

# ***USR Sword & Sorcery***

Rules Lite Role Playing for Fantastic Pulp Fantasy Adventures



Made using Unbelievably Simple Roleplaying by Scott Malthouse  
Written by Jay Murphy

# USR Sword & Sorcery

Written by Jay Murphy 2012, 2016  
copyright Vanishing Tower Press

Contributing Artists: David Lewis Johnson, Earl Geier, Joyce Maureira,  
Luigi Castellani, and Miguel Santos

**(U)nbelievably (S)imple (R)oleplaying is copyright Scott Malthouse and Trollish Delver Games**





## USR Sword & Sorcery Introduction:

Herein lies a heroic role playing game set firmly in the Sword & Sorcery genre. Your player's adventures take place in a prehistoric world that predates ours by millions of years. It is a land of humid steaming jungles, vast untamed wildernesses, danger-filled swamp lands, and hot dry deserts. All manner of massive man eating beasts roam the unexplored regions of your world and beyond. In this harsh world are sprawling cities teeming with merchants, tradesmen, farmers and hunters. Dotted around the untamed regions are ancient ruins lying untouched.

The following is a rules hack of Scott Malthouse's Unbelievably Simple Roleplaying system. His basic text has been changed and modified. For the USR rules as written by the author you will need to download his free set.

## From the USR Creator:

USR is an easy game to learn but there are optional rules throughout if you fancy making it a bit more advanced. Feel free to add your own rules or change current ones to match your preferences. The most important thing is that you and your group have fun with it. In the future I will be releasing a number of role-playing games based on the USR system, from pulp action to time-traveling sci-fi, so stay tuned!

I really hope you enjoy this system and have a lot of fun with it. It's always been a dream of mine to get a role-playing system published and put out there for everyone to play."

-Scott Malthouse – February 2012.



**What the heck is a Crypt Keeper?** A Crypt Keeper (CK), is the Game Master, the game's referee. The job of the referee is in controlling the people and enemies the players come across. The Crypt Keeper also creates the adventure and the world the players inhabit. Essentially the CK is god, but don't let it get to your head.

The Crypt Keeper, most of all, is responsible for invoking the mood and flavor of classic Sword & Sorcery adventures this rules hack attempts to emulate. These are the stories and adventures as found in the books written by Robert E Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Fritz Lieber, and Lin Carter. Also known as pulp fantasy, these are by no means the only writers of fantastic fiction, but their stories exemplify some of the best tropes found in the milieu. As USR is a rules-lite system the game's referee is expected to bring a firm vision of the campaign world they intend to run and much, if not all, the world building will fall directly on the dry, withered shoulders of the Keeper. But despair not, you are never alone. Don't hesitate to stand on the shoulders of giants. The original stories are a wondrous springboard to your own imagination!

**What in the World is Sword & Sorcery?** At its core it is a subgenre of fantasy generally characterized by sword-wielding heroes engaged in exciting and violent conflicts. An element of romance is often present, as is an element of magic and the supernatural. The difference between the Sword & Sorcery genre and say Epic Fantasy is the heroes, the stars of the story, are not necessarily heroic. The quintessential S&S protagonist is often someone who is morally ambiguous and self-serving. The adventures, while thrilling and fantastic, focus mainly on the personal struggles and conflicts immediate to the protagonists.

The main characters are more than likely to be human, or at least the campaign world is extremely human-centric. Monsters and nonhuman races do exist, but are rare and would be considered alien and unsettling. Weird monsters and strange beings are usually referred to as "degenerate", as something that has left the natural evolutionary course of the world. An accident of time which causes revulsion of the world's current inhabitants. Our human hero is often physically powerful and solves problems with a terrible, swift sword. While there is plenty of character customization available to the players with the following rules, USR Sword & Sorcery works best when the player knows why his character fights, and what they are they fighting for, even in just the moment.

As far as "Sorcery" is concerned, while it makes up the second half of the genre title, magic is very powerful but limited to few practitioners who must pay a horrible price to harness this rare art. Human sacrifice and lengthy ritual are usually required to conjure magic and therefore the traveling wizard is a rarity. Most likely the wielder of magic has either found themselves in a position of power in the service of an unscrupulous lord or plots and schemes in the dark corners of the world.

Key to the excitement of a S&S tale is in fast paced action on a personal scale in exotic locations compounded by elements of the supernatural. USR Sword & Sorcery attempts to enforce these genre tropes by limiting player characters to human stock without the ability to cast magic, in the beginning. In the end, though, it is up to the Crypt Keeper to decide what their campaign world will look like. It will be the Crypt Keeper who has to create the horrific adversaries and rare talismans of wonder for the PC's to battle and quest for!

**Creating your Character:** Since this setting is specific to the Sword & Sorcery literary genre characters will play human adventurers. Though there are no particular restrictions on a character learning or using magic no new character starts the game with magic. The basic (U)nbelievably (S)imple (R)oleplaying mechanics for character creation provide a fast method of generation and should appear relatively straight forward for those familiar with role playing games. *USR Sword & Sorcery* doesn't deviate from the basic rules much, only adding some color with character background tables. This means new PC's can be created in five to ten minutes and after buying some equipment the session should be good to go in twenty minutes!

Your new player character is first defined by four initial attributes; *Action*, *Wits*, *Ego*, and *Hits*.

**Action:** This attribute determines how well-versed in combat the character is as well as how quick and dexterous they are.

**Wits:** This attribute determines how intelligent and perceptive the character is. It is also used when a character attempts to study and learn magic.

**Ego:** This attribute determines the character's mental stamina and force of will. A high Ego means the character is a good leader and able to withstand the horrors of the supernatural. Ego is also used when casting and wielding magic.

**Hits:** This determines how much punishment a character can take before he dies or is knocked unconscious. Hits are reduced when a character is hurt and can return to its initial score when the character heals.

After you've jotted each of these attributes down you're going to need to assign dice to them. Each attribute apart from Hits can have one (and just one) type of die assigned to it from the following selection: D6, D8 and D10. Your Hits score is derived by rolling your Action and Wits dice, the total being the final Hits attribute score. If the player rolls less than 5 than starting Hits are 5.

Starting character age is determined randomly as well by rolling two 8 sided die and adding 16 (2D8+16).



**Example:** Glenn decides that his character 'Dor Stryker' is going to be more brawn than brains, so assigns his attributes thusly:

**Action:** d10

**Wits:** d8

**Ego:** d6

**Hits:** 9 (from rolling his Action and Wits die and totaling)

A random roll on the following background table will give you a common background found in *Sword and Sorcery* tales. A second roll is made on the appropriate Background Detail Table which provides another layer of color and inspiration.

## SWORD & SORCERY BACKGROUND TABLE

**01-20 Warrior**

**21-30 Merchant**

**31-45 Sailor**

**46-60 Hunter**

**61-65 Farmer**

**66-70 Slave**

**71-75 Noble**

**76-85 Thief**

**86-90 Beggar (specify Afflictions)**

**91-00 Craftsman (specify Craft)**

Players are then encouraged to embellish the details generated. This is an opportunity to create complications and plot hooks when creating the first adventure. The CK will have to facilitate the final product, but keep in mind, the players are looking to establish the reason they are all together adventuring!

# BACKGROUND DETAIL TABLE

## BEGGAR

1. Temple
2. Spy
3. Blackmail
4. Tout
5. Catacombs
6. Corpse Trader
7. Victim
8. Kidnapper
9. City Knowledge
10. Free Choice

## CRAFTPERSON

1. City Knowledge
2. Enemy Merchant
3. Legacy
4. Guild Debt
5. Embarrassing Witness
6. Dexterity
7. Black Sheep
8. Murder
9. Poverty
10. Free Choice

## HUNTER

1. Area Knowledge
2. Animal Knowledge
3. Beast's Curse
4. Hated by Noble
5. Treasure Knowledge
6. Murder Witness
7. Resilient
8. Animal Companion
9. Hunting Site
10. Free Choice

## MERCHANT

1. Bad Associate
2. Claim
3. Antiquarian
4. Slave Merchant
5. Angered King
6. Caravaneer
7. Ransomed
8. War
9. Taxes
10. Free Choice

## MINOR NOBLE

1. Duelist
2. Bracelet
3. Royal Court
4. Don Juan
5. Ancestral Weapon
6. Mercenary
7. Domain Seized
8. Rescuer
9. Gambling Father
10. Free Choice

## PEASANT FARMER

1. Tax Collector
2. Peasant Revolt
3. Peasant Defender
4. Mercenaries
5. No Money
6. Looted
7. Very Healthy
8. Lord's Right
9. Away
10. Free Choice

## SAILOR

1. Pirate
2. Ports Knowledge
3. Corsair
4. Mutilated
5. Watch
6. Galley Slave
7. Treasure Island
8. Shipwrecked
9. Bad Luck
10. Free Choice

## SLAVE

1. Scars
2. Free Man
3. Torturer
4. Of Wizard
5. Marked
6. Murderer
7. Miner
8. Rescuer
9. Of Court
10. Free Choice

## WARRIOR

1. Gates Guard
2. Mercenary
3. Crusading Knight
4. Training
5. Executioner
6. Outcast
7. Big Battle
8. Temple Guard
9. Desertion
10. Free Choice

## THIEF

1. Last Survivor
2. Secret Passage
3. Dexterity
4. Infamy Mark
5. Banned
6. Gang War
7. Poisoner's Apprentice
8. A Good Job
9. Thieves Ring
10. Free Choice



# Specialisms

A character may choose three specialisms. Specialisms show specific skills and knowledge the character has acquired before his adventures. **A specialism is tied to an attribute and gives a +2 bonus to that attribute's die roll when the specialism is used.**

*For Example;* Glen could choose 'Hand to Hand Combat' as one of his specialisms for his new character Dor Stryker. His 'Hand to Hand Combat' specialism is tied to Action, so he gains a +2 when rolling for Action (d10) when engaging in close combat with hand weapons. Specialisms are written on your character sheet with their bonus listed in brackets, such as Hand to Hand Combat (+2 Action).

There is no set skill list because to cover every conceivable skill for your average Sword & Sorcery campaign world would take a hell of a long time, so try and think of something yourself and run it by your Crypt Keeper to make sure it's appropriate.



*Example of Character;*

## **DOR STRYKER**

Warrior, Executioner's Guard  
(rolled on the background tables)

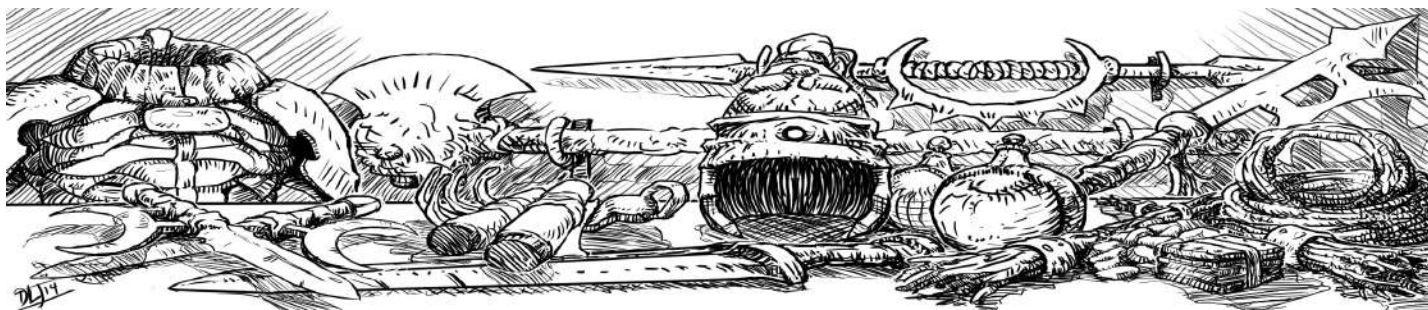
**Action:** D10  
**Wits:** D8  
**Ego:** D6  
**Hits:** 09

### **Specialisms**

Close Combat (+2 Action),  
Drive Chariot (+2 Action),  
Leadership (+2 Ego).

