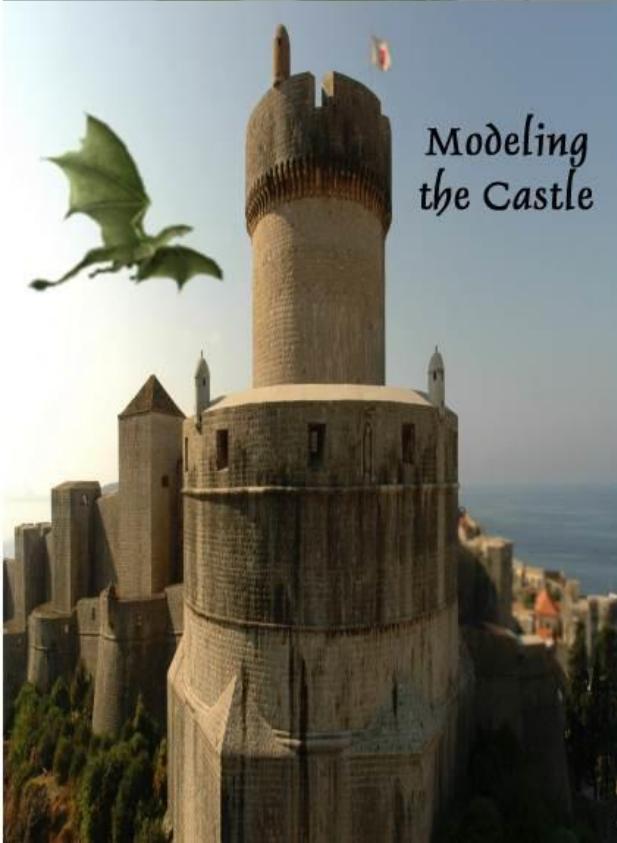


# FANTASY BARONIAL LIFESTYLES

## OF THE RICH AND DEADLY



# Fantasy Baronial Lifestyles

by John Karnes, Bill Morse and Rick G. Gordon © 2004

Thanks to Red Rahm for support on the wargaming Q&D tables.  
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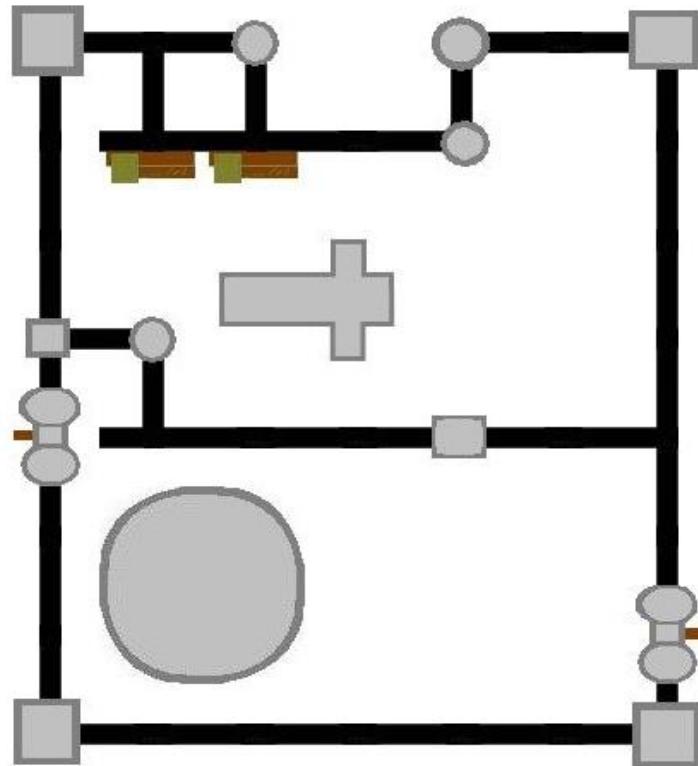
## Basics of a Castle

For the most part, castles in fantasy adventures take the antipodal roles of both sanctuary and dungeon. They exist as set pieces, the place where the players receive their task, the contract mission of the adventure.

Then on the other end, castles become the evil fortress, which the band of players must infiltrate. Those are both fine, but there is so much more possibility in between. As a focal point, each Baron's Castle deserves more than to be treated as mere seat of the Fairy Queen's Court and Count Vlad's Lair. Consider a world littered far and wide by garrison structures, and each one has a story.

## CAD Projects

There are two mindsets on castles. If the referee uses his cartographer skills, he can draw himself a map and place strongholds at all the traditional places: along roads, at political borders, along wilds on the hinterland, in mountain passes and at the mouth of each river. There should be walls and keeps protecting cities, and castles sheltering mines at the entrances to the underworlds. Yet even with a good set of computer drafting tools, all you might be left with is line art. How many ways do you need to draw a wall and a hall, which is basically all there is to the blueprint of a castle?



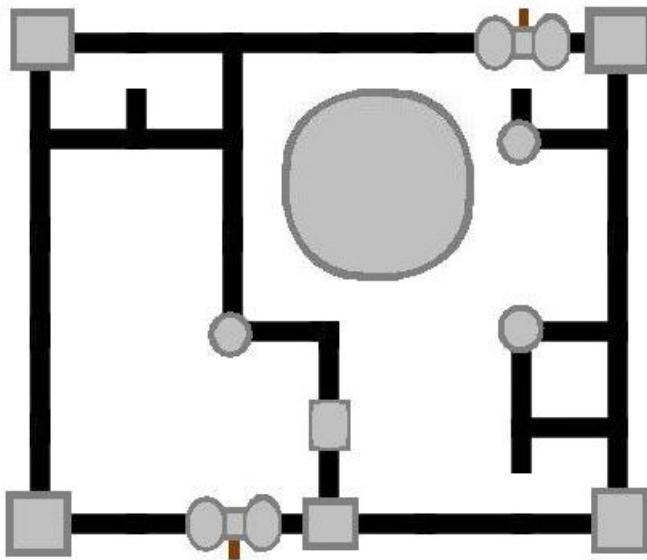
## Bring Life to Floorplans

Which brings us to the second mindset, castles are everywhere, so they should be treated as wandering monsters. Castles ideally should dot the road with at least a barbican or simple baronial blockhouse every twenty miles. That's an awful lot to imagine and have ready at each day's phase of the journey. Yet the internal politics of a castle is what makes them interesting. Still how many castles can one referee

detail? Though it may suffice to have a few stock floor-plans, and one detailed set of encounters to use over and over again, the players will eventually “be players” and through mishap or mischief bring that place down. Then what, resurrect it elsewhere?

## Quick & Dirty Solutions

Free-style play suggests the alternative. We are not all cartographers nor social scientists, and we’d rather have the events of play generate themselves (even if



generated the day before the players meet). While traveling down the road, it would be nice to have a generation system for finding out what greets the players at each days’ end. Who’s inside these magical manors?

Whether the party of players gets involved or not is entirely up to them. As the players become powerful and create their own sanctuaries or take prized locations from the original owners, there should be an easy way to keep tabs

of the backstabbing and kingmaking which will occur as the player is out “being player” or bores of sitting at home counting his four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie. Where there is a need, there is a quick and dirty system to support.

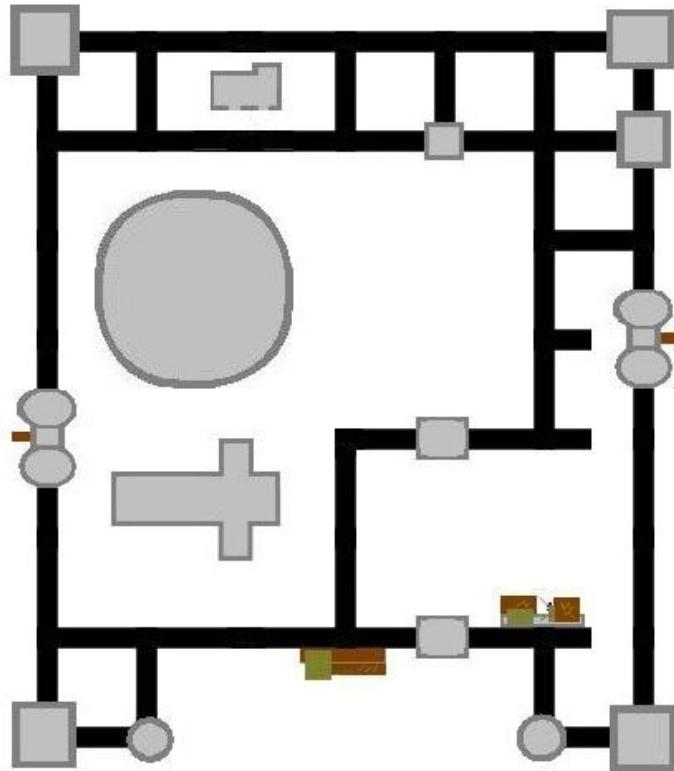
## Paths to Rule

Is it better to be loved or feared? Depends on who you want to impress. The mob wants to love the ruler, but that breeds jealousy in the prime few. The individual responds more strongly to a threat, but collectively a people might rise up in panic. The castle has two main human influences, the serfs and the courtiers. The serfs are the nameless, faceless drones who toil and perform all the work which is not tabulated. Who cleans your garderobe if not a serf? The courtiers are skilled professionals who have a choice as to where they make home. The serfs are collectively a mob, a terrible thing worse than any dragon if angered. The courtiers are more likely to plot to anger the serfs, than to take direct action against the lord.

## Strong Without, Rotten Within

Why have either? Serfs represent the power and courtiers allow the lord to wield that power over an extended area. The serfs will bring commerce and prosperity, food and cleanliness to the manor. The courtiers spread the legend, represent the interests and work the politics for the lordly player. Even a small despot has a cult of followers to do his bidding and praise his name. Even the tiniest of fiefdoms has detractors, and those who hide behind rank, while planning their own rise.

The worst of these being the mostly untouchable, the lord's immediate family. For the player who balks, ask him if his wife or brother or son (in make believe land) could be so easily cast-out for the sake of security and absolute control. If so, he doesn't really have a fief now does he, and certainly no legacy. Castles are more than just a secure place to lock away gold, relics and even golden relics, even for the typical murder hobo of rpg.



## The Seething Unwashed

The mightiest walls mean nothing if they are not there to shelter the poor peasant in time of panic. "I'm rich, from gold collected in the underworlds, I need no farmers." The farmers in fantasy worlds mostly grow to feed themselves. Unless the lord's occupation is just conjuring roasted duck, the general tasks of village and manor must be delegated to someone. The cooks and valets, seneschals and guards, all have a network of connections. Most will be related. Punch a guard and anger his brother, your cook (save versus poison). Fine a miller and find his sister has the ear of your wife (save versus nagging minus four). No act stands without fall-out, and no good deed, as is often said, goes unpunished. Luckily these inter-relationships can be modeled and need not be charted.

## The Beautiful People of Court

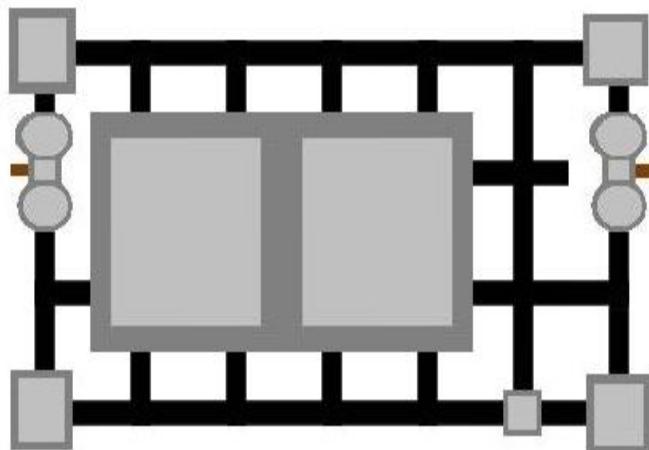
Even the most wicked of loners assembles a following to his cult of personality. Benevolent lords have their agents even more so. The tales of great adventure continue to pay dividends around the fires of winter. The minor rogues and debutantes, henchmen and emissaries, all flock to a healthy citadel. The castle is a center of commerce, but also society. These better than their peers, allow the master to know what is happening in the land, bring news of distant troubles, and protect the lord's interests as he often travels. Yet for the most part, these hangers-on are waiting for the baron to meet with death (by adventure, intrigue or age) and thus inherit control. Women are very patient. Many a son has been thrust into command by the ambitions of his kingmaker mother.

## Those to Fear Most, Family

No matter what the character's charms and beauty, the serf will love his wife more. If he doesn't have a wife, he will be repeatedly asked when he will marry. Women represent stability far more in their spirit and virtue than is obtained in the ultimate authority of the lord. Which leaves us wondering how a female warrior would be considered? Most likely fully loved by the people, but never accepted by the

courtiers in the chauvinistic times.

The lord will marry by arrangement. His mistress might be a favorite commoner, but if he weds her out of love, his relatives will be all problems and no aid.



The lord secures his dealings or peace, expands his holdings, even legitimizes his right to property, all by marriage. When he marries, he spawns a family (whether he wants one or not). Setting aside

biology, the wife's father and brothers and sisters and cousins, even if the player thought he had none himself, will invade the holdings and feast at his hall (balls). Marry an orphan and game the system. Then one small curse or a pressed pillow makes the widower and the contest starts anew. The wife's family, even more than the lord's, brings his power and his source of friction. For these associates will make up the majority of his courtiers.

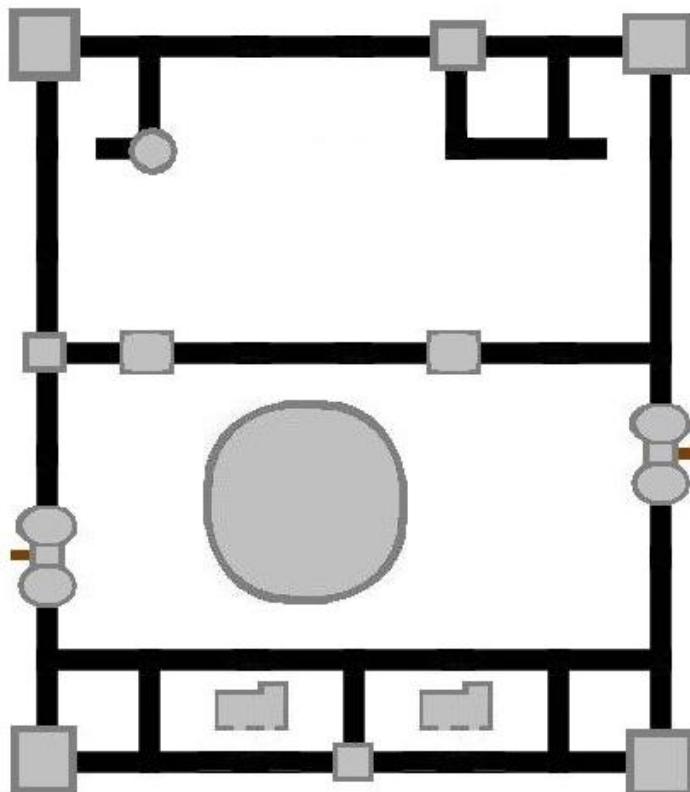
## The Velvet Glove over the Gauntlet

As the lord travels on adventure, his wife is behind walking among the little people and probably using her own charms and spells to make connections and build alliances. She must look out for her own future, mortality rates being what they are in fantasy games. A proper hero will attract a fiery bride. Winsome wench will evolve into fearsome matron (overnight). Willowy princess may stay a waif, but her immediate servants will prove to be exacting and critical. The wife becomes the personality of manor life. Pity the Red Sonja's among the players who leave their husbands alone to rule. Absolute power and abstinence will breed infidelity.

## Golems make Better Children

Even the jealous player can be taunted with his good wife's litter of children, none of which look quite like our hero. And the lads raised with absent father will hardly be "chips off the old blocks." A complicated process and never a happy moment, the pattern in history is remarkable – Good King, Bad King, Good, Bad, repeat. Capable king has lousy children. He was not there. His son spends time with family and kingdom suffers. Yet that son raised in kindness becomes a great monarch. Yet this man neglects his own family, and hence we get another King John or James.

Are you sure you truly need a place to put the Lost Relics of Gilgamash, taken in the last adventure. Maybe they should be left secure where they were. Oh well, room fifteen next to the Throne of the Gods is a good place. Set some magic barriers and what's this, young Geoffrey De'Progeny has entered the vault, his DNA close enough to yours that the spell sort of thought he was you...example hopefully understood.

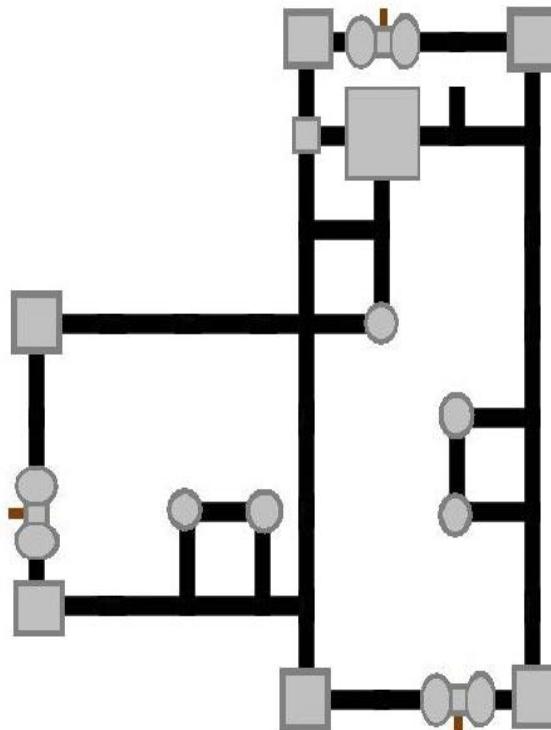


## Not Worth a Farthing

Counting swords in the armory and bushels of hay in the field is not good play. Most of this can be called a wash and rightly so. The people grow food and any excess enriches everyone. The lord will never grow rich on rents and tolls. He will collect just enough to foster corruption. What the rents and tolls give of more importance is power and domain. The area around the castle is controlled, a true fiefdom.

Anyone who enters is subject to the lord's laws and punishment. The players as adventurers must tread lightly not to offend. Even if they probably can cast a few spells and hilt punch their way out of most trouble, again consider the fall-out. The overlord will remember, and the event should be noted for future intrigue. Sack a castle to collect the pocket change or settle on the land and deal with the memory and hatred of being a usurper. If the players can't win, you get the idea.

The conflicts should never go away. The conflict is what makes the game fun and a challenge. By the way, the worst thing a player's fiefdom can be is prosperous, attracting all manner of rogues and enterprise. He may like knowing his gold mine or tannery is in the black on yield, but he'd live more quietly on the verge of starvation in most cases.



## Never Truly Alone

No voice is unheard; no plot kept a secret from all; the castle is a place without secrets. Magic especially makes that so. Yet there are so many secrets awash in the rumors and concealed in the gossip that deciphering the major plots from the minor is the trick of rule. Anti-magical wards and charms only go so far. If they truly

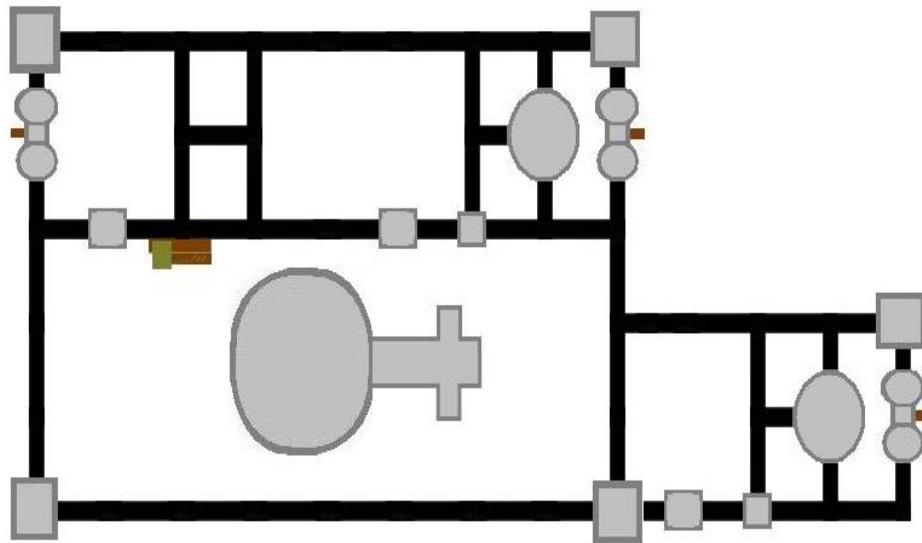
worked, well wouldn't the whole world be eventually covered and protected by these forces?

Maybe that is truly the final fate, and magic will end when all the world is eventually altered to guard against magic. Until then, any castle is vulnerable to attack by shape shifters, teleportation, curses, and charmed leaders. A large number of courtiers become even more justified to watch each other. But also, the day to day actions of all would be monitored. Everyone it seems in the medieval world was a tattle-tale. Hardly any room was built without a small adjacent chamber to eavesdrop. The palaces of Europe are filled with secret passages and listening posts from which agents of both sides (all sides) in the major intrigues would spy in on the conversations of others.

## Banishment by Quest

In a magic filled world, spies might not even be necessary as liars reveal themselves with magic. We have a voyeuristic realm where people freely conspire in the open. The lord would seldom command the respect he feels he should. He might be openly mocked just within etiquette to avoid a duel. The clever word play and innuendo used would be ritualistic and frightfully amusing. "How is the lord's

weather today, of ill-temper or foul-wind?" The lordly host unable to kill all and prevail would have to wait for full-blown intrigue, and act of dagger's drawn, before he could react.



The hall is a place of pundits and charlatans. Everyone's opinion would be voiced, and the courtiers would conspire against one another to have the favor of a untouchable lord. Thus, the fantasy baron or barbaric nature would more likely leave the manor behind for the companionship of the perilous quest. Or what better way to rid oneself of a few upstarts, than sending them off on a mission. Even a small court is wonderful for sponsoring adventure. You need not elevate every

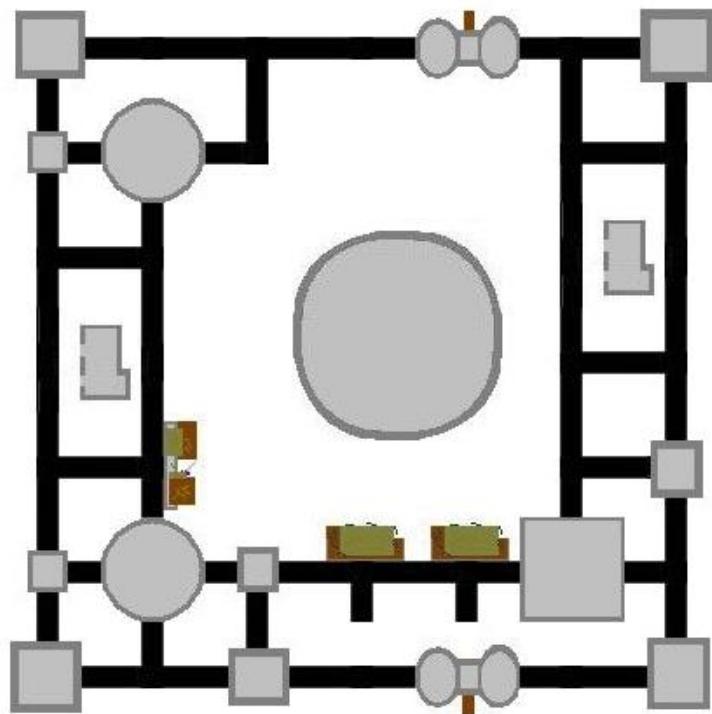
quest to the blessing of his royal highness, the country monarch or overlord. The castle barons are worthy patrons all.

## **Wishing Bastions to Be**

A wizard so powerful he reaches to the ground, tugs on a small bit of grass and with arcane enchantment pulls forth a spindly single spire a hundred stories tall, each level barred with demon or devilish trap. Yes, those agreed will be out there. Yet, that same wizard would probably be happier in the underworld, closer to the ancient sources of magic. He also might find that the greater powers, the Barons, collectively do not care for such monoliths and their disturbing implications.

## **Fantasy Ramifications**

Yet conceding that magic is out there and used, how would it change the castle? The precedent is actually clear to see. As gunpowder and air assault destroyed castles and modern fortress, the builders learned to construct not up but thick and down. The same would be true of the fantasy world. How to defend from airborne assault, fantasy pyrotechnics, dimensional portals and alike? The walls of a castle would be sloped like the ramparts of Yorktown or the bunkers in World War One, the walls earthen and inert.

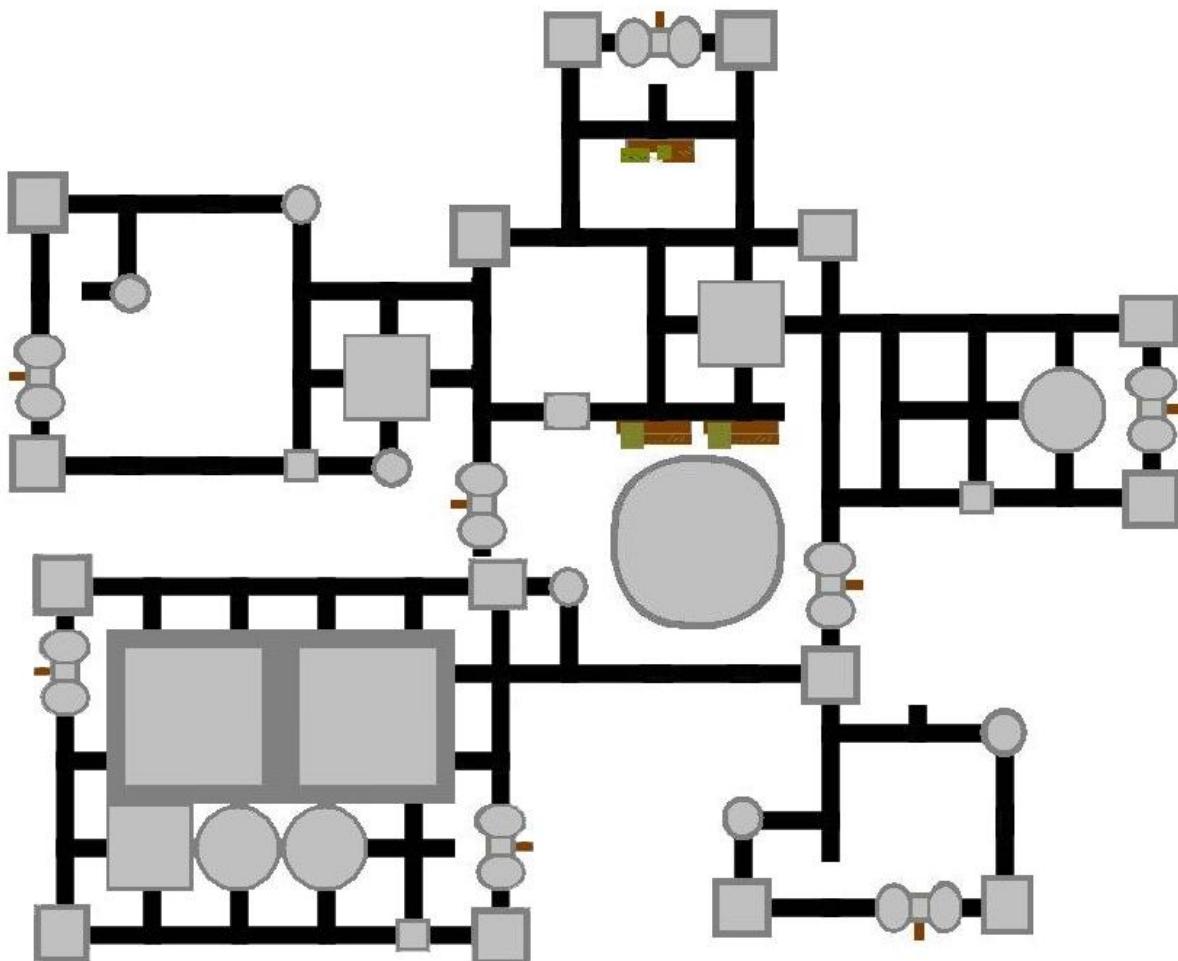


The sides of the bulwarks would be kept damp with a layer of moss to dispel fire. Bands of iron chain might be laid along the ground to conduct away electricity to ponds. The path out from the keep would be cleared as far as the eye could see. The troops would be ready to repel attack from any side and sally forth to overwhelm an attacker spreading around to fully besiege.

## Down Below We Go

The traditional curtain walls are replaced by covered block houses, which could not be attacked from the air. The main protection would sink down, not up. The tall tower would be there solely for observation. And like Beau Gest's Tales of the Foreign Legion, the guard in that tower would be the first to die in any attack, a punishment duty. Castles would be collectively the top layer, the entrance to the bunker of an underworld below. Not very pretty, but certainly more practical.

Underground structures are as old as man. They can even be made quite cozy. We'd all live in our "Hobbit Holes." The result also justifies the many underworlds and mines explored by many a party of dungeon crawlers. The top castles of these structures would be destroyed over and over in magical wars, leaving the ruins lost below or excavated and expanded by the next builder on the spot.



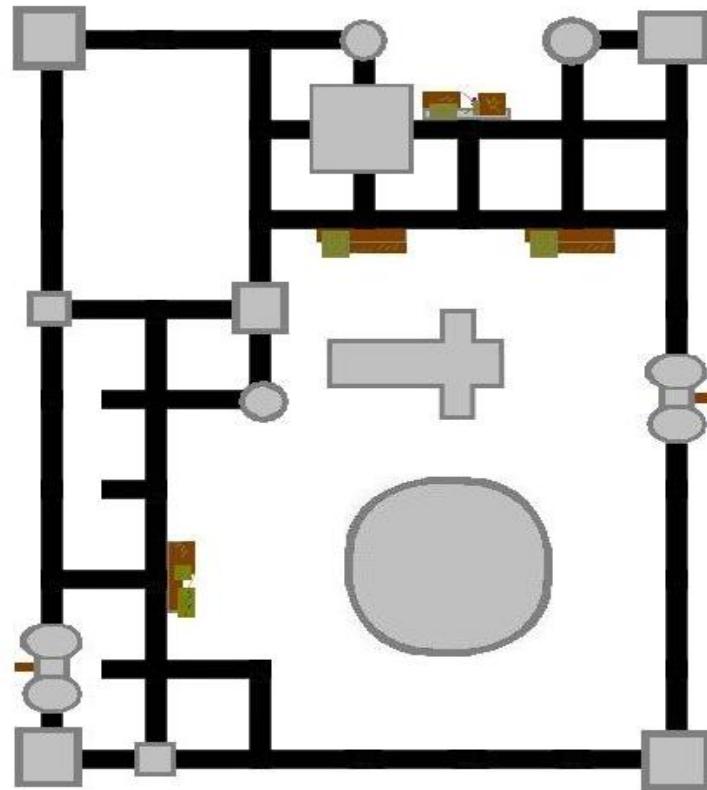
## Creating a Model

Yet using which ever concept you wish: the castle as the walled medieval structure, or castle as rampart and blockhouse extending below, the quick and dirty tables will still apply. A castle, or shall we say Baronial Fief, is condensed to twenty Traits – ten good, ten bad. These either exist or not, just as Traits in free-style fantasy, but also these Traits double as wounds. As the castle society suffers damage from external threat, internal act of intrigue or force of nature, the good traits will be lost. If the mishap spreads, the traits will turn bad.

