

Though his true love lies in Westerns, Carl Smith has been active in fantasy and science-fiction gaming for years. He was a part of the DRAGONLANCE™ design team for TSR, Inc, and worked on CA1, Swords of the Undercity, an AD&D module set in the LANKHMAR™ universe. He is currently a freelance writer and contributing editor for Model Retailer magazine.

This AD&D® game encounter takes place at an abandoned shrine to a forgotten thief, possibly an avatar of some evil, well-known god of thieves. A group of 2-6 characters is recommended, each of 3rd-5th level. A cleric would be extremely helpful, and an assortment of magical weapons is necessary. This scenario may be dropped into an ongoing campaign, as the player characters are traveling along a minor road in a forested region. The time is late in the day.

The Path

A fluke of the afternoon sun's rays reveals a narrow trail, partially overgrown with straight, young hardwood saplings and a multitude of weeds, leading off the road you travel. Under other conditions, you would have walked past it.

GUARDIANS OF THE TOMB

BY CARL SMITH

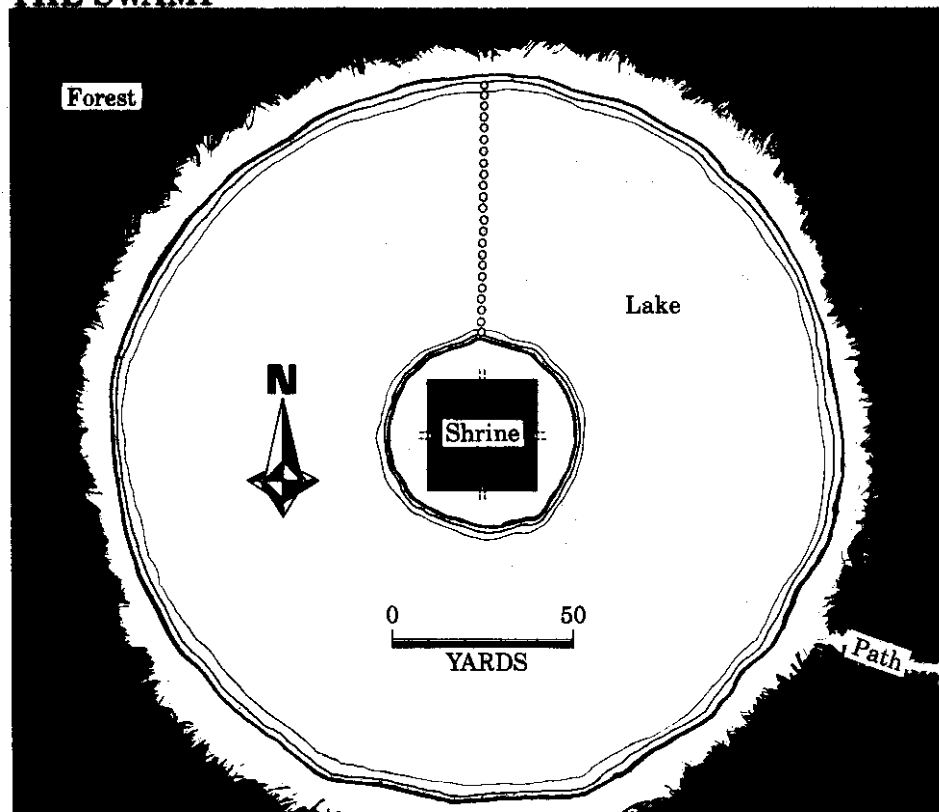
Vengeance awaits
beyond the grave

A successful examination by a ranger, barbarian, or skilled forester shows the manmade trail to be unused by men or large manlike creatures for several months. The saplings took at least four years to reach their present height, and, though they do not block the path, their unbroken state shows that nothing of any size has passed this way for years. Any player character successfully checking finds no evidence of traps or other beings in the area. In fact, no wildlife inhabits this area at all, and no birds are seen or heard—a fact that a druid (and possibly a ranger or barbarian) would notice at once.

