

Troq



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A smug/tg/ production

Plot Based Alchemy

by Cognate

With potions and poisons, smoke bombs, stink bombs and bomb bombs, alchemy is a versatile and evocative skill-set that can be loads of fun. However, it can be difficult to design an alchemy system that doesn't require an encyclopedia of ingredients and recipes, or reduce the alchemist to just another spellcaster throwing bombs instead of fireballs. I have attempted to create an alchemy system that remains balanced and flavourful without being overly complex by approaching the problem from a plot-focused perspective. That is, the system is focused on how the character use can use alchemy to overcome the obstacles they are facing, while working within the constraints of the situation they find themselves in. This system was originally created for an entire homebrew tabletop system I was designing, but it should be adaptable for other systems, as long as they have some sort of concept of skill rolls against a numeric target. This system is also best suited for open-ended problem-solving type campaigns rather than heavily combat focused dungeon crawling type campaigns, and of course will only be appropriate for settings where alchemy fits thematically. With that out of the way, let's begin.

This alchemy system provides a way for characters to 'remember' alchemical recipes, by having the players come up with them on the fly, based on the current needs of the party, and the constraints that they face. The process involves four simple steps:

1. Choose the primary effect
2. Identify key limitations or advantages
3. Roll your alchemy skill against the challenge rating, which is determined by steps 1 and 2
4. If you don't meet the target, the GM will add other limitations to make up the difference

Let's go through that in detail.

First, we decide on what effect we want our creation to have. Choose one of the effects from the table below. Each effect has a level and a type. The level of the effect determines the base challenge rating for coming up with the recipe. The type is the category that the effect falls under. For systems that allow it, the alchemist may specialise in one of these three sub-fields, gaining an advantage when choosing those effects. Otherwise, it's just for flavour.

Level Medicaments / Solvents / Combustives

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Irritant, smell, taste / colour, polish / smoke |
| 2 | Weaken, intoxicate, laxative / identify / light, heat, cold |
| 3 | Sleep, ease symptom, antidote, blind / corrode, refine / explode |
| 4 | Cure ailment, paralyse, kill, enhance attribute / transmute, enhance property / propel, energise |

Say we want to create an acid that is strong enough to eat through an iron drain grate, thus allowing the party secret access through the walls of a city. We choose the effect *corrode*, which is a level 3 effect, so our challenge rating so far is 3.

Next, we identify any restrictions or advantages we have, and add their cost to the challenge rating. There are four main categories here: ingredient rarity, required equipment, preparation time and side effects. There are also a few miscellaneous modifiers.

Cost Ingredient Rarity

+2	Ubiquitous, you probably already have some
+1	Common, you can find it in a matter of hours
0	Uncommon, it will take about a day to find it
-1	Rare, it could take several days to find it, you may have to get it imported
-2	Priceless, finding it is a quest in itself

Ingredient rarity is based on how long it takes to find the ingredient. For uncommon and rare ingredients, there may be a cost involved as well. Where appropriate, the GM may allow alchemist players to purchase generic 'alchemical supplies' at a given level, or provide them as a quest reward. If the character has alchemical supplies of a particular rarity already, then they can use ingredients of that rarity without spending any further time or money in acquiring them. Alchemists should generally only be able to purchase Common or Uncommon supplies ahead of time. Rare ingredients are just too expensive and specialised to be worth buying unless



Woman with armor by Loli anon

you have a particular purpose in mind. For supplies given as quest rewards, the GM may also choose to place limitations on them, restricting them to certain effects or types of effects. In general, supplies given as quest rewards are good for only one batch of whatever is used, and alchemists are expected to spend time and money on restocking purchased supplies at appropriate intervals.

Let's say our alchemist has a phial of hydra venom they harvested from the hydra the party killed a few sessions ago. That counts as a rare ingredient, so we can use it to bring the challenge rating down to 2.

Cost	Required equipment
+1	No equipment or only makeshift equipment
0	Standard kitchen utensils, or portable alchemy kit
-1	Standard alchemical equipment
-2	Advanced or specialised alchemical equipment

Many alchemical procedures require specialised equipment, which the characters may not have access to. A well-prepared alchemist on the road will often pack the basics, such as a mortar and pestle, portable scales, a sharp knife, etc. A well-equipped kitchen will also do in a pinch. More delicate or bulky equipment, such as a distillation still will only be found in a dedicated alchemy lab. If the party has a base nearby, perhaps the alchemist has already set one up and acquired the equipment. Otherwise, they may have to beg a favour from a friendly court alchemist or wizard. Finally, some advanced equipment may only be available in certain locations or at particular institutions. The party may have to sneak into the capital city's arcane university to use their thaumaturgic condensor.

In this case, the party is stuck outside the city walls, and the alchemist's kit was lost in a recent mishap, so we will have to make do with mixing up the ingredients in the fighter's helmet over a campfire and measuring by eye. Makeshift equipment brings the total rating up to 3.

Cost	Preparation time
+1	Less than an hour, by the end of the scene
0	Several hours, half a day
-1	An entire day
-2	Several days

Preparation time should be self-explanatory. In this situation, the alchemist is under no particular time pressure, so we'll leave this unspecified. If a constraint is unspecified, it defaults to the zero cost option, in this case, about half a day. If we need to make up points after the roll, the GM may increase this time. Performing the alchemy will take the alchemist's entire attention for the full time specified. Who knows what could go wrong if he left that cauldron simmering unattended?

Cost	Side effects
+1	No side effects
0	Level 1 effect
-1	Level 2 effect
-2	Level 3 effect

Side effects are extra effects taken from the effects table. The GM chooses the side effects in step 4, along with any other complications. The GM should try and choose side effects that make the party's life more...interesting. For now, we'll leave this unspecified, which will mean a level 1 side effect if the GM doesn't use this category to make up extra points.

Cost	Miscellaneous modifiers
+1	Extra potent
-1	Delicate, special care must be taken when handling the final creation
-2	Dangerous, the alchemist must pass an additional Alchemy test when preparing the creation, or take 4 damage*

There are some extra modifiers that can be applied if necessary. We don't need this acid to be extra potent. For dangerous creations, you'll need to translate the amount of damage to an appropriate amount for your system. It should be a medium-sized wound, enough to be a disadvantage in the next fight if nothing is done about it, but not life-threatening. In the original system, the average PC had anywhere from 9 to 16 health.

Now that we've identified all our restrictions and advantages, it's time to roll. The challenge rating we've got so far is 3. Let's say we roll a 2. We haven't met the challenge rating, but that doesn't mean we've failed. It just means that the GM needs to add an extra point from somewhere. The GM could choose to increase the preparation time or the level of the side effects, but instead the GM chooses to add the *Delicate* modifier, saying that the acid will bubble and spit if jostled or sloshed too much, injuring whoever is carrying it. (This might not have been a problem if the party had access to an appropriate sealed container, but they've only got makeshift tools in this scenario.) The GM also needs to choose a level 1 side effect. In this case, the GM chooses *smoke*. As the acid eats away at the metal grate, it will produce a stream of acrid yellow smoke that will be clearly visible and may attract unwanted attention.

