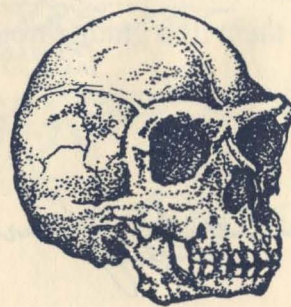


Ramblings

of a

Mad Scientist



Foreward



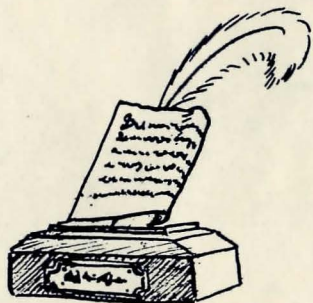
reetings to the Gentle Reader!

Who knows what lurks in the depths of imagination? Such is the world of the supernatural, where the boundaries between fact and fiction melt away like the vanishing veil of an avenging angel. We must take heart as visitors in a world that is as deadly as it is lovely.

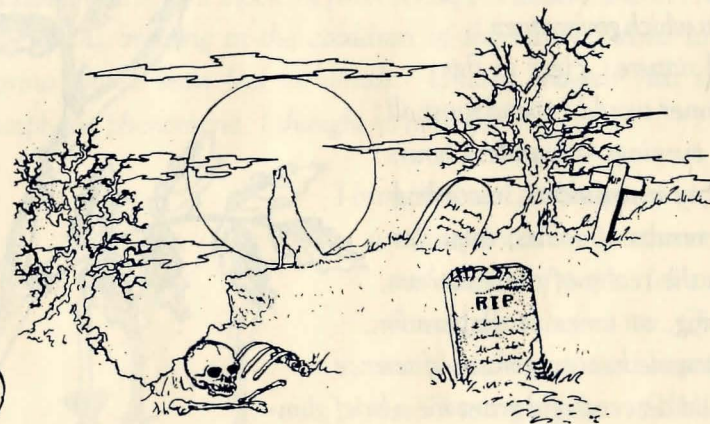
The following tales are all that I could salvage from the burning remains of my library texts and personal notes, after one of my experiments went a bit awry. I hope you will enjoy these stories and use them as a guide through your travels.

Sincerely yours,

Baron Von X



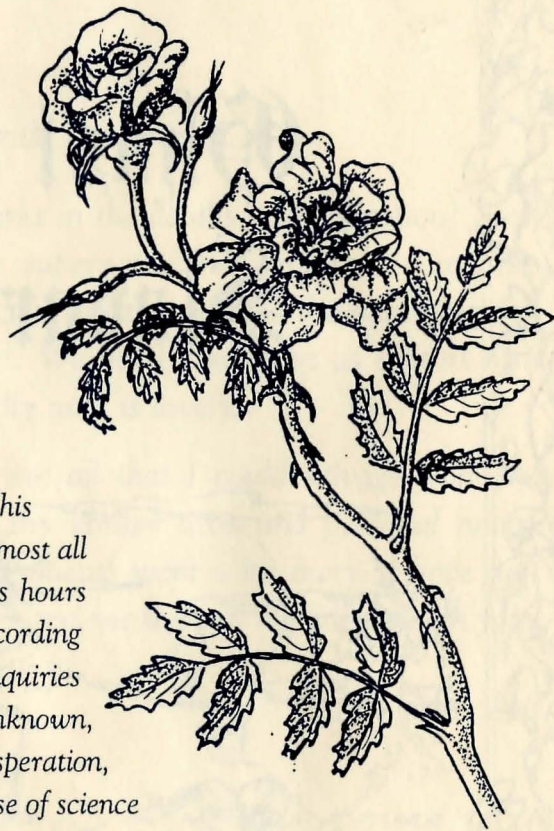
Ghost of Slavaria



Olrich and Bozena

T'was on a mid-summer's eve not so long ago that I sat in my study staring out my chamber's window into the swelling gloom of night and contemplating the laws which govern men and nature. Here in this manner would I spend most all my evenings—countless hours by my instruments, recording the results of endless inquiries into the realm of the unknown, hoping, at times in desperation, that some heavenly muse of science would descend and grant me a brief glimmer of understanding.

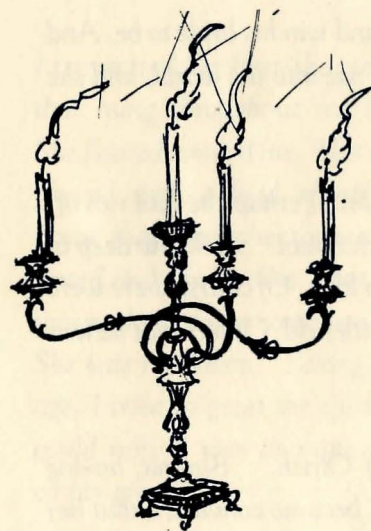
But t'was time for sleep and I rose from my desk and hastened to my bed chamber, pausing only for a moment at the library to find a light reading selection that would soothe my tired nerves. So, reaching into the dark recesses of a neglected bookcase, I chose a work I had never before



touched, a tattered vellum of Ovid's *Amores*, a possession left behind by the chateau's previous owner, a certain Countess Bozena Von Falkenberg.

And as I crept into bed I recalled that on this very night the spirits of the troubled were said to walk the earth seeking justice for a wrong never righted. My faithful servant Jakub had long since retired for the night, and the halls of my estate were as silent as a tomb, save for the steady clicking of a clock's swinging pendulum marking the approach of midnight. And yet, silent or not, I could not help feeling that there was some presence there with me, watching from the shadows, listening from bedarkened corners, perhaps pressed up against my locked chamber door. . .

A distant flash of light shook me from my superstitious trance. A summer tempest was brewing in the cauldron of the harsh Tatras and Mt. Javorina would soon feel its wrath. Ghosts, indeed! Just strange, atmospheric phenomena, I thought to myself.



I broke the seal and began to unfurl the scroll, when, to my amazement, several sheets of paper fell out and floated down before me. Quickly I snatched them up and began reading. They were pages of the Countess' diary.