A player's fortress manor can also have as many as ten great traits. It might also have as many as ten problems. (And shall we note a keep taken by a player through force should start with any number of detrimental traits to repair.) Depending upon which traits the castle has (or lacks), the baron or player will have a motive for adventure, trying to build-up or restore order to his domain.

### Good Castle Traits

Populous  
Magazine  
Strong  
Peaceful  
Patriotic  
Fruitful  
Orderly  
Prosperous  
Justice  
Entertained



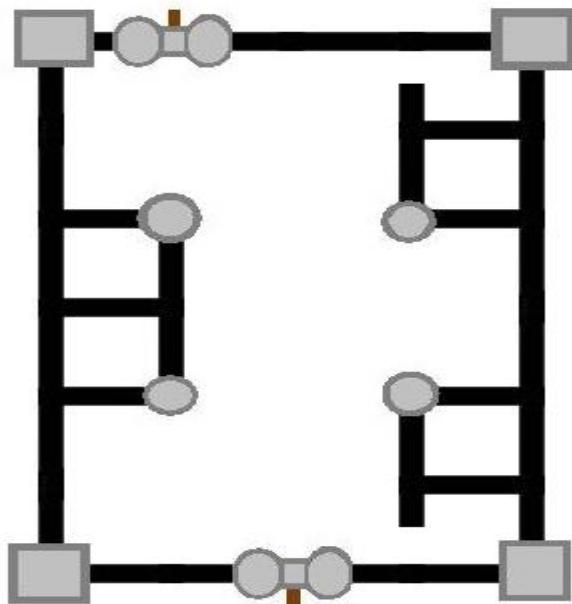
### Bad Castle Traits

Plagued  
Depleted  
Ransacked  
Disorder  
Rebellious  
Famine  
Pestilent  
Pillaged  
Corrupt  
Unruly

Note these Traits are not listed in alphabetical order for a reason. The first trait listed should be the easiest to obtain. The last nearly impossible. People will flock to secure locations. Harder is keeping these visitors amused and not sponsoring intrigue. The bad counterparts are likewise listed to correspond with their good traits. When things go from bad to worse, the result can be seen Strong to not-Strong to Ransacked, Fruitful to not-Fruitful to Famine. In rare cases both the good trait and the anti-trait can be present, but it's probably a short term imbalance and the good trait is more likely to disappear.

## Understanding Free-Style Traits

The words used for the traits can be strictly interpreted, but there is also a fair degree of subtlety which should be applied. Plagued need not always signify the Black Death. A castle and its surrounding communities can be plagued by other debilitating ailments like drunkenness. Famine can be interpreted as massive shortages or drought. Order can be had by an absence of crime during a period of mourning. Again, the referee needs to set his own limits and decide how the player's actions are thus affected.



## Descriptions

**Populous (Plagued)** – Degree of health and sickness in the serfs. This should not just pop on and off with seasonal influences. Only a sustained plague or degenerate (malaria) area could make this anti-trait exist. Or as is possible in fantasy worlds, the source of the disease will be magical and end with the death of the conjuring wizard.

**Magazine (Depleted)** – Stocks of arms and supplies, the ability to withstand siege and even wage war on a neighbor. The magazine is the easiest for the player to create and exhaust. Invest or plunder another and see the windfall. Extract some revenge or celebrate a victory and see mismanagement deplete the castle's coffers.

**Strong (Ransacked)** – Having a wide array of forces and impressive ramparts. Sound structural integrity. This is the garrison's ability, but not a measure of its honor.

**Peaceful (Disorder)** – Seasons cannot be changed; no magic is that powerful. Planting and harvesting must have a cycle. If that cycle is disturbed then not just the peace may be lost. Civil unrest and even superstition can cause disorder. An omen of disaster may be far more damaging than an actual giant. If the lord refuses to accept local customs, he may never live in an orderly peaceful domain. “Put on your kilt and eat your haggis,” in other words, go native.

**Patriotic (Rebellious)** – A body of soldiers enforce the law and keep the castle secure. Many a castle has been handed over by the garrison with little reward. Loyal men may die bravely but still die if they lack the proper arms and fortress.

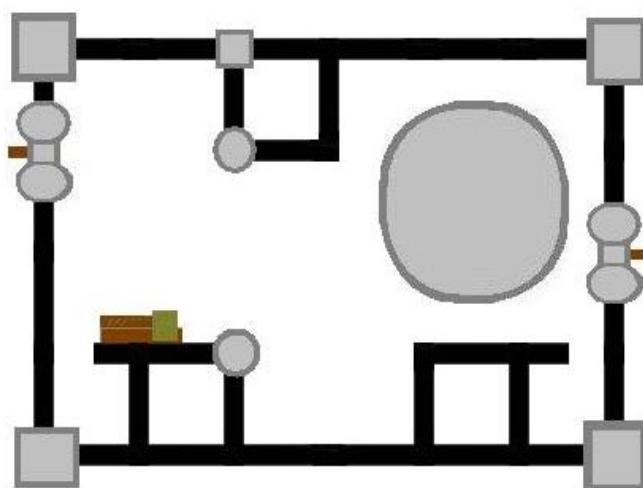
**Fruitful (Famine)** – Though meaningless to the lord (player) who will never be short of grub, the people are the ones who need this trait. Like most traits the effect of one staying bad past immediate action or by inattentiveness, may spill over to detriment of the other castle traits.

**Orderly (Pestilence)** – Measure of the cleanliness of the land and buildings. The first signs of unrest and disease, pestilence will occur more from apathy or act of defiance than external act. But who can say? Pestilence may be monsters in migration. The bugs may be a hundred feet long.

**Prosperous (Pillaged)** – How much commerce is allowed to move unbridled through the area. Rather than count farthings, the trait will come and go as the events dictate broadly the impact of trade. This is not a castle’s coffers, as a player who invests his own plunder in the land may make it Prosperous or he may just be adding fuel to the fires of pillage.

**Justice (Corrupt)** – Lawfulness of the realm and honestly of the courtiers. A certain amount of graft is always expected, but when the laws are being changed simply for profit then all traits could be negatively impacted.

**Entertained (Unruly)** – The couriers are content or bored. Will minstrels and wenches help? No, yes, maybe, this whimsy can change with the season and as the first to change and most feared in consequence, an unruly place will replace its leader sooner not later. The player may win the battle, and take back his realm, but at the price of disease, depletion, disorder, pillage and ransack.



Here are eight examples of fiefs ready for a D8:

*A. The Conquered Domain*

Plagued, Depleted, Ransacked, Disorder, Pillaged

*B. On the Anniversary of Conquest*

Magazine, Strong, Patriotic,  
Orderly, Justice  
Corrupt, Unruly

*C. At the Lords Marriage*

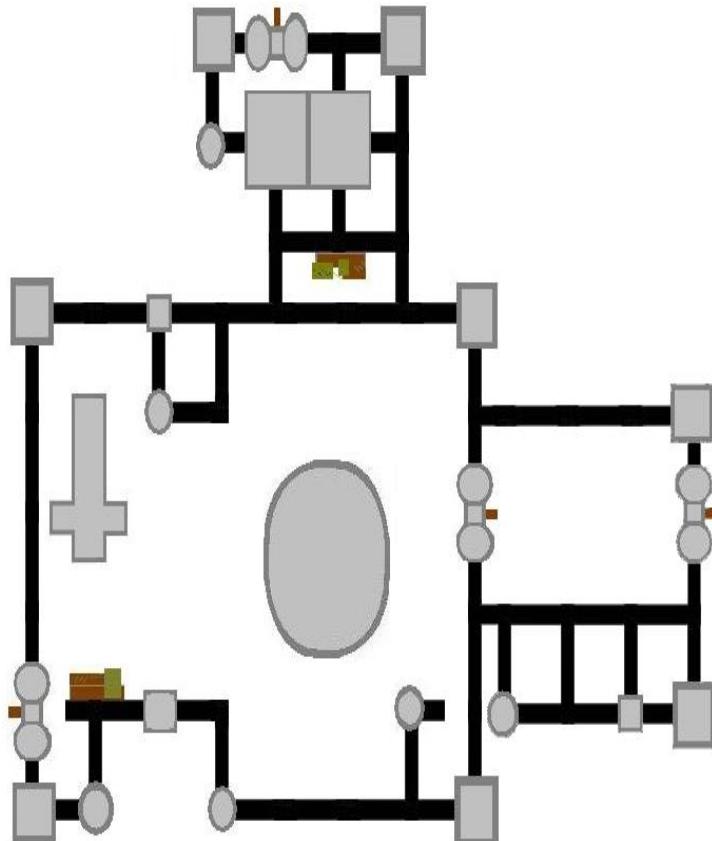
Populous, Strong, Peaceful,  
Patriotic, Fruitful, Orderly  
Depleted, Corrupt, Unruly

*D. Pax Nobless*

Magazine, Peaceful, Fruitful,  
Orderly, Prosperous, Justice,  
Entertained

*E. During Protracted War (or  
Foreign Crusade)*

Populous, Strong, Patriotic  
Depleted, Disorder, Famine,  
Corrupt



*F. On the Loss of an Heir*

Populous, Magazine, Strong, Patriotic, Orderly, Justice, Entertained

*G. On Death of the Warlord*

Populous, Magazine, Strong, Prosperous, Entertained  
Disorder, Pestilent

*H. Lawful Transition of Power*

Populous, Peaceful, Patriotic, Entertained  
Disorder, Corrupt

**Note:** players are often to be Type-A or Type-E by nature of their aloof dealings in the paper world.

## Q&D Fiefdom's Flaws (2D8)

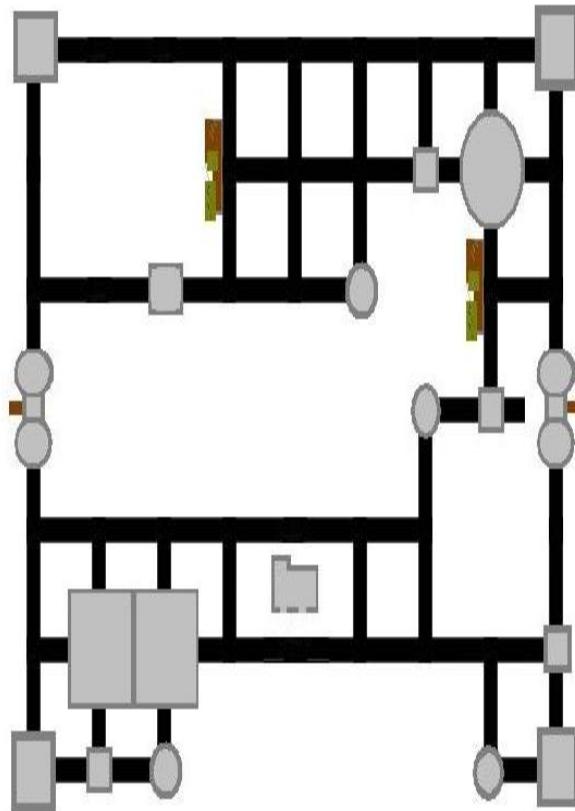
Here's a method of determining what might be wrong with a baronial manor, keep and holdings.

**2 or less:** "*Creed of Fools*" – The garrison maintains an ancient code of honor which is just strange and random in purpose. The enforcement will be spot on and the penalties are usually very severe. The area will not know Justice. The players will offend and draw challenges daily from the garrison and their commander.

**3:** "*Architect Goofs*" – The castle has a serious design flaw, like it is built too close to a mountain overhang or its entrance is down a long gentle slope. Stairwells in castles were built in a left hand screw, so the men climbing the stairs had to fight left-handed to swing a blade. This place may have all its stairs the opposite, right-screw and thus leave the defenders at a disadvantage holding the towers. The castle can never obtain the Trait of Strong. It has too many blind spots or portals and other problems which would require a total demolish. Yet even there the space may not be available to bring it down and preserve the bricks. The area would be left defenseless during the long changeover. Worse, the lord may be in denial and even if the players discover and point-out the flaw, the master mason will take offense.

**4:** "*Undead*" – Wandering souls or spirits can be seen in the area. The site of an ancient battle or magical mishap, the place is simply spooky. Even if the locals grow accustomed to the site of their relatives, the area will never be Prosperous. For the adventuring players, they may be blamed for angering the spirits or face avenging souls from their past enemies. Just not a nice place to live, but not so alarming in a fantasy world as to justify moving.

**5:** "*Vikings*" – Marauders frequently cross the border or arrive on river or seashore. Though they are almost always repelled or bribed to depart with little



loss, the area can never be considered at peace. Passing players may be accused or confused for a scouting party of these attackers.

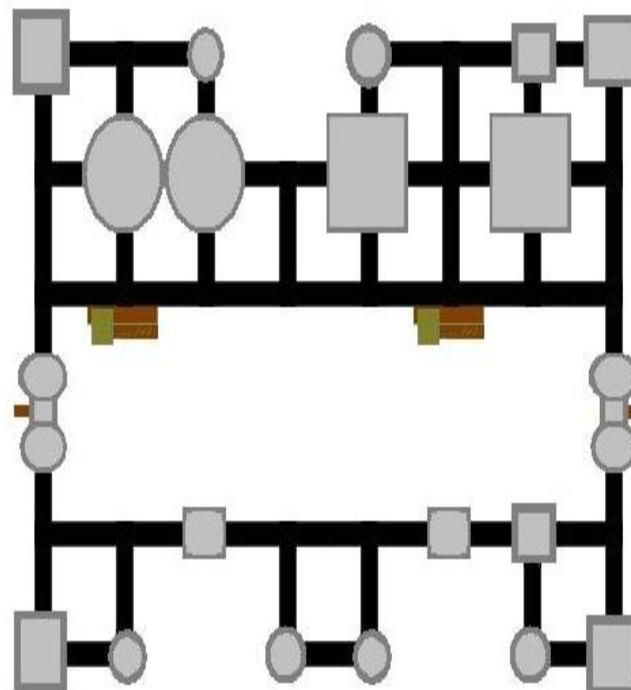
**6: "Bumpkins"** – The region is off the beaten path, hardly visited or just considered gauche and avoided by more aristocratic travelers. The region's courtiers are never in the know on noble intrigue and will never feel entertained. For traveling players, they bring diversion, which can lead to mistaken identity and confrontation, jealous rivalry as the ladies of the castle fawn all over the company to the rage of their regular suitors. On the plus side, the players might claim to be nearly anyone, until magic tells otherwise.

**7: "Ancient"** – Either known or suspected, the castle rests on the parapets of a buried city. The city below is dead but represents a major underworld. The dwarves below will secret away stores, so the castle accounting is always out of balance and never considered a fully stocked magazine. Almost amusing to have a group of adventurers exit a dungeon crawl, right into the middle of some baron's lower larders or great hall. Thieves or magical saviors?

**8: "Prejudice"** – The area lies along the common trade routes and is a crisscross of travelers and migrants and pilgrims. Hence the locals are never unified in religion or custom or even language. This will infect the region with bigotry and cause rivalry and favoritism in the garrison. No patriotic trait, and at least one player will be from the most despised caste. Even if they all are racially the same, the slant of one guy's nose may be considered petulant.

**9: "Guilds"** – The trade in the area is controlled by a master who refuses to allow his secrets to be discovered and shared. The caste hierarchy is always unruly, usually acting more powerful than the lordly landowner. The local lord is often in debt to this guild and will never pay off his loans. Adventuring players may have skills which the guild needs or more often they have skills which the guildmaster will feel they discovered by observing his artisans. How far will he go to keep his secret? The typical answer, to his or the player's death.

**10: "Heretics"** – The region is dominated by a strange radical religion, a cult to some obscure aspect or feature. Never orderly, the minds of the locals are



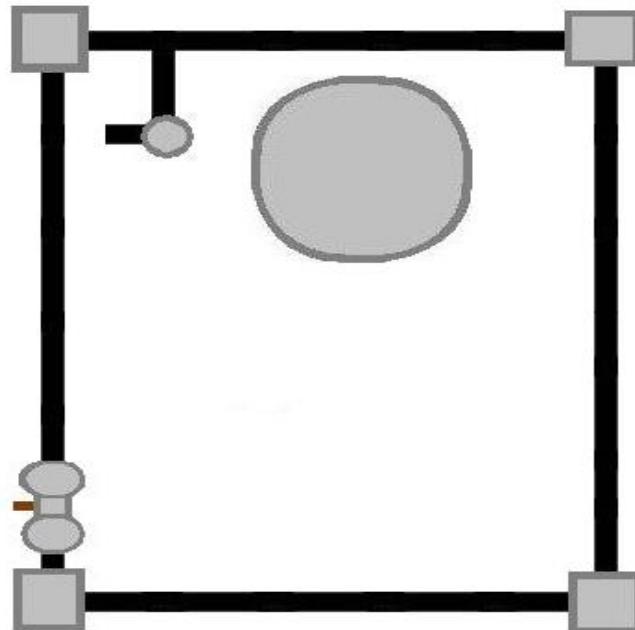
charmed by the need to serve the higher master. Rather than populate the world with demons, though that too works, the mysterious deity need only be a rock formation or ancient alter. The kind of vine covered ruin which players often use as target practice for magical spells or archery practice. Yes, the gods will be offended. Minor annoyance, until the god actually appears. Threaten that impossibility as the situation escalates.

**11: “Horse Flies”** – The area is a rising and falling bog and has its fair share of bugs. Pestilence is always a concern. During certain times of the year, disease too may be a problem, especially as the adventurers enter the region. An area like this may lack a bridge or defined path. The players may wander, only to return again and again like a curse, to the same castle.

**12: “Fury”** – Suspending probability, the area is prone to quakes, floods, brush fires, tornadoes, all manner of natural disaster. Can any place be fruitful, as the crops are routinely washed away, scalded by jest of steam or blown asunder. Visitors bring bad weather. Even if the place is prone to these misfortunes, can anyone truly argue with the logic that the players angered the gods and brought about these calamities.

**13: “Gold Rush”** – The area has numerous mines or rare plant crops, but their location or sprouting is quite random and leads to a free-wheeling prospecting atmosphere. Unlike a true bounty, the wealth is not controlled by happens with a fever of discovery. The castle will always be corrupt, as back room deals enrich the minor enforcers and ministers.

**14: “Mountain Folk”** – The area is stony, and little will ever grow in the region. Goats most likely provide most of the food, and that is never enough. This may also be at higher elevations which are snowed in for longer periods of time. The area always has famine, no matter how much it is supplied by richer partners. The visitor will suffer an accident; minor of a horse going lame, breaking a limb, or major as an avalanche traps the players in the area. As a referee, you may need to give the players an immediate concern to keep them from using magic and flying away from later danger. Of course, flying might also attract the area’s large bird of prey (i.e. Sinbad’s Rocs.)



**15: “No Youths”** – The region is under a curse, or presumed curse, which may be more dangerous. Infertility is the most useful fear. Besides keeping the region from ever being populous, the source of the problem is more difficult to find. The players who enter this area will be seen as possible saviors, foretold by prophecy to bring the cure or end the curse. Seldom will the group of outsiders be able to do so. And wild goose chases, dangerous detours, should follow. The answer may be more complex, social or political, as wars have killed off the young men and left many a widow. This village might just need some man-folk, breeding stock which cannot be allowed to simply recreate and leave. The young men may also have disappeared for unknown, yet very dangerous reasons.

**16 (or more): “Just Move Already”** – roll twice and combine results.

**Note:** These inherent faults cannot be corrected by a loyalist. The best that can happen is when they are recognized, and contingencies are put in place. If a player

takes control of this area, the flaws go with the territory. Not accepting that these can be easily wished-away by magical act, granted a special quest or adventure scenario might be written to put a flaw to rest. But in free-style form, any player correction might last only until the next situation rears its ugly head again.

## Q&D Recent Events (2D8)

Here's a method of determining short-term difficulties which might be exploited by passing players for their own gain.

**2 or less: “Peasant Unrest”** – Until resolved, never Peaceful.

**3: “Fire/Flood”** – Pestilence (bred in the aftermath).

**4: “Celebration”** – For the world-be usurper only, allows free access into the fortress. If selected by a player treat as a boon, and he may remove one bad trait of his choice. (The table can't be all bad.)

**5: “Poor Harvest”** – Famine.

**6: “Excommunicated”** – Until resolved, never Entertained. The castle and its region are no longer recognized or declared unlawful by higher authority. The master must fight to have his charter to the greater land restored or live tenuously

as an independent free-hold, unable to depend on help from others and subject to annex or conquest.

**7: "Guard Deaths"** – Rebellious. Often these were soldiers hanged for their criminal acts but tell that to their brethren who feel some indulgence should be granted to the soldiers.

**8: "Estranged Wife"** – Until resolved, never Orderly. Interpret as disgruntled staff for the acknowledged bachelors and Zena's among the players.

**9: "Raids"** – Pillaged.

**10: "Ambitious Kin"** – Corrupt.

**11: "Quarreling Ministers"** – Unruly.

**12: "Return from Muster"** – Depleted. If the player is the master, the soldiers will also never be Patriotic. Afterall, where was their leader in this last call to arms.

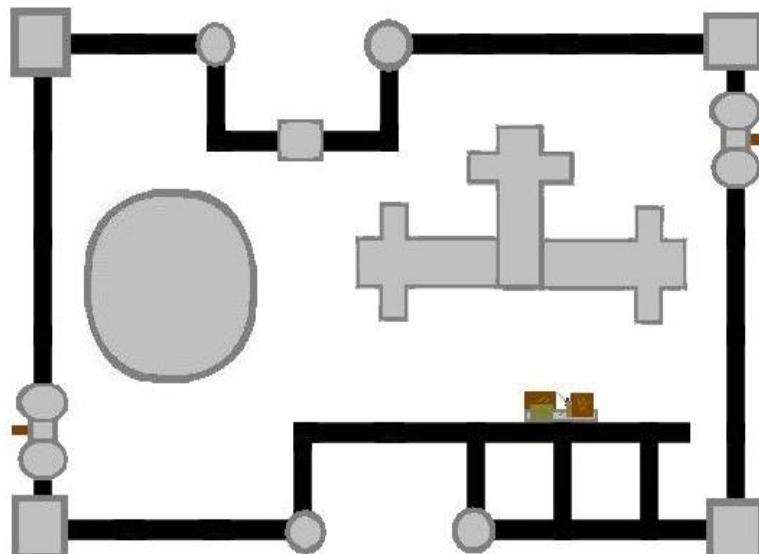
**13: "Disease"** – Plagued.

**14: "Lax Discipline"** – Disorder.

**15: "Disrepair External"** – Ransacked.

**16 (or more):** Roll twice and combine results.

**Note:** Further elaboration is left to the referee. If you're a loyalist of the fief, then you may attempt to mitigate each of these events. The action should take more than a single dice roll. If you're a rival, here's your chance to usurp authority during the mishap. Above all, if the castle is yours, you have my sympathies. These events are a perfect catch-up table for any player lord returning from adventure. If the castle receives a second bad trait of a type already present, then half a D8 other wounds to traits should result. Leave your keep long enough and you may return to find it abandoned, the serfs dispersed, staff departed...everything essentially gone.



## Q&D Lord's Personality (2D8)

Here's a method of generating some quirks in the occasional lord of the manor, or principal Dukes and Earls of a really foul kingdom.

**2 or less:** "*Insane*" – Homicidal, wishes to take everything and everyone with him at death. This lord will not want to transfer power to anyone. He may be immortal having outlived everyone he ever loved a millennium ago. He tires of worldly affairs and wishes the age of man to pass into oblivion.

**3:** "*Tainted*" – Connected with unlawful acts, family ties to nobility were coerced, suspected of fomenting treason, dealt away his daughters in the worst of deals. The man's motives may be chivalrous, but his methods are always sinister. He has no ability to work within the laws and social order, like many a player perhaps.

**4:** "*Contemptible*" – Bigoted, chauvinistic, paralyzed by phobias, will be completely irrational dealing with a certain race or type of person. (Of course, personified by one of the players.)

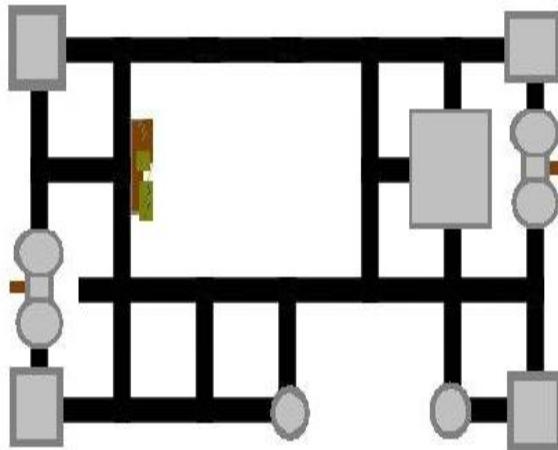
**5:** "*Miser*" – Unwilling to spend for anything, refuses to pay debts, constantly bargaining over small amounts, everything and everyone in his service is second rate. He may have a hidden treasure, but its protection will be first rate.

**6:** "*Paranoid*" – Employs secret enforcers or non-human spies. Untrusting, difficult to read, secretive, he may only be open and show his human side to a single player who will forever be defending the lord's taciturn nature.

**7:** "*Ogre*" – Controlling and demanding, openly feared and hated, aggressive and prone to fits. He may be effective and right in most situations, but most who meet him can't wait for him to fail. Almost everyone is driven to undermine his plans since we instinctively hate such egotistical know-it-alls.

**8:** "*Ambitious*" – Desires to rule the entire land, and he may have the connections and ability to make a try at united the barons under his banner. Yet such men know the nature of politics in that the agents who get one to the top are never the ones who share power. Sacrifices will be made along the way to his goal.

**9:** "*Wanderlust*" – Never at home, always leaving the affairs of the manor to servants. The classic player lord, who probably took the castle as a prize or reward and has little interest in playing house. Yet when he returns he usually runs a major

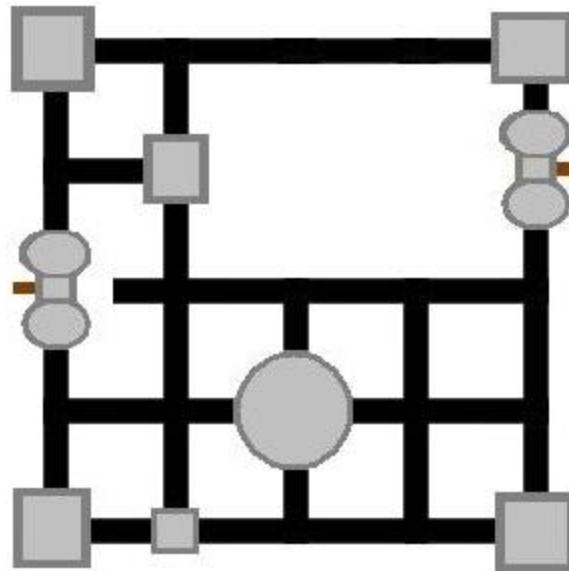


sweep of those he left behind, weeding out the corrupt and ambitious, putting things quickly back to a level of stability so he can leave again for adventure. The players will arrive in the lord's absence or may be duped into thinking a major domo is the resident lord. Only later will the truth be seen as the warlord returns and find the players a major obstacle to his lifestyle.

**10:** "*Fools Debts*" – Reckless with men and money, his countless rivalries and forced marches against enemies has left him indebted to the guilds and anyone with a free-company of mercenaries for hire. Enter the players, a free company of mercenaries. This lord will have numerous acts of intrigue for which he will promise lavish rewards he cannot pay. An expert at delay, he will put the players deeply into his own intrigues and then leave them wondering how to ever extract themselves from being associated with this raging petty incompetent.

**11:** "*Without Heir*" – Refuses to recognize a heir or obsessed with siring a proper offspring. Usually has numerous bastards and disowned sons who wait in the wings with factions to take control on the lord's death. The lord may also be unwilling to pick a legal heir because he cannot play favorites. Yet unless he makes a selection, his region will slip into anarchy upon his death. He knows that but is still indecisive. Whatever resolution the players attempt by interfering will just lead to more chaos. This place should be quickly departed as doomed.

**12:** "*Ugly*" – Repulsive, uncouth, unloved, hated by the beautiful aristocrats of his court, and with no chance of rising in station. The lord may be marred by battle scars which can attest to his combat ability. But he is a fool in the social graces. His gentle wife will usually mock him openly, flaunt her lovers and seek to make the players new pawns in her game. The lord will seldom openly suspect his wife or understand in his simplistic mindset that he is just a bumpkin in their eyes. Loving his wife beyond all else, he lives in denial. He will kill the person (instantly) who opens his eyes to his stature. He'll regret it later of course, but that role is not one a player will successfully fill and survive. Let sleeping dogs lie here and look at your own skill base and see if your own characters would survive under similar scrutiny.



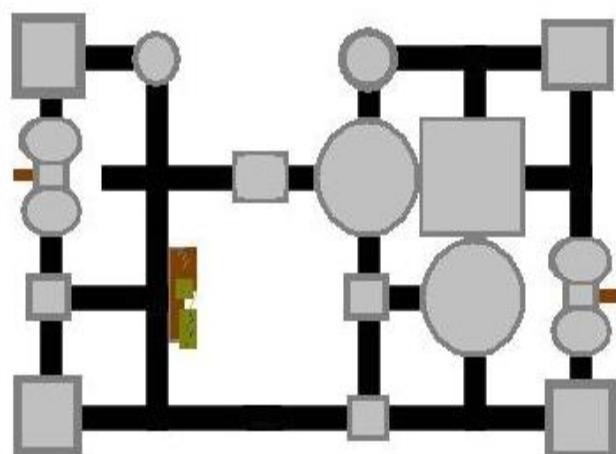
**13:** “*Indecisive*” – Having a strong entourage and a readiness in all things except his own will. The lord second guesses his every action and is always following the advice of the last person he talks to. He may be manipulated magically by an outsider (or insider), but often the lord is just not fit to rule. He may be advanced in age and having memory of more spirited, yet dangerous times wants simply to live out his days in peace. Yet there must be factors threatening. Here is a chance for the players to make a difference. By controlling access to the lord, they can make a positive effect in the region. Or, stupendously gain to their own ends.

**14:** “*Immoral*” – Decadent and silently feared, this lord will have connections to perverse rituals, demonic practices, orgiastic rites and processions of the undead. His courtiers will be equally as vicious and repugnant. The serfs will long for a knight to rid them of this scourge who feasts on the dead (or some other unclean practice). Let the lords appear at first to have just a few foibles and his actions just mocking common taboo, only later will the players uncover the extent of the lord’s depravity. Yes, that will lead to some fisticuffs at the very least.

**15:** “*Fop*” – Dilettante and noble of long lineage, the lord has no outward security and a cast of heartless social climbers in his court. The area will usually be prosperous and sheltered, the brunt of danger held back by neighboring regions. Enters the conflict, the players may meet this lord only after they are sent by another region to get help or relief. Then they must deal with a person who would insist if someone is starving for want of bread, “let them eat cake.” Do not underestimate the agents of such an arrogant patrician. His guards may be angelic toy soldiers and comical diminutive gladiators, but usually just out of sight are the most wicked of protectors (often supernatural).