If you succeeded, and beat the challenge rating by some margin, the GM can choose to add positive modifiers or not. If you wanted a more convenient recipe, you should have aimed higher to start with, but on the other hand, the GM may feel that not having to hunt for ingredients will help move the game along nicely.

This recipe is now ready to use. Unless the recipe has the *dangerous* modifier, it is assumed that the alchemist can follow the recipe without any trouble in normal circumstance. Following the recipe will allow the alchemist to create a single batch of the substance (a handful of smoke powder, enough poison to slip into someone's drink, a single dose of

painkiller). If the alchemist wants to create a larger quantity, the GM can increase the preparation time and cost of ingredients, as he sees fit.

Depending on the campaign, you may wish to write down the recipe, so you can use it again instead of having to roll up a new recipe. In general, it is better to reuse existing recipes with the same effect, rather than creating a new one each time in the hope of finding a better one. On the other hand, the next time this party needs a strong acid, they may not have any more hydra venom, or whatever other advantage they needed for the recipe. In that case, they will need to roll another recipe (or kill another hydra).

As far as adapting this system to fit the game you are playing, it should just be a matter of multiplying the challenge rating by an appropriate factor so that the numbers are in the right scale. For d20 based systems, you might multiply by 5, so a challenge rating of 3 turns into a target value of 15. For Savage Worlds, multiplying by 2 might work. I should probably also mention that I never got to playtest this system in a real campaign, so there are likely other balance issues that the GM will need to correct, but hopefully none that render the system unplayable.

Have fun, and happy concocting! 🍷

Continuity in the Face of Multiversal Indifference by Jipowap

A great deal of time and effort has gone into the concept of time and the efforts there-in. A recursive, expansive, redundant, and yet distinct concept of timelines in what is commonly called a multiverse, or the submerging of histories within a single line. Of these, some many have taken hold of the minds of the masses as 'worth their while' if not best examples, and stand as the metaphysical type specimens of the concept. Back to the Future's tweaking of timeline, Warhammer's Warp, Warframe's Eternalism, the plot in Homestuck, the Arachno-humanoid Poly Multiverse of Spiderman and the adjacent Temporal Loom of the Marvel Universe, Star Trek's Mycelial Network, DC's Greater Omniverse, and other great works of many hands. These many things have wildly different takes on continuity and what results from time traveling, with some forbidding and others saying it merely produces or intrudes into a separate timeline. Though more often than not the result is an overwriting, as most explicit in Back to the Future, Warhammer, and Warframe. That which was is but a memory, or a broken pattern, and that which is shown is the new reality.

I'll ignore Doctor Who, they really do whatever they feel like there. No overarching framing like Star Trek Developed and tentatively stuck to.

This funneling of actions into a lasagna of layered realities is what interests me the most. Much as Hermetic traditions and alchemy were later viewed through a psychological lense, I see a certain inner working of the authors in this. A reflection of the continual reeducation of one's reality, where new history is uncovered, new context is brought to bear, over and over and over. Life is becoming mythological in its liquidity, where if one is without self certainty then ALL is

in flux. Abaddon writes a daemon's name in the sand of the past as his past self overwrites his need to ask, future rewritten, experience remains, save restored. Loki learns how to handle the loom himself, undoing his need to restart his experiences ever again, save locked. Dr. Entrati and his mirror are actively fighting across time and space, tweaking reality as DE goes back to old cutscenes and adds or removes details to change context of set events, one timeline but a continuing game plot and development. These things are unfinished, and so are mutable even now. Human minds are never truly made up and set, and are mutable even now. Our realities are beginning to breathe, to speak, and whether consciously or not are beginning to flex their own muscles by their own will.

Don't tell Grant Morrison, he'll try to have his way with these IP's.

This is all a somewhat temporal type of tale type and framework, in a literal sense that it won't be a thing going forward, I do not think. This wibbly wobbly way of slotting things in seems to me to only have so long in the spotlight of a society is dissolution, dismemberment, and disarray. We are out of order, and so our stories become out of order. We are constantly reminded of the past, while dreading inevitable futures, and so our worlds or interwoven with their pasts while avoiding futures. We see societies where things are different, where people are different, and so our worlds are filled with parallel peoples of reflective presents yet of alternate pasts. This all goes away when society restructures in the next generation, when order reasserts itself in the wake of a demographic collapse. Infinite possibilities resolve into singular lines of hardy survivors, self reliant and exclusive to their kin. I speak of both us and our stories. Atavism is becoming more popular as a story ploy or character trait, I wonder why?

A lunchtime essay by a Lilac enthusiast. 🍷

Delta Green Factions by Esotericanon

The Bridgewalk Fellowship (Neutral): An association taking from various rungs of society within District X (but mainly the lower middle class white and blue collar workers) characterized by their focus on dreams, sleepwalking, and hypnosis. They seek a more "authentic life experience" through their practice of the above. Unusually, they sometimes prefer to use the mentally disturbed among the homeless as their "models." They are secretive, but are happy to induct new members who have shown "aptitude" or "openness" to the utility of dreams or trances. ~~They will swear up and down that they are not a cult.~~ Their far-off goal is seemingly trying to find a way to "engineer" positive changes in personality and even capabilities through finding the ideal trance state, and then "programming" it with the right cues. They aren't willing to kill for that, but there have been unpleasant rumors of perfectly sane hobos who acquired minor to major mental troubles after a few "sessions."

Vrediks (Hostile): A violent street gang of the urban poor who strongly holds turf on Zimmo Road and Welf Avenue

(with small outposts closeby) in the West Side of District X. They are characterized by strange initiation rituals and regular ceremony revolving around the carefully secured Book of Chattuk (Chat-TUCK), a relic of their deceased (???, the gang likes to speak of him in the present tense to both membership and outsiders, despite his recorded death five years before the present) Augustus Lamsk, a Yugoslav emigre. Despite their founder's nationality, the Vrediks themselves tend toward Italian and Hispanic ethnicity. They have a disturbing preference for melee combat over ranged, and have been known to take exotic drugs (which they also traffic for the income) in order to close in a frenzy despite injuries. Outsiders must either "pay homage to the Book" or leave immediately on threat of overpowering violence. Their goal is nothing less than the expansion of "their place" to take more of the West Side under their ways. Larger gangs and the police are just "expected obstacles," despite only numbering a few dozen able-bodied men.

