

PRICE 2 COPPER

1ST ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION

# THE NEW ORCER



# User Manual for Pitzman's Alchemy Jug



Congratulations! You are now the proud owner of Pitzman's World Famous **Alchemy Jug!** A most wondrous item indeed!

When my great great grandfather Pinklen Pitzman (of the famous Yellow Wizzards of Pei) invented this infamous jug over 240 years ago, he had no idea that the company he started in his bathroom would grow to craft thousands of jugs across the multiverse. Today we are proud to continue his legacy in providing artisanal crafted vessels which provide all sorts of useful liquids at a moment's notice. Simply speak its name, and the substance will flow!\*

However, it has come to our attention that even though these jugs have become a staple in every adventuring party's pack, most users are not enjoying the **FULL BENEFITS** our jug has to offer.

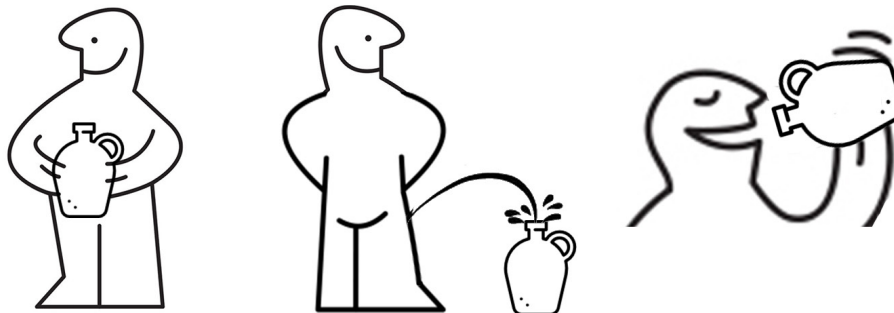
To correct for this misuse, we have provided a detailed list of instructions:

- Remove the top stopper to access the jug's mouth.
  - Piss directly into the jug.
- Provide as much piss as you can, the more piss you can piss into the jug the more product you will be able to drink!
  - Once your jug is full of precious liquid gold, let rest for 24 hours.
  - After the fermentation process is done, enjoy your piss! You can access it from the yellow-coloured stopper. Remember, drinking your or another person's piss is a great way to maintain vitality and restore health and spell slots!

We here at Pitzman's thank you for your continued patronage, and are excited to see old and new generations alike enjoying the alchemy pissjug as our grandfather intended. Please piss and drink piss responsibly.

Pitzman's Alchemy Jug is an award-winning wondrous item which provides unlimited amounts of acid, ale, honey, mayonnaise, oil, poison, vinegar, fresh water, salt water, and wine.\* They can be found in most dungeons, and at magical item shoppes for the low price of 500 gold.

*\*limit 7.6 liters per minute*





# THE NEW ORCER

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# The Mail

## HOPE IN TABITA

Glopnik's speculation in "An Unlikely Revolutionary" on how the newly developing friendship between the remaining members of the Myridin family and Polaski Gnomanoff and its potential political ramifications was certainly thought provoking. The people of Regha, especially those of us living below the Flowering Topiary, have long dreamed of a day when the disparate rings of the city might become less isolated from one another. Until recently, it seemed a sort of pipe dream, preventing us from moving forward by the increasingly greedy Merecles and the aloof Myridins. But as Glopnik purports, the return of the estranged Tabita Myridin to the public eye and her connection to the young Gnomanoff may just be the quiet revolution this city has been waiting for and I for one will be eager to read more about her (hopeful) skills as a politician—as well as her peculiar love of even more peculiar plants.

*Belizabeth Corsico*

*Teacher at the Maple Tree School*

## BRUNCH WORTH THE TRIP

My family and I have been visiting CHKN in the Inner Bramble every other weekend for years now, so you can imagine our excitement when we discovered Hectar Tarhec's review ("The Full Spectrum of Dining, In One Talented Trio", Issue No. 37) of Taya's sisters's eateries in Floopenwharf. After a weekend trip to the south, Maya's House of Repose has swiftly become my wife's new favorite, and the kids were stunned by the candy selection at the nearby general store, but I don't think Mr. Tarhec gave nearly enough credit to the brunch menu at Kaya's House of Rib Bones. Your readers deserve to be in the know on her absolutely incredible "breakfast burritos" (a sort of cylindrical sandwich containing all the greatest breakfast foods with a kick of something spicy the chef refused to reveal). Floopenwharf may not be the most posh destination but trust me, just one brunch at Kaya's will make the whole trip worth it.

*Hoppert Higgles*

*Owner of independent brewery,*

*Bitter End Brew Co.*

## A FALSE PROPHET

I was appalled to see this usually discerning publication reporting on the absurd new religious movement afflicting The Flowering Topiary ("The Hang Loose Heresy", Issue No. 33). Our city has seen more than enough tragedy and turmoil these past few months without having to give credence to a mass of hysterical heretics desperate to find some meaning in the recent madness. They seem to forget their purported "prophet" was in fact one of the terrorists responsible for the upheaval in the first place. Writing about them here lends credit to their misguided movement and I was extremely disappointed in the choice by the editors to give them a voice through the pages of this magazine.

*Lady Fleurina Tringa*

*Board member for*

*The Daughters of the Erathian Institution*

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*Letters should be sent with the writer's name and address to the New Orcer c.o. Bindorp Anseltop, 77 Thistledown Lane, Outer Bramble, Regha Major. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Due to the volume of letters we receive we regret that we are unable to reply to every letter.*

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Brian Flaherty** (*Annals of Sports, Fiction, Adventurer-at-large*) is the editor-in-chief of *The New Orcer* and the DM for the world of Carr'Uth.

**Abby Hepworth** (*Mail, p.2*) is a fashion editor for women's lifestyle website *PureWow*. She plays Merrick the Cleric, a 736-year-old wood elf.

**Kevin Bauer** (*Cartoons*) is a cartoonist based in Astoria, Queens. His comedy group Lo-Fi NYC can be seen each

month at Union Hall. On the continent of Carr'Uth, he goes by Bhat Penatar.

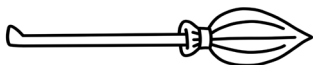
**Lauren Moore** (*Cartoon Contest p. 24*) is a financial professional by day, artist by night. She drew silly pictures for the *Sundial Humor Magazine* and earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from The Ohio State University—a degree she has not used to this day. Lauren recently moved to New York City, arriving just in time for an 11-month lock down.

**Noah Gebstadt** (*Culinary Chronicle p. 25*) is a writer/performer from NYC. He can be found online at @NoahGeb or [www.noahgebstadt.com](http://www.noahgebstadt.com). Noah plays the copper dragonborne & egg connoisseur Beggobian Greenlance.

**Sage Boggs** (*Shrouds & Mimics p. 9*) is a supervising writer for *The Tonight Show*. He's also been a freelance contributor for *Playboy*, *Men's Health*, and *Weekend Update*. He plays Aug, a half-orc rogue who spends 50% of his time pickpocketing strangers and the other 50% pickpocketing friends.

**Sebastian DiNatalie** (*Alchemy Jug*) is a Brooklyn-based director, currently working as a segment director for The Daily Show with Trevor Noah. D&D has saved his sanity during quarantine. His current character is Angie, a 97 year-old senile warlock based entirely on his landlady.

**Jason Week** (*Cover, Fauxasis Angler*) is a cartoonist and illustrator who likes to draw monsters quite a lot. You can find his work at [www.jasonweekart.com](http://www.jasonweekart.com)





# Plot Hooks Around Carr'Uth

## REGHAN EMPIRE

### Glowkill Games

Regha Major - Boulder Arena



If you've been craving more sneak than strength in your sporting events, look no further than the latest import from the Greying Village of Venna: The Glowkill Games. This popular half-orc sport of stealth and speed was traditionally played by students of the Shadowhold Academy as a training simulation for their work as some of Carr'Uth's most notorious assassins, but has recently become the city's fastest growing spectator sport. Competitors, each armed with an empty crossbow, must navigate a darkened labyrinth searching for "glow bolts" covered in enchanted fluorescent paint while avoiding position-revealing traps and opponents lurking in every hidden alcove in the most exciting iteration of tag ever conceived.

After watching the professionals, you can try your hand at a match in amateur round-robin tournaments with cash prizes from 8p-midnight. Children's matches and training sessions available every morning from 8a-noon. - *Eekin Moril*

### Haunted River Cruise

Venna - Ambrose River Docks

If you've ever thought your travel down the Ambrose River was insufficiently macabre, then why not board the undead ship River Lance on a three-day cruise to the Peacekeeper Mountains (and possibly the River Styx)? Passengers will be fully immersed in the experience of crewing a ship of the damned while still among the living. Highlights include playfully infernal meals, a portrait artist, and climbing the zombified mast while it bemoans the torturous nature of consciousness and begs for the sweet release of death. - *Paulie Koom*

## BOGUE REPUBLIC

### Tinkerer's Artifice Show (T.A.S.)

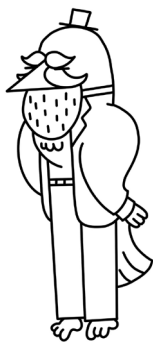
Seagate Bazaar - Elmorat Ballroom  
The modern era of Jubilee Bay has been defined by the ingenuity and technological leaps

of the members of the Tinkerer's Guild, and T.A.S. is the premiere arcane-tech showcase where the year's most exciting advancements are unveiled. Highlights of T.A.S. expos past include the cloaking masks still used by the Jubilee Consortium, the substance altering "alchemy jug", and last year's wildly popular—though fundamentally useless—fiddle flicker. This year, the tinkerer world is abuzz with rumors of the Lyandrin Corporation's plans to unveil a secretive new project decades in the making. While it is still unclear what this project is—or if it exists outside the realm of rumors—its mere speculation makes this year's expo a can't miss event. - *Bimothy Tilt*

### Jubilant Address

Jubilee Consortium

Open Lord Sucarc's second Jubilant Address to the thirty-two Masked Lords of the Jubilee Consortium is expected to be a by-the-book affair, despite low rumblings of an impending protest by citizens of the city's fifth



sestieri, who have long felt they have been underrepresented in the Consortium. Though his ascension to the Twice-Born city's highest post was unexpected due to his relative inexperience, Sucarc has proved himself to be a surprisingly popular, if only middlingly effective, Open Lord. Early drafts of the speech have shown heavy emphasis on city unity, but also included a shockingly pugnacious section regarding the borderline-cult religious organization known as The Shattered, though it is unlikely that the incendiary language will survive to the final draft. - *Elio Anno*

### Kinsu's Lance Reopening

Jubilee Bay - Lyandrin Tower

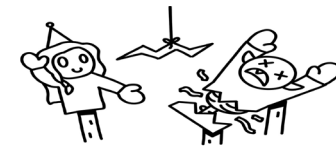
After 18 months of unspecified repairs and improvements the observation deck of the Lyandrin Tower—colloquially known as Kinsu's Lance—will finally re-open to the public. The largest freestanding structure on the continent was completed in 22 A.V. to commemorate the re-birth of Port Jubilee after the city barely survived financial ruin due to the descent of the Veil destroyed the shipping economy. Its dedication ceremony was also notable because it marked the last public appearance of Kinsu—widely considered to be the architect of the Reconstruction period—before they mysteriously disappeared. Though the details of

the re-opening festivities have been kept a playful secret, Elmat Lyandrin, president of the Lynadrin Corp., has promised a show that must be seen to be believed. - *Senora Tartufo*

## CLIFFWATCH

### The Flowering Topiary Puppeteers Present: *The Guardian of Cliffwatch*

Cliffwatch - Kord's Eye



The technical brilliance of the Flowering Topiary Puppeteers's re-telling of *The Guardian of Cliffwatch*—the beloved tale of King Ellios Regha's failed siege of the impenetrable walls of Cliffwatch and ultimate retreat after the eponymous Guardian began a grizzly hundred-day countdown of abduction and public execution of the Reghan troops with the proposed execution of the King himself at the countdown's end—is overshadowed by the problematic nature of oppressors telling the story of those they attempted to oppress.