Dor is the headsman for the Grand Inquisitor of the city of Glug Gulan. He brings the doomed souls chained in the Inquisitor's dungeons to the end of their misery. Recently, the slaves have begun to refuse to carry the bodies of the executed to the canals. They roll their eyes in fear and speak of the horror in the dark. You will have to find a way to dispose of the decapitated criminals soon or the stink will become unbearable.





## Equipment List

The common coin of the realm is silver, and the following equipment list costs are in silver. Fifty silver pieces make for one gold. Bronze is the lowest coin, needing ten of these beggar chips to make one silver. Bronze is usually only good for buying moldy bread, and cheap clothing. The sourest of wines can be had for a few bronze, but only slaves would be found drinking such foul fare.

Gems are the most concentrated form of wealth, ranging in value from 100 to 1,000 gold pieces and up! Most cutthroats would sell their soul for a chance to steal but a few gems.

Mundane gear can be bought using any equipment list the CK approves of. Starting wealth for new PC's is 3D6 times ten silver pieces which they may spend on equipment, weapons and armor. Make sure prices paid are approved by your CK.

<b>ARMOR</b>		<b>DAMAGE RATING</b>	<b>WEAPONS</b>		<b>ATTACK BONUS</b>
Leather coif	100sp	+1 head only	Dagger	20sp	+1
Steel Cap	100sp	+3 head only	Club	2sp	+1
Leather Jerkin	600sp	+1 chest, gut and arms.	Heavy Mace	120sp	+2, 2H
Chain Shirt	600sp	+2 body	Spear	20sp	+1 *
Leather Leggings	350sp	+1 legs and groin	Long Spear	50sp	+1 **
High Leather Boots	250sp	+1 legs	Quarter Staff	5sp	+1
Chain Cowl	250sp	+2 head and throat	Dart	5sp	- *
Full Helm	350sp	+3 head and throat	Sling	1sp	- *
Hide Coat	900sp	+1 body and arms	Throwing Axe	80sp	+1 *
Scale Corselet	1,500sp	+2 body and arms	Hand Axe	60sp	+1
Bracers	100sp	+1 arms	Short Sword	100sp	+1
Gauntlets	200sp	+2 arms	Battle Axe	100sp	+2
Greaves	100sp	+1 legs	Long Sword	150sp	+2
Chain Skirt	100sp	+1 legs, gut and groin.	Scimitar	150sp	+2
Breastplate	900sp	+3 body	War Hammer	120sp	+1,+2 vs. Plate on damage
<b>Fully Armor Suits</b>			Great Axe	200sp	+1 to hit, +3 on damage, 2H
Leather	2,000sp	+2 all	Great Sword	500sp	+1 to hit, +4 on damage 2H
Chain Mail	5,000sp	+3 all	Long Bow	750sp	+2 ranged weapon
Scale Mail	5,000sp	+3 all	Short Bow	300sp	+1 ranged weapon
Plate Mail	15,000sp	+4 all			
<b>Shields</b>					
Small Shield	70sp	+1			
Large Shield	100sp	+2			

\* As Ranged Weapon no Long or Extreme Range

\*\* First Strike Capability

2H: Two Handed Weapon



# Playing the Game

Here we look at how the game is played, from racing chariots against professional slaves to slashing through hordes of undead!



## ***Non-Contested Attribute Test***

Sometimes the player won't be in direct competition with anyone else. Perhaps they're trying to climb a mountain or smith an enchanted sword. Here they must roll their relevant attribute dice against a target number set by the difficulty table. To succeed the character must roll the target number or greater.

***For example;*** Dor is chained to the dungeon wall. He must first break his bonds before he can hunt down the crazed cultists. His player tells the CK that Dor will try and escape from his bonds. The CK asks for a medium Action roll (the chains are old and pitted). The player rolls a 5, which is a success. Dor escapes from his bonds and now stalks the halls looking for vengeance.

Later, coming upon a wide canal, Dor flings himself across to escape subterranean man-apes. This is a dangerous move, so the CK asks for another medium action roll, on the count of the slippery footing and distance to jump. Dor rolls a 3 – and is unsuccessful! Dor bounces hard off the far wall and falls in to the fast moving muck. Escaping the immediate clutches of the man-apes, Dor will now have to try and get out of the dark and foul canal!

## ***Contested Attribute Test***

There will come a time in every game when a player is put in direct conflict with someone or something. This could be a game of chance, lying to a city guard, or skulking unseen by snoring lions; whatever it is there's a really simple way of working out who comes out on top.

When someone is actively competing against someone else the player makes an attribute test. Both the player and the CK (or another player if it involves another character) rolls a die corresponding to the relevant attribute. If the player was locked in an arm wrestle with a decadent flesh merchant, both would roll their Action attributes. The highest roll wins the contest. On a tie the test is re-rolled until there is a clear winner.

The Crypt Keeper may set a threshold for success on top of the contested attribute test, thereby creating a situation where no clear winner is established.

***For example;*** Dor Stryker wishes to leap from his run away chariot onto an opponent's chariot driving by. The CK is totally justified applying a threshold of success above and beyond just getting a higher roll than the other guy.



# DIFFICULTY TABLE

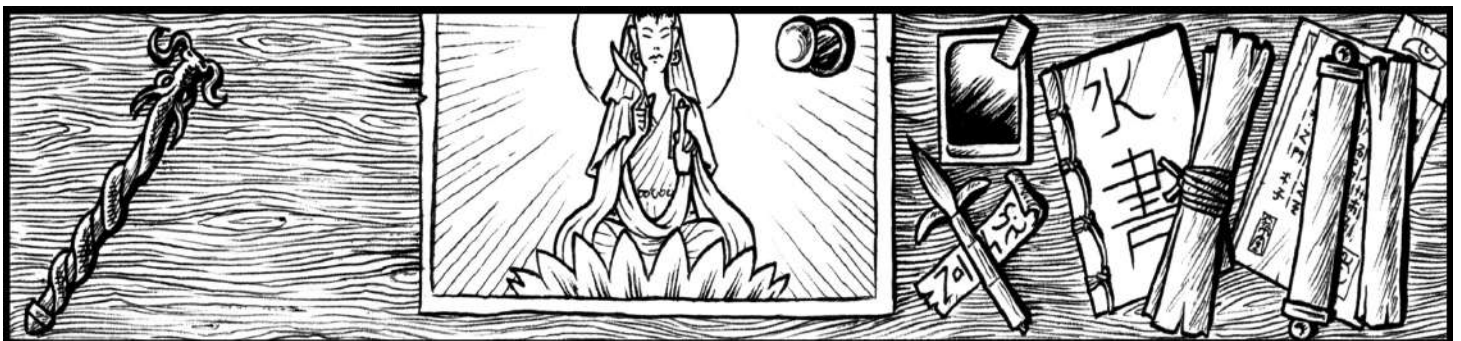
<b>2+</b>	<b>EASY</b>	(e.g. Jumping a Low Wall, Bartering for Food)
<b>4+</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	(e.g. Riding a Horse, Rock Climbing)
<b>7+</b>	<b>HARD</b>	(e.g. Picking a lock, Leading an Army)
<b>10+</b>	<b>VERY HARD</b>	(e.g. Deciphering Ancient Tomes)
<b>14+</b>	<b>IMPOSSIBLE</b>	(e.g. Resist Silver Lotus Poison)

## Using Specialisms with an Attribute Test:

Characters can use their specialisms in order to improve their chances of success if the specialism is relevant to the attempted action. *For example;* the lost nomad wants to find his way to the hidden oasis before he dies of thirst. He has the specialism Desert Lore so the CK awards the PC a +2 on his Wits roll on this 7+ Hard Difficult endeavor.

Notice the numbered gaps between the difficulty levels. This gives the CK leeway when assigning the target difficulty number to a task. A Hard task may be adjusted downwards or upwards if there are certain advantages or disadvantages which would be appropriate to the situation at hand.

Don't forget, Characters may create specialisms to improve their chances on any given task. Creating useful skills during play is a great use of experience points which the CK may hand out from time to time.



# Sword & Sorcery Combat

If Sword & Sorcery is about anything, it is about fighting men and women hewing through opponents and leaving a corpse strewn trail of gore in their wake. To reflect the whirling death described in most pulp fiction stories I have modified the basic USR combat rules to represent simultaneous combat.

All combat rolls (generally) use the Action attribute during combat and occur in a ten second combat turn. If distance and encumbrance need to be considered pilfer any number of encounter game turn scales from your favorite rpg to make quick decisions. Human movement can be anywhere from 24 to 80 yards in a ten second combat turn depending on the situation.

## ***Close Combat, Melee, Hand to Hand, etc.***

The action roll represents both attack and defense, and characters engaged with each other roll at the same time. One on one or one against many, there is no separate roll for attacks or defenses. Characters are allowed to take:

- **One Combat Action,**
- **and One Movement Action.**

A combat action can be any number of things; thrusting and parrying with a weapon, punching and dodging, crashing into your enemies with your shield, making a ranged attack, etc. A movement action is usually an attempt to engage or disengage from your opponents in some manner. A movement action can also be used as an attempt to dodge a second attack against the character in the same combat round. A character can also declare at the start of the Combat Turn that they wish to give up either one of these actions for an additional Combat Action or Movement Action with a -2 applied to all the character's rolls for the Combat Turn.

The attacker is considered the character who rolls highest. The attacker has scored a hit and the defender's Hits are reduced by the difference between the winning and losing rolls.

*For example;* Dor is fighting an intruder. Dor rolls 6 on his Action attribute and the CK rolls a 4 for the intruder. The intruder has his Hits reduced by 2 (6-4=2).



## Weapons and Armor

Weapons give bonuses in combat and the listed modifier gives a bonus to the Action roll when brought to bear. Weapon types are as follows:

**Light weapon +1** (short sword, club, javelin)

**Medium weapon +2** (broadsword, battle axe)

**Heavy weapon +3** (halberd, two handed sword)

Armor can be used to negate the effects of being hurt. Each armor type reduces the number of Hits taken in combat. Shields reduce damage from attacks as long as the character is able to bring the shield to bear against the attack.

Here are some examples of Damage Ratings for different types of armor;

**Light armor +1** (gauntlets, studded armor)

**Medium armor +2** (scale mail, chain mail)

**Heavy armor +3** (plate mail)

These examples are by no means the only weapons and armor that you can have in a game. The CK could create a spear that gives the character a +5 charging bonus or a suit of armor that's a -4. Just use the above examples as guidelines and have fun making up your own bad-ass creations.

**Damage:** When a character's Hits reach 1 the character is incapacitated, but conscious. When Hits reach 0 to -3 the character is incapacitated and unconscious. -4 and less the character is dead.