Hobody's Family (Hostile): A coercive minor crime outfit native to Hadley Boulevard, Peebles Drive, and Gumption Street in the East Side of District X, with outposts and fences throughout. They are led by former haruspex Hal Hobody, a mulatto of equal charm and capacity for cruelty (his father's side of the family is easy to trace, Detroit-born black, but no one can recall seeing his mother, and therefore no one is sure what kind of 'white' he draws from, if white at all), who takes a good-humored pride in his numbers operations, extortion



Slinger 2 by Lolianon

rackets, and fortune-telling hotline. His men (and women) are usually black or the browner sort of Italian, and are known for flashy clothing, fast cars, and well-tuned guns. Technically drawn from the working poor, Hobody likes to spread his ill-gotten wealth around as "perks" for his best performing thugs and associates. So long as outsiders make clear their intention not to meddle while traveling through his territory, Hobody has an easy dismissal for them. To those who don't, and to law enforcement, violence and creative torture are his ready answers. His goal is to expand the Family through the East Side, and maybe see if he can get into more lucrative "business."

"Slipout" (Neutral): A deceptively tight-knit association almost exclusively composed of the long-homeless and the indigent spanning the length and breadth of District X's poorer areas (and large tracts of the underground). "Slipout" is not the members' name for their own group, having more to do with how they call their rounds about the city ("Jes' slippin out, sonny, nuthin new.") and therefore what patrol officers often call them. Though often somewhat malnourished (none of them starve by their own honor, as "that'd be more shameful than pissin' like a dog"), they are often surprisingly fit: whole days can be spent simply pacing around a single quiet street either alone or with another of their group, and they have been known for capable sprinters when the charge of vagrancy is raised. They tend to help out the freshly homeless with spare food and advice, but don't take them into their full confidence unless the unfortunate is "proven fer th' out," and can't acquire permanent housing or a steady and good-paying job. They have no objection to begging, busking, or working odd jobs, however, as that is often their own source of money to augment their scavenging, dumpster-diving, and odd "cookins." Towards most outsiders they are amiable unless followed back to their "siddown" without permission, though even then they almost never resort to violence except in self-defense. Towards the police, they try to be as opaque as possible when they don't avoid them outright. Towards the Bridgewalk Fellowship, they display a passive-aggressive hostility, and will cheerfully help interested parties disrupt their "sessions" if asked. Aside from the situational accomplishments of the above, the Slipouts don't appear to have any greater overarching goal. It is uncertain if they even have a leader, but there are rumors of an "old-walker to beat old-walkers" holds sway in the loneliest parts of the District.

White Cloth (Neutral): A secretive society of upper-middle class professionals of one sort or another, but usually medical-oriented, in the more well-heeled parts of District X. Founded by a former State Priest, Pontifex Locus Joseph Boehme, White Cloth's internal rituals are largely unknown save for the prominence of classical European mythological figures and motifs in their offices, and peculiar stylized caduceus standing astride a fish pond. In public, they appear to be a medical consulting group, by "dark" they seem to function as freelance doctors and healers among the poor. The only condition they appear to maintain for their service is to speak of it, but never exactly who gave it. Their only goal appears to be a continuance of their service, whatever the cost. 🐾

The Lair of Spycrist the Bandit

by Dungeon Anon

The hideout of a local gang leader who is working with Thiric the goblin from adventure one. The note will lead the PCs to a ruined building with a set of stairs leading down. The money in the chest was meant to be payment to the goblin. Otherwise, the PCs can get a rumor of the dungeon's location. The dungeon is a stone cellar below the ruins of an old manor house. It's well made and comfortably sized for humans. All the men inside are wanted bandits working for the leader.

1 Entrance hall made of stone lit by lamps in the southern corners (oil×2). 10ft wide, 10ft deep pit blocks path. A narrow wood plank crosses it, roll a d6 if players try to walk across it. On a 1 it breaks and they fall, taking d4 damage. Closed wooden doors west and south with an open arch east.

2 A guard room lit by a torch on the west wall. A lone guard is sitting at the table drinking. He's facing out to watch the doors. He will investigate any loud noises in room 1 or 4.

Zaagon, HMF 1HD 2HP AC9, +2 STR, Club d4+2

3 Common room lit by a low burning fireplace on the west wall. Three sets of table and chairs are spread out in the room. Two guards sit at a table talking drinking and eating. Closed wooden door south.

Aluana, HMF 1HD 2HP AC9, Club d4

Olavi, HMF 1HD 2HP AC9, Club d4

4 Barracks. Seven simple beds fill the room, with little room between them. A fire place with low embers in the southern wall. A key to the door in room 2 is on the mantle and is easily found. Three men are sleeping in the beds, determine randomly, and will only wake if there's loud noises.

Simon HMF 1HD 2HP AC9, Club d4

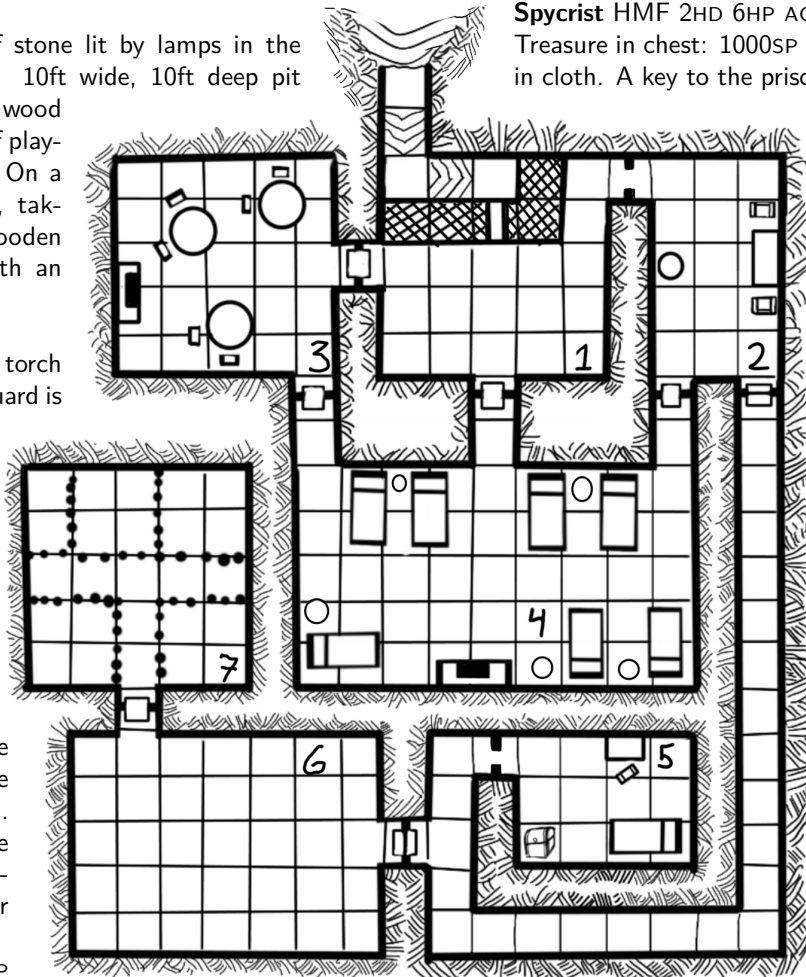
Vortiel HMF 1HD 5HP AC9, Club d4

Ismo HMT 1HD 1HP AC9, Dagger d4

5 Chief's bedroom, It's well furnished and comfortable. An oil lamp burns on a table, no extra oil, with a large bed and a chest at its foot. The leader is here with a 50/50 chance of being either asleep or sitting at his desk. The chest has a spring-loaded trap the does d2 damage. The key is hidden in the mattress and requires a specific search of the bed to find.