**16 (or more):** Roll twice and combine the results.

**Note:** These are not meant to be rolled for every lord and certainly not for a player upon his rise to power. Instead these are aspects of the lord which might be exploited by opportunists or make a loyalist question his allegiance. Start small with each flaw and slowly let it flourish into a severe handicap (over several adventures). As an alternative, the fourteen lords above make interesting minor adventures and may be just presented and run in order. They could also be the fourteen powerful lords of the Curia Regis, deadlocked over which one should be



His Royal Highness. Now that set of interactions can be a tale which plays itself out for a long time.

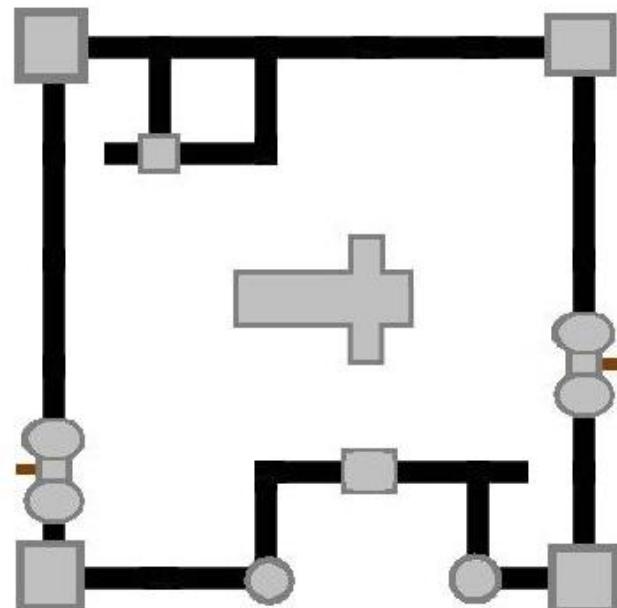
## Who's Who in Castle Life

The players hunker along and pass a castle. The referee has a ready source of intrigue and mishap to test the character skills and abilities while making the player characters both rivals and allies.

If the players are sedentary, members of the castle entourage, then an event might generate some new happenstance for their station; major events of the scenario do unfold. You may even consider using this system as a way to generate missions for those wholly in the castle lifestyle. Have each player start in one role and slowly convert a majority of people to his loyalty as each strives to be the heir apparent of the manor. Perhaps make this a catch-up role on these tables in the recovery time between quests of adventure.

### Procedure

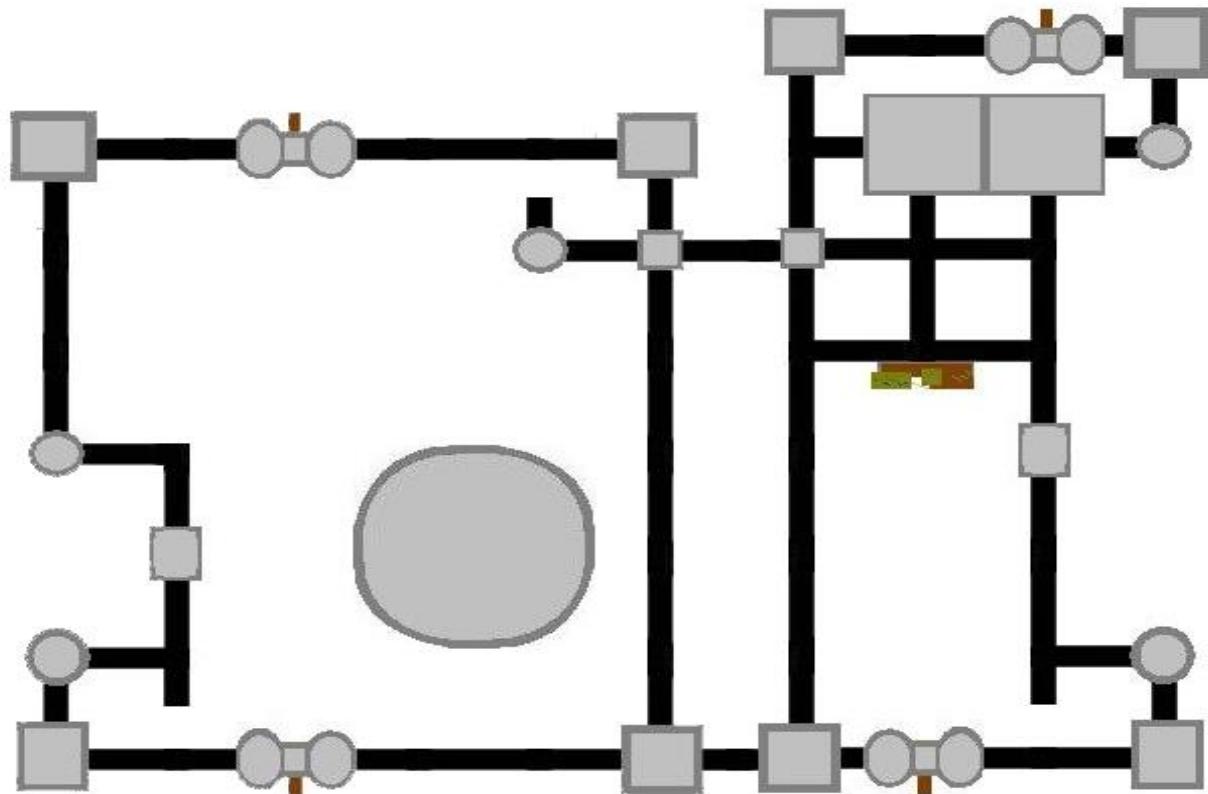
Start at zero and add a D8. That person, numbered one to eight, is in the manor. Keep generating results, each time adding a D8, until you stop when the result is above twenty-eight. The first character role is a loyalist ally of the ruling baron. The second is an antagonist and so forth.



Now no one would live in a seething cauldron of intrigue, at least knowingly. Most of these servants respect and even admire the ruling baron, but his kin are another matter. Some servants fall out of favor with the local lord or are themselves not inclined toward loyalty to the Heir Apparent.

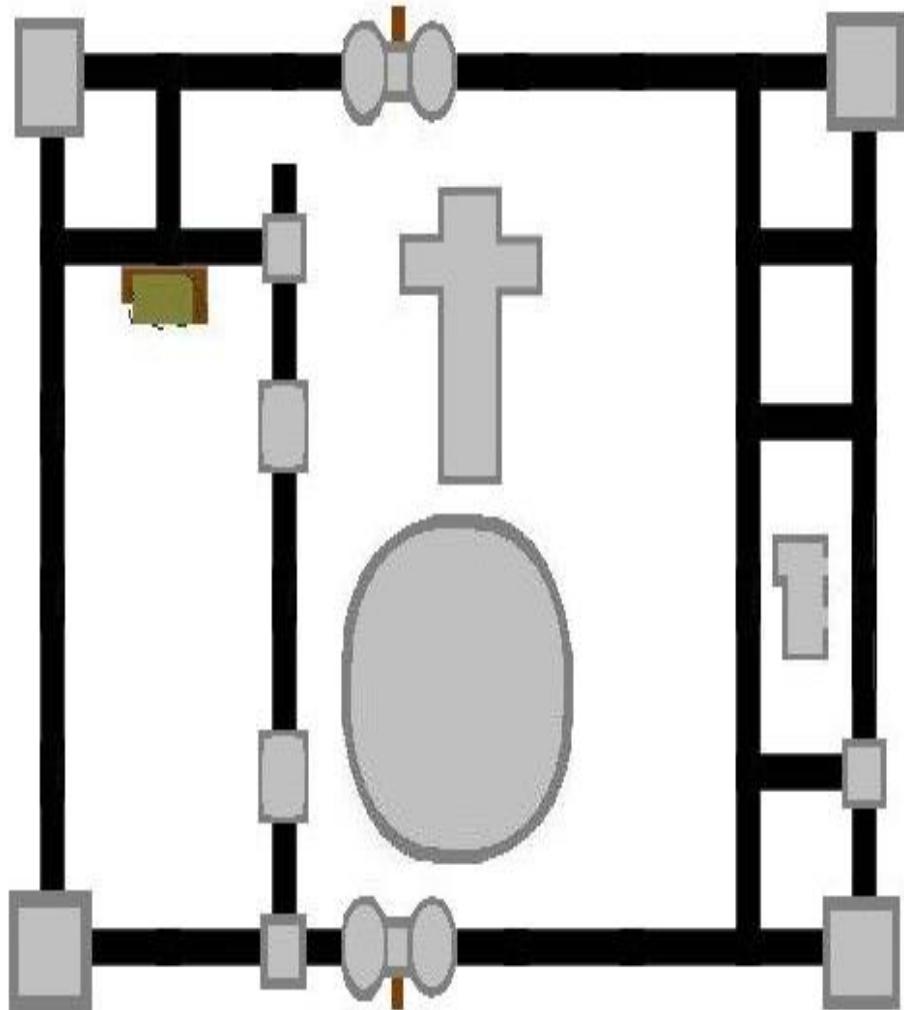
The players will align themselves with a faction for their own advancement in the court. The referee may even let the powerful players, as friendly rivals, generate their own baronial manors and swap around courtiers between themselves in a manner like Medieval Baseball Cards (teams). A change of location may improve a foul minion's demeanor or just leave the new lord with his own obstinate servant. Each player may be then on the look-out, while adventuring, to find new staff for his keep back home.

The whole of the manor is simmering with animosity. Yet the ruling lord must try to be just and impartial. He can't execute someone simply because they make a mistake or hold a grudge. The politics of the situation make each person nearly untouchable, until a major event occurs to discredit them. No one will rise by assassination, and magic query makes "accidents" less likely a cover for mayhem. In most cases a competent and loyal minion can even be raised from the dead, so the players will not wade into this sword in hand. The world itself is dangerous enough, and attrition should provide enough opportunities.



## Cast of Characters

- 1: Alderman
- 2: Armorer
- 3: Astrologer
- 4: Barber
- 5: Captain Watch
- 6: Champion
- 7: Chaplain
- 8: Confessor
- 9: Confidante
- 10: Emissary
- 11: Exchequer
- 12: Forester
- 13: Grammarian
- 14: Heir Apparent
- 15: Herald
- 16: Herbalist
- 17: Jailer
- 18: Jester
- 19: Knight-Errant
- 20: Master Hounds
- 21: Master Mason
- 22: Sheriff
- 23: Smith
- 24: Spy-Enforcer
- 25: Steward
- 26: Valet
- 27: Vizier
- 28: Warden Gate



*Over 28: Stop*

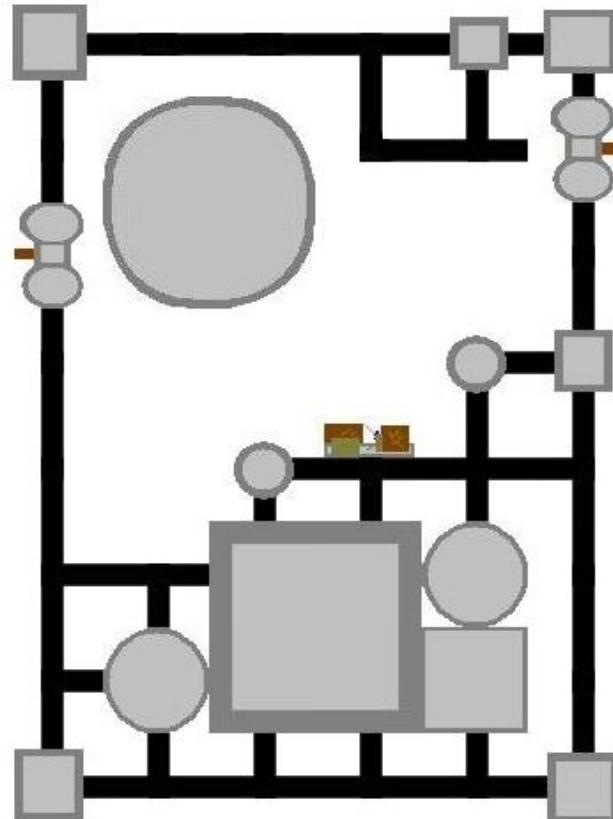
All these roles will be adjusted for fantasy elements. Yet the amount of magic should be augmented to your taste. In some campaigns, everyone and everything has spell casting ability. In other places, only the rare few can be called actual wizards.

## Alderman

*Duties:* The representative of the guilds and another sign that the lord is sharing power with outside forces. The worst of alderman will be those who represent magic purveyors or even worse the grandfather of the delvers.

*Mishaps:* The man is not directly involved with his craft, so the mishaps here will be in his own standing with the craftsmen he represents. He may fall out of favor and seek asylum inside the protection of the keep. The baron must protect his friends or else he will be seen as no friend to others. New enemies are made as an old friend loses his influences. Such is courtly life.

*Intrigues:* The alderman is a leader in his own right and the intrigues usually spill over into the lord's court only when the alderman dies or is replaced by a more militant headmaster who refuses to accept the deals and contracts made by his predecessor.



## Armorer

*Duties:* Manages the arms and armor of the garrison, assisted by ironmongers, tinkers, tanners, et. al. Binds magical properties into metals, cares for the greatest of relics.

*Mishaps:* Every manor will have its share of tinkers and smiths, so by generating a special armorer as a courtier, this fellow must come with a reputation or be there for a reason. True relics are never sound of spirit. Most will roam and wish to find new owners. Relics tend to be forgotten over the ages, and their importance is debated.

*Intrigues:* The spirit of an arm has attracted a questing knight. Or something simple, the vinegar used to keep away rust has acted in the reverse. Mistakes by the supplier or rival attempting to discredit.

## Astrologer

*Duties:* Predict the future, a hopeless activity. The castle charlatan, forecasting is always a random process beginning with the weather. Yet most lords know this. It's their women-folk who like astrology.

*Mishaps:* Someone who truly can tell the future will tend to see nothing but the bad. Even the littlest of mistakes can become major moments of uncertainty and cause a ripple of time-fractured events. A run of events predicted by the astrologer is a mishap in its own right, even if they turn out good. Why? Because something bad is bound to occur and the court will either be complacent, knowing the astrologer will give plenty of warning (wrong). Or the court will be fatalistic thinking no fate is under their control.

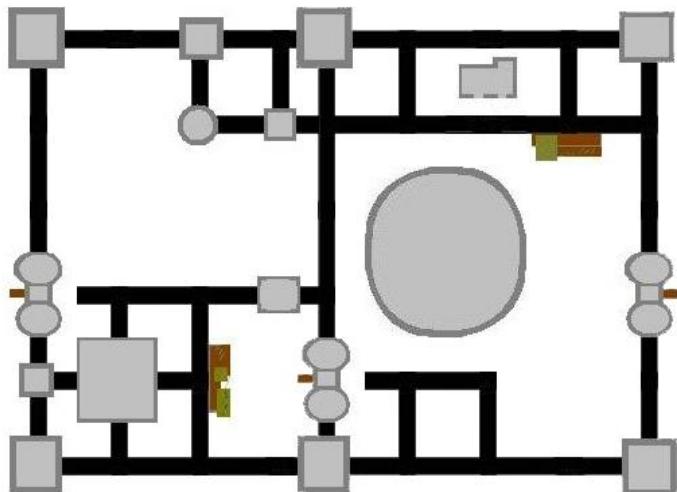
*Intrigues:* Able to turn wife on husband; do not underestimate the control this figure exerts in the court. He will not be loved.

## Barber

*Duties:* The medieval barber was also the doctor. Leeching actually worked to reduce high blood pressure. A salt filled diet and stressful lifestyle needs some moments of relaxation in the barber's chair. Maybe the lord will get a haircut or beard trim as well. The lord who has a barber in court will swear by the man's cure-alls and methods. The players may have to submit to treatment if they complain of aches (and who doesn't at times).

*Mishaps:* A bit too much blood loss can lead to anemia. Though someone would hardly be bled-dry—the barber shouldn't be a total imbecile—at the very least the fatigue of the cure may make the lord or other courtier more likely to have their own mishap.

*Intrigues:* The barber will also have magical healing ability, which can be employed in good faith. When it isn't, or when the magic is miss-applied, then you have animosity and malfeasance.



## Captain Watch

*Duties:* A sergeant at arms charged with setting the rotation of the guards. Try standing a post for eight or twelve hours straight. This guy's diligence and

aggression keep the rank and file in line. Always hated in peace, admired in war, the captain marks a military quality garrison, elite by all standards and the envy of other lords. Yet before even discussing intrigue, ask why someone would settle for being a mere underling. The answers are many with Cups being acts of honor and loyalty, Swords being bloodlust and villainy.

*Mishaps:* Constantly taking people to the breaking point can bring insane reaction. In order to impose his will, the captain must provoke his underlings. Else, the place will never be truly secure. The biggest mishaps will be his own illness or absence or lax nature. The majority of castles will not have a recognized captain, so the entire garrison may be mercenaries loyal to the contract and deal they made to inhabit this barracks domain.

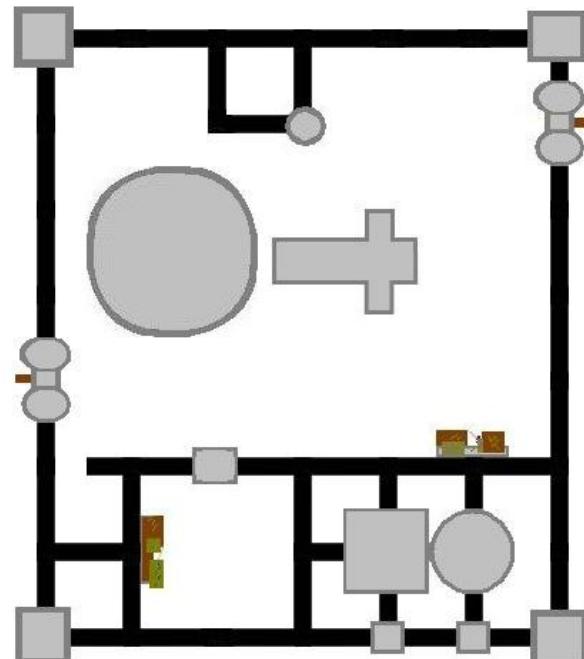
*Intrigues:* Who is on watch can be the difference between an unseen outing or meeting and having the whole court alerted to the comings and goings. The watch commander controls who moves where and when, so he is feared by most who have secrets to hide. And since these castles are socially restrained, there are many affairs both unrequited and passionate which the captain knowingly controls. For he controls when and where lovers may rendezvous.

## Chaplain

*Duties:* For more pagan campaigns, here simply is a temple priest. Regardless, this fellow handles the spiritual needs of the serfs, the common people. He controls them pretty thoroughly. He may be hated by all the other courtiers for this influence. Yet if the chaplain declares something in blasphemy, it will signal a riot.

*Mishaps:* Very few here, since his word is pretty much the word of a higher authority. Yet anything which may discredit his state of grace among the locals is possible.

*Intrigues:* As said, his intrigues involve anything which can discredit him, of which hypocrisy is the worst of crimes and sins. Since the players will find it easy as mere characters to stifle their impulses, no player should be allowed to take this post in the court. Often these grumblers come uninvited to the party. The result here is always tenuous, and the lord is less powerful in the presence of his chaplain.



## Champion

*Duties:* Shield bearer, squire and prime bodyguard of the lord. For non-combatant or elderly barons, this person will also fight his duels.

*Mishaps:* Battle injuries are common, and the champion will often practice at arms with the lord. As the lord fumbles, the champion must grin through the pain.

*Intrigues:* A surrogate in a duel is not bound to fight to his own death. But if he loses by surrender, the master's life is forfeit. How well can this man hide his intent to throw a match remains to be seen. Or a loyal servant may disappear before a challenge, leaving the lord to appoint on the spur a replacement.

## Confessor

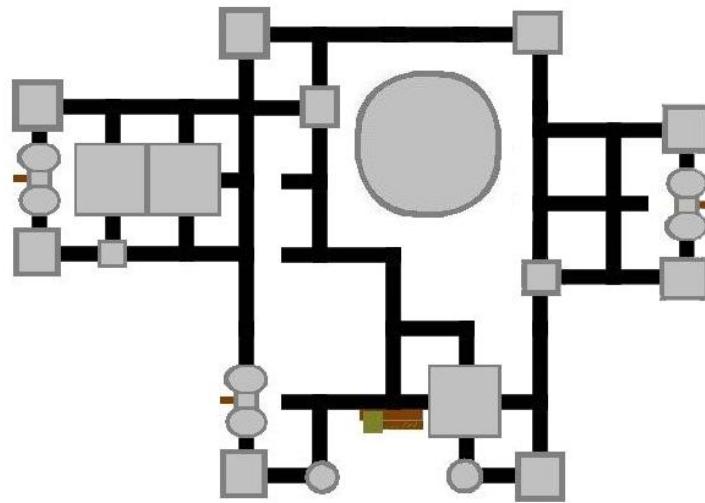
*Duties:* To explain, the confessor is the person who absolves the sins of the lord. The lord is not forced to tell his sundry deeds and plots to just any county chaplain. He has his own man to ensure his admittance to heaven. Most lords take more earnestly to religion later in life. Each noble will one day regret the means he used to advance in power. Hence he has a confessor hear his prayers and grant forgiveness. Guilt relieved.

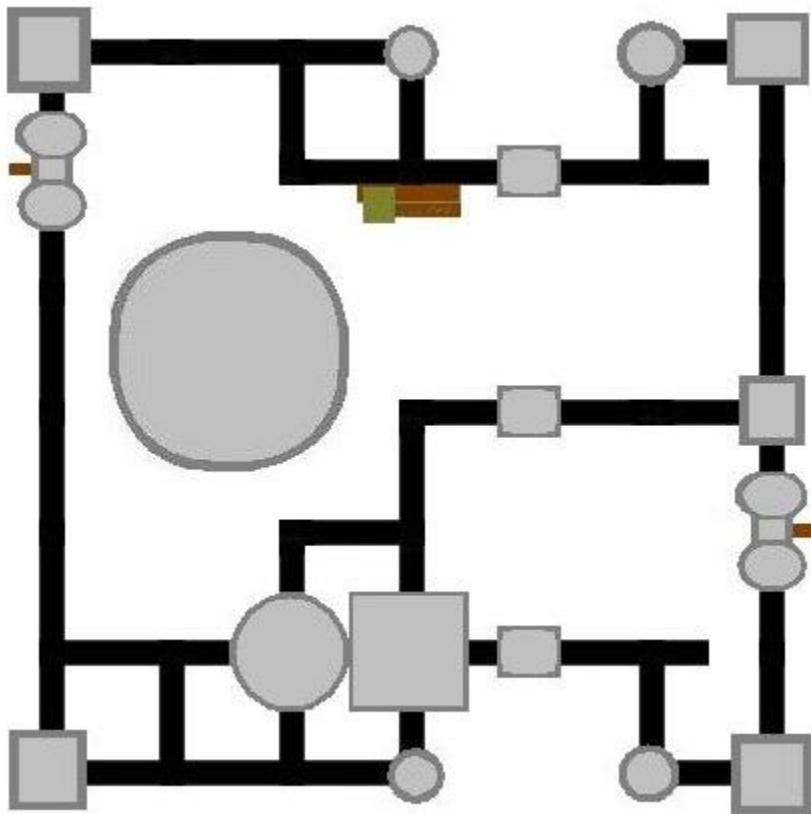
*Mishaps:* The lord in a paranoid fit (or even justifiably) decides that his confessor cannot be trusted. The imprisonment of the man usually follows. If the confessor cannot prove himself worthy again, he will be charged and put to death.

*Intrigues:* The lord's misdeeds are known by someone. Set aside the nature of magic and agree some minds may never be probed and read clearly. Now, even if the confessor is sworn to uphold his vows of silence and obedience, he might be unable to keep his promise. The confessor has gone missing. All resources will be tasked to find the man, dead or alive, bring him back.

## Confidante

*Duties:* A mistress or fraternity brother, a close associate of the lord. The typical court free-loader who stays for the luxury and none of the responsibilities. These know-it-alls have all the answers, but no power or initiative to conduct change. A lord who openly flaunts a mistress will mock social





marriages and their wives at best tolerate the unions. The act is one of contract, not romance. The fact a lord has a mistress is not important, unless he tries to divorce his legal bride. Now there is the stuff of true intrigue. If interpreted as a brother in arms, then the intrigue will be over favoritism and the call of the fraternity brother to get the lord back out on an adventure. The courtiers will want the lord at home. The brother will want to be off to generate more tales.

## Emissary

*Duties:* An attorney who takes grievances to other lords or argues point of law before a higher authority. The arcane nature of laws means that someone who does little but studies the past cases and mindset of each judge will have a better chance of success. There is always trial by combat in a criminal case or accusation. But right of title and rents or even where the lord is quartered during ceremonies are acts negotiated by the emissary.

*Mishaps:* Cases can turn on single turns of the phrase and witticisms. The emissary is never blamed. The lord, not the messenger, is held liable.

*Intrigues:* If the emissary is missing or lacking, the lord will be too busy on the external affairs to handle his daily monitoring of the courtiers. More intrigue

morals and cause all courtiers to question their loyalty. To have such an openly antagonistic person in court is always fractious.

*Mishaps:* The confidante does not make mistakes; that would be too easy. The mishaps will always be where the confidante says, “I told you so,” following another person’s misfortune. Any act of mishap should be assigned to another member of court.

*Intrigues:* Before jumping on the potential cat-fight, remember that most lords have arranged

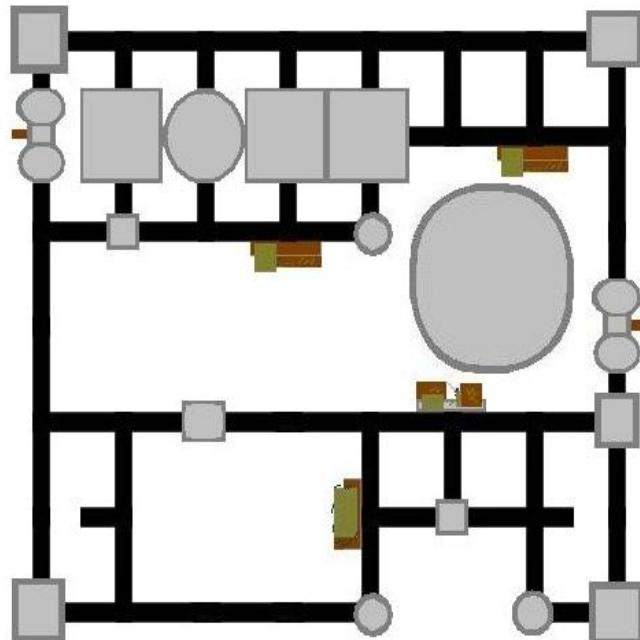
will brew. The most important act of an emissary is to negotiate ransom and terms of surrender. Is he impartial in his acts or serving another's goals?

## Exchequer

*Duties:* The person who coins the coins and keeps the bank records.

*Mishaps:* The same loss of records suffered by the herald may also affect the exchequer. The hoarding of real gold may also attract raiders, delvers and monsters.

*Intrigues:* A certain amount of graft (theft or rep fees) is expected. But how much? The lord will take great offense when his exchequer seems to dress and live more lavishly than himself.



## Forester

*Duties:* The sheriff of the wild lands, the forester in a traditional sense stops poaching. Here the guy is the resident monster hunter. He will know the signs, tracks, dung, odors, destruction, which monsters leave behind. The forester usually like his job and delights in both his role and the opportunity of the hunt. Since the land is owned by the lord, and he has no right to move through it, here he gets the best of both worlds. The right to patrol and hunt, while also having status as a useful member at court.

*Mishaps:* Crossing a path or markings left by some unknown beast. That or showing fear.

*Intrigues:* Hard to believe this likable sort, who often is away from court, ever has enemies or foments unrest, unless the lord is ordering him to kill something he thinks should live. The first ecologists, maybe the forester believes that part of the wood be set aside for the wild creatures to roam. Should any animal, even a monstrosity, be hunted to extinction? That or he's ambitious like anyone in court.

## Grammarian

*Duties:* The most hated man by the heir or the secret power who will later rule, this is the teacher and nurse maid to the lord's children. In the fantasy world almost always a wizard who has lost considerable power in age or by

misadventure. The secrets he may know are another set of intrigues entirely. If a vibrant man inhabits this position, he is always acting nefariously.

*Mishaps:* A child dies in his care.

*Intrigues:* A child under his care is kidnapped.

## Herald

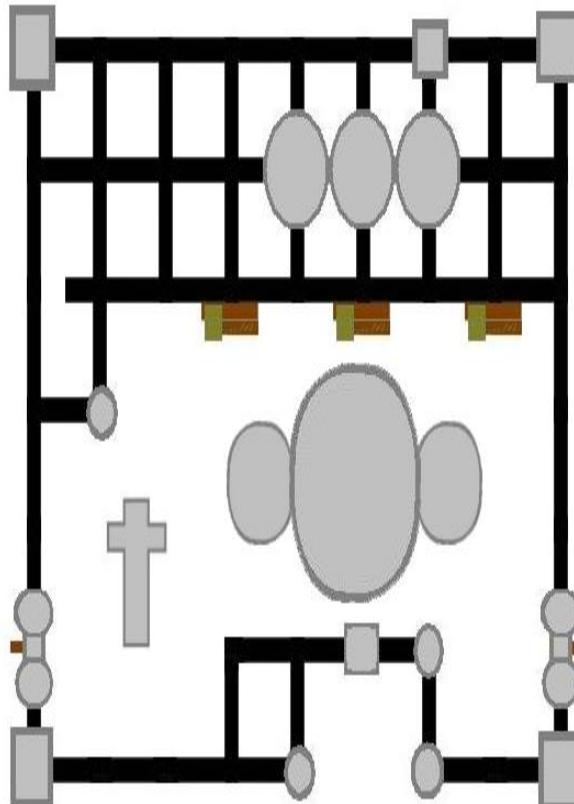
*Duties:* Announces the good deeds of the lord, monitors his travel and itinerary. The herald is the sage who keeps the records of the land. He also works with the emissary to clear the local court docket of petitions made by the serfs. The local lord has much to adjudicate, and the herald keeps him from being capricious. To be a tyrant is much easier than to be labeled inconsistent or irrational.

*Mishaps:* Losing his records would be a disaster. No one can remember all the trivium. The records, mere paper, though often protected by incantation or secret vault, are subject to many a natural demise: fire, water, insects, mold, age, sun fade.

*Intrigues:* People as well have been known to fabricate records. A decision made several generations ago may keep the peace between two fiefs. But no good deed goes unpunished, and the true resolution of a crisis is only deferred to a later generation (the here and now).

## Herbalist

*Duties:* Humble gardener, hardly, full blown alchemist most likely, with a huge array of labs and experiments taking place in the lower recesses of the castle dungeons. But let's not get hasty into the intrigue. The local lord is an addict, either benign or outright. The herbalist is his pusher. Yet to end the vernacular, and say the obvious, the herbalist has some drug which the lord craves. The drug may be social, simply an acquired taste, or more often a curative which allows him to survive. Men in power seek immortality and this herbalist may have the potions to keep someone alive long past his children and his children's children.



