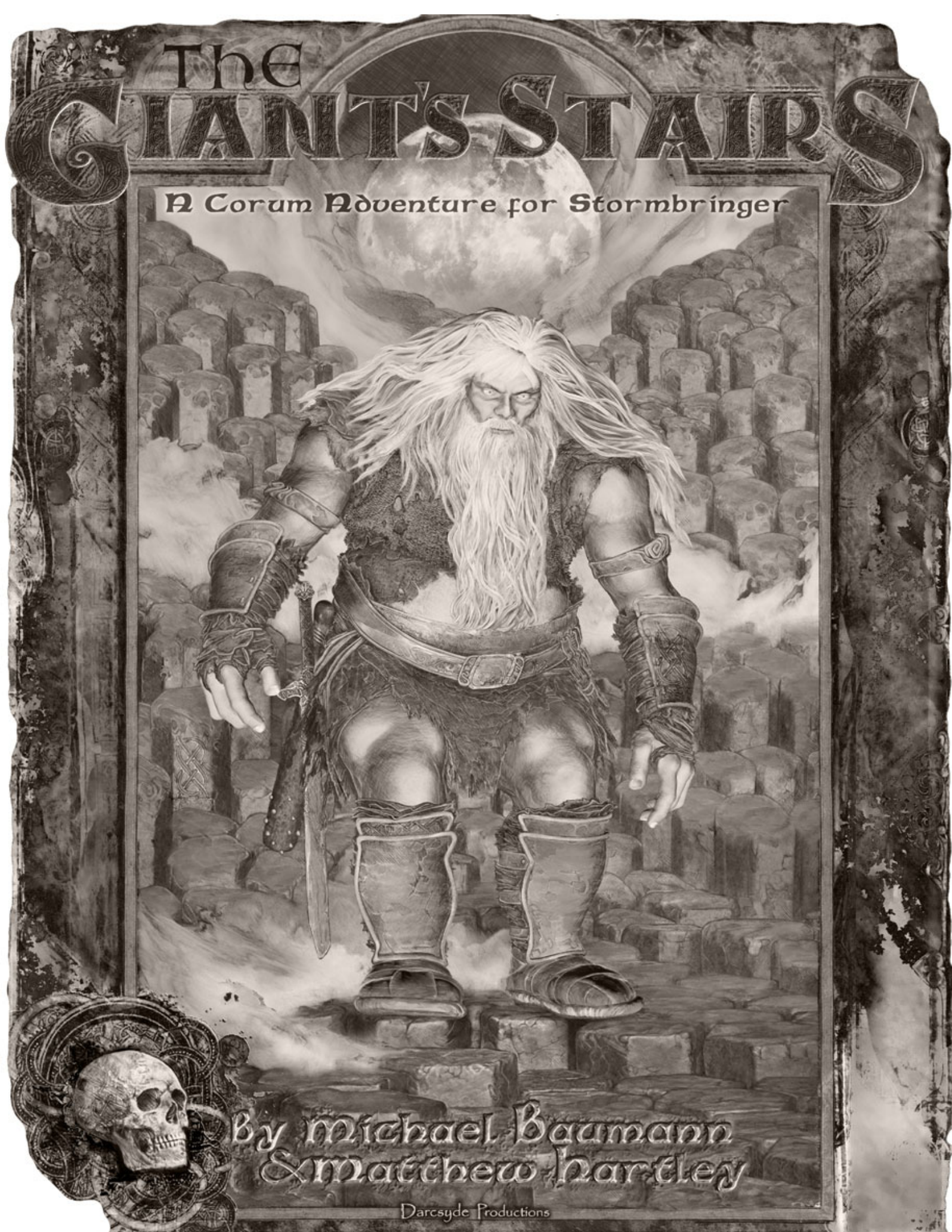




The GIANTS' STAIRS

A Corum Adventure for Stormbringer

By Michael Baumann
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Darcsyde Productions

The Giant's Stairs

A Stormbringer scenario set in the world of Corum

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INTRODUCTION

THE FOLLOWING ADVENTURE is designed for three to six beginning Corum characters. Gamemasters must judge for themselves whether the opposition will give the party a challenge. Successful completion of the quest does not depend upon character skill or prowess, but rather player ingenuity and memory. It assumes that the party will be composed solely of humans, but some notes have been added to various sections to aid in the incorporation of non-humans. Statistics for most of the important characters are included in **Supporting Cast** (starting on page 11).

The Giant's Stairs is based upon the Irish folk tale of the same name. This delightful tale can be found reprinted online at several sites devoted to Irish Folklore. The adventure explores the facets behind Celtic hospitality, or rather the antithesis of them.

Gamemaster's Synopsis

The adventure takes place in Caercurrough, a seaside barony in the land of Lywm-an-esh. The exact placement of the barony is up to the Gamemaster as is the reason the characters are in the area at this time. The adventure begins as the party takes

shelter from a thunderstorm in the ruins of an ancient manor house. During the night, the characters dream of a lad kidnapped from his home and forced into servitude to the giant Machwyn – a twisted vassal of the god Arioch. The boy is none other than the son of the Baron of Caercurrough who disappeared seven years ago. He tells the character he is being held beneath The Giant's Stairs and promises a reward to any who come to rescue him.

If the characters are so inclined they can verify the disappearance of the boy and find out the location of The Giant's Stairs – a craggy island that resembles an enormous staircase – from locals of the barony. With a bit of questioning, the adventurers should be able to divine that the only time they can enter the hall of Machwyn, beneath The Giant's Stairs, is on the anniversary of the lad's disappearance. Once inside they will be beset by a series of encounters where the traditions of hospitality are shattered. If they heed the advice given in the dream they should be able to find the boy and return to the barony to claim their reward. If they fail in their quest they may end up as soldiers in Machwyn's horde.

A DREAM OF A LOST LAD

THE RAIN CASCADES against the decaying roof of an abandoned manor, which provides only dubious protection from the worst of the weather raging outside. A short time ago you were traveling hard through the Barony of Caercurrough, hoping to make it to Dun Royaine before sundown. The fickle spirits of nature had planned to see you soaked to the skin, but Dame Fortune took it in mind to thwart their pleasure and let you spy this ruin just as the rain began falling. At least you have a roof – albeit a leaking one – over your head tonight and for that you can give thanks. The fire crackles pitifully, the watch is set and you settle yourself to get a bit of sleep.

