



7TH SEA



The Sword of Kings

An Adventure for the Fate of Avalon by John Wick
Honoring Greg Stafford, October 10th, 2019
#WeAreAllUs





The Sword of Kings

AN ADVENTURE FOR THE FATE
OF AVALON

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
GREG STAFFORD

Carry him with you.

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Centuries ago, Avalon was not ruled by a Queen, but by a King. And he did not wield the Graal, but instead, a sword. A sword called “Caledfwlch.” With it, he conquered all of Avalon, uniting the Glamour Isles with war and bloodshed. In his later years, he lost the sword, and thus, he lost the kingdom. The Glamour Isles were divided again and would remain so for centuries. And, as the ancient prophets said, “He who holds the sword is the True King of all Avalon.”

Since then, scholars and historians have debated whether the story was history or legend, and now it seems the time to answer that question is at hand. The Explorer’s Society discovered clues leading to a cave where “the ancient blade rests, waiting to be awoken.” Unfortunately, a spy within the Society escaped with the clues, taking them to the Highland Marches where a Villain waits to discover the sword, throw Elaine off her throne and put all of Avalon under his heel. The Heroes must act quickly, for if they do not find Caledfwlch in time, all of Avalon may fall under a terrible, cursed reign...

Running This Adventure

The Sword of Kings is a one-shot adventure that should take your players a single session to complete. While they do not need to be members of the Invisible College, having allies or friends in the Secret Society helps. Even if they don’t, I’ve got you covered.

Whenever I run GM seminars at conventions, I always advocate a simple strategy: don’t have a plan, have contingencies. What does that mean? Well, you know how it goes. As a GM, you sit up all night making a plan for your players. Then, when they hit the first fork in the road, they go in a direction you never planned on. And there goes your plan, right out the window.

So, don’t have a plan. Have contingencies.

This adventure has a general outline, but it also has a bunch of different options. I want you to have those options just in case your players go off in a direction you didn’t plan on. Now, I can’t plan on everything, but with a little effort, you and I can stay one step ahead of the players. At least, we can appear to be one step ahead of them, and that’s good enough. Just like a good magician, if your audience doesn’t see what you’re really doing, they’re none the wiser.

I’m also providing some options so you can custom tailor the adventure to your group. Maybe your players have no reason to know a member of the Explorer’s Society. Maybe they hate the Explorer’s Society. If that plan doesn’t work, we can talk about other ways to hook your Heroes.

Now, this adventure starts in medias res: in the middle of a stormy sea battle. Here’s everything you need to know:

A spy for the Villain Cormac McDougal has stolen part of an ancient map leading to a cave that supposedly holds Caledfwlch.

During the theft, the map was torn in two.

The Heroes have one part of the map, the Villain has the other part, and both need the whole thing to find the sword.

The Heroes were on their way to the Highland Marches to steal the other part of the map, but were caught in a storm that seemed to come out of nowhere. Then, their ship was attacked!

And this is where we start.

Scene One: The Storm

The Scene opens with two ships caught in a seemingly supernatural storm. The Heroes are on *The Last Step*, a vessel owned by the Explorer’s Society. The other vessel is *The Consequence of Thunder*, a Highlander ship that has attacked the Explorers, hoping to get the other half of the map. This is an Action Scene that has many consequences and will demand much from your players. They’ll survive (the Villain wants to use them to get to the sword), but whether or not they arrive at their destination as free Heroes or in chains depends on the way they handle the Scene.

Scene Two: The Island

Once they arrive on the island, the Heroes have to deal with a tribe protecting the cave from strangers. How do the Heroes deal with this? There’s a couple different ways.

Scene Three: The Sword

Finally, the Heroes arrive at the resting place of the Sword of Kings. But is it a weapon of good or evil? Or maybe both? A final test awaits them. And what

desperate trick does the Villain have up his sleeve to pull at the last moment?

The Explorer's Society

Your Heroes have no connection to the Explorers? That's fine. You can pick another Secret Society. The Rilasciare would love to get their hands on a weapon that would unseat the Queen. Better yet, they'd love to get hold of a weapon that would give power to a King and get rid of it. Or, Los Vagabundos may want the sword. They want to hide it to protect Good Queen Elaine. Die Kreuzritter want the sword to fight monsters—including the fae of Avalon. And there's always The Order. They're looking for the weapon to control Queen Elaine.

