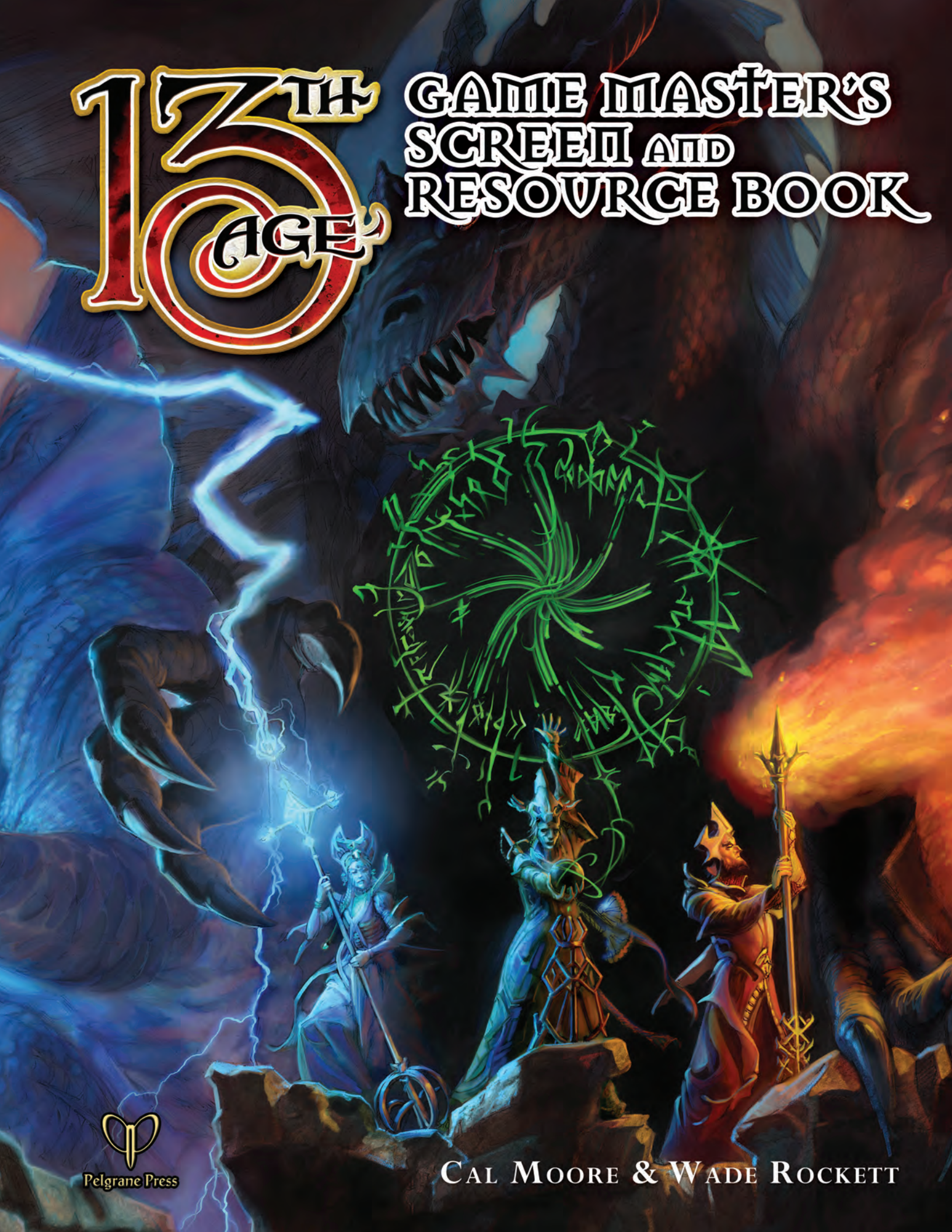# 13TH AGE

GAME MASTER'S SCREEN AND RESOURCE BOOK

Pelgrane Press

CAL MOORE & WADE ROCKETT

13TH AGE

GAME MASTER'S SCREEN AND RESOURCE BOOK

a *13th age* supplement

by **Cal Moore and Wade Rockett**

Pelgrane Press

13th age is a fantasy roleplaying game by
**Rob Heinsoo, Jonathan Tweet,
Lee Moyer, & Aaron McConnell**

