


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/89 March '16

## ALTERNATE DUNGEONS II

### HAVENS AND HELLS

by Sean Punch

**EASTERN ADVENTURES**

by Christopher R. Rice

**THE TITAN'S HOUSE**

by David L. Pulver

**FIVE BEST PLACES TO NEARLY  
GET KILLED BEFORE YOU DIE!**

by Matt Riggsby

**THE SECRET OF  
THE EXPLORERS**

by Steven Marsh

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For years, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* has delighted fans of crypt-crawling hack-and-slash fantasy. But sometimes you want to push the limits of what that game can do, while sticking with most of the *Dungeon Fantasy* framework. Fortunately, *Pyramid* is here to help, by providing alternate ways of looking at swords and sorcery. This month, we offer *three* meaty features – each of which could be a supplement unto itself! – along with other bite-sized goodies.

What if the battle between humanity and monsters was all part of some cosmic game, a diversion of the Gods, a clash betwixt *Havens and Hells*? *Dungeon Fantasy* mastermind Sean Punch offers a complete epic campaign setting. Imagine a world where death in battle isn't permanent, money doesn't exist, and the heroes' actions could ultimately threaten to uncover a secret that strikes at the heart of creation itself. In addition to its history to explore and enigmas to unravel, this campaign includes a detailed breakdown of what advantages, disadvantages, and skills are most appropriate for such a game, plus insight into how magic reacts differently (regardless of *what* magic system you choose)!

Size isn't everything, but it's pretty darn important . . . especially when you find yourself in *The Titan's House*! This month's Eidetic Memory offering from David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* – turns the notion of scale on its head as the heroes explore the gargantuan domain of the titan Gromm. This adventure – suitable as a side trip for any *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign – supplies details on the two-story house and its dungeon below, maps of the area, and seven new monsters to challenge heroes who poke where they're not welcome . . .

The original *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers* explored the idea of the "Mysterious East," with its deadly martial artists. This notion was expanded in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 12: Ninja*, introducing the titular sneaky assassin. Now, we can offer the possibility of even richer *Eastern Adventures*. Longtime *Pyramid* contributor Christopher R. Rice shows how to craft a campaign that revolves around Eastern realms. It includes notes on how to translate existing templates, plus a new lens – the samurai – and new races, power-ups, and more.

This issue also features a Random Thought Table that presents an easily added campaign hook to shake up a fundamental concept in dungeon fantasy, plus another new *Car Wars* vignette from Matt Riggsby that sets the stage for the coming new edition. You'll also get a player-usable map from *The Titan's House*. With this month's *Pyramid*, everything "Ye Olde" is new again . . . and cooler than ever!

## ARTICLE COLORS

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

- Pale Blue:* In This Issue
- Brown:* In Every Issue
- Green:* Columnist
- Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT?

I first got into *Dungeons & Dragons* – with or without the *Advanced* – when I was about eight or nine years old. I'm sure it comes as a surprise to no one that it had a big impact on my childhood and early adult years. (Did you know that a “Steve Marsh” was listed as the editor for the *Expert Set*? That was a big deal for preteen me.)

Yet of all the memories I have of that venerable system, the ones that stick with me most strongly are those where the game was forced to do something *different*: Traveling to another plane of existence – or to Hell itself – with its own strange rules. Flying into space using *wooden ships*. An entire plane of existence devoted to horror.