*Mishaps:* The end of the supply, a rare item in the concoction is not to be had. Weather may have changed enough that the plants no longer grow.

*Intrigues:* Anyone who tries to end the addiction is causing intrigue. The lord and herbalist coexist in loose harmony. But ending this dependence, all manner of power vacuum is created. His dependency may be wrong, but the tough-love cure may be horrific.

## Heir Apparent

*Duties:* Take over upon the death of the baron or when he goes on campaign for war or adventure. Note if this minion is not among those generated, then the heir is too young or unrecognized. Since many lords are young themselves and only recently converted from adventure, the lack of a formal heir can be common.

*Mishaps:* Dying before the father (adopted father). Most every action by the heir is a cause for embarrassment.

Seldom will a good leader pass those qualities on to his heir. (Else we'd have no story.)

*Intrigues:* Trying to hurry along the process of nature, the heir is the source of many an intrigue. There are never two heirs, but there may be bastards and younger brothers who hate the fellow. To prove nothing sexist, he may also have sisters who wish they too could rule. Marry them off? (That's a joke, or is it?)

## Jailer

*Duties:* Besides the obvious, let's ask ourselves how psychotic it must be to run a medieval torture chamber, which is certainly what this man manages. A pure sadist, the jailer is the type of man who delights in suffering and never tires of pleas for mercy. The players instinctively, even those themselves of evil inclination, will despise the jailer. Need more invective? Anyone in the presence of this jailer should be minus four on their rolls for skills and social grace. That should stress the message he's no one's friend.

*Mishaps:* The lord who keeps a jailer is himself suspicious of everyone. His dungeons are usually crowded. He will think hanging is too good for most crimes. The mishap is not so much to the jailer, as to the lord and his court. You can have

the occasional escape, but in a world of magic jails would be pretty formidable. If not, then they'd be useless in general.

*Intrigues:* The presence of a jailer may signify two other special cases. The lord himself may be under house arrest, confined to his keep by higher order. Or, the keep has a special prisoner, usually enchanted, which they have been tasked (again by an august body like the Curia Regis) to hold while disposition is decided. Either represents major intrigue.

## Jester

*Duties:* We all need comic relief. Yet the jester usually gets his laugh at the expense of other members at court. Only the lord will find this twitchy character amusing. The rest will find the mockery to close to the truth. By listening to the jester, the local politics of the court, the dirt on everyone, can be unearthed.

*Mishaps:* The jester may get carried away and insult the lord himself or a favorite.

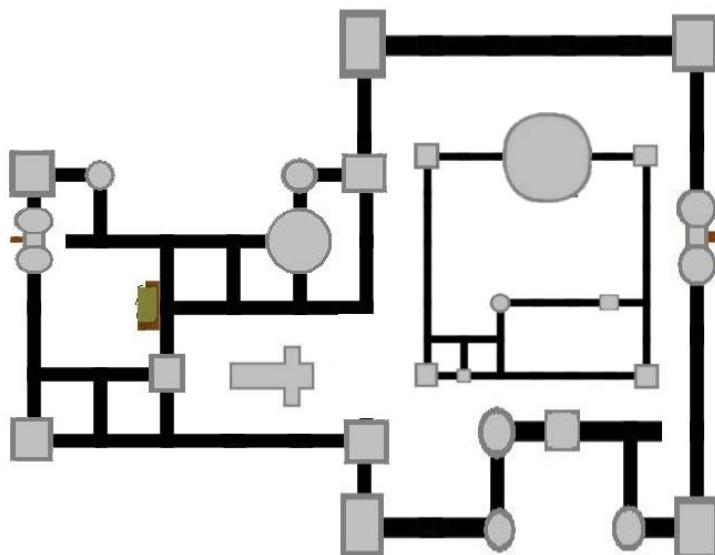
*Intrigues:* Hard to believe this person can be the source of any intrigue, but he usually will be familiar with everything which goes on. How? If not magic, just consider the jester as incredibly perceptive of human nature and motives.

## Knight-Errant

*Duties:* Not truly a post as much as a bachelor who rents a place to stay, paying usually in services. In a fantasy world, there is many a monster to slay. Yet also many a war. The knight will often take the lord's place in foreign battles of duty.

*Mishaps:* The man's past may catch up with him, and all manner of demon and monster may come seeking revenge on the servant as well as any who harbor him.

*Intrigues:* The prime candidate as usurper. The knight will philander in court, overspend his allowance and generally make mischief. He is often there as a favor to another lord, so he cannot be turned away with repercussions. Unlike the other henchmen,



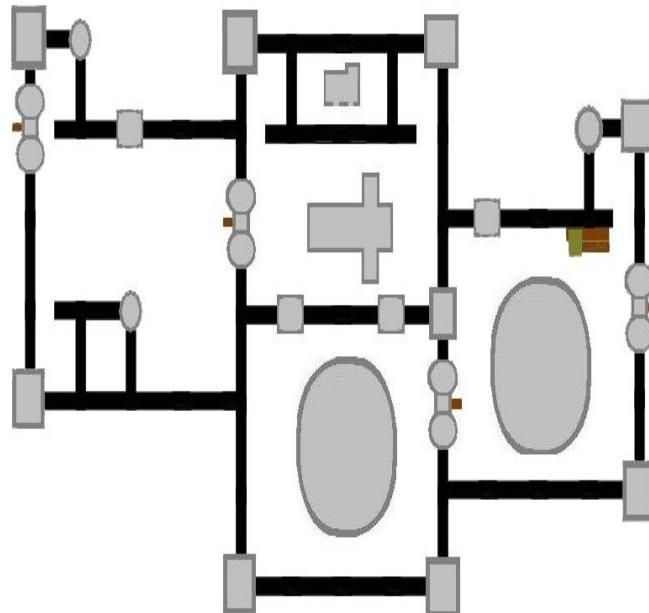
there may be several knights as contenders filling the role. Any more than one will of course create rivalry or even usurpers to the ruling lord. Younger brothers (sword-sisters) make good antagonists in court.

## Master Hounds

*Duties:* The keeper of the kennels. Hounds being just a colorful way of saying beasts with moat creatures and all manner of denizens under his control.

*Mishaps:* Wolves in the pens, i.e. more dangerous species mixing with a tame one. Shapeshifters going unrecognized. A keeper of long standing and tradition will be covered in scars and be an unsightly member of the court.

*Intrigues:* Of all the positions, this one tends to change hands the most. (Or this guy tends to lose a hand the most.) If anyone wants to be the beast-master, he is welcome to the job (often). Cleaning the pens and servicing the monsters is foul work. And in gratitude, who is blamed when the beasts escape? The master of the hounds is almost always totally mad and antisocial. But a lord with such a courtier is far more powerful than his neighbors, as he can call on the beast to quell uprisings or steal forth to do his bidding.



## Master Mason

*Duties:* Keeps the walls and towers of the keep maintained. No need to expand on the details. He's the Strong trait in the castle.

*Mishaps:* Engineering is not an exact science in an age of magic. This mason or his predecessor may have used a bit of magic-putty to hold things in place. Those charms are failing. Who really cares if a section collapses and a guard is killed? What about the fortress entire? If this retainer is in the game, the fortress will be a patchwork of bad ideas, mislaid plans and overwrought construction. The loot brought back by the lord is repeatedly squandered by the master.

*Intrigues:* And he does so, because he's obeying an outside power. The man is purposefully destroying the castle and fortress but proving this is not possible by simply critiquing his works.

## Sheriff

*Duties:* The absolute authority in the area in regard to the prevention of crimes and apprehension of criminals. The accused will be delivered to the baron's court for punishment, but the sheriff's word is hardly questioned. The court is simply to ascertain any secondary events of the punishment. Is the criminal a fellow lord and should be fined? Or is he a nobody and will be summarily executed.

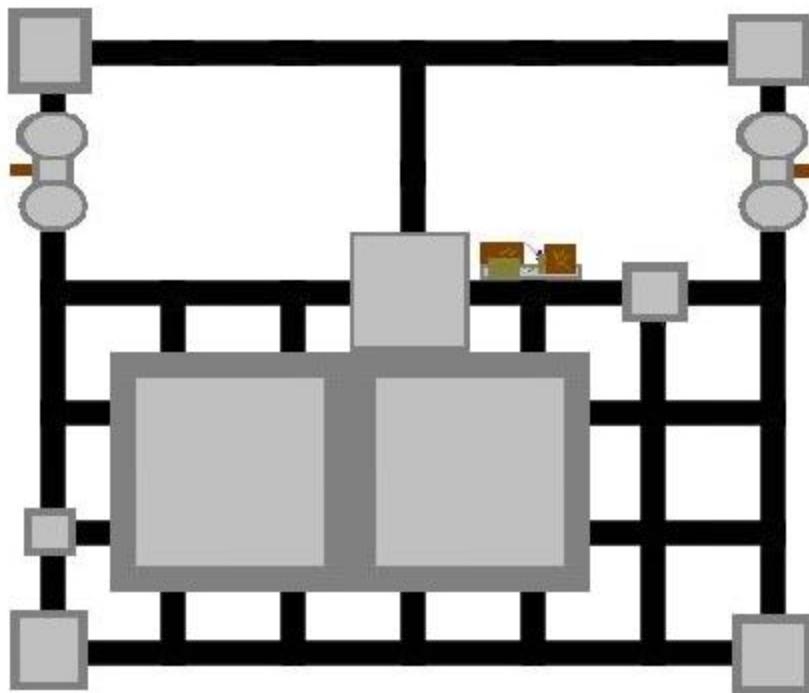
*Mishaps:* Dangerous work, enforcing the law. Most of the mishaps will be accidents resulting from chase on horseback.

*Intrigues:* A corrupt sheriff is a symptom not a disease; the players should leave post haste. Too late, they are usually under arrest.

## Smith

*Duties:* A mere farrier who tends to the horses would not earn a place in court, unless magic is in work. Not deception, but rather the lord must have a mount so fantastic, that its care is trusted to a freelance agent, our smithy. Pick a mount suitable to your campaign, a great stallion with many tricks or go wild and

add a dragon or other monstrous animal. The presence of the Master of Hounds need not complicate the role of the smith. The beast is ride-able only by the lord, the smith merely sees to the animal's special needs, diet, gear.



*Mishaps:* Riding a fantastic creature, be it a roc, or dinosaur, or dolphin, or talking horse, will be dangerous. Since the smith is seldom the rider, the mishaps will be the lord's injury due to the smith's careless handling of the special saddle.

*Intrigues:* If the animal's death coincides

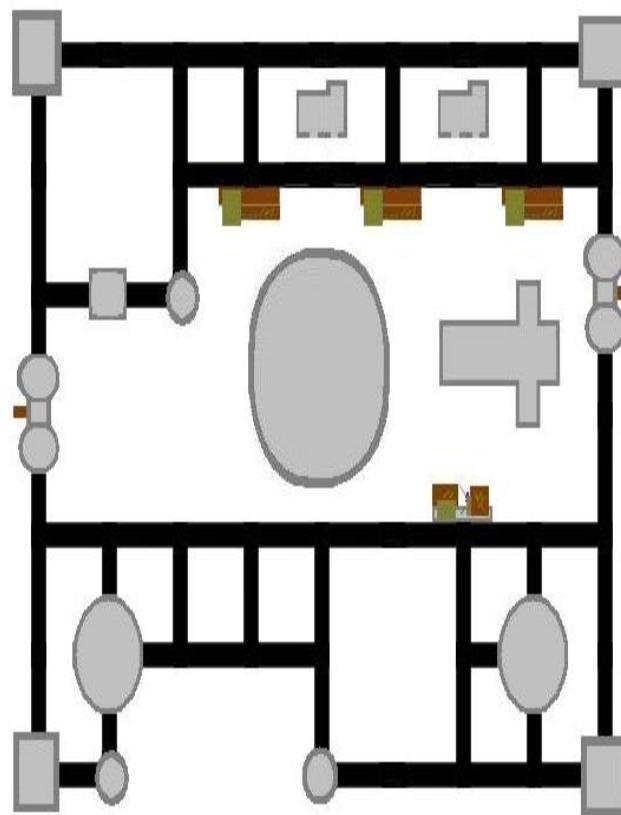
with the players arrival then who will be blamed. The players may have stumbled in and provided an excuse for another to wound the lord by killing his prized beast.

## Spy-Enforcer

*Duties:* The best agents are local; this person is never an ally of the local lord, but instead represents a person sent from the outside to spy within. The players sense the spy, but the ruling lord is dismissive. he sees the man as his most loyal servant. Who he is sent by and for what reason is never as important as the fact he is seen to be there. The local lord may even know himself that he has an outside agent in his presence. Yet he too does not know who sent the pretender of his trust.

*Mishaps:* The agents are usually neutral as most lords like to spy on one another to ensure no intrigue is planned. Here the agent is killed, usually by accident, and now the lord fears that the spy's true master will think the lord committed this act as the first of some other intrigue.

*Intrigues:* So, maybe the lord did kill the agent or have him "Accidentally" removed from his presence. Now before all manner of magical augury reveals the truth, many other acts must follow in a series. This could be the start of the lord cleaning house on several rivals in his court.



## Steward

*Duties:* Handles the staff of servants who cook, clean and make the manor livable. Most castles will become pretty foul in a manner of weeks, even with a staff. Lords usually moved between three (or four) houses to allow the filth to settle in one place while they pollute another. But with magic these delicacies need not be considered. Why recognize the steward here as a special courtier? The only reason would be if he is not human. As such he will extraordinary, a cook of

renown or master of efficiency. Yet his actions will be always suspect, since he isn't human. Depending upon your campaign, take your pick of race.

*Mishaps:* The food is always in spoilage or short in supply. The leading cause of illness will be diet.

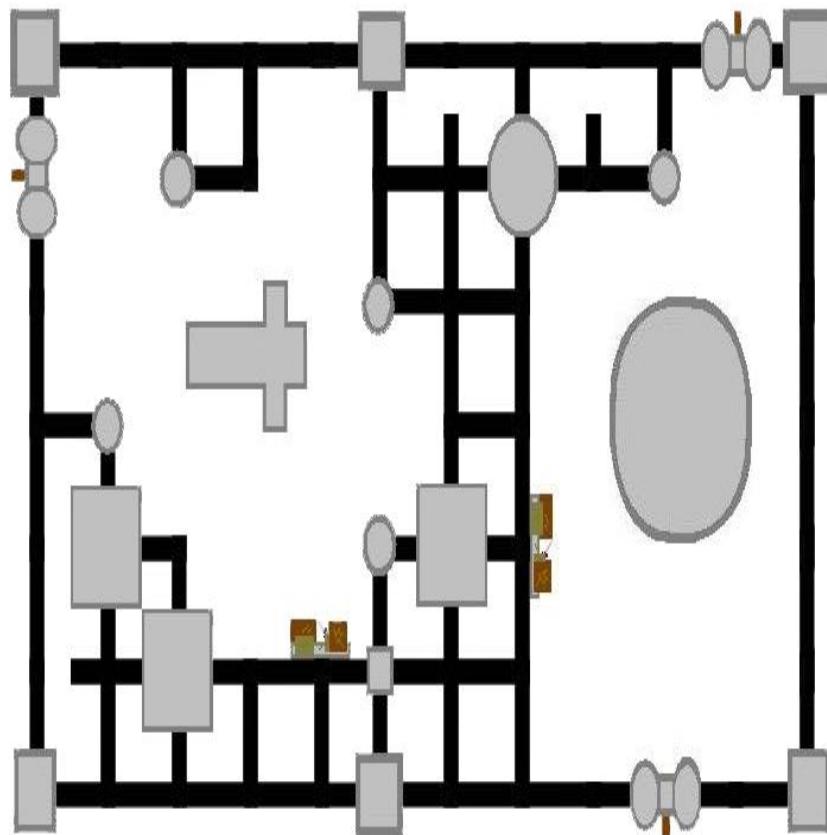
*Intrigues:* Our steward may also be a food taster. Yet a lord who believes he needs someone else to take his risks has much to fear besides poisonous potions.

## Valet

*Duties:* Clothes make the man. But here, the clothes are entirely magical. He's not simply making the lord more presentable, the valet like the armorer is creating magical apparel to protect and empower his master.

*Mishaps:* The binding of magic to articles of fashion can have consequences unintended. But the more serious mishap result when the valet needs a very rare material or dye or metal to complete a design. These quests are doomed from the start.

*Intrigues:* The valet has no ambition of his own. He delights in the creation. He enjoys the comfort of the manor and cares little for the leadership role. Long as he has the means to create unfettered, he will be happy. But his demands may be increasingly harder to come by. The valet will exhaust resources at an astonishing rate. His creations will be beyond reproach, but an entire kingdom may fall into poverty and ruin making a relic for the future. Be it, that's art! Now intrigue will start when the valet is checked, his finances limited. He may threaten to leave with his creations or aid another in exchange for the guarantee of adequate (unlimited) budget.



## Vizier

*Duties:* Chief counselor to the lord, the one who has the ability to tell the lord “no” without fear. The vizier is the lord’s mentor, often his former grammarian. In this court, the lord is secondary, and the power will rest with the vizier.

*Mishaps:* The lord dies, and the vizier will be in a panic. He is in danger of losing all he has to the heir or some other usurper. Yet seldom will these men wish to be the focus of attention. Content to play kingmaker a mishap flows smoothly into acts of intrigue.

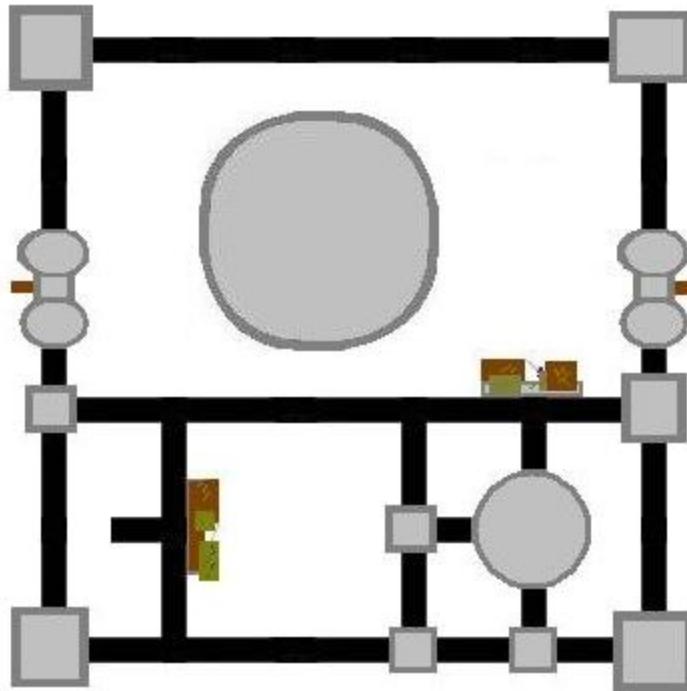
*Intrigues:* So, the vizier is hardly one to discredit. If he was wrong or lacked conviction, then he’d hardly be a vizier. The lord of the estate may be a mere child and the vizier (or properly queen dowager) controls the throne. But a usurper has claimed the right of title and now what. The players have an opportunity to aid the kingmaker or become one themselves.

## Warden Gate

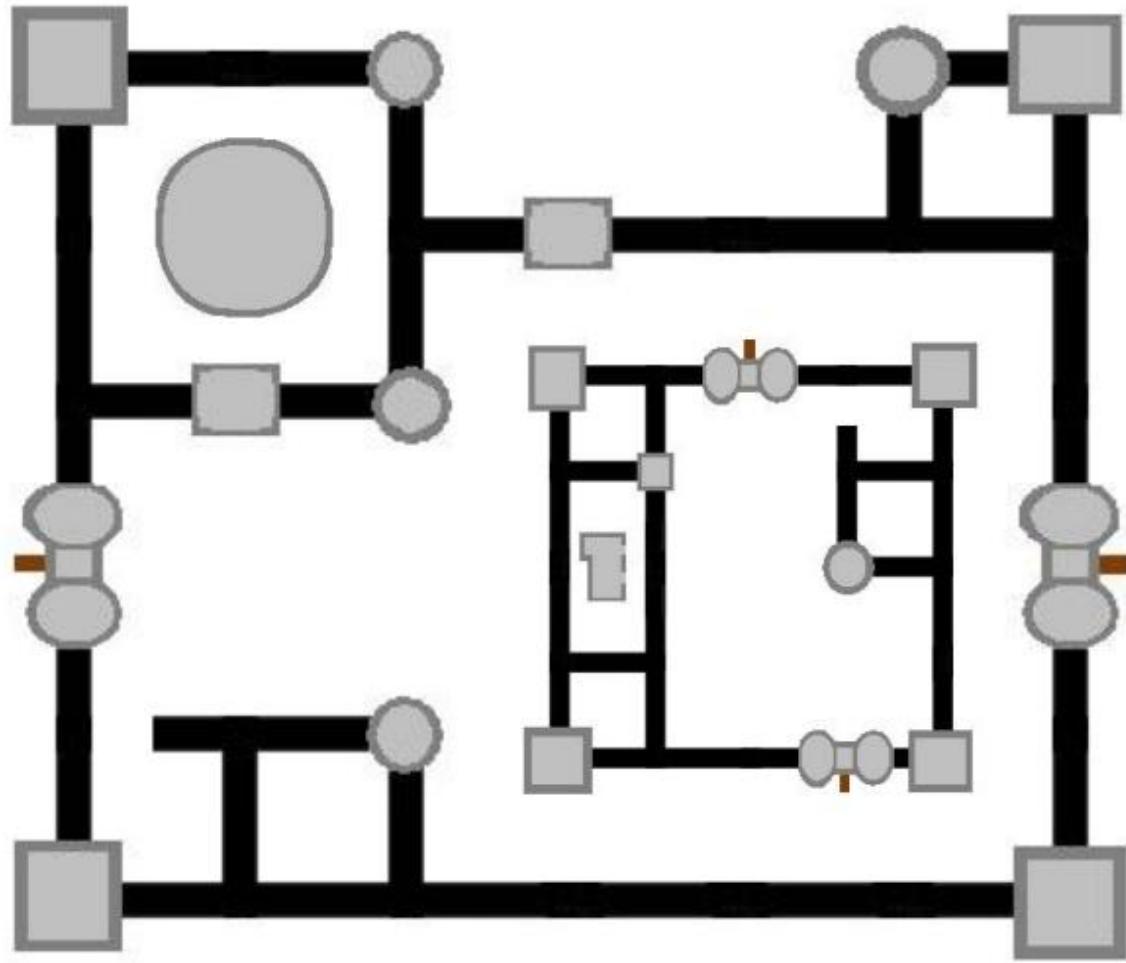
*Duties:* Second to the captain of the watch, seldom will the main gate be used to traverse inside and out after dark. Yet if a horse or merchant’s cart or other item of status and trade must leave or enter, the act must be approved by the lord or his appointed warden. Acting as a self-contained vault, each gatehouse will have its own staff and discipline. The guards will not mix with the regular garrison. Only the most loyal are allowed entrance to this sanctuary. This master is usually very gruff, often repugnant, generally delusional of his importance. The warden controls access to the keep and thus admittance to baron’s court.

*Mishaps:* Accidents abound, both in falls and with the arms of war. The gate, unlike the garrison, has many traps and mechanisms which can malfunction.

*Intrigues:* The difference between a secure fortress and an open path to pillage is through this man. Can he be bought? Surely for the right price, but



seldom in the simple currency of gold. Yet again why have a separate gate warden? The flip takes on more consequence and the gate here should almost always be one which also travels into the domains of the underworlds, either known or unknown to the local lord, he has true delvers in his midst.



### Retainer's Aspects (3D8)

As time allows, a few distinctive personality traits and signs or wear might be added to each person. Some truly memorable NPCs will have a half D8 of these features.

*3 or less:* Person is opposite of expected gender. Else, person is extremely old or young for position.

*4:* Person controls great magic. Else, by reputation only, really has no ability out of the ordinary.

5: Person is relative of another courtier. Else, illegitimate relation, but none the less blood relative.

6: Person supports a claimant for the baron's lands and rights. Else, instead, is himself a potential usurper of a lord's title.

7: Person has numerous allies in a religious sect. Else, among the worshipers of the One True Faith.

8: Person is mistress or paramour of another courtier. Else, a long forgotten lover or paramour.

9: Person is currently in hiding or fleeing another lord. Else, person being fled is an outlander, not lord in the realms of the barons.

10: Person has numerous allies in the barons. Else, his ally is a foreign warlord or exotic chieftain.

11: Person is a relative of the local baron. Else, an illegitimate, disowned or black-sheep relative who hides his true relationship.

12: Person is magically altered, controlled or possessed. Else, he's insane from magical mishap.

13: Person was once very high and mighty, an ordained leader of a secret group, troop, convoy, band, but has left that life behind. Else, he was banished or remains a deserter or fugitive from an army, fleet, country, cause, etc.

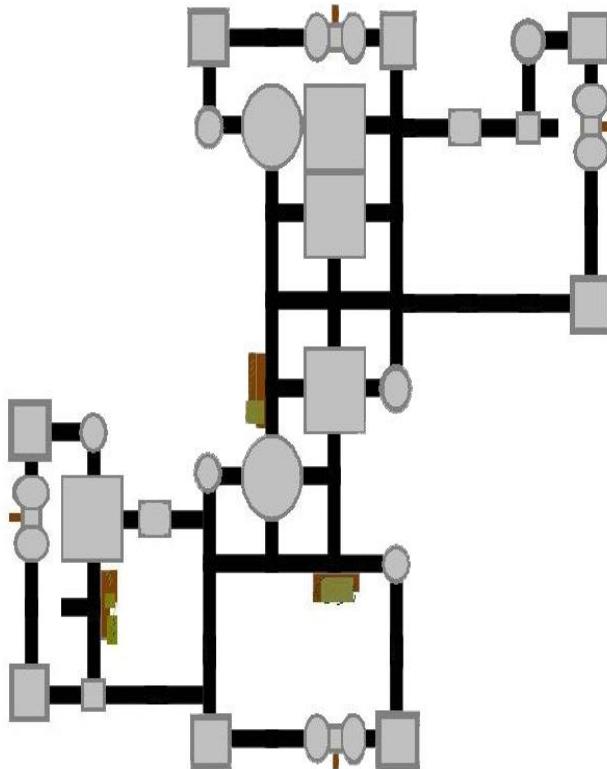
14: Person is skilled at armed combat. Else, person also skilled at unarmed combat.

15: Person is on the verge of losing his post to another. Else, an outsider is disparaging his performance.

16: Person is currently wounded or ill. Else, he will die from sickness sometime during scenario.

17: Person knows of an intrigue but chooses to do nothing. Else, he is the cause of this intrigue.

18: Person is disliked by the entire court. Else, person is feared by the entire court, including the local lord.



19: Person is involved in a mishap. Else, mistake will bring about greater calamity to the court and manor.

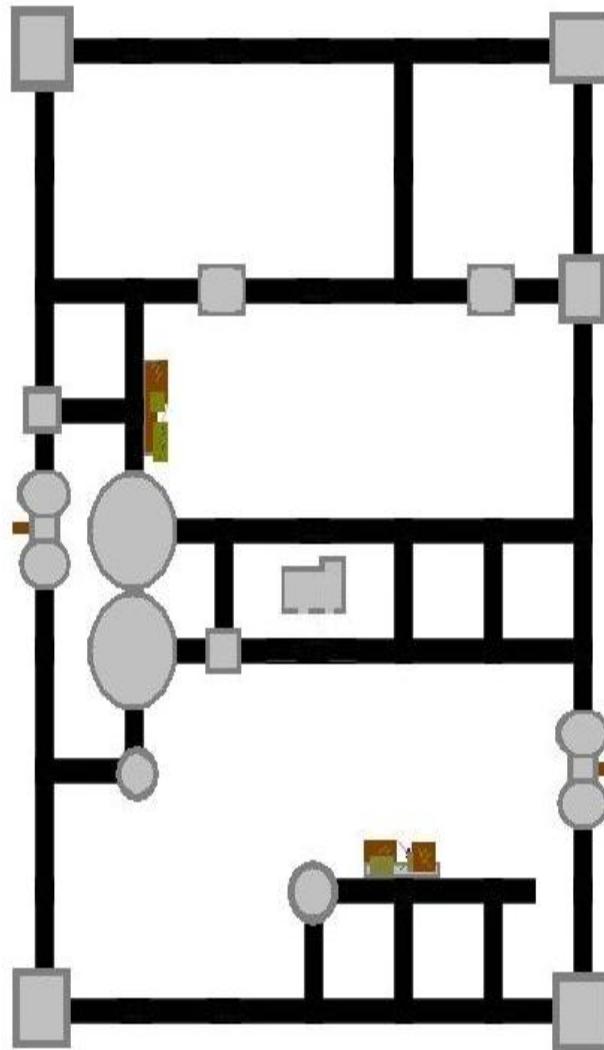
20: Person is someone that one of the players knows from past dealings (a former employer, friend, enemy, distant relative, etc.). Else, at least the courtier thinks so; the person and player are in fact strangers. The player may know this and play along, or he too may be deluded by similarities in references and deeds.

21: Person has many dark secrets and uses magic far more than is wise. Else, person is a master of illusions and nothing about him is as it seems.

22: Person is influential, powerful and rich from sources other than apparent. Else, also conversant in numerous foreign languages and customs.

23: Person is better suited for another role in the court. This becomes obvious to players once they meet the person. Else, everyone knows the person is better suited for another position, but the lord keeps the man where he is in spite or as punishment.

*24 or more:* Person is totally inept; yet he believes he is highly skilled, and constantly blames others for his mishaps. Else, role is being filled by an impostor assuming the image and role of the man he replaced.



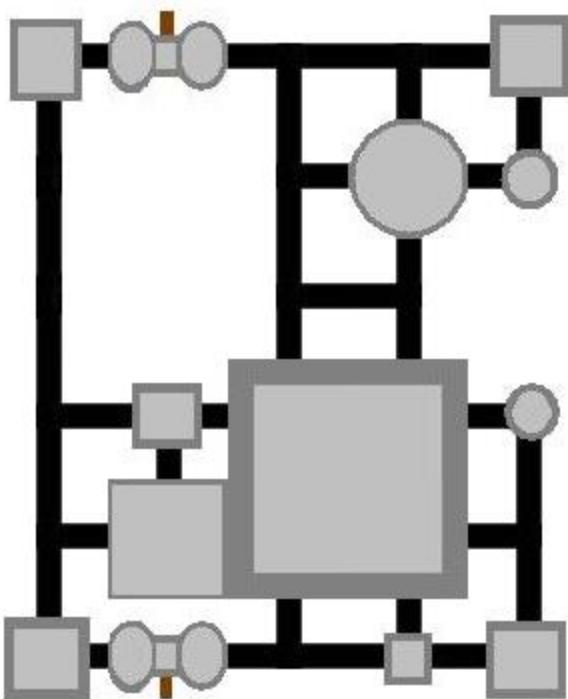
## Assemble the Court

There are probably dozens more who might form a court, so as we exhaust the list above add some of your own. Or to confuse your players, just alter the names slightly and obscure the roles. The next set of major domo, castellan, chevalier and aide-de-camp are as near as a Thesaurus. Get out of the dungeon holes and face the true monster of which side to butter the enchanted toast and which salad fork is appropriate for poisoned greens.