As the party settles in for sleep, they share the following dream:

You stand upon a verdant plain, the smell of the ocean is thick and salty in your nose and the grass cool and soft upon your naked feet. A fine, white horse paws the ground in front of you. Mounted on this magnificent creature is a boy of perhaps seven years age. He is dressed as a prince, in a tunic of red and gold tartan, green breeches and a white cape trimmed in fox fur. A circlet of copper holds straw-colored hair back from his pale face. He is a handsome lad, with eyes the color of

the morning sky, a proud, defiant chin and high, ruddy cheeks. Only a tiny wart, along the right side of his freckled nose, mars his visage.

He smiles at you warmly and says, “My name is Falynd Royaine, son of Marec Royaine, Baron of Caercurrough. Nearly seven years ago I was carried off by the Giant Machwyn and I have been his slave beneath the Giant's Stairs ever since. When seven years have passed, the giant must release me to anyone who will claim me. My father is sure to reward such a man well, but Machwyn will do his best to cheat my rescuers and hold me for another seven years. I can only offer you this advice:

“Walls may have ears, but pay no heed to their mouths.

Shedding a man's blood often brings greater peril.

Drink what you will, but eat only that which is offered freely.

The finest gifts may have unseen attachments.”

As the party listens to the lad's story have them make a *Natural World* or *Ride* rolls. Success indicates that they notice a feral intelligence in the boy's horse. It seems to grow as the lad expounds and the beast is now regarding him with an almost predatory gaze.

Suddenly, the lad's horse lashes out at [a random character] with its iron-shod hoof. Young Royaine cries out in surprise and pulls furiously at the reins, but still the beast lands a glancing blow to the character's head [ID6 damage]. As the character falls to the ground dazed, the others can see the horse galloping away with the lad still trying to bring it under control. Darkness descends and they awake in the ruins of the manor holding aching heads.

The damage to the unfortunate character is real and he or she wakes to find a horseshoe-shaped welt on his or her forehead. *Physik* or magical healing heals the wound. The character also discovers an iron nail (of the kind used to attach horseshoes) in the bedding as they pack the next morning – another memento of their “dream”.

WHO IS MACHWYN?

Characters that make a critical *Five Planes* roll have heard a legend about Machwyn: *In ages past, when Law and Chaos warred across the lands, a giant led the armies of Ariocho through Lwym-an-Esh. He was said to be undefeatable in combat and his armies laid waste to the coasts. He was finally slain by a peasant farmer that crept upon him and took his head with a sickle, as he slept in the ruins of the man's house.*

Gamemaster background: The giant, a vassal of Ariocho, is no legend. Once human, Machwyn has continued to grow ever since he became a Champion of Chaos centuries ago. His skill and ferocity in battle have matched pace with his increased stature and he has become one of The Knight of Swords' favored generals. When not engaged in battle, Machwyn delights in kidnapping the youths of noble houses to serve him in his court beneath The Giant's Stairs. Ariocho allows the giant to pursue this little game, but in his caprice has laid a prohibition on him that he must not mistreat his charges, nor withhold them from anyone who comes to claim them after a year's service in his house.

DUN ROYAINE

HOPEFULLY THE CHARACTERS CONTINUE to Dun Royaine and pursue an investigation into Falyn's disappearance. At the very least, they need to determine the night the lad went missing so that they can enter the Giant's Stairs.

The next day's dawn is dark and foreboding. Although the rain stopped sometime during the night, the skies seem ready to open up and release another deluge at any moment. With one eye to the sky, you quickly attend to your horses and then ride for Dun Royaine. You spy it, as the first drops of water splash on your cloak. The Baronial seat is little more than a village nestled against the seacoast. No wall surrounds it; the only defense being a stout motte and bailey castle to the north. The narrow streets, which after last night's rain have become little more than rivers of mud, wind between the well-kept cottages in a random maze that would make the Lords of Disorder grin in delight.

The village boasts a fine harbor, and even in the gloom you can spy the sails of fishing boats plying nearby waters. The harbor is protected by tremendous spires of black rock that must surely blunt any onslaught of ocean fury. As the coastal road curves in towards the village, the spires seem to merge together forming the image of a fantastic staircase. Surely these are the Giant's Stairs.

Falyn's disappearance was on the seventh day of the seventh month. This date should be within a week of the party's arrival, giving them plenty of time to investigate the Giant's Stairs before they enter Machwyn's lair. There are many options for pursuing an investigation. Some are outlined below.

The Dun

Nobles, heroes or priests are invited to stay at the Baron's household and a feast is held in their honor. Other characters such as entertainers, craftsmen or merchants are also welcome to ply their talents or wares. Only obvious riff-raff (beggars and thieves) are denied entry. Those of higher social standing may gain an audience with the Baron, while those of lower rank can converse with servants. In either case, the Baron treats guests at his house with the courtesy befitting a noble lord. The party is given gifts, entertained, and fed all according to their social standing. The Gamemaster is encouraged to stress this to the players so as to make Machwyn's behavior (later) appear all the more reprehensible.

Baron Marec Royaine

The Baron is a tall, broad-shouldered and well-muscled man in his early forties. His black hair runs long and his beard is fulsome. Attired richly, as befits his rank, the characters first encounter him upon his sturdy but finely carved throne. As with many chiefs, Marec holds his Barony as much by the strength of his sword arm as by the wisdom of his words. A rural warrior chief, rather than a foppish city lord, his manner is blunt and direct. He is, however, well versed in the customs of hospitality and ensures that the characters, as his guests, are each treated properly according to his station. His courtesy extends to non-humans, whom the Baron treats as minor nobility if no other indication of rank is offered.

Royaine is a deeply troubled ruler. The disappearance of his son has caused him much grief. He truly loved his son and

looked to him to lead the Barony and safeguard his final years. Marec regards his nephew, who now stands to inherit the Barony, with ill-disguised contempt. He sees Balyr as weak and ineffectual, and fears for Caercurrough under his rule. That Marec and his wife Etain have been unable to produce another heir has been a further source of woe to the Baron. Little by little he and his wife have become estranged. Characters should be able to learn all about the Baron's views on his nephew and the state of his marriage through servant or village gossip.

