contempt, and (because of the influence of court astrologers) envy.

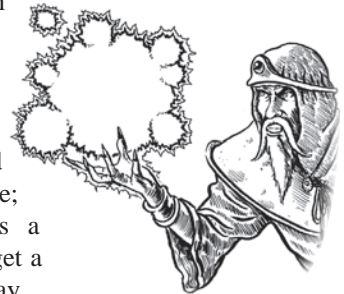
To be fair, most horoscopists are at best a crude sort of psychological counselor. But the upper ranks of astrologers knows there is more to the art than sooth-saying. Wizards willing to pay the price and take the risks of dealing with the Guild can pursue a path that puts them in tune with forces that can grant them great power.

Horoscopy as a Job

Many astrologers have no magical talent or training; they are professional fortune-tellers, providing warnings, solace, or hope to clients concerned about their future. Anyone who wishes to practice openly must join the Astrologers' Guild. This requires taking an examination, an affair cloaked in ritual and mystery. In truth, almost everyone who pays the examination fee passes the test; it is really a way for masters of the guild to assess the applicant's skills and personality. This determines their earning potential and thus the dues that can be wrung out of them.

The guild issues each new member a badge: a tiny orrery of copper, silver, or gold for Astrologer Third, Second, and First Class. Corresponding weekly dues are \$10, \$15, and \$50. The guild assigns the astrologer a "territory," and may refer clients to them.

The Guild does offer some benefits. Chapter houses offer a weekly dinner with a guest lecturer and an after-party which is valuable for networking. Seriously ill or injured members may receive relief from dues and a modest stipend (\$15/week) until they recover. The Guild even offers a form of life insurance; survivors of a member killed as a result of a duel (or assassination!) get a sympathy gift equal to six months pay.



Horoscopist Job Table

| | | | |
|------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------|
| Hedge Astrologer | Astrologer or Mathematician, Literacy | \$50 (\$55 + \$2d6) | 3/17 (4/16) |
| Horoscopist | Astrologer or Mathematician, Poet or Writing | \$75 (\$80 + \$3d6) | 4/17 (5/16) |
| Court Astrologer | Astrologer or Mathematician, Poet or Writing, Calligrapher, Courtly Graces | \$150 (\$160 + \$4 x 3d6) | 4/17 (5/16) |

Good horoscopists are in part showmen; an astrologer who has the Charisma talent reduces their weekly risk roll by one point. Psychological insight also helps the soothsayer tailor a report that pleases, motivates, or consoles the client; having the Detect Lies talent allows a further one-point reduction of the risk roll.

Figures in parenthesis are for rogue astrologers who dare to work without paying Astrologers' Guild dues and conforming to the guild's code of conduct. (The weekly dues are allowed for in members' pay.)

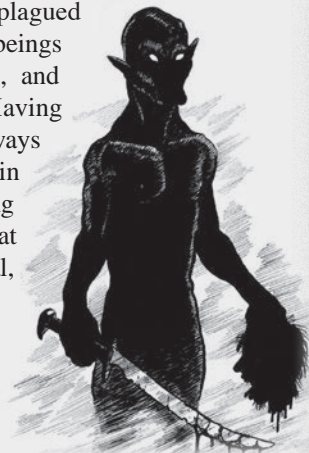
A critical success on the risk roll means the astrologer's fortune for a notable client proved spot-on. This raises their profile and gets them additional clients. In each of the next 2d6 weeks, they earn an additional 20%. (Dues do not increase.)

Dues-paying members who get a result of 17 on their risk roll run afoul of Guild politics. If they can make a 4/IQ roll they are required to sit out of work for a week (but must still pay dues!). On a failed roll, they are out of work for 1d-2 weeks (min. 1).

On a risk roll of 18, a rival challenges the astrologer to a duel! This is a "first blood" combat with ceremonial staves (clubs); the loser is blackballed for 3 weeks and fined \$5 x 1d6; the winner is awarded half the fine. Three consecutive risk roll results of 17 or 18 mean that a rival has hired an assassin to take out the astrologer. This must be played out in the course of an adventure.

Creatures from Beyond the Beyond

Tying one's fate to cosmic forces also makes one visible to creatures which evolved – or were created – to live off of the flux. Wizards having a "good week" (three or four net positive influences) may find themselves plagued by needy ghosts, hungry energy beings (commonly known as will-o-wisps), and dreadful extra-dimensional beings. Having two good weeks in a row almost always results in something sinister lurking in the wizard's neighborhood, snuffling at their footprints and scratching at their doors. Many an important ritual, carefully timed to be cast when the Stars were Right, has been interrupted by a faceless horror intent on sucking the wizard's blazing life-force.