## Merrie Olde Paycheck

When asked to pen a few words on the subject of the economy of the medieval world, I had an immediate reaction. A few words?

Whole libraries have been filled on the subject, at least in the moldy corners of academia. But then I remembered one specific title, “Chaucer’s London,” DW Robertson Jr’s fun accounting of the guild control of London in the high middle ages. Very little Chaucer and a great source on money and city politics, suitable for any fantasy urban adventure. If you need all the nuances, just maybe, it’s still in print. Or like most of the net, scanned somewhere in a pirated attempt at homage.



Guilds were our middle class brethren’s attempt to control something in their lives. The craftsmen of the middle ages lived in a time where might made right and the hereditary lords were as moronic as they were brutal. If you had any intelligence at all, you escaped the hard labor and starvation of serfdom and learned a trade. You could not change your parents and thus find respect with an immediate title, but you might be able to buy one. Yet competition was driving down the prices, so cabals controlled the price of everything.

## Friends and Romans

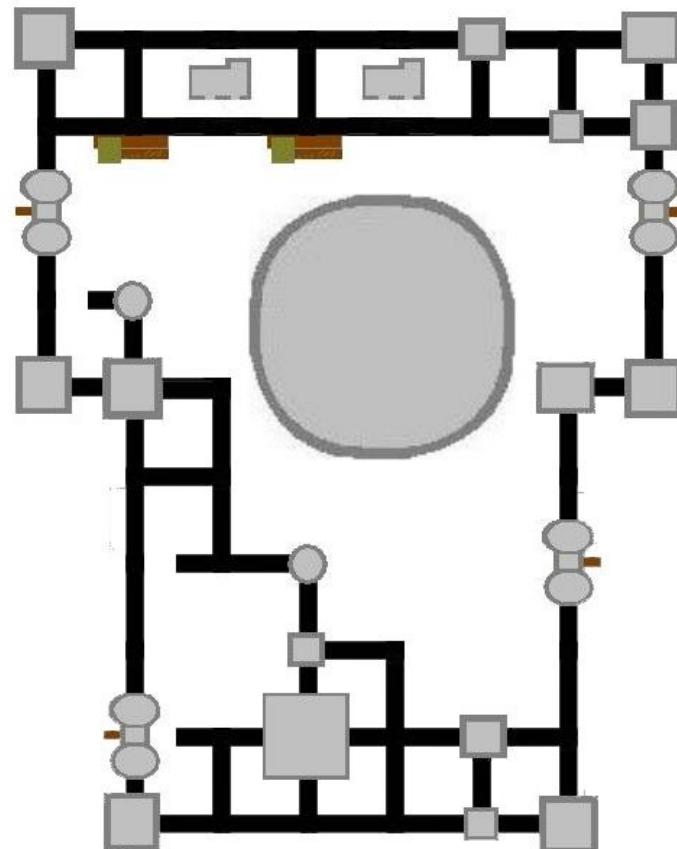
Back up and see the Dark Ages as the collapse of Roman trade. Small cottage industries became accustomed to producing everything needed for an agrarian life. People needed two things: food and clothing. Clothing was sheared wool from sheep with some leather cow or deer hide mixed in for belts (girdles). But livestock was not plentiful, and about one hundred people would labor in the fields simply to create enough surplus to allow one other fellow to call himself a lordly soldier. After that we had a priest (who often by necessity also got his hands dirty), and finally a dedicated tinker. But his medium of choice was hardly ever metal. Maybe it would be better to call this freeloader on the farmers the resident wood-carver.

Consult a Fairy Tale for examples of the stereotype outcast and how many times he had to sell his children to avoid starvation.

Most everything from the hoes to the plows to the cups to the shoes (when even available) was cobbled of wood. Only later did the status of iron enter the picture and with that specialized craftsmen. We'll save the analysis of coinage and its effect for another day, and we'll use the English system of coins to explain what comes next.

## Middle Class

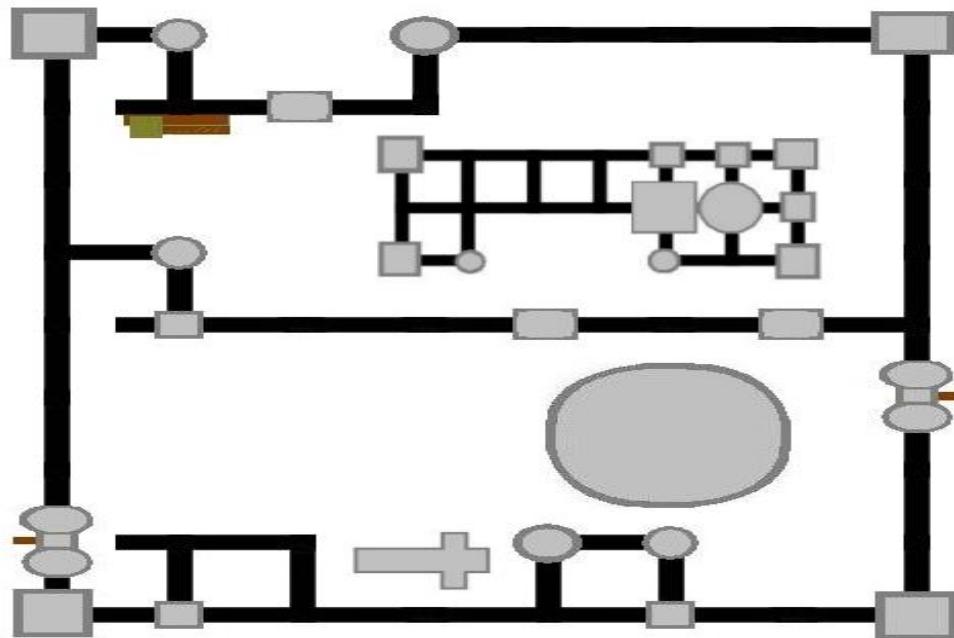
Affluence brought idle hands. The advance of something simple in concept but tremendous in impact, three field rotation, meant our ratio of farming serf to loafing parasite declined. Now you didn't need to live by the Nile to see consistently good crop yields. As the number of lords and priests remained constant, someone else could now leave the fields. But where the lord owned the land and took what was his, and the priests sold entrance to the next life for his daily bread, what would the would-be Bill Gates of the middle ages decide to create? How could he convince the farmers to give up some of their food in exchange for his talents. Worth mentioning is the rise of bandits during this agricultural revolution, who now could maraud knowing there was an excess of food-stores in local granaries. Also, traveling gypsy-minstrels could entertain for their livelihood. But some choose more noble professions in the value-added field of trade.



We're not up to the guilds yet, but we're close. If you wanted to wear something other than dull itchy wool, you could pay a true tailor. Yet this fellow would quickly exhaust his local estate, "vesting" all in his finery, so by necessity he

traveled from place to place selling his sewn fabrics and woven cloth to a variety of villagers. The journeyman was born. In the winter he would spend his time holed-up in a hut spinning and weaving and darning. In the spring, he would hit the road and collect what he might. Simplified for sure, but so is fantasy combat. Now we have trade like once was had in the Roman world. The dark ages fade, we enter the dawn of town life and the middle ages.

The growing affluence created by the excess of food allowed more people to settle in smaller areas, something which previously would have only caused starvation. City life returned. Guilds of craft-services could operate out of established fortresses continuing a tradition from ancient times. The secrets of these guildsmen in producing their luxury and vanity items could be kept in-house, and new slaves (apprentices if you delude yourself) would be pressed into service. (Venice kept all the glass-blowers interned on their own private island to keep the secret safe.) The journeymen would carry the craft into the countryside and bring back the wealth of this enterprise. But competition was feared. My shirt is better made than his might not be enough. The guilds maintained their monopolies on certain products by murder. Perhaps sanctioned by a sympathetic lord or done under the guise of pretense and offense resulting in trial by combat, or simply disguised as banditry, capitalism's humble roots were spread often with a dagger thrust from behind. What better way to prove the quality of ones' product then to test it against the ribcage of a competitor?



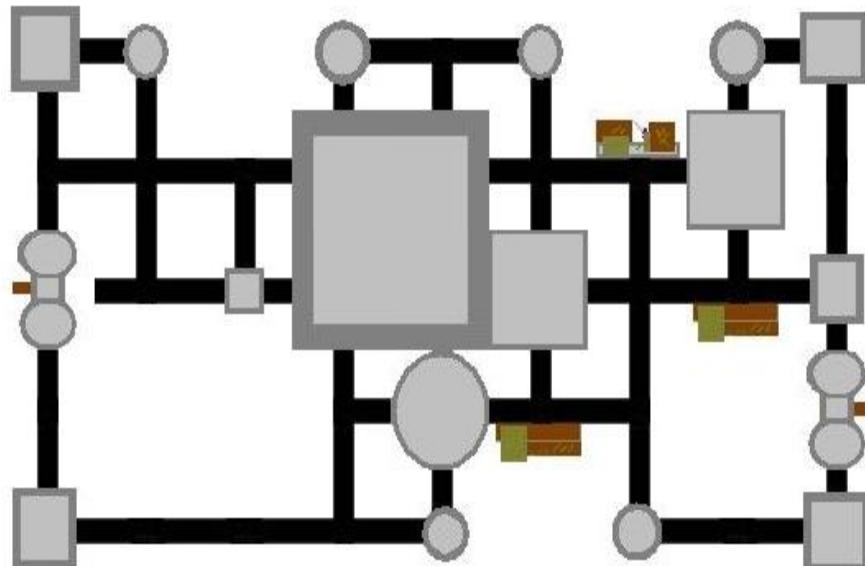
## Guilds

Which brings us to guilds in London and Mr. Robertson's research. The common Counsel of London in the year 1373 consisted of the following members:

- 6 Each of Grocers, Mercers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, Vintners, Tailors, Skinners
- 4 Each of Saddlers, Weavers, Tapicers, Fullers, Brewers, Girdlers, Dyers, Ironmongers, Cordwainers
- 3 Each of Salters, Butchers
- 2 Each of Leathersellers, Founders, Joiners, Tallowchandlers, Curriers, Fletchers, Bakers, Brioders, Haberdashers, Brasiers, Cappers, Pewterers, Bowyers, Hatters, Lorimers, Horners, Armorers, Cutlers, Spurriers, Plumbers, Waxchandlers, Shearmen, Painters, Tanners, Pouchmakers, Woolmongers, Pinners
- 1 Each of Farriers, Bladers, Blacksmiths, Heumers

Looking at the list we can see that food was still important, even in the salting of what little meat might be had. Yet also appreciate the complexity of the distinction, a Blader versus a Cutler or a Haberdasher versus a Tailor. You would have to be a member of these professions to truly appreciate the difference. In the modern world we get accustomed to sharing each other's jobs and blurring our titles. Whoever can get the job done today is lauded. In the middle ages, touch the wrong set of tools and lose your hand.

In a fantasy world no doubt you would need to add the mixture of magical perfumers and curse-removers and increase the status of those who make arms. But these masters by virtue of trade, did control the debt and thus the lords. (Another topic again for later.)



## Currency

Shall we be English and use the farthing (f), a small iron or copper coin?

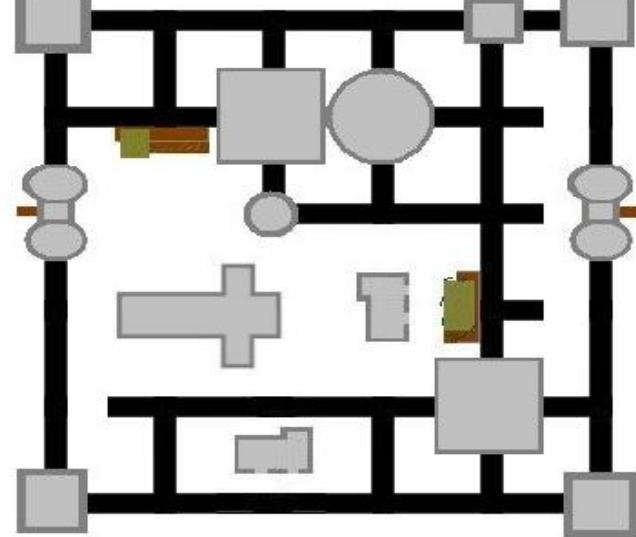
4 farthings = 1 penny (d)

12 pennies = shilling (s)

20 shillings = pound (L)

Ordinary soldiers could expect three pennies a day, while an Earl might receive six shillings in rents a day. A good mercenary might be paid twelve pennies, a full

shilling, to act as a surrogate in a duel, or a bit more to kill a rival. When the black death struck, the shortage of people meant that some workers were demanding the unheard of wage of five pennies a day! (The exclamation point being added for sarcasm.) The amount of coinage plundered on most fantasy adventures is ridiculous. If experience must be equated with gold, then change the value to a thousand xp to one gold, and you'd have a better representation of the cash poor societies.



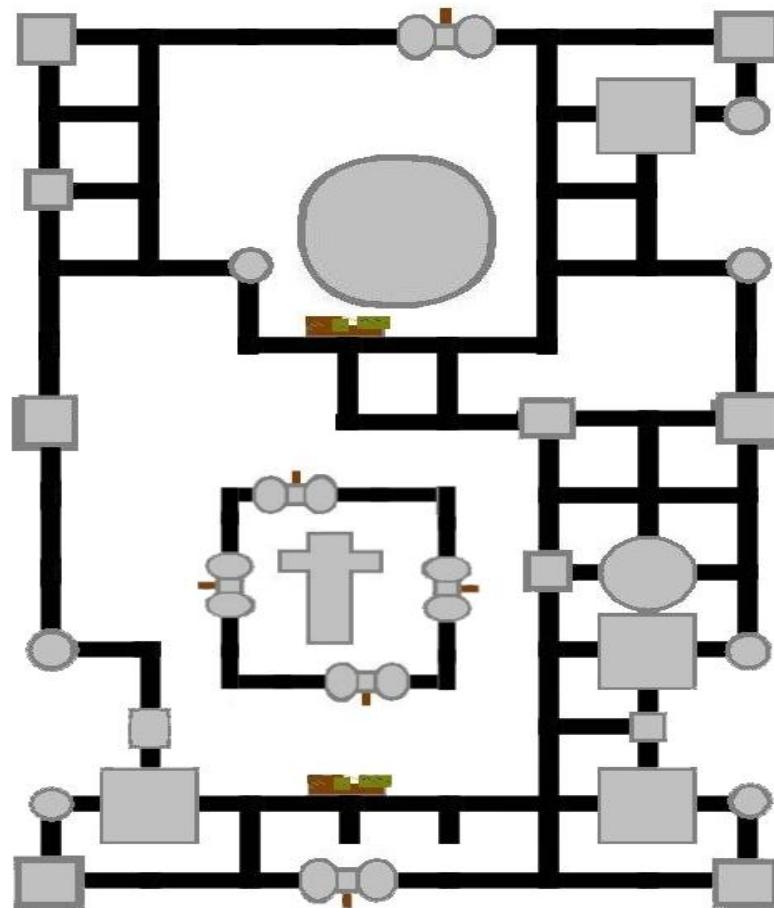
## Paying Ones Bills

What do these wages mean in lifestyle? Robertson tells us that eight pennies a week could support an unmarried woman. A lad in college would live on ten pounds a year. A poor parson would collect four pounds a year plus the fruits of his garden. A fortunate city friar could expect to collect ten pounds yearly from parishioners needing sins forgiven. For a pound a month, someone could live well, ride occasionally, and enjoy meat in his meals. A rich guildmaster funded his marriage with a feast of Roast Pig (8d), Roast Hen (4d), five Larks (1d, 2f), Hen in Pastry (5d) and a Bushel of Oysters (4d). Total cost, carry the one add the odd shilling, well a lot more than most would pay to celebrate.

Ale was graded as common at three farthings a gallon, while the best measure ran a full penny a gallon. Four loaves of bread was a penny. Lambs sold for six. Yet to put things in perspective – before the advent of industrial machined cloth, an

embroidered cape would cost forty pounds! (Now the exclamation point is used for alarm.) A single copy of the Psalms took two years to produce and would require the expenses of 34L, 13s, 7d to fund the production. And people laugh when Cameron spent 200-million to film Titanic.

Accounts were not paid in coins. Coins were actually pretty hard to come by. The wages of most were recorded by an exchequer as a tally on a stick. Each notch made on opposite sides of a branch signified a day of work. The stick at the end of the project would then be spit down the middle. Think of this as a pay-stub. The man would carry his half of the stick, while the other was bundled with all the others and locked away. When the man needed to collect his wages, presumably when the fall harvest could offer a source of payment, the sticks would be produced, compared and a tally of foodstuff would be handed to the worker. Yes, the system was ripe for corruption. Who was the law anyway (topic three deferred.)

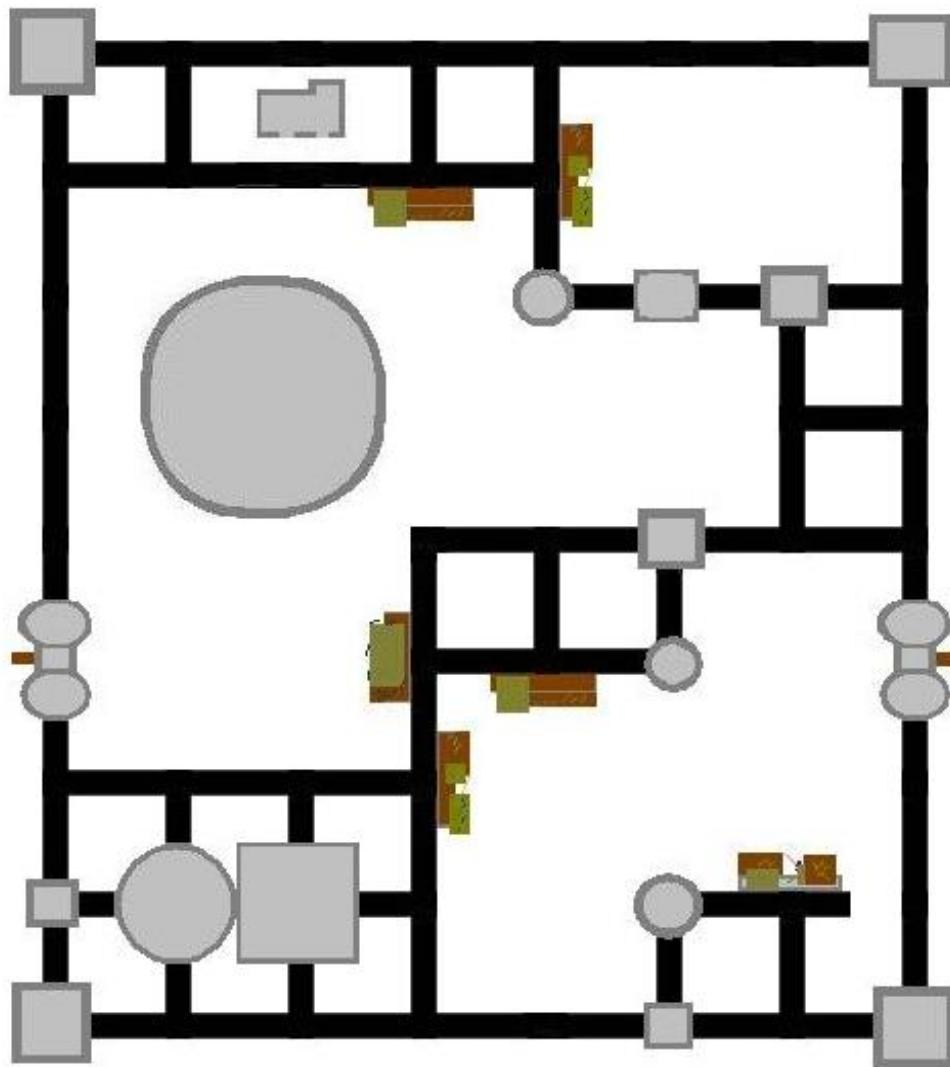


A corrupt guildmaster (alderman) could expect to graft several thousand pounds a year. The worst case prosecuted was the corruption trial of John Pecche who demanded 2 shillings on every barrel of sweet wine sold. He was ousted from England and lost his citizenship. Note, he kept the money and moved to France. These were pretty simple times, and the dominant motive of craft was greed.

## Resolving Sieges

A system of tables can be used to simulate the siege both from without and within. Since the players are seldom (if ever) on both sides of a battle, the action will focus on their skills and abilities as they try to break the stalemate. The use of magic is both continuous and checked, else the battle would be over in a heartbeat. Also, the defenders are considered stalwart and will fight to the last, otherwise a bribe would leave the place overrun. At least both those conditions apply until the Q&D generates events to say otherwise.

A mix of generic skills and abilities are used. If you are playing your own hybrid system, and we hope that you are, freely make the conversion to your game by co-opting your game's skills and character stats which seem to apply. At times, make



your players justify the abilities of their characters. But otherwise, the skills listed are those needed; either you have the listed ability or do not. In each round every player should generate an event and resolve his own action, until the tables say the battle is over – mostly Results G and H.

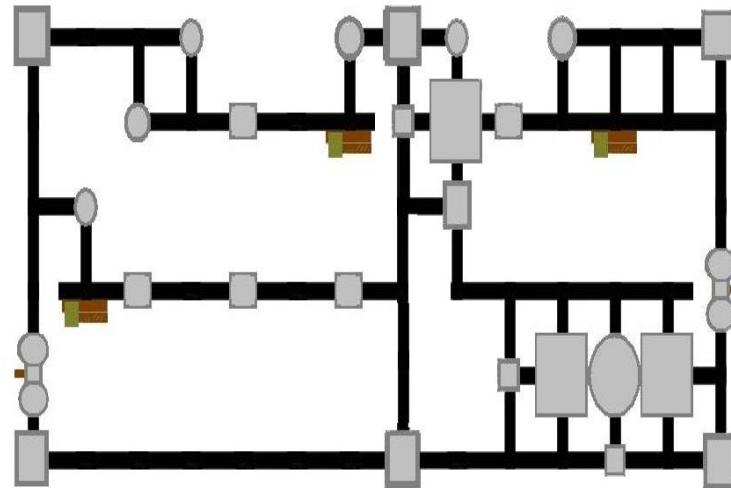
## Mechanics

The castle immediately loses its Peaceful Trait. That is if it had one. All players start the action by rolling on the Q&D Surviving the Siege.

After that each player should keep track of which Q&D he rolls on next in the battle. An exception: see the foot note under the Force Truce table. If the player has the magic spell, skill-feat, stat-trait or other ability, he makes the roll as Simple (50-50 chance typically). If his character does not have any such ability, then the roll is made as Tasking (one in four chance of success for low level). However, if any other player in the group has the necessary skill, the roll can be attempted at Difficult (one in three likely).

By sharing the event, the player with the added skill will suffer mixed and mishap results along with the other player. A mixed roll is a slight miss on the dice; mishap would be as your house rules apply.

Most of the outcomes will move the players along to their final objectives or elimination from the battle. The affair need not be seen as a linear series of events, but rather a highlight of the action. Even if one player is on the verge of victory, another can snatch defeat from the proverbial jaws.



All players must take their turn. The greatest of characters can suffer from their companion's actions. A balanced, well-matched in level group is always the best.

## Overkill, Mixed and Mishap Results

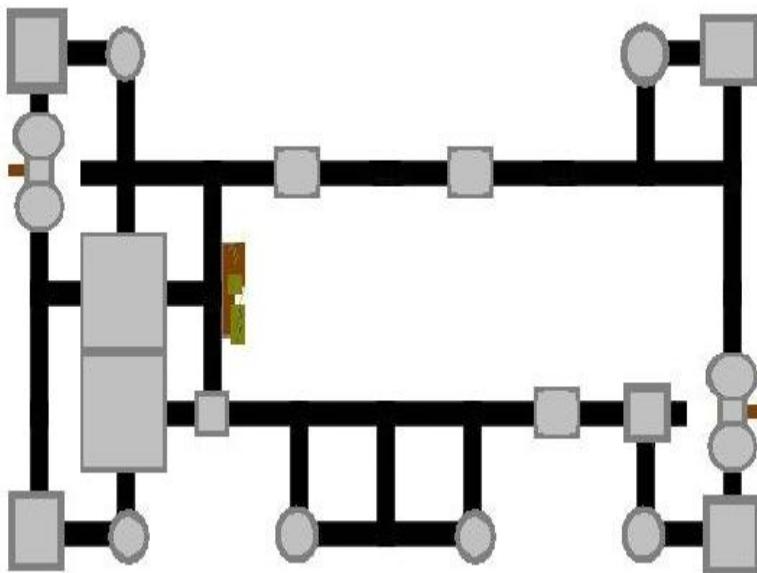
If the dice roll is less than perfect, treat mixed results like success on the table, but the player (and any skill helper) takes a Bleeder wound (eighth of total hps). These can accumulate over the course of events and cause the player to fall in the battle. Mishap results treat like failure, and again deliver a grievous injury (forth of hps).

Overkill (perfect rolls) are success and also grant a plus four dice roll modifier for the player's next action, but only if he voluntarily suffers a Bleeder injury (eighth hp loss, retaliatory or self-inflicted in the carnage).

These tables are not meant to be easy. Siege is a dirty business. Before it occurs, the defenders might want to challenge the attackers on a neutral field of battle. Or the attackers may wish to bypass the citadel or attempt some player inspired sabotage before entering into a prolonged action.

## Time and Situation

Each round of combat, with all players generating an event roll, should represent half a D8 days of siege. These tables apply to either side of the battle. The players on the outside trying to break the will of the castle garrison roll on the same tables as the gallant defending players. The game will instruct attackers to one result, defenders another.



To reiterate, these are the battle's major events, and the actions of any one of the group may be the decisive blow or the final death knell of his side. Non-martial players and pacifists may choose to forego their roll on any table except Q&D Forced Truce; he instead takes his roll on Q&D Surviving the Siege. If told to roll on the Forced Truce table (hardly ever a good thing), the roll may not be

skipped and must be generated and attempted. In a long siege, surely everyone has his turn on the watch.

## Special Cases – Internal Affairs of Honor

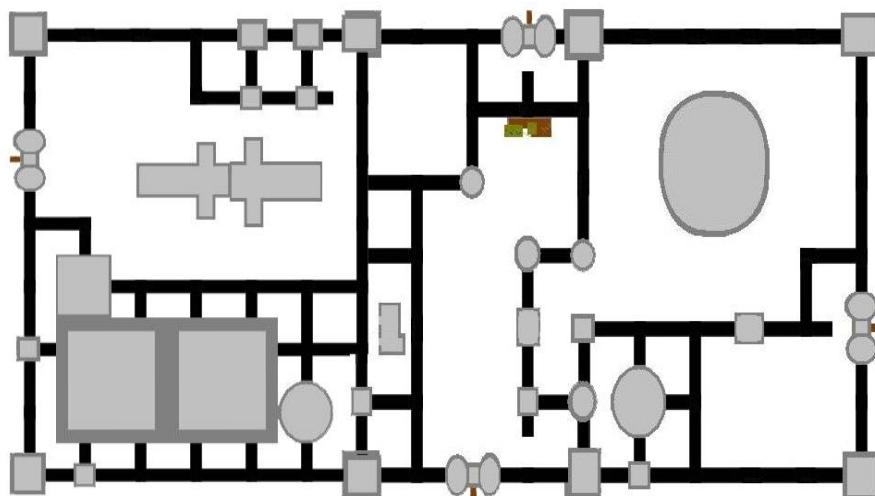
If the players are defending a castle from a peasant revolt, they should all instead start on Q&D Skirmishes on the Fringes, and again keep track of where they each

are in the action for their next event. The battle can be assumed to take place over a single bloody D8 days.

Some of the major events will need slight interpretation as the local serfs are not so much trying to win a castle as to kill a tyrant. The action usually ends once the commander and his major supporters (perhaps the players) are defeated. A new leader is elevated to usurping lord.

Likewise, a revolt of the castle garrison can be handled the same way but start the action at Q&D Keep in Turmoil. The players should not be on both sides as this may generate some contradictory results. But should they be the leader of the mutinous guards, they can fight the battle from an attacker's point of view, trying to wrest control from the current reigning lord.

Many a player  
fiefdom has been  
had in this fashion.  
If the players fight  
on both sides, these  
internal disputes  
should be handled  
by first personal  
duels and rolling  
new characters for  
the losers, then go  
on with the larger  
show. Hopefully,  
the group knows  
better than to split in free-style play.



## Quibbling Players

If your players are not familiar with Q&D style tables, they may ask why their characters can't just attack with a skill they know? The nature of large-scale battle is impersonal; no one can stand against an army no matter how great. If they could, why are we rolling on these tables at all? The series of tables reflect the chaos of the engagement and the unfortunate consequences of letting one's guard down, during the day, and even months, of monotony punctuated by quick clashes.

Bottom line: Suck it up and take it; the game is a game, and a well-rounded character is rewarded in free-style play. Laugh at the brutal mishap events, it sometimes helps.

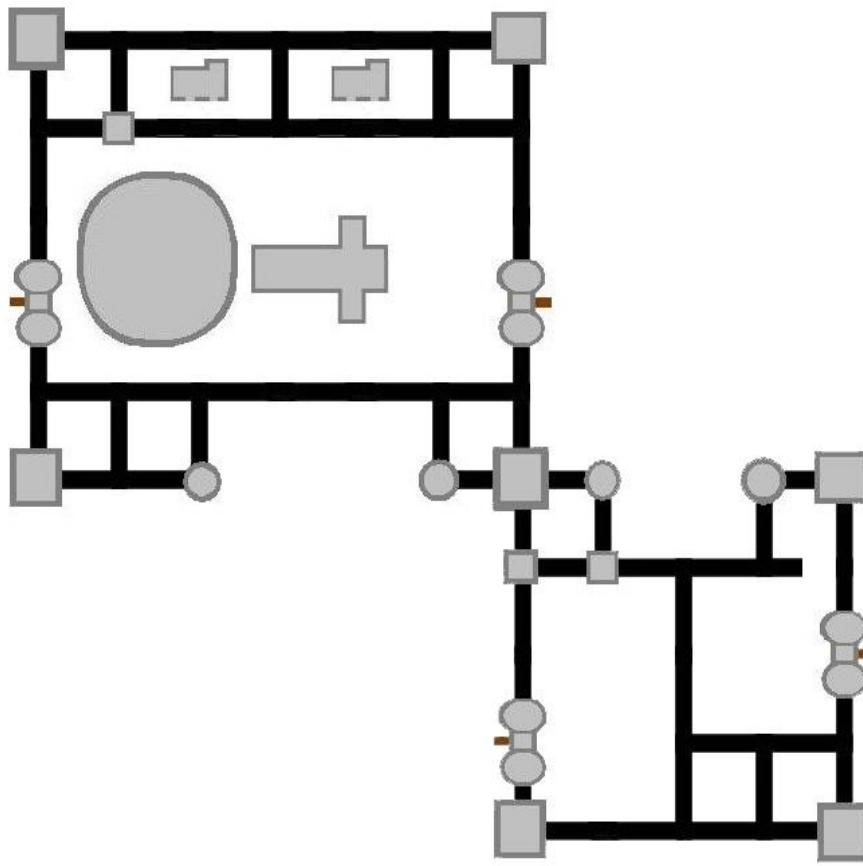
## Castle Trait Modifiers

In the tables below the defenders have easier dice rolls to make if they defend a viable fortress. Yet many of the worst events will affect them adversely or horrifically. Apply the following modifiers to any dice resolution made on these tables:

**Good Traits** of Populous, Magazine, Strong, Patriotic, Orderly, Prosperous, Justice: Add one to the defender's dice rolls, subtract one from attacker's rolls.