FIRE OPAL

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USING ICON RELATIONSHIP DICE

The icons—and the relationships each character has with them—are a c ore concept of t he *13ᵗʰ Age* RPG. Those relationships work on a st ory level as players create stories to support the relationships, and on a me chanical level as the players roll icon dice to determine the benefits their PCs get from those relationships. One question that often comes up from both GMs and players is how to use those 5s and 6s during play. Here's some additional advice to consider along with the examples of icon dice use presented in the core rulebook and *13 True Ways*. Some of these thoughts will go into more detail about the icon advantage framework Jonathan and Rob l aid out in t he core rulebook, while others expand that framework with new approaches or mechanics. Use or ignore these options as you wish.

The following ideas can be used by both GMs and pl ayers, whether for long-term campaigns or one-off games. In general, however, icon relationship rolls have the greatest impact in persistent campaigns where story changes can have lasting effects.

WHEN TO ROLL ICON DICE?

The core rulebook suggests rolling icon dice at the start of every session, or p erhaps at the end t o set up t he story for the next session. But wha t do you do when e very player (or most) rolls one or more advantages? With groups of five or six players, it might mean ten or mor e advantages to use that session. Some GMs struggle to incorporate every icon result into the session; and if players don't get the benefit they expected, they might feel as if their rolls were wasted. Here are some alternatives.

Lump Multiple Advantages Together
Especially when you ha ve a g roup of five or si x players and ar e generating double-digit advantages, consider lumping results with the same ic on together. This may create story events that affect multiple characters or the whole party.

If a player rolls multiple advantages with the same icon, it's fine to combine them into a g reater advantage instead of u sing each separate roll. Those two 6s w ith the Dwarf King and hi s people are one big f avor instead of two smaller one s, and three 6s would be a really big favor. As GM, if you s ee an opportunity where combining a s econd advantage with the first would be more helpful to the party, ask the player if you c ould use it that way. They could say no b ecause they have plans for it, but usually they'll go along. Just make sure you follow through and make the advantage better than normal. Creating more powerful advantages than usual is fine so long a s any complications are also stronger!

You probably don't want to choose this route every time, because there's a lot t o be said f or advantages that are tailored to a single character. But if your GMing-brain threw up its metaphorical hands when you sa w the number of r esults that you, or your players, were set to interpret in the next session, this is your escape hatch.

Roll After Full Heal-Up
Another option is to limit the number of results by only r olling icon dice after each full heal-up. For groups that have longer sessions, that might still end up b eing once per session; but often it will extend to a s econd (or maybe even a t hird) session depending on session length. Rolling the dice less can give the GM and pl ayers more time t o decide how t o best use their advantages, especially with time available between sessions to get creative. Of course, if those rolls come up empty, the GM can always ask for more rolls sooner, or r olls for specific icons only again at a relevant story point.

Roll When the Advantages Run Out
Another timing option for icon dice is to let the players roll again only when the group uses the last advantage they gained from the previous icon dice rolls. This guarantees all adv antages will be used (and each player with a 5 or 6 ge ts a chance to shine). The downside is that it might take multiple sessions before the group gets to roll icon dice again, especially if one pl ayer hoards their advantages "for when we r eally need it." Also, GMs who ar en't fully comfortable incorporating icon advantages into the game will find that this approach means more story chaos than usual results for groups that renew them often.

No Rolls?
If your t able's problem is the opposite of t oo many icon advantages because players consistently roll too few, don't forget that some icon advantages can be awarded without being rolled by the players. A perfectly good reward to the PCs for completing a quest or doing a s ervice for an iconic servant is to grant them (or those PCs with connections to the icon) a lasting advantage (like rolling a 6) with that icon that the PC holds onto until they use it or s ome amount of time go es by (usually when they level up). You'll see a lot of that type of reward in the upcoming Battle Scenes books.