Hits may be regained through healing, but may never go above the initial score. A days rest will return one point of Hits. If any healing droughts or specialized care can be had the CK should decide Hits regained. A nights worth of carousing will return 2 to 4 Hits, but requires a successful (5+) Non-Contested Ego Attribute Roll. If the roll is failed, the character has to roll on the Carousing Table to find out what happens.

Note that armor defensive values reduce damage inflicted, but do not add or subtract from the combat roll while weapon values add to the combat roll.

If the "attacker" is actually taking a defensive action; such as dodging a blow while leaping out the window, the defender wouldn't receive any wounds per se.

Instead the attacker would have been successful with their intended action.

*For Example;* Skavos the Savage intends to leap upon his steed and escape from the harsh blows of a desert nomad. Skavos has Athletics specialism (+2 Action), but has lost his scimitar. The desert nomad is armed with his own scimitar, and is intent on hewing Skavos down where he stands. Skavos rolls a 5 on his d10 Action die for a total of 7. The nomad, with an Action die of d8, rolls a (4+2)=6. Skavos has scored a higher combat roll than his antagonist, successfully dodging the deadly sword thrusts, and for his movement action leaps onto his horse to affect his escape.

## Multiple Attacks

As stated above, a character may make two attacks or two movement actions in their combat turn at a -2 penalty on each roll. It is also true a character may make one combat action and one movement action without suffering a -2 penalty to either roll. But after a character takes two actions any attacks against the character are considered undefended and is resolved against a Non-Contested Attribute roll made against a Medium (+4) Difficulty Action Roll.

## First Strike

The Long Spear is listed as a "first strike" weapon. The character wielding a first strike weapon against an opponent not similarly armed gets a free strike before the first round of combat. Both the attacker with the first strike weapon and the defender roll their contested combat action roll normally. If the attacker loses he doesn't take any damage. If the attacker wins apply damage normally. First strike opportunity is only available on the first round of combat when the characters first engage. Further rounds of combat negate the first strike opportunity. The PC's and CK are free to create other first strike weapons and/or situations during play.

**Hit Locations:** Where a hit lands is determined by a simple hit location chart. Any armor being worn on the location being hit absorbs damage by the armor's Damage Rating (DR). A character is free to attempt a "called shot", whether in melee or ranged combat, but must suffer a minus to the character's Action roll determined by the Called Shot Table.

## COMBAT HIT LOCATIONS

<b>01-02</b>	<b>Head</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Leg Left</b>
<b>03</b>	<b>Throat</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Leg Right</b>
<b>04-10</b>	<b>Chest (Body)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Arm Left</b>
<b>11-15</b>	<b>Guts (Body)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Arm Right</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Groin (Body)</b>		

### Ranged Combat

Attacking at distance is a non-contested action roll against a difficulty number determined by the range of the attack. Once the difficulty number has been established any situational modifiers and/or specialism bonus can be applied to the attack.

The target of the attack does not get to apply any weapon bonuses or combat specialisms or make a combat roll unless they are within Immediate range. At that point the ranged attack becomes a normal contested Action roll unless the target is an inanimate object or helpless. Shields DR is subtracted from the attacker's Action roll if brought to bear. If both opponents are engaging with a ranged attack then who gets off the first shot needs to be established. This calls for an initiative roll based on their Action die. High roll shoots first. If the defender of the first attack is still standing they are now entitled to return fire, or take some other action. If there is a tie, both attackers get off their attacks, and both attacks will need to be resolved simultaneously.

### Called Shot Modifiers

**Limbs:** (-2 to Combat roll) A successful attack to a limb causes no additional damage but may ignore armor or have some other special effect such as disarm or make useless.

**Head or Throat:** (-4 to Combat roll) A successful attack to one of these critical areas gains +4 damage.

**Small Target:** (-4 to Combat roll) Attacks against small targets such as the heart of a succubus or a sorcerer's crystal ball may result in a specific effect as determined by the CK. A successful attack will at least grant +4 to damage.

**Tiny Target:** (-6 to Combat roll) Attacks against tiny targets such as the eye slit of a warrior's helm may result in a specific effect as determined by the CK. A successful attack will at least grant a +4 to damage and usually bypasses any armor protection.

## DIFFICULTY TABLE FOR RANGE

<b>2+</b>	<b>Immediate:</b>	<b>Close Combat Range</b>
<b>4+</b>	<b>Short:</b>	<b>Within 10-40 feet</b>
<b>7+</b>	<b>Medium:</b>	<b>Within 41-70 feet</b>
<b>10+</b>	<b>Long:</b>	<b>Within 71-200 feet</b>
<b>14+</b>	<b>Extreme:</b>	<b>Over 200 feet</b>

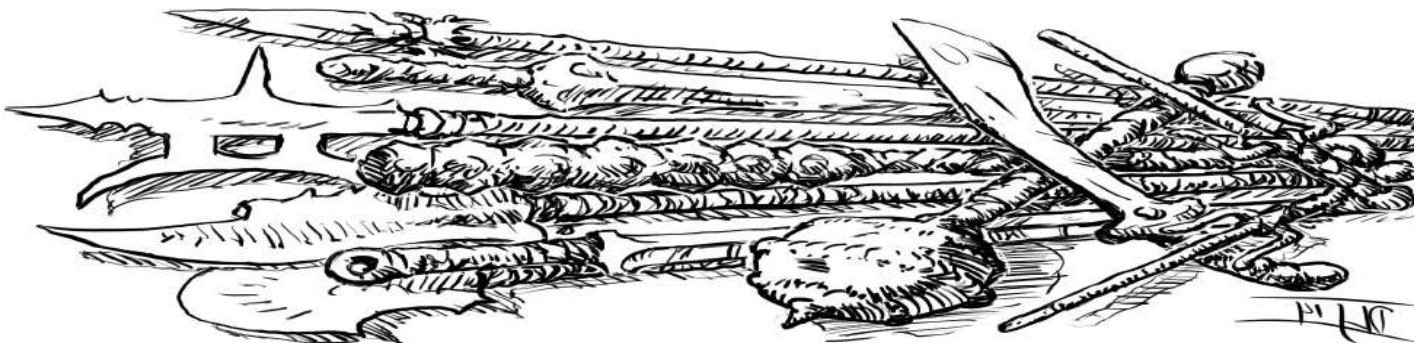
## Critical Hits & Dramatic Fumbles

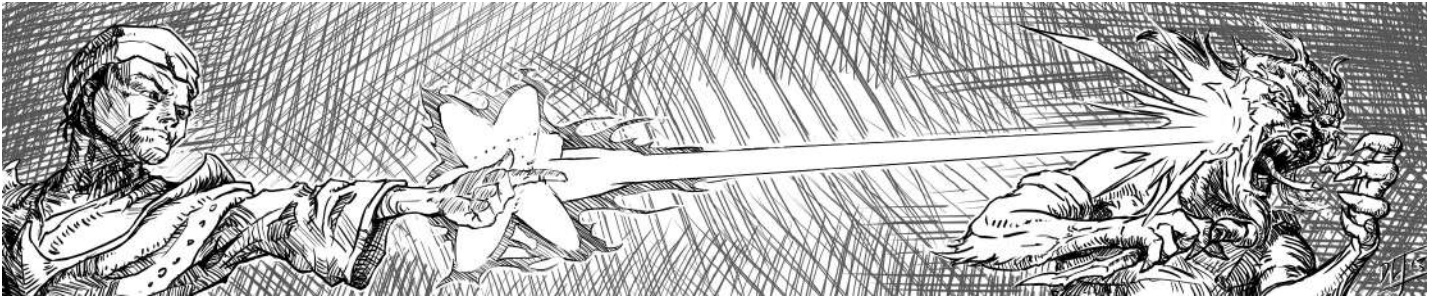
When you roll a natural 1 and your opponent rolls a natural high #, or the reverse, on the attack roll the Crypt Keeper needs to determine if a critical hit or a dramatic fumble has occurred. This check is a simple 50/50 chance roll. If the result is affirmative another

50/50 chance roll is made to determine either the critical hit or the dramatic fumble has occurred. Either way, the character on the losing end suffers the result.

## Critical Hit Table

<i>D100</i>	<i>Result &amp; Effects</i>
01-10	Huge Hit Roll; +1d6 damage added to total.
11-20	Advantage; +4 to attack on target next round.
21-30	Power shot; Enemy prone and cannot act next round.
31-40	Legshot; Random leg useless. Enemy crippled.
41-50	Armshot; Random arm useless. Stuff in hand dropped.
55-60	Gut shot; Medium (4+) EGO check or pass out from shock and horror.
61-65	Blinding Blow; Enemy attacks at -4 for 1d4 rounds.
66-70	Stunning Blow; Enemy cannot act for 1d4 rounds.
71-75	Force Fumble; Enemy rolls on critical fumble table.
76-80	Cleave; Make an attack against another target.
81-85	Armour Buster; Enemy armor reduced two points of DR.
86-90	Enemy stunned; prone for 1d4 rounds, attack at a -2.
91-93	Combination; Roll another attack against target.
94-97	Head shot; Knocked unconscious, at least.
98-99	Savagery; Instant kill, no saves.
100	Monster Crit; Roll twice on this table, rolling this result again stacks.





## Dramatic Fumble Table

<b>D100</b>	<b>Result &amp; Effects</b>
01–05	Glancing blow Roll hit location and apply 1d4 points of damage.
06–10	Weapon twists Roll hit location and apply 1d4 points of damage, but lose next action.
11–15	Weapon(s) tangled Self and opponent lose next action, 25% chance to drop weapons.
16–20	Drop weapon Weapon on ground, one round action to retrieve.
21–25	Disarmed As above, but not immediately retrievable.
26–30	Fumble weapon. Lose next action as you recover.
31–35	Hit wrong target. Hit another nearby (randomly determined).
36–40	Caught on gear. Sacrifice action to untangle. 1-3 on a d6 for success.
41–49	Hit yourself. Roll hit location and apply 1d4 points of damage.
50	Weapon breaks. Weapon broken.
51–55	Foot slips. Slip over, and fall prone.
56–60	Bump ally. Both lose next action.
61–65	Bump enemy. As above, randomly determine.
66–70	Full stumble. Fall against someone sending both sprawling, randomly determine.
71–75	Off balance. Lose next action, +d4 to attacks against you next round.
76–80	Hit yourself hard. Roll hit location and apply 1d6 points of damage.
81–85	Twist ankle. Lose next turn, limp for next 1d20 minutes and -2 to rolls.
86–90	Throw weapon. Hit random combatant. Roll hit location, apply 1d4 points of damage.
91–92	Hit yourself harder. Roll hit location and apply 1d6 points of damage, +d4 to attacks.
93–94	Weapon snaps. 1d4 damage to self and enemy from shards/shock/etc, roll hit location.
95	Weapon shatters. 1d4 damage to self and enemy, roll hit location, no armor protection.
96–97	Hit and stun ally. 1d6 damage, roll hit location, ally loses next turn.
98–99	Crit ally. Crit your closest friend.
100	Megafumble. Roll twice on this table. Rolling this again stacks.



## How Combat Flows

It's up to you how you want combat to play out. You should give the players an indication of their adversaries' obvious actions, and then give your players a chance to declare their intent. An attempt to achieve surprise may require a successful Attribute roll, or not, but the result of surprise generally means the attacker cannot receive an adverse effect, wounds or otherwise, from the attack roll.