Etain

Marec's wife, Etain, is a slender woman in her early forties. Obviously once very beautiful, she now appears drawn, haggard, and prematurely aged both by the loss of her son and her distancing from Marec. Like her husband, she will greet the party appropriately but will become visibly distressed at any mention of her lost son. Etain is rather more suspicious of non-humans than her husband and has always believed that some sort of "elf" has made off with her child. These feelings are noticed only with a successful *Insight* roll on the part of the character.

Balyr

The Gamemaster may wish to add further intrigue in the person of the Baron's young nephew Balyr, who now stands to inherit the barony. Surely this ruthless, overfed noble will try to stop or discredit the adventurers when he realizes their quest. Has he been scheming with local witches to poison Etain and keep her from bearing another child?

Balyr is both nasty and stupid. When he discovers their quest, he attaches himself to the adventurers and insists on helping them find his "beloved cousin". If permitted (he is horribly persistent), he makes all the mistakes in the later encounters. However, his real aim is to attack and kill Falyn. When all are safe (i.e., they have escaped the Giant) he tries to slay the boy "in secret", making it seem like an accident (pushing Falyn out of the boat, for example – or making a hole in the hull so that everyone drowns but him).

Balyr views all non-humans with thinly disguised contempt. He gleefully points out any mistakes such characters make and offers them no assistance unless doing so would further his own goals.

The Guesthouse

The village guesthouse, large by the standards of Dun Royaine, is a single story building with a newly thatched roof. The party can purchase lodgings for the night and pick up all sorts of village gossip with a few drinks or *Charisma* rolls.

The Temple

The modest temple of Urleh, little more than a shrine, is one of the few stone buildings in Dun Royaine. The village priest, named Caffyd, is an amiable, older man who will happily chat with the adventurers in exchange for news of the outside world. The priest will be congenial to any non-humans in the party, but he holds to the belief that their time in this world has passed.

The players may decide that Caffyd has a part to play in Falyn's disappearance and the Gamemaster is encouraged to lead them on this false trail. Perhaps he is seen talking in hushed whispers with Balyr, or overhead questioning the villagers about the characters' investigations. His alibi for the night of the boy's disappearance is that he was meditating in the temple, alone with his prayers. Caffyd is the only one in the village who recognized the name "Machwyn" and can tell the adventurers something of the giant. He is able to provide them with the player information found in **Who is Machwyn?**, on page 4.

Questions and Answers

No matter where the players go for information, here are the answers to some of the questions they may ask:

Who is Falyn Royaine?

The villagers remember "young Master Falyn" fondly. The characters are soon given the impression that he was a great favorite amongst all the people and that they miss him desperately. He was about six years old at the time of his disappearance. His description is a perfect match for the boy in the dream.

What happened to him?

Falyn disappeared from his room at night nearly seven years ago. If pressed, an exact date can be dredged up from someone's memory: The seventh day of the seventh month. The anniversary of the disappearance is about a week away.

Where is his nurse?

His nurse was found brutally murdered during the search for the boy. Her butchered body lay in the same ruined manor where the party sheltered from the storm. Apparently the manor was a favorite playground of the boy.

Has anyone else gone missing before or after Falyn?

If the players are canny enough to ask this question, they will soon be able to deduce a pattern: others have indeed gone missing in years past, always on the seventh day of the seventh month. The children are always young boys, never more than ten years of age, and of good families. Before Falyn, the previous youth, the son of a local cattle-lord, disappeared twenty-one years ago. Searches have never turned up any trace of them, nor has a ransom ever been demanded after a disappearance. No one in the village has heretofore discerned the pattern of abductions because they do not happen regularly every seven years.

What can you tell me about the Giant's Stairs?

Many of the townsfolk have stories about with the Giant's Stairs. Some claim it is all that is left of the Wading God's house, but the most popular claim it to be a roost for the ghosts of drowned fisherman. For the most part fishermen steer clear of the island out of respect for its submerged reefs, if not its spirits. One man does string crab and lobster traps out by the rocky stand: an old fisherman named Caudwl.

The Old Man and the Sea

Caudwl is certainly not a pleasant sight to behold. He is dressed in a rough, homespun tunic and trousers so encrusted with salt that appear as if they could stand on their own. His skin, burned for years by wind and sun, is a deep red, blotchy mass covered in liver warts and moles. The left side of his face, running from his scowling jaw, up along his cheek and over the top of his nearly bald pate, is covered in a series of round, puckered scars. The little left of his white hair stands in clumps that rise nearly straight up from his skull, as if the tips fear to settle any closer to his hardened visage. His left eye is milky white and stares blindly, but his right is clear blue and looks as if it misses nothing.

If the party engages him in conversation about the Giant's Stairs he'll gladly tell his tales over a couple pints:

"The others is foolish not t' set their traps out near the Stairs. I ain't complaining, mind you – I bring in the biggest crabs in the Barony, but all o' them stories o' ghosts and spirits is just hogwash – not that there ain't things t' watch out fer," he says rubbing his left eye absently.

"I only seen one thing what could be considered odd out there," he says, settling in for what looks like an oft-told tale,

"Nigh on seven years ago 'twas. I was comin' in late that night – me tiller havin' took it in mind t' give out that day. The sea was passin' fierce, but as I rounded the windward side o' the Stairs I seen a glow, like lamplight, comin' from the rocks. I reckoned some damn fool had got himself wrecked and needed a ferry back t' shore, although how I was suppose t' take him off in that sea, without wreckin' me self, was a mystery. Anyhow, I reefed the sail and drove a bit closer to holler that I'd see a boat sent out once I'd reached town. Now you won't credit what I seen there, but I swear upon me mother's grave what I say be the truth – 'twas a man, 12 feet tall if'n he was a span, standin' in front o' the cave mouth where this light was a shinin'. This here fellow bends down and takes up a rock bigger than me head and hurls it out at me boat. Lucky for me he missed, and you can be sure I didn't wait around to let him improve his aim. Next day I was back out to the Stairs at first light. I drove around that pile o' rock three times, but I couldn't make out no sign o' cave nor giant."