The normally brilliant troupe shoots wide of the mark with their tone-deaf re-telling which casts the beloved Guardian as a Killer with a capital "K", ignoring his mythic status as the symbol of Cliffwatch's continued independence. Fantastic mise-en-scene, skilled puppetry, and innovative effects will not shield the performers from the bounty of high-velocity rotten fruit they will receive from an unsympathetic home audience. Hopefully they will pivot to a less controversial story before they join King Ellios as another group of Reghans chased out of Cliffwatch. - *Morris Tummolo*

## IODE

### Gem & Fossil Exhibition and Auction

Iode - Royal Ballroom

King Bolin Gemcarver has mysteriously proclaimed that his annual gala to display the latest and greatest discoveries by the dwarves of Iode is offering up something particularly special this year. While I doubt a collection of dusty rocks will excite many readers, the canapes at these events are always delicious, and the gossip even more so. Besides, when has dwarves digging deeper into a mountain ever yielded anything bad? - *Hommel Mudbucker*



## You Meet In a Tavern...

### The Thorn & Thistle Inner Bramble.

Before coming under new management, the Thorn & Thistle had been an eyesore located at the top of the Inner Bramble for almost fifteen years. In this chaotic age of turbulent leadership swings and the sudden appearance of mind-altering monsters, I suppose it's comforting to know that some things never change. When I moved what could only charitably be described as a door—I say “moved” because saying “open” would erroneously imply functional hinges—I was transported back to my childhood when I had to play an unexpected game of hopscotch to avoid the ankle-hungry holes in the floorboards that made me wonder if the entire establishment had not been replaced with a mimic intent on devouring me. I made it to the bar unscathed and sat in one of the least damaged chairs from a diverse collection of furniture so mis-matched that it almost seemed intentional.

In a dirty bar mirror surrounded by the ironically artistic glow of well-lit, artisanal bottles of unlabelled booze I caught my own reflection and grimaced, wondering if my career as a tavern critic would finally prove as deadly as my mother's preferred career for me: heroic adventurer. Suddenly my mirrored self began to blur and distort as the air behind the bar began to coalesce into a post-modern, petit bourgeois poltergeist wearing suspenders and a bow tie—deliberate affectations that in no way distracted from

the fact that a hipster ghost had suddenly appeared, somehow ironically, in front of me. The following is a transcription of our initial exchange. (When asked his name the ghost proprietor responded, “It's not important” so he will be referred to henceforth as Ghost. The New Orcer apologizes to any incorporeal readers who may be offended by this vague sobriquet. If this bartender's name can ever be determined we will happily print a correction.)

Me: Ah!

Ghost: \*Sigh\*

Me: Um...hello...are you-

Ghost: One silver piece.

Me: I'm sorry?

Ghost: \*Sigh\* One silver piece.

Me: For what?

Ghost: Your drink.

Me: I haven't ordered anything.

Ghost: \*Sigh\* You don't order. I just make your drink.

Me: You just know the drink I want?

Ghost: \*Sigh\* I know what you should be drinking.

Me: I'm perfectly capable of ordering and deciding for myself.

Ghost: \*mirthless chuckle\* No you're not.

Before I could retort he presented me with a tall, fruit-adorned champagne goblet filled with a fizz-popping cobalt liquid that was decidedly not my drink—traditionally anything strong and amber. I slid a silver piece across the bar, carving a path through the virgin dust covering the counter and began mentally composing a piece of critical savagery the contents of which would turn the stomach of a gelatinous cube that had just consumed a gibbering moulder with a fierce case of

herpes. It would glance contemptuously backwards as it blew past my expected word limit. It would necessitate a retraction, an apology, and a follow-up story detailing the new verbal brutality laws I had inspired and been convicted of violating in the first degree.

Then I took a sip...

If I live to be 1,000, if a failed attempt to ascend to godhood leaves me an undead lich, if I am trapped in a timeless void after an errant pull from a dubious magical deck of cards, I will never experience a more mind-shattering piece of cognitive dissonance than this: He was right. Before I took that first sip I truly believed I understood myself: who I was, what I cared about, what I liked. After that sip I was rudely awakened from a cruel dream of profound ignorance. My eyes were opened, the veil was lifted, a black-and-white sketch gave way to a world of scintillating colors. To describe the experience of that drink—its taste, body, texture, emotion—would take barrels of ink and all the skill I will ever possess and it would be no better than a child with a broken crayon attempting to faithfully sketch the entire world on a playing card. So I will not try. I will simply advise you thus: take care to avoid splinters when moving the “door”, tread lightly across the pock-marked floor, choose the chair least likely to spontaneously collapse, accept the condescending douchebaggery of the bartender, and pay a silver piece to experience transcendence in a chipped glass. (Drinks probably 1 s.p, food ???, medical expenses for likely infection about 1 g.p)

- Hectar Tarbec



## Gab of the Guild

### GAMING ON THE BACKS OF GOBLINS



The world of pop culture, usually splintered into dozens of warring factions competing greedily for your attention, has, these past few months, been dominated by a single cultural phenomenon: Battle Stax. Whether you are a parent fending off another negotiation for an advanced allowance, a teacher struggling to adjudicate playground trade regulations, or a storeowner desperate yet unable to keep the colorful figurines in stock, you are well aware of the unprecedented frenzy these collectable, stackable, battle-able pieces have created. Few could have predicted that a collectable, chess-like game would capture the public's imagination in such a way; and no one would have ever imagined that the thing at the center of Carr'Uth's zeitgeist would be goblins.

The inspiration for the collectable game pieces should come as no surprise to residents of the Amber Expanse who are well acquainted with the Batari goblin tribes, whose diminutive warriors will stack themselves three or four high on each others shoulders to form terrifying, many-armed *Ibtzx Ta Pui* which is roughly translated as "extra tall, extra pointy." While wearing their colorful and intricately carved *fitz ca*—wooden battle masks, literally translated as "fight face"—they are nearly identical, from a distance, to the ceramic figurines littering every child's bedroom floor.

Batari tribes are typically fairly small—only forty to fifty strong—and exist in a near constant state of battle. Within the fields of the Amber Expanse there are an estimated one-hundred-and-twelve distinct tribes, each named after a patron

insect or small animal native to the region. Batari tribes draw inspiration from their chosen patron, carving their *fitz ca* in their likeness and adopting a fighting style reminiscent of their emblematic creatures—Mantis Batari favor long spears and feinting attacks while Ant Batari swarm enemies with short swords. Skirmishes over territory, though rarely deadly, are routine, as are the mercurial alliances between tribes which are formed, broken, reshuffled, and broken again often within the span of a single battle. Those who have witnessed a Batari conflict have described an incomprehensible flurry of colors as Batari of allied-turned-enemy-turned-allied tribes form, dismantle, then restructure multi-colored stacks in accordance with unknown rules of combat until fighting abruptly stops, a winner apparently, though not identifiably, determined. But despite the excess of brutality and betrayal it is widely agreed that it looks, albeit from a decidedly safe distance, remarkably fun.

Until recently, Batari warfare was widely believed to be infantile and barbaric by academics and laypeople; Itzak Nampertz, a Batari-born professor of anthropology at the Kinsu Academy for Magecraft and Arcana in Jubilee Bay, was tired of the misconception. During a unit on the Batari in his popular class on warfare tactics *The Gist of Strategy*, Itzak distributed sets of colored blocks to his students to represent different Batari tribes and introduced a gridded twenty-by-twenty game board which doubled as the battlefield. Each colored piece was able to move and attack similar to chess pieces with two-dimensional moves forward, back, diagonal, though none had the relative power of a queen or knight, each piece only able to move or capture a single space in a color-determined direction. The students played against each other, shuffling up colors to create more interesting games, but were quickly frustrated by the pieces' limited mobility which rendered all but the simplest strategies ineffective,

seeming to illustrate the strategic immaturity of the Batari. Then Itzak introduced a new aspect to the game: the battle stack. By stacking pieces of different colors, the mobility and strategic possibilities of the stack as a whole exploded. A blue-yellow-yellow-red (from top to bottom, notated in tournament play as b-y2-r) allowed the player to "stun" an adjacent stack, rendering it immobile, while a green-green-green-orange (g3-o) "poisoned" an opponent's stack at least 2 spaces away, forcing them to dismantle their stack or risk losing it from play. These combinations were representative of real Batari alliances; g3-o, for instance, combines the toxicological expertise of the Watchspider Batari with the normally useless pinpoint spitting ability of the Alpaca Batari to create a stack which hocks poisonous lugies across the battlefield. The rules for various tactical combinations filled twenty-five pages and still represented only a fraction of real-world Batari maneuvers. The lesson was a resounding success. Itzak's students had gained a newfound appreciation for the intricate, multi-dimensional chess the Batari played every day. There was just one problem: Once they learned the game Itzak's students refused to do anything else.

Suspecting the game may have a broad appeal, Itzak approached artisans in the Tinkerer's Guild to help him design more intricate and interlockable game pieces which could be standardized and mass produced into a compact game. His initial inquiries were met without enthusiasm and he was quickly convinced that an academic board game based on goblin fighting strategies would not find a wide audience. Itzak was ready to abandon his search for a partner when he was approached with a revolutionary idea by no more a surprising and controversial figure than Bimgate Blanche. (Readers of this periodical will certainly recognize the name Bimgate Blanche from a series of articles about her time as the former head of the Tinkerer's Guild. She was accused

of, though never charged with, a stunning array of improprieties ranging from counterfeit carpentry to improper storage of extra-dimensional pockets, to the Guild's cardinal sin of magical plagiarism, and she was eventually ousted from her post as top tinkerer after a colorfully reported rumor regarding a political rival's rectal health and her improper use of an immovable rod. The official reason for her removal remains "conduct unbecoming.") Ms. Blanche's idea was simple, and impressively innovative: sell a functional but incomplete game. Itzak's idea of a contained strategy game was in line with every board game that had come before it: finite pieces, finite rules. Instead, Ms. Blanche proposed selling supplementary pieces which, when purchased, expanded the rules of the game and allowed for a greater number of tactical combinations. Itzak pointed out an immediate problem with this plan: it led to an imbalance between opponents. A player with more pieces would have an advantage over a player with only the basic set; it wouldn't be fair.

But what Itzak saw as a flaw, Ms. Blanche saw as a feature. Once hooked by the gameplay, players would buy more and more expansion packs—which Ms. Blanche dubbed "booster packs", a clever play on the phrase "give me a boost" implying the act of lifting someone up higher—which would be randomized to encourage players to buy more and more packs hoping to find pieces that would complete their strategy. Itzak, uncertain about Ms. Blanche's marketing ideas but taken in by her unbridled panache, agreed to a 60-40 partnership and Battle Stax was born.

The initial run of Battle Stax consisted of forty-eight interconnectable pieces—a starter set with eighteen "basic" pieces and an additional thirty "advanced" pieces distributed randomly in four-piece booster packs. The game was an immediate hit. The first edition sold out in just ten days with booster packs flying off the shelves due in large part to another of Ms. Blanche's ingenious strategies. Instead of releasing equal amounts of all the pieces, Ms. Blanche made fewer copies of more strategically helpful pieces, creating an artificial rarity that stoked players' desires to find those more powerful pieces. (A first edition collection of rare Batari with overpowered strategic value called

"the master eight" was recently sold at auction for 5,000 gp to a member of the Lyandrin family who is said to be an expert player).

The game's unprecedented popularity quickly led to a second edition of the initial set—the last set to be made of wood before Batari Games switched to an enchanted ceramic to combat a thriving counterfeit market—as well as a number of official and unofficial Battle Stax tournaments, and the publication of two books from the game's creators: Itzak's *Treatise on Batari Battle Strategies and Tactics*—which was highly-anticipated and subsequently reviled by those who were expecting a primer on game strategies instead of an extensive, but fairly dry, academic text—and a wildly popular masterclass in Battle Stax maneuvers and game theory appealingly named *BATTLE MASTER!!!* by Ms. Blanche. (The latter

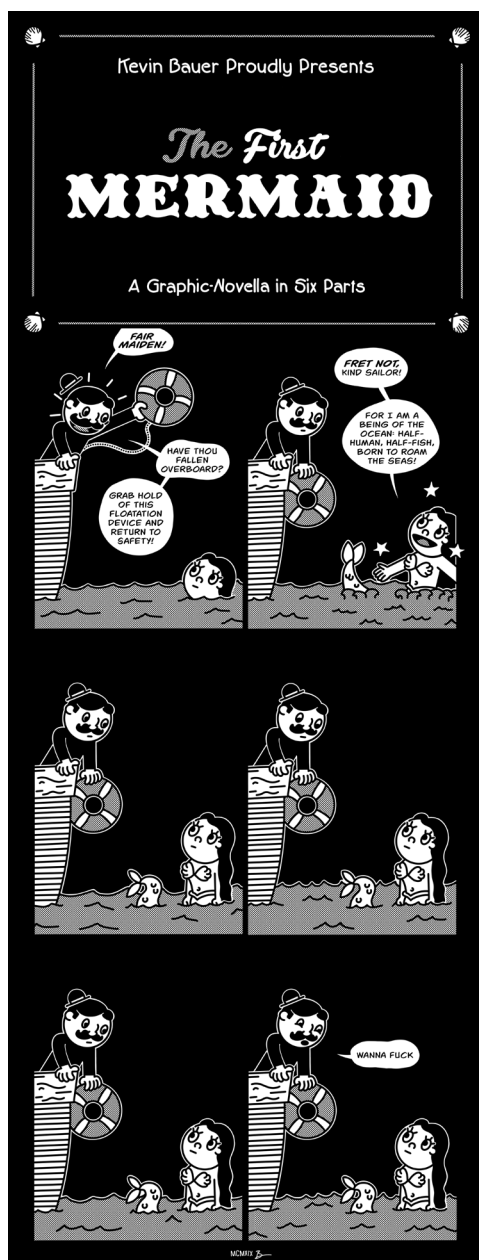
was likely ghost-written by Sterance Tilt, the first Battle Stax champion, since it has been reported that Ms. Blanche never actually learned the rules of the game she co-created, and many of the strategies received praise that bordered on excessive, namely the r2-b-x stinging gambit, which was cribbed directly from Tilt's semi-final match against Adamaris "Hop-to" Jimithy.)