The Swamp

If the player characters follow the overgrown path for a mile, they come to a clearing in the woods, in which stands a dilapidated shrine on an island in a shallow marsh. The marsh is approximately 200 yards across, but only 5' deep. It functions as a moat for the shrine.

THE SWAMP



The overgrown path is not difficult to follow, although overhanging branches need to be chopped away. Ahead lies a clearing with a stagnant, algae-choked marsh. In the center of the marsh rises a small isle of land with a building almost as large as the island. Climbing vines and moss cover the building, concealing most of its decorative stonework. An entrance to the building is visible on one side of the structure. No bridge crosses the swamp to the island. There seems to be an odd chill in the air as well, one difficult to define; the air temperature is certainly warm.

A good-aligned cleric has a 5% chance per level of sensing, without use of magic, the presence of profound evil nearby. This presence seems to come from all directions. Any character who roll a percentile score equal to his intelligence, expressed as a percentage, gains the further feeling that he is being watched — though no watcher can be detected. The use of a *detect invisibility* spell has a 5% chance per level of the user of gaining a brief glimpse of a

dark, featureless human form in a shadowy part of the undergrowth — but the figure then moves away, and no other figures can be seen. A cleric's attempt to *turn undead* produces no noticeable effect at this time. A *detect evil* spell produces a vague reading of evil all about the characters; a *detect magic* spell also produces a vague reading.

An exploratory probe of the murky green water around the small lake's shore reveals that three inches below the surface of the water lies a bridge of stepping stones, leading out from the shore directly across from the northern entrance in the overgrown structure. Each stone is about 1' square, and approximately 2' separate each stone.

Slime and aquatic residue coat each stone. Player characters may cross at a slow walking speed, but characters with dexterities under 13 and those who are traveling at a lower-than-normal speed due to extra encumbrance must check to see if they fall in the water. A check consists of a saving throw vs. paralysis, with failure indicating a fall. The water is only 5' deep, but it is filled with razorweed (see below). No other animal life exists in the lake, and a fall in itself

does no damage. Those attempting to run across the stone walkway automatically fall unless they are unencumbered, have dexterities of 17 or greater, and pass the saving throw noted above. A falling runner has a 40% chance of hitting a stone step in the fall, doing 1-3 hp damage — and damage from the razorweed is automatically raised to the maximum possible on the first round of such damage taken.

Anyone attempting to *fly* or *levitate* across the lake discovers unexpected turbulence. Warm air over the lake contacts the cooler air from the surrounding woods, causing sudden drafts. The chances of turbulence disturbing a flight over the lake is 75% on warm days only.

Characters find that maintaining flight (by animal, spell, or device) is difficult but not impossible (flight speed slowed by 1" per 6" normal speed, so flight at 12" becomes 10"). However, those *levitating* across may find themselves at the mercy of the winds, even being pushed into trees at the lake's edge or into the shrine itself (causing 1-4 hp damage per round) — or down into the lake's razorweed.

RAZORWEED

FREQUENCY *Rare*

NO. APPEARING: *One patch*

ARMOR CLASS: *0 on dry land, 4 in the water*

MOVE: *Nil*

HIT DICE: *2 HD per square yard*

% IN LAIR: *Nil*

TREASURE TYPE: *Incidental only*

NO. OF ATTACKS: *See below*

DAMAGE/ATTACK: *See below*

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Destruction of armor*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Diffraction of water causes -1 to attackers' "to hit" roll; see also below*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *5%*