The first pages began with love poetry of unsurpassed excellence. Each line melted in perfect harmony with the last and the next. Every word danced like a

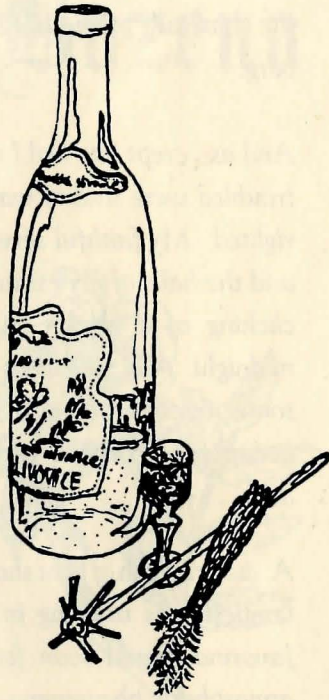
living thing upon the page, inspired by all the passion, pleasure, and pain of a longing heart.

Then, after some time, a correspondence between the Countess and a lover began to appear. His name was Olrich. Though of noble birth, his family had been reduced to poverty by the treachery of his great uncle. Yet Bozena cared not for such trivial things; for her Olrich was the light that had filled her empty heart with love and joy.

Soon it became clear that they could not live without each other. But marriage was impossible, as long as Olrich was poor. Olrich decided that he must venture out into the world to make his fortune and win his bride to be. And so he journeyed, one cold autumn morning, out into the world, and she never heard from him again.

Now, any lesser love would have doubted him. Perhaps he had run off with another. But Bozena possessed no such doubt. She knew deep in her heart that something evil had befallen her love. Of course there were rumors. Some say he had perished on the battlefield. Others that he was done in by highwaymen...

Years passed and there was still no sign of Olrich. Bozena, having searched far and wide with no sign of hope, became convinced that her

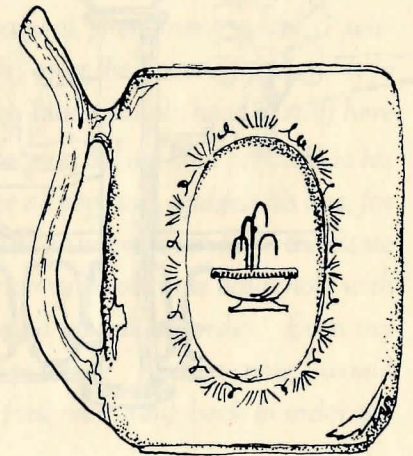


love had met a tragic fate. She grew more ill, until one day her diary ends. Her last entry reads:

There is great sadness in the household, as I am not long for this world. But I tell my friends not to weep on my behalf, for my beloved and I will soon be together again. My only fear is that he lacked a Christian burial. For if not, we will never find peace together. Doomed to different worlds, our spirits will never be able to unite.

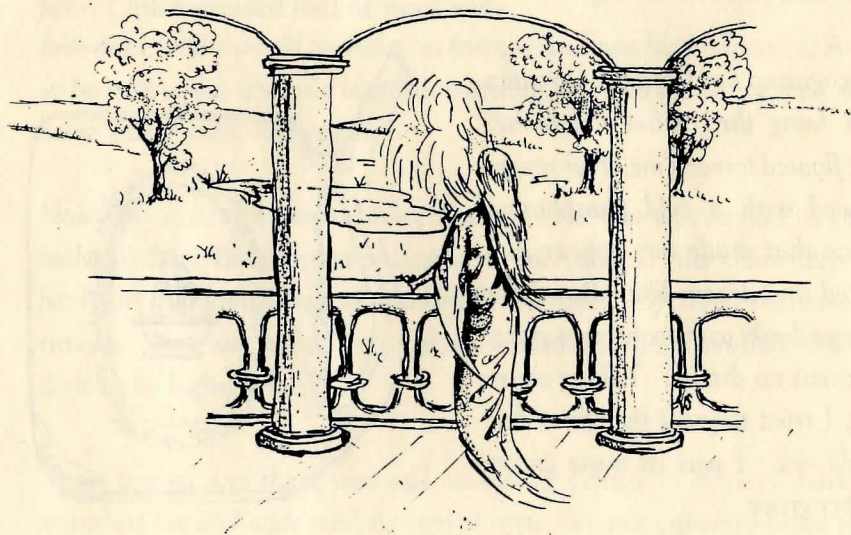
As I finished the last page, the clock tolled midnight and a great gust of wind shook the pane and my candle's flame died. Shrinking behind my covers, I tried once more to convince myself that there were no such things as ghosts. For there in the room with me stood none other than the Countess von Falkenberg!

I recognized her from the portraits that hung throughout my home. She floated toward me. Her image glowed with a livid phosphorescence that made her appear distorted and dream-like. But there was no doubt to my conscious state. She was no dream. Taking courage, I tried to greet the spirit, but could not. I was as mute as an empty grave.



The troubled spirit stopped by the window just short of my bed. I could see her drawn, sad features. Her once radiant face now emitted a hideous pallor, tears ran from eyes empty with despair. The Countess lifted her hand and pointed a crooked finger at the cemetery down the lane and to the hills beyond. Then she produced a shrill wail of agony, so full of bitter anguish that my scientist's heart nearly broke in sympathy. As long as I live, I shall never forget that cry; to this day, on dark, stormy nights, it haunts my soul, echoing in the nether regions of my mind.

At a minute past midnight, her wail ended. And as it vanished, so did the Countess, dissolving as fine powder into the liquid darkness. I regained my voice and called out, but there was no reply. I can assure you my servants and I slept little that night. In the morning I struck out to the graveyard and hiked the hills, but found no answer to the mystery. I did however find the Countess's grave, which lay in a grove of poplars



next to a grave marked Olrich. I cleaned both graves and had the caretaker put flowers beside them. (I felt that this was the least I could do)

Ever since I have queried locals concerning the events of that night. I even consulted the gypsies, who informed me that the countess's love lay unburied somewhere in the hills, and would be found only when midnight was held in place. Who can understand such riddles?