If asked, the old fisherman is willing to take them out to the Giant's Stairs. A bit of coin would be appreciated, but he'll do it for free if they tell him they are searching for the Baron's son.

STAIRS TO ANOTHER WORLD

RISING FROM THE SEA to a height of nearly one hundred feet, the Giant's Stairs lie several hundred yards out from Dun Royaine's harbor. The massive collection of basalt pillars does indeed resemble a huge staircase when silhouetted against the eastern sky. At most times it is nothing more than a rocky island, but once every seven years on the seventh night of the seventh month (the anniversary of Faly'n kidnapping) two of the fifteen planes intersect here allowing travel between the worlds. This gate lasts from sundown to sunrise and takes the form of a cave entrance on the seaward side of the formation. It will take the characters into the abode of Machwyn, a vassal of Arioch, whose hall lies on one of the nearby planes controlled by the Knight of Swords. If any have ventured into this gate, none have returned to tell of it, and the inhabitants of the Barony are quite ignorant of its existence.

Should the adventurers explore the island during the day or at any time before or after the date of the convergence, they can find little but rocks, seagulls, and the occasional sea lion basking in the sun. Vadhagh, and Seers skilled in the precept *Planar Travel*, may enter the gate at anytime by paying the normal cost in Magic Points.

The waves crash violently as you help Caudwl push his boat down the shingle beach. "Looks t' be a might rough out there t'night," he says with a sour expression, "now help me with these sweeps lads. That's it, set your backs t' 'em!" The little boat struggles against the surf until you are deep enough to allow Caudwl to drop the keel and set the sail. Soon you are

knifing through the water as the old salt tacks towards the rocky island.

At night, the Giant's Stairs are truly awesome. Silhouetted in the pale moonlight, you can imagine some enormous god striding down from the heavens upon them.

Those who make *Search* rolls spot the cave entrance in the moonlight. Caudwl spies it if no one else does.

You leap from the heaving boat onto the surf-swept ledge of the cave entrance. The old fisherman gives each of you a long look with his good eye, as if he is trying to remember the face of someone he will never see again. "I'll stand off a piece," he shouts above the roaring surf, "if'n I lie too close these here rocks'll have the bottom outta me boat. Wave a torch when you're set to be picked up an' I'll be back in to getcha." Without waiting for a reply, he ships his oars and rows off into the gloom.

GM NOTE

Time does not pass at the same rate on Machwyn's plane as it does on the characters' home plane; it is slower by a factor of seven. For each year that passes on Machwyn's plane, seven will pass in their home. If the players dawdle about searching for secret doors, resting for a few hours or what have you, the Gamemaster is within his or her rights to trap them. See **Trapped**, on page 10, in **Other Outcomes**.

Faces in Stone

Turning about, you head the black maw of the cavern. The torchlight reflecting against the glistening walls creates the illusion of eerie faces sculpted into the stone. Shadows falling across the living rock turn a pair of bulges into leering eyes, a stalactite into a broken nose, while a crevasse takes the shape of a frowning mouth. As you stride deeper into the tunnel, you become less certain that the faces are merely fancies of the imagination. Indeed, the stony visages become more numerous, crowding together and flowing into one another as if a thousand heads had been piled up and left to ossify in the chthonian gloom. Perhaps most disconcerting is that each time you pause to examine a particular face it vanishes into the rock, as if it were simply a trick of light and shadow after all.

As you trudge further into the bowels of the earth, you become aware of distant whispers in your ears. So soft are they at first that it was impossible to discern any meaning from them, although they become steadily louder as you make your way down the corridor. The hushed murmurs soon resolve themselves into several distinct voices each repeating a phrase over and over again:

"Victims, victims, victims..."

"More fools come to join us. More will share our pain, our woe."

"Turn back. Leave this place before it is too late."

Mixed in with the steady mutterings are intermittent groans of pain and peals of hysterical laughter. Slowly, the volume of each voice grows inside your head until they meld into a cacophony of gibberish that threatens to have you screaming yourself.

The players must make a *resistance roll*, pitting their POW against a value of 21. If a character repeats the first line of Faly's advice (on page 3) the opposing value is reduced to 13. Failure to resist the Faces in Stone results in continuing to hear the mutterings through the rest of the adventure — this nerve-racking drone is a constant distraction, reducing all *Perception* skills by 20%.

Insult for Injury

Eventually the passageway opens into a rough-hewn room lit by sputtering torches. In the middle of the room, hands on hips, is the tall and powerful form of a warrior. Fine blonde hair, restrained by a silver band, falls to his broad shoulders where a beautiful, red linen cape is draped, thrown back to reveal his broad, naked chest. His massive arms sport ornate bracelets and armbands while a golden torc is at his thick neck. The heavy sword at his side has a golden hilt wrapped with silver wire and resides in a gem-encrusted scabbard. He strokes his luxuriant moustache and regards you disdainfully and then says:

"A poor lot of filth comes begging scraps at Lord Machwyn's house. Out of my sight you stinking pigs! Craven whoresons have no place in a hero's manse!"

The Gamemaster is encouraged to expound upon the insults and direct specific barbs at each of the characters. The warrior, whose name is Camulos, knows all of the adventurers' faults

and foibles. Any time a character has been dishonorable, any occasion of cowardice or greed perpetrated in the five planes should be thrown in their face. This is a great opportunity to bring to light anything a player might wish to keep hidden (like the time he helped himself to the treasure while the rest of the party was sleeping, etc.). The only limit on his knowledge is that the event must have transpired within the five planes.

The warrior's tongue is fierce — all characters must make a *resistance roll*, pitting their lowest characteristic against a value of 21. If a character repeats the second line of young Royaine's advice (on page 3) verbatim the opposing value is reduced to 13. Those who fail the resistance roll are compelled to attack their tormentor. Camulos does not respond to reason, guile or greed. He continues to hurl insults at the party until one of them breaks, or they try to move past him through the room's exit — in which case he initiates the combat.