Rogue astrologers who roll a 16 for risk become the subject of a vicious whispering campaign, and will be unable to find work the next week. A risk roll of 17 means the Astrologers' Guild sends two thugs armed with clubs to waylay the miscreant in a dark alley. The enforcers will be satisfied with knocking the character down or reducing them to 3 ST, but accidental death isn't out of the question. On a risk roll of 18 the guild has convinced the authorities to arrest the character. If the rogue astrologer loses the legal case (or fails to bribe the magistrate) they must pay a fine equal to a month of their usual pay, and imprisonment for a week. Two consecutive failed risk rolls (16, 17, or 18) means the guild hires an assassin to do in the rogue.

Astronomical Prediction

Astrologers who have a laboratory or a portable astrologer's set can accurately predict eclipses, planetary transits and conjunctions, and other celestial events that depend on planetary or lunar revolutions.

Senior members of the Astrologers' Guild have a store of secret knowledge, such as the return dates of certain comets and (thanks to observations provided by the star-traveling Mnoren) when the light of a star going supernova will reach Cidri! Because comets, eclipses, and new stars appearing in the sky are considered omens, this knowledge can be very valuable!

Astrological observatory: This is the astrologer's equivalent of a laboratory. It requires a viewing platform with a clear view of the sky (typically the roof of a tall building), a collection of books, and a few instruments. Cost is \$5,000.

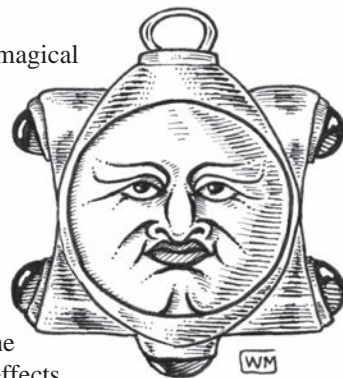
Portable instruments and a compact guide costs \$500 and weigh 5 lbs., but the astrologer must still find a place to observe the clear night sky to use them.

Cosmic Binding

Some wizards seek to tie their magical powers to the motions of planetary bodies. These have a unique effect on each individual, determined by the hour and date of their birth. The net sum of the influences is called the cosmic flux. The flux can give and take; a wizard may have a week when his powers are greatly enhanced, followed by one where he is as clumsy as an apprentice. The effects are predictable, though, and a properly cast horoscope can help the wizard plan ahead. Those who choose to bind their fates to the stars are well advised to learn astrology, or at least have a skilled astrologer at hand.

The very existence of cosmic binding is a matter of dispute in mainstream magical scholarship. Apprentices who ask a teacher or mentor about the practice are routinely disciplined for indulging in rumors and nonsense. Members of the Astrologers' Guild have made a sport of misleading young wizards who inquire about cosmic binding.

Only the rare wizard who rises to high office in the Guild, or an mage who has done the guild leaders a great favor, will be given access to the secrets of cosmic binding.



The Binding Ritual

A wizard who seeks to bind their fate to the cosmos must first learn the necessary lore, study it faithfully, then plan and execute a ritual on the anniversary – hour and date – of their birth. The books and ephemera cost as much as \$500. Committing it to memory requires the expenditure of 500 XP. The ritual required to complete the binding is IQ 12 and has a Strength cost of 20. It must be obtained from the Astrologers' Guild, as it is unique to the wizard

and must be cast at the appointed hour. The Guild generally charges \$500, and may require the seeker to join the Guild (if they haven't already), hire a licensed astrologer as an assistant, or perform some special service.

The spell and associated rituals requires the expenditure of 20 ST and a 4/IQ roll to pull off successfully. On a success, the wizard is forever after bound to cosmic forces. On an ordinary failure, they may try again in a year (after obtaining a new ritual!).

Starstones

Rare enough to be considered mere rumor by many, Starstones are a potent form of Powerstone. They are carefully cut from metallic meteorites whose exact hour of impact is known. In addition to the usual preparation required to create a Powerstone, Starstones are subject to a ritual known only to the highest masters of the Astrologers' Guild. The stones are bound to cosmic forces, and are subject to the same negative and positive forces as a cosmically bound wizard! The stone can have a horoscope cast for it, to track the ebb and flow of its powers.

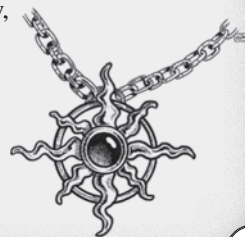
In “bad” weeks, the stone's capacity is reduced by the net negative influences, and a like amount of stored Strength is drained from the stone at the week's beginning. In “good” weeks, the stone's capacity is increased by the amount of net positive influences, and the stone gains stored Strength equal to these influences at the start of each day.

