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JOURNAL



ISSUE 3: MAR 24



FINAL PREP



CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Hex Roll Table.....	3
The Golden Coast.....	5
A Drop-in Dungeon.....	6
“The Madman” 1-page.....	8
The Inciting Incident	9
Conclusion.....	10



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INTRODUCTION



FOREWORD

Welcome to issue 3 of JOURNAL!

This time around I'm going to complete the preparation I need to get ready for session 1 of my new campaign.

So far I have:

- A Map
- A list of my Inspirations for the setting
- A list of the Themes I want to explore
- A map of the starting Town
- A handful of NPC's living in the town
- Some quests for the NPC's to hand out

It hasn't been any great amount of work to get this far, simply through focussing on what I need to get the game going. There's bound to be plenty more work down the line, but I'm going to minimise that by concentrating on the things that my player's show an interest in. I'll fill out any gaps by falling back on my **Inspirations** and **Themes** during any improvisational moments at the table.

The truth is: I have no idea what my players might do, so there's no point devoting my time to developing anything more than I absolutely need to.

So, the last things I need are:

- A Random Encounter table
- A Drop-in dungeon
- An inciting incident

Here I go...

-DMG



HEX ROLL TABLE



RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLES

In Issue 1 I created a small campaign area map.

Rather than plan where I want the adventure to go, creating encounters for a journey from A to B, I prefer to create a random encounter table instead. That way, my player's characters can choose to go wherever they like and I'll be ready with something for them to see or do!

Random encounter tables can be found in most RPG rulebooks or supplements. Usually these tables form a good template to follow when creating my own tables, likely having things like frequency and probability of dice roll results already worked out by the publishers or game designers. All I need to do is duplicate the method used by my chosen rule set, but populate the table with things that reinforce the setting I'm creating.

I feel a tailored encounter table helps set the tone of the region or area it covers, giving players a sense of what kinds of sights and dangers exist in any particular part of the world. For example: If I envision there are a lot of merchants that traverse the roads of a region, with bandits that prey on them, I'll populate that region's table with encounters that revolve around merchants and bandits. If a forested region is inhabited by goblin tribes and brown bears, I'll emphasise those kinds of encounters on my forest tables. I'll add roleplaying encounters, exploration encounters, and discovery encounters, as well as those that might end up resulting in combat. That way my tables will generate variety. After all, there's really a limitless combination of things that might happen to characters when they start exploring, so I like my table to cover a good assortment of events.

I only need to create a single table for now, though. One that covers the whole of **The Golden Coast** region.

HEX ROLL TABLE



As I'm using **Crown & Skull** for this campaign, I'm going to create a Hex Roll table as presented in the rulebook. Normally I'd go for a 2D6 table, but Hex Roll tables are cleverly put together to provide not only an encounter, but also the location of that encounter. They also generate 100 results – perfect for journeys across a large region, or for a hex-crawl style of game!

Each Hex on my map of The Golden Coast represents a single day of travel. Each day of travel, players will roll to see what encounter they might face.

I already put some basic thought into what The Golden Coast region is like while I was drawing the map and deciding on my Inspirations and Themes, so coming up with creatures and NPCs relative to them should be fairly easy at this stage.

As one of my core themes is *Sinbad Films*, I decided The Golden Coast would be 'Mediterranean' in climate and nature. I realise that Sinbad has more of an Arabian setting, but the area of the world that The Golden Coast occupies is closer to the eastern Mediterranean in climate and topography. So, I need to include elements that reinforce that feeling. A quick Google gives me some ideas for the types of terrain (along with economic and social features found in that type of region) that should make the environment feel Mediterranean. I also want to populate the encounter table with monsters inspired by the Sinbad films too. To this end, I created a short list of the elements that came to mind:

TYPICAL SITES

- Vineyards
- Orchards (Lemon, Orange, Olive)
- Golden Fields (Wheat)

TYPICAL CREATURES

- **Bronze Colossus:** A bronze golem like the Minoton from *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (using an iron golem stat-block, or the like)
- **Horned Mantis:** A gigantic hunting insect drawn from the huge monsters of *Mysterious Island* (using the stat block for a giant scorpion or other "giant" insect)
- **Hunting Puma:** Adding a natural Mediterranean predator to the mix (using the stat block for a lion, tiger, or even a wolf)

TYPICAL PEOPLE

- **Hill Bandits:** Drawn from stories of the *Arabian Nights* who plague the roads of the region (I'm sure there's a bandit stat block somewhere)
- **Black Robes:** Semi-spellcasting minions of the "Black Vizier", based on Prince Koura from *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (The stat block for an assassin, cultist, or adventurer will do for now)

I also want to add in some mysterious or supernatural encounters that can't be explained so easily. I'm hoping that these will foreshadow something in the campaign. I don't know what right now, but that's not important.