INCORPORATING TERRAIN INTO BATTLES

As GMs, we've all seen it. We set the stage for a fight, describing in detail the location with the gaping chasm over here and the hanging ropes over there, the low wall or hedge that offers concealment close to the bad guys standing guard, or the pool of swirling silver liquid right there, with the stone ramp that would give a PC the perfect opportunity to run up it and knock the bad guy in just to see what happens. Then the battle starts, and everyone, monsters and PCs, all end up in the middle of the area slogging it out until one side wins. Sure, it works. But is that what being a hero is all about? Perhaps not.

Using interactive terrain in battles, especially weird or interesting terrain, can make your *13ᵗʰ Age* battles more fun for both you and your players. The great thing about including terrain that has some thought behind it is that the terrain can benefit both the GM and the PCs simultaneously, or at different points in a battle. Interesting terrain options should encourage your players' curiosity, and that usually makes a battle more dynamic (and thus more memorable). Everyone remembers the time that Rosco the halfling pulled the pin on the vat of molten iron and totally fried Golt, the ogre jailor. Not so much the time that Rosco stabbed the ogre jailor for 14 damage, killing it by 3 points.

Using terrain benefits the GM because it sets the scene, bringing life and flavor to the enemies and the world, and it often gives those enemies some sort of advantage at the start of a battle, or even all battle long. The goblins know about the thermal vents, so they use their shiftiness to lure their enemies into the area then use their *shifty* ability to run when they hear the telltale sounds of hot steam coming. The hobgoblin chieftain keeps a pair of archers in the balcony of the ruined audience hall accessed via simple wooden ladders those archers will attempt to kick over during the battle if anyone tries to get to them. His troops (mooks) delay the PCs while the archers pick them apart. In fact, the addition of different terrain types, and especially interactive terrain (things either the monsters or the PCs can use during a battle), can make two battles against the same types of enemies completely different for both the GM and the players.

Including interesting terrain in battles also benefits the PCs. In addition to keeping battle scenes from getting stale or feeling like "the same old fight against another squad of orcs," you're presenting opportunities and options for players who like to do more than just declare an attack and roll a d20. Players playing classes like the rogue, ranger, and monk will especially appreciate your efforts, since having terrain to interact with plays to many of their talents and powers (Swashbuckle, Leaf on Wind, and terrain stunt to name a few), while not having any terrain detracts from their options. But any class can benefit from having terrain to use or that the enemies have to account for.

Of course, when you include terrain that helps the monsters in some manner, know that the players will most likely figure out a way to turn the tables on the bad guys, using the terrain against them in the same way. For example, a group of goblins are on top of a short stone tower throwing flasks of burning oil down on the PCs, damaging them fairly heavily to start a battle. But then one or more of the PCs manages to climb the tower, kill or drive off the goblin hurlers, and discovers a bucket full of flasks just waiting to be thrown. And the rest of the goblin horde is on the far side of the tower, just waiting to be incinerated. But that's fine. In fact, it's what you should want—the players interacting with the world you present them. And if they get to dispatch some annoying monsters in a cool new way, it makes the game better overall for everyone involved.

WHAT IS TERRAIN?

As far as setting a scene for a battle is concerned, terrain is any sort of feature besides monsters you as GM add to a battle to help make it come alive. It's the tumbled pillar providing cover or giving access to a high point, the hidden pit (perhaps with a monster waiting below), the clinging thorns where characters get stuck, the chandelier just across from the balcony that would make a great swing, the hanging wooden cage with the captive in it, the frozen pool of purple ice glowing with magic, the unholy flame of purification burning in the center of the temple that can be manipulated, and the giant mirror in the wizard's laboratory that shows images of another place and crackles with teleportation magic, to name just a few possibilities.