Jakub's Skull

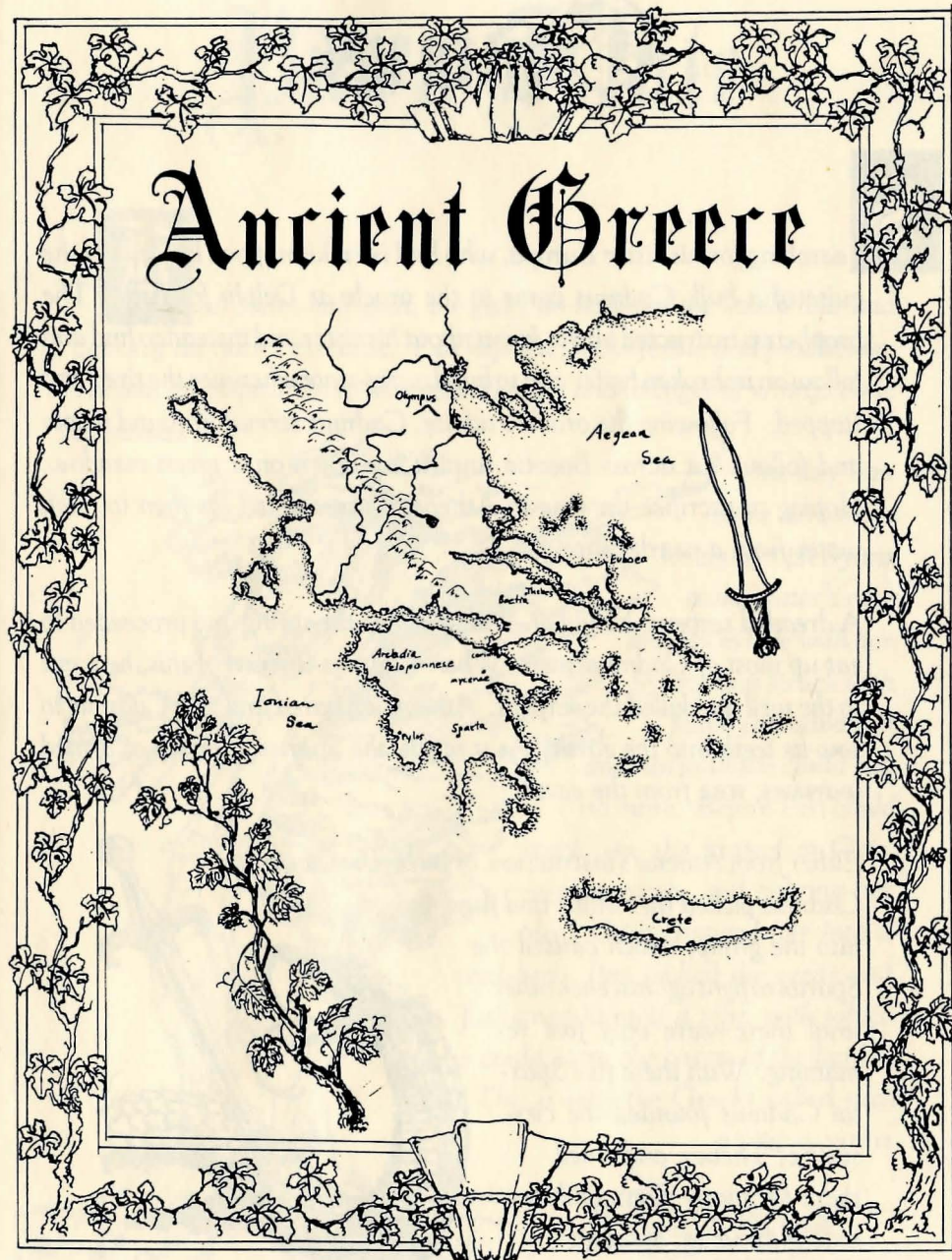


I would like to share with the gentle reader another supernatural phenomena which I witnessed some years after the Bozena incident. It so happened that my butler Jakub, head of staff here at the chateau, died. He had lived to a good old age and perished in his sleep with a smile on his face. We were all very sad, and felt his loss, for Jakub was a truly kind man and there was no one who cared for the estate as much as he. The venerable gentleman ruled over the household with a benevolent, but firm hand. Above all he valued order. Even my laboratory and study fell victim to his presence. Each evening I would leave the place in a shambles only to find everything back in order the following morning.

Seven days after the funeral, when things were slowly returning to normal, strange happenings began occurring throughout the chateau. Servants insisted they felt eerie cold spots and heard strange noises in the middle of the night. . .

One night I awoke to a scream of terror. I leapt out of bed and ran to where I found a maid screaming at the top of her lungs. At her feet was a human skull. Sobbing, she described how she had come up the stairs only to be greeted by a glowing, grimacing skull which floated down the corridor towards her. I and the other servants consoled her as best we could, though I doubt any one truly believed her, but rather thought it a manifestation brought on by imagination or grief. For my part, I was certain that the skull had merely been misplaced from one of my collections. I took the skull and placed it on a pedestal in my study, where it has stayed ever since.

When I awoke the next morning, my study was spotless. Someone had cleaned it, but when I interviewed the staff, no one knew anything about it. From then on my study has been cleaned every night by some unknown force, and, witnessing this force at work, I see no other answer than that the skull indeed harbors the earth-bound spirit of my dear servant.



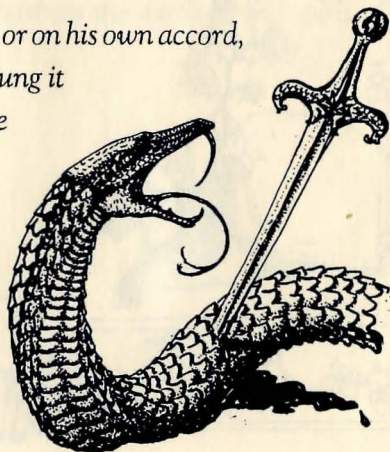
Cadmus

S

earching for his sister Europa, who had been kidnapped by Zeus in the guise of a bull, Cadmus came to the oracle at Delphi for help. The prophetess instructed him to forget about his sister and instead to find and follow an unbroken heifer and to build a city-state wherever she tired and stopped. Following the oracle's advise, Cadmus soonafter found a cow and followed it across Boeotia until it lay down on a green meadow. Hoping to sacrifice the cow to Athena, he instructed his men to fetch water from a nearby spring.