With these basic elements, I can create a table like this:



HEX ROLL TABLE



THE GOLDEN COAST

The Golden Coast is a fertile stretch of land dotted with vineyards and orchards of lemon, orange, and olives. Rolling, grassy terrain, scrub, and light woods of cyprus, laurel, and acacia trees cover the landscape, broken here and there by barren, stony ground. Rich merchants ply their trade along the well-travelled and guarded roads, in constant danger from the notorious bandits that descend from their hideouts in the hills to raid and plunder.

D10 LOCATIONS

1. **Wildfires:** A forest, villa, farm, or vineyard - consumed by raging wildfire!
2. **Boulder Field:** Exposed rock, stone, and boulders cover the landscape.
3. **Disused Vineyard:** Overgrown thickets and wild-growing trees.
4. **Broken Ground:** Sun-baked cracks and weather-worn gullies.
5. **Thornweed:** Sharp brambles and overgrown thorn bushes block travel.
6. **Old Orchards:** Crumbling stone walls and haphazard dead trees.
7. **Rugged Ground:** Undulating, rocky terrain covered in loose stones.
8. **Farm Fields:** Tall golden grains in fields broken by walls and gates.
9. **Working Orchards:** Open fields of olive, grape, and fruit trees.
10. **Golden Grass:** Gently rolling grassy plains with views to the horizon.

D10 EVENTS

1. **Horned Mantis:** A giant camouflaged mantis waits to ambush passing prey.
2. **Hill Bandits:** Bloodthirsty bandits looking for booty by any means.
3. **Hunting Puma:** A man-eating predator of enormous size and ferocity.
4. **Black Robe:** The diabolic henchmen of the Black Vizier.
5. **Bronze Construct:** These ancient living-statues still wreak havoc.
6. **Dark Mist:** An ominous, chilling fog rolls in from the sea, thick and evil.
7. **Baking Sun:** Clear skies bring intense heat in direct sunlight.
8. **Merchant Caravan:** Horses and wagons bring goods and entertainment.
9. **Abandoned Mine:** Shelter from sun and storm, but does it lead somewhere?
10. **Famous Adventurer:** A brave adventurer, with rumours of treasure.

A DROP-IN DUNGEON



JUST ONE PAGE WILL DO!

Having a drop-in dungeon in my pocket is a great way to control players. If they decide to wander off somewhere I haven't prepared, it slows them down and postpones their exploration until I'm ready. If the game is flagging, or the player's don't know what to do: A drop-in dungeon gives them temporary focus. Plus, they're fun!

I don't know what it is, but my player's just love to explore dungeons! If they don't encounter one for a few sessions, they get itchy for one to delve, start questioning NPC about rumours of dungeons, or just proclaim how they haven't explored a dungeon in a while. So, having one ready is just a good move.

I try to keep drop-in dungeons (and larger, more complex dungeon adventures) on a single page that I can refer to at the table, sticking to an easy method of creation that's quick and leaves enough room to adapt the adventure at the table, on the fly. I'm simply not a fan of long-winded dungeon adventure write-ups that take an hour or more to read through, having things like "read-aloud" text boxes, or the like. Instead, I keep them simple and to the point. Besides, this is intended more as a distraction than anything influential to the campaign. If it transpires that the elements of the dungeon peak the player's interest, I can always develop the idea further at a later date.

I need three things to make the dungeon ready to explore:

- A map
- A backstory
- An antagonist

THE MAP

I create a simple dungeon map with around 5-6 rooms to explore, making notes on the map to highlight unique features, creature locations, treasures, notable dialogue, traps, etc.

THE BACKSTORY

Every adventure, no matter how small or insignificant, needs a backstory. It's something that the players can discover. It's what ties the adventure to the setting. It's what makes the adventure complete in both the player's and my own mind. Even if the players never discover the backstory, I feel better knowing what it is.

For a drop-in dungeon, I don't need to develop anything more than a simple premise drawn from my Themes to generate a backstory. I'll choose **Magic Has Consequence** for this dungeon.

However, just placing a dungeon dictates the setting has some kind of history that needs developing. I'm not going to develop any history now, but I do need a simple explanation as to why the dungeon exists. I'll go with a generic ancient empire that occupied The Golden Coast long ago, this dungeon being from that era. I'll call the ancient empire the Khytaan Dynasty and determine it's the dungeon's architecture that identifies it as being from that period. I can also use the Khytaan Dynasty to explain ruins and such in the future, but I don't need to consider any more of that empire's history for now. I'll develop it further as the need arises.