Scene One: The Storm

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Rain so hard it stings when it hits your face. Swords flashing as two crews fight across the decks of two ships. Waves so high, they wash sailors over the sides. You didn't wake up this morning expecting to be in the middle of a storm and a sea battle, but here you are.

You remember earlier... the shores of Avalon. A woman wearing the symbol of the Explorer's Society. She mentioned a legendary sword that could wreck Elaine's rule. And she had part of a torn map.

Now, here you are. You don't have a lot of time to think or recall the past. You know these men have the other part of the map and they want yours. It's time to fight.

This is an Action Scene. The Consequences are:

Brute Squads

Base the number and Strength on the number of players you have. I'd pick one per player, probably around Strength 6- 10. You want to make the players feel pressured. This shouldn't be an easy fight for them. If they lose the fight, the story continues. The Villain in charge has plans for them.

Fire

Their ship is on fire. (Of course it is.) The fire's Rank is also based on your number of players. They need to spend one Raise per Rank of the fire to put

it out. Every Round they do not put out the fire, every Hero takes a number of Wounds equal to the current Rank of the fire.

Waves

You can use a Danger Point to throw a huge wave over the deck. Heroes have to spend 2 Raises to not get washed off the deck. If they spend one Raise, they can catch the rail and hang there until someone (including themselves) pulls their sorry carcasses back on board.

The Villain

Cormac McDougal is here. Again, give him a Rank appropriate for your Heroes. Cormac is dangerous. He has an iron sickle he likes to use on demons and sorcerers. Any Hero with Sorcery takes a Dramatic Wound whenever Cormac hits them with his sickle. McDougal uses a fighting style similar to Leegstra: he causes additional Wounds equal to his Rank whenever he causes a hit.

(I told you he's dangerous.)

Cormac McDougal

Rank: [H]+5

Advantages

Duelist Academy, I'm Taking You With Me, Rich

Other Villains

Don't like Cormac? Easy. You can switch him out for any number of Villains, including any you've already got running in your current game. Or you can make him a Vesten Villain. A smuggler who's

[H] REFERENCES

Throughout the adventure, you'll notice a lot of [H] references. Use this to dynamically modify the size of Villains and Brute Squads for various group sizes. Wherever you see [H], replace it with the number of Hero characters in the Scene. In some places [H] will have a multiplier or divider.

If you have a Heroic Duelist in the Scene, consider doubling the Strength of one or more Brute Squads, Monsters or Villains.

run into Elaine's Sea Dogs once too often and now it's time for revenge! A Castilian sea captain is another good Villain to throw in. Or even a Montaigne noble that she promised to marry, but then reneged... after she took all his gifts of gold and silver. A Vaticine assassin from Vodacce is another choice, sent by a shadowy organization with subtle but incredible power.

Running the Scene

If your players have questions, assure them they'll get answers, but for right now, they must fight to survive. The sailors from the other ship want their part of this mysterious map and they'll stop at nothing to get it.

At an appropriate moment, right when they're on the edge of their seats (usually after you spend a Danger Point), one of the Heroes flashes back to the moment mentioned in the description: the shores of Avalon, a woman wearing the Explorer's Society pin...

Her name is Gerda Oscarisdottir. She has the typical look of a Vesten woman: long, blonde hair, pale skin and blue eyes. Recently, while going through a trunk left by her grandmother, she discovered a map that reportedly led to the resting place of a legendary sword, Caledfwlch.

She reported her findings to her superiors, but shortly thereafter, a spy tried to kill her and take the map. She survived, but the map was torn in half. She did not have time to copy it, but she does remember some small details. Now, she needs the Heroes' help to get to the sword before the spy's master does.

Of course, you can play out this flashback any way you wish. And again, customize the scene to fit your players and their Heroes.

The Heroes can ask her any number of questions and you can make up the answers as you like. However, she does not remember any details. She only knows the location of the cave: on a small island off the coast of the Highland Marches. She willingly shows the Heroes the map and answers any other questions they might have. And as soon as this little detour runs its course...

... back to the ship!

I designed this Scene to really challenge a group of

players. I want them to feel like they fought tooth and nail to win. They'll be battered, but not beaten.

Of course, if they lose, they become captives of the Villain. Not only does he want their map, but he wants them alive to watch his victory...