Meteorites suitable for use as Starstones are so rare that the Astrologers' Guild is quite willing to use its influence in court to start a war to obtain one. Why are they so much more valuable than ordinary Powerstones? Two reasons.

First, when used as a magical adjunct to cast a known spell “from a book,” a Starstone adds its positive or negative influence to the cosmically bound wizard's adjIQ. This makes them a valuable tool for mages creating expensive magic items. A wizard possessing a Starstone will put aside all other work to pursue difficult, magically demanding projects if their own horoscope and that of the stone bode simultaneous good weeks.

Second, they recharge faster! On a good week, a Starstone recharges from ambient mana at 3 ST/day, and on a neutral week it still recharges at 2/day. On a bad week it recharges at 1/day, which is still the same as an ordinary Powerstone.

A third advantage is, as far as we know, only a matter of academic interest. There are theoretical reasons why Powerstones could not be created to hold more than 1,000 ST. Those do not apply to the metal Starstones. But if anyone has created such a super-Starstone, they have not advertised the fact.



On a critical failure, the wizard is blasted into unconsciousness, suffers 2d points of wounds, and can never again try to bind to the cosmos. If this failure becomes known to the Astrologers' Guild, they will secretly take a keen interest in the wizard. People who can work magic despite being "numb" to cosmic influences may be hired to perform dangerous but highly lucrative missions for the Guild. These involve battling cults who use cosmic forces for evil purposes, or hunting down eldritch creatures from dark dimensions. "Numb" wizards actually have an advantage when opposing these nemeses.

Plotting the Flux

Flux patterns are usually plotted a month (four weeks) in advance. For each week, the GM secretly rolls 4d6. For each *even* die result, there is a positive influence. For each *odd* result, the stars create a negative influence. Negative results counter the positive; it is thus possible for a week to have as many as four net positive influences, four net negative influences, something in between, or a total neutral outlook.

It is possible for extraordinary celestial events to add more positive or negative influences. These include supernovae, the appearance of comets, and meteor storms. In such a situation, more dice are rolled.

Each net positive influence gives the wizard a +1 DX while casting spells, and a +1 IQ when Disbelieving. When casting *known* spells from a book (representing careful timing of incantations and gestures to best take advantage of cosmic forces), the wizard also gets an extra point of Strength to cast the spell for each net positive influence.

Net negative influences have the exact opposite effect. For example, if the wizard is unlucky enough to be adventuring when two net negative influences are in effect, they get a -2 to Dexterity when casting spells and a -2 to Intelligence when Disbelieving. Furthermore: If there are net three or net four negative influences, all the wizard's spells cost an extra Strength to cast! (On a "bad" week, wizards influenced by the flux hole up at home and study!)

Predicting the Pattern

The wizard's flux pattern for the month is kept secret, but they can cast a four-week horoscope for themselves to predict it! This requires a night of observation and a half a day of computation. The GM makes the roll, keeping the results secret:

Mundane Astrology talent: 4/IQ

Mathematics talent: 3/IQ

Astrological observatory: +4 Intelligence

Portable instruments: +2 Intelligence

Forecast for a period more than 4 weeks away: -2 Intelligence

Forecast for just one week: +2 Intelligence

On a success, the GM provides the flux patterns for the forecast period.

On an ordinary failure, 1d6-3 (min. 1) weeks of the fortune are miscast; the GM provides false information, but lets the character know that things felt "off" about the attempt. (Whoever is making the forecast can always try again, for a whole month or just a week.) On a critical failure, 1d6-2 (min. 1) weeks are miscast, but the astrologer gets no indication that something went wrong!



It's Hip To Be Square

By Mike Nagel

On the last page of the *TFT Companion*, Steve described three “Heretical Variants” that, although interesting, would modify the nature of the game system negatively. I agree that adding additional statistics to characters or changing the outcome determinant to a twenty-sided die might cause problem. The third variant, using a square grid rather than hexes, deserves a closer look owing to the sheer quantity of RPG adventuring material that could be made available to *TFT* game masters and players.

The basic problem in implementing a square grid is how to deal with movement and ensure that movement within a square grid can properly match movement using a hex grid. Resolving this issue is quite simple.