Although he appears human, Camulos is actually a creature of Chaos. If his blood is spilled, it quickly forms itself into a gory snake that attacks the character that injured him. See *Blood Vipers*, on page 11, in the *Supporting Cast* section.

Feast or Famine

You enter into an enormous, rectangular feasting hall constructed of dressed stone. Delicate carvings of dragons, hounds and stags are interlaced on the walls, but your attention is diverted from the mason's skill by the massive, oak table covered with every kind of conceivable food: A roast, suckling pig lies surrounded by a garnish of succulent vegetables. Silver platters are piled high with slices of venison and beef. A bounty from the sea, including salmon, sea bass, crab and lobster beckon you. Golden brown loaves of fresh-baked bread with pots of churned butter and honey soon have your mouth watering. Confronted with all of these delectable viands you suddenly feel as if you haven't eaten for weeks.

Each of the adventurers finds his or her favorite dishes present on the feasting table. They must each make a *resistance roll*, pitting their CON against a value of 21, or they'll gorge themselves on food. If they recall the third line of the boy's poem (on page 3) the opposing value drops to only 13.

Those who eat from the spread are poisoned! The poison is POT 16 (roll the character's CON against this on the Resistance Table). If effective, the poison causes 1D6 damage and the victim becomes extremely ill, incurring a 15% penalty to all physical skills and rolls.

No Strings Attached?

The passage leads into a room lit and heated by four large, charcoal braziers, any one of which would have been sufficient for the task — the combined heat is stifling. The room is small, square and dominated by a magnificent loom. A work of art in itself — intricately carved and inlaid with ivory — it pales in comparison to the masterpieces being produced upon it: linen tunics of vibrant reds, greens and yellows; kilts patterned with the most intricate tartan; fine shirts and trousers cut from the softest fabrics and dyed in brilliant hues; azure cloaks

woven from the warmest wool, delicately embroidered with interlacing patterns of knot-work. Even the small clothes appear fit for royalty. Undoubtedly the braziers are to keep the damp from the bones of the elderly, apple-faced matrons working inside.

One of the ancients is at the loom, her wrinkled hands moving with lightning quickness, a second is sewing a fabulous garment with equal dexterity, while the third is spinning thread with her left hand, the spindle whorl a mere blur as it turns widdershins.

"Come to see Machwyn, I suppose," croaks one the weaver, without looking up from her loom.

"Aye that they have, I reckon," joins the spinner.

"We'll we can't have you going to see him dressed like beggars now can we?" the seamstress clucks.

"No, I reckon we can't," the spinner comments dryly.

"Come dears," the weaver picks up, "pick yourselves out some nice clothes so you'll look your best for Machwyn."

Each article of clothing is of the finest quality. The craftsmanship is truly fit for a king and any item a character takes a fancy to appear to have been tailored just for him or her. Characters who make a *Search* roll notice that each piece of clothing is still attached to the looms by tiny threads. Nevertheless, it requires an INT vs. 21 *resistance* roll to resist immediately putting the item on, although the number drops to 13 if they recall the last line of Faly'n's warning (on page 3).

If an adventurer dons a tunic or other piece of apparel he or she becomes bound to the loom. While so entangled, the old women warp into the most hideous hags, sprout enormous claws from their withered hands and lash out at the victim. The thread can be broken or the clothing torn off if the player can make a *resistance* roll, pitting their STR against 18, or is able to deliver 16 points of damage in a single blow with a slashing weapon – otherwise one fights the hags with a -30% penalty to all combat skills.

If none of the party takes the proffered tunics the hags curse them as fools and ingrates, and tell them to be on their way.

MACHWYN'S HALL

THE HALL IS ENORMOUS and of such barbaric splendor it threatens to put to shame the court of the Toad King of Bro-an-Mabden. The guttering torches reveal a vaulted ceiling rising to the height of nearly twenty feet. Torn and bloodied banners hang from the heights; surely trophies of armies defeated by Machwyn's horde. More trophies, in the form of grinning skulls, stare at you from dozens of niches in the dressed stone walls, and the decapitated bodies piled haphazardly in the corner testify that some of them must be quite recent.

Tearing your eyes from the grisly walls, you find the center of the room dominated by a grand table, nearly twin to that in the earlier feasting hall. But where the feast on that board made your mouth water, this one brings bile to your throat, groaning as it is under all manner of befouled food. Slabs of meat (from what creature you dare not speculate) are crawling with maggots. Twisted, unhealthy fish gasp and twitch on tarnished silver platters, aswarm with filthy flies. What few vegetables lie scattered amongst this disgusting fare appear rotted and worm-ridden. Rotating slowly above the table, the lifeless body of a man hangs by his intestines from the rafters, forming a macabre centerpiece for the banquet below.

Sitting to table feasting and drinking lustily are ghastly parodies of men. Each is stamped with bestial features: a porcine nose snorts, the jaws of a wolf tear at meat, a whinny sounds from an equine throat. All are clad in heavy mail armor and have wicked-looking weapons close to hand. Any of these huge beast men would incite fear and loathing, and yet their combined foulness is dwarfed by the figure of a man – giant rather – who can only be Machwyn.

A thick mane of dirty-white hair stands wild and unkempt above his heavy-featured face. Vicious eyes peer out from

under beetling brows; eyes that glow with the light of madness. A huge beard, fouled with all manner of food and drink, flows from below his thick-lipped mouth, over his bulging abdomen to where it lies tucked into his belt. He is garbed as if he just returned from battle. A mail shirt, brown with rust and full of rents, covers his torso. Cuirboilli greaves and vambraces are buckled to his shins and forearms. What might pass for a normal man's greatsword swings from one side of his wide, leather belt, while a bronze-studded cudgel hangs from the opposite. His clothes are dingy, travel-stained and flecked with dried blood.

The "court" continues drinking and feasting while the party examines the room. The only other door, a tall, bronze portal large enough to admit a man on horseback, is locked and impervious to damage (both magical and mundane).

Any player making an *Idea* roll recalls they must demand the boy's release from Machwyn's service. When they do so, the whole assemblage turns in surprise, as though they have only just noticed the characters for the first time. The giant rises and offers a *deal* (see next page), while the beast-men eye them hungrily.