Scene Two: The Island

The island is roughly six miles long and ten miles wide. Small enough not to be noticed, but large enough for jungle to grow. There's also an abundance of cranes on the island. Like, a whole ton of them. The jungle is thick enough to cover the small village that lives here and the men and women who guard the cave. They trade with tribes from other islands, but otherwise, they never go far. A long time ago, their elders made a promise to guard the cave. They don't remember why, they just know they must ensure that nobody goes into the cave.

That's going to be a problem for our Heroes, but there are a few ways to deal with this.

There is no good place to port on the island. The ship must weigh anchor, then the Heroes have to row in on boats. Once they do, the island residents will know they're coming.

The local tribe is a Brute Squad with sufficient Strength to give your Heroes pause before just attacking them. Of course, they're Heroes so they won't do that. The tribe has spears, shields and blowguns. Clearly, the Heroes have the tribe out-gunned, but not out-manned. Also, in case you're on the fence about this, taking violent action against those who have sworn an oath to protect something isn't a Heroic act. But how do the Heroes overcome this problem? Again, there are options.

A **Linguist** can speak to the tribe and tell them why they are here. Depending on how the players handle the situation, being honest is probably the best answer.

You can also have one of the village elders—a man with grey hair wearing crane feathers—approach the Heroes. This is the tribe's shaman, Te Whakapau Hina. He is willing to take one of the Heroes into the spirit world and ask them questions there. If he likes the answers, he'll permit them to enter the cave. This ritual involves entering his tent and sitting perfectly still. He burns a plant (found on the island, of course) and invites the Hero to inhale the smoke.

In a moment or two, they feel their spirit leaving their body and entering another place. There, they see the shaman as a crane and a man and a crane and a man... you get the drift. He asks the Hero many questions. Probing questions. His intent is to discover if the person he's talking to is a Hero or a Villain. If the Hero passes the test (they should), he summons their spirit back to the world and allows the Heroes to enter the cave.

If you like, you can have more than one Hero enter the cave with the shaman to perform the ritual. He'll test all of them. He may even find one or two of the Heroes unworthy, based on their answers.

If the Villain is in control of the scene, he will not pass Te Whakapau Hina's test. This gives you the opportunity for the Heroes to get free of the Villain. The tribe raises their spears and blowguns, providing the Heroes with a distraction. They can use the chaos to get free and defeat the Villain and any Brute Squads he has with them.

Option: The Spirit of Te Whakapau Hina

Here's an option to consider.

One of the casualties of the tribe attacking the Villain is Te Whakapau Hina. As he is close to death, he assures the Heroes he is going to be with his ancestors. Then, he closes his eyes and passes on.

This is when you get out a special token you've prepared for this session. It can be whatever you like, but I suggest getting a token of a silver crane or something similar. Put it in the middle of the table. Tell your players, "This is Te Whakapau Hina's spirit. It will always be with you. Protecting you. When things are at their darkest, he will be here. Waiting for you to call upon him. Any of you can, if you wish. Point at the token, call his name, and he'll be here."

Now, just what that means is up to you. It can be a free Raise, a free Hero Point. Maybe it cancels Sorcery. Maybe it cancels a Danger Point. Don't tell them what it does. Let them wonder. Let it be a mystery. Let it be something different each time. When you quantify some things as mechanics, they lose their magic. Let this one thing keep a little of its magic. And make sure they say his name when they call upon it.

Scene Three: The Sword

Once they've won the trust of Te Whakapau Hina, the tribe leads them to the cave. Heroes (and Villain) find themselves in what looks like a small chapel. An ancient Vaticine chapel. This should cause followers of the Avalon Old Faith to take care.

In the center of the chapel hang three swords, each pointing at a single point on the floor. (For reference, see the Three of Swords card from the traditional Tarot). Below them is a pool of water wide enough that someone must wade into it to stand below the swords. Each sword is unsheathed, the blade naked. The pool has a stairway that leads down. As soon as anyone--Hero or Villain--approaches the pool, everyone in the room hears a voice.

"Approach the Sword of Kings with no tool, no weapon, no metal whatsoever."

Anyone who tries to step into the pool with a weapon or tool or metal becomes instantly Helpless. No roll. Just Helpless. They're overpowered by a horrible pain, falling to the ground nearly paralyzed by it. And only one at a time.