Terrain also includes natural and environmental factors that can hinder the PCs or creates a challenge they must deal with to progress. For example, a room filled with poison gas that slowly drains recoveries from the PCs, a water-filled chamber where the PCs have to swim to move (and possibly drown), a muddy bog with deep holes or quicksand, or a lava chamber filled with molten rock and hot, poisonous gasses that deal fire and poison damage every round.

The important idea is that it's something the PCs can (or must) interact with as part of a battle to obtain their goal or defeat the enemy. Terrain challenges also occur outside of battle during exploration, of course, but we're talking about how to use it in battles.

CREATING MEMORABLE NPCS

Player characters live, fight, plunder, and carouse in a world populated with NPCs. Some of them are foes, with combat abilities designed to make them worthy of an adventurers' steel. But most of the people they encounter play smaller roles: the corrupt gatekeeper, the flinty merchant, the world-weary tavern keeper, and many others. NPCs appear in a session because they move the adventure forward by providing the PCs with resources or challenges. Sometimes they perform both functions: if the PCs encounter a gatekeeper who must be bribed or intimidated to let the party into the city, they've learned something important about the city and how it operates.

In this section, we'll offer advice on creating and statting NPCs. We've also provided ready-to-use NPCs, grouped by their suggested icon affiliation and designed to fit easily into a *13th Age* game set in the Dragon Empire—or with some tinkering, any fantasy setting. These characters fulfill small but necessary roles, ranging from buying and selling goods to digging graves and keeping the keys to the castle safe (or failing to do so).

Each NPC entry includes a brief description; a monster role and initiative to help you build them out using the *13th Age* DIY monster rules; and Three Things about the character's mannerisms, habits, or speech. Some of these characters know each other, and may even have family ties or romances.

NPC STATS

NPC stats depend on what level the NPC is, and whether they are an ally or an enemy. An NPC's level and abilities may change over the course of the campaign, especially as the NPC plays different roles relative to the party.

Stats for allies: If the NPC joins the party and fights alongside them, base their attack bonuses, defenses, and hit points on a typical member of that class. The NPC probably is about the same level as the members of the adventuring group. It's tricky to add a higher-level NPC to a group without having them outshine the PCs. Give the NPC a restricted list of powers and talents rather than the full complement that a PC would get. When an NPC joins the party for a battle, even if it's only one fight, define the NPC's abilities narrowly enough to make sure they don't crowd any of the PCs. If the NPC sticks to basic or at-will attacks, they will still add a lot of firepower and hit points to the group, so they'll be valuable even if they're not on par with the rest of the party. Special powers that provide bonuses and benefits to the PCs are also good choices.

Stats for enemies: Set the NPC's level at the PCs' level or a little higher, and use stats for a double-strength monster rather than a PC. By default, give the NPC an attack ability or two that allows them to target two enemies or make two attacks at half the normal strike damage amount, which plays better than a single attack for full strike damage. Adjust initiative, defenses, and hit points as you see fit to match the way you portray the NPC. Each NPC also has a number of abilities that are designed to work regardless of the NPC's level, and you should feel free add your own, as well.

Racial abilities: NPCs don't necessarily have racial abilities. Feel free to give a major NPC the same once-per-battle racial ability that the PCs enjoy (or even something better) if it makes them more impressive, or a more challenging opponent, but don't feel obligated to do so. In your version of the Dragon Empire, maybe not every high elf in the world can teleport—only the extraordinary ones.

BRINGING NPCS TO LIFE

NPCs can easily be made richer and more memorable by giving them a few distinctive qualities—what we call Three Things—that provide them with vivid personality traits; a distinctive appearance, voice, or even smell; and specific behaviors. For example, think of a certain huge, musclebound comic book character: he's green with torn purple pants, he smashes things, and he talks in mono syllables. You know exactly who we're talking about, and chances are, that's how you'd describe him from memory to someone who'd never heard of him.

Memorable NPCs can become recurring characters, and even rise to become major characters depending on how the story develops. The corrupt gatekeeper might be the resident spy for the Orc Lord, skulking around the PCs to discover how much of a threat they'll be to his plans; or he might turn out to be the one surprisingly steadfast ally the PCs have in a city riddled with evil. Heck, he might even be the Prince of Shadows. (Note: *Anyone* could be the Prince of Shadows.)