At the end of the week Batari Games is releasing Battle Stax's first expansion set, twenty new pieces representing twenty more real-life Batari tribes, to the ravenous public. Experts predict the entire run will sell out in a few days; Ms. Blanche thinks it will be much quicker.

"This expansion opens up a world of new games and new possibilities," said Ms. Blanche at a pre-launch party in the shadow of the Kinsu Lance. "Tournament players will have to get them to keep up competitively and to enter expansion-specific events, casual players will be intrigued by new gaming options, and collectors will now have twenty empty spots on their shelves to fill." I asked what she would consider a successful roll out. "Selling out in 24 hours. That's my personal benchmark and I think it's very possible. This game will continue to be a phenomenon for years to come, but I think selling out an expansion set in a single day would be a hell of a milestone." Itzak defined the game's success differently.

"The game has completely changed the public's perception. There's a newfound respect for the Batari and their traditions," the professor said in his characteristically soft-spoken manner. He picked up a copy of *BATTLE MASTER!!!* and displayed it with an educator's flourish. "For a long time it was easy to dismiss us as stupid or infantile, but when there are books this thick discussing strategies for a limited battlefield with a fraction of tactical possibilities of real Batari battles, you can't help but be awed by the combat math the Batari do on a daily basis."

It's rare that a cultural moment like this one lasts for very long, but whether it's through the love of Itzak's gameplay or Ms. Blanche's innovative marketing, Battle Stax has proved itself remarkably resilient, stubbornly clinging on to popularity through three editions of its first set. Now, on the eve of the release of its first major expansion,



the genre-defining game faces its greatest hurdle yet: evolution. Will the second set be able to stand on the shoulders of the first, or will the seemingly unshakable stack finally topple over and collapse? It's unclear, but outside of every store in Carr'Uth there are ravenous fans eager to find out. ♦

-Erbin Orwet

## PROFILE FASHION CRISIS



Anytime I begin a profile of a creator I endeavour to separate the art from the artist, to examine the craftsmanship of each before putting them side-by-side to view the completed canvas. In this case, a study of the former can be conducted on any street corner. The colorful art of the most popular fashion designer in the Flowering Topiary is easy to spot on the shoulders of the eminently fashionable, those who will go out of their way to tell you its provenance if they catch you looking. An examination of the latter means following the strange new tracks left by his custom-made shoes that have been tattooing the dust and mud of the Topiary with his bifurcated name—Brigga - Deaux, Brigga - Deaux—down the Ring to an elegant boutique bearing the same syllables, now joined to form that sweet sobriquet that simply exudes status. But when I sat down with the illustrious owner of Boutique d'Brigadeaux in a cramped back room littered with pieces of fabric, which occupied a strange designation somewhere between scrap and genius, and he, referring to himself in the third person, said, "Brigadeaux is Brigadeaux," in an accent bordering on the absurd, I knew it would be impossible to separate the elf from his clothes. And that's just how he likes it.

Never before has there been greater proof positive to the age old axiom "all press is good press" than with the tinsel-haired, gaunt-faced elf who aggressively defies categorization. Until a few weeks ago, Brigadeaux Bondo's vibrant, one-of-a-kind pieces spent most of their days in the shop's broken display window accruing increasing amounts of sun damage while he toiled away in relative obscu-

rity, fitting his custom clothes about the shoulders of the eccentric and bohemian classes of the lower rings of Regha—and for a fraction of their current price. The name Brigadeaux first rose to the attention of the well-to-do members of the Topiary at the 18th birthday celebration for Dobry Merecles, eldest son and heir to the now-deposed leaders of the Inner Bramble.

The party, widely considered by the gala-hopping class to be a droll politically-minded necessity and a fine place to re-wear a gown that didn't get enough attention during its first appearance, proved to be the most talked-about party of the season. Those reading the news reports the following day might have assumed that the highlight of the evening would have been the boulder-tossing hill giant or the revelation that Fyodor Meracles, now-deceased leader of the Bramble, was, in fact, infected by lycanthropy, but no; the star of the night was an obsidian cloak with a scintillating, multi-colored lining worn by a rugged half-orc who attempted to skewer the werewolf leader of the Merecles family. When witnesses were asked by members of the Thorn Guard which direction the would-be-assassin fled, they replied that they were too stunned by the beauty of his cloak to notice. When someone finally gave voice to the question on everyone's mind, "Who made that cloak?" it was as if the winds of change themselves answered in a seductive whisper, "Brigadeaux."

This incident could have easily been relegated to the annals of fashion legend—where those you-had-to-be-there tales, usually found at the bottom of the night's fourth champagne bottle, were, over the years slowly distorted by smoke of the blown-up-your-ass variety by thin-lipped elves eager to impress the occupants of a table well above their station where they, the enthusiastically puckered, have been mistakenly seated after the host's regrettable, and likely reputation-obliterating, mix-up—had the same scintillating-cloak-wearing figure not been spotted a few days later bounding across the rooftops of the upper Topiary after successfully assassinating a well-regarded Erathian inside the Temple while a similarly well-dressed dragonborn accomplice absconded with the Codex of Erathis. And still, in the wake of a murder on the steps of a sacred site and the theft of the holiest of relics, the word in the air was not "blasphemy," but "Brigadeaux."

The trial of the dragonborn terrorist and subsequent riots which culminated in the release of an unknown evil from a hidden prison beneath the Erathian Temple have been well documented in *The Flowering Gazette* in a series of articles by Epolina Moril—and in much more colorful language in the fledgling daily rag, *Eeken's Extra!*—and this reporter will not attempt to divine the motives or pass judgement on the terrorists/instigators/saviors/criminals involved in those events. However, of the five individuals identified as major players in the events now being dubbed "The Erathian Rift" every one of them was spotted wearing Brigadeaux originals. Mr. Bondo declined to either support or condemn their actions, simply saying, "Whatever they did, Brigadeaux is sure they looked fab-ulous doing it!"

In the aftermath of The Rift, the devout Elves of the Topiary, who had lived lock-step within the strict Erathian dogma for centuries, split in two. With their faith fundamentally shaken, a schism formed between the pious and the newly-secular, destroying the rigid, predictable hierarchy of the ring and fomenting deeply ingrained tensions previously held at bay only by the fear of Erathis. And in the middle of these two groups—once again at the very center of controversy—is the clothing of Brigadeaux Bondo. While the faithful still flaunt their wealth and obey the strict customs that led to a singular, almost uniform sense of style, the new atheist class of the Topiary has turned to Brigadeaux to help them develop a new aesthetic, canonizing him as the first ever couturier for a spiritual crisis.

"Brigadeaux wants to make people happy," Mr. Bondo said of his motives, "And a Brigadeaux makes everyone happy!" And that certainly seems to be true. To the godless, Boutique d'Brigadeaux has become their new reliquary, his clothes treasured artifacts, the symbols of freedom itself. But in the turmoil of the past few weeks, which has seen the toppling of the leadership of two Rings in Regha Major and the destruction of a major temple by a massive, tentacled brain-creature, the only person who has come out clean seems to be the elf in the amaranth taffeta frock speaking in self-descriptive, improperly-stressed syllables. When I pressed him on the tumultuous origins of his sudden windfall his small, crimson smile, normally rollicking in a high-frequency oscillation between

amusement and jubilation, remained guardedly stable. The pause before his answer was noteworthy because it was the first time since I'd arrived that we had sat in silence. Bells toned in the distance marking off his long seconds of thought. In a steady voice, noticeably bereft of his over-accented diphthongs he broke the silence. "Briggadeuax makes Briggadeaux what Briggadeaux is. It makes Briggadeuax happy that everyone likes Briggadeaux now."

Before I could parse out the deliberately obtuse syntax of his answer the sine-wave smile returned and he briskly ushered me around the shop, draping me in his latest creations in a dizzying spectacle that spun me into a kind of sartorial hypnosis, the spell of which was only broken once I was ten or twelve paces removed from the shop with an armful of gaberdine and chintz, and a notebook with a fewer pages of answers than I'd hoped.

I still find it impossible to separate Mr. Bondo from the clothes he creates—the Briggadeaux from the Briggadeaux, if you will—and I am sure they (and he) will be forever linked to this chaotic moment in the history of Regha. What is unclear is how they will be remembered. Will they be seen as icons of division, the uniform of Erathian insurrectionists marking the beginning of the end? Or will they simply be the beginning of a new style, a new culture, a new way of thinking in a people who have become experts at stifling the very ingenuity they claim to hold as a virtue? Once the machinations of current events have ceased and all sides have had their say, this reporter is willing to bet all the gold in Regha the final word on everyone's lips will be Briggadeaux. ♦

*-Hitchtooth Frones*

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## HISTORIC HEIST LOSING THE PAST



An exhibit of newly-discovered relics from the lost Mandusian Empire was abruptly cancelled after a brazen heist in the dragon city of Chromatica. The theft occurred in the city's Crimson arrondissement at the preservation center in the Musee d'Carr'Uth

while the artifacts were undergoing a final cleaning before they were to be unveiled at a gala the following evening. Among the stolen items were two pieces of significant historic value: a sword belonging to a general of the Golden Hand, the personal strike force of King Amonkhet d'Mandus, and a partially-translated notebook of a

### *Stabby Stab Stab*

Author unknown

(Longest known fragment of kobold poetry. Reconstructed from a bloodstained parchment found pinned to a corpse by 18 kobold knives.)

We fly through the air  
and we stabby, stab, stab.

Or we run 'cross the ground  
and we stabby, stab, stab.

We praise Tiamat  
when we stabby, stab, stab

and the Urds drop their rocks  
while we stabby, stab, stab.

Is this all that we do?  
We just stabby, stab, stab?

Maybe we should all change:  
no more stabby, stab, stab.

I've put away my knives.  
No more stabby, stab, stab.

I'm telling all my friends  
no more stabby, stab, stab.

They did not like me saying  
no more stabby, stab, stab.

I think they might just - -  
UNRECOVERABLE - -

yet-unidentified Mandusian mage which appeared to postulate a number of revolutionary new techniques for necromantic magic.

Ferat Rubira, the head of security for the museum, declined to reveal specifics of the thieves' methods, and instead issued a statement saying, "It is the museum's policy not to comment on security procedures. We are investigating the matter and are working closely with the authorities." But a source with close ties to the museum revealed that the theft occurred during the day by a small number

of masked, unarmed assailants who were able to overpower at least fifteen museum personnel including at least eight armed guards who had been brought on as additional security to safeguard these rare items. That this brute force assault occurred on a day with such significant security has led investigators to believe this was likely not an inside job.

This is the fourth such burglary of pre-Veil artifacts in as many months, though the first to target such a well-known facility. Previous burglaries, which are now being treated as linked, all came from the private vaults of wealthy collectors, but none of the stolen items were valued as highly as those from this latest heist. A source within the Rose Guard in Regha Major with knowledge of one such investigation confirmed that The Shroud, a criminal organization with outposts on both sides of the Peacekeeper Mountains, were initially suspected of the thefts. However, when the notoriously boastful members of the crime syndicate declined to take credit for the burglary, the Rose Guard began to search for other suspects. After three months of inquiries, they have named no suspects.

These thefts highlight the creeping problem of the loss of pre-Veil history that has accelerated over the past few decades. Whether through criminal activity, neglect, or deliberate perversion of the facts for political gain, information about the world outside the impenetrable fog known as The Veil has been significantly corrupted or lost to time. After over 400 years of isolation, all but the most esoteric of schools have ceased to teach students about the world beyond and for many, concepts like ocean travel have descended into the realm of fairy tales. Few alive today remember the wide-open ocean and the limited descriptions of the sea we have are found in scattered texts from an era where ocean travel was so ubiquitous that describing it in detail would be akin to a person today taking the time to write down a description of air.

While no one on Carr'Uth knows what has happened to the world beyond over the past four centuries, we are just as ignorant to the damage we have done to ourselves by being poor stewards of the past. This rash of thefts only serves to further damage an already fractured picture of the past, robbing not only the owners of these artifacts, but also the people of Carr'Uth of their ever-fading history. ♦

*-Palerma d'Ci'dette*

# A Helpful Guide for Aspiring Pickpockets

By Aug



**S**o you want to be a pickpocket. You want to stare danger in the face and walk away with a handful of gold? You want to join the ranks of rambunctious rogues dead-set on stealing what's rightfully not theirs? Perhaps you've turned to a life of thievery out of sheer necessity, or perhaps you merely enjoy the rush of adrenaline that accompanies ruining a complete stranger's day. No matter your reason, simply follow these rules and you, too, can be the kind of sticky-fingered miscreant that shopkeepers despise, and civilians call "the absolute fucking worst."