## Using Specialisms in Combat

Characters can use their specialisms in order to gain an edge in combat situations. For example; the greedy merchant wants to find a volatile potion on the lich king's dusty shelves to protect himself. As his first action he uses his Evaluate Treasure specialism to try and find a substance which might be useful in combat. The GM says it's a hard difficulty roll and rolls a 7 and adds 2 for his specialism, giving a result of 9 – a success! The GM tells the desperate merchant a bottle of volatile dragon venom is among the normal inert ingredients on a sorcerer's shelves. He picks up the dangerous venom and flings it at the lurching undead horror. The doomed merchant will need to roll an Action die now to see if he hits!

*Don't forget, characters may create specialisms to enhance the limited set of combat mechanics presented.*



# Character Advancement & Healing

## Experience

The CK dispenses experience points to PC's after the conclusion of an adventure where much has been endured and death averted. +1 xp is recommended. Specialisms are limited to +5 max. Hits can only be increased by an additional 5 points.

**+3 xp's** can be exchanged for a +1 to a current Specialism.

**+6 xp's** can be exchanged for a new Specialism at +1.

**+10 xp's** can be exchanged for a +1 to Hits. This can only be done for human characters aged 18 thru 35. Characters older or younger than this age range cannot improve Hits score.

## Healing

If a character receives competent first aid shortly after being wounded they can expect +2 regained hits. A full days rest (24 hours) will restore +1 hits.

If a character finds themselves unconscious (0 to -3 hits) and without aid they must pass an Ego roll to not succumb to their wounds or they will die. The target number which must be made is determined by the Crypt Keeper.

Carousing is another means of healing your wounded character but carries just as much risk as reward. The detailed carousing rules are outlined in the following section.

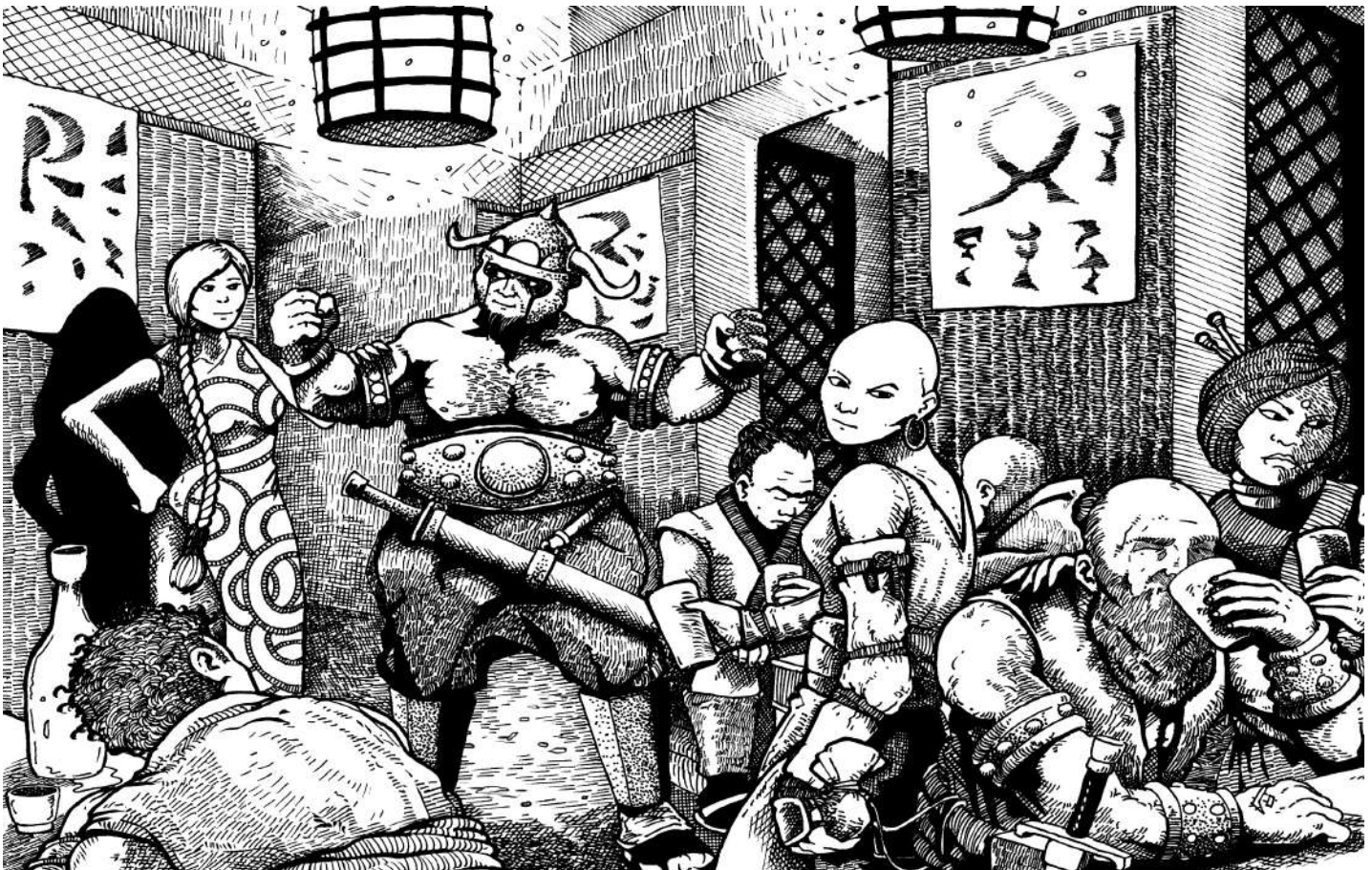
# Carousing

Next to blood soaked combat nothing says Sword & Sorcery like the riblad pleasures found in the hero of the story unloading their ill-gotten gains on tankards of ale, flagons of wine, games of chance and the courtship of strangers. The Crypt Keeper is encouraged to offer many opportunities for the PC's to engage in this noble pursuit, and the following rules should enhance this staple of the genre. The Crypt Keeper should enrich the low taverns and wine houses the PC's find themselves with ample descriptions touching on all five senses. Whether the place is airy and quiet or noisome and stifling, devoting some time to the encounter location will help make one stop from another stand out. Different cultures will offer different fare, games and drink. All forms of NPC's pursuing goals noble and degenerate will provide splendid adventure opportunities.

## Carousing Procedure

Going on a debauch in a town or city will restore 2 to 4 Hits for the nights carousing and debauchery. Regardless of the eventual carousing result, the player will have spent 25% of the coin and jewels he has on him. If the PC does not have money or other valuables than the player may not carouse. Also, a successful 5+ non-contested attribute roll against Ego needs to made to avoid any mishap during the drunken revelry. If the player character fails their Ego roll they will have to roll on the Carousing tables for the consequences. Whether or not the PC succeeds at the Ego roll the PC is still guaranteed the restored Hits. Roll a 1D6; 1-2=2 Hits, 3-4=3 Hits, and 5-6=4 Hits.

The Crypt Keeper is encouraged to replaced used results with diabolical and humorous entries of their own. If the PC's do not want to carouse when coming into a town or city they need to make a successful 5+ non-contested attribute roll against Ego to resist the temptation.



# FAILED CAROUSING RESULTS TABLE

## Roll 1D100

01–02 You boasted of your adventuring skill! Roll 1d6: 1–2 Balancing on a Ledge/Beam/Rope; 3 Bull-Leaping; 4 Dancing; 5 Five-Finger Fillet; 6 Juggling Random Items. Make a 5+ Action roll to see if you showed true prowess or bungled it!

03–04 You boasted of your strength! Roll 1d6: 1–2 Arm Wrestling; 3–4 Wrestling; 5 Keg Tossing; 6 Lifting Heavy Objects. Make a contested attribute roll against your opponent to see if you have won.

05–06 You boasted of your constitution! Roll 1d6: 1–3 Drinking Contest; 4–5 Eating Contest; 6 Long Distance Running/Swimming Challenge. Make a contested attribute roll against your opponent(s) to see if you have won.

07–08 Big Business! You invested  $1d4 \times 10\%$  of your money in a merchant's caravan / ship venture! CK secretly rolls 1d6: 1–2 It's a con; 3–4 It's legitimate, and in 2d6 months you'll have doubled your investment (if you're still alive and around!); 5–6 It's legitimate, but the caravan / ship didn't survive.

09 Brotherly Love! You woke up next to one of the other players' characters (Crypt Keeper determines randomly)!

10–11 Someone stole your coat/clothes while you were intoxicated!

12–14 Dangerous Liaison! You bedded the son/daughter/husband/ wife/temple virgin of someone who can make your life in this area very difficult!

15–22 Drunken Brawl! You started a drunken brawl! You must spend an additional  $1d100 \times 10$  silver pieces on damages and fines to avoid incarceration, or flee and be declared an outlaw. If you don't have enough wealth to pay the fine and do

not flee, you will be incarcerated and your belongings will be confiscated and sold.

23 Fire! You accidentally started a fire in the den of ill repute you were carousing in! You must spend an additional  $1d100 \times 10$  silver pieces on damages and fines to avoid incarceration, or flee and be declared outlaw! If you don't have enough wealth to pay the fine and do not flee, you will be incarcerated and your belongings will be confiscated and sold.

24–31 You gambled away all your money on a game!

32–34 Go Directly to Jail! You woke up in jail charged with a crime! You decide if your character did it or not. An escape may be necessary.

35–37 You incurred someone's anger (or were angered yourself) and have agreed to a duel. Roll 1d6: 1 Local Crime Lord; 2 Local Militia Commander; 3 Local Sorcerer; 4 Local Temple Leader; 5–6 Important Local Leader/Noble.

38–40 How'd I Get Here? You woke up in a strange place with no idea how you'd got there! Roll 1d6: 1 Aboard a ship; 2 In a tree or on a roof; 3 In the back of a wagon (maybe traveling somewhere!); 4 In the nearest stable/animal pen; 5 = In the nearest temple; 6 = In the sewer/gutter.

41–48 How Embarrassing! You made a complete idiot of yourself in public! Locals snicker behind your back and consider you a complete imbecile.

49–51 You have made a foolish pledge, loudly and in public to do something hazardous. Roll 1d6: 1–2 Clear Nearest Monster Den/Ruin; 3–4 Bring Down Local Bandits/Thieves/Thugs; 5–6 Steal Valuable From Important Local (roll as in 35-37 Duel to determine who).

## FAILED CAROUSING RESULTS TABLE Continued

52 Just Married! You woke up to find someone claiming to be your new wife/husband! Roll 1d6: 1-2 Attractive; 3-4 Average; 5 Ugly; 6 Pass the bucket! Crypt Keeper also secretly rolls 1d6: 1-3 It's a con attempt; 4-6 It's true.

53 You wake up next to a corpse! Roll 1d6: 1-2 They died of natural causes; 3-4 They died of drug/alcohol overdose; 5 You think you accidentally killed them; 6 You think you murdered them. Referee also secretly rolls 1d6: 1-3 It's a setup; 4-6 It's true.

54 You wake up next to an animal! Roll 1d6: 1 Chicken; 2 Cow; 3 Goat; 4 Horse/Camel; 5 Pig; 6 Sheep. Lose +25% more of your money.

55-62 My Friends! You spent your money on drink, companionship, and trinkets for your new "friends"! Lose +25% more of your money.