First, let's talk about vectors. A vector is a straight line that continues from a starting point toward infinity. Upon examining Figure 1 to the right, you'll note that a hexagon provides six distinct movement vectors. The circle indicates how far a standard human character can move in one turn (ten hexes). Figure 2 indicates four orthogonal (side) vectors using squares that are the same size as the hexes in Figure 1. Figure 2 also indicates one of four additional diagonal (corner) vectors that extend the same distance as the orthogonal vectors. The problem is evident. It takes a character ten movement points to reach maximum distance when moving orthogonally, but only seven points to travel the same distance diagonally.

Fortunately, this issue can be easily resolved by turning to our old friend Pythagoras. We need to determine how far a character actually moves diagonally relative to moving orthogonally and then convert that ratio into new movement costs for moving in each direction.

If it costs one point to move orthogonally, it costs the square root of 2 (roughly 1.41) points to move diagonally. If it costs two points to move orthogonally, it costs the square root of 8 (roughly 2.83) points to move diagonally. Since we don't want to add complexity by calculating fractions, we need to minimize the difference between the square root result and its nearest whole number. If you run this calculation out to an orthogonal movement rate of 100 per square, you'll find that the optimal orthogonal movement rate is 70 with a diagonal rate of 99. So, each character's base movement rate would be 700 movement points? Hmmm ... that won't work.

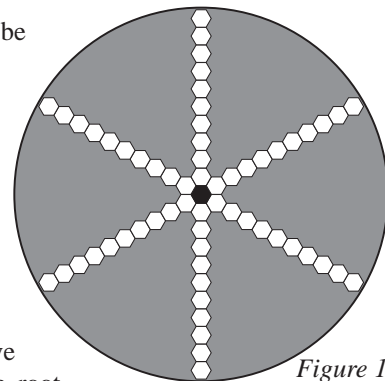


Figure 1

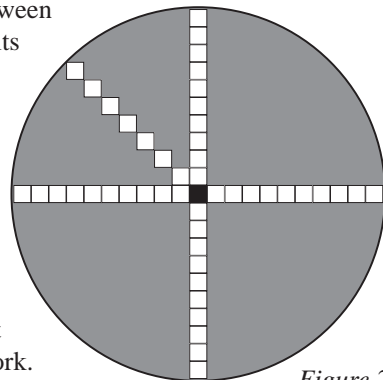


Figure 2

So how about we fudge things a little. I think we can put the “fantasy” into the trip for the sake of playability. If we look down our list of square root calculations, about a third of the way down (when sorted by minimized differences), is an orthogonal movement rate of two and a diagonal rate of three. This means it would take 20 points to get to the end of a maximum orthogonal move and 21 points to get the same distance diagonally. Since its unlikely that movement within a *Melee* battle will exclusively involve straight line movement, we can look the other way and lose that one extra point (although the more anally retentive might want to grant one extra movement point if any diagonal movement takes place).

So, to summarize, square-based movement can be easily adopted by doubling a character’s normal movement to 20 points while charging two points to move orthogonally and three points to move diagonally.

Adopting a square grid has another significant consequence: how to deal with engagement. As we know, when using a hex grid, occupying one of the three frontal hexes of a character constitutes being engaged with that character. Using a square grid changes the nature of a character’s front squares depending upon whether the character is facing a side or a corner of the occupied square. Additionally, there are eight squares surrounding a single square as opposed to six hexes surrounding a single hex. This means two additional points of vulnerability to a character being attacked.

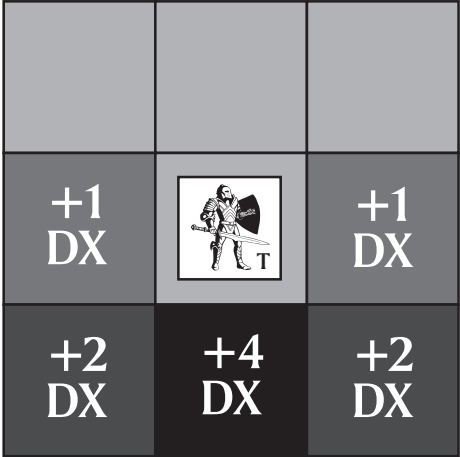


Figure 3

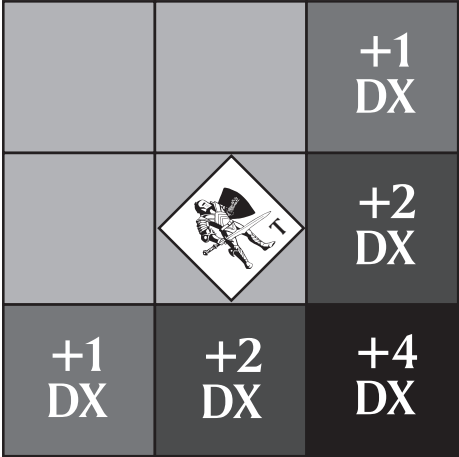


Figure 4

Figures 3 and 4 indicate Sir Thomas’ front squares, depending upon his facing, as well as the DX bonuses for occupying non-front squares. Under these configurations, consider the +1 squares to be “sides,” the +2 squares to be “flanks,” and the +4 square to be the “rear.”