A dreaded serpent, a child of Ares, guarded the spring and proceeded to eat up most of Cadmus' men. When Cadmus learned of this, he went to the well and killed the serpent. Athena appeared and told Cadmus to sow its teeth into the earth. As a result, the Spartoi, a legion of armed warriors, rose from the earth.

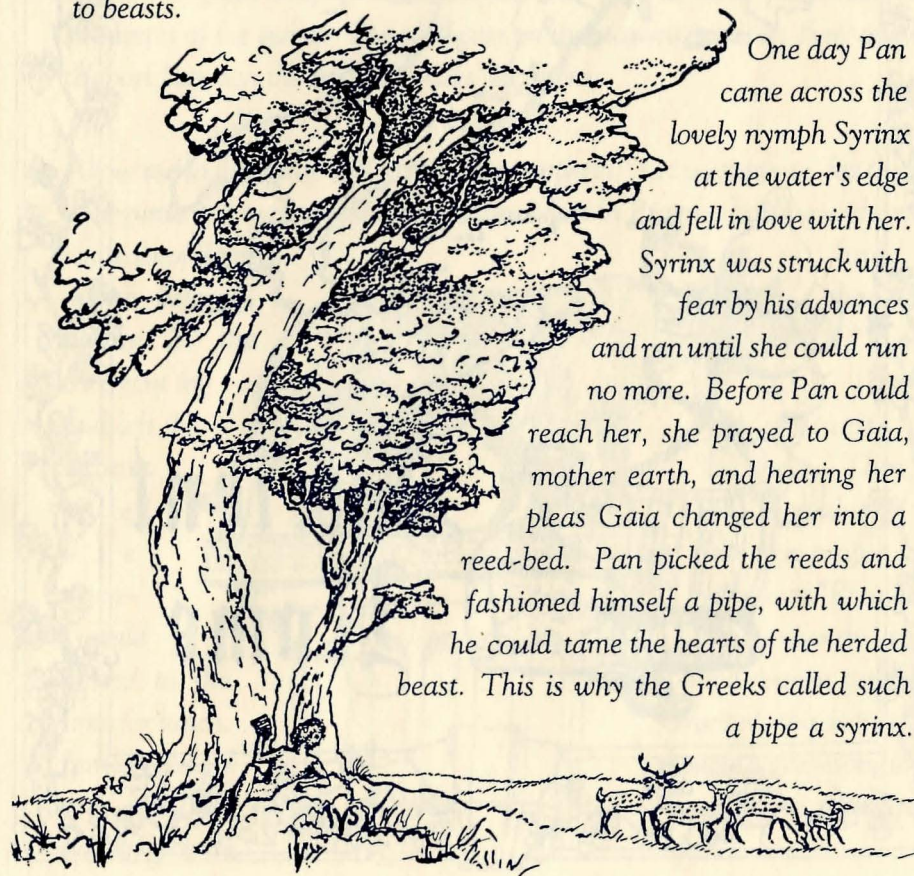
Either from Athena's instruction, or on his own accord, Cadmus picked up a stone and flung it into the group, which caused the Spartoi to fight against each other until there were only five remaining. With these five Spartoi Cadmus founded the city-state of Thebes, and ruled there for many years with his wife Harmonia, a daughter of Zeus.



Pan's Flute

H

alf-man, half-goat, the god Pan haunted the lonely hills and caves of his native Arcadia. Pan kept the flocks fertile and productive. He was an inspiration to the pastoral poets and avenger of wrongs done to beasts.



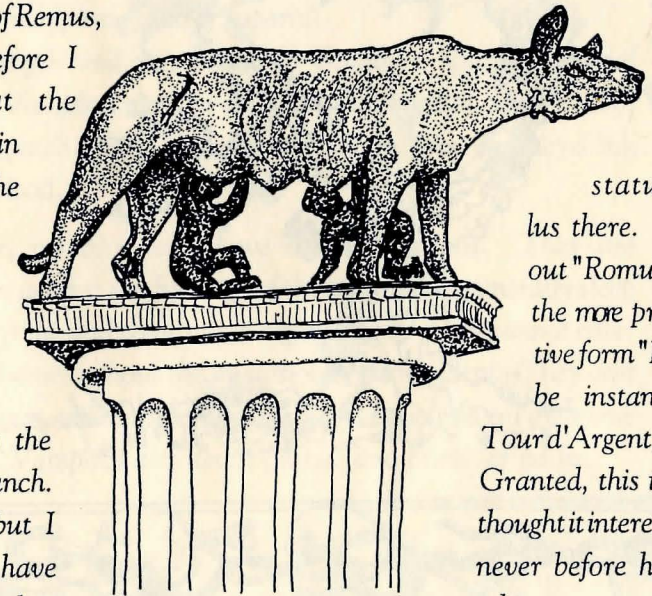
One day Pan came across the lovely nymph Syrinx at the water's edge and fell in love with her. Syrinx was struck with fear by his advances and ran until she could run no more. Before Pan could reach her, she prayed to Gaia, mother earth, and hearing her pleas Gaia changed her into a reed-bed. Pan picked the reeds and fashioned himself a pipe, with which he could tame the hearts of the herded beast. This is why the Greeks called such a pipe a syrinx.

Romulus and Remus

Paging through an ancient text of Livy, I came across a small editorial note, which spoke of a medieval corruption of the Romulus and Remus legend, in which the great sculptor Stultissimus was said to have fashioned magic statuettes of the twins. The spell cast on the statuettes allows their owner to teleport between the two statuettes' locations.