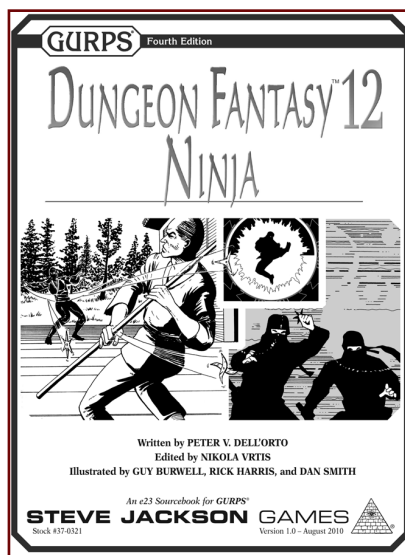
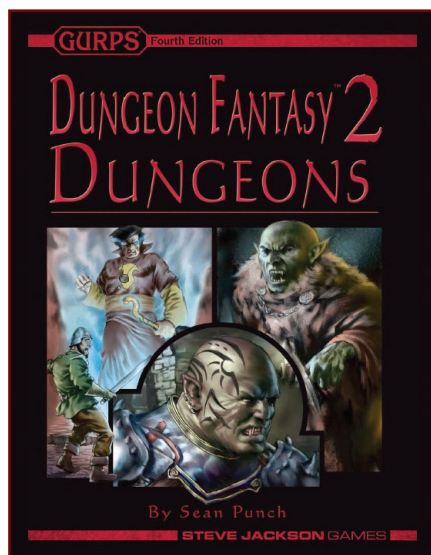
Even the sillier delves into oddness burned brightly in my mind, like the gray infinite featureless plane Nogard from the April Fool-themed magazine *Dragon* #96. (I confess it took me many years to understand the pun in the name “Nogard” . . .)

So it's no surprise that the “Alternate Dungeons” issues of *Pyramid* are some of my favorite. These features keep the pick-up-and-play style of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* while allowing for whole new realms of adventuring.

This issue is a bit different, in that we have focused on three large articles. Each one could practically be a supplement on its own. (And if you enjoy any of them enough to see that happen, let us know!) In this way, we're delivering something that's different both for *Dungeon Fantasy* and for *Pyramid* itself.

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

So, do you like what we've done differently this month? Did something herein leap off the page and grab you by the lapels? Is there something we should leave to the goblin hordes to tear apart? Let us know privately at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or join forces with like-minded adventurers online at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



*Additional Material:* Peter V. Dell'Orto, Jason “PK” Levine, and Sean Punch

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## HELL

*Hell* is the greater world of the new Game. It is the dominion of Chaos, a vastness of storm-churned oceans, primeval forests, jagged peaks, and seething volcanoes. It is a real place, not “another dimension” – the very concept of other planes of existence is alien to monsters and men, and beyond the reach of their mightiest magic. Still, demons *do* dwell here, and there are definitely bottomless fissures, frozen lakes, and lava pools. A visitor somehow transported from a traditional fantasy setting could be forgiven for believing that this is the kingdom of devils who rule over lost souls.

And there *is* a palpable air of eternal damnation here, because nothing that dies in Hell remains truly dead. Monsters of Chaos “respawn” after a time. Some reconstitute bodily in the nearest suitable habitat. Others return as undead, their indestructible spirits joined with broken bodies (often of a completely different kind!) reanimated by divine magic instead of life . . . an attempt by the Gods wagering on Chaos to eat away at the morale of Civilization.

The agents of Civilization don’t stay dead, either. Those who die in Hell reappear at the nearest Haven, awakening naked on the altar in the center of town.

## HAVENS

Civilization’s home base is the *Havens* dotted across Hell. These are splendid discs of sunlight ranging in size from hamlets to villages, surrounded by ever-fertile fields and quenched by gentle showers and inexhaustible springs. They enjoy perpetually clement weather – no storms, droughts, or deep freezes – and provide a modest population with enough to eat and drink.

Even better, no being of Chaos can cross or project effects inside a Haven’s borders. An invisible wall of divine power repels monsters and their abilities. No exception has ever been recorded.

Perhaps best of all, within a Haven, mortals can die only of old age (no known magic can halt or reverse aging) or by their own hand (accident or suicide). Attempts to injure others simply fail: weapons stop short, traps don’t trigger, curses fizzle, poisons prove harmless, and even roundabout schemes somehow miscarry. Deities on both sides of the Game judge the intent of potentially lethal actions and uphold this rule, according it the strength of Divine Law. Consequently, mortals tend to be pacifists with a firm belief in the Gods’ inherent goodness.