Finally, what about megahexes? Since a standard MH is three hexes across, the same can be applied to “megasquares” (MS) – a 3x3 square grid. When calculating ranges using MS, follow the same rules described above.

Using these simple modifications opens up *TFT* players to a massive number of map alternatives to enhance their gaming experiences.



Shadow Sharks

By Chris Warden

Shadow Sharks are two-dimensional, shark-shaped shadows that “swim” along floors, walls, and ceilings. They can “dive” into any dark hex and “resurface” in another hex that is also in shadow, paying the ordinary cost to move between the two. They can also slide under doors, etc., as they are flat. But they do have two true dimensions, so they cannot go through passages narrower than they are.

| Size | ST | DX | IQ | MA | Bite |
|-------|----|----|----|----|------|
| 1 hex | 12 | 12 | 5 | 14 | 1d-1 |
| 2 hex | 20 | 12 | 5 | 16 | 1d+1 |
| 3 hex | 30 | 11 | 5 | 18 | 1d+2 |

These creatures are utterly silent and are excellent at hiding. They are invisible in hexes that are in shadow. In dim light, an IQ roll on 3 dice is needed to detect them.

Shadow sharks’ “bites” steal away life force rather than rending flesh. Treat this damage as fatigue. The two-dimensional nature of their attacks (they partly slide onto their victims) allows them to ignore all armor above 3 points. Treat heavier armor as 3-point armor.

Despite their two-dimensional nature, shadow sharks take damage like other creatures. Someone hitting a shadow shark bare-handed feels intense cold. Weapons with the Light spell on them inflict 1 extra point of damage. Torches do double damage.

Shadow sharks take double damage from Fireball and Lightning spells. The Dazzle spell lasts twice as long on them. They avoid brightly lit areas, and will not enter a hex with the Fire spell, but they may avoid such hexes by using their power to swim between dark hexes.

These are difficult opponents, but a smart adventurer can defeat them. One approach is to notice that shadow sharks must move on a surface. The game master should reward creative thinking. For example, a mage could levitate a boulder that a shadow shark is on. The shark would be unable to leave the stone. Flight is another way to foil the sharks; they cannot reach an opponent who is not in contact with a surface.

No way has yet been discovered to feed, placate, or negotiate with shadow sharks, but they can be attracted; see below.

Shadow sharks do not belong in our dimension, and in their dim brains they want to go home. When not distracted by living beings, they will seek deeper and deeper darkness and eventually vanish into it, returning to the lightless seas that gave them birth.

Shadow Skates

Shadow Skates are a rat-sized relative of the shadow shark. They bite for 1 point of fatigue damage and have ST 1, DX 10, IQ 5, and MA 10. They are a nasty nuisance creature (see the rules for rats). Shadow skates commonly come in groups of up to 12.

Shadow skates can move onto the body of an adjacent victim. This requires a successful DX roll. A skate that hits does no damage but instead moves onto the victim. If the target is holding the scroll that the swarm is on, the move attack succeeds automatically

Once on a victim, starting the next round, they hit automatically for 1 point of fatigue damage per turn. This attack ignores armor. They continue to attack until the victim collapses, and then move off, looking for someone else.

While on a victim, the skates can still be attacked, but extra damage harms the victim, so it's wise to use a low-damage weapon or even no weapon to attack skates that are on a friend.

Adventure Ideas

Game masters can use shadow sharks in many ways. Strange temples dedicated to dark magic are a natural setting for them. Evil wizards can use them as watchdogs in a remote area, as they do not require food or water. Shadow skates lend themselves to guarding magic scrolls or secret documents.

Shadow Shark Rumors – roll 1d

1 – An assassin is killing high-ranking officials. Their bodies have no marks on them. Each one was found dead at their desk. Obviously, the killer is using a hard-to-detect poison, but how is it being delivered?

Mostly true. It's not an assassin's poison; it's shadow skates. A disgruntled bureaucrat has gained access to a horde of shadow skates and is mailing them to various high-ranking city officials.