The water is cool, but not cold. It feels... clean. Holy. As they approach, they see three figures appear, one behind each sword. The figures speak:

First Sword: I am the First Prophet. This is the Sword of Mercy. They who choose this sword will heal and never harm.

Second Sword: I am the Second Prophet. This is the Sword of Wisdom. They who choose this sword will cut through all riddles and mysteries.

Third Sword: I am the Third Prophet. This is the Sword of Justice. They who chose this sword will right all inequity with the swiftness of the wind.

The Hero must pick one of the three swords, which will define the sword for the owner. Again, the sword may only be wielded by a believer in the Vaticine faith. If there are none, they cannot take the weapon. Of course, if you don't have any members of the Vaticine faith, this could cause an issue. Your players may come up with a helpful solution, or you can just ditch that rule and let anyone draw the weapon.

Each of the swords has a different magical property.

The First Sword will never cause Dramatic Wounds or kill an opponent. However, if the wielder spends a Hero Point, they cause an opponent to

become Helpless with a successful strike.

The Second Sword gives the wielder any appropriate Dueling Style. That is, if the wielder needs a shield in one hand to use the Style, they need a shield. The wielder can change Styles with a Hero Point.

The Third Sword causes automatic Dramatic Wounds to Villains. For each Hero Point spent on a hit, the wielder delivers a Dramatic Wound. However, if a Villain has the sword, she can use the same effect on Heroes.

Now, these effects are devastating. One look and you may even say, “overpowered.” But the sword carries with it a terrible price. Anyone carrying the sword becomes Helpless if they leave Avalon’s shores. Traveling from the Highland Marches or Avalon to Inismore is “leaving Avalon’s shores,” by the way. So, the moment someone takes the sword, they become Helpless until they return to Avalon.

Another issue: what to do with the sword once they have it. They could return it to Queen Elaine, or they could keep it for themselves. Good luck leaving Avalon with it.

Also, it’s the Sword of Kings. Meant for a true ruler. Well, there’s a couple problems with that. First, Avalon already has a ruler. That’s a big problem. But, you’ve got an out. See, the Graal and the Sword are counterparts. If the Graal rules Avalon, the Sword serves the Graal. If the Sword rules Avalon, the Graal serves the Sword. That means so long as Elaine has the Graal, Caledfwlch shall remain faithful to her. But if she ever loses the Graal, Caledfwlch may find a new champion to unite Avalon again.

For the curious, a Vaticine blacksmith forged Caledfwlch in the 7th Century. He made it for a knight when Avalon was in chaos. The blacksmith received a vision from the First Prophet, telling him to make the sword. Since then, it has been held by two other knights: one a knight from the Crescent Empire devoted to the Second Prophet and the third a Montaigne knight devoted to the Third Prophet.

Again, what to do with the sword? Well, I can’t anticipate your players, so you’re on your own with this one. But with Caledfwlch found (and in the hands of a Hero), you can bet Villains from all over Théah (and beyond) will come looking for it.

Option: Forgery

Here’s an option for you if the Villain has control of the Scene and the Heroes are his captives. First, make sure you covertly get a message to one of your players. You can do this via note, smart phone text, or any other way you want. You can even tell them before the game starts, giving them a bit of foreknowledge the other players don’t have. What is that foreknowledge? I’ll tell you in a second.