Spycrist HMF 2HD 6HP AC9, Long sword d8

Treasure in chest: 1000SP and 250GP wrapped tightly in cloth. A key to the prison cells. A short sword +1, Dagger +1.



6 Storeroom lit by two low burning torches on the north and south wall. Crates and barrels of very basic supplies, food clothing home goods etc... but no treasure. The key for room 2 will also open the locked wooden eastern door. Two guards are stationed at the door north. They are bored and inattentive as they chat.

Meskenit HMF 1HD 5HP AC9, Club d4

Ensio HMF 1HD 4HP AC9, Club d4

7 Jail cells made of crude iron bars, no lights in the room. All but one are empty and unlocked. The cell in the north-east, which

is locked, contains a human male prisoner who will be woken by any light. The cell key is in the chest in room five. Bars in the adjoining cell can be bent if the PCs get stuck by the lock.

Ryba, the prisoner is a fighter from the local town who went missing. He was working for the city guard and will aid the party if freed and treated well.

16 STR 13 INT 15 WIS 16 DEX 14 CON 10 CHA 🐉

Spiritus County

by Anonymous

This adventure is designed for ACKS, but should work for any B/X based system.

"They're All Dead, THEY'RE ALL DEAD! By my hand or not. I will not let them pass into Nothingness. I REMEMBER."

—Count Braegen the Damned

Deep in the hinterlands of what was once the empire, there lays a county of the damned. Few can tell you much about it. The Sages tell of the last survivors of Haleton County, a betrayal of the Count Eld. He was not betrayed by his court, his friends, the Mage Saiwola and the Knight Braegen. Rather Count Eld was betrayed by Saiwola's apprentice, an aspiring mage by the name Fleume. Fleume had created something vile. An artifact known as the Crown of Muth.

Over time Haleton County was forgotten except for wild stories of ghosts and the damned. When finally men were sent years later to investigate they confirmed that everyone in the county had died and even worse had risen as spirits. The spirits of the victims of Haleton County seemed tired but reasonable. They would talk, if approached gently on the outskirts. They knew little of what had happened, but slowly the story became known.

Count Eld had been betrayed, then everyone died and then everyone was brought back. The spirits didn't know how. So they continued as they did, farming barren fields, living in the ruins of their homes. Slowly the transformed villages were explored, the villages of Heorte, Lungen and Gutte were explored. The villages looked normal, if abandoned, except for being populated by these spirits. In the town of Haleton garrisons of ghostly guards preventing further exploration. Overtime Haleton and Haleton county became known as Gastton and the county known as Spiritus County.

Some heroes had pushed in further, past Gutten into Gastton. Past Gastton into the Count's Keep which was even then being called Spiritus Keep. Only one thief by the name of Lukken has ever returned. He spoke of the Ghostly Knight who brooded in his keep. Leaving only to hunt down anyone who intruded in the keep. Finally, the mages intervened. Through divinations, the stories of how Fleume had betrayed his master and the count were discovered, along with the story of how Count Eld had relied on his friends, the Mage Saiwola and the Knight Braegen, to save his people, and how they had failed. In the end only Braegen remained, now the Count of the Dead.

You have decided to risk the perils of Spiritus County, lured in by rumors of gold and magical artifacts. Can you lay this county to rest, or will you join their ranks like all the rest?

Spiritus County

Ruler: Count Braegen the Damned

Realm Population: roughly 1000 ghosts and a few dozen other undead.

Area: Spiritus County roughly covers 1000 Square Miles or roughly 30 six-mile hexes.

Villages of Spiritus in order of size:

Sken The first small village that technically belongs to Spiritus county but has since been absorbed into its neighbors. Sken is a small village, little more than a collection of 40ish families, mostly farmers making a living in the last good land before Spiritus county.

Wizard's Tower Not a village technically, but a collection of shanties and houses around a singular tower. The site of such powerful necromancy has brought interested mages for decades and decades now, many of whom have funded various expeditions into the county. Currently only a few junior mages live in the tower and, the rest of the village around the base of the tower is mostly lackeys, hirelings or worse.

Heorte The first proper village in the County. Here the ghostly villagers gather after long days in the fields, Heorte's granaries holding their hard labour, a condensed form of spirit from the land. The last living Tavern does brisk business as the spirits mostly ignore them. A few last brave men gather here looking for henchwork.