2 – They say the wizard Obur has been buying sharks from local fisherman. He has also hired some artisans, including a glassblower. Obur is trying to create a giant water monster for the gladiatorial games. The local bookie wants to hire the heroes to find out what Obur is making so he can gauge the odds.

False, but with a grain of truth. Obur is not interested in gladiatorial combat, but he is interested in making shadow sharks. If the heroes investigate, they will encounter his shadow sharks.

Alternatively, Obur may have been killed by his creations, which are now flitting about in the town. The heroes need to go into Obur's home and find the source of the sharks.

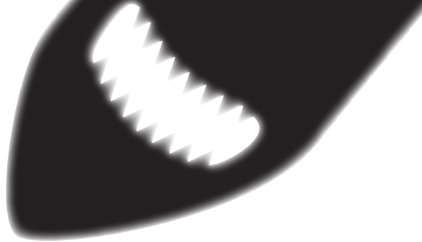
3 – There is a strange dimension called the shadow sea, ruled by a race of beings called the Dark Mariners. These mariners occasionally have dealings with mortals in our dimension, trading their shadow magic for favors and knowledge that interests them.

Dark Mariners sometimes bestow allies with shadow sharks, the living shadows that swim along floors acting as watch beasts. These creatures roam about in underground labyrinths seeking victims. Immortal and un-aging, they guard for all eternity even if their masters abandon the area.

True to varying degrees depending on your campaign. The "Dark Mariners" might just be a Sea Elf cult, and the labyrinths might be a single submarine cavern. Or not . . .

4 – A local bartender says the wizard Emma the Quick bragged that she used the Repair spell to trap a shadow shark.

True. Emma took several ceramic globes and smashed each one inside a sack. She poured the broken shards in piles on the floor of a dungeon known to contain shadow sharks. Sure enough, a shark passed over one pile of shards. She cast Repair on the globe and the shark was trapped inside. The globe became a shadow shark grenade. Emma did it just to see if she could, but would not be averse to repeating the experiment for pay!



5 – A local basement is occasionally infested with shadow sharks and skates.

True. There is an unsuspected dungeon only a rock wall away, and the sharks are swimming from the dungeon “around” the wall and into the dark cellar.

6 – There is a whole ecology of two-dimensional darkness, of which the shadow sharks are merely the tip, trying to force its way into our dimension. The Shadowights are its secret masters.

False. There may be other shadow creatures, but they like light even less than do the shadow sharks, and will never colonize any but the most lightless places. And the Shadowights are three-dimensional and do not like shadow sharks any more than anyone else.

Magic Items

Shadow Skate Scroll

A mage can trap shadow skates onto a piece of parchment. It must be prepared as a scroll while working in deep shadow, rolled into a tube, and left in a place frequented by shadow skates. After a week, the mage may turn on the lights. The interior of the enchanted scroll will be the darkest thing in the room and will attract 1d (min. 2) shadow skates; the mage will be able to tell how many. The shadow skates attack anyone who unrolls the scroll. Burning the parchment, unopened, destroys the skates on it.

The mage must know Write Scroll. This scroll takes only three days to produce. The mage does not actually write anything; he spends the time filling the scroll with the tiniest and most accurate little shark silhouettes he can manage. Artist skill gives +2 to the effectiveness of the scroll.

While there are rumors of actual shadow sharks trapped by a scroll, this seems to happen only by rare accident.

Stygian Shadow Shark Summoner

This fancifully named creation looks like a silhouette of a shark, carved out of obsidian or the blackest of basalt. It may be prepared by an artisan but must be enchanted with Create Lesser Magical Item. It must be at least a foot long; if it is more than three feet long, summoning rolls are at +1, and so are rolls for the number of skates caught by a scroll (above) used in its location.

Make it as for a Fireproofing item (*ITL*, p. 151) except that it requires a single naturally black shark tooth (these are rare – \$500). The going price for a finished Summoner is \$5,000.

Placed in a dark place, the Summoner will make that area “feel” darker, though vision is not actually affected, and will call shadow sharks and skates. Even if there are no nearby dark places, the Summoner itself is a window to the plane of the sharks. After it has been in place a week, roll 1d to see what is currently present:

| | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| 1 | – | 1 shadow skate |
| 2 | – | 1d shadow skates |
| 3 | – | 2d shadow skates |
| 4 | – | 1 1-hex shadow shark |
| 5 | – | 1d 1-hex shadow sharks |
| 6 | – | 1 2-hex shadow shark |
| 7 | – | 1 3-hex shadow shark |



Strange Brews: New Potions for TFT

By David Pulver

Chemists and alchemists are always inventing new potions for themselves or on behalf of their clients. Unfortunately for the world, one of the most common types they're asked to develop are poisons. At the GM's discretion, some of the new potions described here may be common knowledge, while others could be the trade secrets of particular chemists or alchemists.