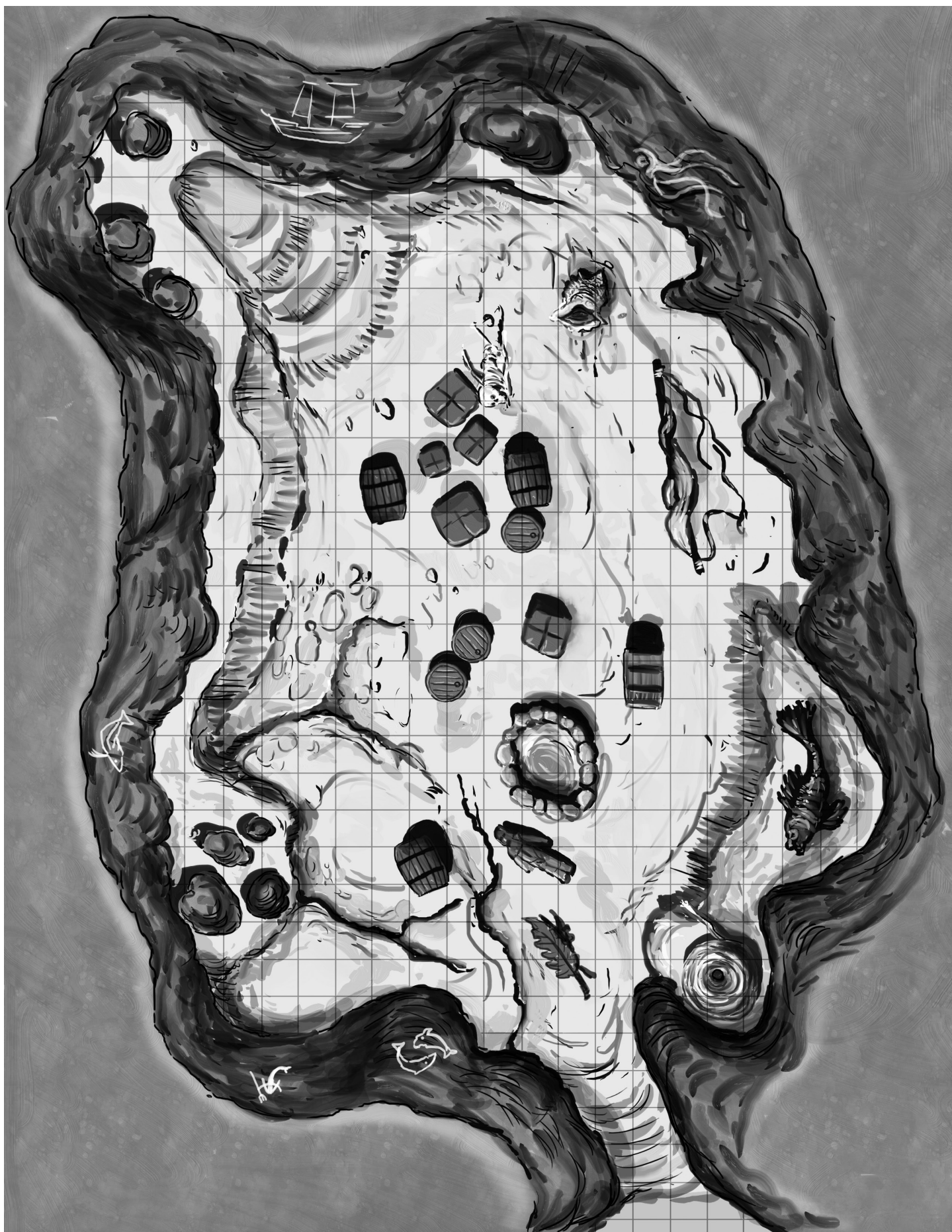
The cave is empty. Well, not empty, but full of trash. An abandoned pirate cove. There’s nothing here but old nets, a few rotten hammocks and a long-dead fire. The Villain kicks around the rubbish, cursing.

This is the opportunity for your Heroes to convince him the map is a forgery. Clearly there’s nothing here. Perhaps they can even convince him to leave them stranded on the island rather than kill them. Your Villain agrees, taking everything they own, leaving them with no equipment or weapons=. The Villain laughs as he leaves the Heroes, sailing away with everything they own.

Now, here’s that bit of cheating information we talked about before comes into play. You see, all the rubbish in the cave... matches the geography of the map! If you look at the map, then look at the cave, you see how the fire in the center of the cave is the compass rose on the center of the map! And the rotting hammocks? They’re waves! The empty boxes? They’re on the map, too! Everything on the map matches the seemingly random rubbish in the cave! And in the far top left hand corner of the map is a small “X.”

When the Heroes examine the wall, they find a small “X” carved into the stone. If they push, the wall pushes away... leading into the sword cathedral!







GREG STAFFORD

(1948 - 2018)

**GAME DESIGNER, MYTHOLOGIST, SHAMAN, FATHER,
GRANDFATHER, HUSBAND, BROTHER, AND FRIEND**

*To honor Greg's memory the family requests, in lieu of flowers,
that you strike up a conversation with someone you don't know,
go somewhere you haven't been,
face a personal challenge head on,
read about something new,
and enjoy life.*

#WeAreAllUs