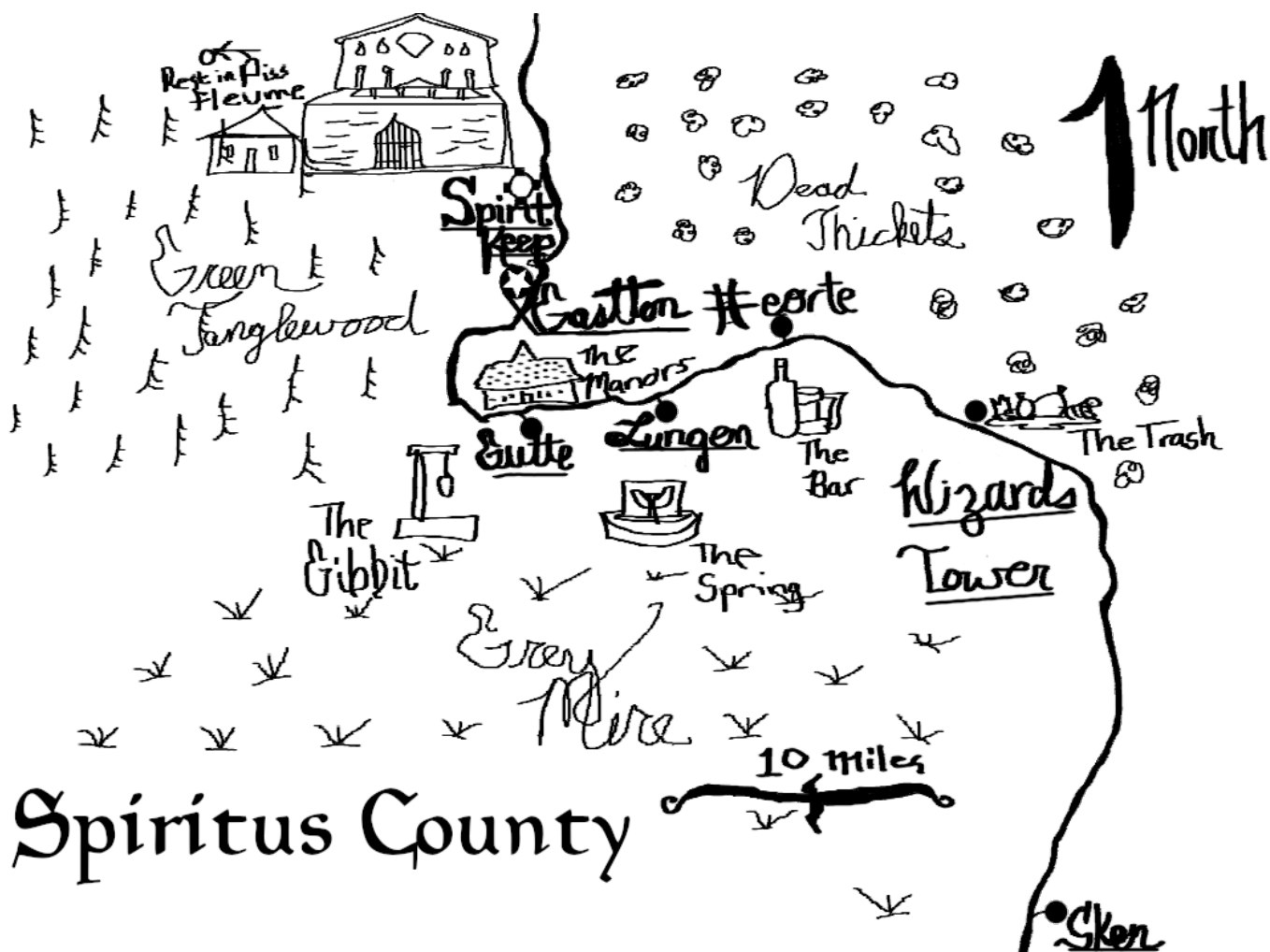
Lungen The second village in the county, home to natural springs and pastures. What's left of houses and graveyards dominate the town as the mossy meadows are now empty of animals.

Guute The larger third village is dominated by what had once been Peat Cutters. Here ghosts still burn the brown soil filling the sky with dark smoke as they watch out the windows of abandoned home. Patrols from the Village of Gastton are regular here, and they have no tolerance for the living.

Gastton is the small town that's the biggest settlement in Spiritus county. Here the rotten remains of once huge manors, inns and taverns dominate. Low streets where once pin makers and blacksmiths worked are now abandoned as the 'High Society' of Gastton press the masses into endless parties and gatherings in the Manors and Inns. Very few spirits and other undead still haunt the streets except for the patrols from the Spiritus Keep.

Spirit Keep dominates the hillside to the north of Gastton. Frequent patrols of Guard follow the road from the keep to Gastton. The keep itself is not reported to be terribly noteworthy. The walls are well worked stone and earthen fill, but the walls themselves stand about 10' tall and the keep is barely 3 storeys tall in a simple cube style. Here the barracks for the guard sits beside the courtyard and Count Braegen himself rules the keep.

In addition to the somewhat linear layout of the towns, there are two basic sets of interest. Each village in Spiritus county have some fixed NPCs and there are randomized tools that wise parties would try to take advantage of in their quest to defeat Braegen.



The Set-up

While no party has successfully broken the Curse of Spiritus county more than a few have tried. There are a handful of magical weapons, rings, and armor that are exceptionally powerful, and their location is randomized for each play through. The items are:

Ring of Negative Level Drain Immunity Gives Immunity to undead's level drain abilities.

Mace of Undead Bane +1 Mace, +3 Mace vs undead.

Shield of Faith +2 Shield that also gives +2 to saves vs Reaction Rolls and +2 to saves vs sight based attacks.

Diamond Diadem As a Scarab of Protection with only 6 charges (one diamond for each one, which burn with use).

Fleume's Spellbook Detailing his betrayal of Count Eld and the creation/properties of the Crown of Muth. The main property is that the Crown of Muth will reanimate spirits nearby to serve the wearer of the crown. The crown also links the wearer's hit points to the number of serving spirits.

Each item should be rolled for to determine location and then placed in the relevant town in a somewhat hidden manner.

You can use the table below to determine the locations randomly. If the same location is rolled twice, the last item rolled is placed there and the original is just discarded and not used, the only exception being Fleume's Spellbook which should always be outside the Keep.

- 1 Wizards Tower (Hidden in a lab or discard bin pending research)
 - 2 Heorte (Hidden in the backroom of the Bar)
 - 3 Lungen (Hidden in a natural spring around town)
 - 4 Guute (Hidden in an unmarked grave, outside of town, near the village gibbet)
 - 5 Gastton (Hidden in the attic of the biggest Manor home)
 - 6 Roll twice and pick one.
- # Spirit Keep (The Location of Fleume's Spellbook, hidden by a body on the ground in the entrance yard to the keep).

In addition to this, if the players need a hook to bring in the party, here are two options. Firstly, the local Duke's messengers are begging for help (and promising large rewards) for anyone who can dispel the Curse of Spiritus county. The Ghost of Saiwola is also searching for help. As a ghost she will do little to harm the PCs, preferring to simply move onto other prospects of help if the PCs seem unlikely to go. An enterprising mage may use her to cast a free Augury spell

once per week as long as they are bound to help her and are traveling towards Gastton.

Spirits of Spiritus County

The Spirits of Spiritus County are different than most of other ghosts, having been formed through the actions of the Crown of Muth instead of other necromancy. In appearance they are the same as in the last days of their life. If they died violently, they show the wounds that killed them. Their bodies naturally glow, giving about as much light as a candle. While appearing human they can interact with physical items (such as tools).

They cannot drain levels or possess the living. They have the usual undead immunities (Immune to Charms, Sleep, Hold, Gas and Poison), and can turn into mist at will (similar to the effects of a potion of gaseous form). They take no damage from ordinary weaponry, but magical weaponry deals damage normally. All of the Spirits are two hit dice undead.

A little Sken in the game.

Sken is little more than a cluster of homes around a crossroads, or what had been a crossroads. Right now only the road North and South seems used, the crossroad being limited to little more than a street. Still, it has the minimum you would expect, an inn and stable, a farrier and cooper, A moneylender and a shingled store make up the four corners of the crossing. The guards posted at the moneylender's and even the Guardsman at the inn all look out of place in the sleepy town.