New Chemists' Potions

Slow Poison: This poison is a slow killer! It has no immediate effect, but anyone exposed must roll a 4/ST check every six hours. (Divide that time by the number of doses, e.g., three doses is a roll every two hours). Failure inflicts 1d hits and requires a further saving throw at the next interval, while success means no effect and ends the poison's ravages. A Chemist or a Physicker can identify Slow Poison symptoms by examining the patient on a 3/IQ roll. Requires three dried poisonous mushrooms (\$30), \$29 in common ingredients, and one week. Costs \$100.

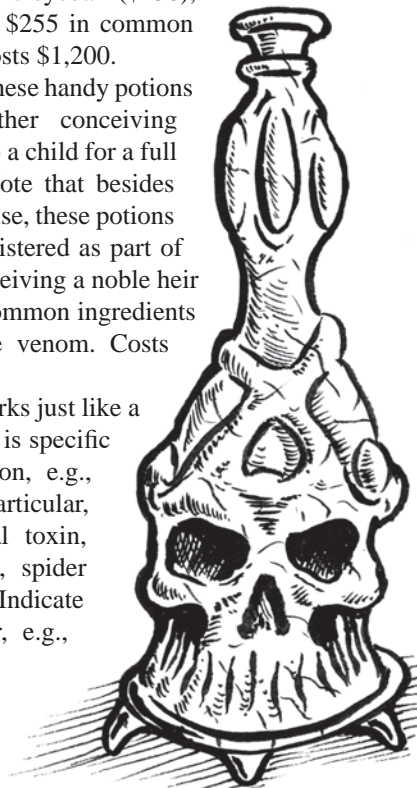
Slow Mammal Poison: Uses the Slow Poison rules, but has a 5/ST roll and only affects mammals (as per Mammal Poison). Requires the spleen of an orc (\$25), \$40 in common ingredients, and two weeks. Costs \$150.

Slow Reptile Poison: Uses the Slow Poison rules with a 5/ST roll; it only affects reptiles. Requires dried stone beetle droppings (\$10) the toenails of gargoyles (\$10), \$21 common ingredients, and one week. Costs \$80.

* **Blindness:** Someone dosed with this potion must roll 4/ST or go blind; the effects will last a full hour per dose administered. A blind person suffers the same effect as if they were in total darkness. It requires a Mauler's eyeball (\$150), a Shadowight tongue (\$250), \$255 in common ingredients, and six weeks. Costs \$1,200.

* **Infertility or Sterility:** These handy potions remove any chance of either conceiving (Infertility) or siring (Sterility) a child for a full one month after their use. Note that besides their voluntary contraceptive use, these potions are sometimes secretly administered as part of plots to prevent someone conceiving a noble heir or the like. Requires \$50 in common ingredients and a diluted dose of snake venom. Costs \$100.

Specific Antidote: This works just like a Universal Antidote potion but is specific to a particular chemist poison, e.g., Mammal Poison, or to a particular, common non-magical natural toxin, e.g., poison gas mushrooms, spider venom, wyvern venom, etc. Indicate type of poison it works for, e.g., Mammal Poison Antidote. \$60 in common ingredients, and two weeks. Costs \$100.



* - Can be used to make a gas bomb.

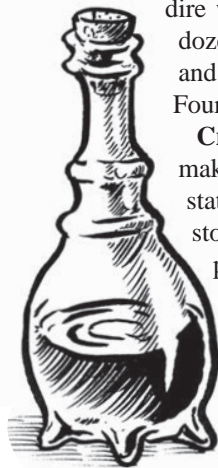
New Alchemists' Potions

Fellowship: This potion makes the drinker more open and friendly. Each dose gives +1 to reaction to everyone else they meet (max +3). The effect is similar to Friendship spell, e.g., sworn foes will not become buddies, but favorable reactions or negotiations are likely. It lasts one hour; you can roll 3/IQ to resist its effects. The potion requires two mob ape hearts (\$150 each) or one dolphin heart (\$300), \$314 in common ingredients, nine weeks, and \$1,500.