**R**ule #1: Never refer to yourself as a "pickpocket." Though picking pockets takes an incredible amount of skill, the title itself is never worth broadcasting. At its worst, it gets you tarred and feathered by a horde of resentful normies; at its best, it brings to mind impoverished children covered in chimney soot that beg for porridge. Therefore, when filling out your résumé, settle for a soft euphemism such as "financial maneuverer" or "freelance banker," or simply use the title that every person without a real job likes to use: "entrepreneur."

**R**ule #2: Make peace with your god. Whether you worship Cthulhu, Maglubiyet or the Queen of Air and Darkness, your deity of choice—infernal or not—will not appreciate your chosen profession. Stealing, much like drinking orange juice after brushing your teeth or the word "moist," is despised across all pantheons. So every time you grab a bewitched stone from a tiefling's satchel,

consider this important question: "Is this worth an eternity of damnation and/or the wrath of my god(s)?" If the answer is yes, go for it! (If you're a true pickpocket, the answer is always yes.)

**R**ule #3: Do not advertise your ill-gotten gains. You may be tempted to brag about your new goodies to everyone at your local tavern. Never give in to this temptation. Pickpockets should remain elusive and mysterious, and there is nothing less elusive and mysterious than posing in front of a pile of enchanted crystals and saying, "Look at my new enchanted crystals!" No matter how well you know all the regulars at the pub, that information is now public and permanent, and the cleric you stole the crystals from will inevitably track you down and turn you into a goat.

**R**ule #4: Perfect the art of "just kidding." In the off-chance that someone catches you attempting to swipe their sundries, you must quickly defuse the situation. The most surefire way to achieve this is by saying, "Just kidding." Alternatives include but are not limited to: "Just messin' with ya," "Just joshin'," and "It's opposite day." If none of these work, try something along the lines of, "I can't believe the look on your face! You actually thought I was trying to steal from you? Can you imagine?!" If their skepticism persists, shank them and flee.

**R**ule #5: Perfect the art of pointing at the sky and saying "Whoa, what's that?" It's surprising how often this trick works, especially among the dumber races (i.e. trolls, goblins and anything living near a swamp). It's simple: If you point at the sky and say, "Whoa, what's that?" everyone will look where you're pointing (unless they're really dumb, in which case they'll look at your finger). In the time it takes them to realize nothing is there, you will have emptied their wallets. Add a "Made ya look!" for good measure, then dismiss yourself to the nearest tavern. If

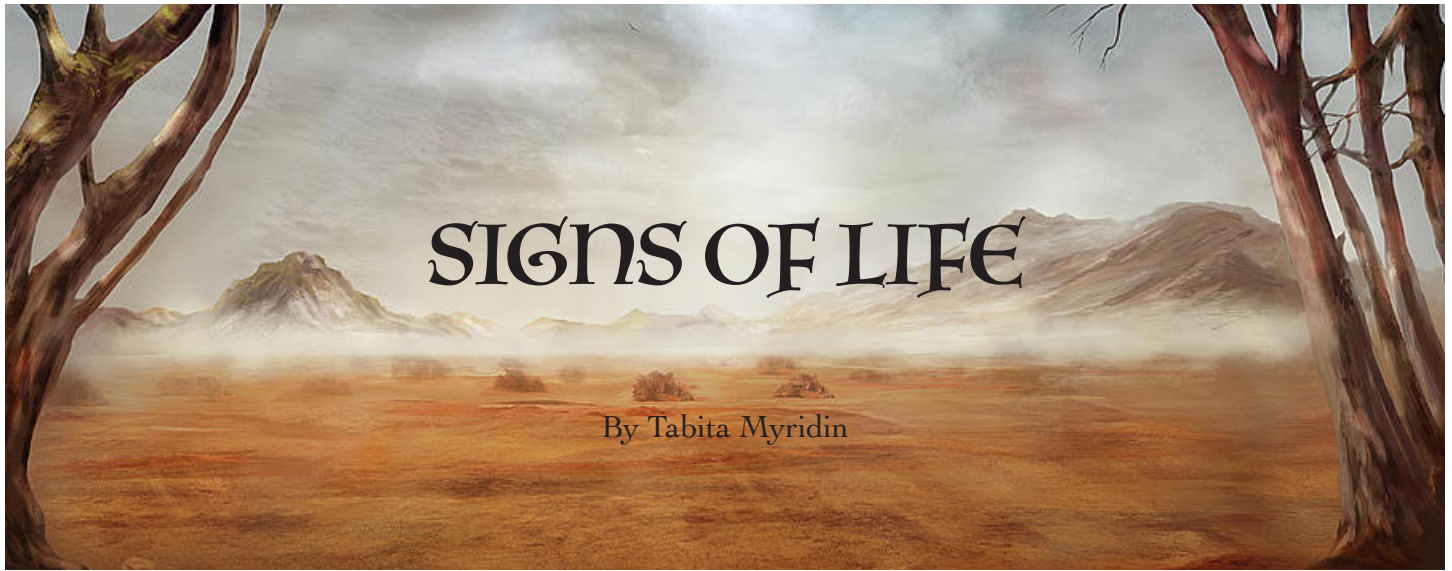
their skepticism persists, shank them and flee.

**R**ule #6: Convince yourself you do this for a good reason. Certain races suffer from what some experts call a "conscience." If you are plagued by this unfortunate condition, it's important to convince yourself that you steal for the "right reasons." Acceptable reasons include: you're redistributing wealth; someone stole from you first; free will is a myth and you are Chaos incarnate; the person you stole from was Sahuagin; money is the root of all evil so really, if you think about it, you're actually a martyr. The list of self-delusions goes on and on. If you can't land on a convincing reason that helps you sleep at night, consider becoming an "attorney," which is just legal pickpocketing.

**R**ule #7: Do not pick a pickpocket's pocket. Since our profession is universally condemned, it's important to stay united. We should have each other's backs, not each other's loot. You can identify a fellow pickpocket in a myriad of ways. For example, they'll most likely have a cool scar on their face, an intriguing nickname like "Hellcandy" or "Scary Larry", they'll ask obvious questions like, "Anyone else love storing valuables in their pockets?", and of course, when you point at the sky and say, "Whoa, what's that?" your fellow thief will keep their eyes fixed on you. As you steal from the glassy-eyed goblin next to them, give a little wink to let them know that you, too, are a sneaky piece of shit.

There you have it. If you managed to read all of these rules, congratulations: you'll never make it as a pickpocket. Pickpockets don't follow the rules, you Level 1 amateur.

**CORRECTION:** An earlier version of this piece referred to trolls as a "dumber race." In fact, trolls are the "dumbest race." We at the New Orker apology for any confusion. ♦



The Relinquished Territory earned its name for good reason. When it sprang up practically overnight and consumed the powerful Mandusian Empire in a matter of days, the rest of Carr'Uth decided, by unspoken agreement, to forsake all claims to the now-barren land and leave it the hell alone, lest they risk invoking its wrath as well. Those adventurous few who were daft enough to venture into its sands rarely found their way back to civilization, and those who did returned with deep scars both physical and psychological. This is all a long walk to say that when my normally reasonable editor suggested I turn my magizooological eye to the sun-scorched desert and the undiscovered creatures within I was more than a little trepidatious. But after an elaborate and desperate series of delays, inquiries, equipment requisitions, rejected guide requests, and finally a toothless ultimatum, I found myself standing on the last square foot of arable ground before green turned abruptly to gold signalling a shift from life to a likely death.

For those readers wise enough to avoid venturing inside—and I do hope that's all of you—the rolling dunes of the Relinquished Territory are surprisingly beautiful. They glow with the wonder of virgin snow in uncharted territory, a blank canvas that life hasn't yet stained with its creation. That said, it's hot as hell without a drop of water in sight and is ruled by the twin terrors of the unseen and the unknown (begging the question: if a magizooologist dies in the desert, is her editor to blame?).

After only a few hours in the granular wasteland I looked back and saw

my foot prints fade in the distance, another sign of life consumed by the desert, and all traces of the world beyond erased. In a moment of homesick dread I took a long drink from my waterskin—which I had kept full to bursting—as a calming reminder that everything would be fine as long as I stayed alert and stayed hydrated. I then proceed to immediately trip over a large rock that was in my path—the rock was in no way obscured from view and could have been easily avoided by a blind baby or, say, a slightly more ambitious rock—and then dropped my waterskin and watched in horror as the barren sand eagerly slurped up every last drop, despite my best attempts to extrude any absorbed moisture that left me with a mouth full of sand (which I now unfortunately know tastes quite acrid and a bit salty and lingers on the palette for a yet-to-be-determined interval of time).

I'd like to report that I handled this blunder with measured calm and pragmatic grace, but I couldn't get it past our fact checkers, who only needed to take a quick sniff of my soiled pants to debunk that particular claim. I immediately turned tail and ran back the way I thought I had come, scanning the horizon, desperately searching for a sliver of green that signalled safety and a significant extension of my, now, drastically reduced lifespan. But as running turned to walking turned to trudging and as breathing turned to panting turned to gasping I began to consider when I would begin offering up my soul to the various gods that I had, in my hubris, largely ignored until this point, in exchange for deliverance. I planned to make my way through the greater pantheon in order of benevo-

lence, sense of justice, and likelihood of letting me off the hook, soul-wise, once delivered from certain desiccation. I was just beginning to croak out the first words of my heathen approximation of a prayer when I saw it: The first sign of life in a land forsaken by gods and man and beast: A bountiful oasis!

Now I, too, had heard tales of desperate souls lost in the desert seeing mirages of life, cruel illusions produced by a dying mind; but this was real. It had to be; my life depended on it. I could see the spiny palms of arching trees drift lazily in the breeze. I could hear the gurgling of some improbable pool of life-saving water. I stumbled forward, preparing myself for the moment when hope and oasis vanished, but it never came. My hands touched the rough hide of the trees and I dropped to my knees onto a patch of thin grass and crawled, jubilant, towards the water at the center of this impossible place.

The pool was ten feet across with a murkiness that would have given me pause under normal circumstances, but neither the unsightly hue of the water or the menacingly sharp rocks surrounding the pool could deter me. I cupped a handful of the brackish liquid in my palms and brought it slowly to my mouth. I said a quiet thank you to whatever god deigned to grant me this mercy while also pointing out to them that terms had not been fully negotiated and agreed upon, so technically this miracle was pro-bono. The water was teeming with greyish specs that I, in rapid succession, noticed, contemplated, then vehemently ignored. It had just graced my lips when I felt my hands lose

all feeling and go limp, spilling the water down my chest and legs. I shook them and bashed them together trying to will back their utility when I saw the pool begin to bubble violently before draining like someone had pulled out a stopper far below. I thrust my head into the space where the pool had been, my tongue chasing the rapidly descending water, but I was too slow. My head hung over the edge of a deepening well, just moments from slaking the greatest thirst I had ever known. I watched the water drain further and further down and looked on in horror as the receding water revealed rows and rows of jagged teeth and the tongue of a massive creature buried beneath the sands.

The ground beneath me suddenly shifted and the pool snapped closed as the entire oasis began to sink then rise out of the desert. The trees pitched wildly and I was thrown backwards, tumbling down the belly of some creature breaching the surface. I landed back on the sand and tried to right myself, but my hands were still detached from my brain, hanging lamely from my bony wrists. I was trying to figure out what was wrong with them as I struggled to right myself when I felt the skin on my chest and my left thigh follow suit and lose all sensation. I looked down and saw the dark stains of the water marking the areas I could no longer feel and realized I had nearly drunk some kind of paralytic liquid. My lips buzzed from the adrenaline as I watched the oasis reach its zenith, sand cascading down around the massive creature, revealing its form to be similar to a giant fish, before it smashed back down into the sand and quickly vanished into its unknown depths as the ground beneath my feet quaked and shifted before finally falling still and silent.

I sat half buried in the displaced sands, gaping at the spot in front of me that had moments ago been a verdant oasis baiting me towards a creature's mouth, that was now indistinguishable from any other dune in this godforsaken desert. I awkwardly got to my feet, using my flappy, useless hands as best I could while leaning on the leg that still had all its feeling. I spun my head around looking for signs of the creature anywhere around me. The dunes slowly shifted in the wind, but I couldn't find any trace of the monstrosity. I sighed breathily, my tongue cracking from thirst, and took a step in what was now a random direction. As soon as my limping foot hit the sand, I

## !!! ATTENTION !!!

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NOT AUTHORIZED BY THE PITZMAN FAMILY!!!!