63 My Land! You gambled/spent all your money and acquired the deed to something! Roll 1d6: 1-2 = Disreputable Inn; 3 = Nearest Ruin; 4 = Plot of Wildland; 5-6 = Run-Down Farm. Referee secretly rolls 1d6: 1-3 = It's a fake; 4-6 = It's legitimate.

64-66 My Precious! When you were passed out or otherwise engaged, someone stole your single most valuable looking item, as determined by the CK! Track 'em down and make 'em pay!

67-69 Ooh, Shiny! You spent all your money on a truly gaudy but otherwise unremarkable item. Roll

1d6: 1 = Armour; 2 = Garment; 3-4 = Jewelry Piece; 5 = Shield; 6 = Weapon. Actual item should be determined by CK based on amount spent, item cost, and the character's preferences.

70-77 Robbed! You didn't spend all your money / treasure! Someone stole it!

78-80 Tattoo You! You spent your money on a fantastic tattoo! Roll 1d6: 1-2 = It actually is awesome; 3-4 = It's fairly good; 5 = It has an obvious flaw; 6 = It has an embarrassing flaw.

81 Treasure Map! You spent / gambled your money and obtained a dubious map to some undefined ruin / treasure! Referee secretly rolls 1d6: 1-3 = It's a con; 4-6 = It's accurate.

82-89 Unexpected Companion! You woke up next to a member of your preferred gender. Determine attractiveness as Just Married! entry. This new companion has adventuring qualities determined by the CK.

90 Where'd This Come From? You awoke with an object in your possession, and you have no idea how you obtained it! Roll 1d6: 1 = Dagger; 2 = Document; 3 = Gemstone; 4 = Map; 5 = Necklace; 6 = Ring. Referee secretly rolls 1d6: 1-2 = You purchased it; 3 = It was gifted to you; 4-5 = You stole it; 6 = It was planted on you!

91-00 Madman! Roll twice and apply both results!



# Magic

There are three schools of magic in USR Sword & Sorcery; Artifact Mastery, Sorcery, and Mesmerism. Regardless of school, the casting of magic is rolled using the Ego attribute die. The actual learning of magic, the studying of ancient tomes and learning blasphemous secrets relies on the Wits attribute. The Crypt Keeper should keep in mind that magic traditionally has a steep price in classic S&S tales. Items of magical power and spell books are rare and jealously guarded. It is not uncommon for secret sects and powerful cults to form around mere fragments of the dark arts.

## Artifact Mastery

Warriors and priests have lusted after power through the use of the discarded remnants of a bygone age by elder beings who once ruled. Their construction lost to the mists of time, there are those who claim knowledge of their workings, are able to know the true mind of gods, and tap great power to conquer his enemies.

A Specialism in such archaic lore would give a character the chance to learn how to use a device of supernatural power, but minimum difficulty is usually set at Impossible. Learning how one is to tap the magical power stored within is an adventurous path itself. Having an artifact bestowed to a character by a patron or god is another way to acquire the knowledge needed to use an artifact of power.

*Rod of Bending Will:* Kings of the world lust after this rumored rod of power. It is told that the wielder of the rod can command others as pliant, obedient slaves. While this bronze and enameled rod does harbor such awesome abilities the possessor of the rod is at risk of falling under the influence of the demon bound within.

*Abilities:* The holder of the rod can command any who hear their voice who fail a Very Hard 10+ Ego test. The effect last as long as the victim or victims remain within sight. Every time someone uses the rod's abilities they must make a 5+ Ego roll or become dominated by the demon which powers the rod. How the demon became imprisoned and what it desires are up to the CK to determine.



## Sorcery

By hideous incantations and diabolical ritual Sorcerers are able to rest power from nameless horrors from beyond. Whether binding other worldly demons to service or deciphering ancient necrotic scrolls, the Sorcerer hopes to gain power by enslaving beings not of this world to his service. Sorcerers are most reluctant to share their secrets and guard their knowledge with maniacal paranoia. Besides making a difficulty roll to find out if one is successful when casting spells, there usually is a roll required when a character initially summons a demon to see if the human sorcerer can maintain his sanity and not be dragged into gibbering madness.

*The Black Binding Ritual of Laguhl:* In the long dead city of Carel corrupt sorcer kings chronicled their horrid reign on the crumbling granite walls. For those wise in ancient scripts study in the lower chambers of the great citadel will provide instructions in summoning Laguhl. Once the hollow shadow of Laguhl is placated this undead servant will protect the summoner for ninety days before dissipating.

*Abilities:* Make a 14+ Wits roll to decipher the ritual, +4 to roll if able to read Carel. Requires the blood of human sacrifice to complete this hour long 10+ Ego summoning ritual. The undead shade will absorb up to 90 points of damage directed at the summoner. If Laguhl absorbs more than 90 points of damage before 90 days he will return to the black abyss in which he came, dragging the summoner to hell with him.

## Mesmerism

There are those who have found a way to bend others to their will. To dominate their minds so completely that they are but puppets dancing on the strings of the mesmerist. This is accomplished by tapping into supra-normal mental abilities. This may occur organically, as part of the character's heritage, or they have been schooled in the use of the psyche through a formal discipline. Usually this requires the practitioner to be able to look the victim in the eye, but poisons, potions, and powders are also commonly used to achieve the same effect.

*Yellow Lotus Incense Stick:* When it is burned the delicate fumes of the plant become a potent hallucinogen and mind altering drug to any who inhale the aromatic smoke. Priests routinely use the Yellow Lotus incense during rituals to influence their worshipers. Those under the influence of the Yellow Lotus become susceptible to suggestion.

*Abilities:* Willing users of the drug will see and feel what another tells them, but in monstrous and exaggerated form. Those who attempt to resist the fumes must make a Medium 4+ Ego roll or fall under the effects of the powder.

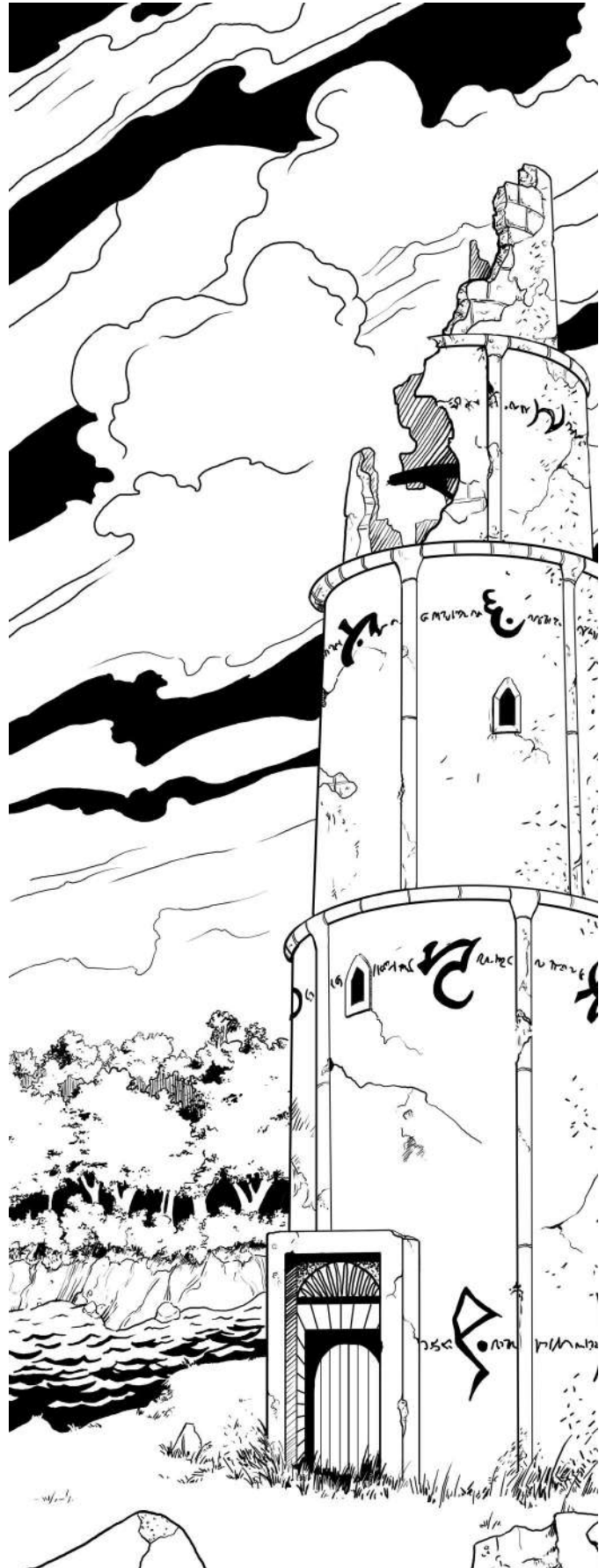
## Magical Research

Any character trying to increase their ability or master a source of magical power must commit at least one month of game time to the effort. At the conclusion of a month of study, research, and experimentation the Crypt Keeper first rolls for chance of a random encounter occurring during the period of magical research. Chance of random encounter is entirely up to the Crypt Keeper, but keep in mind the location. A 1 in 6 chance, 1 in 8 chance, 1 in 10 chance are reasonable choices. If a random encounter occurs the CK rolls again for the type of encounter and plays it out. Once the random encounter has been settled then the character can roll a non-contested attribute roll against Wits to find out if his efforts have resulted in success. The character may make up to six attempts (which would take six months of game time). If the character fails on all six attempts the character has failed in his goal, and the mastery or understanding of the magic trying to be learned is beyond the wizard's ability. It will take another who has successfully unraveled the magic to instruct the would-be magician on how to succeed. Most magic users would never part with their secret knowledge willingly or without exacting a stiff price.



## RANDOM MAGICAL RESEARCH ENCOUNTER TABLE (roll 1d20)

1. Thieves; either on their own or hired by others, a small cadre of professional thieves are intent on stealing something of value from you.
2. Assassins; your research has not gone unnoticed and someone has paid for your death.
3. Rival Sorcerer; your research has not gone unnoticed and you have been marked as a potential threat.
4. Worshiper; some have come to believe you wield the power of gods. They have come to you seeking to serve you.
5. Apprentice; one who is eager to learn the mystical arts has come offering their soul in exchange for teachings.
6. Demon; your research has called forth something from beyond time and space.
7. Fugitive; someone has stumbled upon your sanctum in their desperate attempts to flee some threat.
8. War; the place where you are conducting your research has now erupted in conflict.
9. Prophecy; your work has provided you with a glimpse into the future.
10. Fire; experimentation has erupted into a conflagration. Quick action is needed or all may be lost.
11. Animal; some type of beast has become attracted to your activities.
12. Local Lord; the nearby nobility has found cause to call on you.
13. Crusading Knight; a warrior with a cause has come across your sanctum.
14. Artifact; your research has uncovered the description and/or location of an ancient artifact promising great power.
15. Traveling Merchant; perhaps he carries wares which will aid you in your work?
16. Strange Weather; your efforts seem to have effected changes in the weather. Will it get worse?
17. Great Insight; not necessarily of a magical nature, but valuable nonetheless.
18. Favor of the Gods; an unanticipated boon is the results of your efforts so far.
19. Curse of the Gods; an unanticipated check to your work is the results of your efforts so far.
20. Bandits, Local; you thought you found a secure place to conduct your research. Unfortunately it seems you were wrong.