Sken is more of a starting off point for the adventure. There are three main points of interest in the town. The moneylender Nosu keeps half a dozen bodyguards to protect his interests. If asked, he'll explain that his business is in financing, but he does most of his work with the wizards in the Wizards Tower where, he helps provide funding as needed and liquidity when they need to raise funds or sell off items. Nosu is a Level 6 Venturer and all of his Guardsmen are level 4 Veteran Guards. While Nosu doesn't personally fund expeditions, he can help set up loans if the party wants to provide collateral. He asks for magical items worth roughly 50% more than the value of the loan 'To be held until such a time as the loan is paid'. Nosu has a keen eye for value and if the party leave him an exceptional item or allow Nosu to hold a value in excess of 10,000GP over what they owe him, Nosu will simply leave town with the collateral. Nosu has a reputation that he is not to be trusted, although a thorough investigation will reveal that most of the cases are simply that Nosu held people to the negotiated conditions of their loan.

A senior Guard Hond and his two underlings (Thuma and Thinga) work in town. Sken has become a gateway to the cursed county and Hond's job is to keep riff-raff and the unprepared out. He serves as a sort of Sheriff for the village (with Thuma and Thinga as his Deputies), keeping law and order. He can authorize people to go into the county, although that is not required.

Lastly, the 'Frog and Ferrier' Inn is a simple place built of aged oak with fresh sawdust on the floor. While the other businesses in town often suffer from the through traffic (except the moneylender), it's largely to the Frog and Ferrier's benefit. Despite being an Inn in the middle of nowhere they are surprisingly well stocked in both rooms, baths and food. Two of the rooms are permanently taken by Hond and his deputies (who do most of their business at the bar or in town).

If the PCs haven't encountered the ghost of Saiwola at this point, they will in Sken. Saiwola is looking to get people to defeat Braegen to free her love to move onto the afterlife.

Saiwola's Ghost (as two HD undead)

Distinguishing Trait: An elven ghost with long hair and a burnt section along the right side of her head.

Need: The destruction of the Crown of Muth and the release of the Spirits of Spiritus County.

Agenda/Assets: Saiwola does her best to find brave adventurers to defeat Count Braegen

The Wizard's Tower

While Sken is the launching point into Spiritus county, the first real settlement inside the county is the wizard's tower. While initially intended to be a solitary outpost by a handful of wizards, a shanty town has slowly emerged around it, populated by a variety of henchmen mostly of the unsavoury sort. The tower itself is an odd construction of stone, wood and primitive cement, giving it the appearance largely of a stump, the top of the tower is flat and crenellated.

Erected about 125 years ago, the original wizards who commissioned the tower have passed on and their apprentices and followers have inherited the tower. Currently there are only three Wizards at residence. The area around the tower is arranged in a loop around the tower with a nameless dive bar, a handful of hack-shops or pawn stores that do some lazy business with rarely more than 100GP to their name. There is a dirty throng of for-hire men with little to no scruples as long as the coin flows (hiring out as Level 2 Thieves who are likely to betray the party unless terrified of them). There are a few notable figures who frequent this shanty town.

Master Windu (level 6 human mage)

Distinguishing Trait: A strange tall dark man of a mage.

While his robes are dark, his most recognizable feature is his skin which is mottled grey with vivid reddish rings and spots spread across it. If asked about the skin he will explain that while unsightly, it's the result of a curse and not something you have to worry about. Master Windu has been observed casting spells of the third degree and has been observed to fly unaided as a testament to his power.

Need: Master Windu's primary interest in Spiritus county is the unique ecology of the undead in the County. He is interested in the artifact that created it, but he is more

interested in the 'condensed spirit' that the farmers harvest and will pay handsomely for every mote of it.

Agenda/Assets: Master Windu is mostly interested in his own research, the Crown of Muth is not terribly important to him, but he sees the unique type of ghosts and the condensed spirit as a path to power for him. He forces the lesser wizard Erthe to handle the day-to-day business of their town.

Master Erthe (level 5 human mage)

Distinguishing Trait: A fat, vigorous man with pale and sweaty skin. He is most noted for his ability to cast continual light and customized wizard locks (both of which he sells).

Need: Magical Items and knowledge of all kinds.

Agenda/Assets: Master Erthe slightly resents Master Windu for forcing the day to day running of the shanty town on him, but he has used his position to enrich himself. While Erthe is not a secretary many treat him as such. His inclination to commerce makes him the only source of magical weapons and armor for sale (something which makes him paranoid) even if it does make him wealthy. Master Erthe will have a random assortment 1d6 of +1 armor and weapons picked randomly and a chance (GM's choice) of a more powerful item priced 50% over the market rate.

Madam Waeter (level 2 human mage)

Distinguishing Trait: An attractive red head, older but still sultry.

Need: Resources, Mistress Waeter is mostly concerned with her personal enrichment, and she whores out a handful of fat and ugly girls to bring in steady income.

Agenda/Assets: Madam Waeter was actually a wizard's apprentice at one point but failed out. The Wizard's tower, despite being an incredibly crappy place to live, has been frequented by adventurers and more than a few have been targeted by Madam Waeter and her Charms. She is able to cast Charm person and often does so in the distance before taking advantage of the target's friendly state. Madam Waeter rarely does more than con adventurers out of money or valuable magical items, always opting to run from combat but if pressed, she does have a poisoned dagger that will incapacitate in a few seconds if the skin is broken and slowly kill if untreated in a few hours.

Luek / Lurk (level 5 human thief)

Distinguishing Trait: Tall, bald, and an unflattering nickname.

Need: Luek has managed to bring the thieves and ne'er-dowells of the Wizards Tower under his thumb. He hires out up to level 4 Thieving henchmen, taking 10% of their fee for himself.

Agenda/Assets: Luek's nickname Lurk speaks to his skill as a caser, fence, strong arm, waylayer and general scoundrel. Trained as both a thief and a fighter, although not formally an assassin, he is classed as such.

Heorte and Lungen

The next two villages are fully in the county and are populated almost entirely by the undead. Unlike most undead, these beings seem to live regular ordinary lives that mirror the lives they had in life. They are not particularly aggressive and treat most of the living as inconvenient trespassers instead of enemies to attack. They know that they are dead and 'work' by living their lives as they were. This generates a sort of spirit dust or 'Condensed Spirit' that is useful for magic.

The two villages are roughly 6 miles or a three hours' walk apart. Most of the villagers don't travel and instead live a rough replay of their last days before death. Farmers farm, merchants stand in stores, and so on. They will converse if approached respectfully but most have little understanding of what they are or how they came to be. The only spot of the living is a bar in Heorte, which has been sanctified and warded against the dead. It's currently manned by the resident drunk and slightly mad priest who will heal for tips and serve overpriced drinks. It's mostly empty these days except for a hidden back room behind a store room in the back of the bar. One of the random items can be found there.

The Priest Peost (level 6 human priest)

Distinguishing Trait: Mad, nameless.