A fun way to make this happen is to follow the players' instincts regarding a character. If they automatically mistrust a priest of the Light who offers to heal them, hey—maybe that priest is actually the villain in the adventure. This gives the players the satisfaction of saying later, "I knew we couldn't trust that guy!"

PRINCE OF SHADOWS

The Prince of Shadows? Never heard of him, officer.

Lady Nightwhisper

Normal caster [humanoid]
Initiative: +7

The heroic deeds of the PCs made them noteworthy for a while, but these days the public's attention is captured by the mysterious masked swordswoman known as Lady Chasmodia Nightwhisper. The news sheets breathlessly relate her latest daring exploits. Children playing in the streets pretend to be her, acting out swordfights with sticks. Decorated black masks have become fashionable among the wealthy and powerful. Yes, Lady Nightwhisper is more dashing, skilled, cunning and . . . well, just better than the PCs. Maybe she's just as she seems: a competent rival who will give the party a run for their money, but might be an ally when their interests converge. Or maybe one day, after she's gained the trust of her targets, "Lady Nightwhisper" will disappear forever, leaving behind an empty treasury vault. . . .

Three Things about Lady Nightwhisper

1: Appears to be a young halfling woman with black hair and bright green eyes, dressed in a black military hat, tunic, and trousers tucked into high, soft black boots, with a swirling black cloak, and a eye-mask made of black silk decorated with black-on-black images of dragons.
2: Has a flamboyant, cocky manner, as though she's always just on the verge of revealing a stunning surprise.
3: Prone to wagering, and is a gracious loser—or appears to be.

Oleg "The Owlbear" Stonegrinder

Normal leader [humanoid]
Initiative: +5

Did Oleg Stonecrusher, alleged crime boss, really tear off an underling's arm just for spilling a single drop of blood on his boots? Yes, he did. Does Oleg have a hidden sentimental, kind side that balances out his savagery? Not that anyone is aware of. Unlike some crime figures who prefer to stay in one heavily guarded location, Oleg is always on the go—keeping his "fortress" (as he calls it) around him in the form of visible bodyguards and disguised assassins armed with hidden blow guns. Oleg does enjoy a good story, particularly if it involves someone foolish dying violently.

Three Things about Oleg

1: Broad-shouldered, large-bellied dwarf wearing a leather jerkin and purple cloak, with his moustache and the tip of his beard dyed bright red.
2: Wears a new pair of gleaming, expensive black leather boots every day.
3: Breath smells powerfully of onions, which he eats with every meal in the belief that it wards off evil spirits.

THE THREE

Watch out for NPCs connected with the Three: they rarely work alone. If you kill a sorcerer, get ready to be hunted by a sinister monk assassin and a red-scaled dragonic barbarian.

Agrabath Flameskull

Normal troop [humanoid]
Initiative: +3

Flameskull was a tough son of a gun back in the old days, cleaving and decapitating dozens of foes while roaring the war-cry of the Red. But inevitably, age and battle took its toll. Flameskull retired to the outskirts of a small village, where he lives quietly and mainly keeps to himself. He acts the part of a gruff soldier; but he lives in secret terror of the possibility that the Red will call him into service again.

Three Things about Agrabath

1: Heavily scarred, red-scaled dragonic dressed in simple farmer's clothes, with a large dent in his head from a dwarven hammer.
2: If the PCs overcome his initial suspicion, he is eager to talk about adventuring and war with someone who's been there, unlike the farmers and merchants he lives among.
3: Suffers from trauma that manifests as nightmares and terrified paralysis when in danger.

Rabenna Queal

Normal caster [humanoid]
Initiative: +4

As a sorcerer, Rabenna Queal is not especially powerful. But as a mercenary she has the advantage of complete amorality: no job is too low, dirty, or despicable if your gold is good. Queal has an uncanny knack for survival, returning intact from massacres