## Encounters in the Wilderness and City

For the episodic nature of Sword & Sorcery tales a good set of random tables particular to the genre is highly recommended. The Crypt Keeper should write up custom tables for their game world. Especially tables which reflect the current wilderness environment and cultural norms found in the civilized regions that the PC's find themselves adventuring in. For those who need some quick inspiration here are some fairly generic tables to get you started.

The Random Magical Research Encounter Table can also be used to generate rumors and patrons which may get the PC's involved in the affairs of wizards!

In the wilderness there is a 1 in 6 chance of a random encounter every 12 hours. When the PC's are in civilization the chance of encounter is a 1 in 6 chance every 24 hours.

### Random Wilderness Encounters (roll 6d12)

6. Mega Fauna of a prehistoric nature.
7. Bear
8. Scavengers scavenging (animals or humans)
9. 2d6 Wolves
10. Lone Wolf
11. Lost Dog
12. 1d4 Wild Cats
13. 3d4 Deer
14. Fire Ants
15. Bees/Wasps
16. War Horse
17. Rats
18. Lost Goat
19. Lost Horse with saddle bags
20. Roll twice for entries 6-19, these are fighting
21. Ruins
22. Missionary
23. Messenger
24. 1d4 Adventurers
25. Hunters
26. Pilgrim
27. 2d8 Mercenaries
28. Noble Caravan
29. Tinker
30. Small Circus



31. Merchant
32. Traveling Minstrels
33. A Knight and Squire/Herald
34. Convict
35. Wandering Nomads
36. City Guards far from home
37. Soldiers moving through the country
38. Caravan
39. Domesticated Animal Drivers
40. 22-32 attacked by 33-39.
41. Roll twice 22-38. These are fighting/ arguing
42. Roll twice 22-38. These are allied.
43. Bandits disguised as 22-39
44. Crazy Cultists
45. 2d4 Bandits
46. Slavers
47. Ascetic
48. 2d4 Thieves
49. Sorcerer
50. Roll twice 42-48. These are fighting.
51. Roll twice 42-48. These are allied.
52. 6-19 fighting 42-48
53. Rain, travel takes twice as long
54. Rain, roll again.
55. Heavy Rain, travel is halted.
56. Looted Caravan
57. Lost and delirious citizen
58. Very windy, roll again
59. Lost
60. Carnivorous Plants
61. Lost Travelers
62. Hunter caught in a trap
63. Dying 6-19
64. Precious item in a tree
65. Someone is drowning in a body of water
66. Sharp cliff, must be climbed
67. Sharp cliff, must be descended
68. Mistaken for a criminal
69. Ghostly Spirit uttering prophecy
70. Well, 50% it is poisoned
71. Fire
72. Roll twice and sort that out





### **Random City Encounters** (roll 2d8)

2. City Guard “recruiting” warriors to stamp out; 1-2 rural bandits, 3-4 fanatic cultists, 5-6 rival faction.
3. City Guard wants to take you in for questioning.
4. A wild eyed holy man grabs hold and utters prophecy.
5. The Captain of the Guard demands the affections of one of his soldier’s girl.
6. Foreign tribesman are being hassled by local thugs.
7. Pickpocket attempt. 1-3 accomplished thief, 4-6 trained monkey.
8. The city/town is rife with disease.
9. A robed ape attacks. Attendants hurry to reclaim. Offer 50 silver to remain silent about the matter.
10. Soldiers returning parade by with caged prisoners. One is a long lost friend who begs for aid.
11. Gang of drunken barbarians spoiling for a fight.
12. Alchemist lab explodes sending strange fumes through the neighborhood causing; 1-2 hallucinations, 3-4 frenzied raged, 5-6 stone to mud.
13. A blood red comet hangs in the air, priests demand no citizen can walk the streets during the night until it passes.
14. Desperate looking scribe collides with the party. He hurriedly scurries away, but has dropped...
15. The game of chance you are playing appears to be “fixed” 1-3 in your favor, 4-6 against you.
16. Priests and followers of Nulub pass by. Their burning incense of Silver Lotus has the power to turn you into an ardent adherent to their religion.

## City Fire Table

Sooner or later your PC's will start something on fire. The following table uses an ascending order of magnitude (from sputtering out to reducing the city proper to ash) to try and model this. Numbered result also reflects the number of hours the blaze burns.

Negative modifiers from -1 to -6 are applied to the initial fire roll to reflect any number of factors the Crypt Keeper deems appropriate, such as weather, available fuel, citizen response, etc. This modified result becomes your initial fire roll. This initial roll establishes the ferocity of the fire within the first hour. Any result of 6 and over requires an additional roll at the end of the first hour. If this second, unmodified roll is greater than the initial fire roll # than roll the 1d12 again. Either way, you finally end up on the final degree of damage caused by the fire at the conclusion of the number of hours the fire burned for.

Any result of 1 or less obviously means the fire didn't get very far and may certainly cause more problems for the PC than it was intended to solve. Then again, the same can be said for the other end of the table too.

**01.** Put out quickly by the city watch and concerned citizens. The evidence of arson is plain to see.

**02.** A small portion of the structure is damaged before the fire is quenched. Evidence of arson can be deduced by the wise and the experienced.

**03.** At least half of the structure is damaged, with some of this resulting in a total loss to items within the building. If the building was occupied there is an excellent chance there was loss of life. It will take some investigation to uncover arson as the reason for the blaze.

**04.** While the structure is still standing, there isn't a part of it which has not been ruined by fire or smoke damage. The locals may have their suspicions, but the damage makes it difficult to discern if the fire was deliberately set. Unless inhabitants of the structure were awake, or extremely lucky, many inside will have died in the blaze.

**05.** The structure is a complete loss, dangerous even to walk through after the fire is doused. Nothing of value would have survived and those who were unable to exit quickly will have perished in the flames. Only those who have had their suspicions aroused would be able to discern a deliberate act of arson is the cause.

**06.** The initial structure has become completely consumed and nearby structures have been damaged. At some point during the conflagration the locals have given up on saving the original building and put all their efforts into stopping the fire from spreading further. Occupants of the neighboring buildings would have had time to escape harm.

**07.** Residents and shop owners near the blaze will begin to move valuables away, emptying out the silver cabinet and grabbing the livestock. The streets are clogged with frightened people and animals. Half the city will be aware of the fire at this point.

**08.** The initial fire has burned hot and bright enough to start multiple buildings on fire. Entire neighborhoods will be alarmed and these residents will rush to extinguish the fire. Who knows if their efforts will be successful?

**09.** The neighborhood watch appears in force. They will order citizens to risk their lives in putting out the fire if they half to, turning out common houses and gambling halls. People caught near the fire will be hard pressed to reach safety. Large numbers of people will start to move out of the neighborhood.

**10.** The city musters all its resources in a final attempt to save the city. Property damage is now severe and countless lives are lost. At this point the fire can be easily seen at a distance from the city.

**11.** Most people try to abandon the city. The fire has burned large enough that the inhabitants of the city have lost all ability to contain it. Whole neighborhoods are burning at the whim of the gods and the terrorized screams of man and beast ring out.

**12.** City engulfed. At least 60% of the urban landscape has been destroyed or effected by the raging inferno. The death toll is staggering. Many surviving citizens have been displaced by the fire.



# SHRINE OF THE KEEPERS

*Introductory Adventure for USR Sword & Sorcery*

The CK should have new PC's begin their adventures in a bustling Sword & Sorcery city of his own devising. This will provide plenty of plot hooks and adventure seeds to get started. Patrons and powerful adversaries can be encountered immediately and the game will be afoot in no time. The Character Background Tables used at character creation in the rule book are designed with the intent of sparking adventure ideas at the table between PC's and CK and this adventure module is an example typical of the genre.

## INTRODUCTION

The PCs finish a night of drinking in one of the city's various wine houses, but when the bill comes their coin purse has been stolen. They see a shifty fellow darting out the door holding it in his hand. A pursuit begins (themselves chased by an angry innkeeper demanding repayment), but the wretch loses them in the twisting alleyways of the slums. Suddenly, up ahead, they hear a scream, and find the mangled body of the dog of a thief, horribly and unnaturally killed. Even worse, the money is gone.

At the end of the alleyway in which this happened is the foreboding gate to the Shrine of the Keepers which they see is unbolted. A passing watchman (only mildly concerned with the dead man) warns them that the priests are vicious killers who use their fabulous wealth to satisfy their unwholesome lusts. If they took the PCs money, and certainly that seems to be the case, the PCs should forget about it for they stand little chance against the priests.

## SHRINE OF THE KEEPERS

The homes along the alley are mostly deserted. Only the most desperate and deranged find refuge in the neglected buildings. If the PC's climb to the roof of any of these buildings they will be able to look over the shrine's walls into the courtyard. It is quiet and dark. A black smoke pours forth from a large chimney at the center of the building into a night heavy with moon and stars. Nothing stops them from either climbing down into the courtyard, or walking through the front gate which leads into the empty

courtyard.

1. Three pillars stand in front of the wide steps which lead into this spacious entry. The pillars are carved with despondent souls reaching up to something unseen. Bronze doors directly ahead depict similar wretches, hands raised, pleading for succor (comfort, aid). There is no illumination within this entryway so these details will be lost to the PC's unless they inspect these features closely. The bronze doors are unlocked. The open archway to the north is dark, while the glow of torchlight emanates from the open archway to the south. The door north of the double bronze doors is concealed by a tapestry, and is locked from the other side. The ceiling here and in room 5 and room 11 are twenty feet high. Everywhere else they are only ten feet high.

2. These are cells for unfortunate victims who have either been purchased or kidnapped by the mad priests. Currently only one cell is occupied. The prisoner will plead for release. The CK may either randomly roll up an NPC from the background tables found in your USR Sword & Sorcery rule book or you can introduce a new PC here in the cell. Keys to the cell can be found in room 7 or be taken off of Manchen who is in room 4. The door leading out is unlocked.

3. Food stores in sacks are piled, casks of wine stand upright. Moonlight pools on the floor from a large grate in the ceiling. The door is locked. The key can be found in room 7.

4. The mad priest Manchen; A10, W6, E8, H10, Sp: Stealth +2A, Knife Wielding +2A, Dodge +2A, resides here. He keeps watch on room 5. He will be aware of anyone opening the double doors from 1. He will then quickly go through the concealed door into room 1 and attempt to come at any intruders from behind. He pads silently on bare feet and wields a dagger. Around his neck he carries a key to the cells in 2. This room he lives in has a bed and chest as well as a desk and eating table. A low bench provides seating at the table while cushions and rugs cover the floor. If the chest is searched valueless personal effects and a cult dagger will be found.

The desk contains the mindless rantings of Manchen scribbled on parchment plus two vials of yellow lotus powder. Inhaling even a pinch can immobilize a person for hours in an euphoric delirium or nightmarish hallucinations.

5. The Grand Hall of the Keepers. A wide chamber, the walls of which are hung with velvet tapestries, worked in curious designs. Floor, walls and ceiling are of a green, glassy stone reflecting luridly the light of torches mounted in wall sconces. A bronze platter laden with drugged food and drink sits on a table near the double doors to the east. Anyone sampling the fare must make a 7+ Ego roll or fall unconscious for several hours. All the doors leading out of this room are locked. If Manchen attacks the PC's in this room the priests from 7 will rush in to the mad acolyte's aid.

