

Iridia

role-playing games and miniatures, old and new
by Christian Walker

On Point

I've been sharing the story of Devon Ashwood, Aithne of Far Isle and Abel Artone in recent issues, but I'm going to take a break from that story so that I can focus on some other games and settings. There's just so much I want to write about. I'm just not sure how to fit it all in! I'm still learning how to write in such a confined space, struggling with the best way to present all that I want to. It'll take some practice, but I'll get there eventually, I think. As always, comments and questions can be sent to Christian@IridiaZine.net.

Until next time, Christian

On My Bookshelf

reviews of things you need

Even though the Lost Vault of Tasthzar Rho is an adventure for 1st level characters, newbies need not apply. Third in the Campaign Classics line from Goodman Games, Mike Mearls' module will be one to remember by those who play it. The setup for the module is simple enough. A once-peaceful ogre and kobolds, who dwell in some caves near a village, have recently gone on a rampage. The party is hired to venture to the humanoids' lair to deal some damage. Upon arrival at the caves, the adventurers will realize that all is not well. For example, the marauding ogre, Logbrag, is described as having black skin, glowing green eyes and skin that oozes puss. The kobolds within the caves also appear to have been transformed, appearing with spines jutting from their heads, dragon-like scales and chanting in a low monotone while in combat.

As the party delves deeper into the cave complex, they soon realize that an alien presence is at work. In one chamber, the party will see walls covered with, "...still-living skin and organs of other creatures captured and warped by the Outer Gods' servants. Organs pulse, veins throb, and when the characters move close to the walls the skin and body parts move slightly as if reaching out towards the party." (page 27) Um, did that say "Outer Gods?"

The root of the evil lays with Tsathzar Rho, a wizard who dared tamper with the Outer Gods, alien entities of mind-warping power. When Rho had grown to significant power, the Outer Gods embraced the wizard, transporting he and his underground vault into a universe of terror. Decades later, the Outer Gods have ejected Rho and his vault back into the Prime Material Plane. Rho's chambers materialized within a cave complex and from the underground lair, his corrupting influence creeps forth.

Running this module requires a DM with a talent for description and narrative, a DM who can build tension and handle chaos. Players need to be skilled role-players as well, willing to sacrifice metagaming in order to immerse themselves in the roles of novice adventurers faced with indescribable horror. While it'd be a challenge to execute well, the Last Vault would be a memorable playing experience.



Iron Rations

basic d&d

Love found Abel Artone at the abandoned watchtower. The timing couldn't have been better, given the abuse the human had endured at the hands of an ogre, and later, a surly dwarf. The young man was due for a change in his luck and it came in the form of a short, plump Magic User named Apris the Wondrous.

Never an attentive student, Apris had been expelled from her master's tower before completing her stud-

ies. Alone and with few prospects, Apris traveled to the Borderlands in the hope of finding employment. (Without a recommendation from her master, Apris would have a hard time finding work with established trade houses, or with a noble family.) En route, Apris became lost after wandering off the road during a heavy fog. After hours of stumbling about in the dark, she eventually arrived at a crumbling tower. Finding it empty, save for some moldering furniture on the second floor, Apris fell into a deep sleep.

Early the next morning, Apris awoke to quite a clamor. From what she could tell, something was trying to make its way up the narrow, wooden stairs from the first floor. Terrified, Apris peered around the corner to find not one, but two, ravenous ogres trying to navigate the rickety flight of stairs. Fortunately, the decayed wood and narrow confines of the stairwell prevented the ogres from ascending. Nevertheless, Apris was scared out of her wits. She let fly with a *Magic Missile*, then promptly hid under the bed, quivering with fear.

The two ogres, Willum and Bert, were intent upon devouring the young human. Apris' scent was intoxicating and they just knew that her sizzling fat would taste delicious with fresh-baked biscuits. Unable to scale the stairs, the ogres simply decided to wait her out. Eventually the human would get hungry and would have to make an escape attempt. When that happened, the ogres would smash her skull and put her on a spit. Until then, the brothers took turns at guard duty. One would scout the nearby road, hoping to waylay a lone traveler, while the other watched the stairs.

For her part, Apris waited until nightfall then tried to signal anyone within sight of the tower. She achieved this by casting *Light* upon a stone, holding it out the window of the tower, then opening and closing her hand to create a flashing beacon. After a few days of this, Abel, Devon and Aithne saw the signal and approached the tower to investigate.

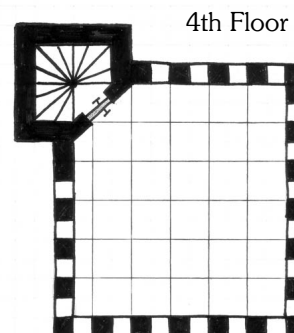
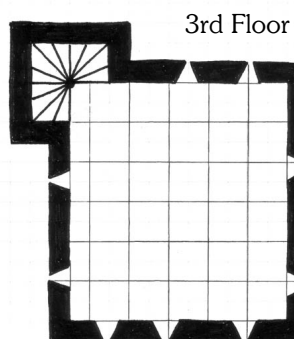
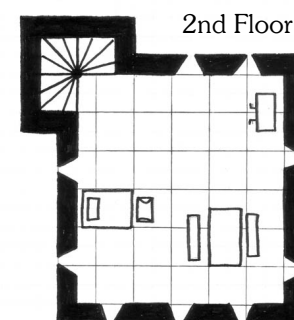
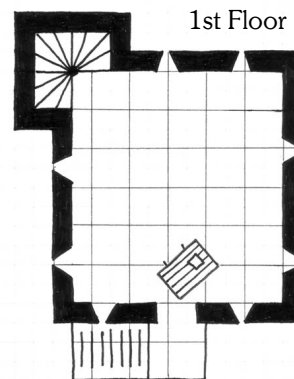
Within, the trio met and defeated the remaining ogre brother. (The party had slain the other prior to encountering Balnor the dwarf in Iridia 6.) Liberated, Apris took an immediate liking to the brooding human. She saw limitless potential within Abel, although she cared little for the sneering Aithne and the scrawny Devon. As Apris and Abel fell deeply in lust, Devon could only look on in fascination and Aithne in disgust.

"Uh, Aithne, why do Abel and Apris keep making that awful slurping sound?"

"Because, Devon, they are humans and as everyone knows, a human can barely contain its urge to disrobe and rut in the middle of the road. Best look away before you have nightmares."

The accompanying tower map might prove useful in your own campaign. Below is Apris' stat block. Perhaps we'll see more of the trio (now a quartet) in future issues.

Apris the Wondrous, Level 2 Magic User; Alignment: Neutral; Abilities: Str 8 (-1 to hit and damage), Int 13 (1 additional language), Wis 9, Dex 10, Con 9, Ch 13 (+1 bonus to reactions), AC 10 (robes); Hit Dice 2 (d4); Hit Points 6; Attacks: dagger (d4); Move: 120'; Spells: *Light*, *Magic Missile*; Languages: Common, Elvish; Special Abilities: Magic User spells.



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