Need: The priest is the sole survivor of a previous attempt and in penance he has opened this bar. He is one of the holders of a magic item and is looking for a worthy soul to take it over.

Agenda/Assets: A warded bar, a magic item, a quest to give.

The Burgomeister Berrs (as two HD undead)

Distinguishing Trait: Dead, Grainmaster.

Need: The Burgomeister oversees the Granaries of Heorte and Lungen and acts as an impromptu mayor of the two villages. He is often seen at either granary or travelling between the two villages. The two granaries in death hold the 'Condensed Spirit' which appears to be the same misty, slightly glowing soul stuff the same that the villagers and ghosts of Spiritus are made of. The breath has a few properties, namely that it 'feeds, heals and restores' injured and incapacitated undead, second that it is a potent substance for the creation of magical items related to the undead.

Agenda/Assets: Burgomeister Berr is mostly concerned with protecting the breath against thieves. The number one thief being members of the wizards tower and any obvious magical users. He will personally stand guard and if needed will call Guards to defend the granaries.

Gutte and Gastton

Guute and Gastton complete the path to Spiritus Keep in the form of a large village and small town respectively. Gastton contained most of the coin in the county, including lending houses that worked with both the baron and farmers to ensure a steady supply of coin in the realm. The spirits in this village and town spend their unlives partying in grand manors or common inns or in between, rarely taking to the streets, relying on frequent patrols of the guard to keep the living out.

Headcutter Cyttan (as two HD undead)

Distinguishing Trait: Friendly, Hard-working.

Need: Cyttan and his Peat Cutters, unlike most of the undead in the county, have actual quotas, as the peat that the dead burn in Gastton is real normal peat. His work is made difficult by the lack of his head. Cyttan is a headless ghost and won't report the living to the guard on account of needing their help. He knows that there are two locations where his head likely is, an unmarked grave just outside the town of Gutte, or a merchant's attic in Gastton. He will pay for the return of his head.

Agenda/Assets: Cyttan doesn't have much but does have a few trinkets he has found and about 2000GP in a mix of gold and silver that he keeps in a hidden hole. He will gladly hand it over for the return of his head.

Note: If your players are thick and haven't understood that there are hidden tools to use, Cyttan can be an excellent way to give them an item they missed earlier on. There's a 50-50 chance his head is in either location described, but each should have its own randomly determined item. Cyttan can also mention other locations of the Randomizer items to help the PC's if needed.

Patrol Boss Wearidan (as two HD undead)

Distinguishing Trait: Hateful.

Need: Wearidan needs to drive the living from the land, he feels it in his ghost mist. Whether he was a good or bad man in life doesn't concern him, he's become a right bastard in death. His aim is to kill and drive off the living. If he feels he doesn't have enough troops, he will collect reinforcements or press ordinary villagers into a mob to help him. He relies on reports from villagers to guide him and left to his own devices will simply patrol the streets of Gastton in a large loop.

Agenda/Assets: A magic cudgel and the will to use it.

Garrison Boss Joly (as two HD undead)

Distinguishing Trait: Laughter

Need: Joly much as in life, desires only wealth. Appearing like an overstuffed sausage in a guardsman's uniform, he's the last vestige of civil government in town. If the living are brought before him, he'll take the 'living tax' or about 500GP worth of goods (or for parties of

over a dozen, 1000GP) before having his men, bind and truss the adventurers and delivering them to the wizards tower.

Agenda/Assets: A warded ring that gives +1 protection but is also paired to a chest as the only means to destroy or unlock it. Inside the large ghostly iron bound chest is about 7000GP in mostly gold, a +1 sword, three potions of healing and a full potion of invisibility.

Theof and Morthor (as 8HD Invisible Stalker with Undead Type and 6HD Ghost)

Distinguishing Trait: Never leave each other's sides, always together.

Need: Theof and Morthor were not good people in life and have spent much of their death tormenting the living. They mostly desire riches despite their unsavory business. They will fight first and talk second but if sufficiently beat or cowed they can provide valuable intel. They want one of the randomized items and will guide the PCs to their locations in return for being given one of the items at the end. Theof and Morthor are some of the only undead that walk the streets of Gastton that are not guards.

Agenda/Assets: Each other first and foremost. They do desire a Randomizer item but aren't above lying, cheating, stealing or murdering the party if they think it's feasible or if the party shows too much trust in them.

Lost Soul Gesolod (as four HD Wraith)

Distinguishing Trait: A Wandering Wraith.

Need: To torment the living. While Gesolod had originally been an inhabitant of Spiritus, it's unknown if they were living or dead during Eld's reign. Now Gesolod is a wandering, faceless, hooded wraith in all ways except they have lost the ability to raise their victims as wraiths. Gesolod wanders most commonly to the South or West of Gastton.

Agenda/Assets: A hate of the living and the willingness to drain levels. Gesolod has no special powers over the native ghosts of Spiritus and instead wanders to the lands along the border in the SW looking for souls to consume.

An Intruder Wreah (as 9 HD Vampire or 7 HD Vampire for followers)

Distinguishing Trait: A Vampire.

Need: Wreah wants to expand its power and convert more living, to take advantage of the abundant food of Spiritus. While the spirits often refer to Wreah as an Intruder, an outsider, not one of them, they will do nothing to attack or interfere with them. Wreah can occasionally be seen walking from the wizards tower to Gastton where they trade.

Agenda/Assets: Reasoned and articulate Wreah desires more thralls, more magical texts, more weapons and armor. Anything that will increase their power. They will trade

if they do not think they can beat you (and Wreah is very conservative in their estimates preferring planning and preparation to the chaos of combat), avoid you if they find you uninteresting and do their utmost to keep the site of their grave a secret.

Spiritus Keep

The keep is relatively small as it only belonged to a border count. A square keep of about 30' x 30' sits behind a walled courtyard of about the same size. On the outside of the keep a short distance from the wall is a low barracks sized for about 40 men to bunk comfortably. The wall is about 10 feet tall and has only a single gate, the walls are stone and filled with earth. The keep is three stories with personal quarters at the top, a receiving hall on the second floor and a long hallway entrance, complete with archer's holes, murder holes, inner gates, etc.

Outside the keep, the barracks generally has about 30 guards nearby. They patrol the walls, guard the gates, spread out in slow patrols some along the road to Gastton and others circling the keep. On the opposite side from the barracks, a dead body can be found in a natural ditch outside the walls. This body is Fleume, and if magically forced in some way (speak with dead, etc) will have complete knowledge of how all this came to pass. Once you enter the keep walls, the courtyard is bare with the signs of what was once a garden but is now dead and barren. Inside the keep, the first floor is empty (and the spirits won't retreat inside the keep to defend it). On the second floor, Count Braegen broods and the remains of the count's treasure can be found in his quarters on the third floor.