As for the premise: my Themes dictate there's a cost to magic and often a promise of something to justify that cost. So, I'll say that someone lost a loved one and is trying to use magic to get them back.

I also like my Inspiration of *Mysterious Island*. In that story, Captain Nemo is experimenting with genetic manipulation to grow creatures to enormous size in order to feed a starving world. I like the "mad scientist making crazy experiments" idea, so I'll go with that too.

A DROP-IN DUNGEON



After a bit of thought I come up with:

- A man discovers the Khytaan ruins and finds ancient magical books and scrolls inside
- He doesn't know what to do with his newfound treasure, so studies them to determine their worth
- An otherworldly entity contacts the man in dreams and offers to teach him the magical power of the scrolls, but he refuses
- The man's wife is seriously injured in an accident, resulting in the loss of her legs
- The man turns to the otherworldly entity, seeking the knowledge of the scrolls to magically heal his wife
- The otherworldly entity grants the power, but twists the man's mind into performing ever greater and more harmful magic
- The result is the man is driven mad while conducting Frankenstein-like magical experiments on animals and innocents in order to restore his wife's legs

THE ANTAGONIST

Finally, I need someone or something to oppose the player's characters, but it seems I've already determined the opposition while thinking about the backstory: The Madman and his creations!

Still keeping it simple (and bearing in mind that my players will only be very low-level) I'll use the stats for some goblins/hobgoblins for the Frankenstein monsters and perhaps an orc for the madman himself. I'll describe the monsters (renaming them Abominations) as having animal parts grafted onto their bodies, giving them claws and fangs to attack with, while the madman will be armed with a huge meat cleaver. I'm not going to introduce any magic at this level, but I'll leave his scrolls and books lying around for some treasure.

So, keeping it simple, I end up with a one-page dungeon like this:



THE MADMAN



A crazed madman conducts horrifying experiments in a lost ruin of the Khytaan Dynasty, torturing man and beast alike to create foul abominations!

The chamber is the madman's laboratory, soaked in blood and filled with operation tables. Human and animal corpses, in various states of amputation, lie on the tables surrounded by blood-stained saws and other medical paraphernalia: The Madman working feverishly on his latest creation.

"Ah, fresh subjects for my experiments!" he exclaims with a twisted grin. "Welcome to my home, where I explore the secrets of life and death. You will not leave here alive, but you will serve a greater purpose. Come, let me show you what I have done so far."

A chest, locked and trapped with a poison needle contains a small amount of treasure.

The entrance is hidden in an overgrown wooded area, clumsily hidden behind thick vegetation. The glint of treasure can be seen from within, where a headless skeleton with a missing arm lies.

An abomination rises up from the water to attack.

Heavy locked iron gates block exploration.

The stench of decay can be smelled long before the piles of mutilated human and animal corpses are seen...

Caged Abominations.

Caged villagers and animals, thankful of freedom.

Timer: The "Latest Creation" (ogre), lying on the stone table, awakes in 1D4 +1 rounds.
Threat: The Madman pulls a lever and opens the west door, unleashing the caged abominations.
Treat: Fire keeps the abominations at bay; the room lit with several torches.

INCITING INCIDENT



BRINGING THE PARTY TOGETHER

Now to get the campaign off to an exciting start!

I want my players rolling dice as soon as possible when we start the game, so I'm going to bring them together with a combat encounter.