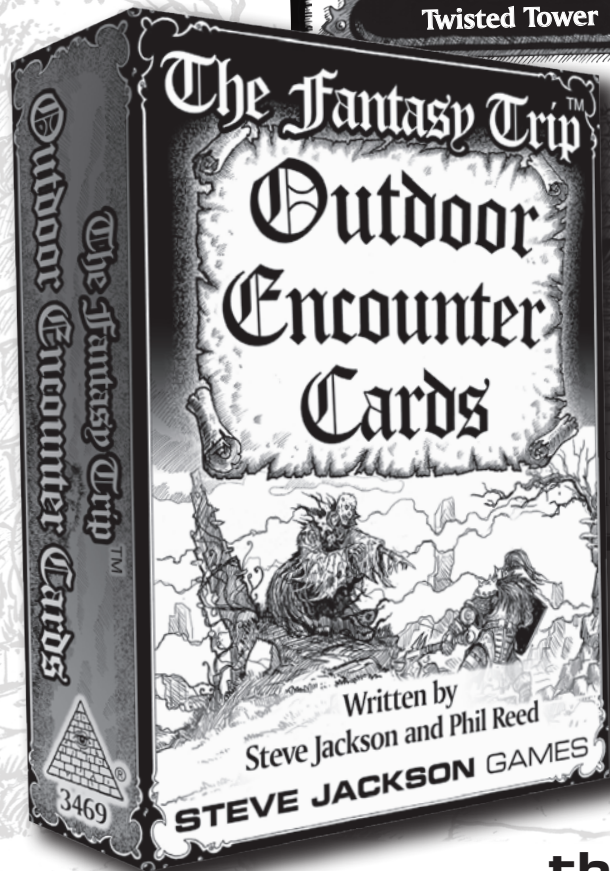


* **Prophecy:** If the drinker goes to sleep within four hours of taking this potion, they experience potentially useful oracular dreams that provide a vision of a possible future (with accuracy similar to a Trance spell). If they knowingly took the potion, they can also think about what they want an answer to before going to sleep; if so, on a 3/IQ roll, they get a useful vision (as per Trance spell); on a failed roll the vision is about something else (GM's option). This requires a fresh gate spider (\$500), a small pearl (\$50 each), \$105 in common ingredients, and six weeks. Costs \$1,200.

* **Beast-Freeing:** Any werewolf who drinks a beast-freeing potion while in their mundane form may immediately transform into were-beast form *without* need for an IQ roll. If they *don't* want to change, upon exposure to this potion they must spend 1 ST and roll 4/IQ to *prevent* that change. If this potion activates a werewolf's transformation, they must remain in bestial form for at least a minute. This is thus a costly (and not infallible) way to tell if someone is a werewolf! While there's no effect on transformed werewolves, on anyone who isn't a werewolf this acts as a Berserker potion! Requires two dire wolf hearts (\$75/each), a dozen vampire hairs (\$150), and \$202 in common ingredients. Four weeks. Costs \$800.



Crystallization: Anyone drinking this potion must make a 4/ST saving roll or be transformed into a crystal statue. While transformed, all metabolic functions stop (they do not age, need food, bleed, etc.) and are protected as if by the Diamond Flesh spell. The transformation can only be reversed by taking the Universal Antidote. Requires an insect in amber (\$100), a fresh basilisk brain (\$150), a melted ice elemental of ST 10+ (\$100), \$596 in common ingredients, and nine weeks. Costs \$2,500.



Twisted Tower



Wizard's Tree

In a clearing near the main road, a decorated tree, surrounded by standing stones, captures your attention. What is all this?

A long-dead wizard created this place. The locals avoid it out of fear and respect. There might be magic to be found here, but you would make no friends by taking it.

Dungeon Veteran

Battered and weary but still hale and powerful, the fighter resting on the side of the road grips his axe as you approach.



Shaky Bridge

A narrow path leads off the main trail toward a stream. A wooden bridge crosses it.

The bridge is trapped, ropes and wood rigged to collapse as soon as someone nears the center. Hobgoblins in the trees wait to strike.

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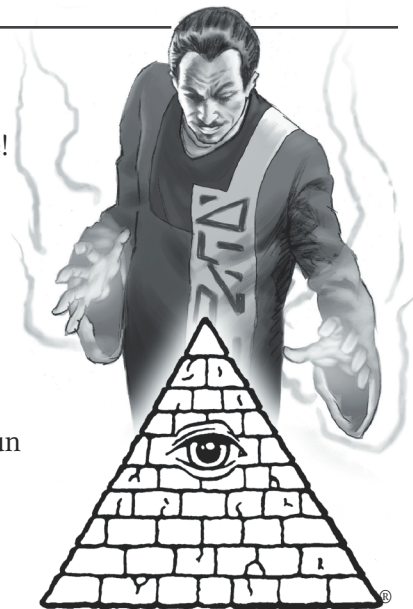
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