Public Service announcement from Pitzman Alchemy Jug LLC

It has come to our attention that a former disgruntled employee of Pitzman's has published an instructional manual in the past five editions of this publication INCORRECTLY advising on how to use Pitzman's Alchemy Jug.  
PLEASE DO NOT PISS INTO THE JUG AND THEN DRINK YOUR OWN PISS!

This will absolutely ruin/destroy all of the magical liquids held within the jug, rendering them useless and leaving you with just a jug full of hot piss.

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To clarify, it only works if a child pisses into the jug. Then the piss is safe to drink.

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*\*limit 7.6 liters per minute*

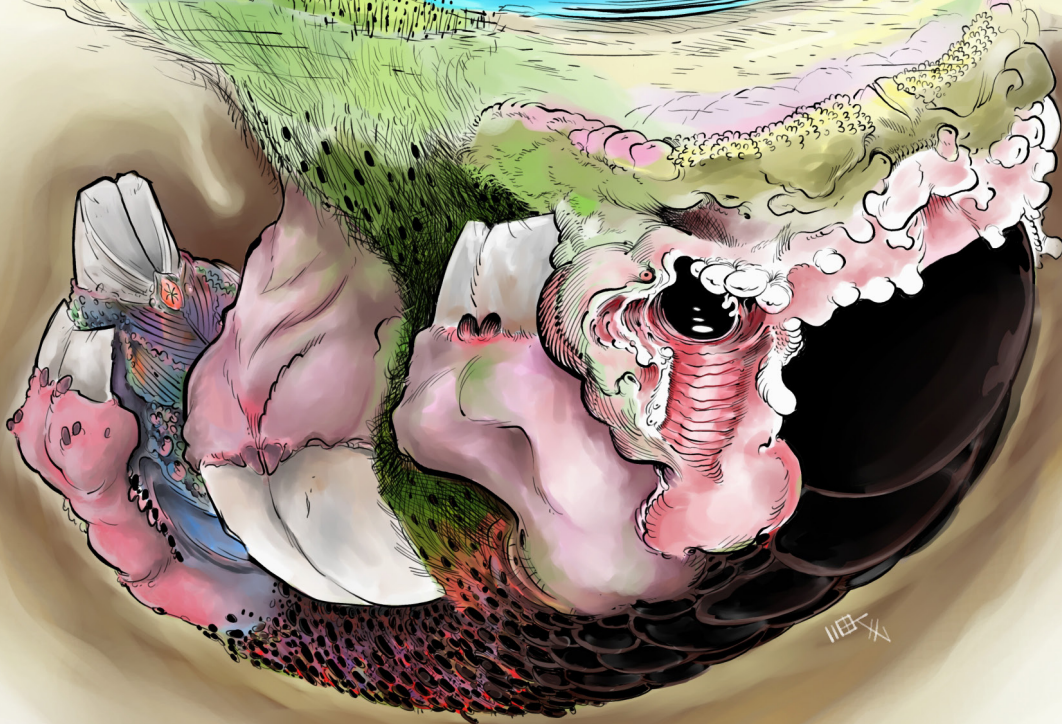
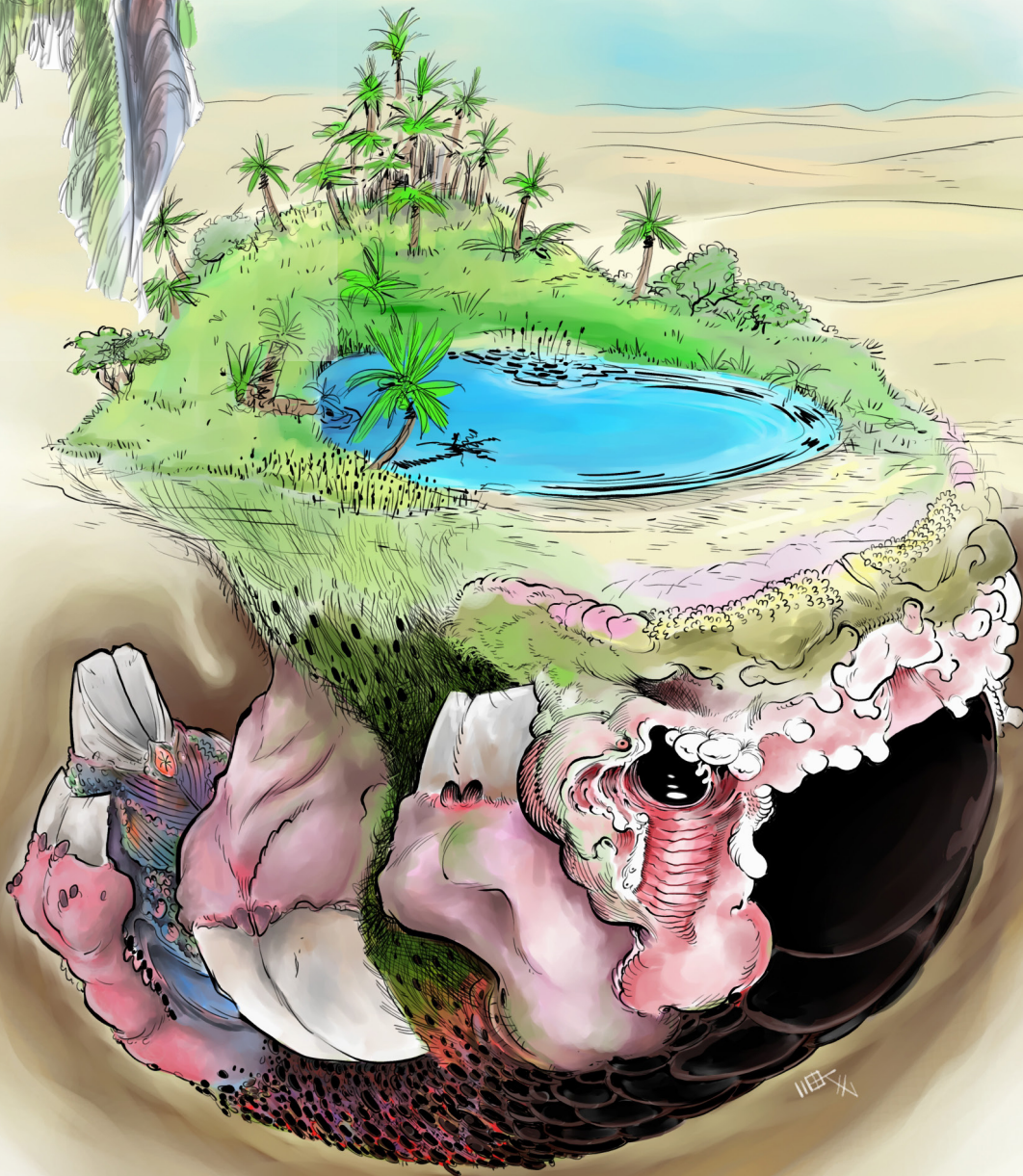
felt it: The rumblings of a creature tearing up through the golden depths. I moved as fast as I could away from where I guessed was the epicenter of the quake. With only one leg obeying my commands I was stumbling with every step, falling onto my elbows since my hands were powerless to catch me. My desperate feet sunk deep into the sand as I felt the rumbling beneath me grow stronger and stronger. I felt the sands begin to rise up below my feet and I hurled my body to one side just as the massive fish creature breached, flinging itself high into the air, its mouth searching for its quarry.

As it hung in the air I was struck by the sheer size of it; it was at least fifty feet long and covered in some kind of greenish moss. It had a massive, razor sharp tail and oversized pectoral fins—probably for maneuvering through the dense sands—but its face was its most interesting feature. What I had thought were palm trees now appeared as a long, thin beard on its chin—some kind of tuberos growth, I think—and the razor-filled mouth I had thought was my salvation took up most of the bottom half of its flat face and sat below two massive grey

mounds I had thought were boulders but now realized were the rocky lids of two huge eyes. This desert fish had adapted the perfect bait to lure in its prey. Like the deepwater angler fish that uses a bioluminescent light to attract its dinner in the darkest part of the ocean, this monster offered up the thing any creature in this desert would be most drawn to: water.

Some of you may be wondering how exactly I survived this encounter to be able to recount for you now my observations of this heretofore undiscovered creature. Suffice to say that I learned two key facts during my escape: One, this creature can be misdirected using the vibrations created by the impact of thrown objects, say, every piece of equipment you brought and every balled up article of clothing you are wearing, and two, when the body enters the “fight-or-flight” mode it seeks to shed any excess weight to maximize efficiency and, in the process, can create an unexpected source of water even in the middle of a desert. So what I'm not quite ready to relive I will leave to your imaginations. ♦

# Fauxasis Angler



As its name implies, this gargantuan sand-dwelling fish is, itself, a fisherman. The Fauxaxis Angler's body is covered in a symbiotic flora which feeds off the moisture exuded from the Angler's waxy scales and gives its body the appearance of being covered in verdant moss. The moss propagates rapidly in the moisture rich regions of the mouth and grows into long, firm stacks reaching a length of up to twenty feet around the lips before branching off into a series of smaller off-shoots. When "swimming" through the sand, these growths would resemble a beard, but if the Faux-axis Angler inverts its body and allows just its mouth to emerge from the sand, the growths stand straight and are nearly indistinguishable from tropical palm trees. The Angler then fills its mouth with a clear, paralytic liquid and becomes an "oasis." It will wait for a thirsty scavenger or lost soul to drink from its "pool" and lose all motor functions before opening its maw and swallowing them whole.

Fauxaxis Anglers are rarely spotted moving through the sand, instead they exist in a semi-permanent state of hibernation in their inverted positions until they are alerted to new prey by their tremorsense. This is likely to conserve energy and to avoid confrontations with nearby purple worms, who also hunt through vibrations and are the Angler's only known predator. Though they are normally passive hunters, there have been reports of aggressive members of their species chasing those who managed to avoid the oasis bait

through the desert while hocking giant paralytic loogies a distance of up to 60 feet!

Little is known about the life or reproductive cycles of the Fauxaxis Angler, but their age can be approximated by the height of the "trees" in their oasis, which grow at a predictable rate. The oldest observed specimen was believed to be roughly 103 years old and had growths over fifty feet in height and resembled a dense forest—though it is worth noting that it is not known if these growths are ever pruned or shed throughout the Angler's lifecycle, meaning these estimates represent the lower limits of the creature's age. ♦



## FAUXASIS ANGLER

*Gargantuan monstrosity, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)  
**Hit Points** 232 (15d20 + 75)  
**Speed** 40 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	4 (-3)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

**Saving Throws** Con +9, Wis +4

**Skills** Stealth +8

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** blindsight 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 11 (7,200 XP)

**False Appearance.** While the Fauxaxis Angler remains buried in the sand, motionless, its exposed head is indistinguishable from an oasis. It is covered in green moss with a number of tree-like growths and its open mouth resembles a refreshing pool.

**Paralytic Pool.** The pool in the oasis is filled with a paralytic liquid indistinguishable from water. Anyone who touches it must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution check or become paralyzed for one minute. At the end of each of its turns, the target can make another Constitution saving throw. On a success the effect ends. Disturbing the pool in any way alerts the angler to a creature's presence.

## ACTIONS

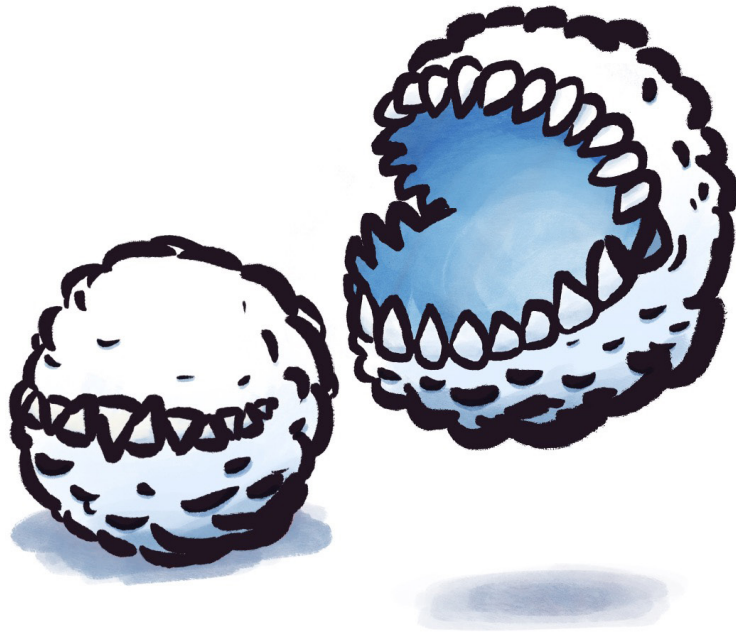
**Multiattack.** The angler makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with either its tail whip or its paralytic spit.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d8 + 9) piercing damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be swallowed by the angler. A swallowed creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the angler, and it takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of the anglers's turns.