Allow me to illucidate this fascinating property: Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, I was to stand on Karluv Most in Prague, holding with me the statuette of Remus,

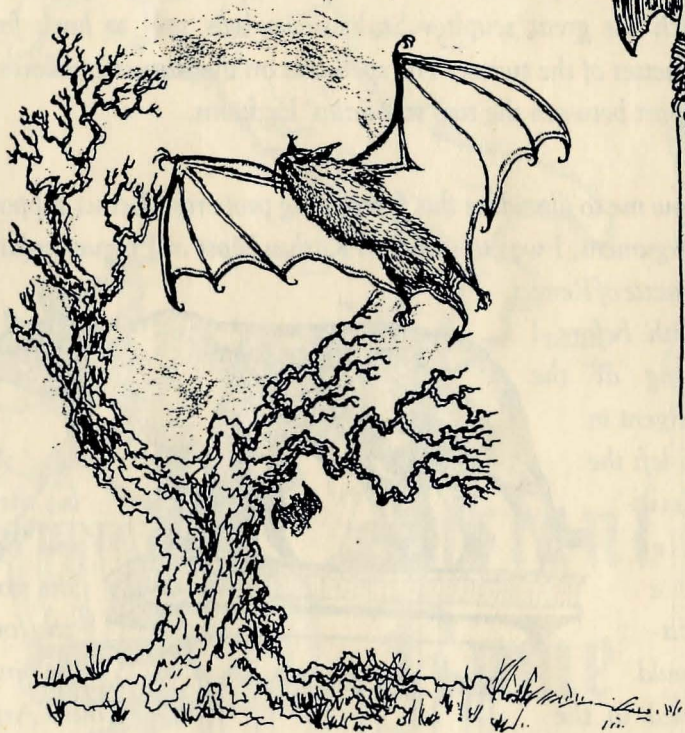
and the month before I had been dining at the Tour d'Argent in Paris and left the Romu- called u s e voca- I would ported to the time for lunch. fantasy, but I ord, as I have tion of such a



statuette of lus there. Then, if I out "Romulus!" (or to the more proper Latin tive form "Romule!"), be instantly trans- Tour d'Argent, perhaps in Granted, this is just pure thought it interesting to rec- never before heard men- tale.

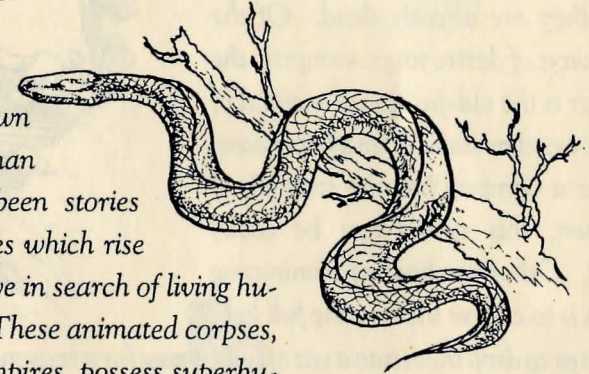


Transylvania

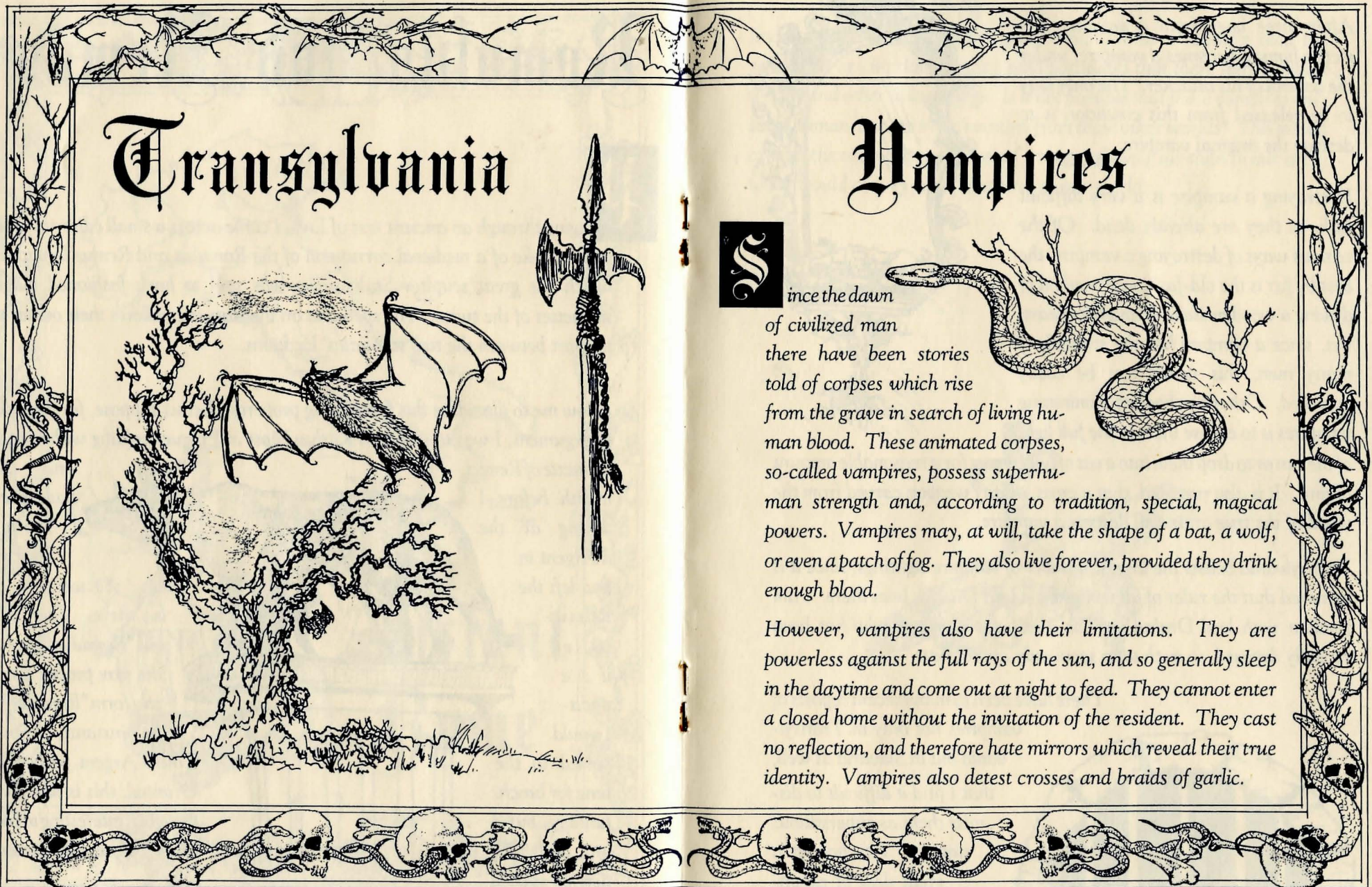


Vampires

Since the dawn of civilized man there have been stories told of corpses which rise from the grave in search of living human blood. These animated corpses, so-called vampires, possess superhuman strength and, according to tradition, special, magical powers. Vampires may, at will, take the shape of a bat, a wolf, or even a patch of fog. They also live forever, provided they drink enough blood.