6. Here a roaring coal fire blazes in a great hearth. The heat is tremendous. Through the flames blackened bones can be seen being consumed. Sacks of black coal line both walls to either side of the fireplace. The block mantle depicts a bearded visage with a gaping maw. This door is unlocked.

7. The door to this room is ajar, and torchlight spills out into the hall. Low voices can be heard. 3 priests; A8, W6, E8, H7, armed with daggers mutter among themselves while they put away scrolls. Shelves along the walls contain many scrolls and tomes filled with the blasphemous practices of the cult. Many describe horrible rituals to be practiced on the living before they are committed to the stone sarcophagi found in room 8. There is also a set of keys which will unlock the cells in room 2 and the door to room 3. Several gold and silver coins can be found in front of the wall where the secret door is located. Close inspection will reveal a concealed latch which allows the door to swing easily out into room 10.

8. This room is recessed five feet below the rest of the shrine. Stone steps descend down to the dark floor. Torches adorn the gray stone walls illuminating numerous granite coffins with an orange light. This appears to be some sort of crypt, well not quite. Those placed in the stone sarcophagi are usually

alive. Only after they have found the sweet embrace of death are they released to be consumed in the great furnace. One poor unfortunate soul managed to escape from his enforced entombment. He lies in a near deathless state on the floor near the northern steps. He will be the first thing the PC's see upon entering from this direction. Checking to see if he is alive will find his body cold to the touch, and apparently incoherent but alive. After a couple of minutes he will awaken with a torturous howl. He can only be subdued with blows, or blades. Even if he is tied up or restrained he will continue to howl. This will bring the priests from room 7 and Manchen from room 4. If the PC's take time to open any other sarcophagi; 50% empty, 10% living soul wide eyed and terrified, or 40% dead and withered. The opening of the lids will bring Machen and the priests.



9. A leering stone idol with ape like features dominates the southern wall of the room. It holds a large bronze plate between gray hands. Upon it can be found some of the coins stolen from the PC's. Tall thin tapers are placed upon the arms and shoulders of the idol. Dripping wax flows across the stone to the polished obsidian floor. The walls are of glassy green stone which reflects the guttering candle light. The ceiling is cloaked in shadow ten feet above. A five foot wide opening in the floor reveals stairs going down into darkness. The east door is unlocked while the west door is locked, though it is easily unlocked from inside the room.

10. This is the sleeping quarters for the priests. There are bunk beds along all the walls except the south wall. Several trunks are in the room. There is nothing of value besides clothes and personal affects. The south door is supposed to be locked at all times but sometimes the priests neglect their duties, relying on the secret door and that few are known to brave the halls of the Keepers.

11. A deep reflecting pool in the center of the room ripples blackly. Tapers in tall floor stands ring the reflecting pool. A soft moan can be heard emanating from its surface. What one sees when they look in the pool who knows? Whatever it is, if they fail a 7+ Hard ego check they will be mesmerized by the sights in which they see. If someone pulls them away from the pool the spell is broken. Cultists use it to snare the unwary throwing them into the holding cells for later sacrifice. The pool is quite deep, a well in fact, and also functions as the shrine's water supply. Only if an initiate can gather water from the well without being hypnotized are they admitted into the diabolical cult. If not... The fact that the pool is deep but does not intrude on the lower level will most likely never be noticed by the players, but there it is nonetheless. The eastern part of the room rises dome shaped and is etched with incomprehensible writings and symbols. The floor and walls are of the same green stone found in 5. Heavy curtains cover the open doorways north and south into this room. The double doors are easily unlocked from this side. A faint rustling can be heard from behind the curtain to room 12 if PC's are listening for it. Here four cult members lay in wait for intruders.

12. The antechamber to the high priest's rooms. There are always two guards and two priests stationed here to subdue intruders and serve the high priest's needs. They will not stir from this room unless ordered to by the high priest. They will be aware of anyone who enters 10 and will be prepared to strike any who pass through the curtain. The room is adorned with a jade table against the west wall flanked by two statues of hideous mocking demons. The surface of the table is etched and stained. A rack holds two spears and a sword on the south wall. Candles on the table are the only illumination. While

the door to room 13 is locked a search of the priests will produce a key to this door.

Guards; A8, W6, E6, H7

Armed with Swords and wearing leather armor over heavy robes, +2 DR chest, guts, and arms. The also wear lurid masks which provides +2 DR to the head.

Priest Servants; A8, W6, E8, H5

Armed with daggers and garbed in robes which provide no armor protection. One of the two possesses a key to room 13.

13. These are the chambers of the High Priest. A tall woman stands in the center of the room. With the presence of a jungle cat she is ornately tattooed and clad in a narrow girdle crusted with blood stones. A burnished mass of night black hair curls down her dark tanned shoulders. When the party enters she will ask, "Who are you. What do you do to find yourselves in the sacred shrine of the Keepers?" If the party asks who she is, she will reply, "I am Thalís of Fhaddar. Are you mad, to come here?" She will laugh at the PC's if they state they intend to regain their stolen gold, and leave the shrine alive. "Thog takes all who come without leave of the High Priest." If asked who is Thog, she will say, "Sit down and I will tell you, but first tell me your names." She herself will recline on a luxurious couch littered with soft pillows. If the PC's refuse to sit she will let out a musical laugh. "Be at ease", she advises. "If Thog wishes you, he will take you wherever you are." If the PC's ask about any others in the shrine, she will say they are deep in the throes of the lotus waiting for Thog to wash over them, and remove from them all desire.

"Thog is that which waits for those who seek. Thog is the one who keeps. All come to Thog eventually. He is an ancient god largely forgotten by the race of men, but he lives, and takes all eventually. Here, in this shrine we deliver many to their final destiny. In return Thog reveals to us the true mysteries of life, and its futility. What difference whether the priests give a victim to the gods, or the god comes for his own victim?"

If the PC's grow tired of her ramblings she will make no move to stop them from leaving, or passing through the curtain to the high priest's personal chamber. The current room is a luxurious lounge filled with valuable plates, goblets, candle sticks, tapestries, rugs, etc. She will not interfere if the PC's start looting the room. She will just laugh at them, assuring them that Thog will take them before they ever see the outside of the shrine. If the PC's attack her she will make no effort to defend herself and will laugh hysterically and give herself to her god as she dies. If the PC's flee with any of these items they will be hard pressed to find a buyer as none will wish to possess treasure from the Shrine of the Keepers for they will fear the terrible priests will come for them as well.

14. The High Priest's private chamber has a large ornate bed, large desk, comfortable couch, rich tapestries, and soft rugs covering the green walls. A secret door in the east wall, well concealed, leads out to a narrow, walled courtyard. There is another secret door in the courtyard walls which leads into empty apartments eventually dumping into the warren of depravity which is the slums of the city. Once again, any treasure taken from this room will be a hard sell in the bazaars of the city.

15. This unlit stairway ends at an unlocked door bound with iron, and wrought with terrifying images of a vaguely humanoid figure devouring helpless victims.

16. Cells for the unfortunate waiting to be sacrificed. Wails of the damned can be heard through the door. This is coming from a dancing girl from the city who will beg for release if the PC's enter. The key to the cells can be found on the High Priest's belt who is conducting a ceremony in room 19. With the right tools the locks can be picked at a 5+ Difficulty Action or Wits roll.

17. This chamber is brightly lit with torches in the many sconces bolted to the wall. Large bronze double doors can be seen to the east. A stout wooden door is to the west. Another ornate door can be seen half way down in the south wall. All have iron rings



for handles, and open easily.

18. Room of the lotus burner. One of the chief priests is deep within the dreaming sleep of the lotus. Any who enter the room must make a Difficulty 7 roll against Ego or succumb to the dreaming slumber. The lotus is burning in several censers placed on the floor along with innumerable candles. It would not take much to knock over a few candles and get the tapestries adorning the walls to catch fire. The dreaming priest would not even notice.

19. The inner shrine of the keepers, and the ceremony of Thog. Here the High Priest is in the midst of his nightly ritual. He is accompanied by eight priests, all are on their knees infused with the effects of the lotus. While the scent and smoke of the black lotus is still present in the room it requires only a Difficulty 4 roll against Ego to resist. A writhing female sacrifice lays bound upon the alter while a dark shadow forms above her. Huge and bulky it oozes from the nameless void. A misshapen head forms though it is not a member of any sane, normal creature. Its outline seems to waver and alter subtly, yet its appearance is solid enough. It is neither misty

or ghostly. This is the god Thog: A12, W6, E8, H14, Sp: Enveloping Shadow Form +2A, Otherworldly Substance +4DR, +4 Surprise in Shadow. Thog will not be able to use its Surprise ability in this current situation, but if the PC's were to encounter the creature at another time...

Along the east wall six to eight guards (ideally two per party member) stand stolidly at attention. If the PC's step into the room they will immediately attack. The priests will not rise from their trance for they are in the presence of their god. While the battle rages the sacrifice can be seen writhing in the lustful grasp of the black nightmare shape that could have only been bred in the lost pits of hell.

High Priest of the Keepers: A8, W8, E10, H9, Sp: Summon Thog +5E, Rituals of the Seekers +5W, Commanding Aura +2E, can force opponent to stay their hand for a round, or the weak willed to stand back in fear, and awe. Breastplate over robes +3DR (only covers chest and guts), ceremonial dagger (no attack or damage bonus).

If the PC's attack the priests, they will arise from their slumber and attempt to defend themselves. If the PC's seem on the verge of defeating the guards the High Priest will shriek for Thog to devour the intruders. Thog, while a monstrous being from a nether realm, can be harmed by normal means. Its bulk is a yielding rubbery mass which rends, twists, and clubs its adversary. The black maw bites with terrible force. When wounded it leaks out a viscose, phosphorescent ooze. When it is down to half its hits it will attempt to flee. It will travel out the chamber