The catch, and what makes the Game a game, is that Havens harbor only modest plant life (grains, herbs, and vegetables) and small animals (bees, cats, chickens, rabbits, etc.), and offer neither the space nor the resources for herding. This means the inhabitants have no indigenous source of large-animal products (e.g., horn, leather, and sinew). As well, Havens are devoid of large trees, good-quality building stone, minerals (ores, petroleum, sulfur, and so on), and magical assets. And since Havens are endlessly fertile and most residents see old age, their populations grow, increasing the pressure to somehow obtain the missing necessities. Thus, as tools break, buildings fall to ruin, and both space and magic run short, mortals have no choice but to venture into Hell to seek what they need. This task falls upon *Collectors*.

## COLLECTORS

Civilization’s fittest, most cunning, and most magically gifted souls are chosen from an early age to become their Haven’s Collectors. Most learn the way of arms, improving quickly because mortal invulnerability *within* Havens allows them to spar as if fighting for keeps (though this does breed dangerously overconfident fighters). Others are taught magic, handed down from the Gods themselves at the dawn of Creation; such training is limited due to the fact that magic is a finite resource in the Havens, but the unrestricted power in Hell makes wizardry a weapon worth mastering. A few are taught the prayers for petitioning the Gods directly, and become priestly miracle-workers, limited only by what Divine Law decrees the Gods may do for their servants.

Once trained, these adventurers strike out into Hell to battle Chaos and win resources. Capturing enough to supply a Haven is a full-time job; Collectors spend more time away than at home, exploiting magic, muscle, and ruthlessness (sometimes including enslaved fiends) to transport the spoils.

### COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Mortals and monsters are aware of almost nothing discussed in *The Cosmic Backdrop* (p. 4) save for the existence of the Gods and of Divine Law that prohibits unmaking. They’re conscious of only those parts of *Second Creation* (pp. 4-6) which they can observe firsthand: the relative harshness of Hell and safety of Havens, Civilization’s need for resources and thus Collectors, the fact that mortals cannot murder one another in Havens, the impermanence of death in Hell, magic’s inability to stop aging (or interact with other dimensions), and the escalating intensity of conflict between men and monsters. In particular, nobody but the Gods knows that the Game is a game – and not the first one – and even the Gods are blind to the truth about Ancient Magicks and Elder Things.

#### *Good and Evil*

Perhaps the hardest thing to grasp is that Civilization sees its Gods as “good” and locked in an eternal cosmic struggle with the “evil” deities of Chaos; sapient Chaos denizens have a similar mythology; and both perceptions are inaccurate! *All* Gods are friendly rivals playing a game. In an ineffable spirit of “Hey, wouldn’t *this* be fun?”, they sometimes even answer the opposing side’s prayers or agree to switch teams. Thus, “good” and “evil” describe loyalties in an utterly temporal conflict, and have nothing to do with any kind of divinely mandated morality.

Which isn’t to say that there’s no cosmic sense of right and wrong. From the Gods’ perspective, Divine Law is *good*. Elder Things and Ancient Magicks – by dint of lying outside Creation and Divine Law – would be *evil*. Godly omniscience fails around the latter phenomena, however, meaning that agents of Civilization and Chaos can openly dabble in matters that their deities would call evil in the name of doing what they themselves would call good. It’s all very confusing!

*Primary Skills:* The points spent on the two Fast-Draw skills can be spent on a single skill if the player wishes.

\* This is for *one specific weapon*, just as if it were for Weapon Bond. Losing the weapon means that advantage is also lost! The GM may allow a quest to recover the weapon, but nothing less than it, or a *miraculously* identical copy, will work. The points cannot be reassigned to a different signature weapon.

## THIEF

The thieves of the Mysterious East operate much like their brethren, and they need no adjustments or notes. Those without *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 12: Ninja* may wish to use thieves as a way to fill in that niche.

*Illusionists are the most common types of wizards.*

## WIZARD

Wizards (often called *sorcerers*) are not necessarily masters of a specific element, but instead are particularly adept

magical generalists. Out of the three archetypes presented in *Adventurers*, *illusionists* are by far the most common.

*Advantages:* Add Life-Force Burn (**Power-Ups**, p. 24) and Resistant to Deception (+3) or (+8) [5 or 10] to available traits.

*Disadvantages:* Add Odious Personal Habit (Mysterious or Enigmatic) [-5] to available traits.