If the angler takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the angler must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the angler. If the angler dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 20 feet of movement, exiting prone.

**Tail Whip.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 29 (4d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage. On a hit, the target must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be launched 20 feet into the air in a direction of the fauxaxis angler's choosing.

**Paralytic Spit.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. On a hit, the target must make a DC 17 Constitution Saving throw or be paralyzed for one minute. At the end of each of its turns, the target can make another Constitution saving throw. On a success, the target breaks the paralysis and the effect ends.



# FROST BALL

*Rules & Regulations of the frozen sport of the Frost Shire*

BY WILMORN KRUPP

This year marks the inaugural season of professional Frostball, a new sport being played high in the Peacekeeper Mountains between teams representing the five villeges of the Frost Shire. This thrilling and chilling game has been a traditional favorite of denizens of the Frozen Star, but has found a new and enthusiastic audience with the foundation of the Professional Frostball Association (PFA). So before you book your trip up to Winter's Ward or Cider Springs, here's a quick primer on the game.

### 1. Overview:

Frostball, at its core, is a game of capture the flag with an enchanted snowball fight twist. The object of the game is to capture the opposing team's flag from their *castle* and return it to your own while avoiding the cold, debilitating strikes of the opposing team's *snowball elementals*, capable of slowing and even immobilizing the players. The standard game is played by two teams of five players occupying various positions, each with their own special abilities and equipment, on a large, rectangular field with moveable, square *castles* which house each team's *flag*.

### 2. Playing Field & Equipment

1.01 Playing Field. A regulation-sized frostball pitch is a 100ft. by 40ft. rectangle and is normally located on a surface that is flat, level, and clear of obstructions. The edges of the field-of-play are clearly delineated by black paint or some other clear marker.

1.02 Starting Position. At the start of a match, the opposing castles are each placed 10ft forward from the touch lines on opposite sides of the pitch and centered between the sidelines. (see diagram 1).

1.03 Equipment. There are five major pieces of equipment each team uses in frostball: 1x flag (traditionally red), 1x castle, 1x 10ft. "Icicle", 1x snow sling, 25x snowball elementals.

**Flag:** A small 1ft. x 1ft. square of fabric, traditionally red. It is hooked inside a wall of each team's castle. It is possible, though difficult, to throw the flag forward. Using an action, a player may throw the flag 15ft. in any direction by making a DC:15 dexterity check to hit a target. On a failure, the flag lands five feet short of its intended target.

**Castle:** a 5ft.x5ft.x5ft. wooden box that is enclosed on three sides and open on the top, back, and bottom with a crossbar which acts as a yoke, allowing the castle to be lifted using a player's shoulders and moved around the field. The flag is hooked to the interior wall. The castle can be moved at ½ the castle-keeper's speed and provides ¾ cover except from attacks made from its exposed sides.

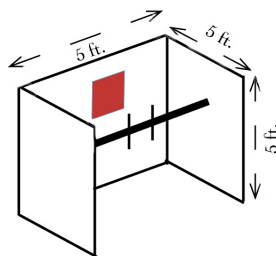


fig 1. Castle

**Icicle:** A 10ft. frozen pole wielded by the sentinel. It is used to temporarily freeze opposing players and deflect incoming snowballs.

**Snow Sling:** A weapon wielded by the sniper that is used to fling snowball elementals across long distances. It is a leather pouch capable of holding a projectile in the middle of two lengths of cord.

**Snowball Elementals:** Tiny, inert para-elemental creatures which resemble snowballs with razor-sharp icicle teeth. To attack an opposing player, make a ranged attack against the opponent's unarmored

AC (10+Dex mod). On a failed attack, the snowball elemental hits the ground and breaks apart. On a hit, the snowball attaches itself to the target. While attached, the target's speed is reduced by 5ft.. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach one snowball, destroying it and removing it from play. If the target's speed is brought to 0 as a result of a snowball hit, the attached snowballs form around the target into a snowman shell, restraining them. A player restrained in this way is termed "Snowed Out" and is removed from the field of play for the remainder of the round and displayed, humiliatingly, on the sidelines.

### 3. Participants

3.01 A team consists of five players: 1x castle-keeper, 1x sniper, 1x sentinel, 2x chargers.

#### Defensive Players

**Castle-Keeper:** The castle-keeper is the protector of the flag and the only player on a team allowed to move the castle. However, any player is allowed to move the opposing teams castle if left unoccupied or through a contested strength check with the opposing team's castle-keeper. They are usually the strongest and beefiest member of the team, capable of wrestling opposing players to the ground and keeping them from taking the flag.

**Sentinel:** The sentinel is a defensive player. The sentinel wields the icicle, a two-handed 10ft. frozen pole with which they are proficient. The sentinel may not wield the snowball elementals. The sentinel gains the following benefits while wielding the icicle:

On a hit with the icicle, the target's speed drops to zero until their next turn and any movement they were making immediately stops.

If an opponent comes within the sentinel's 10ft. reach, the sentinel can use their reaction to make an opportunity attack against the target.

If a snowball is thrown towards a teammate within reach, the sentinel can use their reaction to attempt to deflect the attack. Roll a d20 + Dex + Proficiency. This attempt is a contested roll vs. the thrower's attack roll. On a success, the snowball is deflected.

#### Offensive Players

**Sniper:** The sniper is an attacking player. The sniper wields a snow sling, a dexter-

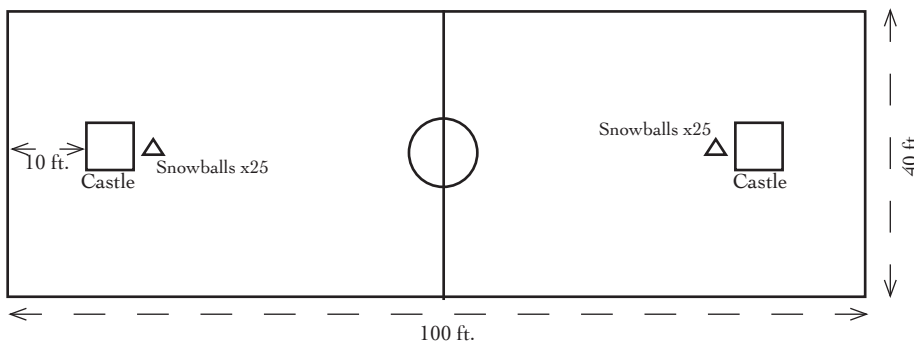


diagram 1. Starting Position

ity-based range weapon with which they are proficient. It allows greater range when throwing the snowball elementals (30ft./60ft.). The sniper is the only player allowed to wield the snow sling. The sniper can carry up to 10 snowball elementals in a sling pouch on their backs.

**Charger:** The chargers are fast, attacking players who are generally responsible for retrieving the opponent's flag. They can wield the snowball elementals as thrown weapons with which they are proficient with a range of 15ft./30ft.. Chargers can carry up to 10 snowball elementals in a sling pouch on their backs.

#### 4. Gameplay

**4.01 Starting Position.** At the start of the match, all five players from each team start with their hands touching their respective castles. The sentinel and sniper have their respective equipment in hand. The 25 snowball elementals start in a pyramid-shaped stack in front of each castle.

**4.02 Play.** The game begins with the referee's whistle. All players may move freely within the boundaries of the pitch and may utilize only their designated equipment. If a player is knocked unconscious and turned into a snowman they are "snowed out" and are removed from the field of play for the remainder of the match (unless brought back on as a boon, see section 4.03). Play proceeds until one team has successfully retrieved the opponent's flag and returned it to their own castle. It is not required that both flags be present in a castle to win, just the opponent's flag.

**4.03 Regulation Matches.** Regulation matches consist of three rounds—each of which is referred to as a point. Best two out of three wins. The team who loses a point may choose to gain one of two "boons":

- a. 1. They may revive a "snowed out" player to half speed and return them to play. Or
- b. 2. They may change one of their chargers into either a sniper or a sentinel. The new sniper or sentinel will not be proficient with either the snow sling or icicle.

#### 5. Fouls & Penalties

**5.01 Disarming:** It is illegal to remove by force or pick up the icicle of the opposing team's sentinel. The offending player loses their next turn.

**5.02 Illegal Arcana:** It is illegal to use any form of magic, magical items, or trickery of an arcane nature in the playing field.

Each player of the offending team loses their following turn.

**5.03 Illegal Use of Equipment:** A player may only use the equipment authorized for their position. An offending player loses a turn and the mis-used equipment is returned to the appropriate player.

**5.04 Out-of-bounds play:** By stepping out of bounds, either by choice or by force, a player's turn immediately ends and they forfeit their next turn. This penalty also applies to any player using non-magical means of flight. In the event a castle containing a flag is pushed out of bounds, the flag is placed fifteen feet from the touch line where the castle was forced out. The castle remains out of bounds for one turn and during that time may not be used by the controlling team to score a point by placing an opponents flag inside.

**5.05 Illegal Flag Disturbance:** No player may attempt to hide either their own or an opponents flag, nor may they move a flag to any location other than back to their

own base.

**5.06 Unnecessary Roughness:** While tripping, tackling, grappling, and shoving are all legal maneuvers, no attacks may be made with the intention of injuring, maiming, or otherwise incapacitating an opposing player. An offending player is given one verbal warning. On their second offense, they are removed from the match and their team will play down a player for the remainder.

**5.07 Out-of-bounds Flag:** If a player holding a flag is pushed out-of-bounds by an opposing player, the flag is immediately given to the opposing player.

#### 6. Officials

**6.01** The officiating team consists of two line judges, who monitor the game from the sidelines, and one referee, who monitors play from the field. Each official has a passive perception of 18 with +8 to both insight and perception checks. ♦

## The Cider Springs Pommeliers

### WILMORN KRUPP (CAPTAIN)

*Small humanoid (Gnome), Charger*

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**Armor Class** 14

**Hit Points** 44 (8d8+8)

**Speed** 30ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	19 (+4)	13(+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)

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**Skills:** Acrobatics +6, Perception +3, Performance +6

**Senses:** Passive Perception 13

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**Championship Maneuver (3/game).** If an attack would hit Wilmorn, he can choose to use a championship maneuver to avoid the hit instead.

**Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** For 1 minute, Wilmorn can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 ft. of it makes an attack roll or saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand Wilmorn. The creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends is Wilmorn is incapacitated.

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### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Wilmorn makes two ranged snowball attacks.

**Snowball.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one target. On a hit, the target's speed is reduced by 5ft.

## TODDY KRUPP

*Small humanoid (Gnome), Charger*

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 27 (6d6+6)

Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	12(+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills: Acrobatics +5

Senses: Passive Perception 11

**Cunning Action.** On each of his turns, Toddy can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Toddy makes two ranged snowball attacks.

**Snowball.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one target. On a hit, the target's speed is reduced by 5ft.

## Astrid Mott

*Medium humanoid (Human), Sniper*

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 38 (7d8+7)

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)

Skills: Acrobatics +5, Insight +6, Perception +8

Senses: Passive Perception 18

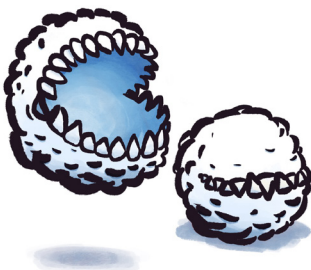
### ACTIONS

**Snow Sling.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. On a hit, the target's speed is reduced by 5ft.

**Snowball.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one target. On a hit, the target's speed is reduced by 5ft.

### REACTIONS

**Elegant Dodge.** As her reaction, Astrid can add +2 to her AC against one attack that would hit her. To do so, Astrid must see the attacker and be wielding her snow sling.



## CATES "LEFTY" PLUMICE

*Medium humanoid (Elf), Sentinel*

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 38 (7d8+7)

Speed 35ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Skills: Acrobatics +5, Perception +3

Senses: Passive Perception 12

**Teamwork.** Cates has advantage on any attack roll against a creature if at least one of her allies is within 5 ft. of her and the ally isn't incapacitated.

### ACTIONS

**Icicle.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. On a hit, the target's speed is reduced to 0 until the end of its next turn.

### REACTIONS

**Deflect Snowball.** If a snowball is thrown at a teammate within reach, Cates can use her reaction to attempt to deflect the attack. Roll an attack with the icicle's attack bonus. This is a contested roll vs. the thrower's attack roll. On a success, the snowball is deflected and destroyed.

**Sentinel.** On a hit, the target's speed drops to zero until the start of their next turn and any movement they were making immediately stops.

## HADDIUS POMP

*Small humanoid (Dwarf), Castle Keeper*

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 58 (9d6+27)

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Skills: Athletics +8, Intimidation +3

Senses: Passive Perception 10

**Goalkeeper's Fury.** While within 5 ft. of his castle Haddius has advantage on strength checks.

### ACTIONS

**Castle Smash.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 5ft., one target. On a hit the target is pushed 10 ft. back. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Dex save or be knocked prone.