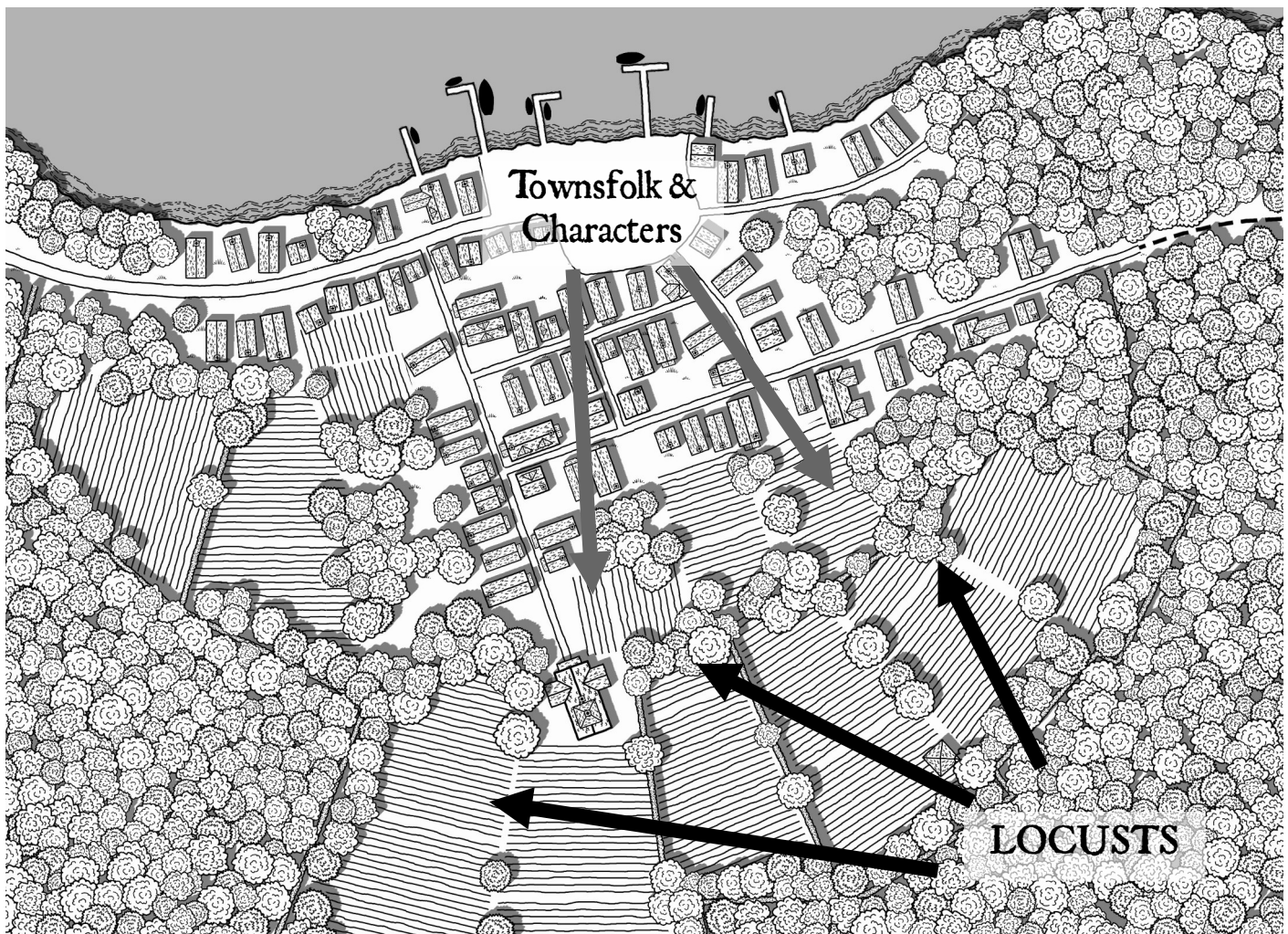
I've already determined that everyone will be starting in the town of Lamros and that the leader of Lamros, Kamos Kain, is motivated to provide safety for his townsfolk. I also created a starting quest to be offered by Kamos: Destroy the black locusts plaguing Lamros.

That gives me enough for the inciting Incident (all my prior preparation coming into play now!).

I think I'll start with the black locusts swarming over the fields on the edge of town, drawing the entire town (along with the player's characters) to the fields in order to repel the locusts.

This incident immediately gives the players a reason to work together and start building their reputation as heroes amongst the townsfolk. It also provides Kamos Kain with a reason to recruit the players into his quest line.

I'll just use a Swarm stat-block for the locusts and balance the encounter at the table.



CONCLUSION



THE TOOLBOX

Well, my preparation for the upcoming campaign is complete. Not too much work to create a solid toolbox to use at the table.

In review of what that toolbox contains:

- A list of *Inspirations* that allow me to imagine, visualise, and describe the world around the player's characters
- A list of *Themes* to base adventures around, determine NPC motivations, and create consistency to different aspects of the campaign
- A *map* of the starting region, illustrating safe havens, places to explore, and giving the players an overview of the world their characters inhabit
- A map of the *starting town* that provides characters with a place to stay, a place to pray, and a place to pay
- A short list of *NPCs* that inhabit the starting town, along with their motivations, knowledge, and some quest hooks
- A list of NPC *names* that can be drawn upon during incidental encounters, or when the characters meet someone I haven't prepared
- A *Random Encounter Table* to provide locations to explore, challenges to overcome, and dangers to face as the players travel The Golden Coast
- A *drop-in dungeon* for when I need to distract the players, slow them down, or just provide an exciting one-off adventure
- An *inciting encounter* to kick-off the campaign in style

The next step is to bring it all to the table and unleash my players on it.

I'll talk about what happens next time.

Until then: let your imagination go wild!

-DMG