*Background Skills:* Add Artist (Illusion) (H) IQ-2 [1]-13 to the option list.

# NEW LENS

One new lens especially suits Mysterious East *Dungeon Fantasy* campaigns.

## SAMURAI (KNIGHT OR SWASHBUCKLER LENS)

0 points

You are a warrior and leader of men who knows no fear. With your *daisho* at your side, you do the bidding of your master with complete and utter loyalty. Alternatively, you're a "fallen" samurai (called *ronin*) who may wander the countryside as a knight-errant or mercenary, looking for a reason to continue your masterless existence. Most samurai are bedecked in their iconic armor (*o-yoroi*) – use steel laminate plate (p. B282) with or without the Ornate modifier (*Adventures*, p. 26).

This lens is most often applied to knights, but those who focus on swordplay may be swashbucklers.

*Secondary Characteristics:* Will +3 [15].

*Advantages:* Fearlessness 1; Chi Training (Kiai) [1]; and Social Regard 1 (Feared) [5]. • Knights add Charisma [5/level] to options. • Spend 35 points on further advantages instead of 60.

*Disadvantages:* Code of Honor (Bushido) [-15] is required for samurai, while ronin often have Code of Honor ("Stays Bought") [-5].

*Primary Skills:* Knights omit Shield and add Leadership (A) IQ+3 [4]-13\*. • Swashbucklers choose one sword skill at DX+4 [16]-19 and Leadership

(A) IQ+1 [4]-11 (as their melee skills package), and may take Bow (A) DX [2]-15 as a ranged weapon option.

*Secondary Skills:* Kiai (H) HT [4]-13. • For knights, Leadership is no longer a secondary skill.

*Background Skills:* Knights take *three* instead of four.

• Swashbucklers take *five* instead of seven.

\* Includes +2 from Born War-Leader Talent.

## SHO'NUFF I GOT RESPECT!

*Dungeon Fantasy* ignores things like Status, standard Wealth, and well, society beyond "Town" as a place to recoup, rest, and sell loot. Mysterious East adventures can use the same model, but most traditional stories assume that some social interplay will occur. For such encounters, Social Regard (see below) makes them more interesting. A GM looking for an alternative can use "Traits for Town" from *Pyramid* #3/58: *Urban Fantasy II*.

### Social Regard

See pp. B86-87

This functions as per the *Basic Set* except that delvers can purchase this trait up to +8, not +4. Those with Social Stigma have a lower maximum than other delvers. This equals eight minus the reaction penalties from Social Stigma; e.g., an ogre barbarian with -5 in reaction penalties from Social Stigma (Minority Group) and Social Stigma (Monster) could have at most  $8 - 5 = 3$  levels of Social Regard.

# NON-HUMANS

The following *Dungeon Fantasy* races are not available for Mysterious East campaigns unless the GM permits them (see *Gaijin and Foreigners*, p. 15): coleopteran, halfling, gargoyle,

leprechaun, minotaur, and troll. For the most part, the majority of non-humans are human-looking or capable of hiding their otherness.

During the day, one warband warrior is here, cleaning his weapons (two others are with Gromm, one at the gate, two on patrol). At night, four warband giants (2/3 of the band) are asleep, one stands on guard outside the door (ready to awaken the others in the event of trouble) and one is on patrol (switching with the one on guard duty every few hours).

### 13. Thrall's Quarters

A bleak room with eight simple wooden cots (16' long) with straw mattresses, along with several piles of laundry and a laundry tub.

During the day, one thrall does laundry. At night, six thralls snore here.

### 14. Storage Room

The room is crammed with piles of broken furniture, linens, ceramic pots, carpentry tools, etc. (all scaled SM +2 or +4), two tons of salted meat, giant sacks with a ton of salt (\$30,000), and giant barrels holding 2,400 gallons of ale (\$12,000). This is a good place to hide.

*Jack: I've got an idea.*

*Elmont: What?*

*Jack: I'm gonna wake a sleeping giant.*

*Elmont: Well, that doesn't seem like a good idea.*

– *Jack the Giant Slayer*

## SECOND FLOOR

The south windows overhang the cliff and are often used as urinals. The inner windows look down on the courtyard. In the event of attack, the thralls gather on the stairs leading to the second floor.