**Snowball.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one target. On a hit, the target's speed is reduced by 5ft.

FICTION



Through the fog of sleep Marf's outline was unusually angular. Garla's yellow eyes blinked away the blurred transparencies of night as her mother shook her awake, awkwardly cradling her baby brother, Aug, in her arms.

"Get dressed," Marf said. "Armor and sword."

"Why?" Garla groaned. She slid a pillow over her head hoping to drown out the answer in goose down.

"Darf says. Now move." Marf wrestled the pillow off Garla's head and tucked the plush prisoner beneath her free arm while the other attempted to wrangle the squirming baby back into his sling.

Garla rolled over to protest, but her vision sharpened and she saw the moon's silvered glow glint off Marf's adamantine armor. The sheen was dulled from dust and disuse, but the scars that decorated its surface told tales of deeds Garla was still too young to hear. She got dressed quickly; armor like that should never be challenged.

The cool night air cut through the kinks in her armor as Garla clattered down the dirt road behind her parents. She still wasn't accustomed to the restrictive metal and moved clumsily, her joints made artificially arthritic. Her gracelessness was compounded by the greatsword she was attempting to balance on her shoulder; despite being designed for a child it was still a few inches taller than she was and even those who were skilled in its use had difficulty carrying it. Garla was not skilled in either. It was heavy and made her slower than the other children she sparred with who were armed with short swords and shields—she had the bruises to prove it. As they turned a corner the blade caught on the side of a neighbors house and carved out a small chunk of the sandstone wall. The yellow dust caught the moonlight like dirty snow.

"Careful with that," Darf snapped. Her father was attempting to tie off the straining laces of his leather armor. Everyone always told Garla that, in his day, Darf was one of the greatest half-orc fighters Venna had ever produced; Garla always wondered how far away that day was. Still, there were moments where she could see glimpses of his fading glory: his striking tusks, his eyes pulled tight like razor blades. As he pulled the armor into place she could see the lines carved in the old leather connect the menagerie of fractured scars and transform his pink and grey flesh from an incomplete abstract to

a striking canvas of warfare. The effect of which was dimmed somewhat when he was forced to admit defeat, loosened half of the laces, and let the armor leak his flabby grey flesh.

"You're sure you want to bring them tonight?" Marf asked.

"I was ten, you were nine. Weren't we both ready before then?" He said.

"Ready for what?" Garla asked. Her parents ignored her, their armor deflecting her blunted query.

"I suppose. But are you sure *she's* ready? She's not even eight yet." Marf adjusted the sling holding Aug, struggling to keep him under the quieting thrall of sleep. Garla resented the doubtful emphasis on "she"—the silibant hiss of it that rattled like a serpent's warning.

"She's close enough," Darf said. "Besides, she's stronger than she looks. Isn't that right, Garla?" Darf shot Garla a smile. It was an uncommon moment of filial affection that caught her off guard. Her father wasn't unloving, but he usually reserved his affection for other objects: the rose bushes that lined the walk, the rows of corn in their fields, the blades of his weapons that he kept humming from the whetstone. Garla just smiled and looked away.

As they walked down the worn path, Marf drifted off towards a nearby building and let her fingers run across the flaxen walls until they found a smooth grey stone where she allowed them to linger. Garla had seen her parents do this on occasion—she had even blindly copied them, hoping to find meaning in imitation—but they never offered an explanation for the gesture; and she never asked. In the light of the waning moon the buildings of Venna were nearly identical. Each was squat and made of the same golden sandstone blocks as her home; the only difference between them was a seemingly random speckling of grey bricks that dotted the exteriors. Some buildings had only a few of these pallid freckles while others had whole walls consumed by this anemic infection, like the life inside them had been drained with a straw. Occasionally Garla would discover a new grey brick on a familiar building and it seemed to her like she was witnessing some form of stone-bourne disease, a topical affliction affecting only the walls of Venna that was passed from building to building each time a door opened up and coughed out its occupants.

Marf rapped her weather-beaten knuckles on the stone before veering back to rejoin her family. Garla tugged on her mother's armor, pulling her attention away from the squirming child in her arms.

"Where are we going, mama?" Garla asked. Marf rested a hand on Garla's back, comforting her while continuing to press her forward into the gloom of night.

"To become Venna."

The silence of the Amber Expanse was dulled by the percussive cadence of metallic footsteps as a steady stream of villagers converged with their path and marched together towards the center of town. Their armor varied. Some wore heavy plate mail while others were nearly naked, letting their thickened hides serve as their only protection. An imaginative assortment of weapons caught the moonlight and sent sharpened refractions dancing about the road. A few among the crowd were covered in black cloaks that seemed to fade into the night and carried crossbows tucked under their arms. Garla could see the silvered glint of hidden knives as their cloaks swayed between steps. Everyone was dressed for battle, but none wore an expression of war.

"C'mon, keep up," Marf said over her shoulder. The crowd had grown dense and the unwieldy mass of metal and menace jostled itself in a continuous display of kinetic energy as it made a wide turn to the west. Garla attempted to maneuver her greatsword through the thicket of armor while keeping her eyes trained on her parents' silhouettes as the crowd slowly obscured her view.

"Marf," Garla called out. She quickened her pace to catch up, but her sword caught on something and sent her tumbling to the ground and wretched the weapon from her hand. She clumsily righted herself, her armor creaking unhappily, and scanned for her parents through a forest of legs. A hot syringe of adrenaline pumped into her chest, mixed with her blood, and boiled into a panic as she realized she could no longer see them in the crowd.

"Marf!" Garla yelled, but her voice got lost in the river of metal and leather steaming past her. She grabbed the handle of her sword and pulled it towards her, but each time she tried to lift it an errant boot would rip it from her hands, burying it again in the dirt.

"Marf!" Garla shouted louder now, her voice tinged with childish panic as it tried to breach the clamorous rattle. Her little arms tugged at the sword, only freeing it from the ground for a moment before an inevitable heavy step would pin it back with oblivious cruelty. The half-orcs that marched around her didn't see her crouched over in the darkness and a few stumbled over her, cursing as they caught themselves. A figure in the distance pushed against the flow of the crowd and grabbed the pommel of the sword with a meaty hand and yanked it up sharply, nearly knocking over someone unlucky enough to be on top of it.

"I told you to keep up," Marf said as she pushed Garla's sword into her chest. Garla grabbed her mother's arm and let herself be pulled through her wake as she pushed forward, parting the sea of bodies with her bulk. It was then that Garla finally noticed: she was the only child in the crowd.

When they pierced through to the front they found themselves next to Darf standing on the inner edge of a large semi-circle surrounding the courtyard of the Greytap Pub. In the waking hours this yard was usually dotted with tables and humming with the half-drunken gossip of the village as the owner bounced between groups delivering hefty plates of meat or an assortment of tiny glasses topped with unnatural pinkish-purple flames.

Garla loved coming here just to watch those tiny, colorful fires dance on their tiny, clear pools before her parents swallowed them back, flames and all. During every visit she would ask if she could have a sip, desperate to know how cotton candy fire would feel on her tongue. Marf always told her she was too young to try it, but one day Darf cupped his hand over the glass, snuffing out the fire, and slid it across the table to her while Marf was out of sight. Garla picked up the glass, disappointed by the colorless liquid, and took a sip. Even without the flaming diadem, the drink ignited her mouth, burning its way down her throat until it hit her belly where it crackled for a while, warming its new hearth. Garla coughed in spite of her attempts to contain the fumes and Darf laughed, downing the rest of the glass without a thought. "Don't tell your mother," he said. She never did.

Tonight, the courtyard was stripped of its usual charming seating and had replaced it with a ten-foot tall pile of wood, neatly stacked together, surrounded by a nest of branches and straw, and at the top was a lone woman. She was laying quietly, similarly dressed in plate mail armor, but pieces of the metal were peeled back in jagged strips, exposing skin that was equally damaged and torn, her peaceful expression at odds with the wreckage of her body. A jeweled battle axe rested stiffly in her hands. Garla tried to look closer, but her eyes were unable to interpret the carnage before instinct compelled her to bury her face in Marf's thigh.

"Why is she—" Garla started before Darf cut her off. He turned her around forcefully.

"Shh. You need to watch." Darf turned to face forward and let his hand rest on her shoulder, holding her in place. Garla squirmed and tried to slip free from his grasp, but he gripped her tighter, anchoring her to that spot.

Two figures split from the long shadow cast by the wooden centerpiece and stepped towards the crowd. There were twenty feet between them and the edge of the circle and each inch of that space seemed to be no man's land, a swath as desolate as the sands of the Relinquished Territories to the west. With an umbral jerk, two sparks flashed in unison from the figures, igniting twin torches that revealed their bearers in fragments of orange and black.

Garla recognized one of them; the hulking figure in sparse leathers with only patches of grey flesh floating in a sea of scar tissue was Mordo Boarskin. He was the newly appointed leader of the Stonesword Barracks, where Garla and most of the children in the village were trained to fight. For hours each day Garla felt him cast his long shadow across the training ground as he stood on the high walls of the arena, observing their sparring with his one remaining eye. Occasionally he would leave his perch to instruct a promising student in an advanced technique or demonstrate a superior fighting style, but he had never taken special interest in Garla.

The figure next to Mordo held her torch inches from her face, but the flickering light seemed unable to fully illuminate her features; instead it cast deeper and more chaotic shadows, distorting the

peculiar angles of her identity and smearing her with darkness. Garla only knew her by the warm ball of dread that had migrated from her chest to the bottom of her belly, weighing her down: this was Zotara Eagleshot, headmistress of the Shadowhold Academy.

Looking around, Garla saw her students scattered throughout the dense crowd, shrouded in black cloaks that concealed poison-tipped, pinpoint daggers, the lightning-twitch fangs of vipers. Every day Garla was drilled in combat, tactics, battle maneuvers; she was taught to meditate on the ferocity of a bear—its sharpen claws and raw power—and to use that strength to overwhelm her opponents.

When she saw the raw power of Mordo or Marf or Darf when they swung a sword or parried a blow, she understood it, even if she wasn't yet able to duplicate it. It was clear, elegant in its simplicity. But the black cloaks from Shadowhold adopted a different strategy. They hid in darkness, waiting to strike when the opponent dropped their guard, finishing the job before another sword could be drawn. They were undeniably weaker—they were thin, lightly armored, and carried smaller weapons that even a middling fighter like Garla could demolish in close quarters—but they possessed a quiet patience that made Garla itch. Whenever she saw them around the village she spent the rest of the day with a creeping tension in her neck that twisted it into a constant swivel, her eyes darting behind her to check for signs of an attack she would never see coming.

The crowd went still and silent. For a moment, the gentle crackling of the twin torches was the loudest sound in the world. Then came the sudden rattle of weaponry. The percussive stomp of boots. The accented beats of fists on armor. Garla's head spun around as she saw the citizens of Venna moving in unprompted unison, creating a cacophonous wave that drowned out the quiet sputtering of the flames with a metallic din. Marf and Darf pounded their chests with a dignified fury and Garla scrambled to imitate them, hurting her knuckles in the process.

Orlax Greytap stepped forward from the crowd and joined the torchbearers in front of his Pub. Garla recognized him from their many visits. He was barely covered, with only a few thin scraps of leather over his skin. A longsword hung impotent from a flagging strap on his back, its point occasionally carving a shallow groove in the dirt behind him as he



*Do You See The Sail?*  
(Traditional Jubilee Bay Sea Shanty)

Eyes to the mist boys, keep them wide  
for signs of the Jubiliers lost inside.  
They're battling through the winds and tides  
to find their way back home.

-chorus-  
Hey! Ho! Do you see the sail  
of a long lost ship that has pierced the Veil?  
When you do we will hear the tale  
of the hell they were cursed to roam.

They took to the Durnwell just to see  
the kind of woman the Sea would be.  
She was fine and fair and oh-so-free  
so how could they have known?

-chorus-  
Their love for her was true and strong.  
They told her tales and sang her songs.  
Then a flash of light and it all went wrong  
as the waves began to foam.

-chorus-  
The world around bound up in white,  
all hope was lost, no stars in sight.  
Now they sail blind through endless night  
to find their way back home.

-chorus x2-

walked. Mordo leaned in and whispered something in his ear. Orlax shook his head and Mordo handed him his torch, transferring ownership with a small bow before taking a few steps to the side, letting the dim orange light slide off his face as he sunk into darkness.

The fervor of the crowd began to pitch into an uncontrolled crescendo as the torch in Orlax's hand began to rise, his clinging grip creating the illusion of it being pulled skyward by some celestial gravity rather than being raised by his meaty arm. Garla saw Orlax's lips split and his throat tighten as his voice noiselessly joined the chorus as the flame rose higher and higher in the air. The crowd roared louder and louder as his arm lifted the torch over his head, his skin pulled taut as his shoulder strained to inch it closer to the stars. The thick veins in his neck bulged as his wild voice pierced through the racket of the dissonant choir in a fearsome solo made more monstrous by his body stretching beyond its limits to push the flame higher and higher and higher, his muscles spasming in the contortion.