INTELLIGENCE: *Non-*

ALIGNMENT: *Neutral*

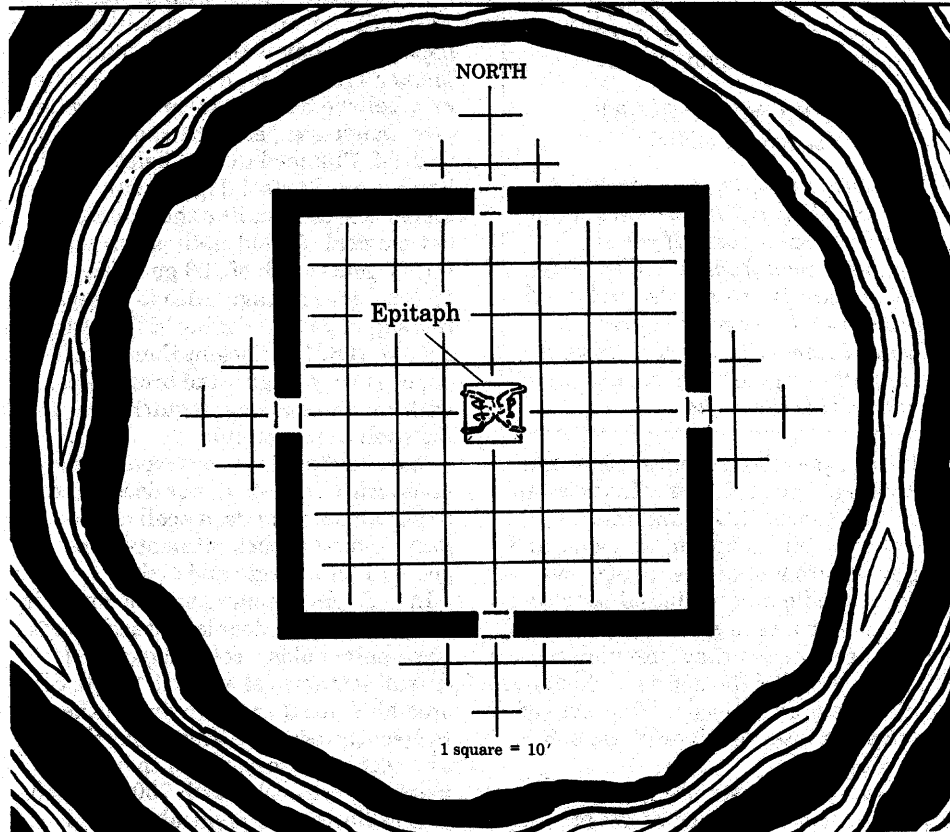
SIZE: *L (2d20 x 10 square yards)*

PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Attack/Defense Modes: *Nil*

Razorweed looks like normal aquatic grass, but both the sea and freshwater varieties are more blue in color than their normal counterparts. A player character has a chance of noticing its saw-toothed, sharp edges by casual inspection; this chance is equal to a

THE SHRINE



protect a humanlike being from further attacks (unless a new patch of razorweed is entered). A horse-sized quadruped can be affected by up to 10 square yards of razorweed, or by lesser amounts if smaller.

The Shrine

The island in the swamp is only 140' across and basically circular in shape. Though the ground is soft, it is strong enough to support anyone's weight up to one ton. Creatures weighing over this amount must move at half-normal speed. Weeds grow to a depth of 3' around the isle.

The building is an ancient tomb to a legendary thief, born many hundreds of years ago, named Kholum the Swift. The shrine is blocklike, 90' to each side and 30' high, and each side has a door 10' high by 6' wide in the middle of it. The granite walls are 4' thick. There are four open entrances, one for each point of the compass. Carved above each door is a name: (North) Pride, (East) Hate, (South) Treachery, and (West) Greed. The player characters may enter through any entrance they wish. Light

enters the building through four 5' x 5' windows covered with rusted steel grates which are set in the roof. The spaces between the bars are each 1' across.

Anyone checking for traps as the building is entered notes none around the doorways, though the floor on the inside of the shrine by the doorways appears to have been scratched and marred in the past. Interestingly, the stone forming the door frames is perfectly smooth, unlike the rest of the building.