However, vampires also have their limitations. They are powerless against the full rays of the sun, and so generally sleep in the daytime and come out at night to feed. They cannot enter a closed home without the invitation of the resident. They cast no reflection, and therefore hate mirrors which reveal their true identity. Vampires also detest crosses and braids of garlic.

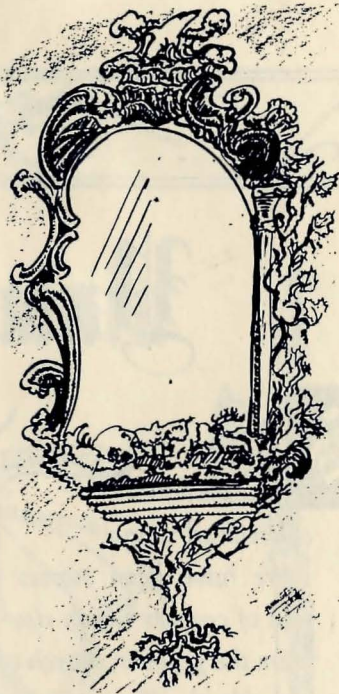


After three bites from a vampire, the victim himself becomes a vampire, under the control of his attacker. The only way to be released from this condition is to destroy the original vampire.

Destroying a vampire is a very difficult task, as they are already dead. Of the various ways of destroying a vampire, the best by far is the old-fashioned method of driving a wooden stake through its heart. Yet, since a vampire has the strength of many men, this would not be easily achieved. Other methods of eliminating vampires is to expose them to the full light of the sun or to drop them into a vat of holy water for a reasonable amount of time. It is also rumored, that a cross, or any weapon carved from the wood of the true cross will destroy a vampire.

Transylvania boasts the largest number of vampire sightings, since it is rumored that the ruler of all vampires, a lord Drakul, lives there. I am familiar with lord Drakul only as a dispicable tyrant, who has been recently deposed, so such tales seem only appropriate.

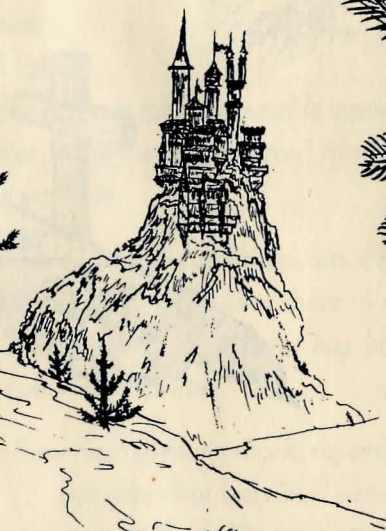
There have been so many recent reports of vampires not only in Transylvania but in Slavaria as well, that I find it difficult to dismiss them as superstitious rumor. Yet, having a great deal of experience with corpses, I



find it unlikely that vampires are human. I have recently read the reflections of Giordano Bruno, who postulates that there may be other worlds and other living beings. Is it not possible that these vampires only seem human, but are in fact visitors from these other worlds? This would explain the recent appearances of strange, glowing air ships in our area, which could convey such creatures to our world.



Slavaria



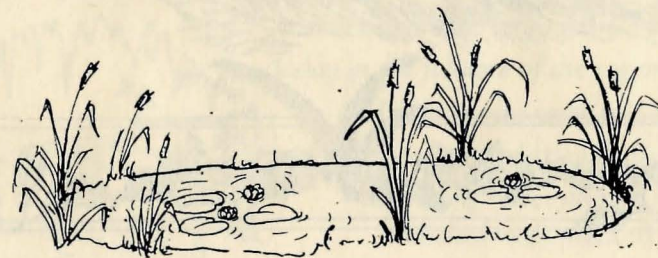
Vodnik

Any self-respecting Slavarian learns of the Vodnik by the time he or she can walk and talk. Slavarians take great pride in their very own mythical celebrity.

The Vodnik is a merman, who makes his home in the wetlands of Slavaria--in ponds, streams, and quite often in the still water that collects near a mill site. He appears very much human, apart from the fact he has green skin and webbed fingers and toes. He is usually dressed in a green suit with striking red shoes. One of his coat tails is dry, the other wet, according to some descriptions.

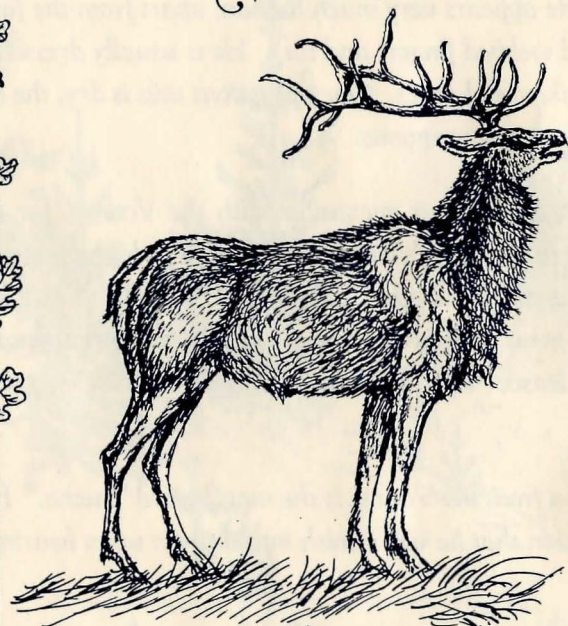
Few have lived to tell of their encounter with the Vodnik, for those venturing too close to the water's edge are entranced by his hypnotic gaze and drawn into the murky depths. He captures their souls and keeps them in little vases in his underwater home. Sometimes, although rarely, a spirit may be released. This explains why bubbles rise mysteriously from still water.

The only protection from the Vodnik is the magic word "Sucho." He so detests the expression that he will vanish into thin air upon hearing it.