**Bad Traits** of Depleted, Ransacked, Disorder, Rebellious, Unruly: Add one to the attacker's dice rolls, subtract one from defender's rolls.

**Bad Traits** of Plagued, Famine, Pestilent, Pillaged: Subtract one from everyone's rolls.



**Note:** These modifiers should never result in a positive modifier of greater than four or negative modifier below minus four, after the character's skill bonus is applied. (e.g. Warrior's Sidearm +3 in a battle as defender with all ten bad traits would still be minus four. The same guy in a Strong, Patriotic, Justice fiefdom would only be plus four.)

## Five Siege and Storming Tables

Skirmishes on the Fringes

Running the Ramparts

The Keep in Turmoil

Surviving the Siege

Forced Truce

## Twenty-Six Results

- A. Roll next on the Q&D Skirmishes on the Fringes.
- B. Roll next on the Q&D Running the Ramparts.
- C. Roll next on the Q&D The Keep in Turmoil.
- D. Roll next on the Q&D

Surviving the Siege.

- E. Roll next on the Q&D Forced Truce.

F. Fall with a vicious wound. In larger groups of players (three or more), this result eliminates the player from further rounds of combat. The siege will be decided by others.

G. Garrison surrenders; the castle is defeated.

H. Attackers routed; the castle folk are victorious.

I. Castle loses trait Populous; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.

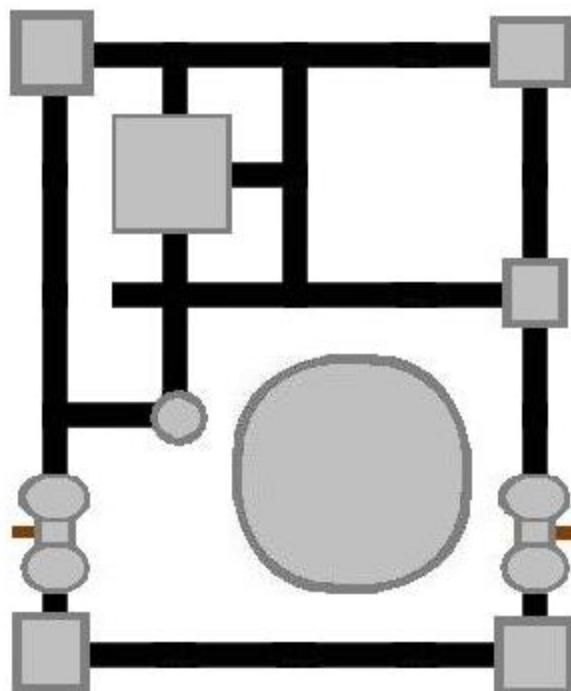
J. Castle loses trait Magazine; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.

K. Castle loses trait Strong; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.

L. Castle loses trait Patriotic; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.

M. Castle loses trait Orderly; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.

N. Castle loses trait Prosperous; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.



**O.** Castle loses trait Justice; if not present, then lose a D4 other good traits or gain one bad trait.

**P.** Castle gains trait Plagued; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**Q.** Castle gains trait Depleted; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**R.** Castle gains trait Ransacked; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**S.** Castle gains trait

Disorder; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**T.** Castle gains trait

Rebellious; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**U.** Castle gains trait Famine; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**V.** Castle gains trait

Pestilent; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**W.** Castle gains trait

Pillaged; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

**X.** Castle gains trait Unruly; if already present, then castle is defeated (treat as result G).

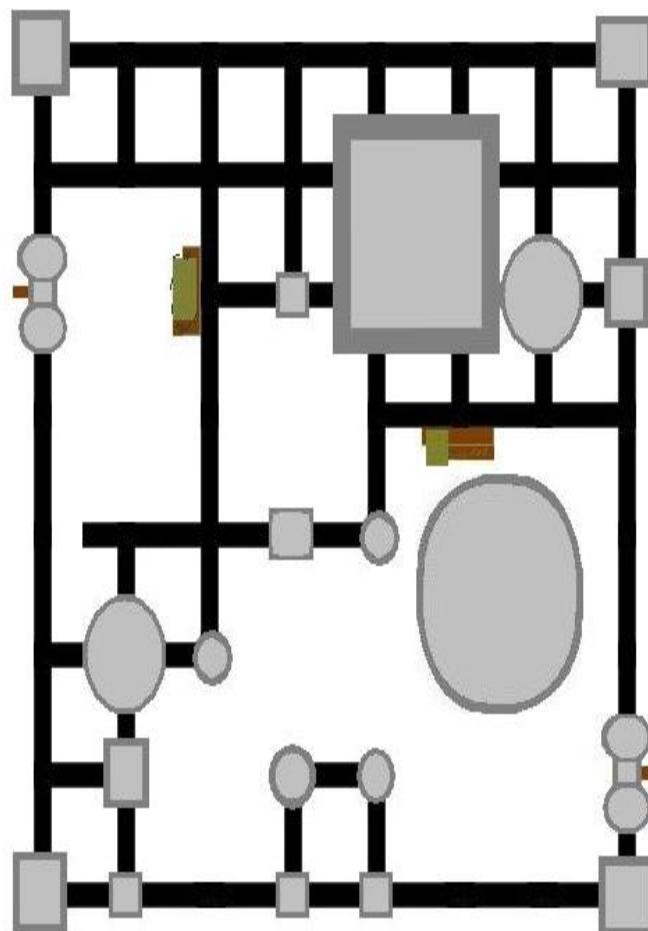
**Y.** Secondary event of bad nature impacts the player. He might suffer a loss, mishap, be captured, be judged inept or a coward...Referee decides.

**Z.** Secondary event of good

nature aids the player. He might make a curious discovery, gain a skill, take a hostage, inspire or restore another to vigor, be judged a hero...Referee decides.

Character that can demonstrate his ability = Simple Roll (50-50)

Character lacks a suitable ability listed = Tasking Roll (1 in 4)



## Q&D Skirmishes on the Fringes (2D8)

Use when prompted by other tables or independently when engaged in combat along the encampments outside of a siege.

**2 or less:** “*Diversion*” – Ride around the fortress with a smaller group of soldiers, firing bows to harry the enemy positions. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Missilery. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result C.

**3:** “*Ingenuity*” – Dupe opponent into dividing his forces, while you reorganize yours. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Cleverness. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result C.

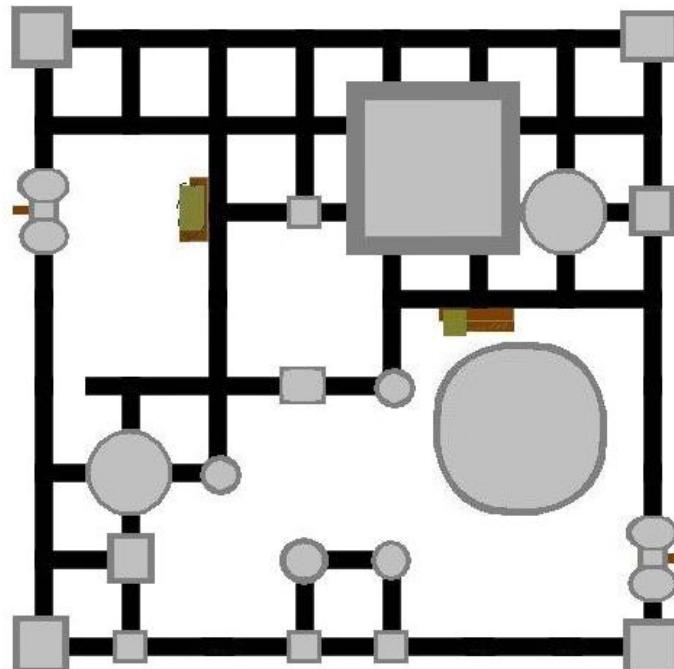
**4:** “*Man to Man Challenge*” – Meet the opposing commander and exchange attacks in a personal duel. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Bold. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result B.

**5:** “*Assemble Here*” – Command a force of men into the skirmish. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Leadership. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result B.

**6:** “*Close One*” – Could only be sheer luck or divine fate, maybe both, that the arrow stuck into your buckle and not your belly button. Still your troops carry you off in fear of your injury. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Magical Act Defender or attacker failure result E.

**7:** “*Regroup*” – Abandon the direct attack and flee away from several bowmen setting up within range. They can be flanked later from the trees. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Energetic. Defender failure result B. Attacker failure result D.

**8:** “*Tip Hat, Perhaps*” – Lose the grip of your sword or buckler, so forced to parry a second opponent’s blow with your cape, while readying or retrieving your blade. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Gesticulate Garment. Defender failure result B. Attacker failure result F.



**9:** “*Irregulars*” – Inspire the locals to join your cause and assemble the rabble for battle if only to dig trenchworks. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Bold. Defender failure result I. Attacker failure result H.

**10:** “*Certain Sacrifices*” – Force the peasants to burn only select buildings and fields to deprive the enemy of sustenance. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Spurning. Defender failure result N. Attacker success result J.

**11:** “*Broken Blade*” – Your attack falters when you lose your weapon in the heart of the melee. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Iron Grip. Defender failure result D. Attacker failure result H. Regardless, player’s weapon is lost.

**12:** “*Side Show Engagement*” – While the enemy is engaged in the field, the invaders attempt to undermine the main fortress. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Speed & Guile. Defender success result Z. Attacker success result K.

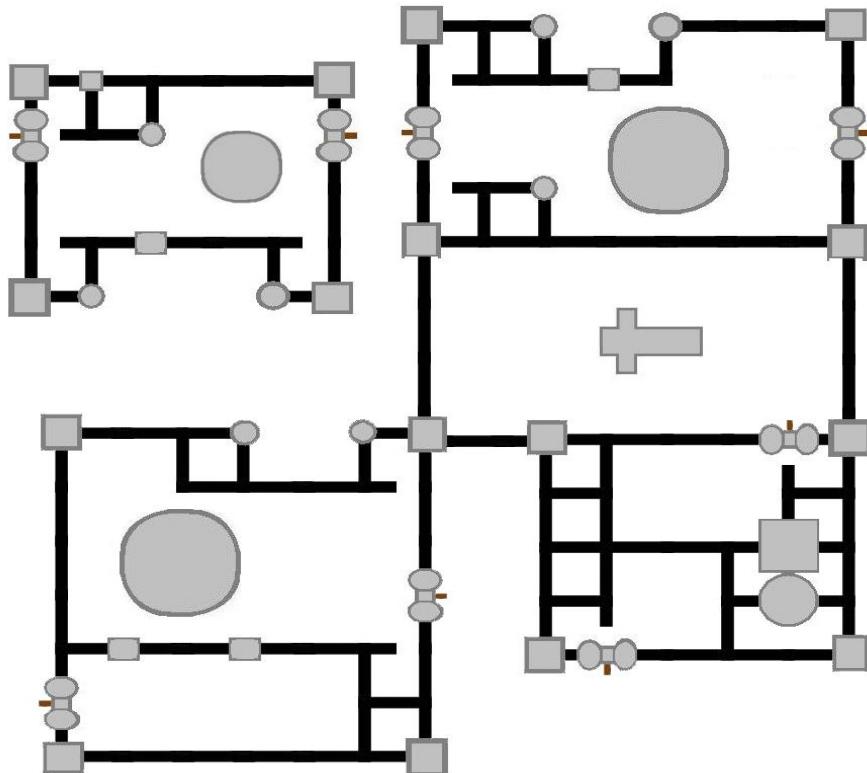
**13:** “*In the Sacred Name of....*” – Inspire the men to glory and loyalty for the cause. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Energetic. Defender failure result M. Attacker failure result H.

**14:** “*Chaos*” – Enraged to almost inhuman frenzy, you assault the enemy. But will your fury inspire further acts of lawlessness? Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Berserk. Defender failure result O (unable to bring your fit under control). Attacker success result N (and set a fine example for others to pursue).

**15:** “*One of the Grunts*” – Join the ranks of the elite portion of the forces in this day’s clash.

Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Ruggedness. Defender failure result L. Attacker failure result H.

**16 or more:**  
“*Flukes*” – Generate a secondary event, affecting the whole of the battle. The Major modifiers are a good starting list for the possibilities.



## Q&D Running the Ramparts (2D8)

Use when prompted by other tables or independently for an assault on the curtain walls of a fortress.

**2 or less:** *“Conflict of Interests”* – Shut down the secondary industry of the area and signal your motives and determination through the region. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Cleverness. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result N.

**3:** *“Isolation”* – Systematically secure the routes that couriers might travel to secrete messages of support into and out of the tower. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Methodical. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result O.

**4:** *“A Towering Giant”* – Block the passage of several opponents, until others arrive to reinforce your position. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Grapple. Defender success Result A. Attacker success Result K.

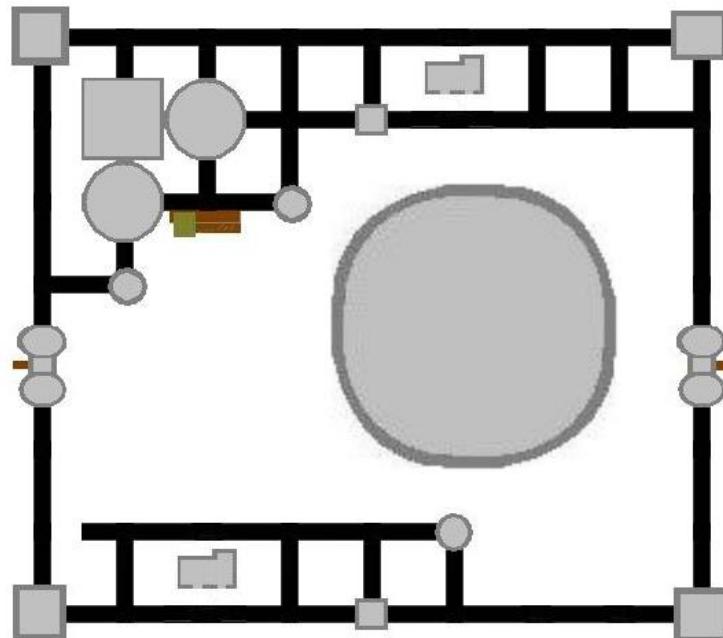
**5:** *“Rewards”* – Bribe the defender to extra sympathy for your cause. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Haggle. Defender success Result H. Attacker success Result L.

**6:** *“Time to Regroup”* – During a white flag truce, several prisoners on both sides are exchanged. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Diplomacy. Defender or attacker failure result E.

**7:** *“Backstab”* – Slink along, knifing opponents as they cross to reinforce an overrun section of the walls. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Fake Death. Defender success result A; Attacker failure result A.

**8:** *“Rabble”* – The area serfs are trying to mount an attack to save their homes. Add your voice to the gathering. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Battle Cry. Defender failure result I; Attacker success result I.

**9:** *“Looting”* – A secondary force of men, aided by an insider, has dug or cut through the wall of a storehouse motivated only by self-interest. Teach them a



lesson in loyalty. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Quick Blows. Defender failure result J; Attacker success result J.

**10:** “*House of Cards*” – A section of wall is about to give way and topple on your own troops unless immediately reinforced. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Pyramid Builder. Defender failure result K; Attacker failure result F.

**11:** “*Cinematic*” – Swing out and ride a tilting ladder crashing downward upon a group of the enemy poised for a critical attack. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Flamboyant Moves. Defender failure result C; Attacker failure result H.

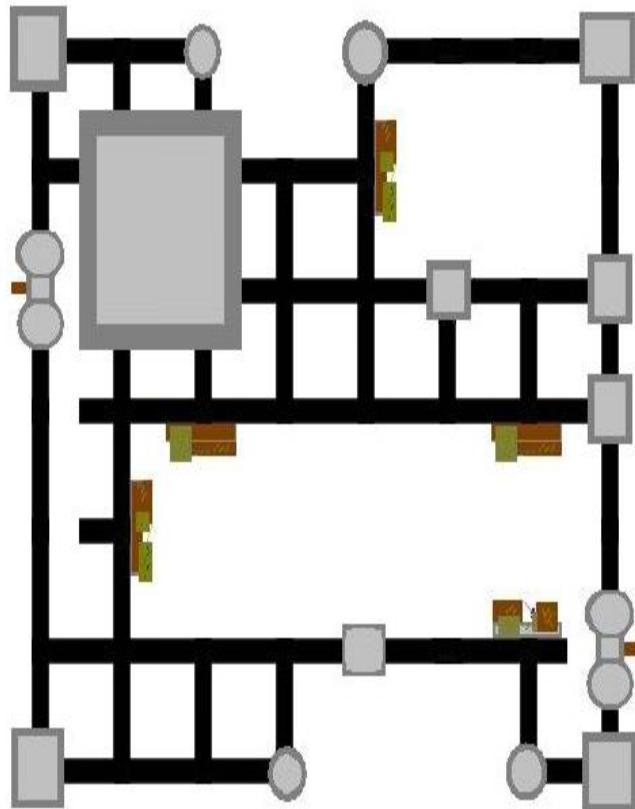
**12:** “*Spitting Rage*” – Stand atop the ramparts and dare any and all to attack; after defeating a few opponents, intimidate the remainder to flee. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Grimace. Defender failure result M; Attacker success result C.

**13:** “*Double Your Threat*” – Dupe the opponent into shifting his forces away from a well-ordered assault and respond to a feign on the other side of the grounds. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Speed & Guile. Defender failure result C; Attacker failure result H.

**14:** “*Lend a Hand*” – The main portcullis is stuck, and the defenders desperately try to force the gate back down. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Strength of Limb. Defender success Result A. Attacker success Result C.

**15:** “*Outlaw Interests*” – The invading troops are more intent on ravaging the countryside and robbing travelers moving through the region. They must be attracted to bring the battle back into focus on the manor. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Energetic. Defender failure result N; Attacker failure result A.

**16 or more:** “*Flukes*” – Generate a secondary event, affecting the whole of the battle. The Major modifiers are a good starting list for the possibilities.



## Q&D Keep in Turmoil (2D8)

Use when prompted by other tables or independently for an overrun inside the halls of a fortress.

**2 or less:** *“Room to Fight”* – Begin to retreat and draw opponents from the walls, only to slaughter them below in the open courtyard. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Hero’s Great Weapon. Defender success result H; Attacker success result G.

**3:** *“Obstructions”* – A group of defenders are assembling a temporary barricade to block the breach. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Engineer. Defender success result B; Attacker success result G.

**4:** *“Last Grasp”* – Dive from the wall onto a group of opposing soldiers, who were destined to reinforce the wall. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Brawl. Defender success result B; Attacker failure result B.

**5:** *“Cut the Reins of Power”* – Bring down the supports on a platform holding a sub-commander as he directs the action. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Crushing Blow. Defender success result B; Attacker success result T.

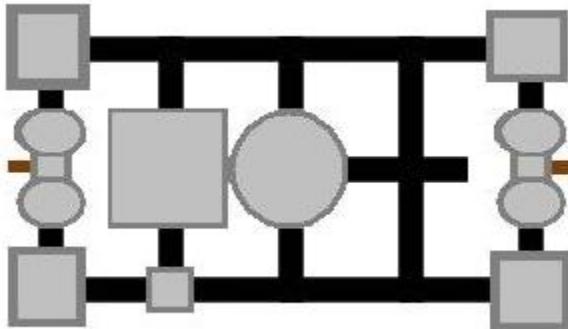
**6:** *“Misplaced Priorities”* – Discover the hidden location of the fortress treasure or garrison paybox. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Evaluation. Defender or attacker failure result E.

**7:** *“Look Out Below”* – Jump out from under a falling section of roof or wall. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Animal Reflexes. Defender or attacker failure result F.

**8:** *“Larders and Pantries”* – Organize the men to haul-away the stores and provisions of the garrison to a sheltered location. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Methodical. Defender failure result Q; Attacker success result Q.

**9:** *“Kill That One”* – Attack like a wild man, killing a dozen men and drawing opponents from all over the fortress to engage. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Berserk. Defender failure result R; Attacker success result R.

**10:** *“Mighty Steed”* – Mount a stallion and fill the gap in the fortress breach to trample it free of the enemy. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Equestrian. Defender failure result S; Attacker success result S.



**11:** “*Down to the Basics*” – Boldly run the halls and barracks disrupting the enemy at every turn. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Warrior’s Sidearm. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.

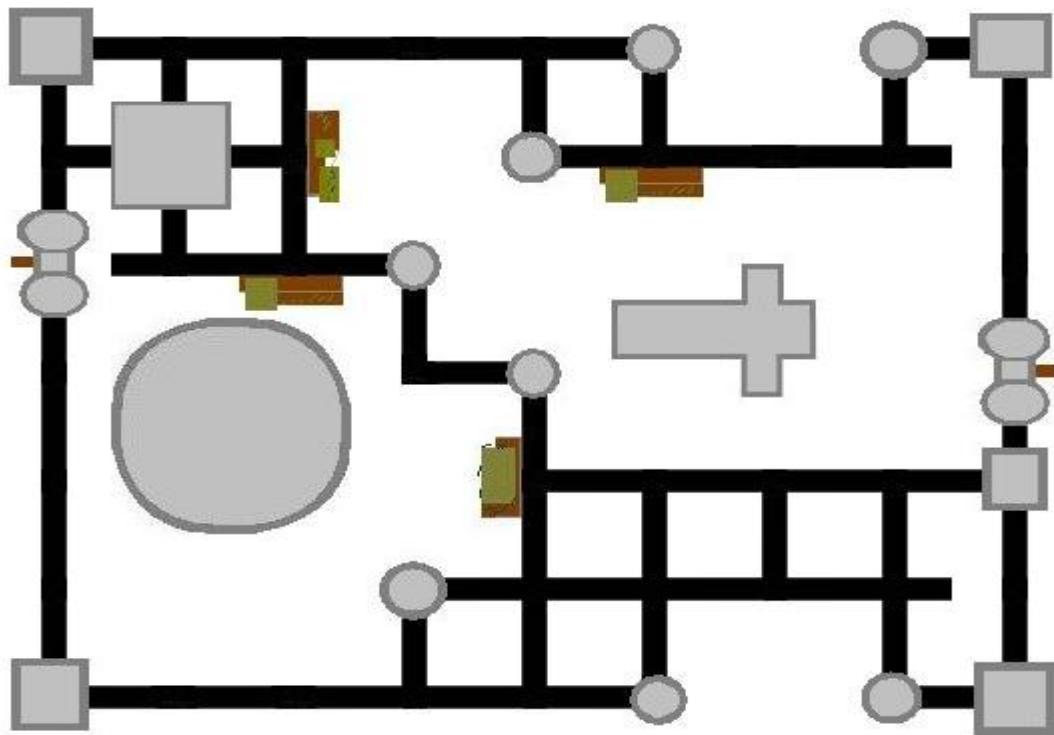
**12:** “*Split Ranks*” – Forced to lead two smaller forces in attacks on separate as well as distant parts of the keep; run between the two directing the action. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Stamina. Defender failure result W; Attacker success result W.

**13:** “*Dead-Fall*” – Hurl a brick into the support of a crumbling platform causing it to fall on the main body of the enemy’s reserves. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Irregular Style. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result B.

**14:** “*Non-Combatants*” – Protect a hostage by disarming the sword of a lunging mercenary. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Parry. Defender failure result X; Attacker success result X.

**15:** “*Strike Leaders*” – Climb on the underside of a ladder and stab outward through the rungs at a sergeant at arms at the top. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Foul Blow Defender success result B; Attacker success result T.

**16 or more:** “*Flukes*” – Generate a secondary event, affecting the whole of the battle. The Major modifiers are a good starting list for the possibilities.



## Q&D Surviving the Siege (2D8)

Use as the starting point for most sieges and for any period of lull when the defenders and attackers are locked in a stalemate.

**2 or less:** *“Enough Prattle”* – Climb the wall and challenge opponents to drive you away. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Ruggedness. Defender success result H; Attacker success result B.

**3:** *“Sunrise Excursion”* – Strike out on your own and make a preemptive assault at dawn in front of the main body of combatants. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Slashing Steel. Defender success result A; Attacker success result C.

**4:** *“Dagger Toss”* – Caught below the ramparts, glance up to see an opponent on high; silence him before he sounds an alarm for support. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Wrist Speed. Defender failure result C; Attacker failure result A.

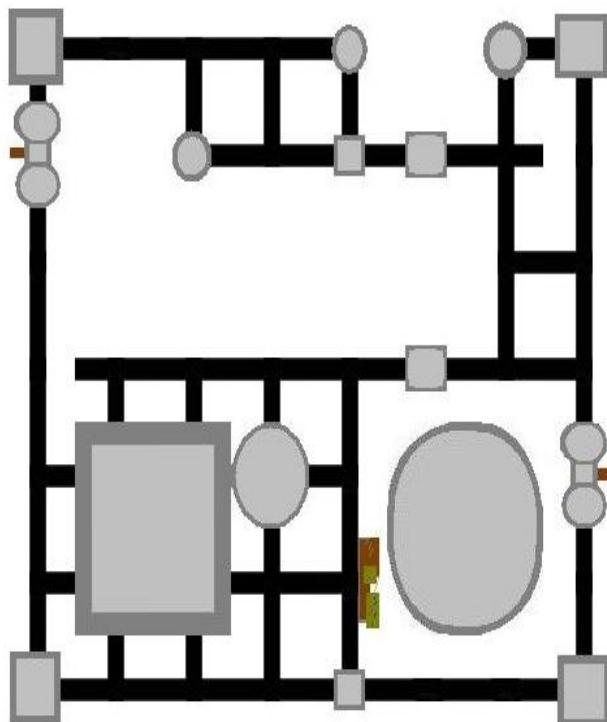
**5:** *“Forward March”* – Deploy to reinforce an show of force attack on the outer bulwarks. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Rules of Engagement. Defender or attacker success result B.

**6:** *“Boxing Match”* – In a show of unity and to relieve boredom, you sponsor a prize fight of you versus a champion in the guards. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Fisticuffs. Defender or attacker failure result E.

**7:** *“Wrong Minded”* – In all the confusion, you were bound to make a few honest mistakes and have a momentary lapse of reason. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Magical Acts. Defender or attacker failure result Y.

**8:** *“Upstart”* – Block the blow of one of your own troops challenging your authority and dispatch him with a punch. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Hilt Punch. Defender success result B; Attacker failure result F.

**9:** *“Distractions”* – Use drums and smoke to appear greater and dupe opponent into changing his battle plans. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Cleverness. Defender failure result C; Attacker success result B.



**10:** “*Second Guess*” – The enemy is planning a surprise attack, but you think you can make a counter show of force of your own. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Methodical. Defender success result B; Attacker failure result A.

**11:** “*Sniped*” – Moving to get a closer look at the enemy positions, you felt you were well out of range of the archers. The blackguard must have added a spritz of magic. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Mastery of the Shield. Defender or attacker failure result F.

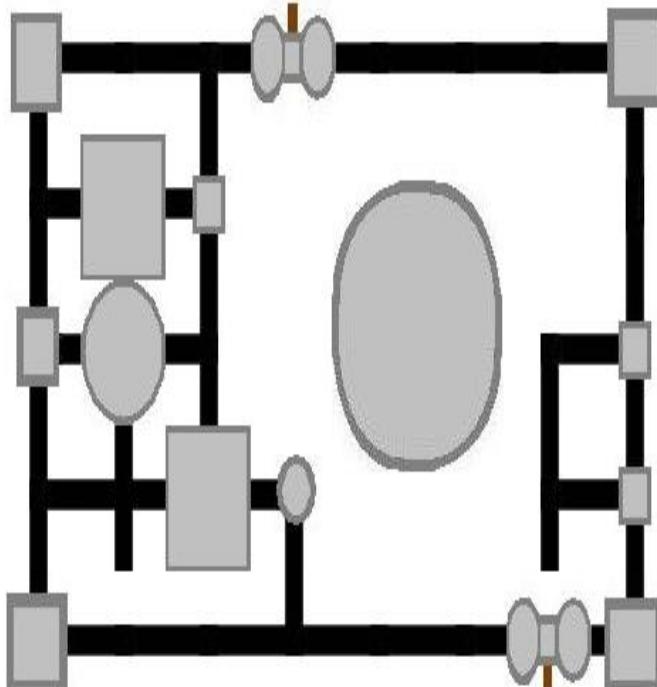
**12:** “*Plots Anew*” – The battle is all encompassing to some, but not to you. You have several things at once on your mind. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Concentration. Defender or attacker success result Z.

**13:** “*Dropped Blade*” – Wrestle two infiltrating opponents and hold back their slashes, until you ready a knife or call for aid. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Seize Swordarm. Defender or attacker failure result F.

**14:** “*Fell Yon Magic User*” – Slay a nearly invisible conjurer who is trying to secrete his way close enough to your forces to issue a magical barrage which will be inside of your protections and generated with no time for counteraction. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Ranged Precision. Defender failure result C; Attacker failure result A.

**15:** “*Hunting Party*” – Entice a scouting cavalryman to charge, then drop prone and stab upward to topple him and his horse. Will make a fine feast later. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Feigns. Defender or attacker failure result F.

**16 or more:** “*Flukes*” – Generate a secondary event, affecting the whole of the battle. The Major modifiers are a good starting list for the possibilities.



## Q&D Forced Truce (2D8)

Use when circumstances are not controlled by the player, and he is forced to accept the authority of another in deciding the actions of the greater battle.

**2 or less:** “King’s Men” – A larger territorial force arrives to break the stalemate but is unconvinced who represents the legitimate owner in this dispute. They may wait, and let the winner decide who was more just for good shall conquer evil. If there is clearly a bad guy in all this, the troops may still be under a spell or illusion which can only be broken by voiced plea. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Eloquence. Defender success result H; Attacker success result G.

**3:** “Parley” – This matter can be set aside if both sides agree to a compromise, perhaps a union of families. The consequence of this bargain, though not immediate, will not be favorable. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Prodigal. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.

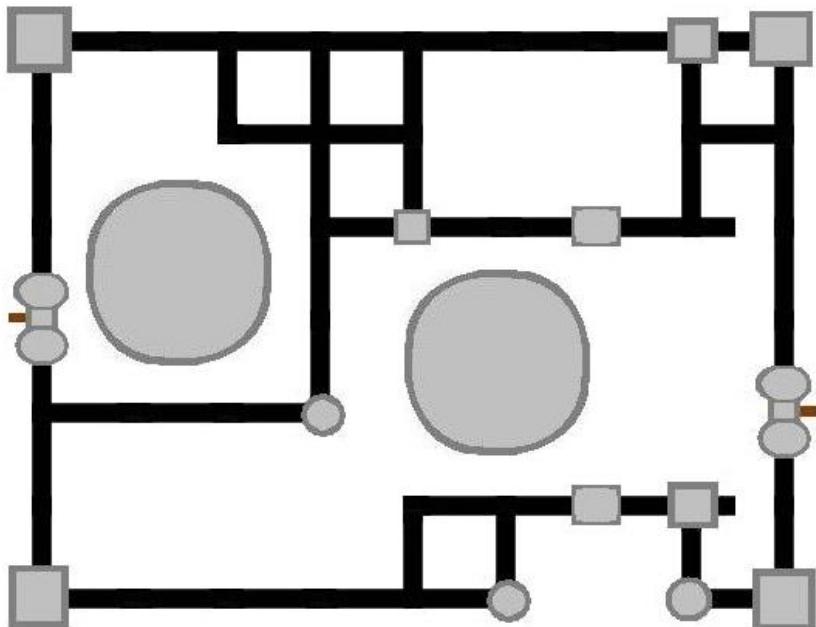
**4:** “Divine Deliberation” – Representatives of both sides have been locked in debate over the legal authority of the crown prince to intercede in this dispute. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Litigation. Defender success result H; Attacker success result G.