The inside of the building makes it apparent that the structure is a shrine of some sort, possibly a temple or tomb. Huge, twin statues, set back to back with their arms raised, stand in the middle of the huge room on a stone platform. Each statue depicts a thin, narrow-faced human male wearing belted robes and sandals. The eyes of the statues seem to glow with light and follow your every movement. No weeds grow between the flat stones making up the floor, and no sign of life can be seen inside. Odd bits of debris litter the area.

percentile roll of 5% per intelligence point of the character. Anyone who deliberately examines the weed or who has encountered razorweed before has a 95% chance of knowing it for what it is.

Razorweed occurs most often in tropical seas and lakes, though occasional patches appear in temperate climates. A dry-land species that resembles a Spanish bayonet in size and shape is known as well.

Anyone falling or walking into a patch of razorweed suffers immediate slashing damage from the hundreds of bladelike leaves on the plant. This damage varies with the size and surface area of the victim. Human-shaped beings take 1d4 hp damage if they are 3' or less in height; for every foot of height over 3', an extra 1d4 hp damage is taken. Four-legged beings take 2d4 hp damage if 3' high or less at the shoulders, and an extra 2d4 hp damage for every 1' over that height.

All cloth, leather, and paper goods exposed to razorweed attacks must save vs. normal blow each round or else be cut to pieces. Ropes and items of thin wood ($\frac{1}{2}$ " or less in thickness) must also save or be destroyed. Leather and padded armor are reduced in AC value one step for each round exposed to this growth, and ring, scale, and studded-leather armor are reduced one step every three rounds they are in razorweed. Other armors are immune to this effect, as they cannot be so easily slashed apart. Any damaged armor remains in damaged condition until repaired by qualified armorers, tailors, and leather-workers (see page 29, *DMG*). Magical armor loses its magical powers if the saving throw noted above is failed.

Any treasure found in a patch of this material is purely incidental, left over from previous victims. Treasure types J-N (x5), Q, and C (magic only) are suggested. Patches of strangeweed (see the *Monster Manual*) often grow in and around razorweed, making for a deadly combination in certain oceanic areas.

Razorweed burns easily if dry, but wet razorweed takes only half damage from fire. Submerged razorweed is, of course, immune to fire. Razorweed is immune to lightning and electrical effects, but it can be chopped apart by bladed weapons. Blunt weapons do not affect razorweed at all, and it cannot be affected by bare-handed attacks. Destroying a square yard of this weed is sufficient to

Words carved on the northern face of the stone platform say, in an old variant of the common tongue:

KHOLUM THE SWIFT
Lord of the Night

Of the best I was, but you must put aside the old ways and see that everything here has a place. If you steal from me, I steal from you. Why tempt futility and disturb my sleep when all things must be where they are? Things taken will come full circle, for though the day calls you master, my servants rule the night.

This inscription is an oblique reference to the traps and the guardians of the treasure.

The odd debris, upon examination, proves to be bits of armor, weapons, and equipment, from many years ago, left lying on the floor of the building to rust and rot. No bones are present, however (the owners were turned into undead shadows). Most of the debris is clustered near the four doorways or in corners of the shrine's interior. None of the debris is magical.

The two statues, standing with widely separated feet and joined at the back for support, are of Kholum, the thief buried in this tomb. Each figure holds its arms out at shoulder-height, palms up; their palms correspond with the median compass points, (northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest). The statues are 20' tall, their palms 16" from the ground, and they rest atop a single 3' - tall, 12' -square stone platform. The statues are cast from solid bronze and are now covered with verdigris. The statues have eyes of engraved *glassteel* crystal (500 gp value) which catch all light and reflect it, giving everyone inside the shrine the impression that they are being individually watched. The eyes radiate faint magic.

Anyone making a *detect traps* or *locate secret doors* roll discovers that several of the engraved words on the stone are on sections of stone that may be pressed into the platform, as either a trap or secret door trigger. If any characters push in the given words from the epitaph — STEAL FROM ME — a secret door (3' x 6') opens in the space between the heels of the-stone statues, on the stone platform.