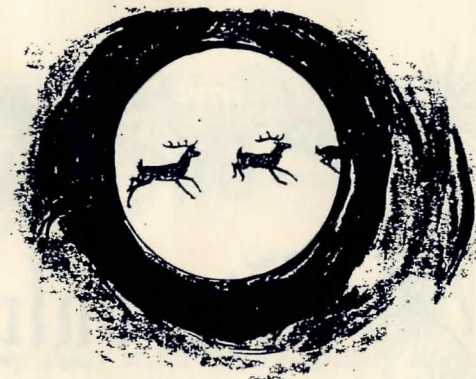


Wildlife of Slavaria



Magic Elk

There is a tale that in the forests of Slavaria near Mt. Javorina lives a herd of magic elk, who were embued with the power of flight by the wizard of the great king Wenceslaus. Perhaps this tale is related through mythical convention to the tales of flying reindeer...



Killer Moths

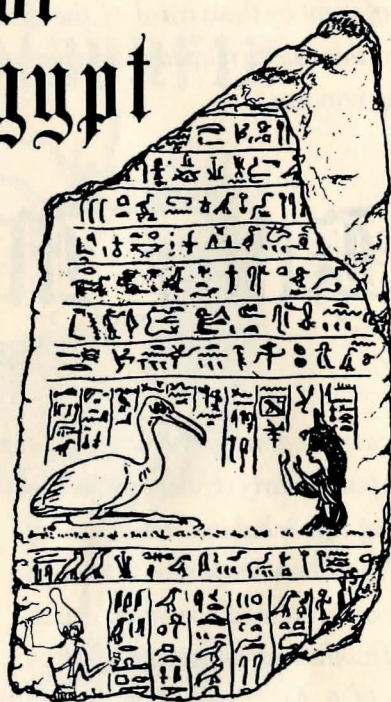
Killer carpathianus is the scientific name given to a particularly virulent genus of moths which long ago inhabited the caves of Slavaria's southern lowlands. Although no living or preserved specimen exists, reports of moths with wingspans of a foot



or more and with long, sharp fangs survive today in the folklore of the region. Swarms of these moths were said to rise from caves on nights with a full moon, devouring everything in sight — thatched roofs, precious crops, even furs and textiles.

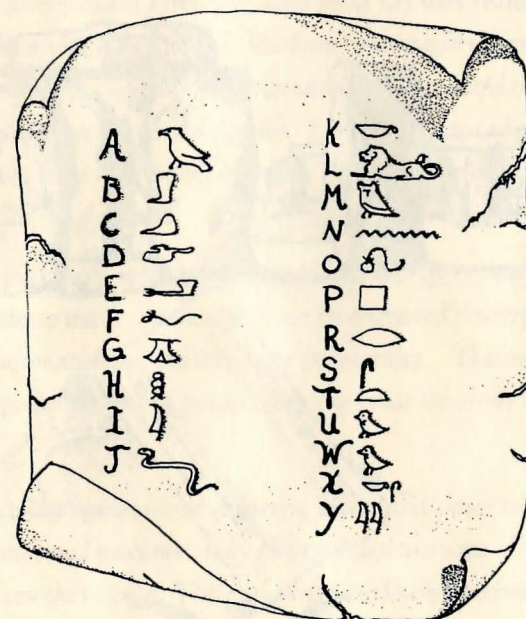


Hieroglyphs of Egypt



Hieroglyphs

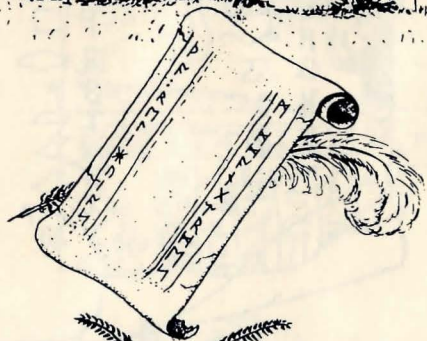
King Boleslav consulted with me today and asked me to study an inscription in his private Egyptian exhibit (perhaps he seeks to find the gold that is fabled to be there). I accepted the task and translated the inscription using an over-simplified hieroglyph alphabet. To my amazement, it was legible in my own language! I provided the king with the translation which was a riddle of some sort, which I have not been able to solve.



One most often reads from top to bottom, beginning from the direction in which the characters face. If the characters face left, then one reads left to right. If the characters face right, then one reads right to left.



Relics of Middle Earth



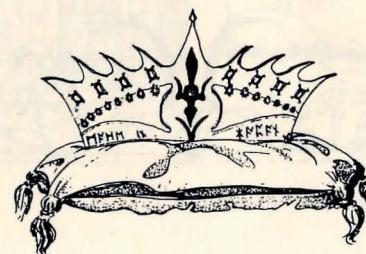
Crown of Hrothgar

The ancient Nordic tribes speak of an age when their gods ruled the universe. In this age man lived amongst great monsters, and nations of elves, giants, and dwarves. Mankind lived on Midgard, middle earth. The Gods lived in the heavens above, in the gleaming palaces of Asgard and Valhall, while deep under the earth, in dark Svartalfheim, dwelled the race of dwarves, who were the greatest miners and smiths in the world.

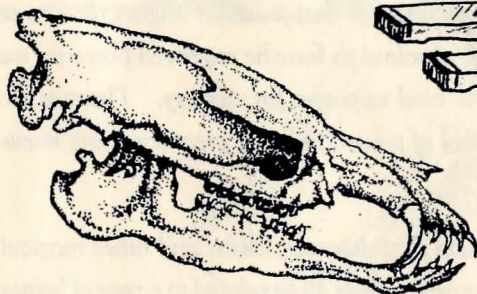
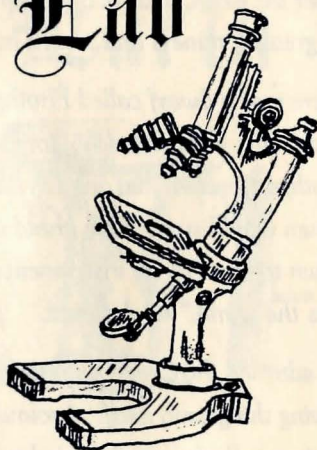
There was a dwarf called Hrothgar, who some say was related to Brokk and Sindri, the brothers who forged Miollnir, the mighty hammer of Thor. Hrothgar foresaw that one day his generation would end and that only the race of men would survive the grand demise. For this new race he crafted a great crown to serve as an instrument of order. "For good or evil, whichever force wins the world," he declared.