### 15. Vorg's Room

A heavy bed dominates the room. The floor is strewn with garments and wyvern and bear pelts (400 square feet of exotic pelts, \$2,000, 300 lbs.). A bench holds a pile of smelly clothes. A fur cloak and an axe hangs from pegs. On a table is a flagon of ale and a hunting horn; nearby is a wooden stool. A chest (locked) contains 70 silver coins. All items and coins are scaled for SM +4. Stuffed monster heads adorn one wall: mantichore, giant elk, siege beast, giant ape, and wyvern (20-70 lbs., \$500 each).

Vorg (p. 31) is here at night only about 50% of the time.

Day or night, chained to the bed frame is a pretty female giant, 14' tall, half-dressed in a tattered shift, body bruised and cut. She's Zaki, an uppity giant-thrall (p. 32) forced to endure Vorg's attentions. Zaki is at 2/3 HP due to Vorg's brutality, but her spirit has not broken. She reacts at +5 to any adventurers offering her a chance at freedom or vengeance, or to free her brother Orak (see Room 21, p. 29). The 9' chain is DR 14, HP 22.

### 16. Gromm's Chamber

The eldest titan's bedroom; all furnishings and goods are scaled for SM +4. Gromm (pp. 30-31) sleeps here at night, often with his cat Loki (see *Critters*, p. 30) curled on his bed. By day, he locks the room.

There's a giant wooden bed with an iron frame; a chair, a bedside table, a mammoth-hide rug (800 square feet of exotic furs, \$4,000, 600 lbs.), a large closet, and a chamberpot.

Hanging on the wall above the bed is a 900-square-foot tapestry Freyla spent an entire year weaving for her father as a birthday gift. In brilliant reds and gold threads, it depicts the titan Gromm with a great fire-breathing dragon atop a pile of gold (350 lbs., \$7,000).

On the bedside table are two silver goblets, a dagger, a giant-sized dragonbone comb, and a gold candle holder with a pair of wax candles. On rungs on the wall are a crossed spear and a great axe. A "small" closet (10 x 15 yards!) holds two fur cloaks, a robe, a pair of boots, a pair of slippers, four shirts, a pair of trousers, and a hat with a roc's feather crest. (Also a titan-sized moth with a 6" wingspan. Harmless but scary . . .)

On the floor of the closet is a large chest (100 cubic feet), holding three suits of neatly pressed titan-sized women's dresses and slippers (clothes that belonged to the master's wife, Skraeda) and an ivory scroll case (\$5,000, 10 lbs.). Inside is a map that shows the route to the realm of the giants (p. 29).

### 17. Nursery

This room contains a giant cradle housing Skrom, a 9.5'-long titan baby, his toys, and his exhausted wet nurse Hilda, a 13'-tall giant-thrall who struggles to feed and care for a babe almost as big as she is.

Skrom is awake about half the time (roll randomly); his occasional crying can be heard down the hall. He's big and demanding enough to be dangerous: whether he coos delightedly at someone's antics and claps his chubby hands together, is enthralled by their bard singing a lullaby and goes back to sleep, wails loudly for his missing mother, or grabs a party member to "play" with depends on reaction rolls and the PCs' own actions.