The secret door reveals a stone-sarcophagus with a lid weighing 300 lbs. Lifting the lid reveals the skeleton of a

man in rotting robes, with dried, dark skin pulled over his features like fragile paper. The body is that of Kholum the Master Thief though by now characters may believe Kholum to be a lich, vampire, magic-user, etc. The skeleton is not undead. Clutched in the skeleton's left hand is an old steel dagger with a clean blade. The dagger, like the skeleton, is not magical. An old cloth pouch containing 47 gems (each of 100 gp value) lies on Kholum's ribcage. Also in the pouch is a slip of paper, reading "I STEAL FROM YOU" in ancient Common. The paper is very fragile and breaks apart with rough handling, requiring a *mending* spell to reassemble.

The skeleton does not respond to a *speak with dead* spell, nor does move under an *animate dead* spell (due to past protective enchantments). The gems radiate magic and evil.

In addition, treasure may be found in the palms of the double statues' hands. Each palm holds a colored *glassteel* crystal statuette of a man 8" high, colored blue (northeast), green (southeast), red (southwest), and amber (northwest). The statuettes, because of their workmanship, are each worth 750 gp. Each also radiates both magical evil auras. None of the four statuettes is immediately visible from the ground.

The moment that either the gems on the body or the statuettes in the hands of the twin statues are handled, each of the four entrances to the tomb is instantly sealed by a *wall of stone* spell cast at the 18th level of magic-user ability. These *walls of stone* can only be removed by a *dispel magic* or *disintegrate* spell, each spell affecting but one doorway. These *walls* remain in place for but one day, disappearing again at dawn on the day following that on which the treasures in the tomb were disturbed. Anyone caught in the doorway as the *walls* appear is hurled into the tomb's interior, taking 2-16 hp damage from the blast.

Within 2-5 turns following sundown, or within 2-5 turns if the theft occurred at night, the guardians of the tomb approach the shrine through the surrounding forest, drifting through the trees like shadows — which in fact they are (AC 7; MV 12"; HD 3 + 3; #AT 1; Dmg 2-5; SA drain one strength point per strike, turn victim into shadow at 0 strength; SD + 1 or better weapon needed to hit, immune to *charm/sleep/hold* spells, surprise 90% in absence of

bright light; AL CE). These shadows were originally followers of Kholum who were slain as thieves and reincarnated by their deity as shadows to guard their former guildmaster's tomb. Over the centuries, these shadows have been joined by the spirits of grave-robbers, wanderers, and others who were trapped in the tomb, until a small army of these creatures lurks in the area. By day, the shadows hide in the forest and avoid all contact with living creatures, though their presence drives away all wildlife. At night, the shadows gather at the tomb if summoned by magical triggers on the gems and statuettes mentioned above. There, the shadows attack intruders mindlessly until slain or until dawn comes, at which point they leave again.

The shadows float over the water of the lake as they approach the shrine, then rise into the air and enter the tomb through the' grated ceiling windows. The DM should count the number of PCs and NPCs inside the tomb, double that number, and add a random number from 1-12 to get the total number of shadows who will attack. These shadows will pass by anyone who is not in the tomb unless they are attacked, in which case they counterattack.

Not all shadows present in the area come with each visitation; perhaps 100 shadows are present in the area around the shrine to Kholum, each new group appearing only at dusk if summoned by the magical traps in the tomb. If a whole group of shadows is slain, and if the gems and statuettes are left behind without being further molested, the surviving characters (minus any who were turned into shadows to join the unliving guardians) may escape at dawn when the *walls of stone* vanish.

Anyone who *levitates* up to the ceiling bars may attempt to *bend bars* to escape, but note that strength-draining by the shadows may harm this escape method unless done during the daytime.

These magical traps can be activated any number of times, even if the *walls of stone* are continuously destroyed. The treasure was meant only to cause the deaths of an unlimited number of beings — bait for the living cast by the dead. Only the use of a *wish* or an *exorcism* can remove the trigger on the tomb's traps. The shadows in the area must then be dealt with, as they will wander away, no longer bound to the tomb of Kholum the Swift.