He adorned the crown with jewels that pulsed a bright crimson, as if it were a living thing unto itself. Around its base he engraved powerful magic runes, casting spell after spell to bind its power for eternity. The masses thought of it only as a special symbol of power, only the great sorcerers knew of its true purpose.

I will reiterate my opinion that dwarves, elves, and other magical creatures such as vampires and sorcerers, may all be related to a race of beings that came to earth from another world. Their magic is most likely a technology far beyond our own.

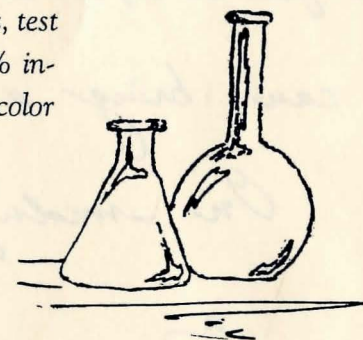


Fun and Games in the Lab

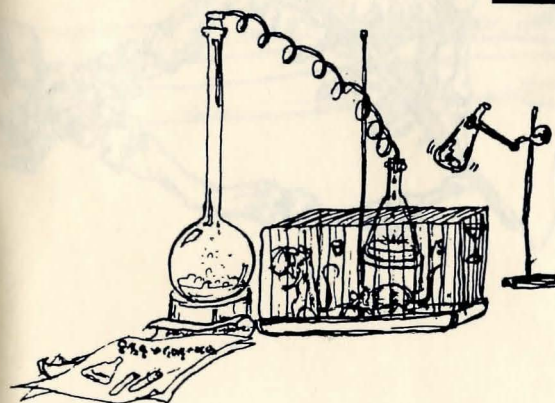


Magic Potions

Potion XK41B — This elixir was designed to allow human beings to see in the dark. Although it is still in the experimental stages, test subjects have experienced a 30% increase in vision acuity. Its yellow color is due to the presence of an acidity tester.



Potion JM32C — This elixir serves as a recombinant agent which counteracts the effects of any metamorphosis. Its purple color is due to the presence of an acidity tester.

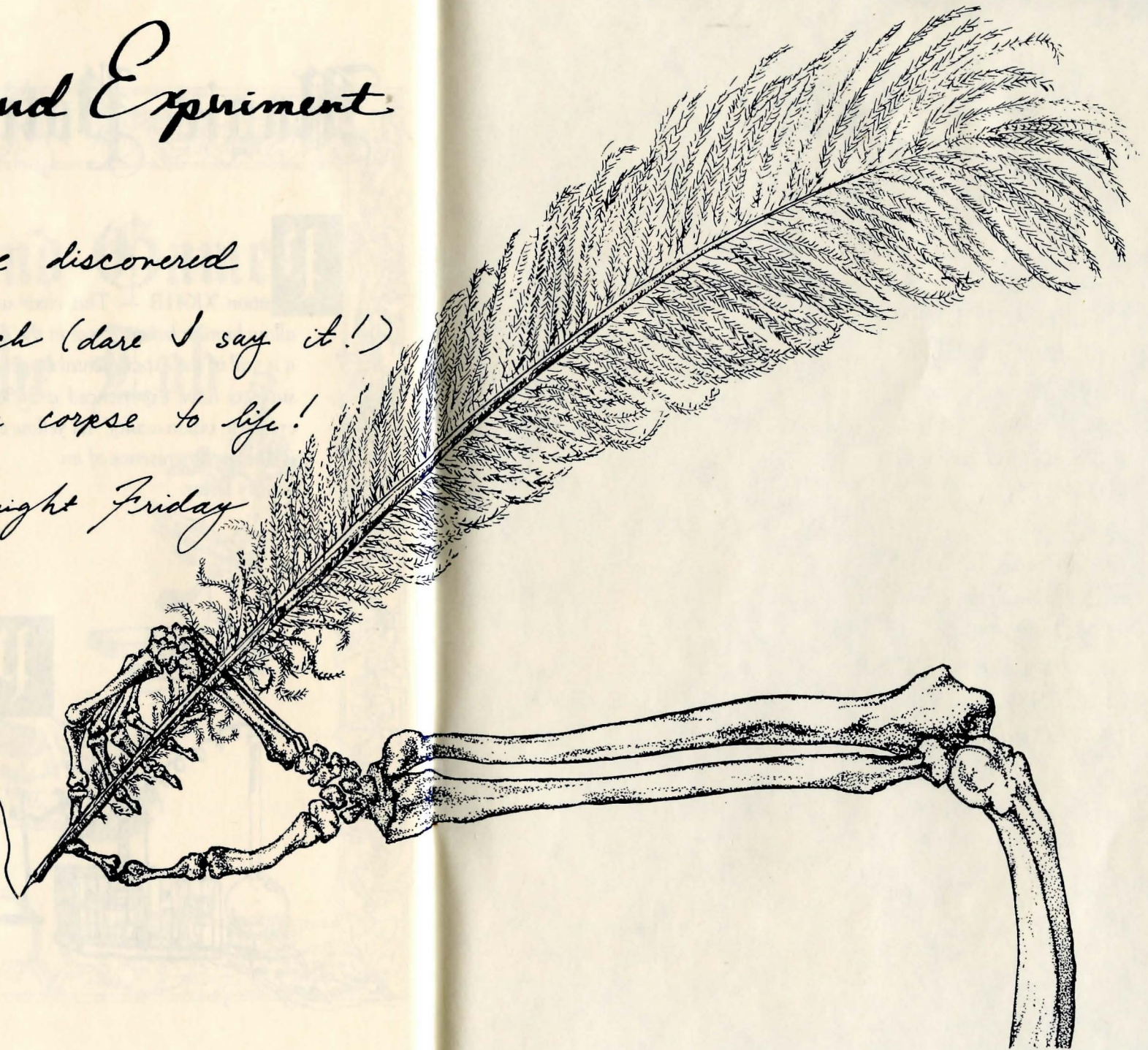


The Grand Experiment

I have discovered
a process, which (dare I say it!)
can bring a corpse to life!

On midnight Friday

a



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