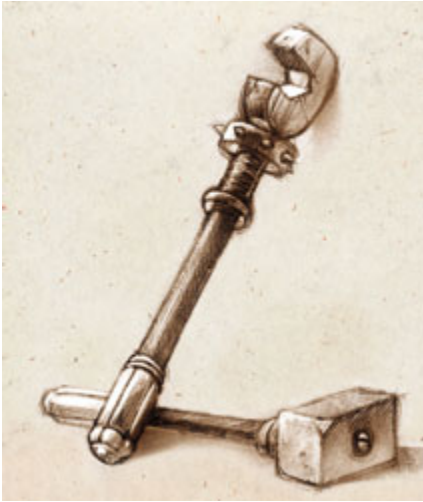


## Locks

by Chris Philbrook



Wiping the sweat off his brow, Erlin focused on the trapped chest in front of him. Cursing his thick Dwarven fingers, he pulled his gloves off, and manipulated his small picks carefully between forefinger and thumb. Focusing over the dripping water in the Dungeon, he listened for the sounds from the tumbler.

“Click” went the lock, and Erlin Boltripper let out a sigh. If he managed to crack all of the chests in the temple quickly enough, he’d be able to dig through them and take whatever he wanted before returning the remainder to his moldy, foul-smelling Necromancer master. Opening the chest cautiously, Erlin lifted a jar of coins and an ornately gilded diadem into his bag. He quickly stowed them away in his loot sack, hoping they wouldn’t clank too badly if he had to run.

Because death was a relative term with the Sect, he thought to himself, and if I’d druther, I’d druther not have death as a relative. He snickered quietly in the dark at his joke, and looked up and down the stone passages for signs of more loot. But then, perhaps twenty paces away, he heard a shuffling movement just outside of his field of vision. Reaching down to his belt, he hefted the comfortable weight of his wrench, and stood completely still, closing his eyes so they wouldn’t glint in the distant torchlight. The sound of the shuffling grew louder. The closer it came, the more the stench of decay and rot accompanied it. Erlin took slow deep breaths through his mouth to try to avoid gagging, as the overpowering stench was all around him now. Fighting back an urge to scamper away, he steeled himself as the thing moved down the passage less than three steps away from him.

A cold breath of fetid air hit him square in the face, sending the hair on the back of his head bolt upright. The awful smell was coppery and metallic, and filled with the telltale stench of blood. Erlin stayed as still as the stone wall behind him. After what seemed like an eternity, the shuffling creature finally moved down the passage and away from his hiding place. Exhaling as quietly as he could, he opened his eyes and surveyed the empty passage.

“I need to find better bosses.” The dwarf shook his head, sighed, and slinked over to his next prize.