If the players attempt some other strategy or ruse they are not likely to fool Machwyn. In most cases he assumes they are here to release Faly'n, regardless of the story they contrive to tell him. The Gamemaster must be the final arbitrator on the success of such a ploy.

If the adventurers simply attack, Machwyn and his followers are quick to join the battle, and are not subject to surprise. If the party is able to defeat the assemblage, they find a bronze key in the Giant's pouch that unlocks the tall door, revealing Faly'n and his eight *Gaulyn* (see page 12) look-alikes.

Machwyn's Deal

If the party calls for the boy's release, Machwyn notices them and rises. As he stands, he seems to increase in stature, towering over his officers as well as the characters. His eyes burn like coals beneath his thick brow ridge as his look of surprise slowly turns to anger. Any courage quails beneath that fierce gaze, leaving the characters feeling as children – children who have angered their elders and now stand ready to be punished.

"Falyn has indeed served his time faithfully, and I'll gladly send him with you," he growls, his mouth twisting into a grin that makes his earlier frown look inviting.

As the words leave his lips, a tall door creaks open and out file eight boys. All are dressed in tunics of red and gold tartan with green breeches. Eight copper circlets hold the lads' straw-colored hair back from their pale faces. Each is mounted on a fine, white horse. The octuplets dismount and quickly arrange themselves in a line as if for inspection.

Each boy is indistinguishable from the one to either side. All stand proudly, with hope shining in their pale blue eyes.

"As you see, many lads serve at my court. Pick him out and he is free, but if you're wrong you'll be serving me as well – as fodder for my army. Now, make your choice and be quick about it!"

The Choosing

Picking out Falyn from the eight identical lads is no mean feat, as Machwyn does not permit the adventurers to question any of them directly. The following are some ideas the players may wish to try:

The Wart

Those who recall that Falyn had a wart along side his face may attempt to *Search* for him based on this feature. True enough, only the real boy has the wart.

The Laugh

If a player has read the tale he may think to make the boys laugh, and pick out the lad by his voice. A *Charisma*, *Fast Talk* or certain *Arts* (juggling, or other performance skills)

can achieve the desired result. A further *Listen* roll is needed to pick the boy out.

The Horseshoe

The characters may recall the horseshoe nail found in their bedding after the initial dream. If they examine the hooves of each of the horses, sure enough the real lad's horse is missing a nail from its shoe.

By Luck

If all else fails they may have to pick at random. Roll ID8: they pick the right boy on the roll of a "1".

By Force

Fighting is a bad option. Machwyn and his beast-men are very tough opponents. Once battle is joined, the boys (all except Falyn) revert to demons and join the fray. The characters might be able to grab hold of Falyn and make a run for it, though, pursued by demons and beast-men. Machwyn attempts to capture the characters for his armies if at all possible. See **Other Outcomes**, on page 10, if they lose the fight.

Picking the Wrong Boy

If the characters pick the wrong boy, Machwyn instructs his officers to "take the fools". A fight most likely ensues, but the giant does not take part unless things seem to be going badly for his beast-men. The Gamemaster may wish to encourage the party to make a run for it. If they stay to fight they will probably be overwhelmed. See **Other Outcomes**, on page 10, if they lose the fight.

Picking the Right Lad

The giant gives the party a look sure to curdle fresh milk.

"Clever. Very clever indeed," he rumbles. Then, turning on Falyn with a snarl he spits: "and don't think I won't forget you, young Royaine! Soon, very soon indeed, Arag will have need of my legions and I'll be sure to pay a special visit to your lands." Young Falyn stands straight under the onslaught, but the lad's eyes widen with fear at the thought of the giant's horde descending on his homeland. "Begone with you, then!" Machwyn spits, "if you're not gone in five minutes I won't answer for you."

LEAVE TAKING

YOU HASTEN THE BOY down the passage to the weaver's room – at least what you thought was the passage, for the room is not ahead where you expected it, instead the corridor branches right and left. From down the hall Machwyn's voice echoes like a gentle tremor: "give them their five minutes, then take them!" You don't think it wise to return to the hall. Is it right or left?

Any character making an *Idea* roll is convinced that they have returned by the same passage they entered. The truth of the matter is that the passages and rooms that they previously traversed are no longer present, replaced instead by a labyrinth.

Machwyn allows the group to stumble around for his promised five minutes, and then sends the remaining "pages" (who have since dropped their guises and appear as the nasty little demons they are) after them. The party must fight a running battle with the demons while navigating the maze in order to be free of the Giant's Stairs. The Gamemaster should keep the party fumbling around the labyrinth as long as it is fun to do so.

A tang of salt air leads you down the final passage to emerge on the slick shelf outside the cavern. Caudwl's boat bobs in the waters below, the old fisherman peering up with a look of

relief on his face and a barbed spear in his gnarled hand. "Decided to take a nap, did ye?" he grins, "you lads've been gone hours and I became passin' tired of waitin'. I was just about to..." His words trail off and a look of astonishment crosses his weathered face as you hand Falyn down into his boat.

Caudwl gives young Falyn the respect due to a Baron's son and if asked he assures them that he is the lad, but he'll also mention he doesn't look much older than when he disappeared, although he should be nearing his thirteenth birthday by now.

The old man's words may allow the characters to puzzle out that time passes more slowly inside the Giant's Stair. It is for that reason that Falyn seems to have aged only a year, while he has been gone for seven. An *Idea* roll can be used to enlighten the players, if they don't figure this out on their own.

Other Outcomes

While it is expected that the party will manage to rescue the stolen child, it is possible that events will deny the characters their victory. Here are notes on some other resolutions.

Captured

The characters are pressed into the Machwyn's army. If the players seem resigned to their fate, the Gamemaster should be able to create scenarios filled with war and raiding as the horde rampages throughout the five planes. All adventurers should rack up plenty of Chaos points and perhaps a bestial feature or two for atrocities they commit. After a year's service they may make their escape through the Giant's Stairs, only to find that 7 years have past in their home plane!