Count Braegen broods on the second floor and will execute any living creature that enters the keep. He will normally wait for them on the 2nd floor, affecting a casual air but already committed to their destruction.

Count Braegen (as ten HD wight)

Distinguishing Trait: Last (un)Living member of the Count's Party.

Need: Braegen is a material undead who appears as he did in life. He wears his heavy armor, wields his weapon (a shield and longsword) and the crown of Muth. His goal is to maintain the current status of the county, preventing the dead from moving on and maintaining them as part of his 'fiefdom'. The ghostly undead of Spiritus obey Braegen immediately, although he rarely asks much of them.

Agenda/Assets: Braegen wears the crown of Muth, which connects him to every undead in Spiritus. While wearing the crown, Braegen has 1HP for every ghostly person in the county which gives him roughly 1000HP. Braegen can be weakened by killing every ghostly citizen of Spiritus county (which will draw Braegen's ire and lure him out of the keep to attempt a surprise attack) or by severing the connection to the Crown to Muth, which would require a remove curse or dispel

magic spell. Dispel Magic will deactivate the crown for 1 min per caster level and remove curse will remove it for 1 hour per level. If the crown has been removed from Braegen, one last remove curse will destroy the unattended crown. The Crown of Muth appears to be an elaborate lead coronet or ring shaped crown that is studded with various child sized teeth.

If Count Braegen's connection to the Crown is dispelled, or his citizens obviously under attack to weaken him, Braegen will retreat from the keep aiming to prevent the crown from being destroyed. If Braegen is Reduced to 40HP or less during combat, he will attempt to retreat. If Braegen successfully retreats, he will attempt to ambush the party, trying to find their weakest time to strike. If he cannot ambush the party, he will start patrolling the borders of Spiritus County and will always encounter them if they try to leave and he has not been destroyed. Braegen will fight to the death in the second fight.

Treat Braegen as a 10HD Wight with the ability to channel his Level Draining Touch through his weapon. Due to the connection with the Crown of Muth, Braegen has 1 hit point for every undead spirit in Spiritus county. That connection can be interrupted temporarily with dispel magic or remove curse, although the crown itself can only be destroyed (with remove curse) after it has been removed from Braegen's possession.

Braegen – 10 HD Wight

% In Lair: 100%

Dungeon Enc: Single, Unique (1)

Wilderness Enc: Single, Unique (1)

Alignment: Lawful

Movement: 90' (30')

Armor Class: 7

Hit Dice: 10** (maxed) 80 hit points or 1000 hit point if connected to the Crown of Muth.

Attacks: 1 Weapon or 1 Touch

Damage: 1d8+3 Weapon and Touch Energy drain

Save: F10

Morale: +4

Treasure Type: Unique

XP: 3000

Braegen's treasure should be assigned by hand but should be roughly equivalent to Q and N together (similar to a 10HD dragon). Braegen without the crown naturally has 80HP, and if the crown is disrupted (even temporarily) he uses his own hit points during that time. Braegen will retreat and regroup at 40 hit points to heal using condensed spirit and plan to ambush the PCs, or attack them if they try to leave the county.

Once Braegen is defeated, the PCs must decide what to do with the crown. While undead normally can be said to be suffering, the undead of Spiritus County and the crown are unique. Living can use the crown (and gain the benefit of the command of the spirits, and shared hit points) at the cost of 'deathly visage' and a permanent evil aura. Undead who use the crown appear merely as normal undead.

If the PCs have reached or are about to reach level 9, Halleton County/Spiritus county would make a good 'starter fief' for players easing into the leadership side of the game. The county can be made a fief either of the living or the dead (dependent on the destruction of the crown of Muth) but enjoys a flat 10% decrease in costs construction, festivals and experts for up to 10 years as it rebuilds. If intended for more long term play, a dungeon that had been cleared during the times of Count Eld (and repopulated during the time of Count Braegen) would be a great addition under the Keep itself. 🗡️

Modern Mythology by Albatrossus

The Anglosphere is an orphan of cosmology. What gods and devils it held before in its lands Welsh to Pictish are missing or mere fragments of memory. Their mythology razed with every wave of conquest. The sedentary aboriginals were conquered by the Indo-Europeans of various waves, then they in turn were conquered by Celts, then the Romans, the Vikings, the Normans at last. Just as many times their pantheons were scattered and forgotten.

Tolkien felt a phantom pain in this erasure. Where all the great peoples he studied had folk tales of fey or divine ancestors before Christ, his own Britons had forgotten their base tales. No core ethnic continuity was to be found in his composite people, no remaining heroic examples of good behavior and honorable bearing "explicitly" of men like him. Thus he was set to fever of purpose and wrote *The Silmarillion*, the languages of Elves and Dwarves, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* all. He made a great Legendarium to fill the spiritual hole history had left in England.

I need not tell you how well he succeeded. The world now "dreams" in faux renaissance. As English is the international *lingua franca*, LOTR and its many derivatives have become the universal symbols of fiction. In its complete success it has hilariously become as generic as possible. Like a cheeseburger, though definitely European in origin, of indeterminate pedigree. While a foundation was laid firmly, the spiritual hole of English mythology persisted. Until 1988ish.

I posit that the expansive worldbuilding initially based off English great works, the murky details and recurring recontextualization of established facts makes *Warhammer 40,000* the only living mythology in the modern era. Where all other religions and mythologies are inert, products of now commercialized and digitized peoples, 40k was born in such and is now ablaze with the passions of the English man. The lessons in the tales told are "growing", relevant, and in the modern vernacular.

Only the animisms of the East have any "motion" to them, and only on the personal level. The Christian order is inert or in decay, the near East has baked itself as pottery in the image of its Ottoman peak, and all else is a museum piece waiting to be embalmed. Nothing continues onward, everything has merely happened and gets commented on. 40k happened, is happening, and will continue to happen in a manner the common man may feasibly influence. The last

time anyone must have felt this specific mix of emotions was the damn marches with Cyrus the Great kicking the city gates down on behalf of his specific deities. Living gods with living wills and living representatives.

The fervor and zealotry that can be unabashed in 40k now begins to seep into reality. The many jokes in engineering and maintenance about machine spirits are increasing in number. The want for an Imperium just as well, ending democracy. It feels like an echo of the effect *Stranger in a Strange Land* had on the hippie movement. Good people are getting antsy for double-headed eagles. Good people want to "live" for an Emperor, rather than "die" for any shit cause. Trump unintentionally tapped into this in 2016; now imagine if a national organization purposely did the same. We're the lore buffs on a fault-line that may trigger a cultural tsunami.

Paying homage to a secular egregore Caesar of Caesars, paired with worship of the holy King of Kings, would be quite a cultural combo. A sort of modern succession of the Doctrine of the Two Swords. Christ in our heart, an imperial filigreed rifle in hand. 🗡️



Christian Imperium Soldier by Albatrossus

