

Fall 2010 Issue 15

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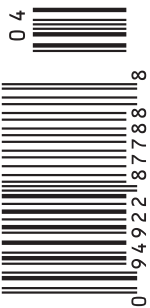
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On the Cover

The art of William O'Connor appears on KQ covers frequently, but nothing quite like this piece, "Merlin and Arthur."

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Editorial:

Trapped!

The world around us seems safe, but it's so clearly not. Disease, slippery stairs, and currents carrying us out to sea are all part of the natural world: it's not just butterflies and flowers out there. Traps take this fear of invisible dangers to an extreme, playing on our fear and suspicion of the world around us. That's what lurks behind them.

Certainly the obvious dangers are, well, obvious. Fire burns, dragons bite, no one is surprised by this.

Traps are different. Their dangers are hidden right on top of us while remaining oblivious; then suddenly, traps change the world we know. Elevators fall. Air turns poisonous. Boulders tumble, and ceilings collapse.

That unexpectedness makes traps a joy for the GM ("Gotcha!"). Traps can be a giant physics lesson. You know, the approach that says: "Hey, your hero may defeat dragons, but he still plummets at 9.8 m/s^2 ." Or they might be fiendishly well hidden, exploiting a moment of weakness when PCs are rummaging through loot.

While traps make players rightfully wary, traps can—in theory!—be a lot of fun for players as well. Finding them, knowing how to circumvent them, and turning them against foolish monsters can all be pretty satisfying. As a player, I find great satisfaction in not falling for a trap, in outwitting the trapsmith (and outwitting the GM by

proxy). And hey, there's XP in defeating that as well.

Traps are the ultimate expression of competitive, head-to-head rivalry between players and GMs. Unlike monsters, traps reveal how clever a GM is in dreaming up places to put them while lulling PCs into a false sense of security. Monsters are expected and planned-for. Traps, on the other hand, are just lurking around the edges, invisible until they make everything more exciting and potentially lethal. The best are baskets brimming with ticking bombs and secondary cascading triggered runes and tertiary explosions and spikes rigged in clever ways.

As a designer, I'm often stumped by ways to make traps live up to their potential. So this issue features different takes on them for players (with thief rigs in "Rig This!") and for GMs (with "Pits of Despair"). The trap needs reinvention every now and again. And we're happy to provide the trigger.

Let's remember the value of a little wariness. Even among the boldest heroes, victory is not quite certain, and death may claim even the stoutest heart when a hidden adder strikes. So celebrate the trap. Go forth, and set your snares for the foolish.

Until next time,

Wolfgang Baur

Kobold in Chief