Trapped

If the party dawdles about inside the Giant's Stairs, the Gamemaster may rule that night has passed outside and the gate to their home plane has shut. They may find another exit from the giant's caves, but they are trapped on Machwyn's plane. The Gamemaster should invent an adventure to bring them home.

A FAMILY REUNITED

THE BARON AND HIS WIFE recognize their son even though he has only aged a year. The townsfolk also accept that it is Falyn immediately, and put any discrepancy down to the spirits of the Giant's Stair. The characters are feasted by the Baron for weeks, and are gifted with clothing, jewelry, and weapons. The Gamemaster should, of course, ensure that the reward fits the tone of his or her ongoing campaign, but the party are elevated to the status of heroes in the barony and are always assured of a warm welcome in Dun Royaine.

Further Adventures

Gamemasters who introduced Balyr, the Baron's nephew, may wish to continue the intrigue as he plots to regain his inheritance. He would be more than happy to see young Falyn "disappear" again, and he has a band of unscrupulous henchmen to assist him to this end.

Arioch will call upon Machwyn and his armies when turmoil arises in Lywm-an-esh. The giant is certain to visit the barony with a vengeance, hoping to slay Falyn and his family. Will the characters be able to thwart Machwyn's wrath and drive his beast-men back to their home plane?

SUPPORTING CAST

FALYN

Son of the Baron, age 7

The brave and precocious son of Marec and Etain Royaine, Falyn was the darling of the Barony. Kidnapped by Machwyn, the lad has served as a page in the revolting court beneath The Giant's Stairs. While Falyn has seemingly endured a year's service, in actuality seven years have passed in his home plane.

Chaos –, Balance 2, Law –
STR 6 CON 12 SIZ 6 INT 14 POW 15
DEX 13 APP 16 HP 9
Damage Bonus: -1D6

Weapons: None

Armor: None

Skills: Art (Courtly Manners) 35%, Climb 57%, Dodge 48%,
Hide 25%, Insight 47%, Jump 30%, Ride 40%, Swim 40%

BALYR

Heir Apparent, age 23

A mass of raven hair frames the pudgy face of the Baron's nephew. Always dressed in the most expensive clothes and bedecked with rich jewelry, Balyr strives to present an image of a sophisticated courtier, but only succeeds in looking like a gaudy fool. At the age of sixteen, he went from an unwelcome hanger-on to the heir to the Barony of Caercurrough. Stupid and indolent, Balyr abuses his position at court – bullying the servants and over-indulging in food and drink. While dull-witted, he realizes that if Falyn is returned he will lose his position as the Baron's heir. He aims to see the characters fail in their quest and, barring that, to ensure that the lad meets with an unfortunate "accident". His schemes are not subtle and should be easily thwarted by the party.

Balyr employs half a dozen thugs as his personal "guard". He calls upon them if he ever feels threatened. Use the *City Guard* statistics from page 225 in the *Stormbringer* rules book, but replace their armor with Leather.

Chaos 5, Balance –, Law –
STR 11 CON 10 SIZ 15 INT 9 POW 8
DEX 13 APP 9 HP 13
Damage Bonus: None

Weapons: *Shortsword* 57%, damage 1D6+1

Armor: Beautifully tooled Leather (1D6-1)

Skills: Belittle Others 87%, Conceal Object 68%, Dodge 41%,
Hide 29%, Listen 45%, Move Quietly 62%, Ride 51%,
Trap 42%

CAFFYD

Priest of Urleh, age 47

Thick white hair falls shoulder-length around his narrow, but friendly face. He dresses in long black robes embroidered with the symbol of Chaos. Caffyd is an artist at heart and his altar is decorated with his own sculptures of Urleh. A good man at heart, the priest is eager to aid the party if they confide in him.

Chaos 12, Balance 10, Law 5
STR 10 CON 12 SIZ 14 INT 14 POW 11
DEX 11 APP 13 HP 13

Damage Bonus: None

Weapons: *Quarterstaff* 48%, damage 1D8

Armor: None

Skills: Art (Sculpture) 91%, Art (Theology) 88%, Bargain 51%,
Five Planes 85%, Insight 105%, Listen 78%, Million
Spheres 16%, Natural World 43%, Oratory 95%,
Physik 97%, Potions 76%, Scribe 102%

CAUDWL

Old Fisherman, age 49

The grizzled old fisherman has been setting his nets and traps around The Giant's Stair since he was a lad. One of the most hardworking fishermen in the Barony, Caudwl's generous spirit ensures that he never has more than a few pennies to his name at any time.

Chaos 2, Balance 10, Law 3
STR 14 CON 16 SIZ 14 INT 12 POW 13
DEX 11 APP 7 HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Weapons: *Short Spear* 82% damage 1D6+1

Thrown Spear 72%, damage 1D6+1

Armor: None

Skills: Art (Story Telling) 35%, Bargain 82%, Climb 91%, Craft
(Net) 102%, Dodge 71%, Five Planes 25%, Insight 31%,
Jump 55%, Natural World 75%, Navigate 78%, Physik 51%,
Sailing 119%, Swim 105%

CAMULOS

Sharp-tongued warrior, age 31

Camulos appears as a handsome warrior of imposing stature, but he is in fact a creature of Chaos. When he takes damage from a bladed or piercing weapon, the blood he sheds transforms itself into a horrid serpent (see **Blood Vipers**, below) the following combat round. Characters may pummel him insensible with fists or cudgels, as blunt weapons do not cause enough blood to spill.

Chaos 181, Balance –, Law 11
STR 18 CON 21 SIZ 19 INT 14 POW 20
DEX 18 APP 17 HP 20

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Weapons: *Long Sword* 134%, damage 1D10+1

Armor: None

Skills: Art (Taunt/Insult) 175%, Dodge 90%, Wrestle 90%

BLOOD VIPERS

Crimson Gastric Snakes

Camulos' blood forms into a creature that resemble a ropy mass of gory intestines ending in a maw filled with razor-sharp teeth. One of these loathsome creatures forms every time an edged weapon draws blood from the warrior. The size and strength of the creature depends upon how many hit points of damage he takes from the blow (see table below). Blood vipers are immune to magical domination.