**5:** “Onward All” – As all seems hopeless, set the example and inspire the men to acts of gallantry.

Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Bold. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.

**6:** “Wasteland” – Stare out on the barren, scalded and magically altered fields where once pastoral huts dotted an idyllic landscape.

Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Ruggedness. Defender or attacker failure result E. Regardless, apply result W to the castle.



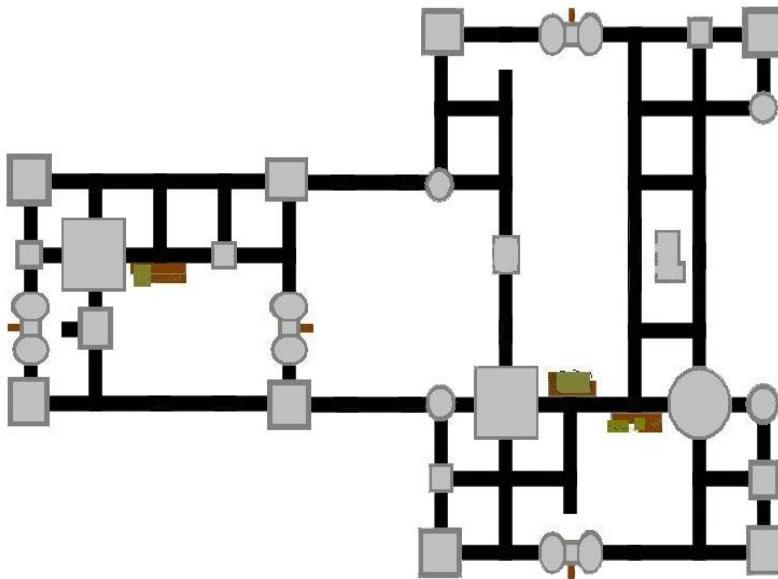
**7:** “Typhus” – Shrug off the first sign of a sniffle as you stand watch in the pouring rain. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Battle Hard. Defender success result A; Attacker failure result F. Regardless, apply result P to the castle.

**8:** “*Baked Belt*” – Not having anything to eat in a while, you are forced to boil and feast on the leather in your boots waiting out a lull in the battle. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Endure Hardship. Defender success result B; Attacker failure result F. Regardless, apply result U to the castle.

**9:** “*Rats*” – Use fire to drive nested vermin out from under the area in which you try to sleep. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Vile Tools. Defender failure result F; Attacker success result C. Regardless, apply result V to the castle.

**10:** “*Scoundrels*” – Smugglers can guarantee a shipment of much needed supplies, if a proper price can be agreed upon. They may wish more than mere money. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Haggler. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.

**11:** “*Eulogy*” – A champion who has inspired all with acts of kindness and courage lays mortally wounded. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Medicine. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.



**12:** “*Cloaked Figures*” – Heading to a meeting with the enemy, you realize you have fallen into an ambush set by third-party renegades simply out to profit from this affair. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Escape. Defender or attacker failure result F.

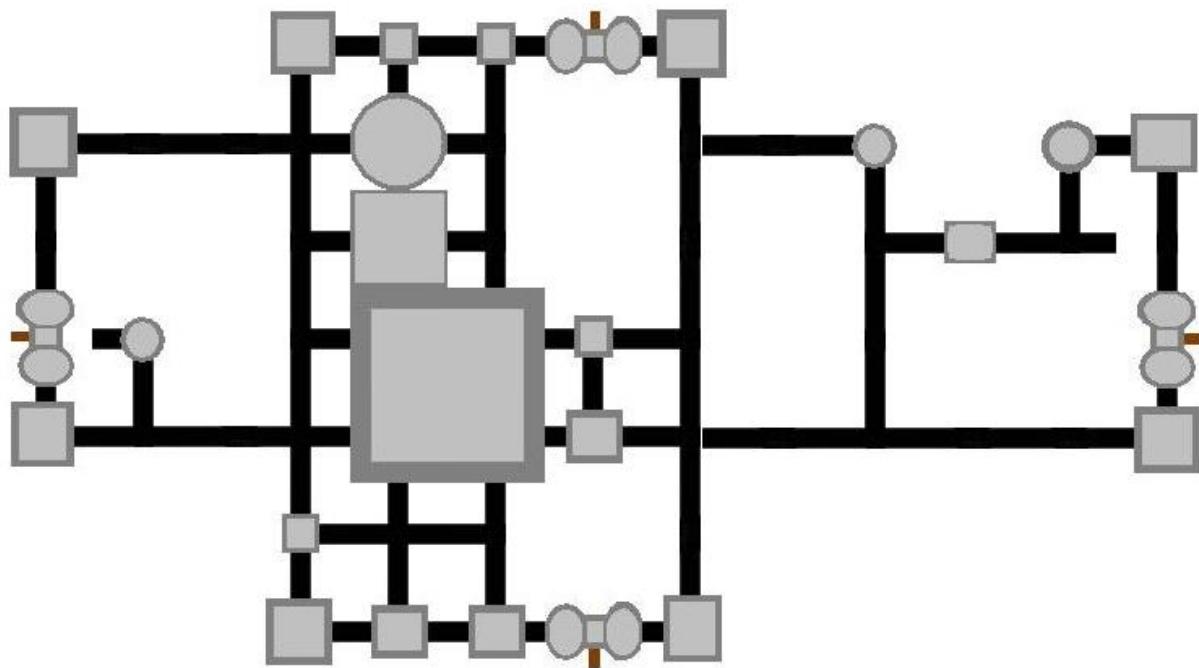
**13:** “*Traitor in the Ranks*” – Finding a very nervous watchman or scout, you settle his nerves with quiet conversation, but wonder later if he was concealing some deceit. Now what did he look like again? Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Perception. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.

**14:** “*‘Twas Not Me*” – The enemy challenges that they know you from other dealings, not here but elsewhere, yet proving you lack honor and courage. Even if it’s true, convince him he has the wrong person. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Theatrics. Defender or attacker failure result Y.

**15:** “*Simple Tactics*” – Each day you review the battle plan and the positions of the troops correcting the placement based on what you know of the enemy. Demonstrate by character ability and dice roll: Strategy. Defender failure result G; Attacker failure result H.

**16 or more:** “*Flukes*” – Generate a secondary event, affecting the whole of the battle. The Major modifiers are a good starting list for the possibilities.

**Note:** Unlike the other tables, on which the player continues to roll until told to move to another Q&D, only on the Knave event (dice 6) would he roll again here. Unless told differently by a result, continue the next round’s action as Q&D Surviving the Siege. Forced Truce are a momentary weakness in the lengthy affair.



## Sieges – Major Modifiers (3D8)

A set of event modifiers for use in castle sieges.

**3 or less:** The battle plan is executed poorly; treat all rolls below seven as eight.

**4:** The player may select any previous Major Modifier to apply again. If none have occurred, he receives result seven.

**5:** Ignores the result of any further Major modifiers generated.

**6:** The defenders hold the day, but at high cost; automatically drive off attacking opponents, but the defenders suffer the immediate combination of a D8

losses of good castle traits or addition of baneful castle traits. What's left may be a wasteland. Both sides' NPC commanders usually die from injuries in the aftermath.

**7:** The player has been knocked-out and taken captive. He will be held by the enemy (either in the fortress or outside in a tent) awaiting the battle outcome. Other players might attempt a rescue (after dark, using display of skills or personal duels), or player caught might haggle (or litigate) his escape (release). Otherwise, if the side holding the player should lose, the player will most likely be slain. A victorious side will keep the player as a hostage for ransom or impresses him to work for the new cause. (Can anyone say break out the Fantasy Digression roles.)

**8:** Selecting player rolls twice and chooses which result he desires.

**9:** Receive unrequested aid from a freed group of slaves, prisoners in the opposing force, mercenaries

switching sides, troops in rebellion, peasants mobbing the field or misdirected magical fire.

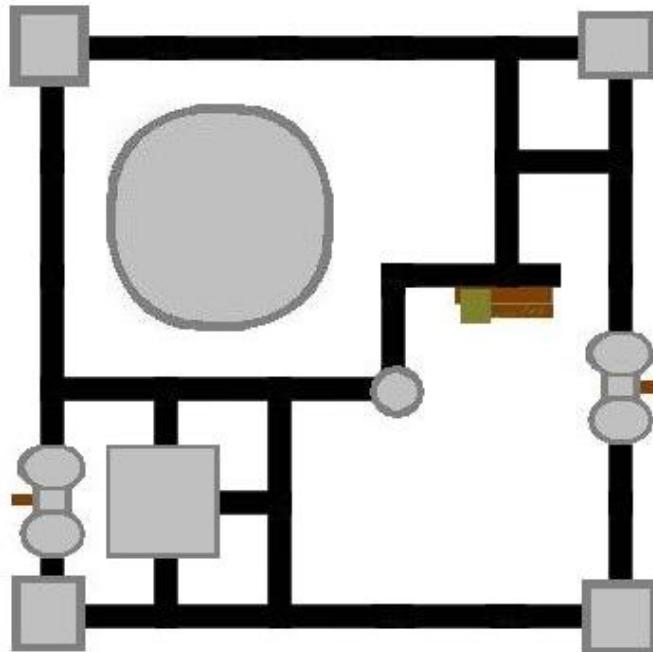
Lower the difficulty for any event which the player does not have the necessary skill; he may still roll with around a one in three chance of success. if this result happens a second time, aid comes to support and help the enemy; cancel any benefit previously received.

**10:** The fortress garrison surrenders for assurances of humane treatment. The referee or player commanding the attacking side, the victors, decide how humane. The defending players may try to rally the troops back into the fight, but it may be more interesting for the sides to reverse roles as an invigorated garrison turns around and assaults its own towers. Yet at a penalty of all rolls being one degree of difficulty higher.

**11:** Discover (or dig) a secret entrance into or out of the fortress; The player may use this to escape, raid after dark, spy on enemy, skirmish against outside, etc. If the player shares his discovery with the rest of his group he risks enemy discovery. This special entrance should be his and his alone.

**12:** Roll twice and take both results.

**13:** The fortress is overwhelmed by massive assault. The casualties on both sides should be horrific. Every player will be wounded in one way or another but



give them the benefit of the doubt and as defenders they managed to avoid capture and somehow escape.

**14:** Optional, the player makes a bold act. He can automatically win the battle for his side, but at the expense of his own life or something he holds dear, say a magical device, an ability, a trait. Decide this in conjunction with the player. If no sacrifice is made, the player still is knocked from battle with instant Result F.

**15:** The battle extremely bloody. All players take a Bruise/cut injury (twelfth of hps) after their roll, regardless of success. These accumulate and could knock the player out of the action.

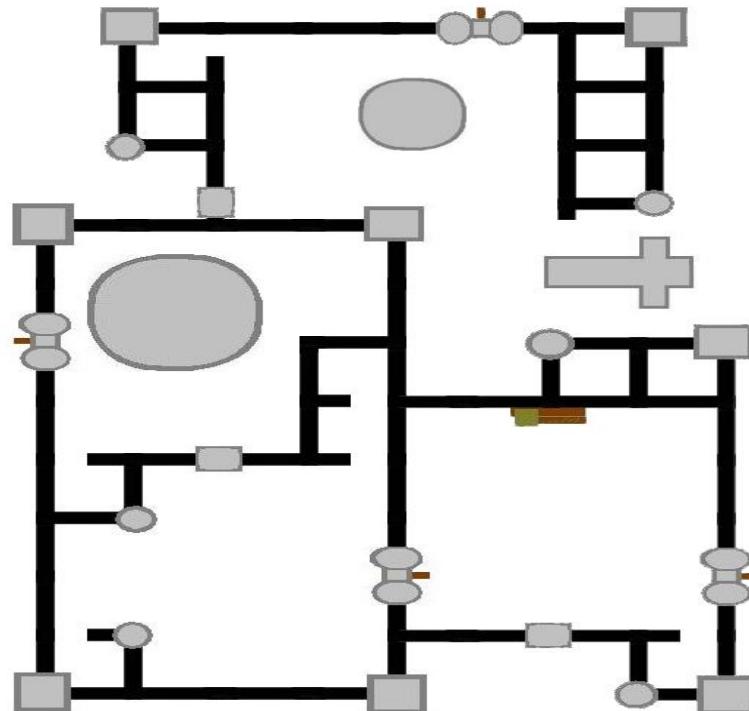
**16:** The selecting player becomes cautious. Player may only roll Surviving the Siege, unless from there he is directed to take an event on the Forced Truce Q&D.

**17:** The player in a rash move performs an act of magic that will have mixed results and hurt both sides. Examples include, befouling, poisoning or salting the area's wells of water. Burning a landmark or chapel which in the eyes of all common soldiers condemns the area. Cursing the castle's treasury to keep the items from being looted but preventing its future use. The player and referee together must decide upon a deed with the referee interpreting the result. If the player runs a magical null or other phobia to magic character, treat this result as sixteen.

**18:** A devastating fire and magical explosions consume the fortress. At least half of the garrison is slain in the blaze, and the rest surrender. The attacking force has minimal losses, but the fortress is in ruins, both worthless as a shelter and requiring a rebuild far beyond basic repairs. Plunder is nonexistent.

**19:** Cancel the effect of all Major Modifiers presently influencing play.

**20:** The selecting player suffers a personal mishap. He might lose something, suffer memory loss,



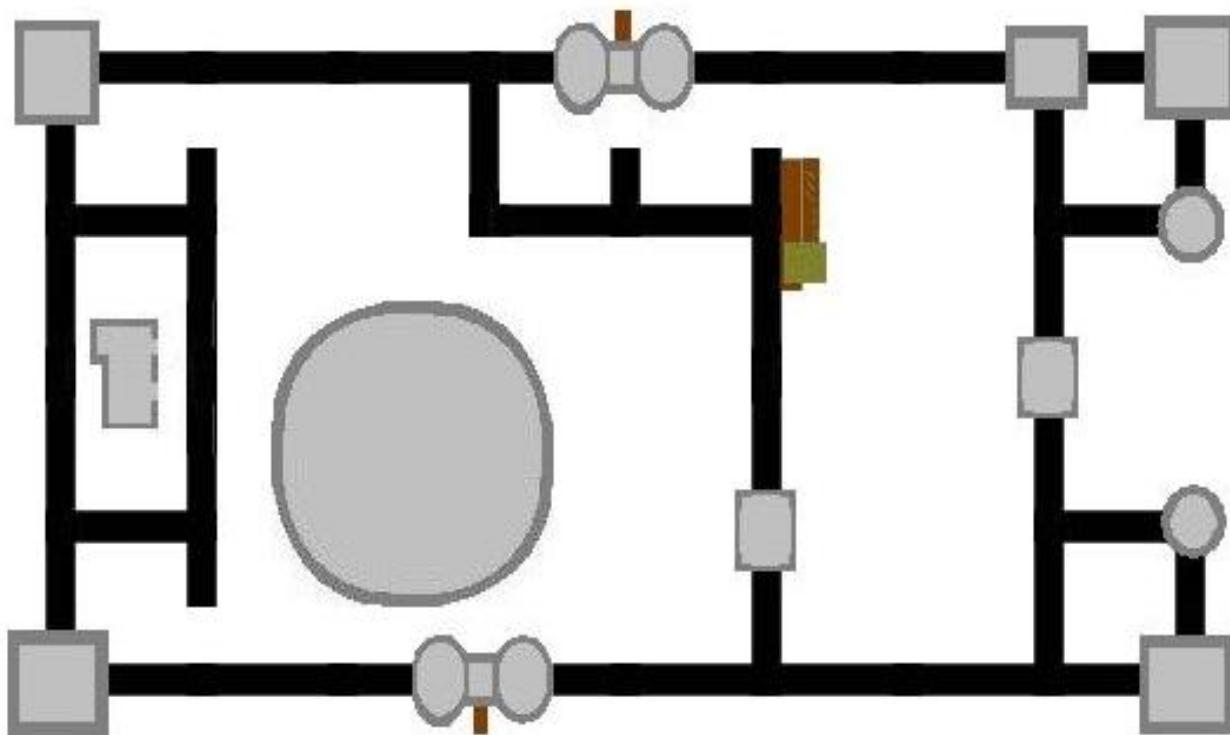
temporarily lose a trait, suffer a maiming wound, lose his horse, break his weapon, etc. For this event, the referee decides.

**21:** No matter if the character has the defining ability or not, the next result is successful.

**22:** A weakening of magical protections results in a barrage striking and destroying a major building in the siege. First, suffer the loss of a castle trait (or gain a bad trait). Second, all defending players must roll a simple roll of luck or agility to avoid being in the damaged structure when it collapses. The player rolling here will be credited with the attack or blamed for the lack of defense.

**23:** The players receive a messenger. On the defense, this might be that help is on the way or a proposal to surrender peacefully with considerations. On the attack, the messenger brings word of an insider who will open the gates and allow the fortress to be taken by storm, provided certain conditions are met. This should be considered a good event in many ways. However, the leader of the forces will not believe in the terms and must be convinced by the player.

**24 or more:** A personal event happens that will be good, but only if the player drops from the battle (as if he was wounded). Most likely he has run away from the engagement and will only return later after all is resolved. The player might find something, gain a skill, learn a clue to greater mission, make a friend, steal away with a magical item, etc. The referee decides the specifics.



# The Myth of the Medieval Castle in War

An article designed to enlighten the reader to widely held fallacies appearing in fiction. Don't let them change your games. But just to set the record straight, there's a reason we classify our games fantasy, science and historic fiction. The truth is just not much fun.

## Dispelling the Myth

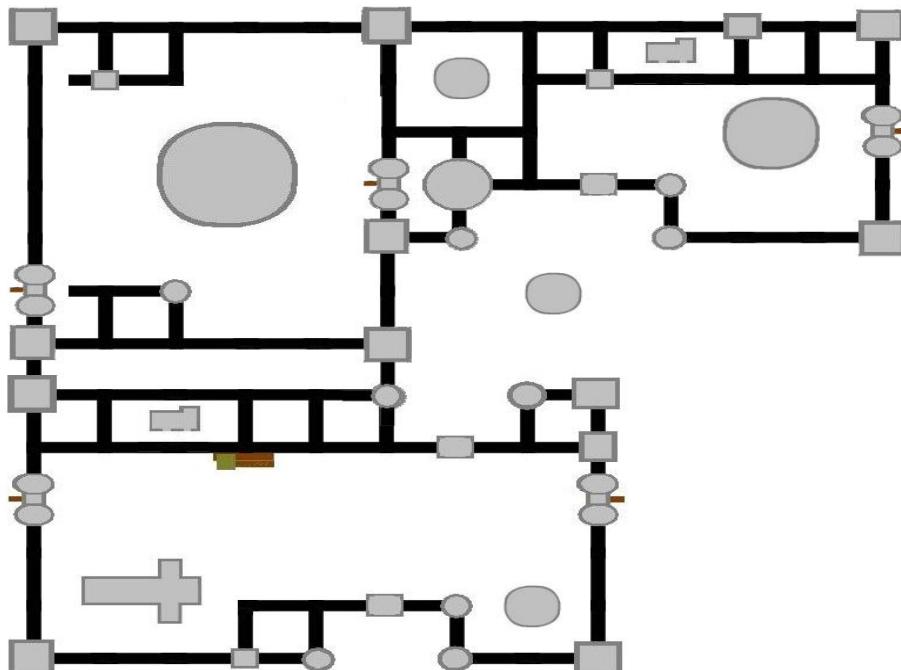
No single weapon of war has both dominated an era's strategy and become a relic of fascination more than the Castle. That is with the modern exception of the boogie-man, known as an A-Bomb. In the case of a castle, the legend proves powerful; however, the real thing was at best inconsequential. Castles, simply put, were just show pieces of great societies.

## Exercises in Authority

A powerful fortress will keep an enemy at bay, but only when the garrison is loyal. With that caveat, even in the modern age, defended battlements are difficult if not impossible to assault on the ground. The major modern forts have only been defeated by air assault or the time honored tradition of internal surrender. Siege and land assault has never taken a citadel.

Never say never, let's not bandy definitions; just agree with me, that a good wall is hard to cross. The utter stalemate of WWI shows the scale of such futility. The assault on Leningrad in WWII lasted years without the finest land army of the last

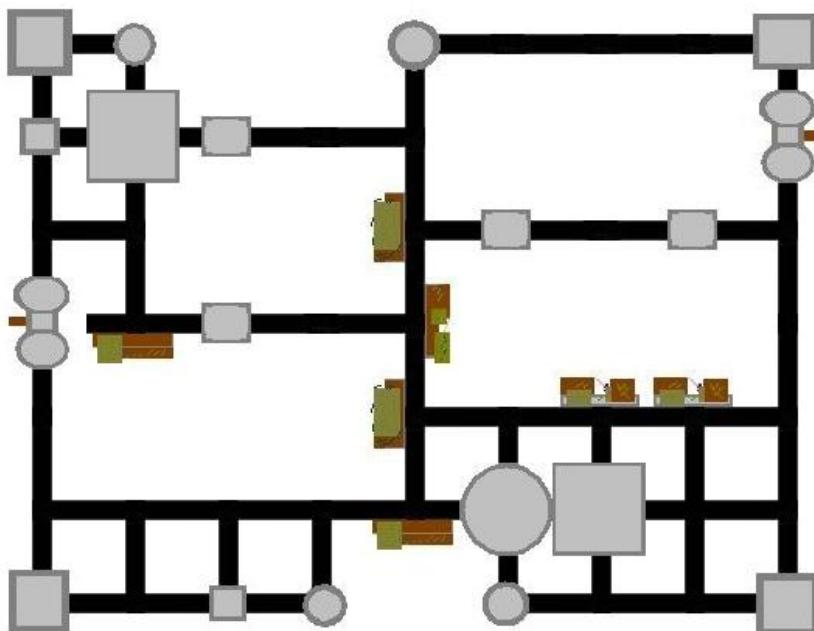
century capturing the city center. The battle of Petersburg in our Civil War was a disaster for the attacking union troops. "I will not go forth if Jesus Christ should order it," a subordinate commander



was said to say of several repelled attacks. In ancient times, the port of Tyre suffered decade long sieges gaining a reputation of invincibility. Again, and again and to Latin-speak ad nausea, no one has taken a castle on the ground. Why would I claim castles are ineffective tools of war? Defensive positions are only as strong as the men behind them. The castle gates of too many fortresses have been handed over to an enemy without a fight.

## A Rather Fine Hole

The earliest improvised battle works were of course Roman. Those masters of tactics saw the value in fighting from on-high against someone foolish enough to run at them from below. Roman garrisons used wooden stockades, hardly castles, to great effect. The area around a camp was cleared. That was the true value. Massed surprise attack was to be avoided. The walls were a delay, while troops geared for action.



greater force of attacking “Belgi-mites.” (Celts, Germans, Gauls, Spaniards, take your pick on the ethnic groups which crossed the region and to a man hated the Republic of Rome.)

So, what happened? The Romans won of course. Because no one can win an attack on a fortress without cannon. The inner circle eventually opened the doors when they saw the outer force limp away. Note these were just felled trees. We’re not ready yet to talk about stone keeps.

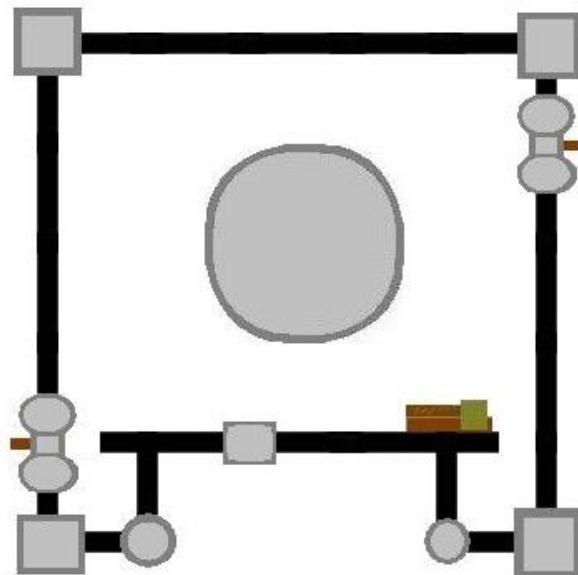
The Romans liked to surround the enemy with their own trenches. The most famous being a double encirclement where several Roman legions surrounded one of their own garrison outposts lost when irregular Gaelic troops were bribed to open the gate. The Romans set up a breastwork to surround the place they lost and in turn were surrounded by an even

## Stone Keeps

Okay, so we are ready to talk of stone keeps. The era of the castle warfare lasted a meager three hundred years. Compare that to horse ops which served commanders for several thousand years. Or firearms going strong for six hundred. Castles were tried but proved pointless.

Yet starting before the Norman conquest of England and extending into the high middle ages (say 1300) Europeans built a number of impressive piles of stone. One influential king, Edward I, started the social trend by building (reference pictures with a web search) Flint, Rhuddlan, Conway, Caernavon, Harlech and the magnificent yet unfinished Beaumaris. Now all those pictures need to be downloaded and added to your fantasy campaign folder. But the point is, Edward made castles a fashion statement.

Any king who wanted to be perceived as divine needed a big pile of stone. Returning crusaders at the same time, after seeing the Roman walls of Constantinople and winning the battle for Jerusalem (by bribing an insider to open a gate), these knights built miniature versions of the castle-walled stone cities they had witnessed (also read as feared).



## Crashing Halt

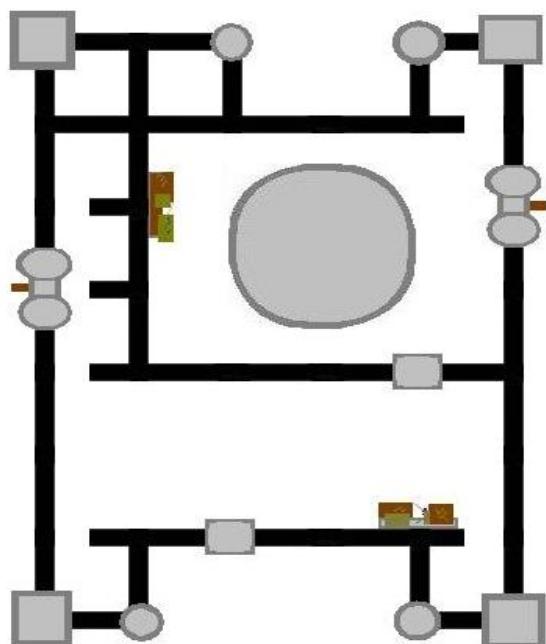
By 1300, the illusion of invincibility was over just as the designers were being truly ambitious in planning for the never-to-be-seen storming action. Cannons would render these structures a complete waste. Magic equals cannon fire? High walled, living quarters and eight garderobes (privy) models fell off the market like so much swamp land in Florida before air conditioning. Forts returned to being forts, thick walled ramparts used to sculpt a battlefield not draw an enemy into a siege. Would that not be so in a fantasy realm. Thick walls or underground lairs being preferred?

## Old Habits, Kill Soldiers

How could a mere 300 years of trial and little testament of power inspire such romance in fantasy stories. (He asks rhetorically.) The walls of Minas Tirith, the Halls of Helms Deep, the Towers of Orthanc...wait a second could Tolkien's love of Dover Castle have corrupted us all?

What is it about castles, the white ashlar (paving stone), the crenellation with flags unfurled, the fire warmed hall of feast and merry. Yes, Hollywood and literature love the castle, and from Robin Hood to Ivanhoe to The Prisoner of Zenda, these structures do hold a lasting mystique. This was aided by the military minds, stuck fighting the last war. Need proof ask yourself why modern soldiers still have bayonets. Castles would continue to be created and flourish as propaganda pieces

long after the thirteen hundreds. They just didn't pretend to be for a fight against anything except peasants.



Even as the craftsmen moved on to building cathedrals, the best example of castles, the ones we see in our mind's eye, were those created by mad princes in Bavaria using modern steam drills and machined rebar. Or we picture the most magical castle of all, Disney's.

Typical of government projects, many foundations were laid and only finished centuries later when rich aristocrats created the enchanted postcard visages that adorn many a novel. But back to the

point, castles were lousy in war. Second only to the tactics often attempted to penetrate them.

## Storming Actions

I love movies like "The Vikings," Douglas, Curtis, Borgnine, rent it. Men throwing axes into a door and climbing up to liberate a keep. A cool sword fight between a one-eyed man versus a one-handed opponent. I shiver thinking about the action. But it's pure hokum. Men did not scale walls with ladders, batter down doors, fill moats with hay and make courageous storming actions. The defenders did not make the last ditch cavalry charge.

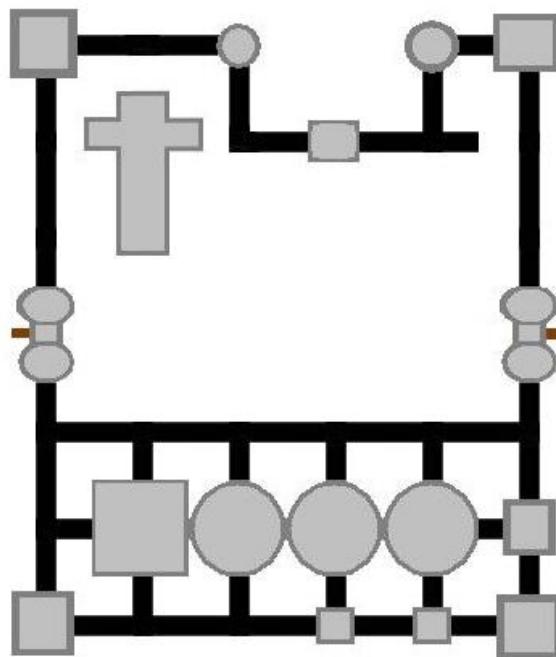
How big do you think the courtyards of these places were? Castles served the great purpose of making the local peasants fear the guy inside. They also could protect someone inside from the marauding baron. But all it took was a few coins to the right guy, and that means anyone on the inside, and the defenses buckled. Time and time again that was the case. The term *hors d'affaire* is French for surrendering with honor a castle you could easily hold forever, but you don't care to survive on unbuttered toast and roasted dog. Those inside can't get in, nor in effect keep you from fleeing by cover of night, still those inside must be content to lord over nothing. Professionals do it well; nobles would rather switch sides.