Finally when the crowd could grow no louder and the torch held no higher the tension in his body burst and he chucked the torch onto the pyre, igniting some unseen accelerant that had thickened the air with a sickly-sweet odor, setting the wood and the woman ablaze. The crowd was instantly silenced, but Orlax's tortured cry continued, outstripping the terrifying presence of the surrounding army until every bit of air and raging life had been forced through his ragged windpipe and he fell to his knees, prostrate before the crushing silence that reclaimed the throne of night.

Garla could just barely hear Orlax's heaving gulps of air over the sound of blood pumping in her ears. The roar of the fire was accompanied by a sickly hiss and wisps of thin, grey smog that clung to the edges of the dark smoke like vicious tendrils. A small, child-like choking sound grew from the center of the circle; it took Garla a moment to realize the tiny sobs were coming from the hulking figure that still lay crumpled on the ground.

Though she had not yet experi-

enced it herself, Garla instinctively understood the sounds of grief. She took a step towards Orlax, hoping to find some way to comfort him, but a hand reached out and held her back. She followed it up to see Darf looking down at her, his eyes misty. His grip on her shoulder was light, barely even a grip at all; rather, it was a gentle suggestion, a physical expression of a father's guidance. It was an unspoken conversation between equals, not a command from a parent.

With that light touch her father guided her into the world. In that moment she understood: She understood the consequences of the war games she played at school: She understood the price of a misstep or a moment of broken concentration or just a bit of bad luck. The end was laid before her, wreathed in flames. Garla was no longer a child, not really. With a quiet touch her father had casually conferred on her the weight of mortality.

Garla stayed and watched the flames grow and learned just how long it takes for a body to burn.

After a time the hypnotic dance of the fire began to slow as the flames curled inside the embers and ashes, content to slowly glow instead of burn. The aura of yellow and orange cast dancing shadows over his paint-streaked face as Orlax turned again towards the gathered crowd. With a halting voice he spoke, "We are Venna."

"We are Venna." The crowd answered as one, roaring through the silence of the past few hours, making Garla jump at the sudden outburst as she mumbled the same words in a childish reflex she immediately regretted.

Zotara and Mordo stepped forward, wreathed in a vibrant florescence and began to rake the still-smoldering embers into a large, metal drum they had produced from behind the remnants of the pyre. Garla watched the proceedings with one eye on Orlax, waiting for another verbal cue, prepared to join in the village's collective response. But his eyes stayed fixed on the ashes and expended fuel and charred bone as it was loaded into the drum, the interior radiating a sickly gleam in the summer night.

After the drum was filled with ashes it was lifted with some difficulty and brought forward to Orlax. He took one of the axes strapped to his side and drew it slowly across his palm. A pool of grey blood filled his hand and he let a few

drops fall onto the ashes.

"I am become Venna," he said and stepped aside. The ashes responded with a halting hiss, quiet but insistent.

Mordo and Zotara replicated his movements, letting their blood mix with the ashes. Garla could see their hands were heavily scarred as they reopened old wounds made from dozens, if not hundreds, of identical injuries.

"I am become Venna," they said. The ashes whispered their same sibilant response.

One by one the villagers of Venna stepped to the ashes and repeated the motions, pulled by the ritual's invisible, habitual arms.

"I am become Venna."

"I am become Venna."

"I am become Venna."

Garla led her parents in the procession. When she reached the drum she saw a grey slurry. It gave off a few wisps of steam in the cool morning air, its glow almost fully extinguished. She pulled her sword off her back and slid her hand across it without hesitation. The blade had dulled and it caught on her skin causing it to tear painfully. Garla looked at the messy cut that pooled with blood and cursed her laziness. She silently vowed to always keep her sword razor sharp.

"I am become Venna." She let the blood fall from her hand and mix with the ashes of a warrior and the blood of a village. The cooled embers stayed quiet. There was only a thick "plonk" as the viscous drop sent concentric ripples though the pearly remains. She watched the rings grow larger and weaker as the surface showed Garla's distorted reflection before settling into a hazy mirror.

Garla looked into the vague shapes of her eyes in the pool and tried to see something new, to prove that this night had changed her, but she saw nothing unexpected. Either nothing had changed or things had changed so completely that they erased all memory of what came before. She didn't have time to determine which before her father nudged her along and repeated her actions, gazing into the ashen pool, maybe even looking for the same thing.

The last few villagers cast their blood into the ashes. Zotara and Mordo took a large, intricately carved paddle and cast it into the once-living sludge. They stirred it until it thickened and tested their strength. After only a few minutes it hardened into a thick peat. The mixture was poured into a large rectangular mold and

taken away by the village stonemason on his cart. He vanished from view, but the squeak of his cart's wheel could be heard as he walked quickly to his kiln.

Once the squeaking subsided a dark smoke rose from the north. As it mixed with the air, Mordo handed Orlax a large, well-worn warhammer and he hefted it, walking inside his pub. After a moment of silence, a loud thud echoed through the air. Yellow dust shook from the wall of the two story sandstone building. With the next thud Garla saw a large yellow stone block near the entrance shake. With each strike of the hammer the stone was squeezed out of wall a few inches at a time. It only took six massive strikes before it tipped out and smashed into the ground, leaving a pile of golden-brown rocks that littered the manicured bushes that surrounded the pub.

After a time the stonemason rounded the corner carrying a large grey stone on his cart. Garla watched as the stone made of ash and blood was worked into place, a perfect fit for the expelled piece of sandstone. The stonemason slid a few strange tools around the wall, adjusting minutia invisible to Garla's eyes. When he stepped away the stone looked as if it had always been a part of the pub. The seams melted away and the woman became a part of the building, a part of the village itself. And so, she realized, did Garla.

Orlax Greytap rested his hand on the fresh stone that added a new dot of grey to the speckled exterior. He spoke to the stone. His words carried out over the crowd that stood in the silence of dawn.

"Heema Greytap, you are become Venna." He leaned in closer and whispered something Garla couldn't hear, but she didn't need to. Anyone who had ever loved knew what he needed to say.

The crowd dispersed as the sun illuminated the Amber Expanse, tinting the world a hue as golden as the sandstone in the buildings they passed on their way home. The village hummed. It was awake now and it seemed like everyone would forsake sleep that night, choosing to spend their day in a restless daydream. Some would lump that night's funeral service into the many others they had attended, adding it to the amorphous, somber blob that stuck to the back of their minds; but Garla would remember. Throughout the years she would see the village slowly grey, she would reopen the scar on her hand over and over, and she would

remember everyone who helped to build Venna. And every time she swore to herself she would be worthy of joining them. For now, she had to train.

"Where are you going?" Marf asked as Garla turned north towards the Stonesword Barracks.

"To practice," she said. "I'm going to the blacksmith's too. I need two copper pieces to get my blade sharpened." Garla stuck out her hand expectantly. Marf was about to argue, but Darf pulled out two copper and handed them to Garla.

"Darf I think -" Marf cut herself off when she saw Darf's focused look. She tracked his gaze to Garla's eyes; they were steeled, looking forward, already running through drills and combat maneuvers in her mind. Her body gave tiny, subconscious jerks as she imagined battle scenarios and she balanced her greatsword on her shoulder, still clumsily, but with the beginnings of grace. Marf sighed. She knew it would be pointless to argue. "Alright. But be home before dark."

"I might stay late and do some extra sparring."

"No, you'll be home for dinner. Food and rest are just as important as practice. It all requires patience. You need to learn that." Garla considered this, her eyes focused momentarily on the present, then nodded. Marf and Darf watched her as she walked away. They waited until she disappeared around a corner before they continued home. Garla never turned back.

It was brisk half mile to the Barracks but Garla chose to walk slowly. She studied each identical grey stone as she passed, feeling the weight of something she had once considered so mundane. Some homes were newer and almost perfectly golden, untouched by the primal grief she was only beginning to understand. Others held more history, greying stories that she would likely never know.

At some point on her walk she had a thought that would come to haunt her for the rest of her life. It lingered in her mind and she would rage against it with every swing of her sword for the next thirty years. Somewhere in that golden morning with her still-dull sword on her shoulder she thought, "No matter what we do we're all the same size in the end."

She felt a tickle down her arm and saw the cut on her palm had reopened, letting a trail of grey blood drip onto the path. She smiled.

"I am become Venna." ♦



BY BEGGOBIAN GREENLANCE

**G**reetings, fellow yolk folk. Today we will be going through some of the very best eggs and rating them. Use this guide as a tool for your travels so you know when to pocket an egg you stumble across a good one.

**ABYSSAL CHICKEN EGG**

You're telling me this goth bird from Hell lays eggs? No thanks. This egg is a bummer for a bunch of reasons. The screams of the oblivion can be heard every time you crack open one of these dang things. Not to mention that when you finally get the egg into the pan it always just morphs into a pentagram shape. Mornings are hell enough as it is, no need to bring abyssal chicken eggs into the mix.

**RATING: 1 egg out of 5**

**GIANT COBRA EGG**

"Huh... I wish this cobra was bigger" said absolutely no one ever. So you're telling me if I want to eat a giant cobra egg I have to deal with a giant cobra before getting into their nest? Yikes. Also, you're telling me if I have a giant cobra egg and don't use it immediately it may hatch and then I'm now stuck with a giant cobra. This egg is a full lose/lose situation. Hard pass.

**RATING: a big yikes out of 5 eggs**

**A BIG CUP OF RAW EGGS**

Also known as "breakfast juice" it's a great way to start the day if you're in a rush or a boxer who loves stairs. Fun life hack: drink the eggs, eat some raw bacon, and throwback some sourdough starter before heading the to sauna. While you're steaming the food will cook in your belly and it'll be like you ate a breakfast sammie!

**RATING: 3.75 eggs out of 5**

**ABNORMALLY LARGE GOOSE EGG**

Now I don't think we should be eating abnormally large goose eggs. Not because they aren't tasty but if you let enough hatch you'll have an abnormally large goose army. The realm would have to bow down to you and your legions of abnormally large geese. The ground will shake with their bellowing honks. Your enemies will retreat when they see a wave of abnormally large geese crash against their front lines! Abnormally Large Goose armies will reign for eternity! All in all: a pretty good egg.

**RATING: 4 eggs out of 5**

**EGG OF MYSTERY**

[REDACTED]

**RATING: [REDACTED]**

**AXEBEAK EGG**

Despite popular belief, this is not the band name of a group of bards that want to get into heavier, faster music. These eggs are good but there's a danger in getting your eggs from a bird with a weapon for a beak. It's like getting your milk from a Sword Cow.

**RATING: 3 eggs out of 5**

**BALD GUYS**

Though their heads may look like eggs, you could get in a lot of trouble for eating them for breakfast.

**RATING: 0 eggs out of 5**

**FABERGÉ EGGS**

Nothing says "fancy" quite like an egg that looks like a craft store supply wagon crashed into a chicken coop. This forbidden egg is a bit of a conundrum. It is an egg but you can't eat it. People will applaud you for having a fancy egg. Now you could sell said fancy egg for money to purchase a bunch of real eggs. It's always a good idea to diversify your portfolio with any type of egg.

**RATING: 4 fancy eggs out of 5**

**DEVILED EGGS**

These eggs are the result of a wizard turning a party into a piece of food. I once had a deviled egg with some minced spicy pepper on top and saw the gods. Deviled eggs, why do you taste so angelic?

**RATING: 5 eggs out of 5 ♦**

**HAVE YOU OR A LOVED ONE PISSED INTO AN ALCHEMY JUG AND THEN DRANK THAT PISS?**

If so, you could be entitled to a large compensation in GOLD as part of a class action lawsuit against Pitzman Alchemy Jug LLC for the unlawful and dangerous advertisement printing of "User Manual for Pitzman's Alchemy Jug" wherein the suggested course of action is to piss into the jug and then drink your own piss.

This dangerous suggestion has resulted in serious injury/death in many users.

If you think you may be affected, please contact the law firm of D, D&D for a free consultation.

*If you drank your own piss, it's a meeting you won't want to miss!*

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit your caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote on your favorite. This week's cartoon was submitted by Dugald De'Pouf. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in our next issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, send a letter to The New Orcerer c.o. Bindorp Anseltop, 77 Thistle-down Lane, Outer Bramble, Regba Major.*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“.....”

DURNWELL  
SEA



CLIFFWATCH

BEST TOWN

AMOROSE RIVER

MIREWOOD  
FOREST

REGHA MAJOR

VENNA

RELINQUISHED  
TERRITORY

IOOF

AZURE  
PASS

ICEKEEPER

FRIST  
SHERE

THE  
VERDANT  
SHARDS

SUN  
SOUL  
MONESTARY

CHROMATICA

JUBILEE  
BAY

# CARRÜTH