	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20
STR	8	10	14	18	22
CON	6	10	14	18	22
SIZ	5	10	15	20	25
POW	1	1	1	1	1
DEX	25	20	15	10	5
HP	6	10	15	19	24
DB	-1D4	-	+1D4	+1D6	+2D6

Weapons: *Bite* (DEX x 4)%, damage 1D8

Armor: None

Skills: Dodge (DEX x 4)%

THE THREE CRONES

Mysterious Old Women

Tall and thin, with stringy gray hair and sallow, wart-covered skin the crones appear to be witches from the darkest fairy tales. Their nimble fingers end in iron-hard claws, while their slender limbs are possessed of surprising strength. Despite their hideous appearance, they are not demons, but rather humans warped by Chaos. The crones use the *Chaotic Effect of Shape Change* to transform themselves into the kindly old Matrons the party encounters when they first enter the sewing room. They drop this glamour revealing their true forms when attacking.

	#1	#2	#3
STR	17	16	18
CON	15	15	14
SIZ	14	16	14
INT	12	14	13
POW	16	18	16
DEX	17	15	14
APP	1	1	1
HP	15	16	14
DB	+1D4	+1D4	+1D4

Weapons: *Claw* 96%, damage 1D6

Armor: None

Chaotic Effects: *Shape Change*

Skills: Craft (Spinning) 120%, Craft (Weaving) 120%, Craft (Seamstress) 120%, Dodge 86%

MACHWYN

The Giant, age unknown

See **Who is Machwyn?**, on page 4, for his background, and **Machwyn's Hall**, on page 8, for his description.

Machwyn is not designed to be an opponent the party can defeat in combat. If he is attacked, he orders his beast-men to assault the enemy, then stands back to direct them. If the characters do engage him, have him shatter a shield with a blow of his cudgel before backing off again. Of course if the players persist they should encounter his full wrath.

Chaos 208, Balance -, Law 17

STR 28 CON 24 SIZ 36 INT 16 POW 24
DEX 12 APP 8 HP 30

Damage Bonus: +3D6

Weapons: *Giant Broadsword* 254%, damage 2D8
Huge Cudgel 207%, damage 2D6

Armor: Heavy Chain Hauberk w/o Helm (2D10-2)

Chaotic Effects: None

Skills: Art (Tactics) 137%, Bargain 91%, Dodge 115%, Five Planes 71%, Insight 102%, Listen 75%, Million Spheres 51%, Oratory 82%, Scent/Taste 63%, Throw 68%, Track 112%

BEAST-MEN OFFICERS

Hideous Soldiers

Machwyn's officers are an unsavory assortment of half-men. All are hideously deformed with bestial features. One may have the head of a goat, the next a pigs snout and ears, while yet another walks on horse-like hooves. The officers are not necessarily the brightest of Machwyn's army, but they are the ones most likely to carry out his orders. None have more than fleeting memories of their former lives.

Although they long to, the beast-men will not assault the party unless ordered to by Machwyn. This only happens if the party is foolish enough to attack first, or if they linger after their task is complete.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
STR	15	14	16	17	16	15	14
CON	12	17	15	13	16	16	14
SIZ	18	15	14	14	17	15	11
INT	14	9	9	10	8	8	13
POW	14	12	11	8	11	12	10
DEX	17	12	12	12	11	10	8
HP	15	16	15	14	17	16	13
DB	+1D6	+1D4	+1D4	+1D4	+1D6	+1D4	+1D4

Weapons: Roll 1D8:

- 1-2 *Longsword* 85%, damage 1D10+1
- 3-4 *Battle Axe* 85%, damage 1D8+2
- 5 *Heavy Mace* 85%, damage 1D8+2
- 6-7 *Great Axe** 85%, damage 2D6+2
- 8 *Long Spear* 85%, damage 1D10+1

* *Treat as a War Axe, as shown in Corum, on page 23.*

Armor: Half-Plate w/o Helm (1D8-1)

Chaotic Effects: None

Skills: Dodge 75%, Jump 56%, Ride 80%

DEMON CHILDREN

Diminutive Demonic Doppelgangers

For description and notes, see **Gaulyn**, on page 13, in the **New Magics** section.

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
STR	9	12	12	16	9	14	11
CON	13	12	12	9	11	11	6
SIZ	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
INT	12	9	10	13	11	14	04
POW	19	18	7	11	22	15	16
DEX	17	17	16	16	15	14	13
HP	10	9	9	8	9	9	6
DB	-1D4	-	-	-	-1D4	-	-

Weapons: *Claws* 50%, damage 1D6

Armor: None

Abilities: *Doppelganger*

Skills: Art (Acting) 50%, Dodge 50%, Fast Talk 40%

NEW MAGICS

Demon Breeds

GAULYN

lesser demon, humanoid double or "evil twin"

Gaulyn are consummate impersonators. Their plastic bodies can assume the form of anyone the summoner specifies while their skill in acting aids in the deception. The true form of these creatures is a squat, bald, pale-skinned humanoid with a rotund body, long, attenuated arms, and sharply pointed ears. Gaulyn despise their true form and revert to it only when attacking, or if slain.

Characteristics	Roll	Average
STR	2D8	9
CON	2D8	9
SIZ	3D8	13-14
INT	2D8	9
POW	3D8	13-14
DEX	3D8	13-14
MOV	2D8	
HP		13-14
DB		none

Abilities: *Claws* 50%, damage 1D6

Doppelganger (see **Demon Abilities**, below)

Skills: Art (Acting) 50%, Dodge 50%, Fast Talk 40%

Need: The demon must taste a drop or two of the person's blood at least once every three days, it must also keep with it a personal possession of the person to be imitated.

Magic Points to Summon: 51

Demon Abilities

Doppelganger (demon SIZ): A more specific form of the *Shape Change* ability, Doppelganger allows the demon to duplicate the physical features and voice of any human or near human (Melnibonéan, etc.) individual. In addition to the base cost in the Demon's size, one magic point must be spent per person the demon can mimic. While the demon is a virtual twin of the subject, there is always some small flaw in the mimicry that may be noticed by close acquaintances on a *Search* roll. The demon cannot duplicate the mannerisms of the double unless it also has the Art (Acting) skill.