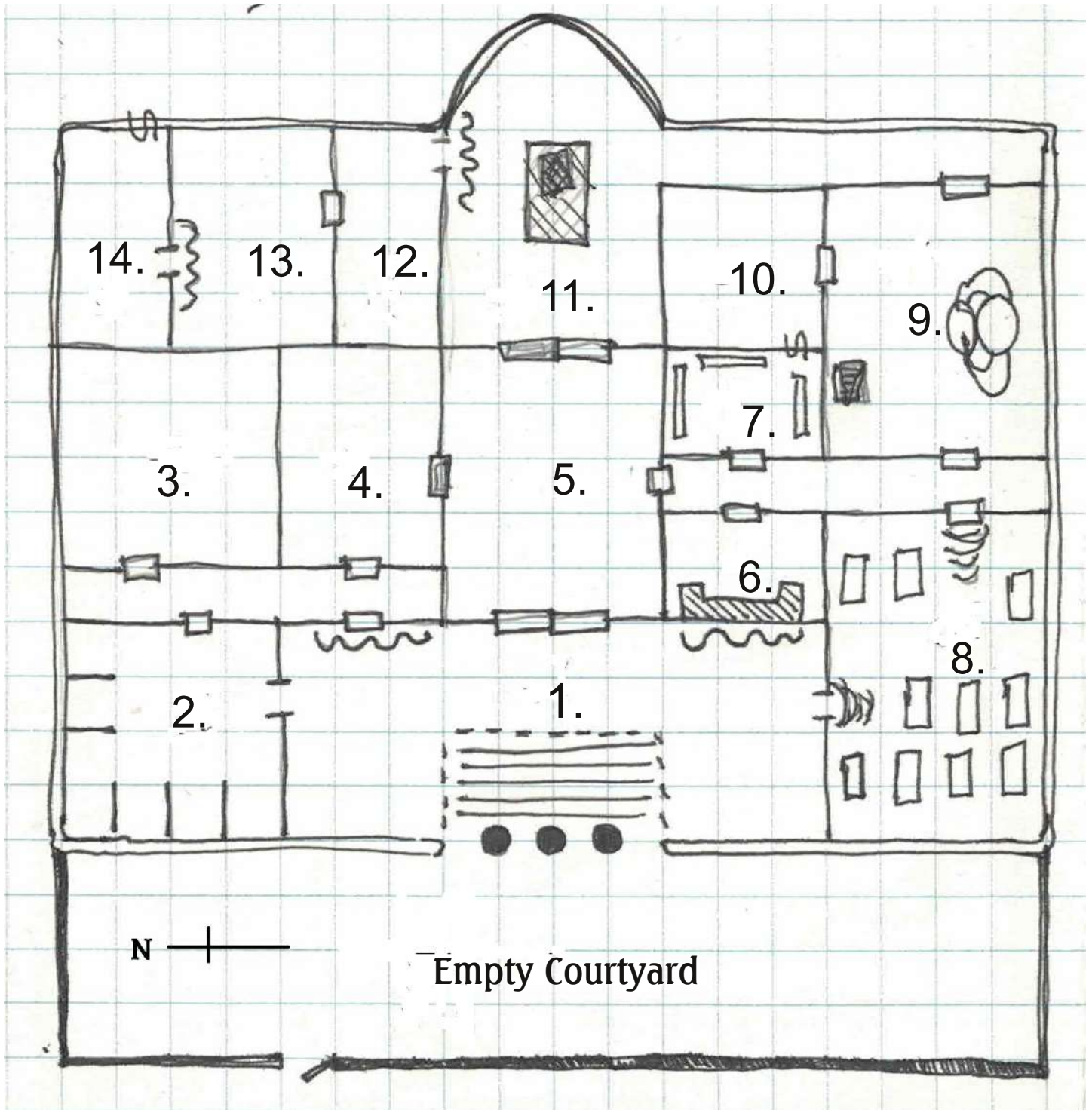
to the black reflecting pool in room 10 above. There is a secret door which leads to a small alcove with a ladder which leads up to an empty apartment outside the shrine. The High Priest will attempt to escape by this egress if the battle goes ill for the cultists. This squalid safe house has coins and gems secreted in compartments for the priest's quick escape. He will mark the PC's for vengeance.

If the shrine is looted of its gilded, and exotic treasures only the most depraved and perverted nobles would desire them. Finding this type of connoisseur will be an adventure worth telling in itself. As trade in the bazaars of the city they are basically worthless and would only bring inquiries from the city guards if traded openly. This will reveal another of the genre's tropes; the need to travel far and wide! This could come from the need to sell ones ill gotten gains in a foreign market, to escape the wrath of enraged cultists or outrun the reach of the city guard.

It should be noted the demon Thog will attack indiscriminately. The High Priest has little control over the creature. It just never thought of leaving the altar before. Roll randomly to see who the demon attacks first; the High Priest, other priests, the guards or the players. All are fair game!

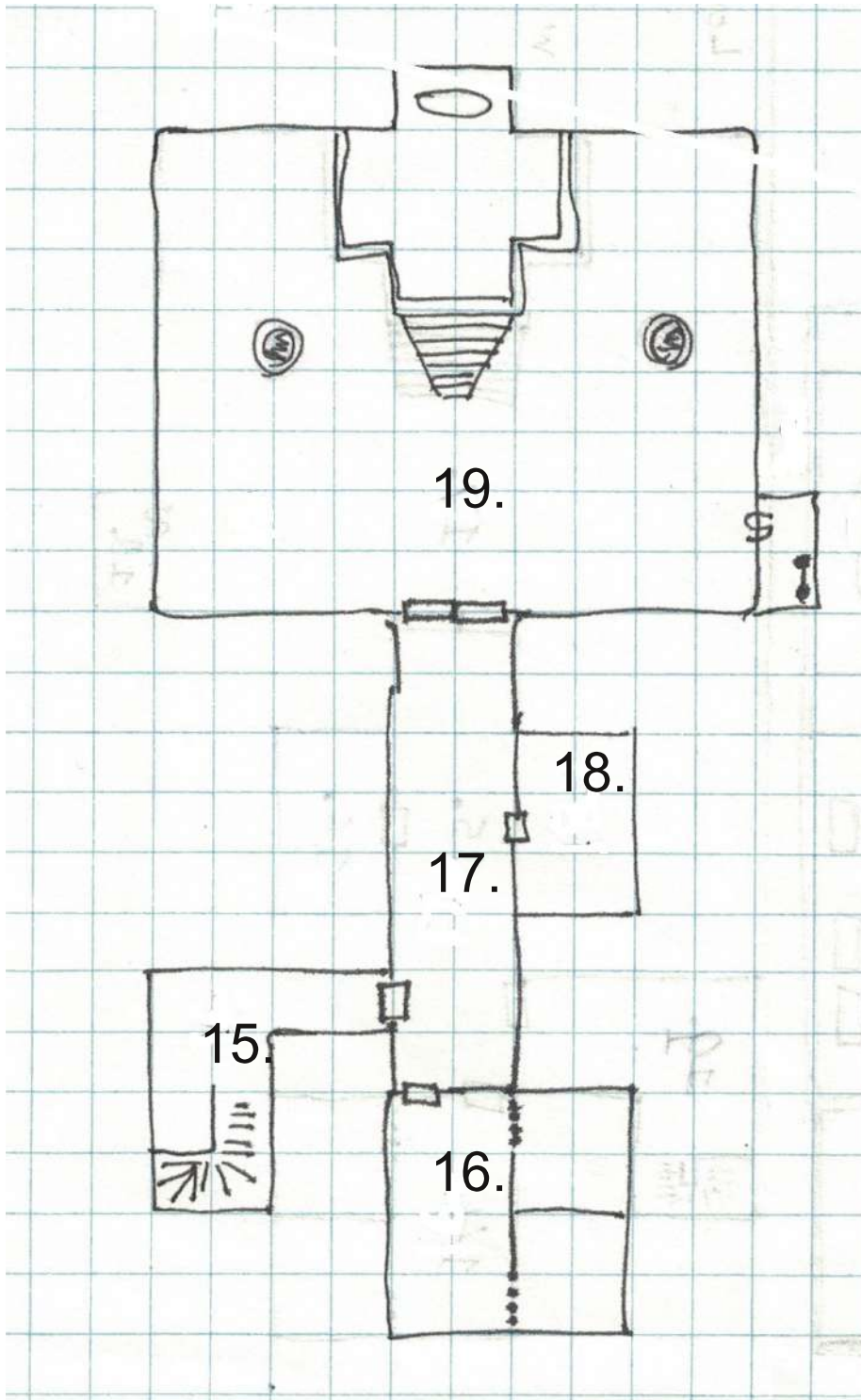






# Shrine of the Keepers

Main Temple Level

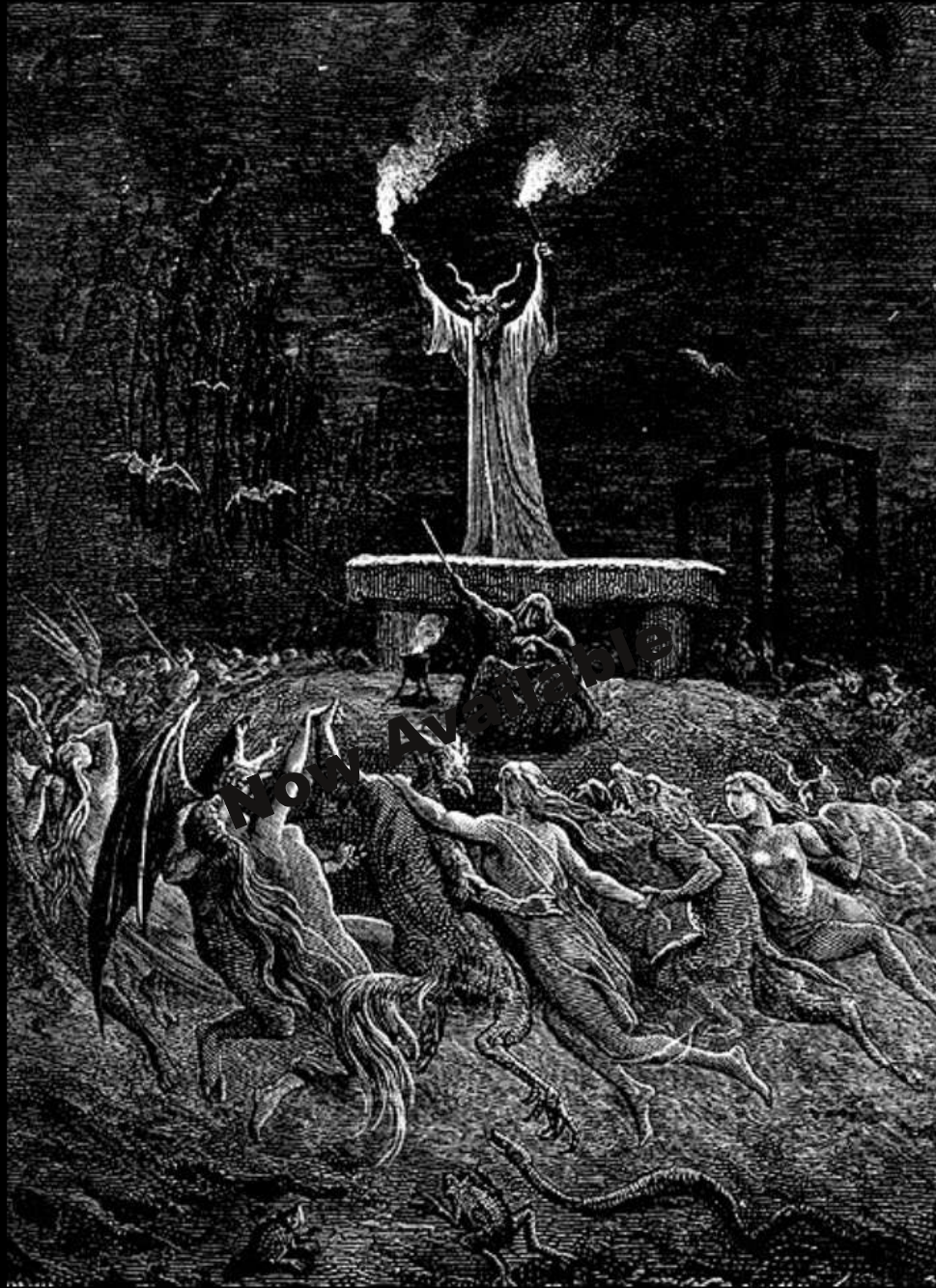


**Shrine of the Keepers**  
Lower Temple Level





# Horrors Material & Magic Malignant



**A Compendium of Magic and Monsters for USR Sword & Sorcery**

# SAILING ON THE SEAS OF USR SWORD & SORCERY

Optional and Mass Combat Rules for USR Sword & Sorcery



A USR Sword & Sorcery Supplement