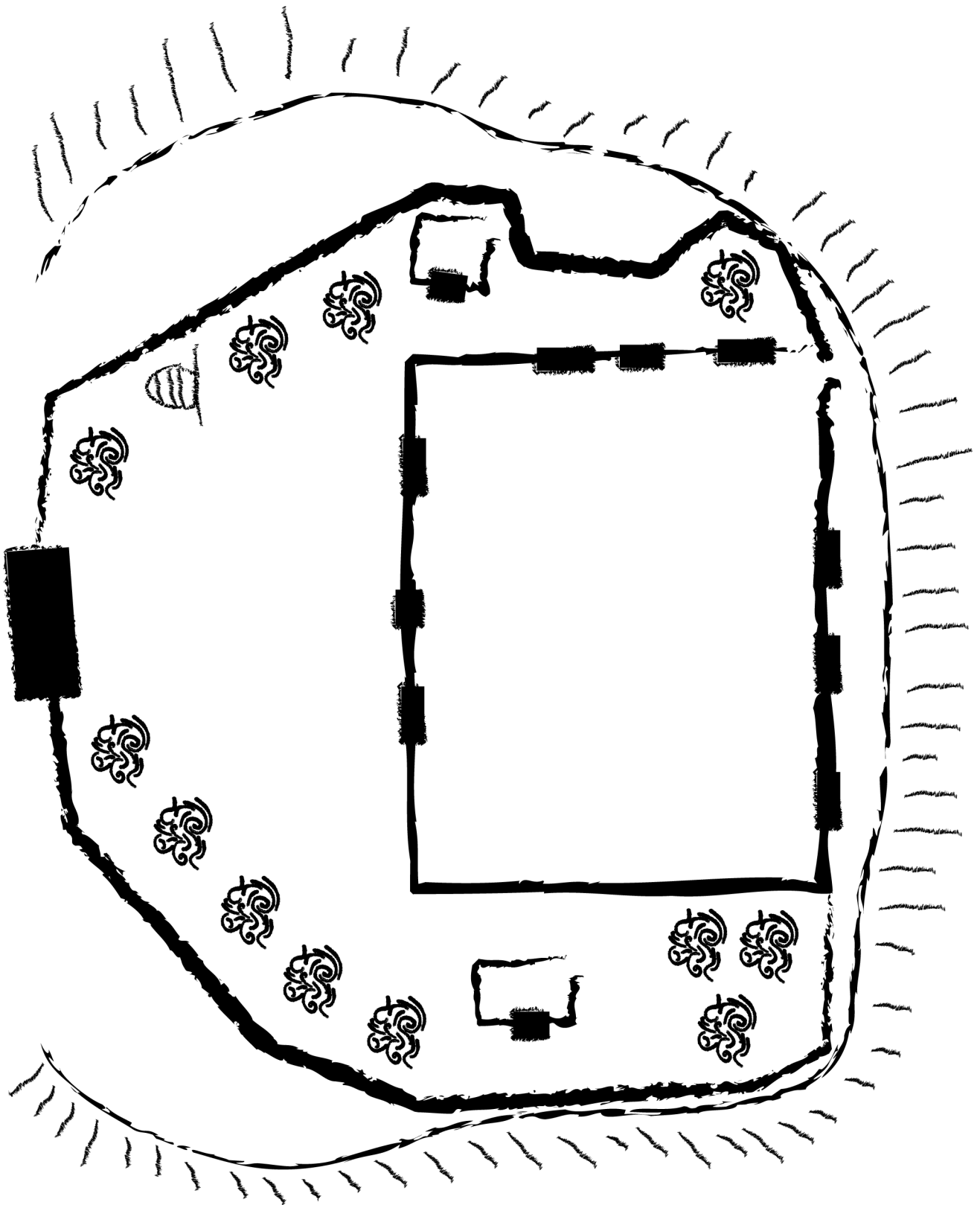
If Skrom is harmed and Gromm learns of it, he will swear to wreak terrible vengeance. (However, taking Skrom hostage or ransom is an effective ploy.)

Freyla spends a few hours helping care for the babe each day (usually at night).

### 18. Freyla's Chamber

This room features a feather bed, a dressing table and wooden chair, a cedar wardrobe, and a work table with a spinning wheel and sewing kit. Furnishings and items are scaled for SM +4. The wardrobe contains a collection of summer tunics, winter dresses with fur trim, two pairs of sandals, a hat, trousers, two shirts, and a scabbard and giant-sized shortsword.

The cabinet is locked (Freyla has the key). The lower shelf (10' off the ground) holds jars of herbal ointments and home remedies (+1 to First Aid and Physician skill) – enough to treat a regiment of 1,000 soldiers (or four titans and their thralls . . .). The upper shelves carry surgical tools and first-aid supplies: scalpels, bone saw, and clean bandages.



*HOUSE OF THE TITAN*

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