## Catapult, Ballista and Trebuchet

If you don't come out, we'll batter down the walls. At least so it seems. The force wasn't there. These machines took days if not weeks to construct in the field. They were prone to counter-attack. They failed spectacularly, killing the operators with decapitating snapped straps, splinters through eyes, very gross and ouch. They all needed to be tested and aligned, meaning they would often fling their weights into your own forces either nearby or on the far side of a siege. You do in fact have to surround the target castle, and the stones from these science projects overshot and cascaded mostly on your own troops.

Modern attempts to fabricate these devices, even using modern machine tools, prove they have no effect other than for morale. But let's not downplay that. The enemy was just as likely to wonder what terrible destruction the machine could bring. Hence, "we surrender," usually followed their construction. In practice again to say, they were not useful. Against a town, they might be able to start some fires and deliver some poisoned bread or diseased animals inside the walls. But against a good old fashion block-house castle keep, they were never employed.

Warfare always had economic overtones and the expense of these engineered toys would be a ten dollar hammer breaking open a kid's ten cent penny-bank. That is



in your dreams, that you can finely tune a rock to arc perfectly high to descend and crack a circular wall. Low arc, high velocity cannons, even when as likely to explode on the gunners, shattered the bases of the mighty French stone piles – the castle walls of Joan of Arc's war were felled. The Siege of Constantinople was won because the cannon were perceived as just another set of weakly employed catapults. Yet even here, sapping (as will be discussed in a moment) was the method of choice.

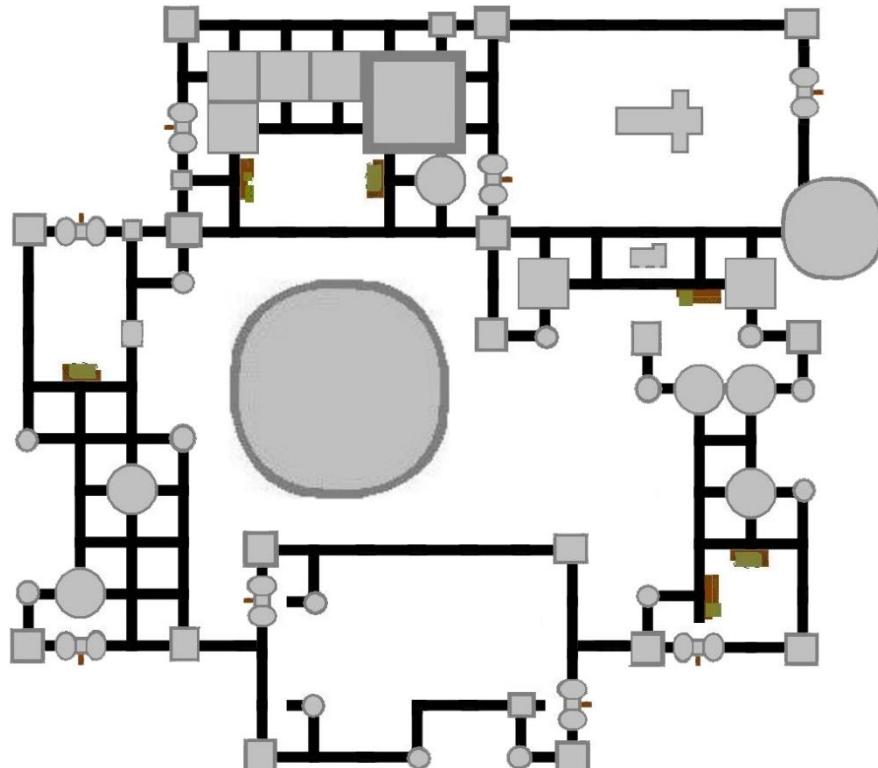
## Belfry, Not Just for Bells

Defined as a tower on wheels, pushed up to the side of a castle and then dropping a drawbridge, invaders could cross over. Even covered by freshly skinned deer, these towers were log chimneys. Combustibles, oil, animal fat, even the suicidal act of a immolated Tafur, were easily enough to turn the base of such structures into an inferno, a towering one. The smoke confined under the deerskins would suffocate the men riding inside or at least drive them to flee. On an unmanned wall, yes these devices were pretty reliable.

## Archers

I'll not quote you a price on fletching. The mere fact that a soldier can only kill someone within his own range begs the question: how can archery take down a tower? It can't. You can drive people from the walls perhaps. Or more often get yourself slain on the approach. The guys inside could practice firing at targets below. They'd be more deadly overall.

But save the ammunition in case they storm the gate. Archers in castles were feared. Much of the construction was designed to make a few men appear as

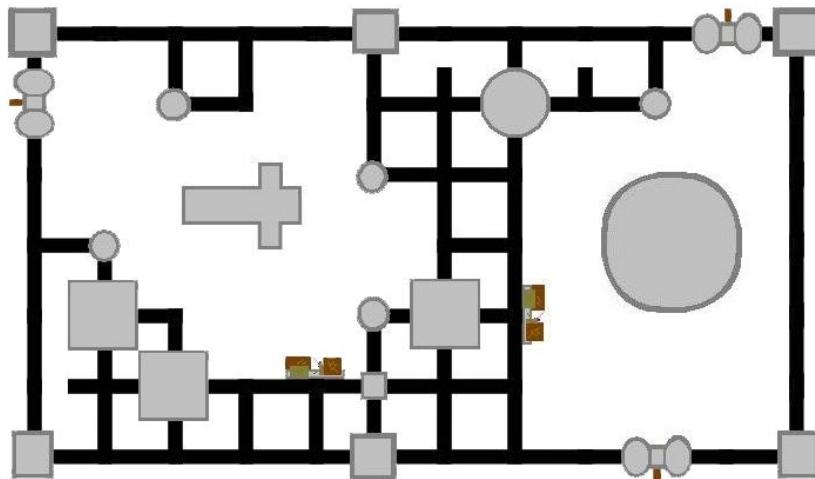


hundreds. The archers could move about and fire through many ports (called embrasures); no attacker could be sure where to hold his shield.

No, I'm not defending the castle as an instrument of war. These same open holes caused the deaths of too many guards from illness. Try to get warm squatting on stone next to a vent which funnels winter air in a reverse manner to that of baseboard convection heating. Could be why so many castles carpeted the walls? The single barrel castle with center high wall keep would make opposing archers on the field below laughable. Again, a storming action even supported by Conan's Bossonian Bowmen is just as much a figment as Howard's Bossonian Archers.

## Ram, Bah Ram Mew

Which brings us to sappers. There was no battering ram to bring down a door. Besides the far too many protections of the approaches and jig-saw path which led to most gates, the damn thing would never drive itself. This was not an age of great metal carriages or steam powered engines. Rams would need to be dragged, hauled and maneuvered to a gate. They'd need to be felled in the forest and brought to the keep.

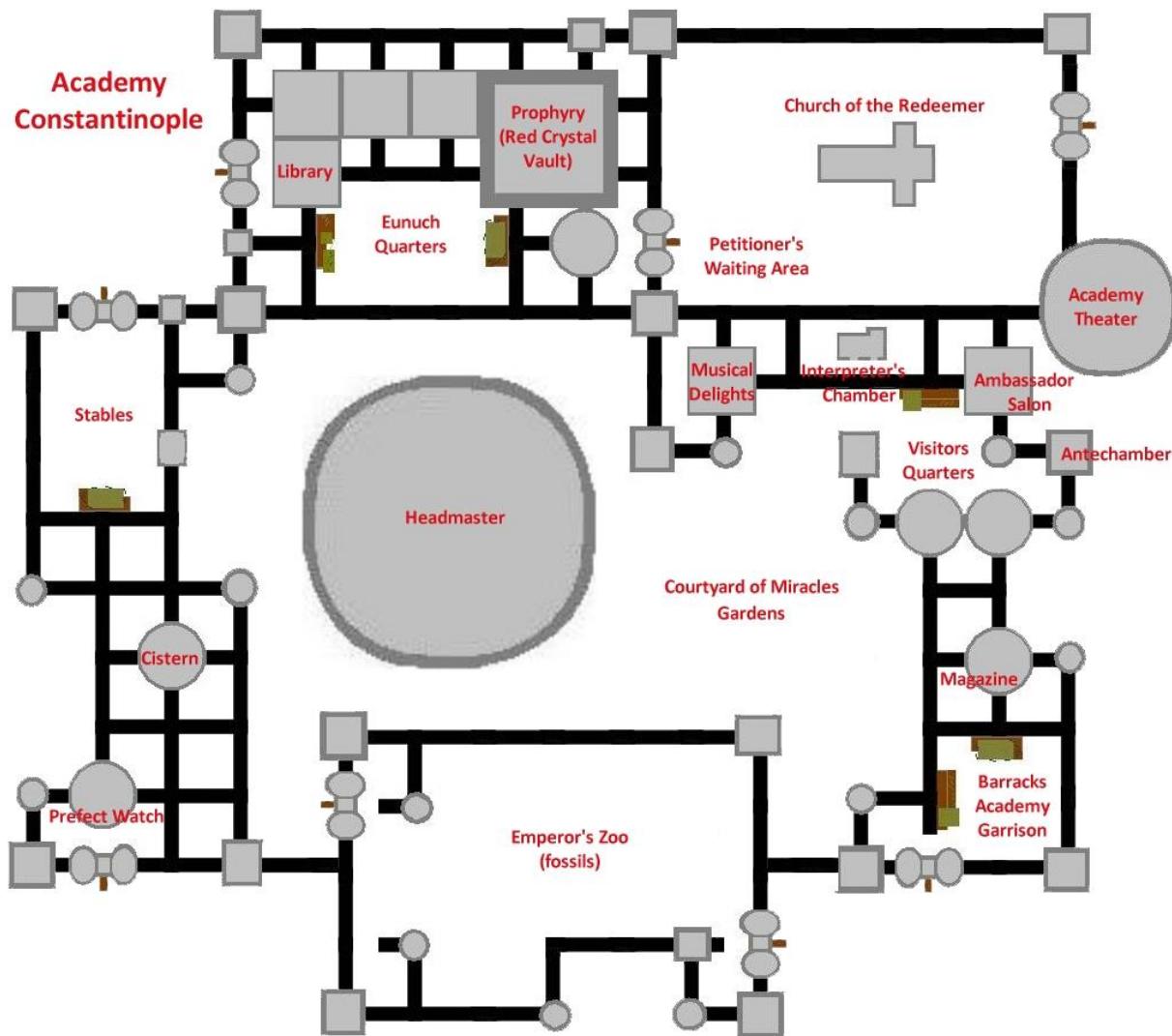


The fields around the castle were farms, plowed, uneven, watered. If the ram was heavy to ensure it could breech a wall or door, then it would sink. If it could be carried, it was

just a focal point to bring more flame and rocks tumbling from above. Remember the archers. Now's the time when the lord would not worry about wasting ammunition. Now rams did become tools of castle warfare, but not in the heroic fashion we all imagine. Maybe somewhere in the world, a lord built his main gate on a gravel paved road with gentle straight line slope to the entrance, so with some running start and a hundred well-fed mercenaries, the gate would be sent asunder...okay, what was a ram.

Rams were part of sappers. They were really big hammers. Sappers were guys who dug. The only way to bring down a wall was to dig under it. You couldn't go over as was seen. You just took the time. If you hated a lord enough, you'd take the

time. If the objective was clear enough and the desire of the defenders so adamantine, you took the time. Now here's where a few dwarves with picks (or the purple worm) would be truly feared.



## Start Again, Battering Rams

Sappers could either tunnel all the way from afar to the walls. Or, they would drive away defenders by distraction or massive cover fire (or simply employ cover of dark) and set up an initial canopy to fend off arrows far enough away to avoid tossed rocks and hurled paint (I mean oil). Quickly dig, or since life was so cheap, employ the lord's own peasants to start the dig. Once you had the hole started, sloping at an angle toward the corner foundations, you could assemble a ram down below on a sling supported by the mine's cross beams. Back and forth the earth would be pounded. Eventually you would crack the foundation stone.

The weight above would do the rest, kaboom. In theory yes, but there is no historic record outside of Constantinople where undermining felled a great tower. That only became necessary when the cannons exploded killing the master armorer, Urban, the only guy who could aim them correctly. Back to our sapper hole...If needed fires could be started to heat the rock, then back again cracking at the foundation. Strike the stone enough and it would fail. Gunpowder really aided this task, but by then you had cannons, so who needed the miners, except to enter cities by subterfuge. (I'm thinking that word's origin comes from French for subterrain.)

As the wall collapsed the sappers were almost always killed. Okay, once again we employ the other guy's peasants, those who lingered and didn't go inside the tower. Shall we look again at starving them out? Well our own food is pretty low, and there isn't much left to glean from the fields. Shall we just use John's cousin who says he will open the gate for the title of Forester and a stipend of three plucked hens on Saint Crispin's. Has the point been made?

## **Defenses Revisited**

The best defense a castle had was the walls. Everything else was pretension. The first castles were called Motte and Bailey. The term moat comes from Motte, but they are actually quite different. A Motte is a raise mound of dirt created by digging trenches. The trenches de facto became moats after one rain. The Bailey is the palisade garrison barracks which protected the horses and long houses (communal living quarters). In time of need, the defenders could all clamor to the top of the Motte and see who they were fighting.

## **Weak at the Gates, Hardly**

The best defense was an iron studded door, one with a decent hinge. After that, the defense contractors of their day, sold the lords a bill of false goods and promises with no substance. They marketed their enhancements with great expressions like Murder Holes and Bartizans, Enceinte and Buttress, Portcullis and Bastion, but they all added little to the basic feature, a wall. But I'll admit I drive Honda and don't understand why anyone would pay for a Jaguar. Most of these really cool chrome pieces on the basic un-vaultable wall were just wasted expense or worse a source of detriment.

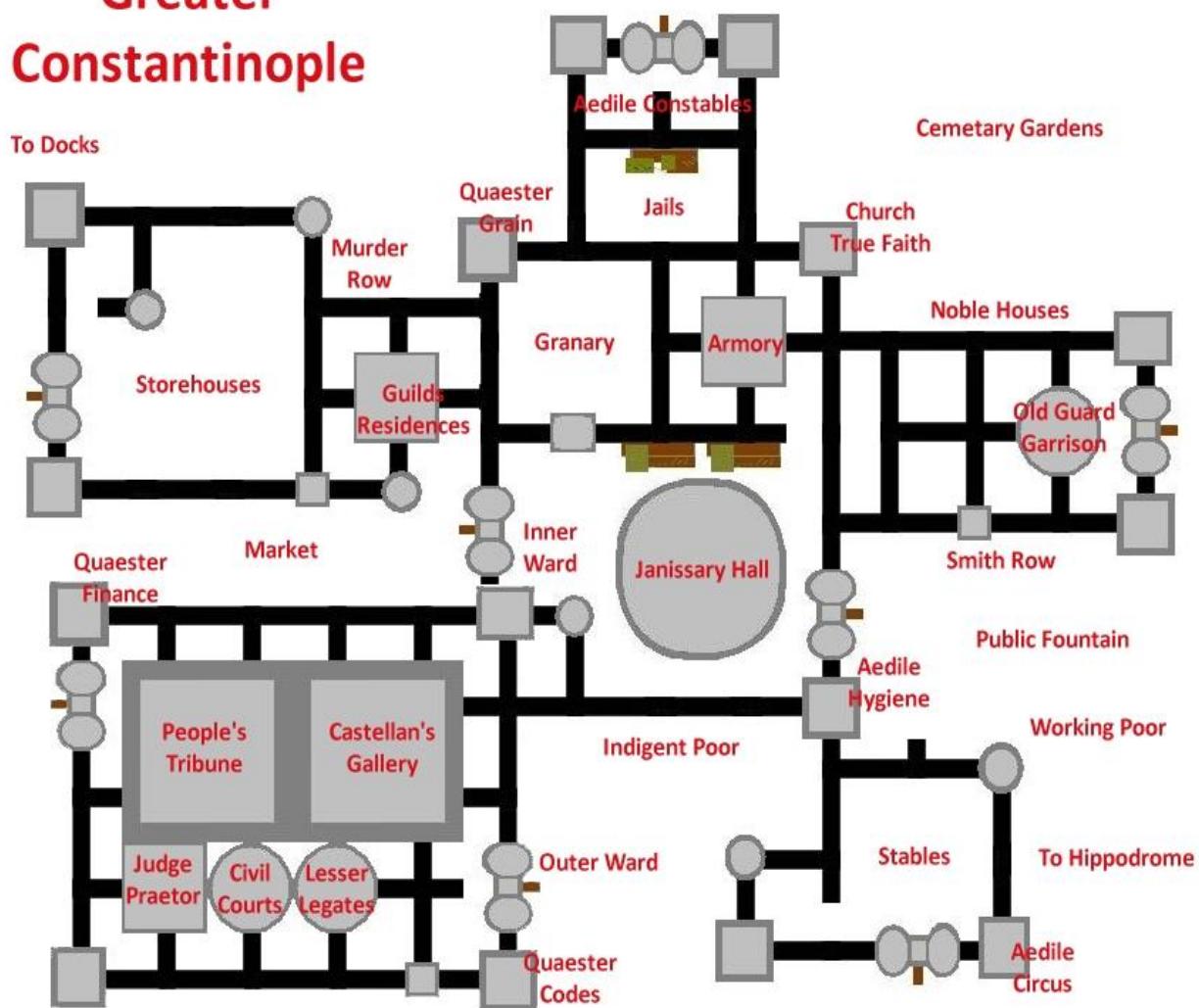
## **Drawbridges**

The silliest of things ever invented. Placed to protect against the ram, the span they covered was too easy to fill to make this addition anything but a nuisance to daily

living. The first designs were cantilever. A weighted length of logs was allowed to see-saw on the stones and drop into a hollow behind the door. Yes, there were earlier versions which were dragged in and out by horses. But wood on ground means rot, and who wants to cut new planking once a month. Just leave it down, I can hear the cry.

Back to the pit and rocker drawbridge...the pit was a source for cholera. It collected more filth then the moat itself. The smells in summer, the drainage in winter's thaw, well this early design made the lords long for the horse dragged pile of boards. Engineers devised a chain lifted model. Again, the door would have been sufficient, especially when placed say ten feet up a narrow set of stairs, as can be seen in early castle keeps, but some lords had to protect their full courtyards. Shall I digress, yet again, to explain.

## Greater Constantinople



## A Days Ride

Travelers in the ancient and medieval worlds did not like to be out at dark. Same is true today, correct? Many forts were put deliberately a day's travel apart. The wandering chandler could pull his cart into the enclosure and for a small fee, he would stable his beast, sell some wares and lose money at gambling in crooked games with the local castellan. Yet some of these merchants were early risers and would likely abscond without the fee. Hence the drawbridge.

Cart goes in, lower when money is paid. Drawbridges were used to hold things inside, to prevent the easy movement of articles to without. They might have fancied the design as protecting the keep from all manner of storming actions, but in practice they were just annoying, the faulty elevators of their day which made people use side gates and hack new tunnel-doors into beautifully built Roman walls.

## Drawbridges Redux

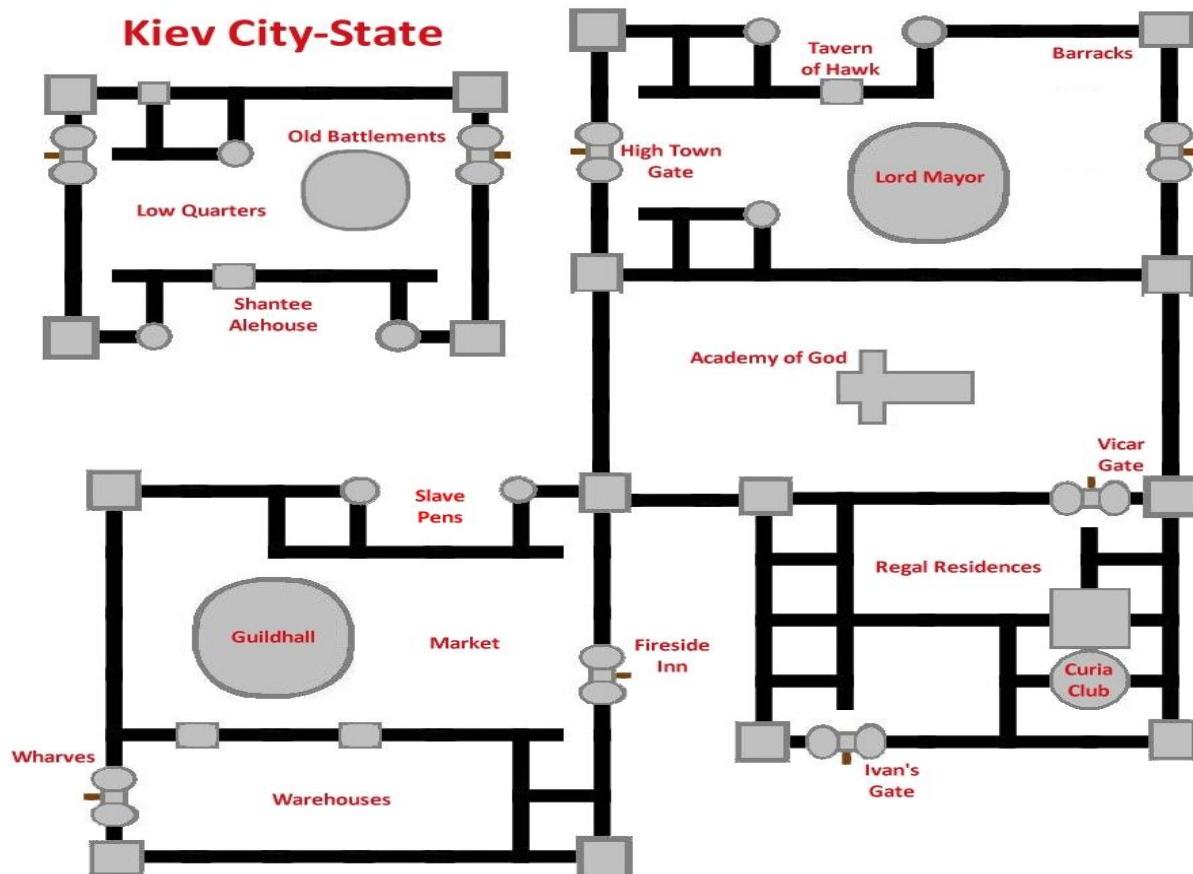
Any organized force can make planking. To deliver the planks to the walls was as difficult as crossing the field with or without a drawbridge. The additional stonework around the door and hence the added garrison made most of the entrances the safest and most secure. But it was the men who made this the case, and also as so often explained, the way most castles were defeated. Imagine the mechanical feat of moving chain to raise an untreated section of lumber – think rot and bugs, fittings wrenching loose with each up and down action, warp in heat and cold and never as perfect a fit as we see in illustrations. And before you cry out that they must have been covered with tar as a sealant, that would make them extremely flammable and a mess in Summer to cross. I'll save discussion of the winch and chain assemblies for my next section.

## Portcullis

Invented as an alternate to the drawbridge, the riches lords were sold the need for both. Who can deny the logic of selling the lord both? This piece of protection is just needlessly complicated. I can imagine them stuck half open and people just accustomed to bending to go beneath. Think about what these things are, a cell door which descends from above instead of sliding to open. Too heavy to dead lift or else ineffective, there had to be a room above to hold the door when retracted. That meant the keep needed an extra level of stone. Hence a larger foundation to carry the load. Hence an enormous extra expense, just to add a gate inside a gate. Chains, well-oiled and maintained ran above to what?

In early designs they looped over timbers, so each time the chains were used, the device sawed away at the ceiling supports two stories up. Collapse imminent, let our primitive ancestors make their mistakes to learn. We lost a few people before employing an iron eyelet. Well, iron moving through iron is even worse friction than sawing through a beam. Sparks and fire on the hay lined upper room accompanied each entrance. (Straw was used in place of carpet and to reduce fleas.) Even when properly lubed, the metal still created filings. Once the first set of eyelets were rubbed into failure, the next set had to be tamped into the wooded hole of the last. Never a good idea to nail a new nail into the old nail hole.

Going on, we had stage three of the design, a real life pulley crossing to a winch. That was a marvel of complexity to keep the wrap from twisting or the bearings from making ear shattering screams. At least the lord would know when someone was coming and going. They could always employ cord, but only if the gate's weight was lowered. The bottom line is any lad could in Archimedes style, use a 2x4 to jimmy these defenses up, at least far enough for a comrade to shimmy under or notch it open with some stones. Yes, but then he'd have to face the cascading wash of burning oil through a murder hole, so speaketh medieval defense contractor.



## Murder Holes

The appropriately named openings cut in the roof of an entrance causeway through which a primed vat of boiling oil could be poured and presumably set aflame.

Remember the sappers I spoke of earlier. They used fire to crack stones. Now we have a plan to torch our own entrance in case someone knocks in the door. Murder Holes are impressively tactile. Looking at one you feel the threat. They must have had the same effect on the inspecting lord as he crossed under his defenses. He felt more secure knowing that someone would be burned alive if they crossed into his sanctum. Sure, more often they might be used to assassinate the same lord, as garrison loyalty seems once again to be the key to the castle on attack and defense.

But back to the flaming oil shooting like napalm from above. The outside attacking commander, Lord Dubious, would order men to bring up some hay and stoke the flames. The defenders are doing his job, burning their own keep. Why such oil would not have been used to protect the outside door before the invaders got to the inner foyer can only be dismissed as short-sighted on my part for asking.

Thousands of men were storming the walls, several now have breached the gate, so one man alone must stop them from raping the damsels inside. There he stands, torch and cauldron at the ready, and voila, the enemy is defeated and driven away.

If sarcasm isn't enough, I'll try a bad analogy. You could win a hockey game by having four of your guys stand in front of the goal—I don't know hockey, so that may be illegal—but wouldn't it be better to go after the puck further away. Murder Holes would be too little too late. But they did make a nifty drive-through window for the attacker to pay the defender for opening the gate. The traitor could even bargain for more not to dump his oil.

## Hoardings

Now if you know what one of these are without looking it up, you my friend are a true military scholar. These defensive platforms were added on top of the stone walls. The Hoarding was an expanding shelf which could hang over the walls and then in time of attack be extended to create covered shelters from which to fire arrows or drop stones. Now you probably know how much I like mechanical parts created before the machine age. Sliding timber moving through stone apertures on top of crenellated walls.

Wow, that was a defense contractors' dream project. It must have taken years to design each platform and keep it working. What a scam. Split, untreated wood

would never last, let alone slide. The utter complexity defeats the concept. The wall itself was plenty. Rocks and arrows were easy enough to send below. Why you would need a three foot extension which offered a target to flaming arrows was pretty farfetched to justify. Yet they were tried, and the best castles boasted hoardings along the entire front of walls. Gun turrets on the side of eighteen inch gun barrels. Actually, few surviving castles show the hole cuts needed for these improvements. They must have been thought of as a good idea, difficult to orchestrate. Later builders designed the hoardings right into the walls.

## **Machicolations**

Yes, we have slots built into overhangs on the tallest towers of later castles. Yes, the same tall towers no fool would dare climb while a lower curtain wall remained as a target. Yet I must praise the machicolation not for its name of course, again those French and their love of warfare in the absurd, but the slots aided drainage of melting snow away from the inner fill under the ashlar (remember, a fancy word for paving stone). Water is our enemy as builders, and anything which can provide a formed channel in the basins which top castles would extend their life.

The castles with machicolations were more solid. People could feel the strength in the stone, the lack of give, the hardness of dry timber beneath. Can we blame these “I’m the master mason because I own a straight edge” architects for thinking the slots were a defensive must. And not knowing they were just sound structural devices on an overall ridiculous build-up from the very useful and basic Roman stockade.

## **Sad Conclusion**

Well if you’ve gotten here, you’re either burning mad or smiling with me. Insulting a man’s castle is rather low. From the sixteen year old warfare mentality of the Middle Ages, the castle will always be impressive. But now that you know the reality, as biased by my engineering degree and home improvement projects will attest, anything more than a stone curtain wall was overkill. And in a fantasy domain, a simple wall is just asking to be taken down by the cannon of fireball and lightning. Mere third level spells, if memories serve.

## **Historic Sieges – Five Spit-Spot Case Studies**

**Antioch**, taken at first by the crusaders by, you guessed it, a Christian Armenian opening a gate. The city center held under siege all the way to and through the counter siege by Damascus Turks who eventually lost the battle when God gave the crusaders the Holy Lance, the one which pierced Jesus. With this talisman, the

starving crusaders attacked outside, many lighting themselves on fire. The smoldering grass routed the Turkish horses. The crusaders stormed the enemy camps and sent them fleeing. More tents on fire, burned baggage. The Turk commander even with superior, fed forces was astonished by the ferocity. Maybe it was the holy Lance. The inner fortress surrendered. No storming action on anyone's part took the day.

**Alamo**, even with outside gunfire and cannons, the men inside made a hell of a stand. Before you counter that it was taken by storm, heavy losses but taken by storm, it's a church used in the gunpowder age. Santa Ana didn't run at it with ladders, despite the portrayal by John Wayne (or Billy Bob Thornton).

**Masada**, it was essentially a sapper operation but instead of digging down, the ramp was built up. The slaves used were Jews hence the defenders had to just watch. But they took the general's honor away by ending their own lives rather than become captured. (A tragically great tale.)

**Troy**, as the story goes the Greeks could only take the city by hiding inside a horse. Or more likely bribing someone to open the gates (to receive a nice shiny wooden pony). Again, no storming action, just disloyalty.

**Magdeberg**, in the gunpowder age, with horrific casualties to the attackers even with the aid of cannon. Finally, the city gates were opened by battle weary defenders. The city was still punished for failing to surrender early. Burned in the single largest one day loss of life until, you may guess...Nagasaki.

### **An After Thought, Ultimate Outcome**

The resources and labor needed to construct these behemoths (that era's worthless Battleships), generated a town. The construction crew on Beaumaris listed 400 masons to cut and lay stone, thirty smiths to keep the tools sharp, 200 carters to move the stone and 1000 ditchers and breakers to do the simple tasks, per R J Unstead, "See Inside a Castle." The master of operations was paid a whole three shillings a day. The rest were press gangs, men told to work at spear-point, paid in victuals and what they could steal.

Yet the large number meant many would settle on the site and employ the skills they learned in building to other crafts. Maybe they could keep machicolation and portcullis serviceable. These towns were far more important to society than the castles. Over time almost all castles were deconstructed to pave the roads and create the foundations of the goodly craftsmen's progeny's homes. The castle

wasn't so much an instrument of war, as a creatively piled assemblage of mined rock, set aside for a later generation.

Feel free to disagree.

## Yet Upon Reflection

Now that was history, but you're playing a fantasy game with dwarven builders and elven natural magic. The undead don't really mind a draft, and who is going to refute the common knowledge that orcs excrete concrete?

Look at the parts of the castle defenses listed and consider the situation should each one actually work as intended. The Portcullis, Murder Holes and Hoardings would make for some magnificent protections. Plus, you can fire out while the enemy can't truly attack back. Add some magic wards, anti-magic spells, to prevent invisible intrusion, some monsters with heightened senses or demonic dogs that see into other dimensions, and now you have some danger the cast of player characters must circumvent.

I can be rather blunt, but only to those pretending this stuff was real. In game terms, fantasy game terms, these obstacles are all great fun. Use them well, if the baron can afford the player character consultants to install the latest trends and models, of course. Have I got a Machicolation for you!

